TOWARD A NEW ERA OF EUROPEAN SUPPORT TO POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEMS

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Contents

Executive summary

Political pluralism is a cornerstone of any democracy. The diversity of voices and interests that must coexist in any democracy require intermediary bodies like political parties that link society to the functioning of the state. Indeed, representative democracy cannot function without a political party system. Yet, support to political parties and pluralist party systems has long been an underdeveloped element of the EU and Member States' external assistance.

The reasons are obvious: parties deal with political power and external actors feel that it is often better to support change through other avenues. At the same time, it is also very hard to see how broader challenges to effective governance - such as greater polarisation, populist discourse or restricted democratic space - can be overcome without engaging directly with the key transformation agents of politics.

The recent 2019 EU Council Conclusions on democracy and the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 have the potential of bringing about a new era of European support to the political party system. While political party support is still a small part of overall support to democratic governance, the EU has slowly but surely recognised that there is a need to step-up support to political party systems in order to deal with different development and foreign policy objectives like policy reforms or conflict mediation. For their part, organisations supporting political parties have evolved over the past couple of decades to incorporate different techniques and lessons learned into their work. So what do those lessons tell us about what can be done by the EU and other actors to improve support to the political party system?

This paper outlines three areas - chosen on the basis of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy - where the EU can and should engage more in support of the political party system in the context of wider policy and programming priorities. These three themes are 1) inclusion in political parties, 2) the role of parties in elections, and 3) cooperation between parties and between parties and other actors (see table below).

1. More inclusive parties and party systems	**Supply-demand chain for increased inclusiveness:** Promoting more inclusive parties almost always challenges the status quo. Strategies to empower representatives of marginalised groups to become active participants in policy-making needs to be consistently combined with strategies that compel party elites and the wider society / electorate to revise biases.
	Ensuring buy-in from political leadership: Even when the need for increased inclusiveness is recognised by party leaders, in many instances no one is actually empowered to drive that change. Acknowledgement, a solid plan, and the empowerment of other leaders are key.
	Capitalise on consistent transition support: Moments of political mobilisation, transition or rupture are opportunities to break barriers to inclusion. Early stages of party development are particularly ripe for questioning existing power structures and promoting more diverse and inclusive parties.

2. A greater contribution by parties to electoral integrity	**Long-term approach to capitalise on entry points in the electoral cycle:** It is crucial to invest in political parties' capacities for reform in order to prepare actors for the inevitable moment when it is possible - otherwise the opportunity is often lost.
	Taking ethical behaviour seriously: Efforts to improve the conduct of political parties and to encourage them to adhere to certain standards of behaviour can greatly benefit the overall level of trust in the political process.
	Engage political parties as allies in the fight against online disinformation: Addressing the role played by parties, politicians and hyper-partisan media in creating, disseminating and 'endorsing' disinformation cannot be solved without parties themselves.
3. More cooperative parties	**Investing in parties' internal preparedness:** Parties need to be accustomed to cooperation for this to really have a clear impact on the behaviour of parties and on policy-making. This is particularly true for making the most of openings for change.
	Supporting incentives: Understanding interests and incentives is key to success and an important share of those incentives are often in donors' hands.
	Expanding dialogue beyond parties: Policy challenges require the input of a multitude of different players, and those supporting parties must also bring in other players (like CSOs, trade unions or religious groups) to support sustainable policy change.
	Linking dialogue to other development priorities: Support to dialogue between parties can benefit from focusing on specific themes like environmental governance or healthcare in order to both anchor that dialogue in concrete policy domains (rather than political identities) and work towards development objectives.

The paper draws on the lessons learned and the experience accumulated by the implementing partners of REACH for Democracy, as well as the wider political party support community within the EPD network, in order to outline recommendations for future EU action. These are:

- **Integrate political actors like parties into development programmes** - through engaging parties into programmes on development and foreign policy priorities, or streamlining party work into programmes on thematic issues. Parties are development actors in their own right and including them in cooperation programmes can result in increased political buy-in for such programmes and foster multi-party cooperation beyond the developmental issue at stake.

- **Think and act long-term,** as effectively improving political action and behaviour needs to take into consideration slow moving cultural and institutional practices. All three areas underline the need to look beyond the usual time

horizons of development projects.

- **Programme with parties' incentives in mind.** Triggering structural change within parties in favour of inclusion, electoral integrity and cooperation is possible but the needs and interests of politicians must be considered for the status quo to be successfully challenged.

- **Do not focus exclusively on political parties.** When defining target groups, donors and political party support organisations should work on selection criteria keeping in mind that future aspiring politicians often emerge from the ranks of other organisations or organised groups active around the area of policy-making.

- **Work directly with parties themselves,** and set clear parameters to work with them. Parties have much to contribute in countering challenges that affect not just the party system but the country or party they come from too.

Policy-makers and practitioners will find a list of 'recommended actions' on the basis of these recommendations in the final section of this paper. These are practical and actionable ideas to make the most out of an evolving EU policy framework that increasingly recognises the key role that political parties play in creating inclusive and well-governed societies.

Introduction

Support for political parties involves important political and ideological calculations on the part of state actors (like the EU or EU member states) and non-state actors (like party support organisations). These calculations often mean individual parties do not receive much financial or political assistance out of concerns of becoming embroiled in national politics. But while the logic of treading carefully in the case of support to individual parties is well understood, the same case is on much less solid ground when it comes to support for the whole of the political party system.

Taking into consideration the foreign and development priorities of the EU and EU member states, it is clear that the EU and its member states should be supporting political party systems.[1] To avoid doing so while consistently recognising the importance of representative democracy in rhetoric would be negligent, if not hypocritical. Representative democracy cannot work without political parties. Yet, we also have to recognise that political party support presents a set of specific challenges to donors, practitioners and policy-makers.

Member states of the European Union have supported the political party system through intermediary organisations for decades – these include foundations linked to political party families and non-partisan party support organisations. However, the EU had been slow to take up support to the political party system in foreign and development policy, as well as steering away from the issue within its own boundaries. But that has changed in recent years.

The Council Conclusions on Democracy agreed to by EU member states in 2019 state that the EU will promote support to "the capacities of parliaments and (in a non-partisan manner) political parties, on national and sub-national levels, to play their essential role in democratic societies"[2]. This is a clear improvement on the Council Conclusions on Democracy Support agreed to a decade earlier that only listed parties within a longer list of important political actors.[3] The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 that was adopted in November 2020 includes three action points focusing on the role of political parties, up from one action point in the previous Action Plan covering 2015-2019 and no mention of political parties in the 2012-2014 Action Plan. Within the Union, the Commission has recently released plans to revise the rules related to the financing of pan-European political parties.[4]

In its programming, the EU launched a first ever pilot call on support to the political party system in 2017

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1 Academic evidence points to the fact that the institutionalisation of the political party system has an impact on the quality of the political system and the provision of state services. See for instance, Casal Bertoa, F. (2019): 'The Calm Before the Storm: Explaining the Institutionalization of Southern European Party Systems Before the Great Recession'. European Politics and Society, 20:5, 567-590, doi:10.1080/23745118.2018.1557446. Rasmussen, M. & Knutsen, C. (2019): 'Party Institutionalization and Welfare State Development'. British Journal of Political Science, 1-27, doi:10.1017/S0007123419000498.

2 Council Conclusions on Democracy (2019). Available here.

3 Council Conclusions on Democracy Support (2009): "EU democracy support should include a special focus on the role of elected representatives and political parties and institutions, independent media and civil society. The EU support should take into account the full electoral cycle and not focus on ad hoc electoral support only." Available here.

4 European Democracy Action Plan (2020). Available here.

that supported 5 different projects, 3 of which have a multi-country scope.[5] This paper is written on the basis of the experience of one of these projects - REACH for Democracy - in order to draw lessons for future support programmes. EU delegations across the world have also supported a wide range of projects working directly with political parties – a detailed list can be found in Annex.

All of the above points indicate that the EU has become more serious about the need to work with political parties in recent years and the Action Plan 2020-2024[6] provides the parameters for taking this forward. The three relevant action points state that the EU will:

- Work towards women's and youth's equal, full, effective and meaningful participation, in all their diversity, in all spheres and levels of public and political life, including by advocating for their inclusion on political parties' lists for winnable seats and building candidates' capacity.

- Support pluralist party systems and political parties' capacities in a non-partisan manner, including through assisting in the application of international standards on transparent party financing, internal democracy and inclusivity in the selection of candidates and office-holders. Promote and support the adoption of electoral and political party laws for these purposes and promote a level playing field in electoral processes. Support the development of cross-party codes of conduct aimed at preventing electoral fraud and electoral violence, as well as the development of parliaments' capacity to promote and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- Increase the capacity of political parties and oversight agencies, especially in conflict-affected and transitional settings. Support cross-party alliances and multi-party dialogue on policy issues

of common concern.

The action points variously touch upon priorities (e.g. inclusion, participation, elections, conflict prevention) as well as mechanisms or tools (e.g. multi-party dialogue, technical assistance, capacity-building) for support. In terms of the approach, the emphasis on non-partisan support is clearly important for the EU, being underlined in the Council Conclusions of 2019, the Action Plan 2020-2024, and the pilot call. While there are merits to support for individual parties, the EU is understandably wary of engaging in this for fears of appearing partisan. The mix of issues in the action points covers a wide range of possible political party support programmes and underlines the important role parties play in political processes around the world. Based on these action points, we believe three specific areas deserve further attention in order to look at what the EU should prioritise: inclusion, elections, and cooperation.

This paper is designed to provide insights for the EU and EU member states when designing political party support programmes. It is not a comprehensive overview of party support but an analysis of where we think party support stands, where it has been successful, and where to invest in the future. It first looks at the key challenges to political party support programmes with a particular emphasis on the new restrictions under COVID-19 that have deepened already existing tendencies of restricting democratic space.

This is followed by three separate sections that look at inclusion in political parties, the role of parties in elections, and cooperation between parties (and with other actors). Each section looks at the barriers and the strategies for those supporting the political party system. The paper closes with a short conclusion and recommendations.

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5 Available here.

6 Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 (2020). Available here.

Challenges to supporting the political party system

Wider societal challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has added fuel to a series of troubling trends in democratic governance over recent years, such as polarised political debate, the rise of populist discourse, restrictions on political and civil rights and increases in coordinated campaigns of disinformation.[7] At the same time, the health restrictions and economic fallout have generated greater inequality in many states around the world, disproportionately impacting disadvantaged groups such as women and girls. In early 2020, protest movements came to a halt under tighter conditions of freedom of assembly but have since returned with a vengeance in the United States, Belarus, Peru, Lebanon and other countries. The unique place of political parties within a representative democracy means that individual parties can have agency on a number of these trends, while others find themselves on the receiving end of longer term restrictions. This key role deserves far greater attention in the current context and cuts to the very essence of political power.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to parties themselves is the impact of a lack of trust in the general population. According to Eurobarometer, 76% of citizens in the European Union tend not to trust political parties[8] while political party membership has declined in recent decades.[9] In 2018, just over 83% of Latin Americans expressed little or no confidence in political parties.[10] Between 2016-2018, over 50% of Africans interviewed by Afrobarometer stated that they had little or no trust in ruling parties and over 60% said the same for opposition political parties.[11] These are worrying figures, because in the end elected officials are responsible for public policy and legislation. Political parties mean different things to different people, but there is clearly a problem of trust for the party system more generally which indirectly contributes to undermining support for political party assistance among donors.

Disinformation and polarisation under the pandemic are putting increased stress on trust in multiple public and democratic institutions. While it is too early to say what may happen to trust in political parties as a result, it is hard to see this improving in the short term. For example, the increased ability of parties in power during the pandemic to dole out large procurement contracts (e.g. for protective equipment) to individuals with personal connections increases the potential for corruption in government[12]. Likewise, numerous ruling parties in hegemonic party systems have benefited from the sanitary state of emergency to bypass Parliaments

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7   European Partnership for Democracy (2020): Imagined Continuities: Political Scenarios after the COVID-19 Pandemic. Available here.

8   See Public Opinion in the European Union, Eurobarometer 92 (December 2019). Available here.

9   Van Biezen, I. & Poguntke, T. (2014): 'The Decline of Membership-Based Politics'. Party Politics, 20(2), 205-216, doi:10.1177/1354068813519969.

10   Latinobarómetro (2018): "Por favor, mire esta tarjeta y dígame, para cada uno de los grupos, instituciones o personas de la lista. ¿Cuánta confianza tiene usted en ellas?: Los Partidos Politicos". The average in 18 countries is 54.3% responding 'poca confianza' and 29.4% responding 'ninguna confianza'. Available here.

11   Afrobarometer survey 2016-2018: "How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?" The survey took place In 33 African countries. Available here.

12   Transparency International (2020): 'Covid-19 Has Created Conditions In Which Corruption In Health Procurement Can Flourish. Here's Ho Open Contracting Would Help'. Available here.

and enforce restrictive legislations that will potentially affect democracy in the long-run.[13]

At the same time, it is also very hard to see how societies will be able to deal with the set of challenges described above - polarisation, populist discourse, restricted democratic space - without the support of political parties. Indeed, a wide array of challenges might be described as linked to the 'software' of democracy (how we interact politically) rather than the 'hardware' (democratic institutions). That democratic software needs a critical update in order to build or restore the trust of citizens in the leadership and developmental capacities of those in power. All of this points to the fact that any response will not succeed without engaging directly with the key transformation agents of politics - underlining the importance of working with parties to improve their capacities, outreach, policies, leadership, representation and legitimacy.

Programme implementation challenges

Support for political parties has existed for decades and has evolved over time to incorporate different techniques and lessons learned. Yet, some challenges have not changed. The limited financial resources available to providers of party support programmes mean that the sector often has a niche approach that misses key opportunities for working beyond the national level. Without the resources for working at the sub-national or local level, it is harder to help stimulate bottom up dynamics within political parties. It also means that it can be difficult to provide truly tailored support to the different needs of specific parties.

Similarly, political party programmes often work within a vacuum of politics without the opportunity for a more holistic approach that brings in other key actors like Parliaments, oversight bodies and civil society or is linked to more substantial projects supporting elections.

Due to a recognition of the importance of building lasting relationships, party support programmes have developed a greater focus on long-term engagement (particularly with the party leadership) which can be challenging in times of greater pressure on aid budgets. Indeed, one can easily make the case that support to the political party system is the most difficult element of development aid to grasp and 'do-right' when there is a focus on avoiding risk and ensuring predictable and tangible results. Yet, support for an inclusive political party and electoral system is crucial for representative democracy, upholding human rights, and the rule of law, and therefore cannot be ignored.

Political party support organisations have long championed the need for 'programmatic' political parties that base their electoral appeal on clear ideological policy positions rather than clientelistic or personality-based power.[14] This recognition of the importance of policies also points to the need to move past the temptation to support parties to win elections - this is, after all, what parties want - towards thinking more about the ability of parties to govern.

Almost every party over promises and under-delivers - and moving beyond a focus on programmes of parties to thinking more about governing is easier said than done. The act of governing involves balancing different interests, taking into account budgetary limitations, recognising trade-offs and engaging in fundamentally difficult decisions, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown in stark detail (see also text box on p. 11).

The aforementioned challenges – both old and new – are widely recognised among political party supporters, yet it is sometimes hard to digest the fact that party support is, to a large degree, stuck with them. The premise of this paper is that political party support needs to take steps towards more relevance and integration with thematic priorities beyond the political party support sphere. Further down the road, it is clear that several of the macro-

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13   Civicus Monitor (2020): 'Civic Freedoms and the Covid-19 Pandemic: a Snapshot of Restrictions and Attacks". Available here.

14   International IDEA (2014): 'Politics Meets Policies. The Emergence of Programmatic Political Parties'. Available here.

level trends such as greater geopolitical competition and digitalisation will lead to further innovation in political parties. The following three sections look at particular themes to draw out what priorities policy-makers and practitioners could consider focusing on in the coming years.

COVID-19 challenges

Many political party support organisations have been able to adapt to the various restrictions to movement under the COVID-19 pandemic, pivoting towards working online and engaging more in short, frequent meetings rather than waiting for physical meetings to catch up. Still, various aspects of support to parties are harder under such conditions. For example, due to travel restrictions and poor internet connections, it has also become more difficult to engage with branches of political parties outside capital cities, especially in countries that lack good internet access in the entire territory. We believe two key results of the COVID-19 pandemic for organisations supporting the party system are worth exploring more fully.

First, the virus has increased the speed and magnitude of decisions taken by politicians in power while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of dialogue with peers. Politicians of all stripes have been forced into making decisions in recent months that would previously have been hard to imagine outside of wartime. These involved major collective and economic sacrifice and inevitably put the short-term interests of some members of society above others. Not only did this mean that politicians in power concentrated on fighting the crisis but in many instances these politicians also needed to reduce their interactions with others. This has meant less time for dialogue, discussion and direct engagement with citizens – all of which form core components of several political party support programmes. The emphasis on gradual procedural change in most projects is at fundamental odds with the political realities of a pandemic. Current circumstances also underline that crisis can bring about political opportunities for change highlighting the importance of flexibility in making the most of such opportunities.

Secondly, the pandemic has limited the type of contacts – new contacts and physical meetings – that are necessary for programme design and implementation. In normal circumstances, international partners and development practitioners need to grasp and navigate the incentives of key stakeholders in order to understand the contours of the support they provide. This understanding is vital in outlining what a reasonable ambition for a project might be or what changes are required to achieve a given policy reform. Restrictions under the pandemic have meant that it is particularly tricky to establish relations of trust with new interlocutors or maintain an atmosphere of trust in multi-party settings.

Inclusion

Key barriers to inclusion

With inclusion, we refer to the extent to which parties are diverse and representative, as well as enablers of civic participation. The existence of diverse chambers reflecting the concerns of all communities within a single party as well as across the party system, means that policies that are more sustainable and responsive to citizens' needs are likely to follow.

While barriers to inclusion are manifold and often overlapping, they can be broadly distinguished into regulations, norms and cultural biases originating at the level of the party system, on the one hand, and of individual political parties, on the other hand. A first key obstacle has to do with electoral systems' strong impact on underrepresented groups' participation in politics and inclusion in candidates lists. Proportional representation is known for being an enabler of diversity compared to majoritarian systems. In the latter case, the success of the party heavily depends on the candidate it selects. Such a candidate is usually picked on tightly defined criteria for the most "successful" candidate, which negatively impacts the possibility of selecting a representative of an underrepresented group.

To the contrary, candidate selection in a proportional system is dictated by the need to appeal to as many voters as possible, which increases the chances for diversity. Furthermore, even if the proportional system does not always materialise in underrepresented representatives being elected, it still provides a platform to bring up issues that concern them and voice their opinion. Nevertheless, electoral systems are always deliberately designed and picked by the majority, whose members are likely to opt for regulations that perpetuate their comparative representational advantage.

Parties have for long struggled with structuring engagement and competition around talented individuals, political values and competitive ideas, as candidate selection often does not operate democratically and transparently, with clear implications for underrepresented groups' opportunities. Political parties often lack the political interest to increase opportunities for marginalised groups, as shortage of youth or women in politics is driven more by a lack of demand for such candidates from political parties than a lack of supply of qualified candidates. Positive actions - such as candidate quotas for specific groups, shortlists and reserved places, more general policy statements on diversity, to regulations ensuring a more equitable distribution of campaign financing and access to the media - can be enforced at the party system and individual party level to reduce the gap in demand.

However, positive actions and formal rules for candidate selection are often heavily intertwined with informal practices that tend to close off selection to those outside internal party cliques, and those who are not longer-standing party members. Informal practices in candidate selection processes tend to negatively impact parties' inclusiveness and benefit male aspirants over female ones and, more broadly, the elite or dominant group. In these regards, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting disruption in formal political processes may favour a shift to informal political practices, which are often less accessible to women and other political outsiders who lack the necessary connections.[15]

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15   Brechenmacher, S. & Hubbard, C. (2020): 'How the Coronavirus Risks Exacerbating Women's Political Exclusion'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available here.

Financial power is a further barrier to inclusion with clear implications for underrepresented groups' access to politics. Elections are often clientelistic in nature, favouring the exchange of goods and favours for the promise of electoral support. Hence, only those with the right connections and deep pockets can be credible candidates to run – criteria that favour (wealthy) men. In these regards, the "Cost of Politics" research series from WFD has shed light on factors which drive up the cost of entering politics, and a common finding across the case studies is that the significant costs involved with running for office have a disproportionate impact on marginalised groups like young people and persons with disabilities who, along with women, are often excluded from the outset. For the sake of inclusiveness, strategies to counter the 'arms race' in election spending and to level the electoral playing field must clearly revolve not just around increasing political finance transparency, but also around encouraging political participation and competition based more on competitive ideas and parties' role and less around finances.

Stereotyping and cultural biases are a further, more profound obstacle with ramifications that go well beyond candidate selection and access to politics, and touches decision-making procedures and roles within parties themselves. Underrepresented groups are less likely to be heard in decision-making once elected and to be confined to less prominent roles within the party.

Empowering women aspirants to challenge the rules for candidate selection

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)'s Multi Party Office (MPO) has been working with the Africa Liberal Network to support both the supply and demand sides of inclusion within political parties. A recent research project from the MPO had begun to investigate the highly sensitive and private topic of political party's internal candidate selection processes. It found that formal party policies on candidate selection do usually exist and are made available to potential candidates. However, researchers found that there are numerous 'exceptions' to this – to the extent that policies are rarely applied. For example, the deadline for candidate applications is often waived; rules about the length of time a candidate needs to have been a member of the party is often amended; voting processes and local party branch selection of their own candidate are, not infrequently, overruled by the party leadership.

Overall, initial findings are that selection processes are more opaque and more difficult to navigate than parties often portray. The lack of clear rules for the selection of candidates leads to the use of informal networks, patronage and 'who you know' systems to select candidates. These generally exclude women more than men and disproportionately affect women. Accompanying this research, MPO has also been working on the supply-side of the issue, training women members of liberal parties in Africa to support their formal participation in elections. The trainings included skills on volunteer recruitment and management, leadership, public speaking, and social media. Attendees have been able to use these skills themselves, and to share them with other women in their own communities. One woman trained over 400 women after attending, 50 of whom expressed an interest in running for elected office themselves.

Key priorities for improving inclusion

In order to address these challenges and improve inclusion in political parties, our experience suggests it is important to strengthen the ability of underrepresented groups to "claim" a seat at the policy-making table, while addressing those written rules and unwritten practices that exclude such groups from participating in the political arena. Multi-level approaches working simultaneously on national legislation, on political parties' internal regulations as well as on fostering an open political culture are key to the creation of more inclusive political parties and party systems. In these regards, we believe 3 strategies are to be prioritised for the creation of more inclusive parties and party systems.

1. Supply-demand chain for increased inclusiveness

The number of representatives of underrepresented groups that are usually nominated and elected to political office is the result of the interaction between the supply of potential candidates from such groups and the demand for their inclusion from elites and voters.[16] Broadly speaking, the supply of candidates from such groups is shaped by access to resources (time, money, experience) and their levels of motivation or drive, while demand hinges upon perceptions of their qualifications – assessments that are shaped by the preferences and opinions of political elites, which are often highly gendered and discriminatory. This theoretical starting point suggests that promoting diversity entails combining supply-side strategies empowering representatives of marginalised groups to become active participants in policy-making, with demand-side strategies seeking to compel gatekeepers – most often, party elites – to revise biases against underrepresented groups and regulations that might perpetuate inequalities.

Increasing the supply of candidates from such groups often entails awareness-raising and monitoring

strategies highlighting their exclusion and potential contribution to politics (with a critical role being played by civil society), as well as symbolic actions within political institutions (especially parliaments) recognising the roles that such groups do play in political life. Ideally, such actions can be combined with reforms to legislative working conditions - especially in the case of women candidates - as well as outreach initiatives and capacity development programmes to cultivate the skills, knowledge, and connections needed to pursue a political career. Together, such strategies can undermine dynamics of informal practices, personal socialization and public stereotypes to produce a more supportive environment for underrepresented groups to participate in political life.

On the other hand, elites' interest in promoting the inclusion of candidates from underrepresented groups can be fostered through the enforcement of positive actions/regulations at the party system level. These include electoral quotas, funding regulations and campaign support opportunities to create incentives, or the imposition of sanctions on parties to encourage them to include stakeholders from underrepresented groups. In addition to quotas, a number of non-quota measures at the party level can also enhance elite demand for underrepresented groups' candidates, such as the promotion of soft targets and the establishment of underrepresented groups' sections or wings to promote capacity building among potential underrepresented candidates and, more importantly, elites at the party level.

Raising the gender and diversity consciousness of elites – who are usually male – is vital for changing attitudes towards underrepresented groups as potential political candidates and leaders. In other words, addressing and debunking the myths about underrepresented groups not being "qualified" as well as highlighting the gains to the party and the country of their greater political participation is key in addressing the elite demand gap. A variety of multi-party or network-party approaches

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16   UN Women (2015): Promoting Women's Political Participation: A Monitoring Guide. Available here.

can be employed to compel party elites to revise biases and regulations that might perpetuate inequalities and to apply such quotas or non-quotas regulations, with a central role being played by the dynamics of peer pressure. Creating avenues for a group or network of parties to collaborate on inclusivity and in reaching certain standards or targets usually stimulates expectations around parties' behaviour and regulations on this aspect that elites are more likely to meet due to the influence of peers and the wish to not under-deliver.

Recent support to the political party system in Georgia is a good example of how creating a safe space for consensus on policy solutions to lower barriers to political participation, while building the capacity of underrepresented groups can contribute to enhancing

inclusiveness of parties organisational structures and, more broadly, of the party system. The REACH for Democracy project was able to build on the implementing partners' experience with this multi-level approach in Georgia in previous years and lessons from other countries. This involved combining the setting-up and facilitation of a dialogue on gender equality (demand-side) with democracy education in a multi-party setting (supply-side) as a means of strengthening the capacities of the high-potential representatives of underrepresented groups from political parties.

The Georgian experience also hints at the need to create synergies with strategies that foster societal demand for underrepresented groups' increased participation. While supply strategies expand their resources to wage

Tackling the supply-demand chain for women's political participation in Georgia

Georgia's Parliamentary elections on 31 October 2020 were the first elections in Georgia to include a gender quota to break up a male-dominated Parliament (nearly 90%). In a July 2019 survey by NDI, 65% of Georgians said they supported mandatory gender quotas in parliament.[*] Since 2011, the EECMD has been operating a Multiparty Taskforce on Women's Political Participation in Georgia, which was created to facilitate an inclusive political dialogue on the matter. This Taskforce became a unique multi-party platform where prominent party figures could discuss priorities related to women's rights and political participation in a conducive and trusted environment. Targeted stakeholders have gained a better understanding of multi-party systems, inclusiveness and representation, and how these principles can be promoted within their party and the party system.

Eventually the Taskforce played a key role in raising the gender sensitivity of senior politicians and in creating consensus to advance a gender equality agenda within political parties. In parallel, the EECMD has strived to deepen the knowledge of the member parties and empower them with additional expertise and analysis on inclusion. Therefore, since 2014, the EECMD has produced the Gender Equality Ranking of Political Parties to measure the intra-party, electoral, and policy dimensions of gender equality related aspects of a political party's work. The ranking consistently provides an in-depth overview of the areas for further improvement by political parties, and creates a healthy competition among political parties for the top spot in the EECMD's ranking, thus encouraging steady progress towards gender equality in politics.

* National Democratic Institute (2019): 'Public Attitudes in Georgia. Results of July 2019 survey'. Available here.

successful campaigns, and demand interventions ensure that elites nominate them in "winnable" positions, favorable public opinion towards underrepresented groups as political leaders need to be cultivated through research and awareness raising. In Georgia, political parties' decision to take concrete steps to increase women's participation cannot be explained without referring to the efforts made by civil society to build momentum for greater gender equality. Therefore, support for political parties' work on inclusiveness needs to go hand in hand with support to civil society programmes, in order to ensure civic demand for parties to change. As more women are elected, investments in feminist movements and in dialogue between feminist actors in government and those mobilizing for gender equality within civil society are crucial to ensure that gender-sensitive commitments are met and upheld.

2. Ensuring buy-in from political leadership

Parties can assume a primary initiative to promote inclusiveness through the introduction of internal regulation that favours underrepresented groups' engagement. However, if leaders do not acknowledge the lack of diversity, and are not willing to endorse a course of action to address such a deficit and gain buy-in from other leaders, the likelihood of change is extremely low. Even when the need for increased inclusiveness is recognised by the party leadership/leaders, in many instances no one is actually empowered to drive that change. Acknowledgement, a solid plan, and the empowerment of other leaders are key.

Providers of assistance have refined different plans to provide political parties with a clear roadmap to further increase underrepresented groups' political participation and sensitise internal policies and procedures. 'Action Plans' or 'Roadmaps for Inclusive Political Parties' are carefully negotiated processes helping to build an internal consensus on the party's state in terms of inclusiveness, what it wants to achieve, and what kind of action agenda is necessary to achieve the desired state across all institutional structures, processes and

practices. Action plans contribute not only to increase representation of underrepresented groups in the party, but also to increasingly regender or resensitise it, thereby setting in motion a more profound change that challenges the foundations of biased or gendered opportunities for political participation.

In order to secure political buy-in for a plan or strategy for inclusiveness, several political party support organisations balance engagement of party members from underrepresented groups with champions from the majority within the party ranks, who are ready to endorse and support the process as a response to discrimination. Underrepresented party members need to be well aware of the extra effort that the process will require from them and the risks of clashing with some of their colleagues. In Kenya, for example, one of the key approaches of NIMD's Respect for Women's Political Rights programme was to find supportive men or 'male champions' who could convince their fellow party members of the importance of removing gender barriers in Kenyan politics.

Nevertheless, potential for implementation of any strategy or action plan for inclusiveness is highly dependent on validation from the leadership of both the analysis (identifying the barriers to inclusiveness) and the content (concrete actions to overcome such barriers with a clear allocation of responsibilities, timeframes and resources) of the Action Plan. External pressure and public opinion campaigns, research reports and analyses of barriers to inclusiveness, or party audits are enablers of commitment, often facing parties with the role they themselves play in perpetuating inequality.

Agreed actions to overcome barriers should be accompanied by indicators of success, a clear progress monitoring mechanism and, possibly, enforcement and accountability measures in case of non-compliance. Monitoring reports and analyses must be shared with the broader public to help keep pressure on parties and make sure that positive results feedback into the process. Change for greater inclusiveness often does not come from political parties themselves, the implication being that parties will not make steps towards greater

Securing political buy-in for parties' gender equality plans in Zambia

In Zambia, gender equality has become important rhetoric in public decision-making but, in practice, women continue to face many obstacles in their paths from electoral candidacies to party leadership. Electoral campaigns are costly affairs with great risks for the candidates, and often otherwise-promising women candidates cannot afford campaigning or the high fees for candidacy. Discriminative attitudes are persistent as well: politics is still not considered to be a woman's job by many men that hold political power. Demo Finland has worked with Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL) to boost women's political participation at national and district levels since 2013.

Over the years, Demo Finland's and the ZNWL's joint initiative The Women in Politics Platforms has grown into an effective and strong network of the women's wings of the political parties and women politicians across party lines. The programme supports women politicians from municipal to national levels by changing negative attitudes towards women in politics, by building advocacy and other crucial skills in politics and by offering peer support and coaching in moving issues of common interest up in the political agendas. At the core of the programme is multi party dialogue and the building of cross-party collaboration. With the support of Demo Finland, the Zambian National Women´s Lobby (ZNWL) has been advocating and supporting Zambian parties to make structural changes to their parties in terms of gender equality.

Until 2020, nine political parties have been supported in drafting gender equality plans, which cover issues from promoting gender equality in party leadership positions and election candidate lists to addressing gender equality in political programmes. ZNWL has advocated the parties' leadership on the issue and supported the parties in finalising feasible plans to be implemented. Buy-in from leadership has been ensured by involving the National Executive Committees of the political parties throughout the entire process.

inclusiveness without clear demand from civil society - which brings us again to underlining the importance of finding synergies between political parties' work on inclusiveness and civil society programmes.

3. Capitalize on consistent transition support

Times of political mobilization, transition or rupture (e.g. following the ouster of an authoritarian leader or the settlement of a conflict) and their impact on processes of party formation create opportunities to break barriers to inclusiveness, as the development of party structures, constitutions, and rules can enable marginalised groups to push for greater representation, to question existing power structures and bring new issues to the political agenda.[17]

Several contextual factors clearly intervene in achieving or not greater levels of inclusiveness - the most prominent being whether the transition process aims at changing the system, with a thorough revision of foundational

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17   Brechenmacher, S. & Hubbard, C. (2020): 'Breaking the Cycle of Gender Exclusion in Political Party Development'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Available here.

laws and constitutions. But the existence of organised and broad-based movements or networks advocating for gender equality and the rights of underrepresented groups is a key factor in ensuring that regulations promoting inclusiveness are included on parties' political agendas and anchored in constitutional commitments, new electoral codes, or party bylaws. Pre-transition support to underrepresented groups and activists is then functional to ensure readiness and coordination when political openings occur, and that such groups articulate political demands.

Political party assistance providers have at times supported active engagement of underrepresented groups' leaders (both from parties, social movements and civil society) in transitional bodies negotiating new governing structures. Hence, technical assistance provided to transitional processes, from constitutions drafting to electoral and political parties regulations, have at times included guidance on more inclusive institution-building. In Sudan, for example, WFD worked with women political leaders on technical and strategic preparations for sensitive talks for the peace process. This included advanced work in negotiation techniques with women nominated by parties to the December 2019 peace talks.

In a similar vein, targeted support to parties in the early stages of development is a potential enabler of commitment and regulations for greater diversity. Like constitutions and national legal frameworks, party foundational documents are important for providing a framework for greater inclusiveness – they provide a vision of the party and entrench the rules for achieving that vision. Therefore, efforts from the EU to promote underrepresented groups' participation "including by advocating for their inclusion on political parties' lists for winnable seats"[18] should consider that early stages of party development are ripe for promoting diversity-sensitive recruitment procedures. Such moments often

entail windows of opportunity for including commitments and regulations on inclusiveness in foundational documents that can later on provide anchors for sustained internal advocacy for greater inclusion.

The consistency and robustness of this type of party support is particularly important to avoid the phenomenon of the 'glass cliff' – a situation in which women or members of other underrepresented groups are given the opportunity to move into positions of power during crises when the chances of success are much lower.[19] If things do not go well, these individuals carry the burden and label of failure, with lingering implications for women's political equality and perceptions of women's leadership.

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18   Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 (2020). Available here.

19   Ryan M.K., Haslam S.A. & Kulich C. (2010): 'Politics and the Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Preferentially Selected to Contest Hard-to-Win Seats.' Psychology of Women Quarterly, 34(1), 56-64, doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01541.x.

Elections

Key barriers to electoral integrity

By shaping the rules and the dynamics of political competition, political parties play a key role in enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of electoral processes. Rules of the game that meet democratic standards are an essential component of a so-called free and fair electoral competition. Electoral systems, regulations for candidate selection, campaign finance and transparency rules, and for media coverage of electoral candidates can be a barrier to the inclusion of underrepresented groups. Moreover, they often intervene in the electoral integrity equation and include elements that effectively hamper the creation of a level playing field.

Yet, electoral competitiveness poses parties with a problematic dilemma in front of the rules, as the incentives to manipulate elections may often outweigh fears of electoral repercussions. In the case of incumbents, this might even go without legal breaches as empirical evidence shows they effectively enjoy a sizable electoral advantage when they run for re-election. Incumbents dominate the national and media narratives, wield the powers of government, can launch their policy priorities and re-election campaigns even before their first term begins, and their initial success creates an existing campaign organization and donor bases to rely on.

A skewed playing field, in which resources are not fairly distributed or accessed, is known for producing results that are not accepted by all parties, thereby negatively affecting the legitimacy of the electoral process. A skewed playing field is also known for being the most effective means to weaken the opposition, allowing autocrats to keep their hold on power without resorting to the kind of fraud or repression that can undermine their

international standing or, in the words of Levitsky and Way, "to have their cake and eat it too".[20] Nevertheless, in regimes where electoral competition is not a fait accompli such as in electoral democracies and hybrid regimes, political parties can work to set limits on unequal access to essential resources for election campaigns.

At the same time, the ethical behaviour or conduct of political parties is also central to the promotion of a genuine electoral process that respects democratic rules. Yet, the ultimate desire of politicians to hold the reins of government can often be at odds with electoral integrity. The questionable behaviour of the Trump administration and many prominent Republican party representatives who questioned the legitimacy of the 2020 US Presidential election has led directly to a large number of the US electorate viewing the result as illegitimate. In many democracies elections can provide particular entry points for conflict, and creating the conditions for a level playing field and for adherence to certain standards of conduct is even more central to the protection of democracy. A genuine electoral process can have a stabilising effect and contribute to the inclusion of political and societal actors that could potentially play the role of spoilers if outside the political system.

Priorities for improving electoral integrity

Efforts to ensure that political parties promote a level playing field and refrain from harmful and confrontational conduct are always a long-term endeavour which cannot be fostered on the eve of an electoral process, namely, when the dynamics of competition can negatively impact inter-party relations and the ability to

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20   Way, L.A. & Levitsky, S. (2010): 'Why Democracy Needs a Level Playing Field'. Journal of Democracy, 21(1), 57-68, doi:10.1353/jod.0.0148.

compromise. In this regard, the electoral cycle approach provides a conceptual basis for understanding political party support efforts as a cross-cutting component of electoral assistance. Supporting electoral processes and institutions without supporting contestants in shaping fairer rules of the political game and abiding to standards of political conduct is like making a mojito without any rum.

1. Long-term approach to capitalize on entry points

The electoral cycle approach is extremely useful in identifying entry points for political party support efforts to promote broader democratic changes to those obstacles that might skew the competition and, more broadly, to the electoral and political party system. Framing political parties support actions as one part of a broader approach to programming encourages more focus on the post-election period - i.e. the longest phase in the electoral cycle - and the possibilities of implementing reforms and developing capacity in between elections.

Broadly speaking, supporting reform efforts in the run-up to elections can negatively impact the process given the fact that they are inevitably viewed as more politically charged at moments of greater political tension. Building on the momentum of observers' recommendations and the post-election consolidation activities, providers of political party assistance play a key role in capitalizing on those critical nodes at times when there is less political tension and a greater interest among political parties to seek out compromise positions.

Even when the political context restricts the space for electoral or party reforms, it is possible to strengthen capacities and encourage space for debate and ways of promoting them. The impossibility of political-electoral reform in practice is not an impediment to building a technical and well-informed electoral reform discourse among political and social actors. To the contrary, such

sustained and long-term perspective of engagement is key to building up the capacity of political actors to fully engage in the electoral debate with a view to reform and not only monitor and complain on E-day process and result.

In short, even when there is no reform, it is crucial to invest in political parties' capacities to prepare actors for that moment and, when that moment occurs, change can more easily be fostered. The capacity-building and the generation of knowledge for members of political parties and other sectors of interest should not be neglected, as the preparation of participants in a reform debate could be necessary or insufficient if a situation arises that favours or demands such reforms. The development of seminars and fora for the exchange of experiences or the comparative analysis of the electoral institutionality of other countries, the organisation of workshops for the generation of proposals in favour of electoral reform and specific learning exercises, to name a few, can be of great support for the training of qualified personnel, the construction of institutional discourse, and the shaping of a critical and informed population.

2. Taking ethics of behaviour seriously

In the context of elections, positive efforts can be made to engage political parties on improving their ethical behaviour and respect for democratic principles. A Code of Conduct (CoC) is the most common tool to restrict and improve the conduct of political parties and to encourage them to adhere to certain standards of behaviour, thereby enhancing trust in the political process.[21]

Critics of this tool often question its effectiveness in shaping parties' behaviour throughout the electoral process, the main bottleneck being overseeing and enforcing such codes. The soft and non-binding nature of voluntary codes creates room for political actors to ignore some of the agreed-to provisions. On the other hand, mandatory CoCs do not entirely solve the problem

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21   International IDEA (2017): Dialogues on Voluntary Codes of Conduct for Political Parties in Elections. A Facilitator's Guide. Available here.

- as hinted by the Italian saying "Fatta la legge, trovato l'inganno", i.e. rules are made to be broken, as the legal nature of mandatory CoCs is not a guarantee that political actors will shape their behaviour accordingly. After all, ethics should not be thought of as divorced from political parties and processes, nor as something to be enforced by outsiders. One could even argue that there would be greater gains for democracy by trusting political parties to take more (but not total) responsibility for developing, promoting and regulating their own ethics than from having a code developed, implemented and enforced by an outside body.

Experience with the formulation of codes in different contexts suggests that, without dialogue, consensus and the achievement of a genuine commitment to the value of a code, there is the risk that the impacts of a code will be minimal. After all, a CoC is all about the process: the negotiation of the CoC is a trust-building exercise that is as equally important as the result. A handshake just before election time requires months, even years, of careful trust-building - the implication being that to achieve its goals, a CoC for political parties needs to be part of a consultative dialogue with other parties. Regardless of whether a CoC is voluntary or mandated by law, good practice confirms that involving parties in designing and drafting the CoC is essential in order to increase the likelihood that they will own and commit to implementing it.[22]

Needless to say, prospects for a meaningful discussion leading to an effective CoC 'owned' by political parties are higher in contexts where inter-party dialogue is institutionalised and a culture of dialogue to tackle practical issues and to dissipate mistrust between opponents is fostered. In such cases, it becomes much easier to initiate a dialogue on the need and development of a CoC at the most opportune moment, when parties can see the relevance, but when the situation is not too tense to make dialogue ineffective, impossible or even harmful. Ahead of the parliamentary and presidential

election of 2019 in Tunisia, the high-level multiparty dialogue platform founded in 2016 by the Centre des Etudes Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI), with the support of NIMD and Demo Finland, facilitated the drafting and signature of a Charter on "Loyal electoral competition" by 13 political parties. In cases where a dialogue platform is already existent, it is also much easier to timely react to escalations of tension in highly polarized environments. For example, on the eve of the 2016 Parliamentary elections in Georgia, NIMD/EECMD facilitated a constructive dialogue to enable the ruling and opposition parties to make relevant commitments in response to a series of violent incidents that threatened to escalate. The timely reaction of the NIMD contributed to an increased sense of urgency among politicians and gave them early signals that the international community was concerned about the violence.[23]

Although parties are the primary owner and play the biggest role in achieving the goals set by the codes - be it promoting electoral integrity or a level playing field, or avoiding electoral violence and hate speech -, other electoral stakeholders need to be consulted or involved throughout the CoC process. While the presence of election management bodies (EMB) and other regulatory authorities is clearly of key importance, civil society actors' role should not be overlooked. Ultimately, a CoC can address citizens' concerns over an electoral process and fulfil the heightened legal and ethical standards to which voters hold parties and candidates accountable. Involving civil society representatives in the drafting and implementation process is the most effective way to bring those concerns to the table and to enhance public participation.

Civil society engagement is strategic in publicising a CoC and in organising information campaigns that inherently increase the incentives for parties to abide by the rules. Ideally, the resources committed to communicating the goals included in the code will affect awareness and acceptance among political actors

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22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

on various levels, thereby increasing public pressure to abide by provisions and, to a certain extent, the chances of voluntary compliance. In other words, monitoring is key to the success of any CoC. While only a legally binding CoC can be enforced through sanctions by the authorities, public exposure can be a more effective deterrent than enforceable sanctions, especially in hybrid or authoritarian regimes characterised by weak enforcement and investigatory capacities or lengthy adjudication procedures. While some parties will be less concerned about their reputation as an ethical party, this can change over time if strategies are identified to encourage commitment and trigger increased public demand for compliance and reputational costs for

Capitalising on entry points to prepare electoral stakeholders for reform in Honduras

The last two electoral competitions (2013, 2017) in Honduras have underlined a profound need for electoral reforms to improve the confidence in the electoral institutional framework, to favour the acceptance of the results, and to strengthen the inclusion of politically underrepresented groups (mainly women).* While the context of the changing party system (from two-party to multi-party and hegemonic party) has not been conducive to achieving relevant and comprehensive reforms between 2012 and 2017, explicit demands for deep reforms were advanced by the international community after the 2017 general elections were tarnished by numerous irregularities, electoral violence and unrest. Despite this, by focusing its efforts on the post-election phase, NIMD took advantage of favourable circumstances along the electoral cycle to prepare actors for reforms and, when reforms have occurred, NIMD has bet on them and on the possibility of change. When the National Congress approved the application of quotas of 40% in 2012-2013 and 50% (parity) in 2017, NIMD formed a significant share of women candidates elected through its women academy.

Following the approval of the Law on Financing, Transparency and Oversight of Political Parties and Candidates and the formation of the "Clean Politics Unit" in 2017 and the newly established Electoral Court and National Electoral Council, NIMD facilitated strategic planning within these new organizations and peer learning from similar institutions in Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia and El Salvador. The role of the Clean Politics Unit has been considered quite positive, as in the 2017 electoral process it was possible to observe a significant decrease in political propaganda displayed on the streets and in the electronic media, and candidates showed willingness to open bank accounts and submit income and expenditure reports. Moreover, building on EU EOMs recommendations from 2013, NIMD supported political parties in elaborating internal party documents containing their main points and positions on different electoral issues. Although the discussion on electoral reforms did not take place during the 2014-2018 electoral cycle, NIMD could work on this previous engagement to also promote the adoption of the recommendations included in the 2017 EU EOM. Honduras is entering the 2021 elections with new electoral institutions and new electoral legislation. These developments have the potential of re-establishing trust in the electoral process and could become an important step towards enhancing the quality of democracy.

* European Partnership for Democracy (2019): European Democracy Support in Honduras. A Case Study Reviewing European Democracy Support. Available here.

breaches.

Whether monitoring and adjudication of potential breaches are left to self-enforcement, delegated to an independent committee, or a mixture of both solutions, building the monitoring capacity of both party structures and CSOs needs to be a priority. Very often, joint monitoring and implementation solutions - including party delegates and organisations that are trusted across the political spectrum - can reinforce the legitimacy of the CoC by maintaining the promotion of party ownership, while adding independent scrutiny and counteracting public perceptions of deal-making between political parties.

3. Engage political parties as allies in the fight against online disinformation

Disinformation has been cropping up on online platforms for years and there are multiple reasons to believe that the use of disinformation to sway people's opinions will continue to have serious implications for electoral integrity and citizens' trust in their democratic institutions. Since the events of the 2016 US campaign, a growing body of evidence has shown that weaponised misinformation from political parties is now a global problem. Since 2017, organized social media manipulation has more than doubled, with at least 70 countries known to be using online propaganda to manipulate mass public opinion, and in some cases, on a global scale.[24] In 45 out of these 70 countries, evidence was gathered on political parties or politicians running for office who have used the tools and techniques of computational propaganda - the use of algorithms, automation, and big data to shape public opinions - during elections. Here, parties' disinformation practices include instances of politicians amassing fake followers, parties using advertising to target voters with manipulated media or instances of micro-targeting, or purposely spreading or amplifying disinformation on social messaging apps such as WhatsApp or Telegram.

To a large extent, such types of online disinformation practices are not captured by traditional approaches to election finance, as parties effectively disseminate political messages to high numbers of voters at low or no cost, and electoral authorities have no oversight over the campaign spending or the online activities themselves. For political systems that enforce spending limits on advertising in order to promote election fairness and integrity, the rise of social media undermines the objectives that spending limits were designed to promote.

Several initiatives are being put forward to counter disinformation with clear benefits for the promotion of electoral integrity. At the European level, a more robust approach has just been announced through the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP), which includes a legislative proposal on online political ads. Meanwhile, the proposed Digital Services Act places restrictions on online platforms, including transparency measures on all online advertisements, potentially including restrictions on microtargeting for political ads, better enforcement of privacy rules, and measures such as labelling, and targeting criteria. The Digital Services Act also serves as a co-regulatory backstop to the voluntary Code of Practice against Disinformation, which commits online platforms to certain self-regulatory measures to limit the spread and virality of disinformation on their platforms, particularly around elections. The Digital Services Act also obliges large online platforms to identify threats to electoral integrity, such as malign disinformation or manipulation campaigns, and adopt risk mitigation measures.

So far, most regulatory and legislative responses to tackling disinformation at international and national levels have mostly reverted to either attempts at regulating content on social media platforms or extending existing law or regulation that pertains to traditional media. Within these two approaches, the debate has often revolved around the responsibility of big tech companies and the role of national regulatory

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24 Bradshaw, S. & Howard, P.H. (2019): The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation. Available here.

agencies in identifying and mitigating the risks, as well as of CSOs and media in exposing 'inauthentic behaviour' and raising awareness.

On their part, political party assistance providers have been working with political parties and electoral commissions to support efforts to eradicate hate speech and disinformation during election campaigns. They have also been working with Facebook to empower EMBs in using its Ad Library to track data on active and inactive ads on Facebook and Instagram about elections and politics. However, there is a growing need to also start addressing the role played by parties, politicians and hyper-partisan media in creating, disseminating and "endorsing" disinformation. In these regards, the promotion of codes of conduct for political parties with pledges against disinformation, and the development of innovative methodologies by domestic election observers to monitor campaign behaviour in the online space are worth being explored.

Moreover, a growing number of 'campaign warriors' have made a career out of disinformation, offering strategies, tactics, and management techniques for content manipulation as a key area of expertise for a successful electoral campaign. The events of the 2016 US elections turned the spotlight on a close circle of campaign consultants and social media masters who played a key role in Trump's victory and then 'went international', bringing their expertise in elections overseas and in political contexts where the ethics of behaviour of such consultants are not exactly under the radar of public accountability. Campaign consultants are indeed a largely overlooked part of the electoral integrity equation, and regulatory and legislative attempts are failing in considering the role that campaign professionals play in creating disinformation.

Dialogue and Cooperation

Key barriers to cooperation between parties as well as between parties and other actors

It is impossible to speak of politics without speaking of competition. Taken to the extreme, Carl von Clausewitz and later Vladimir Lenin held the view that politics is essentially war by other means. Indeed, the mere presence of elections creates competition between different forces. Yet, for successful democracies it is also impossible to speak of politics without speaking of cooperation. Sometimes this cooperation is based on common beliefs and in other instances it is created through necessity. But how does this cooperation function? What are the barriers to dialogue between political parties? What about cooperation between parties and other actors?

The severity of political polarisation across a multitude of democracies undermines the foundations for cooperation between different political forces. Polarisation erodes the norms upon which democracy is based and often leads to a deterioration in the impartiality of democratic institutions like the judiciary.[25] Polarisation is used by political entrepreneurs for electoral gain who then feed again on the polarisation of the electorate if this strategy proves successful - creating a downward spiral of political division. In such circumstances, it is particularly difficult to find compromise or to engage in cooperation between parties, even if cooperation between parties and other actors (like think tanks, media outlets or CSOs) is not necessarily undermined but rather a reflection of that same polarisation.

In a wide array of different political settings, politics is not

viewed as war but as a zero-sum game. A traditional view of politics, particularly in Europe, holds that parties build their manifestos on specific ideologies (programmatic parties). When in power, these parties may be able to compromise on their positions in the name of attaining power or due to economic or social realities. However, in many states politics is based more on identity than ideology - in Europe, for instance, the last decade has seen a clear rise in the use of identity politics by different politicians. Identity can be a fluid concept - one's identity encompasses a multiplicity of different factors - but it is far less fluid than ideology and tends to elicit stronger emotional reactions. While cooperation is possible where parties are based on religious, linguistic or ethnic identity, compromise and cooperation tend to become harder when politics is framed on such grounds.

For organisations who have been supporting political party systems around the world in recent decades, the challenges posed by identity politics come as no surprise but underline the need for tolerance and the importance of dialogue. As noted above, the particularities of the electoral system also have an impact on the potential for cooperation. Broadly speaking, a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system tends to create less possibility for cooperation as it accentuates the power of larger parties and lowers the necessity of coalition government. However, despite this tendency, there are a vast number of examples of successful coalition governments and multi-party platforms in countries with FPTP.

In conflict-affected settings, political party cooperation can be especially difficult due to either immediate overt violence or a recent history of violent disputes. It is much harder to come to an agreement with representatives

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25   Carothers, T. & O' Donohue, A. (2019): Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

who have or may have ties to forces that have inflicted physical or emotional harm on others. The EU is therefore right to emphasise the need to "support cross-party alliances and multi-party dialogue on policy issues of common concern"[26] in such settings.

Key priorities for improving cooperation

Cooperation between political parties can take a variety of different forms: party mergers, coalition government, parliamentary caucuses, institutionalised political party dialogue and informal dialogue processes.[27] Several political party support organisations focus on dialogue between political parties and the importance of such dialogue for cooperation across political divides, building up a significant knowledge base in recent decades. Dialogue between parties is often referred to as 'inter-party dialogue', 'multi-party dialogue' or 'political party dialogue', while processes with a wider degree of actors are referred to as 'multi-stakeholder dialogue'. Both are important - and in the context of EU objectives both dialogue between parties as well as dialogue between parties and other actors are highly relevant. We believe four strategies are particularly important for improving cooperation: investing in internal party preparedness, supporting incentives, expanding dialogue beyond a party-only affair, and linking dialogue to other development priorities.

1. Investing in internal preparedness

The necessity of party cooperation ebbs and flows over time and is of course linked to the electoral cycle - parties are less inclined to cooperate when competition is at its most intense. What stands out from experience is the need for parties to be accustomed to cooperation for this to really have a clear impact on the behaviour of parties

and on policy-making. Cooperation rarely emerges out of thin air, rather it requires regular engagement and an internal preparedness for political cooperation.

Political parties and external actors have come up with various different models and modes for this cooperation in different countries. Formal cooperation can be led by a permanent structure owned by the parties themselves or by an independent organisation benefitting from the trust of key political parties. Some countries may even combine both (see Kenya's example on page 27). Regardless of the model, without a focus on long-term engagement it is much harder for personal relationships, mutual recognition or shared understandings to develop.

The recognition of the importance of long-term engagement has led to several organisations increasing their focus on supporting young politicians, in an effort to contribute to creating a culture of dialogue between parties. The REACH for Democracy project brought together young leaders and aspiring politicians from Morocco, Benin, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan in an effort to strengthen avenues for cross-party dialogue. Many political party support organisations focus their dialogue activities on youth or education in an effort to build a culture of dialogue between political opponents. NIMD and Demo Finland cooperate together in the implementation and support of Democracy Schools in Myanmar and Tunisia in order to increase the capacity of political party members in dialogue, inclusive policy-processes and in being a politician – in a multiparty set-up. The importance of civil society engagement as part of functioning multi-party democracy is emphasized.[28] NDI runs Youth Academies in different countries across the world, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy supports cross party groups of young parliamentarians in Nigeria and Uganda. Meanwhile, a wide variety of other political party support organisations implement projects

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26   Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council - EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 (2020). Available here.

27   International IDEA, NIMD & The Oslo Center (2015): Political Party Dialogue: A Facilitator's Guide. Available here.

28   NIMD also supports Democracy Schools in Burundi, Jordan, Iraq, Ethiopia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras and Venezuela.

supporting young politicians in a multi-party setting.

In programme design an emphasis is often placed on including mechanisms and processes of cooperation in a wide variety of activities. Cooperation is therefore embedded within the approach rather than being the main objective of the project itself. Classic requests for field trips or travel abroad from political parties may be important for building relationships between individuals outside of the political sphere, in addition to the official reason for the travel. Indeed, bringing politicians together across party lines in a foreign setting can often lay the groundwork for deeper dialogue on systemic issues. Having worked with parties in North Macedonia, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy brought politicians and officials to the UK in order for North Macedonia's parliamentarians to collectively discuss measures for political reform. This led to adoption of a mutually agreed set of priorities and concrete measures, e.g. the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office in the Assembly, to strengthen financial and administrative accountability.

Supporting multi-party dialogue at the right time: The case of Kenya

In Kenya, assistance from the Oslo Center and the National Democratic Institute to individual political parties started two years before the 2007 election, focusing on internal party preparedness for dialogue processes. This support was provided in conjunction with the establishment of the Centre for Multiparty Democracy in Nairobi in 2004. This allowed parties to factor in the different dynamics of dialogue at a time when dialogue and coalitions were not an issue of the day. If parties had had to factor in such dynamics when there was an urgent need for dialogue (such as in January 2008), there is little chance that the negotiations would have actually led to a peaceful resolution to the post-electoral conflict. In 2011, Kenyan political parties created the Political Parties Liaison Committee through the national Political Parties Act.

2. Supporting incentives

The rationale for cooperation may come naturally or it may be created through particular incentives. Key actors within a country and from abroad (such as the EU) may have particular reasons for supporting cooperation, whether based on a fundamental belief in its importance, a desire for an end to a conflict, or due to economic interests. Within the party there may be pressure from internal party structures or political party members to engage in cooperation with other parties.

In addition to the internal or external incentives, incentives can be both positive and negative - a party may want to benefit from dialogue outcomes or fear being sidelined by other parties by not participating. The calculations and rationale of different political actors have often been overlooked in literature about development, but specialists on political parties know that understanding interests and incentives is key to success. Due to the fact that dialogue between parties requires a long-term vision, the moments where incentives are at the highest (e.g. international support to post-conflict dialogue) may lead to failed dialogue because of the lack of preparedness for cooperation. So if incentives do not naturally exist, how can they be fostered by internal or external groups?

Counterintuitively, evidence shows that engaging in capacity-building of individual parties (direct party assistance) can help political party support organisations generate interest in inter-party dialogue. This should be done in a cost-efficient manner and not give the

impression of favouring one party over another. Indeed, organisations may offer a series of capacity building workshops which are then tailored to the requests and needs of specific parties that are included in a dialogue process.

However, this should be carried out carefully. In many countries the lack of access to financial resources has been identified as a key problem of parties' weak institutional capacity, including the ability to engage in inter-party dialogue. While direct party assistance that entails, for example, the financing of national conventions, meetings at the local level or the provision of office hardware can (at least partly) address the symptoms of this problem and contribute to parties' improved functioning in the short-term, it does not solve the key problems in the long-term (and means the support is not sustainable). As such, several political party support organisations balance direct assistance with efforts to engage in other more long-term support, such as strategic planning for parties. NIMD and International IDEA first developed a practical tool on strategic planning based on NIMD's experience in Georgia and Mozambique, which has since been used by NIMD and its partners in a wide variety of contexts.[29]

Governing parties can sometimes be the most difficult to persuade to enter into dialogue. At the same time, these are the parties that have the most to gain from working with international donors due to their control over state resources. As such, international donors may have important leverage in promoting dialogue between political parties, underlining the important linkages between development partnerships and support for the political party system (see also point 4 below).

3. Expanding dialogue beyond parties

While it is clear that policy challenges require the input of a multitude of different players, the relative weight of these different actors is also important in the political arena. This can differ significantly depending on the political system or the effectiveness of political parties. Trade unions, religious organisations, protest movements and organised civil society may all jockey for the same political influence. In Myanmar, for example, there is competition and distrust between parties and civil society organisations because they often have the same target groups. Similarly, cooperation between political parties and protest movements usually starts off on the wrong foot because there is some level of competition or antagonism between the two.

This is complicated by the fact that the boundaries between these different groups are not clear-cut. In Jordan, trade unions may sometimes act as the political opposition, while the Muslim Brotherhood is not an official political party and also provides public services in certain regions. While we may think we know how to place different groups, the lines are usually more blurred than they appear at first glance. The rise of Bobi Wine in Uganda illustrates the nonlinear links between protest movements, formal party structures and political power.

In light of this, it is usually up to the political party support organisation to identify which actors are important for achieving specific objectives. The aforementioned democracy schools of NIMD and Demo Finland include individuals from different groups beyond political parties. NIMD also has a long track record of working with political movements, from inviting the Movimiento al Socialismo to dialogue before it was an official Bolivian political party to working with different social movements in Guatemala, of which one later also became a political party, the Movimiento Semilla. Other political party support organisations, like the Olof Palme Centre or the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, have long-standing links with trade union movements. In Kenya, Westminster Foundation for Democracy and Demo Finland collaborate to bring disabled people's organisations (DPOs) closer to political parties and to create space for the DPOs to build the capacity and understanding of politicians to improve the level of disability inclusion of the parties.

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29   International IDEA & NIMD (2013): Strategic Planning for Political Parties: A Practical Tool. Available here.

As noted above, because of the ties built with parties, individuals and other groups over time, political party support organisations are well placed to help build trust. Within the context of dialogue, collective assessments of policy challenges can help to underline points of mutual agreement or contention. Joint actor mapping exercises - where different groups describe how they view key political actors - can show those conducting the mapping exercise how they are viewed through the eyes of their peers. And even in formal dialogue platforms between political parties, organisations like the Instituto para Democracia Multipartidária in Mozambique have made a point of ensuring that other partners move in and out of the dialogue process.

Finally, dialogue can also focus on citizens themselves. In Colombia, the Council of Bogota held citizen assemblies throughout 2020 with the purpose of engaging citizens in debates on a new Development Plan and Territorial Arrangement Plan. All political parties participated in these dialogues with support from NIMD, and Councilmen and Councilwomen had the opportunity to share their political views on the purposes and goals of the administration. A total of 100 people participated in the first Latin American itinerant citizen assembly in December, where citizens' opinions and inputs were collected and then presented to the Council itself.

4. Linking dialogue to other development priorities

As the governing party is often - but not always - the party with the least obvious incentive for cooperation, it can be difficult for the leadership of the party to see what benefits dialogue with opponents can bring. Governing parties already hold the main levers of power so why cooperate with political rivals? Experience has shown that a simple demonstration of the success of cooperation can go a long way towards bringing governing political parties to the table. As such, those supporting dialogue

avoid controversial issues at the outset, focusing instead on low hanging fruit that a wide variety of parties can get on board with. These issues may not address some fundamental problems between parties but provide a basis from which to mutually discuss challenges to the political party system or to development in general.

A second trend also points in the same direction. In recent years, political party support organisations have moved to focusing dialogue on specific themes - such as environmental governance, water legislation, healthcare or equal access to loans for women - because broad agreements are much harder to actually implement. A broad agreement on political cooperation involves a much larger degree of actors and a larger swathe of entrenched interests. Focusing on sectoral policies has the added benefit of providing tangible and implementable action points. Successful political party dialogue platforms have looked at a wide-range of different issues such as the pandemic response at the local level in Mali, food security in Myanmar in relation to the education system, or a review of legislation on the legality of public meetings in Uganda.[30]

Some organisations have also implemented such an approach through integrated support programmes to parliamentary committees, which by nature focus on specific sectoral policies. Cross-party engagement in parliament is often doomed to fail unless the political parties that parliamentarians represent are on board with a collaborative approach, underlining the importance of cooperation between parties for policy reform. In Mozambique, the Instituto para Democracia Multipartidaria (IMD) has supported the capacity of the Parliament to oversee the extractive industry sector and the policies and practices related to it.[31] This has included capacity building of parliamentarians as well as the creation of a new dialogue platform bringing together national and regional politicians.

All of these trends add significant weight to the logic for

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30   The 3 examples are from the organisation NIMD. Further information can be found here (Mali), here (Myanmar) and here (Uganda).

31   Details from the project in Mozambique can be found here.

ensuring greater involvement of political parties in support of sectoral priorities and other developmental objectives. The case comes from two directions, the political party world and the development world - a win-win situation for both. As shown above, experience from political party assistance points towards a strong underlying case for engaging with parties on sectoral policies. Similarly, development practitioners have frequently noted the importance of cross-party agreement on development objectives for the durability and sustainability of reform.

The involvement of parties in conflict resolution provides an important example of this. The international community supports efforts to end armed conflict around the world through different forms of diplomacy and longer-term efforts to tackle the root causes of conflict. Peacebuilders are developing their understanding of how to improve the inclusivity of these efforts, but the role of political parties is usually overlooked. Involving political parties in peace processes has been shown to have a positive impact on the sustainability of the peace brokered.[32] [33] Efforts by the EU and EU member states need to involve national political parties in the programmes they finance as well as the diplomatic efforts they engage in to resolve conflicts around the world.

The example of the peace process in Colombia is illustrative of the important role that political party support providers can play in moving beyond conflict to political competition and ultimately cooperation. In early 2017, NIMD was requested by the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP to help select experts to form the Special Electoral Mission (SEM), the Colombian body tasked with recommending reforms of the electoral system following the 2016 Peace Agreement.[34] In this context and with EU financial support, NIMD also provided institutional support for the Agreement on Political Participation, regularly holding multi-party dialogue sessions on the challenges that parties face in implementing the Agreement (e.g. on rules on party

financing or political opposition). While the peace in Colombia remains fragile, the presence of dialogue is in itself an important sign for the sustainability of reform and the absence of violent conflict in the coming years.

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32   Ishiyama, J. (2016): From Bullets to Ballots: The Transformation of Rebel Groups into Political Parties. London: Routledge.

33   Demo Finland (2019): Political Parties & Peace Building. The Forgotten Stakeholder in Peace Processes. Available here.

34   NIMD (2016): Press Release: NIMD invited to select Special Electoral Mission of Colombia. Available here.

Recommendations

As demonstrated by the gradual change in policy documents, the EU has increasingly sought to integrate political parties into its support for democracy. The EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 shows that this comes from a recognition of the key role parties play in democracies, but also of the link between parties and other external action objectives such as inclusion, election observation, and peace. At the same time, many of the current challenges to democracy - polarisation, populist discourse, restricted democratic space - have underlined the key role political parties will play in protecting democracy around the world.

This paper has highlighted 10 areas of prioritisation for the EU which are summarised in the table below. In order to underline the important links between these priority areas, the paper suggests that the EU, EUMS and political party organisations should focus on 5 key recommendation areas: integrating parties into other programmes, thinking and acting long-term, programming with incentives in mind, not focusing exclusively on political parties, and working directly with parties themselves.

Areas of prioritisation for EU support to political parties

1. Supply-demand chain for increased inclusiveness
2. Ensuring buy-in from political leadership
3. Capitalize on consistent transition support
4. Long-term approach to capitalize on entry points in the electoral cycle
5. Taking ethics of behaviour seriously
6. Engage political parties as allies in the fight against online disinformation
7. Investing in parties' internal preparedness
8. Supporting incentives
9. Expanding dialogue beyond parties
10. Linking dialogue to other development priorities

1. Integrate political actors like parties into development programmes

As important development actors in their own right, development programmes (as well as programmes addressing other foreign policy priorities) need to consider ways to address the views and influence of political parties in projects more systematically. The representatives of the executive branch of government, so often the key interlocuteur of donors, are politicians after all. Efforts at integrating political parties and other political actors into other cooperation programmes have two benefits. Firstly, they increase the potential for those sectoral programmes to have wider political buy-in. Secondly, they foreground issues of substance (where donors have leverage) in political party cooperation, increasing the potential for dialogue between parties.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Provide capacity-building to parties linked to specific thematic areas
A focus on a specific thematic area, such as policy capacity development, can be beneficial as long as its scope is not too broad and context-specific factors can still be taken into account when designing and implementing the support.

Use existing entry points for the involvement of parties in development priorities
Programmes can build on international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals and recommendations in Election Observation Missions, peace agreements and Truth and Reconciliation reports that provide entry points for linking political party work with wider foreign policy priorities.

Combine institutional support to parties with other thematic priorities
Parliamentary committees and parties themselves play a key role in policy decisions in development priorities such as education, health, the use of natural resources and digitalisation. They should be more systematically included in specific sector support efforts.

Consistently integrate support to political parties into electoral assistance programmes
Working with political parties is key to take advantage of changing circumstances to advance political and electoral reform, and to promote a technical and well-informed electoral reform discourse among political and social actors.

2. Think and act long-term

Perhaps more than many other areas of development funding, working to improve political action and political behaviour takes time as it involves many cultural considerations and institutional practices. All three focus areas of this paper have underlined the importance of a long-term approach for donors and political party support organisations - which is crucial for driving change in electoral integrity, building trust and capacity for inter-party dialogue, and creating the foundations for making the most of moments for change. This can be hard to ensure due to the dynamics of development cooperation, but there are positive examples that can serve as ways to promote a long-term approach more systematically.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Set up a flexible fund at the global level to provide support to political openings
Societal mobilization or political rupture can bring opportunities to break barriers to inclusiveness, as the development of party structures, constitutions, and rules can enable marginalised groups to push for greater representation, to question existing power structures, and to bring new issues onto the political agenda. The EU Instrument for Stability and Peace shows this can be done in relation to crises - it should be done in relation to opportunities too.

Set up a global programme for political party support
This would help to identify and mobilise long-term funding from different donors through joint research and technical expertise. The EU has created global programmes in support of parliaments and media actors in recent years. This same model could be repeated in supporting EU delegations to work with political parties.

Provide support to the youth wings of political parties
Fostering a culture of democracy and dialogue among youth wings is key to bringing new generations of democrats into national parliaments and positions of political power.

Provide operating grants to political party support organisations
Donors should look towards providing operating grants to local and international organisations that have demonstrated a track record of success.

3. Programme with parties' incentives in mind

Working with political parties inevitably involves a need to understand the obligations, interests and objectives of politicians. It is important to recognise that this is really no different from those supporting classic development projects who must understand the same dynamics for public sector officials - it is just much more visible in the case of politics. Political party supporters have recognised that these incentives can be both positive and negative, as well as internal to the party or external. For example, due to the 'cost of politics' and cultural biases, parties have little incentive to engender their electoral gains by recruiting economically disadvantaged groups, or candidates they consider not "qualified" or "popular" enough. Similarly, most opposition parties are keener on inter-party dialogue than those who hold power. Providers of political party support have shown that it is possible to help create incentives for structural change within parties .in favour of inclusion, electoral integrity and cooperation.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Support the creation of incentives for parties to select candidates in a more inclusive way
Prominent methods for this include electoral quotas, funding regulations (such as special 'earmarked funds'), and campaign support opportunities for disadvantaged candidates to promote inclusion. At the same time, donors and support organisations can increase demand for inclusive political parties by debunking the myth that underrepresented groups are less likely to receive votes, and by supporting parties in taking the lead on campaigning rather than single candidates relying on their personal wealth.

Offer capacity building support to parties that incentivises cooperation across political lines
This can help to counterbalance the tendencies towards zero-sum competition and improve the prospects for agreement on areas of mutual interest.

Jointly decide on the use of resources
Political party support organisations can provide the same amount of bilateral support for all parties and decide on how those resources are used with each party. This allows for tailor made support and crucially provides a clear distinction between well organised and upcoming parties. It is also likely to lead to much higher marginal gains for smaller parties.

4. Do not focus exclusively on political parties

Political party support organisations have increasingly expanded their work beyond targeting political parties to focus on other actors with a key role to play in politics, particularly civil society organisations, think tanks and citizen groups. All of these groups can play a role in monitoring the behaviour of politicians (such as in the case of Codes of Conduct) and in increasing pressure as well as electoral incentives on parties to improve inclusion within their political family. This also recognises that in many countries around the world future aspiring politicians often emerge from the ranks of other organisations or organised groups - a premise that to a large extent informed the REACH for Democracy project's criteria for selecting beneficiaries. Donors and political party support organisations should continue to reinforce their focus on this wider target group in their activities.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Remove restrictions to political party involvement in civil society support projects
Due to the important links between civil society organisations and political parties in many countries, donors should allow civil society organisations to work with parties in a non-partisan manner if they choose so. This will also improve outcomes related to inclusion and women's political equality as women are far more likely to begin their political activism in civil society.

Expand scope of support to other political actors in addition to parties
Integrated programmes that deal with political groups beyond officially recognised parties allow those providing support to work with social or political movements as well. Considering the fluidity of the party landscape in many countries, this could help improve the long-term impact of support as well as political pluralism over the long term.

Include other groups in political party support programme activities
The criteria to select individual beneficiaries of political party support programmes should look beyond people with official political party affiliation to those with political ambition. This allows for greater inclusion of other groups like trade union representatives, media actors, businesspeople and activists who may end up playing important political roles.

Provide support to civil society to formulate demands vis-à-vis political parties
Such support can include programmes specifically targeting the funding of political parties, but also programmes looking at the transparency of political parties in general.

Step up engagement of civil society in monitoring commitments of political parties
Whether it is an electoral Code of Conduct or a Roadmap for Inclusive Political Parties, civil society plays a key role in holding parties accountable to their commitments and in increasing incentives to abide by the rules. Party support programmes should include support to produce indicators of success, clear progress monitoring mechanisms and their integration into wider civil society advocacy efforts in case of non-compliance with parties' commitments.

5. Work directly with parties themselves

Over the years there has been a reluctance to work with political parties on the side of a number of donors and development organisations. The EU has dealt with this by emphasising the non-partisan nature of its support to political parties - meaning assistance is offered to all parties on the same basis. Such non-partisan support is vital for addressing issues of party representation, building up expertise in dialogue and addressing the internal democracy of political parties. Capacity-building, coaching and mutual learning are vital for all three priority areas of inclusion, elections, and cooperation. This covers a wide gamut of skills, from campaigning for office to understanding disinformation tactics, to the often overlooked but no-less important skills for actually governing a state.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Develop operational guidelines for EU delegations on direct party assistance
The creation of clear operational guidelines would help EU delegations to ensure that calls for proposals or direct support programmes are in line with a non-partisan approach. It would also go some way towards reducing the perception of risk for individual delegations when supporting parties.

Increase support for horizontal and regional experience sharing
Political parties around the world are faced with similar challenges, and learning to deal with these challenges is relevant no matter where a political party is based. Whether online or in-person, it is likely that the most fruitful exchange will happen in regional contexts where similarities are usually more pronounced.

Devise support programmes targeting party leadership to foster change towards inclusion and democratic practices within party structures
This could be done by supporting the capacity of underrepresented groups' wings and their ability to establish partnership for change with change-makers within their parties. It can also be achieved through peer-to-peer engagements in which party leaders who have made inclusion a priority engage peers from like-minded parties in other countries on the benefits of this commitment, akin to the horizontal and regional experience sharing noted in this section.

Support parties to engage in rebuttals of misinformation (campaigning)
Start addressing the role played by parties, politicians and hyper-partisan media in creating, disseminating and "endorsing" disinformation, by involving parties more prominently in regulatory and legislative responses to tackle disinformation at international and national levels. This could be complemented by actions to advance the development of methodologies to monitor parties' online behaviour and foster discussion with parties themselves on the findings. Other potential actions include upholding codes of conduct, spreading best practices on internal protocols and safeguards, and appropriate legislative and parliamentary oversight actions to protect electoral integrity from disinformation efforts.

Annex

EU funding to political parties' support programs under the last Multiannual Financial Framework (2014 - 2020)

Benin

» NIMD: "Support Programme to the National Assembly of Benin for the Promotion of Participative Government and Human Rights", including a component of capacity strengthening for political parties and support to School of Politics, funded by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

Burundi

» NIMD: "Strengthening the democratic culture of political political actors in Burundi" (2020-2021), supporting political actors before and after the 2020 electoral cycle, funded by the European Development Fund (EDF).

Colombia

» NIMD: "Acción democrática para la paz" (2016-2018), including capacity strengthening for political actors and promotion of dialogue scenarios for the strengthening of the democratic culture and reconciliation under the auspices of the Peace Agreement, funded by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) .

» Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE) and NIMD: "Protection of Leaders for Inclusive Democracy" (2020 - 2023), contributing to the generation of government policies and institutions to prevent human rights violations of political, social, and community leaders, and encourage peacebuilding with the support of civil society, funded by EIDHR.

Ethiopia

» NIMD: "Supporting the Ethiopian Political Parties Dialogue" (2019-2021), including building trust and facilitating dialogue on governance reform and Democracy Academy for parties engaging in dialogue, funded by IcSP.

» International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA): "Establishing an Environment for Inclusive, Knowledge-based Dialogue on the Political Process in Ethiopia" (2019), including a dialogue component to engage political parties and other stakeholders issues of national concern, funded by IcSP.

Honduras

» NIMD: "PRODemos: More inclusive, transparent and democratic political parties" (2018-2022), strengthening the management and administrative capacities of political parties, and increasing membership of under-represented groups (youth, women, afro-Honduran, LGTBI and other groups) at the national and local levels, funded by the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

Jordan

» European Center for Electoral Support (ECES), WFD, NIMD, Agence française de développement médias (CFI) and EPD: "EU JDID - EU Support to Jordanian Democratic Institutions and Development", with a political party component implemented by NIMD , funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

» Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: "Towards a Multi-Party Democracy: Strengthening the Role of Political Parties in Jordan's Democratic Reform Process" (2013-2015), to increase the inclusion and representation of Jordanian political parties, funded by the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

Mozambique

» International IDEA: "Support to Consolidation of Democracy in Mozambique" (2018-2023), supporting consolidation of democracy by reinforcing the fairness, transparency and credibility of the electoral processes and strengthening capacities of the elected representatives and their democratic institutions.

Myanmar

» International IDEA, DIPD, Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) and Democracy Reporting International (DRI): "Support to Electoral Processes and Democracy – STEP Democracy', (2015-2018), with political party support implemented by DIPD and FNF, funded by DCI.

» International IDEA, NIMD, DIPD, Demo Finland and DRI: "STEP II - Support to Electoral Processes and Democracy', (2018-present), with political party support implemented by Demo Finland, DIPD and NIMD including capacity building support to political parties to strengthen Myanmar's democratic transition, funded by DCI.

Nepal

» Demo Finland: "Mobilizing Youth for Gender Equality in Politics" (2013-2015), with a funding contribution from EIDHR.

Nigeria

» ECES, WFD et al.: "EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) programme" (2017-2021), with a political party support component implemented by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), funded by EDF.

Paraguay

» International IDEA: "Promotion of Democracy through Capacity Development of the National Electoral Management Body", concentrating on gender equality and promotion of women's and youth participation throughout the electoral cycle.

Philippines

» Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: "Bangsamoro Political Party Building (BPPB)" (2015-2017), contributing to the development of a pluralistic political landscape in the Southern Philippines, funded by IcSP.

» Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: "Democratic Leadership and Active Civil Society Empowerment in Bagsamoro (DELACSE Bangsamoro)" Phase I (2017-2018), enhancing leadership capacities of future political leaders in Bangsamoro, funded by IcSP.

» Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: "Democratic Leadership and Active Civil Society Empowerment in Bagsamoro (DELACSE Bangsamoro)" Phase II (2018-2020), enhancing leadership capacities of future political leaders in Bangsamoro, funded by IcSP.

Tunisia

» NIMD and Demo Finland: Support to civil society initiatives that contribute to the democratic transition and the promotion of women's rights in Tunisia, (2014-2015), co-funded through EIDHR.

Zimbabwe

» Olof Palme International Center and NIMD: "Strengthening democratic dialogue in Zimbabwe" (2017-2020), funded by IcSP.

Multi-country

» Demo Finland: "Participation in Action. Sharing, Learning and Evolving Together", implemented in Finland, Nepal, Bangladesh and Slovenia, and funded by the Youth in Action programme (by the EU Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency).

» Demo Finland: "Youth Creating Solutions for Meaningful Participation", implemented in Finland, Nepal, Bangladesh and Slovenia, and funded by Erasmus+.

» NIMD: REACH for Democracy or "Multiparty Dialogue Hubs: Creating Strong Networks of Multiparty Democracy Advocates", implemented in Tunisia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Benin, and funded by EIDHR.

» International IDEA: "Level Up: Political Finance with Integrity", implemented in Mongolia, Moldova, Paraguay, and funded by EIDHR.

» Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: "Get involved! Women empowerment in Morocco and Benin", funded by EIDHR.

» OXFAM: "Strengthening Parity Democracy in Political Parties in Bolivia", funded by EIDHR.

» Folkekirkens Nødhjælp Fond: "Young Women in Active Politics (YAP)", implemented in Malawi and funded by EIDHR.

EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP FOR DEMOCRACY