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**Civil Society Groups and Parties:
Supporting Constructive Relationships**

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The paper does not necessarily represent the views of any but the author, and all errors are my own.

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND PARTIES: SUPPORTING CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many of us working in democracy assistance tend to consider civil society groups and political parties, and support for them, separately. This situation is not an unexpected result of bureaucratic structures and histories. But reality remains much more complex, and the nature of existing relationships in the countries we work in and the effects of democracy assistance on those relationships matter for our larger democracy and governance (DG) goals. They therefore deserve explicit examination. This paper deals with two broad sets of questions. First, what do we think we should be aiming for at the systemic level, in terms of the relationship between civil society and parties? Second, in a given setting, what kinds of relationships, at the micro level (among individual organizations), can contribute to democratization?

The paper begins by summarizing liberal democratic theory's view of the relationship between civil society groups and parties. A critical distinction commonly made between civil society and parties in liberal theory is that parties seek to control state power while civil society groups do not. Civil society groups and parties therefore have relatively distinct and complementary roles. But even in theory, there are difficulties in making clean distinctions. A quick look at the roles frequently attributed to civil society groups and parties reveals great overlap. Turning to reality, it is even more difficult to specify the distinctions between civil society groups and parties. We can see such functions as representation, mobilization, even putting up candidates, increasingly performed by civil society groups in some countries. In a few, the core distinction of civil society groups not seeking state power is even eroding. Parties, meanwhile, are struggling to fulfill these roles in many countries as changes in socio-economic structures erode traditional bases of party membership and throw up new issue and identity groups. How should donors understand and respond to these changes in ways that advance democracy?

The range of relationships that are possible between individual parties and individual civil society groups varies greatly within countries and across them, along at least three dimensions – the type of activity connecting a party and a group, the strength of the connection, and the direction of influence. Each dimension has implications for the design of DG programs. The kinds of activities connecting civil society groups to parties include: lobbying and advocacy on specific or systemic issues, provision of information and analysis, candidate forums, training of elected officials or candidates, endorsement, provision of money and materials, voter mobilization, constituent services, and monitoring. A party may request support and, in exchange, represent CSO issues in public and decision-making arenas, pursue CSOs' preferred policies, and provide money and other material support. With regard to the closeness of relationships, at least four types of relationships exist from the point of view of civil society. Civil society groups may avoid contact with parties; distribute support across parties; ally with one party; or seek to form a party. Conversely, parties may have distant relations with civil society groups; support from a variety of groups on a short-term basis; or long-term, more exclusive relations with one or more civil society groups. Finally, the direction of influence may flow from the party to the civil society group or vice versa.

The next step is to consider what mix of relationships is desirable at the macro (or political system) level, and which relationships we should foster at the micro (or organization-to-organization) level. At the macro level, the ideal political system is one in which both sectors are vibrant and *generally* autonomous of each other, but also entails a *mix* of kinds of relationships between civil society groups and parties. At the micro level, there are a number of activities that we can support. USAID- and other US donor-supported activities directed at CSOs that directly affect civil society-party relationships include: monitoring of parties, by observing elections, primaries, or behavior in office; training of party politicians; candidate forums; and advocacy of legal and policy reforms affecting parties. In programs directed at parties, the link tends to be in the form of encouraging parties to reach out to CSOs to

strengthen parties' ties to constituents, or occasionally in assisting groups in civil society to become parties. The question then becomes, when and where are such activities most effective?

Where parties are too powerful relative to civil society, as in one-party states or countries where the dominant parties have politicized and effectively "divvied up" civil society amongst themselves, the possible tasks of a DG program are to preserve or expand the autonomy of civil society, and to open up the party system, to enable more freedom of choice in matters of political participation, and more accountability on the part of power holders. Sound programs would include an emphasis on non-partisan monitoring of parties and advocacy of political issues. In particular, supporting civil society groups to address issues *not* covered by parties may help to expand political space. Alternatively or in addition, civil society groups might be encouraged to engage in multi-party activities. Support might also be given to nascent parties, including those forming from civil society groups.

Where parties generally are weak, choosing the best DG strategy and set of tactics is much more difficult. In such contexts DG programmers need to think carefully about how to work with civil society (as well as parties) to avoid unintended further weakening. At the macro level, we face a potential imbalance that may be exacerbated by a donor emphasis on civil society. At the micro level, we need to ensure that the changes advocated by civil society groups we support are constructive with regard to the party system, or at least do not have unintended negative effects. The paper suggests: working with civil society groups to help them understand the implications of individual/politician- vs. party-centered support; encouraging advocacy that improves the party system rather than simply goes around it to the executive; and encouraging interested civil society groups to look beyond election-centered activities, like electoral law advocacy and election monitoring, to those that can foster party reform between elections, like advocacy of party laws and monitoring party primaries and voting records.

When civil society groups do interact with party politicians, DG programmers may still encounter thorny issues. One concerns the diffusion of support by civil society groups across parties and the alternative, partisanship. Diffusion happens in weak party systems when civil society groups provide support to candidates without regard for their party affiliation. While this often makes instrumental sense for the CSO, it is also likely to perpetuate weak party systems. Within the universe of USAID-supported activities, candidate training provided by NGOs is often a case of the distribution of support. The paper argues that individualizing support for elected politicians continues the vicious cycle of citizen disregard for parties as institutions. It follows that civil society groups that provide training and other support to politicians, or aspiring politicians, should consider providing explicitly multi-party help, that is, tying help to parties rather than to individuals.

The paper also suggests encouraging closer, more exclusive relationships on the part of at least some civil society groups with particular parties. Clearly, certain civil society groups should be non-partisan, and some section of civil society in every country should be autonomous of partisan politics. But other groups that advocate interests and even broad democratic reforms might "make a party their project" rather than diffusing their support. A long-lasting, relatively exclusive relationship between a civil society group and a party represents committed, concentrated support that may, in certain circumstances, be more likely to help reform one party than diffused support is to reform any party. One key feature of a constructive relationship along these lines, however, is its conditional nature – one side should not be wholly dependent upon the other, and unable to leave the relationship. Also, while the groups supported might be partisan, USAID support need not be – it should be *multi*-partisan or *multi*-party. Finally, in a few countries, among a few civil society groups, reformers have begun to consider establishing new parties. This is a trend that we should consider supporting.

How can DG programmers figure out, systematically and country-specifically, how to support the development of constructive relationships between civil society groups and parties? The paper recommends using the DG strategic assessment framework to help understand and make decisions about the relationships between civil society and parties in a given setting. The assessment framework moves the analyst from the “big picture” of key problems in democratization, through the dynamics of politics in a country and the institutional setting, to the donor’s constraints and resources, in order to determine priorities and interventions. The paper suggests ways to adapt the framework to enable it to deal better with weak party systems, and to illuminate relationships between civil society groups and parties. Relationships between civil society groups and parties, and the variation in them, are the product of a number of factors, including: the nature of the regime and its attitude towards parties and civil society groups; laws that condition parties and civil society groups and their relations (e.g. parliamentary or presidential, electoral laws, provisions for civil society participation in elected assemblies, decentralization, media regulations, and so on); ideas about parties and civil society groups, and their proper relations, and levels of public confidence; characteristics of the civil society and party organizations themselves (e.g. experience in relating to the other sector, need for support from the other sector); and the history of the incorporation of a country’s citizens into political processes and voluntary organization, and their socio-economic underpinnings. The paper then provides a list of possible DG program activities relating to civil society-party relationships.

For reasons of time and resources, this paper was not a full-blown research effort. It is an attempt to stimulate critical thinking on the topic rather than provide all the answers. A useful next step would be to collect, more systematically, examples of constructive relations between civil society and parties (across all the categories listed above), especially those supported by USAID. Above all, this paper recommends that those working on civil society and party programs begin to discuss with each other how their programs can and do affect each other.

I. INTRODUCTION: WHY IS THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP(S) BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND PARTIES WORTH CLARIFYING?

Many of us working in democracy assistance tend to consider civil society groups and parties, and support for them, separately. Some of this is the not unexpected result of bureaucratic structures and histories. U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide support to civil society groups and parties have had largely different origins; the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Center for Democracy and Governance (DG) itself divides its staff into separate teams along these lines, along with its funding mechanisms.¹ Moreover, much recent scholarship treats civil society and political parties as distinct phenomena.

Reality is much more complex than this, of course. On the one hand, a wide range of relationships, from hostility and distance to almost complete overlap, exist between civil society groups and parties. In many countries we even need seriously to consider where – and even whether – the line between civil society and parties exists. This is the case, most obviously, in those countries where laws invite civil society group representation in parliament, and civil society groups put up candidates for office (e.g. Thailand, the Philippines). It is also an issue in countries where society is both highly politicized and polarized, such that many civil society groups are extensions of major parties. Elsewhere, as in much of Europe and Latin America, parties are struggling to maintain their vote bases and traditional functions in the face of profound changes in socio-economic structures, and competition from civil society groups. These variations are part and parcel of the different paths countries take to democratization.

On the other hand, many DG programs do in fact combine party and civil society elements. Many programs to assist party development deliberately include civil society groups. Civil society strengthening programs also include elements that affect parties and party systems, although often not deliberately or explicitly.² What do we know about constructive relationships? Might some forms of support for one sector have unintended consequences for the other, consequences that mitigate the impact of USAID DG programs? This paper argues that the nature of existing relationships in the countries we work in and the effects of democracy assistance on those relationships matter for our larger DG goals. They therefore deserve explicit examination. Understanding what we want in terms of civil society-party relationships, and what actually exists, is necessary to design effective DG programs and avoid unintended effects.

The origins of this paper lie in the author's work in recent years in evaluating civil society programs and beginning dissertation research on party formation in the Philippines. I was struck, first, by the discourse of "replacement" – the apparently unquestioned belief in the minds of many civil society activists and observers that, where parties are failing, civil society groups can and will provide citizens with alternative means of political participation. It is worth asking – is such replacement what is actually happening? Is it possible? Is it desirable? I was also struck by the discourse of "difference" among civil society activists and proponents. In many countries, civil society groups stress their differences from political parties: they are newer, more participatory, more programmatic, less corrupt, and the like. But this difference is, surely, an empirical question, rather than something to be assumed. In particular, how true are such assertions where civil society groups engage in political, even party-like, activities?

¹ Michelle Schimpp of the G/DG political processes team estimates that only six out of the Center's current 33 funding mechanisms cross DG sectors. This paper was funded by a civil society cooperative agreement.

² In doing research for this paper, we had difficulty obtaining information on the links between civil society group and parties in DG programs, especially from groups that focus on civil society. We believe this is an indicator of the tendency among DG programmers not explicitly to consider the interactions between the two sectors, rather than of an absence of such links.

These questions have already occurred to many in the DG assistance community. Even more tellingly, they have already occurred to civil society activists. As civil society organizations have become politicized – organizing constituents and taking on policy positions similar to parties – some have realized that their ability directly to implement policy and change the nature of politics is limited. Some have turned their attention directly to issues in party reform, like *Queremos Elegir* in Venezuela whose slogan had been “politics is too important to be left to parties.” A few have formed parties. Mexico Posible (formerly *Por La Equidad y La Ecología*) emerged from a coalition of civil leaders active in election observation and women’s rights in Mexico. Other examples include *Primero Justicia* in Venezuela and AKBAYAN! in the Philippines. The time seems ripe, therefore, to clarify the issues surrounding relationships between civil society and parties. This paper attempts to lay out these issues as systematically as possible to enable further discussion and coordination among DG programmers in both sectors. Since my experience in DG assistance has been primarily with civil society programs, and the sponsor of effort is the DG Office’s Civil Society Team, the paper tends to approach the issues from the angle of civil society. In my own defense, however, I would argue that the effects of civil society assistance programs *per se* on parties, not least their unanticipated effects, are less well examined than the effects of involving civil society groups in party assistance programs.

The paper deals with two broad sets of questions. First, what do we think we should be aiming for at the systemic level, in terms of the relationship between civil society and parties? It seems premature to dismiss parties as dysfunctional in favor of civil society groups. At least in theory, parties are able to represent, aggregate and negotiate interests in ways that civil society groups by definition cannot. Drawing on historical scholarship and much of democratic theory, this paper argues that *both* vibrant civil society and effective parties are necessary for sound democracy. But what do complementary roles at the macro level look like in different political-economic settings? Second, in a given setting, what kinds of relationships at the micro level, among individual organizations, can contribute to democratization? In particular, how might civil society groups help rejuvenate decaying party systems? Are there any circumstances in which partisanship is constructive? In addition, what factors influence civil society-party relationships, and which of these can we, as democracy programmers, influence? With regard to both sets of questions, the paper devotes more attention to weak party systems than to settings in which parties are relatively powerful,³ as the former are less well examined and pose more complex programming challenges than the latter.

The paper begins in Section II with a summary of liberal democratic theory with regard to the roles of parties and civil society groups, as this is what most of us involved in democracy promotion base our programming assumptions on. It points to some of the ambiguities in theory, and moves on to the complexity of real world civil society-party relationships. The paper considers both the macro level – civil society-party relationships in general, in and across countries – and the micro level – the level of organizations and particular relationships. The paper sets out a typology of these micro relationships. Section III addresses programming issues, beginning again at the macro level with a discussion of what we are aiming for, ideally. It then moves to more detailed recommendations with regard to programming, and a discussion of how to assess programming needs. The paper includes examples of donor-supported activities, and was informed by an informal survey of organizations whose programs may affect civil society-party relationships.⁴ In short, this paper provides a brief introduction to the real-world complexity of civil society-party relationships, raises some issues DG programmers may wish to consider in

³ The adjectives “strong” and “weak” are probably more confusing than helpful when applied to individual parties, and I try to avoid using the terms in this paper. However, it is generally accepted that weak party *systems* are characterized by endemic party switching, personalism, unpredictability and/or an absence of choice with regard to policy stances, and electoral volatility.

⁴ Unfortunately, of the sixteen organizations contacted, only six were able to provide examples.

structuring their support, and makes a plea for improved communication between those working in each area.

II. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS AND PARTIES IN THEORY AND REALITY

A. Relationships between civil society groups and parties in theory

One definition of civil society that would likely be broadly accepted among the aid community is the following: an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values (this version is from White 1994:379).⁵ Definitions of “party” have perhaps consumed as much paper as those of civil society but one that would probably have wide acceptance is: an organization that pursues the goal of placing its avowed representatives in government positions (this version is from Janda 1993:166). A critical distinction commonly made between civil society and parties is that parties seek to control state power while civil society groups do not. Thus, for example, Diamond explains: “What distinguishes [civil society] groups from other collective actors in society is that civil society organizations are concerned with and act in the public realm, relate to the state (without seeking to win control over it)... By contrast, the purpose of groups in political society – especially political parties...is to win and exercise state power” (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995:27).

If one accepts these definitions and the central distinction,⁶ it is a short step to assuming civil society groups and parties have relatively distinct roles. In the liberal tradition,⁷ parties aggregate – or represent a broad array of – interests, and negotiate those interests in ways that translate into state policies. Civil society groups meanwhile represent interests in a more specialized or narrow form. They can demand and critique policies, but they cannot implement them. Moreover, they can maintain a critical distance from the state that parties cannot; civil society groups can therefore hold parties and the state accountable, and fend off power holders from the citizenry. Thus, in its ideal form, we have a vision of a complementary relationship between the two sectors. At the micro level, the level of individual organizations, we might expect to see parties soliciting the support of some civil society groups and in turn their members. Civil society groups might temporarily endorse certain parties, monitor party behaviors, or simply abstain from political activity.

But there are difficulties in making clean distinctions, even in liberal theory. Political science literature on parties in particular contains fairly extensive attempts at distinguishing parties and civil society organizations, but most such efforts end in an acceptance of a certain level of ambiguity. For example, Ware admits that “[t]he problem is that of identifying precisely the boundaries between parties and other kinds of social and political institutions... The boundary between [parties and pressure groups] is far from easy to draw” (1997:2,4).

⁵ Civil society, organizationally, includes groups that range from social movements to small membership organizations to professional NGOs, from village associations to farmer federations to business interest groups. The emphasis here will be on legally organized entities since they are what AID tends to work with, but it is important to note that I am using a broad definition so as to capture as many relationships with parties as possible. I also will not deal directly with media relationships to parties although this sub-topic is certainly worth more examination.

⁶ This paper attempts to identify and work from a common vocabulary among DG programmers, but it is worth noting that there is at least one major school of thought that would not accept the preceding definitions and assumptions: Marxist analysis posits much closer relationships between parties, civil society, the state and class fragments. From a Marxist starting point, then, the issues raised in this paper are false.

⁷ See Dahl 1982 and 1993, for example.

A quick look at the roles frequently attributed to civil society groups and parties reveals great overlap. According to USAID documents, “parties serve to organize, aggregate, and articulate the political interests of citizens in the political arena” (1999:4). Other roles ascribed to parties include holding government accountable, mobilization, socialization, integration, helping ambitious politicians obtain office, governing, and conflict management (see Aldrich 1995, Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Lapalombara and Weiner 1966). Civil society has accumulated an equally extensive list of roles in liberal theory. Larry Diamond’s well-known list of civil society’s functions includes stimulating participation and building political skills, socialization in democratic values and practice (in “large free schools”), articulation and representation of interests, reducing conflict (by cross-cutting cleavages), recruiting and training new political leaders, and strengthening the state (1994). This could be a list of party functions. My point is not to throw out political theory on these topics – it provides necessary analytical leverage. But it is important to note that even in theory substantial overlap between the sectors is possible.

B. The range of relationships found in democratizing countries

1. In general

Turning to reality, it is even more difficult to specify the distinctions between civil society groups and parties. An important source of this difficulty is that, in many countries, the roles of civil society and parties have been changing in recent years. In a few, the core distinction of civil society groups not seeking state power is even eroding.

In Western Europe, observers have detected signs of the “dealignment” of voters from long-standing party allegiances as structural changes increases in wealth and education, coupled with shifts in the nature of work, have occurred, weakening the organized working class and producing “post-material” issues related to quality of life (see Diamond and Gunther 2001; Bartolini and Mair, 2001). Thus old cleavages, for example of class or religion, no longer seem as strong a set of bases for party allegiance and ideology, and parties appear increasingly to be made up of professional politicians with tenuous links to constituents. New interests, as of women and environmentalists, are rising, and new parties along with them. The Green parties of Europe are the most prominent manifestations of such newly articulated interests. They are also, it is worth noting, modern instances of social movements – which are elements of civil society – turning into parties.

In Latin America, even in countries that have had relatively stable party systems, parties are discredited and face uncertain futures. Economic and policy shifts have frayed the bonds between parties and their traditional organizational bases in civil society, unions (Roberts and Wibbels 1999:585-586; Sabatini 2002). In the wake of partisan dealignment and declining faith in political parties, civil society groups, according to Gerardo Le Chevalier of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), are increasingly undertaking key party roles in some Latin American countries. First, for cadre development, parties are increasingly relying on the training provided by civil society groups. Second, growing numbers of parties are giving up their own, in-house think tanks, and relying on civil society groups in the process of platform development, or piecing together various civil society group agendas into one platform. Third, parties now project issues along with civil society groups in fora organized by civil society groups. Fourth, party electoral machines are increasingly supplemented or replaced by door-to-door canvassing conducted by civil society groups and by contracted polling organizations. In other countries in the region, the collapse of parties has left an institutional vacuum that, in cases like Venezuela, is being filled not by civil society, but by anti-system, populist leaders.

Elsewhere, parties have been weak since their countries' formation or independence, while civil society has become increasingly vibrant. In the Philippines and Thailand, civil society groups are often referred to as replacements for unrepresentative, programmatically indistinguishable, patronage-based parties. Indeed, a new constitution in Thailand reserves seats for civil society organizations in the upper house of parliament, and the Philippines has instituted a party list system that has encouraged civil society groups to put up parties.

So we can see such functions as representation, mobilization, even putting up candidates, increasingly performed by civil society groups. Parties, meanwhile, are struggling to fulfill these roles in many countries. Even the function widely considered to be the preeminent domain of parties – interest *aggregation* – is under attack: Jankowski (1988) argues that broad-based interest groups may aggregate interests more effectively than parties in some circumstances.

Of course, the respective roles and nature of parties and civil society organizations vary greatly across countries. By no means can one say that parties are in decline while civil society is on the rise across all (formal) democracies. Most obviously, in much of Africa single party regimes face relatively weak civil societies that are, generally speaking, more likely to withdraw from politics and engagement with the state than they are to “replace” parties. In countries emerging from Communism, both parties and civil society tend to be weak, and generally are wary of each other.

This section has so far essentially referred to parties and civil society organizations in post-transition democracies. The roles of and relationships between parties and civil society organizations in the processes of transition have also varied greatly, and often change after the transition. In Serbia, for example, both sectors played important parts in the ouster and replacement of Milosevic, but civil society organizations were critical of both the incumbent regime and the opposition and have since maintained relatively distant relations. In South Africa, by contrast, opposition parties and civil society groups cooperated to effect the transition. Now, however, many civil society groups are attempting to remain autonomous of the increasingly dominant ANC.⁸ In the Congo, civil society groups joined a united front with parties to oust Mobuto, but after his overthrow civil society groups aligned with the incoming government, and now have antagonistic relations with opposition parties. Indonesia is, to a lesser extent, another example of cooperation during a transition. In other countries, one or the other sector has been significantly more prominent in the transition.

2. At the level of individual organizations

Most of the preceding discussion has concerned the macro level – the roles and relationships of parties and civil society *in general* in a (formally) democratic political system. We need also to consider the range of relationships that are possible between individual parties and individual civil society groups, keeping in mind that these will vary within countries, as well as across them. We can examine relationships along at least three dimensions: (a) the type of activity that connects a party and a civil society group; (b) the strength of the connection – that is, how close and how exclusive it is; and (c) the preponderance or direction of influence in the relationship. Each aspect has implications for the design of DG programming: the second and third aspects speak to the desirability of addressing civil society-party relationships, and the emphasis such assistance might take, while the first suggests concrete areas of support. I will return to programming issues in Section III.

⁸ “The Transition to Sustainable Democracy in South Africa and the Strategic Role of USAID: Case Studies in Program Impact,” May 2001.

(a) Activities connecting civil society groups and parties

The relationships between civil society groups and parties can take many forms.

- Lobbying/ advocacy: In so far as a civil society group is an interest group it will lobby parties to push its general interests and specific policy demands. Most groups will advocate particular substantive issues; a few will push for legislation that directly affects parties and party systems, as in the areas of electoral regulations, campaign finance reform, and decentralization.
- Information provision: Civil society groups – including advocacy groups, think tanks and universities – often provide information on issues and even policy position documents to one or more parties.
- Forums: They may be able to run forums that assemble candidates from different parties to debate or answer questions about their policies.
- Training: They may provide training to candidates and activists from one or more parties, covering topics from campaigning to how to behave while in office.
- Transitional “home”: Sometimes, civil society groups will produce individuals who become party activists and candidates, or they will provide a home for out-of-office politicians between elections. In countries where political parties are hierarchical, or advancement through parties is otherwise limited, civil society groups thus serve as “valuable arenas for mobility” for the politically ambitious.⁹
- Resources: Civil society groups may provide tangible and intangible resources to a party beyond information and exposure, in exchange for a promise of party support. These include endorsement, money and materials (such as campaign posters).
- Mobilizing voters: Civil society groups can play an active role – beyond endorsing the party – in mobilizing voters for parties. At election time they may conduct voter education programs that encourage voting in general and/or voting for parties and candidates that conform to a set of qualifications, or they may engage in party-specific campaign activities. Once a union has endorsed a party, it may, for example, hold internal meetings at which members are encouraged to get out the vote for that party. Groups can also maintain and mobilize voters between elections by providing services to constituents on behalf of parties. Familiar examples are the Islamic and ethnically based parties with affiliated grassroots NGOs that provide health and education services to (potential) constituents.
- Monitoring parties: Following or independent of a request for support, civil society groups may monitor parties. They may monitor and publicize party behavior around elections and primaries, their policies and promises, their voting records in assemblies, and their financial and other records.

Conversely, a party may request support and, in exchange, represent CSO issues in public and decision-making arenas, pursue CSOs’ preferred policies, and provide money and other material support. And of course civil society leaders may use parties to get into public office.

(b) The closeness and exclusiveness of relationships

⁹ Gary Hansen, civil society team leader in the DG office, expresses the relationship in this way.

It is important to look beyond such a list of activities that link civil society groups and parties to assess the closeness of the relationship and its exclusivity. From the point of view of civil society in this regard, at least four types of relationships exist (see attached diagram of Civil Society-Party Relationships): *civil society groups may...*

1) *...avoid contact with parties.* Most civil society groups around the world are probably not involved in politics in any significant way – the bowling leagues of the world. In the developing world, community self-help groups are often an example. This may be due to focusing on activities that do not require political action, to apathy, or even to fear of reprisal for political, and especially partisan, involvement. Others engage in political activities, but shun contact with parties for various reasons. Such groups may be willing to lobby executive agencies, but believe that contact with parties will mark them as partisan, or more generally, that it will involve them in “dirty politics.”

2) *...distribute support across parties.* In many countries, groups develop issue agendas, then support whichever parties adopt the agenda (following, at least in this regard, the liberal vision of politically active civil society). In countries with weak parties, groups are likely to support whichever politicians adopt their agenda, effectively distributing support across parties. Where parties are reasonably coherent, interest groups may still distribute support to multiple parties to ensure good treatment whichever wins, particularly business associations. Groups with a principled interest in changing the political system, like human rights groups, may distribute support in attempts at broad reform. Multi-party candidate training programs, fora/debates and monitoring also fall into this category.

3) *...ally with one party.* This is essentially “partisanship.” In this case, a civil society group will provide policy information, training, and other resources exclusively to one party. The most recognizable example of this case is probably the historical pattern of trade union support for particular (usually left-of-center) parties. Other issue-oriented groups may in certain countries come to believe that particular parties will best project the groups’ agenda. Thus an environmental group may persistently ally with a green party. Of course, groups concerned with the same issue may persistently support different parties. National, politically active women’s groups in the U.S. divide along partisan lines.

4) *...seek to form a party.* One group or movement may set up a party, as the labor movement in Brazil produced the Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT). Less successful attempts to form parties have been made by unions in Korea and Indonesia. Or multiple groups may come together to form a party. Akbayan in the Philippines is the product of three semi-formal ideological groups (so-called “political blocs”) and a number of NGOs. An element of a transition to democracy may be the metamorphosis of an anti-regime movement into a party, as was the case with the Union of Democratic Forces in Bulgaria.

From the point of view of parties, at least three relationships are possible. *Parties may have...*

1) *...distant relations with civil society groups.* This situation may signal a party’s disconnection from constituents, stemming from an inability to reach out to groups and/or a lack of awareness of the utility of such outreach. Or it may be the active product of hostility and competition. In Kenya from 1994-97, for example, civil society groups and parties competed to set the agenda, with civil society groups advocating constitutional changes and parties seeking to solidify their positions before undertaking radical reforms. Learned Dees of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Chris Fomunyoh of NDI both point to competition for donor resources (which go overwhelmingly to civil society programs) as an important source of tension in a number of African countries.

2) *...support from a variety of groups on a short-term basis.* Here again we have the liberal vision of parties soliciting the support of multiple interest groups, and assembling differing coalitions of support in almost every electoral cycle.

3) *...long-term, more exclusive relations with one or more civil society groups.* The traditional alliance between particular parties and trade unions is an example of what one might call the “mild” form of this case.¹⁰ Party think tanks are another; one example is the Political Academy of Central Europe (PACE), which served as a training academy solely for the Union of Democratic Forces of Bulgaria;¹¹ another is the Reform Institute of Ukraine which is conducts economic research for the Reforms and Order Party of Yuchenko. Parties may also establish recreation clubs and other groups to attract members. The corporatism of some Western European and Latin American countries is essentially the case of long-term, relatively exclusive relationships extended to the whole political system. In many developing countries, a wide range of organized groups in society has been highly politicized and polarized by parties, including media outlets. Thus, for example, in Bangladesh, almost all civil society groups are reputedly allied with one or the other leading party. We also increasingly see parties forming NGOs to capture resources (donor civil society program resources, in particular) and/or to extend their reach and support in society. The author heard specific references to this phenomenon in Afghanistan, Armenia, Panama, Peru and the Philippines, and suspects it is occurring in many countries. Islamic parties, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, may be a special instance of the case of close, long-standing civil society-party relationships; many are organically connected to Islamic service delivery organizations. Ethnically based parties may often be similar; NDI works with ethnically based parties in Afghanistan that provide services such as relief or education through affiliated civil society groups.

4) Finally, parties can also break up into or spin off civil society groups that may or may not remain partisan; the Ari movement in Turkey, for example, began as the youth wing of a party, but became a civil society group to be better able to advocate political reforms. In some less-than-democratic countries in the Middle East, party activists have formed civil society groups (like human rights groups) because they believed they would be more effective than parties.

While a country may exhibit trends in the closeness of relationships so that, for example, civil society-party relationships are generally wary and distant, most political systems will contain a variety of relationships: some civil society groups will support one or more parties, while the majority abstain from politics, for example.

(c) Direction of influence

Finally, one should examine in every civil society group-party relationship the direction of influence. In the U.S., we tend to assume parties are beholden to “organized interests.” A given party may be more under the influence of some groups than others, however, depending on the political economy of the country. Thus business or farmers groups may be more influential than women’s, consumers’ or environmentalist groups. Similarly, within one type of civil society group, like unions, some groups may be more autonomous of parties than others, even within one country. The party may also be more powerful than any interest group. In much of Africa ruling parties have captured or established many civil society groups. Traditional Leninist Communist parties are the extreme example of the party being in control, with civil society groups merely fronts.

¹⁰ I do not mean to imply that trade unions always ally with only one party; some are opportunistic in their relationships and distribute support.

A. ¹¹ “Transition to Sustainable Democracy in Bulgaria and the Strategic Role of USAID: Case Studies in Program Impact,” June 2001.

The preceding categories were deliberately non-normative. The next step, then, is to consider what mix of relationships is desirable at the macro (or political system) level, and which relationships we should foster at the micro (or organization-to-organization) level.

III. SUPPORTING CONSTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

A. What should we be aiming for?

In many countries, the general relationship between civil society and parties is one of mutual hostility and reluctance to engage. In some, one hears that civil society groups are replacing parties, as parties fail to reform themselves and/or decline (as in Latin America), or fail to develop (parts of Southeast Asia, for example). In others, the relationship is one of capture, compromising the autonomy of one or both sectors. There seems to be a growing sense of competition between the two sectors for human and financial resources (not least donor funds), and power. None of these scenarios seems attractive from a DG point of view.

So what should we be aiming for? Thomas Ertman (1998) has put forward a provocative argument about the ideal relationship between civil society and parties at the macro level. In examining the varied fates of Western European democracies in the interwar period, he finds first that those democracies that survived possessed *both* effective parties and vibrant civil societies. Moreover, “the *relationship* between political parties and associational life...underlay divergent interwar outcomes” [emphasis added]:

[W]here parties and party competition stood at the center of political life before 1914 and the associational landscape was well developed (Britain, France, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands), the two came to reinforce each other in such a way as to further democratization and increase the durability of the resulting democratic regimes after 1918 (p. 499)... Finding themselves confronted with diverse and well-organized civil societies, emergent parties in these countries sought to forge ties with associations and win over their members, but the resulting overlap between the associational and party landscapes was far from perfect... This lack of a one-to-one correspondence between associational groupings and political parties had a beneficial effect on the long-term political trajectory of these nations. On the one hand, it allowed individuals whose views may have differed on many other issues to organize reform campaigns that cut across party and class lines... On the other, it forced the parties to remain pragmatic and flexible in their positions in order to win the support of a range of interest groups and react to new currents within civil society (p. 501).

Conversely, where the associational landscape was well developed but parties and party competition were not central to political life (Germany and Italy), conservative political forces were fragmented and only weakly tied to bourgeois and agrarian associational networks. This situation created conditions favorable to the sudden success of far-right movements of agrarian and bourgeois defense under the crisis conditions of the interwar period (p. 499)... Associations and the economic interest groups cultivated a growing antipathy toward party politicians in favor of a belief in the superiority of government through bureaucratic experts.... While the dense nature of... associational networks... permitted support for both Fascism and national socialism to spread extremely rapidly (p. 503).

The opposite situation, where associational life before 1914 was weak but party government strong (Spain and Portugal), tended to reinforce patron-client networks and the cacique politics associated with them. When more modern right-wing parties emerged after 1918 in response to

left-wing parties firmly rooted in associational subcultures, they remained weak and divided among themselves, leading their supporters to seek military assistance to counter the threat from the left (pp. 499-500). Finally... Russia possessed neither party-centered politics nor an extensively developed associational landscape before 1914. The result there was a pattern of very weak parties and conspiratorial organizing that helped make possible the Bolshevik overthrow of the Kerensky government (p. 500).

I have quoted Ertman at length because his argument is a helpful, and rare, application of liberal theory to a broad range of concrete and dynamic cases. His review of history has two clear implications for democracy assistance: first, the consequences of giving up on parties, and of strengthening civil society exclusively, are potentially devastating for democracy; second, the interactions among the two sectors matter greatly for the prospects for democracy. Fundamentally, democracy involves citizens having choices with regard to their leaders and public policies, and broadly held ability to participate in decision-making with regard to the public policy agenda, individual policies, and policy implementation. Parties and civil society groups, as outlined at the outset of this paper, both play critical roles in articulating interests, shaping and providing political choices, and enabling participation in decision-making. The ideal political system here is one in which both sectors are vibrant and *generally* autonomous of each other. But such a system also entails a mix of kinds of relationships between civil society groups and parties – some will be close and long lasting, others will be more distant and antagonistic.

I will return to the question of how we might assess the health of the two sectors and the mix of relationships between them in a particular country in Section III.C. The next sub-section expands upon some of the challenges of supporting constructive relationships between parties and civil society groups, assuming a need to do so.

B. How can we support constructive relationships between civil society groups and parties?

Where parties are too powerful relative to civil society, as in one-party states or countries where the dominant parties have politicized and effectively “divvied up” civil society amongst themselves, the possible tasks of a DG program are pretty straightforward. They are to preserve or expand the autonomy of civil society, and to open up the party system, to enable more freedom of choice in matters of political participation, and more accountability on the part of power holders. Sound programs would include an emphasis on non-partisan monitoring of parties and advocacy of political issues. In the run-up to elections in Serbia, for example, the critical relationship the student union movement (OTPOR) (which was assisted by IRI and the NED) maintained with the opposition as well as government parties may have helped keep the opposition from undemocratic actions and thus supported a more democratic transition. In South Africa USAID’s assistance for the active involvement of non-partisan CSOs in the policy arena has helped counterbalance to the increasing dominance of the ANC.¹² Support to help civil society groups address issues *not* covered by parties may also help to expand political space; the importance of environmental groups in Indonesia in drawing attention to larger governance problems before the transition is a good example. Alternatively or in addition, civil society groups might be encouraged to engage in multi-partisan, or multi-party, activities. Support might also be given to nascent parties, like the UDF in Bulgaria, including those forming from civil society groups.

But where parties generally are weak – where not only are they indistinguishable on the basis of policy, but also where party organization tends to exist primarily to mobilize voters at elections and defections by leaders and members are frequent – choosing the best DG strategy and set of tactics is much more

¹² “The Transition to Sustainable Democracy in South Africa and the Strategic Role of USAID: Case Studies in Program Impact,” May 2001.

difficult. There is in a sense no organization to open up – in weak party systems, parties are temporary vehicles for ambitious individuals. Understandably, where there is little or no interest in reform within such party systems, where the timeframe for obtaining results is relatively short, and where civil society is vibrant, DG programs may, understandably, focus on civil society. The question I want to raise here is not how much support each sector deserves under these circumstances, or even how best one can spark reform in weak party systems. It is, when parties and the party system are weak, and a decision has been made to support civil society groups, how can we avoid further weakening the party system?¹³

At the macro level, we face a potential imbalance in the direction of civil society. Donor emphasis on civil society may exacerbate a drain of human and other resources away from parties, and further erode the image of parties. How do we address the issue of civil society groups potentially constituting a replacement for parties? This should not be a long-term goal if you accept the liberal democratic argument outlined above that parties and civil society groups perform different roles. But is it an acceptable outcome in the short- to medium-term, if party reform is a distant prospect?¹⁴ How can we moderate the risk of “replacement,” given an opportunity to expand representation and participation and effect policy change through civil society groups?

At the micro level, we need to ensure that the changes advocated by the civil society groups we support are constructive with regard to the party system, or at least do not have unintended negative effects.

- At a minimum, persistent civil society criticism of parties in the absence of constructive attempts at reform should be avoided. Peru’s current political instability is at least in part the result of intense civil society criticism of parties, in the absence of mechanisms for constructive dialogue.
- Ignoring parties and the consequences of advocacy for parties is also likely to be unconstructive in certain instances. Civil society groups should be encouraged to consider how particular decentralization proposals or campaign finance reforms, for example, affect parties. Such changes may make party-building more difficult (or easier) in a weak party system, or simply be irrelevant to the needs of parties in such a setting. For example, the trend to decentralization in Latin America may be contributing to the fragmentation of party systems there (Sabatini 2003).
- Finally, paying attention to parties, but only episodically – in relation to elections – is a less than desirable approach. For example, civil society groups advocating systemic changes should be encouraged to look beyond election- and campaign-related regulations to the study and advocacy of legislation that directly affects parties *between* elections.
- Similarly, in addition to monitoring general elections, civil society groups might monitor party primaries, where they exist, and voting records once they are in office.

When civil society groups do interact with party politicians, DG programmers may still encounter thorny issues. One concerns the diffusion of support by civil society groups across parties and the alternative, partisanship. Diffusion happens in weak party systems when civil society groups provide support to candidates without regard for their party affiliation. Civil society advocacy often involves groups

¹³ The implied focus here is a situation in which the party system is weak and civil society is relatively vibrant. Where both the party system and civil society are weak, building parties is unlikely to be something USAID can or should do; the practicable course would be to build on civil society initiatives. But the caution not to allow imbalance is still relevant in this context – this civil society-building program should ensure that civil society groups are reaching out to parties and attempting to stimulate party responsiveness.

¹⁴ Pat Merloe of NDI brought the issue of timeframe to my attention.

supporting any candidate that promotes their issues, regardless of party affiliation. While this makes instrumental sense for the CSO, it is also likely to perpetuate weak party systems. Within the universe of USAID-supported activities, candidate training provided by NGOs is often a case of the distribution of support: candidate training programs supported by USAID and other US donors often select participants on an individual basis (via the first-come-first-served criterion, or some set of personal characteristics, like “reform-oriented”). I would argue that ignoring party affiliation – individualizing and even personalizing support for elected politicians – in such programs continues the vicious cycle of citizen disregard for parties as institutions that characterizes weak party systems.

- It follows that civil society groups that provide training and other support to politicians, or aspiring politicians, should consider providing explicitly multi-party help, selecting participants against party quotas.
- Similarly, data produced by the monitoring of individual politicians (e.g. of their voting record in office) ought periodically to be aggregated to the party level.

I would also suggest another possibility: to encourage closer, more exclusive relationships on the part of at least some civil society groups with particular parties. I am not referring to groups that must, almost by definition, be non-partisan. Clearly, certain civil society groups, including human rights and elections monitors, should be non-partisan, and some section of civil society in every country should be autonomous of partisan politics.¹⁵ But other groups that advocate interests and even broad democratic reforms might, to use a Philippine expression, “make a party their project” rather than diffusing their support. The argument here is that a long-lasting, relatively exclusive relationship between a civil society group and a party represents committed, concentrated support that may, in certain circumstances, be more likely to help reform one party than diffused support is to reform any party. One key feature of a constructive relationship along these lines, however, is its conditional nature – one side should not be wholly dependent upon the other, and unable to leave the relationship. Unions and think tanks provide numerous examples of constructive, durable, relatively exclusive civil society-party relationships: they have been important means by which parties are linked to voters and think through policies, respectively.

Yes, groups in durable, relatively exclusive relationships with parties are partisan. But I am not arguing that USAID support should be partisan. USAID support can be multi-partisan, supporting a range of partisan groups. The point is, it should not rule out supporting groups that are partisan or insist that all civil society partners be non-partisan. Rather, it should be asking: are there circumstances – DG programming circumstances – in which civil society partisanship is constructive? It is also worth noting that we’re already supporting partisan groups in civil society. Partisanship cannot be avoided by working with civil society groups rather than parties. Most if not all of the civil society groups we work with within DG programs are political – they pursue political change in political arenas. “Politically active” does not, of course, mean “partisan,” but it is difficult always to draw a line between “strongly held political views” on the part of civil society groups and “partisanship.” Certain civil society demands, demands that we might support, may have natural “homes” in certain parties. Thus civil society advocates of freer markets or of farm tenants’ rights are likely to work with particular parties along the left-right spectrum (if it exists at all in a country’s party system) – they are *de facto* partisan. In any case, many of the groups we work with are probably more partisan than they let on to donors. Also, in specific settings, where the incumbent government has been undemocratic, support to civil society groups

¹⁵ And, as mentioned above, in countries where most of civil society has been politicized and polarized by parties, we should encourage greater autonomy overall. The discussion in this subsection focuses on DG programs in weak party systems.

lobbying for improvements in political processes has been *de facto* partisan, in the sense of being against the party in power (the effectively anti-Meciar stance of get-out-the-vote efforts in Slovakia in 1998 is an example). As Pat Merloe of NDI points out, it is *concealed* partisanship that is truly problematic for donors.

Finally, in a few countries, among a few civil society groups, reformers have begun to question whether civil society advocacy is an adequate vehicle for their aims, but have also given up on existing parties. They are therefore considering establishing new parties. The founding organizations in Akbayan are examples. OTPOR in Serbia has also, reportedly, considered becoming a party. Mexico and Venezuela are seeing civil society leaders found parties and even civil society groups as wholes considering becoming parties. Such groups' mission in becoming a party is explicitly to reform the party system from within, by being exemplary parties and by gaining direct power to influence the political system. This is therefore a trend that we should consider supporting. But again, DG programmers should assess the risks of (1) further fragmenting the party system in the short term by supporting a new party rather than encouraging reform of existing parties, and (2) a perception of partisanship if no other party support is given.

C. Assessing civil society-party relationships

In the preceding subsection, I made some broad arguments about the kinds of relationships that might be worth supporting where parties tend to be powerful and where party systems are weak. This section deals with the question of how DG programmers can figure out, systematically and country-specifically, how to support the development of constructive relationships between civil society groups and parties. Presumably every polity will include parties and civil society groups with closer and more distant relations, but what is the appropriate mix in a given setting? Should we be encouraging more or less engagement at a given moment in time? A more watchdog role on the part of civil society, or more cooperative one? And among which parties and groups?

The argument of this paper is that the two sectors should be considered more often together. It therefore suggests a DG problem-oriented approach to decision-making about civil society-party relationships.¹⁶ One good suggestion is to use the DG strategic assessment framework.¹⁷ The assessment framework analyzes the country setting in order to determine the DG goal, and thus could help to determine what kind(s) of relationships we want to foster, strategically and tactically. What follows are suggestions for how the assessment tool can be adapted to illuminate the relationships between civil society and parties in a country, although I do not mean to imply by this exercise that the critical problem of democratization, or its remedy, will always lie in civil society-party relations.

The strategic assessment framework is divided into four parts or steps that move the analyst from the “big picture” of key problems in democratization, through the dynamics of politics in a country and the institutional setting, to the donor's constraints and resources, in order to determine priorities and interventions. For the sake of parsimony, I assume readers have some familiarity with the assessment framework, or a willingness to refer to it for details of each step.

¹⁶ A DG-problem oriented approach also facilitates the integration of party and civil society work into *all* DG sectors.

¹⁷ “Conducting a DG Assessment: A Framework for Strategy Development” is a guide for how to undertake a DG assessment which provides a framework for constructing democracy and governance strategies. It can be found on USAID's Democracy and Governance website at <http://www.usaid.gov/democracy/dgtpindx.html#pnacd395>.

Step 1: Defining the key problems in democratization. Step 1 identifies the regime type and determines broadly “how the game of politics is played.” To do so, the assessment tool posits five key variables in democratization: consensus, competition, inclusion, the rule of law and good governance. The most important variables for the purposes of this paper are those of competition and inclusion.

Generally, if competition has been identified as the primary challenge for democratization, then a DG program might encourage parties to seek civil society support, but help civil society groups to provide that support conditionally. Such assistance would encourage elites to compete for citizen support, and protect societal groups from capture. However, competition problems can be of two broad types: too limited, as in a one-party or otherwise authoritarian state, or vigorous but fragmented, as in the weak multi-party system of the Philippines. If competition is limited, the emphasis will likely be on opening up the ruling party (if there is one) or leading parties, encouraging nascent parties, and expanding the autonomy of civil society. If competition is present but fragmented and presents little real choice, the DG programmer faces the thorny issues raised above with regard to breaking the vicious cycle of weak party systems.

If inclusion is the central issue, one’s impulse might be to encourage civil society groups to try to forge relationships with as many parties as possible to increase avenues for participation in politics. But it may be desirable for societal groups representing the marginalized to ally with one party or a very limited number of parties, so that they can deploy the power of their numbers most effectively. The key question here is whether participation is structured in such a way as to have sustained impact on decision-making.

The other variables also relate to the relationships between civil society groups and parties. For example, if governance problems loom large, civil society groups may best serve as watchdogs over parties.

Step 2: Analyzing how the game of politics is played in a country – actors, and their interests, strategies and resources. Step 2 investigates the dynamics of the “game of politics.” In this step one might look at the extent to which key political actors are using parties and/or civil society groups to advance their interests, and how. What is the interaction between the parties and civil society groups? How are resources distributed between the two sectors?

CSOs, like parties, differ organizationally. A prominent difference is between membership or primary organizations and secondary organizations, commonly termed “NGOs.” The former focus on their own community’s needs, and rely upon volunteers. The latter may work with multiple communities, and are made up largely of professional staff. Thus a farmers’ group is a primary, membership organization; the developmental legal assistance NGO that provides it with paralegal training is a secondary organization. Civil society groups will differ also by the nature of their membership, constituencies, target population or issue basis, for example, business, women, farmers, the environment, consumers, or gays and lesbians. Finally, groups differ in the nature of their chief activities: self-help, recreation, advocacy, policy-analysis, watchdog (e.g. election monitoring, anti-corruption, rights) and so on. All of these qualities are likely to affect a group’s relationship with parties. For example, advocacy and policy-analysis groups may be more likely to approach multiple parties. Watchdog groups will want to be impartial and even distant from parties. But the nature of the organization – whether it has members or is professional and serves other groups, whom it represents, and the activities it engages in – does not uniquely determine how it will or should interact with parties.¹⁸

¹⁸ Similarly, parties may be programmatic or relatively content-free. If they have a discernable vote base, that can differ by class (working or middle class/elite), or by issue groups. A party can be well organized or poorly so. Classifying parties is a cottage industry in itself, so I will not add to that literature here. As with civil society, I would argue that there no necessary relationship between party type and relationship to civil society. There may be

To understand how the decision to interact (or not) is made, or to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of a given type of relationship (how close and how exclusive, what kind, who dominates), it is important to look at underlying incentives. A number of such factors will condition whether and how civil society and party actors relate to each other.

From the point of view of civil society actors, they include the following:

- Does the issue the group is concerned with require political action that includes interacting with parties (or forming a party)?
- Are members and leaders interested in relations or wary? Are they used to relating?
- Does the organization have the time and resources to develop links?
- Does the organization perceive costs to supporting one or more parties, or forming one?

From the point of view of party politicians:

- Does the party feel it needs the support of organized groups (rather than relying on media campaigns and/or traditional patron-client networks)?
- Are there groups that could provide effective support? Do potential support groups in civil society represent a significant portion of the population (in terms of numbers or other power)?
- Does the party know how to reach out to groups?
- Is it coherent and distinctive policy-wise? or more a temporary coalition of individuals?
- Is the party in government or in opposition?

Step 2 also draws attention to deeper structural influences on civil society-party relations. The nature of political parties and civil society groups, and of their relationships, is at the deepest level the product of the history of the incorporation of a country's citizens into political processes and voluntary organization. Which citizens have been brought into the political process, and in what ways? This process in turn will have been underpinned by different socio-economic trajectories and the resulting structural cleavages in society, like ethnicity, race and class.

Step 3: Assessing the impact of formal and informal rules – institutional arenas. How political actors and organizations – including parties and civil society groups – behave is strongly conditioned by their institutional setting. The institutional setting structures the incentives and disincentives for a relationship, as well as its nature. Whether a political system is parliamentary or presidential will shape, among other things, how much parties are likely to rely on interest groups. Electoral laws will influence the number of parties and their organization. For example, proportional representation (PR) may strengthen parties in some respects, but discourage close ties to constituents. The two sectors and their relations will also be affected by laws on lobbying, donating to parties, media ownership and freedom of speech, and so on. How decentralized the state is likely to have a significant effect on parties, although very little research has yet been done on this topic.

Especially interesting for the purposes of this paper is the degree to which laws encourage, or “incent,” civil society groups to engage in political action and representation and link to parties. As mentioned above, constitutions and other laws in Thailand and the Philippines encourage civil society groups to act like parties. The new Thai constitution reserves seats in upper house for civil society groups. The Philippine Party List Law explicitly encourages civil society to put up party lists. Mexican legislation has implicitly acknowledged the complex nature of civil society-party relationships – by trying to tidy them.

historical patterns, but given changing structural contexts, parties need to be engaging in new thinking about to interact with civil society.

Three years ago the then ruling party enacted legislation that distinguishes "political" from "non-political" civil society organizations, and both from parties. Both types of organizations must conform to regulatory rules and, not surprisingly, the rules are stricter for "political" groups. The language of the legislation, however, still struggles with ambiguities in party and civil society functions: "the law acknowledges and regulates the national political groups (*agrupacion politica*) as citizen associations working to develop democratic life and political culture...In no case can they use the name 'political party', and they will only be able to participate in a federal election process by means of a participation agreement with a political party...These agreements can produce candidates from a national political group..."¹⁹ Tanzania provides a more typical, and less subtle, example. The state has claimed that a major women's organization is acting like a party and is, therefore, subject to greater government regulation. In Japan the government tried to separate associations from political parties in order to minimize the extent to which parties and parliament could serve as anti-government forces (Pempel & Tsunekawa 1979:249).

It is also worth thinking about the *ideas* about the appropriate roles and relations of civil society groups and parties that are woven into a country's informal and formal institutions. For example, a central feature of the analysis by groups on the left in the Philippines of that country's politics is that mainstream parties are the embodiment of "traditional," clientelist, corrupt politics, and are therefore to be avoided. In other countries, left-of-center unions have long traditions of expressing their political demands through close party affiliations. Parties, similarly, may carry long-held notions of their "superiority" to interest groups, or of the importance of corporatist ties with certain groups in society. In some versions of Islamic political theory, there is little or no separation between state, party and society, so close, lasting connections between organized groups in society and Islamic parties are "natural" within this framework. A critical aspect of the realm of ideas is public opinion regarding parties and civil society – how much confidence citizens' place in them respectively, how representative and legitimate they believe them to be. As implied earlier, a striking feature of many formal democracies today is the low and declining respect citizens have for parties. This may hinder constructive relations with civil society.

Step 4: Donor constraints and resources. I will not go over this step in any detail except to make two points. First, if the results of the research conducted for this paper are any indication, other donors are not looking at the interaction between parties and civil society. Furthermore, many not equipped to work at this nexus (because they work with one sector or the other), unlike USAID, with its diverse set of partners. So there is both a need and a comparative advantage for the USAID-partner community to work on the issues raised here.

Second, some USAID partners sense that USAID is often reluctant to work in the area of party reform, and much more comfortable with ostensibly less partisan civil society programming. To the extent that this is a valid observation, I encourage USAID units at least to consider the issues raised in this paper with regard to the implications of civil society-party relationships for DG goals.

D. Programming options

This sub-section briefly describes a number of types of DG program activities that touch upon civil society-party relationships. Some are being implemented, and we have examples; some are probably being implemented, but we were unable to get examples; some seem not yet to be included in DG portfolios. The types of activities a DG officer chooses to support should flow from a larger assessment of the desired mix of relationships at the macro level (and the even larger DG assessment). With some exceptions, the activities described below could support different objectives, depending on how they are

¹⁹ From a primer on the law, "Answers to 25 Essential Questions," by the Federal Electoral Institute (no date).

shaped – whether focused on a single party, multi-party or non-partisan, and whether short- or longer term.

Among programs directed at CSOs, activities that directly affect relationships between civil society groups and parties include:

- Monitoring of parties, by observing
 - elections,
 - party primaries, and/or
 - voting records in parliament.

Election observation (with USAID funding) is now an established activity for CSOs in many countries. NDI has observed party primaries, as in Paraguay, and supported *Participacion Ciudadana* to do so in the Dominican Republic. The monitoring of representatives' and parties' voting records is widespread, particularly among advocacy groups focused on particular issues. Examples of parliamentary vote monitoring include *Hagamos Democracia*, funded by IRI, in Nicaragua; the University of the Andes Visible Congress Project in Colombia, funded by the NED; and *Transparencia's* USAID-supported efforts in Peru. Broader, multi-issues studies may also be conducted; with funding from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Development Academy of the Philippines has attempted to match legislation introduced in the national legislature with party platforms. Also in the Philippines, the Center for Legislative Development, with funding from The Asia Foundation, has monitored legislative action on women's and other issues since the 1980s.

- Training of party politicians, in:
 - Issues – content, implications, and alternative solutions,
 - Process – how to legislate, ethics,
 - Local government, and/or
 - How to campaign (and win), usually for candidates

NDI's leadership training program in Latin America brings young people from every major party in a given country to Washington for training in outreach to constituents and internal party reform, among other topics; NDI then provides follow-up training in country. Training of party politicians is not only done directly by the U.S. party institutes, but may also be done by in-country NGOs, with donor funds. For example, the Jesuit University in Bogotá, Colombia, provides party training, with assistance from NDI. The Ford Foundation supported the BATMAN consortium of NGOs in the Philippines to provide training to elected (and appointed) government officials in participatory local governance. A number of programs designed to encourage women to participate in politics include candidate training. The Asia Foundation and NDI have supported such activities around Asia. In Mexico, IRI supports ANCIFEM for this purpose. Groups concerned with the quality of democracy in general, like the Ateneo School of Government in Manila, conduct training programs to instill ethics in public officials and help get reform-minded politicians elected. These programs have been multi-party. I have also mentioned the Political Academy of Central Europe (PACE), which serves as a training academy exclusively for the Union of Democratic Forces of Bulgaria.

- Fora:
 - Candidates, and/or
 - Q&A of already elected officials.

U.S. donors have funded CSOs in many regions to hold forums at which candidates for office explain their positions, to encourage them better to understand and respond to citizen concerns. Fora can also be

held with already elected officials and those in opposition and/or others outside government to debate or answer questions about their policies. The NED has supported *Presencia Ciudadana* in Mexico to convene virtual debates among presidential candidates around issues related to youth. With NDI assistance, *Poder Ciudadana* organized party debates on campaign finance reform in Argentina. CIPE has worked with business associations and think tanks to organize candidate forums in Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Philippines. ACILS worked with NDI in Cambodia to get unions to participate in issue forums with political candidates. In Kwazulu Natal, which has been riven by political violence, USAID supported the Institute for Multi-party Democracy to organize multi-party forums at the community level as structures for sustained political dialogue.

- Polling, surveys

Surveys provide vital information on the issues important to particular sub-groups of citizens. Social Indicator in Sri Lanka conducts a regular survey of attitudes to the peace process intended to encourage both major parties to commit to a negotiated settlement to the conflict there. In Venezuela, IRI is developing polls that include a core set of common questions along with questions desired by particular parties; results of the former are shared while those of the latter go directly to the relevant party. Some NGOs may provide survey results to a limited pool of parties seen as “sympathetic to the NGOs’ aims. For example, the Institute for Popular Democracy, also in the Philippines, is developing a database of quantitative and qualitative data on local voting contexts that it plans to make available to “progressive” political parties.

- Advocacy of legal and policy reforms affecting parties and the party system, including:
 - Election laws,
 - Parliamentary vs. presidential systems,
 - Campaign finance reform,
 - Election administration reforms, and/or
 - Decentralization.

I suspect U.S. donors support hundreds of civil society groups to advocate for changes in electoral laws and practices in ways that may encourage the reform of parties. In the Philippines, a number of CSOs, with multiple sources of donor funds, have been working together to effect changes in electoral laws and administration, and a switch from a presidential to a parliamentary system; they are now expanding their efforts to include campaign finance reform and passage of a party law. Other groups that have conducted electoral law advocacy include FEMA in Bangladesh, Transparencia in Peru, CESID in Serbia, and ProDemocracy in Romania. As discussed above, some reforms – like decentralization – may affect parties and party systems, but often insufficient attention is given to this aspect of the desired change.

- Policy analysis

Policy analysis is conducted by a wide range of CSOs, from local, membership groups worried about, for example, changes in farm tenancy, to national NGOs concerned land reform. I have mentioned, as an example of a party think tank, the Reform Institute of Ukraine which is conducts economic research for the Reforms and Order Party of Yuchenko in Ukraine. The National Institute of Policy Studies in the Philippines primarily assists the Liberal Party, but is also willing to provide analysis to other reform-oriented parties, with funding from Friedrich Naumann Stiftung. The Center for Legislative Development (CLD) in the Philippines provides policy analysis to politicians on a non-partisan basis; it has been supported by TAF, USAID and other donors.

- Issue advocacy by CSOs to parties

Policy analysis is often part of issue advocacy by CSOs to parties: some groups may present an issue and the pro's and con's of legislation on it without advocating a particular solution, but others conduct policy analysis as part of a process of developing a particular position on an issue. For example, CLD, as a member of a consortium of women's organizations, has used its analysis of rape-related legislation to advocate for better protection of women's rights.

An elaborated form of issue advocacy is the issue network. In an issue network, CSOs and parties, along with government agencies, businesses and other actors, work together in a particular issue area to effect reform. The NGO FIDAC in Mexico has formed a network of civil society activists, political party leaders, journalists and jurists to promote a freedom of information law. Other examples include efforts to end violence against women in the Philippines, and pro-peace campaigns in Sri Lanka.

- Encouraging political participation, through:
 - Voting – in general, for “good” candidates, for “good” parties, or for a particular party;
 - Joining a party – in general or in particular, and
 - Other forms of participation

CSOs may encourage various forms of political participation that affect parties, from voting to actual membership. They may do this generically (encouraging political participation as a general good), or by encouraging participation without regard to parties per se (as in efforts simply to encourage voting or voting for individuals), or by advocating participation in those parties that meet certain standards, or by attempting to attract citizens to a particular party (partisanship). In Venezuela, Queremos Elejir is holding “fairs” at which parties are invited to set up booths and explain their positions; at the same time, Queremos Elejir encourages civil society activists and citizens to attend the fair and join a party (although they do not endorse any party).

- Formation of new parties

U.S. donors have on occasion assisted groups in civil society to become parties; for example, in Bulgaria IRI helped the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) to develop from an umbrella of anti-communist movements into a coherent party. In Venezuela, support from the NED has helped Primero Justicia, originally an NGO providing legal assistance to the poor, to become a reform-oriented party. Activity in this area need not be partisan, or beneficial to only one party. Donors could, for example, help convene working groups of activists and academics on how to form reformist, programmatic parties, in a given country, regionally and/or internationally.

- Integrating party representation into civil society organizational structures

One way civil society groups link to parties is by nominating party members to their governing boards. Such board members can provide intangible as well as tangible support, by providing advice on navigating the political system and entrée to it. The National Endowment for Democracy, NDI and IRI all have political party leaders on their boards. Seats on boards may be limited to an affiliated party or be multi-partisan. The NED's board is bipartisan.

In programs directed at parties:

- Strengthening links to constituents

The link tends to be in the form of encouraging parties to reach out to CSOs to strengthen parties' ties to constituents. In Ukraine, for example, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has had some success in getting parties to reach out to NGOs on issue campaigns, so that parties get information on desirable reforms, and they enter into commitments to particular reforms in return for support. In Guatemala, IRI is encouraging parties to reach out to youth, women's and indigenous groups.

- Improving platform content

Donors may also encourage links to think tanks, partisan or non-partisan, to help the parties develop their platforms and refine the content of their policy/legislative proposals. The FNS-supported National Institute for Policy Studies in the Philippines is primarily responsible for the development of the Liberal Party's platform. AKBAYAN! relies heavily on the Institute for Popular Democracy and the Institute for Politics and Governance for platform development, although it has reached out to numerous sympathetic think tanks and other NGOs for assistance in this regard.

E. Summary of recommendations

The preceding discussion leads to a number of recommendations for DG programmers. These are my own views, not necessarily those of USAID, and they are intended to provoke discussion (not to be definitive). They fall roughly into the areas of program goals, designing activities, monitoring and evaluation, and coordination among units.

- Do not mistake liberal ideals about the distinctions and complementarities for reality. Also, be wary of generalizing about a region or even a country, and of allowing regional and country patterns to color assumptions about other regions and countries. There is great variation in relationships between civil society and parties at the macro and micro levels, within and across countries. Assess a given setting carefully.
- Do keep the ideal of complementarity of civil society and parties in mind to avoid (inadvertent) imbalances at the macro level. If party politics are a critical problem in democratization, you won't be able to get around it by working with civil society on other things. Consider party reform programs, even if they have to be run through civil society.
- Where parties are powerful relative to civil society, but generally uninterested in reform, e.g. one party states or countries where parties have politicized much of civil society, civil society autonomy is a critical need, along with encouraging parties to be more open and accountable. The question then is how to reform parties, as working through civil society may be difficult.
- Where party systems are weak, think carefully about how to work with civil society (as well as parties) to avoid unintended further weakening; in particular, work with civil society groups to help them understand the implications of individual/politician- (e.g. candidate or elected official) vs. party-centered support,²⁰ and to encourage advocacy that improves the party system rather than simply goes around it to the executive.
- Encourage interested civil society groups to look beyond election-centered activities, like electoral law advocacy and election monitoring, to those that can foster party reform between elections, like advocacy of party laws and monitoring party primaries and voting records.

²⁰ Where feasible, that is in countries where local elections are on a party basis and parties exist (in some form) at local levels, this recommendation applies not only to national level programs but also to local level ones.

- Encourage constructive civil society-party links in weak party systems, for example links that provide connections to constituents and information on sound policy alternatives; do not avoid assistance to groups that are allied with particular parties, i.e. partisan, although assistance overall should be multi-party.
- Support civil society group attempts to become programmatic, cohesive, reform-minded parties if they decide to do so, although in weak party systems the DG programmer should be wary of encouraging further fragmentation of parties and the party system.
- Encourage program monitoring and evaluation that takes civil society-party relationships, at macro and micro levels, explicitly into account; and share stories about these relationships and the activities that affect them – for good or ill – across DG programs.
- Use the DG assessment framework to help understand and make decisions about the relationships between civil society and parties in a given setting, but refine it to illuminate these relationships, and to deal better with weak party systems.
- Be alert to and avoid program designs/ RFAs/ RFPs/ task orders that ignore the potential role of parties in civil society activities (a number of RFAs I have read in the last year do not mention parties, or mention them only in passing, even when the RFA concerns advocacy and civil society participation in political arenas).

Finally, I recommend that the G/DG civil society and political processes teams confer regularly on the links between their efforts.

IV. CONCLUSION

Most of us are probably operating with a liberal view of civil society organizations and parties, a view in which they are distinct and complementary. As a long-term goal, the conception of democracy in which civil society and parties are both vibrant and effective, and autonomous of each other, with cross-cutting and short-term alliances, is legitimate. But this vision does not reflect reality in many countries, and does not provide much of a guide for DG programming in democratizing countries. Civil society-party relationships, overall and on an organization-to-organization basis, vary tremendously across and within countries, as well as over time. To design effective DG programs we need to figure these relationships out empirically. And we need to think creatively and carefully about what sorts of relationships to support in the short- to medium-term. I've been especially concerned here with how civil society groups can support party reform. In settings where competition is limited or absent, promoting civil society as a watchdog of parties, perhaps even as an alternative to them, seems a reasonable strategy. But in weak party systems, where there is political competition but it is fragmented and/or lacks real content, we face a more difficult set of decisions. Even here, though, CSOs may be able to encourage parties to be more programmatic and provide information on policy needs and options, to link them to constituencies, and to hold them accountable when they don't deliver for those constituencies. I am not arguing that civil society-party relationships are always critical to democratization, much less that closer relationships should always be encouraged. But if nothing else, we should try to ensure that efforts in one area don't undermine efforts in the other. And first of all, we need to communicate better amongst ourselves to understand the links between the two sectors.

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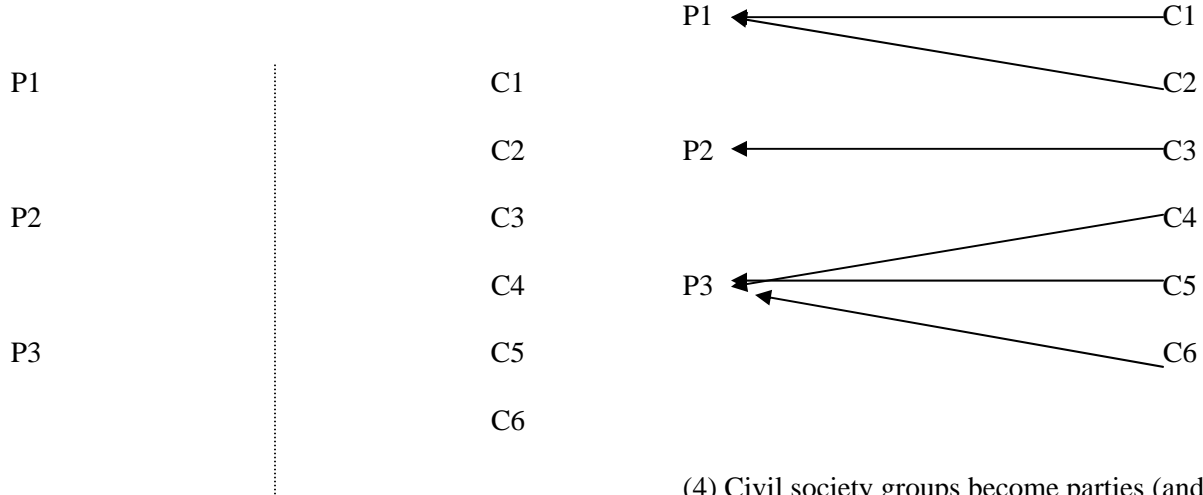
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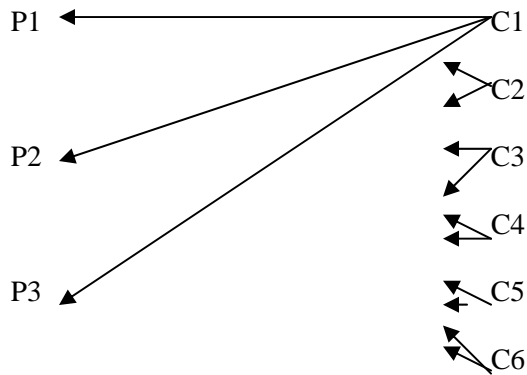
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CIVIL SOCIETY – PARTY RELATIONSHIPS: DIFFUSED OR CONCENTRATED?

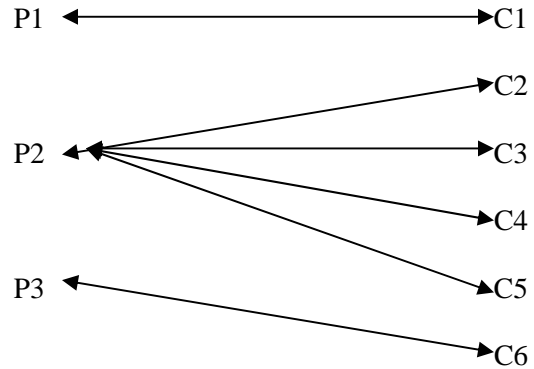
(1) Distant relationships



(2) Civil society groups distribute support across parties; parties get support from multiple civil society groups



(4) Civil society groups become parties (and parties conceivably can collapse into civil society groups)



(3) Civil society groups ally with one party; parties have longer-term, more exclusive relationships with certain civil society groups