



Review of international assistance to political party and party system development

Case study report: Latin America

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August 2010

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank DFID and the FCO for their generous support for this project, however, the views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of DFID, the FCO or ODI.

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Contents

	Contents	v
	Tables, figures & boxes	vi
	Executive summary	vii
1	Introduction	1
2	Regional trends in political party and party system development	1
2.1	Historical-structural factors	2
2.2	Institutional factors	3
2.3	Current challenges for political party development in Latin America	4
3	Support to political parties and party systems in Latin America	5
3.1	Key implementing organisations	6
3.2	Key donors	8
3.3	Objectives of party and party system assistance	9
3.4	Trends and challenges	10
4	Types of party and party system support in Latin America	11
4.1	Political party support	11
4.2	Party system support	14
4.3	The approach to results	16
5	What are the lessons from Latin America?	17
	References	19

Tables, figures & boxes

Boxes

Box 1: NIMD in Latin America	7
Box 2: DFID's strategy in Latin America	8
Box 3: Categories of party assistance (Carothers 2006)	12
Box 4: Example of good practice at the programmatic and operation level (Ballon-Echegaray 2009)	14

Executive summary

The purpose of this review of political party assistance in Latin America is to track the evolution of international assistance to political parties and party systems, to identify changing patterns in the nature of the interventions, and to advance a tentative assessment of whether the different approaches and methods of donor¹ support contribute constructively to the development of political parties in the region. The report forms part of a larger research project into international assistance to political parties, funded by DFID and FCO.

The report summarises first the nature of regional trends in political party and party system development from a historical perspective, and signals contemporary challenges for parties in the context of the third wave of democratisation. The second section reviews the main actors involved in party and party system assistance. The third section examines some of the ongoing challenges for the international community, and signals lessons learned identified as relevant for the current debates on political party support. The final section presents an analysis of the challenges of measuring impact in party and party system support, and develops some recommendations from the lessons learned.

Latin America has been a recipient of the whole gamut of political party and party system assistance. There is by now a range of emerging lessons and recommendations from regional experiences which are of relevance to the broader debates on how external actors' can best support the development of political parties in developing societies and young democracies. At the same time, there are regional and country specific particularities which warn against developing a one size fits all approach.

Emerging recommendations include: firstly, that deep knowledge of context, including through political economy analysis methodologies, are central to achieving results in Latin America. The UK has been one of the leaders on this, and should continue to play a role in facilitating context specific analysis.

Secondly, that working with country systems requires ongoing participation by the key stakeholders to ensure ownership and demand driven programmes which are more likely to match country level needs. For this, donors need to remain updated on changing events on the ground.

Thirdly, given the deeply political nature of the processes of change that party and party system assistance aims to support, it is important to work with realistic objectives. This includes acknowledging the limitations of technical assistance methods focused on capacity alone – while not diminishing their value - and learning to think more politically.

Fourthly, it is important to maintain robust analytical coherence in relation to the desired aims of party support. This means working with more caution on some of the causal assumptions that underpin party and party system support. For instance, the correlation that is assumed as between good governance and the likelihood of better development outcomes is in general terms persuasive. However, some more concrete assumptions, such as the belief that institutionalised political parties are more likely to make pro-poor policy choices needs to be treated with care. The political and ideological dimension of pro-poor policies should not be forgotten, and institutionalised parties will not necessarily agree on what these should be.

Despite these qualifications, the development of stable political parties remains highly relevant for advancing the quality of policy making processes in Latin America, including in terms of the fulfilment of the tasks of aggregating social preferences, and articulating corresponding policy choices in keeping with electoral preferences (that is, representation). This would be no small achievement. A closer look at party assistance for political parties suggests that under some

¹ In the main, this report focuses on the support provided by donor agencies for party assistance, rather than examining other external actors, except where explicitly stated. This reflects the dominance of donors in assistance in this area in Latin America.

conditions, the development community can contribute to facilitating some processes of change.

1 Introduction

Latin America has received political party assistance for several decades, and it has taken many forms. However it is in the third wave of democratisation since the end of the 1970s that political party, and later, party system assistance has taken a new dimension as well as more diverse forms.

The purpose of this review of political party assistance in Latin America is to track the evolution of international assistance to political parties and party systems, to identify changing patterns in the nature of the interventions, and to advance a tentative assessment of whether the different approaches and methods of donor support contribute constructively to the development of political parties in the region. In addition, the review examines the assumptions that underpin the different types of party and party system assistance. The degree to which they are likely to lead to better practice, and whether international assistance is founded on sound knowledge and understanding of context is also assessed. This report forms part of a larger research project into international assistance to political parties, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The first section of the paper reviews regional trends in political party and party system development from a historical perspective, and signals contemporary challenges for parties in the context of the third wave of democratisation. Section two reviews the main forms of party and party system assistance, looking at: the main actors involved in and forms of donor support to political parties in Latin America; the different types of types of intervention; the underlying objectives. Throughout, examples are given from different contexts. Section three examines some of the ongoing challenges for the international community, and signals lessons learned that are identified as relevant for the current debates on political party support.

2 Regional trends in political party and party system development

This section draws attention to a number of structural, historical and institutional factors recurrent in the region which, in different ways, have contributed to shaping political parties and party systems in the region. There is increasing recognition within the international community of the need to understand context, and this features more prominently in programmatic support to political parties (for instance in relation to the analysis funded by DFID in the context of the multi-lateral Latin America partnership for political party support). However it is not always evident that this knowledge has translated into more effective political party and party system assistance.

A number of typologies have been developed which capture categories of parties and party systems across a range of criteria, or spectrums. Categorisations of party systems include the number of parties; levels of ideological polarisation (Alcantara et al; Coppedge 1997); levels of institutionalisation (Mainwaring and Scully 1995); levels of electoral volatility; and degree of programmatic coherence. Additional distinctions include whether political party systems are closed or open to renovation and inclusion of new political formations in keeping with processes of social and political change. Carothers settles on a distinction between those countries with stable two to three political party systems (typically, the Southern cone countries, Colombia, Costa Rica and Honduras), and other countries which have a more inchoate party system, with higher levels of volatility, and party instability (Bolivia, Brazil). The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) focuses on two criteria for categorising parties: levels of organisational coherence and institutionalisation and degree of programmatic substance (Caton 2007). To some extent the choice of categorisation criteria is an indication of what is assumed to be the nature of the problem that

needs to be addressed – and thus would have different implications for policy recommendations.

Whatever the criteria for party and party system typologies – and the corresponding problem areas that are identified - there is wide consensus that political parties are relevant actors for governance and development, and that they can constitute an important connecting point between state and society. They should be organisations that represent the interests of the citizens before the state; provide a channel for political participation in the democratic process; structure the programmatic choices for citizens to choose from for the election to public office; and are able to form government and guide policy-making.

At the same time, political parties and party systems are the product of context specific political, social and economic histories. The nature of party systems, and the type of parties that characterise each context, are the product of the specific processes of state formation, political and institutional development, and how social cleavages have been translated into political positions and resolved. In Latin America, there are a number of recurrent structural and historical themes which are worth signalling as relevant antecedents to understanding contemporary governance structures and challenges of political party development.

2.1 Historical-structural factors

Firstly, most countries in the region achieved independence in the early 19th century, and since then, through cyclical bouts of constitutional and authoritarian rule, political parties have featured in the political landscape with varying levels of stability and renewal. Therefore political parties are not new actors. This sets Latin America somewhat apart from the experience of other post-colonial regions grappling with building up party systems as a more recent challenge.

Secondly, different transformative moments of state formation and political development since independence have had an impact on shaping the character of parties and party systems. In turn, and to varying degrees, political parties have contributed to shaping moments of political and social transformation or regime transition. For instance, the Mexican PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucionalizado*) was the product of the 1917 Mexican Revolution, and became consolidated as the dominant party for most of the 20th century – in large measure crystallising and defining the nature of the political settlement that was forged out of the Revolution. In turn, dominant party rule became the institutional framework for Mexico's version of the developmental state that characterised the model of development until the 1980s and 90s (Randall 2007). Key transformative processes of state development in the region typically include some of the following:

- Early experiments in constitutional rule in the 19th century in which **elite parties** (typically Liberals and Conservatives) articulated interests of landed and natural resource-based oligarchies and emerging capitalist interests. In very few cases did any of the 19th century parties survive the emerging demands for broader political participation and expansion of the vote to new social groups in the early 20th century (as in Europe, typically the vote was limited to propertied or literate males until well into the 20th century).
- The crisis of economic liberalism with the depression of the 1930s and the emergence of new social actors from below (trade unions, labour movements, rural mobilisation and emerging urban petty bourgeois voice) resulted in the emergence of new forms of **mass based parties**. In some cases, these translated into multi-class nationalist alliances reacting against economic liberalism and in favour of state-led capitalism (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*, APRA in Peru, the *Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario*, MNR in Bolivia, Peronism in Argentina). In others, left-right ideological positions began to colour the spectrum of electoral choices, such as in Chile, with emerging socialist and communist parties in opposition to conservative forces aligned with elite interests.

- The Cuban revolution, the crisis of the state-led capitalist models of import substitution industrialisation, and the escalation of the Cold War logic ushered in an era of **political polarisation between left and right** which resulted in a wave of military rule that swept the region through the 1960s-70s. In most cases, this led to political parties being banned and mass exiles of intellectuals and party members either to countries like Mexico and Venezuela, which did not experience military rule, or to countries in the North. The experience of exile itself in some cases was influential in shaping political strategies of parties in the later processes of democratisation.
- The recent 'third wave' of democratisation, since the end of the 1970s, brought with it the most stable cycle of electoral governance and competitive party rule in the region. In some cases parties played an important role in negotiating the return to democracy (Argentina, Peru). In others, as in Chile, the top-down military controlled liberalisation and left an indelible mark in contemporary Chilean politics, creating the basis for a more cautious and consensus-based form of politics than in the past. Whatever the process, democratisation in the region brought with it a new protagonism for political parties as key actors in shaping developmental outcomes.
- Following three decades of democratic rule, a number of factors have created different manifestations of disenchantment with representative party politics. These include high expectations about the prospects of civilian rule, the harsh realities of the debt crisis in the 1980s, the shortcomings of the Washington Consensus measures of economic liberalisation in the 1990s, and a growing disenchantment with political elites and with democratic rule. In some cases it has led to **new political formations** (such as the indigenous movements of Bolivia, Peru, Mexico), or the emergence of neo-populist figures (such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela). The failings of democratisation have been experienced very differently in the region, but to varying degrees in the last decade, the landscape of political parties and political party systems has changed significantly following a region-wide sense that parties are not credible or legitimate vehicles for political representation.

2.2 Institutional factors

In addition to the above structural/historical legacies, a range of institutional arrangements that constitute the political system are important in shaping political parties. These contribute to shaping such questions as the number of political parties that can compete and survive electoral processes, the incentives for consensus and coalition-formation behaviour, the opportunities for practices of clientelism and patronage and the nature of executive and legislative relations. These have consequences for party formation and development. In the recent cycle of democratisation, donor engagement in the region has played a role in policy debates and reform processes in relation to some of the following in a number of countries:

- The particularities of **electoral legislation** go a long way towards defining the number of, and interaction between political parties. In the 1980s and 1990s, significant progress was achieved in terms of reducing electoral fraud and improving the conditions for fair party competition, and international assistance was not unimportant in this process (Whitehead 2001). In addition, decisions around the forms and degree of proportional representation, or whether to work with open or closed party list systems, or the system for electing the president, have been crucial in defining the number of political parties that can compete, and the rules of the game for political interaction. These aspects of electoral legislation (often not sufficiently understood in the donor literature on political party assistance) are crucial in shaping party strategies and incentives for consensus and coalition building behaviour – and generally the nature of party interaction. For instance, in Brazil the open-list system severely undermines the internal coherence of parties, including in relation to the legislative process, but conversely arguably provides a stronger link between legislators and their constituents (Morgenstern and Vazquez-D'Elia 2007).

- The formal and informal **logic of presidentialism**, and the rules that define the relationship between the executive and legislative branch are also important in shaping party development and behaviour. During the 1980s and 1990s, an academic debate centred on the merits and perils of presidentialism. Linz famously argued that presidentialism – in contrast to parliamentarism - by definition enhanced personalist politics, and undermined political party development (Linz 1990). Presidentialism was seen to have weakened democratic prospects in Latin America. By contrast, others indicated that presidentialism *per se* was not the problem but that each system needed to be assessed on the merits of the particular formal and informal attributes of the executive and legislative powers, and the interaction of government and opposition parties in relation to policy making (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997). The point here is that the particular features of presidential institutions can significantly affect internal party dynamics, both of governing and opposition parties.
- As **decentralisation processes** took hold in some countries, these too were increasingly seen to be also shaping new opportunity structures for sub-national politics to develop in new ways, and with varying impact on national political parties (Moreno 2003). For instance, in Bolivia, the decentralisation process of the 1990s contributed significantly to opening up new political space for the emergence of grass roots movements that have in time coalesced to become the new ruling party of the *Movimiento al Socialismo* party (MAS).
- **Party laws** have become a more recent feature of the formal governance structures. In part they are a consequence of the growing disenchantment with political party performance in the current wave of democratisation. Party system assistance has been important in driving the passage of important political party laws, which have the objective of providing regulatory frameworks on minimum standards and conditions that parties must abide by in order to be registered to compete for public office. In varying degrees, political party laws also deal with the complex issue of **party finances**. Increasingly this has come to be seen as an important issue regarding the legitimacy of political parties.

Political parties are also shaped by **informal institutions**. In recent times there has been increasing acknowledgement of the importance of understanding the impact of informal rules of the game in politics generally (Helmke and Levitsky 2004), and political parties specifically. Overall international assistance to parties across Latin America does not appear to have been in any significant way informed by an awareness of the universe of informal institutions that shape incentive structures and the conduct of political actors – including political parties. Until recently, the emphasis has been on the formal aspects of political party structures (Langston 2004).

2.3 Current challenges for political party development in Latin America

There are a number of challenges for governance in contemporary political processes in Latin America which seem to have some degree of recurrence throughout the region. Despite the diversity of party systems and types of parties, some commonalities exist in how political parties are evolving, and the factors that they are responding to.

Firstly, the emergence of **new social actors** in the face of the failings of the democratic process and the legitimacy crisis of political parties since the 1990s has led to new political formations either around populist figures (such as Hugo Chavez in Venezuela) or more grass roots movements (Bolivia, Ecuador and to some extent the power base of Lula in Brazil, although this responds to more long standing structures of union politics). This is not necessarily problematic in terms of democratisation processes, as it signals the openness of political systems to new political forces, but it does point to some of the tensions between governance and participatory politics led by grass-roots processes.

Secondly, **organised crime** and campaign funding can have a powerful impact on political parties. The impact of the drug trade on party systems should not be underestimated (for example, in Colombia, Mexico and Bolivia). This has brought with it increased concern with how political parties are financed.

Other recurrent themes which undermine the development of parties include: excessive personalism; patronage and clientelism, where political parties are more a vehicle for cronyism than for representation; the resulting legitimacy crisis of representative democracy rooted in the perceived divorce between political parties and society; the factor of democratic compression (Carothers 2007), where too many expectations are placed too quickly on relatively young democracies; the features of 'delegative democracy' (closed-door executive-led policy making in collaboration with Washington consensus technocrats, but insufficient sense of democratic deliberation) (O'Donnell 1993); deteriorating socio-economic indicators which in some cases have severely aggravated recent processes of political polarisation (and or fragility).

It is important to note that many of these challenges are also present in established democracies. The difference appears to lie in the level of state resilience, and in the institutional 'thickness' of democratic governance.

Finally, in the **world of ideas, ideology and political programs**, political parties are afflicted by a hollowness of political identity and programmatic weakness following, on the one hand, the crisis of the traditional (Marxist leaning) left and on the other the failings of neo-liberalism. To some extent, the waning of economic liberalism as an ideology has been followed by emerging new political discourses around alternative models of development (Panizza 2009). These include the emergence of identity politics through new indigenous parties; new narratives of state-led capitalism, as in Ecuador or Argentina; and milder forms of social democracy, as in Chile and Brazil. Despite these developments, political parties in Latin America tend to be predominantly seen as having weak programmatic coherence.

3 Support to political parties and party systems in Latin America

Political party assistance in Latin America has a long history, and predates the third wave of democratisation. Until the late 1990s, what Carothers (2006) has called the 'standard method' dominated, involving different types of support to parties, either individually or through multi-party interventions. More recently there has been a shift towards what several authors call a 'second generation' of party assistance, targeted at strengthening party systems rather than specific parties (Ibid.). Latin America has been a crucible for experimentation across a broad range of forms of both party and party system support. This section will examine first who the key funders and implementers are, the types and methods of assistance provided, and the objectives of party and party system assistance.

The main actors' involved in the provision and implementation of international assistance for political parties and party systems include: a) the party foundations; b) multiparty organisations (in the donor countries and at the local level); c) international organisations; d) bilateral donors; e) multi-lateral donors. Importantly, given the political nature of this type of interventions, external actors have channelled a large proportion of party support indirectly through implementing organisations (including the party foundations, multi-party organisations and international bodies such as International IDEA). In some cases, these implementers also obtain funding from the parties that they are aligned to in the donor countries. But even in these cases, most funding comes from public resources.

3.1 Key implementing organisations

Political party foundations represent one of the earliest expressions of international support for parties in the region. Their role in political party assistance has evolved overtime, in part shaped by their experience, in part by changing trends in political party and party assistance.

Traditionally, the key actors have included the German *Stiftungen* (the biggest being the Social Democratic Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and the Christian Democratic Konrad Adenauer Foundation). In 2007 they were calculated to have had a budget of €100 million, generally, although not all of this is directed at party assistance, but includes broader democratic support measures. By one count there are 32 European party foundations which are active in party assistance (Caton 2007). The Spanish party foundations, including the socialist Pablo Iglesias foundation, have acquired a presence in Latin America since Spain's transition to democracy, and have had close ties to some left leaning parties in the region. The main US party foundations are the National Democracy Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) which are linked to the American Democratic Party and the Republican Party respectively. They were established with resources from the National Endowment for Democracy which continues to fund 10% of their budget. But most of their funding comes from USAID (Caton 2007; Carothers 2006).

Party foundations traditionally focus their assistance on like-minded parties (the sister party method) in recipient countries. This has particularly been the case for the European political party foundations. The 'sister party' assistance method in Latin America faces the challenge of political contexts where there are high levels of electoral volatility and fluid party systems. It has not always been easy to find like-minded parties to support. In some cases, parties that had benefitted from support in the past have become politically irrelevant.

For instance, in Venezuela the Christian Democratic Party, COPEI, which the Adenauer Foundation supported as its flagship program, became irrelevant in current Venezuela politics (Carothers 2006). Moreover, the traditional left-right spectrum is not always easily identifiable (as in the case of Argentina where the Peronist and Radical party are not easily distinguishable from one another on this spectrum). The moderate traditional left in Bolivia in the 1980s, represented by the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) or the *Movimiento Bolivia Libre* (MBL), have become generally irrelevant, and in the case of the former, increasingly discredited through high levels of corruption when in office. Thus party volatility means that the target organisations often change and keeping up with these changing political environments can be challenging for party-to-party support (Carothers 2006).

In connection to this, but also as a reflection of the general trend away from the sister-party method, even the more traditional party foundations such as the *Stiftungen* have moved towards multi-party activities and party system assistance.

The US party foundations, NDI and IRI, have from the start been organised to provide multi-party support in Latin America. This also reflects the controversial history of US-Latin American relations which has meant that the US foundations have traditionally been perceived as too closely aligned to US political interests or foreign policy priorities. Given that a large proportion of their funding is from USAID this has been problematic in the past. However, increasing engagement with other funding sources and the development of more context sensitive diagnostics has created the sense of better country embeddedness and acceptance. Concretely, the NDI in Peru and Bolivia, for instance, have been involved in multiparty support activities which in principle are informed by findings from more sophisticated political economy analysis – and in which DFID has played an important role (NDI 2004, 2009).

Multi-party organisations include such bodies as the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) or the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). These organisations focus, as part of their mandate, on multiparty or party system programmes, or general democracy support, and the objective is not to privilege links to any single party. The NIMD in particular has a strong presence in Latin America in this regard. It is especially strongly

involved in facilitating inter-party dialogue. In Ecuador and Bolivia it works through local multi-party organisations to facilitate dialogue (see Box 1).

Box 1: NIMD in Latin America

NIMD has presence in a number of countries in Latin America, with an especially strong presence in the Andean region (notably Bolivia and Ecuador) and Central America. Both sub-regions are characterised by high levels of political party volatility. Its Regional Programme (LARP) provides support for the country programmes in the region and facilitates south-south exchange of best practices, peer reviews and policy exchanges between practitioners on specific topics and skills

The NIMD works in some cases through local multi-party organisations, such as Agora in Ecuador and the fMDB in Bolivia, which have the objective of facilitating political dialogue between parties and other relevant political actors. In both countries it has been involved in facilitating inter-party dialogue around the divisive issues related to constitutional reform. NIMD is also involved in support party system reform. For instance, in Guatemala it has played an advisory role in supporting legislative processes aimed at improving mechanisms of governance, accountability and rule of law. Two examples of this include its role in supporting the new Organic Law of Congress (2008), and the Law on Violence Against Women (2009).

The key international partners include: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI); Proyectamérica (Chilean think tank); the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLASCO); and Radio Netherlands World Service (RNW). NIMD also collaborate on the ground with IDEA-International. Agora, Ecuador is an example of a joint venture between the two organisations.

International bodies working on democracy support include International IDEA. International IDEA is an intergovernmental organization which has a general mandate to support democracy through a range of activities that focus on: electoral processes; constitutional building processes; political parties and representation; democracy and development.

International IDEA has become one of the principal service providers in political party assistance in Latin America, through its regional and country offices. IDEA's work on political parties more broadly has grown from the Institute's activities in Latin America which began in the late 1990s (Power et al 2009). The central objective that has guided its work is "to assist in development and strengthening political parties so they perform as effective actors in democratisation and good governance, trusted by voters, representative and responsive to public needs and concerns, equipped to support government and a constructive opposition, thus playing a role in ensuring transparency and accountability of government" (cited in Power et al 2009).

To achieve these objectives, International IDEA in Latin America has identified a set of issues as central to building parties which have organisational capacity and programmatic coherence. These include: "internal party structures, democracy and transparency; political party financing and funding for the fight against corruption; political parties and the fight against poverty; training for party leaders, members and candidates, particularly young people and women; political party operations at the municipal level; and international cooperation between political parties".²

The activities of International IDEA in Latin America and the methods of engagement have changed over time, but the central objectives have remained the same. These include on the one hand, research activities aimed at building a databank of knowledge and information on different aspects of political party development and governance, and the institutional environment in which they operate. On the other hand, IDEA has been involved in political party assistance and party system assistance through a number of interventions which include direct technical assistance, the facilitation of interparty dialogue, support to policy processes around party and related regulatory legislation (such as electoral and political party

² (<http://www.idea.int/americas/pp.cfm>).

legislation), among others (see for instance, Power et al 2009; GPA 2009; Ballon Echegaray 2009).

Evaluations suggest that levels of impact are mixed, but there is a strong sense that in Latin America IDEA has come to be perceived as a politically independent and credible organisation. Moreover, it has tended to develop programmes on the basis of generally very sound knowledge of context, and engagement with local stakeholders. In part, according to some of the evaluations, this is down to the roles played by key individuals who have driven the endeavour to be up to speed on changing political realities, and have developed networks which reflect evolving processes and the emergence of new political actors (Ballon-Echegaray 2009; GPA 2009). Finally, an important component of the effectiveness of country offices has been ensuring a degree of flexibility in programming to ensure capacity to adapt to changes in the political context. This is especially relevant for countries with high levels of political volatility, and high turnover of competing political actors, as new political and social forces come on the scene.

3.2 Key donors

USAID is one of three main sources of political party assistance of the US-based party foundations, in addition to the NDI and IRI in Latin America. It has funded political party development within the context of its support for democracy. USAID aspires to provide neutral party support through a focus on technical assistance, training and capacity development, but faces the challenge of the history of the US's political role in the region. USAID is currently undergoing a major review of its political party work. Latin American countries prior to 1999 were not principal recipients of political party assistance (USAID 1999).

DFID has not been a major player in political party assistance. But in the last decade it has led an innovative approach to political party and party system support in Latin America through the Regional Assistance Program (RAP). The emphasis of DFID's strategy in the region has been on linking good governance with the development of a pro-poor policy agenda. Specifically, it has identified political parties as a 'missing link' in the governance agenda, where donors focused more on government and civil society, but insufficiently on parties as vehicles for linking state and society in the attempts to promote pro-poor policy making (see Box 2).

Box 2: DFID's strategy in Latin America

In 2005, DFID closed its bilateral programmes in Latin America. These were replaced by RAP, which had the goal of strengthening the pro-poor impact of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). RAP has two components: funds managed by DFID offices in the sub-regions (the Andes, Central America and Brazil), and three trust funds in the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). DFID has also worked through partnerships including with IDEA, the NDI and UNDP

The strategy with political parties has been to facilitate the following:

- Build a better understanding of the drivers and obstacle to pro-poor reform
- Raise awareness of the need for pro-poor reform among political parties
- Devise incentives to encourage pro-poor initiatives, including through improving the political representation of the poor
- Engaging actors outside political parties in policy dialogue on poverty and inequality, and strengthening the role of parliaments

Engaging donors and IFIs in using this analysis, and improving the quality of policy dialogue around country strategies through more politically conscious analytical work and more broadly-base consultation approaches.

DFID has also funded in-depth political economy analyses of the political landscape of a number of Latin American countries. The NDI carried out DFID funded studies of Bolivia and Peru (NDI 2005a; 2005b) and has worked in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank (WB), UNDP, and IDEA to support studies which identify the structures and incentives of political elite behaviour and party development (DFID 2008). DFID was instrumental in funding the IDB's *Politics of Policies* work in 2007. The strategy of using Political Economy Analysis (PEA) tools for a deeper understanding of the contextual challenges of political parties in connection with pro-poor development objectives has widely been commended (Rocha-Menocal et al 2009; Booth et al), but unfortunately DFID's Latin America programme has now closed.

As part of the effort to improve the knowledge base for better and more informed political party work, DFID has encouraged more effective consultation within Latin America with a broader range of stakeholders in order to generate more in-depth and locally generated analysis of governance challenges.

DFID's work has had an impact on how other donors, such as the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), are developing their work on political parties in the region. AECID (the official Spanish Agency for international development cooperation and for humanitarian assistance) has been involved in party system support in Latin America, through bilateral aid, but also increasingly in collaboration with the UNDP, the Organisation of American States (OAS), IDEA and the IDB. Typically it has tended not to deviate from standard forms of technical assistance, funding seminars and exchange programs.

Among the multi-laterals, such as the UNDP and the EU, political party support tends to fall within the remit of democracy support. UNDP outweighs other multilaterals in terms of funding volumes (Power 2009). In Latin America, most UNDP assistance aimed at political parties and party systems has focused on the facilitation of political dialogue and improving women's participation in politics and political parties (UNDP 2005).

Within the Americas, the OAS and the IDB have in recent years developed policy objectives aimed at supporting party system development across a range of initiatives directed at democracy support. At the Third Summit of the Americas in 2001, the political leaders mandated the OAS and the IDB to undertake an assessment of a range of issues relating to political parties (Carothers 2006: 82). Subsequently, party system assistance featured more prominently in the democracy and governance support of both organisations, as well as in the analytical reasoning that regional organisations have embraced behind the notion that politics matters or development (Stein and Tommassi 2008).

As donors expand in the field of political party assistance it is still unclear the degree to which efforts are coordinated. Carothers (2006) describes in the case of Guatemala as an increasingly 'crowded field' where in the last decade, as the country's democratic process has faltered, there has been a push by a number of donors to be active in political party support. There is a sense of some improved coordination at the high level of strategic thinking, as different bilateral and multilateral agencies have in the last ten years began to work together more consistently. In some cases this has happened through the funding of implementing organisations such as the NIMD (Jimenez et al 2004). But the levels of coordination weaken at the operational level (Ordóñez 2008).

3.3 Objectives of party and party system assistance

Political party and party system assistance in the region focuses on a wide range of objectives premised on different assumptions. Two recurrent overarching assumptions cited include: first, that institutionalised and programmatically coherent political parties are central for the achievement of good governance; second (but this is more recent), that given a presumed link between good governance and development outcomes, institutionalised and coherent political parties are more likely to yield pro-poor policy choices. Of course, the link between governance and development outcomes remains a matter of debate, but is in principle a persuasive

starting point. Less evident is the connection between well-organised and coherent parties and the likelihood of pro-poor policy. In any event, if the purpose of international engagement is to support democratisation efforts, the development of political parties is an important piece of the puzzle. But here the challenges include what donors can realistically hope to achieve; and how well suited they are to supporting political processes without interfering with domestic politics; and then which methods of party and party system assistance are most effective in achieving this.

From these general objectives, a range of sub-goals populate the range of party and party assistance and typically include the following:

- Providing forums for dialogue and debate (for instance, through support for local forums for interparty dialogue and discussion)
- Strengthening party systems (for instance through supporting political party laws)
- Improving internal party organisational capacity (for instance, through capacity development)
- Creating conditions for increasing political participation (both in terms of quality as well as quantity) of representatives from indigenous peoples, women and youth
- Improving relations between political and civil society.

These are ambitious goals, for which the signs in Latin America show that levels of political party credibility are not improving.

3.4 Trends and challenges

The main general trend that can be observed is that Latin America has become the depository of a diverse field of political party and party system assistance, and this is reflected in the fact that the number of players in the field has increased. This reflects two trends in donor thinking regarding the link between governance and development.

First, the premise that the international community can play a role in supporting democracy, and that political parties are key players for democracy now features more prominently in governance and democracy support discourses. Second, the quality of political governance is recognised as important for achieving developmental outcomes. DFID has been especially active in driving the analytical link between pro-poor development and governance, and its work in Latin America has been important in influencing donor thinking on political party support in the region (for instance through the IDB and OAS).

Donors and implementing organisations in Latin America appear to increasingly incorporate analysis of context into the definition and follow-up of their activities. But this is still relatively recent, and it is not clear that better analysis translates into better party and party system assistance.

There is also a growing sense that monitoring and evaluation of party assistance efforts is becoming more routine in Latin America. While the literature still signals the paucity of evaluation reports, there is no doubt that the picture has changed considerably from the early days of political party support.

An important challenge for multi-party interventions across the board includes the difficult calculation of which parties are included for funding or not (Carothers 2007). Where implementing organisations or donor organisations are not sufficiently attuned to local context, there is a risk of 'doing harm' by either wittingly or unwittingly being biased in the selection of recipients of political party assistance. To some extent, this is reflected in the evaluation of DFID in 2005. Another example is that of the NDI in Bolivia. As late as 2003/4, NDI held capacity development training under its leadership programme which included only the waning political parties, with no presence from newer political formations (NDI 2004). It is often the case that most activities took place in urban centres, and especially in the capital cities, with insufficient outreach in the rural areas.

4 Types of party and party system support in Latin America

A review of the documentation on Latin America provides a relatively similar and recurrent list of target areas across different countries aimed at political party and party system support (and objectives and activities across the two overlap). Notably, the list of policy objectives has expanded in the last decade, in part reflecting the shift in gear in governance and pro-democracy work, the growing acknowledgement that politics matters for development, and a cumulative process of learning by doing. In part, the evolution in objectives also reflects the fact of a more sophisticated approach to political party assistance – notwithstanding the limited number of evaluations available regarding concrete political party and party system assistance.

There are two broad categories of support. This includes, first, party support (or the ‘standard method’ as named by Carothers 2006), in which assistance is channelled directly to political parties either through direct assistance, or through multi-party programs and activities. The second category refers to political party system support, which refers to assistance aimed at enhancing the enabling conditions and environment for political parties to be able to achieve their functions. Much of this falls also under the broader label of democracy support.

4.1 Political party support

Political party support encompasses a range of objectives and goals. The balance between them has shifted overtime. Increasingly the trend is towards multi-party assistance and away from support to like-minded parties. Latin America is populated with most forms of political party assistance. The levels of ambition vary but the overall objective commonly remains that of building political parties that, through improved organisational capacity, programmatic coherence, and abidance by the rules of good governance, can constitute a fundamental building block for the consolidation of democracy.

The trend has been to move away from the sister party model to multiparty assistance, either on an individual basis (with assistance providers working with individual parties) or where the programmes involve all parties in the same activities.

Party support has traditionally focused on north to south knowledge transfer. This has taken a number of forms and has evolved somewhat, but as Carothers (2006) notes, the toolkit has not changed greatly overtime. There are a number of categorisations of forms of assistance delivery for party support (Carothers 2006; Caton 2007; Kumar 2004) (see Box 3).

Box 3: Categories of party assistance (Carothers 2006)

Carothers categorises party assistance into three methods of party support.

- **Flexible party support**, which is longstanding and characterises much of how the *Stiftungen* or single party foundations operated occurs when the assistance provider offers a mix of funding resources as part of a long-standing partnership between like-minded political organisations. This assistance tends not to be strategic or guided by clear objectives other than mutual political sympathy.
- Second, **concentrated training** refers to the assortment of technical assistance and capacity building, often in the form of short workshops, or fly in visits from technical experts from the north with limited understanding of context. Typically weak local knowledge undermines the suitability of this type of party assistance.
- Third, **exchange relations** involve mutual visits between party organisation members of north and south.

In all three there is little evidence of impact on parties in terms of either improved levels of institutionalisation, programmatic coherence or legitimacy. Rather, these interventions have often resulted in little more than intra-party distribution of resources along clientelist or cronyism dynamics (Carothers 2006, 2008)

Latin America has been a depository of all three types of party assistance.

The toolkit summarised in the box above (Box 3) seems relatively unaltered over time in Latin America, and there is a sense of disappointment in terms of impact. Certainly, the pervasive sense of an undiminishing legitimacy crisis of political parties in the region would seem to signal that little has been achieved, given that party support is no longer that new. This raises a number of questions: Are the broader objectives based on flawed assumptions? Are the concrete goals of political party support realistic? Are they suited to context, and informed by sufficient understanding of local politics? Does the problem lie in the methods of party assistance?

On the question of assumptions, some premises of party support appear to be based on some problematic assumptions. For instance, some of the assumptions about the connection between pro-poor policies being an inevitable outcome of party systems which have greater levels of institutionalisation and programmatic coherence is not so clear, and must surely be a matter of empirical analysis. On the goals of political party support, the key challenge lies in tailoring objectives to what is realistic, given the political nature of the issue, and that international actors are inevitably only marginal actors in what are in the main domestic processes of political development. (Of course, that also applies to most governance related reforms that are supported by international actors). That does not diminish from the fact that the international community can contribute to supporting certain political processes, but it requires both a deep understanding of context, and ensuring that the different party assistance methods are also informed by demand and buy-in from the relevant political actors.

Overall, there remains the sense that a number of activities under taken have had only limited impact. For instance top-down technical assistance involving fly-in visits from external experts is seen as unlikely to leave lasting impact, but continues to be used in Latin America. Moreover, even as knowledge about context improves, it is unclear that this is channelled into programming, or that it has an impact on changing methods of practice.

The evaluations and progression of party assistance in Latin America, especially as it has evolved in the last decade, do signal some important lessons, and incipient new trends which merit acknowledgement:

- Greater evidence of 'lessons learned' informing the analysis and discourse of party assistance, (even if it is not clear that it has yet translated into practice) (for instance, Ballon-Echegaray 2009; DFID 2008; NDI 2008; NIMD 2009).
- More attention paid to context, although this is uneven. There are some examples of assistance providers integrating context analysis into ongoing programming efforts (Ballon-Echegaray 2009, GPA 2009).
- More recourse to local expertise for capacity development (Ballon-Echegaray 2009; NIMD, 2009). This requires working beyond top-down elite level, and ensuring that all political positions are represented.
- Introducing flexibility into strategy, programming and operations, given the political nature of the work, and the need to adapt (to variable degrees) to rapidly changing political contexts, (GPA 2009).
- More attention paid to the need to work more effectively with local stakeholders, and enhance the 'demand-side' dimension to inform diagnostics. This includes working not only with political parties but also with the range of social actors relevant in shaping political outcomes, or that constitute a representative voice of specific social groups (NIMD 2009; NDI 2008).
- Combinations of different types of support which can be mutually reinforcing, such as multiparty assistance in party dialogue, direct party technical assistance, and legislative support to strengthen the relevant party and funding legislation (PEM 2008; GPA 2009).
- In the case of International IDEA, the quality of country staff has been recognised as an important asset. Thinking about staffing skills and requirements can go a long way to improving the quality of operational design and implementation (Power et al 2009; Ballon-Echegaray 2009).
- More sophisticated approaches to training that can go beyond one off visits by external experts. This includes adapting capacity development to local needs, building in courses which run over several months, and encouraging sustained participation by party members at different levels (GPA 2009).
- The importance of knowledge. International IDEA has been at the forefront of pioneering research aimed at building the knowledge of country contexts from a number of institutional perspectives. The emphasis of the studies is on formal institutions, and has been critiqued for not being sufficiently linked to strategic thinking on political party and party system assistance (Power et al 2009). But given the level of knowledge available, the databank that is being created is likely to constitute an important resource for the field.

The documentation reviewed for this paper points to several cases of emerging lessons informing how donors and assistance providers are reflecting on their experiences. An example of emerging lessons translating into good practice, includes the IDEA/UNDP programme in Bolivia (see Box 4).

Box 4: Example of good practice at the programmatic and operation level (Ballon-Echegaray 2009)

The IDEA/UNDP programme in Bolivia was seen as being:

- Anchored in realistic objectives and sound knowledge of context
- Bolivia is an example of a fluid polity which by some standards has strong elements of fragility. The high levels of political uncertainty and political polarisation raise particular challenges.
- Other examples of good practice within the project included:
 - The allocation of resources to party activities for CD on the basis of a combination of criteria that ensure proportionality across the range of relevant political parties.
 - Context analysis was not a one-off activity, but was integrated as an ongoing process of the project to ensure ongoing relevance and adaptability of the project to fit the needs of rapidly changing circumstances
 - In-built into the program were mechanisms to ensure that the sub-projects within the project were demand driven, defined by the particular needs of each political party. Given the very diverse forms of political parties, and respective constituencies, integrating demand led plurality of forms of assistance to suit the needs of each political party has ensured a higher degree of ownership, relevance and effectiveness.

4.2 Party system support

Increasingly political party assistance has branched out to include the wider range of activities that aim to enhance the conditions for an enabling environment for party development. Under the label of political party system assistance we can include a broad range of activities. The dividing line between this and party support is not always evident, and the overlaps are considerable. This is especially so with regard to objectives. Much of what falls under party system support also falls under the broad category of democracy support.

Facilitating political dialogue: This has become a growing area of party system support, and it is aimed at contributing to change in how politicians from opposing parties interact with each other. In part it reflects the lesson that a major obstacle to governance and democratic development lies in the level of political polarisation that in many countries in the region undermines political and even regime stability. The NIMD, UNDP and International IDEA are all involved – in some cases collaboratively so – in activities aimed at facilitating political dialogue in the region. Especially in those countries where levels of political polarisation and/or social unrest have (re)emerged in recent times (as in Ecuador or Bolivia) or where the legacy of war and conflict have left fractured political communities in place (Guatemala), the role of facilitating dialogue between political contenders can be particularly helpful in moving the political process towards stability, and enabling a habit of communication between parties. In particular it can contribute to the process of re-establishing trust, at least around the rules of the game and the need to work together.

Supporting electoral processes: is an important aspect of party system support. Here it is useful to distinguish between three levels of support which are not always clearly delineated in documentation, but which have different purposes (and impact) with regard to facilitating the conditions for political party development.

- Electoral observation, which tends to be limited to the electoral moment (and the lead-up). This has value in transitional settings where foundational or first-time

elections are still untested in terms of levels of fraud or manipulation. By the 1990s, in much of the region, issues of electoral probity had improved significantly since the early elections of the 1980s. In countries like Guatemala it remains an issue. And in others, the escalation of problems related to renewed levels of political polarisation have again opened up the relevance of electoral observation (for example in Venezuela, Bolivia and Mexico).

- Electoral legislation and the mechanisms of oversight to ensure a robust regulatory framework has also been an area targeted by party system level support. Latin American countries have, since democratisation, experimented with a range of electoral systems, and with varying degrees of donor support. It is important to stress that decisions on electoral formulae are deeply political which poses additional sensitivities for the role of external actors. For example, International IDEA has led on providing knowledge resources on political party legislation. It has also been involved in facilitating technical assistance and playing an advisory role in this area, (for example in Peru, GPA 2009).
- The ongoing development of electoral mechanisms and procedures, not only at election time (for instance, the creation and development of electoral commissions and tribunals) are another key area for support. The credibility and effectiveness of the corresponding regulatory and oversight institutional mechanisms are critical in constraining and shaping the incentive structures that guide political party interaction in the process of political competition. In Bolivia, international support since the 1990s to the electoral tribunal has been crucial in ensuring acceptable levels of credibility of electoral competition.

Advice and support on law writing, in relation to electoral legislation and other (connected) laws regulating political party organisation and conduct has become more frequent. International support to electoral legislation has a longer history, dating back to the beginnings of the democratisation in the 1980s. But a newer area of support includes political party laws and financing regulations. The challenge of facilitating legislative reform – as in other areas – is ensuring that it goes hand in hand with high levels of country ownership. Moreover, the relevant stakeholders (political parties in this case) need to be involved in the discussions in order to avoid the fate of other legal transplants whereby new laws remain dead letters. In Mexico, International IDEA is providing both technical assistance and facilitating seminars for relevant stakeholders on further developments in political party and electoral legislation, as Mexico seeks to move on its legislative framework.³

The regional office of International IDEA has published one of the few existing resources on political party funding in Latin America (see IDEA 2005). Precisely the manner in which political parties fund both their campaigns and their expenses between elections is key in Latin America, in terms of understanding patterns of patronage, clientelism and political capture. One point worth noting is the issue of party funding which is especially thorny and complex, and one on which established democracies are far from resolving in terms of their own political party behaviour (Carothers 2006).

Development of knowledge resources: International IDEA has been at the forefront of the notion that the knowledge base on political parties needs to be much further advanced. As Carothers (2006) and others have highlighted, however, IDEA's database is not fully accessible, in part because it is still incomplete on internal political funding. But if it develops in the right direction, it can become an important knowledge resource. IDEA's work, especially in the Andean countries, is especially informed by the fact that local staff are seen as deeply knowledgeable of context. Moreover, there seems to have been a consistent effort to work with a wide range of local stakeholders, to the point that it has become a trusted and respected organisation locally.

The political economy work inspired by DFID is potentially important as a knowledge resource in Latin America, but it is not yet clear how it has translated into programming. Crucially what

³ (http://www.idea.int/americas/mexico/idea_mexican_senate.cfm).

is being more systematically advanced is the understanding that political party and party system assistance can only be fashioned on a case by case study, and needs to be informed by a needs-based assessment which takes into account the particular country conditions.

Women and political participation: has become an important area of political party and party system support in Latin America. This includes enhancing the number of women in politics by supporting quota systems as well as capacity development for women at different levels (in civil society and within political parties). A report by IDEA maps out the range of policies and strategies which during the course of the the last decade have taken place to improve levels of political participation for women in the region (Llanos and Sample 2008). There have been important changes within political parties, and the broader legislative framework, including the introduction of quota systems and the creation of special ministries or departments for gender issues. Experience is very diverse – including because this is informed by the broader nature of the political process. Thus more embedded experiences of democratisation, as in Argentina and Chile, have advanced further in consolidating achievements of political participation for women.

4.3 The approach to results

Our knowledge of the impact of party and party system support remains underdeveloped. In part this reflects the paucity of evaluations around the range of activities that constitute party assistance. Party foundations in the past rarely felt compelled to assess their role or impact. This has changed in the last decade with the shift towards new forms of party assistance⁴. Evaluations of political party support also take place within the remit of broader democracy support assessments.

But the challenge of assessing impact also lies in the elusive nature of democracy support – and within that political party and party system support. Given the multi-actor and multi-dimensional nature of the processes of change that party and party system support seeks to support, causality and attribution is often difficult to establish. For instance, DFID (2008) implies a direct connection between its activities, and contributing to the political dialogue around the Constituent process in Bolivia.

A closer look at the intricacies of the constituent process in Bolivia would suggest that this relation of direct causality is not evident. That is not to say, however, that efforts directed at facilitating dialogue between political parties cannot play a valuable role and should not be supported. Through the role of interparty dialogue at different levels, party assistance can contribute to building a broader narrative and culture of consensus based politics which is often lacking. But attribution can only be tentative, and donors need to work with adequate measures of realism.

From the experiences that have been documented, it seems clear that effective engagement requires that donors be prepared to take the long view and work with a more sophisticated framework of analysis than one which is based on short-term results.

Some impact indicators can be clearly identified in Latin America. For instance, the production of knowledge resources; the passage of an act of legislation which is consonant with support and advisory efforts of donors, and its effective implementation overtime and acceptance by the key stakeholders; the improved credibility of an electoral commission; and improved participation and voice by women in party politics, in terms of presence and capacity.

Looking beyond these measures, donors may need to accept that a direct results-based connection in the short term between donor efforts and political party transformation may be difficult to establish. On the one hand, this reflects the political nature of the issue. On the other hand, it reflects the fact that party development is one aspect of complex domestic political processes in Latin America over which attribution in relation to concrete programmes

⁴ See for instance: Koonings and Mansilla 2004; Jimenez et al 2004; GPA 2009; Power et al 2009; NIMD 2009, Ballon-Echagary 2009; Booth et al 2007; NDI 2008.

is difficult to establish and over which international actors can only realistically play a marginal role in the short-term. It also reflects the fact that the kind of transformation that is aspired to may be unlikely to take place in the short term.

5 What are the lessons from Latin America?

The emerging lessons signal unequivocally that deep knowledge of context, including through political economy methodologies, are central to achieving results in Latin America. The UK has been one of the leaders on this, and should continue to play a role in facilitating context specific analysis. This needs to include understanding of the political system and process in which political party development is embedded, as this will shape the incentive structures and constraints that contribute to determining political party behaviour and organisation, as well as their role in mediating across state society relations.

This would allow the much needed shift from 'one-size-fits all' models that have dominated in the past, including moving away from the 'myth' of perfect political parties⁵, to a deeper understanding of the structural constraints, opportunities and needs of parties and party system at the country level. The evaluations do show that this is likely to lead to better results at the country level. Moreover, there does seem to be some progress, (although this is more evident in relation to some implementing bodies than others) that analysis is informing practice and ensuring a better fit. For instance, the NIMD in Bolivia has moved to ensure better political representation of new political actors in the local forum for party dialogue, that it funds. Likewise, International IDEA country offices have increasingly managed to incorporate a degree of flexibility in their programming that allows adapting to changing political circumstances. This has won local IDEA offices the reputation of political neutrality among local parties.

Working with country systems also requires ensuring ongoing participation by the key stakeholders to ensure ownership and demand driven programmes which are more likely to match country level needs.

In terms of developing realistic objectives, some objectives speak to deeply political processes, which are unlikely to be transformed as a direct effect of international assistance, or as a result of programmes which focus on technical assistance methods focused on capacity alone. Increasing capacity levels of parties in terms of organisation and programmatic coherence, while important in Latin America, does not resolve the matter of political will.

Behind some of the objectives identified above, there are assumptions about what can be achieved through party and party system support which are not necessarily supported by the evidence. The connection between good governance and the likelihood of better development outcomes is valid. However, the specific linkages that are identified in some of the donor documents need to be treated with some caution.

For example, the analytical connection between pro-poor politics and strong party systems assumes that more institutionalised parties, and more robust party systems, will pursue pro-poor policies. This does not necessarily describe contemporary political processes in Latin America. It also implies that a pro-poor policy agenda is politically neutral and reliant on the capacity dimension of parties, whereas the matter of what constitutes a pro-poor policy agenda is deeply political and normative, in Latin America and elsewhere. The Washington consensus of the 1990s claimed to be pro-poor, as does the current more state-capitalism orientation in Ecuador under Correa, or in Bolivia under Morales. Thus the connection between concrete policy choices and the quality of political parties needs to be treated with care.

However, we can assume that better organised and more programmatically coherent parties will be more likely to "promote longer time horizons, greater policy consistency over time and a greater potential for intertemporal agreements, since commitments made by current party

⁵ See Carothers 2006

leaders are more likely to be respected in the future" (Scartasini 2008; 62). Thus, the development of stable political parties is highly relevant for advancing the quality of policy making processes in Latin America, including in terms of the fulfilment of the tasks of aggregating social preferences, and articulating corresponding policy choices in keeping with electoral preferences (that is, representation). This is no small achievement, and external actors can do much to support it.

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