

FACTSHEET: PROMOTING MORE POLICY-FOCUSED PARTIES THROUGH CIVIC ORGANIZING

In democratic systems, political parties should provide opportunities for citizens to oversee or influence their government. In many places, however, political parties are too weak, too personality-driven, too constrained by oppressive governments or too out of touch to play this critical role in democratic governance. Developing more vibrant and inclusive democracies requires citizen-centered approaches that help people increase their engagement with and influence over political parties. While the theoretical foundations for this approach appear strong, analysis of lessons learned from practical experiences are limited.



Under the Global Elections and Political Transitions Leader with Associates grant, technical leadership activities help enhance USAID and partner capacities to conduct elections and political transition programming worldwide. As part of its technical leadership initiatives, the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) recently examined the conditions under which civic organizing – such as anti-vote buying campaigns, citizen policy platforms, and other forms of advocacy – can help promote more policy-focused, citizen-centered political parties.

As part of the initiative, CEPPS:

- Conducted a literature review;
- Held a peer review roundtable discussion with democracy and governance practitioners, academics and transparency/accountability professionals;
- Conducted desk research (Belarus, Slovakia) and field research (Liberia, Uganda) to identify lessons learned from four programs; and
- Developed a guidance note based on the literature review and case studies.

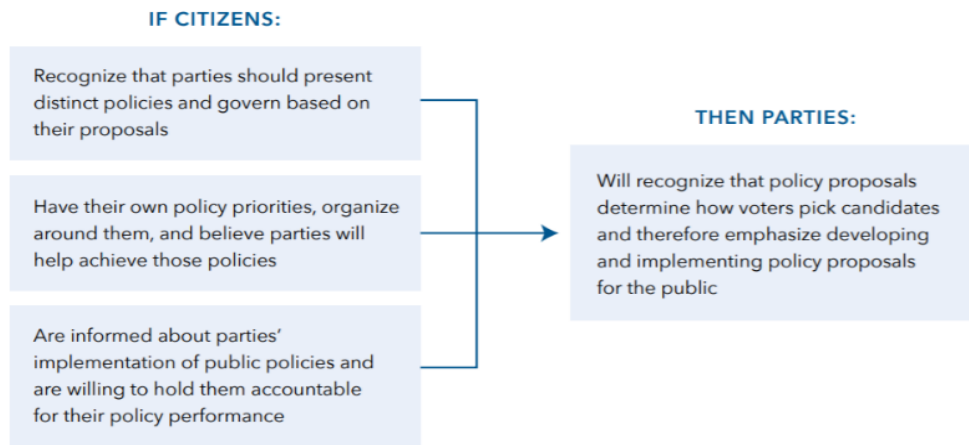
Highlights of the guidance note include the following.

A theory of change for using civic organizing to promote more policy-focused parties.

If citizens:

- recognize that parties should offer differentiated policies and govern based on those policy proposals, and are willing and able to cast their votes based on that understanding;
- have policy priorities and preferences, organize around them, and see parties as viable means for achieving those policy preferences; and
- are willing and able to hold political parties and elected officials accountable for their policy performance;

- then parties will place increased emphasis on developing and implementing policy proposals for the public good.



☑ **A framework for considering different contextual factors that could have implications for programming: political space; institutional and structural factors; political party capacities and interests; and civil society dynamics.**

For each set of factors, the guidance note outlines a series of issues to consider and the potential implications for programming.

☑ **Four recommendations for strengthening future program design and implementation:**



Consider different contextual factors and their potential implications for programming.



Set realistic expectations for progress toward more policy-focused political parties.



Plan for medium- to long-term efforts that incorporate a variety of interventions, use multiple entry points in the political cycle and that can be sustained over time.



Consider how entrenched social norms may influence power relations and party responsiveness to demands from marginalized groups. When mobilizing people around a shared identity such as gender, carefully weigh how intersecting identities – gender, age, religion, or race, for instance – may affect prospects for uniting people around a single, shared, identity maker.

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This Technical Leadership product is funded by the Global Elections and Political Transitions (GEPT) Leader With Associates (LWA) grant and is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.