

Multilateral Political Party Assistance on Societies in Transition to Democracy: A Critical Review

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Abstract. Several international actors have been engaged in democracy promotion initiatives devoted to supporting and assisting democratisation reforms. Various projects were implemented to assist political parties in societies in transition. In this paper, I will integrate the debate concerning political party aid with the international dimensions of democratisation and theories of cooperation. This is motivated by the fact that most research on the development of political parties and party systems in transitional societies is still very much concentrated on internal factors, neglecting the intervention and the potential impact of democracy promotion initiatives. I begin with a clarification of the main concepts in discussion, followed by a critical assessment of the theoretical approaches proposed in the literature, focusing in the impacts for societies in transition. I argue that disaggregating democracy aid into its components is a more promising analytical strategy. In terms of donors' strategies, two tendencies emerge clearly: there is a preference for the model of influence by consent and a tendency to formulate linear assumptions on the attitudes and strategies of the actors in the recipient country.

Key-words: political party assistance; multilateralism; international dimensions of democratization; democracy promotion; transitions to democracy.

Assistência Multilateral a Partidos Políticos em Sociedades em Transição para a Democracia: Uma Revisão Crítica

Resumo. Diversos actores internacionais têm vindo a envolver-se em iniciativas de promoção da democracia, vocacionadas para o apoio e assistência às democratizações. Entre os projectos desenvolvidos conta-se a assistência a partidos políticos em sociedades em transição. Neste trabalho, integrarei a reflexão teórica em torno da assistência a partidos políticos com as teorias centradas na cooperação internacional e dimensões internacionais de democratização. Este artigo é motivado pelo facto de que a maior parte da investigação acerca do desenvolvimento dos sistemas partidários e partidos políticos em sociedades em transição está muito centrado em factores domésticos, negligenciando o papel das iniciativas internacionais de promoção da democracia. Em primeiro lugar, faremos uma clarificação dos principais conceitos em discussão e, em seguida, discutiremos criticamente o contributo das abordagens teóricas propostas na literatura, tendo como principal enfoque os impactos nas sociedades em transição para a democracia. Neste trabalho defendemos que a estratégia analítica mais promissora consiste na desagregação do fenómeno de promoção da democracia. Do ponto de vista das estratégias dos doadores duas tendências emergem claramente: existe uma preferência pela aplicação do modelo de 'influência por consentimento' e a tendência para a formulação de pressupostos lineares acerca das atitudes e estratégias dos actores no país de destino.

Palavras-chave: assistência a partidos políticos; multilateralismo; dimensões internacionais de democratização; promoção da democracia; transições para a democracia.

1 Introduction

Why are international organizations increasingly involved in democracy assistance activities¹? What is the role of multilateralism and international cooperation in the success of processes of democratisation in societies in transition² to democracy? Why is it important to support political parties as part of democracy aid programs? More than three decades passed over the inaugural moment of the third wave of democratisation and it is generally recognized that the movement towards democratic transitions faces many challenges: namely the institutionalization of democratic institutions and practices – in particular, political parties (Carothers, 2006) -, rule of law and the political engagement of citizens (Carey and Reynolds, 2007).

¹ "After all, these days, most international development agencies see eradicating poverty and fostering substantive democracy as part of their core mission" (Murphy, 2006, p. 3).

² Transition to democracy is here broadly understood as a process in which democratic reforms are advanced in a country previously dominated by non-democratic rule. This concept is discussed in section 3.

In face of these problems, various international actors engaged in democracy promotion and state-building initiatives in several countries. The promotion of democracy has been conceptualized as a set of voluntary activities adopted, implemented and supported (directly or indirectly) by international actors - public or private - designed explicitly for the political liberalization of authoritarian regimes and their subsequent democratisation (Schmitter, 2008). Recently, multilateral organizations have assumed a more prominent role, but this is still relatively under-explored in studies of democratisation. I focus on multilateral programs for two main reasons: first, to overcome the 'standard' focus on the nation-state (and bilateral cooperation) that has been the dominant unit of analysis in the literature and, secondly, to understand the motivations and strategy underlying these programs to assist societies in transition to democracy. Furthermore, considering the literature available, it is also unclear what are the impacts and conditions that favour the success of these external programs stimulating democratic reforms.

Amongst democracy promotion activities, political parties became an important dimension because they are crucial for both the emergence and consolidation of democracies, as they perform vital functions in the democratic political system. Considering their importance, it is not surprising that party assistance, as a field of international aid, has existed since the 1960s and "has been expanding steadily since, both in terms of money spent and number of actors involved" (Catón, 2007, p. 5). However, this has not been echoed by a similar amount of scholarly attention to the various dimensions of the phenomenon (namely the determinants and impacts of this type of cooperation)³.

In this perspective, two theoretical traditions provide crucial insight for this analysis: theories of international cooperation and theoretical approaches on the international dimensions of democratisation. I will start by analyzing the several forms of international influence on processes of democratisation and then consider the types of cooperation. Finally, I will concentrate on the main features that characterize the context of the development of political parties in societies in transition and the concept of party assistance, focusing on the multilateral involvement of international organizations – illustrated with the case of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP onwards). Overall, this paper aims to provide clarification on how this form of democracy promotion impacts the actors in the recipient country and the broader process of democratisation.

2 Direct Forms of International Influence: Democracy Promotion

This domain of foreign aid has received the attention of many actors⁴, which engage in initiatives to promote or protect democracy in diverse geographical contexts. Some years ago, the main (and almost exclusive) motivations to intervene and design multilateral cooperation programs were the fostering of economic development, the integration in the world economy or the support of peace agreements. Nowadays, it seems generally recognized that the political circumstances of a country are decisive, not only internally, but also in terms of the stability of international relations in a context of complex interdependence (Keohane, 2002).

After the September 11 attacks, several political leaders have called for a deeper engagement of the international community in the efforts to promote democracy abroad⁵. Ever since, a multitude of interventions became prominent in the public sphere, in particular, those that required a more

³ Among the few but important exceptions are the contributions of Kumar (2004), Carothers (2006, 2008), and Burnell (2009).

⁴ International organizations, state agencies and private actors (such as NGOs or foundations) engage in activities to promote (or protect) democracy externally. This arena of international politics has become the focus of growing scholarly attention, as it raises important issues, specially relating to the legitimacy of external interventions, the model of democracy to be promoted, the impact of the projects implemented.

⁵ McFaul (2004) revises the arguments used by political leaders and administrations involved in democracy promotion initiatives.

intensive involvement, namely the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Concentrating on the external factors that directly affect democratisation processes, Carothers tries to clarify the understanding of the concept of democracy promotion – in his perspective democracy promotion programs consist of “aid that is specifically designed to foster a democratic opening in a non-democratic country or further a democratic transition in a country that has experienced a democratic opening” (1999, p. 6).

Nonetheless, several arguments have been raised as to the best strategy and timing to put in place initiatives to support transitions to democracy. Two main sets of arguments seem to be at the forefront of the debate: sequencing and gradualism. Sequencing consists in the idea that the democratisation process should follow several reforms that prepare the institutions, political actors and society to the transition to democracy. Mansfield and Snyder (2010) argue “it is dangerous to push states to democratize before the necessary preconditions are in place and that prudent democracy promotion efforts should pay special attention to foster this preconditions” (2010, p. 159). The notion of gradualism, on the other hand, emphasizes more the importance of a strategy that prioritizes “iterative and cumulative ways (...) [and] small but significant steps” (Carothers, 2010, p. 143) towards democratic reforms, which open the public space to real pluralism.

Among the theoretical approaches to the international dimensions of democratisation, the ‘diffusion hypothesis’ has been tested and the results provide support to the claim that “international factors can exert a strong influence in the prospects for transitions to democracy” (Gleditsch and Ward, 2006, p. 911) – it is also shown that, for example, prior regional conflicts decrease the likelihood of democracy in a country. This line of research has also shown that the probability of a transition to democracy becomes larger once a majority of neighbouring countries are already a democracy (Gleditsch and Choun, 2004)⁶.

Other forms of international influence have been identified, namely what has been designated as ‘western leverage’ (vulnerability to external pressure) and ‘linkage⁷ to the West’ (density of ties), both concepts described and analyzed by Way and Levitsky (2005, 2006). The authors defend that international linkage is the strongest external factor affecting democratisation processes among these two forms of influence, mainly because it works as a ‘transmitter’ of international influence in the form of dominant political norms and values, but also as concrete ties (organized networks, organizations and resources) that “created democratic constituencies for democratic norm-abiding behaviour; and reshape the domestic distribution of power and resources, strengthening democratic and opposition forces, weakening and isolating autocrats” (Way and Levitsky, 2007, p. 54).

However, in order to understand how this form of international influence affects countries in transition, I argue here that it is important to take into account what kind of donor is the interlocutor, as well as the dimensions covered by democracy promotion initiatives. Up to now, the scholarly research has been working mostly with an aggregate concept of democracy promotion – nevertheless, this taps multiple dimensions making it harder to disentangle the process through which it operates and the potential effects on the democratisation process.

3 Theories of International Cooperation

Cooperation is frequently used as a broad concept that covers situations where “parties agree to work together to produce new gains for each of the participants unavailable to them by unilateral

⁶ Along the same line, Elkins (2011), sustains that the international diffusion of democracy might be driven by dynamics of public opinion and mass revolutions, presenting evidence that demonstrates that “the diffusion of attitudes, in combination with a cascading model of revolutions, is indeed a possible theoretical explanation of the spatial clustering of democracy” (2011, p. 1).

⁷ Linkage is defined as “the density of ties (economic, geographic, political, diplomatic, social and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) between particular countries and the United States, the European Union and Western-dominated multilateral institutions” (Way and Levitsky, 2007, p. 53).

action, at some cost” (Zartman, 2010, p. 1). Other authors have engaged in theoretical and empirical endeavours to shed light over other dimensions of democracy promotion initiatives that cannot be framed in terms of cooperative processes, namely coercive measures (sanctions, military interventions) (Brooks, 2002; Lektzian, 2007).

I opt to focus on the role of international governmental organizations (IGOs), as this domain is less explored than the bilateral cooperation agreements⁸. It should be noted that besides bilateral a multilateral organizations, other actors have engaged in party assistance initiatives, namely non-governmental organizations, intermediary organizations (such as private consulting firms that implement assistance programs), party foundations or other party channels (a well-known example are the German party foundations, *Stiftungen*, which engage in relations with parties in third countries with similar orientations to their core values). Regarding the type of external intervention, what appears as especially interesting in multilateralism are the paradoxes that have occupied the thoughts of many scholars on foreign aid: why do states delegate resources to multilateral institutions as international interventions are a “useful instrument of statescraft”? (Milner, 2006)⁹.

States would rely on international institutions in order to strengthen and facilitate cooperation processes by creating and enforcing agreements (reducing what is usually referred to as ‘transaction costs’) and monitoring the compliance of the parts. However, this theoretical framework did not escaped controversy: most of the shortcomings pointed were related to the claim that international organizations are fundamentally insignificant since states yield the only real power in world politics (Keohane, 2002). In the 1980s, research on international institutions and cooperation has turned away from legalism (effectiveness of law despite the political conditions) and idealism. Political realism was adopted by scholars, “accepting that relative state power and competing interests were key factors in world politics” (Keohane, 2002, p. 30).

In the same vein, Ruggie (1992) argues that states conform to a multilateral orientation when they expect to extract some benefits, at least in the long term. This kind of decision is also dependent on the type of cooperation sought both by states and international organizations, but, generally, “cooperation (...) occurs to create beneficial outcomes that the parties cannot create alone, but it is also needed to allocate those benefits; there is always a distributive as well as an integrative aspect to cooperation” (Zartman and Touval, 2010, p. 7). Moreover, the conclusions derived from foreign aid research have provided some insights on how bilateral and multilateral flows of cooperation might vary. Bilateralism seems to occur more frequently when trade, historic, colonial and strategic ties are in place (Alesina and Dollar, 2000), while the attribution of multilateral aid seems to be more related with performance criteria (e.g. states with satisfactory economic growth and democratic reforms) (Schraeder, Hook and Taylor, 1998).

Turning now to the normative debate on multilateralism, it has also been argued that multilateral aid is “less political, less commercial and less tied to donor’s self-interests, and more humanitarian and responsive to recipient needs. Multilateral institutions are far more likely to give aid according to these criteria than bilateral aid programs, which are beset by special interest pressures and concerned with foreign policy problems” (Milner, 2004, p. 18)¹⁰. However, the reality on the international stage is that most aid is still attributed through bilateral frameworks. This raises the issue of which conditions contribute to the choice of the type of cooperation to implement, by national executive bodies.

⁸ Following World War II, bilateral efforts were made—particularly by France and England—to transfer models of democratic governance to areas undergoing decolonization. Regimes that declare themselves democratic have emphasized the importance (for the well-being of the national and international community) of democratic rule as a goal for all nations (Boutros-Ghali, 1996).

⁹ We assume here that states opt for multilateral interventions if it generally serves their foreign policy objectives.

¹⁰ In this article the author also discussed the attitudes of the public opinion towards the implementation of foreign aid: according to data on OECD countries, the citizens often trust more in international organizations than in national governments, regarding the management of foreign aid (Milner, 2006).

Focusing now on the advantages and costs attached to the forms of cooperation, I will concentrate on the characteristics and arguments associated with the implementation of a multilateral cooperation framework. Multilateralism is perceived as a more legitimate and inclusive form of cooperation, despite the potential problems of efficiency and effectiveness that might arise with it. However, this assessment of the problems of a multilateral approach is not shared by all the scholars. The functional argument, which generally refers to issues related to transaction costs, provides that a multilateral approach helps reducing the costs of coordinating policies¹¹, making it “cheaper for governments to get together to negotiate agreements (...) [and] allow governments to take advantage of potential economies of scale” (Keohane 1984, p. 90). On the other hand, different authors claim that, with an increasing number of actors, the costs associated with cooperation will certainly increase (Caporaso, 1992)¹². Underlying this debate is, however, the confrontation between multiple definitions and methods of estimation of the costs (and impacts) of cooperation.

Furthermore, a number of normative dilemmas pervade foreign aid. One of the most prominent among them is the asymmetrical character of cooperation: “conditions set by the donor are part of everyday life in aid relations – they are the ‘normal’ pattern” (Stokke, 1995, p. 34). Other two issues have been raised, specifically regarding the outcomes of cooperation initiatives: firstly, the prescription of particular solutions involves a responsibility for the outcome, not only in cases where the result is a success (then the most immediate question is: to what extent are donors willing and able to take responsibility for the results of their programs?); and secondly, to what extent can we be confident that the ‘recipe’ recommended will generate the intended effects (Stokke, 1995)?

Many reasons have been proposed regarding the political/ moral arguments that sustain multilateralism. Among the most common justifications, there is the idea that a multilateral approach contributes to international stability and, in that sense, reduces the likelihood of tensions and conflict (bring to the fore the notion of reciprocity, but it certainly does not eliminate conflict and antagonism). Behind this perspective some argue that policies are legitimized by the consent of others. In addition, independently of the type of cooperation, the question emerges: “how to legitimize it to those outside, whether those rejecting the action or those not invited to join it” (Zartman and Touval, 2010, p. 8)?

A supplementary argument is made stating that multilateralism works as a restraining mechanism for those who may disregard the interests of others: “it is in the interest of every state to bind itself by accepting the constraints of multilateralism, because by doing so it helps other states to do so as well and to accept limits on their freedom of action” (Touval, 2010). Furthermore, this debate turns frequently to the impact of this form of cooperation on the supervision of the action of great powers – but, can it be seen as a ‘balance of power’ mechanism? It is clear that multilateral frameworks of cooperation provide the ‘weaker’ states with more possibilities to voice and influence the policy of their counterparts (Ruggie, 1992). The rise of external democracy promotion initiatives is actually seen as evidence of a strategic option by international actors interested in promoting a more stable and peaceful international arena (Santiso, 2002).

Despite these arguments, under which conditions is multilateralism ‘democracy-enhancing’? Two main arguments have been put forward: multilateral organizations can encourage and support transnational discussions and networks that might give way to new forms of participation¹³; and “moving some forms of governance up to a higher level, insisting on elaborate mechanisms for

¹¹ Larson and Shevchenko (2010, p. 192) contend that “Multilateralism facilitates hegemonic order by securing compliance without coercion”.

¹² This is exactly why Caporaso defends that “multilateralism activity without an organization to facilitate and enforce agreements brings up all of the problems that haunt international political cooperation in the first place: absence of trust, weak and unreliable information, incentives to defect, and renegeing on agreements when it is convenient” (1992, p. 610).

¹³ An example of this potential is the World Bank initiative ‘Civil Society Policy Forum’ (<http://web.worldbank.org>).

public debate and criticism, and making use of impartial and expert decision-making bodies can improve democracy” (Keohane, Macedo and Moravcsik, 2009, p. 26)¹⁴.

However, this position did not remain uncontested and other scholars have claimed that multilateralism, with its bureaucratic nature and the distance from citizens, might undermine democratic deliberation and accountability (Dahl, 1999). One of the most popular examples of this is certainly the perceived ‘democratic deficit’ of the European Union (EU), which has become a central issue for critics who contest the fact that political elites use multilateral institutions as a way to bypass the process of communication and persuasion that is required in democratic regimes (Dahrendorf, 1999).

Another unresolved issue relates to the normative question that emerges in relation to the moral motivation/ obligation to intervene and/or cooperate beyond boundaries. Scholars have reflected deeply about this issue: for example, a cosmopolitan liberal view of cooperation would stress that basic human rights are universal and not dependent on membership in a particular community (Keohane, 1984). Nevertheless, a perspective focused on national sovereignty might question the extents and limits of international intervention, arguing that the external action is a matter of serious interference on domestic affairs. More recently, other authors have developed arguments on the importance of the integration of the universal right to democratic governance in international law (Franck, 1992; Rich, 2001).

Nonetheless, ‘democracy’ does not appear in the Charter of the United Nations or the Covenant of the League of Nations, but, for example, the Vienna Declaration adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (1998) declare that “Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (...) The international community should support the strengthening and promoting of democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the entire world”¹⁵. This was considered an important step towards a more committed intervention of the international community on the promotion of democracy, despite the fact that this is a nonbinding instrument.

Previously, in the period after the II World War, other international organizations also integrated the idea of democracy into a broader discussion that included the concepts of peace and development. The 1945 Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated that “The great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of democratic principles”¹⁶; the 1948 Charter of the Organization of the American States (OAS) asserted: “representative democracy is an indispensable condition for the stability, peace and development of the region (...) to promote and consolidate representative democracy, with due respect for the principle of non-intervention”¹⁷. Despite these important elements – that show the integration of democratic principles in international instruments –, the subsequent decades, marked by Cold War, refrained further development in this trend (Rich, 2001).

More importantly, this change on the focus of the cooperation endeavours shows that more than the economic conditions of a country, one has to understand what are the political values, institutions and regime in place, because these elements are fundamental to the establishment of any cooperation effort (and, eventually, drive domestic change). Wright (2009) claimed that a conditionality framework in cooperation programmes might have different results – on what concerns the democratisation process - depending on the size of distributional coalitions linked to the leader in office: the evidence shows that if there is a large coalition supporting the political

¹⁴ These authors are referring particularly to a constitutional conception of democracy: “we adopt a constitutional conception of democracy because well-designed constitutional constraints enhance democracy, understood as the ability of people as a whole to govern itself, on due reflection, over the long run” (Keohane, Macedo and Moravcsik, 2009, p. 6).

¹⁵ Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, paragraph 8, section 1.

¹⁶ 1945 Constitution of UNESCO, p. 1.

¹⁷ 1948 Charter of the OAS, p. 1.

leader in office the prospects of winning fair elections tend to be higher and, in this circumstance, the response to aid favours democratisation.

Alesina and Dollar (2000), on the other hand, concentrated on the determinants of foreign aid and found “considerable evidence that the pattern of aid giving is dictated by political and strategic considerations” (2000, p. 33). Some of the perspectives held in the literature show scepticism¹⁸ towards the type of motivations held by the donors: for example, Maizels and Nissanke (1984) argued that the main drivers of external aid are strategic foreign policy concerns. Nonetheless, one of the general laments in the literature is the lack of evidence on the relative importance of different variables – strategic interests, colonial past, trade, political institutions of the recipient country, among others - contributing to explain the patterns of foreign aid (Alesina and Dollar, 2000¹⁹).

In addition, many authors sought to test if democratisation was fostered and ‘rewarded’ by foreign aid programs. Knack (2004), Alesina and Dollar (1998) find mixed evidence on these regard: there is a clear pattern for democratizers to get a substantial increase in assistance²⁰, but Knack (2004, p. 262) considered that the evidence suggests “that either the favourable impacts of aid on democratisation are minor, or they are roughly balanced by other democracy-undermining effects of aid dependence”. In terms of the determinants of bilateral aid, Alesina and Dollar (1998) are clear: “the allocation of bilateral aid across recipient countries provides evidence as to why it is not more effective at promoting growth and poverty reduction (...) colonial past and voting patterns in the United Nations explain more of the distribution of aid than the political institutions or economic policy of the recipients” (1998, p. 55).

After considering the theoretical approaches on international cooperation and, in particular, multilateralism, I will concentrate now on one specific form of democracy promotion: international political party assistance, focusing on the structural and institutional context of societies in transition and the role of political party support in the democratisation process.

4 Political Party Assistance in Transitional Societies

International party assistance has been defined as the organizational effort to support democratic political parties, to promote a peaceful interaction between parties, and to strengthen the democratic political and legal environment for political parties (Burnell, 2010). Among the various interconnected forms that democracy promotion can assume, international political party assistance is increasingly recognized as one of the fundamental features of the foreign intervention in the democratisation process. It is widely acknowledged that in societies in transition to democracy the institutionalization of political parties opens several possibilities²¹ - especially if accompanied by other democratic reforms -, as they might be one step further in the direction of better democratic representation and involvement of the citizens in their political community (Randall and Svasand, 2002; Carothers, 2006).

¹⁸ One other important debate refers to the evaluation of the efforts developed by donors which are highly controversial. Some authors argue that these cooperation instruments are used in such a way as to promote donor interests – which formulation is dominated by political and economic calculations – undermining their ability to cooperate with other donors (and, for example, collectively initiate sanctions) (Emmanuel, 2010). In the same vein, Schraeder, Hook and Taylor (1998), sustain that self-interest pervades the cooperation agenda, acknowledging also the importance of other factors such as regional identification, the sharing of ideological beliefs (donors and recipients), the economic potential contribution to the donor’s economy, the strategic importance of the recipient state and the humanitarian needs in presence.

¹⁹ These authors claim that it is fundamental that future research concentrate on creating better measures of ‘strategic interests’ and also test a full model that can predict donor behavior (Alesina and Dollar, 2000).

²⁰ An increase of 50 percent on average (Alesina and Dollar, 1998).

²¹ Nonetheless, the result of the debate on the features and qualities that parties in democratic regimes should possess is far from being consensual (for an overview see Randall and Svasand, 2002; Diamond and Gunther, 2001).

The role of parties in democracies has long been object of intense debate among political scientists. Tocqueville ([1840] 2004) devoted attention not only to political voluntary associations, but also to political parties and their role in the future developments of democracy in the United States. Later, Schattschnieder (1942) went as far as to claim that democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties, while Aldrich (1995, p. 3) reformulated this idea, defending that “democracy is unworkable save in terms of parties”.

What are the reasons behind these arguments claiming a focal role for political parties in democracies? Lipset (2000) argued that political parties are indispensable because institutionalized party competition is a fundamental feature of democratic regimes. Political parties²² are expected to perform representative – policy formation, interest articulation - and procedural/ institutional functions (Bartolini and Mair, 2001) in democracies. Ware (1987) also defined three elements that are relevant for the assessment of party performance: interest optimization (parties should promote and defend the interests of the citizens), civic orientation (as it is vital that parties foster the participation in the democratic process) and popular control (citizens must be able to render the elected representatives accountable).

Regarding representation, there subsists a divergence regarding the reforms that should be pursued at the party level and electoral system: Tocqueville claimed that political parties could be thought off in terms of two main categories – parties that accentuate ideology and parties that put emphasis on interests. In the same vein, Powell and Vanberg (2000) underline the importance of the partisan/ collective dimension of representation, associated with the ideological and policy contents, while those more interested in “individual-level accountability are more concerned with maximizing virtue – deterring the betrayal of the demands of particular voters that picked an individual legislator” (Carey and Reynolds, 2007, p. 259).

5 Political Parties in Societies in Transition: Structural and Institutional Context

In young democracies, political parties play important functions in different arenas. According to Huntington (1996) and Mainwaring (1998), parties, in this context, are expected to articulate and aggregate interests into their party manifestos, forming and sustaining, if elected, democratic governments²³; recruit and socialize political elites; habituate the public to democratic norms and practices; and if in the opposition, they take action to render the government accountable (yielding checks and balances on the executive – horizontal accountability). The decisive role of parties – channelling, aggregating and expressing political views – is arguably more accentuated in conflict-prone societies where more pronounced cleavages are embedded in linguistic, religious, regional and other dividing lines (Reilly, 2006). Empirical evidence shows that the absence of political parties, a political leader, the military or civil bureaucracy usually take over the functions exercised by the parties, rendering the mechanisms of democratic accountability weaker²⁴ (Ezrow, 2011).

Regarding party institutionalization and party system institutionalization, Randall and Svasand (2002), call attention to the fact that, frequently, these two concepts are not appropriately distinguished in the literature. In fact, party institutionalization²⁵ and party system

²² Political party is here employed in a broad sense, indicating an organization composed by a group of citizens that are organized to seek and exercise power in a political system (Katz and Mair, 1994; Kumar, 2005).

²³ “The argument to be made in favor of political parties is that they are tools, not only for representing the electorate, but also a way for the electorate to hold parties accountable for their actions and promises” (Randall and Svasand, 2002, p. 6).

²⁴ A good example of this situation is Pakistan’s party system: “two main parties, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) are instruments of two families, the Bhuttos and the Sharifs – both of whom have had a penchant for corruption” (Ezrow, 2011, p. 4).

²⁵ Manning (2008, p. 41) sustains that “the degree to which a party is institutionalized matters, but there is less agreement about whether more institutionalized parties are more or less likely to be able to respond to external shocks effectively”.

institutionalization are not the same and are not necessarily compatible – a good example of this might arise from situations where the major source of institutional strength of a party derives from the identification with a specific ethnical or cultural group (Randall and Svasand, 2011). In this case, it can be argued that this feature is a positive factor contributing to the institutionalization of the individual party, but not necessarily something beneficial in terms of representativeness and political competition at the party system level. Furthermore, it is very important to understand the specific constraints and challenges that political parties face in transitioning societies.

In emerging democracies²⁶, political parties and party systems show signs of several problems²⁷ and among these stand out the instability and volatility of party systems – a potential sign of the poor institutionalization of parties - or, in other contexts, the problem is the reverse: the party system is virtually locked to new political actors, frequently due to a high degree of centralization and corruption (Levitsky and Cameron, 2001; Carothers, 2006). Among the conditions in which political parties develop in societies in transition, the weak or inexistent democratic experience is usually defined as a major setback for the development of a politically engaged civil society (Biezen and Kopecky, 2007). Other symptoms of the crisis that political parties face are related to the rise of “anti-system politicians”²⁸ (...), political parties have been heavily attacked and associated with ‘old politics’ and party fragmentation has increased” (Ezrow, 2011, p. 1).

Moreover, among the most recurrent problems faced by political parties in emerging democracies, the lack of an organizational base is regularly perceived as a fundamental limitation (Carothers, 2006). This might be seen as a manifestation of the deficiencies of party institutionalization processes – institutionalization defined as “the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability”, measured through four essential criteria: adaptability, complexity, autonomy and coherence (Huntington, 1968, p. 12). Panebianco (1988) also emphasized party autonomy, but added another criteria, namely internal ‘systemness’ (or interdependence of different sectors). Mainwaring (1998), on the other hand, argues that party institutionalization depends on parties’ roots and links with society; the organizational consolidation of the party; and party legitimacy.

Furthermore, there are other particular features that characterise political parties in societies in transition, namely the relation between the parties and the state. In an overall assessment, “parties in the newer democracies are closely linked to the state (...) they are to a large extent managed by the state, while they also have control of key resources of the state” (Van Biezen and Kopecky, 2007, p. 251). This is potentially revealing of the importance that the regulation of party activity assumed in the constitution and public law of transitioning societies. However, the results of empirical research seem to point to relevant regional differences (Van Biezen and Kopecky, 2007; Lewis, 1998). Contrary to other regions of the world, in Africa parties do not get state subsidies, even if they are contemplated *de jure* (Pinto-Duschinsky, 2002). On the other hand, Eastern European and Latin American democracies are characterised by a high-level of state intervention in parties and high levels of rent- seeking (Van Biezen and Kopecky, 2007).

In addition, the results of political attitudes surveys show evidence of declining confidence in political parties (Croizier *et al.*, 1975; Pharr *et al.*, 2000). Nonetheless, Burnell (2004, p. 6) argues

²⁶ According to the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF), emerging democracies are defined as “countries with a history of autocratic rule or civil unrest which have a purposeful process of democratisation, albeit with weak and inexperienced institutions” (‘Situating the UN Democracy Fund in the Global Arena’, in <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/XSituatingDemocracy.htm>, visited on the 3rd October, 2011).

²⁷ Nonetheless, some of these problems extend to political parties in consolidated democracies (Diamond and Gunther, 2001). Randall and Svasand (2002, p. 19) argue that in emerging democracies “parties cannot build on a pre-existing organizational base and established identity, it is not surprising that they often consist of ephemeral vehicles for politically ambitious individuals with charisma and/or access to the necessary resources”.

²⁸ Levitsky and Cameron (2001) argue: “the election of political outsiders has frequently resulted in ineffective, irresponsible, and in some cases undemocratic governments” (2001, p. 6).

that an important distinction should be made between the “boredom of success” – as witnessed in mature democracies – and the ‘anger of frustration’, which characterises more the countries of the developing world”²⁹. In the next section, I will concentrate on a particular form of democracy promotion created and implemented to support political parties and party systems in societies in transition.

6 The Rise of Political Party Assistance

The last decades witnessed an increasing involvement of the international community in the promotion of democratic governance all over the world. The momentum for this growth was related with the perception that the efforts undertaken in transitions to democracy were facing difficult obstacles and political parties were “one of the main institutional weaknesses contributing to those troubled transitions” (Carothers, 2006, p. 70). It became also clear that, despite democracy promotion initiatives, the results can be mixed and, eventually, political parties can either adapt to democratic rules and procedures or bloc democratic reforms (Manning, 2008).

The rise of political party assistance, as a dimension of democracy promotion activities, has occurred in two phases: the first one is identified with the support to transitions in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989; the organizations involved in party assistance were mainly the American and European party foundations, which soon started working in the sub-Saharan Africa, as well (Carothers, 2006). The second more recent phase (after the 1990s) represented the continuation of the party aid programs started in Africa, but also their expansion to Latin America – and the rise of new actors involved in party assistance activities, namely multilateral organizations, as the UNDP, the Organization of American States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Conceptually, party assistance programs are here understood as the initiatives that intend to reform and strengthen political parties to promote multiparty democracy in transition and post-conflict societies, through various forms of assistance: financial and commodity support; technical assistance; seminars, workshops; training for political leaders and functionaries; research and polling (Kumar, 2004). Burnell and Gerrits (2010, p. 1066) defined it as “the organizational effort to support democratic political parties, to promote a peaceful interaction between parties, and to strengthen the democratic political and legal environment for political parties”.

Among the main arenas of intervention³⁰, party assistance providers have been mainly concentrating on organizational development, elections, women’s participation, multiparty collaboration and legal/ regulatory reforms (Kumar, 2005). These activities have been developed through some relatively well-defined sets of methods of (direct and indirect³¹) intervention, mainly materialized through training in party building and electoral processes; promotion of inter-party dialogue; exchange visits and consultation. Carothers (2006) defines three configurations of this type of aid: “flexible party resource” (resource-intensive form of cooperation that provides material aid, training and consultation), “concentrated training” (aid mainly focused on capacity and skills

²⁹ Other issues are related with “non-transparent political funding, the under-representation of women, lack of internal party democracy and weak capacity to contribute to policy deliberation on major issues” (Burnell, 2004, p. 7), especially in countries that lack democratic experience.

³⁰ The goals of party assistance programmes are affected, in their scope and objectives, by multiple factors ranging from the assessment of perceived needs of the recipient countries to the level of commitment of international donors (Kumar, 2005). Van Wersch and de Zeeuw (2005) gathered information on the combined size of the budgets of the main European democracy foundations and the released figure was around €400 million (2004), of which around 70 percent was allocated to political party assistance.

³¹ An example of indirect intervention is assistance to electoral processes that help fostering free and fair elections and also important pre-electoral negotiations between parties and the electoral commission to set the electoral regulations.

building) and “exchange relations” (a less intensive form of party assistance that involves regular visits by delegations to and from the recipient institutions).

Furthermore, it is frequently claimed that this is a rather unexplored area of democracy promotion activities (Erdmann, 2010). Among the most cited reasons for this situation is the fact that donor organizations have little incentives to evaluate and publicize their performance and results. The literature focus on political party assistance started to develop relatively recently, with the initial contributions from Carothers (2002, 2006), pleading for more attention to party assistance efforts and impacts. Burnell (2006) and Kumar (2005) also focused on diverse issues concerning party aid, namely objectives, focus and types of assistance programs, as well as the problems and challenges that international donor organizations face while implementing these programs in emerging democracies.

Current approaches to political party assistance seem to have mixed assessments of the effectiveness of party aid. Despite the rhetoric of political leaders³² and the investment made on democracy promotion, the external support for political parties still faces severe criticism³³. Carothers (2006) questions the main contours and dimensions of the party aid response to the problems of political parties in transitioning societies, i.e. what political interests do party aid programs serve and, in particular, are they used to favour particular parties for the sake of influencing electoral outcomes (Carothers, 2006)? Assessing and explaining the consequences of the budgetary allocations of the international efforts to promote democracy is a complex task, not only because of the multidimensionality of the concept, but also due to the gap between official and real agenda (on both sides of the cooperation process).

In brief, the international involvement for political party development is gaining momentum, but it is still far from being the main focus of democracy promotion activities³⁴. If it is true that multilateral donors have invested an increasing amount of resources in democracy assistance programs, it is also apparent a lack of (visible) efforts in the improvement of the practices and instruments in place – a case in point is the evaluation of the impacts of the programs and the engagement with local actors (Emmanuel, 2010). This might be due to several factors, among them the limited resources and the implementation strategies pursued by donor organizations, which have been accused of diverse shortcomings, namely a nonstrategic scattering of activities and lack of knowledge of the local/ contextual conditions of parties to guide the assistance programs.

7 Multilateral Organizations Supporting Political Parties

As it has been shown, democracy assistance and political party support have only recently become part of the agenda and initiatives of multilateral agencies. The projects designed to assist political parties and party systems involve several phases and are particularly contingent on the ‘stage’ in which the democratisation process is in the recipient country. Among the multilateral organizations, the UNDP – described as “the UN’s global development network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life” (UNDP cit. in Murphy, 2006) – become involved in political party assistance and

³² See President Reagan’s speech of June 8, 1982 “Promoting Democracy and Peace,” at: <http://www.ned.org/about/reagan-060882.html>; see also President Bush’s speech, 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy founding, in a speech on November 6, 2003, at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>.

³³ Burnell (2004, p. 1) also stresses that “political parties haven’t had a good press. In both mature and emerging democracies they are often held in low esteem, while the people who run them are viewed as pursuing their own interests rather than those of the people they seek to represent”.

³⁴ In addition, as noted before, political parties are not the main priority of democracy promotion programs, as the main emphasis concentrates on civil society assistance and non-governmental (NGO) partnerships (Burnell, 2004). This lack of attention to party organizations and emphasis on civil society created the impression of the possibility of moving beyond political parties (Doherty, 2001).

developed specific country programmes. I concentrate here on the UN because it is one of the multilateral organizations with one of the most extensive records on political party assistance initiatives³⁵. On the other hand, the United Nations are seen as referent for many actors in the international arena (Murphy, 2006).

A place for democracy in the international legal order came forward with human rights conventions, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which defines the will of people as “the basis of the authority of government”, that should be elected through “periodic and general elections” (articles 21 and 25)³⁶. Furthermore, the fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights adopted the Resolution 2000/47, “Promoting and Consolidating Democracy”³⁷, stressing the importance of “human rights, rule of law, electoral processes, and civil society required to strengthen democracy” (Rich, 2001, p. 24). Another very important aspect regarding this Resolution refers to the fact that it also emphasizes the right to vote in a “free and fair process (...) open to multiple parties”³⁸.

Nonetheless, the engagement of international organizations in promoting democracy came about with two international instruments: the International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Managua in 1994 and the subsequent Conference of 1997, held in Bucharest, with the direct involvement of the UNDP (acting as secretary of the Conference). In both events, the final declarations called for a direct involvement of the UN in the promotion of democracy worldwide. UN engagement in this domain has “come in many fields, but perhaps have been most intense in electoral assistance (...). Since 1989, the UN received more than 140 requests for electoral assistance from 84 member states” (Rich, 2001, p.26). Electoral observation and assistance became a very prominent task of the international support for democratisations, in a time where some start emphasizing the ‘emerging right of democratic governance’ (Franck, 1992; Sen, 1999).

The UNDP exists since 1966 but the integration of democratic governance as a major goal of its activities happened in 1986, when the organization embraced formally the advocacy for democratisation and introduced the Human Development Report (published for the first time in 1990) (Murphy 2006). It has also been argued that the UN engagement with democracy promotion should be understood as part of a broader program of action, for e.g., integrated in the support to peace and/or state-building efforts (Archibugi, 1995). Regarding the substantive engagement of UNDP with party assistance, six areas of intervention stand out: capacity development for Members of Parliament (MP); capacity development for political parties; enhancing political party engagement in dialogue processes; initiatives aimed at increasing women’s political participation; improving electoral systems and processes; and strengthening political party systems (UNDP, 2005).

However, rather than focusing on the characteristics of UNDP engagement with party assistance, I analyze these initiatives in the light of theories of cooperation and international dimensions of democratisation, disentangling potential impacts for the recipient countries. In the case of the models of international influence, a vast majority of these initiatives fall under what Whitehead (2001) designated as model of influence by consent: UNDP diagnoses and works with the political actors of the recipient country. The voluntary character of the involvement of both donor and recipient is a fundamental element of this model of cooperation, along with the engagement of both parts in the definition of the program of action.

³⁵ According to a 2005 report, the UNDP had 44 country offices involved in political party assistance (16 directly involved and 28 indirectly involved) (UNDP 2005) and spent 1.4 billion US dollars on activities relating to democratic governance (Carothers 2006).

³⁶ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>.
³⁷ Resolution available at <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/%28Symbol%29/E.CN.4.RES.2000.47.En?Opendocument>.

³⁸ Resolution 2000/47, “Promoting and Consolidating Democracy”, adopted in the fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights, paragraph 1(d)(ii), accessed on July 12, 2011, at <http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/%28Symbol%29/E.CN.4.RES.2000.47.En?Opendocument>.

In contrast, the international influence through conditionality implies a more obvious asymmetrical relation, with the donor demanding the fulfilment of certain criteria or conditions – the most prominent example being the EU democracy and human rights protection and promotion. This can assume the form of positive conditionality – for e.g. Copenhagen criteria for accession to membership – or negative conditionality – for e.g., interruption of diplomatic relations/ sanctions applied to countries that violate human rights.

In the case of international influence by contagion, the role of multilateral organizations is not so obvious as it is expected that diffusion happen through proximity/ exemplarity of other processes of transition to democracy in the region. Nonetheless, it is likely that democracy promoters are willing to encourage the transmission of good practices across borders in the regions where they intervene. Furthermore, it is possible that the democratic ‘contagion’ happens through the membership of a regional organization where non-democratic states receive pressure (or even sanctions) if they do not show signs of political opening towards transition to democracy.

Turning to the binomial approach of international influence by Levitsky and Way (2002) – western leverage and linkage – UNDP interventions increase certainly the linkage magnifying the domestic impact of external pressure, giving to pro-democratic movements an important signal and resources to the advancement of the reforms unfolding during the transition process. In this sense, linkage also enhances leverage because the events in the recipient country become much more scrutinized by the international organizations and also because after the end of the authoritarian regime, the new government would seek international support for implementing the respective program of action. A related issue involves the identification and development of relations with local political actors. This stage of the process of implementation of international assistance programs is very important as the legitimacy and success of the interventions depend on these actors to accomplish the reforms and objectives intended (Schmitter and Brouwer, 1999). This is extremely challenging for international donors, as it has to be accomplished in the uncertain context of societies in transition to democracy.

In the case of UNDP party assistance, two main assumptions are made regarding the actors in the recipient country: 1) when implementing party assistance initiatives, the donor expects that political parties will moderate in time, as conflict and tensions will be channelled via democratic institutions and, 2) secondly, the participation of the parties in electoral processes will reinforce the commitment to the democratic ‘rules of the game’, as the constituencies of each party will press for an investment on the party’s ability to compete in elections³⁹. Underlying these two assumptions, the socialization of both political elites and citizens for democratic values and practices are usually seen as a fundamental condition to the achievement of the more general goals of democracy promotion (UNDP, 2005).

In terms of impacts of the multilateral intervention on democracy promotion - and party assistance, in specific – the transition to a democratic regime will require an effort of adaptation, at least, in three main arenas: behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional (Linz and Stepan, 1996). In order to comply with these programs, party organizations will then need to reflect the adhesion to democratic values and practices, with parties abiding to party law, engaging in democratic political campaigns and respecting the vote outcome of free and fair elections. In fact, as part of a broader process of political change, the development of democratic political parties is dependent (and impacts) on several other spheres⁴⁰ - for example, the consolidation of the rule of law and the expansion of independent media.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that democracy promotion initiatives are designed with a specific model of democracy as guideline. This is a fundamental issue to have into account while

³⁹ Manning (2008) suggests also that party adaptation to democratic rules is most likely where there is vigorous interparty competition, because competition creates internal pressure to consider party identity and program.

⁴⁰ “[W]hether or not electoral politics leads to democracy depends in large part on the responses of political parties to the internal and external challenges of formal democratic politics” (Manning, 2008, p. 13).

analysing this phenomenon, as certain implementation strategies and goals are implied in each model. In the literature, two (polemic) perspectives, have been salient: on one hand, Zakaria (2003) argues for a liberal conception of democracy (and democracy promotion), while those defending a social democratic model, more oriented towards a participative/ deliberative democracy framework, claim a more encompassing vision of the political process, where democracy assistance is "more dialogical, reciprocal and non-hierarchical" (Hobson, 2012, p. 451).

8 Discussion

The growth of political cooperation in the last decades has brought to the centre of the debate on the international dimensions of democratisation the question of whether the external initiatives of democracy promotion were effective or not. However, two streams of the literature have remained apart: theories of international cooperation and the models of external influence on democratisation. Through the connection of these approaches and the link to party assistance, several implications for the democratisation process and societies in transition were discussed and illustrated with the case of multilateral cooperation by the UNDP.

In this work, it is argued that, due to the role they play, parties are crucial institutions for the development of processes of transition to democracy. Furthermore, it is noted that party aid still represents a modest part of democracy promotion, but several scholars have alerted to the importance of investing and supporting democratic representative institutions in order to incentive and increase the odds of a successful process of democratisation. Nevertheless, the assessment of the results of party aid programs is rather insufficient and fragmented.

In terms of the methodological implications of these lacunas, future quantitative research can contribute to our current understanding of democracy assistance activities by giving a comparative picture of the impacts of external intervention, through large-n analysis – even if the democratisation process is deeply shaped by the actions and preferences of domestic actors (Berg-Schlosser, 2007). This type of research design is specially tailored to capture the dynamics at the macro-level, for e.g. determinants of structural/ political regime changes⁴¹. On the other hand, in-depth case studies can shed light on the outcomes and process of implementation of donors' programs and, also, on the interaction between recipient and donor actors – this applies mostly to the meso and micro levels. Furthermore, using a case study approach is crucial if one wants to overcome the problem of overaggregation diagnosed in the literature (Carothers, 2006; Schmitter and Brouwer, 1999): to understand democracy promotion one has to be sensitive to the fact that it is composed by a complex and diverse array of targets and forms of intervention – political party assistance, support to civil society organizations, electoral monitoring, among others – and a diverse range of impacts.

I have explored the role of multilateralism and, more generally international cooperation, in the success of processes of democratisation. Two patterns in the behaviour of these international actors are clear: donors frequently make linear assumptions on the attitudes and strategy of the actors in the recipient country that might not be adapted to the conditions present in the contexts of intervention. On the other hand, there seems to be a preference of multilateral donors for the model of influence by consent, which requires an effort on the part of the donor to mitigate the asymmetrical character of the power relation necessarily present in cooperation relations. These patterns should, however, be tested and confronted with other types of international intervention on democracy aid (for example, coercion, conditionality), and this could in turn inform further theorization on regime change and international influence.

More importantly, it is crucial to develop a better understanding of the main problems and challenges faced by political parties in emerging democracies, as sometimes the 'standard'

⁴¹ Nonetheless, the quantitative-oriented studies frequently face many shortcomings related with the data availability and comparability.

functions and party politics culture in this context do not match the donor's preconceptions (and, as noted by other authors⁴², are far from being prepared to adapt easily to a 'standard approach', often inspired in consolidated political party systems). It is often claimed that party assistance rarely has transformative effects, but if the international interventions aim to enhance and support democratic political competition and democratic consolidation then these are important lessons to take into account.

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⁴² Carothers (2006) and Manning (2008).

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Artigo Recebido em: Agosto/2012.
Artigo Aprovado em: Dezembro/2012.

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