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Civil Society, Conflict and Violence

An introduction

Wolfgang Dörner and Regina A. List

Introduction

The main currents of the discussion on civil society in academia and in international organizations usually concentrate on civil society's positive effects on democracies and on political systems in transition, following such ideas as civil society organizations (CSOs) acting as schools of democracy (after Putnam's work from 1993), and their function of interest expression as the sensor for social needs, which are transformed into political requests (Almond *et al.*'s framework for 'comparative politics'; Almond *et al.* 2002). The literature and research pay rather less attention to situations in which conflicting interests are not negotiated peacefully and to the link between civil society and violence (Stacey & Meyer 2005). This volume intends to contribute to a broadening of perspective by looking more closely at aspects such as the status of civil society during and after armed conflict, the interplay between non-state actors and state authorities as they react to threats of emerging or past episodes of conflict or violence, and situations in which civil society actors make use of violence.

A biased perspective on civil society, where civil society is assumed automatically to be a force for good, is related to a prevailing one-sided perception of the phenomenon. Generally, actors within civil society are assumed to be oriented towards goals such as working against oppression, and the reconciliation of interests and finding of compromises. They are believed to work towards an abstract, collectively shared common good. As a consequence, there is a danger that attempts to explain any uncivil actions and violence on the part of civil society are dismissed because the explanations themselves are often seen then as a justification for such actions and violence (Ezzat & Kaldor 2006).

In some cases such a one-sided understanding of civil society is deliberately chosen. Some scholars exclude from civil society by definition the 'uncivil' or 'bad' elements, which do not promote and practise non-violent and democratic values. But often this preconception occurs rather unconsciously, for example,

when civil society is treated as one monolithic entity, or a single sector in society, which has positive qualities and generates beneficial effects for governance and the community *per se* (see for example the World Bank's *World Development Report 2011*). Whether by deliberately focusing only on the 'good' and 'civic' elements of civil society, or simply by taking the positive effect of civil society for granted, such approaches underexpose, 'define away' or ignore the potential of permanently present conflicts, which might evolve into violent confrontations.

The prevailing optimistic but partial perception of civil society also affects the research related to the question of the role civil society plays in long-standing, worsening and armed conflicts. According to the positive interpretation, 'civil society figures as the antithesis of conflict and violence. It is suspended in times of war and has to struggle to re-emerge in its aftermath' (Albrow & Anheier 2006: 4). As a consequence, the focus of research lies on civil society's constructive contributions to peacebuilding and reconstruction in the aftermath of armed conflict. Occasionally, case studies highlight the positive role which CSOs play during an ongoing violent confrontation, such as mobilization for peace negotiations and provision of services for persons who are deprived of regular, public support. Uncomfortable questions, for example the extent to which actors of civil society may have accelerated the emergence of violent conflict or hindered peace and reconciliation processes have, until recently, received minor attention.

This optimistic, somewhat euphoric, approach to civil society might be explained by the historical occurrences of the 1980s and 1990s, the successes of which are often ascribed to civil society, i.e. the process of ending the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and the counter-authoritarian movements in Latin America. However, towards the end of the 1990s and during the first years of the new century, a more critical view on civil society began to appear. Occasionally, the discussion seems to have swung to the opposite extreme, to the point that 'attacking civil society has become a sport among academics and political commentators' (Encarnación 2006: 357). However, critical examinations in (often historical) case studies provide valuable input to help refine the discussion.

The more critical works envisage the links between civil society and uncivil behaviour exhibited by both non-state and state actors in situations of conflict at two different levels. The first type of studies examines the 'uncivil' or even violent activities in which civil society groups and organizations engage. For example, in their edited volume, Kopecký and Mudde (2003) collect case studies of 'uncivil' occurrences in civil society in post-communist Europe. With his case study on social movements in Nigeria that are prone to resort to violence, Ikelegbe (2001) provides another example for the 'perverse manifestations' of civil society. These authors show that actors within civil society often directly sympathize with or even support violent activities, and thus accentuate already

existing cleavages, pushing for non-democratic action rather than stronger democracy.

The second type of studies turns to the general situation and the effects of civil society as a whole with respect to the political system at the national level. For example, Berman's study (1997) examines the case of the Weimar Republic in Germany before and during Hitler's rise to power, and describes how engagement in a vibrant civil society became a substitute for effective political participation. Civic engagement took the form of a retreat to the private collectivity, which failed to influence political happenings. As a consequence of this mode of engagement, civil society did not actively take part in the politics of the country and failed to help prevent the outbreak of violence and atrocities by the state. From a more critical point of view, it could be said to have made the atrocities more possible.

Taking inspiration from these more critical perspectives, two possible directions emerge for further research on civil society and its role with regard to conflict and violence. First, studies need to look into the composition of civil society and 'what the actors actually do' (Bermeo 2000). This means the research on civil society needs to go beyond the assessment of its strength as measured by the mere existence of CSOs (e.g. number and size of organizations, membership rates) to also take into account the values it pursues and practises. Second, research should explore the wider issue of the integration and the impact of civil society in the political system and in society more broadly, and the extent to which the conditions in which civil society operates contribute to a peaceful dealing with conflicts and hinder or support an escalation of conflicts.

For this volume, we have asked young as well as experienced scholars and analysts to take up these research challenges, examining the make-up of civil society and its integration in its social and political environment, using the findings assembled through a multi-country, comparative action-research programme, the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI), implemented during 2008-2011 in thirty-eight countries and territories around the world (described in detail in Chapter 2). The mission these scholars were given was to conduct exploratory analyses of these data, often combining them with other sources, and to examine the links between civil society, conflict and violence and their implications for future action, including further research and policy advocacy.

After this brief introduction to the topic and scope of this book, in the remainder of this introductory chapter, we will 1) define the concept of civil society used in the CSI research that is the foundation of this volume; 2) examine the relationship between civil society, conflict and violence; 3) discuss potential or theorized roles of civil society in situations of conflict; 4) discuss some of the impacts of conflict on civil society; and 5) present the organization of the volume.

Defining civil society for comparative research

In order to assess the status and the strength of civil society in the broad range of countries covered by the CSI project, the national research teams applied the following definition:

Civil society is the arena, outside the family, the state and the market which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests (Mati, Silva & Anderson 2010: 17).

In Mati, Silva & Anderson (2010: 17–21), CIVICUS provides greater detail about the reasoning behind the adoption of this definition, based on various strands of relevant literature, on CIVICUS's goals, and on the experience gained in the first phase of the project (2003–2007). Three elements of this reasoning are particularly pertinent to the analyses in this volume.

In the first place, the CSI project focuses on the political concept of civil society. This choice stems from CIVICUS's own interest in strengthening civil society and its contribution to social change. The conceptualization of civil society as a political term differs from 'nonprofit sector' or 'third sector' approaches that focus on the economic weight and role of civil society and its activities.

Second, the definition of civil society employed by CIVICUS places emphasis less on organizational form and instead highlights its functions and roles. This enhances the chances of capturing a broader diversity of organizational forms and features as well as types of activities and phenomena. This functional definition works as an advantage for the CSI project, which has a highly explorative character and pioneers in areas where little is known about the situation of civic participation.

Finally, and especially significant for the analysis here, CIVICUS opted for a non-normative – or non-exclusive – concept of civil society. This means that the definition acknowledges that 'civil society is not a homogenous and united entity, but rather a complex arena where diverse and often competing values, ideologies and interests interact and power struggles occur. These can manifest in peaceful, but also violent forces or ways that may advance or obstruct social progress' (Mati, Silva & Anderson 2010: 20–21). Thus, civil society as conceived for the CSI research includes both 'civil' and 'uncivil' actions, organizations and institutions.

This approach to civil society is founded in the conviction that it is the interplay of diverse interests and deliberation about different opinions that is the most appropriate way to bring about positive change. While being '... realistic about conflict in today's world', one can be 'optimistic that most people, organizations and businesses will work together'.¹ Therefore, single elements within civil society might endorse and enact values which are not considered positive by the majority of persons. Indeed, the promotion of issues

(which in the end could also be called interests) not generally recognized and not supported by the majority is a very basic trait of civil society. A cause that one person or group judges to be worth advocating for might not be acceptable for others. But the expression of interests and concerns by citizens, engagement for specific causes and negotiations around the diverse points of view generate overall beneficial effects – if the conditions for this interplay among the diverse interests and preferences are fairly set.

The working definition is refined further during the research process in two ways. First, in an early phase of the implementation cycle (see Chapter 2 for details), the CSI definition is vetted by the national partners and the set of civil society stakeholders that make up the national advisory committee. During one of the advisory committee's first meetings, participants engage in an exercise to discuss and validate (or modify, if deemed necessary) both the definition of civil society used for the research and the list of types of organizations or groups that would be included within the civil society arena in their local setting. This step serves to ensure that what is measured is relevant in the specific context. The results of these discussions are reported in the CSI Analytical Country Reports.²

Second, with the selection of indicators and the formulation of survey questions, the research design translates the abstract working definition into concrete operationalizations, as will be described in more detail in Chapter 2. The indicators used to measure or describe civil society fall into two categories: those describing the 'structural' features of civil society and various forms of participation, including levels of membership and volunteering and the state of financial and human resources, and those referring to the 'cultural' features, that is, the practice of values in civil society.³ Though other factors (such as the level of resources available to the country implementation partners) also influenced the choice of these indicators and questions, they can nevertheless be seen as reinforcing the CSI's working definition.

Civil society and its relation to conflict and violence

As noted above, civil society is defined for the CSI research as the arena created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions seeking to advance shared interests. When those interests become claims before governments, businesses or other actors, there will likely arise conflicts – including over resources, identity and policies. Conflict among diverse interests, which are shared by some but not by others, can thus be considered one of the main features of civil society. Indeed, Reichardt (2006) calls on us to see civil society as a 'conflictual arena' and reminds us that civil society does not always entail peaceful and cooperative means of settling conflicts, but often rather 'crude ways', including violence.

One of the key questions then, as Varshney (2001) poses in the case of ethnic conflict, is whether conflict is waged and ultimately settled through institutionalized channels, e.g. elected bodies, nonviolent protest, etc., or through 'crude ways' such as violence. In this section we reflect on the circumstances under which conflict can be dealt with in a peaceful way through such institutionalized channels and when, instead, the use of non-democratic – in the extreme, violent – means for expressing or controlling the expression of interests becomes more probable. We focus on three elements that influence those circumstances, namely, opportunity structures, legitimacy and capacity.

According to Tilly and Tarrow (2007), by regulating the way in which organized citizens can make claims, political authorities create 'political opportunity structures'. These opportunity structures take three different forms: one, the power-holders prescribe avenues for expressing interests (the legal channels); two, they tolerate certain modes of expression that are not legally prescribed but accepted; and, three, the authorities forbid selected claim-making methods. As a result, civil society actors have basically two options when their aim is to express their interests or those of their members: either 'contained claim-making', i.e. accepting and using the legally defined or tolerated channels, or 'transgressive claim-making', i.e. going beyond the limits of legal and tolerable actions. This latter type of claim-making might include the use of violence.⁴

Whether different civil society actors opt for legally prescribed, slightly transgressive or outright aggressive means of claim-making is closely related to the question of whether they consider the political system to be legitimate or not. Legitimacy – in an ideal situation – means that 'those who are ruled believe that the rulers have a right ... to implement their decisions by force if necessary' (Almond *et al.*, 2002: 14). However, a more nuanced examination reveals that 'those who are ruled' is not one compact entity, but a composition of different groups. Therefore, as Arendt explains more precisely (Arendt 1969), a regime's legitimacy derives from the support of the strongest (but not necessarily most numerous) group in society. In many parts of the world, recognition as a governing force results from being the comparatively strongest among many (minority) groups and from being the comparatively best organized group in society. Even if those groups which do not support the government (the opposition of a regime) outnumber those that rule, these groups would have to act in concert and possibly to organize themselves well in order to challenge the established regime.

From this perspective, civil society is not only 'an arena of contested and competing values'. Civil society becomes the contested 'source of legitimacy with potential for political mobilization' (Albrow & Anheier 2006: 2). CSOs, and, in some cases, civil society as a whole can lend support to ideas, groups and institutions and thereby bestow on them an additional measure of legitimacy. This is especially so when civil society and groups within it enjoy broad support from the population and are thus seen themselves as legitimate actors.

The opportunity structures that define the available channels for claim-making and the legitimacy of the various political actors, as well as the support for civil society actors, are major determinants of the way civil society functions and the way it interacts with the state in representing society's or its members' interests. But ultimately, the extent to which civil society's interactions with the state follow the modalities of contained or transgressive interest expression depends at least as much on the capacities of the main actors (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 55 ff.). Governing regimes distinguish themselves through higher or lower capacities to control the rules and to monopolize effectively the use of force (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 62 ff.). High-capacity regimes (whether democratic or authoritarian) are successful in responding to expressed interests and in limiting claim-making to the prescribed and controlled options. Low-capacity regimes, by comparison, are less successful in satisfying requests from groups within society and fail to prevent competing factions in society from resorting to violent means for claim-making and for resolving conflicts. As a consequence groups other than the ruling party are able to marshal popular support (and thus legitimacy) and to apply physical power and coercive means. Examples for these alternative centres of power are separation movements, the uncontrolled use of force by war lords in fragile states, or the phenomenon of public lynching in the United States in the previous century, when a formal and functional democracy showed itself unable to control the occurrences of civil society exercising the use of force, outside of the state's monopoly (Reichardt 2006: 150).

By the same token, civil society as a whole and its constituent organizations and institutions also have different levels of capacity to interact with the state and other societal actors when making claims. CSOs are able to organize and coordinate their activities to different degrees, depending on the capacities (and willingness) of the individual organizations and the environment that enables (or does not enable) these activities. Even in the midst of an armed conflict, for example, CSOs may indeed find the means to collaborate in making claims for peace despite the collapse of the usual institutionalized channels. On the other hand, civil society capacity may be so weak following years of authoritarian rule that it does not have the ability to clamour for transitional justice measures despite the opening of institutional channels. Similarly, in the situation of post-communist democracies, CSOs often seem to lack the ability to make effective use of prescribed avenues for claim-making, resulting in an increased distance between society and political system, and thus threatening and eroding the legitimacy base of a newly-established democratic order.

The connections between legitimacy (related to the monopolized use of force) and capacities help to explain not only the direct interactions between the state and civil society, but also some dynamics among the different non-state actors. In general, the less people support the current regime and the less rules are considered legitimate, the more likely becomes the use of violence for

the settlement of conflicts between different groups in a society. Regimes which enjoy little acceptance (legitimacy) and which have low capacities fail to ensure that groups within society use legitimate, non-violent processes for settling conflicts among themselves. While factions might not intend to challenge the central powers, the government might simply not be able to prevent factions of society turning to violent means for confronting competing and opposing parts of society.

Summing up, the circumstances under which claims can be made and conflict can be dealt with peacefully or not are influenced by the political opportunity structures creating channels for such action, the legitimacy of the actors involved, and the capacity of these actors – be they state, civil society or other societal actors.⁵ In the following section, we turn specifically to civil society, the focus of this volume, to examine the roles it plays or could play in the various stages of conflict under a variety of circumstances.

Potential roles of civil society in situations of conflict

The theoretical orientation laid out on the previous pages took as its starting point the working definition of the CSI, based on a distinctively political concept and putting an emphasis on the aspect of political participation, the interactions with political institutions and actors and civil society's functioning as a bridge between the population at large and the political system. However, there are many roles which civil society fills in society that are less directly related to these political aspects.

Going beyond the CSI definition, we turn to other possible frameworks, based in democratic and related peace theories. In his examination of civil society in peacebuilding efforts, Spurk (2010) elaborates a model of seven basic civil society functions in political, social and development processes. He combines functions proposed by Merkel and Lauth (1998), drawing from democratization theory, with other elements taken from development cooperation practice. The roles thus include:

- protection of citizens
- monitoring for accountability
- advocacy and public communication
- socialization
- building community
- intermediation and facilitation between citizens and state
- service delivery

The model, especially as it applies to peacebuilding efforts, recognizes that civil society actors will not fulfil all these functions all the time and that some functions are more relevant to certain stages of conflict, including the period leading up to the outbreak of violence, or peacebuilding.

Furthermore, in keeping with the CSI conception of civil society as including ‘civil’ as well as ‘uncivil’ elements, we must add that not all civil society actors make such positive contributions and that, whatever their intent might be, not all civil society contributions are perceived to be positive. For example, some groups within broadly defined civil society express or even practise intolerance while fulfilling these functions, and can have the effect of exacerbating existing divisions and stimulating violence. In addition, a single action undertaken by a CSO could be perceived by other parties as either fighting against oppression and defending the rights of the marginalized, or inciting discord and unjustly questioning a regime or institution considered to be legitimate (at least by the strongest groups in society, as suggested earlier).

We should also mention here that, as noted by Paffenholz and Spurk (2006), many scholars and practitioners question the service delivery function, particularly in the peacebuilding phase. They raise the question of whether service delivery, which serves a social or economic function, is primarily a possible point of entry for peacebuilding efforts, and should only be seen as a civil society function when it is connected to the other functions. Even when focusing on the political aspect, however, one cannot deny the importance and value of the role many CSOs play, especially during and in the immediate aftermath of armed conflict, in providing for the basic needs and security of affected populations.

The impact of armed conflict and violence on civil society

Though as outlined above, some literature has examined the actual and potential roles civil society and its constituent elements fulfil before conflict turns violent, during conflict, and in the context of peacebuilding and reconstruction, relatively few efforts have been made to trace and document the impact of armed conflict on the development and functioning of civil society at these different stages.

One step in this direction is documented in the report of the 2011 CIVICUS/ Open Forum Thematic Consultation on CSO Development Effectiveness in Situations of Conflict (Poskitt & DuFranc 2011). It offers the accounts of a group of CSOs that have sought to operate during situations of outright and low-level armed conflict in various countries and regions. Among the most troubling impacts was a reduction of civil society’s space to act. It is hardly surprising that a government would restrict certain activities and channels for

claim-making during armed conflict and even at the point when arms have finally been laid down. The difference lies in, among other things, the extent to which the restrictions are considered legitimate, the extent to which they are applied equally, and whether they are loosened once conflict has subsided.

Furthermore, CSOs in the above study cited fewer opportunities to participate in governance. In many cases, these result from many of the same restrictions mentioned above, which may or may not be seen as legitimate or appropriate. Government might be so weakened by conflict that it simply lacks the capacity to address claims at all. Still, even when a government might be willing to hear other voices, security concerns and the lack of resources, time and freedom of movement simply prevent civil society's participation – not to mention the fulfilment of other more basic functions, such as those described in the previous section.

Not surprisingly, the priorities and activities of CSOs change during periods of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. In times of such crises, when basic security is threatened, people are displaced and basic services become unavailable, CSOs frequently shift priorities and existing resources to attend to the most pressing needs of those they serve or represent. Many local CSOs, however, note that the priorities of external donors often receive emphasis over their own. The donors' lack of understanding of the local context and local needs, they contend, can have a negative impact on local tensions and conflict (Poskitt & DuFranc 2011).

Moreover, civil society itself may become polarized, especially (but not necessarily) those parts of civil society that represent competing interests in a conflict (Paffenholz & Spurk 2006). Though CSOs are often assumed (and called on) to be neutral, the reality is often quite different on the ground, in particular where neutrality would be akin to standing by and watching human rights abuses take place. In other cases, however, elements of civil society may take up the opportunity to pull together to avoid further escalation or attempt to mediate conflict.

Finally, some have posited that armed conflict may in fact be positive for the development of civil society (Meyer & Stacey 2010). In some cases, armed conflict may lay the groundwork for civil society's expansion and development in later years. In the absence of a functioning state, self-organization becomes more necessary and crisis may promote greater civic engagement. Furthermore, CSOs may gain greater legitimacy and support by making positive contributions during conflict and, in some cases, in peacebuilding processes.

Organization of this volume

Departing from the functional definition of civil society as it is used in the CSI research that forms the foundation for the contributions to this volume, this

introduction has provided some conceptual elements, namely opportunity structures, legitimacy and capacity of state and civil society actors, for an orientation on the discussion of the relationship between civil society, conflict and violence. The previous pages have outlined these elements that influence the circumstances under which conflict can or cannot be waged and settled through peaceful means at a theoretical level and hinted at some of the roles civil society can and does play during the various stages of conflict, and the impact conflict can have on civil society and the organizations working within it.

The authors of this volume approach the topic of civil society, conflict and violence from diverse angles, touching on these themes to different degrees. They base their analyses on different elements from the diverse empirical outputs of the CSI project, taking advantage of the qualitative as well as the quantitative material and bringing evidence from other research endeavours, as well as from the day-to-day advocacy work in the field of promoting civil society and civic participation.

To lay the foundation for the subsequent analyses, Michael Hoelscher and Thomas Laux in their chapter, *Measuring Civil Society Globally with the CSI*, provide key background information on the development of the methodology used to collect the CSI data. In addition to describing the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology, they present the data structure in detail, describing the implementation process by which the data were collected and calculated, the various data sources from which the data were derived, and the many outputs. They also point at some critical issues related to the measurement of civil society in a comparative way and more specifically regarding the quantitative data. Thus they express some caveats for the researchers which should be kept in mind when working with the material.

From this broad overview of the methodology and data, Tracy Anderson brings the discussion to focus on the volume's central topic in her chapter, *Exploring Civil Society in Conflict and Post-conflict Countries: A Continuum to Peace*. Drawing on the CSI International Indicator Database, she elaborates a profile of twenty-five countries included in the dataset, clustering them according to whether they were in the midst of armed conflict during the period in which the data were collected, were in a post-conflict status for less than ten years or more than eleven years, or had experienced no recorded armed conflict since 1945. By examining and comparing the profiles of civil society in these clusters more closely, she explores the possibility of an observable trajectory of civil society development along the five CSI dimensions through the various stages of a conflict-to-peace continuum.

The contribution of Tricia Olsen, Leigh Payne and Andrew Reiter then turns to a subset of CSI countries. In their chapter, *An Exploratory Analysis of Civil Society and Transitional Justice*, they focus on those countries which are included in their Transitional Justice Database and have undergone a regime change. The authors examine the possible range of associations between

the application of certain types of transitional justice mechanisms (such as amnesties, trials and truth commissions for dealing with the human rights violations of previous regimes) and certain features of civil society. A distinction between CSOs in general and the specific sub-group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights groups helps to refine the analysis. By concentrating on selected indicators from the CSI Organizational Survey, they explore whether there is support for the hypothesized relation between civil society strength and transitional justice choices.

In his chapter, *Civil Society, Conflict Resolution and Post-conflict Reconstruction in Kosovo and Liberia*, David Kode hones in on two specific post-conflict countries, Kosovo and Liberia, to show how the role civil society plays during a conflict situation might influence its profile once the conflict has ended. His analysis builds on a description of the two armed conflicts, based to a large extent on the perspectives in the two country's CSI Analytical Country Reports. His work focuses on an essential difference between the two situations: while one conflict can be characterized as a struggle against oppression and for independence, coinciding with a clear 'us' vs. 'them' situation, the other can be seen as the outcome of warring parties fighting for hegemony, a situation which is still related to ethnic groups within the population, but with less clear-cut divisions. It is assumed that these broader contexts co-determine the space and the possibilities that are left for CSOs in which to act. Kode then uses the CSI indicators of the perceived impact of civil society and its organizations to illustrate the long-term effects this may have.

Mandeep Tiwana and Brett Kyle then use selected CSI indicators to examine more closely the state's role in regulating and controlling civil society and the space in which it may make claims and operate more generally. In their chapter, *The Law, Security and Civil Society Freedoms*, they follow a trend that has been perceived by civil society advocates in many countries in the period following the terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001 and the subsequent 'war on terror'. The authors begin by examining two indicators from the CSI Organizational Survey reporting the perceptions of CSO representatives regarding the general legal environment in which civil society operates and illegitimate attacks on CSOs. They then trace related incidents described in the CSI Analytical Country Reports and in advocacy-related material in order to illustrate how civil society actors – both organizations and individuals – are often hindered or even criminalized for their engagement. They also explore whether the perception of a restrictive legal environment and of attacks on civil society is related to the type of governmental regime.

In their chapter, *Violence in Civil Society: Insights from the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Databases*, Anaël Labigne and Anne Nassauer seek to contribute to the discussion on the CSI definition of civil society by examining whether certain types of violence or 'uncivil' action are wholly incompatible with the conception of civil society. They begin by looking at the CSI indicators focusing

on the perception of the use of violence within civil society to determine how prevalent the use of violence actually is. Their work then turns to the descriptions of violent activities as they have been reported in the CSI Analytical Country Reports from both the latest CSI phase (2008–2011) and the previous phase (2003–2006). Their intention is to go deeper than the description of the phenomenon by numbers and to show how the uses of violent means by groups within civil society differ. Their reflections contribute to the analysis of situations in which conflicts escalate into violence, taking into consideration the interplay between the political environment of CSOs and their goals and repertoires of activities.

Finally, in our concluding chapter, we summarize the results of these explorations – connecting them to some of the issues and topics raised in this introduction and thus highlighting the ways in which the single pieces with their particular perspectives examine specific elements which may influence whether the use of violence becomes an option. In addition, we highlight areas where additional research or data might support or extend the findings and suggest other possible questions relating to the link between civil society, conflict and violence that could be examined using the rich CSI data.

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