

# Organizations, Resistance, and Democracy: How Civil Society Organizations Impact Democratization

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When are episodes of resistance likely to lead to democratization? We argue that the participation of durable organizations rooted in quotidian relationships that are not themselves designed to compete for political power (what we call “quotidian civil society organizations,” QCSOs) drives successful democratic transitions. QCSOs are more likely to have stable preferences for democracy and durable mobilization structures that create greater accountability for new elites during political transitions and thus make shifts to democracy more likely compared to movements dominated by other organization types, such as political parties. Quantitative tests using novel data on the composition of resistance movements in Africa from 1990 to 2015 support these arguments. Older QCSOs and those independent from opposition political parties and the state also appear to be the most likely to engender democratization.

¿Cuándo es probable que los episodios de resistencia conduzcan a la democratización? Sostenemos que la participación de organizaciones estables, arraigadas en las relaciones cotidianas, que no están diseñadas para competir por el poder político (lo que llamamos “organizaciones de la sociedad civil cotidianas” [Quotidian Civil Society Organizations, QCSO]) impulsa el éxito de las transiciones democráticas. Las QCSO tienen más probabilidades de mostrar preferencias estables por la democracia y estructuras de movilización duraderas que crean una mayor responsabilidad para las nuevas élites durante las transiciones políticas y, por lo tanto, hacen que los cambios hacia la democracia sean más factibles en comparación con los movimientos dominados por otros tipos de organizaciones, como los partidos políticos. Las pruebas cuantitativas que utilizan datos novedosos sobre la composición de los movimientos de resistencia en África entre 1990 y 2015 respaldan estos argumentos. Las QCSO más antiguas y aquellas independientes de los partidos políticos de la oposición y del Estado también parecen ser las que tienen más probabilidades de propiciar la democratización.

À quels moments les épisodes de résistance sont-ils susceptibles de mener à une démocratisation? Nous soutenons que la participation des organisations durables ancrées dans les relations quotidiennes qui ne sont pas elles-mêmes conçues pour se disputer le pouvoir politique (que nous qualifions « d’organisations de la société civile quotidienne ») favorise la réussite des transitions démocratiques. Les organisations de la société civile quotidienne sont davantage susceptibles d’avoir des préférences stables en termes de démocratie et de structures de mobilisation durables qui donnent lieu à une plus grande responsabilité pour les nouvelles élites durant les transitions politiques et rendent ainsi les passages à la démocratie plus probables que les mouvements dominés par d’autres types d’organisations, comme les partis politiques. Des analyses quantitatives employant de nouvelles données sur la composition des mouvements de résistance en Afrique entre 1990 et 2015 soutiennent ces arguments. Les organisations de la société civile quotidienne plus anciennes et celles qui sont indépendantes des partis politiques d’opposition et de l’État apparaissent également comme étant les plus susceptibles d’engendrer une démocratisation.

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NB: The estimated proportion of women authors in the bibliography is 27.5 percent based on Jane Sumner’s web tool.

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## Introduction

Recent studies have found that popular mobilization, particularly nonviolent mobilization, correlates with democratization. Yet, many of the problematic transitions of recent decades show that this path is indirect and rocky. Most major political transformations in the post-World War II era have been undertaken in the name of democracy, but only half of the nonviolent movements in [Chenoweth and Stephan \(2011\)](#) had successfully democratized five years after the end of the campaign. What explains why some resistance movements generate democratic transitions while others do not?

We argue that the organizational composition of resistance episodes shapes the likelihood of democratization. In particular, organizations that are not designed to capture state power and are rooted in quotidian networks—such as religious organizations, trade unions, and professional organizations—are the most likely to generate democratization. We call these “quotidian civil society organizations” (QCSOs). These organizations have more stable preferences for democracy and an enduring capability to resist attempts at reautocratization in the medium term. In contrast, mobilization without QCSOs, especially mobilization dominated by political parties, is less likely to produce democratization because parties’ democratic preferences may weaken once they gain power.

Empirical analysis of new data on the organizational composition of “maximalist” mobilization in Africa from 1990 to 2015 supports our argument. There is a robust positive correlation between the participation of QCSOs in resistance campaigns and future levels of democratization. Political party participation has a significantly weaker effect on democratization and a negative impact in some models. Mobilization by older QCSOs, which are independent of the state and opposition political parties, drives higher levels of democratization, suggesting that organizational durability and expectations of sharing in state power have important implications for democratization.

Focusing on the organizational composition of resistance episodes sets us apart from structural and elite theories of democratization that see popular mobilization as a symptom of deeper (typically economic) structures ([O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986](#); [Przeworski 1991](#); [Boix 2003](#); [Acemoglu and Robinson 2005](#)). We also depart from much of the quantitative literature on nonviolent campaigns and democratization by disaggregating resistance campaigns into their organizational components ([Teorell 2010](#); [Chenoweth and Stephan 2011](#); [Bayer, Bethke, and Lambach 2016](#); [Brancati 2016](#); [Haggard and Kaufman 2016](#); [Kadivar 2018](#); [Bethke and Pinckney 2019](#)). Studies examining how specific social organizations or groups impact the mobilization of social movements and influence democratization are closest to our work ([Diani and Bison 2004](#); [McCarthy 2005](#); [Tarrow 2011](#); [Della Porta 2014](#)). For example, several large-*N* and small-*N* studies have pointed to organized labor and trade unions as a driver of democratization ([Rueschemeyer et al. 1992](#); [Bratton and van de Walle 1997](#); [Collier 1999](#); [Wood 2000](#); [Bermeo 2003](#); [Haggard and Kaufman 2016](#); [Butcher, Gray, and Mitchell 2018](#); [Dahlum, Knutsen, and Wig 2019](#)).

We advance this literature by deducing a general framework to understand how organizations impact democratization. We then test this theory’s expectations on systematically collected, large-*N* data on the organizational composition of violent and nonviolent resistance episodes in Africa from 1990 through 2015. Finally, detailed data on the features of participating organizations also allow us to explore our proposed mechanisms, increasing our

confidence that the large-*N* correlations reflect our posited causal processes.

The paper proceeds as follows. We begin by outlining the central hypothesis linking QCSOs to democratization. Then, we introduce the research design and present findings showing that the participation of QCSOs in resistance movements correlates positively with democracy two to three years into the future, an effect that is robust to a wide range of alternative specifications. We also explore the mechanisms underpinning our theory with data on the age and ties to other organizations of QCSOs. The final section concludes by highlighting the importance of QCSO mobilization for the prospects of post-campaign democratization.

## Theory

### *Organizations and Democratization*

Democracy exists where leaders achieve power through free and fair elections, where there is relative certainty in the institutions for alternation in power but uncertainty as to the outcome of those alternation procedures ([Przeworski 1991](#), 10), and where near-universal suffrage and basic freedoms of association and information make elections meaningful ([Dahl 1973](#), 2).<sup>1</sup> We understand democratization to be movement toward this ideal point of democracy and autocratization as movement away from this point.

Democratization is frequently driven by resistance campaigns involving social groups and organizations “from below” ([Haggard and Kaufman 2016](#), 128; [Pinckney 2020b](#)). Such prodemocracy campaigns face two key challenges that drive the extent to which they will successfully lead to democratization. First, they must be strong enough to force pro-democracy concessions from an autocratic regime ([Schock 2005](#), 49–55). Campaigns that mobilize many people from a diverse support base are those most likely to generate such democratic openings ([Chenoweth and Stephan 2011](#), 39; [Klein and Regan 2018](#)).

However, after achieving an initial breakthrough, campaigns face the second challenge of maintaining high levels of civic mobilization through transition periods and directing that mobilization toward building new political institutions ([Pinckney 2020b](#), 30–34). A regime may promise democratization today and renege tomorrow ([Acemoglu and Robinson 2005](#), 26). During transitions, national conventions and constitutional design processes are often held, transitional elections need to be organized, and these processes can take years to complete. In most cases, the old elite remains an important player that may create or exploit opportunities to return to the status quo. The attempted coup by the Presidential Guard in Burkina Faso in 2015 and the actual coup in Egypt in July 2013 are examples of the old regime “striking back” during transition periods.

The organizational composition of pro-democracy campaigns shapes whether the opposition can overcome both of these challenges: compelling concessions and maintaining mobilization after breakthroughs. Dissident campaigns are often made up of coalitions of formal organizations ([Pearlman 2011](#), 1–11; [Metternich et al. 2013](#); [Brancati 2016](#), 18–23; [Haggard and Kaufman 2016](#), 16; [Butcher, Gray, and Mitchell 2018](#)) in addition to informal participants and groups ([Branch and Mampilly 2015](#); [Pearlman 2020](#), 9). They often result from “meso-mobilization” processes

<sup>1</sup> Similar definitions, with slight but important variations, underlie most of the major cross-national datasets that define democracy as a binary variable. See [Przeworski et al. \(2000\)](#), [Boix et al. \(2013\)](#), and [Geddes et al. \(2014\)](#).

where activists draw upon preexisting social networks and organizations to mobilize (Chung 2011; Dyke and Amos 2017; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020). The 2007–2008 protests in Kenya, for example, were mobilized primarily by political parties, while protests in Burkina Faso in 2014 included trade unions, political parties, and civil society organizations (Engels 2019, 118).

Broader social groups do mobilize in periods of resistance, but their demands are often instantiated through formal organizations (Haggard and Kaufman 2016). Such formal organizations play multiple crucial roles in mass mobilization, including “provid[ing] strategic and tactical leadership, a focal point for the interaction of activists ... and a source for recruiting new members and identifying future leaders” (Tarrow 2011, 123). They also often make decisions about whether to accept government concessions or to remobilize during transition periods and frequently sit at the table during negotiations to refashion political institutions (Dudouet and Pinckney 2021, 10).

We argue that democratization “from below” is most likely when the organizations comprising pro-democracy campaigns have strong and stable *mobilization capacities* as well as strong and stable *preferences* for democracy through transition periods. Organizations need durable mobilization capacities to generate initial concessions from the regime and resist attempts at autocratic backsliding during transitions. As Pinckney (2020b, 69) shows, sustained civic mobilization through transitions is one of the most robust predictors of democratization following civil-resistance campaigns. Yet, organizations’ mobilization capacities are not stable over time. Organizations may strengthen during transitions, as the changing political environment provides new opportunities for activity, but they may also weaken and fragment. “Negative coalitions,” for example, may fracture after a focal leader falls and struggle to remobilize over less-clear-cut issues (Beissinger 2013). Nor, in the context of a democratic transition, is durable mobilization capacity limited to the ability to send supporters to the streets. Some organizations have the capacity to mobilize their supporters into sizable blocs of voters, with the consequent ability to shape democratic outcomes not just through extra-institutional action but through shaping who comes to power through founding and follow-up elections.

Even strong movements based on durable mobilization bases will be unlikely to generate democracy if their *preferences* for democracy are not also stable. Transitions can change the preferences of organizations that were originally part of a pro-democracy campaign by creating new governing coalitions, often from elements of the campaign that previously resisted the autocratic regime. As these newly included organizations enjoy the benefits of power, their preferences may change from pro-democracy to more exclusive institutions that lock in the advantages of government. At the very least, the opportunity costs of dissent are higher for these newly included organizations. They, thus, no longer have incentives to bear the costs of dissent in order to enforce democratization.

In contrast, organizations that do not share directly in, or have access to, executive power will generally prefer democracy because it provides opportunities for power-sharing, public goods, and protection from arbitrary repression (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005, 332). Any access to state power will have to rely on links to other organizations directly included in the governing coalition. This creates a severe principal-agent problem, in which a newly empowered partner organization may defect from past agreements. For instance, Zambia’s 1991 pro-democracy movement in-

cluded both a political party, the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), and the country’s largest trade union, the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). ZCTU leaders were confident that once in power, the MMD would pursue policies in line with their interests, particularly since the MMD’s leader, Frederick Chiluba, was a former ZCTU general secretary. However, once in power, the MMD government rapidly became a fierce opponent of the ZCTU by engaging in widespread political corruption and putting in place an extensive IMF-mandated structural adjustment program (Abrahamsen 2000; Pinckney 2020b, Ch. 4). Democratic institutions are a more reliable way for organizations to minimize the negative consequences of such uncertainty (Acemoglu and Robinson 2005, 29). Thus, while stable links to organizations in power may reduce such preferences, on average, organizations that are unlikely to directly share in state power should have greater democratic preferences than organizations that can expect to dominate state power at the beginning of a transition.

In sum, we expect that democratization is most likely when strong and durable organizations mobilize against an autocratic regime and where those organizations are unlikely to share in state power during a transition. These organizations are more likely to have stable preferences for democracy as well as the ability to coerce it from regimes that may be reluctant to do so. We argue in the next section that a particular subset of organizations—QCSOs—fit this description well.

#### *Quotidian Civil Society Organizations and Democratization*

As mentioned above, we define QCSOs based on two central features. First, they are based on everyday or “quotidian” social networks forged in regular and durable interactions that create powerful, high-trust, and stable mobilization infrastructures. Second, QCSOs are not designed to capture state power.<sup>2</sup> Greater embeddedness in quotidian networks means that QCSOs are more likely to have the capacity to generate anti-state mobilization in the first place (Thurber 2019) and sustain that mobilization for the long term. While generating initial mobilization is important for driving regime changes (Chenoweth and Belgioioso 2019), sustaining mobilization is crucial for democratization (Butcher, Gray, and Mitchell 2018, 316; Dahlum, Knutsen, and Wig 2019, 1495; Pinckney 2020b, 69). QCSOs should also, on average, prefer democratic political arrangements that limit the repressive capacity of the state and provide institutional avenues for changing political leaders as they are not designed to capture state power for themselves.<sup>3</sup> Because of these characteristics, we argue that resistance episodes with more QCSO participation have the strong and durable mobilization infrastructures *and* the stronger and more durable democratic preferences critical for producing democratization.

Which organizations that typically participate in resistance campaigns fit into this QCSO category? In the Anatomy of Resistance Campaigns (ARC) dataset (Butcher et al. 2021)—discussed in more detail below—

<sup>2</sup>Kadivar (2018) and Huang (2016) argue that insurgent groups can create durable mobilization infrastructures over years of struggle or through creating institutions to tax civilians. Here, we emphasize the literature that argues that movements commonly draw upon preexisting organizations rather than creating them *ex nihilo*.

<sup>3</sup>Groups who do not share in executive power—but are vulnerable to it—have incentives to prefer democratic institutions that are responsive to broader preferences and that limit the ability of the state to use repression (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2005, 332)

political parties, insurgent groups, trade unions, women's organizations, human rights organizations, minority rights organizations, student organizations, religious organizations, and professional organizations are identified as participating in anti-government dissident campaigns in Africa from 1990 to 2015. From this organizational ecology, we argue that three types of organizations—trade unions, professional organizations, and religious organizations—fit the QCSO definition.

Trade unions are often large organizations with powerful and enduring mobilization capacities and experience with collective action (Lee 2012, 517–22). They can engage in strikes that are more resilient to repression and draw from constituencies that are important to core economic functions (Collier 1999, 110; Butcher, Gray, and Mitchell 2018, 306–309). Trade unions are based on social networks forged and reformed in near-daily workplace interactions, which tend to generate high trust and stable mobilization infrastructures. The Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), for example, was critical to mobilization in Tunisia because local leaders could draw upon strong, workplace-based grassroots connections (Honwana 2013, 67).<sup>4</sup> This mobilization capacity rarely declines during transitions; rather, union membership often surges, providing trade unions with the capability to resist autocratization attempts (Karatnycky 1992, 48). The UGTT, for example, organized general strikes after left-wing politicians were assassinated in 2013 and a political crisis threatened to undo the transition. Trade unions were also central to overturning the coup by the Presidential Guard in Burkina Faso in 2015 (Engels 2019, 118). Therefore, trade unions satisfy the first criteria for QCSO membership; they are based on durable, everyday social networks. Second, trade unions are primarily designed to advocate for workers' rights, not to compete for state power, meaning that they satisfy the second criteria for QCSO membership (Blackburn et al. 2016). Trade unions sometimes ally with political parties, or parties can be strongly based in the organized labor movement. We discuss these nuances later but expect that trade unions have strong and durable mobilization infrastructures that arise from their quotidian social networks and stable preferences for democracy arising from their low probability of sharing directly in state power.

Religious institutions may be formally designed for observance, teaching, education, or community outreach, but they can turn their extensive social networks and moral authority against governments. Religious organizations are typically founded on stable networks of regular worship and observance. Studies of civil resistance often point to religious groups across the major faith traditions as loci of particularly robust mobilization networks (Hamid 2009, 69; Slater 2010; Nepstad 2011, 126; Rao and Dutta 2012; Brooke and Ketchley 2018, 168). Like trade unions, these religiously based mobilization infrastructures are unlikely to decline substantially over transition periods. While the strength of religious networks will vary with attendance and religiosity (Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011, Ch. 2), we argue that on average, these religious organizations mobilize from constituencies that satisfy the "quotidian" criteria for QCSO membership.<sup>5</sup> Religious organizations (with a few important exceptions) are also primarily designed to organize religious practice and education, not compete for state power, thereby satisfying the second criteria for QCSO membership.

Finally, professional organizations may not typically be as large as religious organizations or trade unions, but they satisfy the main criteria for QCSO membership. Like trade unions, professional organizations are based in stable workplace interactions. The "Sudan Professionals Organization," which spearheaded the civil-resistance movement against the regime of Omar al-Bashir in 2019, brought together organizations representing doctors, teachers, pharmacists, engineers, accountants, veterinarians, medical professionals, lawyers, journalists, and university professors, for example (Sudan Professionals Association 2019). We argue, therefore, that professional organizations satisfy the "quotidian" criteria for QCSO membership. In addition, professional organizations draw from workers who often represent services critical to regime durability. Doctors, bankers, and judges, for example, provide key public services that impact the ability of the state to function and meet the basic needs of its citizens. Like religious organizations and trade unions, professional organizations are also not primarily designed to compete for or capture state power. Overall, we expect that professional organizations have strong and durable mobilization infrastructures and stable preferences for democracy.

In summary, trade unions, religious organizations, and professional organizations have the durable mobilization infrastructures rooted in everyday social networks that are needed to generate and sustain democratic transitions, as we argued in section "Organizations and Democratization." These durable infrastructures enable movements to effectively mobilize against incumbent regimes and then retain their capabilities over time and remobilize, or threaten to remobilize, if democratic backsliding occurs. They are not designed to capture state power or contest elections. They are unlikely to significantly share in state power during or after any transition, while they remain vulnerable to state repression under autocracy (Ansell and Samuels 2014, 65). Expectations of low private benefits and vulnerability to repression mean that trade unions, religious organizations, and professional organizations should, on average, have incentives to advocate for a political system that can provide public goods benefiting their organizational activities and membership, especially freedom from repression and freedom to organize, while also locking in mechanisms—elections—that allow for the regular revision of power.

Our argument about the characteristics of each of these types of organizations is probabilistic, not deterministic, and important exceptions to these general trends exist. For instance, the Iranian revolution was spearheaded by Shi'a clerics who subsequently seized power and established the Islamic Republic. However, such occurrences are remarkable for their relative rarity and are well explained by contingent factors of the specific case. In the case of the Iranian revolution, the unique role given to the clergy in Twelver Shi'ism and the characteristics of Ayatollah Khomeini as a revolutionary leader are typical factors argued to have led to the revolution's distinct outcome (Sachedina 1981; Abrahamian 1982; Akhavi 1983). Minus such exceptional cases, QCSOs are rarely part of the new executive during transitions and indeed are more frequently not even included in the dialogue processes that give rise to new institutions (Dudouet and Pinckney 2021, 10–11).

It is plausible that QCSO participation in anti-regime dissent represents a very severe form of bargaining failure. In "normal" times, the state often co-opts labor unions, religious groups, or professional organizations (Kim and Gandhi 2010). When these organizations engage in dissent

<sup>4</sup> See also Kraus (2008, 21) for examples from sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>5</sup> Religious organizations often also have "moral" leverage against the regime (Slater 2010, 168).

against the regime, this may reflect the breakdown of an enduring bargain between powerful social groups and the state, which can only be appeased through democratic institutions that allow those social groups to punish regime defection in the future through elections. Seeing QCSO participation in dissent as a form of severe bargaining failure helps us understand why regimes might offer democratic concessions to these organizations in the first place, but we argue that the durable preferences and mobilization infrastructures embedded in QCSOs enable them to enforce regime promises of democratization through transition periods and translate offers of democracy into concrete institutional changes.

We expect, therefore, that democratization is more likely when trade unions, professional organizations, and religious organizations participate in protest campaigns against the state. Our first hypothesis is as follows:

**H1:** *Resistance movements with the participation of a greater proportion of QCSOs increase future levels of democracy.*

Other types of dissident organizations share some, but not all, features of QCSOs. We discuss political parties in more detail below. Student organizations are not designed to capture state power and can mass-mobilize, but their membership is often fluid over time. As students enter and exit university, they are only temporary participants in these groups and their membership composition is not as durable and stable as that of QCSOs (Dahlum 2019a). Human rights organizations are also unlikely to share in state power but are often not based on social networks that are forged and reformed in regular, everyday interactions such as work and worship. Other organizations also have difficulty sustaining mobilization infrastructures through transition periods. Rebel groups, for example, face high transaction costs for converting their wartime mobilization apparatus to electoral context (Dunning 2011) and if they succeed in wartime, they share directly in state power either through power-sharing arrangements or by capturing the state (Huang 2016). Spontaneous protest movements may be effective at generating turnout in the short term, but the proliferation of weak ties makes these movements vulnerable to repression and prone to fragmentation in a transition (Tufekci 2017, xv).

#### *Political Parties and Democratization*

Political parties, while they frequently participate in pro-democracy campaigns, provide a clear conceptual contrast to QCSOs. Parties may mobilize from religious groups, professional organizations, and workers, but they seek to channel these collective resources to win elections and capture state power. The potential for sharing power after a resistance episode changes the incentives that political party leaders have to follow through with democratization, as compared to QCSOs. Political parties may oppose an autocratic regime in one period but become a part of the governing coalition in another after winning transitional elections, joining a government coalition, or accepting offers of cabinet positions. For example, following the 2014 Burkinabe Revolution, the presidential elections in 2015 in Burkina Faso were won by Roch Marc Christian Kaborè of the People's Movement for Progress—a participant in the 2014 uprising.<sup>6</sup> Even if the old regime is not removed, it may reshuffle the governing coalition in response to dissent and

include opposition political parties that had been mobilized against the state.

Newly included organizations enjoy the private benefits of state power, which reduces the utility of a democratic system that would give competitors the opportunity to remove these actors from office. Instead, previously “democratic” organizations that served as a check on state power when outside of government may seek to consolidate their own transitional power into a long-term or permanent nondemocratic regime. For example, while fighting against the British colonial rule, Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP) articulated a vision of liberal, democratic rule in Ghana (and ultimately across the African continent). However, soon after Ghana's independence from Britain, the CPP cracked down on opposition through passing the Preventive Detention Act (PDA), which allowed for the repression of opponents without trial, ultimately spearheading the trend of single-party authoritarian rule in Africa when they outlawed all other political parties and proclaimed Nkrumah president-for-life in 1964 (Biney 2008).

This tendency for new leaders to govern just like the “old” (authoritarian) leaders has been cited as an important reason why democratization has stalled in parts of Africa despite numerous pro-democracy campaigns (Van De Walle 2007; Lynch and Crawford 2011, 276). In Africa, political parties have been described as the weak link in democratization processes because of their organizational weakness, fragility, lack of internal accountability, appeals to ethnic constituencies, and personalism (Randall and Svåsand 2002, 32).<sup>7</sup> These factors may increase the benefits that individual party leaders obtain from sharing in power, or create incentives from ethnically based constituencies to prefer patronage over democratic change. Therefore, political party-based pro-democracy campaigns often have motivations to block substantial democratization efforts, even if their campaigns are successful in removing autocratic leaders. Strong domestic and international incentives to maintain the semblance of formal democratic institutions mean that we do not expect deep autocratization after political party-based resistance campaigns. Rather, we anticipate observing stasis around the status quo, often of semi- or flawed democracy.

Political parties do not necessarily have antidemocratic preferences once in power. There are numerous examples of opposition parties that have continued to push for democratic reforms once in power. However, we expect that, on average, when political parties have access to state power, they will seek to take whatever institutional steps are possible to increase their chances of maintaining that power indefinitely. We, therefore, expect resistance episodes dominated by political parties to have a weaker association with future levels of democracy, as compared to those campaigns grounded in QCSO participation.

**H2:** *Resistance episodes dominated by political parties have a significantly weaker impact on democratization than episodes dominated by QCSOs.*

Our theoretical framework also generates additional empirical implications. For example, if proximity to state power undermines preferences for democracy, we would expect weaker impacts on democratization when QCSOs have close ties to political parties. While the principal-agent problems described in the preceding text may still lead to some

<sup>6</sup> Kaborè defected from the ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress in January 2014 to form his own party (Engels 2019, 119).

<sup>7</sup> This is a general observation and does not characterize some systems to the same extent such as Ghana and Zambia (Lindberg and Morrison 2008).

positive impact, this effect should be weaker.<sup>8</sup> Our argument also suggests that older QCSOs should drive democratization because their mobilization infrastructures are more durable when compared to younger QCSOs that form close to an episode of resistance. We explore some of these implications empirically in the “Exploring the Mechanisms” section.

#### Research Design

We test our hypotheses using data covering all country-years in North and sub-Saharan Africa from 1990 to 2015 in countries with populations greater than five hundred thousand. The temporal and geographic range is based on limitations in available data, rather than theoretical scope conditions; however, we are cognizant of the challenges of extrapolating general trends from regionally limited data. We can, of course, only say with confidence that our findings apply to cases within Africa. The data come primarily from two sources, the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem), version 10 (Coppedge et al. 2020) and the ARC project (Butcher et al. 2021).

#### Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable is the “polyarchy” score from Coppedge et al. (2020), measured at time  $t + 2$ . Democratization in the wake of dissent usually manifests two to three years after a period of contention and is fairly stable afterward (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Dahl 2020, 7).

The polyarchy score is an index of democratic institutions that aggregates measures of the existence of electoral institutions, their degree of freedom and fairness, the extent of suffrage, and protections for freedom of association and expression.

#### Independent Variables

Our independent variables come from the ARC dataset (Butcher et al. 2021), which records organizational participation in events of collective dissent with “maximalist” demands in North and sub-Saharan Africa from 1990 to 2015. Organizations in the ARC data are structures designed to pool people and resources—often through collective action—for collective goals (North 1990, 2). Maximalist demands are “demands for changes in the political structure which, if implemented, would significantly alter the executive branch’s immediate access to state power, the rules through which executives are selected, or the policy or geographic areas over which the executive has the right to exercise authority” (Butcher et al. 2021, 2). Demands for democracy in autocratic settings are a subset of maximalist demands, but this broader definition includes episodes of contention that are aimed at the preservation of democracy rather than its creation (e.g., against changes to term limits) or establishing new states that may or may not be democratic. Organizations participate in collective dissent when they deploy their mobilization infrastructure to encourage individual participation in events of maximalist dissent. For example, this occurs when a union calls a strike and encourages its members to participate, as the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions did in the late 1990s (Hadebe 2019, 118).

<sup>8</sup> Similar to how Lee (2012, 2016) finds that “cohesiveness” between labor unions and political parties narrows unions’ focus and undermines the expansion of the welfare state, unless complemented by “embeddedness” in civil society.

The ARC dataset includes annualized information on organizations that were identified as participants in nonviolent and violent maximalist events of contention, primarily groups that were named in newswire sources as being present at or organizing protests, strikes, or armed attacks. The data include information on 1,426 distinct organizations active across 3,407 country-organization-years. Organizations in ARC are identified partly from newswire sources, potentially biasing the data toward larger, more prominent organizations and those with experience or incentives to interact with the news media. Correlations between QCSO participation and levels of future democracy may, therefore, be spuriously related to levels of political openness or media freedom. To partially address this issue, we follow the suggestion of Weidmann (2016, 216) and limit the analysis to “severe” events that receive more consistent media coverage. Only organizations associated with events with more than one thousand participants or associated with violent events in the Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED; Sundberg and Melander 2013) and Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED) (Raleigh et al. 2010) are included in the measurements described below. We also include several controls (including country- and year-fixed effects and a lagged dependent variable) to directly address the problem of varying cross-national coverage.

#### QCSOs and Parties

Our hypotheses emphasize the dominance of certain types of organizations in resistance episodes. Our main measure is the percentage of all active organizations in a given country-year that were QCSOs (trade unions, professional organizations, or religious organizations). Table 1 outlines which organizations were classified as QCSOs based on the “organization type” variable in the ARC dataset. This measure captures QCSO participation relative to all other organizations, treating all mobilized organizations equally. We measure political party dominance in the same way. The hypotheses were retested with numerous alternative specifications, discussed in more detail in the results section.

#### Control Variables

QCSO participation is not randomly distributed and is likely affected by the past levels of civil society openness and regime type, the past levels of contention, structural economic factors, and economic growth (Brancati 2016; Dahlum, Knutsen, and Wig 2019; Butcher et al. 2021). Our modeling strategy is designed to minimize the effects of such omitted variable bias.

We include *GDP growth* because economic crises weaken regimes and create democratic transitions (Brancati 2016, 60). We also control for economic development using *GDP per capita*, as development is associated with increasing organizational density in civil society and may independently cause regimes to liberalize (Boix 2003). These two variables come from the World Bank (2020). Countries with freer and denser civil societies may have more QCSO participation, and the *Core Civil Society Index* from V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2020) was included to account for this. Controls for whether there was a presidential or legislative election held in that year were included as separate variables from Coppedge et al. (2020). Elections can be focal points for protest and (independently) indicate an underlying democratization process (Knutsen, Nygård, and Wig 2017). We control for oil wealth with oil rents as a percentage of GDP from the World Bank (2020) as oil-rich countries may be able to

Table 1. Organization types

Type	Org. goals	Classification	Example
Revolutionary	Maximalist goals	Revolutionary	AFDL: Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo
Political party	Win elections, hold political office	Political party	UFDG: Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea
Trade union	Workers' rights/interests in a trade or industry	QCISO	CTNG: The National Confederation of Guinean Workers
Professional	Professionals' rights/interests	QCISO	ONAT: Tunisian Bar Association
Religious	Coordinate religious activities	QCISO	FNAI: Tunisian Front of Islamic Associations
Student	Youth/student interests	Student/youth	GUTS: General Union of Tunisian Students
Women's	Women's rights/interests	Other CSO	AFTD: Tunisian Association of Democratic Women
Ethnic	Ethnic rights/interests	Other CSO	MAK: Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie (Algeria)
Other CSOs	Broad, universal non-maximalist goals (i.e., human rights)	Other CSOs	CNOSCG: National Council of Civil Society Organizations

suppress dissent, are less likely to democratize (Ross 2001), and are less likely to experience nonviolent campaign onset (Pinckney 2020a). We include a control for regional democracy because surrounding democracies may support protest movements and independently drive democratization (Gleditsch and Ward 2006). We also account for the age of the leader because elderly and sick leaders can generate elite splits, opportunities for protest, and openings for democratization (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2017, 717).

An indicator for whether there was an ongoing nonviolent campaign in the country-year from Chenoweth and Shay (2020) was included because large, mature civil-resistance campaigns may have more organizational participation and independently drive democratization (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 29). This introduces some posttreatment bias because QCISO participation should provide campaigns with organizational foundations and make them larger and better able to survive (Butcher, Gray, and Mitchell 2018), but it helps to separate our argument from the broader argument about nonviolent campaigns and democratization. A control for the presence of an ongoing violent campaign was also included because violence may deter participation and make democratization less likely by increasing elite cohesion (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 29). We controlled for the log number of unique organizations in dissent in the country-year since more organizations may correlate with more QCISOs, and it may simply be organizational diversity that drives democratization processes (Bayer, Bethke, and Lambach 2016, 759; Celestino and Gleditsch 2013, 391). A control was also included for the number of Social Conflict Analysis Dataset (SCAD) protest events in the country-year to exclude the possibility that more QCISOs reflect more contention and contention drives democratization (Teorell 2010, 100–16).

Country- and year-fixed effects were tested to capture factors at the country level that may have encouraged democratization, the strong likelihood that more organizations are captured with better newswire coverage over the twenty-five years of our study and within certain countries, and other continent-wide shocks (such as the Arab Spring).<sup>9</sup> Finally, we include the lagged dependent variable (measured at  $t - 1$ ) because the level of democracy at time  $t + n$  is related to past levels of democracy, and it is also related to freedom of the press and our ability to identify organizational participation. All controls except for elections, ongoing nonvi-

olent and violent campaigns, the number of organizations, and the number of violent organizations were measured at  $t - 1$  to avoid contaminating the control variables with the effects of organizational participation at time  $t$  and introducing posttreatment bias. We also ran a robustness check with a control for the number of newswire hits in the Factiva database for that country in that year to control for time-varying aspects of media coverage and whether there was a “regime end” in the Historical Regimes Data in the country-year (Djuve, Knutsen, and Wig 2020) because our argument emphasizes that QCISOs *sustain* democratization processes rather than necessarily generating regime changes in the short term (although we expect these efforts to be correlated).

## Results

Figure 1 shows how the organizational composition of antigovernment resistance varies across observations that experienced autocratization at  $t + 2$  (negative changes of more than  $-0.1$ ), were stable (changes between  $-0.1$  and  $0.1$ ), and democratized at  $t + 2$  (changes greater than  $0.1$ ). The values were calculated by taking the proportion of all organizations active in maximalist resistance against the state accounted for by the organization type in question, across the three categories of institutional change. The ARC data include information on other organizations beyond QCISOs and political parties and for comparison, we also show results for “other CSOs,” rebel organizations,<sup>10</sup> and student organizations.<sup>11</sup>

These descriptive statistics are in line with our expectations. Autocratization at  $t + 2$  occurs in the *absence* of QCISOs and frequently occurs in the presence of political parties and armed rebel groups. Positive changes toward democracy are marked by greater dispersion across organizations with a relatively even spread of QCISOs, other CSOs, political parties, and armed groups. Of course, these descriptive patterns do not account for potential confounders discussed in the research design; thus, we turn to the findings from our multivariate regression models.

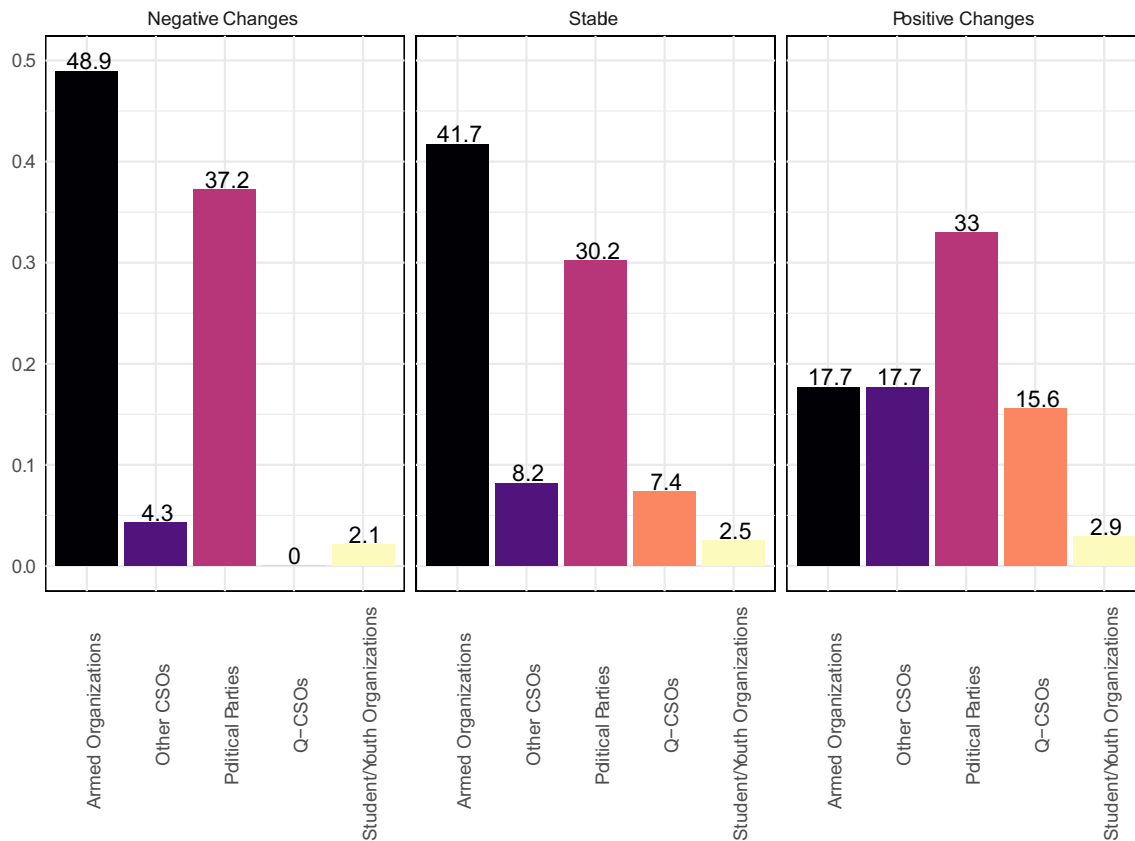
Figure 2 summarizes our main results.<sup>12</sup> The evidence is consistent with our expectations. The participation of

<sup>10</sup>This variable comes from the alternative organization-type variable in ARC that discriminates between armed and unarmed organizations.

<sup>11</sup>We do not examine the category of revolutionary organizations in this article, apart from those that happen to also be rebel groups. Revolutionary organizations largely consist of fronts of other organizations or organizations designed specifically to mobilize protest campaigns.

<sup>12</sup>All models contain the control variables described above (GDP growth, GDP per capita, core civil society index, election year, oil wealth, regional

<sup>9</sup>However, more recent events likely have poorer coverage in secondary/historical sources.



**Figure 1.** The organizational composition of maximalist resistance and democratization  $t + 2$ .

QCSOs in dissent is associated with larger shifts toward democracy. A one standard deviation increase in the percentage of QCSOs mobilized during resistance campaigns is associated with an increase of nearly 0.027 points on the polyarchy scale. A year of maximalist contention without QCSO participation would be, on average, 0.054 points lower on the polyarchy scale after three years, compared to a movement composed of 50 percent QCSOs. This might appear to be a small effect, but it accumulates through the lagged dependent variable. As a comparison, a country's civil society index would need to increase by more than a third of the full range to have the same impact on democratization. These associations are most pronounced in autocracies and, after regime changes, consistent with the idea that QCSOs are more important in political environments that restrict other sources of mobilization, and during periods of institutional change.

The positive association between QCSO participation and democratization is also significantly larger than the impact of political party participation. The upper bound of the 95 percent confidence interval for the percent political party estimate (0.008) is smaller than the lower bound of the 95 percent confidence interval for the QCSO estimate (0.011). It is unlikely that political party dominance and QCSO dominance have the same association with democratization, given the variance in the data and our estimated

democracy, leader age, ongoing nonviolent campaign, number of unique organizations [logged], and number of SCAD events. The "FEs" model also includes country- and year-fixed effects. The "Extra Controls + FEs" model includes country-fixed effects, year-fixed effects, and variables measuring the number of newswire hits in the country-year in question and whether the country-year included the end of a regime.)

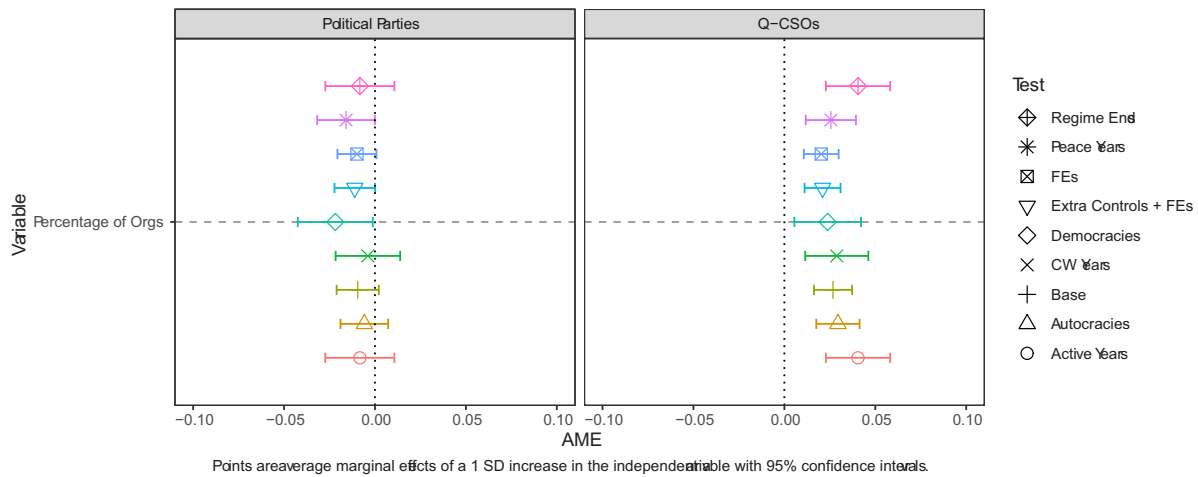
model. A Wald equivalence of the coefficients test shows that these two coefficients are unlikely to be equal ( $p < 0.0001$ ). We, therefore, find support for  $H_2$  in the data.

Common alternative explanations are unlikely to explain these associations. All models include the full set of controls described above. The results are also robust to year- and country-fixed effects, making it very unlikely that underlying country- or time-specific variables explain away these results. The results are also not explained by the general link between nonviolent campaigns and democratization (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Celestino and Gleditsch 2013) in this limited sample. While we cannot rule out the presence of an unobserved confounder, we see these results as strong evidence for an independent effect of QCSOs on medium-term democratization.

We subjected these findings to several robustness tests. First, we reran the models in various subsamples, including (but not limited to) autocracies, only in years with active campaigns and years in which there was a regime termination according to the Historical Regimes Dataset (eighty-eight observations; Djuve, Knutsen, and Wig [2020]). Figure 2 summarizes these results. Second, we revisited our results using three different operationalizations of the dependent variable. Third, we examined alternative specifications of the independent variable. Fourth, we ran several models with a variety of additional control variables. Across all specifications, the results are broadly consistent with our central hypotheses on the impact of QCSOs on democratization.

We discuss these various models, and present full-regression tables for all our tests, in the online appendix. However, a few specifications that address alternative



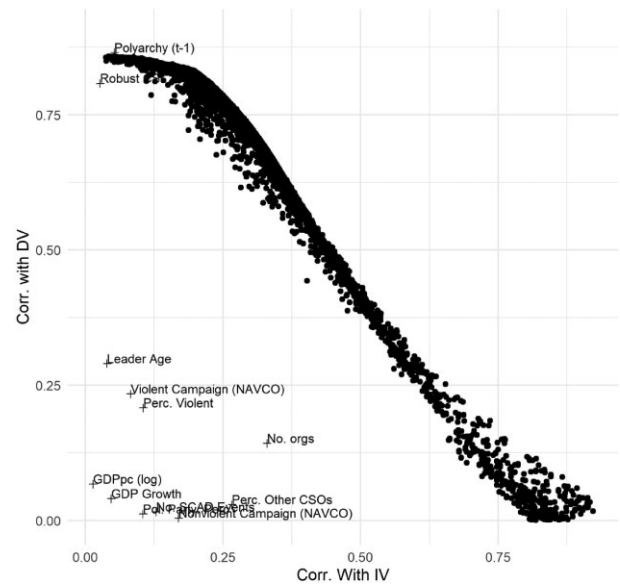


**Figure 2.** Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression results, QCSOs, and democratization  $t + 2$ .

explanations bear mentioning here. First, our “extra controls” models include a control for whether there was a Varieties of Democracy (VDEM) regime transition in the country-year, and the positive and significant association between QCSO participation and democratization remains. This suggests that QCSOs impact democratization by shaping the trajectory of transitions rather than by exclusively generating regime changes in the first place.

Second, we considered whether the association between QCSOs and democratization might simply be reduced to the impact of organized labor in general or the possibility that QCSOs simply reflect a broader association between civil society mobilization and democratization. First, we added a control for the proportion of organizations that mobilized from a “workers” or “professional” constituency from the “social base” variable in the ARC dataset.<sup>13</sup> This accounts for the possibility that QCSOs simply mobilize more often from organized labor and that the organizational form of that mobilization is inconsequential to democratization. A second control was included measuring the percentage of organizations that were “other CSOs,” specifically organizations such as human rights organizations, development organizations, women’s organizations, and cultural advocacy organizations. These groups commonly participate alongside QCSOs (and are, therefore, correlated with QCSO participation) and may independently drive democratization. Neither of these variables change our main results. We find no strong associations between movements dominated by other CSOs nor organizations that mobilize from “workers,” which suggests that specific organizational forms help understand the conditions under which mass mobilization—including the mobilization of labor—results in democracy. Furthermore, when we specify models including trade unions, professional organizations and religious organizations separately, we find that all three have a positive and significant association with democratization at  $t + 2$ , something we do not observe for student organizations, other CSOs, political parties, or “revolutionary organizations.”

Finally, to address issues of unobservable omitted variable bias, we followed Imbens’ (2003) suggested procedure of replicating our results with a simulated confounding vari-



**Figure 3.** Imbens’ unobserved confounding tests.

able. For the QCSO variable, we replicated our results one hundred thousand times, each time adding a simulated confounder with a randomly generated degree of correlation between our independent and dependent variables. We then observed in which of these models with the simulated confounder our independent variable no longer has a statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) relationship with the dependent variable.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 3 shows the results of these tests run on models with country- and year-fixed effects and the dependent variable measured at  $t + 2$ . The black dots are simulated correlations that rendered the result statistically insignificant. The labeled crosses are the absolute levels of correlation between the control variables and the independent and dependent variables. A simulated confounder would have to have a similar degree of correlation with the polyarchy score than its own value at  $t - 1$  for the QCSO percentage to no longer be

<sup>13</sup>The social base variable is an open-text string indicating the types of broad social groups from which the organization in question mobilized, as identified in secondary literature and newswire sources.

<sup>14</sup>The online appendix shows a similar test using the sensemakr package in R (Cinelli and Hazlett 2020) with similar results.

significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Other control variables have levels of correlation with QCSO participation and the polyarchy score at  $t + 2$  far below the amount necessary to nullify the result. Such a confounder is possible, but based on the existing research, figure 3 suggests that it is unlikely. Our speculation is that such a confounder might exist toward the right of the  $x$ -axis in figure 3 through a closer examination of the composition of resistance episodes that is beyond the scope of this article.

The Imbens test does not rule out the possibility that reverse causality may explain this relationship. While future democracy cannot directly cause events in the past, QCSOs may be particularly good at mobilizing in situations when they anticipate that a high level of democratization is imminent. Our inability to fully account for reverse causality is one limitation of this study. However, we also consider it unlikely that reverse causality through anticipation is a sufficient explanation for the patterns that we identify here. First, transitions are highly uncertain, particularly in the often-chaotic environment of mass mobilization (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 76). Second, such a relationship would require not just that QCSOs be able to anticipate future democratization several years in advance despite the chaotic character of transition periods, but also that they be significantly better at anticipating future democratization than other organizations in resistance campaigns, particularly political parties. Given the typical expertise of political parties, we find it unlikely that this is taking place systematically among the cases we examine.

#### Exploring the Mechanisms

Can particular features of QCSOs explain some of the association between QCSO participation and democratization? While cases such as Burkina Faso in 2014, Tunisia in 2011, and Mali in 1990 are paradigmatic examples of democratization following QCSO participation in dissent (Honwana 2013; Engels 2019), not all years of QCSO participation were successful in the pursuit of democracy. Years of QCSO participation in Zimbabwe were followed by (small) democratic declines. A long, trade union-dominated, pro-democracy movement in Eswatini has not produced democratization and the regime remained roughly as autocratic in 2015 as it was in 1990 (polyarchy = 0.143).

Our theory leads us to expect campaigns with the participation of *durable* QCSOs that were more *independent* from the existing political parties and the state should generate democratization. These are QCSOs that can credibly enforce institutional changes to democracy and have low expectations of sharing directly in state power. To explore this, we created indicators of organizational durability and independence from political parties and the state. First, to measure durability, we use the log of the mean organization age in the observation year for participating QCSOs.<sup>15</sup> Older QCSOs should be more likely to generate democratization because they are more likely to maintain their mobilization infrastructures during transition periods. We constructed a second variable indicating the number of QCSOs that mobilized from a “social base” that matched a text string used to identify workers and professional groups, using the social base variable in the ARC data.

Third, we constructed a dummy variable indicating whether any of the participating QCSOs in the country-year had a direct alliance to a political party. Sometimes, this re-

fects short-lived alliances of convenience, but it often reflects deeper ties between political parties and trade unions. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, for example, was instrumental in creating the Movement for Democratic Change (a political party), and the two organizations maintained a close alliance throughout the 2000s (Raftopoulos and Quantin 2001, 43; Hadebe 2019, 118). QCSOs with ties to political parties should be less likely to facilitate democratization as they are more easily bought off by access (even partial access) to state power. This variable was based on the “alliances” variable in the ARC dataset.

Fourth, we created an indicator of whether the leader of any QCSO had served as a high-ranking minister, military official, or was a member of parliament, based on the *Leadership Ties* variable in the ARC dataset.<sup>16</sup> This variable captures individual ties between the leadership of QCSOs and law-making legislative and executive institutions. The same measurements for political parties were also included.

Figure 4 shows results from models that include these variables (the model setup is otherwise the same as in the main analysis). Older QCSOs are associated with democratization across all models. An episode of contention where QCSOs are 15 years old is, on average, 0.04 points higher on the polyarchy score than the same movement with a newly formed QCSO. The more that QCSOs mobilize from worker or professional constituencies, the larger the impact on democratization. Moreover, the democratizing effect of QCSOs is reduced when they have direct ties to political parties or their leadership has political ties to a past regime. Ties to a political party decrease the expected polyarchy score at  $t + 2$  by 0.016 points, as do ties to the state (−0.016 points). These results paint a picture of democratization being driven by older QCSOs that have strong organizational infrastructures rooted in quotidian networks such as work, while being independent from the state and political parties.<sup>17</sup>

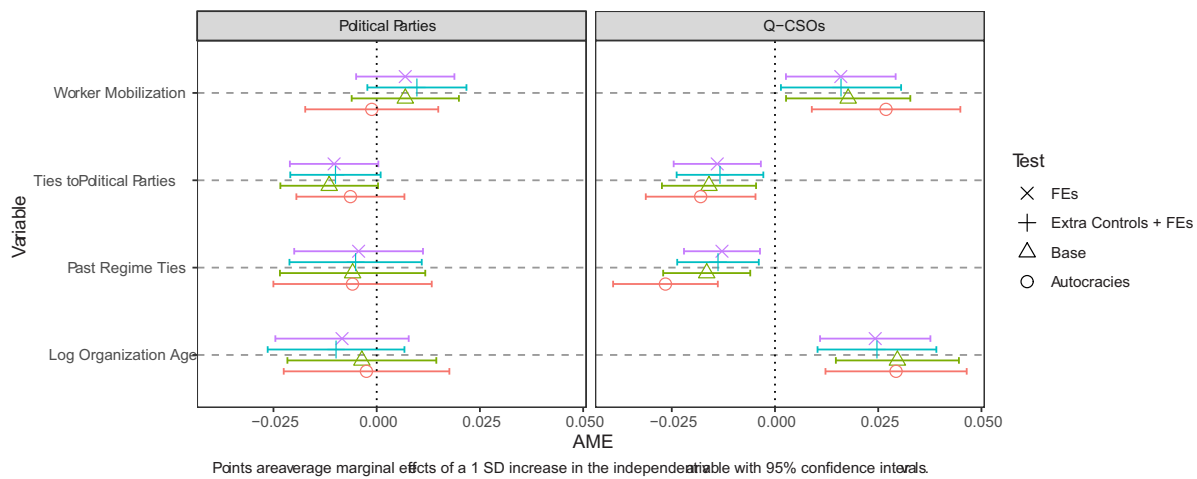
These organizational features have different effects on democratization when manifested through political parties. Older political parties have a weaker impact on democratization than older QCSOs. The null hypothesis that the coefficients for political party age and QCSO age are the same is unlikely to be true, given the data ( $p < 0.05$  for the fixed-effects models). In the sample of more autocratic states, worker mobilization has a significantly weaker—and sometimes negative—association with democratization when it is instantiated through political parties, compared with worker mobilization through QCSOs ( $p = 0.059$ ). Features such as organization durability and social bases likely have different impacts on institutional change depending on their organizational instantiation. Ties to other political parties have a similar impact as for QCSOs: they generally reduce the impact of contention on democratization, while ties from political party leaders to past regimes have only weak associations with democratization.

These results help to explain the varied consequences of QCSO participation for subsequent democratization, even if these organizations have a positive effect in general. For example, the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 did involve the participation of unions, but these unions were newly formed while the older, large, state-run Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) did not take to the streets. Similarly, the campaign's largest participating group was a religious group: the Muslim Brotherhood. Yet, this group

<sup>16</sup> Leadership ties exist where the leader of an organization had a regular and meaningful impact on national-level policy in the past.

<sup>17</sup> See Riley and Fernández (2014) for a discussion of organizationally strong versus autonomous civil societies.

<sup>15</sup> This is calculated by subtracting the year that the organization was born from the year of observation.



**Figure 4.** OLS regression results, mechanisms  $t + 3$ .

quickly formed a political party to enable its direct access to state power. The resultant Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) followed the pattern that we identified previously by making autocratizing moves to cement its position in power. These moves were perceived as such fundamental threats that the political parties and revolutionary groups comprising the 2013 anti-Morsi protests were willing to strike a deal with the military, facilitating a coup to oust the FJP from power.

### Conclusion

We argue that maximalist dissent by civil society organizations embedded in quotidian social networks with no direct mechanism for seizing state power (QCSOs) fosters subsequent democratization. QCSOs combine stable pro-democratic preferences with durable mobilization structures that, on average, facilitate democratic progress. Adopting a conservative modeling strategy employing country- and year-fixed effects, a lagged dependent variable, and a battery of controls accounting for alternative explanations, we find strong evidence that QCSOs are positively correlated with democracy two to three years into the future. This result is robust across a number of modeling strategies and subsamples. This impact is heightened when QCSOs are older and independent of political parties and the old regime.

We also predicted that political parties have a weaker impact on democratization than QCSOs and found support for this claim. Political parties are obviously essential to functioning democracy, but they may be problematic when they dominate the *establishment* of democracy. Partial democratization may even create a cycle whereby dissent becomes channeled through organizations—political parties—that have incentives to stall democratization once in power. These effects might be especially pernicious or limited to party systems characterized by clientelism, personalism, and low institutionalization, as is the case in some African states (Randall and Svåsand 2002, 33). Our findings help to explain the persistence of semi-democracy in some African states where political elites often rotate governing coalitions around election periods, only for the new governing coalition to try to lock in their advantage by stalling democratic reforms or undermining democratic institutions (Van De Walle 2007).

While the results in relation to political parties might appear counterintuitive and appear to deviate from important historical cases (such as the role of the African National Congress in South Africa) to an extent they reflect mixed associations between political party coalitions and democratization in the existing studies (Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius 2013; Bogaards 2014). Haggard and Kaufman (2016, 106–107, 128) find that while parties were often present during democratic transitions, mobilized civil society actors were more decisive for democratization. Some types of political parties may also have positive impacts on democratization while others have negative or uncertain effects. Unpacking this relationship is an important question for future work.

These findings deepen our understanding of the link between nonviolent contention and democratization. Variations in the “anatomy” of these movements help explain why some cases of nonviolent resistance, even successful nonviolent campaigns, do not ultimately democratize. Crucial turning points in the “Arab Spring” may, for example, have been the decision of the UGTT to join protests in Tunisia and the decision of the EFTU or the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) to remain on the sidelines. Our results suggest—other things being equal—more hope for the democratization process in Sudan after protests spearheaded by the Sudan Professionals Organization removed Omar al-Bashir than in Algeria after Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s fall where, again, the UGTA was not a major player in the protests.

Our study advances the understanding of how social groups shape democratization (Haggard and Kaufman 2016; Butcher, Gray, and Mitchell 2018; Dahlum, Knutsen, and Wig 2019) by showing that organizational forms matter. Workers and religious practitioners can be mobilized through trade unions, churches, or political parties, and our analysis suggests that how these individuals and groups mobilize affects democratization. We recommend a continued focus on organizations in transition processes. Organization leaders are often at the negotiating table or in constitutional conventions, and the incentives that these actors have to propel or stall democratization should be critical to institutional outcomes. Finally, our findings account for why trade unions are important in democratization processes. We (1) show that trade unions possess

the more general characteristics of a durable mobilization infrastructure and low expectations of sharing in state power—features that other organizations can also possess—and (2) conduct a rigorous empirical testing of these claims, using a dataset that covers the full ecology of organization types in violent- and nonviolent-resistance episodes. This allows us to separate the associations between trade unions and other dissident organizations that participate alongside them.

This work comes with some important limitations. Our argument is informed by prior scholarship on the roles played by trade unions and religious organizations in resistance movements across a wide range of contexts, including in Southeast Asia (Boudreau 2009; Slater 2010), Latin America (Stepan 1989; Toft, Philpott, and Shah 2011), and Eastern Europe (Kuran 1991; Bunce and Wolchik 2011). However, our analysis is limited in time and scope to Africa in the post-Cold War period. While there is significant diversity across African countries and the resistance campaigns therein, it is possible that the results of this study do not generalize due to idiosyncratic features of the “second” and “third” waves of protest that have swept Africa (Mueller 2018, 49–51), the prevalence of personalistic and ethnically based political parties, or the relatively small middle class and low average level of income (Boix 2003; Ansell and Samuels 2014). We encourage future research to systematically test the impact of QCSOs across a broader set of temporal and geographic contexts.

QCSOs also generate medium-term democratic openings (one to four years into the future), but these gains appear to fade over time, unlike the impact of nonviolent campaigns more generally, which are more enduring in our study (see the online appendix) and in prior research (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Transition periods have profound legacies for democratization (Seely 2005) and QCSOs can shape institutions during this crucial period, but other features of nonviolent campaigns, such as their diversity, leadership, unity, or gender composition, may consolidate these gains further into the future. Finally, these results indicate that direct ties between QCSOs and political parties may stall democratization processes. Our mechanisms emphasize how such ties enable regimes to “buy off” QCSOs in transition processes with a share of government power, but we recognize that scholars have identified other mechanisms that may be at play. Ties to political parties may legitimize severe government repression, as appears to have been the case in Zimbabwe (LeBas 2006, 424), or may reflect unobserved conditions that make regime change difficult, thereby forcing opposition organizations into direct alliances. Further exploration in these areas also offers promising directions for future work.

Despite these limitations, our findings shed light on when resistance “from below” does and does not lead to medium-term democratic change as well as practical implications for activists, practitioners, and policymakers. This work speaks to the importance of investing in the kinds of quotidian civil society networks of labor, worship, and professionalization that can later serve as the backbone for resistance to autocracy. It also speaks to the importance of building capacity for resistance into these types of organizations that are not typically built for dissent, for instance, through training in nonviolent resistance. As demonstrated by the powerful examples of organizations from Solidarity in Poland to the Sudan Professionals Association, when QCSOs join the fight, even the most robust and repressive regimes may be followed by democratization.

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