



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Sarah Ahmed

Title: The Activity of Organizations Supporting Civil Society in the Middle East. The Case of Egypt and Turkey

Programme/year: MAIN, 2018

Author of Evaluation (supervisor/external assessor): Jakub Zahora

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	3
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	15
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	26
<i>Total</i>		80	44
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	9
	Style	5	4
	Formal requirements	5	4
<i>Total</i>		20	17
TOTAL		100	61



Evaluation

Major criteria:

Although the thesis is quite impressively comprehensible in empirical terms and draws on a wide body of scholarship, it remains unclear what the author seeks to achieve. In the introduction she offers several aims. The author states that the thesis is an “attempt to understand the two most influential political bodies of democracy promotion: the European Union (EU) and the United States (US)”, that is, “try[ing] to understand their efforts, influence and entwinement with their own domestic affairs, i.e., security vs. democracy” (pp. 2). She then goes on to say that “the analysis which follows this is not based on finding new theories but rather explaining, for both myself and the reader, current events in both countries that have led them both to being headline news stories every now and then with arrests or instability leading a global spreading of fear” (pp. 2). Then in the conclusion, the author states that “This thesis was an attempt to understand some of the concepts that are gaining more and more importance everyday, from ‘civil society,’ emerging in Ancient Greece, to ‘democracy’ and ‘authoritarianism.’” (pp. 75). Coupled with a lack of methodological apparatus, the reader (at least this one) is left unsure what kind of questions will be pursued in the thesis.

This confusion persists in the conceptual chapters (1 and 2) in which the author offers discussions of several key terms like democracy, authoritarianism, civil society and democracy promotion. Nonetheless, the chapter offers more of an overview of various authors’ take on these issues (going from the Ancient Greece to contemporary thinkers) rather than a coherent discussion and conceptualization of the terms to be used by the author in the thesis. Moreover, in the case of EU and US democracy promotion initiatives, the thesis consists much more of the historical evolution of these programmes rather than a conceptual analysis regarding how we can understand them more generally.

Later in the thesis, the author seems to adopt “Tocquevillian” and “Gramscian” understanding of civil society but this does not really stem from the theoretical part in which she discusses a whole range of conceptualizations of the term. Moreover, at times she seems to understand “Tocquevillian” and “Gramscian” as prescriptive rather than analytical categories. For example, on the page 29 she states that ““even Putnam’s Tocquevillian concept of civil society (see chapter one) did not attract donors either”. That is to say, to me it appears that the author understands academic concepts as policy ones.

The respective chapters on the situation in Turkey and Egypt are exhaustive but they still suffer from unclear focus. Essentially, the author deals with both the conditions of civil society and its relations with the state apparatus, as well as US and EU democracy promotion initiatives over the last several decades. She provides a very good empirical overview of the topics but it is not clear how it relates to the central concerns stated in the introduction and the theoretical/conceptual chapters.



**FACULTY
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**
Charles University

All these features result in a somewhat bifurcated thesis: it is really not clear if the author wants to assess the impact of EU and US programmes on the civil society in the discussed countries, or is more interested in the domestic situation per se. Both focuses would be of course legitimate but in the current form the reader is kept wondering what the author is really after. The too loose conceptual framework/discussion does not provide much of a guidance in that regard either.

Minor criteria:

The thesis at some parts suffers from a bit convoluted language, especially in the introduction. Nonetheless, this does not disrupt the reader's understanding.

Some more controversial statements would deserve a reference: for example, on the page 29 the author states that "before the 1990s and until the end of the Cold War, the US did not explicitly support civil society organizations in countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (though arguably did covertly)". But it should be noted that overall speaking the thesis draws on an impressively wide body of sources.

Overall evaluation:

The thesis clearly demonstrates author's interest in and knowledge of the topic and the empirical parts are fairly exhaustive. The main problem, as I discussed above, is the lack of clear methodological approach, somewhat confusing theoretical debate, and the insufficient link of conceptual and theoretical debate with the discussed empirics, all of which contribute to the general sense of thesis's lack of focus.

For the oral defense, I would recommend to discuss following issues:

Could you more elaborate on your understanding of civil society?

What are the main conclusions of thesis regarding the comparison of the state of civil society in Turkey and Egypt, and the US and EU involvement in the region when it comes to democracy promotion?

Depending on the result of oral defense, I would suggest grade D or E.

Suggested grade:

D/E



FACULTY
OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Charles University

Signature:

