

[Emily Greenspan](#)

February 8 Readings

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“Power Shift,” Jessica Matthews: This article discusses the rise of civil society and relative decline of states since the Cold War, largely as a result of new technologies and communication systems that enable widespread access to and interchange of information. Today’s NGOs rely on rapid communications systems to bring national attention to their respective causes, particularly in cases where states have violated international norms. NGOs have grown considerably in past decades, delivering, “more development assistance than the entire U.N. system (excluding the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund)” [53]. NGOs both contribute to the setting of policy agendas and the implementation of policy. They provide the advantage of responding more rapidly than governments to challenges. This article provides an interesting perspective on the evolution of NGOs as a predominant force on the international scene, but does not get at some of the potential problematic issues associated with their emergence.

“The Idea of Global Civil Society,” Mary Kaldor: Kaldor defines civil society as, “the process through which individuals negotiate, argue, struggle against or agree with each other and with the centres of political and economic authority” [585]. Over time, civil society has evolved to this definition from a time when it included the state. Kaldor asserts that civil society achieved a revival in the 70s and 80s in Latin America and Europe, where groups frustrated by severe state regimes found support from international organizations and newly arising human rights legislation. In the 1990s, numerous social movements sprung up (human rights, environment, etc.), and NGOs became increasingly powerful, even taking on some state roles. Kaldor believes that the U.S. war on Iraq presents a threat to the emerging global system described, but does not believe Bush’s actions will derail the process. While the arguments presented are compelling, I would have liked the article to explore more fully the implications of direct state interventions, or what the article refers to as “international relations” as opposed to global systems. The article appears to condemn the Iraq war, but would the author similarly condemn the U.S. government unilaterally sending forces into Darfur to end the genocide?

“Worlds Apart,” John D. Clark: This article describes the dramatic increase of civil society organizations in past decades, and addresses many of the challenges faced by NGOs and CSOs in responding to many and varied international demands. It discusses some of the strategies employed by big-name NGOs and their relative advantages (ie. international organizational consistency vs. local office issue flexibility). Organizations that effectively utilize information, symbolism, leverage, and accountability have been proven successful. The article also responds to widespread critics of the World Bank by downplaying the Bank’s influence in the international arena and asking that both the U.S. and developing countries’ governments be held accountable for their actions as well. Finally, the article addresses the growing trend of less centralized and more networked N-form organizations, which promote enhanced information exchange.

“Social Movements and World Politics”, Smith, Pagnucco & Chatfield: This article explores the value of transnational social movements and their role as compared to IGOs. These movements fill an important gap as implementers, where IGOs often fall short (assuming more the decision-maker role). They also serve to grab the public’s attention quickly and internationally, drive change rapidly through informal professional and friendship networks, provide valuable technical insight to governments, and work to promote government accountability and transparency through monitoring and advocacy.

“Civil Society and the Future of the Nation State”: This article explores the potential dangers of the rise of civil society and the weakening of government power in favor of private interests. Threats include the potential ascendancy of single-issue activism, unruly or malevolent groups assuming power, and

weakened democracy (as private interests do not report to individuals beyond their own constituencies). An additional issue the article could have addressed would be the influence that international organizations have on the local politics of developing countries. The question of democracy becomes even more critical when "civil society" represents foreign interests in national decision-making.