Political Party Aid

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I.   Party Troubles

Democratization is facing serious challenges in almost every part of the world where democratic transitions were launched during the past twenty years. These challenges range widely. Some countries once thought to be democratizing are slipping back to authoritarian or semiauthoritarian rule. Others have achieved successful, successive elections yet their new pluralistic systems are performing poorly, failing to translate democratic forms into democratic substance, and thereby alienating their citizens. In still other cases, democratic transitions are undermined by continued or new civil conflict.

The struggles of democratization in the later years of democracy's "Third Wave" should not be a surprise. Creating new political practices and institutions built on principles of representativity, accountability, and freedom is slow and hard, even in the best of circumstances. And the rapid spread of attempted democratic transitions in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the former Soviet bloc of the past twenty years has meant that democracy is being tried out in many countries that lack the underlying social, economic, and political characteristics commonly thought to favor democratization.

Although the range of partial or "hyphenated democracy" in these countries is wide, a striking commonality exists among them. Citizens of almost every struggling or new democracy are deeply unhappy with their political parties. With remarkable and dispiriting consistency, political parties are named in public opinion polls as the least respected socio-political institution in countries all across the developing and postcommunist worlds. In some countries, fewer than 10 percent of citizens express any confidence or belief in political parties.

Not only is a low regard for political parties extremely common, but the specific complaints that citizens have about their political parties are strikingly similar across these many different countries. The complaints add up to a standard tale of woe which can be summarized as followed:

Parties are perceived as corrupt, self-interested organizations that relentlessly work to maximize their own welfare with no real concern for ordinary citizens. They are seen as elitist organizations run by self-appointed leaders who are in politics out of greed and ambition. Citizens see little real difference among the main parties in their countries; the parties do not seem to stand for anything and whatever ideological labels are affixed to the parties are either just historical holdovers or empty symbols. The parties appear to waste vast amounts of energy and time in constant infighting with each other, squabbling over petty things out of a ritualistic, unproductive tendency to turn every issue into a partisan conflict. And citizens believe that parties do a bad job of governing once in power, not only because the parties look after their own interests rather than the country's but also because they lack people qualified in governance.

Undoubtedly parties in every country are not necessarily as feckless, corrupt, and dysfunctional as citizens believe them to be. And parties often get the blame for shortcomings or problems that are not necessarily their fault, such as poor state performance or weak economic growth. Nevertheless even a quick look at parties in many struggling or new democracies reveals major flaws along the lines described above. And in many countries the problems of parties are severe, whether it is the de facto purchasing by predatory business elites of some parties in Ukraine, the near collapse of the party system in Peru, the sidelining of parties in Nepal, the debilitating infighting of parties in Bangladesh, and so forth.

The unpopularity of parties leads to their being punished by voters. Many countries experience a high level of voting volatility, with voters feeling little loyalty toward parties and shifting their vote in each election from party to party. Parties that come to power, outside of countries where dominant parties have gained a firm hold on power, often serve only one term and then are crushed in the next elections as dissatisfied voters move on in search of something better. The unexpected success in some elections of non-party figures or persons outside the traditional parties, such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Simeon Saxe-Coburg Gotha in Bulgaria, Vladimir Putin in Russia, and Rios Montt in Guatemala, is another sign of the weakness of parties. And many new or struggling democracies face declining voter turnout across successive elections, which can partially be ascribed to the low regard in which parties are held.

Given the central functions that parties are supposed to play in a democracy, the weak state of parties in many developing and postcommunist countries is a serious problem for democratization. Above all, the shaky state of parties contributes significantly to the inadequate aggregation and representation of interests which is such a debilitating problem in so many new and struggling democracies. Large sectors of the citizenry often feel that their political system, though nominally democratic, is uninterested in and unresponsive to their needs. Troubled parties also fail to socialize citizens into the democratic process, not creating links with citizens beyond the appeal for votes every few years when an election takes place. Furthermore, problematic parties, when called upon to take part in legislatures or help fill executive positions and govern, import their internal problems, ranging from corruption and infighting to rigid internal hierarchies and unqualified persons—into the state apparatus.

II.   Aid for Political Parties

    A. Providers of Party Aid and Their Funders

Most political party aid is carried out by party institutes or foundations associated with West European or American political parties. These organizations vary dramatically in size from some of the German *Stiftungen* and American political party institutes that have hundreds of staff members, budgets in the tens of millions of euros, and offices in dozens of countries, to some of the small institutes associated with some European parties that have one or two staff members, budgets under one million euros and no foreign offices.

The funding sources for these institutes or foundations vary but are generally one or more of the following:

- Direct funding from the national legislature

- The home country's bilateral aid agency

- The home country's foreign ministry

- A special foundation or endowment set up to provide funding for party institutes (such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the National Endowment for Democracy)

- Private money raised by the party itself

In addition to these national institutions devoted to party aid, some international institutions are beginning work in this area as well. The Organization of American States, for example, has party aid programs in Central America and sponsors the regional Political Party Forum. The United Nations Development Programme has begun to work with political parties as part of its efforts to promote national dialogue processes.

Party aid is carried out throughout most of the developing world and postcommunist world where countries have moved at least partially away from authoritarian rule. Over the past decade, it has been much more extensive in Central and Eastern Europe than anywhere else, with probably approximately half of Western party aid going to that region. Smaller but still significant amounts of party aid go to parts of the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and Africa. Only very small amounts go to the Middle East and Asia.

B. Types of Party Aid

The most common type of party aid is assistance that seeks *to help a party build or strengthen its basic party organization*. This usually consists of efforts across a range of associated areas, such as (1) training central and local level party cadres in membership building, grassroots outreach, political platform development, communication methods, fundraising, and center-branch relations. (2) pushing and helping the party to increase the amount of internal democracy in the party, (3) assisting in the development of women's and youth wings of the party, (4) exposing party cadres and leaders to methods of party organizing and functioning in established Western democracies. In some cases it includes minor amounts of material assistance such as fax machines, or other office equipment, money for printing of party materials, or money for party members to travel to internal training programs, or abroad on study tours.

The second most common type of party aid is assistance *to bolster a party's capacity to participate in an electoral campaign*. This usually involves training efforts to help a party become more effective at message development, media relations, fundraising, voter mobilization, candidate selection and candidate preparation, volunteer recruitment and deployment, coalition building, polling, and general campaign strategy and management. Such aid is usually carried out in the six to twelve month period prior to elections. It typically stops sometime before the actual elections, usually around a month or a few weeks before.

A more specialized, less extensive form of party aid directly relates to elections but is distinct from campaign-related aid. It is assistance *to help parties participate effectively in the actual election process*, which usually includes training of party pollwatchers and in some cases support for technical assistance for party members who are on national election commissions.

An additional type of party aid is training *to help parties that are represented in national legislatures how to be effective members of such bodies*. This consists of training in legislative drafting, constituency relations, anti-corruption, negotiations and coalition building, and parliamentary rules of operation. Such aid overlaps with the broader category of legislative assistance, which also includes aid not targeted at parties as participants in legislatures, but at the institutions themselves (focusing on issues such as staff development, committee formation, public relations, parliamentary budgeting, parliamentary information offices, etc.).

There is also an increasing amount of party aid work not directly aimed at strengthening individual parties through interventions with the parties but rather at strengthening overall party systems. This aid is discussed in Section V below.

C. Goals of Party Aid

Party aid organizations tend not to make their goals very explicit beyond general statements that they are seeking to strengthen the parties they are working with. They proceed from a conception of "strong parties" or "good parties" that is implicit in their activities but rarely spelled out in much detail.

Observation of the actual efforts of party aid programs in many countries leads me to conclude that most political party aid providers generally are trying to help foster a common set of characteristics in the parties they work with. These characteristics are listed on the model party template detailed in Figure 1 (at end).

Interestingly, although the political parties in the various countries that sponsor political party aid vary greatly (Swedish and American political parties, for example, are obviously quite different), the party aid programs developed by these different countries all seem to adhere to the same template for party building. Generally speaking this template appears to correspond most closely to a northern European political party model, one that is quite traditional in its basic features and reflects the idea of parties in a pre-television age when parties depended almost exclusively on grassroots organizations to build support. It is not surprising that European party institutes seek especially to reproduce European style parties around the world. American political party institutes do the same and thus promote an ideal of a strong or good party that is quite different from the actual nature of American political parties. A striking feature that emerges from a cross-regional look at political party aid is how similar such aid is coming from party aid actors that draw upon very different party traditions. Equally striking is the fact that party aid programs look basically the same on the ground all over the world, no matter how different the political contexts and traditions of the places where the programs are carried out.

D. The Core Method

Although party aid is a growing domain, with new institutions entering the field and looking for new types of ways to help parties, a core method still dominates. A high percentage of party aid (probably over 75%) consists of training seminars and other technical assistance for people working in political parties in the recipient countries. The classic method is the short (one to three days) training seminar led by a foreign trainer— usually a political consultant, member of parliament, party official, or other political expert from the country sponsoring the training. These seminars attempts to transfer some Western know-how about party organization or campaigning to a group of party officials, usually either mid-level cadres from the party's central organization, or regional branch activists. In some cases, the transfer of Western know-how is attempted not through a training seminar but instead through a consultative process in which the visiting Western expert seeks to spend some time over a more sustained period with relevant people in the target party to teach them about platform development, public outreach, or whatever the particular skill in question is. When the party aid organization has an office in the country

which it is aiding, the country representative often develops personal ties with party counterparts and carries out informal consultations with them.

The other forms of aid—such as study tours to sponsoring countries and modest material aid—are supplements to the core training method, and are often used to build good relations with party elites and therefore facilitate participation of party cadres and activists in the training sessions. Study tours also have a training purpose of their own, as another way to try to transfer Western know-how to parties.

E. Single-party and Multiparty Aid

Most assistance efforts to strengthen parties in other countries follow either a fraternal party approach or a multiparty method. The fraternal party approach consists of a Western party institute or foundation building a relationship with a party in a developing or postcommunist country on the basis of assumed ideological kinship—liberal party with liberal party, social democratic party with social democratic party, etc. Usually it is an exclusive relationship; the Western party organization chooses just one party to aid on a fraternal basis. Sometimes this choice is related to which party in the recipient country is a member of the corresponding party international. The assumption is that the different party institutes from the aid-providing country in question will develop relationships with their various counterpart parties in the receiving country, thereby ensuring a multipartisan diversity of the assistance in the country.

In the multiparty method, the party aid organization works with a number of parties at once. It may bring different parties together in joint training sessions or hold single-party training sessions with multiple parties over the assistance period. In many democratizing countries there are a very large number of parties and the multiparty method requires coosing to work with some parties but not others. Criteria vary for deciding which parties will be included in the assistance. One common approach is to work with all parties represented in the parliament. Another is to work with all parties that are democratic, i.e. those that do not espouse an anti-democratic ideology and accept the basic political rules of the game.

Very generally speaking, European party aid organizations favor the fraternal party method (though the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy is an exception) while the U.S. party institutes tend to utilize the multiparty method (though in some countries they have worked principally with only one party, or one coalition of parties). International institutions entering the party aid domain gravitate toward the multiparty method.

III.   Issues for Discussion

     A. A Mythic Model?

     Looking at the list of political party characteristics that party aid programs seeks to promote in new or struggling democracies, it is hard to escape the impression that party aid is based on a highly idealized or even mythicized conception of what political parties are like in established democracies. Although some parties in a small number of OECD countries may have most of the characteristics set out in Figure 1, most do not. Many parties in the established democracies countries are not, for example, very internally democratic, are highly personalistic in their external image and internal functioning, do not maintain regular contacts with voters beyond elections, do not have clear ideological definition, do not give women a strong role in the party, and do not do a good job of incorporating youth in the party.

     A party aid advocate might reply to this by saying that of course few parties conform fully to the ideal but it is important to have a coherent aspiration. Moreover, many areas of democracy aid suffer, to at least some degree, from the problem of pursuing idealized models—such as programs which expect aid-receiving countries to develop efficient, effective judiciaries and parliaments, to have strong, independent NGO sectors, and to have consistently high voter turnouts—that established democracies themselves often do not live up to. Yet there is still a troubling sense with party aid that the assistance efforts seek to create something in new and struggling democracies that exists at best only very partially, or rarely in much older, more established democracies.

     Western party aid seems to be based on a old-fashioned idea of how political parties were in some earlier, more virtuous era, before the rise of television-driven, image-centric, personality-driven politics, the diminution of direct links between parties and voters, the blurring and fading of traditional ideological lines, and the growing cynicism about partisan politics that characterize political life in many established democracies. Some party aid practitioners might believe that parties in new and struggling democracies can first be helped to develop the way parties used to be in many established democracies and then worry at some later time about the corrosive effects of technology and postmodern culture on party politics. But this would be a mechanistic, stage-based idea of development that does not correspond to reality. The reality is that although new and struggling democracies are trying to consolidate the basic institutions of democracy that many OECD countries consolidated many decades (or longer) ago, at the same time they are confronting the effects of television-driven, image-centric politics. In some sense therefore they are forced to grapple simultaneously with the challenges of both modernism and postmodernism in political party development.

     The fact that party aid follows an implicit institutional template—a relatively standardized, detailed, and fixed idea of what a good political party is—raises the same two important questions that confront other areas of democracy aid in which template methods are common (such as parliamentary assistance and judicial aid). First, does the

use of such a template lead party aid providers to have low tolerance for local differences and to unconsciously (or consciously) insist on trying to reproduce parties that look basically the same no matter how different or varied the local political contexts are? And second, in focusing on the characteristics they would like to see parties in new or struggling democracies have, are party aid providers ignoring the underlying economic, socio-cultural, and other structural determinants of party development? That is to say, are they assuming that merely by working with the parties themselves (as opposed to trying to address some of these underlying structures and conditions) they can produce parties that conform to the Western ideal?

B. Improving the Core Method

When I interview people in political parties on the receiving end of international party aid, I find a striking critical consensus regarding the core method of such aid, i.e. the short-term training programs typically led by visiting foreign experts. So striking is this consensus that it appears as another "standard tale of woe" parallel in some ways to the one that citizens of new or struggling democracies express about their political parties.

One extremely common complaint concerns the foreign trainers who lead the seminars. Such trainers are often viewed by the persons they are training as having little understanding of the local context and an irrepressible tendency to suggest approaches and solutions that are designed in their home country but not necessarily suited to a different terrain. It is also commonly said by trainees that these trainers underestimate the level of knowledge of the people they are training, mistaking the poor socio-economic conditions for a low level of political knowledge or assuming that the troubled state of parties must be caused by a lack of understanding of what parties might or should be.

Another major complaint is with the supply-driven nature of much of this sort of training and the one-off nature of the training efforts. Too often, local party representatives say, the idea for the seminars comes from the party aid organizations rather than from the local parties, with a consequent low sense of local ownership in the program, and, in the view of the parties being trained, a lack of connection between what is offered to them and what they believe they really need. The one-off nature of many of the trainings, and the lack of follow-up, results in little lasting effect on the parties.

Party officials also report that the wrong people often end up going to the training seminars. Party leaders use the trainings (especially foreign study tours) to reward people they owe favors to. Or they send marginal people to the sessions out of a desire to avoid influential middle-level people getting training that they may try to use to push for changes from the leadership. Key senior people rarely take part in the trainings, feeling above such exercises.

Participants in trainings also frequently criticize the events for being too lecture oriented and not using more active learning methods such as role playing, practical trials, and active discussions. They are especially critical of efforts to teach party doctrine, finding them too abstract, uninteresting, and often impractical.

Some party aid organizations have tried to move away from the tired, standard method of training, though it is not clear how widespread improvements actually are. Many party aid groups for example say they have moved away from using one-time visiting Westerners to do the training. Instead they use either (1) Western trainers who have spent some significant time in the country and know the local scene; (2) third country experts who have relevant experience from another country that has undergone similar political developments; or (3) local trainers who have received instruction in the relevant subject, often through training of trainers initiatives.

Party aid organizations tend to insist they have moved away from the bad habit of supply-driven training, that they consult extensively with political parties about their needs and interests before going ahead with training seminars and that they often develop a counterpart person in their party partner who takes responsibility for coming up with idea for trainings. Some organizations (such as NIMD) have parties apply for funds to carry out training, with the idea that this process of application and approval will improve local ownership of the training exercises.

To alleviate the problem of one-off training events, some party aid organizations are investing instead in training efforts that reach a smaller number of people over a longer period, such as leadership schools for young party activists. And party organizations say that they are learning to avoid straight lecture format trainings and increasingly using more active learning methods.

Several main questions remain about this issue of the core training method. How extensive are these reformed methods and how much are party aid groups still falling back on the standard method? How much do the improved methods strengthen the process of knowledge transmission and overcome the larger fatigue on the part of many parties in new or struggling democracies with the overall effort by Western groups to train them?

C. Comparing the Fraternal and Multiparty Methods

Both the fraternal and multiparty methods have advantages and disadvantages, and the local contexts of party aid vary so much as to ensure that one method is not necessarily better or more appropriate overall.

The primary advantage of the fraternal method is that the common ideological link between the provider party institute and receiver political party may be the basis for a bond that will make cooperation more effective. Party organizations which use the fraternal method assert that their partner parties in new or struggling democracies feel that they can trust them more because they know it is a potential long-term partnership rooted in ideological fraternity. This trust, they say, is essential to gaining access and influence within the parties that they are trying to help. Furthermore, party organizations using the fraternal method also feel they can be more effective helping parties with a similar ideological orientation because they will tend to understand the particular challenges of such parties. For example, a right-of-center party institute may know better how to help a

right-of-center party in a developing country reach a business constituency better than a left-of-center party institute would.

Another advantage of the fraternal method is that it helps connect parties in the developing and postcommunist worlds to the party internationals, which is useful for socializing parties into the international networks and norms of political party life. Often it is Western party institutes in developing or postcommunist countries that introduce parties to the party internationals and facilitate their entry into them.

The fraternal party model faces a major disadvantage or limitation. In many parts of the developing world and the postcommunist worlds (especially the former Soviet Union), parties do not divide along ideological lines that correspond to the main European ideological groupings, or even along a left-right axis at all. As a result, Western party institutes cannot find natural ideological partners in many countries. Insisting on the fraternal party method in such contexts, which are numerous, leads either to artificial attempts to read a particular ideological orientation into certain parties or very spotty coverage of the main parties. Even when some parties in new or struggling democracies do fall into the conventional ideological groupings, there are often many more parties that do not. If Western party aid organizations only work with the former parties they will be excluding a large number of parties.

The fraternal method also often results in a partisan approach, which can be controversial in the recipient country and potentially distortive of the domestic political scene. A decision by a Western party institute to work with just one party in a multiparty system constitutes a partisan approach. The assumption is that other party institutes from the same provider country will choose to work with other parties, balancing out the aid in a multipartisan way. Yet given limited budgets and incomplete global coverage, often the other party institutes of the provider country will not decide to work in that country, leaving the assistance from that country unbalanced. Moreover, the party institutes in provider countries themselves do not reflect an even partisan balance and thus will project their own partisan orientation onto other countries. If a provider country, for example, is traditionally dominated by a strong right-of-center party, the funding of its party institutes will likely be such that if they follow the fraternal method, that country will be giving much more support to right-of-center parties abroad than to other parties.

An additional problem with the fraternal party method is that it sometimes produces party aid that is not really much about helping strengthen parties (or democracy) in other countries but instead serves other interests of the aid-providing country. My interviews with representatives of some West European party institutes, for example, made clear that some of the West European party aid to Central and Eastern Europe is motivated less by an interest in promoting democracy *per se* than in developing party partners who can join West European party coalitions in the European Parliament. Also, some West European party institutes, particularly the German *Stiftungen* and the international departments of the British political parties, sometimes use fraternal party aid to build relations with foreign politicians, officials, or parties for the sake of facilitating diplomatic relations with or pursuing certain interests in those countries. This is not necessarily a bad

thing in and of itself but it should not be confused with party aid that primarily aims to strengthen parties and build democracy in other countries.

With regard to the multiparty method, its main advantage is its inclusiveness. The inclusiveness allows party aid providers to avoid partisanship, which can be a major benefit in many political contexts. By working with all the major parties in a country, a party aid actor can often be relatively assertive and far-reaching in its work without setting off political alarm bells in the country.

The multiparty method facilitates efforts by the aid provider to think about the overall problems of parties in the country as a whole. This can be useful to help stimulate the external aid actors to confront all factors shaping the evolution of parties in the country rather than to continue training one party at a time under the assumption that the main obstacles and solution to party development lie only with the parties themselves. In this way, the multiparty method can help lead to the development of new types of efforts to strengthen the overall party system in a country rather than just the individual parties.

The main disadvantage of the multiparty method is the greater difficulty of creating a very close party-to-party relationship between the provider and recipient. The value of such relationships is open to debate but adherents of the method believe that such relationships are crucial to gaining real influence inside the party to push for important internal reforms. On the other hand, party institutes that use the multiparty method believe that over time they can develop quite close relationships with some parties in a country even though they are helping several or even many parties in the country simultaneously.

D. Partisanship in Party Aid

When asked about partisanship, providers of party aid are usually quick to say that their work is non-partisan. Aid agencies like USAID that fund such work tend to have official policies of non-partisanship. In reality, however, party aid is often partisan. I do not view this as necessarily a bad thing but I think it would be preferable if providers of party aid would recognize this reality more openly and make sure they have thought through all the ramifications of it.

Generally speaking, there are two major types of partisanship in party aid. The first sometimes arises in European party assistance that uses the fraternal party method. As discussed above, although the work of any one party institute using this method is partisan, the intention is for such aid to be part of a larger multipartisan framework. But in practice, the aid from any one providing country sometimes does not reach all of the major parties in a recipient country; overall it reflects the partisan weighting of the providing country, which is itself usually not evenly balanced. Fraternal party aid therefore, in practice often favors one or more parties at the expense of others.

When asked about the partisan nature of their work, persons working in West European party institutes tend to downplay it at first. They start by noting that multiple party institutes from their country engage in such work. When it is pointed out that in fact

in many recipient countries one particular party from the aid-providing country is much more involved than others, they turn to other arguments. They may, for example, draw a distinction between campaign-related work and party building work and say that they do the latter rather than the former, and therefore are not really affecting the outcome of elections. They also argue that they stop their work some time before any elections, such as a few weeks or a month, to avoid direct influence on the campaign. Yet they acknowledge, when asked, that a party which manages to strengthen itself organizationally will likely be more effective in building support and doing well in a campaign. Therefore almost any effective party aid should almost by definition affect the performance of parties in elections.

In my experience, representatives of West European party aid organizations, when pressed on the point of partisanship, will acknowledge that their efforts do have a partisan quality but they will not be greatly troubled by it. Persons who work for party institutes tend to believe in the cause of their party. Representatives of a social democratic party tend to believe that every country in the world should have a social democratic party, or a party that follows those basic principles. Persons working at a conservative party institute tend to feel the same about the value of conservative parties. What, they ask, is wrong with promoting political values they believe in, values that appear to have very wide applicability? Unlike persons working in bilateral or multilateral development agencies, persons who work in Western party institutes are not developmentalists or diplomats. They are political actors and as such have less concern about possible violations of sovereignty or neutrality that arise in doing political work across borders. In fact they see cross-border political work as a fact of life that is already well-established and not very controversial, even as developmentalists cringe at funding anything that might be seen as directly affecting the outcome of a foreign election. They tend not to ask, as I think they should, how this party aid which favors one or more parties at the expense of others is perceived in the recipient countries. And they tend not to face the question of why, if it is of unquestionable value, most countries that sponsor party aid strictly prohibit any other country from doing the same in their own borders.

The other type of partisanship in party aid is more visible. It tends to exist in U.S. rather than European party aid efforts (though it is not unknown in the latter). It comes when party aid is directed to one or more parties that are facing an opponent—either a ruling party or another party competing for power—that the party aid provider believes is non-democratic. This kind of partisan aid has been most common in postcommunist contexts. In Eastern Europe in the 1990s, for example, the International Republican Institute (IRI) supported center-right parties against their left-of-center opponents in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, with the specific intention of improving the chances of those parties gaining and holding onto power and knowing that there was no corresponding U.S. aid to the other parties. In Russia and some other countries in the former Soviet Union, both IRI and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) have engaged in partisan aid aimed at helping opposition parties trying to challenge rulers or ruling parties. And in some cases, such as in Serbia in the late 1990s and Belarus in 2000, party aid is part of relatively explicit U.S.-government funded efforts to unseat disliked (by the United States) leaders. These efforts combine party aid with targeted civil society and media aid as well as diplomatic pressure. Partisan aid has not only occurred in postcommunist contexts. IRI,

for example, has engaged in partisan aid in Haiti and Cambodia, supporting opposition parties working against leaders or ruling parties IRI felt were not democratic.

The principal justification of this sort of oppositional partisan aid is that the assistance seeks to strengthen democratic political forces working against non-democratic rulers or parties. The argument therefore is that such aid is not really partisan in the sense of interfering with voters' choice between democratic alternatives but is rather aid to strengthen democracy against non-democracy.

This justification tends to satisfy some persons (in the United States at least), especially when the party aid is directed against political figures like Slobodan Milosevic or Alexander Lukashenko. And the party aid efforts directed against those leaders were part of broader assistance and diplomatic campaigns that various European and multilateral organizations joined in as well. The case for partisan opposition aid becomes less certain when the political campaign is not against a clearly non-democratic figure or party, but rather against a party whose democratic values are merely distrusted by the particular external actors involved. Such was the situation in Bulgaria and Romania in the 1990s when U.S. aid went to the opponents of the former communists, i.e. against political forces that were not dictatorial in nature.

E. The Relationship of Parties to Civil Society

One very common problem with political parties in new and struggling democracies is their lack of connection to civil society. When asked about their relationships with civil society, party elites usually have little to say. In parallel fashion, when asked about ties between their organizations and political parties, civil society leaders typically disparage the idea.

As party aid representatives go deeper trying to strengthen parties in the developing and postcommunist worlds, they encounter this divide between parties and civil society. And as they do, they are increasingly seeking to do something about it. Their response is often to create special programs to bring political party people together with civil society representatives, with the idea that if the two sides can get to know each other better and learn about each other's perspectives, each will better understand the importance of working with the other and will pursue new ties with the other. Thus party aid groups organize forums or roundtables to bring the two sides in contact with each other, sometimes at the national level, sometimes at the local level.

These efforts, while certainly not harmful, have not yet shown themselves to produce very much change. Civil society representatives who go to such meetings often come out of them complaining that the political parties just want to dominate or use them for their own political purposes, and have no interest in real partnerships. Political party representatives, in turn, complain that the people on the civil society side are uninterested in collaboration and look down on political parties.

Some of the problem with the attempts to create more cooperation between parties and civil society comes from the relatively narrow definition of civil society that many aid

organizations use, especially those working on democracy aid. In looking at civil society they tend to focus on NGOs, particularly the circle of Western- funded advocacy NGOs and social service NGOs, rather than on the much broader range of formal and informal social organizations that make up civil society. People who work in the donor-funded NGO sector tend to have gravitated to that sector to avoid partisan politics. They usually have a very negative view of political parties as being corrupt, dishonest, and self-interested, and they wish to keep their organizations from being tainted by association with them. Moreover, in the 1990s, when much new aid began flowing to the NGO sector in new or struggling democracies, donors were telling these civil society groups that it was best to stay away from partisan politics and to cultivate neutrality and technocratic excellence. The civil society activists are somewhat surprised to be getting the opposite message now from providers.

To take forward the idea of promoting greater ties between civil society and political parties, party aid actors will need to think through some of the issues more deeply. To start with, they need to explore in more detail the question of what kinds of relations they would like to see civil society organizations develop with parties, and which parts of civil society are most likely to seek such relations. In some established democracies, parts of civil society have quite deep relations with parties (such as unions that are intertwined with social democratic parties or, in some cases, environmental or women's organizations that work directly to endorse and support one party in an election) while other parts of civil society keep their distance. Given the highly conflictive nature of partisan politics in many new or struggling democracies, it is not surprising that advocacy or service NGOs will not want to be seen as aligned with any one party (the consequences for them if their party loses might be disastrous). Yet other groups more oriented toward broad membership and mobilization, such as teachers organizations, or indigenous persons organizations, might well find it useful to engage in strategic mobilization with parties. In short, both party aid and civil society aid representatives will have to move away from formulaic ideas like "civil society should be politically neutral" or "parties and civil society need to work together more" and really examine what they mean and what they want in detail and in relation to the reality of the local contexts.

F.   The Relative Absence of Evaluations

In my interviews with representatives of Western party institutes I have been struck by how rarely these organizations evaluate their own work. When I ask about evaluations, most people in party institutes just shrug their shoulders and say their institutes do not do evaluations, either because of cost or for unnamed reasons. USAID missions sometimes carry out evaluations of IRI or NDI work that they have funded. The only party aid organization that appears to regularly evaluate its own work is the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy.

The lack of evaluations is striking considering how many uncertainties linger in donor agencies and other organizations about the value of party aid. People who work in the party institutes do not seem very troubled by the lack of evaluations. They are generally convinced of the intrinsic value of their work, proceeding from the following set

of assumptions: 1) parties are essential to democracy; 2) the best way to strengthen parties in weak democracies is to go directly to the parties that exist and offer them training and other support; and 3) there are no other organizations better qualified to do that than successful political parties, i.e. the parties that the party institutes are based in. Thus although they sometimes recognize in private that their aid meets a lot of obstacles and frustrations on the ground, they believe it is intrinsically valuable and do not see any alternative approach to the problem.

People in party institutes are also wary about evaluations because donor agencies and foreign ministries that are the likely sponsors of such exercises often push for quantitative or other narrowly focused methods of attempting to measure the impact of aid. Quantitative evaluation methods do not work very well in most areas of democracy assistance, but they are especially problematic when it comes to the domain of party aid due to the very organic and fluid ways parties are organized internally and how they function. Representatives of party institutes also tend to feel that no one outside political parties can really understand or assess their work properly, and that most people outside parties tend to be too harsh in their judgments about parties, and do not accept the fact that politics is inevitably a messy, imperfect business.

Although the reasons party institutes tend to be wary of evaluations are understandable in some ways, clearly there is a shortage of systematic learning and review in this area. Given their misgiving about evaluations forced on them from the outside, it is incumbent on party institutes to develop credible methods of assessing party aid and to apply those methods to their own work.

IV.   The Challenge of Party Reform

Party aid providers often report success in providing assistance that is valued by people within parties—training programs that participants say are useful and appreciated, advice and counsel to party officials that is met with genuine interest, study tours that are cited as very helpful in exposing people to new ideas, material aid that is put to immediate use, and so forth. Yet a look at the evolution of parties in countries where party aid providers have been operating, as well as conversations with party aid providers who have been working in various countries, make clear that party aid seems to produce rather modest and incremental changes, at best, in the overall functioning and character of the parties it reaches. In fact, it appears that in many cases party aid tends to bounce off the parties it targets, and that many parties in new or struggling democracies remain seriously problematic despite years, or even decades of foreign assistance directed at them.

Undoubtedly there is much more to be said and learned about the ways party aid has or has not helped produce the reform of parties in particular countries. The point here is simply that parties are clearly not easy entities to help change and the question of how party aid aims to change parties and why and how parties respond to such efforts deserves exploration.

Like most areas of democracy aid, party aid uses training and advice as the principal motors of intended change. Stated very simply, the core idea is that by transferring new ideas to people within parties about how parties can and should function, those people will change their behavior in accordance with these new ideas and in so doing will change their parties as well.

In practice, this core approach to change comes in three variants, aimed at producing change from the bottom, middle, or top of parties:

- Training programs for local or provincial level party activists in party branches, both to promote change at the local level of the party and then encourage that change to "work its way up" in the party to change the party overall. For example, training may be directed at local-level candidates to teach them how to carry out grassroots campaigning with the idea that if such campaigning is carried out and is successful, the central hierarchy in the party will see the benefit of it and incorporate it as a main part of the party's approach.

- Training programs for middle and senior level party cadres in the central party hierarchy to introduce them to new ideas, encourage them to adopt new methods, and push the party leaderships to make reforms.

- Advice and counsel (rather than training) for party leaders and the top leadership circle to explain the need for reforms in the party and the kinds of reforms that are possible and desirable, and to encourage them to carry out some reforms.

Despite these different-level approaches, and the often quite persistent application of them over time, the hoped-for reforms in the targeted parties often do not occur. There appear to be two main reasons for this: (1) the party leadership often blocks the reforms; and (2) elements of the political context in which the parties are operating make the reforms difficult.

A. Leadership Blockages

For reasons that will not be elaborated here, most political parties that have formed during the last twenty years in new or struggling democracies are what might be called, for lack of a better term, "leader parties." They are organized around a strong leader who exerts dominant control over the party—the leader chooses who is on the party's executive council, determines who will be candidates in legislative and other races, controls the party finances, makes the main decisions about themes, campaigns, platforms, and so forth. Although leader parties often develop relatively extensive internal structures, the informal lines of control emanating from the leader predominate. The leader-centric nature of the parties is often reinforced by the fact that the parties are operating in cultures in which deference to hierarchical authority is strong. It is also fueled by the fact that most new parties in these countries are financed by a small number of wealthy business patrons who

develop direct personal ties to the party leaders. The narrow range of sources of money for the party, and their concentration in the hands of the party leader, greatly increase the power of the leader.

Although occasionally leaders of such parties are reformers who welcome internal party reforms and dedicate themselves to party institutionalization, in most cases they do not. Usually those leaders resist changes coming from the bottom and middle of the party and do not initiate significant internal reforms themselves. Why is this the case, given that the reforms that party aid providers prescribe are, in a larger sense, intended to strengthen the parties and make them more effective?

The main answer is that party leaders in these sorts of highly centralized parties resist reforms and institutionalization because they fear losing power and control. Internal democracy may mean they lose their place at the top. Meritocratic or democratic selection of legislative candidates removes an important perquisite or lever that leaders like to control. Empowering local branches diminishes the authority of the leader. Making party finances more accountable takes the power of the purse out of the leader's secret control.

Party leaders also resist the sort of institutionalizing reforms that party aid supports for other reasons. The leaders are usually focused narrowly on the next election. Long-term reforms such as strengthening local party chapters or developing internal training capacity for party cadres appear to be very low priorities or even appear as distractions from the immediate electoral task at hand. Such leaders often see themselves as the essence of the party and assume that their reputation or image is responsible for the party's support in the country. In such a mindset, developing the internal organizational structures of the party is of little interest. And in some cases, party leaders resist prescribed reforms because they simply do not share the values underlying the reforms. They may nod in agreement when visiting foreigners talk with them about the importance of giving women a greater role in the party, for example, but often their hearts are not behind the idea.

B. Other Obstacles

It is not only the stubbornness of party leaders, however, that makes reform of political parties so difficult. The underlying political and economic contexts in which parties in new or struggling democracies operate produce many obstacles to party strengthening. Just to name a few:

- In poor societies most parties are usually short of funds and cannot afford many of the sorts of institutionalization measures external aid providers recommend (internal training capacity, strong local branches, etc.)

- Although outsiders tell parties that they should have more developed party platforms and clearer ideological definition, the fact is that citizens in many new or struggling democracies (just as in many established democracies) often base their vote on candidates' images and

personality. Citizens are impatient with ideological positioning and mostly just want competence, or charisma. It is not clear therefore how much weak parties should invest of their scarce resources in platform development.

- Many new or struggling democracies face a profound citizen disaffection from politics due both to the legacies of authoritarian rule and the messiness of life in an attempted democratic transition. The task for parties of building ties with citizens is extremely difficult, defeating normal grassroots organizing methods.

- The weak rule of law that exists in many postcommunist and developing countries makes it hard for parties to carry out reforms that depend on a well-functioning rule of law, such as reforms of party financing, or establishing rules for internal democratization. Predatory actors, such as powerful business elites are able to subvert such reforms to ensure their own interests.

- In many new or struggling democracies, the media is reflexively critical of political parties, not just for merited reasons, but as a populist posture that corresponds with the public's prejudices and helps the media build an audience. Parties seeking to improve their ties with the media and the public are stymied by the continual negative publicity they receive.

Some political scientists who study political parties reach pessimistic conclusions about the very possibility of party reform. Examining the problematic evolution of Latin American political parties in recent decades, for example, Michael Coppedge suggests that party replacement (parties dying after repeated decisive electoral defeats and new parties arising in their place) is a more likely path to party change than party reform. But the point of the analysis in this section is not a counsel of despair suggesting that party aid is futile. Rather it is that all aid which seeks to stimulate reform in political institutions or other key institutions is very difficult. All important institutions in a country—whether the judiciary, the parliament, the labor unions, the national election commission, or any other frequent focus of democracy aid—usually have significant internal reasons (rational or irrational) to resist what may seem like perfectly logical, productive reforms to outside aid providers. And the environments in which the institutions operate also tend to be rife with elements that make reform difficult. As with all areas of democracy aid, party aid has to move beyond the assumption that training alone will be a major driver of change and look more closely at the internal incentives and disincentives for change within and around political parties and craft assistance strategies that reflect these realities.

V.   Strengthening Political Party Systems

A. Reforming the Legal Framework

As concern for the troubled state of political parties in many developing and postcommunist countries broadens and deepens, some persons trying to find ways to help strengthen parties are looking beyond aid to parties *per se* to see if it is possible to help strengthen party *systems*. Aid providers do not usually draw upon any well-defined criteria of what is a good party system, but rather seem to proceed from the idea that is an extension of their model for political parties: a good party system is a collection of some moderate number (perhaps between two and eight) of major parties (parties that have at least some of the desired characteristics of parties listed in Figure 1) that compete peacefully and lawfully on a relatively level playing field, and avoid ideological extremes while still offering citizens some distinct choices.

Such efforts to date have tended to focus on the laws and rules governing the operation of parties, with the idea that reforms in those laws and rules may be able to help change the ways parties organize and function.

One such area is that of electoral laws. They have been the focus of elections-related assistance in many democratizing countries during the past 20 years. Although political scientists have done considerable work on the interaction of types of electoral systems and types of political parties, aid work relating to electoral law reform has mostly been done more with a view to the elections-specific administration issues than shaping certain kinds of party development.

It is possible that in some countries electoral law reform might be an area of focus for party aid providers looking to try to change the configuration or types of parties. It is an area that bears further exploration. Yet it also has some substantial obstacles. Most importantly, it is hardly up to aid providers in most developing or postcommunist countries to push for electoral law reform. Such reforms are very basic and go to the core power issues in the country. The key political forces in the countries, though they do not always know the ins and outs of different choices in electoral law reform, are usually well aware of the potential consequences of reform measures and are very unlikely to work for reforms that may threaten their power. Such reforms usually take place at major junctures when the system has been broken open by larger political events, not when external aid providers decide it might be a good idea.

Another area of focus for those interested in trying to change the underlying laws and rules that shape parties is political party law reform. There is some increased attention to political party laws by aid providers, based on the idea that some of the core problems of parties must be related at least in part to the legal ordering of the party domain. The hope is that reform of the political party law of a country may be a way to cure some of the endemic problems with parties.

A recent example of donor-supported political party law reform occurred in Peru. The main Peruvian political parties, helped by a sophisticated technical assistance effort on the part of Transparencia, a major democracy NGO, successfully pushed for the enactment of a new political party law. To reduce the fragmentation of Peru's political party system it raises the petition signature threshold for the registration of parties and requires parties to have offices in many parts of the country. One of the principal goals is to discourage the multiplication of many small parties or regional parties. The law also provides for future public financing of parties.

The Peruvian law embodies what is probably the most common emphasis of political party law reform, at least as pushed by outside actors looking to help improve the shape of the political party system: raising thresholds to discourage the formation of smaller parties. It is important to note that such reforms are hardly all benign. Russian President Vladimir Putin pushed through a party law reform in the period before the 2003 parliamentary elections, using the same sort of threshold raising measures, with the purpose of reducing the number of opposition parties and strengthening his centralizing grip on the country. From the perspective of the smaller Peruvian parties, the Peruvian reform was hardly pro-democratic. In their view, it was an effort by a closed circle of discredited political elites to wall off their hold on power against the growing assault of new political forces. Thus we must be wary of the notion that there is any such thing as a neutral, pro-democratic form of political party law reform or that such reforms are not in most cases efforts by entrenched powerholders to protect their own position.

Furthermore, although it is possible that changes in a party law, such as those in Peru, may influence the shape of the party system, it is not clear that such law-induced changes are necessarily very important. If the underlying problem is a failure of the main parties to successfully represent the interests of average Peruvians and to govern effectively, shutting out small parties is hardly likely to do much to solve the problem. Seen in this light, the party law reform appears to treat a symptom (fragmentation) of the core problem (failure of representation) rather than the problem itself.

Clearly much more work needs to be done to assess the experiences of countries that have made changes in their party laws in terms of what impact those changes actually had on the development, configuration, and functioning of the political parties in the country. From such empirical studies, aid providers will be able to extract knowledge that may allow them to refine efforts to support party law reform in ways that do help strengthen party development.

B. Interparty Dialogues

Another aid intervention at the level of the overall party system, as opposed to with individual parties, are interparty dialogues. These dialogues attempt to improve communication and relationship-building among the parties in a country. Starting in the late 1980s, some efforts were made to foster interparty dialogues to help parties work out election planning issues, often to help parties negotiate jointly with the national election

commission. These were usually short-term initiatives limited to the very specific issues of the election context.

In recent years, several organizations (such as the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Development and UNDP) have been working to promote interparty dialogues on a somewhat broader basis, as a methodology of its own, not directly related to party strengthening work. These dialogues sometimes include all the parties in a country and other times just the parliamentary parties, or some other subset of all the parties in the country. They sometimes bring together party leaders, other times mid or senior level party cadres.

These efforts have two broad, inter-related goals. First, they seek to improve communication among the parties, to break down barriers and create personal links among party leaders or cadres and to provide a regular opportunity for them to know each other better and talk to each other. The underlying idea is that more communication among the parties will lead to better functioning of the political system. Debilitating political confrontations and standoffs will be nipped in the bud, more decisions can be made on the basis of informal consensus, the commonalities among the parties can be explored and made good use of, and so forth.

Second, they aim to get the parties working together to study and then take remedial measures, at a systemic level, of deficiencies in the party system. The idea is to get the parties as a group to realize and take some real responsibility for the troubled state of parties in the country, and also to take some concrete measures (like party financing reform or political party law reform) to improve it. Usually the external aid organization plays some role not just in getting the parties together but also providing some technical assistance to steer them toward possible remedial measures they might take.

The utility of interparty dialogues seems clearest in postconflict countries where the main political forces are usually at odds, with sharp, bitter lines drawn between them, and often serious personal enmity or incomprehension among contending party elites. Just getting these elites in the same room, talking civilly with each other on issues of national significance is often a breakthrough of sorts. Participants from postconflict countries in such exercises consistently report that they find utility in getting to know and working with persons from opposing political groupings.

The utility is less clear in countries whose politics are not marked by a deep rift between the main political forces. In such contexts, the general goal of increasing interparty communication finds traction less easily. Often the parties already engage in quite a bit of interparty back and forth, in national and local legislatures and other forums. And in some countries, many citizens feel that the political elites from different parties are already communicating too much with each other, in complicitous ways, and in doing so are cutting themselves off from ordinary people. In such situations, fostering yet more interparty dialogue requires a very careful look at whether it serves any real purpose.

Efforts to help parties identify and then work together on reform projects also presents various challenges. To start with, the parties may view projects such as electoral law reform or political party law reform as opportunities to pursue their interests rather than deepen democratization. In addition, civil society and other parts of the public life may object to parties meeting outside of the legislature to plan reforms, fearing that such interparty processes may be an effort to avoid the normal channels of open, accountable governance. Nevertheless, it seems useful to encourage party elites, through dialogue processes, to face the fact that the parties are in a troubled state and that systemic reforms are likely necessary to revive the image and place of parties in the society.

The interparty dialogue method is relatively new and would benefit from study to determine what such dialogues have achieved, when they can be most useful, when they are less useful, and how they might be developed further. It is important to avoid any tendency to sponsor dialogues for the mere sake of dialogue, but the method clearly has some promise.

C. Party Financing

The means and methods of financing are central to the shape of political parties, and the overall political party system, of any country.   In searching for root causes of the troubled state of parties, many citizens of developing and postcommunist countries, as well as aid organizations interested in trying to help support democratization, have settled on the financing of parties as a key area for reform. In a very high percentage of new or struggling democracies the financing of parties is perceived as a swamp of corruption and inequity that has manifold negative effects—distorting the relative strength of different parties in line with the concentration of economic power, reducing the representation of citizens' interests, embedding corruption in the whole governing system, damaging public faith in the pluralistic process, and so forth. As a result, efforts to reform party financing are multiplying, with a growing number of international actors offering support in this domain. Much of this international support comes not from the party institutes that typically provide party-to-party support but instead from other sources, such as multilateral organizations, bilateral aid agencies, and private foundations.

At the risk of oversimplification, efforts to reform the financing of political parties fall into three categories, of increasing order of interventionism:

- Greater disclosure: Some reforms focus on increasing the transparency of party financing by requiring parties and candidates either to declare the sources and amounts of contributions they receive and/or to declare the expenditures they make in campaigns. An additional form of disclosure requires media enterprises to disclose who paid for campaign ads that they accept.

- Imposing limits: Other reforms impose limits either on the amount of money that parties or candidates may accept from private contributors or on the campaign expenditures that they may make.

- Public financing: Some countries seek to introduce or to expand provisions to provide public funds for parties or candidates.

Along with reforms in these three main categories, some states have tried other measures, such as imposing legal restrictions on party switching (to discourage newly elected legislators from accepting money to switch parties), or making voting compulsory (to reduce vote buying).

Aid interventions to support the reform of party financing are also of several types:

- Programs to help government officials, NGO activists and others learn about, discuss, and develop possible laws and regulations to increase transparency, impose limits on spending or contributions, or create a public financing system.

- Support for government bodies and independent agencies (such as election commissions) to develop the capacity to monitor and enforce new party financing mechanisms.

- Support for civil society organizations, especially anti-corruption or other pro-transparency NGOs, to monitor party financing rules regarding disclosure or spending.

- Support for training of journalists to learn about new party financing laws and how to monitor them.

This is a rapidly growing area of assistance in which new forms of assistance are continually being explored and the lessons of the work to date are not yet very clear. Already however it is evident that one of the major cautionary lessons is not to assume that the problems or attempted solutions in any one society are necessarily transferable to another. For example although the use of large, secret private donations are the major distorting influence in some political party systems, they are not always the main financing problem. In other systems the misuse of administrative resources by the governing party in the single biggest factor in inequality in the campaign. Also, attempting to stop one problem may only open up the door to others, such as in Thailand where the decision to ban films and entertainers at political rallies ended up encouraging parties to engage in direct vote buying. More generally, efforts by international actors to support party financing reforms must be infused with the deepest possible sense of humility given that party financing continues to be a huge problem in many well-established democracies and there is little consensus among politicians in Europe and the North America on how to go about attacking this problem.

It is also clear that the impulse on the part of some international actors to view public financing of parties as a natural solution must be tempered by awareness of the complexities of the issue. Public financing holds out the promise of weaning parties away

from corrupt private sources, allowing smaller parties to exist, and leveling the overall playing field. Yet it brings with it risks as well. Depending on how it is designed, public funding for parties can close off the system to the entry of new parties, or in some cases lead to a multiplication of small, fragmented parties. Public funding of parties with weak ties to the citizenry may allow those parties to survive without any real social base and reduce their incentives for developing grassroots contacts. In a context of weak rule of law (which is the situation in many new or struggling democracies), establishing public financing mechanisms may only lead to new forms of corruption and disillusion the public further.

As with other areas of international aid to support the reform of party systems, efforts to support party financing reform are in a relatively new state. They would benefit from serious empirical work to study the record of experience of the initial wave of assistance programming to ensure that good intentions end up leading to good results.

Figure 1

Party Aid: Objectives

Party aid providers seek to help parties in developing and postcommunist countries to have:

- A democratic leadership structure with competent, rational, and transparent methods of internal management

- Processes of internal democracy for choosing candidates and party leaders

- A substantial presence around the country with local branches enjoying significant responsibility for party work in their area

- A well-defined grassroots base and regular contacts with the persons making up the base, both for constituency relations and broader political education

- Cooperative, productive relations with civil society organizations

- A substantive party platform and the capacity to engage in serious policy analysis

- A clear ideological self-definition that also avoids any ideological extremes

- Transparent, legal funding that draws from a wide base of funders

- A strong role for women in the party as candidates, party leaders and managers, and members

- A good youth program that brings youth into the party, trains them, and makes good use of their energy and talents