

Civic Update

Shaping Democratic Norms and Attitudes

Citizen Participation Team | September 2017

Although necessary, establishing formal political institutions and processes alone is not sufficient for democracy to develop and deepen. In practice, a functioning democracy also requires norms and attitudes that shape political behavior and create the social pressure for adherence to democratic standards. Such democratic norms include those that compel elected leaders to respond to their constituents' priorities, political parties to compete on the basis of issues rather than identity, public debate of policies, use of persuasion rather than threat or coercion and the inclusion of all citizens in public life. In most countries transitioning to democracy, fostering these behaviors requires changing expectations about what is politically acceptable and permissible.

This issue of the Civic Update begins to explore different strategies that can be used to encourage the development of democratic norms and attitudes, alongside the development of formal institutions and processes. One strategy involves the use of public opinion research to better understand and address the drivers of discrimination and stigmatization. Another is inter-group cooperation, which builds relationships between disparate identity groups and helps counter negative bias and misperceptions. There is also a set of strategies that address community beliefs about the role of citizens and lines of accountability, by employing awareness raising and collective action tactics to transform political dynamics.



A sign posted in a Ugandan village to deter would-be voter buyers.

Inside this Issue

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| What are Norms and Attitudes? | 1 |
| Norms, Attitudes and Democratization | 2 |
| NDI Experiences Addressing Norms and Attitudes | |
| Ukraine: Public Opinion Research on Gender Norms ... | 2 |
| Ukraine: Deliberative Polling to Counter LGBTI Discrimination | 3 |
| Central and Eastern Europe: Reducing Bias through Contact and Cooperation | 4 |
| Uganda: Countering Expectations About Vote Buying .. | 5 |
| Civic Forum: Supporting Collective Action | 5 |

What are Norms and Attitudes?

While definitions vary, norms are typically considered to be widely held beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behavior within a certain group. Norms consist of informal, agreed-upon expectations and rules within a society that are developed and maintained by the collective views of its members. These deeply rooted perceptions shape individual and collective action and interactions. The important distinction between norms and attitudes is that norms are social beliefs - which are shared and governed by a group - whereas attitudes are the property of an individual. Attitudes are associated with an individual's personal views, beliefs and state of mind.¹

The complex interplay between social norms and an individual's attitudes influences how they make decisions and interact with their surroundings, and is one of the main determinants of behavior.² Norms are an especially pow-

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| Norm | Informal rules and expectations that apply to a social group and guide the behavior its members |
| Attitude | An individual's mental state, which evolves from their personal views and beliefs |
| Behavior | How an individual acts |

erful predictor of behavior, because people generally conform to what they believe the majority of their peers will do in a given situation. In fact, individuals usually comply with norms and social standards that exist in their community even if their personal attitudes differ from those norms, because they fear the repercussions of breaking away from their social group.³ What this means is that not all attitudes are reflected as behaviors. The nuanced relationship between the two explains why people may say they believe one thing, but behave differently.

An example of this is a context in which the bribery of government employees is widespread and considered a typical way to get something done. In this instance, paying officials to complete a task is the *norm*. However, an individual's personal belief may be that bribery is wrong, which represents their *attitude*. And yet their *behavior* may be to pay a bribe when asked because they need a certain service and are not prepared to challenge the existing social construct.

Norms, Attitudes and Democratization

Transitions to democracy require corresponding shifts in citizen beliefs, perceptions and expectations about what is acceptable and permissible political behavior. To be consequential, these changes must extend beyond what is envisioned in principle to include what actually tran-

The Cognitive Factor

In summer 2017, NDI's Gender, Women and Democracy team hosted Madeleine K. Albright Fellow Basma Jaber, a student at Wellesley College whose research lies at the intersection of neuroscience and politics. Her contributions to NDI included educating staff on cognitive science theories related to norm and attitude change. Research shows that many norms, attitudes, beliefs, and similar constructs are deeply rooted at the cognitive level, and some neuroscientists theorize that they have a biological or evolutionary dimension. Some of these theories posit, for instance, that reactions to one's "in-group" versus one's "out-group" actually occur differently in the brain, and that conceptions of personal identity are connected to our bodies' fight-or-flight response. This is just one example of the interdisciplinary nature of how norms and attitudes form, evolve and change.

spires in practice. This can pose a significant challenge, since the process is not linear. Instead, it often involves a struggle to change practices buttressed by existing political norms related to how power is used.

Too often, the prevailing norms in many countries limit types of participation, favor opaque decision making and exclude many voices from political processes. In these instances, programs may need to consider why certain political behaviors persist (e.g., discriminating against a minority group, withholding public information, or threatening a political opponent) despite formal "rules" to the contrary. Deeply rooted ideas and practices don't change overnight and, when they do, may evolve in subtle, difficult-to-measure ways. Also, when certain actors benefit from fragile or undemocratic contexts, they have incentives to maintain that status quo. Because norms and political power dynamics influence one another, this interrelationship should be explicitly considered when formulating democracy assistance programs, since democratic change so frequently requires shifts in the overall balance of power between citizens and government.

There remains much to understand about this aspect of democratic development, and NDI itself still has plenty to learn. Nonetheless, work is being done to directly change norms and attitudes, recognizing that interventions that address norms must be integrated into an array of programs. Just as new democratic behaviors and institutions will not endure without norms that support them, addressing norms and attitudes alone is not sufficient for meaningful democratic change. Norms and attitudes are important precisely because they help ensure that democratic institutions work in practice and become sustainable, and must be considered alongside them.

NDI Experiences Addressing Norms and Attitudes

Ukraine: Public Opinion Research on Gender Norms

Public opinion research is an effective way to measure the beliefs of a large population by utilizing techniques like surveys, in-depth interviews, implicit association tests and focus group discussions. Public opinion research provides insights on prevailing attitudes and trends in society as well as the motives behind them. This can help identify existing norms and attitudes related to democratic development and inform interventions to address them.

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NDI has used public opinion research globally to assess local context, design programming, guide local partner campaigns and provide information to decision makers.

In Ukraine, for example, NDI regularly uses research to gauge citizen sentiments, including prevailing gender norms related to women's political participation. This is undertaken with the understanding that discriminatory norms and attitudes form the basis for most structural impediments to women's political participation and equality. Representation of women in Ukrainian political life lags behind most other European countries, and deep-seated gender bias permeates public life. Despite some progress, sexism is poorly understood and sporadically challenged, and remains quite common in public discourse.

Public opinion research NDI conducted throughout 2016 found that political parties are important gatekeepers for women's political participation, and that party leaders are critical barriers to women running for office. NDI used a number of research methods including in-depth interviews, implicit association tests (IATs) and list experiments, which found that among voters in Ukraine there is very little bias against women candidates. In order to explore attitudes and biases toward the roles of women and men in family, professional and political lives, NDI used IATs, a research technique that measures the strength of associations between concepts and evaluates hidden biases. IAT results showed that, while most people do not associate women with political life (women are actually less likely than men to make this association), associating men with political life does not prevent people from voting for a woman candidate. Results also showed that strong explicit resistance to women's political participation exists, but is rare.

These findings were further strengthened by an experiment NDI conducted with more than five thousand survey respondents selected via random sample. The respondents were presented with three images, one at a time, and told that the candidates pictured had entered politics to fight corruption. The respondents were then asked how likely they would be to vote for them. The pictures were shown in random order and the respondent was not aware that it was a gender experiment. Results showed no significant difference in the ratings for male and female images.



Images from experiment in Ukraine to gauge respondents' likelihood to vote for a male or female candidate.

Using this information, NDI is developing a greater understanding of the major underlying barriers to women's political participation and making programmatic choices to help foster a political environment more conducive to women's engagement. NDI's surveys inform program strategies through exploring geographical variations in attitudes with regard to perceptions of women in politics. This has included targeting drivers of gender stereotyping (such as journalists and media) for program interventions, and adjusting different messaging strategies when addressing political parties and voters, respectively.

Ukraine: Deliberative Polling to Counter LGBTI Discrimination

Also in Ukraine, NDI is using research to understand and challenge negative public attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities, who suffer from widespread discrimination. Ukraine does not recognize same-sex marriage, and a prolonged legislative battle was required to pass legislation outlawing workplace discrimination against LGBTI persons in 2015. Homo- and trans-phobia is promoted by misinformation, suppression of alternative views and hesitation on the part of political and civic leaders to counter anti-LGBTI propaganda.

Recognizing that research can provide insights to help LGBTI activists defend their rights, NDI utilized a form of public opinion research, never before used in Ukraine, known as deliberative polling. Deliberative polling combines quantitative and qualitative methods of research. Its primary goal is to understand if and how public opinion changes when citizens become more informed on issues. Deliberative polling gauges how new ideas and issue framing shifts attitudes, which can inform broader campaign tactics and strategy.

In this process, a random sample of the public is asked to provide feedback on an initial questionnaire about their knowledge, perceptions, and preferences on a specific topic. A portion of this sample is selected to deliberate on the issue through small-group discussions and conversations with experts, thereby becoming more informed. The sample is then asked the same questions from the initial survey. The results of the first poll are compared to the final poll, to explore any changes in opinion.⁴

NDI conducted deliberative polling in four cities (Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, and Kharkiv) during November and December 2016 in collaboration with the market research group GfK. The program began by surveying 2,400 citizens to determine the Ukrainian public's baseline knowledge and attitudes about LGBTI communities. Selected survey respondents were then invited to deliberative polling sessions. These began with focus group discussions to help GfK and NDI develop a deeper understanding of the survey results. The second step was educational sessions in which participants were informed about the discrimina-

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tion and human rights abuses LGBTI people face in Ukraine. They were delivered by activists from partnering Ukrainian CSOs, and for many participants, this was the first time they had ever engaged in conversations about LGBTI issues or heard personal stories about what it is like to be LGBTI in Ukraine. After these sessions, participants were asked again the same survey questions to gauge if their attitudes had changed.

The final poll revealed that participant attitudes towards LGBTI people were significantly more positive following the deliberative session. For example, in response to the question “To what extent should a good citizen defend the rights of homosexuals?” the percentage of participants who responded “always” or “often” rose from 32 to 51 percent. The percentage of participants who agreed that “It should be legal for homosexuals to marry” increased from 25 to 51 percent. The research also found that the Ukrainian public’s understanding of “discrimination” and “human rights” is varied and typically excludes discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. Accordingly, messages framed around these ideas are less effective, while messages highlighting the idea of “equal justice for all” are more appealing to Ukrainians.

This polling helped identify effective messages that can be used when reaching out to the wider public to advocate for LGBTI rights. Research findings were presented to Ukrainian LGBTI organizations, and NDI consulted with them on strategies for incorporating the findings into existing or planned advocacy campaigns. For example, the organizing committee of Kyiv Pride subsequently changed the slogan of the 2017 pride parade to “A Country for All,” a message that reflects the research finding that inclusive messaging (rather than messaging explicitly singling out LGBTI rights) is more likely to shift public attitudes and build support for LGBTI equality among non-LGBTI people.

Central and Eastern Europe: Reducing Bias Through Contact and Cooperation

In central and eastern Europe, the refugee crisis, rise in terrorist attacks, and prolonged economic recessions are reviving historic prejudices and xenophobia against religious and ethnic minorities. In 2016, NDI launched a regional program spanning the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia which aims to build alliances among religious communities and ethnic minorities to help them develop strategies to combat discrimination and promote pluralism. Fundamental to the program approach was shifting unfamiliarity and bias between these communities into positive, trusting relationships.

This program began by convening CSOs representing Jewish, Muslim, Roma and other minority groups to participate in a series of workshops, which were tailored to the context in each of the four countries. Workshops were intended to improve the groups’ organizing skills and help them identify common objectives and coordinated approaches to countering xenophobia and racism. They were



Participants from different communities in Hungary speak during an event titled “The Dance of Life – Ancient Elements and Spirituality.”

also meant to allow a space for these diverse identity groups to build the relationships required to work together. Workshop sessions led participants through exploring personal biases and discussing intersectionality and the complexity of identity - both for themselves and for others. NDI also trained participants in effective advocacy, community mobilization, research, public outreach and communications. Small projects, such as community research and exchanges between organizations, helped promote relationship- and skills-building between workshops.

NDI worked to build trust and understanding amongst program participants utilizing contact theory, which is based on the premise that under the right conditions, interpersonal contact between different groups can meaningfully reduce prejudice. According to the theory, interpersonal contact provides an opportunity for members of different groups to communicate and thus facilitate understanding and an appreciation of different points of views. This develops more positive perceptions between the individuals, which they then internalize and generalize for all members of the other group. For contact to effectively reduce prejudice it must fulfill four criteria: groups must 1) be of equal status within the interaction; 2) work to achieve a common goal through cooperation; 3) have the support of an facilitating authority; and 4) involve significant personal interaction.⁵

Supporting interaction along those parameters helped program participants realize their commonalities and understand the motives and dynamics behind different points of views. This allowed the groups to build trust and diffuse potential conflicts, which facilitated the formation of the intended coalitions. In the second stage of the program, these new alliances will execute campaigns counter-

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ing xenophobia and religious-based discrimination that aim to achieve educational, policy and institutional reforms. Forming these crossover coalitions will help minority communities build a critical mass and achieve greater impact in their civic response to xenophobia and discrimination; this type of political organizing often requires a level of collective action which individual minority communities struggle to accomplish solely on their own.

Uganda: Countering Expectations About Vote Buying



An ACFIM activist explains the anti-vote buying campaign during a village leaflet drop.

Vote buying and selling in Uganda is widespread, with 85 percent of respondents in a recent Afrobarometer survey reporting that politicians “often” or “always” give cash or gifts in their village as part of their political campaigns. Politicians wield their political power in the form of vote buying, which challenges citizen capacity to take collective action and demand government responsiveness. These problems stem from, and are perpetuated by, norms that consider vote buying and selling to be legitimate uses of political power. Changing this norm is therefore required to diminish the practice.

In the lead-up to Uganda’s 2016 general elections, NDI and local partner the Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring (ACFIM) worked together on an anti-vote buying and selling campaign. The objective of the campaign was to counter local norms that regarded vote buying and selling as expected and acceptable. Close to 800 activists were recruited to conduct campaign activities in approximately 1,400 villages across the country. These activities included dropping leaflets urging citizens not to sell their votes and village meetings to build awareness of vote buying’s harmful consequences. NDI and ACFIM also sent robo-calls to citizens on the eve of the election reminding them of their

pledge not to sell their vote. 58 percent of the villages agreed to endorse an anti vote-buying resolution and displayed posters to deter the practice during the last week of the election campaign period. By focusing at the village level, this tactic attempted to shift the norm by targeting collective attitudes about the acceptability of vote selling. Human beings’ tendency to conform to the behaviors and expectations of their peer group would suggest that an individual is less likely to sell their vote if they believe no one else in their village is doing so.

An initial analysis of the campaign illustrated an unexpected result: while the campaign did not reduce the incidence of vote buying, it did reduce its effectiveness. In other words, while candidates were still attempting to buy votes, citizens who had been exposed to the anti-vote buying campaign appeared to be taking the money but then feeling free to vote for their preferred candidate. Among other implications, this result suggested that targeting candidates in addition to citizens might more effectively reduce vote buying and selling as a practice.

In April 2017, NDI, ACFIM and the First African Bicycle Initiative Organization (FABIO) followed up this effort with a new campaign for the parliamentary election in Kagoma County. Applying learning from the earlier campaign, this effort invited all candidates to sign an anti-vote buying pledge. The campaign thus attempted to increase community pressure against vote buying and selling practices, while alerting candidates that their vote buying attempts would be less successful in villages participating in the campaign.

Preliminary results from the second iteration of this campaign are consistent with the first. The campaign appears to have affected voter behavior in that it reduced votes for the incumbent - the predominant vote buyer - and increased votes for the challenger. This approach to countering vote buying and selling, by tackling norms associated with the practice and utilizing social pressure within peer groups, is just one example of attempting to curtail a practice by targeting social perceptions that support it.

Civic Forum: Supporting Collective Action

A persistent problem in new and transitioning democracies is that people in positions of power are not accountable to citizens. In many places, existing political norms do not oblige elected officials to meet with their constituents, respond to their priorities or compete for their votes on the basis of issues. Nor are there expectations that citizens should engage in solving community problems or demand that representatives act on their behalf.

One way NDI addresses the normative aspect of these accountability relationships is Civic Forum. Civic Forum is a guided, iterative process to promote local-level citizen participation in new and emerging democracies. By helping people take collective action on issues they care about, it

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Members of the Association of the Blind, a Civic Forum group in Soroca, Moldova, distribute leaflets in their community about their success having the sidewalks repaired.

re-orient power relationships in favor of citizens and shifts ideas about what citizenship behaviors and practices are appropriate and expected. The Civic Forum approach is based on experiential learning, where facilitators first educate groups of citizens on fundamental political principles. These groups then work on taking collective action to tackle a real community problem. As citizens build their political influence and claim new positions of power, they are able to hold elected officials accountable.

Helping citizens organize and take action in this way goes beyond mere capacity building. While capacity building helps individuals develop the skills necessary for civic participation, it is not sufficient on its own to change political dynamics. Those dynamics transform only when citizens take meaningful public action. Through this action, new perceptions and expectations emerge about participation, the roles that citizens should play and their relationships to decision makers. Meanwhile democratic behaviors are practiced repeatedly and observed by the rest of the community. Over time, this translates into new norms that support accountability and regular citizen engagement.

To date, NDI has used Civic Forum in more than a dozen countries globally. In Moldova, for example, an assessment NDI conducted at the outset of the program revealed that citizens did not believe they could influence change in their communities, and that despite many complaints about service delivery, they did not know what they should expect from local government or how to get it. Yet through the Civic Forum program Pune Umarul (“Civic Initiative”), the past several years have demonstrated a notable normative shift in what these communities consider typical and appropriate political behavior on the part of citizens, and likewise what level of responsiveness is expected from elected leaders. Civic Forum groups have organized around issues ranging from sidewalk repairs to large-scale voter education for the 2015 elections, and are increasingly being consulted by local government officials. At the same time, more citizens are becoming active

through the organizing campaigns, by joining a town hall meeting, signing a petition or attending a candidate debate. This change in the way citizens and local government approach community decision making demonstrates a transformation in the norms governing the use of political power.⁶

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