

#1 BUILDING PARTY INFRASTRUCTURE

SUMMARY:

Closing political space presents challenges for building party infrastructure, but those challenges make strong infrastructure all the more important.

To become more resilient, parties must create organizations and leaders, a network of local branches, a strong internal communications infrastructure, a broad geographical presence, youth wings, women's organizations, and ancillary organizations (like clubs or newsletters).

However, these initiatives create new vulnerabilities. Party sub-units may not be as well resourced or high capacity as other units (or the national organization). They may be more susceptible to closing space tactics. Building party infrastructure must be paired with improvements in operational security and with protection of sensitive information throughout the party organization.



Example Problem Statement: *in* CLOSING SPACE

Political parties are unitary, centralized, and homogenous. This can limit opportunities to engage broad constituencies and make the party more vulnerable to closing space tactics, especially tactics that target individual leaders and prominent opposition figures.

PROGRAM APPROACHES:

1. Support the development of strategic plans on party organization.

2. Provide training on secure communications, cybersecurity, and data management, especially on protecting all personal information (PII).

3. Develop youth wings, women's organizations, and party caucuses.

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE:

If political parties develop organizational infrastructure, then they will be more resilient to closing space, because sub-units can help recruit and mobilize members and supporters, and can help the party weather tactics that undermine their central leadership

4. Create institutions that promote internal party democracy: broad leadership recruitment and promotion (focused on youth, women, and historically marginalized constituencies), candidate selection, and procedures for developing policy platforms.

5. Build internal communication and organizational infrastructure (member lists, organizational charts, rules and procedures, staffing and recruitment policies, secure communications and databases, etc.), including for local branches.

Example Output Indicators:

- Number of strategic organizational or communications plans developed as part of a workshop
- Party members develop benchmarks for organizational development and recruitment
- Number of proposals developed for candidate selection reform
- Number of party members and staff that receive training on secure communications, cybersecurity, or data management

Example Outcome Indicators:

- ✓ Number or proportion of local party branches established.
- ✓ Number (as a percentage of party membership) of youth, women, or members of marginalized groups engaged as part of an organizational growth strategy.
- ✓ Parties adopt a strategy for member and leader recruitment and retention.
- ✓ Number of proposals by party youth wings or women's organizations adopted as part of the party platform.
- ✓ Parties implement cybersecurity protocols or adopt tools to improve operational security.



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DESIGN & ART BY



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#2 DEVELOPING POLICY PLATFORMS and PARTY BRANDS

SUMMARY:

Political parties can prevent closing space by offering an alternative to the incumbent party - i.e., giving voters a clear choice at the polls. But it's not enough to just be on the ballot. For parties to get votes, voters need to recognize them on the ballot and associate them with policy alternatives!

That recognition happens through consistent platform branding. Failure to brand makes it easier for incumbent parties to frame alternative parties negatively, especially by painting them as "obstacles to progress." In simple terms, if a party lacks its own brand or a clear commitment to a set of policies, it is more easily defined by its political rivals and that can sap public support.



Example Problem Statements: *in* CLOSING SPACE

- ❑ The party has no clear platform and therefore can't organize opposition to closing political space.
- ❑ Partners struggle to explain to voters policy principles that distinguish them from opposing parties.
- ❑ Parties lack a durable, recognizable brand that voters can associate with their sets of policy principles.

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE:

If political parties develop consistent and recognizable brands and policy platforms, then those parties will be more resilient to closing space. Recognizable platforms and brands are key. They facilitate voter mobilization; let voters reward parties with responsive policies; and help unite political leaders that might otherwise be co-opted or not participate.

PROGRAM APPROACHES:

1. Workshops on developing policy programs and platforms.
2. Develop electoral campaign strategies based on policies.

3. Public opinion research and workshops to help parties develop policies that respond to citizens.

4. Training on strategic communications, including relationships with media outlets, branding and marketing, and multimedia strategies.

Example Outcome Indicators:

- ✓ Party platforms reflect constituents' policy preferences.
- ✓ Party branding elements, messages, and policies are consistent between election cycles.
- ✓ Campaign advertisements emphasize policy issues.
- ✓ Data shows increased party loyalty and membership consistency between elections.

Example Output Indicators:

- Number of party members who are trained in public opinion research, strategic communications, and/or campaign strategy
- Number of policies incorporated into platforms
- Number of strategic communications plans developed



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#3 TECHNOLOGY TOOLS for POLITICAL PARTIES

in CLOSING SPACE

SUMMARY:

When parties try to organize under repressive conditions, technology can both provide advantages and pose new risks.

By using new organizing technology, party members and supporters may not need to gather in physical locations. They can facilitate direct communication to large audiences in real time to plan, organize, and share information. Tools can also provide encrypted and secure methods of transmitting politically sensitive information.

But be careful! Technology can expose groups to surveillance, open party infrastructure to cyberattacks, enable online harassment, spread dis- and misinformation, and exacerbate the risks of exposing sensitive information, including personal information about members and supporters.

Democracy support programs need to help partners so they can benefit from these new digital tools while minimizing potential threats.



Example Problem Statement:

Technology tools provide important benefits to political parties in building resilience to closing space, but they can create vulnerabilities to closing space tactics: surveillance, harassment, intimidation, mis- and disinformation, cyberattacks, and exposure of sensitive information.

PROGRAM APPROACHES:

1. Training and support for developing a culture, operational infrastructure, and training process that emphasizes cybersecurity.
2. Support for efforts to counter online harassment and dis- and misinformation especially on protecting personally identifiable information (PII).
3. Where possible, engage state agencies, platforms, and private sector actors to mitigate abuse of technology to close the political space.

Example Output Indicators:

- Number of party members trained on digital tools and/or cybersecurity best practices
- Number of plans for cybersecurity onboarding for candidates and new members
- Number of reports produced on emerging online harassment campaigns

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE:

If political parties are equipped to use technology to facilitate organizing, mobilization, and strategic communication, and if party members are trained to recognize, prevent, and respond to emerging digital threats, then they will be more resilient to closing space tactics.

4. Training on tools including social media platforms, secure peer-to-peer communications apps, virtual private networks (VPNs), or database apps (like accounting software, or customer management software), including technical aspects and legal, regulatory, and risk aspects.
5. Training on cybersecurity and digital hygiene, including network security, encryption, cloud services, device management, and data protection.

Example Outcome Indicators:

- Parties put strategic plans in place, including contingency plans, on cybersecurity and digital hygiene.
- Number of citizens reached as part of online countering disinformation social media campaigns.
- Number of cybersecurity tools and/or best practices (two-factor authentication, encryption, network protection, etc.) adopted.



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#4 CAPITALIZING on DIASPORA and INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

SUMMARY:

In closing political space, stakeholders outside of the country-like diaspora communities; activists, civic leaders, and political opposition in exile; international and regional organizations (I/ROs); and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) -can play an important role in supporting local organizing. Funders and implementers of democracy assistance programs can help facilitate these connections.

However, diaspora and international support are not panaceas. Diaspora communities (and their home-country family, friend, and professional networks) may be subject to repression.

Also, diaspora support can be problematic if diasporas are disconnected from events on the ground or if they do not represent popular political sentiment at home. Support from I/ROs and INGOs may also delegitimize domestic political parties, especially when perpetrators brand political opponents as foreign agents or enemies of the state.



Example Problem Statements:

- Domestic restrictions on organizing, free expression, and independent media prevent advocacy efforts.
- The international community's lack of awareness of the closing space process allows perpetrators to close the political space to opposition with relative impunity.

PROGRAM APPROACHES:

- Stakeholder mapping workshops to identify international actors with specific resources.
- Support for specialized research (academics, lawyers, party think tanks, etc.) on the legal and regulatory environment for international action.
- International exchanges to help connect diaspora communities with domestic political parties.

Example Output Indicators:

- Number of domestic political party and diaspora members engaged as part of an international network or exchange
- Political party members demonstrate increased knowledge or awareness of legal or de facto restrictions on international support
- Political parties create strategic plans for identifying and engaging with diaspora communities, R/IOs, and/or INGOs

in CLOSING SPACE

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE:

If domestic political parties are connected to diaspora communities, activists or opposition figures in exile, regional and international organizations, or international nongovernmental organizations, then those parties will be more resilient to closing space because international and offshore actors can provide additional channels for organizing, fundraising, and advocacy, and they can alter the incentives of perpetrators of closing space.

- International conferences, summits, and workshops to connect domestic political actors to networks of R/IOs and INGOs.
- Training for domestic party members and activists in engaging international and regional organizations for advocacy and awareness.

Example Outcome Indicators:

- ✓ Diaspora leaders advocate with their host-government and/or home-government to open political space.
- ✓ Number of statements issued by R/IOs or INGOs expressing support for targets of closing space.
- ✓ Political parties identify, engage, and use resources from international advocates.

#5 FORMING OPPOSITION COALITIONS

SUMMARY:

There's strength in numbers. Forming a coalition of opposition parties to contest elections can be an effective way of overcoming even extreme instances of closing space.

In many cases, where parties are small, weak, or splintered, a coalition may be the only way to contest power. However, political coalitions are vulnerable to pressure. "Collective action" (or "free rider") problems underscore the fact that each party has an incentive to let potential partners bear the costs of organizing and the risk of repression.

Collective action problems are particularly pronounced when perpetrators of closing space use incentives or coercion to co-opt coalition parties and individual politicians. However, coalition and party rules, structures, and norms help coalitions overcome these collective action problems.

Democracy support programs can help coalitions develop unified goals and policy priorities, clear guidelines for cooperation and decision-making, consensus on candidates, clear timelines and division of labor for coalition members, and frameworks for cross-party interaction.



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Example Problem Statements:

in CLOSING SPACE

- Opposition parties are particularly susceptible to closing political space if they lack clear brands and policy platforms, are organizationally weak, suffer from low party loyalty, and have not coalesced around a viable opposition candidate or electoral strategy.
- This makes it easier for the incumbent party to successfully divide the political opposition by coercing and co-opting potential opposition parties and candidates.

PROGRAM APPROACHES:

1. Encouraging and supporting coalition functions and activities between election cycles.
2. Organizing cross-party dialogues to facilitate conversations on potential coalitions.

Example Output Indicators:

- Parties gain an enhanced understanding of constituencies of potential coalition partners
- Number of political party members that participate in cross-party dialogues
- Coalitions develop institutions (rules, structures, or norms) to facilitate collective action as part of a workshop or dialogue
- Parties develop mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing coalition agreements

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE:

If political parties develop coalitions, and if those coalitions develop institutions (rules, structures, and norms) that overcome collective action problems, then parties will be more resilient to closing space, because the coalition will be less susceptible to repression and the co-optation of coalition members.

3. Public opinion research and utilization workshops to identify potential coalition partners.

4. Training and support for convening pacts, facilitating mutual monitoring of coalition agreements, and providing fora to negotiate rules and procedures within the coalition (e.g., for candidate selection, platform development, agenda setting, public communications, campaign strategy, etc.)

Example Outcome Indicators:

- ✓ Parties form coalitions on the basis of partnerships that can mobilize distinct, but compatible constituencies.
- ✓ Coalitions use group institutions to make collective decisions on contentious issues – e.g., ranking candidates on a joint election list, priorities in the policy agenda, campaign strategy, etc.
- ✓ Coalitions establish disciplinary action policies and follow through when a member or candidate violates rules.
- ✓ Coalitions retain core partners between election cycles.

#6 MAINTAINING RELEVANCE OUT OF OFFICE

SUMMARY:

When political space is closing, political parties that are out of power can still influence and engage voters. To resist closing space, parties must maintain their relationship with citizens without jeopardizing the safety of party members or supporters.

Ensuring political parties maintain engagement with citizens and their organizational structure while out of power requires an assessment of the potential risks. For instance, the parties may become too closely affiliated with civil society groups or NGOs, leaving the groups and NGOs susceptible to opponents framing them as political parties.



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Example Problem Statements:

- Between elections, party loyalty is low. Pre-election alliances created to resist closing political space rarely survive after an election.
- Parties may disperse and re-organize under new brands or around new leaders, and incumbents may use state resources (or the resources of private patrons) to induce opposition defections.
- As a result, parties that oppose the closing of political space are often unable to build durable organizational capacity and recognizable brands, and party loyalty within the legislature is too low for effective oversight over the executive.

PROGRAM APPROACHES:

- Developing contingency plans to adapt to losing seats, being out of power, or deregistration.

Example Output Indicators:

- Number of strategies for engaging voters outside of election cycles developed as part of workshops
- Number of party members trained on platform and brand development, or organizational capacity and infrastructure building
- Number of adaptation strategies produced as part of a scenario planning exercise

in CLOSING SPACE

THEORY OF CHANGE EXAMPLE:

If political parties receive support in building and maintaining organizational capacity, citizen engagement, policy platforms, and recognizable brands between elections, they will be more resilient to closing space.

They will minimize the odds that members or supporters will defect to other parties – especially the party in power – and can continue to engage citizens under a consistent brand and policy platform.

- Develop consistent branding and policy platforms between elections.

- Supporting building party capacity and infrastructure to continue to engage voters while out of office.

Example Outcome Indicators:

- Party brands, policy commitments, and membership stay relatively constant between election cycles.
- Party organizations integrate contingency plans into risk assessments and operational processes.
- Number of voters engaged as part of off-cycle party activities.