

POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE AMERICAS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Final Conclusions from the Meeting of Marbella, Marbella, Chile, August 25 and 26, 1995

Under the auspices of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the Ministry of the Presidency of Chile, leaders from more than a dozen Latin American countries met in Marbella, Chile August 24 to 26 for a conference entitled "Political Parties in the Americas: Challenges and Strategies."

The meeting was convened in response to recommendations from political party leaders through out the Western Hemisphere who expressed interest in discussing the new realities confronting political parties.

Prior to the conference, NDI, and Romer y Asociados, a public opinion and communications firm, conducted a series of focus groups on public attitudes toward political parties in six Latin American countries.

In general, political leaders agreed that the political system faces new realities that are affecting political parties. Among other trends, the participants noted the:

- globalization of political and economic systems;
- end of the cold war;
- information and communications revolution;
- appearance of new social actors, such as civic organizations; and the media which has grown to become part of the political dynamic and in some cases a political intermediary.

There was a general consensus that these trends are a universal phenomenon, not exclusive to the nations of the Western Hemisphere.

Following are ten general conclusions from the meeting. These conclusions were outlined by participants as general objectives for political parties.

1. Greater openness and democracy within political parties, including: 1) a system for selecting candidates that facilitates citizen participation; and 2) greater participation of women, youths and minorities.
2. Modification of electoral systems in countries where it is necessary to achieve broader representation in the leadership ranks. These electoral changes must be made with the realities of each country in mind.
3. Political parties must develop a concrete ideology that will help citizens to identify with the party.
4. Political parties must develop closer relations with citizens. It was mentioned that the training of community leaders would serve as one means of achieving a more direct relationship with the public.

5. The political process, especially election campaigns, should serve as a mechanism to educate the public and to communicate the ideas and proposals of the political parties. At the same time, political parties should also educate the citizens about the irreplaceable role that political parties play in a democracy.
6. Rekindle the interest of young people in political participation.
7. Stimulate a dialogue between political parties to improve governance.
8. Political parties must search for ways to reinvigorate their leadership.
9. Transparency, controls and limits on financing of political parties and campaigns are important issues.
10. Beyond addressing these issues, it is fundamental that parties develop moral and ethical standards to help restore the dignity of the political process.

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