



# Promoting More Policy-Focused Parties Through Civic Organizing: A Guidance Note



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- Support meaningful transition processes that establish positive precedents for effective democratic governance.
- Promote the integrity of elections as a sustainable vehicle for peacefully and democratically choosing leaders.
- Facilitate the ability of elected political actors to fulfill their responsibilities to citizens through better governance practices.
- Promote competitive and representative multi-party political systems.
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Cover photo: A community leader signs a pledge committing to promoting the priorities of the LWPP on the campaign trail, including to call upon candidates to promote women's policy priorities (August 2017).

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# THE PURPOSE OF THIS PUBLICATION

This publication examines the following research question:

- Under what conditions have civic interventions incentivized more policy-focused parties?
  - Are these approaches more relevant/effective in some contexts than others?
  - What skills, strategies, and assets do civic groups need in order to be able to engage and influence political parties effectively?
  - What strategies can help ensure that policy processes are more inclusive and reflect the interests of women, youth, minorities, and other traditionally marginalized groups?<sup>1</sup>

Based on a literature review and four case studies, the publication highlights lessons learned from four programs in different environments and outlines recommendations to strengthen future programming. It aims to help donors and implementers make more strategic decisions about when and how to use civic organizing to promote more policy-focused parties. It details:

- A theory of change for the use of civic organizing as a means to promote more policy-focused political parties; and
- A framework of issues to consider when contemplating this approach.

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<sup>1</sup> In general, in a given context, marginalized groups may include women, young people, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and communities in difficult-to-reach areas. Three of the four case studies in this study included an emphasis on marginalized groups. Belarus and Liberia included efforts to highlight women's policy priorities, and Slovakia focused on increasing the political participation of Roma. The Liberia case study also references lessons learned from a youth policy platform.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The democracy support community implements a wide range of programming to promote more competitive and representative multiparty systems. Traditionally, these political party programs have focused on improving the capacity of party activists and political leaders to: conduct citizen outreach; represent different societal groups, including marginalized communities; develop and pursue public policy proposals; recruit and nominate candidates; compete in elections; and form governments. However, without strong incentives for change, greater organizational capacity alone rarely leads to more inclusive, responsive, and accountable political parties. As a result, assistance providers have started to supplement technical assistance to parties with interventions to incentivize more responsive, inclusive, and accountable parties.<sup>2</sup> Although the theoretical foundations for these approaches appear strong, comparative lessons learned and best practices from practical experiences are limited. A deeper understanding of the efficacy of these approaches would strengthen the effectiveness of political party programming and inform future strategies. This publication seeks to answer the following research question:

- Under what conditions have civic interventions incentivized more policy-focused parties?

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Responsive policy-making requires informed and active citizens that express their policy preferences and hold their leaders accountable for those priorities. While civic organizing is valuable in its own right as a means to increase citizen participation in political processes, it can also serve an instrumental purpose in promoting more policy-focused parties. For instance, through issue-based voter education, debates, citizen platforms, and political process monitoring efforts, civic groups have tried to push political parties to: increase their focus on policies, involve citizens in policy processes, and improve service delivery.

This approach is based on the following theory of change, which is also outlined in Figure 1.

If citizens:

- recognize that parties should offer differentiated policies and govern based on those policy proposals, and are willing and able to cast their votes based on that understanding;
- have policy priorities and preferences, organize around them, and see parties as viable means for achieving/implementing those policy preferences; and
- are informed and have opinions about the extent to which parties/governments are implementing policies/providing services (public goods), organize around those views, and are willing and able to hold political parties/elected officials accountable for their policy performance;

Then:

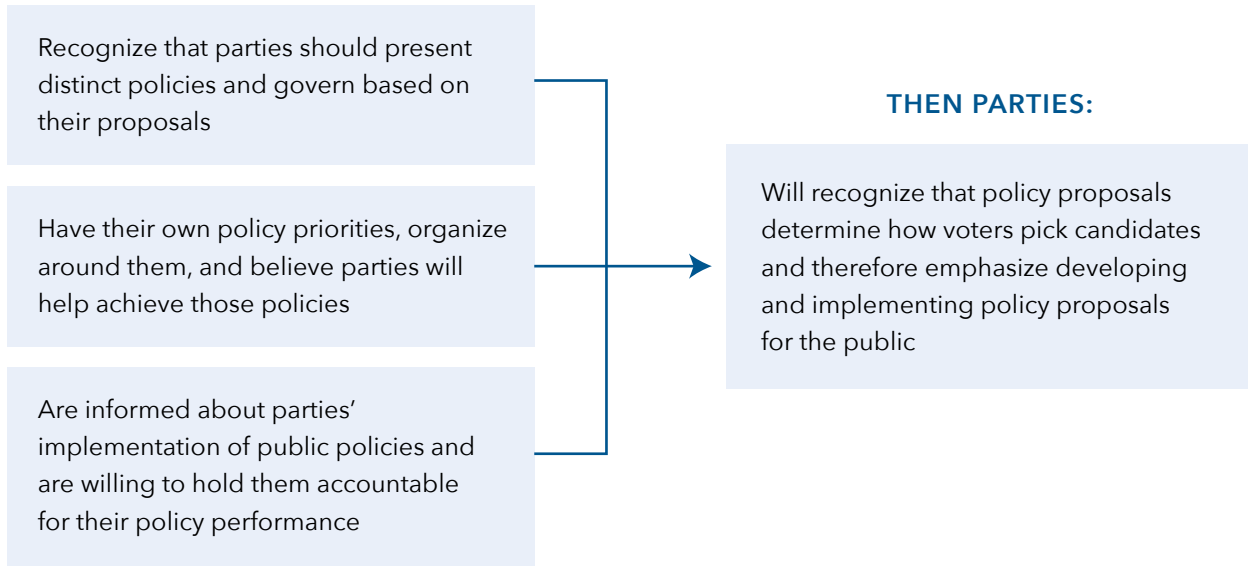
- parties will recognize that policy proposals/processes and their ability to deliver them are important factors in how voters choose between candidates, and in determining electoral outcomes. As a result, political parties will place increased emphasis on developing and implementing policy proposals for the public good.

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<sup>2</sup> Carothers, Thomas. (2006) *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Washington, DC. pp 180, 214. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2006/10/23/confronting-weakest-link-aiding-political-parties-in-new-democracies-pub-18808>

# FIGURE 1: PROMOTING MORE POLICY-FOCUSED PARTIES THROUGH CIVIC ORGANIZING: ABBREVIATED THEORY OF CHANGE

## IF CITIZENS:



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the overarching research question, CEPPS/NDI conducted a literature review outlining: the different types of civic interventions that have been used to incentivize more policy-focused parties, existing knowledge of the strengths and limitations of each, and priorities for further research. Based on the resources available, and to supplement the literature review, CEPPS/NDI identified four case studies.

Together, the case studies were selected to reflect different opportunities for lessons learned based on: the operating context (varying degrees of openness and party institutionalization), geographic diversity, the type of intervention(s) used, and the approach to the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups. Two case studies (Belarus and Slovakia) were developed based on desk research, and the additional two (Liberia and Uganda) involved field research.

Based on the literature review and the four case studies, this document highlights lessons learned from four programs in different environments and outlines recommendations to strengthen future programming.

## FINDINGS

Experiences across programs in the four countries pointed to the following:

1. **A variety of factors influenced party responsiveness to citizen demands, including: international incentives, type of electoral system, and opportunities for positive media coverage.** Further, parties operating within the same country context made different calculations about how to respond to civic pressure based on their own circumstances and considerations. As a result, responsiveness varied by party. It also required the existence of well-placed, intraparty champions.
2. **Realigning the current relationships between political parties and citizens in favor of those based on different proposals for the provision of public goods requires deep behavioral changes on the part of both citizens and political parties.** These changes require investments throughout the entire political cycle, not only during election periods.

Elections can serve as a strategic entry point for more policy-focused engagement between civic groups/ citizens and parties, even where political space is constricted. However, beginning programs right before elections may not provide enough time for deeper civic education about the roles and responsibilities of parties/candidates, or to foster meaningful engagement between civil society and political parties in the post-election period. In fact, a heavy focus on election-related programming without complementary follow-on activities throughout the political cycle may inadvertently undermine the credibility of civil society organizations (CSOs) and contribute to citizen disenchantment with political processes.

3. **Increasing marginalized groups' ability to share skills and information with other members of their community and to have the potential to speak with a stronger, collective voice is critical.** However, people experience the world differently based on overlapping identity markers, and efforts to help groups that share a common identity need to be sensitive to these differences. Further, entrenched socio-cultural norms may influence party leaders' receptiveness to demands from marginalized groups. Marginalized groups can benefit from joining with other organizations to build their numbers, broaden support for their priorities, and increase their political power.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations could help improve the effectiveness of future programming.

At the design stage, donors and implementers should:

1. **Consider how a range of factors might create opportunities or risks for the successful use of civic organizing to promote more policy-focused parties.** This includes:
  - Political space (including the security environment, inclusion issues, opportunities for civic and political organizing);
  - Institutional and structural factors (for instance, electoral systems and other features of the political system, the reach/authority/legitimacy of the state, and the structure of the economy); and
  - Party and civil society capacities and interests (such as political parties' and civil society's perceptions of each other, and their respective capacities to formulate and advance their policy priorities).



2. **Based on analysis of country contexts, set realistic expectations for progress towards more policy-focused politics.** This includes supporting or developing risk management strategies that recognize the potential for unintended consequences and resistance to change, and regularly monitoring social, political, and economic developments in order to adjust program strategies and expectations where needed.
3. **Plan for medium to long-term efforts that incorporate a variety of interventions, and use multiple entry points that can be sustained over time.** This includes identifying strategies for sustaining support to civil society and political parties throughout the political cycle, not solely during elections.

As part of these efforts, donors should consider:

- How to ensure adequate time in the run-up to the polls and for sustained follow-up in the post-election period when using elections as an entry point;
- Ways to build in a sustainability focus from the conception phase. This may include combining organizational capacity building for CSOs – fundraising and financial management, for instance – with technical assistance; and
- Interventions and partnerships – with universities, the media, and appropriate government agencies – that can be replicated and sustained in a given country context.

Implementers and CSOs should:

- Ensure that messaging content and delivery methods are designed to promote meaningful participation by diverse citizens, especially those from marginalized communities;
  - Link monitoring and information-sharing efforts with initiatives that involve strategic, citizen-led collective action that helps citizens exert pressure on their political/elected leaders;
  - Explore ways to facilitate alliances and constructive engagement between different types of CSOs; and
  - Use the media to expand the reach of civic education and advocacy campaigns and explore the potential for media coverage as an incentive for political parties to engage in more policy-focused communications.
4. **For programs targeting marginalized groups, donors, implementers, and CSOs should consider how entrenched social norms may influence power relations and party responsiveness to demands from these groups. They should also carefully examine the appropriateness of opportunities to unite identity groups around shared issues and consider strategies that may be needed to build trust with the relevant community(ies).**

# INTRODUCTION

Responding to citizen needs and interests is a central feature of democratic governance. In democratic societies, political parties aggregate these demands from diverse groups and articulate public policy options for addressing these needs. During elections, political parties campaign on their distinct proposals for addressing societal needs, offering voters the opportunity to choose among parties on the basis of their policy positions.<sup>3</sup> These campaign efforts also promote different parties' credibility, competence, experience, and genuine interest in addressing different societal needs.

Policy-focused parties:

- primarily (but not exclusively) mobilize support based on their policy positions;
- have some degree of internal cohesion around policy priorities;
- can be distinguished from their competitors based on their policy positions; and
- have a serious commitment to implement those policies when they form governments.<sup>4</sup> (Parties may also try to advance their policies even when in opposition.)

In vibrant multi-party systems, party policy processes occur in both opposition and ruling parties. Those processes are:

- **inclusive**, providing broad and diverse segments of the population – including women, youth, and other marginalized populations – and different interest groups within each party meaningful opportunities to influence the policies that political parties develop and promote;
- **responsive**, addressing the needs that a diverse and representative group of citizens considers most pressing, as well as those that are critical to the country's welfare; and
- **accountable**, in that parties clearly communicate their policy stances, their efforts to implement or advance those policy proposals, and the results of their policies, allowing citizens to hold their leaders to account.

These processes have significant implications for governments' ability to respond to citizens' needs and improve public welfare.<sup>5</sup> They:

- affect the extent to which public policy-making – and political processes more broadly – is inclusive of various societal groups, including marginalized populations;
- facilitate greater accountability of elected officials;
- help legitimize democratic governance; and
- can help curb the mismanagement of public resources that might occur as a result of graft and excess patronage.

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<sup>3</sup> This project focused on party policy proposals and processes that relate to service delivery and the provision of public goods. However, it is important to note that, in any context, political parties may propose policies on a variety of issues, including those that may heighten societal divisions or have detrimental effects/consequences for certain segments of society (e.g., anti-LGBTI or other discriminatory laws).

<sup>4</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2014) Politics Meets Policies: The Emergence of Programmatic Parties. Sweden, pp XIII - XIV, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/politics-meets-policies-emergence-programmatic-political-parties>

<sup>5</sup> National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). (2014) Political Party Programming Guide Washington, DC. [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Political\\_Party\\_Programming\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Political_Party_Programming_Guide.pdf)

In fledgling democracies, the policy proposals that do exist may have been developed behind closed doors, depriving citizens of a key form of political participation and the opportunity to influence the direction of their government. The result may be policies that are out of touch with citizens' most pressing needs or that offer sweeping, vague, and unrealistic promises to resolve intractable socio-economic challenges. Political parties may heavily rely on vote-buying; patronage; candidates' personal charisma; or divisive ethnic, tribal, or religious appeals to mobilize support. Further, the shortage of distinctive, coherent, and inclusive policies leaves citizens unable to distinguish between parties on any basis other than money offered, personalities, or identity-based appeals. The risk is governance that fails to deliver on citizens' priority issues and leaves constituents unable to hold their leaders to account, potentially undermining public support for democracy.

## CIVIC ORGANIZING AS A MEANS TO MORE POLICY-FOCUSED PARTIES: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Responsive policy-making requires informed and active citizens that express their policy preferences and hold their leaders accountable for those priorities. **If parties are able to win elections and hold power without offering proposals for public goods and services, and later delivering on those proposals, there is little incentive for them to become more policy-focused.** Policy-focused parties and party systems need citizens who:

- have personal preferences over different policy options/priorities;
- express those preferences through participation in policy processes;
- are aware of party policy proposals; and
- use that information to choose between parties and hold government accountable.<sup>6</sup>

Further, civic organizing has incentivized changes in many different aspects of political party behavior. In a variety of contexts, civic organizing has helped push political parties to actions, such as improving transparency and accountability in political financing and increasing the participation of marginalized groups. As one study notes, "Whether advocating for specific policies, providing expertise on public welfare issues, monitoring government performance, or raising awareness about needs, collective citizen action can help change political practices and outcomes."<sup>7</sup>

Thus, civic organizing is valuable in its own right as a means to:

- increase citizen participation in political processes;
- help marginalized groups challenge their exclusion; and
- drive improvements in service delivery.

It can also serve an instrumental purpose in promoting more policy-focused parties.

1. **Civic education can help shift voter understanding and expectations regarding party behavior. This includes sustained efforts to help citizens understand the roles and responsibilities of various actors in a democracy, as well as such election-focused efforts as anti-vote buying campaigns, issue-based voter education, and candidate debates.**

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<sup>6</sup> Carothers, Thomas. (2006) *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Washington, DC. pp 44-45. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2006/10/23/confronting-weakest-link-aiding-political-parties-in-new-democracies-pub-18808>

<sup>7</sup> NDI. (2017) *Putting Elections to Work for Accountability*. <https://puttingelectionstowork.ndi.org/>

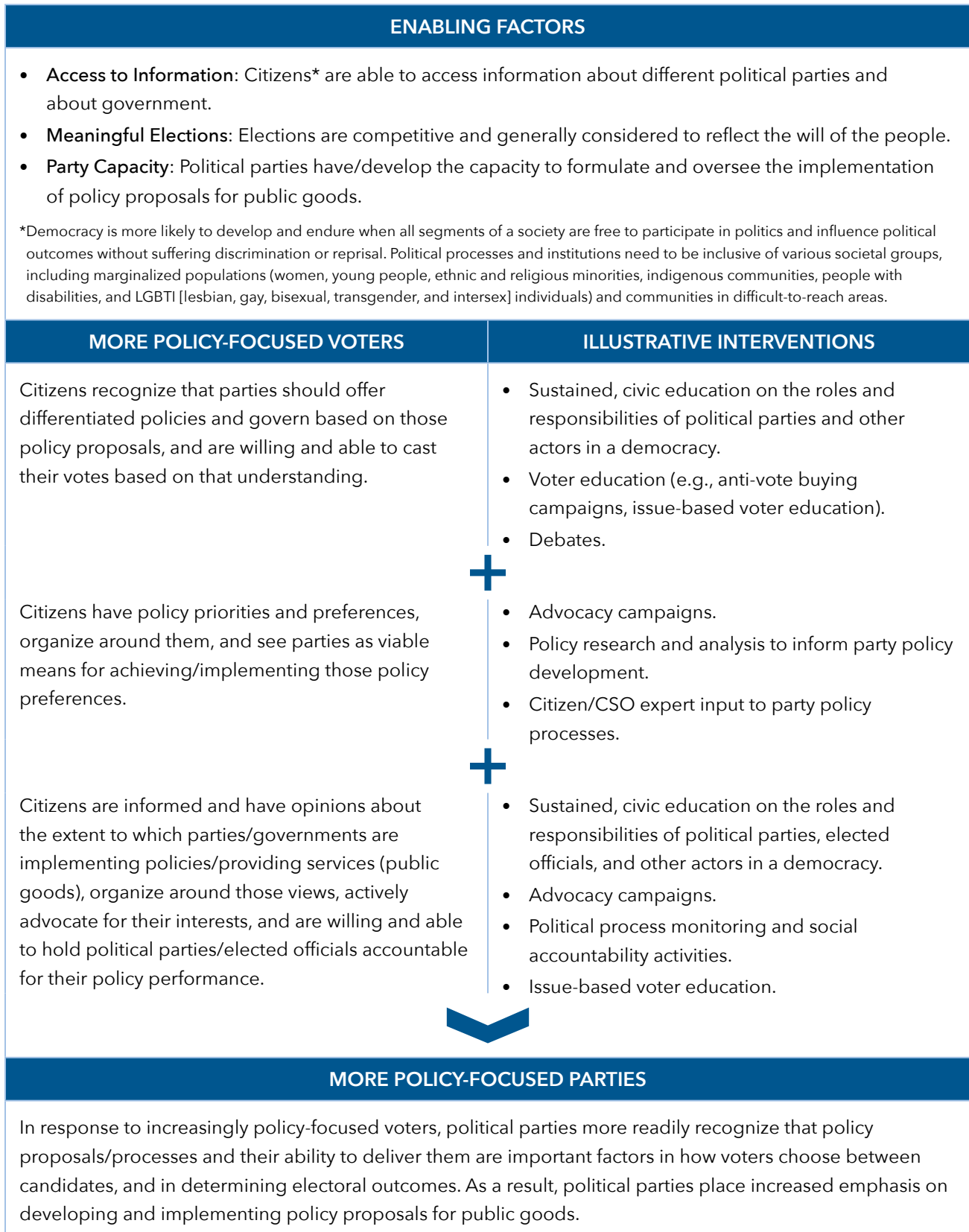
In theory, if citizens/voters recognize that parties should offer differentiated policies and govern based on those policies, they will increasingly place policy-focused demands on their politicians. In response, political parties should increase their focus on policy-focused campaigning and on governing to address citizens' priority issues. Issue-based voter education is a persuasive and relevant way to make civic participation resonant and meaningful for communities whose lives and priorities are often absent from dominant political and social discourse. Issue-based voter education is often a key strategy toward political inclusion of marginalized populations, as historic barriers to education, lack of accessible information, and a host of other discriminatory practices mean that these groups often lack basic knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Civic and voter education that targets marginalized communities and considers their lived experiences and priorities is, therefore, fundamental to decreasing barriers to political inclusion.

The media also has an important role to play in broadening the reach of civic and voter education. However, different target groups have distinct needs and preferences, and access to platforms varies across different communities; these issues need to be factored into program strategies. For instance, in a given country context, Instagram, may be more popular with young people, Facebook might find broader but older audiences, while Twitter may be less commonly used by marginalized groups. As an example, a growing body of research is highlighting how the digital world has also become a forum for disinformation, hate speech, abuse, and harassment targeting politically-active women.

## **2. Civic advocacy, policy research, and analysis can inform or influence the content of, and citizen participation in, the development of policy proposals.**

If citizens/voters have policy priorities and preferences, organize around them, and see parties as viable means for achieving their goals, then, in response, parties will improve the quality and content of their policies and expand the inclusion of different groups in policy processes. Such civic organizing efforts can also facilitate data-driven decision making, which has become a greater challenge with the spread of disinformation and fake news. The media can also help link political parties with voters by covering the policy positions and messages that candidates are running on, reporting on policy issues that citizens care about, and presenting this information in a way that is truthful, relevant to, and digestible by citizens.

**FIGURE 2: HOW CIVIC ORGANIZING CAN HELP PROMOTE MORE POLICY-FOCUSED PARTIES**



Efforts to influence policy content and processes provide a concrete vehicle for citizens, including marginalized communities, to engage in the political processes around issues that are meaningful for them. This type of engagement increases the political influence and skills of civic actors, while improving the consultative and participatory quality of political processes. The more diverse the segments of the population who are engaged in a process, the more inclusive it becomes.

**3. Through advocacy and by monitoring parties' or officials' performance in government, civil society can hold political leaders and institutions accountable for their policy proposals and service delivery.**

In theory, if parties/elected officials know that they will be held accountable for implementing their policy promises/proposals, or for their ability to deliver public goods, then they will be more likely to offer realistic proposals and to work to improve service delivery.

These different types of interventions can build upon each other. As such, donors and implementers should consider these different activities as inter-connected components along a spectrum of policy-focused citizen engagement with political parties, rather than as three completely distinct interventions. For instance, policy-focused civic education is often a precursor to post-election monitoring on citizens' priority issues. Moreover, political process monitoring is typically most successful when civil society uses the resulting information for advocacy. Figure 2 summarizes the theoretical framework for the use of civic organizing to promote more policy-focused political parties. It highlights enabling factors and illustrative interventions, and outlines a theory of change for this approach.



# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDY SELECTION

With USAID funding through the Global Elections and Political Transitions (GEPT) mechanism, CEPPS/NDI researched the efficacy of engaging civil society to incentivize improved party policy development and responsiveness to all citizens. The research examined:

- Under what conditions can civic interventions incentivize more policy-focused parties?

Based on the overarching research question, CEPPS/NDI conducted a literature review outlining: the different types of civic interventions that have been used to incentivize more policy-focused parties, existing knowledge of the strengths and limitations of each, and priorities for further research. Based on the resources available, and to supplement the literature review, CEPPS/NDI identified four case studies.

Together, the case studies were selected to reflect different opportunities for lessons learned based on: the operating context (varying degrees of openness and party institutionalization), geographic diversity, the type of intervention(s) used, and the approach to the inclusion of women and other marginalized groups. Two case studies (Belarus and Slovakia) were developed based on desk research, and the additional two (Liberia and Uganda) involved field research. Given the research question, the initiative did not include an exhaustive evaluation of the effectiveness of specific civic interventions. Nor did it examine the strengths and weaknesses of different modes of capacity building for political parties. Case study research did not include an extensive examination of how NDI assistance to civic groups was structured or sequenced. Instead, it focused on the extent to which civic organizing led to changes in party policy practices. Further based on the research framework, the project examined the types of campaigns or activities the local civic groups conducted and whether and how these activities impacted political parties. The project did not include an in-depth examination of how assistance to civic groups was structured.

Across the case studies, CEPPS/NDI explored the strengths and weaknesses of civic organizing campaigns in enabling citizens to place more policy-focused demands on their political parties or candidates. It also examined what, if any, impact these citizen-organizing activities had on political parties. Research also identified the factors - internal to and external to programs - that influenced outcomes. Appendix 1 outlines the lines of inquiry for the study.

## THE FOUR CASE STUDIES

**Belarus.** The Belarus case study presented an opportunity to examine how limited political space affects opportunities for civic groups interested in engaging political parties on policy issues. This case study drew upon the program proposal, reports, and an overall review of the program conducted in 2016. The 2016 review of the program examined lessons learned and outcomes from the policy-focused campaign in the lead-up to the 2015 presidential election, public perceptions of these campaigns, and the depth and breadth of linkages between civic and political organizations and civil society. The 2016 study included: in-depth interviews with civil society groups and political party leaders on political party and constituency working groups' (CWG)<sup>8</sup> perspectives of each other and on the policy-focused campaigns, focus groups with citizens not directly involved in civic or political activities, and interviews for a social network analysis of civil society-political party linkages.

**Liberia.** This case study examined the extent to which community platforms – particularly those focusing on marginalized groups – can influence policy content, increase citizen participation in party policy proposals, and present opportunities for holding candidates accountable to delivering on campaign promises. This case study drew from an extensive review of program documents from the USAID-funded Liberia Elections and Political Transitions (LEPT) program and field-based research interviews with members of the Liberian Women's Policy Platform (LWPP) steering committee, political party leaders, women party members, women legislators, women civil society leaders, and women journalists. The case study also captured perspectives on a community dialogue initiative through interviews with Liberian civil society and community-based organizations, including: the Bassa Concerned Citizens Movement (BCCM), the Center for the Promotion of Democracy and Development (CPDD), and the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD). Finally, the NDI interviewed members of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) and NAYMOTE-Partners for Democratic Development to gain insight into the extent to which political parties adopted the National Youth Manifesto (NYM) during the 2017 election cycle. A comparison of the different experiences of the NYM and LWPP shed further light on lessons learned from community platforms that focus on marginalized groups.

**Slovakia.** The Slovakia case study presented an opportunity to examine lessons learned in efforts to empower a marginalized group to participate in policy processes, and to ensure government responsiveness to their needs. Increasing nationalist rhetoric in the later years of the program also provided an opportunity to identify lessons learned from when political space narrows for a particular group. This case study drew primarily from an extensive community-based participatory research (CBPR) study that NDI conducted from 2015-2016 to evaluate its programming with Roma in Slovakia from 2005 to 2015.<sup>9</sup> The program's broad theory of change for political empowerment posited that increasing the strategic and meaningful political participation of marginalized groups leads to a more credible political voice, more inclusive political space, and stronger lines of government accountability. That CBPR research study engaged Roma as analytical partners and evaluated how varying degrees of "citizen voice" and "political space" influenced "government accountability" for delivering public goods to Roma communities. It also examined the extent to which political parties developed pro-Roma policies in response to civic activism. Additional desk research for this case study included a review of NDI's 2003 assessment of Roma political participation prior to the start of the program, a series of newsletters and donor

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<sup>8</sup> These CWGs were loosely affiliated networks of civil society organizations working on similar issues. NDI supported the emergence of these groups as part of the program.

<sup>9</sup> Stern, Linda (2016). A Theory-Based Evaluation of Roma Political Voice, Space and Accountability in Slovakia: 2005-2015. National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. Washington, DC. <https://www.slideshare.net/NDIdemocracy/roma-summary-report-from-participatory-analysis-sessions-with-roma-leaders-and-activists-in-slovakia>

reports throughout the life of the program, and published interviews with program participants conducted previously by NDI. This was augmented by consultations with current program staff in Washington, DC.

**Uganda.** The Uganda case study presented an opportunity to draw lessons learned from two anti-vote buying efforts in a single-party dominant system. This case study drew upon program reports to the National Endowment for Democracy and USAID, other project documents, and an unpublished working paper highlighting the findings from randomized control trials (RCTs) conducted around the anti-vote buying campaigns in 2016 and 2017. It also drew upon interviews with program staff and partners in Uganda. NDI Senior Advisor for Political Parties Sef Ashiagbor and NDI Senior Program Officer for Citizen Participation and Inclusion Lauren Kitz conducted interviews from August 21 to 30, 2018 in Uganda, meeting with political party representatives, candidates, civil society, and some of the voters who participated in the anti-vote buying programs. The interviews occurred in Jinja, Kabale, and Kampala. Given the information available from program reports and the RCTs, the field interviews focused on examining: issues that voters considered in deciding whether or not take a resolution to reject vote buying, the extent to which party leaders at the national level were aware of the AVB campaigns and their perception of the campaigns, and how parties or candidates weighed the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the campaign.



Stock photograph of a community discussion.

## FINDINGS

### Belarus

Regime Type	Freedom House <sup>10</sup> : 6.5 (Not Free) V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index <sup>11</sup> : 0.11
Civic and Political Rights	Freedom House: Political Rights: 7, Civil Liberties: 6 V-Dem Freedom of Association Index <sup>12</sup> : 0.39
Party System	V-Dem Party Institutionalization Index <sup>13</sup> : 0.78
Electoral System	President: Two-Round System Legislature: First-Past-the-Post

<sup>10</sup> Freedom in the World assigns two ratings for each country: one for political rights and one for civil liberties. Both ratings are based on a 7 point scale, with 1 representing the greatest degree of freedom and 7 representing the lowest. Based on the average score across both ratings, countries are ranked Free (1.0 to 2.5), Party Freely (3.0 to 5.0) or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0).

<sup>11</sup> The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government through: constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. The Index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account. Under the Index, 1 equals achievement of ideal liberal principles of democracy.

<sup>12</sup> The Index measures the extent to which parties, including opposition parties, are allowed to form and to participate in elections, and to what extent civil society organizations are able to form and to operate freely. Under the Index, 1 is the ideal/perfect score.

<sup>13</sup> The Index measures various attributes of the political parties in a country, e.g., level and depth of organization, links to civil society, cadres of party activists, party supporters within the electorate, coherence of party platforms and ideologies, and party-line voting among representatives within the legislature. A high score (with 1 being the maximum) on these attributes generally indicates a more institutionalized party system. This Index considers the attributes of all parties with an emphasis on larger parties, i.e., those that may be said to dominate and define the party system.

## PROGRAM CONTEXT AND ACTIVITIES

Space and opportunity for citizen participation in politics in Belarus are severely limited. The country consistently receives a “Not Free” (authoritarian) rating in the Freedom House Index of Freedom in the World,<sup>14</sup> and fear of retribution stifles the participation of many Belarusian citizens in politics. Draconian registration and funding rules – including stiff penalties – heavily restrict the activities of CSOs. Elections are not competitive,<sup>15</sup> and oppressive registration requirements severely restrict the number of political groupings with formal registration status. As a result, there are several unregistered “political movements.”<sup>16</sup> The state almost completely controls traditional media,<sup>17</sup> and these outlets are often dismissive and critical of independent parties and movements. Despite widespread CSO and party distrust of each other, there have been some examples of positive interaction, and at least a willingness and belief about the positive benefits on both sides.

The program began in May 2015, in the lead-up to presidential elections that were expected that November. However, early in the program, elections were moved to October 2015. With NDI support, CSOs formed Constituent Working Groups (CWG),<sup>18</sup> briefed presidential candidates on their policy priorities, used questionnaires to solicit candidate policy positions on selected issues, and developed online and off-line voter education materials based on the responses. In the lead-up to the legislative elections a few months later, the program helped three parties develop and implement plans for outreach to target constituencies and CSOs, and supported regional roundtables where political parties and civil society could engage each other on issues of mutual interest. Throughout these activities, under a separate grant, NDI was training candidates on a variety of skills, including how to create, manage, and use contact databases to improve citizen outreach, and how to use public online platforms for open discussion and debate on policy positions.

## OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In general, CWGs found the questionnaires to be a useful tool for engaging with politicians, pushing their agendas and building bridges to candidates. While the presidential candidates affiliated with the current regime did not respond to the questionnaires, the two leading opposition contenders responded to the questionnaires, and all of the CWGs were able to conduct voter education campaigns based on those responses.

Several parties and candidates referenced the CWG positions in their campaigns, indicating that the notion of CWGs’ ability to act as agenda setters and sources of issue expertise was growing. One party used the feedback from a reverse town hall<sup>19</sup> with entrepreneurs to design outreach materials targeting entrepreneurs. Another candidate used some of her state-mandated television time to address CWG issues. This candidate also took questions from CWG members at a town hall meeting produced by NDI in partnership with media groups and an online discussion platform. Several of the candidates whom the CWGs contacted in the lead-up to the legislative elections also incorporated CSO-recommended issues and messaging into their platforms.

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<sup>14</sup> Freedom House (2018). Freedom in the World 2018: Belarus. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus/freedom-world/2018>

<sup>15</sup> Walker, Shaun (2015). Belarus election: Alexander Lukashenko wins fifth term with election landslide. The Guardian. United Kingdom. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/11/alexander-lukashenko-expected-to-remain-as-belarusian-president>

<sup>16</sup> For purposes of this case study, political parties refers to organizations that have expressed or demonstrated the intent to contest elections, regardless of formal registration status. “Independent” refers to candidates or groupings that have no affiliation – formal or informal – with the President or allied parties.

<sup>17</sup> The International Center for Not-for-Profit-Law (2019). Civic Freedom Monitor: Belarus. <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/belarus.html>

<sup>18</sup> These CWGs were loosely affiliated networks of civil society organizations working on similar issues. NDI supported the emergence of these groups as part of the program.

<sup>19</sup> “Reverse town halls” are meetings where civic groups brief political parties or candidates on their policy priorities.

Although CWGs used several different media platforms to distribute information about the candidate positions, **online materials attracted the most public interest.** This included online petitions, votematch websites, and printed materials.<sup>20</sup> Focus group participants who viewed these materials found the different media complementary and not duplicative. For instance, participants viewed the electronic platforms as entertaining and modern, and noted that they allowed for more detailed candidates' responses. In general, respondents noted the project's importance in raising public awareness about political processes and policy issues.

**CWGs that partnered with public online platforms to distribute the results of the questionnaires had a higher response rate from parties than the CWGs that distributed their questionnaires on their own. This suggests that the opportunity to receive additional media coverage helped incentivize parties to participate in the initiative.** NDI and its CSO partners launched a votematch website, which summarized candidates' positions on CWG-defined issues. The site included a quiz for visitors to determine which presidential candidate's positions most closely matched their own. Further, in collaboration with NDI and the CWGs, online media platforms created a similar questionnaire that citizens could respond to and see how their answers compared to four registered candidates' responses. The questionnaire included eight questions from the CWGs questionnaires. The involvement of media had other impacts as well: publishing the questionnaires online expanded their reach, but also enhanced the profile of the CSOs involved in the program – potentially increasing public understanding of what civil society does and is capable of doing.

Since 2016, cooperation between CSOs and parties has continued to increase, and independent parties are taking up causes/issues that civil society has identified, especially at the local level. For instance, in Brest, political party representatives and civic activists joined forces to advocate against the construction of a battery plant in the city. Brest is a moderately-sized city close to the Polish border. Beginning in 2018, protesters began to organize weekly protests over the proposed construction of a potentially hazardous battery plant. The protests were typically on the smaller side, 100-200 citizens, with the largest being around 2,000 protesters. The protests around the battery plant were exclusively a local issue until several independent bloggers became aware of the protests and began to draw attention to them on their YouTube channels. In the following months, the protests were directly cited by the chair of the upper chamber of parliament, who criticized local authorities for simply creating the “appearance of work” and not actively communicating with citizens. Finally, in June of 2019, the Brest Executive Committee announced the temporary suspension of the plan until all of the construction concerns were addressed.

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<sup>20</sup> Votematch refers to applications (often online) that solicit voter opinions on a variety of issues and use those responses to identify which candidate's policy positions mostly closely match the voter's.



## FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

While maintaining limits on political space in Belarus, the government periodically eases restrictions on citizens and independent political parties, creating opportunities that the program could leverage. Further, given the relative ease of travel, political and civic activists have been exposed to a variety of experiences and environments from which they can draw lessons learned and develop ideas for their own context. High levels of internet penetration have also expanded the options available for civic and political organizing and increased access to independent sources of information.<sup>21</sup> Despite these opportunities within the broader restrictions in Belarus, certain civil society groups decided not to participate in the program, given the risk associated with “political” activity.

Both civic activists and political party representatives noted that starting the program earlier would have increased its effectiveness. CWG members noted that starting the initiative earlier (as much as nine months before election day) would have allowed them more time to identify additional partners, refine their strategies and networks, and disseminate their voter education materials. For political party representatives, additional time would have allowed them to engage CWGs more and to refine their responses to the questionnaires.

The program focused on parties that had already expressed an interest in expanding outreach, a significant factor in the program’s success. Based on NDI’s previous experience, the Institute identified parties that had the required organizational capacity, had experience with grassroots outreach, and demonstrated the highest level of interest in expanding and strengthening their outreach. Further, while NDI was supporting engagement between civil society and political parties, under a separate grant, the Institute was simultaneously working with political parties on capacity building. This included training candidates for public office, teaching party activists how to create and manage a contact database, and how to use online platforms for open discussion and debate. These activities helped enhance the impact of civic efforts by supporting party efforts to improve policy-focused outreach. They also made it possible to identify the political party representatives who would be most interested in engaging with civic groups.

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<sup>21</sup> As cell phone and internet penetration has increased, state-sponsored misinformation (including anti-European Union propaganda) via the internet has become more common, but not to the level where it impacted program activities or outcomes. Belarusians use social media differently than the West. As a result the country has not experienced an echo chamber of false narratives and disinformation being shared and distributed online.



An activist in Grand Cess, Grand Kru County explains the Liberia Women’s Policy Platform to her community members (March 2017).

## Liberia

Regime Type	Freedom House: 3.3 (Partly Free) V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index: 0.46
Civic and Political Rights	Freedom House: Political Rights: 3, Civil Liberties: 3.6 V-Dem Freedom of Association Index: 0.88
Party System	V-Dem Party Institutionalization Index: 0.20
Electoral System	President: Two-round system Legislature: First-Past-the-Post

### PROGRAM CONTEXT AND ACTIVITIES

Liberia is a post-conflict country whose 13-year civil war (1989-1997, 1999-2003) left its political party system fragmented. Politics continue to mirror sharp pre-existing cleavages between Americo-Liberians and “indigenous”-based parties, fostering ethnic-based identity and personality-driven politics. The country’s political parties are organizationally weak and have loose relationships with their candidates and elected representatives. The most successful or most popular candidates are often those who market themselves based on individual merit, charismatic personality, and grandiose promises.<sup>22</sup> Political parties develop their manifestos with minimal, if any, consultation with citizens. Despite the Liberian government’s general openness to working with civil society to address national issues,<sup>23</sup> parties have not capitalized on this openness to improve their policy development processes. Further, despite the pivotal role that women played in ending Liberia’s civil war,

<sup>22</sup> According to NDI-organized focus groups about the 2017 presidential election.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, civil society played an important role in helping the Liberian government respond to the Ebola crisis in 2014/2015. United States Agency for International Development (2014/2015/2016). CSO Sustainability Index for sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, DC. <https://bit.ly/2DLKLWx>, <https://bit.ly/2DMOV0o>, <https://bit.ly/2WYBecF>

and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's 2006 ascension to the presidency, entrenched traditional patriarchal norms, cultural practices, limited economic mobility, and limited access to education continue to hamper women's political participation and their influence in public policy. Women who do make it onto party decision-making bodies are often the sole voices raising issues of concern to women, and their male colleagues can easily drown them out. The 2017 election would result in Liberia's first peaceful democratic transfer of power since 1944.

In advance of the October 2017 general election NDI supported an informal group of activists,<sup>24</sup> the Liberian Women's Policy Platform (LWPP) steering committee, to:

- research and draft a platform outlining women's policy priorities;
- seek feedback on the platform through a national policy conference;
- develop an illustrated version of the LWPP and incorporate it into drama performances and songs to expand the platform's reach to citizens with low literacy;
- disseminate the platform through a tour of 10 counties; and
- present the LWPP to party leaders and candidates.

Under a separate program component, with NDI support, civil society and community-based organizations in 16 electoral districts helped citizens develop community platforms and present them to their legislative candidates ahead of October 2017 election. Further, under a separate award, NDI began implementing a political party strengthening program in the months leading up to the election. However, given that the political party grant launched only three months prior to the October 2017 election, there was insufficient time to work with parties on platform development.

The case study also references the experiences of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) and NAYMOTE-Partners for Democratic Development in developing a National Youth Manifesto (NYM) during the 2017 election cycle. While not supported by NDI, they provide helpful comparative perspectives.

## OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Members of the LWPP steering committee cited the inclusion of a wide range of women's views as one of their greatest accomplishments.** They noted that compared to a previous effort to develop a women's manifesto in the wake of the 2003 peace agreement, the 2017 experience was more successful at incorporating the views of women outside Monrovia into the women's platform. However, initially, disagreement over the "ownership" of the policy platform among the Monrovia-based CSO leaders who were involved in drafting the 2005 manifesto created challenges for coordination and agreement on how to develop and publicize the women's platform. Ultimately, those in favor of a more inclusive process came to form the steering committee that moved the LWPP forward.

**The LWPP was more successful as a voter education/mobilization tool and for campaign-training than as a means of directly influencing party platforms.** By the time the LWPP was fully drafted, political parties had already selected presidential and legislative candidates, and developed their policy platforms. Further, by February 2017, given concerns about the low rates of voter registration among women, the LWPP steering committee decided to focus its efforts on ensuring that women understood the importance of participating in

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<sup>24</sup> These activities included representatives from the Coalition of Political Party Women of Liberia, the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia, and the Liberia Rural Women Association. The October 2017 election resulted in a run-off for the presidential election that was held in December. However, NDI and LWPP program activities took place in the lead up the first round.

the registration process.<sup>25</sup> As a result, the steering committee was not able to implement the robust advocacy effort originally envisaged to encourage party leaders to incorporate the LWPP into their policy platforms.

In contrast, FLY's political party engagement strategy for the NYM began in 2016, allowing the federation time to inform party leaders of the initiative and to involve civil society groups and party youth wing chairs in program activities. FLY initially convened separate meetings with CSO and party youth to discuss the initiative and identify priorities. These separate sessions, which allowed each group to speak freely but also to begin to recognize some of the policy concerns they had in common, helped to pave the way for subsequent, constructive joint sessions incorporating civil society and party youth. FLY also convened two roundtable discussions with national youth wing chairs to solicit feedback on and buy-in for the document.

**Integration of the LWPP into a separate program component targeting potential women candidates helped female aspirants develop messages for their campaigns and prepare for candidate debates,** increasing their confidence to participate in discussions about why they were running for office. Women activists and legislators believe that the LWPP remains relevant in the period following the elections but have different views on how to proceed.

**The involvement of party youth wing chairs in the development of the NYM played an important role in securing party leaders' support for and broadening ownership of the youth policy document.** Part of this success may also have been the relationships forged via NAYMOTE's Young Political Leaders' School, which brought together youth leaders from civil society and political parties in 2016. Relationships developed through the Leaders' School may have facilitated access to party leaders and helped to forge consensus on priorities among the CSOs and party youth. The Alternative National Congress, the All Liberian Party, and the Liberty Party endorsed the NYM ahead of the October 2017 elections. However, the country's two largest parties did not endorse the initiative until later: the Unity Party signed on in December 2017 (in the lead up to the runoff election) and the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) endorsed it following the presidential inauguration in 2018.<sup>26</sup>

**Civic activists working to develop community platforms initially faced challenges in recruiting community members to participate in efforts to identify and prioritize community needs.** These individuals noted that despite previous efforts to engage their candidates, campaign promises remained unfulfilled and they still had limited contact with elected officials outside campaign periods. The prospect of securing candidates' signatures to address a series of priorities that community members had identified helped overcome these individuals' reluctance and signaled greater opportunities for holding elected officials accountable to their policy concerns. After the elections, the follow-up meetings allowed community representatives and their legislators to review the pledges and begin discussing ways to address the contents.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, without additional funding to support these activities, follow-up sessions have not been sustained. **Civic activists expressed concern that future initiatives to involve citizens in similar efforts would face even greater challenges in convincing citizens that such engagement is worthwhile.**

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<sup>25</sup> Parley, Winston (2017). Liberia: NEC Claim Low Women Turnout. The New Dawn. Liberia. <https://allafrica.com/stories/201702240601.html>

<sup>26</sup> In general, political parties endorsed the platform by signing documents stating their support for the platform. Although different parties signed these commitments at different points during the electoral calendar, in general, they appended their signatures relatively late in the electoral process and when party platforms had already been finalized. As a result, these commitments did not influence written party platforms.

<sup>27</sup> There is anecdotal evidence that some elected officials are working to address the priorities in the platforms. For example, one elected official is working to improve a government-run hospital located in his district, reflecting one priority from the community dialogues. Another elected official purchased ambulances and sent them to his district to respond to health-related priorities from the community platform.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

During the interviews in Liberia, it was clear that party leaders viewed young people as a more strategic voting bloc than women. Possible explanations for this perception include longstanding negative stereotypes about women's role in politics and the absence of a unified and influential women's movement.<sup>28</sup> While women ultimately registered and voted at similar rates to men in 2017, historically low voter registration rates among women may have also reinforced the perceptions that they were not a strategic voting bloc or constituency for party leaders to appeal to.

Civic activists noted that political parties tend to be wary of civil society initiatives that are conducted in the immediate lead-up to elections and often suspect that these initiatives and the organizations conducting them have a hidden partisan agenda. The two largest parties may have also made a calculation that their position on the NYM manifesto would make no material difference in their electoral support, a calculation that is borne out by the fact that CDC, which ultimately won the election, did not endorse the NYM until after it had secured the presidency.

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<sup>28</sup> In contrast, FLY, established by law in the 1970s, but functioning at arms' length from the government, represents a united, influential voice on youth priorities. FLY serves as an umbrella for all Liberian youth and student organizations and has networks across the country. There is no comparable organization for women's priorities.





Participants of a workshop on Roma youth activism speaking with residents of the Lenartov Roma settlement (2010).

## Slovakia

Regime Type <sup>29</sup>	Freedom House: 1 (Free) V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index: 0.76
Civic and Political Rights	Freedom House: Political Rights: 1, Civil Liberties: 1 V-Dem Freedom of Association Index: 0.90
Party System	V-Dem Party Institutionalization Index: 0.87
Electoral System	President: Two-Round System Legislature: List Proportional Representation

### PROGRAM CONTEXT AND ACTIVITIES

Comprising roughly eight percent<sup>30</sup> of Slovakia’s population, the Roma minority has been subject to centuries of discrimination and exclusion, leaving them ill-equipped to address the severe poverty and limited access to services that hinder their advancement. Further, geographic isolation, generational divisions, entrenched cultural differences, patriarchal structures that excluded women, and differences in language, clan, and social class have made political unity difficult.<sup>31</sup> Unlike some countries in Europe, Slovakia has no seats reserved for ethnic Roma

<sup>29</sup> All scores in the table below represent the average ratings across the program’s duration.

<sup>30</sup> Denton, James “Roma Political Participation in Slovakia.” National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Assessment Mission (2003). pg. 3.

<sup>31</sup> For additional reading on Roma political participation in Slovakia, see Vermeesch, Peter (2000). Romani Political Participation and Racism: Reflections on Recent Developments in Hungary and Slovakia. *European Roma Rights Journal*; Hrustic, Tomas (2012). The Trends in Participation of Romani Candidates in Elections in Slovakia. *European Roma Rights Journal*; and Flasičková-Benová, Moka, Swoboda, Hannes, Marinus Wiersma, Jan (2011) Roma: A European Minority. Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. [https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/3693\\_EN\\_SD\\_Roma\\_book\\_0.pdf](https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/3693_EN_SD_Roma_book_0.pdf)



in any elected body at any level of government, but several Roma political parties did emerge during the rebirth of Slovakia's democracy.<sup>32</sup> However, despite the agreements they had brokered with mainstream parties, Roma parties seemed unable to advance pro-Roma policies in the parliament or government.<sup>33</sup> Mainstream party attitudes toward Roma ranged from tokenism to bigotry. For their part, Roma had little reason to trust Slovakia's emerging democratic institutions. Their only engagement with parties was around elections when candidates made campaign promises that they rarely kept, or attempted to bribe or intimidate Roma into voting.

In its initial assessment in 2003, NDI concluded that entering and influencing mainstream political structures (as opposed to focusing on Roma parties) offered better prospects for empowering Roma given the weakness of Roma parties. Based on this assessment, NDI developed its program, which the goal of increasing mainstream party efforts to: engage Roma as members; address Roma policy priorities; field Roma candidates; and address Roma policy priorities in the messaging and work of non-Roma candidates and elected officials.

Although NDI continues to support increased Roma political participation in Slovakia, this case study focuses on lessons learned from programming that occurred between 2005 and 2015.

Over those 10 years, NDI implemented a range of interventions to support Roma participation in policy development and performance monitoring of parties and government including:

- public opinion research in Roma communities;
- training in advocacy and electoral campaigns for Roma activists; and
- policy dialogues on issues affecting Roma.

NDI also provided hands-on support as Roma activists began organizing their own campaigns to reduce vote buying, monitor elections, and advocate for parties to address Roma concerns in their policy proposals. The Institute's support to Roma activists in Slovakia was part of a broader regional program that included efforts to support greater Roma inclusion in Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. In addition to supporting Roma inclusion efforts specific to Slovakia, NDI supported events where Roma from Slovakia could meet with Roma from other countries included in the initiative during regional training events and also share challenges and lessons learned

## OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

**A new generation of Roma leaders and agents of change emerged, taking on roles in politics, media, civil society, and academia. Some of these politically-engaged, young Roma formed CSOs that could engage parties more effectively, and helped train other Roma.** For instance, New Roma Generation (NRG) and Roma Public Policy Institute (RPPI) used a combination of advocacy campaigns, watchdog activities, and policy research to assert themselves in the public debate around the 2006 parliamentary election and subsequent government formation. They had the greatest influence over party platforms, serving as an example to other fledgling groups. Advanced training of the most promising program graduates, as well as the grooming of a cadre of trainers – through the Train-the-Trainers (ToT) program – to teach these skills to other activists, increased prospects for sustainability in building political skills among Roma.

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<sup>32</sup> "Roma political parties" (or "Roma parties") refers to a political party founded and led by ethnic Roma with the intention of representing Roma communities. These parties are often based on clan or family ties. Some have formed coalitions with each other or with non-Roma political parties.

<sup>33</sup> Denton, James. "Roma Political Participation in Slovakia." National Democratic Institute for International Affairs Assessment Mission (2003). pg. 7.

**Building off the momentum of Slovakia’s EU accession and the launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion,<sup>34</sup> civil society used broad coalitions and media pressure to force nearly all major political parties to include pro-Roma policies in their platforms.** For instance, during the 2006 electoral campaign, NRG issued an open letter challenging all political parties to address Roma issues in their platforms. Support from mainstream civil society groups and a press conference that attracted broad media coverage helped increase the letter’s impact. In addition, RPPI’s policy research outlined specific proposals and issues relevant to Roma communities, such as education and employment, that parties, government ministries and local councils could use.

**Civic organizing had the greatest impact on parties in the lead-up to the 2006 parliamentary election.** This was a clear departure from 2002, when only two platforms had mentioned Roma, and none had articulated specific policies. The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), an established reform-oriented party, was the first to respond to NRG’s open challenge to parties to put Roma issues on their platform. SDKU had a genuine interest in Roma issues but had previously lacked both the capacity and connections to adequately address them. NDI leveraged its established relationship with SDKU, based on years of previous assistance, to encourage the party to work with its Roma partners. SDKU’s response helped spur a new form of competition for Roma support, and soon other parties began to articulate Roma policies in their platforms and establish regional advisory councils. Outreach to Roma soon reached unprecedented levels, with several prominent parties seeking Roma policy recommendations, appointing Roma as campaign advisors, and establishing regional advisory councils. Mainstream political parties included Romani issues, such as more and better quality social housing and mandatory pre-school, in their 2006 platforms. These parties included: Direction- Social Democracy (Smer), the Christian Democratic Union, Party of the Hungarian Coalition, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, and the Movement for Democracy. Smer eventually gained an endorsement from one of the larger, traditional Roma parties, and partnered with two nationalist parties in its post-election governing coalition. Thanks to ongoing pressure from Roma activists for the Smer party to fulfill its campaign promises, the party did give significant attention to Roma issues in its official government program. Smer’s cooperation continued through the local elections later that year but eventually waned, as extreme nationalist forces pushed the political spectrum further to the right.

**A combination of CSO approaches, including not only advocacy but also policy research, awareness raising, and monitoring efforts, were critical to success. The most successful Roma advocacy efforts also incorporated mainstream CSO allies who had expertise, resources, connections, and credibility with the public.** This helped Roma CSOs amplify their voice, raise broad awareness of Roma concerns, and advocate more effectively to mainstream parties and government offices. Roma who joined mainstream parties and other allies within parties also played a role in advocating for Roma issues from within parties.

**Roma advocacy was also effective at the local level, where regional party offices proved more amenable to cooperation than did national headquarters.** Roma also found that they could resolve issues in their communities by cooperating with or pressuring mayors and city councils; some towns even established Roma advisory councils that provide input on municipal budgets.

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<sup>34</sup> The Decade of Roma Inclusion was a 12-country initiative launched in 2005 by the Open Society Institute with support from a host of multilateral organizations. <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/pages/4/roma-decade-and-the-eu>

## FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Initially, NDI's Roma partners were able to leverage external incentives – from Slovakia's EU Accession and the Decade of Roma Inclusion – to their advantage, increasing publicity and pressure on political leaders. **However, in the later years of programming, different international incentives changed the calculations of Slovak parties and political leaders.** Following Slovakia's accession to the EU, the question of who would take responsibility for Roma inclusion – the EU or the Slovak Government – was unclear, so most parties chose to point fingers at Brussels.

**Further, rising anti-Roma sentiment increased the political costs for parties who might have otherwise considered promoting Roma policy priorities.** As the June 2010 parliamentary elections approached, right wing parties saw increasing popularity. In addition, Slovak Brotherhood -- a banned nationalist party that subsequently reorganized as a civic group -- organized intimidation marches in Roma communities across the country. In addition, Marion Kotleba, a neo-Nazi politician with openly anti-Roma, anti-Semitic, and other extreme-right views, began to attract support after forming a new party, People's Party – Our Slovakia, in 2010. Kotleba garnered 20 percent of the votes in the Banska Bystrica region during the 2013 regional elections, and secured his seat as governor during the run-off. Since then, the party has continued to gain support, enough to gain seats in the parliament in the 2016 parliamentary elections. With the increasingly intolerant political climate, addressing Roma issues became too much of a liability for most parties. As political space narrowed, Roma activists gained the most traction with smaller parties that had smaller voter bases and, as such, had less to lose by espousing Roma causes. By 2011, Slovakia was experiencing an economic downturn and the EU's new Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies left individual countries responsible for resolving the complex social, political and economic issues involved in Roma integration. In an environment characterized by increased scapegoating of Roma and negative media coverage of the ethnicity, some municipalities began to construct walls around Roma settlements to physically segregate Slovakia's Roma citizens from their non-Roma neighbors.<sup>35</sup> These developments created significant barriers to greater inclusion of Roma.

**Slovakia's electoral system disperses Roma votes across a single national electoral district, making it difficult for activists to mobilize Roma in support of parties that promote their cause or to get them to hold parties accountable for broken campaign promises.** Closed party lists limit CSOs' power to affect outcomes by endorsing candidates who advocate for pro-Roma policies. In certain local government districts, Roma voters, as a larger percentage of the electorate, had greater opportunities to influence vote outcomes or work directly with officials to solve problems. Roma found that they could resolve issues in their communities by cooperating with or pressuring mayors and city councils; some towns even established Roma advisory councils to provide input on municipal budgets.

**Due to endemic racism, Roma are still so highly stigmatized and easily scapegoated by the larger population that few parties are willing to risk their reputation by championing Roma causes.** While Roma CSOs have made gains in changing the political debate on matters of concern to their community, parties remain resistant, not because they are unwilling to listen to civil society, but because they are unwilling to listen to Roma. Despite these challenges, the 2012 elections saw the election of Peter Pollak as Slovakia's first Roma MP. Pollak, a graduate of NDI training programs, and other Roma activists continued to highlight Roma policy concerns but faced a backlash from far right parties who were also tapping into broader (non-Roma) citizen concerns about unemployment and other pressing issues. Kotleba, and similar political figures, are only part of the problems that Roma continue to face in Slovakia. Europe's refugee crisis and prolonged economic recession have continued

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<sup>35</sup> Abbass, Merin, Tvrdá, Katerina, Walach, Vaclav, Rydlinski, Bartosz, Nociar, Tomas "Right-wing Extremism in Central Europe: An Overview." Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2011). Pg. 1-7.

to fuel nationalism, xenophobia and racial prejudice. Moreover, with the conclusion of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” in 2015, attention to Roma issues waned. Although the Decade had its flaws, the initiative provided some structure to ensure that national governments allocated resources for the improvement and growth of Romani communities.

You wouldn't sell your soul. You wouldn't sell your village's future.

## WHY SELL YOUR VOTE?



Stand together with your community and  
**don't sell your vote.**  
 It is your chance to demand a better future!



ACFIM's "civic" leaflet from the anti-vote buying campaign for the Kagoma by-election (2017).

## Uganda

Regime Type <sup>36</sup>	Freedom House: 5.3 (Partly/Not Free) V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index: 0.28
Civic and Political Rights	Freedom House: Political Rights: 6, Civil Liberties: 4.6 V-Dem Freedom of Association Index: 0.58
Party System	V-Dem Party Institutionalization Index: 0.52
Electoral System	<b>President:</b> Two-Round System <b>Legislature:</b> First-Past-the-Post

### PROGRAM CONTEXT AND ACTIVITIES

Although elections occur on a regular basis, Uganda is largely a single-party dominant system. Opposition parties and candidates regularly face suppression, and incumbents use patronage and vote buying to maintain support. CSOs attempting to obtain information sometimes risk their staff being arrested or face threats of forced closure, deregistration, or frozen bank accounts. The campaigns run by candidates rarely echo the ideas or promises made in their party's manifesto. Several MPs and candidates have also complained that the electorate is not very interested in policy-focused messages adapted from party manifestos, and that voters prefer to receive "gifts" from candidates. Despite legislation that forbids vote buying and vote selling, various

<sup>36</sup> All scores in the table represent the average rating across the program's duration.

reports point to high levels of vote buying in the country.<sup>37</sup> Candidates use vote buying as an indication of their ability to mobilize resources, assist constituents, and provide political leadership. It is also used as an inducement to increase turnout in favor of particular candidates.<sup>38</sup> As one respondent noted, “If the expectation is that I should only vote if I am paid, then I won’t bother if no one has paid me.”<sup>39</sup>

NDI supported two separate anti-vote buying (AVB) campaigns by the Alliance for Campaign Finance Monitoring (ACFIM). The campaign in the lead-up to the 2016 national elections reached 1,426 randomly-selected villages in 52 districts and included:

- community discussions on the causes and potential effects of vote buying, and the option of taking resolutions (as a community) to reject selling their votes;
- the delivery of 220,000 leaflets highlighting the dangers of vote buying to 68,488 households; and
- 32,625 robocalls to campaign participants, reminding them of their pledge and the social costs of vote buying.

Of the targeted villages, 65 percent passed resolutions to reject vote buying/vote selling and erected billboards noting: “This is a No Vote Buying Village.”

In Kagoma, an election petition about vote buying led to the nullification of the 2016 result and a new election. In the lead up to a 2017 legislative by-election, ACFIM activists conducted a modified AVB campaign in Kagoma, involving:

- door-to-door outreach in selected villages;
- pledges that all candidates signed committing to desist from vote buying;<sup>40</sup>
- the distribution of “civic” leaflets about the dangers of vote buying; and
- the distribution of leaflets highlighting the fact that the candidates had signed pledges to desist from vote buying.

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<sup>37</sup> Larreguy, Horacio; Marx, Benjamin; Reid, Otis; Blattman, Christopher (2017). A Market Equilibrium Approach to Reduce the Incidence of Vote-Buying: Evidence from Uganda. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. United States. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e10f/5272b7d8f74c1ed3567695ea453ede028fc1.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> While vote buying was not the focus of the Liberia case study, a similar dynamic exists there. Traditionally, politicians rarely visit their constituencies outside the electoral period. As a result, campaigns create a sort of “harvest season” mentality, where citizens seek to maximize their gains from interactions with candidates. These practices point to the broader need for greater understanding of the role of political parties and elected officials in a democracy, and to the need to work on changes to attitudes and behaviors of both citizens and parties. Additional information is included in the cross-country findings and recommendations.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with a Member of Parliament, conducted by Sef Ashiagbor in Kampala, August 29, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> The candidate pledge was not part of the original program design but was incorporated based on a suggestion from the election commission, which ACFIM had contacted to brief them about the program.

## OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The AVB campaigns had a mixed impact on candidates, their messaging, and their campaign strategies. In response to the 2016 campaign, some challenger candidates increased their vote buying while increasing policy-focused campaigning – an indication that they did not see the two approaches as mutually exclusive. In one village where the 2016 AVB campaign was particularly successful, previous civic education/engagement activities by ACFIM helped “prime” community members for the AVB initiative. Residents of the village noted that while they do not see some of their elected officials as often as they would like, the decision to reject vote selling had made it easier to hold their leaders accountable. If they had taken the “gifts” offered during the campaign period, the residents argue, it would have been much more difficult to ask questions about public services in the period following the elections.

For the 2017 Kagoma by-election, the campaign was most successful in parishes where both the civic and pledge leaflets were distributed: it lowered instances of vote buying and increased turnout. The distribution of leaflets was also more cost-effective than the village meetings used in 2016 and made it easier to engage women, people with disabilities, older persons, and others who do not typically attend rallies. In addition, the door-to-door approach also allowed for a broader conversation with voters (some of whom did not even know about the by-election or who was running for office). These more intimate conversations drew less attention than public meetings, making it more difficult for candidates, their agents, or others to mobilize groups of citizens against the initiative. It may also have lowered the personal risks for activists.

There is no evidence that information about the campaigns trickled up to party officials at the national level. This seems to be a result of the fact that ACFIM and NDI did not explicitly reach out to party leaders during the 2016 and 2017 campaigns (although the 2017 campaign included the appeal to candidates and signed pledges).<sup>41</sup> In both cases, the program did not have an explicit goal or strategy of engaging political parties. Further, both campaigns occurred over extremely short periods – the Kagoma campaign in 2017, for example, was only 26 days long.

In selected communities, ACFIM member organizations built on the AVB campaign with a series of village engagement meetings. These *Hakuna Mchezo*<sup>42</sup> meetings included a citizens’ meeting, where villagers: identified their priority needs, mapped which level of government was responsible for each priority issue, and established a committee to reach out to locally-elected officials. As part of these meetings, citizens also signed a pledge that they would not ask leaders for money or discuss their personal, individual concerns, and would instead focus on community needs. During subsequent meetings, villagers presented their priorities to their elected officials and sought updates on progress towards addressing the service delivery needs of the community. Although funding for these activities has been limited, ACFIM members believe that, in areas where these meetings have been sustained, focusing the discussion on public good is slowly and gradually beginning to change the relationship between citizens and their locally-elected officials.

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<sup>41</sup> At the time of the AVB project, NDI was not working directly with political parties. The initial iteration of the AVB campaign focused primarily on engaging the demand-side (i.e., voters) of vote buying. A subsequent iteration of the project (during the Kagoma by-elections) included outreach to the legislative candidates. It is possible that outreach to candidates and political parties would have raised greater awareness of the campaign and potentially enhanced its impact. However, it is also possible that greater exposure could have allowed candidates to mobilize and amplify various forms of resistance to the campaign.

<sup>42</sup> The name for these meetings was adopted from a comment by President Museveni, when he called for “kisanja hakuna mchezo,” a Swahili phrase loosely translating as “no funny business.” The president used the phrase in the context of a conversation about corruption. Collard, Michaela (2017) Uganda – President Museveni’s term of “no joking around” takes a dramatic turn.” Democracy in Africa. <http://democracyinfrica.org/uganda-president-musevenis-term-no-joking-around-takes-dramatic-turn/>



## FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM OUTCOMES

**Weak sanctions for violating AVB laws are a strong impediment to limiting the practice.** Vote buying is hard to prove, and because voters are banned from selling their votes, they risk incriminating themselves if they report violations they have been involved in. Evidence of vote buying can result in the nullification of elections and trigger a by-election. However, vote-buying candidates remain eligible to run again for the same office. For example, the Kagoma by-election was the result of a nullification due to vote buying. However, the candidate whose campaign practices led to the nullification was able to run for office again, eventually winning. There is, therefore, little incentive for candidates not to attempt to use the tactic.

**Concerns about vote buying are just one element of a broader conversation about the commercialization and the personalization of politics in Uganda.** Civil society and political leaders on all sides are concerned about the funds that candidates and parties feel compelled to spend during primaries (especially in the ruling party, where nomination processes are highly competitive) and as part of the campaign. These expenses often result in significant personal debts and raise concerns about how candidates might settle their debts or finance additional patronage once they assume elected office. These costs also likely serve as a significant barrier to women, youth, and political aspirants from other traditionally marginalized groups, who are less likely to have access to these resources. Respondents noted that voters often assume (rightly or wrongly) that the services are funded through the personal largesse of the political leaders. This is a perception that political leaders themselves sometimes fuel, by blurring the distinction between publicly-funded services or projects and those funded by personal resources or other means.<sup>43</sup>

**The likelihood that AVB efforts will be successful is somewhat dependent on the socioeconomic conditions of the communities targeted.** Respondents noted that vote buying occurs less often in urban areas, where citizens' economic status tends to be higher. It is more likely to take place on a wide scale in rural and peri-urban areas, where communities are poorer and, therefore, more susceptible to vote buying practices. Economic insecurity and lack of access to public goods can be a decisive factor for some citizens as to whether to sell their vote for a small gift or amount of money.

Finally, although ACFIM activists did face attempts to prevent and disrupt the campaign, these efforts were not on a scale or an intensity to prevent the campaign.

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<sup>43</sup> Similar conditions exist in Liberia.

## Cross-Country Conclusions

Drawing upon the four program case studies, this chapter highlights findings across the different experiences, focusing on conclusions that could inform civic organizing and promote the emergence of more policy-focused parties across different contexts.

**A variety of factors influenced party responsiveness to citizen demands, including: international incentives, electoral systems, and opportunities for positive media coverage.**

For instance, in Slovakia, international attention to issues of inclusion (through the Decade of Roma Inclusion and requirements for EU accession) created opportunities to advance Roma policy priorities. However, the nature of the electoral system presented challenges for activists trying to advance Roma priorities at the national level. Furthermore, over time, rising extremist and nationalist sentiment in Slovakia and elsewhere in Europe made advocacy for Roma inclusion more difficult. In Belarus, CSOs that collaborated with an online platform to distribute information about candidate positions had a higher response rate from parties than the CSOs who distributed their questionnaires on their own. Media coverage also played an important role in Roma advocacy efforts that succeeded in pressuring parties to address Roma issues in the lead-up to Slovakia's 2006 elections.

**Parties operating within the same country context made different calculations about how to respond to civic pressure based on their own circumstances and considerations. As a result, responsiveness varied by party. It also required the existence of well-placed, intra-party champions.**

Smaller parties in Belarus, Liberia, and Slovakia were more responsive to civic pressure than larger parties, who had more of a prospect of controlling the reins of government and, therefore, may have been more confident in their ability to mobilize sufficient support to win elections. In Liberia, the involvement of party youth wing chairs in the development of the National Youth Manifesto played an important role in helping secure party leaders' support for the youth policy document. In Belarus, the program focused on parties that already had some experience with grassroots outreach and demonstrated the highest level of interest in expanding these efforts, an important factor in program success.

**Elections can serve as a strategic entry point for more policy-focused engagement between civic groups/ citizens and parties, even where political space is constricted.**

In open and competitive multiparty systems, as parties seek to expand their electoral support in the lead-up to elections, they may be more open to engaging civil society in efforts to improve their public image. Despite limited political space and uncompetitive elections, Belarus programming did provide opportunities for more policy-focused engagement between civil society and political parties. This was primarily because both CSOs and the targeted political parties saw advantages to engaging each other on policy issues, even as they recognized the challenges in Belarus. However, obviously, the risks and opportunities associated with civic organizing vary from one context to the other and need to be carefully weighed in consultation with program partners, who may have different thresholds for risk.

**However, beginning programs right before elections may not provide enough time for deeper civic education about the roles and responsibilities of parties/candidates or to foster meaningful engagement between civil society and political parties.**

Three of the four programs used elections as an entry point for promoting policy-focused engagement between political parties and CSOs and/or citizens. However, the interventions varied and included anti-vote buying activities, community platforms, and issue-based voter education. All had some success in moving voters and/or parties towards more policy-focused political engagement. However, in Uganda, by the time the AVB campaign occurred, some candidates had already bought citizen votes. In Belarus, both politicians and CSOs noted that starting the initiative (as much as nine months before election day) would have significantly increased the program’s effectiveness. In Liberia, by the time the LWPP had been finalized, political parties had already adopted their platforms, and it was relatively close to election day, leaving little time for a sustained, broad-based campaign around the contents of the platform.

**FIGURE 3: LADDER OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**



Realigning current relationships between political parties and citizens in favor of those based on different proposals for the provision of public goods requires deep behavioral changes on the part of both citizens and political parties. Political norms are often deeply rooted and require time to change. As indicated in Figure 3, citizen organizing for purposes of accountability involves relatively sophisticated or advanced forms of political participation. It involves forms of organizing that are coordinated, sustained, collective, and iterative. Such organizing efforts must also adapt in response to pushback from parties or other resistance to change. Thus, while elections provide a natural impetus for issue-based voter engagement, providing citizens with information/civic education alone is not sufficient to spur the emergence of “policy-focused” voters. Citizens require long-term support as they acquire and interpret new information, coordinate with others to take action, mobilize sufficient power to exert pressure on political leaders, and hold them accountable for progress towards delivering public goods. As a result, the emergence of more policy-focused parties in response to citizen organizing requires long-term efforts; these efforts should combine support to civic organizing as well as support to political parties. Further, progress may occur in fits and starts: across the case studies, where parties did respond, change was incremental and not necessarily linear.

**A heavy focus on election-related programming without complementary follow-on activities throughout the political cycle may limit the effectiveness of - and even inadvertently undermine - the credibility of CSOs, thereby contributing to citizen disenchantment with political processes.**

In Liberia and Uganda, respondents from civil society and political parties noted that political parties and candidates are highly skeptical of civic groups who significantly increase their activities around elections. Political leaders are more likely to assume that these groups have thinly-veiled political motives and hope to influence election outcomes. Particularly in closed or closing spaces, a heavy focus on election-related activities may expose civic activists to greater risk of backlash. In Liberia, an additional concern emerged: how a focus on election programming without sufficient follow-up in the post-election period could inadvertently deepen citizen disenchantment with political processes and democracy. Legislators conduct limited outreach outside election periods, in part, because they worry about the grand promises they made and unreasonable demands from citizens. One of the reasons why citizens place such demands on their political leaders is because they see them so rarely outside election periods. As a result, they perceive campaigns as a harvest season of sorts. Those citizens who do not recognize that not all promises can be met become increasingly resentful over the lack of information from their elected representatives. In the meantime, contact between political leaders and citizens remains heavily focused on elections and on personal rather than community concerns, feeding further cynicism among citizens and reinforcing legislators' and voters' misperceptions of each other. It is also possible that citizens do not fully understand the role that legislators are supposed to play, which points to the need for broader civic education.

**Marginalized identities can serve as a unifying factor for civic interventions, increasing groups' ability to share skills and information with other members of their community and to potentially speak with a stronger, collective voice. However, people experience the world differently based on overlapping identity markers, and efforts to help groups that share a common identity marker need to be sensitive to these differences.<sup>44</sup>**

In Liberia, the LWPP steering committee noted the inclusion of women outside Monrovia in the development of the platform and in the effort to mobilize women to register to vote and increase their political participation as one of their most significant accomplishments.<sup>45</sup> Integration of the LWPP into a separate program component targeting potential women nominees helped aspiring women candidates develop policy-focused messages for their campaigns and prepare for debates, increasing their confidence to participate in discussions about why they were running for office. In Slovakia, the grooming of a cadre of Roma trainers to teach these skills to other activists resulted in an increased number of politically-active, young Roma, some of whom formed their own CSOs, conducted advocacy campaigns, ran for office, or helped others to do so successfully. However, the Slovakia case study also showed that Roma are a heterogeneous group - divided by geography, language,<sup>46</sup> class, and clan - with diverse opinions on policy issues. They do not share a common political or national identity and do not comprise a unified voting bloc. As a result, it is difficult to identify one, unified voice on Roma policy priorities. Further, different members of the community make different decisions about whether or not to identify as Roma.

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<sup>44</sup> For instance, in Liberia, there have been inter-generational conflicts between women in civil society and women in political parties. Liberian young women may feel the need to choose between prioritizing their identities as "youth" or as "women" and decide whether to join their party's youth wing or the women's wing. Some young women have indicated that those leading women's wings and women's organizations do not want to make space for young women's voices.

<sup>45</sup> Through outreach to rural and peri-urban communities, the committee was able to foster a broader sense of ownership of the platform among Liberian women. They noted that compared to a previous effort to develop a women's manifesto in the immediate wake of the 2003 peace agreement, the 2017 experience was more successful at incorporating the views of women outside Monrovia.

<sup>46</sup> Roma speak different languages. While some speak Romani, others speak languages based on where they settled and who governed the land in a place where borders have frequently shifted (e.g., Slovak vs. Hungarian vs. Czech vs. Ukrainian, etc.).

Entrenched socio-cultural norms influenced party leaders' receptiveness to demands from marginalized groups. However, marginalized groups can benefit from joining with organizations that are not primarily by or for marginalized groups in order to build their numbers, broaden support for their priorities, and increase their political power.

During field research in Liberia, it was clear that party leaders viewed young people as a more strategic and significant electoral constituency than women. Historically, low voter registration rates among women and the absence of a strong and unified voice for women's priorities may have helped to reinforce this perception. That male political leaders are still rather dismissive of women in Liberia – which elected the first female head of state in Africa and saw women activists play lynchpin roles in efforts to end the country's civil war – points to the long-term efforts required to overcome negative stereotypes about women and other marginalized groups and to help them build greater political power. In Slovakia, the incorporation of allies from outside the Roma community was critical to influencing political party behavior. Roma CSOs found natural partners among human rights and democracy groups, forming coalitions that helped Roma CSOs amplify their voice, raise broad awareness of Roma concerns, and advocate more effectively to mainstream parties and government offices. Nevertheless, rising nationalist sentiment changed incentives for many parties' willingness to publicly address Roma concerns in their policy platforms.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

A wide range of factors affect civil society's ability to influence changes in party behavior. This includes: opportunities for citizens to access information and organize without fear of retribution, institutional arrangements that shape strategic entry points for influencing policy processes, and the capacities or interests of different civil society groups and political parties. In some countries, CSOs – individually or as a group – may be well positioned to push for changes in party behavior. In others, they may be too weak or too constrained to take on that role. As noted elsewhere in this document, the types of interventions required to influence political leaders and redefine social contracts involve citizen organizing that is coordinated, sustained, collective, and iterative, that is – relatively advanced political organizing skills. In addition, parties operating in the same context make different calculations about the costs and benefits of responding to civic pressure.

Further, while the overall focus of a democracy support program might be to promote more policy-focused parties, local partner CSOs are more likely to mobilize around a specific issue or set of policy issues that they care about. Good governance CSOs may take up changes in party behavior as their explicit mission, but, increasingly, the civic groups with which NDI works are engaged in these types of activities because they believe political party engagement will yield improvements for priorities like healthcare, education, or unemployment. As a result, there may be times when CSOs do not want to take an explicitly political stance on an issue or may want to target their campaigning at a particular party.

Across the four case studies, there were significant differences in the operating context, the capacities of the civic groups, the types of civic organizing campaigns, and the duration of the campaign. Nevertheless, the four unique experiences highlight a number of issues that can help improve future programming across a range of operating contexts.

## 1. Consider how a range of factors might create opportunities or risks for the successful use of civic organizing to promote more policy-focused parties.

Figure 4 outlines a number of issues that programs should consider in identifying potential opportunities, risks and entry points for using this approach in their country context. The figure groups issues to consider in the following categories:

- Political space (including the security environment, inclusion issues, opportunities for civic and political organizing);
- Institutional and structural factors (for instance, electoral systems and other features of the political system, the reach/authority/legitimacy of the state, and the structure of the economy); and
- Party and civil society capacities and interests (such as political parties' and civil society's perceptions of each other and their respective capacities to formulate and advance their policy priorities).

For each category, the figure outlines questions to consider as well as the potential implications for the effectiveness of civic organizing as a means of promoting more policy-focused parties.



## FIGURE 4: ISSUES TO CONSIDER<sup>47</sup>

FIGURE 4.1: POLITICAL SPACE

ISSUES TO CONSIDER	IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent does the security environment facilitate or restrict public political activity and access to the media?</li> <li>• To what extent does the political environment facilitate or restrict citizens' ability to freely assemble, associate, collectively organize, and voice their priorities?</li> <li>• How competitive are elections and to what extent are they perceived as being a meaningful expression of the voters' will?</li> <li>• To what extent are citizens knowledgeable about the roles and responsibilities of different governance institutions, elected officials, and their roles in holding these institutions/individuals to account? Are citizens able to access credible information about politics and policy?</li> <li>• What broad themes characterize the context (e.g., conflict/violent extremism, ethnic/religious diversity, economic prosperity/crisis/inequality)? How have these conditions come to exist, and by whom were they created/influenced? How do these conditions affect parties and CSOs?</li> <li>• To what extent are some social groups marginalized (formally or informally) on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, language, region, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc.?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The potential (real or perceived) security, reputational, or financial risks to CSOs/citizens of appearing to criticize the government or particular parties.</li> <li>• Civil society's tolerance for, and ability to withstand, any potential backlash for activities/statements that could be perceived as critical of the government.</li> <li>• Citizens'/CSOs' ability to access, analyze, and disseminate information about public policies and services.</li> <li>• Citizens' readiness/ability to act on information and to do so in a coordinated manner that exerts pressure on parties.</li> <li>• Capacity of groups that represent the interests of marginalized groups. Extent to which these groups are networked with/have allies in other communities.</li> <li>• Parties' perceptions of the extent to which elections are decided fairly and based on competing policy proposals.</li> <li>• Parties' ability to disseminate policy messages through various media platforms and engage in constructive dialogue over policy options.</li> <li>• Parties' interest in developing policies in ways that are inclusive of, or responsive to, the priorities of women and other marginalized groups.</li> <li>• How the relative competitiveness of elections incentivizes/disincentivizes parties to be responsive to citizens/CSOs in order to win elections.</li> </ul>

<sup>47</sup> Adapted from NDI's Context Analysis Tool: NDI (2017). Context Analysis Tool. Washington, DC. [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_ContextAnalysisTool\\_proof\\_f.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_ContextAnalysisTool_proof_f.pdf)

**FIGURE 4.2: INSTITUTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL FACTORS**

ISSUES TO CONSIDER	IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach, authority, and legitimacy of the state.</li> <li>• Structure of the economy and sources of state revenue.</li> <li>• What formal institutional and structural conditions define the political system?</li> <li>• Where, when, how, by whom, and why are decisions made about legislation, policy, and other governance issues?</li> <li>• In what ways does the state currently interact with citizens and vice versa?</li> <li>• To what extent do parties in government use state resources for patronage?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSO and citizen perceptions of political party engagement (versus engagement of other stakeholders or sources of power) as a reasonable/effective strategy for getting their concerns/priorities addressed.</li> <li>• The most strategic entry points for different groups to place meaningful pressure on political parties/government.</li> <li>• Parties’ perceptions of the extent to which they have a role in shaping public policies.</li> <li>• Parties’ perceptions of party platform/policy proposals as significant in shaping voters’ choices and determining their success as parties.</li> <li>• Parties’ willingness to formulate policies on a range of issues.</li> <li>• Parties’ ability to deliver on these policies if in government.</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 4.3: POLITICAL PARTY CAPACITIES AND INTERESTS**

ISSUES TO CONSIDER	IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where and how have parties made a difference politically, either locally or nationally?</li> <li>• How are various parties placed in terms of access to influence people and relationships with significant CSOs, trade unions, the business community, the military, etc.?</li> <li>• To what extent do parties see it as their role to engage citizens or civil society as part of the policy process? To what extent do they find it helpful/beneficial to do so?</li> <li>• Are there prior instances of CSOs successfully influencing party platforms and holding them to account?</li> <li>• What is the extent of party capacity (i.e., individuals with the relevant skills and technical expertise, or the internal systems to aggregate interests and develop policies) for such tasks as development of platforms, legislation, strategy, and policy?</li> <li>• How do policy/platform-making processes incorporate public or constituent input/feedback, if at all?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSO and public perceptions of whether political party engagement is a reasonable/effective strategy for getting their concerns/priorities addressed.</li> <li>• CSOs’ willingness to engage particular parties or parties as a whole on policy issues.</li> <li>• Parties’ ability/willingness to respond to policy demands from CSOs and the broader public.</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 4.4: CSO CAPACITIES AND INTERESTS**

ISSUES TO CONSIDER	IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent do CSOs have the capacity to educate/mobilize citizens and organize around priority issues?</li> <li>• Are CSOs considered credible representatives of citizen concerns?</li> <li>• What types of civic associations, coalitions, or networks exist, either formally or informally? What is the history of their collaboration?</li> <li>• What are the current and historical relationships between CSOs and parties? What type of roles have CSOs played in party platform development, citizen mobilization, debates, etc.?</li> <li>• Are there diverse CSOs with the capacity to play different roles (e.g., policy research, infomediaries, advocacy, etc.)?</li> <li>• To what extent is there a breadth of /the potential for strategic alliances that allow CSOs to: access information, collaborate with complementary groups, and withstand/forfend possible backlash?</li> <li>• Where and how have CSOs had success in influencing service delivery or policy change, either locally or nationally?</li> <li>• What are the barriers impacting the organizing of CSOs led by women, young people, ethnic and religious minority groups, people with disabilities, LGBTI communities, and other historically marginalized groups?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parties’ perceptions of different CSOs as legitimate representatives of citizens’ interests or educators.</li> <li>• Parties’ perceptions of CSOs as credible experts on policy issues.</li> <li>• Parties’ perceptions of CSOs and their interventions as influential in shaping public perceptions, including citizens’ voting choices.</li> <li>• Parties’ perceptions of CSOs that represent historically marginalized groups as credible, influential political actors</li> <li>• The existence of CSOs with the capacity, interest and influence to create coordinated and sustained pressure for changes in political party behavior.</li> </ul>

2. Based on analysis of the different factors that could create risks or opportunities for the use of this approach, donors and implementers should set realistic expectations for progress towards more policy-focused politics.

This includes developing or supporting risk management strategies that recognize the potential for unintended consequences and resistance to change.<sup>48</sup> In addition, donors and implementers should regularly monitor social, political, and economic developments and adjust program strategies and expectations where necessary.

For instance, events that foreshadow a narrowing of political space will likely require CSOs to adjust their activities. Risk management and “Do No Harm” considerations are particularly critical for marginalized populations, especially women, ethnic and religious minorities, and LGBTI communities, who can face disproportionate backlash for exercising their political voice. Implementers should work with local partners to carefully examine potential threats to their safety and that of other participants, and design interventions accordingly. Alternatively, a change in the leadership of a particular political party or changes in its support may make it more open to engaging civil society and to improving policy-focused outreach than in the past. Socio-economic crises can also create openings for more policy-focused engagement between political parties and the people they are supposed to represent.<sup>49</sup>

Programs should more clearly articulate their anticipated pathways to change along with incremental measures of progress. In general, it is not realistic to expect that political parties and/or voters will transition from personalistic, clientelistic, or other forms of mobilizing support to policy-focused politicking over one election cycle. For instance, in communities that have little interaction with government officials and institutions, basic civic and voter education are essential and could be important precursors to demanding change or altering voter behavior. It may be helpful to distinguish between initial changes (or innovations) in party policy practices and progress towards making those innovations more widespread and then normalized. Over time, additional innovations may occur in response to changing conditions. Expectations should also be reviewed regularly based on changes in the operating context that negatively or positively affect prospects for change. While outcomes will vary based on the operating context and the program strategy, Figure 5 outlines some illustrative results for the emergence of more policy-focused political parties in response to civic organizing.

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<sup>48</sup> In response to anti-vote buying campaigns and/or non-partisan election monitoring in particular areas, parties/candidates might reduce the use of such strategies in project intervention areas. For instance, research shows that efforts to raise awareness about corruption contributed to lower turnout in Mexico and in India, where voters seemed to favor/value politicians with criminal backgrounds focusing them on areas that are not included in program plans.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, the Justice and Development Party, which emerged during Turkey’s financial crisis in 2001, embraced economic liberalization, Brazil’s Workers’ Party emerged from unions when reforms threatened social security and other benefits, and South Korean parties’ response to a financial crisis also spurred a greater focus on public policies. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2014). Politics Meets Policies: The Emergence of Programmatic Parties. Sweden, pp 51, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/politics-meets-policies-emergence-programmatic-political-parties> In the United States, the assassination of a president helped trigger the adoption of the Pendleton Act of 1882. This legislation began the country’s move from a civil service based on merit rather than one based on political patronage. Fukuyama, Francis (2013). Democracy and the Quality of the State. *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 pp. 5-16, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/democracy-and-the-quality-of-the-state/>

**FIGURE 5: ILLUSTRATIVE SHORT, MEDIUM, AND LONG-TERM RESULTS**

<p align="center"><b>SHORT-TERM</b></p> <p align="center">(e.g., one political cycle)</p> <p align="center"></p>	<p align="center"><b>MEDIUM-TERM</b></p> <p align="center">(e.g., a few political cycles)</p> <p align="center"></p>	<p align="center"><b>LONG-TERM</b></p> <p align="center">(e.g., multiple political cycles)</p> <p align="center"></p>
<p>Progress toward more policy-focused parties may not be linear. Even when implementers use adaptive management techniques, initial progress may accelerate, stall, or reverse in response to various developments outside the control of democracy support programs.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civic organizing mobilizes sufficient pressure to place new/enhanced demands on political parties.</li> <li>• Civic organizing sparks a positive response/reaction from political parties.</li> </ul> <p align="center"></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parties adopt new policy practice(s) in response to civic pressure.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties participate in candidate debates.</li> <li>• Political parties/candidates change behavior in response to anti-vote buying campaigns.</li> <li>• Political parties endorse/embrace CSO policy proposals.</li> <li>• Political parties include new groups in their policy processes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased policy-based engagement between CSO/ citizens and political parties beyond the immediate electoral context.</li> <li>• Civic organizing is sustained and/or adapted to maintain pressure on parties.</li> <li>• Continued civic organizing helps to sustain/expand changes in party practices.</li> </ul> <p align="center"></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New party policy practices are repeated or expanded to new areas/actors.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All major parties participate in candidate debates.</li> <li>• Further reductions in vote buying practices.</li> <li>• Political parties continue to include/expand CSOs and/or marginalized groups in their policy processes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens/CSOs and parties expectations of each other are redefined.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens/CSOs expect parties to offer public policy proposals.</li> <li>• Voters choose between parties based on their policy proposals and/or policy performance.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p align="center"></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New party policy practices become normalized.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties regularly participate in informative candidate debates.</li> <li>• Political parties believe that their public policy proposals are a significant factor in attracting votes.</li> <li>• Political parties regularly include marginalized groups and other citizens in their policy processes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



**3. Plan for medium to long-term campaigns that incorporate a variety of interventions, and use multiple entry points, and can be sustained over time.**

This includes identifying strategies for sustaining support to civil society and political parties throughout the political cycle, not solely during elections. As part of these efforts, donors should consider:

- How to ensure adequate time in the run-up to the polls and for sustained follow-up in the post-election period when using elections as an entry point;
- Ways to build in a sustainability focus from the conception phase. This may include combining organizational capacity building for CSOs – fundraising and financial management, for instance – with technical assistance; and
- Interventions and partnerships – with universities, the media, and appropriate government agencies – that can be replicated and sustained in a given country context.

Figure 6 outlines a series of questions that can be used to identify different entry points in a given program context.

While the case studies confirmed that different interventions can help move voters and parties towards more policy-focused politics, they also point to the need for multifaceted interventions. These conclusions are consistent with separate studies highlighting examples of how CSOs have: framed policy issues, proposed solutions, found evidence to support their position, built alliances with multiple stakeholders, established relationships with decision-makers, and compelled a response from their political leaders.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the social accountability community is increasingly focusing on the need for multi-stakeholder coalitions that are capable of engaging in sustained collective action well beyond a particular electoral cycle.<sup>51</sup>

For instance, even in countries where political parties do not routinely engage in extensive, consultative policy development processes, developing community platforms early in the process would allow civic groups more time to organize sustained campaigns around their policy priorities and to identify potential allies and entry points within different parties. In the post-election environment, groups can and should maintain pressure on political parties and elected officials to deliver on promises they made during the campaign or to make new commitments to address the contents of community platforms.

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<sup>50</sup> NDI. (2017) Putting Elections to Work for Accountability. <https://puttingelectionstowork.ndi.org/>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

## FIGURE 6: DETERMINING PROGRAM ENTRY POINTS

- To what extent are political parties interested in, and have opportunities to, debate and influence public policy? Consider:
  - What incentive structures positively and negatively influence parties' interest in policy development (e.g., perceptions of ethnicity, patronage, or religion as more effective ways of mobilizing support or leader-centric, patriarchal party structures that do not promote participation)?
  - To what extent does the political environment support vibrant multi-party policy debate?
- What political processes or events are taking place or planned during the program duration (e.g., national or local elections, regulatory reforms, development planning)?
- What issues are dominating the political agenda (e.g., EU accession, extractive industry oversight, crises in particular sectors), and to what extent do these provide opportunities for engaging CSOs and parties in policy-focused efforts?
- Who are the potential champions for improved policy development within the parties, and where are they located (e.g., in selected parties, in elected office, at the grassroots level, at the national level, among traditionally marginalized groups)?
- What types of resistance might new behaviors face, and from whom within different parties and among program stakeholders? What strategies could be used to manage these risks?
- To what extent are citizens, civic groups, and the media explicitly trying to influence political party policy processes (in terms of process or content), and which of these groups could be strategic partners on the "demand side"? Consider:
  - Which organizations or groups of citizens have a specific set of issues they have been working on? Or, is there a well-defined constituency (e.g., women, youth, a specific community)?
  - What issues do citizens care most about (e.g., public health, water and sanitation, education)?
  - Are there existing mechanisms for citizen engagement with candidates and/or political parties (e.g., debates, town hall meetings, rallies)?
- How are different marginalized groups engaging in political processes, and what types of strategies might be needed to ensure their inclusion in programming and in political processes more broadly? Consider:
  - Differences within potential target marginalized groups (e.g., intersecting identities);
  - The extent to which messaging content and delivery may need to be adapted for different potential marginalized groups due to historic exclusion (e.g., language, lack of access to education);
  - The potential for alliances between marginalized groups and other CSOs; and
  - Potential for disproportionate safety and security risks for certain marginalized groups when conducting high-profile organizing activities.
- What resources do parties have available that could be used to strengthen policy development? Consider the extent to which parties have:
  - Functioning, active branches and wings;
  - An active and documented membership;
  - Representatives serving in legislatures (national or subnational) or individuals in the executive; and
  - Formal and informal relationships with think tanks, civil society, and other groups who could assist with policy development.

Implementers and CSOs should:

- Ensure that messaging content and delivery methods are designed to promote meaningful participation by diverse citizens, especially those from marginalized communities;
- Link monitoring and information-sharing efforts with initiatives that involve strategic, citizen-led collective action that helps citizens exert pressure on their leaders;
- Explore ways to facilitate alliances and constructive engagement between different types of CSOs; and
- Use the media to expand the reach of civic education and advocacy campaigns and explore the potential for media coverage as an incentive for political parties to engage in more policy-focused communications.

Discrimination, including limited access to education and information, means that traditionally marginalized populations often lack basic knowledge about their rights and responsibilities as citizens, or opportunities to engage directly in political processes. Messaging content and delivery methods may need to be tailored to ensure that these groups are able to access, and can act upon, new information.

Political process monitoring and social accountability initiatives help create transparency and an evidence base around different sets of issues. But monitoring alone rarely results in real change, unless monitoring results are taken up by an advocacy campaign or the results are heavily publicized in a way that puts pressure on the political parties and the government.<sup>52</sup> A growing body of evidence suggests that producing data alone is insufficient to change behavior. Instead, efforts to share information with political leaders, which are then linked to strategic, citizen-led collective action, are much more likely to be successful in influencing decision makers. In addition, a forthcoming study has concluded that the type of information that is provided to voters matters. More specifically, information that explains what different officials/agencies are responsible for (including the types of outputs/services they are supposed to be delivering) is important in order to provide citizens the information they need to engage in accountability efforts.<sup>53</sup>

Given the different capacities that are required to influence policy processes, coalition building among CSOs will likely be important. It is unrealistic to expect a single CSO to play all the roles required in pushing political parties to become more policy-focused. For instance, a CSO that has strong skills in policy research may need to partner with a different group that is stronger on advocacy. In Slovakia, a combination of CSO approaches, including not only advocacy but also policy research, awareness raising, and monitoring efforts was critical to success. The most successful Roma advocacy efforts incorporated mainstream CSO allies who had more experience, resources, connections, and credibility with the public.

Traditional and social media can play powerful roles in extending the reach of civic and voter education and in amplifying civic organizing efforts, thereby helping to increase pressure on political parties and government. The opportunity to use media to communicate their policy proposals and to respond to citizen concerns can be a powerful incentive for political parties, especially in environments where politicians cannot readily access these channels.

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<sup>52</sup> This is supported by a recent multi-country Metaketa study on information and political accountability which concluded that information needs to be complemented by other interventions. Cheney, Catherine (2017). What works? A new way to bring more evidence to development. Devex. <https://www.devex.com/news/what-works-a-new-way-to-bring-more-evidence-to-development-90653>; Fox, Jonathan (2015). Social Accountability: What does the Evidence Really Say? World Development Vol. 72: pp. 346-361. <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0305750X15000704?token=9F310213C6EE88D382499C77919662C3EE32F90C8E183E59E9A237A8426902B4DEA84345C5BF44D0DD26A1313D8BF4A3>

<sup>53</sup> Forthcoming research from Lila Tsai, Harvard Govlab and Varja Lipovsek, Twaweza.

4. For programs targeting marginalized groups, donors, implementers, and CSOs should consider the ways in which entrenched social norms may influence power relations and party responsiveness to demands from these groups. They should also carefully examine the appropriateness of opportunities to unite identity groups around shared issues and consider strategies that may be needed to build trust with the relevant community(ies).

As the Liberia and Slovakia experiences show, traditional gender and cultural norms can significantly influence the power relations between CSOs and parties, parties' willingness to be responsive to CSOs, and the time and strategy required for meaningful change to result. Medium to long-term strategies for challenging negative stereotypes and helping these groups build greater political power may be necessary.

Efforts to engage those with a shared identity marker around joint efforts need to carefully weigh the extent to which particular identities share common experiences, are willing to be identified primarily by one particular identity marker for the purpose of organizing, and can meaningfully coalesce around shared issues and use the same language to frame their priorities. Assessments conducted early during program design can be helpful in ensuring that interventions are appropriate for the context and the targeted communities. They can help improve understanding of not only the targeted communities, but also their history, culture, barriers, need priorities, and differences. Such assessments can also be helpful in identifying potential allies and champions within different government institutions, political parties, and other civil society groups.<sup>54</sup> They can also identify trust issues that may impede programming. In Slovakia, where Roma communities' distrust of outsiders could have impeded the ability to build partnerships, NDI hired staff with relevant language skills, knowledge of Roma culture, and experience with Roma communities. This was critical to building trust with and among Roma participants.

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<sup>54</sup> CEPPS. Designing and Implementing Effective Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Democracy and Governance Programming. (2017) Washington, DC. pp 14. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bx0f3Od-pmQiYnJtOHRPSEpSdjA/view?usp=sharing>

# APPENDIX 1: LINES OF INQUIRY

## LINES OF INQUIRY

The following lines of inquiry guided case study research.

### Individual Case Studies

#### General Context

- To what extent are civic groups able to organize and express themselves without fear of reprisals?
- How competitive are elections?
- How institutionalized is the party system? What are the primary means by which parties/candidates mobilize voters (e.g., policy issues/provision of public goods, ethnicity, vote buying, etc.?)
- What is the history of engagement between political parties and civic groups?
- How did the context change over the course of the program? And how did contextual factors (and changes in these factors over time) affect program interventions and outcomes?
- How are public policies developed and implemented? (Consider which groups are involved and at what stage, as well as power relations based on gender, economic status, urban versus rural, and other identifiers)

#### Party Outcomes

- Did program outcomes vary by party and if so how/why?
- Where within parties did the program get the most traction (e.g., at the grassroots level or at the leadership level)? To what extent was the program designed to “scale up” improvements/innovations within parties? Or did this happen organically? What were some of the successes/challenges/lessons learned?
- What do parties see as the most significant outcomes and the benefits/challenges of engaging CSOs as a result of the program?

#### Inclusion Strategies and Outcomes

- What strategies did programs use to promote gender inclusion?
- What strategies did programs use to ensure the inclusion of marginalized groups (e.g., youth, ethnic minorities)?
- What were the outcomes and lessons learned from these strategies?

### **CSO Characteristics, Strategies and Outcomes**

- What types of CSOs did the program engage?
- Which CSOs/strategies had the most success and why? (e.g., group characteristics/capacities, types of strategies, and spaces used [claimed or invited spaces<sup>55</sup>])
- What do CSOs see as the most significant outcomes and the benefits/challenges of engaging parties (e.g., policy outcomes, relationship building, etc.)?

### **Managing CSO-Party Dynamics**

- How did program staff balance their “mediation”/“convening” role in working with the demand (CSO) and “supply” (parties) sides?

### **Lines of Inquiry for Cross-Country Analysis**

- What are the strengths and weaknesses, lessons learned, best practices, dos and don'ts of this approach? Where relevant, consider differences based on:
  - The context;
  - The type of intervention;
  - The characteristics of the civic group;
  - Inclusion of /impact on women; and
  - Inclusion of /impact on marginalized groups.

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<sup>55</sup> Claimed space is when “participation is based on citizen terms and objectives;” invited space is when “citizens are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities, be they government, supranational agencies, or non-governmental organizations.” NDI. Political-Process Monitoring: Considering Outcomes and How They Can be Measured. (2012). Washington, DC. pp 5; 21. <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/PPM-Considering-Outcomes.pdf>



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/FURTHER READING

### POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICAL REFORM AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

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## INCLUSION

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