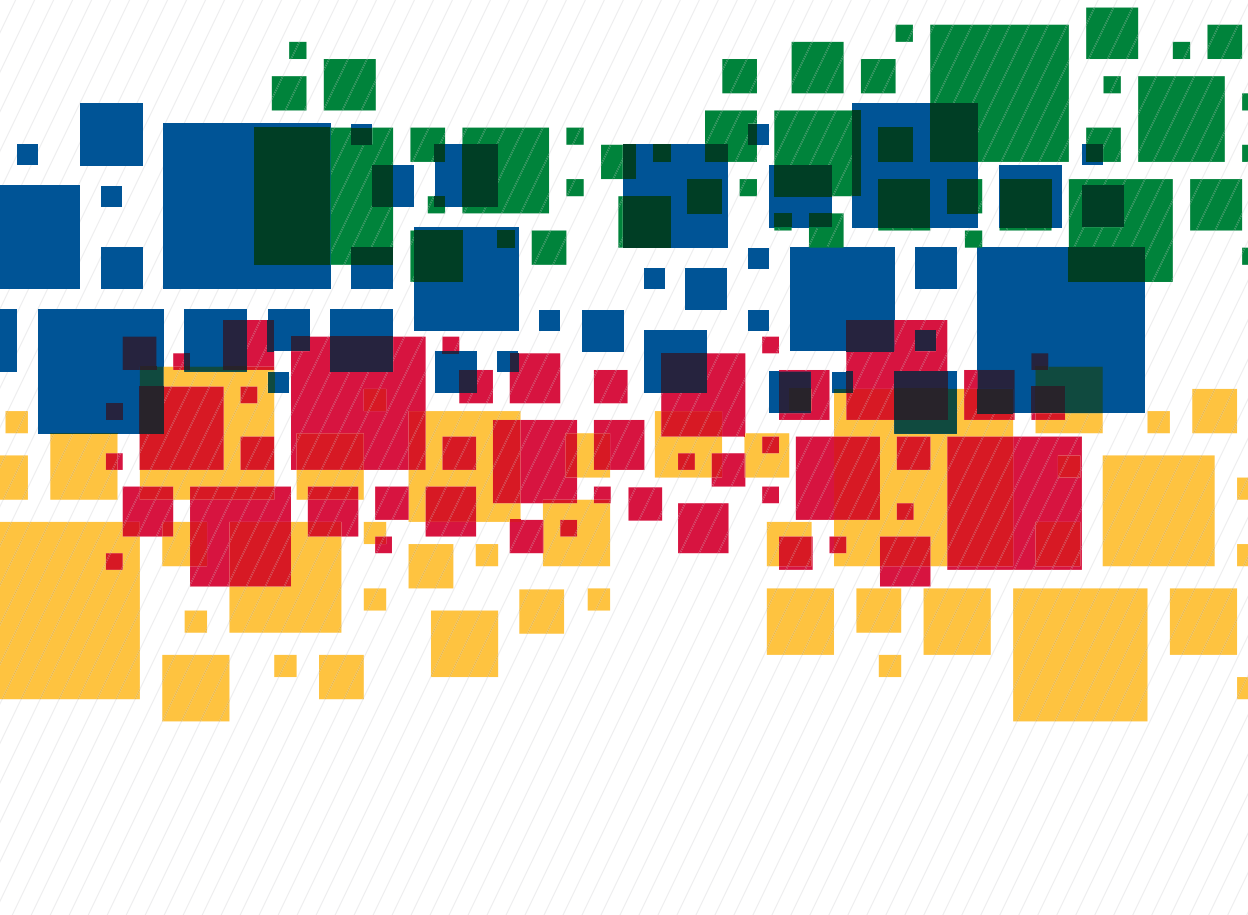




# POLITICAL PARTIES AND CITIZEN MOVEMENTS IN ASIA AND EUROPE







# **Political Parties and Citizen Movements in Asia and Europe**

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## Preface

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Political parties are important democratic institutions that allow citizens political participation and representation, which are among the key expressions of democracy. They remain the primary avenue through which candidates for various levels of public office are nominated. Thus, members of a political party can be chosen to run for public office and, when elected, become public officials. Once in Parliament, political parties can formulate and vote on public policies.

A political party that applies democratic principles to its own procedures and practices should allow citizens to participate and contribute to decision-making processes; engage in advocacy and lobbying; and provide checks and balances through party structures, membership, communication channels and outreach procedures. Members of political parties can also elect their representatives to leadership positions at different levels of the organization.

Political parties in Asia and Europe play a critical role in electoral democracies. Yet they are increasingly said to be a weak link of democracy and no longer regarded as the only engine of democratic processes. Although there are many important examples of well-functioning parties, more and more people have been voicing concerns that parties have primarily taken on the role of election machines. These concerns also include the charge that political parties lack strong democratically functioning structures and procedures for including diverse groups, and that they provide an insufficient number of policy alternatives.

These perceived shortcomings allow other actors in a polity to play a more visible and catalytic role, including civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizen movements, which serve as vehicles for public engagement in political issues and thereby influence a country's politics. In countries

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where political parties are not trusted or are perceived as a hindrance to change, some citizens turn their hopes to other actors to address their political needs.

In recent years, and largely due to advances in telecommunications and social media, citizen movements have emerged as an alternative to political party membership for citizen participation in democratic decision-making processes. Diverse groups of citizens, often including high numbers of youth, have made an increasing impact on democratic processes in Asia and Europe. By using social media to organize and stage their protests, they have managed to circumvent political parties and CSOs as the traditional entry points for political participation and representation.

A joint project of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Hanns Seidel Foundation and International IDEA this publication looks closely at initiatives and activities undertaken by political parties in Asia and Europe to relate to CSOs and citizen movements. Since political parties in the two regions operate in different domestic political contexts and different socio-economic conditions, there are varying approaches and a myriad of experiences, which vary from country to country—including the idea that there is no common definition of democracy and no single political trajectory toward democracy.

The case studies presented in this publication highlight common issues, challenges and lessons that can be shared between the two regions. They also serve as examples of good practice from which actors from the two regions and beyond can benefit and learn.

*Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)   Hanns Seidel Foundation   International IDEA*

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

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<b>AAP</b>	Aam Aadmi Party (India)
<b>ABF</b>	Workers' Educational Association [ <i>Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund</i> ] (Sweden)
<b>ACTA</b>	Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (Poland)
<b>AOF</b>	Educational Association of Norway [ <i>Studieforbundet Arbeidernes Opplysningsforbund</i> ]
<b>ASEF</b>	Asia-Europe Foundation
<b>AUN</b>	<i>Asociación Abusos Urbanísticos ¡NO!</i> (Spain)
<b>BJP</b>	Bharatiya Janata Party (India)
<b>CARPER</b>	Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme with Extension and Reforms (Philippines)
<b>CDL</b>	<i>Centro Democrático Liberal</i> (Spain)
<b>CDS</b>	<i>Centro Democrático y Social</i> (Spain)
<b>CIC</b>	Central Information Commission (India)
<b>CoR</b>	Committee of the Regions (EU)
<b>CPP</b>	Communist Party of the Philippines
<b>CPV</b>	Communist Party of Viet Nam
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organization
<b>DnA</b>	Labour Party [ <i>Arbeiderpartiet</i> ] (Norway)
<b>ECJ</b>	European Court of Justice
<b>EDSA</b>	Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (Philippines)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FIES</b>	Family Income and Expenditure Survey (Philippines)
<b>FILIA</b>	Centre for Curriculum Development and Gender Studies [ <i>Centrul de Dezvoltare Curriculară și Studii de Gen</i> ] (Romania)
<b>FRONT</b>	Feminism in Romania [ <i>Feminism în România</i> ]
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>HSF</b>	Hanns Seidel Foundation
<b>IAC</b>	India Against Corruption

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## International

<b>IDEA</b>	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
<b>LO</b>	Trade Union Confederation [ <i>Landsorganisasj(ti)onen</i> ] (Sweden/ Norway)
<b>LP</b>	Liberal Party (Philippines)
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>PDAF</b>	Priority Development Assistance Fund (Philippines)
<b>PDL</b>	Democratic Liberal Party [ <i>Partidul Democrat Liberal</i> ] (Romania)
<b>PDP</b>	Philippine Democratic Party
<b>PiS</b>	Law and Justice [ <i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i> ] (Poland)
<b>PNL</b>	National Liberal Party [ <i>Partidul Național Liberal</i> ] (Romania)
<b>PO</b>	Civic Platform [ <i>Platforma Obywatelska</i> ] (Poland)
<b>PP</b>	Partido Popular (Spain)
<b>PR</b>	proportional representation
<b>PSD</b>	Social Democratic Party [ <i>Partidul Social Democrat</i> ] (Romania)
<b>PSL</b>	Polish Peasants' Party [ <i>Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe</i> ]
<b>PSOE</b>	Socialist Workers' Party (Spain)
<b>RMDSZ</b>	Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania [ <i>Româniai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség</i> ]
<b>RP</b>	Palikot's Movement [ <i>Ruch Palikota</i> ] (Poland)
<b>RTI</b>	Right to Information Act (India)
<b>SAP</b>	Socialdemocratic Party [ <i>Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet</i> ] (Sweden)
<b>SLD</b>	Democratic Left Alliance [ <i>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej</i> ] (Poland)
<b>UCD</b>	<i>Unión de Centro Democrático</i> (Spain)
<b>UDMR</b>	Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania [ <i>Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România</i> ]
<b>USL</b>	Social Liberal Union [ <i>Uniunea Social Liberală</i> ] (Romania)



# Introduction

# Introduction

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Raul CORDENILLO and Sam VAN DER STAAK

In headlines around the world—from Turkey to Thailand, Brazil to Bulgaria and Egypt to Ukraine—large-scale citizen protests have emerged in recent years, rocking political systems and challenging seemingly secure leaders. Often known by the streets and squares they occupy (Tahrir, Taksim, Wall Street), the colours worn by their protagonists (red caps, yellow shirts) or simply the causes they espouse, these citizen movements sprang up rapidly on all continents and at roughly the same time. Some of the most striking protests occurred in Asia and Europe. These movements—at various times dubbed a ‘wave of anger’, a ‘march of protest’ or ‘the rise of the citizen’—have shifted politics increasingly to the streets. Meanwhile, formal citizen participation in political parties is drastically decreasing. This trend toward increased participation in informal movements and decreased participation in political parties raises the question of how politicians and political parties can regain citizens’ confidence.

## **The rise of the citizen: what’s new?**

Citizen movements are not a new phenomenon. The years 1848, 1917, 1968 and 1989, for example, have become widely associated with popular revolts. Some of these movements resulted in the formation of political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs) and trade unions that still exist today. Nonetheless, the current wave of citizen movements stands out for a number of reasons that are linked to their rapid formation, frequency and appearance on all continents at roughly the same time—and the fact that they are often facilitated and enhanced by the use of social media.

Recent data confirm that there has been a significant increase in both the number of protests and the number of protesters around the world, especially since 2010. Globally, the number of protests increased from 59 in 2006 to 112 in just the first six months of 2013 (Ortiz et al. 2013). Meanwhile, citizens have also reduced their formal political

participation. For instance, voter turnout in Europe fell steadily from an average of 80 per cent in the mid-1980s to 61 per cent in 2012. In Asia, the decrease has been taking place since the late 1990s, from an average of 70 per cent of eligible voters in 1999 to an average of close to 53 per cent in 2013 (International IDEA 2014).

Citizen support for political parties has followed a similar trend. For example, party membership has almost halved in Europe since 1980 (Van Biezen et al. 2012), and public trust in European parties has dropped considerably (Eurobarometer 2013). The standard citizens' laments include parties being corrupt and self-interested, not standing for anything, wasting too much time fighting over petty issues rather than cooperating to solve the country's problems, being only active around elections and being ill-prepared for government (Carothers 2006: 4). Many politicians blame the decline in popular support for parties on a combination of greater media exposure of party shortcomings, increasing pressure for populism to placate voters, and a perceived reduction in parties' policy influence vis-à-vis globalization and supranational decision-making bodies. In many Asian countries, political parties are perceived as personalistic networks, while party membership is treated as a privilege that is bestowed upon, rather than chosen by, citizens (Ufen 2014).

Meanwhile, citizens have also been withdrawing from traditional CSOs such as trade unions, church organizations, charities and cooperatives. This phenomenon is especially prevalent among European youth. Explanations range from the disappearance of traditional societal strata such as religion and clear-cut class divisions, to technological distractions from societal involvement, to the greater exposure of corruption and other reputational damage among CSOs (Putnam 2000; World Values Survey n.d.; The Economist 2013a).

While this has led some to conclude that citizens are no longer interested in the society that they are a part of or the politics that guide it, the rise in citizen protest movements in recent years contradicts this view. Citizens, especially young people, who have not previously engaged in political party or CSO activities are now taking to the streets more frequently and en masse (Ortiz et al. 2013). Citizen movements are therefore increasing while overall political participation is dropping.



## The project

In 2013, the Asia–Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Hanns Seidel Foundation and International IDEA initiated a project to analyse the emerging trends surrounding the relationship between political parties, CSOs and citizen movements, and in particular to address two key questions:

1. Why are citizens today increasingly drawn to citizen movements rather than joining political parties?
2. How can political parties become more responsive to citizens' needs?

Since early 2013, the three organizations, all of which traditionally place the citizen at centre stage in their work, have been exploring the emergence of citizen movements and their effect on political parties. Asia and Europe are the overlapping geographic areas of all three organizations, so these regions were chosen as the main focus. Research on the topic was commissioned in nine countries: Germany, India, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and Viet Nam. These case studies were selected, through an open call, from among 42 submitted proposals. Each was chosen based on its relevance to the topic of this project, as well as on the basis of the quality of the analysis and the author's access to first-hand accounts of the events they describe.

A workshop was organized in Yangon, Myanmar, in November 2013 to validate the research. There, the country studies were complemented by case studies from elsewhere in Asia and Europe, such as Bulgaria, Cambodia, Japan, Myanmar and the Netherlands. The results of these activities are brought together in this publication, which examines the shifting relationship between political parties and the citizen in Asia and Europe.

## Case selection and delimitations

The chapters in this book are based on the commissioned case studies, which took a political party perspective and focused on the relationship between political parties, CSOs and citizen movements. Despite the clear importance of this issue, there have been too few studies of how CSOs, citizen movements and political parties interact, and of the

lessons that can be learned for future cooperation. At a time of rapidly increasing citizen activism, coupled with public lament over the demise of political parties, there is an urgent need to examine this relationship further.

The case studies address how different citizen movements and CSOs originated and engaged with political parties in the nine countries. Some CSOs and citizen movements have created political parties or have themselves become political parties. The cases also illustrate what contributed to the successes or failures of CSOs and citizen movements in involving citizens, gaining political attention and making a political impact. Moreover, the case studies show how political parties have responded to the emergence of citizen movements and the lessons they have learned while trying to regain the confidence of citizens.

Quantitative studies show that Asia and Europe are part of a global trend of increasing numbers of citizen movements. Protests in East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific increased from eight to twenty per year between 2006 and 2012, while in Europe and Central Asia this number increased from three to eleven during the same period (Ortiz et al. 2013). This publication shows that Asia and Europe provide a window into the diverse shapes that citizen movements take and the issues they raise. The countries studied represent a variety of political systems, from established multiparty systems to one-party states and emerging democracies, which facilitates comparisons in a variety of contexts.

Moreover, the size of the political parties, CSOs and movements that were studied varies considerably. Some are very small political parties (the Philippines, Spain) or movements (Romania), while others are very large CSOs (Norway and Sweden), movements (Poland, Spain) or parties (Germany and Viet Nam). This provides a myriad of experiences and illustrates how the same trends manifest themselves regardless of not only the region or country but also of the size of the movement or organization.

To include various perspectives, the contributors come from various backgrounds as well. Some hail from academia, and others are politicians or CSO representatives. Some tell their stories as observers, while others were protagonists in the political developments they describe. Together, they highlight the changes that political parties and citizen movements are undergoing from as broad a spectrum as possible.

The contributors were given a degree of freedom to voice their own views and experiences about the nature of political parties and citizen movements in their countries. Because the developments they describe are so recent, this allows for greater insights into the thinking of today's political and civil society leaders. Although some statements are current or topical and may be overtaken by events, that is a given risk in analysing current affairs. Even though some of the cases studied might have evolved further, the lessons learned will still be relevant for the wider global debate on political parties and the citizen. This debate will certainly continue beyond this publication.

## **Roles and responsibilities: political parties, CSOs and citizen movements**

Citizen political participation can take many forms. Beyond traditional procedural means, such as voting, membership of a political party, standing for elected office and becoming an elected representative, citizens can also become engaged in a cause led by a CSO or join a street or virtual protest organized by a citizen movement, depending on their political objectives.

At a minimum, a political party is defined as 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office' (Sartori 1976). In addition to taking part in elections, however, political parties perform a number of other representative, procedural and institutional functions that are crucial for the functioning of modern representative democracies. Representative functions include the representation of social demands, and interest articulation and aggregation. Procedural or institutional functions include leadership recruitment and the organization of parliament and government (Bartolini and Mair 2001). Citizens may choose to take up different roles vis-à-vis a political party in order to influence political decision-making. This could mean voting for a party, becoming a member in order to influence its policies or even standing for elected office to represent other citizens on behalf of that party in a government body.

Meanwhile, CSOs constitute a wide array of formal organizations outside the family, market and state. The EU considers CSOs to be:

all non-state, not-for-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organize to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether

political, cultural, social or economic... they include membership-based, cause-based and service-oriented CSOs. Among them, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, foundations, research institutions, gender and LGBT organizations, cooperatives, professional and business associations, and the not-for-profit media. Trade unions and employers' organizations, the so-called social partners, constitute a specific category of CSOs (European Commission 2012).

Citizen movements, on the other hand, are 'networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity' (Diani 1995). Citizen movements are neither as structured as a political party or interest group nor as unstructured as a mass trend without goals—they are somewhere in between. Citizen movements usually aim to challenge the status quo through reform, revolution or by reversing societal developments. Commonly used tactics include mass demonstrations, sit-ins, marches and verbal appeals, but there is also evidence that citizen movements may actively affect voter participation (Freeman and Johnson 1999).

Since all three can mobilize and articulate the interests of citizens, there is a clear overlap in the representative roles of political parties, CSOs and citizen movements. One important difference, however, is how they organize representation. Political parties and CSOs are more formally institutionalized. Citizen movements are often loose networks without clear leadership or organizational structures. Some citizen movements, however, develop in consecutive stages as they coalesce and bureaucratize, and therefore take on more and more traits of CSOs (Christiansen 2009).

Political parties differ from CSOs and citizen movements because they stand in elections, make and adopt laws and policies, coordinate among politicians, and in parliamentary countries form governments. CSOs and citizen movements lack governing power and instead attempt to influence decision-makers through lobbying, dialogue, and awareness-raising campaigns and protests. Political parties face serious challenges in effectively combining their representative and institutional roles, leading to the high level of citizen dissatisfaction with political parties, that is now evident around the world. In advancing their political interests, citizens therefore shift between political parties, CSOs and citizen movements.

## Overview of the chapters

In Chapter 1, citizen protests in Germany are examined via infrastructural projects. Since the 1960s there has been a steady acceptance by political parties of such protests; what was once considered unconventional forms of participation is now accepted as legitimate. For Germany, the stark growth of such movements is evidenced by the number of petitions and referenda, which doubled from 2007 to 2013. Such new social movements—taking place mostly in the local and regional levels—are also responsible for the roots of a new party, The Greens, now a well-established political party in the German political system. As such, party strategists now work to create alliances with protest movements in a bid to harness support and eventually translate this to votes at the ballot boxes. Correspondingly, political parties have had to accept a somewhat diminished political role as citizen representatives. The authors also discuss the role of the middle class in protesting public projects. A group that has considerable resources to pursue and sustain their protests, their political might was witnessed in the 2013 protest against the new Stuttgart railway station, which also contributed to the loss of office by the longstanding Christian Democratic Union. In their recommendations, the authors point to key actions, such as reviewing the process of infrastructure construction; pre-empting opposition and finding consensus with opposing parties during the planning stage; bolstering the communication of infrastructural plans to the public; and distancing the infrastructural planning from political elections.

India is the largest and arguably one of the most established democracies covered in this volume. Nonetheless, the country experienced an electoral shift when a citizen-movement-turned-political-party won a large electoral victory in the December 2013 city elections in Delhi, and eventually formed a minority government. Chapter 2 discusses the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which started as an anti-corruption movement but later became a political party in order to maximize its political influence. A central part of the chapter describes the dilemmas facing a citizen movement when deciding whether to become a political party. Many of the movement's supporters feared that becoming a party would mean losing its 'outsider' credentials, but others stressed the merits of gaining political influence. The chapter discusses the innovative ways in which the AAP aimed to raise its profile as a party that is responsive to citizen demands by: improving its transparency and internal party democracy; investing heavily in

outreach to citizens through its website and social media and, more importantly, via innovations to more traditional means, such as the use of advertisements on rickshaws and membership registration by SMS. The AAP's electoral success provoked responses by more established parties, with the intention to reshape their engagement with citizens.

The case of Poland, presented in Chapter 3, tells the story of two citizen movements: the anti-ACTA [Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement] protests of 2012 and Solidarity's initiative, Platforma Oburzonych, of 2013. The anti-ACTA case describes large-scale protests against the ratification of an international treaty on intellectual property rights. Solidarity's Platforma Oburzonych, a diverse movement of trade unions, civic organizations and individual citizens, started off expressing discontent about the increase in the retirement age to 67 that was instituted in May 2012 but transformed into a more general call for constitutional amendments to change the nature of political power in Poland. The two movements demonstrate how social media were used to mobilize large groups of Polish citizens at a time when many considered the majority of the country's citizens to be politically apathetic. Once citizens became actively involved in both movements, politicians realized the urgency of engaging with them. After first dismissing the anti-ACTA movement, the ruling party made a U-turn when public opinion became strong enough to force it to change its stance. Meanwhile, a number of opposition parties that were tempted to jump on the bandwagon of citizen protest for their own political ends were quickly rebuked by the protesters. When trust was at its lowest, citizen movements became purely anti-politics, blocking all collaboration with political parties—even those with similar aims. Finally, the Poland case illustrates how political leaders can feel compelled to cooperate with citizen movements even when they do not consider them to be acting rationally. ACTA, which sparked the protest, did not necessarily conflict with existing law, and limited consultations had previously taken place. The movement may equally have signalled a perception of unresponsiveness, which in politics can be just as important.

Chapter 4 examines the Akbayan party in the Philippines, which started as a group of CSOs and citizen movements but decided to form a political party to achieve political reform. Its reliance on a newly introduced electoral law, with limited elements of proportional representation, shows the relevance of the conducive context through which it was ultimately able to take a minority position in government. The party managed to balance its presence in national politics with maintaining

active ties with citizens and leaders at the local level. Throughout its transition from a coalition of CSOs to a political party, Akbayan tried to maintain a high level of internal party democracy with strong bottom-up structures, relative autonomy for affiliated non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a strong focus on gender and diversity. Yet it matured its political machinery by adopting so-called delight issues that appeal to large audiences, mobilizing more campaign resources and focusing on building political skills to gain more political influence. From time to time, however, Akbayan struggled with its status between a political party and a citizen movement. Despite prioritizing pro-poor policies and anti-corruption, it was at times shunned by citizen protest movements. A case in point was the so-called pork-barrel protests of August 2013—a large-scale and largely leaderless citizen movement protesting against corruption and a scandal involving parliamentarians' discretionary funds—which was mobilized primarily using social media. Although Akbayan was a long-time supporter of the movement's causes, it was treated like all the other parties. Today, it focuses more on legislating on political rights and good governance to enable social change rather than its direct socio-economic campaigns and grass-roots organization.

Chapter 5 examines the Centro Democrático Liberal (CDL), a small political party in Spain, against the background of the large-scale street protests of 15 May 2011 mobilized by the Indignados movement. The CDL was seeking to gain attention in an environment in which politics and the media were dominated by two large political parties. With little funding available for outreach activities, the CDL decided to invest in links with CSOs to reach citizens on a larger scale. The chapter shows how it tried to convince CSOs not only of their ideological similarities, but also of the party's political access—in particular at the supranational level in EU institutions. The chapter makes a clear distinction between the party's interactions with CSOs and with citizen movements. It describes the Spanish Indignados, or 15M movement, which achieved high turnouts at street protests partly through its innovative use of social media. In spite of the movement's broad exposure, the author questions its ability to effect political change. Many parties encountered initial hostility to their presence at the protests, and most (including the CDL) decided to keep their distance from the movement. In spite of its initial success, however, the movement soon struggled due to its lack of clear leadership, internal conflict and the absence of clear proposals to replace its initial anti-politics message. Nonetheless, the movement represented sincere political frustrations among citizens, which the

author believes are likely to remain for the foreseeable future.

The difference between CSOs and citizen movements is illustrated in Chapter 6, which examines Romania. It describes the role of two women's rights CSOs during large-scale anti-government protests in Romania in 2012. The chapter shows how relatively small CSOs can play a substantial role in larger and internally highly diverse anti-government citizen movements. The two CSOs achieved this through strong internal organization, by clearly framing their messages, and using outreach methods such as social media and more traditional methods to mobilize citizens. The chapter describes the fluctuating relationship between the movement and political parties throughout the demonstrations. When Romania's ruling coalition refused to engage with the citizen movement, it was punished and eventually forced to resign. Conversely, opposition parties were first prevented from joining the movement out of frustration with the entire political class, but later received support when it became clear that their political agendas overlapped. Eventually, many of the policies of the two women's CSOs were adopted by the opposition parties, which were later elected to government. The chapter describes the lack of a coherent social media strategy in most Romanian political parties and calls for a change in parties' current top-down use of social media.

Chapter 7, on Viet Nam, is distinctive in that it discusses a one-party state with a rapidly developing economic system. In Viet Nam, citizens' protests occur on a regular basis. The Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV), in an attempt to maintain its legitimacy and hold onto power, displays varying degrees of engagement with citizen movements, which the author terms a 'repressive-responsive approach'. This engagement ranges from collaboration, where civil activity concerns women's rights, to outright resistance to protests regarding land-grabs or constitutional reform. The type of cooperation and approval from the CPV determines whether protests emerge as formalized civil society groups or more spontaneous civil protest. In recent years, high levels of social media protest have emerged inside and outside Viet Nam, despite attempts by the regime to infiltrate and block the sites used. Through social media, citizen movements have managed to mobilize spontaneous protest groups, especially regarding land-grabs. Ultimately, the author sees the CPV as undergoing changes as a result of pressure from CSOs and citizen movements, albeit to a limited extent and with the sole aim of staying in power. More fundamental changes to citizens' daily life, however, continue to come from economic reforms.



Looking to Norway and Sweden, Chapter 8 examines a more traditional form of party-citizen relations: the close cooperation that has existed between social democratic parties and trade unions since the early 20th century. This historic bond includes statutory trade union representation on the parties' executive committees, institutionalized joint committees and regular party funding by trade unions. The chapter shows how the social democratic parties were founded by the trade unions and how the confederations of trade unions were founded by political parties. This alliance between a political party and a body that once started as a citizen movement has sustained both sides for decades. In spite of the historic impact of both the parties and unions, which has brought about political change in partnership, challenges have recently emerged in the relationship, which is now criticized as being too close. The chapter questions whether their entwinement is still acceptable when trade union membership is plummeting and union members increasingly vote for other political parties. It also discusses the recent efforts made by the parties and trade unions to counter this trend and thereby maintain legitimacy.

These case studies stem from entirely different contexts. However, all of them illustrate the growing gap between citizens' demands and delivery by their political representatives. Each chapter describes how political parties have tried to deal with this gap in different ways, but there is also recognition of commonality in the problems faced. The overall findings of the chapters, as well as those of the workshop held to validate the cases, are presented in the concluding chapter, which also provides recommendations for politicians, CSOs and citizen movements.

# **Chapter 1**

**Contested Infrastructures:  
Citizen Protest and the  
Response of Political Parties  
in Germany**

# Chapter 1

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Roland STURM and Thorsten WINKELMANN

## Contested Infrastructures: Citizen Protest and the Response of Political Parties in Germany

### Introduction

Citizen movements in post-war Germany have their origins in the 1970s (Mayer-Tasch 1976). They gave voice to critical attitudes towards top-down political decision-making in Germany. This opposition against political routines was rooted in the feeling that public administration, as well as traditional interest groups, had become detached from daily life and had developed their own universe of priorities, which in the eyes of citizens often lacked legitimacy.

In particular, new and important issues had appeared on the political agenda, such as environmental issues, which the political parties in power had neglected. The parties themselves were perceived as ‘closed shops’ – closed to citizen initiatives, highly hierarchical in organisation and lacking in responsiveness. These perceptions existed on the local and national level.

Over the years, citizen protests have contributed to institutional change at the local level, and such institutional change can be said to have strengthened direct democracy at the cost of representative democracy. Political parties had to accept a somewhat diminished political role compared to their former dominant position as citizen representatives. Parties, for example, had previously selected most of the candidates for the office of mayor, but voters today directly elect a person of their choice. This outcome no longer hinges upon the parties’ political majority on the city council, as was the case in many parts of

Germany. Moreover, direct democracy on the local level now includes tools for legislative initiatives by citizens, as well as opportunities for citizen initiatives to change decisions made by local administrations and local councils.

Citizen movements also have an impact on national politics. Often, citizen movements at the local level would escalate to become nationwide interests. For example, a local community that protests against the building of a nuclear power station in its neighbourhood will often result in a national movement against the building of nuclear power stations.

In the 1980s, citizen movements in West Germany gave birth to nationwide 'new social movements'. These movements, critical of party politics, changed Germany's political landscape (Brand 1985; Guggenberger 1980; Raschke 1985). Political parties began to accept such political protest and began to see unconventional forms of participation as legitimate. Party strategists also tried to forge alliances with protest movements and made efforts to co-opt the leadership of protest movements into their organisations. Their aim was to win over the voters who supported political protest, and this sometimes meant a radical change of the political agenda of parties. It also forced the parties to become more of a forum for political discourse. The new social movements formed the roots of a new party, The Greens, today a well-established party in the German political system. Nonetheless, The Greens, as a political party, could not organise all kinds of citizen disaffection. Grass-root movements, which preferred self-organisation, did not feel represented by party politics. A considerable number of citizens still chose the option of self-help and autonomous organisation instead of expressing their protest at the ballot box by voting for parties in opposition (Poguntke 1987: 79).

Though German politics and political parties have been efficient when it comes to dealing with problems of integrating long-term anti-system protest, there remains structural incompatibility of party political competition and short-term citizen protest. Citizens tend to protest in the narrow framework of their emotional, economic or social perceptions of a problem. In Germany, as in other countries, the NIMBY ('not in my backyard') syndrome does play a role. Furthermore, the argument of political parties to focus on the broader national perspective, rather than a narrow, sectional or local one, is no longer credible in German political culture. Therefore, a dispute over a railway station in one town

can throw up a slew of questions, such as how to deal with political violence of protesters; how to give the citizens a voice; how to mediate conflicts between parties and citizen movements; and how to cope with frictions inside parties caused by the controversy (Decker 2012).

In this chapter, we will investigate the relationship between citizen protest and political parties in an area of particular significance in German politics today, namely, the opposition against infrastructure projects. Contested infrastructures can be part of energy production (wind farms, photovoltaics, power stations, etc.), and also railway stations, airports or national parks.

### **The political relevance of infrastructure developments**

High-quality infrastructure is an important precondition for a functioning economy. When committing to infrastructure projects, political parties need to weigh the inherent risks and benefits. On the one hand, there are the immediate and long-term benefits for future generations, and on the other, such projects are highly visible and involve a certain degree of risk due to complicated planning decisions and solutions (Flyvbjerg 2007: 579). Infrastructure projects may also have unexpected technical and economic consequences.

**Table 1.1. Examples of contested infrastructures**

Project	Description	Cost (in Euros)	Responsibility	Type of Protest	Time frame of Protest
Stuttgart 21 (Stuttgart)	Railway station	4–11 billion	Federal; Regional (Land)	Violent and peaceful demonstrations; citizen initiatives; petitions; referendum	2010–2012
Berlin-Brandenburg International (Berlin)	Airport	620 million (originally); now between 6 to 8 billion	Federal; Regional (Land)	Petitions; citizen initiatives	Since 2010
Elbphilharmonie (Hamburg)	Opera	77 million (originally); 789 million	Regional (Land)	Citizen initiatives	2009–2012
SuedLink (Bayern)	Powerline	2–5 billion	Federal; Regional (Land)	Petitions; citizen initiatives	Since 2012
Nord-Süd-Stadtbahn (Cologne)	Tram	600 million (originally); now 1.1–1.3 billion	Local	Citizen initiatives	Since 2009
Waldschlösschenbrücke (Dresden)	Bridge	150–210 million	Local	Petition; citizen initiatives; referendum	2004–2013
Hochmoselübergang (between Wittlich and Longkamp)	Bridge	250–400 million	Regional (Land)	Petition; citizen initiatives	Since 2008
City-Tunnel (Leipzig)	Railway tunnel	572 million (originally); now 960 million	Regional (Land); Local	Citizen initiatives	2004–2013
Riffgat (Borkum)	Offshore-Wind farm	400–550 million	Federal; Regional (Land)	Petition	2011–2013
Atom Mülllager (Gorleben)	Storage of radioactive waste	1.6 billion to date; expected to be up to 5 billion	Federal	Violent and peaceful demonstrations; petition; citizen initiatives	Since 1978/79

Most of the infrastructure projects are long-term, which means they risk falling out of favour with the electorate over time. The best example is nuclear power. In the 1960s wider German public saw nuclear power as the future of energy. Today, it is regarded as dangerous and unacceptable. When attitudes of the electorate change, political parties may lose the confidence of their voters and the latter would look for political alternatives.

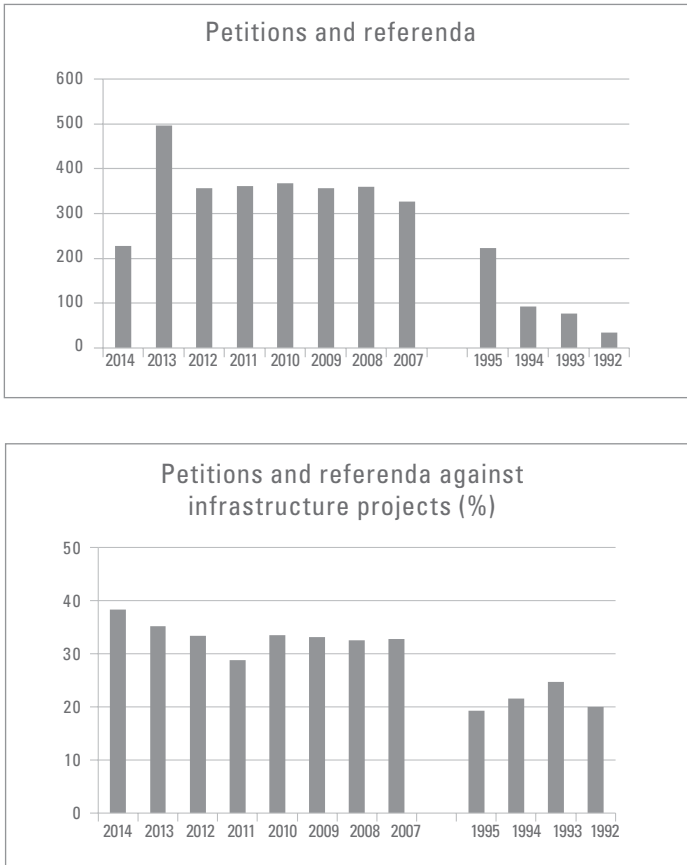
Another aspect of infrastructure projects is that once plans are carried out, they are often difficult to reverse or correct; once a forest disappears, a dam is built, or an airport opens, decisions to backtrack are close to impossible.

Often, citizens protest infrastructure projects because they believe that alternatives have not been tested sufficiently, and that the political decisions have been made without much research and consideration. Citizens also fear cost overruns; there is the thinking that once a lot of money has been invested in a project, additional costs are more easily accepted later because the alternative would be losing the entire initial investment. This is an argument frequently made in the literature. For example, Cantarelli et al. argued: “When an investment in time or money is made..., individuals prefer to continue with the project because doing so allows for a chance of successful implementation, as opposed to a sure loss of the investment should they decide to quit” (2010: 795). Because citizens often miss involvement, information and communication, citizen initiatives provide an alternative space for political communication, from which political parties could seek feedback before implementing a project.

## **Protests against infrastructure projects**

Protests against infrastructure projects have developed despite the availability of a wide range of procedures that guarantee public access to planning. These include the legal instruments for an individual citizen to intervene during the planning process. Germany has seen a general increase of petitions and referenda, especially on the local and regional levels. In the 1990s, it was rare to have 200 initiatives on the local level of government, whereas from 2007 to 2013, the number of initiatives almost doubled (see Figure 1.1). Almost 40 per cent of these initiatives focused on infrastructure projects, and many initiatives asked for the infrastructure projects to cease. These figures show a very stable trend—one of permanent challenge to party politics. For parties in government it is almost impossible to ignore the challenge of citizen protesters because protesters have the ability to mobilize the electorate, but also to produce non-voters. In Germany, a decreasing turnout at general elections has been discussed in the context of a perceived lack of responsiveness to issues outside party politics (Steingart 2009; Decker et al. 2013).

**Figure 1.1. Petitions and referenda in local politics**



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from [www.mehr-demokratie.de](http://www.mehr-demokratie.de)

When there are competing interests involved in an infrastructure project, it is the duty of public administrators to balance such interests. Some of the most important channels for citizen involvement at a very early stage of infrastructure planning include: mailed background papers, public meetings, public hearings, detailed information on official documents and veto rights.

However, German population have generally low awareness with regard to the opportunities for procedural participation. As such, procedural participation in early stages of planning has developed into a privilege for insiders and organized special interests; and wider citizen involvement



often occurs well beyond the planning stage, resulting in controversial public debates. For instance, when construction works begin, citizens then start to form opinions and react to decisions made at the planning stage, leading to impressions that their interests are ignored. In opinion polls, 68 per cent of the citizens were sympathetic to resistance against infrastructure projects that had already gone through all stages of procedural participation (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach 2011: 7). One reason for this is that many had ignored the project until they saw it.

Protests occur when there is a lack of trust in political parties and elected decision-makers, as well as the feeling that those directly affected by infrastructure projects were never asked nor given sufficient information. In addition, social networks provide support and function as alternative public space for citizen protests, where the media would feature the citizens' concerns, making political parties take sides. Political mobilization against infrastructure projects gains traction when local protests are fuelled by anti-party and anti-government feelings. It thrives on a closed communication space, which filters information and is based on a common understanding of political priorities of the protesters. The more homogeneous the priorities of citizen protest become, the more protesters disregard communication outside the inner circle of protest. Citizen protest uses symbolism, emotional confrontation and media events to influence the public mood. When they are minority challenges to political routines, protest movements cannot hope to win electoral contests. By mobilizing citizens, protest movements temporarily control the political agenda by applying public pressure on parties and governments. Agenda control is made easier when the message of citizen protest movements is fairly simple and suggests straightforward solutions. In this sense, the approach of protesters can often be somewhat contradictory. Technical detail and the nitty-gritty of expenditures for construction works are of secondary importance for them, because this information complicates their message. At the same time, the argument of cost overruns is used and contributes to the plausibility of citizen initiatives.

Citizen movements also tend to portray parties in government as actors responsible for cost overruns. There is some truth in these accusations, because governments often run into one or more of the three basic problems of infrastructure planning: bad luck, delusions and deceptions (Flyvberg et al. 2009, p. 172). It is fairly easy to experience bad luck when an infrastructure project ventures into new territory, and it is a

typical delusion to underestimate costs and to overestimate the future gains of a project. For political decision-makers, the latter is a constant temptation; the cheaper and more efficient an infrastructure project is, the easier it is to get political support, or as Merewitz (1973, p. 280) has argued: “keeping costs low is more important than estimating costs correctly.” What counts politically is the presentation of the project: “A project that looks highly beneficial on paper is more likely to get funded than one that does not” (Flyvberg 2007, p. 586). Such a rationale is short-sighted, as citizen groups may start questioning early calculations and expectations when things go wrong. In the last problem of deceptions, these border to the criminal and thrive on information asymmetries. They only survive as long as the political decision-making process lacks transparency. And because citizen initiatives usually start with demands that involve transparency issues, when these demands are successful it could lead to an end of asymmetrical information; and once the information is made public it will provoke new rounds of citizen protests.

The later a citizen protest against infrastructure projects becomes politically relevant, the higher are the costs when political decision-makers finally agree to include the preferences articulated by protest movement into their agenda. Political parties have a vital role here; the protest is more than a lack of willingness to live with the infrastructure project, it is above all a statement on representative democracy. Parties may choose to dismiss certain protests with the argument that minority interests should not get more attention than the interests of the majority represented by the parties in parliament. Alternatively, parties in opposition may see an opportunity to challenge the government by taking the side of the protesters.

In Germany today, parties tend to see citizen protest as an indicator of a lack of responsiveness in representative democracy. Protest is a middle-class phenomenon (Hutter and Teune 2012, p. 14) to which parties are inclined to respond not least because of the electoral strength of this section of the electorate. Only the middle classes seem to have an interest in public protest based on individual preferences, and only they have the necessary resources such as time and money (Jörke 2011, p. 15f.; Walter 2009, p. 113).

Citizen protest in Germany is also an expression of a profound change in German society. Decisions made by institutions of representative democracy, in which parties have a leading role, can no longer expect

to be implicitly respected. A growing part of the citizenship believes that rules and regulations, though they may be necessary for the common good, need not be respected when they infringe on their special interests. This is a dilemma, because protest movements argue that they prefer deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996) as an alternative model based on the equality of all participants in a public discourse, which in turn adds to representative democracy. In this discourse, it is not the most powerful individual, group or party that wins, but the best or most convincing argument. The dilemma arises when protest groups claim from start that theirs is the best argument. This turns the model of deliberative democracy into an instrument to dominate others engaged in what was supposed to be an open discourse.

## **Role of political parties**

Political parties traditionally concentrated on legislation to give citizens access to the infrastructure planning process, and especially for those directly affected by planning decisions. As mentioned above, while well intentioned, in the eyes of the citizens it is too technocratic and legalistic. In addition, whenever citizens participate in hearings and consultations, their views are not always heard. When public administration officials decide, they have to balance conflicting interests and, in addition, provide room for manoeuvre, to allow officials to take into account previous decisions and their specific institutional preferences.

Citizen participation would include the sharing of information and the consultation of each group that shows interest in a controversial infrastructure project. Both political parties and citizen could co-operate and make co-decisions through roundtables, public dialogues and conflict mediation procedures. When in doubt, political parties usually turn to more citizen participation, which makes the whole process more transparent.

All German parties have noticed that citizens tend to ask for more than just the traditional routines of infrastructure planning and agreed that the legal framework for planning processes should be modernised. This was a consequence of the 2013 protest against the new Stuttgart railway station, which saw an unprecedented rejection by the middle classes and contributed to the loss of office by the Christian Democratic Union, a conservative party that had been in office without interruption for decades (Decker 2011).

Top-down planning processes are seen as somewhat obsolete, although new procedural solutions for citizen protest have not solved the problem of spontaneous disagreement and alternative organization. The ideal solution is to have a kind of early warning system, which allows political parties to pre-empt political protest and integrate dissenters. This is not just for electoral reasons, but also because parties need to defend the constitutional integrity of representative democracy in Germany. For infrastructure projects, in particular, parties need to confront a general pessimism concerning technological change, which can become an obstacle to economic development in a highly industrialized country such as Germany.

## **Responding to citizen protests: CSU in the state of Bavaria**

Parties in government have the ability and the means to be responsive to citizen protest. A good example is the way the Christian Social Union (CSU)—a party that governs the state of Bavaria and a coalition partner in the federal government—has dealt with this challenge. Because of the unpredictable risks of nuclear power—as witnessed in Fukushima, Japan—the German government announced that by 2022, all nuclear power stations in Germany would be shut down. Future energy would come from renewables, such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves and geothermal heat. Prior to this, Germany invested heavily in photovoltaics and wind farms.

Though the majority of Germans supported the new alternatives to nuclear energy, many citizens did not want wind farms in their neighbourhood. Many argued that wind turbines were noisy and ugly, and would destroy the scenery in the neighbourhood. In many places in Bavaria, citizen protest groups were formed to stop wind farms in their areas. These protest groups also opposed new gigantic overhead power lines, which would transmit electricity produced by offshore wind farms in the North Sea to Bavaria.

The Bavarian government was open to the demands of the protesters, but because of the federal decision to phase out nuclear power, the wind turbines had to be built.

A political compromise with the citizen movements had to be found. This compromise came in two dimensions. First was the guarantee of building wind turbines further from residential areas, which would

minimize the noise pollution. The Bavarian government stipulated rules for the implementation of the federal law on renewables, such that the distance between people's dwellings and wind turbines had to be ten times the size of the turbine. This rule guarantees that bigger turbines—which are noisier than smaller ones—have to be built further away from where people lived. Second, the Bavarian government joined in opposing the construction of new overhead power lines, seeing no need for them, or at least for the most contentious one.

The Bavarian government stressed in this context the advantages of having existing instruments of citizen involvement that focused on political strategies to support renewables as future source of energy. Citizens are offered early involvement in the planning process. During certain planning stages, participation of citizens is required by law. Participation includes local government meetings to inform the general public; a dialogue between investors and owners of wind farms; public access to documents on planning; and the right to comment on plans and to be heard. Whenever a wind farm is built, there is a guarantee for citizens that the owner of the wind farm has to tear it down when it is no longer in use, i.e., in about 20 years. The owner of the wind farm has to make sure that the area where the wind farm stood will be restored to its original form, with the scenery intact.

### **Political breakdown in communication: Stuttgart 21 in Baden-Württemberg**

The Bavarian case is an example of a non-confrontational style of land use decision-making when dealing with citizen protest against infrastructure projects. In contrast, the conflict over a new railway station in Baden-Württemberg (Stuttgart 21) demonstrates the dangers of a breakdown in political communication. The idea to replace the old Stuttgart railway station by a modern underground station was first mooted in 1988 and then presented to the public in 1994. What followed was an intense debate on the pros and cons, with the issue appearing in Parliament 146 times and 200 times on the agenda of the Stuttgart City Council. In the planning stage of the railway station project, more than 9,000 demands for changes on the official plans were voiced by interested individuals and groups of citizens.

Even though instruments for participation of citizens in the planning stage were also available and all the final decisions were tested in the

courts (Stüer and Buchsteiner 2011, p. 339), this did not guarantee general agreement on the project. Once building works started, protesters began to mobilize. In November 2009, weekly demonstrations (on Mondays) became the rule with several thousand participants at each turnout. The demonstrations were organized by citizen initiatives, environmental groups, and the local Green Party. The protesters gained the attention of a greater political audience, and on 1 October 2010 when the first trees were felled, the protest turned violent. Nationwide, the railway station project was discussed not in terms of its benefits or disadvantages but as a symbol of a new culture of citizen protest. It was argued that it is not enough when a project fulfils all legal preconditions. Citizen initiatives referred to moral and environmental arguments, while planners provided their own expert knowledge. Meaningful communication between the planners—the federal government, the railway company, the land and the city councils—and the protesters was difficult. The planners stressed the technical needs and the economic advantages of the railway station project while the protesters debated their right to be heard and the social consequences of the project. Misunderstandings, permanent revisions of the data presented by the planners to the public, piecemeal information tactics, and a lack of coordination by the planners resulted in citizens losing trust with the planners.

Initially, political parties did not see the potential political conflict in the discussions of the new railway station and their wait-and-see attitude gave the citizen opportunities to play a central role as defenders of political interests. Parties only got into the defensive mode when the views of citizen initiatives dominated the public discourse and the conflicts became highly emotional. To ease the conflict, a new form of citizen participation was tested. The idea was to invite the opponents and the supporters of the railway station project to a dialogue, which was mediated by an elder statesman acceptable to both sides. The dialogue was open to the public and broadcast on television for everybody interested to listen to both sides of the argument. At the end of the dialogue, no compromise was met because the political decision-makers could not accept the position that the railway station project should be abandoned.

The parties re-entered the stage with an initiative for a referendum to settle the issue. This referendum was held on 27 November 2011. In

the state of Baden-Württemberg, 58.9 per cent of the voters supported the railway project, where there was a majority in favour in the Stuttgart region. However, some citizen initiatives did not accept defeat and argued for the crucial values underpinning their continual fight against the new railway station in Stuttgart. This shows the limitations of conflict resolution, especially when minority citizens are unwilling to compromise.

## Recommendations

1. *Parties in government when planning new and ambitious infrastructure projects should try to find a consensus on these projects with opposition parties.* The planning and construction of infrastructure takes months and years. Support amongst parties would help avoid U-turns when governments change. Such support also reduces the danger of making infrastructure projects into a political game of blaming and shaming. However, agreement between parties cannot rule out that citizens would still feel challenged and take up a controversial issue. An all-party consensus can, only to some extent, reduce the likelihood of infrastructure projects being contested. All-party support may give an infrastructure project additional credibility, while making difficult technical solutions more plausible. Parties should avoid, as has been the case in Germany's regional elections, using contested infrastructure projects as bargaining chips in coalition negotiations. This signals to the voter that parties do not care about their preferences when making concessions for future coalition partners in order to get into power. Such an attitude provokes the immediate response of protest by citizens who feel excluded, and contributes to an estrangement of citizens and parties.
2. *Separate infrastructure projects and election campaigns.* Citizens tend to take note of infrastructure projects when they become visible. For political parties, it is therefore important that the building works start when election campaigns are over. Election campaigns are a window of opportunity for protest groups to hijack the issues. In Germany, public protests against a new railway station coincided with regional elections that led to an unexpected change of government in the state of Baden-Württemberg; this relegated the largest party in that state to that of opposition. To a significant degree, this was the result of The Greens taking ownership of the protest issue. It also excluded the party of the former Baden-Württemberg prime minister

from future participation in the regional government, because this party was not within the protest coalition (Gabriel and Kornelius 2011).

3. *Parties should make efforts to communicate to their grassroots and local communities the benefits of planned infrastructure projects beforehand.* A lack of information is a key reason behind protest movements. Often, the benefits of planned infrastructure projects and their costs remain nebulous. With the tools of social media, the Internet, local newspaper and regional TV, citizens can be reached in a short time. It is important to have specific information and to differentiate between those affected by the infrastructure projects in their daily life; those who gain from these projects; and the biggest group of citizens who are watching what is going on. If anything goes wrong, the latter group is likely join forces with the affected citizens to oppose the planned infrastructure project. Those directly affected by the infrastructure project will also join in the citizen movements if political parties ignore the side effects of infrastructure decisions, such as noise pollution or reduced property value.
4. *Parties need to engage in a permanent and all-encompassing dialogue with citizen movements.* Many infrastructure projects in Germany have shown that it is not sufficient to rely on a one-way communication strategy, where the government informs and the citizens listen. Citizens demand more; they want to get involved in project planning processes at an early stage. Existing legislation, which already guarantees citizen participation, is important but insufficient. Citizens in Germany expect a participatory culture, which allows them to communicate with decision-makers on an equal footing. Politicians should avoid taking recourse to legal arguments only. However, participation without responsibility for the results also has to have its limits. Infrastructure projects that meet with resistance are not bad ideas per se. Elected politicians need to balance all interests involved and they also need to learn to live with defeat. This is a way to gain credibility, which is an important resource for the planning and construction of other infrastructure projects (Hennecke and Kronenberg 2014, p. 15).
5. *Parties should give new infrastructure projects a more prominent place in their party manifestos.* Such projects are often seen as a triumph of a political party or single politician. They therefore need to be given political relevance, which is necessary especially in Germany—a country generally sceptical of the benefits of technological change—to point out the economic benefits an infrastructure project has for the common good. Manifestos could



make infrastructure projects part of the overall economic strategy of parties. A modern infrastructure is the pre-condition for Germany's economic competitiveness. This general argument remains true, even if—as has been the case—successful citizen protests have contributed to a critical awareness of economic losses when infrastructure projects go wrong.

6. *Parties have to review the process of constructing infrastructures.* Citizen protest is often triggered by cost overruns and delays. It has become rare for infrastructure projects in Germany to stay within agreed parameters set out at the onset. Therefore, it would be wise to include the calculation of risks and extra budget for unexpected events within the planning process. Unrealistic budgets and timelines do not assure citizens that projects can proceed as envisions when things go wrong. Infrastructure projects should not be determined by early optimism but by positive results that everyone can see at the end of a project.
7. *Parties need to reduce the red tape for infrastructure planning.* The legality of infrastructure decision-making does not guarantee their public acceptance. In the meantime, protest movements have learnt to circumvent legal firewalls; it may even be the case that a legal argument of secondary importance wins the day. In Germany, it is common to have infrastructure projects stopped by legal arguments concerning the protection of birds or other environmental matters. While these are important considerations, such arguments can dominate the debate to the extent of overshadowing the original merits of the infrastructure development.
8. *Parties should only engage in the decision-making process of infrastructure projects but not the process of the construction of the infrastructure.* If political parties in government accept this role of involvement in construction by giving politicians a role on the board of companies involved in these projects, as is the case now, infrastructure projects will eventually be politicized. Politicians on the boards of airports or other public companies cannot do the job of experts, and certainly should not be appointed as project managers. Citizen protest will identify incompetence or even worse, corrupt practices. Project managers can also refuse to accept responsibility when problems arise.

# **Chapter 2**

**From India Against Corruption  
to the Aam Aadmi Party: Social  
Movements, Political Parties  
and Citizen Engagement in India**

## Chapter 2

Prashant SHARMA

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# From India Against Corruption to the Aam Aadmi Party: Social Movements, Political Parties and Citizen Engagement in India

## Introduction

Anna Hazare, a well-known social activist, began a hunger strike in New Delhi in April 2011 to pressure the Indian Government to enact a strong and effective Lokpal (Federal Ombudsman) Act in order to root out corruption from the country, in response to the exposure of unprecedented financial scams and corruption.<sup>1</sup>

Public trust in the government specifically and the political class in general seemed to be at an all-time low, which drew an impassioned response to Hazare's fast, prompting the largest popular protest in India in recent memory. Thousands descended on the site of the fast in New Delhi in his support, leading some to call it 'India's Tahrir Square' (Rajalakshmi 2011). Social media facilitated a huge outpouring of support for Hazare's cause, the dominant tone of which was an anguished tirade against corruption. According to an editorial in *The Indian Express*:

By now, it's been compared to Tahrir, to 1968, even to Woodstock. For those who have never experienced the energy of a mass movement, the Anna Hazare-led movement over the Lokpal bill feels like catharsis, like revolution, a tidal wave that will sweep away the entire venal political class and replace it with those who feel their pain. What connects this crowd of ex-servicemen, yoga enthusiasts, auto-rickshaw unions, candle-light vigilantes, actors and corporate big shots and students? That they all feel let down, in different ways, by the political apparatus, and they are mad as hell (2011).

These protests brought to the fore fundamental debates on the nature, practice and institutions of representative parliamentary democracy in contemporary India. The intensification of these debates in the following months eventually led to the formation of a new political party—the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP, or the “Common Man’s Party”)—in November 2012.

Against this background, this chapter analyses the process that led to the metamorphosis of a popular movement into a political party; assesses the pressing debate on the relationship between citizens, social movements and political parties; and makes recommendations on how relevant actors can deepen this complex and increasingly contentious relationship.

## **The movement**

The origins of efforts to create a constitutional entity with the power to investigate corruption at the highest levels of government (including the prime minister, Cabinet and parliamentarians) can be traced back as far as 1968. Bills to establish the office of a federal ombudsman were introduced in parliament by various governments ten times from 1968 to 2008, but none became law. During this time, anti-corruption campaigners and activists regularly articulated the need for such an office.

In October 2010, the most recent version of the bill under consideration by the government was leaked to the media. The draft drew the ire of many activists and anti-corruption campaigners, who saw the government’s draft bill as insincere. Civil society activists of different hues and predilections soon coalesced under a loose umbrella coalition called India Against Corruption (IAC) to pressure the government to strengthen and enact a law. A two-pronged strategy was adopted. First, an alternative bill was drafted with the support of well-known legal luminaries who were part of the movement. Second, public opinion and support were mobilized around the alternative draft by reaching out using the media (especially social media) and organizing large rallies and meetings across the country.

Anna Hazare, a diminutive 74-year-old man of humble origins, soon became the face of the movement. His, some would say carefully crafted, Gandhian persona and tactics of fasting and prayer drew the masses in vast numbers. Hazare was supported by a clutch of activists and professionals who became known popularly as Team Anna.<sup>2</sup> They

included Arvind Kejriwal, a civil-servant-turned-activist, and Prashant Bhushan, a Supreme Court lawyer known for espousing public causes, leading some to conclude that Kejriwal was the driving force behind the movement (Laul 2012).

The alternative draft bill proposed by the group soon became known as the Jan Lokpal bill ('People's Ombudsman' bill), a term that possessed a multiplicity of meanings suggesting not only that it was a bill that had been drafted by 'the people' as opposed to the government or parliament, but also that it would establish an ombudsman who would be *of* and *for* the people. While it is beyond the remit of this chapter to carry out a detailed comparative analysis of the two drafts—and other drafts proposed by other actors—it should be noted that a key difference lay in the jurisdiction of the ombudsman envisaged in the two bills.<sup>3</sup> Critically, investigating the prime minister, Cabinet, parliamentarians and the judiciary fell unequivocally within the jurisdiction of the ombudsman in the Jan Lokpal bill, while this was not the case in the government version. The political class was widely perceived as corrupt to the core, and to consider itself above the law. Thus, the idea of a strong ombudsman resonated very strongly with the public mood.

At this juncture, as Anna Hazare launched his fast to demand the formation of a joint drafting committee comprised of government representatives and civil society actors, the fundamental tensions rose to the surface. This conflict affected not only the proximate context of the movement, but also the formation of the Aam Aadmi Party.

## **The battle lines**

On 8 April 2011, three days into Anna Hazare's fast, the ruling Congress Party held a public media briefing in which the party spokesperson questioned the basis of Hazare's demand that members of civil society should sit on a legislative drafting committee: 'I am not for the moment going into the very important question: who represents civil society? Do you represent civil society? Does he represent civil society? Do two out of those 20 people at India Gate represent or those 200 represent civil society? Who decides and how to decide?' (Singhvi 2011). A response to his polemical question was published in a popular news magazine soon after:

You asked the oft repeated question that the corrupt are wont to ask, viz:

'Who represents the civil society?...You questioned the common sense of the civil society. You said that sloganeering does not lead to governance. You taunted civil society with not understanding the difference between substance and procedure. You called them obdurate and inflexible. And you went on and on. And on. But let me ask you something first: Whom do you represent? I think the civil society, howsoever defined, has a right to know. Do you represent the people of the country? (Agrawal 2011)<sup>4</sup>

This brief exchange lays bare the heart of the matter. In a democracy, who decides the rules by which society must live, and what are the sources of their legitimacy? In the debate that ensued and consistently informed the tussle between activists and the government in the following months, the argument was generally polarized as follows. The political class claimed legitimacy by asserting that in a representative parliamentary democracy, Parliament is supreme, and possesses unquestioned legitimacy, as its members have been elected by the people.<sup>5</sup> Civil society actors cannot make any legitimate claim to represent the will of the people or to participate in the processes of decision-making and rule-making because they do not stand in popular elections. Political parties by extension, possess unquestionable legitimacy, as they are the vehicles through which the will of the people is ascertained and actualized through elections.

At the other end of the spectrum, many civil society activists argued that in a democracy, elected representatives can claim legitimacy only if they consistently act in accordance with the spirit of the constitution and the will of the people they represent. In this sense, unquestioned legitimacy cannot be claimed by participating in elections, but must be constantly renewed by elected representatives. Civil society's role is therefore to ensure that elected representatives—and, by extension, political parties—remain accountable to the people at all times.

In the Indian context, popular discourse typically perceives civil society as organized entities and/or processes (e.g., NGOs and formal entities that work on specific social themes with well-established, institutional sources of funds). Social movements, on the other hand, are seen as organic, bottom-up and spontaneous claim-making processes, which may or may not rally around strong and charismatic leaders, that seek financial support from individual contributions. In the Lokpal debate, the definitions of civil society and social movement became fluid constructs and were used by different actors at different times to make larger political points. Political actors tended to play down the social

movement aspect and portray the protests as an organized effort to, among other things, destabilize the government, while the leaders of the movement sought greater legitimacy by portraying the protests as a spontaneous popular movement.

Although this debate continued—and continues in different forms to this day, and not only in India—the story unfolded in the following months with numerous twists and turns. A joint committee was eventually formed, but after several meetings could not agree on a common draft. The government's version of the bill was subsequently passed by the Lok Sabha (lower house) in December 2011 and sent to the Rajya Sabha (upper house) for debate, where it languished long after.

## The formation of the AAP

When the bill entered the domain of parliamentary procedure in August 2011, the IAC movement and its leadership tried to keep the issue of corruption at the forefront of public consciousness, but the momentum began to wane. Media interest had plummeted, and the crowds at public rallies were thinning. From a political sociology perspective, when a movement begins to wither, there are at least three possible ways to re-energize it: change the leader (Hazare), change the demands (anti-corruption/Jan Lokpal Act) or change the nature of the organization.<sup>6</sup> The first two were clearly not possible, as the movement owed its success thus far to these factors. With respect to the third, the group could 'either continue with and expand this civil society movement while remaining outside the formal political process or convert it into a formally political one' (*Economic and Political Weekly* 2012: 8).

At this juncture, ideological cleavages began to appear within Team Anna. Hazare had consistently argued that entering electoral politics was not an option, as the political system had become too murky and compromised to allow any space for 'clean' candidates and political parties to exist. Kejriwal, on the other hand, asserted that they had 'tried everything from *andolan* (movement) and *anshan* (fasting) to pleading with folded hands but nothing [had] worked with the present-day political leaders' (Parsai 2012). Forming a political party was soon considered to be 'the only suitable response to the challenge from the political class who had questioned the legitimacy of the anti-corruption movements and were dismissively calling them just a handful of people shouting in the streets' (Kumar 2013: 13).

The limitations of continuing as a movement thus appeared to be twofold. First, however large and widespread a social movement is, it will eventually have to petition and lobby parliament, the political executive and political parties to bring about the changes it is demanding. Second, the political class is 'bent upon ignoring the moral imperatives and refus[ing] to recognise the processes of civil disobedience like fasting and *dharna* [sit-in]' (Kumar 2013: 13) and can always fall back on the legitimacy argument to discredit a movement and maintain the status quo. The leadership of the Jan Lokpal movement eventually split on this issue, and in October 2012 Kejriwal announced that a new political party would be launched to provide an 'alternative politics for changing the system and giving power back to the people' (Parsai 2012). The AAP was formally launched on 26 November 2012, the anniversary of the birth of B. R. Ambedkar, who is widely regarded as the author of the Indian constitution.

### ***Factors that encouraged the formation of the AAP***

As noted above, there was a growing disenchantment with the established political parties in India. The underlying causes can be distilled into a basic, existential question: What is the central purpose of a political party, and what is the nature of its relationship with citizens? Is it to provide a platform and a space for citizens' concerns to be articulated? Is it to represent the voices and demands of specific populations or interest groups? Is it to mobilize citizen action? Is it to create a politically aware and engaged citizenry? Is it to promote a specific ideology? Or is it to win elections and seek power, not as a means of bringing about social and political change, but as an end in itself?

### *Political parties as election machines*

With 1,392 registered, unrecognized political parties on the books of the Election Commission of India, the responses to such questions are no doubt varied (Palshikar 2013: 10). However, there is a popular perception that for most of the recognized regional and national parties in the current political ecosystem, 'winning and losing elections has become the only role a party envisages for itself' (Hasan 2010: 250). This was not always the case. The origins of the Indian party system lay in the evolution of the nationalist discourse as a response to colonialism. The Indian National Congress Party grew out of the independence movement and later became the leading nation builder, and therefore



could not be premised on any single social cleavage such as caste, class, religion or ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> For a party that was seeking to mobilize people across a bewilderingly complex country for a common cause— independence from colonial rule—it was essential to build a wide and deep organizational structure, as well as significant levels of internal democracy to ensure acceptance across typical social cleavages.

However, greater democratization and wider political participation have led to the creation of a political context that is characterized by a multiplicity of political parties, many of which are based on social cleavages that include caste, religious, linguistic and regional identities. These parties compete vigorously with each other, resulting in a preponderance of coalition politics. Increased political competition, measured and compared primarily by success in elections, has also resulted in the gradual but inexorable strengthening of the parliamentary wing over the organizational wing of most established political parties. This means that identifying and promoting charismatic leaders and ‘winnable’ candidates has become more important than persevering with ideologically or issue-based work by the party organization on the ground.<sup>8</sup> With the definition of political legitimacy being reduced to success in elections and the number of seats a party can gain, winning popular elections (as opposed to strengthening intraparty democracy or organization building) has become the primary occupation of most established political parties at both the national and regional levels.

### *Corruption and criminality*

A study commissioned by International IDEA reports that ‘criminality and corruption among party leaders are becoming more common and parties are becoming more identified with a single personality and are unable to develop internal mechanisms for leadership renewal and the renewal of senior office holders’ (International IDEA 2008). Indeed, an increasing number of parliamentarians have criminal records. The 2004 Lok Sabha experienced a 31 per cent increase in members with serious criminal records from the previous election (Joseph 2009).

Taking note of these trends, the Supreme Court of India recently passed two judgements that deeply resonated with the disaffection of ordinary citizens with the political class. In the first, the Court ordered that any sitting member of parliament or of a state assembly would automatically be disqualified if any court convicted him or her of a crime and sentenced him or her to more than two years’ imprisonment

(Venkatesan 2013).<sup>9</sup> Previously, members could take recourse to a higher court and continue to represent their constituency pending the outcome of an appeal, which in practice could take decades. In the second judgement, the Court ordered the Election Commission of India to allow voters to select a 'none of the above' option at each election. While the modalities of providing such a choice have yet to be worked out, it follows the theoretical principle of voters having a right to reject any given pool of candidates, which has been championed by the AAP (*Indian Express* 2013b).

### *Campaign finance*

Competing in elections has become very expensive. By some estimates, the total expenditure across all political parties in the 2009 Lok Sabha election was USD 3 billion (Timmons 2009). The deputy leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha recently stated that 'his campaign expenses for his parliamentary election in 2009 had skyrocketed to 80 million rupees (USD 1.3 million at current rates). This was more than 30 times the permissible limit of 2.5 million rupees at the time. The amount also exceeded his total declared assets of 62.25 million and was in stark contrast to his sworn declaration before the Election Commission that his election expenses came to only 1.94 million' (Bhushan 2013).<sup>10</sup>

Why are such vast sums of money required for election campaigns in India? The most problematic 'costs' are outright attempts to buy individual votes, cases of which have been regularly reported in the media (Hiddleston 2011). Buying media space, whether through regular advertising channels or by buying favourable reportage, is also expensive (Raman 2009). Other costs are 'political necessities' such as providing 'largesse to campaigners and contractors, caste and community leaders and incentives to minor political rivals to gut their own campaigns' (Bhushan 2013). Finally, as a consequence of the organizational hollowing out mentioned above, most political parties no longer have a regular cadre of party members and workers who are willing to dedicate time and effort to carry out the required organizational work before and during elections. This means that a large number of people have to be employed during an election campaign, which requires significant resources.<sup>11</sup>

### *Politics and business*

Needless to say, if billions of dollars are being spent on elections, the money has to first come from somewhere and later be recouped. This

inescapable economic logic has played a critical role in the proliferation of political corruption, leading to the public anger that was manifest in the Jan Lokpal agitation. The state does not finance party election campaigns in India. In the past, big businesses and wealthy individuals made large donations to political parties on the right and in the centre, which were seen as an investment in maintaining good relations across the political spectrum. Such donations, along with individual contributions from party members and in-kind contributions from the state, such as free airtime on what was then only state-owned media, typically financed the relatively low costs of election campaigns.

Today, however, politics is increasingly seen as a lucrative business. Elected representatives not only make policies that benefit certain business interests over others, but they are also in a position to influence the allocation of government contracts worth billions of dollars. For example, *The New York Times* reports that ‘In Andhra Pradesh [a state in southern India], the [then] Chief Minister converted most of his party’s legislators into contractors by allotting them government contracts to build canals and roads’ (Bhushan 2013). Raising funds from interested actors to finance election campaigns is therefore not very difficult, as campaign donations are considered investments with high returns. Deeper ethical questions are raised by the increasing trend of wealthy businessmen financing their own campaigns and obtaining party nominations and directly entering the national parliament or state legislatures. This trend has led to widespread public concern ‘that politicians are controlled by private “money bags” or criminal elements who also find their way into politics’ (International IDEA 2003: 176). A recent study carried out by the National Social Watch Coalition reported that ‘128 out of the 543 members of the 15th Lok Sabha belonged to the business class’.<sup>12</sup>

### *Family matters*

The greater democratization of the political process by increasing non-elite participation has also led to a shrinking of the democratic process *within* political parties, including centralized, oligarchic party leaderships that are often controlled by family dynasties (Sridharan 2009). As large sums of money play a central role in this heady mix of power and politics, much of it through illegal and unaccountable channels, trust in the political class also becomes a matter of concern—and in matters of trust, family comes first. This partially explains the importance of dynastic politics in India. In the current Lok Sabha, ‘28.6

per cent of MPs [have] a hereditary connection' with politics (French 2011: 116). Furthermore, 'Every MP in the Lok Sabha under the age of 30 [has] in effect inherited a seat, and more than two-thirds of the 66 MPs aged 40 or under [are hereditary] MPs' (French 2011: 119–20).<sup>13</sup> In a situation in which political 'parties have become a closed shop with entry restricted only to those who have the right credentials of birth' (Hasan 2010: 250) or the ability to generate and/or invest large sums of money, most established political parties cannot claim to be either representative or democratic, as their functioning appears to restrict the ability of ordinary citizens to participate directly in the political process.

In sum, the Jan Lokpal movement was a response to the profound questions that are confronting most established political parties in India. These include a reduction in the defining characteristics of the democratic process to electoral politics (rather than internal party democracy); questionable strategies and actions related to financing and managing election campaigns; the whittling away of internal party organizational and institutional structures; and the infiltration of political parties by vested interests. The next section examines the extent to which the Jan Lokpal movement addresses these questions.

### ***Unique features of the AAP***

#### *Origins*

The AAP self-consciously locates its origins in the IAC-led movement described above; its vision document states that:

For the past two years, millions of people came out on the streets to fight corruption and demand Jan Lokpal...For two years we tried all available avenues. We negotiated for our cause with the government, prayed to all parties, begged in front of them, sat on dharna [sit-ins], organized protests and sat on indefinite fasts three times but nobody listened—neither the parties nor the leaders...We realize now that begging will not work. It is time to uproot these parties and change the whole system' (AAP 2012b: 1).

The party leadership has also asserted that the decision to form a party was made after consulting supporters of the popular movement through a survey organized using social media: 76 per cent of respondents were reportedly in favour (DNA 2012). The leadership claimed that it entered the political arena reluctantly after exhausting all other available options, and in consonance with the wishes of a popular movement. The AAP

therefore differentiates itself from the established political parties by asserting that its very existence is premised on a deep and meaningful engagement with citizens, reflected in the popular movement against corruption that preceded its formation.<sup>14</sup>

### *Strategies for outreach and engagement*

The AAP has also made efforts to deepen citizen engagement, including through the use of social media and modern telecommunications. The party has 1.5 million registered phone users in Delhi, which enables it 'to muster thousands of protesters at a few hours' notice by text message'. Kejriwal has claimed that 20 million people have subscribed for party updates (*The Economist* 2013). The AAP also plans to launch an online television news channel (Menon and Subramaniam 2013). Party leaders claim that its extensive use of social media is important in part due to corporate control over, and intimidation of, traditional media outlets, which have begun to ignore the AAP because it has spoken out against large corporations and their influence over government policies (Jebaraj 2013). As of 5 September 2013, the AAP's page on Facebook had been liked by 293,107 people, compared to 264,423 for the Congress Party, and it had 116,871 followers on Twitter—minuscule numbers for a country with a population of over 1 billion, but with an Internet penetration of only 12.5 per cent of the population (International Telecommunications Union 2013).<sup>15</sup> Social media have played an indirect role by generating sufficient public interest in the AAP's activities on virtual platforms, which in turn has forced traditional media outlets to report on its activities. Yet the AAP relies primarily on other innovations to spread the word. For example, several auto-rickshaw unions in Delhi agreed to support the AAP by putting up posters for the party on over 30,000 rickshaws in the run-up to the elections in Delhi in November 2013, and volunteers associated with the party were encouraged to put up posters outside their homes (*Business Standard* 2013).

Apart from such innovations, the AAP leadership suggests that its strength lies in its ability to mobilize volunteers and members at the constituency level, in the first instance in Delhi:

The people, in large numbers, are with us...Young boys and girls who have given up their careers, postponed their services exams; software engineers who have taken off from work for two years...Every single street [in Delhi] is being mapped. For every 25 homes, there has to be one sthaniya prabhari

[local volunteer] whose job [will] be to communicate the message of the party and to be in touch with people. Our target is [125,000] volunteers as sthaniya prabharis, and we have already crossed 75,000...That is our strength... None of the [other] parties have any grassroots volunteers. They are completely shallow. Other [parties] have money power. And they hire people (Joseph 2013).

### *Structure and functioning*

Although it appears that the process is still evolving, the AAP's main public organizational principle is intraparty democracy. It premises its structure on a membership basis, and any adult can become a member of the party by paying a small fee (AAP 2012a). The AAP claims that 'There is no central high command in [the] Aam Aadmi Party. The party structure follows a bottom to top approach where the council members elect the Executive Body and also hold the power to recall it'.<sup>16</sup> Elections at all levels will take place every three years, with the proviso that: 'No member will hold the same post as an office bearer for more than two consecutive terms of three years each' (AAP 2012a: 16). Furthermore, the party states that: 'If someone is a member of any Executive Committee of the Party, then none of his or her immediate family members can become a member of any Executive Committee of Party' (AAP 2012a: 22).

The party constitution also provides for the office of an internal Lokpal (which is already in place) to investigate allegations of 'corruption, crime, substance abuse and moral turpitude against all office bearing members of the party. Any citizen can present proof of wrongdoing against a party member. If the internal Lokpal finds the party member guilty, he or she will be subjected to appropriate disciplinary action as decided by the internal Lokpal'.<sup>17</sup> The party Lokpal's current members, none of whom are (or can be) members of the party, are a former chief justice of the Jharkhand High Court, a former chief of naval staff and a human-rights activist/academic.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the party is attempting to institutionalize systems of internal democracy from the very beginning, and use them to deepen citizen engagement through its membership structure, party governance and organizational activities.

### *Candidate selection*

Perhaps the AAP's greatest innovation in citizen engagement is in its selection of candidates for the Delhi Assembly elections.<sup>19</sup> The process it has devised flows from its stated intention to be different from other

political parties: 'No one will need to buy an election ticket in our party. Candidates contesting elections from an area will be selected by the people of that area. In all political parties today criminals and mafia goons are given election tickets. Such people will never be given tickets in our party. A thorough screening process will ensure that no one with a criminal record or proven corruption charges can stand for elections for our party'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, and in a direct indictment of the dynastic politics discussed above, the party also asserts that 'No two members of the same family will be eligible to contest elections in our party'.<sup>21</sup>

All who aspire to a party nomination must first have the signed support of at least 100 voters from his or her constituency. The signatures are sent to a screening committee, which interviews the supporters. Based on the interviews and input from local volunteers, a shortlist of five names is released for feedback from the public, which is encouraged to 'submit proof of any wrongdoing by the shortlisted candidates'.<sup>22</sup> Party volunteers then rank the candidates in a secret ballot using a preferential voting system. Finally, the Political Affairs Committee holds another round of interviews to select the final candidate, taking the result of the ballot into account. The AAP used this system to select party candidates for 33 of Delhi's 70 assembly constituencies in the November 2013 elections.<sup>23</sup>

### *Finances*

The AAP also aims to function very differently from established political parties on the critical issue of campaign and party finances. It asserts that the 'party will function with full financial transparency. Every single rupee collected by donations to run this people's party will be publicly declared on the party's website and all expenditures will also be declared on the website'.<sup>24</sup> The list of donations is posted on the party website, and information about online donations is updated in real time. The website also provides details of donations by country, province within India, month and amount. The party has also published statements of its income and expenditures from its inception to date.<sup>25</sup> Social media are being used extensively to raise individual donations, and a recent email campaign sought to raise INR 1.4 million (USD 24,000), which is the legally permissible limit for campaigning in each assembly constituency, for a party candidate who had been seriously injured in a road accident. The party reported that it received USD 32,000 within a single day in response to the call (Khandekar 2013).

The AAP collected over USD 1 million<sup>26</sup> in its first year, suggesting that ordinary citizens are willing to contribute to a political party if they feel inspired to engage with it. To put this figure into perspective, the amount that can be legally spent by a candidate on an election campaign for the Delhi Assembly is INR 1,400,000,<sup>27</sup> which is roughly equivalent to a total of USD 1.6 million for all 70 Delhi Assembly constituencies. The two largest national political parties in India, the Congress Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), reported their incomes from 2007 to 2011 as USD 250 million and USD 130 million, respectively (Vyas and Rao 2012).

Interestingly, a recent development appears to corroborate the AAP's position on party transparency. The Central Information Commission (CIC), the highest appellate body for disputes related to the implementation of the Right to Information Act (RTI Act) in India, ruled in 2013 that six major political parties (and, by extension, most others) were deemed to be public authorities under the RTI Act and had to therefore set up systems and processes to comply with the Act. The RTI Act provides a legal framework for citizens to seek *any* information that is held by any public authority in the country, subject to well-defined exceptions such as those related to national security. Although most major political parties criticized this judgement on the grounds that previous legislation provides sufficient transparency, research suggests that 'a great deal of money is flowing through illegal channels' to political parties (*Times of India* 2013; Gowda, Rajeev and Sridharan 2012: 233). All the major parties appear to have closed ranks on this issue, and the government is planning to amend the RTI Act in Parliament to exclude political parties from its ambit. The AAP, by contrast, welcomed the CIC ruling and reiterated that it has been proactively placing all its finances in the public domain—regardless of how small the donation—and that its candidate selection process is far more transparent than that of any other party.

Using the above approach, strategies, agenda and activities, the AAP is seeking to redefine democratic politics in India. It portrays itself as resurrecting the essence of multiparty democracy by building a people-based organizational structure, practising norms of meaningful intraparty democracy and engaging with citizens at every stage of the electoral process—from raising funds transparently to selecting candidates for elections and developing constituency-level election manifestos. It goes further to advocate legislative practices—such as referendums, direct initiatives, the right to reject and the right to recall<sup>28</sup>—that will allow deeper citizen engagement with the electoral



process before elections and greater accountability from their elected representatives.

Unsurprisingly, the strongest criticisms of the AAP have come from the established political parties. The main themes of the critique revolve around assertions that: the AAP is essentially a media creation; neither the anti-corruption movement nor the political party that arose from it are representative of the concerns of the people as a whole; its popularity is limited to urban centres and the middle classes; it proposes naive solutions to the complex problems of democratic practice in an extremely diverse social context; and, finally, it is best to ignore it as a non-starter in the national political arena. Most political parties initially adopted a wait-and-see approach to assessing the extent to which the AAP is able to generate popular support.

## **Election results**

The State Assembly elections held across five states in India, including Delhi, in December 2013 were regarded as a litmus test. This chapter focuses on the Delhi Assembly elections. If the party garnered a significant share of the vote or number of seats in the Assembly, then mainstream political parties might be forced to take on board some of the AAP's reformist ideas in order to make themselves more competitive in future elections.

In a stunning and unprecedented debut, the year-old AAP became the second-largest party in the house by winning 28 of the 70 seats in the Assembly with 30 per cent of the vote. In comparison, the largest party, the BJP, won 32 seats—four short of a majority—with a 33 per cent share of the vote. The incumbent Congress Party won only eight seats with 25 per cent of the vote, leading to a hung Assembly. Interestingly, the AAP's Arvind Kejriwal comprehensively defeated the incumbent chief minister, who had held the position for the past 15 years, in her home constituency.

Although the results of the Assembly elections in much larger states were also announced at the same time, the victory of the AAP in Delhi quickly became the main story of the day. The 'transformatory' potential of the party soon became obvious in statements from the established political parties. According to the vice president of the Congress Party, Rahul Gandhi: 'the AAP involved a lot of people who the traditional political parties did not involve. We are going to learn from that and do a better

job than anybody in the country and involve people in ways you cannot even imagine now...I am going to put all my effort into transforming the organisation of the Congress party together with the leaders of the Congress party, and give you an organisation that you will be proud of and has your voice embedded inside it' (*Indian Express* 2013c).

The days after the election results saw frenetic activity on the issue of government formation. In the early days, both the BJP and the AAP made statements to suggest that they would not attempt to form a government, as they did not have a clear majority in the house, and would prefer to sit in the opposition. Commentators saw this as a radical change in the political culture brought about by the AAP (*Firstpost* 2013). As the deadlock continued, it appeared that Delhi was headed for president's rule and fresh elections within a few months, in all likelihood to be held in conjunction with the national elections in 2014. After a few days, however, the Congress Party suggested that it would be willing to support an AAP-led government from the outside. Criticisms of the AAP began to appear in the media suggesting that it was being irresponsible by not taking the opportunity to form a government, especially as some in the Congress Party had suggested that its support would be unconditional.

While a political analysis of this offer is beyond the purview of this chapter, what followed was another interesting experiment in the political history of India. The AAP conducted a 'referendum' to elicit the public's opinion on whether it should form a minority government with outside support from the Congress Party, a party that its leaders had castigated as irredeemably compromised and corrupt to the core. Using text messages, web-based polling and over 250 community-level meetings to carry out its referendum, the AAP claimed that an overwhelming majority of respondents—including 750,000 responses received through text messages and the web—wanted it to form a government. Thus Kejriwal was sworn in as chief minister of a minority government on 28 December 2013. He resigned, however, on 14 February 2014 after he was unable to introduce the Jan Lokpal bill in the house.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

Some scholars have suggested that the AAP lacks a deep understanding of the root causes of corruption in politics, which are linked to the globalized neoliberal economic environment (Shukla 2013). Others suggest that the party is focusing on the wrong issue, as corruption is

not the most important problem in Indian politics, and that its proposals to decentralize and democratize politics may actually do more harm than good in a context in which entrenched socio-economic hierarchies define political practice (Palshikar 2013). Palshikar further suggests that 'ideas of recall and legislative initiative also have a shade of political anarchism to them. Recall in particular is a recipe for chaos and undermining the system's ability to run' (Palshikar 2013: 11). He also argues that the AAP needs to focus on party building, while warning that 'a party that seeks to adopt very open procedures for designating its office holders runs the risk of being taken over by those who may have different ideas than the founders and more active members' (Palshikar 2013: 12). He remains unconvinced of the potential contribution of the AAP, calling it a likely spoiler in a multiparty electoral system, at best, and an entity that has 'sharpened a sense of "specific anti-partyism"' at worst (Palshikar 2013: 13).

Interestingly, many civil society groups that have been active in the area of anti-corruption for several decades were highly critical of the substance and leadership of the IAC and Jan Lokpal campaigns. However, the intensity of the criticism from within civil society/social movements decreased substantially once the AAP was formed. This may, of course, reflect the complex and often competitive dynamics within civil society. In many ways, the AAP is attempting to reinvent the relationship not only between citizens and political parties, but also between political parties and civil society.

While the long-term influence of the AAP is not known, it has had substantial success in bringing the debate around political parties and citizen engagement to the fore of public consciousness. Citizen trust in political parties and the political class has rarely plumbed such depths in recent memory. Some reasons are discussed above, and the AAP seems to be addressing many of them via its stated aims and actions. Critically, it has been able to do so as the result of its origins as a social movement, which has helped it mobilize thousands of volunteers in a short space of time. At the very least, the party has succeeded in re-engaging many ordinary citizens in the political process. For example, a supporter declares on the AAP's website: 'I have never supported or ever voted for any party in my life...But today I have donated INR 100 [USD 2] to support AAP...and I feel really good about it...Need to see India a better place.'<sup>30</sup> However, the process of evolving from a social movement into a political party has been far from smooth, and has engendered vigorous debate both within and outside the 'movement'.

Throughout these debates, however, the formation of the AAP has been posited as a necessary step to enable ordinary citizens to reclaim political power in a more meaningful way.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the above discussion, political parties, citizen movements and citizens could take some concrete and immediate steps to resurrect their failing relationships with each other.

### ***Political parties***

1. Political parties must revisit and in most cases rejuvenate the organizational structure through which they build and maintain their relationships with citizens on a day-to-day basis, not merely at election time. In this sense, they must ensure that they return to their primary role as critical and legitimate mediators between citizens and the state, and not restrict themselves to acting as electoral machines.
2. Political parties must take urgent measures to actualize systems of intraparty democracy and democratic processes, and must do so visibly and transparently. A political party that is not internally democratic will find it difficult to convince citizens that it will act for the common good when in power.
3. Political parties must transparently present their finances. The proactive disclosure of detailed information pertaining to revenues and expenditures will help re-establish a modicum of trust between political parties and citizens.

### ***Citizen movements/citizen groups/citizens***

1. Citizen movements and citizens must not allow their frustrations with current democratic practices to turn into anti-democracy rhetoric. Political parties, however deeply flawed, are essential to the democratic process, and it is important to focus on reforming, rather than eliminating, them.
2. It is not necessary (or healthy for democracy) for all citizen movements to turn into political parties in order to be effective. A movement's decision to evolve into a political party must be well thought out.
3. Citizens must proactively increase their engagement with the political apparatus. In practical terms, this could mean joining political

parties—either new or old—that are proximate to their needs and sensibilities, and demanding changes from within; holding political actors to account using instruments such as the RTI Act; and using avenues such social media to engage with the democratic process beyond the occasional casting of votes. Eternal vigilance, after all, remains the price of democracy.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> These include the telecom spectrum scam, which according to some accounts cost the treasury USD 40 billion; allegations of ‘USD 80 rolls of toilet paper’ purchased for the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi; and the allocation of housing intended for the families of fallen soldiers to politicians and senior bureaucrats at below-market rates (*Business Week* 2010). In addition, tapes of tapped telephone conversations leaked to the media in 2010 seemed to suggest that large corporate entities had been directly involved in selecting the Cabinet and allocating key ministerial portfolios when the current Congress Party-led coalition took office in 2009 (*Open* 2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Although an official list of the members of Team Anna was never announced, names and brief profiles of those popularly understood to be part of the core leadership of the movement are available at <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Team\\_Anna#Original\\_group](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Team_Anna#Original_group)> (accessed 11 July 2013).
- <sup>3</sup> See <<http://www.prsindia.org/uploads/media/Lokpal/Comparison%20of%20govt%20JLP%20and%20ncpri%20bills%20updated.pdf>> for a comparative table of the different versions that had been proposed (accessed 11 July 2013).
- <sup>4</sup> Emphasis in original.
- <sup>5</sup> The irony of this position, given that the prime minister himself was a member of the upper house, and therefore not directly elected by the people, was also mentioned in the debate.
- <sup>6</sup> Telephone interview, Professor Anand Kumar, member of the National Executive of the AAP, 12 July 2013.
- <sup>7</sup> Post-independence, the immensity of social, linguistic and cultural diversity continues to explain why no party in India has ever been able to dominate national politics by focusing on any single social cleavage.
- <sup>8</sup> For a more detailed report on this issue, see the Vohra Committee Report on the Criminalization of Politics, Department of Legislative Affairs, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India (co-sponsored by the Election Commission of India (2010).
- <sup>9</sup> This issue has caused much controversy. The government, in consultation with all the major political parties, first sought to annul this order by

- passing an ordinance, but later backtracked and accepted the judgement amid great political drama.
- <sup>10</sup> The Election Commission has sought an explanation from the candid, if errant, member, and he runs the risk of being disqualified from running for election for three years.
  - <sup>11</sup> International IDEA has carried out detailed comparative research on the legal frameworks that regulate political financing in democracies around the world. However, evidence-based research on the state of implementation of these frameworks, particularly in the context of India, is sparse. The IDEA database on political finance is available at <<http://www.idea.int/political-finance/>>.
  - <sup>12</sup> This included Vijay Mallya, a member of the Rajya Sabha and the owner of Kingfisher Airlines, who was quite conveniently on the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Civil Aviation (Raman 2012).
  - <sup>13</sup> There are six parliamentarians aged 30 or under. By 'hereditary MPs', French means parliamentarians whose parents or close relatives from the previous generation are or were parliamentarians or representatives in state assemblies.
  - <sup>14</sup> Other political parties have emerged from social movements in the past, but apart from the Janata Party (established in 1977, also on an anti-corruption plank), most arose from regional movements and none has had much electoral success. The AAP is perhaps the first movement-turned-political-party since the Janata Party that has aspirations at the national level.
  - <sup>15</sup> It should be noted that those with Internet access largely belong to the middle and upper classes, which are key actors in forming public opinion.
  - <sup>16</sup> See <<http://aamaadmiparty.org/page/how-are-we-different>>, accessed 18 July 2013.
  - <sup>17</sup> See <<http://www.aamaadmiparty.org/page/internal-lokpal>>, accessed 21 July 2013.
  - <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>19</sup> Details available at <<http://delhi.aamaadmiparty.org/news/candidate-selection-process-delhi-elections-2013-english-version>>, accessed 20 July 2013.
  - <sup>20</sup> In a recent development, 'the Supreme Court...struck down a provision in the electoral law that protects a convicted lawmaker from disqualification on the ground of pendency of appeal in higher courts' (*Indian Express* 2013a).
  - <sup>21</sup> See <<http://aamaadmiparty.org/page/how-are-we-different>>, accessed 18 July 2013.
  - <sup>22</sup> See <<http://delhi.aamaadmiparty.org/news/candidate-selection-process-delhi-elections-2013-english-version>>, accessed 20 July 2013.

- <sup>23</sup> See <<http://delhi.aamaadmi-party.org/Delhi-Elections-2013/CandidateList>>, accessed 21 July 2013.
- <sup>24</sup> All parties must declare all donations over INR 20,000 (approximately USD 350) to the Election Commission, and such information is indirectly available to citizens via the Right to Information Act.
- <sup>25</sup> See <<http://aamaadmi-party.org/income%20expenditure%20details>>, accessed 7 September 2013.
- <sup>26</sup> Of which about USD 200,000 came from a single source, Shanti Bhushan, who is a well-known Supreme Court lawyer and the father of one of the founding members of the AAP. Figure as of 8 September 2013. Updated figures are available at <<http://aamaadmi-party.org/page/aap-donations-visualizing-the-change>>.
- <sup>27</sup> <<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/delhielections2013/election-commission-to-monitor-delhi-polls-spendings/article1-1120902.aspx>>.
- <sup>28</sup> For details of their legislative proposals, see AAP 2012b.
- <sup>29</sup> <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/arvind-kejriwal-quits-over-jan-lokpal/article5688528.ece>>.
- <sup>30</sup> See the comment by Manoj of 10 July 2013, available at <<http://aamaadmi-party.org/donation-list>>, accessed 21 July 2013.

# **Chapter 3**

**Outbursts of Activity by  
Polish Civil Society: Any  
Lessons for the Governing  
Political Parties?**



## Chapter 3

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Baiba WITAJEWSKA-BALTVILKA

# Outbursts of Activity by Polish Civil Society: Any Lessons for the Governing Political Parties?

## Introduction

It is commonly, and to a large extent correctly, argued that both civil society and political parties are relatively weak in Poland. Party membership, electoral turnout and, most importantly, trust in political parties are among the lowest in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, membership of NGOs or CSOs, as well as Poles' awareness or sense of community, are also low even compared to other countries in Central Europe.<sup>2</sup>

However, despite the general trend of political parties failing to be an effective link between civil society and the state, and civil society's unwillingness or inability to organize itself, there have been recent examples of more pronounced activity by citizen movements in Poland, some of which changed the course of the governing parties' policies and led political parties to engage in a dialogue with citizens. This chapter focuses on two cases—the Anti Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (Anti-ACTA) protest movement and the 'Platform of the Outraged' (Platforma Oburzonych), a movement founded by the Solidarność (Solidarity) trade union—and raises questions in three related areas. First, was the primary goal of the citizens and leaders of these movements to express general dissatisfaction about the government, or did they seek to change specific policies? Second, did the key political parties respond by engaging in a dialogue with the leaders of the movements? Did the movements cause them to change their course, policies or way of communicating with citizens? Third, are there lessons that political parties, citizen movements and civil society

can learn from these cases? Could such lessons help these actors better accomplish their goals or maintain citizens' political participation and representation in the democratic process?

The following section provides concise background information on the case studies, providing a glimpse of the key political parties and civil society in Poland today. The next section demonstrates how each event unfolded, paying particular attention to the interaction between the citizen movements and the five major political parties: Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO), Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), Palikot's Movement (Ruch Palikota, RP), the Democratic Left Alliance (Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD) and the Polish Peasants' Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL). The final section discusses how each actor could have improved its performance in order to achieve its set goals in a constructive manner.

## **Political parties in Poland**

Since the 2005 parliamentary elections, the political scene in Poland has been dominated by two competing political parties—the PO and the PiS—both of which emerged from Solidarity's Electoral Action, a broad and ideologically heterogeneous electoral alliance of around 30 right-wing parties that ruled between 1997 and 2001. The PO won the two most recent elections (2007 and 2011) and has since been the key governing party in Poland, in coalition with the PSL. The PiS was in power between 2005 and 2007, but is currently the largest opposition party. Although regarded by many as fairly liberal and fairly conservative, respectively, the PO and PiS are close to each other politically, and are both considered to be on the right side of the left-right ideological spectrum (Rae 2008). However, the PO is more liberal in its economic policy and its moral-cultural standpoint, although this has varied over time,<sup>3</sup> whereas the PiS has always been strictly Catholic conservative.

As is increasingly the case in most of Europe, party competition is highly personalized in Poland. The leading figure in the PiS in recent years has been its party leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, who many observers characterize as a skilful strategist, but also as a confrontational and populist figure (Bilefsky 2013; Traynor 2010). Since 2010, when the more conservative and liberal wings left the party, the PiS has been quite homogeneous, and there has been no strong opposition to the party leader, who enjoys unchallenged authority. Kaczyński has always tried to maintain good relations with Radio Marya, to which his party

members give frequent interviews, and with the trade unions, most notably Solidarity (Ferfecki 2011). Not surprisingly, his strongest rival is the PO, and its leader Donald Tusk in particular, who Kaczyński never misses an opportunity to criticize.

The PO is less homogeneous and currently has three clear wings that divide party members, mainly but not exclusively on moral issues: the conservative wing, whose main representative until recently was Jarosław Gowin;<sup>4</sup> the liberal wing, represented by Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska; and the wing of party leader Donald Tusk, which is trying to maintain party unity. This fragmentation, and different stances on moral issues such as abortion, has made the party vulnerable to other actors, most notably the PiS and the RP, which are constantly challenging its stance on important and sensitive issues in Polish politics. Moreover, having been in government for six years, it has become an obvious target for criticism not only from opposition parties but also from citizens, and the party's popularity has been falling in recent years (CBOS 2011).

Three other political parties currently represented in Parliament play, or have played, an important role in the country's politics—the PSL, the SLD and the RP. The PSL is an agrarian political party with strong local branches across the country that enjoys stable rural-agricultural electoral support, mainly due to the popularity of its local government leaders. It tends to stay silent on national politics and is somewhat less confrontational.<sup>5</sup> This has made it a handy coalition partner for governments from across the ideological spectrum. Since 2007, it has been in coalition with the PO, but it previously governed with the SLD. Its two key leaders are Waldemar Pawlak (a former party leader) and Janusz Piechociński (the current party leader and deputy prime minister). The RP was founded and is led by a controversial and rather populist politician, Janusz Palikot. It is the newest political party in Poland, which emerged from the liberal wing of the PO before the 2011 elections. It presents itself as clearly anti-clerical and liberal, and has targeted and gained support from middle-class young people and entrepreneurs. However, aware that its anti-clerical appeal might be too limited, it has begun to place greater emphasis on a broader message of business-friendly, small-state social liberalism, promising to bring about a 'modern, secular, socially oriented, civic and friendly' state (Szczerbiak 2012: 21). Harshly critical of the governing coalition and the PiS, Palikot has tried to maintain friendly, or at least non-confrontational, relations with the successor to the Communist Party, the SLD. However, Palikot is too anti-clerical for them (at least in rhetoric) and competes for the same

electoral demographic, which has made it difficult to achieve closer cooperation. The SLD, once the main left-wing party, which governed between 2001 and 2005, has lost its significance and popularity, partly due to large-scale corruption scandals and internal conflicts in the early 2000s. Previously supported mainly by the older generation, which felt sympathy for the old regime, the party is now losing its appeal among this group and has not been able to gain significant support among other social groups (Materska-Sosnowska 2010: 213). The current leader of the SLD is Leszek Miller.

## **Civil society in present-day Poland**

Citizen movements and their huge number of activists helped to bring down communism in Poland. Today, however, Poles are much less willing to participate in political life. There is a general political apathy and a lack of belief or trust in civic participation. Less than half of the electorate voted in the most recent national and local elections—49 per cent in the 2011 national elections (IPU ND) and 47 per cent in the 2010 local elections (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza 2010). Only 3 per cent of Poles believe that CSOs can play any role in resolving their problems; only 13 per cent belong to an NGO (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2011); and membership of political parties, at 1.2 per cent, is the second-lowest among EU member states (Biezen et al. 2012). Only around one-third of the population has ever participated in any form of civil society activity (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2011). Poland's ratio of CSOs—at one to every 470 inhabitants—is about one-third the rate of its neighbours Slovakia and Hungary (1:160 and 1:150 inhabitants, respectively).<sup>6</sup>

This picture of civic apathy is reinforced by the low level of trust in political institutions and the general value hierarchy of most Poles. There is little trust in almost all political institutions apart from the presidency. Moreover, values and their hierarchy do not leave any space for civic awareness and community spirit. As the social anthropologist Janusz Czapiński puts it, the hierarchy of values is 'me' and 'my family' first, followed, after a big gap, by the church and, only somewhere at the periphery, the nation.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, despite this rather gloomy picture, it is possible to identify examples of increased civic activism in Poland, two of which are further analysed in this study. The first is the Anti-ACTA movement, which began

at the beginning of 2012 as a protest against the government's 'secret' intention to join an international treaty that would limit freedom and privacy. The protests were joined by a remarkable number of CSOs specializing in the issues of e-democracy, human rights protection and freedom on the Internet, as well as individual citizens. The protesters managed to pressure the government to change its policy despite the lack of a strong leadership or organization. The second notable citizen movement activity, launched at the beginning of 2013, is Solidarity's Platforma Oburzonych, which seeks to bring together citizens dissatisfied with the ruling political elite in order to promote constitutional change that would give more power to the people. The initiative has been supported by a number of CSOs and individual citizens.

## **Two stories of citizen movement activity in Poland**

### ***The Anti-ACTA protest movement***

The Anti-ACTA protest movement was directed against an international treaty that aims to establish multinational standards on the enforcement of intellectual property rights. The agreement establishes a framework for a wide range of goods, such as generic medicines and luxury goods, but the protesters were mostly concerned about stricter rules on copyright infringement on the Internet, which were perceived as an invasion of privacy and a violation of civil liberties. Protests occurred across Europe, but in Poland they were particularly widespread and loud.

The Anti-ACTA movement emerged very suddenly in Poland in January 2012 after the mass media drew attention to the fact that the Polish ambassador to Japan had signed ACTA.<sup>8</sup> This news spread rapidly among skilful, young and active Internet users, and they immediately expressed their dissatisfaction with the government's actions. They posted frequent status updates, organized in groups and invited others to do 'something about it' soon. This resulted in the emergence of a number of parallel groups of protesters that started to plan action. It took the most skilful among them only a few days to organize a blockade of the websites of the main governmental institutions. Over the weekend of 21–22 January, it was not possible to access the websites of the Polish Parliament, the prime minister, the prime minister's office, the Ministry of Defence or the Ministry of Culture (Gazeta.pl 2013). Another initiative that soon followed received broad support from citizens: an invitation to those who supported the protesters' cause to block their own websites

for a day in order to symbolically demonstrate 'a day without the Internet'. In parallel, in cities such as Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan, Wroclaw and Szczecin, individual protesters or groups organized demonstrations and meetings that gathered thousands of supporters. For example, the first large-scale demonstrations on 25 January attracted 15,000 supporters in Krakow, around 5,000 in Wroclaw and several hundred or a few thousand in many smaller towns (TVN24 2012c). On 27 January, protests increased across the country and attracted tens of thousands (Channel 6 News Online 2012). It was striking how easy it was to organize a protest. As one young protester from Lublin admitted, he just put a status update on his Facebook account inviting people to meet the following day in the town square. He did not expect many people to turn up, but to his surprise, a couple of thousand joined him (Gazeta.pl 2013).

At the same time, around 1.8 million individual emails were sent to parliamentarians that attached the Anti-ACTA petition (Radio RMF 2012). All this activity developed rapidly with no single leader, attracted an unexpected scale of supporters within a few weeks and dissipated once Prime Minister Tusk announced that he would not proceed with ratifying the treaty.

Although the activities were noteworthy in terms of their scale and resonance, it is doubtful whether most protesters were aware of what they were protesting about. Limitations on Internet freedom and violations of privacy were the key slogans, and a poll conducted at the end of January indicated that 50 per cent of Poles thought the treaty would limit essential individual freedoms and 64 per cent opposed the signing of ACTA (Polish Public Radio 2012b). However, there was little if any constructive debate about the substance of the issue, that is, how to reconcile the interests of artists and art consumers in the digital age. The claim regarding limitations on Internet freedom was shouted down categorically, and no mechanism was provided for dialogue. In addition, joining ACTA would probably not have involved additional major limitations on individual rights, as many of its norms had already been incorporated into Polish law.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, there are two probable explanations for the scale of the support for, and the style of, the protests. First, although the movement targeted a specific issue, which was apparently very important to many citizens, it was also a protest against the government in general. Great emphasis was placed on the fact that preparation for ACTA took place

‘in secret’. Members of the PO were portrayed as ‘traitors’ who were not working in the interests of their own citizens, and the government was often criticized about issues not directly related to ACTA. Second, given that a large proportion of the protesters were young people, who spend a significant portion of their time online, it is not hard to imagine that the issue was particularly salient for them. As many have observed, for young people the most important sphere of freedom is apparently freedom on the Internet, and the Anti-ACTA movement reinforced this idea (Polish Public Radio 2012c).

The first political party to pick up the ACTA issue was the RP. The day after Poland signed ACTA, RP members arrived in Parliament wearing masks to draw media attention to the issue. Palikot announced that there was no clear benefit to small countries such as Poland signing the treaty and was strongly critical of the government’s decision. Trying to boost their popularity further, Palikot and other party members even joined the demonstration that took place a few days later in front of Parliament. However, the crowd tried to push him out, and he was almost forced to leave (Gazeta.pl 2012c). Nonetheless, in the following weeks of protests he backed the activists and continued to argue that the government had lost citizens’ trust by signing ACTA (Gazeta.pl 2012c).

The protests took political parties by surprise, especially the governing PO, which had expected to continue the ratification process without much attention from the media or citizens. The first reactions from Donald Tusk and the minister of foreign affairs, Radosław Sikorski, were quite straightforward: the government would continue its course and ratify the treaty. Sikorski argued that the Internet should not be an area of legal anarchy and that Poland should join civilized countries where piracy is a crime (*Wprost* 2012b). Moreover, Tusk reminded people that there had been more than a year of public consultation—although he neglected to mention that the consultation had been with only one stakeholder, artists—during which nobody had raised any major criticisms (TVN24 2012a). Just a few days later, however, Tusk changed his mind and announced that the government, although unable to withdraw its signature, would not ratify ACTA at the time. By publicly acknowledging that the government had made a mistake by signing the treaty without *extended* public consultation involving all stakeholders, he called for an in-depth debate on copyright issues that would also review the relevant Polish legislation—which, he argued, was more restrictive than ACTA. A few weeks after the protests, the government organized a roundtable to which several CSOs were invited;

major copyright issues were debated.

Like the RP, the PiS tried to take advantage of the anti-ACTA protests. Aware of increasing citizen dissatisfaction with the PO, the leader of the PiS, Kaczyński, tried to escalate the conflict by repeatedly calling for a referendum on ACTA and arguing that the government had lost the trust of citizens (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 2012). However, one of his party's European Parliament members was a member of the ACTA working group. When asked about this, he argued that it was 'a mistake' and refused further comment (*Wprost* 2012a).

As a member of the governing coalition, the PSL's rhetoric was very much in line with that of the PO. However, since it was not the leader of the governing coalition and was not experiencing a severe decline in popularity, it could afford to be more forthright at the start. According to the PSL party leader, Waldemar Pawlak, the protests were 'ineffective' and the debate on ACTA should be considered 'a closed case' since the treaty had been published several years before, followed by a five-year debate (*Gazeta.pl* 2012a). However, just days later, after Tusk had announced his modified policy stance on the issue and when the protests were gathering force, Pawlak changed his stance somewhat by saying that the ratification could be postponed, while still condemning the protests and continuing to emphasize that there was nothing in ACTA that did not exist in Polish legislation (Polish Public Radio 2012a).

Although least active in its response, the SLD was in line with the other opposition parties. It was critical of the violation of civil rights and liberties, and condemned the lack of prior public debate on copyright issues. Party leader Leszek Miller called on the government to withdraw from ACTA (*TVN24* 2012b). Like the RP, it also wanted to show solidarity with the protesters, this time by joining the homepage blackout initiative.

The responses of the key political parties were therefore different but, as a rule, reflected three important factors. First, they confirmed the logic of government-opposition relations. Given the widespread citizen dissatisfaction with not only the problem in question, but also the government, all three opposition parties picked up the issue to demonstrate solidarity and tried to join the movement, as Palikot did, or the blackout initiative, as the RP did, or called for a referendum, as Kaczyński did. All harshly criticized the PO. It was an opportunity for the opposition parties to improve their image and increase their popularity. However, none of the parties tried to get closer to the civil society



movements or individual citizens by offering a constructive dialogue about the substance of the problem. That said, doing so might have proved difficult, given the emotional nature of the protests.

Second, the responses demonstrated the power of such large-scale emotional protests. Although, as discussed above, the PO was initially firm about continuing with the ratification of the treaty, and was even quite dismissive of citizens' early actions—Tusk initially called them a mess created by some Internet hooligans—it was forced to make a U-turn as the protests intensified. Moreover, the PO formally changed not only its policy, but also its tone of communication with citizens—later acknowledging them as an 'important citizens' voice' and even organizing a roundtable discussion with some organizations on copyright issues.

Third, the ACTA case showed that public opinion can change political parties' stances towards citizen movements and affect their openness to citizen protest movements even if they disagree with them. The PO withdrew in fear of a sharp decline in popularity. The PiS is a conservative, right-wing political party that might be expected to protect intellectual property owners and support the United States—one of the key supporters of ACTA—but it strongly opposed the agreement as soon as the issue became so highly politicized.

Finally, the Anti-ACTA protests demonstrated that civil society movements and political parties having the same stance on an issue does not guarantee cooperation, which is relevant when trying to establish a dialogue between the two. Activists might be reluctant to cooperate with political parties even when they seem to share the same opinion. If citizens have a low level of trust in political parties, as is the case in Poland, it might be difficult for parties to get involved in any kind of cooperation with civil society.

The Anti-ACTA movement reached its goal within a few weeks, when the government announced it would not ratify the treaty. This achievement can be interpreted from three perspectives. First, from the perspective of the *democratic political process*, it can be regarded positively, as it demonstrates citizens' willingness and capacity to stand up for a cause, in contrast to the gloomy general picture of Polish civil society. When viewed solely from this perspective, it is not important whether the political parties responded to citizens' demands due to rational motives such as fear of losing popularity or being re-elected, or for ideological

considerations (e.g., standing up for a cause or believing in a moral duty to respond to citizens' fears). It merely proves that political parties can still be *responsive* to the voice of the citizens, which is one of the key conditions for maintaining a link between civil society and political parties.

However, the assessment may differ if viewed from the second perspective of *policy outputs*. Since many protesters might not have had a comprehensive understanding of the treaty and its implications, it is possible to perceive the outcome as negative for two reasons: first, simply because it shows that citizens—no matter how loud and emotionally convincing they might appear—can lack an understanding of what they are protesting about, second, because it reflects political parties' inability or unwillingness to communicate and explain their policy stance. Contrary to what the governing parties declared they believed at the beginning of the protests, they chose to act *irresponsibly* when faced with large-scale civic protests. Hence, the political parties acted *responsively*, but not necessarily *responsibly*, in this case.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, when analysing the protests from the third perspective, their *organizational nature*, it is important to emphasize that a lack of organizational structure and the spontaneous manner of organizing protest events—for which the protests were often criticized—should be seen as in line with ongoing technological change in society. The Internet and, in particular, social media have enabled citizens to organize differently—more spontaneously and more quickly, without a unified leadership or organizational structure. This trend is not negative per se. From this perspective, the Anti-ACTA movement clearly demonstrated the impact of cultural and technological change on a society—and on the nature of civic engagement.

### ***Solidarity's initiative: Platforma Oburzonych***

Solidarity is one of the biggest trade unions in Poland. Under Lech Wałęsa, it became the main opposition force to communism in the 1980s and played a key role in the Round Table negotiations in 1989. Although it dissolved as a broad social movement and transformed itself into a traditional trade union, it is still an important civil society actor in Polish politics and has recently received a lot of attention due to one of its ongoing activities, Platforma Oburzonych.

In 2011, Solidarity launched a campaign to collect signatures to initiate

a referendum on the retirement age in response to the government's plan to improve the economy by gradually increasing the retirement age. After collecting more than a million signatures, Solidarity submitted a proposal for a referendum to Parliament in February 2012. According to the current Polish constitution, parliamentary consent and at least 500,000 citizen signatures are required to initiate a referendum. However, with little discussion or consideration, the governing coalition of the PO and the PSL rejected Solidarity's request and increased the retirement age to 67. The RP backed the vote, while the PiS and the SLD voted against it. This frustrated and angered the Solidarity leader, Piotr Duda. Together with musician and civic activist Paweł Kukiz,<sup>11</sup> he announced the launch of Platforma Oburzonych as a protest movement against the policies of the government, which they saw as ignorant of citizens' demands, corrupt and alienating, and the country's current economic situation—a stagnant economy, increasing unemployment, declining real wages and an increased use of insecure, short-term contracts.

Parliament's refusal to allow a referendum on the retirement age was apparently the tipping point in general dissatisfaction with the political elite in Poland. The movement was launched not only to further the goals of certain socio-economic policies, but also to initiate constitutional amendments that, according to Duda and Kukiz, were necessary for the effective change of political power. In the context of high levels of dissatisfaction with the political situation in Poland and low levels of trust in politicians, Duda expected his new movement to gain considerable support from other trade unions, CSOs and individual citizens. He called the first Congress in March 2013 to mark the establishment of the new movement; it was supported by the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych), Solidarity and a number of other CSOs. It gained wide mass media attention and drew citizens' attention.

Although a seemingly positive sign of civil society activity, it is possible to identify a number of worrying characteristics of the movement and, in particular, its leadership. First, what distinguishes this Solidarity initiative from previous ones in the history of Poland is that its leader refused to engage in dialogue with practically any political party, including Solidarity's long-time ally, the PiS.<sup>12</sup> Not only did he criticize the Polish political system for being overtaken and manipulated by the privileged few in political parties, but he went so far as to ban all the political parties represented in Parliament from attending the first Congress,

and thus joining the movement. Hence, as was the case with the Anti-ACTA movement, civil society activists were reluctant to cooperate with political parties.

This leads to a second problem related to the ambiguity of the leaders' intentions and the project's goals. The formal goals of the movement are clear: to change the political system by giving more power to the people (i.e., refusing the constitutional norm that requires parliamentary consent for holding a referendum) and to introduce a first-past-the-post electoral system. However, it is unclear how Duda intends to achieve these goals without either turning the movement into a political party and standing in elections or looking for supporters among the current political parties. One of the main criticisms is that this noble initiative to improve the quality of democracy in Poland and 'bring it back to its citizens' is being used as a cover to build up his popularity and establish a new political party before the 2015 election. Although Duda has always denied these allegations, they have nonetheless been hanging over him and have prevented him from establishing the spirit that he wants to see within the movement.

A third potentially worrying characteristic is Duda's keenness to escalate the conflict between citizens and political parties. By presenting Platforma Obywatelska as the 'true force' that will bring democracy back to the Polish people, he is trying to draw a sharp line between 'us the citizens' and 'them, the cartelized political parties'. While it is true that most citizens feel this sharp division anyway, it is questionable whether Duda, as an authoritative civic leader who claims to want to improve the quality of democracy in the country, should be polarizing society and escalating conflict instead of trying to create a constructive dialogue, which is one of the cornerstones of a democratic process.

In response to Solidarity's initiative and, more precisely, to the declaration issued at the movement's Congress on its political aims, Tusk expressed dissatisfaction with the aggressive style of the Solidarity leader. According to Tusk, Duda was clearly entering the political arena and trying to undermine a democratically elected government. He was also surprised that Solidarity did not address the PO on the issue of changing the electoral system, as he described himself as 'a veteran' fighting to introduce single-member districts.<sup>13</sup>

Kaczyński was even more angered and frustrated. On learning about Duda's initiative and the ban on any parliamentary party attending the

Congress, he said that all such movements are created just to ‘mix up citizens’ minds’ in order to direct their support away from the PiS, which, he argued, was the only true political force able to change Poland for the better (Gazeta.pl 2013). Given the long-established cooperation between the two organizations and the fact that the PiS was planning to support Solidarity’s proposal for a referendum on the retirement age, Duda’s decision to exclude the PiS and lump them together with other political parties was incomprehensible to their political partner. In response to the initiative, Kaczyński decided to elaborate a socio-economic plan for Poland to try to recapture citizens’ attention and redirect it away from political reforms. He continues to claim that people should vote and support his economic plan rather than follow ‘different movements’ that are trying to start a political revolution (Baliszewski 2013).

The minor political parties were reluctant to respond to Solidarity’s initiative or engage in any debate, which is not surprising, given that they would lose out if a majoritarian electoral system were introduced. The PSL merely issued a polite statement in appreciation of Solidarity’s civic activism and inviting the political parties to listen to their supporters, as they were the ones who were feeling deprived by the ruling political elite; it made no comment on the substance of Solidarity’s cause (Polish Public Radio 2013). Similarly, Palikot did not comment on Solidarity’s initiative. Only the SLD was more direct, arguing that it was ready to support Solidarity on its socio-economic (but not its political) platform (*Newsweek Polska* 2013).

At the time of writing, it is too early to assess the movement’s success. However, given Duda’s aggressive style and lack of dialogue with key political parties and the organizations that have joined the movement, it is difficult to imagine that it could evolve successfully into a civil society initiative. Moreover, although *Platforma Oburzonych* has gained citizens’ attention and appreciation, support is not strong. Although it could become a political party in time for the 2015 national elections, this is likely to depend on the levels of popularity of the major political parties at that time.

## **Conclusion**

Despite generally low levels of civic activity in Poland over the past two decades, such activity can at times be quite noteworthy. As

demonstrated by the two civic movements discussed, however, citizens' primary motivation to get involved is not policy-oriented, but rather to express overall dissatisfaction with the country's political elite and political processes. Controversial government decisions—e.g., to join ACTA or reject a referendum initiative on the retirement age—can serve as a pretext. There appears to be a strong underlying belief that in order to achieve certain policy objectives, one has to first change the political system and political actors.

Although political parties have been willing to cooperate with civil society movements, where there is widespread dissatisfaction with politics and little trust in political parties—as is currently the case in Poland—it is very difficult for political parties to establish a dialogue with civil society. Both the Anti-ACTA protesters and the Platforma Oburzonnych leaders refused, at least initially, to get involved in a dialogue with political parties despite the latter's pronounced willingness to do so.

The political parties, faced with ever-increasing and aggressive pressure from civil society, have responded in different ways. In the case of the Anti-ACTA movement, the ruling PO rapidly changed its stance in order to prevent a further decline in popularity. Platforma Oburzonnych ignored the request for a referendum and seems unlikely to change its position despite growing protests. These different responses might be related to the scale of the protests and the importance of the reforms. Anti-ACTA was more aggressive and more concentrated, and ratification of ACTA was never a primary policy concern for the PO, whereas increasing the retirement age has been one of its key planned policy reforms.

Furthermore, it is important to note that civil society movements are not necessarily always 'right' in terms of either how they participate in the democratic process or their cause. The Anti-ACTA case is a particularly good illustration of this. The movement's supporters often seemed insufficiently informed about the cause they were campaigning for, and tended to engage in rather destructive protests even after the leading political parties had expressed a willingness to engage in dialogue.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Civil society/individual citizens***

*Get involved.* Polish civil society, as discussed above, tends not to believe in the power of civic involvement. However, the Anti-ACTA case

demonstrated the opposite: even with relatively little effort from each citizen, a cause can be promoted effectively. This case reminds citizens not to underestimate the role of individuals or the power of the crowd they create, and not to overestimate the ‘superiority’ of political parties. Political parties do care about citizens’ opinions—for ideological and pragmatic reasons, and as a moral obligation.

*Be active on social media.* In order to stay in touch with the community and receive information about ongoing events, it is important to have a presence and build extended networks on social media.

*Initiate action.* As the case of the young Anti-ACTA protester demonstrates, advanced organizational skills and leadership experience are not needed to organize a successful protest. It can be as easy as posting a status update on Facebook for hundreds or even thousands of supporters to attend an event.

*Stay moral.* Advances in technology have eased citizens’ engagement in civic activities. It might even have become too easy to get involved: for example, there are no regular meetings, membership applications or membership fees. Although there are many benefits of this, it might also decrease citizens’ sense of responsibility. There is no other way to control this than to follow one’s own moral code. Therefore, it is crucial that citizens should be aware of the consequences of their actions and support a cause only if they are certain about it—and should not just follow the crowd for the sake of action. The Anti-ACTA protesters were criticized precisely because some young people who barely knew what they were standing for found the protests exciting and joined almost purely for the sake of entertainment.

### ***Civic movements and organizations***

*Harness the momentum and act immediately.* One of the main reasons why the Anti-ACTA movement was so successful in accomplishing its goal was that it captured the momentum and acted immediately. Similarly, Solidarity’s movement attracted a lot of support and attention because it was launched at a time when civic dissatisfaction with the government was increasing and the government had just rejected a policy proposal that was very important to many people (changing the retirement age).

*Be simple and concise when putting an issue on the public agenda.*

To achieve large-scale support for a cause, it is vital to formulate goals simply and concisely. Even something as simple as ‘against ACTA’ or ‘against the current political establishment’ can work, as both cases have demonstrated. These simplistic slogans will not reflect the depth and complexity of the problem, but they will capture the attention of citizens, political parties and the mass media, and will put the issue on the public agenda.

*Be prepared to have strong and detailed arguments about the cause and policy proposals.* Capturing attention is only the first step. Soon afterwards, the mass media and politicians will expect civic movements and organizations to have strong and detailed arguments for their cause and new policy proposals. In the case of the Anti-ACTA movement, the government organized a discussion and invited NGOs to participate. At this stage, the cause must have strong arguments and new policy proposals in order to move forward.

*Always engage in dialogue.* Although in the beginning it might seem to be a good strategy to cut nearly all communication with ‘the enemy’, it seldom proves to be the right approach in the longer term. Because Solidarity demonstrably cut all communication with the political parties in the beginning, its initiative might face a deadlock. It does not seem to have as much citizen support as could have been expected for such an activity, and it will be difficult to pressure politicians in the way the Anti-ACTA movement did. It has also, to some extent, spoiled its relations with its long-time ally, the PiS, whose support would be crucial in attaining at least some of its proposed constitutional changes.

*Be online, but not only online.* It has become common practice to have a presence, share information and plan interactions on social media; civic organizations usually do not need to be reminded about this. They should also, however, remain loyal to conventional organizational methods if they want to reach various segments of society, as many groups are not, and might never be active on social media. Platforma Oburzonych, for example, is trying to be, active in both the virtual and physical worlds, and therefore has the potential to capture the attention of different target and demographic groups.

### ***Political parties***

*Always engage in dialogue.* As touched on above, maintaining a dialogue with all interested stakeholders is the only viable long-term option. In this



respect, the political parties, especially the PO, chose the right strategy: not to close the doors on potential dialogue with Solidarity regardless of its initial refusal to cooperate with any political party. Not only did the PO improve its public image by doing so, but keeping the possibility of dialogue open also helped maintain a constructive and respectful political process. Similarly, the PO organized a round-table discussion with the civic organizations participating in the Anti-ACTA movement. The fact that they did not want to organize a wider public debate before signing the treaty, and undertook limited and formal consultations with only one stakeholder, sparked the mass protests and loss of popular support in the first place.

*Change your policy stance if there is a good reason.* Following a party programme, values and policy stance is understandable. However, mass protests and dissatisfaction with the party's performance might sometimes—but not necessarily always—indicate a problem of internal inconsistency of party policy positions, unmet expectations from its electorate or a cause that is salient for the citizens but unheard by politicians. Therefore, political parties should be responsive and responsible, and change their policy stance if there is a good reason to do so.

*Balance pragmatism with principles and morality.* Ideally, a political party should have a sound balance among its threefold goals: vote seeking (citizens' support during elections); office seeking (official posts in the government); and policy seeking (persuading people to support their programmatic goals). It can be argued that a party can run effectively, get elected and govern while not caring much about the third goal, polishing its image for the elections with a populist but skilfully developed electoral campaign. However, such an approach usually leads to a decline in the party's long-term popularity and trust. This will not only make re-election increasingly problematic, but might also threaten its existence. New parties might emerge, and frustrated civil society might advocate constitutional changes that sweep away at least minor political parties. Solidarity's initiative on constitutional change serves as an excellent example of such a scenario. If Duda decides to run for election, the position of the two major parties—or at least one of them, depending on each party's popularity at the time of the election—would be threatened. If some of the proposals for constitutional changes were approved, only two or three major political parties would remain. Hence, not caring only about re-election and office, but also having values, is not just the morally right thing to do, it

can also be a wise and sustainable political strategy.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Compared to most other EU member states, Poland has long had the highest proportion of citizens who do not trust political parties. In the five-year period from 2008 to 2013, 80–89 per cent said they did not trust political parties, while the EU average is 75–80 per cent (Standard Barometer, n.d.). Mistrust of political parties has been increasing in most EU member states since the 2008 economic crisis, but lack of trust in political institutions and, in particular, political parties, has been a permanent feature of Polish politics since the 1990s (Mishler and Rose 1997, 2001; Rose 1994).
- <sup>2</sup> Grzegorz Makowski, a scholar of Polish civil society, describes Poles as not particularly willing to engage in activities that involve cooperation or that are directed towards the common good. He also argues that Polish NGOs are becoming increasingly detached from their social base, and are turning into contractors that merely carry out tasks commissioned by the public administration (Kucharczyk and Zbieranek 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> In the past decade, the PO has undergone changes in its policy stance from socially conservative but economically liberal at the beginning of the century to more centrist and more fragmented today (Rae 2008). Some left-leaning members, including Janusz Palikot, left the party before the 2011 elections. In September 2013, the informal leader of the conservative wing, Jarosław Gowin, also left the party. The latest split was largely due to internal disagreement over support for the legalization of same-sex civil partnerships (Szczerbiak 2013a).
- <sup>4</sup> He left the party in September 2013; at the time of writing, it is not clear whether other conservative members will join him or stay in the PO at the time of writing.
- <sup>5</sup> Aleks Szczerbiak, a scholar of Polish political parties, calls the PSL a pragmatic negotiating partner. As the party is primarily office-seeking and has a rather narrow policy agenda (Szczerbiak 2012: 7), this arguably makes it more willing and able to accept various potential coalitions.
- <sup>6</sup> Makowski (2012) provides comparative statistics on the number of NGOs.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> The agreement was signed in Japan, so the Polish Government delegated its ambassador to Japan to sign the treaty.
- <sup>9</sup> However, it also established an international supervisory body responsible for implementing the agreement. This will probably lead to more changes and stricter enforcement of the law than the substance of

the copyright norms themselves.

- <sup>10</sup> The typology of responsive vs. responsible government is borrowed from Mair (2009). Whether (and under what conditions) a political party should act responsively or responsibly is a matter of normative debate beyond the scope of this chapter. It is sufficient here to mention these two dimensions and highlight the potential trade-offs between them.
- <sup>11</sup> Paweł Kukiz has initiated other civil society activities before, one of which was *zmieleni.pl*, an initiative to change the electoral system in Poland. Probably because of this previous activity, Duda invited Kukiz to co-lead *Platforma Oburzonych*, to help reach the younger generation.
- <sup>12</sup> Since this activity is still ongoing, significant changes in the rhetoric and stances of the movement's leaders can be expected. For example, at the time of writing, relations between *Platforma Oburzonych* and the PiS were improving and Kaczyński even supported demonstrations planned for 14 September 2013.
- <sup>13</sup> The PO initiated a bill on introducing single-member districts for national elections in the lower chamber, but since amending electoral law requires a supermajority in parliament, there was insufficient support (Radio RMF 2013).

# **Chapter 4**

## **Reforming the Political Party System in the Philippines: The Akbayan Citizens' Action Party**

## Chapter 4

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Sabrina GACAD

# Reforming the Political Party System in the Philippines: The Akbayan Citizens' Action Party

## Introduction

Politics in the Philippines provides an interesting case study of democracy in developing countries. On the one hand, the formal democratic institutions are run by elite families and are weakened by a deeply embedded system of patronage. On the other hand, the country has a strong civil society that can bring down presidents, and that takes pride in the peaceful, non-violent manner in which its political influence is exercised. This chapter explores the dynamics between citizens, CSOs, political parties and the institutions of governance, using the experience of the Akbayan Citizens' Action Party.

Akbayan is a centre-left, democratic political party that emerged from the social movements of the Marcos era. Akbayan believes that in order to mould a more equitable society and create a government that is responsive to the needs of ordinary Filipinos, it is crucial for an activist political party to be part of government. Since its founding Congress in 1998, Akbayan has combined the tactics of social movements and parliamentary engagement to achieve significant political reforms. After the victory in the 2010 presidential election of Benigno Simeon Aquino III, a candidate supported by Akbayan, the party gained greater political leverage, and several prominent party figures were appointed to senior roles in the administration. The party continues to maintain strong ties with social movements and civil society in its work in the legislature, and more recently in some areas of the executive.

By examining the evolution of Akbayan into a political party, and its

current engagement with the Philippine government and civil society, this chapter contributes to the evolving conversation about the role of political parties in democracies and how citizens may best be represented in government.

The chapter provides a brief description of the socio-political context in the Philippines and the origins of Akbayan—its current structure as a political party, its experience and governance, and its engagement in the legislature and with different administrations and CSOs. The chapter concludes with recommendations for political parties, CSOs and social movements.

## **Philippine socio-political context**

The Philippines, with a population of 92 million,<sup>1</sup> is characterized by inequality and poverty—and economic inequality breeds political inequality. The incidence of poverty among Filipino families, as determined by the 2012 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES), is 19.7 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Yet the combined wealth of the country's 50 richest individuals and families amounts to over one-quarter of the national gross domestic product (GDP) (Karmali 2013). Political leadership at both the national and local levels is dominated by a small number of elite families or political dynasties. Between the two is an emerging middle class that, as described below, on occasion can form a strong civil society.

Formal democracy in the Philippines is characterized by a government that is divided into three equal branches—the executive, a bicameral legislature and the judiciary. Congressional and local government elections take place every three years, and presidential elections every six years. The president, vice president and members of the Senate (the upper house) have six-year terms. The House of Representatives (the lower house) is elected every three years. In addition to representatives of districts elected from geographic constituencies, the Party-List Act of 1998 provides for the election of party-list representatives through proportional representation (PR). Elections generally have high turnouts.

### ***Political dynasties, populist politics and the democracy deficit***

Academics and political analysts often describe the Philippines as an elite democracy, characterized by the prevalence of political dynasties,

or elite families, that have made a business out of public office, as well as cyclical shifts of populism, patronage and reformism and a strong presidency that can manipulate a weak state (Thompson 2010). Political families are prevalent in democracies around the world, but the political dynasties in the Philippines not only wield significant political influence, but also control major economic enterprises. Their systematic consolidation of wealth and power has resulted in the 'political dynasties' abuse of weak democratic structures' and has left many at the margins of democratic and political engagement and socio-economic development (Curato 2013). This is particularly important in rural areas, where political power becomes a means to perpetuate economic dominance and vice versa, often through patronage.

Another characteristic of elite democracy in the Philippines is that elections have become the means by which elite power rivalries are managed. Elite families resolve electoral contests by either coming to an informal agreement to divide local elected positions among themselves or ensuring their absolute victory over their opponents. This makes elections very expensive endeavours. Ordinary Filipinos who aspire to run for office can rarely rise through the political ranks to compete in elections, and they win much more rarely. Political parties in the Philippines have traditionally been skeleton political organizations—they are a clearing house for the momentary coincidence of the interests of different political families, especially at election time. Alliances shift as easily as they are built, hence the consistent practice of traditional dynasties jumping from one political party to another in different election cycles. Traditional political parties also serve as the conduit through which political favours and patronage are distributed from the national to the local level.

Filipinos have been taught to value two distinct features of democracy: the constitutional right to vote and, albeit an extra-constitutional feature, the power of the people to express their discontent with the government or oust public officials in non-violent political protests (often alluded to as 'people power').

The criteria for electing leaders to office are markedly different according to class. While the middle and upper classes often support educated candidates, and give consideration to merit, hard work and a track record in good governance, the poor and lower classes prefer candidates they perceive as kind or caring, emphasizing the empathy these candidates project for the plight of the masses. The middle class readily castigates

the choices of the poor as unwise decisions made only on the basis of populism and facilitated by the mass media. However, the poor's preference for candidates who embody particular traits highlights the 'politics of personal dignity in which the poor are treated as their *kapwa* or fellow human beings worthy of attention and recognition' (Curato 2013). All classes perceive much room for improvement in the way the government operates and how development is facilitated. Nonetheless, while elections are still largely popularity contests among the elite—and while there is still a certain level of vote buying, voter intimidation and electoral fraud (Thompson 2010)—for different segments of society, elections remain a credible mechanism for determining the nation's leaders.

Inasmuch as the people have the power to choose their leaders in elections, they also believe it is important to have the power to take back this mandate through non-violent demonstrations. This gives rise to an interesting socio-political dynamic: the relative strength of civil society movements outside formal democratic institutions.

The Philippines has a powerful presidency. The level of citizen participation in formal economic and political decision-making is therefore largely dependent on the predisposition of the incumbent administration to accommodate ordinary citizens, citizens' organizations and CSOs. However, democracy in the Philippines is also characterized by the relative strength of civil society in shaping politics and the discourse of governance outside formal democratic institutions. This is particularly true when the choice of the people, as determined in elections, is so brazenly subverted by public officials, as well as through large-scale corruption and other morally and ethically reprehensible acts. This dynamic, which is often left out of the top-down, elite democracy characterization of politics in the Philippines, makes its democracy a contested democracy (Quimpo 2008). Civil society has been known to remove presidents from office, from the 1986 People Power revolution that led to the fall of dictator Ferdinand Marcos, to the second People Power protest, or 'EDSA Dos', which ousted action-star-turned-president Joseph 'Erap' Estrada.<sup>3</sup>

### ***The Akbayan Action Party***

According to Ric Reyes (2013), one of the party's founders and leaders, Akbayan emerged as a 'critique of political parties and realities in



Philippine society, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and collapsed socialisms of the past'. Akbayan's formation was influenced by events that occurred well before its founding Congress in 1998. Its leaders trace the party's inception to the events surrounding the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution and its profound impact 'on both state politics (removing Marcos) and non-state movements (the sidelining of the CPP and its allied organizations)' (Claudio 2013). This critical period changed the political landscape of the Philippines from authoritarian to democratic, established the relative strength of the country's civil society and exposed the weakness of the traditional communist movement.

The CPP had served as the backbone of the anti-dictatorship movement. The group's guerrilla wing, the New People's Army, led a protracted people's war in the countryside and organized a campaign of urban-based political dissent. Nonetheless, the party failed to establish political power and ride the momentum of the People Power Revolution. This failure fed into a brewing internal conflict within the ranks and leadership of the CPP and resulted in a split in the early 1990s into the reaffirmists and the rejectionists. The former reaffirmed the main tenets of the CPP: the primary Maoist principle of the protracted people's war and the Stalinist concept of governance through one-party dictatorship. The latter rejected these. Akbayan is among the latter. The dramatic way in which the dictatorship fell and pushed the CPP to the margins emphasized that Filipino civil society can be a strong political force for democratic engagement and accumulation of state power.

The president of Akbayan, Arline Santos (2013), argues that the period of 1986–88 presented forces on the left with a new challenge: the 'political line' or the creation of a leftist party that could participate in elections rather than the armed struggle that the left had previously espoused. Perceiving the viability of civil society movements and activist political parties in post-dictatorship Philippines, discussions were premised on two tenets. First, the left must carve out the political space to transform the country's political system. Second, participation means engaging in the elite's political game.

In this context, the political blocs that would eventually form Akbayan came together. No one from the left had any direct experience of participating in elections to win seats for the left, and there was a question over whether 'critical participation' could happen in a largely elite-led democratic exercise.

The left experimented with political and electoral participation by entering into alliances with established political parties for national and local elections. In the 1992 elections, Akbayan emerged as a non-party formation that entered into a formal coalition with the Liberal Party (LP) and the *Partido Demokratiko Pilipinas* (Philippine Democratic Party, PDP). The non-party formation was a coalition of some of the same CSOs, mass movements and political blocs that would later constitute the political party. They backed the bid of Senators Jovito Salonga and Aquilino Pimentel Jr. for president and vice president, respectively. The LP-PDP coalition lost the presidential election. In 1995, leftist organizations tried their luck at mid-term elections by endorsing candidates from the slates of traditional parties. However, the victory of the left did not last, as ‘the winning candidates eventually abandoned progressive trappings and revealed their adherence to patronage’ (Quimpo 2008).

#### *The Party-List Act and the founding of Akbayan*

In 1995, the introduction of the party-list electoral system for elections to the lower chamber gave the left’s political project new life. For many on the left, including the founders of Akbayan, the PR system presented an opportunity to enter politics and accumulate state power. The system recognizes that political representation based solely on geographically determined districts may not reflect the diversity of political, sectoral and regional interests. To ensure that these interests are also represented in the House of Representatives and to make legislation more pluralistic, the Party-List Act expanded membership of the lower chamber to include representatives of smaller or non-traditional political parties, as well as organizations and citizen movements that are formed along sectoral interests, or regional or ethno-linguistic entities registered as ‘party-list organizations’.

Thus, during elections, in addition to voting for a representative for their district, Philippine voters also vote for a party-list representative. A party-list party that reaches the threshold of at least 2 per cent of the total votes cast secures one seat. The second and third seats are granted according to a rather complex, and changing, mathematical formula that further refines the proportionality of the votes. The Party-List Act allowed Akbayan to register as a national political party for the first time and compete for seats in the House of Representatives in the first party-list elections in May 1998.

The party's founding Congress in January 1998 was facilitated by four distinct political blocs formed after the CPP's split, which united different civil society and grassroots organizations under distinct variations of leftist political ideology. Each of these blocs had a strong mass movement of grassroots organizations and other CSOs that shared their aims. The 'Akbayan! Citizens' Action Party' was registered as a national political party with the Electoral Commission in 1998. The decision of these groups to come together in a single, national political party was linked to the organized left's earlier realization that it needed to accumulate state power in order to carry out the socio-political reforms it envisaged, and to ensure the rights and welfare of its constituencies. In addition, most of the CSOs in these political blocs had been part of the social movement lobbying to institutionalize PR in the Philippine Congress and had worked for the passage of the Party-List Act of 1995.

Following failed attempts to engage in previous elections through the candidacies of established politicians, and maximizing the opportunity presented by the Party-List Act, these groups decided to make a bid for Congress through Akbayan. In the spirit of an activist party that arose from social movements, it elected Loretta P. Rosales, head of the Institute for Political and Electoral Reform and one of the key civil society advocates of the Party-List Act, as its first nominee to the House of Representatives in 1998. She became Akbayan's first representative in the lower chamber.

### *Political blocs and the growth of Akbayan as a political party*

In its formative years, the main organizing force behind Akbayan were the four political blocs with their diverse political and ideological interests, which perceived the party as a platform to forward these interests. Because of the democratic structure of Akbayan, the party's leadership and policy direction were largely shaped by the relative strength of the blocs. Competition took the form of bringing in party members from local-level citizens' organizations and NGOs to strengthen their respective bloc's voting power.

According to Akbayan's current leaders, the blocs' relevance began to erode as the party grew and became involved in Parliament and national politics, which required bloc leaders to shift their focus from intra-bloc politics to meeting the demands of leading a national political party. This shift was reinforced by the social movements turning to the

party as a whole to push their political and ideological interests at the national level.

Another factor that contributed to the growth of Akbayan as a party, and to the diminishing relevance of the blocs, was its expansion drive at the local level. As the party broadened its parliamentary engagement, more 'non-aligned' individuals found its good-governance platforms attractive (Santos 2013). This allowed the party to evolve more as a citizen movement; it began to attract more middle-class members, grass-roots activists and local government officials. This resulted in the party's more active participation in local politics, which extended to building alliances with progressive local government officials.

#### *Akbayan's organizational structure and membership*

Individual members are organized into chapters, divisions and regional councils, and also through people's organizations and NGOs affiliated with the party that operate at the local level. A combination of advocacy work and good governance advocacy brings people into the appropriate party structure.

Reflecting the party's pluralist, democratic nature, its highest governing and policymaking body is the National Congress. It convenes every three years and is composed of representatives of divisions or territorial groupings and representatives from the mass movement formations. The Congress also includes representatives from elected public officials and overseas members. Among the responsibilities of the National Congress is the election of the party's National Council, the second-highest decision-making body, which meets biannually between party congresses, and the Executive Committee, which meets on a more regular basis to address the organizational and operational concerns of the party. The Congress also determines the party's nominees for representatives in the House of Representatives.

In the spirit of ensuring the representation of social movements in Parliament, Akbayan derives its legislative and governance agenda from mass organizations and territorial groups. It has created sectoral caucuses that serve as the consultative body for legislative and policy engagement. The caucuses also aggregate the interests of the mass movement organizations that are affiliated with Akbayan into concrete policies or action points. In addition, Akbayan responds to 'local mass struggles', which are political and advocacy engagements unique to

citizen movements in the local chapters or divisions that the party elevates to various levels of government.

Akbayan's primary aim is to win seats in national elections, through the party-list system in the lower chamber and, more recently, in a bid for a seat in the Senate. This is complemented by winning local electoral contests. Akbayan has a track record of electoral victories at the local level—over 100 in the most recent local elections.

The grassroots organizations and NGOs affiliated with Akbayan have a degree of autonomy from the party's national leadership. They can develop their own political and advocacy agenda, and have the authority to enter the party into alliances with local officials, provided there is consensus among their members and support from the national leadership.

The party draws its legitimacy from being an alternative to traditional political parties. Whereas traditional parties draw strength from their network of political families, wealth and the 'guns and goons' mode of politics of their members and leaders, Akbayan's main political weapon is its membership—ordinary Filipinos—and their shared vision of an alternative society founded on the principles of equality, social justice and democracy.

### *Akbayan's experience*

In the past five years, Akbayan has won major victories for social justice and systemic reform through the passage of the Reproductive Health Law and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme with Extension and Reforms (CARPER).

The Reproductive Health Law, passed in 2012, ensures the government's active role in promoting reproductive health rights and family planning as a tool to break the cycle of poverty. The 14-year struggle to pass the law was testament to the need to combine strong, activist political parties and elected representatives with social movements to defeat the traditional and conservative views of the Catholic Church and its supporters in the legislature. Reproductive health has been Akbayan's flagship legislation since it first won a seat in the lower chamber. With public officials from the health and social welfare departments, experts on women's rights and reproductive health and like-minded legislators, the party led substantive discussions on the bill in the legislature. On the social movement front, Akbayan was also represented by its

members, especially from the youth and women's sectors in the Reproductive Health Advocates Network, which strategized the lobbying and built public pressure for the legislation. Akbayan also facilitated the advocate networks' meetings with the Office of the President to secure the Aquino Administration's support for the measure. With the active engagement of civil society and Congress, the Reproductive Health Network succeeded in bringing to the fore issues of maternal death and women's rights, overpopulation, poverty and a glaring lack of reproductive health education, and consolidated public opinion on the need for an act. The public support of President Aquino and members of his Cabinet, and the combined efforts of advocates and legislators, secured the measure's passage despite the desperate attempts of the Catholic Church hierarchy and the anti-reproductive-health lobby to derail the process. Currently, the law is being evaluated in the Supreme Court, as its opponents have challenged its constitutionality in a last-ditch effort to halt it.

The passage of CARPER was a significant victory for dispossessed farmers and tenants who demanded the right to the land they till, extending agrarian reform and completing the distribution of agricultural land. This landmark struggle faced strong opposition from the economically and politically influential landed elite. Although the general public does not necessarily identify with the land reform issue, the extension of the land reform programme gained support and passed the legislature due to the highly emotional struggle against poverty and injustice that farmers mounted, supported by CSOs and activist legislators in Akbayan. The CARPER campaign reached its peak in October 2007, when farmers from the municipality of Sumilao in the southern Philippines undertook the 'Walk for Sumilao Land, Walk for Justice'. This two-month, 1,700 km march by farmers from Sumilao to Manila to demand that the government stop the conversion of agricultural land into an agro-industrial hog farm bolstered public and political support for CARPER (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2007). The momentum from the social movement's success and the party's strong partnerships with legislators, who understood the value of continuing agrarian reform as a means to promote rural development and social justice, led to CARPER's passage into law in 2009. This victory is significant because it happened when Akbayan was in the minority and under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whose family opposed CARPER due to their ownership of vast areas of agricultural land that might be subject to the programme. Akbayan is now pressing President Aquino, who also belongs to the landed elite,

and his administration to complete the implementation of CARPER. This is particularly crucial because the land acquisition and distribution component of the programme is set to expire in 2014, and there is still a massive backlog in titling and distributing land.

### *Presidents and people power*

Philippine civil society, especially the middle class, has had a strong influence in the unmaking of presidents and politicians in the post-dictatorship period. This is particularly true for those identified with massive corruption, such as former presidents Joseph Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Akbayan also figured in the national civil society movements against these presidencies.

Former President Estrada was a famous movie-actor-turned-politician. While he enjoyed widespread populist appeal, Estrada's presidency was marked by the return of cronyism, the president's involvement in illegal gambling circuits, massive amounts of ill-gotten and unexplained wealth stored in bank accounts held under different names, and the subversion of formal democratic institutions to the whims of the president's friends.<sup>4</sup> The details of Estrada's extensive abuse of public office were revealed during an impeachment trial, and were met with widespread anger from the middle class. When the impeachment faltered in January 2001, the middle class, joined by Akbayan and other CSOs, relaunched EDSA and successfully ousted Estrada in what is now referred to as EDSA Dos, or People Power 2. His vice president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, succeeded Estrada as president.

Akbayan's decision to be part of EDSA Dos was linked mainly to the build-up of public opinion against Estrada in Manila. Founding member Ric Reyes believed at the time that the party had not sufficiently explored engagement with the Estrada Administration, and had reservations about public action to remove the president from office.

Four months after EDSA Dos, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo ordered Estrada's arrest, and a populist protest of several hundred thousand (called EDSA Tres) called for his reinstatement. Macapagal-Arroyo declared a 'state of rebellion' and ordered the armed forces and police to disperse the protest. Akbayan sent a contingent to the protest, with the slogans '*Bantayan si GMA*' ('Guard against GMA's abuse') and 'defend the gains of EDSA Dos'; it was shunned and booed by the crowd. Reports castigated this citizen uprising as a mob of Estrada loyalists.

In the party discussion that followed EDSA Tres, Akbayan Party Chairperson Risa Hontiveros recognized the uprising as part of the People Power narrative—‘a legitimate expression of the frustration of the masses that formal democracy had not substantively improved the quality of their lives’—and condemned the ousted political elite’s attempt to use EDSA Tres to return to power. Akbayan Party President Arline Santos argues that it was clear to Akbayan at that time that the masses strongly identified with Estrada. Between his impeachment and arrest, he had played the underdog card, portraying himself as bullied by the educated class, which strengthened mass support for him. For Akbayan, this highlighted the society’s divisive, discriminatory distinction between the educated and the masses, and the inability of social movements to tap into the mentality of the masses.

Macapagal-Arroyo’s presidency was similarly marred by high-level corruption and illegal gambling—mainly through her husband, Mike Arroyo. However, what really cast doubt on her presidency was the massive electoral fraud revealed in a leaked recording of her speaking with an Electoral Commission official on the status of her 2004 election victory. From then on, as civil society made attempts to oust the president, she unleashed the full powers of the presidency to silence dissent, consolidate support in the House of Representatives to thwart all efforts to remove her from office and appoint officials whose loyalty she could command to protect her even after she stepped down. As Macapagal-Arroyo’s legitimacy declined, Akbayan came to the fore as one of her strongest critics. This angered her so much that she withheld the party’s Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) allocations (see below).

### *Coalition with the Liberal Party*

In the run-up to the presidential elections in 2010, Akbayan decided to enter an alliance with the Liberal Party (LP) and support the presidential and vice-presidential ticket of LP stalwarts Benigno Simeon Aquino III and Mar Roxas. Akbayan also decided to launch a senatorial bid by Risa Hontiveros, who ran in the 2010 and the 2013 elections on the LP coalition slate.

This decision was premised on the argument that the best way for the party to gain greater credibility and political prominence was for it to match its strong opposition to the corruption-laden leadership of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo with an equally potent commitment to



good governance and political reform. Aquino and Roxas were the exact opposite of Arroyo: they had a spotless track record in terms of corruption. They were also more open to the reforms that Akbayan was espousing than other contenders in the 2010 elections. The LP coalition ran a multi-million-peso campaign that created a cult with the slogan: '*Kung walang kurap, walang mahirap*' ('if there were no corruption, there would be no poverty').

In the aftermath of Macapagal-Arroyo's nine-year presidency, Akbayan led the mainly middle-class efforts to call her to account and rid the government of her cronies. The major targets were Ombudsman Merceditas Gutierrez—in the Oust Merceditas Gutierrez Movement (OMG!) campaign—and Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona. In these campaigns, Akbayan again combined civil society advocacy and legislative intervention. The party rallied its members to support these causes, and led the public campaign. The party was also very active inside Congress, and Akbayan representatives Walden Bello and Kaka Bag-ao were among the core group of legislators that prepared charges against Gutierrez and Corona. Bag-ao was also on the roster of prosecutors in the Senate impeachment hearings against Corona. The complaints and public pressure led to the resignation of Gutierrez and the impeachment of Corona by a majority vote in the Senate.

Another political milestone that Akbayan achieved through the coalition was the appointment of Akbayan leaders to senior positions in government offices such as the Commission on Human Rights, the National Youth Commission, the National Anti-Poverty Commission and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Political Affairs. Party leaders from the labour sector were also appointed to the board of the state pension system. These appointments increased the party's political prestige, provided a new platform for social movement struggles and created an opportunity for the party to create a network of allies throughout the government bureaucracy.

### *Mainstreaming the party image*

In the run-up to the 2010 elections, the party moved to mainstream its public image in an effort to be recognized as a reputable political party and appeal to a wider base. This was important because a close reading of Philippine society showed that a majority of voters continued to perceive the left and activism in a negative light, and continued to perceive Akbayan as a leftist activist group in Congress. There was no

question of dropping the activism, which had proved valuable in terms of political engagement. It was a matter of showcasing and popularizing the party's brand of governance, which was largely removed from the ways of traditional politicians, in order to make it more appealing to voters.

Akbayan made a major effort to take positions on issues that enjoyed near-universal appeal with the public. There were mass campaigns at the community level against the spread of dengue fever, a life-threatening infection contracted through mosquito bites, and to enforce a 20 per cent discount on medicines for people with disabilities, which the Mercury Drug Corporation had tried to ignore.

The party led a strong nationalist stance on the country's territorial disputes over several islands in the Spratly Archipelago. Akbayan led the Peace and Sovereignty Mission in July 2011, the first civilian mission to Kalayaan Islands to raise the flag and establish a dialogue with the citizens and armed forces stationed there. In the process, Akbayan captured the nationalist imagination of ordinary Filipinos and successfully channelled this into the peaceful, civilian assertion of national sovereignty against incursions to the national territory of the Philippines.

### *Key challenges*

The party's major current challenges are protecting the victories achieved through legislation, and the evolving political terrain in which it is engaged. The battles over reproductive health and CARPER continue—policies that are backed by millions of ordinary Filipinos but challenged by a set of influential forces. This is an opportunity for the party to strengthen its engagement with civil society; encourage more talented, progressive individuals to seek public office; and forge stronger ties within government. The political space for progressives in the party-list system is shrinking. The party's access to, and participation in, political decision-making in the executive through the coalition have had little impact on its strategic objectives.

The party has achieved political recognition, but has not adequately translated this into political influence that can change the balance of power during elections. Nor have the political appointments allowed the party to advance more radical reform objectives that target social inequality and empower the poor and marginalized. Radical reforms that change socio-economic structures—such as ensuring workers'

security of tenure, implementing public policy on social housing that requires contributions from developers and protecting local agricultural production—are rejected by a government that continues to subscribe to free-market economics. Concern has been expressed that the coalition benefits the administration more than it does the party, because the party's advocacy and objectives improve the administration's reform-oriented image—and that the party is being used as the 'conscience' of the coalition.

In Akbayan's recent electoral engagements, the party observed that family pedigree and wealth were still strong determinants of election outcomes. This is particularly evident in the candidacy of Hontiveros, who carried the Akbayan banner on the coalition slate. Her candidacy enjoyed the personal endorsement of the president, and a closer look at the survey results showed that she commanded loyalty from supporters due to her good-governance platform and reputation and track record as a progressive legislator. However, this was not enough to match the well-funded candidacies of the political elites, who had more established names.

Even the political terrain of the Party-List Act was not significantly altered by entering into a coalition with the ruling administration. Akbayan received over 1 million votes in 2010, when it was endorsed by presidential candidate Benigno Aquino III, but it did not enjoy the same support in the 2013 mid-term elections. Because traditional politicians now see the party-list race as a back door to the House of Representatives, competition has become fiercer.

In electoral arenas for both chambers, significant contributions to the campaign kitties of local government officials were still an election victory prerequisite for a strong, well-oiled local campaign machinery, and to fund advertising in traditional media outlets—especially for senatorial races.

In this regard, it will be important to mount an aggressive party-building effort at the local level in terms of both the membership base and participation in local governance, with a particular focus on the majority of voters who are in the lower income classes. Local organization is a prerequisite for securing votes. It is also a good way to introduce alternative politics and socio-political reform, which political elites at the national level still resist. While a strategy of 'going local' does not directly contradict the national strategy of progressive politics, the two

campaigns compete over limited resources. The commitment to local expansion will therefore require deep reflection and careful strategizing.

### *The Million People March and the PDAF*

The Million People March of 26 August 2013 demonstrated the power of citizens and civil society over government political dynamics. This protest was in response to a billion-peso corruption scandal and resulted in the abolition of the PDAF, a lump-sum fund allocated to members of the Senate and House to be spent on their choice of social welfare or public works projects. The disbursement of the lump sum (e.g., selection of projects, contractors and intermediaries) was entirely at the discretion of the legislator.

The PDAF provided ‘frontline services’ and addressed the basic and welfare needs of the poorer segments of society, such as healthcare and education, entrepreneurial and technical skills training, school buildings and daycare facilities, and even decent roads, which the government cannot provide through its executive departments. However, because PDAF disbursement was solely at the discretion of parliamentarians, it also served as high-value currency for patronage. It turned the government’s inability to provide for citizens’ basic needs into a privilege that was distributed by politicians to their loyal followers. Historically, the PDAF has been a major source of corruption in government. In 2013, an exposure of ‘pork barrel’ corruption revealed a scandal involving three senators and Janette Lim Napoles, the head of several bogus NGOs through which the senators systematically plundered public funds.

The public uproar over the scandal is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, the strong, angry middle-class uprising emerged organically and leaderless through social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter, with calls for one million people to take to the streets. Second, the protests resulted in the abolition of the PDAF, effectively severing one of the major patronage ties through which traditional politicians maintained their political influence.

For Akbayan, the scandal over the PDAF and the citizen movement that emerged created a political opportunity to push for a major reform of the political system. It also tested the party’s political sophistication in balancing the interests of the party’s members with the demands of civil society, and the political interests of the coalition with those of the incumbent administration.

Akbayan's position on the PDAF has always been clear: it was a tool for patronage that was easily misused; thus, it should be replaced by a strong government programme that provides for the basic needs of the people. However, for as long as it was offered to members of the legislature, the party used its allocation (when it was provided) to ensure benefits to ordinary Filipinos in a transparent and accountable manner. While dynasties and local politicians used the PDAF to secure the loyalty of their supporters, in Akbayan's case there appears to be minimal correlation between the votes it won and PDAF disbursements.

The party leadership debated whether to call for the abolition of the PDAF and refuse its PDAF allocation in the 2014 national budget. A survey of grass-roots political officers revealed that while members understood the principle behind PDAF abolition, most placed equal, or greater, value on the services that the PDAF had made available to the party's constituents and disagreed with the proposal to refuse it. Thus, the party called for the unequivocal abolition of the PDAF in the 2014 budget, and the reallocation of PDAF funds to basic services such as health and education, as well as budget reform and freedom of information. To prevent the resurrection of the PDAF, the party identified policy alternatives that would prevent the misuse of public funds, such as freedom-of-information legislation. Akbayan joined the movement that arose from the PDAF scandal, making it clear that the party's main objective was to add its voice to the people who are fed up with corruption, to demand changes in the system and to ensure the prosecution of those involved in the scandal.

As noted above, the protest arose organically and virtually through social networking, and the individuals who decided to form a skeleton secretariat to coordinate the activities of the march insisted that it remain 'leaderless', much in the same way as the idea emerged. Akbayan regarded this second characteristic as particularly important, because it demonstrated the people's refusal to let public outrage be associated with the traditional leftist forces that had monopolized mass protests and mobilizations to engage the government. It was an indication that the people were not only fed up with corruption in government, but also rejected the left's traditional domination of public protest for their own political ends. According to Sylvia Estrada-Claudio, 'People are absolutely right to be leaderless. People have always been instrumentalized for others' anger. [And thus far]...people still cannot distinguish Akbayan from the left, which has instrumentalized their legitimate demands for so long.'<sup>15</sup>

A leaderless march also showed that the public's anger made no distinction between reform-oriented and corrupt politicians. It identified all politicians as part of the same 'establishment' that they were protesting against. For Akbayan, this emphasized the value of winning the hearts and minds of the people to the party's progressive cause, and determined the manner in which it engaged with the protesters.

The sudden announcement by President Aquino that the PDAF would be abolished called into question the survival of political dynasties and the traditional politicians who have thrived on the funds. The knee-jerk reaction of parliamentarians was to come to the defence of the PDAF. Akbayan, through the party's newly elected representative, Ibarra Gutierrez III, took a position against it. The party also made a particular effort to push the budget reform agenda to the forefront. Eventually, support for PDAF abolition gained ground in both chambers as the extent of the corruption was revealed. It reached a point at which arguing otherwise would be political suicide. Both chambers passed the budget without the usual lump-sum allocation to individual members. Parliamentarians seeking additional funding for their constituencies were thus required to follow regular procedures, such as endorsing a local organization's proposal to government departments for public works, and applying for scholarships and medical assistance. This necessitated meeting more stringent bureaucratic requirements, much earlier participation in the budget process and gaining departmental approval.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

At a time of increasing inequality—and when citizens are fed up with massive corruption and political parties' seeming inability to respond to the collapse of the global economy—politicians, the government and political parties in the Philippines are trying to regain the public's trust. The main lesson from Akbayan's experience is that, at such a critical juncture in history, accumulating state power is a viable option for civil society and social movements to achieve the changes in society that they have long fought for. However, being an activist political party does not mean only pushing for reform according to the dictates of civil society. It also requires sophisticated politics that allow the party to survive the elite's political strategies while remaining grounded in the social movements from which the party emerged.

The threat of being treated as the 'conscience' of the ruling elite is very real for political parties that emerge from social movements. It is easy for traditional political parties to echo the advocacy of progressive groups, and provide them with space in government, without committing to implementing their radical policies and reforms. The balance of power is still on the side of the established, elite political parties. The inherently uneven playing field that social movements and activist political parties face in their efforts to shape society from within government requires sophisticated politics that explore coalitions and compromises without abandoning the principles that define the organization or the mass base that constitutes its power and legitimacy. Activist political parties provide citizens with an alternative to the status quo that they can be part of.

The recommendations below are intended to guide citizens and social movements that seek to reform the political party system and respond to its changing dynamics. The strategies should be tailored to the social and political conditions that determine power relations within government institutions and developing democracies around the world. To ensure the successful launch of a political party from within social movements, the following recommendations are taken from Akbayan's experience.

1. Building an activist political party means aggregating the political interests of mass movements. Because such parties do not have the traditional political machinery that operates on the basis of elite networks and wealth, activist parties must ensure that they adequately represent the interests of social movements and achieve political and social policy gains for them.
2. Parties must give NGOs and mass movement organizations affiliated with the party, as well as the membership base at the local level, relative autonomy from the national leadership to make decisions on political alliances, advocacy campaigns and other aspects of political life.
3. Political parties that emerge from social movements must brand and conduct themselves as a political party, which often involves going beyond the usual advocacy and resorting to populist measures. It also means developing programmes and projects that will reach out to a majority of voters.
4. Parties must be ready to play the power game in order to defeat established politics. It is important to manage the diverse interests of political actors in bureaucracies, and create and maintain

alliances with key players. This also means balancing coalition politics and navigating internal politics by developing sophisticated strategies and compromising with allies without violating the party's fundamental principles.

5. It is difficult for an anti-establishment party to become part of a ruling coalition. It is important to learn the limits of coalition politics; being the 'junior partner' in a coalition of traditional politicians does not mean that an activist party will have a real impact or the leverage to implement radical reforms. First, the social conditions that will set the stage for such reforms must be created.
6. As an activist party accumulates political power, it must recognize the line between protest and 'establishment roles'. An appropriate combination of both may lead to significant gains for the party, civil society and citizen movements. In policy and legislation, parties must lead social movements to ensure follow-through and policy implementation. It is important to recognize that once a movement becomes a party, the public may consider it to be mainstream and withdraw support from it. To manage public perceptions and maintain the party's integrity, it must continually assert its independence from the ruling coalition.

To ensure the success of civil society and citizen movement engagement with government, the Philippine experience demonstrates the following:

1. It is important to differentiate between CSOs and citizen movements. There has been a tendency to instrumentalize citizens' anger for the left's (and civil society's) political ends. The organized left and civil society must respect the legitimacy of people's grievances on their own merits.
2. CSOs and citizen movements must maximize the government's piecemeal proposals for reform. It is important to translate the wider objective of reforming society into smaller policy proposals that can be implemented by government. Citizen movements should transform their anger into concrete actions to change social norms by crowd-sourcing policy proposals and measures that directly address governance problems.
3. Greater monitoring of government transactions and policies can be achieved by developing technical competence in the corresponding fields. This is to avoid a repeat of the 'pork barrel' scam.
4. It is important to reach out to the masses and campaign on issues that are relevant to ordinary citizens. Civil society is often occupied with advocacy for democratic and political rights, and social justice



for specific sectors of society. However, these campaigns are often too abstract for the poorer families that comprise the main voter base of the political elites. Creating campaigns or supporting government programmes that link these demographics with government institutions, or provide direct services to meet their basic needs, is a good starting point to organize the masses and introduce alternative politics and social organization.

The success of a political project by activist parties such as Akbayan depends on proving that it is possible to have an alternative to the current governance and politics. The only way to do this is by consolidating the energies of civil society and those citizens whose stake in improving society is highest, redefining political parties and putting alternatives into practice.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> The May 2010 census is available at <[www.nscb.gov.ph](http://www.nscb.gov.ph)>.
- <sup>2</sup> This figure is slightly lower than the 2009 and 2006 levels (20.5 and 21 per cent, respectively). The same survey revealed that, because of the country's growing population, the estimated number of poor families had risen from 3.8 million in 2006 to 4.2 million in 2012. The 2012 FIES estimated that 7.5 per cent of Filipino families are in extreme poverty, but the number of people in extreme poverty has remained steady at around 1.6 million since 2006. See <<http://www.census.gov.ph/survey/annual-poverty-indicator>> and <[http://www.nscb.gov.ph/pressreleases/2013/NSCB-PR-20131213\\_povertypress.asp](http://www.nscb.gov.ph/pressreleases/2013/NSCB-PR-20131213_povertypress.asp)>.
- <sup>3</sup> The EDSA People Power Revolution refers to the peaceful protest in February 1986 that took place on Manila's main thoroughfare, the Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (EDSA), after snap elections in 1985 led to Marcos being fraudulently declared the winner of the presidential race over Corazon Aquino, the democracy icon and widow of Senator Benigno Aquino Jr., one of the strongest critics of the dictatorship.
- <sup>4</sup> Quimpo (2010) describes Estrada's presidency as playing a 'pivotal role in the shift from clientelist to predatory politics'.
- <sup>5</sup> Sylvia Estrada-Claudio, meeting of the Akbayan Executive Committee, August 2013.

# **Chapter 5**

**Political Parties and Citizens:  
The Centro Democrático  
Liberal in Spain**

## Chapter 5

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Sean O'CURNEEN CAÑAS

# Political Parties and Citizens: The Centro Democrático Liberal in Spain

## Introduction

The Centro Democrático Liberal (CDL) is a political party in Spain. It was founded in 2006 and has representatives in a small number of municipalities across the country. The CDL has no significant financial backers or access to important national media. Throughout its early years of development, forming relations with CSOs has therefore been part of its strategy to gain visibility, establish partnerships and grow as a party. The CDL's efforts to establish itself have coincided with the emergence of an important nationwide citizen movement known as the Indignados, which has grabbed headlines all over the world. This chapter charts the CDL's relationship with CSOs in general and the Indignados in particular. It makes a set of practical recommendations for political parties that seek to engage with CSOs and citizen movements.

## Twenty-first century Spain and the birth of the CDL

### *From Centro Democrático y Social to CDL*

To understand how the CDL has interacted with CSOs and citizen movements, it is necessary to understand its *raison d'être*. This, in turn, requires a brief look at the history of its predecessor, the Centro Democrático y Social (CDS), and the country's recent democratic history. Spain's transition to democracy was steered by Adolfo Suárez, who was appointed prime minister by King Juan Carlos in July 1976.<sup>1</sup> The first democratic elections took place in June 1977, for which

Suárez brought together a coalition of social democrats, liberals and Christian democrats—the Unión de Centro Democrático (UCD). This coalition of differing and divergent ideologies lasted five years; because of its internal differences, it was destined to collapse as soon as the democratic system became more consolidated. Suárez himself left the UCD in July 1982 to found the CDS. In the 1982 general election, the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) won 202 of the 350 seats available, and the conservative Alianza Popular (AP) became the main opposition party with 107 seats. With his new party, Suárez won just two seats in Parliament. The disintegration of the UCD and the consolidation of the socialists and conservatives marked the beginning of the struggle in Spain to create a centrist-liberal party to challenge the two main parties.

The efforts of Suárez to build such a third force lasted just over a decade. Having surged to 19 seats in 1986, the CDS lost all of its seats in 1993. Suárez had already resigned and retired from politics two years earlier. Although there were attempts to revive the party's fortunes, it never recovered; it limped along for more than a decade thanks to a hard core of local councillors.<sup>2</sup> In January 2006, the CDS merged with the conservative Partido Popular (PP),<sup>3</sup> which governed from 1996 until 2004, when it became the main national opposition party.

The decision to disband and join the PP was by no means unanimous. Sixteen local councillors who disagreed with the move founded a new party—the CDL. The CDL's first electoral test came the following year in the local elections of May 2007. It more than doubled its number of local councillors to 39 around the country. By January 2008, the CDL had attracted new people to the party from several fronts, who came together to steer the party through its next stage of development. Thus began a new attempt to build a centrist-liberal political party in Spain.

### ***Spain in 2008***

While the CDL was putting together this new team, Spain was in the midst of both a general election campaign and a surreal national debate about whether there was an economic crisis (*Elcomercio.es* 2008). When the sub-prime crisis wreaked havoc on the global economy in the summer of 2007, Spanish banks appeared at first to have been shielded from the worst effects. This allowed the PSOE government to deny, during the 2008 election campaign, that Spain had been affected. Thus, despite the PP's determined efforts, Prime Minister José Luis

Rodríguez Zapatero improved on his party's performance from four years earlier, securing 169 seats to the PP's 154.

Although Spain's electoral system is officially proportional, this still-maturing democracy is for all practical purposes a two-party system. Since the first elections in 1977, when 81 per cent of the seats in the lower chamber were held by two parties, the percentage gradually crept up to 92 per cent in 2008, dropping only slightly in 2011. There are two main drivers of the two-party system. First, constituencies are defined by provinces—relatively small geographical areas with a limited number of seats allocated to them—which requires a high concentration of votes to get elected to Parliament and favours larger, wealthier parties. Second, strong regionalist or nationalist parties often capture votes that could otherwise go to a third centrist-liberal party.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there have been signs in the early 21st century that the electorate is tiring of the two main political parties. In this context, the CDL began an attempt in 2008 to develop a liberal-centrist party that could aspire to emulate at least the best results of the CDS in the 1980s. Since it had virtually no access to the media, most of which is aligned with one of the two main parties, a crucial element of the CDL's strategy involved engaging directly with citizens' CSOs.

## **The CDL, CSOs and citizen movements: a tale of power, political culture and the search for a common language**

### ***Civil society and the power of power***

In October 2009, it was clear that, faced with extremely limited financial resources and little media access, the CDL should establish a fluid dialogue with civil society in order to gain visibility, attract members and supporters, and enrich its policy content. Over time, experience at the national level proved to be very different from that at the local level, which provided an important lesson. The party's ideology and member networks led it to focus its attention on national associations specializing in renewable energy; medical research; alternative medicine; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual rights; female entrepreneurs; small and medium-sized businesses; scientists and researchers; and teachers' associations. Yet the CDL was simply not of interest to most of these national associations.

However, the response at the local level in particular during the lead-up to local elections was completely different. Local associations, including

those dealing with similar policy matters as those described above, readily engaged with the CDL, even taking the initiative to contact the party to influence policy proposals. In those areas where the CDL had elected representatives on the town council or was expected to gain a seat at the next election, local CSOs actively sought to open lines of communication with the party.

This difference in engagement at the local and national levels was due to two factors. First, at the local level many CDL members personally knew the local CSO representatives, so a relationship of trust already existed. Second, and most importantly, at the local level the CDL was either already in power, and therefore taking decisions that affected the local community, or in a position to influence municipal decisions because it had a good chance of winning the election or gaining representation on the town council; at the national level, the CSOs knew that the CDL would not be in a position of power anytime soon. The CSOs thus focused their efforts on engaging with political parties that had institutional power.

Yet there is a grey zone, as demonstrated by the CDL's activity at the EU level. As the EU has developed, a tier of supranational government has emerged with significant competences and powers. There is an executive, the European Commission, and a European Parliament that co-legislates with a Council of Ministers of member state governments. These receive advice from two further assemblies: one of politicians from around the EU who hold elected mandates at the subnational level, known as the Committee of the Regions (CoR); and another of representatives from civil society called the European Economic and Social Committee.

Because the CDL had strong ties with leading politicians at the EU level from its earliest days,<sup>5</sup> it was in a position to open doors for a number of CSOs. The CDL's Brussels contacts were valuable for CSOs that felt ignored by Spanish political parties at the national level and wished to apply pressure on them from the EU level, or needed to communicate directly with EU institutions to address their problems. This was the case in particular for four citizens' associations in five different regions of Spain: (1) Galician victims of the Afinsa pyramid fraud scheme; (2) a trade union of the Madrid-based national public broadcaster RTVE; (3) the victims of the 2011 Lorca earthquake; and (4) the Asociación Abusos Urbanísticos ¡NO! (AUN), an association focused on irregularities related to planning applications, which mainly represents European

expatriates who bought property in Spain in the early 2000s and discovered problems with the legal status of their property. All of these CSOs experienced growing frustration with local, regional or national authorities, repeatedly accusing them of slow progress, indifference and favouritism.

### *Afinsa, Galicia*

Afinsa was a credit company that was accused in May 2006 of massive fraud that affected the life savings of 350,000 private investors, many of them pensioners.<sup>6</sup> Frustrated at the lack of progress on their claims at the national level, the association of victims in Galicia contacted the CDL branch in the region, asking for help in being heard by the European Parliament. One of the CDL's key members in Brussels visited them to hear their case, which was followed up in February 2011 with a formal petition by the representative of the victims to be heard in person by the European Parliament. The CDL team in Brussels personally knew the key official to contact on the Petitions Committee, so they submitted the request on behalf of the victims and ensured that they received a written response.

### *The public broadcaster in Madrid*

The European Commission challenged a new law in the European Court of Justice (ECJ) that changed the funding mechanism for national public television (Ros 2011). Fearing that up to 3,000 jobs could be lost if the ECJ ruled against the Spanish Government, television workers who were members of the Asociación Profesional Libre e Independiente (Free and Independent Professional Association) asked the CDL to arrange a meeting with members of the European Parliament to urge them to initiate an EU law establishing criteria for funding public broadcasting. Thanks to its contacts with the European liberal parties, the CDL arranged a bilateral meeting for three trade unionists with the vice president of the European Parliament's Culture Committee, Morten Lokkegaard.

### *The Lorca earthquake*

Lorca is a town of 60,000 people in the south-eastern region of Murcia. At the time of the earthquake, the CDL had no elected councillors on Lorca's town council, but did have an active local group campaigning for the local elections. The group had direct contacts with a number of the people displaced to temporary accommodation following the

earthquake. Out of frustration at the slow progress in rebuilding their homes, and knowing that the regional president was also the vice president of the CoR, the association of victims asked the CDL to transmit a number of concrete proposals directly to him, which it did. The victims found it easier to deliver their message through the CDL in Brussels than locally in Murcia.

### *The AUN and planning irregularities*

By far the CDL's longest and most-developed relationship with a CSO is with the AUN. The AUN is an association of mainly European expats who bought property in Spain and have since discovered a range of problems, such as lack of planning approval, properties retroactively declared illegal or the absence of compulsory environmental impact assessments. The party's interaction with the AUN began in 2009 when it agreed to include one of its members as No. 4 on the CDL's list of candidates for the European Parliament. Since then, the relationship has continued in various ways, with well over 200 email exchanges sharing information, brainstorming on lobbying ideas and identifying opportunities for collaboration. The EU dimension has always been of most interest to the AUN. In this respect, the CDL was able to use its EU contacts to represent the AUN's views at two key moments in 2011. In September, the CDL persuaded the liberal political group in the CoR to table a number of amendments on the AUN's behalf to a CoR opinion on the implementation of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. In October, when Spain's deputy ombudsman participated in a debate at the European Parliament, the CDL privately discussed the victims' concerns with him, as well as publicly during the debate.

These examples demonstrate that, although in general terms, the chances are low that a political party that is not represented in a democratic institution will be able to open key doors for CSOs, those chances improve considerably if the party is part of a broader political family that holds institutional power. In the CDL's case, it is 'the EU liberal family', but this might equally apply to parties that are junior partners in a coalition. The conclusion therefore remains the same: institutional power and the degree to which a party can provide access to it gives a political party the power to interact with CSOs. CSOs, on the whole, understand how democratic politics works; their long-term strategies involve engaging with the system.



### ***Citizen movements and the complexities of politics***

Zapatero's joy at being re-elected with an increased majority was short-lived. Just weeks before the election, he had been able to confidently assert that the global crisis had not affected Spain. By January 2009, however, the country's credit rating had been downgraded and the economy had contracted by nearly 2 per cent—the largest three-month contraction since 1960. Unemployment rose dramatically and continued to rise throughout that year and the next, reaching 4.7 million by the end of 2010—over 20 per cent of the working population. Fears that Spain would require a bailout or even bring down the euro led the EU, its member states and even the US administration to pressure Zapatero to rein in the deficit, which in 2009 had increased to 11.1 per cent of GDP (Expansion.com 2010). The PSOE prime minister found himself going against his political instincts and applying tough austerity measures, which caused further anxiety among the population.

Several social media pages and websites were set up throughout 2010 calling for citizens to take action, but with little effect. After the Arab uprisings began in January 2011, however, several groups came together in Spain to create a Facebook page, *iDemocracia real YA!* (Real Democracy Now), organize a mass demonstration and draft a manifesto that included a number of proposals to regenerate Spanish democracy and tackle the economic crisis, including the creation of a citizens' action group to coordinate pro-citizen movement groups. They invited citizens to join a demonstration on 15 May 2011, just one week before local and regional elections.

On 15 May, people took to the main squares of Madrid and several provincial capitals throughout the country. By 17 May, around 10,000 citizens were camping in the Puerta del Sol, a square in Madrid, outside the headquarters of the regional government. The protesters rapidly became known as the *Indignados*, inspired by the 2010 book *¡Indignaos!* by the French author Stéphane Hessel, although they are now just as frequently referred to as *Movimiento 15M* (the 15 May Movement). With only five days to go until the local and regional elections, most political parties were scrambling to understand the significance of the movement, and trying to engage with it. Given the visible hostility the protesters displayed towards politicians, the CDL sent a member undercover in order to mingle, listen and talk; he discouraged the CDL from pursuing further contact before the elections. He reported that the level of anger among the demonstrators, and their disgust at the

numerous revelations of corruption in politics, meant that anyone attempting to work within the political party system was regarded with disdain at best, and aggression at worst.

The CDL increased its number of local councillors by 50 per cent in the election. The overriding preoccupation for most political parties, however, was attempting to make sense of the massive citizen movement that was proving to be much more than the one- or two-day demonstrations that had been seen many times before throughout Spain's democratic history. As time went by, the nature of the movement became clearer, as did the fact that the drivers behind it were mainly left-wing economic ideas.<sup>7</sup> The movement also received considerable support from left-wing media. For a centrist-liberal party such as the CDL, which was still working to get off the ground and therefore able to offer the movement much less, these developments all but closed off any possibility of cooperation with the Indignados—particularly on the economic front, which was, and still is, the main concern of Spaniards.

In its early days, the Indignados movement was huge and diverse, and the CDL was convinced that there were opportunities to collaborate. Perhaps the biggest challenge that the CDL faced in engaging with the Indignados was that they had no clear leadership, and rapidly became absorbed in their own internal organization. In their attempts to keep the movement going, they organized democratic assemblies throughout the country, with corresponding rules for participation, a radio station and various discussion forums. Inevitably, as decisions had to be taken on internal functioning, the prioritization of work and the tactics to follow, the movement experienced internal conflict, and only the most committed with time to dedicate to the movement remained part of the inner core (Pérez-Lanzac 2013). Some even tried to convert the movement into a political party, while others broke away to set up a separate political party.

Of the thousands of undoubtedly independent citizens who first participated in the protest, many no doubt came to realize that building an alternative to the political system is difficult, and requires an inspiring but achievable vision, as well as determination, dedication, stamina and a lot of time. They may have learned that while they may not like political parties and politicians, the job of building and offering a set of proposals that are credible, that can gain the support of the electorate, and that can then be enacted is by no means easy. Many of those who participated in the early days were no doubt of interest to the CDL and

perhaps potentially interested in a party like the CDL. Many of the less ideologically committed, unable to dedicate more time than they already had, eventually returned to their daily lives. Since they were no longer active in any kind of organized structure, identifying them became, for the CDL, with its limited communication resources, like searching for a needle in a haystack.

### ***The language of twenty-first century communication***

The Indignados were highly effective in using communications technology—particularly social media, websites and Internet radio—which the CDL had found quite difficult. As a small and growing party, it was vital for the CDL to find ways to communicate directly with citizens and potential supporters, bypassing the traditional media that, for various reasons, were mostly inaccessible to the party. The CDL has not managed to exploit the full potential of social media, primarily because its success depends on three factors: generating daily content, dedicating several hours a day to promoting that content and finding new supporters on a daily basis. The CDL has always relied exclusively on volunteers to develop the party, so it has never been possible to manage social media consistently and reliably. The Indignados movement, however, was born out of successful Facebook pages. From the start, experts in IT and online technology played a key role in its success.

The fact that the CDL was unable to match the level of technical expertise of the Indignados in effect created a form of language (or even psychological) barrier that in all likelihood prevented further interaction and even collaboration, in particular in geographical locations where the CDL had a stronger presence.

## **Conclusions**

Citizens engaging in political activity outside of institutional or traditional structures is not new. For example, throughout history there have been many revolutions. Nonetheless, the scale, frequency and geographical spread of citizen movements in recent years has taken many by surprise. Citizens in Europe were showing signs of wanting to become involved in more unconventional political activity as early as 2002 (O'Curneen Cañas 2002). Nowadays, they appear to be growing increasingly frustrated with their elected representatives, and while

they may not want to replace political representatives altogether, or dedicate as much time to government affairs as politicians do, they are no longer willing to participate only at election time. Thus, as multiple studies have shown (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Norris 1999), people are either turning away from politics altogether or demanding greater involvement and finding new ways to communicate their demands. As a result, political parties, CSOs and citizen movements must find new ways to co-exist, complement and nurture each other, and tackle society's challenges together.

The relationship between political parties and CSOs is well established, and their roles in society are well defined. Political parties seek election to democratic institutions, and CSOs seek to influence the policy decisions of those parties in degrees that vary according to the parties' presence in government, or their capacity to influence government in a coalition or through parliamentary pressure. However, it is the relationship between political parties and citizen movements that is disrupting the status quo and requires greater analysis before the waters settle. While the problems of representative democracy may be resolved in such a way that citizen frustration might disappear, making citizen movements unnecessary, this will not happen anytime soon. Thus, citizen movements will form part of the political landscape for many years to come.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the CDL's experience, a series of recommendations for political parties and citizen movements on facilitating dialogue between political parties and citizens is presented below.

### ***What political parties should do before engaging with CSOs and citizen movements***

1. *Know your power.* Do you have institutional power or influence over institutional actors? This is the most direct route to bringing about change. Use it wisely to reach out to citizens, and consult widely with CSOs and citizen movement leaders to seek the broadest possible consensus. Do you have access to the media? If the media at the local, regional or national levels are interested in your views, use them to reach out to citizens. Have you got the capacity to mobilize members and voters? Establish a dialogue between your members

or supporters and citizens. Feed what you have heard from citizen movements into your regular channels of communication, and discuss and seek solutions. Understanding how much power you have is the first step toward successfully engaging with citizens. It will also help manage members' expectations in any negotiations with CSOs or citizen movements. Make sure your members are aware of the limitations of the party and the CSO/citizen movement, such as reliance on volunteers who have full-time jobs and family commitments that prevent regular commitment to political activity. Set realistic goals in order to minimize the risk of disappointment and conflict.

2. *Know and understand what you are offering.* Citizens and the media can easily check someone's facts and their knowledge of a subject. If your statements are inaccurate, you will lose credibility. Consult with members who are experts on the subject before making or issuing statements. If no members have expertise in the subject, try to consult elsewhere. If you are unable to consult, avoid taking a position.
3. *Understand and practise democracy.* Make sure you understand what it takes to have a democratic culture within your party, and ensure that it is practised, especially if you are engaging with citizen movements. They will want to see that they can trust you, and your own members will want reassurance that there have been no secret deals. For their part, CSOs will need to know how decisions are arrived at in your party in order to understand your constraints.
4. *Build trust—and beware of mistrust.* Building trust is one of the most important ingredients of a successful organization or partnership. It requires patience, transparency in working methods, frequent communication, and clear explanations of the choices made or to be made, as well as a culture in which disagreements are considered acceptable and are not viewed as attacks.

### ***Political parties engaging with CSOs***

CSOs are generally organized to work within the political system, and are often well informed about its possibilities and limitations. They also have clearly defined and publicized goals. Engaging with them is generally more straightforward than engaging with citizen movements, which by their very nature can be unpredictable.

1. *Identify CSOs that share common interests.* CSOs have a mission to influence policy and legislation. They will usually be happy to work

- with anyone with common interests. Find those that share your aims, and introduce your party and its objectives.
2. *Be selective according to where you have power.* CSOs will be most interested in working with you if you have institutional power or the power to influence those who hold institutional power—that is, if you are in opposition but can place certain items on the agenda for discussion. Know your power and tell the CSOs what power you have.
  3. *Invite CSOs to events, debates and policy forums.* Welcome their participation and input into the party's activities and policy development. CSOs can provide information, statistics, analyses and proposals that enrich the party's policies. Furthermore, regular contact will keep your party in tune with a key constituency and their needs. The CSOs will also often publicize what you do to advance their goals.

### ***How political parties can effectively engage with citizen movements***

1. *Be geographically focused and selective.* Focus on geographical areas where together you can make a difference at the local, regional or national level.
2. *Get to know their concerns.* Listen, read their literature, show an interest and suggest concrete actions you can take.
3. *Involve them in your work.* If there is common ground and a mutual interest in working together, introduce the movement's leaders to key people in your party and engage in joint brainstorming sessions to identify possible solutions.
4. *Respect their autonomy.* If citizens are in a movement, it might often be because they mistrust political parties or have not found one they can identify with. Do not expect people to rush to join your party. Although you may be working together on certain initiatives, show that you respect their autonomy as a separate organization. Clearly label their work with their logo, and ensure that they have their own space at meetings or joint events.
5. *Give them feedback.* If they are not involved through to the end of your party's policy decisions, ensure that they are kept informed of developments—what has been taken on board, what has not and why not.
6. *Do not rush the relationship.* If there are elections on the horizon, the citizen movement is likely to be suspicious of your interest in them.

Tell yourself and your teams that this is a long-term relationship that might bear fruit for elections further down the line, and that positive results should not be expected in the short term. Reassure the citizen movement by offering a calendar of joint activities or meetings that goes well beyond the next election.

### ***How citizen movements can establish a constructive dialogue with political parties***

1. *Stand for something—not just against something.* Make sure you provide suggestions for solutions; otherwise, the work of the political parties and elected representatives is made more difficult. Offering a solution to a well-known problem is better than simply protesting about its existence.
2. *Do not make the mistake of generalizing* (e.g., ‘*all politicians are corrupt*’). Generalizations are rarely accurate, and they can easily alienate the very people from whom the movement is seeking solutions.
3. *Try to provide your followers with guidelines.* When inviting people to demonstrate, give them guidelines on acceptable conduct.
4. *Focus on a few specific issues.* Trying to replicate political parties will undermine you. The strength of citizen movements lies in keeping attention focused on one or two specific matters that are being neglected by political leaders and political parties.
5. *Practise democracy within the movement, and avoid authoritarian attitudes.* In this way, citizen movements can lead by example and gain credibility among their followers and the wider public, as well as with existing democratic political parties. Most importantly, by acting democratically, citizen movements contribute to strengthening and solidifying the democracy that exists in their society.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Technically, Spain’s head of government is referred to as the *presidente del gobierno* (president of the government). The function, however, is identical in concept to what is widely referred to internationally as a prime minister.
- <sup>2</sup> The CDS had 142 local councillors throughout the country in 1995. By 2003, this had dropped to 52.
- <sup>3</sup> The AP changed its name to PP in 1989.
- <sup>4</sup> According to an April 2013 opinion poll by Spain’s national sociological

research centre, 13 per cent of Spanish voters regularly describe themselves as liberal (see <[http://datos.cis.es/pdf/Es2984rei\\_A.pdf](http://datos.cis.es/pdf/Es2984rei_A.pdf)>, p. 55). Examples of political parties that frequently capture the support of centrist voters dissatisfied with both conservatives and socialists include, but are not limited to, the Partido Andalucista, which is active only in the southern region of Andalucía; the Coalición Canaria, which is active only in the Canary Islands and a member of the liberal group in the European Union's Committee of the Regions; and the Partido Regionalista de Cantabria, which is active only in the northern coastal region of Cantabria.

- <sup>5</sup> The author of this chapter, who has been secretary general of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in the CoR since 2004, joined the CDL in 2007 and was elected as the party's international relations secretary in 2008. In this capacity, he regularly attends key meetings of the European Liberal Party and the European Parliament, and thus has direct access to liberal leaders at the EU level. In 2008, the Secretary General of the European Small Hydropower Association joined the CDL, and, through her, the party has access to key politicians in the energy field at the EU level.
- <sup>6</sup> Money-marketuk.com, 'Forum and Afinsa Case Awaits Resolution', 2 May 2011, <<http://www.money-marketuk.com/Ausbanc-Inhouse-News/1569-forum-and-afinsa-case-awaits-resolution.html>>.
- <sup>7</sup> The Economy Group of the Indignados presented a list of 15 proposals in late July 2011. See Pintos 2011; Flores 2011.





# **Chapter 6**

**Women's CSOs and Political Parties in Romania: Lessons from the 2012 Civic Protests**

## Chapter 6

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# Women's CSOs and Political Parties in Romania: Lessons from the 2012 Civic Protests

## Introduction

This chapter examines the communicational dynamic between adaptive and flexible CSOs. It focuses on women's issues and citizen protest movements on the one hand, and political parties on the other, against the background of the extended protests that took place in Romania in the first half of 2012. These protests led to two changes in the government coalition and a significant reshuffling of the Romanian political landscape on the eve of the 2012 parliamentary elections. With this in mind, the chapter problematizes the social media (for example, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) strategies of Romanian political parties and identifies several challenges that these parties face in the context of citizens' increasingly fluid positions on political matters. It focuses on the digitally networked action (DNA) of CSOs focused on women's issues to examine how future interactions can improve political party representation of citizens' interests. The chapter concludes with a series of recommendations for Romanian political parties on developing a better social media presence to engage with citizens and improve the representation of women in politics.

## Political parties and CSOs in Romania

Romania has followed a similar trajectory of democratic political development to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. After the fall of the Ceaușescu dictatorship in 1989, the country embraced the basic principles of representative democracy and adopted a market

economy (Miroiu 2010). This was accompanied, however, by a dramatic drop in women's representation in politics,<sup>1</sup> which had a negative effect on women's opportunities to participate from a position of parity with men in democratic decision-making. Tellingly, in early 2012 women made up less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians, less than 13 per cent of county councillors and less than 4 per cent of elected city mayors in the country. The advent of multiparty democracy also witnessed a return to the traditionalist view that politics was 'improper' for women, which consequently led women to avoid party politics and opt instead for a more active presence in CSOs (Miroiu and Popescu 2004: 299–300; Norocel 2009: 247).

In a little over two decades of democratic rule, all three of the major political actors that constitute the 'primordial choice' (Mair 1997: 13) for citizens with voting rights—the centre-left Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat, PSD), the liberal National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal, PNL) and the centre-right conservative Democratic Liberal Party (Partidul Democrat Liberal, PDL)—have alternated in power by building various coalitions. As in other European democracies, the rotation of these political parties in government was generally perceived as a process of democratic normalization (see Best and Higley 2010; Higley and Gunther 1995). Yet the erosion of the role of Romanian political parties in the process of democratic governance has been criticized, with accusations that the entire political elite has become increasingly remote from its constituencies and only remembers its primary task of representing citizens' interests at election time. There have been calls for the introduction of new forms of direct democracy through plebiscite and a quest for new forms of civic democratic engagement (see Canovan 1999; Mouffe 2000; Rosanvallon 2008). This citizen disenchantment is also reflected in the low level of citizen involvement in political parties. As of the end of 2011, the PSD had 409,833 members, the PNL 131,908 members and the PDL 88,860 members out of a total of 18.3 million citizens with voting rights.<sup>2</sup> This process of erosion has also increased the prominence of party leaders in politics (Best and Higley 2010: 11; Norocel 2009: 247–8) and moved political party competition along a single cleavage—between being either in government or in opposition (Mair 1997).

A number of structural shifts have taken place more recently over which political parties appear to have little leverage. Since Romania joined the EU in January 2007, the country's political parties have experienced a gradual but continual transfer of their political power from the national

to the EU level. This development was accompanied not by a serious strengthening of the legislative powers of the European Parliament, but by increased expert specialization and a growing role for the judiciary at both the EU and national levels (Wallace et al. 2012). This gave rise to frustration among citizens and subsequent appeals for increased citizen involvement in political decision-making processes, and the situation became more acute in the aftermath of the 2008 economic and financial crisis.

Such appeals have been answered by *adaptive and flexible* CSOs and less-structured citizen movements that generally aim to address 'the inability of electoral/representative politics to keep its promises' (Rosanvallon 2008: 274) by developing indirect forms of democracy in the Romanian context. These CSOs closely monitor political parties and hold them accountable for their policies and actions. They mobilize civic resistance against policies deemed to be against the interests of ordinary people, and use the judiciary to hold politicians suspected of misconduct accountable. This chapter analyses two such adaptive and flexible CSOs focused on women's issues: the Centre for Curriculum Development and Gender Studies (Centrul de Dezvoltare Curriculară și Studii de Gen, FILIA) and Feminism in Romania (Feminism în România, FRONT). Both CSOs are based in Bucharest. Despite their small size, with only about 12 activists each, they successfully focused attention on women's issues during the 2012 civil society protests that were directed mainly against the government's austerity measures, but also the increasing remoteness of political parties from the grievances of ordinary citizens (Stoica 2012).

Another feature of these protests was their fluid and rather amorphous nature, which brought together individual citizens under the imperatives of the moment. This trend reflects the increased fluidity of the political preferences of citizens who mobilize more often around specific political issues driven by CSOs—such as the demolition of heritage buildings in Bucharest, the proposed Roșia Montană cyanide-based gold extraction in the Carpathian Mountains or the expedient privatization of healthcare services—and less so based on ideological convictions. It is illustrative that only 39.3 per cent of registered voters voted in the November 2008 parliamentary elections, which dropped to 27.2 per cent for the June 2009 European elections.<sup>3</sup>

Indirect forms of democratic expression by citizens indicate a significant transformation that is also demonstrated in other electoral democracies,

in which a consistent percentage of citizens, particularly the younger generation, appear to shun traditionally organized political parties—especially large party organizations and rigid leadership structures—and traditional CSOs such as trade unions and religious organizations. They instead support *adaptive and flexible* CSOs or citizen movements, which have a framework for collective action based on DNA though social media (Bennett and Segerberg 2012: 743), that affords a different and more individualized means of political engagement, and demonstrates high resilience across different conditions, issues and scales (Bennett and Segerberg 2012). In this context, the DNA infrastructure refers to the collection of social media that facilitates such collective action. The civic protests that took place in early 2012 are used below to assess the DNA infrastructure of the selected CSOs.

A few observations are necessary. First, the DNA and adjoining infrastructure of Romanian CSOs and their members who are engaged in women's issues are used below to (1) identify possible means of social media communication for Romanian political parties and (2) illustrate how political parties in general can use these means to engage with citizens and more flexible CSOs. In other words, the CSOs discussed below should be understood in the wider framework of the civil protest that unfolded in Romania in the first half of 2012. Second, it is important to keep in mind that the DNA infrastructure has rarely been used separately from other, more established means of organization, such as traditional face-to-face meetings, coalition building and issue brokering. It has been successfully used to supplement these methods and create a more fluid architecture for organization and communication (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Livingston and Asmolov 2010; Polletta 2002). Third, Internet connectivity—and, consequently, social media usage—in Romania is skewed, with a high concentration in Bucharest and larger urban areas. In 2012, Romania ranked last in the EU in household Internet connectivity, with just 50 per cent penetration across the country.<sup>4</sup> The percentage was significantly higher in Bucharest—approximately 79 per cent<sup>5</sup>—and roughly similar between genders (48.1 per cent women compared with 51.6 per cent men).<sup>6</sup>

## **The gender aspect of the 2008 economic crisis in Romania**

On the eve of the 2008 global economic crisis, the centre-right PDL initially formed a governing coalition with the centre-left PSD, before forming

a government with the centre-right Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România, UDMR/Româniai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, RMDSZ), which represents the Hungarian minority in mainstream Romanian politics. The centre-right government embraced the message of economic austerity and pursued an agenda of deep structural change despite widespread dissatisfaction among citizens.<sup>7</sup> These developments need to be understood in the context of the contemporary laissez-faire market economic models at work around the world. The various Romanian governmental formulas that attempted to emulate these models identified the traditional family as the most suitable social institution to compensate for the streamlining of the state apparatus. Consequently, centre-right ministers endorsed the traditional family structure as the most suitable setting to ensure the maintenance of a disciplined workforce, stimulate and regulate consumerism, and provide childcare and social security, under the guise of a much-acclaimed return to traditional values (Lancaster 2006: 117).

The welfare infrastructure built during communism is crumbling as a consequence of chronic state underfunding. The enforced 25 per cent salary cut for state employees in May 2010 has particularly affected domains in which women are over-represented, such as education and healthcare, but circumvented those dominated by men, including the police and national defence forces and the intelligence services (Iancu 2011: 29–35). Contributing economically to the family budget has been added to the traditional gender roles that emphasize women's central role in taking care of family members. There are contradictory policies on women and childcare in relation to work—encouraging the internalization of childcare within the family, yet also stipulating the externalization of childcare (albeit with childcare subsidies being constantly cut back) to prompt women to return to work (Băluță 2011: 64–5).

Matters of widespread misogyny and gender-based violence continue to be ignored, both within the family and in the public sphere, as do women's rights to their own bodies—especially on issues of abortion rights and sexual health. A number of governmental institutions dealing with such issues were retrenched in response to the crisis.<sup>8</sup> Last but not least, the burning issue of the equal representation of women in politics—less than 10 per cent of Romanian parliamentarians are women—has constantly been dismissed as a secondary issue and a distraction from current political priorities (Miroiu 2010: 589).

## The 2012 civil protest in University Square

The pursuit of an austerity-led political agenda was met with widespread civil protests at the beginning of 2012. A televised debate on the planned privatization of the Romanian medical emergency system led to the resignation of its founder, Raed Arafat, and the initiation on 16 January 2012 of a series of protests in Bucharest and other urban centres. Initially, the civic protests were in support of Arafat, but they quickly morphed into a politically non-aligned civil protest against the entire political class, particularly against the austerity measures of successive Romanian governments. The demonstrations attracted a fluctuating number of demonstrators—from roughly 1,500 on 16 January<sup>9</sup> to over 10,000 on 19 January 2012,<sup>10</sup> in Bucharest alone. Following weeks of protests, on 9 February 2012 the government of Emil Boc II—the PDL allied with the UDMR/RMDSZ and some other minor parliamentary groups—resigned. It was replaced by a government led by Mihai Razvan Ungureanu, made up of the same coalition parties. On 27 April, the Ungureanu Government also fell as a result of a vote of no confidence. It was replaced on 7 May by a caretaker government led by Victor Viorel Ponta I—the PSD allied with the PNL and other minor parties and parliamentary groups in the Social Liberal Union (Uniunea Social Liberală, USL). Around this time, the protests ended.

University Square (Piața Universității) in Bucharest was the focal point of the protests, although similar demonstrations were organized in 52 other urban centres across the country.<sup>11</sup> From early on, participating CSOs organized their protests with the help of DNA infrastructure—an interconnected system of blogs, Facebook profiles and, to some extent, Twitter—and directed their protest at both the governing coalition and the parliamentary opposition. Among the most prominent CSOs involved in or supporting the protests in University Square were: Alburnus Maior—Save Roșia Montană (Salvați Roșia Montană),<sup>12</sup> an ecological group protesting against cyanide-based gold extraction; ActiveWatch,<sup>13</sup> a media-monitoring agency in support of human rights; and the Clean Romania Alliance (Alianța România Curată),<sup>14</sup> an umbrella organization focused on the rule of law, democratization and human rights. The entire political class was accused of being more interested in forming government coalitions in various guises than governing the country and being accountable to its citizens. On several occasions, the protesters vehemently opposed the presence of opposition leaders among the speakers in University Square.<sup>15</sup>



The social media presence achieved mixed results. The Piața Universității Facebook page collected 51,360 likes at the time, but only 50 people mentioned it in their Facebook conversations. The corresponding Twitter account registered just 97 followers and followed only four other Twitter profiles, although the account did send out 1,716 tweets. The YouTube channel, which documented the protests in University Square, initially contained 30 videos grouped in a specific playlist, of which 23 are still publicly available. Among them, the most popular, which documented the initial protests on 14 January 2012, registered 101,422 views. The video of the 8 March demonstrations, however, registered just 465 views, although the anonymous YouTube post that recorded the same event registered 1,247 views—perhaps giving a more accurate picture of the interest in the demonstrations.

From the beginning, FILIA and FRONT were among those protesting. They had a clear agenda for improving the situation of women and combating gender-based discrimination in Romania in the context of the extended economic recession and successive budget cuts that had affected women particularly hard. Both are interconnected through a dense DNA infrastructure (e.g., blogs and websites, Twitter accounts, YouTube channels and Facebook pages) with a worldwide network of locally, regionally and globally active CSOs focused on women's issues.

FILIA was founded as a women's issue CSO in 2000 to promote equality, women's empowerment; gender-sensitive public policy; research and studies that incorporate a gender dimension; women's political participation and the political representation of women's interests; social inclusion; and public policies that support the development of a gender-sensitive public-private partnership and reconcile women's family life with their professional development.<sup>16</sup> FILIA's civic engagement is structured along three lines of activity. First, it conducts research on the level of democratization in gender relations in Romania and offers specialist gender expertise to public institutions and other interested civic actors. Second, FILIA has been involved in projects and public policy programmes that aim to increase women's participation in the public sphere, to improve gender equality and add a gender dimension to public policies, increasing the visibility of women's contributions to the fields of culture, education and economics, for example. Third, in the area of institutional development, FILIA maintains the only gender-themed library in Romania that is fully open to the wider public.<sup>17</sup>

FRONT was founded in 2011. The definition of feminism to which it subscribes acknowledges that feminism is intrinsically linked to democracy. It affirms the necessity to represent the interests of all citizens in order to safeguard their rights and dignity. Any violation of these principles on the grounds of innate sexual attributes—either male or female—is thereby unacceptable. FRONT’s civic manifesto begins with an acknowledgement that:

In Romania women are poorer than men. In Romania, women are victims of domestic violence. When attempting to join the labour force they meet supplementary obstacles just because they are women, and once employed their work is paid less, they have fewer opportunities to reach positions of leadership, and they are generally confronted with a double work burden (at home and in the workplace).<sup>18</sup>

### ***The gender aspect of the University Square demonstrations***

The University Square protesters were a highly heterogeneous mix of various CSOs, ad hoc citizens’ groups and even football fans—labelled football hooligans (*ultrași*) in media reports. From early on, women were a constant presence among the protesters gathered in the square and on social media. Despite their small size and their specific focus (Lee 2011), from the beginning FILIA and FRONT opted for unambiguous slogans in support of women’s issues. The major bone of contention was women’s under-representation at the political level in Romania. Their messages were quickly picked up by the mainstream media—one consequence of the extensive media contacts established by their activists. One FILIA activist declared in a television interview:

I came to protest because women’s interests are not represented. ...I think I voice women’s interests because the government [austerity] measures have impacted negatively the feminized sectors such as health and education. ...The Interior Ministry has money [while] battered women die in their homes [and] the National Agency for Family Protection has been abolished. I do not understand why the crisis must be coped with at their expense. It seems there is always money for a lot of other things. But there is no financing for kindergartens, no financing for measures to prevent violence [against women], and no financing for the sectors where that overwhelmingly work in either. ...I want to underline that there are a lot of women demonstrating in the square tonight, and that [in Romania] we have not only [male] citizens but female citizens too, and this government has made them completely invisible.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, a FRONT activist commented in the mainstream media on the gendered aspects of the demonstrations, stressing that women were an active and coherent presence among the demonstrators and appealing for greater awareness of women's issues. Consequently, several FILIA and FRONT slogans were adopted by the wider mass of protesters in University Square, many of whom underlined the gender aspects of their grievances by referring to specific issues in particularly feminine terms.<sup>20</sup>

## **DNA infrastructure and the 8 March demonstrations**

Indicative of the importance that women's issues were given by those participating in the civil protests is the fact that the 8 March 2012 protests in University Square had a specific topic related to the political representation of women, and more generally addressed the issue of women's rights in Romanian society. Under the slogan 'We want representation, not trinkets', women and men gathered in University Square to discuss and chant slogans about the situation of women in Romania, pointing out the grim reality that 'women represent half the population of Romania and half the taxpayers, but their interests and needs are not represented in Romanian parliamentary democracy'. Protesters accused the Boc II Cabinet of being more concerned with pointless aesthetic embellishments of the roadside while ignoring the pressing needs of women, such as nurseries and modern maternity services.<sup>21</sup> On the eve of the demonstrations, which were coordinated through Facebook, a manifesto was published under the slogan: 'This 8 March We Fight!' It called attention to the situation of women in the country and emphasized that the two CSOs aimed to transcend the status of mere lobby groups for women's issues. More clearly, the CSOs highlighted a serious *democratic deficit*. The manifesto acknowledged from the beginning that:

Approximately 51 per cent of the Romanian population are women. However we have a majority only on paper. In everyday life the numbers are not in our favour:

Women represent only 9.7 per cent of parliamentarians, 12.6 per cent of county councillors, 10.8 per cent of local councillors...and 3.5 per cent of city mayors. We demand civilized, fair and real political representation!...

86 per cent of parental leave is taken by women. We want effective policies for the involvement of our children's fathers in child-rearing...

There has been a drastic 85 per cent reduction in nurseries and kindergartens since the 1990s. We pay our taxes, but our needs are never prioritized in the state budget. We want the development of much-needed welfare infrastructure (nurseries, kindergartens, homes for the elderly).

71 per cent of the victims of domestic violence are women. We are in danger in the streets and at home. We demand committed protection, shelters for abused and battered women and appropriate legislation to punish the perpetrators...

95 per cent of the victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women. We want stricter punishments for traffickers, a committed strategy to reduce prostitution, and prevention and protection programmes for the victims of trafficking.

Women are more vulnerable to extended and extreme poverty (in Europe, approximately 22 per cent of women aged 65 and older are at risk of poverty, compared to 16 per cent of men). We demand social protection for elderly women and coherent strategies for the prevention of, and fight against, poverty.<sup>22</sup>

The 8 March event was organized on Facebook by the acting vice chair of FILIA. It attracted 221 confirmations of participation, along with 69 more possible participants.<sup>23</sup> An anonymous YouTube post was later added to the event page, which attracted over 1,000 registered views. The event was also promoted on the Piața Universității Facebook page and the associated Twitter account. At the event, the acting FILIA chair declared that women were demonstrating in University Square because they wanted a ‘democratic Romania for women’, because ‘democracy needs women and women need democracy’. She emphasized the importance of solidarity and that there was also ‘sorority, not only fraternity’, that ‘8 March is International Women’s Day, a day that marks the struggle of women for equal rights and opportunities’. On such as day, she argued, women must remind society that the ‘public space belongs to women too’ and make their voices heard.<sup>24</sup> The female demonstrators also took the initiative to offer small bouquets of flowers to the gendarmerie deployed in University Square, a gesture meant to underline the non-violent nature of their demonstration and symbolically reverse the gender roles—women offering flowers to men in uniform on this day traditionally associated with women and womanhood.

The protesters also demonstrated against widespread gender discrimination and pervasive sexism in Romanian society, the general ignorance of women’s issues in political debate, and the massive budget cuts in the health-care, education and social-welfare sectors.

They chanted slogans such as: '1, 2, 3, down with misogyny!'; 'We demand political representation, not just flowers and trinkets!'; 'We want schools and hospitals, not to build cathedrals!'; 'We are outraged, not manipulated' and 'We demand nurseries and kindergartens, not new pavements and other fancy things!'.<sup>25</sup> An important moment of solidarity and cooperation between the diverse groups of citizens protesting in University Square was marked by the chanting of feminist slogans by the football supporters at the protest (Stoica 2012).

## **Protesting as a means of democratic engagement**

Upon closer inspection, it is apparent that the CSOs used their DNA infrastructure to mobilize in order to raise awareness of the situation of women in Romanian society, joining civic protests against the centre-right governing coalition but not necessarily in favour of the opposition parties. The CSOs dealing with women's issues were more concerned with questions of political accountability and the processes of democratic deliberation, and the need to make women's issues visible on the political agenda was crucial to their participation in the University Square protests. According to the former FILIA vice chair, the participation of CSOs with a women's agenda:

has been above all a civics lesson—a means to prove that citizens still have the power to remind the government of its obligations. I personally spent those two months demonstrating in the square because I wanted to prove that it is my right as a citizen to protest and because I saw this as a lesson [in civic participation] for those who remained at home. [T]ruly important were the participation of feminist activists [such as FILIA and FRONT] and the chanting of gendered slogans, the fact that for the first time women became visible [as women] in the context of civil protest in Romania: women who demanded their rights.<sup>26</sup>

The political parties reacted differently to the civil protests across Romania, depending on their position in the PDL-led governing coalition or the USL opposition. The official PDL line was combative. Some party members labelled the demonstrators 'worms', 'armed thugs', 'inept and violent scum' and an 'imbecilic television-brainwashed crowd'.<sup>27</sup> Initially endorsed by the centre-right governing coalition, the reaction of the police and gendarmerie was particularly harsh in the initial stages of the protests, using water cannon and teargas to disperse demonstrators. Demonstrators were arrested, and many people were reported injured

in the confrontations.<sup>28</sup> As a direct consequence of the protests, the Boc II Government resigned and was replaced by the Ungureanu Cabinet, which generally preserved the same governing coalition.

The USL opposition attempted to associate itself with the ongoing civic protests. At first, this had the opposite effect, as some of its representatives were booed and chased away while attempting to address the protesters in University Square. Despite these initial frictions, the USL organized its own demonstrations and marches to protest against government austerity measures and show solidarity with the protesters.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the PSD and PNL women's chapters separately expressed their support for the female demonstrators. In the parliamentary arena, the USL demanded an extraordinary joint session of both chambers of Parliament to discuss the political situation and advocated early elections as a means to address it. In the months to come, the civil protests gradually leaned toward support for the USL and its political line. The centre-right Ungureanu Cabinet lost a vote of no confidence in April 2012 and was replaced by the caretaker Ponta I Cabinet of the USL coalition. Overall, there was a rather low level of interaction between the social media infrastructure of Romania's political parties and the DNA of the CSOs studied and of other participants in University Square.

## **FILIA and FRONT and their DNA infrastructures**

FILIA and FRONT were among the most active CSOs that successfully put women's issues on the public agenda. They had access to a varied DNA infrastructure. Prior to the civil protests, among their most visible actions were organizing and disseminating information about the Romanian leg of the so-called Slut Walk (Marșul Panaramelor),<sup>30</sup> which aims to raise awareness of violence against women in the public sphere; analysing the impact of the economic crisis on women; and establishing the first online platform in the Romanian language to address sex education issues (Sexul vs. Barza).<sup>31</sup> The DNA infrastructure used by FILIA and FRONT analysed for this chapter includes:

- FILIA's website, established in 2008; a YouTube channel, established in November 2011; and an associated Facebook page, established in November 2012.<sup>32</sup>
- FRONT's website, established in 2010; a YouTube channel, established in August 2011; an associated Twitter account,

established in May 2010; and a Facebook page, established in April 2011.<sup>33</sup>

- The interconnected blogs with a feminist focus of various activists, the personal Facebook profiles of core members of the leadership, an anonymous YouTube post, e-news platforms specializing in women's issues and a women's news platform.<sup>34</sup>
- The Piața Universității general Twitter account, its related Facebook page and the YouTube channel concerning the civil protests at University Square.<sup>35</sup>

To give a tentative quantitative overview of their general DNA infrastructures,<sup>36</sup> the FILIA Facebook page collected 3,380 likes, with 186 people mentioning it in their Facebook conversations. Its YouTube channel collected 1,034 views. The FRONT Facebook page collected 3,673 likes, with 397 people mentioning it in their Facebook conversations. Its YouTube channel collected 395 views, while the Twitter account registered 212 followers and followed 115 other Twitter profiles with a total of 48 tweets. At the time of the protests, FRONT used its Facebook page to mobilize public support, while the core leadership of FILIA organized the protests from their own personal Facebook profiles.

In comparison, the DNA infrastructure of Alburnus Maior, the key environmental CSO organizing in University Square, was much more complex. It involved an official webpage, active since 2002; a YouTube channel, active since July 2012; a Twitter account and three Facebook profiles. The Alburnus Maior Facebook page collected 7,016 likes, with 2,080 people mentioning it in their Facebook conversations.<sup>37</sup> The group also maintained a second webpage (Save Roșia Montană,<sup>38</sup> which collected 3,142 likes with 353 people mentioning it in their Facebook conversations) and a third webpage for the purpose of including Roșia Montană on the UNESCO World Heritage list.<sup>39</sup> It collected 109,782 likes, with 12,536 people mentioning it in their Facebook conversations. The YouTube channel collected 231,614 views, and its Twitter account registered 408 followers and followed 34 other Twitter profiles with a total of 3,085 tweets.

An assessment of the DNA infrastructure of FILIA and FRONT shows that protesters made uneven use of it during the demonstrations. FRONT was active on several platforms (webpage, Facebook official profile, organizing events, posting comments on various threads on linked profiles and its YouTube channel). It also benefited from the individual

support of engaged activists using their personal Facebook profiles to popularize events and post personal comments on various threads on linked profiles. FILIA also used its webpage for these purposes, but since it did not have its own Facebook profile at the time, it relied heavily on the activity of its core members using their personal Facebook profiles to organize events and post personal comments on various threads on linked profiles. There seems to be a wider preference among Romanians for using Facebook, and a more particular preference among CSOs for communicating on Facebook as a means of connecting and debating with their fellow citizens—facilitating remote real-time debate on their profiles, events pages or discussion threads on linked profiles, but also with the traditional media and individual journalists that follow their Facebook profiles—which replaces more traditional press conferences and press releases.<sup>40</sup> This is testimony to the establishment of a *multidirectional dialogue* between CSOs, dedicated activists, protesting citizens, journalists and the general public across the country. One important aspect of the presence of these CSOs in University Square was their successful use of DNA infrastructure, despite their comparatively small size, which enabled them to mobilize their supporters and gain visibility among the other actors participating in the civil protests.

## **The social media presence of Romanian political parties**

The social media infrastructure of the main Romanian political parties (PSD, PNL, PDL, UDMR/RMDSZ) does not seem to have been systematically developed.<sup>41</sup> For example, PSD's official webpage<sup>42</sup> provides a link to an official Facebook profile<sup>43</sup> designed to serve as a press office on social media. It has collected only 122 likes, and eight people have mentioned it in their conversations. A similar PSD Twitter profile<sup>44</sup> registered 236 followers and followed 26 other Twitter profiles, with a total of 328 tweets. However, another PSD Facebook profile<sup>45</sup> page collected 8,974 likes, with 55 people mentioning it in their conversations. A different PSD Twitter profile<sup>46</sup> registered 449 followers and followed 121 other Twitter profiles, with a total of 146 tweets. The PSD's official webpage links to the YouTube channel<sup>47</sup> of Prime Minister and PSD Chair Victor Ponta, which registered 31,291 views.



**Table 6.1. Social media impact/DNA infrastructure of main Romanian established political parties and selected Romanian CSOs**

Social media impact	Romanian political parties				CSOs—women's issues	
	PSD	PNL	PDL	UDMR/RMDSZ	FILIA	FRONT
Official website links to other social media	Yes	Yes	No (inactive links)	Yes (trilingual: HUN/RO/EN)	Yes	Yes
Official [unofficial] <b>Facebook</b> page likes/mentions	122/8 [8,974/55]	6,765/433 [4,990/15]	[10,537/11]	19,207/952	3,380/186	3,673/397
Official [unofficial] <b>YouTube</b> channel/views	[PM Ponta channel: 31,291]	49,874	None	None	1,034 [1,247]	No
Official [unofficial] <b>Twitter</b> account/followers/follows/tweets	236/26/328 [449/121/146]	876/130/3,028	None	264/270/2,872	No	212/115/48
Official <b>Tumblr</b> account	No	No	No	No	No	No

In the case of the PSD coalition partner, the PNL Facebook profile linked from the party's official webpage<sup>48</sup> collected 6,765 likes, with 433 people mentioning it in their conversations. Another PNL Facebook profile was identified<sup>49</sup> that is connected to the PNL Twitter profile and to the PNL's official webpage. This profile collected 4,990 likes, with 15 people mentioning it in their conversations. The PNL Twitter profile<sup>50</sup> registered 876 followers and followed 130 other Twitter profiles, with a total of 3,028 tweets. The PNL YouTube channel<sup>51</sup> registered 49,874 views. The USL Facebook profile<sup>52</sup> page collected 14,404 likes, with 1,303 people mentioning it in their conversations; the USL Twitter profile<sup>53</sup> registered 509 followers and followed 71 other Twitter profiles, with a total of 708 tweets. Intriguingly, there was a low level of interaction between the social media infrastructures of the two coalition parties (PSD and

PNL), and even between the common social media infrastructure of the coalition (USD) and the social media infrastructures of these parties.

The PDL does not have an official Facebook profile or a Twitter profile, or functioning links to Facebook or Twitter. An unofficial Facebook page<sup>54</sup> collected 10,537 likes, with 11 people mentioning it in their conversations. No PDL Twitter profile could be identified—only several Twitter accounts for the PDL youth chapter, several county chapters and several prominent PDL politicians. In contrast, the UDMR/RMDSZ official webpage<sup>55</sup> links directly to the official UDMR/RMDSZ Facebook profile, which collected 19,207 likes, with 952 people mentioning it. The UDMR/RMDSZ Twitter profile<sup>56</sup> registered 264 followers and followed 270 other Twitter profiles, with a total of 2,872 tweets. The UDMR/RMDSZ YouTube channel registered 331,697 views.

Romanian political parties do not seem to have a coherent social media strategy. Some parties have several competing Facebook and Twitter profiles claiming to be their 'official' social media channels. In general, the communication on these social media is hierarchical, institutional and unidirectional, with little room for interaction.

## **Conclusions: social protest challenges for Romanian political parties**

The key conclusion that can be drawn from the above analysis is that Romanian citizens have decided to become more actively involved in the democratic decision-making process. The major political parties reacted differently to the protesters' general dissatisfaction with politics. The centre-right governing coalition, particularly the PDL, refused to engage with the protesters in University Square. In contrast, and although initially rebuffed by the protesters, the USL coalition expressed its solidarity with the protesters and its opposition to the government's austerity measures. The PSD and PNL women's chapters separately announced their support for women's issues raised in the context of the protests. The USL eventually won the political confrontation, forming a caretaker Cabinet to organize new elections.

In the context of the 2012 civil protest, a more topical conclusion concerns the diverse interests that motivated those who participated. A closer look at the internal dynamics of the civil protests shows that certain slogans, messages and civic demands gained prominence, particularly those issued by more formally organized groups such

as the CSOs analysed above. These CSOs successfully combined *traditional* forms of organizing civic protests with *adaptive and flexible* forms of mobilizing support through available DNA infrastructure, and reached out in the public debate to initiate a *multidirectional dialogue* on the issues of concern to them. By achieving these goals, the CSOs benefited greatly from the commitment of individuals who were part of their organizational structure and active on social media.

It is worth underlining that although the CSOs that supported women's issues were not a strong numerical presence among the protesters in University Square, they were successful at bringing women's issues to the top of the political agenda as a consequence of their successful framing of women's issues as a *democratic deficit*. Their key arguments were that, although women represent a majority of the citizens in Romania, they are faced with severe political under-representation, a lack of support and outright discrimination in terms of employment equality, the distribution of resources and protection against violence.

With regard to the social media infrastructure of Romania's major political parties, a primary conclusion concerns the noticeably low level of interaction between the various social media infrastructures within the parties, which creates an impression of communicational cacophony. A second conclusion pertains to the low level of civic engagement, in the sense that social media appear to be used by most Romanian political parties for top-down unidirectional communication of the party's official message rather than for engaging in a multidirectional dialogue with concerned citizens. This strengthens previous criticism that Romanian parties lack a systematic strategy for recruiting new members and a coherent relationship with civil society. Unsurprisingly, this is reflected in citizens' low level of identification with the various parties (Mitulescu 2011: 82–3).

### **Recommendations: strategies to increase the presence of political parties on social media and enhance their interactions with CSOs**

With regard to the wider *communication challenges* they encounter today, Romanian political parties should:

- use social media to provide a space for civic deliberation, in the sense of engaging as representatives of political parties in a direct, unmediated and real-time *multidirectional dialogue* with

- citizens, including specially developed platforms for consultation with citizens on issues of concern (see Milioni 2009; Tsiliki 2010);
- extend their accountability to citizens via their social media strategies (i.e., commit to pursuing debates on issues of concern);
  - design a clear, professional and transparent political party profile: a unified party presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube; and
  - develop and enforce a clear and transparent communication strategy to engage with the DNA infrastructures of various CSOs in order to ensure transparent communication channels with citizens.

To address the *democratic deficit* experienced by Romanian political parties, and thereby strengthen their legitimacy from a gender perspective, parties should:

- design coherent strategies for recruiting party members and building closer and lasting channels of collaboration and consultation between the parties, citizens and CSOs that represent women's issues; and
- empower women to actively participate in internal party life, and encourage them to participate as candidates in elections at the local, county and national levels, for example, by implementing a so-called zipper system of alternating female and male candidates on party lists.

These are just a few ways to tackle the challenges faced by Romanian political parties.<sup>57</sup> They may allow parties to address the issue of gender equality in politics and use advances in telecommunications and social media to interact with citizens in a democratic framework over and above more traditional means. Failure to engage with citizens in a meaningful manner, and increased remoteness from citizens' grievances, can only strengthen the attractiveness of extremist political movements for disenchanted citizens and lead to the possible misappropriation of democratic processes by such political forces.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> In 1985, for instance, 33 per cent of the members of the Grand National Assembly, a rubber-stamp parliament, were women. The situation worsened significantly after 1989. After the 1996 elections, just 3.65 per cent of members of the Chamber of Deputies and 2.1 per cent of senators were women.

- <sup>2</sup> <<http://tmb.ro/index.php/partide-politice>>, <[http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/statis/algenstat\\_25112008.xls](http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/statis/algenstat_25112008.xls)>.
- <sup>3</sup> <[http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/statis/prez\\_ora22.pdf](http://www.becparlamentare2008.ro/statis/prez_ora22.pdf)>, <<http://www.bec2009pe.ro/Documente%20PDF/Statistici/ora21.pdf>>.
- <sup>4</sup> <[http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Individuals\\_Internet\\_2000-2012.xls](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Individuals_Internet_2000-2012.xls)>.
- <sup>5</sup> <<http://www.newmediatrendwatch.com/markets-by-country/10-europe/80-romania>>.
- <sup>6</sup> <[http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Gender\\_2008-2012.xls](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Gender_2008-2012.xls)>.
- <sup>7</sup> As a consequence, in the December 2012 parliamentary elections, the centre-right alliance led by the PDL polled only 16.5 per cent of the vote for the lower chamber and 16.7 per cent for the upper chamber of Parliament. This was a serious setback compared to the November 2008 election results, when the PDL on its own polled 32.4 per cent of the votes for the lower chamber and 33.6 per cent for the upper chamber.
- <sup>8</sup> The National Authority for Child Protection and the National Agency for the Protection of the Family were abolished in November 2009. Their functions were delegated to a new institution that was in turn abolished together with the National Agency for Equality between Women and Men in June 2010 (Bragă 2011: 89).
- <sup>9</sup> <<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/bilantul-protestelor-de-luni-13-000-de-manifestanti-in-52-de-localitati-un-intreg-arsenal-descoperit-la-protestatari-din-capitala-9152022>>.
- <sup>10</sup> <<http://www.exclusivnews.ro/stiri/stiri-nationale/live-text-proteste-la-bucuresti-19-ianuarie.html>>.
- <sup>11</sup> The square, located in the heart of the capital, is highly symbolic for supporters of democratic engagement. The first civil protests in democratic Romania were organized in the square on 13–15 June 1990. Ever since, major civil protests have generally been organized with the square as their main focal point.
- <sup>12</sup> <<http://rosiamontana.org/>>.
- <sup>13</sup> <<http://activewatch.ro/>>.
- <sup>14</sup> <<http://www.romaniacurata.ro/>>.
- <sup>15</sup> <<http://www.mediafax.ro/politic/ludovic-orban-huiduit-si-imbrancit-in-piata-universitatii-orbane-pleaca-de-aici-ca-dai-de-belea-pdl-usl-aceeasi-mizerie-9153156>>.
- <sup>16</sup> <<http://www.centrulfilia.ro/index.php/despre-noi/misiune>>.
- <sup>17</sup> <<http://www.centrulfilia.ro/index.php/despre-noi/misiune>>.
- <sup>18</sup> <<http://www.feminism-romania.ro/despre-noi/manifestul.html>>.
- <sup>19</sup> Alice Iancu (FILIA): <<http://www.garbo.ro/articol/Social/10132/femei-proteste-universitate.html>> (translation by author).

- <sup>20</sup> The Romanian language, like other related Latin languages, is characterized by the presence of gendered nouns and the general construction of a sentence to reflect the gender of its subject and object. As a case in point, ‘citizen’ when translated into Romanian becomes  *cetățeană*  when referring to a woman and  *cetățean*  when referring to a man. In this case,  *cetățeană*  was used in the protests.
- <sup>21</sup> <<http://totb.ro/foto-femeile-au-sarbatorit-8-martie-in-piata-universitatii/>>.
- <sup>22</sup> <<http://blogul-medusei.blogspot.se/2012/03/manifestatie-de-8-martie-in-bucuresti.html>> [translated by the author].
- <sup>23</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/events/383025708375338/>>.
- <sup>24</sup> Oana Băluță (former FILIA chair): <<http://www.dcnews.ro/2012/03/femeile-ies-in-piata-universitatii-de-8-martie-vrem-reprezentare-nu-doar-martisoare>>.
- <sup>25</sup> <<http://blogul-medusei.blogspot.ro/2012/03/despre-protestul-de-8-martie-din-piata.html>>.
- <sup>26</sup> Andreea Molocea, former FILIA vice chair, Facebook personal correspondence, 11 June 2013.
- <sup>27</sup> <<http://voxpública.realitatea.net/politica-societate/viermii-%E2%80%93-inepti-inculti-si-ciumpalaci-%E2%80%93-protesteaza-baconschi-o-tine-langa-pledex-nevinovat-73062.html>>.
- <sup>28</sup> <[http://www.realitatea.net/violente-la-universitate-jandarmii-au-folosit-gaze-lacrimogene-live-video\\_904138.html](http://www.realitatea.net/violente-la-universitate-jandarmii-au-folosit-gaze-lacrimogene-live-video_904138.html)>.
- <sup>29</sup> <<http://www.ziare.com/stiri/proteste/doua-proteste-paralizeaza-capitala-mii-de-oameni-asteptati-in-strada-live-1145886>>.
- <sup>30</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80VAjjNZrsg>>.
- <sup>31</sup> <<http://www.sexulvsbarza.ro/>>.
- <sup>32</sup> <<http://www.centrulfilia.ro>>, <<http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9LyWnWYIvIhJyO7ulm9w>>, <<https://www.facebook.com/centrul.filia>>.
- <sup>33</sup> <<http://www.feminism-romania.ro/>>, <<http://www.youtube.com/user/FeminismRomania>>, <<https://www.twitter.com/feminismromania>>, <<https://www.facebook.com/Feminism.Romania>>.
- <sup>34</sup> <<http://blogul-medusei.blogspot.ro>>, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF8Y4YV-NVQ>>, <<http://pandoras.realitatea.net/>>, <<http://www.garbo.ro/>>.
- <sup>35</sup> <<https://twitter.com/Universitatii>>, <<https://www.facebook.com/PiataUniversitatii>>, <<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLlkyIJRWwfaMgBE20heQK1lZrTeJzdOP>>. The channel was founded and maintained by Vlad Petri, a Romanian photojournalist and documentary filmmaker.
- <sup>36</sup> All the data presented in this chapter were verified for accuracy on 12 June 2013. It is worth noting, however, that Facebook pages and YouTube channels do not provide a clear breakdown for the specific dates that are of interest here. The numbers presented are therefore only indicative

of the effective spread of the general DNA. In addition, the civil protests resumed in September 2013, which had a direct impact on the numbers, since support for some of the CSOs demonstrating in the square had grown.

<sup>37</sup> <<http://rosiamontana.org/>>, <<http://www.youtube.com/user/SalvatiRosiaMontana1>>, <<https://twitter.com/alburnusmaior>>, <<https://www.facebook.com/alburnusmaior>>.

<sup>38</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Salvati-Rosia-Montana/217841634921482>>.

<sup>39</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/rosia.montana.in.unesco>>.

<sup>40</sup> Andreea Molocea, former FILIA vice chair, Facebook personal correspondence, 11 June 2013.

<sup>41</sup> The numbers were collected from the homepages of the above-mentioned political parties, not from their local branches or from individual party members. Like the DNA infrastructure, these numbers are aggregated, as a specific breakdown for a specific time frame is not possible.

<sup>42</sup> <<http://www.psd.ro/>>.

<sup>43</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/BirouldePresapSD/likes>>.

<sup>44</sup> <<https://twitter.com/biroupresapsd>>.

<sup>45</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Partidul-Social-Democrat/107952782572800?fref=ts>>.

<sup>46</sup> <[https://twitter.com/PSD\\_Romania](https://twitter.com/PSD_Romania)>.

<sup>47</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/user/VictorPontaPSD/about>>.

<sup>48</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/pnl.ro>>, <<http://www.pnl.ro/>>.

<sup>49</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/PartidulNationalLiberal>>.

<sup>50</sup> <[https://twitter.com/PNL\\_Ro](https://twitter.com/PNL_Ro)>.

<sup>51</sup> <<http://www.youtube.com/user/liberalii1>>.

<sup>52</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/uslonline>>.

<sup>53</sup> <[https://twitter.com/USL\\_Online](https://twitter.com/USL_Online)>.

<sup>54</sup> <<https://www.facebook.com/pages/PD-L/132648170108204?fref=ts&rf=120658321464173>>.

<sup>55</sup> The party has three official web addresses, reflecting its multilingual character.

<sup>56</sup> <[https://twitter.com/RMDSZ\\_UDMR](https://twitter.com/RMDSZ_UDMR)>.

<sup>57</sup> As of December 2013, there were few reasons for optimism. The USL governing coalition appeared to have taken some timid steps toward addressing the issues raised by the two CSOs analysed. However, on matters of environmental concern—particularly the question of Roşia Montană and cyanide-based gold exploitation—the coalition had ignored the protesters' earlier demands. Consequently, civil protest erupted once again in September 2013 and continues at the time of writing.

# **Chapter 7**

## **Political Parties, Civil Society and Citizen Movements in Viet Nam**



## Chapter 7

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Hai Hong NGUYEN

# Political Parties, Civil Society and Citizen Movements in Viet Nam

## Introduction

This chapter is part of a conversation about the contemporary worldwide role of political parties, civil society and citizen movements in promoting and maintaining democracy. Political parties are recognized as important political institutions, but the public is losing trust in them due to infighting among party elites, parliamentary debates that emphasize personal attacks rather than policies, and a sense that everyday concerns are being ignored. In the meantime, civil society could emerge as an open space for equal citizen participation, become an alternative expression of democracy and significantly influence how services are delivered to meet public demands. However, in non-democratic societies, civil society is often unwelcome because it can provide the basis for an opposition force that challenges the power and legitimacy of the ruling regime.

An underlying crisis in public trust and concern over injustice and inequality are also triggering citizen movements in many parts of the world (Faiola and Moura 2013; *The Economist* 2013). ‘Citizen movements’ is a new term, but the movements per se are as old as the emergence of democracy. They take many different forms, from a group of displaced farmers protesting land-grabbing, to a rally to submit a collective complaint, a patriotic protest against a foreign country intruding on national sovereignty, or a rally to express support for, or opposition to, a political position. Examples of citizen movements include the street demonstrations and occupation of public spaces provoked by events such as the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in 2011 or the death of Khaled Saeed in Egypt in 2010, which led to regime change

in those countries (Brancati 2013); the Occupy Wall Street movement, which spread across the United States and was inspired by protests in European cities (Klein 2012; Hardt 2011); and the protests of the factions distinguished by coloured T-shirts in Thailand (Forsyth 2010; Ungpakorn 2009). Against this background, both political theorists and activists ponder how political parties, whether in power or not, can engage with civil society and respond to citizen movements. What can promote and consolidate democracy?

The Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV) has been the ruling party in the North since 1954 and the only party in power in Viet Nam since 1976.<sup>1</sup> However, in recent decades, particularly since its economic reform programme of the late 1980s led to a Western-style market economy, there have been significant changes within the party. Its organizational structure and membership admission practices have changed, and senior members of the leadership board are now more openly elected. These changes did not inevitably flow from the needs of the party itself, but were influenced by an emerging civil society that encompasses all sorts of organizations and associations that exist beyond the state and the market (Carothers 2000). Empirical studies have shown that economic liberalization enables the emergence of civil society and is often followed by political liberalization (Howell 1998). This poses a challenge to the CPV, which is explored in this chapter.

The chapter discusses the major changes that have occurred within the CPV and the factors driving that change. The focus is on the emergence of civil society and citizen movements in recent years and the CPV's perspective and domestic policy responses. Pragmatic recommendations are directed at CPV policymakers, and members of civil society and citizen movements, to help these ostensibly contesting elements of society cooperate as Viet Nam follows what is widely thought to be an irreversible trend of democratization associated with economic liberalization. The underlying thesis, and conclusion, is that constructive interaction between the CPV, civil society and citizen movements is essential for peaceful and democratic development in Viet Nam.

## **A changing party?**

Viet Nam under the CPV's rule can, by any standard definition or literal description, be characterized as an orthodox authoritarian regime.<sup>2</sup> To avoid confusion, it is referred to here as a one-party state; the party is

also the government: Vietnamese legal scholars call it a ‘two-in-one’ model (Úc 2007). Recent developments in Vietnamese politics have led many to believe that the CPV is intensifying its monopoly on power and control over society (Brady 2013). However, it is undeniable that genuine transformations are taking place, in terms of both thinking and actions, within the party. Repression—such as the arrest, detention and trial of dissidents or bloggers—demonstrates that the CPV is trying to maintain control.

There are four major reasons for recent social change. The first is economic development and the integration of Viet Nam into the world economy since the CPV’s launch of its reform programme (Doi Moi) in the late 1980s. The second is the rise of a new social class of wealthy entrepreneurs known as ‘red capitalists’ or the ‘nouveau riche’ that is bound by economic and political interests to a segment of high-ranking party officials (Fforde 2013). The third is the emergence of a nascent but increasingly outspoken civil society, which is a by-product of the introduction of a market economy.<sup>3</sup> The last is the outrage of farmers who have lost their land to construction projects allegedly enabled by corrupt local authorities (Brown 2013).

Viet Nam started its economic reform programme after the Sixth Party Congress in 1986. In 1990–2010, it had one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, with an average growth rate of 7.3 per cent (Welle-Strand et al. 2013). The country was even seen as the next economic ‘tiger’ in East Asia, following the ‘dragons’ in the region such as South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia (Sepehri and Akram-Lodhi 2002; Pincus and Vu 2008). This economic growth decreased the percentage of people living in poverty from nearly 60 per cent in 1990 to below 10 per cent in 2010 (World Bank 2012). A new wealthy middle class of red capitalists emerged (Stocking 2013), which has been an engine for political transformation and democratization (Barro 1999). The red capitalists have gradually exerted influence over decision-making and reached out to the party to manoeuvre relationships with it. This is reflected in the CPV’s recent acknowledgement of what it calls ‘interest groups’.<sup>4</sup> While the CPV’s underlying power and decision-making structures have hardly changed since its formation, it has recently experienced incremental change.

The first change is the introduction of modest deliberative democratization within the party. The secretary general of the party sits on both the Politburo and the Secretariat, and has historically

been considered the most powerful figure in the country. With the introduction of a collective leadership mechanism, he or she no longer has a decisive voice in all matters, especially those concerning state governance; absolute control is limited to party-related affairs. In addition, decisions made by the Politburo can now be rejected by the Central Committee. While the party never accepts external opposition in society, it tolerates or encourages different views within the system at the highest level. This helps explain the party's recent nuanced attempts to strengthen its control through 'criticism and self-criticism' programmes that emphasize ethics education rather than punishment for high-ranking members who commit serious wrongdoing.

The second change is increasing competition in intraparty elections. Members and the secretary general of the Central Committee are elected at the National Party Congress. In the two most recent congresses, nominations and self-nomination were allowed to take place at the Congress for the first time, and two candidates (rather than just one) were nominated for the post of secretary general. This more competitive (though still not democratic) electoral regime might create space for interest groups or lobbyists to influence the results, as happens even in well-established democracies (Nguyen 2013c).

The third change concerns admission to membership. The 10th Party Congress in 2006 passed a resolution allowing party members to run a business. At the following congress in 2011, it also agreed to admit private entrepreneurs into the party. Many recognized this as a substantive reform of the party's Marxist-Leninist ideology. Private capitalists, the 'enemy of the working class', can now join the party even though traditionalists in the party fear that this reform threatens the party's class representation and nature.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, it is arguable that these provisions simply formalized a procedural matter. Since the early 1990s, the CPV had de facto allowed the establishment of, and appointed its party members to run, large-scale state corporations or economic groups known as Corporations 90 or 91,<sup>6</sup> which follow the economic model of Chaebols in South Korea (OECD 2013). The CPV's party statutes state, on the one hand, that it is seeking 'to increase its compatibility' and image as 'the party of the whole nation, representing the most advanced production force' by attracting private entrepreneurs into the party. On the other hand, it can now control this section of society that tends to support Western-style liberalization, while noting that the alternative Stalinist centrally planned economic policy led the country to extreme poverty and the verge of political crisis in the 1980s.

These changes in the CPV can be attributed to the influence, whether direct or indirect, of its economic reform and open-door policy started more than two decades previously. Nevertheless, reform of the party and of Vietnamese politics in general lags behind the economic reforms. Many scholars, intellectuals, retired party members and government officials—those who are less bound to the party’s rules and principles—have called on the CPV to make more substantive political reforms. The political voice of these people and others is expressed in various ways and forms, including on the Internet.

Recognized as a country with one of the fastest-growing rates of Internet usage in the world (Cimigo 2011), Viet Nam has more than 12 million Facebook users, as well as millions of users of home-grown social networks such as Zing Me or HaiVL (Anh 2013a, 2013b). While Facebook is one of the most widely used sites (Cimigo 2011), Twitter is not popular in Viet Nam. Personal blogs, Yahoo or Google-based mailing groups or clubs are also mushrooming. Local NGOs and interest groups use these websites to publish and exchange arguments against government policies, to call for rallies and demonstrations, and to marshal support for social and political campaigns.<sup>7</sup> Netizen communities in Viet Nam are expected to face stricter surveillance in the future now that Executive Decree 72 of July 2013, which aims to manage the use of the Internet and online information sharing, has officially entered into force. More than 600 people have signed a petition in protest and called for the annulment of the decree.<sup>8</sup>

The vibrant activism of these emerging networks, alongside the existence and operation of a large army of associations and NGOs, has created the impression of a rise of civil society in Viet Nam (Vuving 2010). Furthermore, land-related corruption, land grabs and evictions by local government have triggered outrage movements, and protests, collective complaints and petitions are happening all over the country<sup>9</sup>—which pressures the CPV to adjust and change.

## **The CPV and civil society movements**

In the context of one-party rule, it is crucial at the outset to ask whether civil society exists in Viet Nam. If it does, to what extent can it, and will it, develop? There is already extensive literature on the issue, but these questions have not been answered adequately. There are two main reasons for the uncertainty in confirming the existence of a functioning civil society in Viet Nam.

First, there is the CPV's abnegation of civil society. To date, the term has not been found in any official policy documents, or in speeches by CPV senior leaders or heads of government agencies. Observing an unwritten rule, even officials in government agencies such as home affairs and public security, who are in charge of managing NGOs, have never used the term publicly. Civil society is a sensitive term in Vietnamese politics because it is linked to an implicit fear that civil society is a social force that operates beyond the party's control and represents a challenge to the regime.<sup>10</sup> The term is only used by researchers and, most often, NGO communities.

The second reason it is unclear whether a functioning civil society exists in Viet Nam is that there are different definitions of civil society. According to the conceptualization of civil society used by most Western political theorists, it does not exist in Viet Nam (Hải 2013). Nonetheless, the number of NGOs has increased in the two decades of the Doi Moi programme. They are operating in different fields, from poverty and hunger alleviation to policy advocacy. Some pursue increased transparency and good governance, as well as an intensification of grassroots democracy, others the protection and promotion of the human rights of vulnerable social groups such as women, children, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, legions of Vietnamese use the blogosphere every day to criticize the CPV and sometimes call for street protests or demonstrations. It seems obvious that, taking a more flexible approach to defining civil society in Vietnamese politics, one has emerged.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph Hannah (2007) has proposed a model to gauge the development of civil society in Viet Nam. It is a descriptive continuum of six roles (implementing state policy, advocacy, lobbying, watchdog, opposition and public resistance)<sup>12</sup> with the state at one end and civil society at the other. His conclusion is that despite optimism over its development, civil society in Viet Nam is a long way from maturity. Based on Hannah's model, civil society in Viet Nam at this stage arguably stands at Position 1, i.e., implementing CPV and government policies and programmes. However, some CSOs, with the assistance of foreign NGOs operating in Viet Nam, have started moving to Positions 2 and 3, as illustrated in the example below.

The so-called land field, which includes the use of land, ownership and state land administration, is a sensitive and controversial issue in Viet Nam, where more than 70 per cent of the population makes a

living from agriculture in the countryside. The CPV's rallying cry for the peasantry in the two resistance wars for national independence was to 'return farming land to the peasants'. In a market economy, however, farmers are being evicted from their land, which is being occupied by modern construction projects. David Brown (2013), a long-time Viet Nam observer and freelance journalist, contends that the CPV is betraying the farmers. The existing land law provides no guarantee to protect farmers' interests and creates loopholes for corruption, which has outraged farmers. Most farmers' protests, collective complaints and petitions have so far been related to land.

In early 2012, a violent protest in Hai Phong was extensively reported in the national media after a farmer used homemade landmines and an improvised shotgun to engage the security forces who came to evict him and repossess his farmland. Many used a Vietnamese proverb to describe his resistance: 'even a worm will turn'. The eviction was reportedly linked to corruption and the mismanagement of land by the local authorities. The prime minister responded to public outrage by branding the eviction 'illegal', and dozens of local officials were reprimanded and disciplined.<sup>13</sup> Protests such as collective complaints and petitions about land grabbing are commonplace across the country. The situation is getting so bad that there has been a warning that farmers' protests and outrage 'are threatening the legitimacy and survival of the regime'.<sup>14</sup>

To address the problem, the National Assembly—the legislative body—attempted to amend the Land Law in 2013. However, many National Assembly deputies, as well as CSOs, argued that the draft amendment remained at odds with reality and would not benefit farmers.<sup>15</sup> Nearly 20 CSOs—most notably two alliances, the Forest Land Alliance and the Land Alliance—carried out a wide range of activities to prevent the amendment to the Land Law from being passed. The CSOs held community consultations with the assistance of Oxfam UK, the Institute of Legislative Studies (a think tank affiliated with the Standing Committee of the National Assembly), the offices of National Assembly deputies and, in some localities, the Viet Nam Women's Union. This involved more than 1,300 farmers, marginalized poor and ethnic minority women and men, and approximately 300 local government officials from 22 communes of 11 districts in four provinces. A report with recommendations was submitted by the CSOs to the National Assembly (Oxfam 2013a). The organizations also released a press communiqué about their recommendations,<sup>16</sup> which could be seen

as putting public pressure on the legislative body. Subsequently, the National Assembly decided not to pass the amendment. In a press statement welcoming this decision, Oxfam said that it was very pleased to see that the recommendations submitted by the CSOs were accepted (Oxfam 2013b).

The involvement of CSOs in policy advocacy and lobbying, which is moving from Position 1 to Positions 2 and 3 on Hannah's civil society model spectrum, is not rare. Another typical example of advocacy work by CSOs is the adoption of two important laws by the National Assembly: the Law on Gender Equality (2006) and the Law on Domestic Violence (2007), which aim to protect women's human rights and dignity. The strategies used by CSOs are diverse, from training public officials to workshops and seminars for lawmakers. Such activities are appreciated by the authorities, although not all of them are welcomed by the CPV. One example that led to state dissatisfaction with civil society was the protest by a group of well-known scholars and intellectuals against a bauxite mining project in the central part of the country. In addition to economic and environmental complaints, the group criticized the CPV for allowing Chinese companies to implement the project in a region of great national security importance. They submitted protest letters to CPV leaders and even established a website named after the project, <http://www.boxitvn.net>, 'to update and exchange views on bauxite in Viet Nam'. The website is now a forum where voices critical of the CPV and the government from across the political and social spectrum are published. Even though it is strictly monitored by the CPV security agency, the website remains active and is a brilliant symbol of the growth of civil society in Viet Nam.

Attempting to predict the future status of civil society in CPV policy is foolhardy because of its attitude to and scepticism of the motives it sees as driving civil society. There have, nonetheless, been changes in Vietnamese politics that allow citizens to speak more freely about what they think is right or wrong. This is an indisputable sign of a society moving toward pluralism. The CPV is fully conscious of this development, and is now striking a balance and demarcating political and non-political issues. It is intensifying the surveillance and repression of CSOs working on political issues, fearing that these organizations are seedlings for the emergence of opposition parties. Yet it encourages those working on non-political issues, because these organizations pose no challenge to its rule—and to some extent help the party consolidate its legitimacy by providing social services to the needy in areas where the one-party system cannot carry out its duties.



## The CPV and citizen movements

The case for an emerging civil society in Viet Nam is even stronger where elements other than NGOs are concerned: the farmer protests, citizens' campaigns and demonstrations, which can be defined as citizen movements. In Viet Nam, the term 'mass movement' (*phong trào quần chúng*) is usually used to describe those launched to implement a 'revolutionary' or 'political' goal of the CPV. Hence, any citizen movements without the CPV's backing are labelled 'crowds' or 'rallies causing public disorder'. In the past two years, several citizen movements of this kind have risen up that were not welcomed by the authorities.

The first movements were the farmers' protests: collective complaints and petitions about land grabbing and evictions by local government. Very often, groups of farmers, some of which are made up of hundreds of people, come from one or more provinces collectively to submit their complaints and petitions to central government agencies, denouncing unjustified land grabs and land-related corruption. In recent protests, around 500 farmers in Văn Giang, Hưng Yên and Dương Nội-Hà Đông accused their local government of secretly cooperating with property developers to appropriate farmland. Evicted farmers organized themselves into crowds with banners in front of relevant central government agencies to pursue their petitions and complaints over a long period. In some cases, the farmers had violent clashes with the local police as they tried to protect their land. The common characteristic of these movements is that they were voluntarily driven without an organizer or leader. Someone may have circulated a call for protest, but he never acknowledges himself as the organizer for fear of being arrested. Hence, these wildcat movements are sporadic and easily broken up.

The second movement collects signatures in support of a Western-style draft constitution, as prepared by 'Group 72'—72 former high-ranking party officials, well-known intellectuals, veterans and others. Group 72 is not an organization, and is not bound by any rules. Members voluntarily come together on the basis of their common concern about how to write a new national constitution that will lay down democratic foundations for the establishment of a Western-style democracy in Viet Nam. The group's draft constitution has been circulated since February 2013 on Internet networks such as [www.basam.info](http://www.basam.info) and [www.boxitvn.net](http://www.boxitvn.net) in order to collect signatures of support. Thus far, 14,785 signatures have been collected in 34 rounds of circulation. In June 2013, while

the National Assembly was in session, Group 72 released a letter of protest against the Constitutional Amendments Drafting Committee (the Drafting Committee) for not only rejecting its suggestions but also submitting a new draft that, in the opinion of Group 72, was 'a step back' compared with previous versions.<sup>17</sup> Recently, Group 72 sent another letter to CPV leaders urging them to 'continue seeking contributions and opinions on the draft amended Constitution and the Land Law', with more than 100 supportive signatures.<sup>18</sup>

CPV officials bluntly rejected Group 72's recommendations. In a meeting outside Hanoi, the general secretary of the CPV criticized what he called 'the decay and degradation in political ideology and ethics' (Phường 2013). This criticism was interpreted as being aimed at those who had made constitutional suggestions, including Group 72, which clashed with the CPV-directed draft. In a reply to Group 72, the head of the Drafting Committee candidly attacked the group's recommendations as 'irrelevant to the spirit of Resolution 38 of the National Assembly' (Lâm 2013). In a one-party state, making a speech opposed to the party line is obviously unacceptable.

The motion initiated by Group 72 has drawn attention from Vietnamese in the country and abroad. The signatories of Group 72's papers are diverse, and include factory workers, intellectuals, former high-ranking government officials, party members, entrepreneurs and Vietnamese nationals abroad. The impact of the group's recommendations is hard to quantify, but it has created public pressure and led the CPV to defer the adoption of the draft constitution from March to the end of 2013 in order to collect more comments from the public. Nevertheless, some considered the CPV's decision to be a cosmetic tactic, because little can be changed if the citizens cannot directly vote on the constitution.

Such citizen movements, including recent 'human rights picnics' by hundreds of citizens in parks in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Nha Trang, are among many in Viet Nam that are unwelcome to the one-party state. From another perspective, however, they are specific illustrations of a positive and optimistic change in Vietnamese political culture, which can arguably be branded as 'a hidden pluralist society in a one-party rule'. Historical studies of the emergence of democracy show that minor political changes and opposition voices can be the beginning of a more inclusive democratization process.

The CPV, while still currently the single ruling party in Viet Nam, is undeniably adapting itself to the new political and social context of the

country as a direct result of Doi Moi. This change can be attributed to, among other things, emerging CSOs and citizen movements, which have put pressure on the CPV. In response, the CPV is trying to balance repression and responsiveness, which means that it will sometimes accommodate but will also repress demands and criticism from civil society actors—especially those who pose a threat to its monopoly on power. Close observers of Vietnamese politics interpret this flexible approach by the CPV as balancing tensions within the party, such as elite infighting, and within society, such as pressure from CSOs and citizen movements, in order to maintain its legitimacy and consolidate its monopoly on power.

In sum, in a one-party state, citizen movements and CSOs can affect the party's behaviour, although the space to do so is limited. The CPV is, however, changing very slowly and reluctantly in response to these pressures. It is motivated more by the desire to survive and avoid Tahrir Square-type events than by a true belief in democratic reform. Most of the modest opening-up within the CPV in recent years is due to economic reforms and the emergence of a strong class of entrepreneurs looking for political power, rather than to citizen pressure. The CPV allows mainly non-political citizen protests, and remains strict on political protest, which it perceives as a greater threat to its dominance. Citizen protests take place online, but the CPV strictly monitors the Internet. Citizen movements in Viet Nam are often without single organizers or leaders. Some protest movements are condoned and used by the ruling party to pressure external actors. Nonetheless, given the dynamics of such a changing political culture and of increasing pluralism, Vietnamese society is arguably moving into the orbit of democratization processes.

## **Recommendations**

Future debates about political change in Viet Nam will focus on the tripartite relationship between the CPV, civil society and citizen movements. Each of these elements will have to work out its own strategy to deal with the others. Below are some suggestions on how to do so.

### **CPV**

The party needs to continue to reform along the lines suggested by its advisers (Cam 2013). The changes made thus far are progressive,

but not enough to create a genuine democratic spirit within the party. Decision-making by, and the election of, CPV leaders are two examples. The party needs to allow more competition for leadership posts,<sup>19</sup> and to organize public debates within the party about important decisions. Some have suggested holding votes of confidence in high-ranking party officials, including the secretary general,<sup>20</sup> and live, televised question-and-answer sessions with the Central Committee.<sup>21</sup> Such changes are unlikely to be put into practice any time soon, but concrete actions will deepen the democratization process in Vietnamese politics.

Civil society is a natural partner of a successful market economy (Carothers 2000). Since Viet Nam's market economy has performed successfully since the CPV started its Doi Moi programme, the emergence of civil society is natural. The party should not consider civil society a 'hostile force', but instead as its extended arms—like its own CSOs that perform party-directed political duties, as well as CSO functions between Positions 1 and 3 in Hannah's CSO model. Furthermore, thousands of NGOs are operating in different areas of social life. They have a positive partnership cooperating with party and state agencies to formulate and implement public policy.

The CPV must legalize the establishment and operation of CSOs, create a level playing field for all NGOs and mitigate arbitrary state interventions in the activities of these organizations. A bill on NGOs was prepared under the guidance of the CPV, but has been placed on the backburner. The CPV fears threats to its power if independent NGOs and opposition political parties can be legally established. Nevertheless, without such a law, and given the current role of CSOs, CPV's efforts to create a society based on the rule of law and good governance, and to combat corruption effectively, will fall short.

## **CSOs**

Vietnamese NGOs can be divided into two categories: CPV-sponsored non-governmental and pseudo-non-governmental organizations; each type operates in its own space (Nguyễn 2013b). Grassroots democracy that is initiated and legalized by the CPV is premised on the motto: 'people know, people discuss, people do, and people monitor and check', and on the 'public services socialization' policy. Under this policy, state agencies outsource some of their public services to non-state actors and create a space that is large enough for CSOs to operate. In

this public space, the CSOs work on such issues as poverty and hunger alleviation, gender equality and the human rights of vulnerable groups (e.g., women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS). Many of these CSOs are currently very active in the operational spectrum between Positions 1 and 3 in Hannah's CSO model.

The CPV's sceptical and vigilant attitude towards CSOs forces them to adopt a cautious strategy of constructive engagement with the party rather than a counterproductive radical approach. In Viet Nam, a gradual transformation might work better than coercive change. The best strategy for CSOs operating in an authoritarian regime is to find a delicate balance between engaging with the party's mass organizations<sup>22</sup>; promoting constructive cooperation with the CPV and government agencies on the one hand, and criticizing the CPV in a constructive manner where it is clearly in violation of democratic principles on the other. Success stories of cooperation between CSOs and CPV institutions are common and should be highlighted, while opportunities for effective protest against the greatest wrongdoings of the one-party state should not be ignored. The adoption of the Law on Gender Equality (2006) and the Law on Domestic Violence (2007), the delay in passing the draft amended Land Law and the annual production of the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (a project coordinated by CSOs and state agencies) are good examples of positive cooperation. In the absence of a legal framework for CSOs, active engagement with state agencies using available models can help them participate in and to some extent influence decision-making. The public-private partnership model is another example. CSOs can implement their roles as described in Hannah's model, from Positions 1 to 3, and even to some extent Position 4 by exposing corruption. At the same time, spontaneous citizen protests against glaring CPV wrongdoing, such as land grabs, cannot and perhaps should not be prevented. These protests have functioned as effective wake-up calls for the CPV. It must rid itself of internal corruption or risk losing support from important segments of the population.

Exposing corruption is one of the key roles of CSOs. However, little has been written about corruption in civil society (Mittelman and Johnston 1999). While CSOs make significant contributions to democracy, including by enhancing accountability, they also have their own accountability problems (Schotte 2004), which can discredit those that operate well. While there is little firm evidence, it is hard for Vietnamese

CSOs to argue that they do not have similar problems. There are limited governance mechanisms within Vietnamese CSOs to make their activities accountable. In a one-party state where exposing corruption is dangerous because of dysfunctional mechanisms to protect whistleblowers and limited accountability, CSOs cannot prosper if they do not themselves follow the fundamental principles of democracy, in this case transparency and accountability. If they are seen to consistently apply these principles to their activities, CSOs could potentially even work in the spaces in which issues such as law formulation, and the promotion of democratic practices, governance and human rights are still considered 'sensitive'.

Finally, CSOs must take a creative and flexible approach. Confrontation and radicalism have thus far often been counterproductive in one-party states like Viet Nam, where the rule of the CPV still strikes a chord with the majority of Vietnamese. Moreover, CPV rule is different from the Park Chung Hee regime in South Korea or the Chiang Kai-shek Government in Taiwan, the two East Asian examples of the link between democratization, economic growth and a functioning civil society. What was needed there may be very different from what is needed in Viet Nam, since the Vietnamese people—after experiencing decades of lethal and destructive wars—cherish political and social stability and an economically affluent life. Similarly, it should be noted that the people power movements in many Asian, Latin American, East European and most recently Arab countries arose under quite specific conditions: a genuine demand for regime change among the populace and, most importantly, a thoroughly corrupt, unresponsive and incompetent ruling regime. Vietnamese society has undeniable defects, but this characterization is not currently applicable to Vietnamese politics. The Vietnamese people might be frustrated with corruption, but most of them still support the CPV and, most importantly, do not perceive a real need for regime change. The role of the CPV is undeniable in leading the nation through anti-colonial and anti-imperialist wars for national independence and unification, and in achieving economic progress over the past three decades. Hence, for many Vietnamese, change does not mean regime change for now, but finding better ways to do things.

### ***Citizen movements***

Unlike civil society, it is hard to locate citizen movements in either a democracy or an autocracy, due to their sporadic nature. The blurred

line differentiating a citizen movement from a CSO or a political party fades when members of the movement unite and cooperate with each other to establish a new organization or party. Historical experience in Viet Nam during the anti-colonialism period (1930–45)<sup>23</sup> and the transition of civil society movements into new political parties after the Arab uprisings are significant in this regard (CCDP 2012).

The main characteristic of citizen movements in Viet Nam such as Group 72, arising either from political perspectives of civil issues such as farmers' protests and collective complaints related to the land issue, is that they are wildcat and fragile responses to state repression. One reason why these movements are so fragile is that there is no opposition party or group in Viet Nam to rally a mass challenge to the CPV's monopoly on power. Furthermore, there is no legal framework such as a law on demonstrations, protests or strikes, that puts any citizen movement at risk of being broken up and repressed. Hence, the best strategy for citizen movements is to find a balance between (1) protesting when the CPV is clearly in violation of democratic principles, and when it can make good use of the bursts of energy of spontaneous citizen protests and (2) cooperating with CSOs when they need greater organizational strength. Citizen movements also need to seek assistance from the legal community, which can give them advice on aligning their actions so that they can be dealt with by legal proceedings in legal forums. For citizen movements of a political nature, frank and constructive dialogue with the CPV should be pursued if protest is ultimately to be transformed into reform. In any event, social media networks are strategic and powerful tools for bringing issues to the attention of, and garnering support from, the public and should be used to the full.

## **Conclusion**

According to Jonathan London (2013), a professor at the City University of Hong Kong and an experienced Viet Nam scholar, 'predicting politics in authoritarian regimes is generally foolhardy'. However, there are arguably only two possible future scenarios for the CPV: to either consolidate the authoritarian regime and close its doors to the outside world like North Korea, or continue the reform programme and deepen the democratization process. The CPV is fully aware that the former is hardly possible, because the Vietnamese people and the international community would not allow it to do so. Consequently, it has no other choice but to take the latter option. In this scenario, the CPV would

continue to take a responsive-repressive approach to civil society and citizen movements. The CPV will always try to avoid a violent ‘Viet Nam Spring’. In the worst case for the CPV, if it has to accept giving up its monopoly on power in order to avoid revenge and bloodshed, it would be more likely to look to Myanmar as a good model of transformation (Kami 2012).

Practical experience shows that in all societies, whether they are multiparty democracies or single-party autocracies, political parties have to make compromises. Any conflict of interest between political parties and civil society or citizen movements that cannot be reconciled leads to the same result—the collapse of the government of the ruling party—whether this occurs with violence and bloodshed, as in the Arab states, or peacefully, as in some East European countries and former Soviet republics. Which path Viet Nam takes will depend on the CPV.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Between 1976 and 1988, there were two other political parties: the Democratic Party of Vietnam and the Social Party of Vietnam. In 1988, these two parties were said to have voluntarily announced the ‘termination of their revolutionary missions and dissolution’. This issue has recently been revisited in an ongoing debate and as a result of a call from a group of dissident CPV members and scholars to establish a multiparty system and a new political party in Vietnam. Since press activity and publications are strictly controlled by the authorities, the literature discussing these two parties is virtually non-existent or banned. The only way to find out about the parties is to rely on informal channels such as unpublished memoirs on personal websites or blogs.
- <sup>2</sup> This is clearly stated in the CPV’s statutes, and is enacted in Article 4 of the Vietnamese Constitution of 1992. The Constitution is currently being revised, but no change in the monopoly status of the CPV is expected either de facto or de jure. By definition, an authoritarian state is one ‘in which dominant parties discourage or disallow organized political competition’ (London 2009) or a state with “‘closed” political opportunity structures and “unfree” socio-political systems’ (Wells-Dang 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> Many historians and scholars in the field of Vietnamese civil society or development studies would not agree with this proposition. For example, Chinh (2012) argues that Vietnamese ancient village life, with its activities autonomous from the Royal Court, illustrates civil society. Phuong (1994) contends that civil or citizen society has remained



throughout the course of Vietnamese history. However, it is difficult to argue that civil society, if any, existed before the 1986 economic reforms or had any influence over political change in the country. By arguing that civil society is ‘a by-product of the market economy’, I emphasize the nexus between civil society and the market economy and its influence on the political transformation in Vietnam.

- 4 Closing speech of CPV Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong, delivered at the end of the Third Plenum of the CPV Central Committee (Tenure XI), 10 October 2011, Hanoi.
- 5 Response by Nguyen Viet Thong, secretary of the CPV Central Committee’s Council of Theory Studies, in an interview with *VnExpress* “*Ba luồng ý kiến về việc chủ doanh nghiệp tư nhân vào đảng*” [Three flows of thoughts on admission of private entrepreneurs to the party], on 17 January 2011, available at <<http://www.tinmoi.vn/Ba-luong-y-kiem-ve-viec-chu-doanh-nghiep-tu-nhan-va-o-dang-01221093.html>>, accessed 2 February 2011.
- 6 According to government decrees, the prime minister appoints the heads of state-run corporations and economic groups.
- 7 For example, calls for signatures to support the petitions of evicted farmers or to appeal to the authorities for the release of dissidents, as in the case of Cu Huy Ha Vu or Le Quoc Quan, are circulated on the Internet.
- 8 See “*Tuyên bố Nghị định số 72/2013/NĐ-CP vi phạm Hiến pháp, pháp luật Việt Nam và các công ước quốc tế mà Việt Nam tham gia*” [Statement rejecting Decree No. 72/2013/ND-CP for its violation of the Vietnamese Constitution, law, and international treaties to which Vietnam is a party], available at <<http://www.boxitvn.net/bai/18696>>, accessed 1 September 2013
- 9 See Tự, Lê, ‘Văn hóa...kinh chuyển’ [Culture of...kindly transferring complaints somewhere else], 14 July 2013, available at <<http://vietinfo.cz/cung-suy-ngam/van-hoa%E2%80%A6kinh-chuyen.html>>.
- 10 See the response by Dinh (2006), a researcher on civil society development in Vietnam, in an interview given to the public media. Some bloggers were harassed or arrested after attending a training programme on civil society in the Philippines in 2013. See “*Bị bắt vì dự khóa học xã hội dân sự?*” [Arrested after attending a course on civil society?]. *BBC Vietnam*, available at <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2013/10/131010\\_detained\\_youth\\_asian\\_bridge\\_course.shtm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/vietnam/2013/10/131010_detained_youth_asian_bridge_course.shtm)>, accessed 11 October 2013. A cyber ‘Civil Society Forum’ was recently established in Vietnam by a group of 103 intellectuals, scholars, CPV members and former high-ranking government officials living in the country and abroad. They have issued a declaration calling for the implementation of civil and political rights and mechanisms to transform the current regime into a democracy. See “*Tuyên bố về thực thi các*

- quyền dân sự và chính trị” [Declaration on the Implementation of Civil and Political Rights], available at <<http://boxitvn.blogspot.de/2013/09/the-declaration-on-implementing-civil.html>>, accessed 28 September 2013. Obviously, the CPV will consider this a threat to its power. While the authorities have not yet taken any action to repress or harass the people who initiated the forum, some state newspapers have started attacking it.
- <sup>11</sup> For a broader discussion of civil society in Vietnam, see Thayer (2008; 2009; 2010); Gray (1999); Vuving (2010) and Norlund (2006).
- <sup>12</sup> The six CSO roles described by Hannah are: (1) *implementing state policy*, welfare, social services, anti-poverty measures as a ‘shadow state’; (2) *advocacy* for policy change; (3) *lobbying* for constituents, changes in policy implementation and ‘secondary beneficiaries’; (4) *watchdog*, exposure of corrupt officials or practices; (5) *opposition* in the press, public criticism of policy and regime; and (6) *public resistance* to the regime through civil disobedience or mass demonstrations.
- <sup>13</sup> See ‘*Thông báo kết luận của Thủ tướng Chính phủ về vụ việc cưỡng chế thu hồi đất ở xã Vinh Quang, huyện Tiên Lãng, thành phố Hải Phòng*’ [Public Notice of the conclusions by the Prime Minister of the Government on the land eviction in VinhQuang commune, Tiên Lãng district of HảiPhòng city], available at <[http://baodientu.chinhphu.vn/Uploaded\\_VGP/nguyenphuongmai/20120210/TB%2043.pdf](http://baodientu.chinhphu.vn/Uploaded_VGP/nguyenphuongmai/20120210/TB%2043.pdf)>. See also ‘*Thông cáo báo chí của Thành uỷ Hải Phòng về việc thực hiện Thông báo số 43/TB-VPCP ngày 10/02/2012 của Văn phòng Chính phủ thông báo kết luận của Thủ tướng Chính phủ về vụ việc cưỡng chế thu hồi đất ở xã Vinh Quang, huyện Tiên Lãng, thành phố Hải Phòng*’ [Press Notice from the HảiPhòng Party Committee on the implementation of the Official Notice No. 43/TB-VPCP of 10 February 2012 of the Office of the Government providing the conclusions of the Prime Minister on land eviction in VinhQuang commune, TiênLãng District, HảiPhòng city].
- <sup>14</sup> Response by Le Hieu Dang, vice chairman of the Advisory Board of Law and Democracy under the Vietnam Fatherland Front, in an interview with Thụy My of RFI, «*Luật gia Lê Hiếu Đằng: Hoãn thông qua Luật Đất đai là bước lùi tích cực* » [Lawyer Le Hieu Dang: Postponing adoption of the Law on Land is a positive step back] 22 June 2013, available at <<http://www.viet.rfi.fr/viet-nam/20130622-le-hieu-dang-hoan-thong-qua-luat-dat-dai-la-buoc-lui-tich-cuc-truoc-xa-hoi-cong-da>>, accessed on 15 June 2013.
- <sup>15</sup> A broader discussion and the opinions of the National Assembly on the draft amended Land Law, as well as a letter submitted by 18 CSOs on 13 June 2013 recommending that the National Assembly not approve the draft amended land law, are available at <[http://duthaoonline.quochoi.vn/DuThao/Lists/DT\\_DUTHAO\\_LUAT/View\\_Detail.aspx?ItemID=528&TabIndex=4](http://duthaoonline.quochoi.vn/DuThao/Lists/DT_DUTHAO_LUAT/View_Detail.aspx?ItemID=528&TabIndex=4)>.

- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> See <<http://www.boxitvn.net/bai/16432>>, accessed 10 July 2013.
- <sup>18</sup> See <<http://www.boxitvn.net/bai/17289>>, accessed 17 July 2013.
- <sup>19</sup> The CPV's Eighth Plenum in 2013 adopted regulations to make intraparty elections, including for senior positions, more competitive and democratic.
- <sup>20</sup> CPV Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong's response to questions by voters at a meeting in Ba Dinh district, 28 June 2013, 'Sẽ lấy phiếu tín nhiệm trong Đảng' [Vote of confidence will be organized within the party], available at <<http://tuoitre.vn/Chinh-tri-Xa-hoi/556514/se-lay-phiieu-tin-nhiem-trong-dang.html>>, accessed 1 July 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> Response by Vu Mao, former chairman of the National Assembly Office, 'Nên công khai chất vấn trong Đảng' [The Party should organize question time open to the public], available at <<http://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/xa-hoi/nen-cong-khai-chat-van-trong-dang-2224345.html>>, accessed 25 July 2013. See also a related article: 'Toàn văn phát biểu của Tổng Bí thư Nguyễn Phú Trọng' [Full text of the speech by the Party Secretary General Nguyen Phu Trong], available at <<http://vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/xa-hoi/lay-phiieu-tin-nhiem-hang-nam-voi-chuc-danh-trong-dang-2224045-p4.html>>, accessed 20 July 2013.
- <sup>22</sup> According to an initial assessment conducted by the World Alliance for Citizen Participation, Vietnamese social organizations and civil society actors still fall short of cooperation with each other. See CIVICUS (2006).
- <sup>23</sup> The establishment of political parties in Vietnam during this period was linked to political movements led by well-known progressive personalities and scholars to marshal the support of the populace for the struggle against the French colonial regime.

# **Chapter 8**

## **Social Democratic Parties and Trade Union Confederations in Norway and Sweden: Lessons Learned**

## Chapter 8

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Sofia KARLSSON and Kristin JESNES

# Social Democratic Parties and Trade Union Confederations in Norway and Sweden: Lessons Learned

### Introduction

This chapter highlights different aspects of the cooperation between the social democratic parties in Norway and Sweden—the Norwegian Labour Party (DnA) and the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP)<sup>1</sup>—and the trade union confederation in each country, known as *Landsorganisasj(tion)en* (LO), which is an umbrella organization that represents the national unions of specific trades or branches of a business. Organized workers belong to a local trade union, which is affiliated with one of the national unions.<sup>2</sup> In turn, national unions are affiliated with one of the trade union confederations,<sup>3</sup> which act as an intermediary between the trade unions and the government to coordinate wage bargaining, international work, education and other activities. Hence, trade unions are one instrument through which workers have a voice in politics.

Throughout the 20th century, trade unions played a major role in Swedish and Norwegian civil society and were the largest CSOs. At its height, union membership in Sweden reached 85 per cent of the working population in the 1980s—the highest in the world. Norway had lower levels of union penetration at around 58 per cent<sup>4</sup> (Kjellberg 2010: 12). LO Sweden currently represents 14 national unions with 1.5 million members, and the LO Norway represents 22 national unions with 890,000 members. In both countries, the LO is the largest confederation, organizing 25–30 per cent of the total workforce (LO Norway 2013). The cooperation between the LOs and the social democratic parties dates back more

than a century. The trade unions formed the social democratic parties in the late 19th century and, in turn, the social democratic parties established the LOs. This century-long cooperation was built on the converging interests, shared ideology and common goals of the labour movement. Nonetheless, the two entities remain separate, with different roles and political agendas.

This chapter thoroughly assesses this relationship and discusses the current challenges of this cooperation. Since this cooperation developed in a similar historical, cultural and political context in both countries, these alliances are examined as a single phenomenon, and the differences in each country are noted where necessary. The political and economic context in which the cooperation developed is reviewed, and the institutional arrangements that endure between the LOs and the social democratic parties is described. The current challenges facing this cooperation (and some of the strategies used to mitigate these challenges) are discussed in the context of political, economic and social change. Given the enduring close relationship between the LOs and the social democratic parties, the question of whether CSOs should be politically dependent or independent is examined, as is the question of how much influence political parties should allow CSOs. The lessons learned from Norway and Sweden show how such cooperation can be sustained in the long term. Based on these findings, a set of policy recommendations is provided for political parties and CSOs. Although many of the factors that constitute conditions for cooperation are products of a particular history and specific circumstances, this chapter provides useful background to the current debate on including CSOs in political decision-making.<sup>5</sup>

## **The characteristics of cooperation**

### ***The context: social dialogue and tripartite collaboration***

In both Norway and Sweden, social democratic parties dominated national politics for most of the 20th century. In Sweden, the SAP formed the government continuously between 1932 to 1976, and were in opposition during the years 1976–82 and 1991–94. In Norway, the DnA was in office from 1935 to 1965, and has governed through minority governments supported by other parties on the political left periodically since 1971. The high level of voting based on social class meant that the majority of the LO's members voted for the social democratic parties, which in turn depended on LO's endorsement to win general elections.

Thus, by supporting the social democratic parties, the LO obtained substantial influence over political decisions, especially those involving labour relations and social policies.

Labour relations in Norway and Sweden are marked by a long history and tradition of compromise. The labour movement intended to bring about economic growth without challenging the capitalist nature of production. This spirit of cooperation between unions and employers' associations was primarily manifested in the agreements between the confederations of blue-collar workers and private-sector employers in the late 1930s (Kjellberg 1998: 75), which set the stage for labour relations in the two countries. Confrontations were replaced by social dialogue and 'a climate of consensus'.

The labour markets in Norway and Sweden are built on collective bargaining between representatives of the trade union confederation and the employers' associations, without much interference from the political system. These collective actors negotiate wages and labour conditions with each other, and nurture close contact with the government in a 'tripartite collaboration' form of social dialogue. The tripartite collaboration builds on regular meetings in which the collective actors agree on the circumstances for negotiating wages and labour conditions based on the status of the economy. The state sets the legal framework for the negotiations and intervenes if they collapse. Successful negotiations require more or less equally strong collective actors. The organization of labour relations in Norway and Sweden constitutes one of the three pillars of the Nordic Model. The other two are economically responsible government policies that focus mostly on creating wealth and universal tax-financed welfare arrangements (Løken and Stokke 2009: 41; Dølvik 2013: 13).

This tripartite collaboration is widely believed to have generated a well-functioning labour market characterized by pragmatism, consensus and low levels of conflict. During the period of a set agreement, unions refrain from strike action—although this is sometimes breached. As the collective agreements pertain to all organized workers, this encourages unionization. The system is sustained by the workers' incentives to organize and the employee associations' willingness to sign collective agreements. Basic agreements regulate relations between employers and unions. Some of these, such as the Employment Protection Act, have been integrated into common legislation and pertain to all employers and employees regardless of whether they are organized.

The system of collective bargaining has four levels: the workplace, the local union branches, national unions and union confederations (Kjellberg 1998: 75–6). Collective agreements on wages and related issues are negotiated centrally, but are often supplemented by local agreements negotiated at the company level between the union workplace organizations that represent the national unions and the employer's representatives. The system also encourages dialogue between other parties. For instance, the social dialogue continues when the conservatives are in government. Meetings between the LO and different political parties, are an institutionalized practice. Thus, there is dialogue between the LO and other political parties, as well as between the social democratic parties and the other trade union confederations.

Since the 1990s, however, societal and political conditions have changed in ways that have challenged this collaboration. The DnA and SAP have been experiencing a general electoral decline, coupled with a decrease in electoral support from unionized workers. There have also been major changes in the make-up of the labour market: voting along class lines is no longer the norm. The traditional working class has also diminished in size, while other trade union confederations that organize primarily white-collar workers have emerged. The Norwegian system of collective bargaining remains at the central level, but negotiations have been decentralized to the sector and company levels in Sweden. The Swedish Employers' Confederation withdrew from centralized bargaining in the 1990s. Although it is clear that the Nordic Model contributed to the favourable context for cooperation, politicians and researchers are currently debating its future and that of tripartite collaboration.

### ***Institutional arrangements***

Through institutionalized cooperation with trade unions, political parties can obtain votes, donations, ideas and general political support. In return, trade unions can gain influence over political decisions concerning labour relations and social policy (Allern et al. 2010: 5). Institutional arrangements comprise this cooperation at the central, district and local levels. These include joint committees, representation on executive councils, joint electoral campaigning, financial contributions and other cooperative practices.<sup>6</sup> These arrangements may inspire other political parties and CSOs to engage CSOs in policymaking. However, it should



be noted that they have evolved over time and are therefore difficult to replicate and institutionalize.

### *Joint committees*

At the central level, the Norwegian Cooperation Committee (Samarbeidskomitéen) and the Swedish Trade Union Committee (Socialdemokraternas Fackliga Utskott) have overall responsibility for cooperation between the social democratic parties and their respective LO.

Sweden's Trade Union Committee consists of the SAP's party secretary, the chair of the LO, representatives from the national union affiliates and the Workers' Educational Association (ABF), as well as parliamentarians with experience with union-political work. The Trade Union Committee is a formal party organ formed by the SAP, and the party's Executive Committee appoints its members. The Trade Union Committee meets several times a year to provide updates on policies and discuss future directions and joint strategies.<sup>7</sup>

The Norwegian Cooperation Committee consists of representatives from the DnA (chair, vice chair and party secretary) and the LO (chair, vice chair and leaders of the main national union affiliates). The Cooperation Committee currently meets every two weeks at the LO headquarters. The chair of the DnA has a secretary who is responsible for daily contact with the LO and receives preparatory papers for the meetings. The Cooperation Committee provides a mechanism for the DnA and the LO to coordinate their policies and discuss political developments.<sup>8</sup>

As the name suggests, the Cooperation Committee is a cooperative forum between the LO and the DnA, while the Swedish Trade Union Committee is a formal committee within the SAP party structure. According to Øyvind Hansen, vice chairman of LO Norway's Information Department, Norway's structure creates an equal basis for cooperation, which suggests that the Swedish Trade Union Committee is balanced in favour of the SAP. Yet SAP Vice Party Secretary Ylva Thörn stresses that although the Party Executive Committee appoints the Trade Union Committee, the agenda is set in consultation with the LO, as it is contingent on both parties' interest in cooperation. It has been suggested, however, that the central leadership of LO Norway remains significantly stronger than its Swedish counterpart, and that this is one of the reasons why LO Norway has continued to have access to decision-making and policy formation (Dølvik and Stokke 1998: 125).

At the district and local levels, cooperation is more formalized in Sweden than in Norway. The SAP statute states that every party district must appoint a union committee that is responsible for overseeing trade union political work in the municipalities. Each union committee leader chairs the SAP District Executive Committee. The agenda is usually set by the unions, but the District Executive Committee can decide what questions to discuss.<sup>9</sup> At the local level, each municipality must appoint a local union committee to coordinate its work with local trade union branches. Its role is to advocate the interests of the trade unions within the local party organization. The task of the local union committee leader can be difficult, as he or she is sometimes the only one supporting the LO's demands on the local political agenda.<sup>10</sup> Although cooperation in Sweden is clearly set out in the party statutes, a 2010 report showed that only 25 per cent of all districts had union committees (Rydstedt 2011: 8). This indicates that, despite the stipulations, cooperation remains dependent on individual engagement and activism at the local level.

In Norway, cooperation at the county and local levels is based on the formation of joint committees, which is not stipulated in any formal regulations. Thus, the activities of these committees depend on the commitment and engagement of elected representatives and trade unionists. It is sometimes difficult to sustain the work of the joint committees, as there is a high turnover of membership in both the DnA and the LO at the local level.<sup>11</sup>

### *Representation in Executive Committees*

An additional institutional arrangement is the party Executive Committee. The chair of LO Sweden is elected into the SAP Executive Committee, and the chairs of the three largest union affiliates are elected into the DnA's Executive Committee in Norway. This tradition of having the LO's leaders represented on the Executive Committee is an institutionalized and permanent practice. There is no equivalent representation on LO's Executive Council, but the leaders of the social democratic parties speak at LO congresses. For example, the DnA's president, and former prime minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, spoke at the LO Congress in April 2013 and at other LO meetings, which indicates that the LO and the DnA are on good terms. The practice of electing as leaders of the social democratic parties those who are on good terms with, or have a background in, the unions is another symbolic gesture.

### *Elections and financial contributions*

In Sweden, the LO provides roughly half of the SAP's annual contributions (SEK 6 million of approximately SEK 13 million) (Rydstedt 2011: 9). The LO is the largest individual financial contributor in Norwegian politics, donating NOK 5 million per year to the DnA. In both countries, cooperation intensifies during elections and involves various joint electoral strategies, as well as increased financial donations. In Norway, the chair of the LO usually serves on the party's internal election committee, and election centres are established in the DnA's central office to coordinate joint campaign efforts. Prior to the DnA's electoral campaign in 2013, LO Norway announced donations of at least NOK 10 million, in addition to smaller sums to the other two political parties in the centre-left coalition. The LO's members also volunteer, arrange debates and seminars, and campaign for the DnA. The LO is therefore an important partner during elections.

### *Informal practices*

According to SAP Vice Party Secretary Ylva Thörn, the cooperation between the LO and the social democratic parties is in many ways sustained by open organizations and informal communication based on personal relationships and networks. Petra Bergquist, SAP's Ombudsman, argues that personal relationships also generate continuity by making it easier to follow up and reconnect. A district union leader, Jimmy Runesson, states that he is constantly on the go, meeting new people in the labour movement in order to build relationships and forge new discussions. Are Tomasgard, the confederal secretary at LO Norway agrees that personal relationships and networks function as the 'glue' between the two organizations; it ensures that cooperation continues despite disagreements.

The LO also pushes for political candidates with a background in the unions to be selected as party candidates. Runesson argues that it strengthens cooperation when there are people who are members of, and active in, both the unions and politics. However, when the same people are affiliated with both organizations, questions of accountability can arise. Ultimately, people's positions are the outcome of elections, and therefore one person can end up holding two positions at the same time. According to Tomasgard, this is not a problem. If this practice were prohibited, it would be impossible to sustain the local political organization. Nonetheless, Tomasgard stressed that it is important to be open about the different positions held before an election, and to be able to separate the different roles in the decision-making processes. It

is the individual's responsibility to declare any conflicts of interest and to withdraw from a particular position.

## **New challenges**

### ***Changing societal and political conditions***

Since the 1990s, the DnA and the SAP have suffered a general electoral decline, coupled with a decrease in electoral support from organized workers. They remain the largest political parties, with approximately 30 per cent of the vote each, but their political programmes have shifted somewhat to the right in order to adapt to the changing make-up of the electorate.

In addition to electoral changes, union membership has fallen. Since the 1990s, LO Sweden has lost more than 500,000 members, which has undermined its political influence and considerably reduced its budget. Since 2000, union membership in Sweden fell from 82 to 71 per cent.

Norway did not experience the same fall, but only a small decline in the 1990s and has had stable membership since 2000 at around 53 per cent (LO Norway 2013). A small increase in membership has been observed each year. Even so, due to the general increase in the size of the workforce, union density has not increased and the LO's share of union membership has fallen. This stagnation is partly explained by the changing structure of the labour market, with an increase in the educated workforce that remains unorganized or organized outside of LO (Berge and Nergaard 2010: 7).

In 2001, the DnA had its worst election in history. The privatization of large industries and a general shift to the right in the population led the unions that make up LO Norway to be more critical of cooperation with the DnA. The LO organization in Trondheim opted for a broader approach to cooperation in order to put issues that were relevant to the unions back on the political agenda. This approach became known as the Trondheim model, in which the LO draws up its political aims and supports the parties it judges will best pursue them. Each political party is asked to answer around 40 questions, and the parties are ranked according to how closely their answers correspond to the LO's political aims (Erikson 2011: 11). The Trondheim model has been adopted at the central level. The LO's broader approach to cooperation with the DnA allows it to support all the political parties in the centre-left coalition by

campaigning and with financial contributions. In 2005, the DnA won the election and formed a centre-left coalition government. The coalition was re-elected in 2009, but it lost the election in 2013 to a coalition of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party.

In Sweden, the SAP was ousted in 2006 after 12 years in office. The Moderate Party formed a centre-right coalition that was re-elected in 2010. This government increased the fee for the unemployment insurance that is operated by the trade unions with subsidies from the state, which caused many people to opt out of union membership. During the 2010 election campaign, the SAP formed an alliance with the Green Party and the Left Party, and campaigned on a coalition programme. Unlike the LO in Norway, the Swedish LO only supported the SAP and did not participate in any campaigning (Arbetarrörelsens Tankesmedja 2010: 6). Despite the changes in the SAP's political programme, the LO remains formally tied to the party, a decision that was reaffirmed at the most recent LO Congress in 2012.

Support for the DnA has fallen considerably among LO members; in 1969, 75 per cent of them voted DnA, but in 2005 and 2013 support dropped to 53 and 46 per cent, respectively (Kagge 2013). In Sweden, the LO still mobilizes more than 50 per cent of its union members to vote for the SAP (Arbetarrörelsens Tankesmedja 2010: 2), in part because they are aware of the legitimacy issues that cooperation would raise if support fell below 50 per cent.<sup>12</sup> According to a survey conducted by LO Sweden in 2007, only three out of ten members favoured continuing cooperation with the SAP (Rydstedt 2011: 5). This is partly explained by changes in the party's programme, greater heterogeneity of LO union membership and changes in the Moderate Party's policy approach.

From 2005 to 2013, the DnA was in office as part of a left-centrist coalition, but the coalition lost the 2013 election. The SAP is currently in opposition, aiming to win the next election in September 2014. It should be noted that the DnA has been in power in Norway most of the time since the early 1990s, while in Sweden there has been an electoral shift to the right. There are some differences in the strategies adopted by the respective LO organizations, but LO Norway's decision to broaden its cooperation with the DnA does not indicate that the relationship is less significant than in Sweden.

### ***Responding to new challenges***

The immediate challenge for this cooperation is to avoid further divergence that would challenge the legitimacy of continuing a close relationship. Both the LOs and the social democratic parties have adopted a number of policies to respond to this challenge, including recruitment strategies and strengthening the local organization.

#### *Recruitment strategies*

There are two types of recruitment challenges that pertain to this cooperation. First, the LO—together with the DnA/SAP—must increase the number of organized workers that are members of, and/or vote for, the social democratic parties. Second, the LO must increase union membership in the affiliated trade unions in order to remain relevant as a political actor. There are three main recruitment strategies: (1) encouraging the trade unionists affiliated with the LO to accept political roles; (2) endorsing closer cooperation between the LO and the social democrat youth organizations; and (3) increasing union membership within groups that have lower rates of unionization and encouraging members of these groups to become union representatives.

The first strategy has been adopted in both Norway and Sweden. An increase in the number of social democrat politicians who have a background in the unions would be positive for cooperation in the long term. LO Sweden is working to implement policy directions from the central leadership that would promote such developments.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the national union affiliates are implementing efforts to support union representatives who accept political roles and increase their political awareness (Fellesforbundet 2010; *Kommunal* 2004).

Efforts have been made to implement the second recruitment strategy by increasing union membership among youth, immigrants, women and workers in the private sector (LO Norway 2013). With regard to youth, the LO's unions are increasingly active in universities, and organize courses in union political work with the aim of including young people in cooperation. LO Norway also targets youth with summer patrols, in which young union representatives travel around the country to ensure that young workers have the rights they are entitled to. These patrols are unique opportunities to inform youth about union work and to recruit new members, and have produced a significant increase in student membership in LO-affiliated unions (Berge et al. 2013). The LO

also encourages the election of members of the targeted groups as union representatives in order to boost the membership of such groups and gain new perspectives from groups that often suffer poorer working conditions (LO Norway 2013).

The social democratic parties and the LOs support close cooperation with social democratic youth organizations (Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking and Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Ungdomsförbund) in order to implement the third recruitment strategy. Since today's young people will one day will one day be the future politicians in the social democratic parties, their interest in the unions and knowledge of cooperation is essential for both the social democratic parties and the LOs.<sup>14</sup>

### *Reinforcing local engagement and cooperation*

The social democratic parties and the LO gain their legitimacy from the grass roots through work done locally, so they have implemented three main strategies to improve local cooperation and encourage political activism among trade unionists. First, they are attempting to re-engage with political discussions and raise political awareness in the workplace—where the most important political discussions are held. All trade unionists belong to a local trade union branch, and every workplace with trade union branches should have elected union representatives who conduct union work and represent their members' interests vis-à-vis the employer. Union representatives in the workplace generate increased employee interest in issues pertaining to political union work, and thus more union activity takes place (Hotell och Restaurang 2011). Union representatives can channel workers' views and concerns through the unions to the LO's leadership and social democratic politicians (Kommunal 2004; Fellesforbundet 2010). Without union representatives, it is difficult for the social democratic parties to reach the workers, since politicians have no legal right to enter workplaces. According to Runesson, an SAP union leader, it is therefore important to increase the number of union representatives in the workplace and to give them the tools they need to forge political discussions. Thus, it is important to make sure that every workplace has a union representative who engages in the trade union's political discussions.

The second strategy to improve local cooperation and activism is to organize educational activities and training for union representatives and politicians in order to improve their knowledge of political and trade

union work, respectively, and to justify and strengthen their shared ideological bond. Educational initiatives include courses, workshops and seminars organized by LO unions or local trade union branches. These initiatives are organized in Sweden by the ABF and in Norway by the Educational Association of Norway (AOF). Through free and low-cost educational activities, such as courses and study circles, the ABF and AOF play an important role in raising awareness about workers' rights. The courses help increase political interest and raise awareness of unions' political work.<sup>15</sup>

The third strategy, to reinforce local cooperation by implementing structural changes in the LO, is being pursued in both Norway and Sweden. In Norway, the 2013 LO Congress undertook a thorough review of the local organization of the LO in order to adapt it to current challenges and changes in society, and to reaffirm its ties with the DnA in local council districts (LO Norway 2013). In Sweden, the local organization depends on the formation of union committees in the local council districts. The party district is responsible for ensuring that every council district has a union committee. In order to strengthen this local work, the District Union Committee assists in organizational matters with guidelines targeting the local union committee. Guidelines can include recommendations on how to organize meetings, how to function as an intermediary between workers in the workplace and SAP politicians, how to map out which party members are members of a union, how to organize a union's political studies locally and how to make nominations to the electoral list.

## **Politically dependent vs. independent**

Since the beginning of their relationship, the social democratic parties and the LOs have faced criticism for their close collaboration. In both Sweden and Norway, the LO has been criticized for acting more like a political party than a trade union confederation, and the social democratic parties have been criticized for allowing the LO too much political influence.<sup>16</sup> This type of criticism is becoming increasingly relevant due to changes in societal and political conditions. The question is whether trade union confederations and political parties are capable of engaging in close collaboration while maintaining their integrity as independent organizations.

According to Folkestad, other trade union confederations in Norway and Sweden are politically independent and seek regular dialogue with



politicians from different political parties to bolster support for their cause. Political independence allows trade union confederations to act on behalf of their members and engage in political debates without being tied to one political party. Hence, close political collaboration and dependency are not the only ways that political parties and CSOs can engage with each other. Social dialogue facilitates flexible approaches to political networking and coalition building that benefit political parties and CSOs in general. In this context, looser constellations may even provide more leeway for trade union confederations, since they are then able to keep channels open to different political parties.

There has also been criticism from within the ranks of the LOs of their close relationship with the social democratic parties. Some have questioned how political decisions and public policy directions can be influenced more efficiently, and whether partnership with one or more political parties is more beneficial than independence from political parties and the political arena. When the Trondheim model was introduced at the central level in 2005, LO Norway decided to broaden its approach to political parties in order to gain further influence over policy directions and put questions relevant to the unions back on the political agenda. LO Sweden retains its formal ties with the SAP, but some within the organization advocate reconsidering this stance.

Financial contributions from the LOs to the social democratic parties are another cause of contention. When class voting is no longer a given, and less than 50 per cent of an LO's members vote for the social democratic party, which is the case in Norway, some have contended that LO members who do not vote for the social democratic parties should not have to donate money through their union membership. According to Folkestad (president of Unio Norway, the Confederation of Unions for Professionals), people should be careful about buying and trading in politics. Concerns include the uncertain legitimacy of financial donations to the social democratic parties, and the fine line between legitimate economic support and buying political influence. LO Norway and Sweden have answered these criticisms by highlighting their internal democratic elections and emphasizing that financial donations are subject to democratic votes in their Congress.<sup>17</sup>

## **Conclusions and policy recommendations**

This chapter outlines different aspects of the cooperation between the social democratic parties and LOs in Norway and Sweden. Based on its

findings, a number of conclusions and policy recommendations are set out below for political parties and CSOs.

*The converging interests of the labour movement are at the core of this cooperation.* In order to build sustainable relationships, it is in the interest of both political parties and of CSOs to share values and to work toward some common goals. There will be disagreements about how to reach these goals, but fundamental values should converge. If the LO and the political party drift apart ideologically, it will become increasingly difficult to legitimize close cooperation.

*Political parties and CSOs should welcome dialogue and show respect for the other party.* The high level of social dialogue found in Sweden and Norway has evolved over a century and in a particular context; it is not possible to duplicate this scenario. Nonetheless, political parties and CSOs could be inspired by this dialogue and establish platforms that allow the main collective actors to discuss and arrive at productive solutions. Continual social dialogue generates a sense of mutual understanding between parties that are in conflict by nature, such as employers' associations and trade unions. Mutual understanding does not mean that CSOs and political parties should agree at all times or compromise their integrity, but by adopting a less confrontational strategy parties can arrive at constructive solutions.

*Political parties and CSOs should develop effective internal structures based on democratic processes and transparency.* The social democratic parties and the LOs both have comprehensive internal structures with democratic elections, well-established decision-making bodies, and clear guidelines for their work at the county and municipal levels. This facilitates both top-down and bottom-up dialogue, as well as transparency in decision-making processes.

*Political parties and CSOs benefit from inclusive policies and should develop progressive strategies on how to include minority groups and women in decision-making processes.* The LOs and social democratic parties have historically been at the forefront of including women in political decision-making. Today, they promote strategies that include migrants and youth. Groups should be creative in seeking out potential members who are most likely to be interested in what they have to say. It can be a good idea to place people from targeted groups in positions where they can reach out to other potential members of the group.

*Political parties should use their knowledge of CSOs to reflect on their party programme and policies.* Trade unions with strong grass-roots connections have valuable knowledge of which issues are relevant to people; parties should use these links to learn about the conditions of the labour market and society in general. Political parties must first reflect on what people need and use this information to develop social and employment policies. By engaging with CSOs, political parties can get ideas and constructive information on what people want and care about, which can be used to develop party programmes.

*Political parties should promote a participatory political environment.* The social democratic parties were created by grass-roots movements, which gave them broad legitimacy with the people. For political parties that were created by traditional elites, it is important to stay connected with the grassroots through CSOs. While parties must reach out to citizens themselves in order to maintain credibility, CSOs can help since through their various people-oriented activities, they are closer to the realities on the ground.

*Political parties and CSOs should establish platforms and networks that educate citizens on workers' rights and political work.* This would establish a foundation for political interest and knowledge, and create the preconditions for a participatory political environment. As noted above, the LOs educate trade unionists in political work through the ABF in Sweden and the AOF in Norway. CSOs and political parties in other countries have created similar educational institutions financed through collective membership or looser forms of educational platforms.

*Personal relations are crucial.* They facilitate the exchange of ideas, generate new discussions and dialogue, and provide easy access to information about policy changes. Personal relationships also generate continuity since they make it easier for individuals to follow up on various issues and reconnect. They are particularly important at the local level, since institutional arrangements are sometimes less organized.

*Representatives who are active in both organizations must separate their different roles and maintain their integrity.* There must be transparency in the political process. A union representative, for instance, must make the best decisions for the members of the union, while a political party representative must take the concerns of the whole constituency into account. At all times, it is crucial to 'know which hat you have on' and to avoid conflicts of interest. Political parties and CSOs must be aware of the risks of compromising the autonomy and

integrity of their organizations, as well as the risk of corruption.

*Decision-makers should welcome the formation of joint committees and other institutions.* Various institutional arrangements are feasible ways for political parties to engage CSOs in political decision-making. At every level of internal organization, joint committees serve as structures for coherent practices, formal meetings and general coordination. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the joint committees and networks in Norway and Sweden have evolved over a long period of time, and that looser CSO-political party relationships and networks can also create a positive basis for dialogue and political influence.

*CSOs and political parties should recognize the benefits of unity and effective internal organization.* The LOs are held together by comprehensive organizational structures that promote coherence as well as unity. Thus, organizational structures must strengthen their internal unity.

*CSOs gain political power when they can directly influence politicians.* In Norway and Sweden, the LOs have gained substantial influence over policymaking from the inside of political parties. Therefore, it can be fruitful for CSOs to have a strong connection to a specific political party, yet different approaches to collaboration with political parties can be beneficial.

*CSOs can take an active role in shaping public opinion.* CSOs have the opportunity to 'break the ice' in political debates and can make political demands that parties may be unable to make. By taking an active role in the political debate, CSOs can forge new political discussions, affect public opinion and compel the political party to state its position on a specific issue.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Norway and Sweden have small populations and strong economies, mainly export industries in Sweden and oil and fish in Norway.
- <sup>2</sup> In Sweden, LO unions only organize traditional blue-collar workers. In Norway, on the other hand, although the largest affiliates are blue-collar, the LO represents two national unions that are considered 'white-collar'. Hence, the division between the confederations is stricter in Sweden than Norway.
- <sup>3</sup> The centralized trade union confederations are: the LO, the Confederation

of Unions for Professionals (Unio in Norway and the TCO in Sweden) and the Federation of Professional Associations (Akademikerne in Norway and SACO in Sweden).

- 4 The difference between Norway and Sweden is partly explained by their unemployment insurance funds, which are run by the unions with subsidies from the state in Sweden, and are directly administered by the state in Norway.
- 5 The primary sources are relevant party and union documents. The secondary sources are mainly from think tanks of the Swedish labour movement and the Norwegian research institute Fafo. Interviews were conducted with key informants to obtain insight into the experiences and opinions of representatives at the national and local levels. Although the informants were chosen with care, it should be stressed that they do not necessarily reflect the general views of party and union members. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the same themes to be covered with each participant, while leaving room for spontaneous responses.
- 6 Until the 1990s, these practices were complemented by a system of collective membership, which meant that each trade union that joined the LO automatically brought all of its members into the social democratic parties. This scheme ended in Sweden in 1991 and in Norway in 1997.
- 7 Author's interview with Ylva Thörn, vice party secretary, SAP Sweden, July 2013.
- 8 Author's interview with Øyvind Hansen, vice chairman of the Information Department, LO Norway, Oslo, June 2013.
- 9 Author's interview with Jimmy Runesson, union leader, SAP Skåne party district, Malmö, July 2013.
- 10 Author's interview with Petra Bergquist, ombudsman, SAP Skåne, July 2013.
- 11 Author's interview with Are Tomasgard, confederal secretary, LO Norway, Oslo, July 2013.
- 12 Author's interview with Jimmy Runesson, union leader, SAP Skåne party district, Malmö, July 2013.
- 13 Author's interview with Tobias Baudin, vice chair, LO Sweden, June 2013.
- 14 Author's interview with Jimmy Runesson, union leader, SAP Skåne party district, Malmö, July 2013.
- 15 Author's interview with Åse Webeklint, ombudsman, ABF Skåne, Sweden, July 2013.
- 16 Author's interview with Anders Folkestad, president of Unio Norway, Oslo, August 2013.
- 17 Author's interview with Øyvind Hansen, vice chairman of the Information Department, LO Norway, Oslo, June 2013.

**Political Parties  
and the Citizen:  
The Current  
State of Affairs,  
Where Next and  
Recommendations**

# Political Parties and the Citizen: The Current State of Affairs, Where Next and Recommendations

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Sam VAN DER STAAK and Raul CORDENILLO

Why are citizens today increasingly drawn to citizen movements rather than to joining political parties? What can political parties learn to become more responsive to citizens' needs? The previous eight chapters have looked at these questions by examining nine countries in Asia and Europe. This chapter presents the findings of these cases studies, as well as the main recommendations that stem from them, all of which were validated at a workshop in Myanmar in November 2013.

## The trends

The cases in the preceding chapters illustrate the fact that citizen movements are a force to be reckoned with in both regions. These movements have manifested themselves, for example, as Indignados in Spain, anti-ACTA protests in Poland, Vietnamese land rights demonstrations and anti-corruption rallies in India. As noted in the introduction, citizen movements are not new, but they now appear more frequently and in more countries, although the issues they fight for are often of local concern. The chapters in this book thus provide a more detailed illustration of studies that have been conducted elsewhere that highlight the almost threefold increase in citizen movements at the global level (Ortiz et al. 2013).

Second, in spite of the simultaneous and rapid emergence of citizen movements across the two regions, context matters a great deal and affects the way in which parties engage with both CSOs and citizen movements. This is especially the case where a country's democratic freedoms allow citizen movements to express themselves through street protests or online debate. Furthermore, even though the extent of the problems associated with political parties is similar across both regions, there seem to be more similarities in the observable party-citizen disconnect in European countries than in Asia. These similarities include the ongoing decline in Europe's long-institutionalized mass-membership political parties, which some observers say has made

politics in Europe 'more and more about the competition between professionalized party elites and less about the mobilization and integration of socially distinct groups' (Van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). Many Asian countries have less of a tradition in this respect, and so experience the rise of the citizen as less of a breach with past party-citizen linkages. Another reason for the difference between Asia and Europe is that the digital divide, the gap between those with and without Internet access, is wider in Asia. This divide restricts citizen involvement in political affairs more in Asia, and allows movements to organize and mobilize protest faster in Europe, as fewer resources are needed.

Third, the individual chapters in this book discuss how movements are organized. Citizen movements are often incoherent groups with varying interests and causes. Those who protest are often not just the more traditional agents advocating social change—from organized youth groups and faith-based organizations to women's rights movements—but also waves of middle-class people of all ages.

The protests in Romania, with their combination of ecologists, human rights activists, defenders of women's rights and even football supporters, are a case in point. The two small women's rights CSOs in Romania demonstrate how tiny factions within citizen movements can have an impact on political parties. To understand their impact, various aspects of citizen movements need to be closely examined. Although the shortcomings of political parties should be taken seriously, citizen movements can also frame their messages more effectively. The case of Poland, where citizens turned against ACTA, which many politicians believe reflected existing policy, is one example. The anti-ACTA movement was criticized for its lack of organizational structure and its spontaneous manner of organizing protest events.

Finally, new means of communication, such as more real-time (traditional) media and social media, have increased politicians' visibility—as well as the pressure on them to deliver instantly. At the same time, many mention that politicians around the world have less direct control over the politics in their countries (Naim 2013). As global developments increasingly influence national politics, a gap emerges between what politicians are expected to promise and what they are able to deliver. This gap has contributed to the overall drop in voter turnout and party membership numbers discussed in the introduction. While more citizens are turning away from political parties, new forms of technology and outreach are giving them the opportunity to



engage in decision-making directly. Information and communications technologies, social media and also traditional media—the distinction between which is becoming increasingly blurred—have made it possible for citizens to not only monitor the behaviour of political parties, but also to voice their opinions more easily than ever before (Cohen and Schmidt 2010). Social media have, moreover, made it easier for citizen movements to coalesce and mobilize offline protest more quickly, as the use of blogs, Facebook and Twitter in Viet Nam, the Philippines, Spain and Poland clearly show.

### **Why are citizens increasingly drawn to citizen movements rather than to joining parties?**

Why do citizens tend to form citizen movements instead of joining political parties? Virtually all the chapters in this book show that citizens are losing trust in parties, which confirms the trends observed in global barometers and the scholarly literature. Among the many issues citizen movements protest against, three stand out: (1) unequal economic distribution, and parties' perceived inability to deliver on their promises, as in Poland; (2) corruption and the lack of integrity of political parties, as in India and the Philippines; and (3) a lack of democratic freedoms in general, as in Viet Nam. Often, citizen movements seem to be an amalgamation of causes of citizen discontent spread across all three categories, with citizens testing their citizenship. We see, for instance, how protests—while being unconventional forms of political participation—are increasingly seen as legitimate by the German people and even the political parties themselves. Together, they can converge into an overall anti-political-establishment sentiment.

In spite of the trend for citizens to join citizen movements, the cases cited in this publication also demonstrate the value of, and the need for, political parties in any representative democracy. While some of the representative functions of political parties can be fulfilled relatively well by other representative bodies, the tasks of organizing Parliament and government, and translating electoral choices into policy decisions, cannot be performed by other actors. Many of the case studies, from the AAP in India to trade unions in Sweden and Norway, show a desire by citizen movements and CSOs to engage with political parties at a later stage of their development in order to affect political decision-making. The challenge for citizens and politicians is therefore to make political parties more responsive to citizens' demands.

## **How can parties become more responsive to citizens' needs?**

Within the existing framework of representative democracy, the preceding chapters highlight a number of innovations in parties' engagement with citizens. Some of these relate to parties' use of communication technologies and social media. The call for bottom-up use of social media by parties in Romania to engage with citizens and online donations to the AAP in India are good examples of the potential power of technology, but not all success comes from technology. Social media, for instance, are only one tool of many that parties can use to address the lack of trust among citizens. Social media tools are drawing large interest from the Philippines to Spain, but the full potential to use these tools to address the current trust deficit between citizens and political parties requires additional research. As the Romania case shows, if social media tools are only used in a top-down manner to convey a party's views, rather than engage in debate, they will lose much of their impact on citizens.

Elsewhere, more traditional tools are used, but in innovative ways, to engage with citizens. These included innovative ways of using the print media and mobile phones in India, and of using regular party-CSO meetings in Spain, and drawing in younger and more diverse audiences in Sweden and Norway. Reasons for also using traditional tools range widely, from an absence of alternatives because of limited online access, or the lack of mass mobilization capacity; the realization that some tools only work when used in combination with others, such as social media and traditional media; and the types of situations in which action is required—action does not always require mass protest. Best practices should be collected and made available to political parties around the world.

Political parties should not restrict themselves to investing in innovative tools. Many of their traditional tasks need updating too. In the case of Germany, political parties are now well aware that citizens do not want just the traditional routines of public consultation when it comes to infrastructure planning; the legal framework for planning processes should be modernized to meet the demands of a new generation.

Another dominant citizen complaint regarding political parties in all the case studies is the level of corruption and lack of transparency in internal party decision-making. Addressing these issues must be a high

priority in order to regain the citizens' trust. Parties should focus their efforts on financial transparency and internal party democracy. The case of the AAP in India showed how a focus on financial transparency helped the party gain electoral success. Much of this increased focus starts with solid strategic planning by political parties, for which tools are already available (IDEA and NIMD 2013).

Finally, as the cases of Poland and Romania show, low levels of trust in political parties are in many instances linked to high levels of political polarization, which can cripple political decision-making and provoke citizen dissatisfaction with the political establishment. Engaging in interparty dialogue to resolve political disagreement is a strong alternative to power shifts as a result of citizen protest.

### ***Engaging with the citizen: problems at stake***

Before adopting these innovations, parties will have to decide when and with whom they should engage. The country case studies presented in this publication contain a variety of interactions between political parties and CSOs/citizen movements. At one end of the spectrum, there are examples of close cooperation, as in Norway, the Philippines, Spain and Sweden (and even Viet Nam in the case of women's rights CSOs). Often, the aim of such collaboration for the CSOs and citizen movements is to obtain decision-making power. At the other end of the spectrum, however, CSOs refrained from any form of cooperation with political parties, and vice versa, in Germany, Poland, Romania, Spain and Viet Nam. In Poland and Spain, citizen movements became anti-establishment and anti-political, making it difficult for even opposition parties to establish links with them. Why citizen movements decide not to engage with political parties is a subject for further study. In the cases analysed here, the decision to engage seems to be linked to the movement's goals—influencing policies or replacing the political establishment—as well as the make-up of the movement. It might be easier for a homogeneous network to agree on political engagement, whereas a heterogeneous network might find it easier to unite around issues of opposition. Political parties and citizen movements have different roles to play in society, which means that whenever they decide to collaborate, they should aim to further each other's roles—or at least not counteract them. For instance, citizen movements traditionally focus on a limited number of key themes, whereas political parties have to balance their views on different topics while remaining coherent.

Furthermore, citizen protest movements do not always represent a significant portion of the population, and can combine a diversity of sometimes incompatible interests. Many parties, such as those examined in this volume, may therefore find it difficult to distinguish between movements with minority stances and those with broadly supported views. In Poland and India, political parties did not initially take the citizen movements seriously, dismissing them as troublemakers, badly informed or not democratically elected. This raises the question of whether political parties should always adapt to citizen movements. In Poland, some parties did not take the citizen movements seriously at all, while others did and still others changed their minds halfway through the protests. Although based on rational decisions, the consequences of non-engagement were in some cases harmful for the parties involved. In Poland, the ruling party's reputation was at risk when it later had to change its stance, whereas in Romania non-engagement forced the ruling party from power. In India, none of the parties engaged with the IAC movement, which led it to become a party and win a large share of the votes in the Delhi Assembly elections.

Political parties must distinguish between demands that they consider reasonable and those that they consider unreasonable, as well as democratic and undemocratic, populist and non-populist, and those that reflect majority opinion or just large minorities. Asking these questions and communicating their views clearly to the wider public will help a party decide who to engage with and how to engage with them. Such open communication may also help the general public understand its choices. The public discussion on trade union cooperation within social democratic parties in Norway and Sweden is one such example. In Germany, on the other hand, going by the protest movements against infrastructure projects, a growing proportion of citizens are willing to forego rules and regulations, especially when they infringe on their special interests.

Nonetheless, communicating with citizen movements does not necessarily make it easier to avoid noisy crowds. The conflict over a railway station in Germany's Baden-Württemberg (Stuttgart 21) is a case in pointing out the breakdown of such communication. The intense public debate on the modern station appeared in Parliament no less than 146 times, 200 times on the Stuttgart City Council's agenda, with over 9,000 demands for changes in the official plans by groups of citizens. Ultimately, many parties will have to ask themselves: can we afford to ignore citizen movements and CSOs?

Perhaps even more importantly, once political parties have decided whether to reach out to citizen movements, there is the issue of whether citizen movements and CSOs will want to engage with the parties. As the Spanish and Nordic cases show, many CSOs are interested in cooperating with parties in order to obtain decision-making power. However, other citizen movements seek to distance themselves from political parties to avoid being seen as part of the establishment. Citizen movements may equally have trouble distinguishing between parties that are willing to get involved in dialogue and those that just want to co-opt them. Especially in emerging democracies and one-party states such as Viet Nam, citizen movements and CSOs might not want to become too involved with political parties for fear of being co-opted. Much therefore depends on the regime type. Established multiparty systems often experience a different level and nature of political party-citizen engagement than countries in transition or one-party systems. Democracies provide political space for citizen movements, whereas in repressive states citizen movements have to create their own political space, which they will not want to give up easily. These contextual differences mean that parties should also differentiate how they interact with citizens.

### ***Types of engagement***

Political parties and CSOs/citizen movements can engage in many different ways, such as on issues of finance or institutional cooperation, and issues of policymaking or elections/campaigning. The funding of social democratic parties by trade unions in Sweden and Norway is a clear example of financial collaboration, as is the institutional intertwinement in these countries, where trade unions have statutory representation on political party executive committees. In Spain and Romania, some CSOs, citizen movements and political parties have collaborated closely to influence policy-making. In the Philippines, CSOs have campaigned directly for a political party. In other cases, politicians might have felt that the policy demands of citizen movements were unrealistic and decided not to engage directly, but political parties still learned about new engagement tactics from citizen movements.

To decide which of these types of engagement work in which environments, parties should consider a number of options. First, they should determine whether citizen movements aim to work within the existing political system or to replace it altogether. Especially in the

former case, parties may offer their support to further certain policy reform goals. Second, the internal make-up of the movement matters. The more heterogeneous and leaderless a movement is internally, the more unlikely it will agree to any cooperation with outsiders. Parties will find little response to their calls for dialogue in such cases. Parties should, however, keep communication channels open to those within the movement who are inclined to collaborate in order to anticipate future windows when collaboration on reform is in the interests of the movement. Finally, parties can determine their level of engagement based on the degree of overlap of their reform plans. The broader the overlap of objectives, the more intense the engagement might be, including even financial support.

CSOs and citizen movements can and have become political parties in India, Germany, Norway, the Philippines and Sweden, which is a growing global phenomenon. In recent years, similar developments have occurred with, for instance, the Five Star Movement in Italy, the Yesh Atid party in Israel, South Africa's Economic Freedom Fighters and the Movement for Socialism in Bolivia. The Tea Party in the United States has influenced a political party not by founding a new party but by occupying key positions within an existing one. This is not without risk. As the cases of India and the Philippines show, transformation into a political party can be an internally disruptive affair, since not all members of a movement or CSO will want to join a political establishment that until recently they were protesting against. The most valuable lesson in this respect is to develop clear political skills while not neglecting links to grassroots support.

### ***Implications***

Reforming political parties is not easy; they face constraints on engaging with citizens more closely. First, any change in behaviour by political parties requires the political will for reform. Since most changes require politicians to reassess their current position and restrict their own powers and behaviour, they stand to lose out. Second, parties are often small organizations that depend for their daily operations on small budgets and volunteers. They often lack the capacity or know-how to conduct complicated internal reforms, such as administering large amounts of small donations, conducting fundraising, policymaking, marketing and campaigning, while also engaging regularly with citizens.

Nonetheless, following the many examples of CSO/citizen movement engagement with political parties from Asia and Europe, and despite the important differences in contexts between the various cases, there are experiences that can be learned and lessons that can be shared. Given the global trend for shifts in relations between citizens and political parties, the good practices in other countries can serve as key lessons for political parties, CSOs, citizen movements and individual citizens

## **Recommendations**

### ***Political parties***

1. Engage with citizens throughout the electoral cycle, using all possible outreach methods. A relationship of trust with citizens is the most valuable asset for any party. Political parties must engage with citizens on a continuous basis—not merely during election time—and tailor their engagement to the needs of citizens in each phase of the electoral cycle. All possible citizen outreach mechanisms should be explored, from open primaries to active canvassing and social media, and from investing serious budgets in citizens' political education to establishing joint party-citizen forums on political reform. Political parties should know their power and capabilities, and not make unrealistic promises. This means they should also explain the limits of what they can do for citizens.
2. Seek collaboration with citizen movements. Political parties should further explore collaboration with citizen movements. If they do not, parties that are already experiencing decreasing support stand to be replaced altogether. The broader the overlap with the reform objectives of the citizen movements, the more intense the engagement can be. In addition, collaboration is easier with homogeneous than with heterogeneous and leaderless movements. Collaboration might include joint campaigning, policy formulation or even financial support; it does not mean assimilation. Politicians should preserve their own roles and responsibilities. It is not necessary to agree on everything, and limits need to be drawn—especially if citizen movements aim to undermine the democratic system. Parties should carefully select who to work with within a movement. To avoid suspicion and build up trust, the relationship should not be rushed. If collaboration is initially shunned, parties should keep communication channels open in order to anticipate

- future windows of collaboration.
3. Collaborate with CSOs. CSOs are seen as hostile forces in many countries, but parties often stand to benefit from collaborating with them, if only to connect with the grassroots more easily and increase their public credibility—including in the areas of transparency and corruption. Parties should also use CSOs to enrich their policy proposals and help publicize them more widely. To achieve this, they should invest in personal relationships as well as formal institutional links.
  4. Improve financial transparency and internal party democracy. Citizen protest has erupted over the twin party shortcomings of outright internal misbehaviour and antiquated forms of citizen inclusion. Political parties should therefore consider far-reaching accountability rules and innovations in internal party democracy. Positive examples, from India and the Philippines among others, involve internal integrity committees that are independent of the party leadership and have extensive powers to investigate and enforce internal rules. Candidate selection procedures and policy formulation processes should allow for more internal competition and participation.
  5. Use social media to engage with citizens and keep up with debates between citizens and political parties. Politicians need to use social media to listen to citizens' concerns and communicate and discuss proposed solutions. Engaging proactively with the social media of CSOs and citizen movements would help to achieve this goal. Parties should rethink their communication infrastructure, as social media require faster, shorter and more direct forms of interaction. Investing in social media should not replace more traditional means of communicating with citizens that work well.
  6. Movements-/CSOs-turned-political-parties must understand their new role. They must not assume that their skills are automatically transferable to the political level. They must make deliberate efforts to develop governance and political competencies to enable them to achieve their political goals. At the same time, new parties should seek to expand at the local level in order to maintain grassroots support and secure votes.

### ***Citizens and citizen movements***

1. Avoid political apathy. Responding to a weak democracy with political apathy is the end of democracy. If citizens feel disappointed in their system, they should increase their engagement in order to support their democracy and improve their political apparatus.



2. Do not allow anti-democratic rhetoric. Political parties are essential to the democratic process—they should be reformed, not replaced. Citizen movements must stay ethical and realize the consequences of their actions, and not just protest for the sake of protest.
3. Be democratic internally. Practise democracy within the movement and avoid authoritarian attitudes. Citizen movements criticize political parties for their hierarchies and for not being internally democratic, so they should lead by example. They should think inclusively and focus on marginalized groups wherever possible.
4. Be focused. To be effective, citizen movements should have a strong message on a small number of issues. They should combine this with detailed arguments and proposals, and seize the momentum for action when it appears.
5. Be political. Citizen movements should maximize their political impact by transforming calls for reform into policy proposals that can become legislation. If the goal is to have a long-term political impact, they should not discard the option of dialogue with political parties when invited.
6. Know the roles of movements vs. parties. Not all citizen movements have to transform into political parties. They should choose their status on the basis of their goals in society.
7. Use social media. Social media provide increasingly useful tools for staying in touch with other citizens, but also for initiating new activities. These must, however, be combined with more conventional organizational methods.

### **CSOs**

1. Collaborate with political parties. To be effective at the legislative level, engage with political parties on important and common issues that affect the country. Where the aim is to improve the system and not replace it, working with those within political parties is often more effective than working from the outside.
2. Know your role. Invest in both formal and personal relations with political parties, such as joint committees, but maintain clarity on your separate roles.
3. Invest in internal organization. CSOs face the same risks of corruption and shady deal making as political parties. CSOs should ensure that they have both an effective and a democratic internal organization.
4. Combine a strong voice with policy knowledge. Invest in technical competence in policy areas that allow engagement with political parties and governments on an equal footing.

5. Stay recognizable. Adopt reform issues that are relevant to ordinary citizens' daily lives, not just to the politically engaged.
6. Use social media. Invest in social media to engage in dialogue with citizens and political parties.

### ***Democracy assistance providers***

1. Invest in grassroots involvement as well as political leadership. Political elites are crucial for political decision-making, but the emergence of citizen movements in recent years has highlighted the effects of not involving ordinary citizens sufficiently in political parties. In their support activities, assistance providers should seek to involve politicians from all ranks within parties they work with, including the rank and file.
2. Support linking political parties to citizen movements. There are difficulties in working with informal bodies, but successful examples do exist. The emergence of citizen movements around the world—and their impact on democratic systems—means that democracy assistance providers should support greater collaboration between parties and citizen movements. In some environments, assistance providers can function as impartial facilitators of dialogue, while in others they could provide financial help or technical expertise, such as on policy formulation. Given the novelty of this type of collaboration, more global comparative research is likely to be needed.
3. Revive support for internal party democracy. Since the emergence of political party assistance in the early 1990s, the support provided to improve internal party democracy has met with mixed results. Influencing a party's internal decision-making structures has proved to be among the most difficult areas of work for outsiders. However, the emergence of citizen movements and the decline in party membership have shown that the role of citizens in political parties continues to be a weak spot. Assistance providers should therefore rethink internal party democracy.
4. Provide outreach experiences from around the world. Both traditional and innovative outreach methods, such as social media, remain the primary ways to engage with citizens. The majority of parties around the world cannot, however, rely on political consultancy firms to access these. Democracy assistance organizations can help collect and disseminate these methods, making them more widely available, and help political parties adapt them to their own contexts.
5. Connect political party and CSO support. Civil society support and political party assistance are two sides of the same coin. Too often,

donors and assistance providers perceive these as separate fields, a notion that the emergence of citizen movements has in recent years refuted. International organizations and donors should invest in greater coordination between both fields, and should provide incentives, including funding.

## **Political parties and the citizen in the future**

In recent years, there has been a significant increase around the world in the number of citizen movements demonstrating their discontent through street protests. This publication illustrates that rise in a number of country case studies. It answers some of the questions about why citizens tend to form citizen movements rather than get involved in party politics, and suggests ways in which political parties can reverse this trend. Parties will, however, face an uphill battle. The global economic crisis, from which much of the world is still recovering only slowly, as well as the rising number of young unemployed globally, among other things, mean that citizens will continue to voice their anger. In its 'World in 2014' report, The Economist estimates that 43 per cent of the countries in the world remain at a high or very high risk of social unrest in 2014. Many of these are in Asia or Europe. The rise of social media and the spread of related technologies may facilitate such unrest.

Political parties, meanwhile, are far from resolving the problems that many of the country studies in this report describe. Most can therefore expect to face even greater opposition in coming years from citizens demanding to be heard. Political parties have only one way to respond to the question of whether they are losing their relevance: to find new ways of engaging with citizens. The best way to do this is to address the issues raised by citizens head-on and without delay.

More research is needed, however, to complement the findings in this publication. Future studies should focus on other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa, to confirm the trends that were identified in Asia and Europe and to learn from the best practices there. Political parties, citizen movements and CSOs should be challenged to capture their own best practices in order to share with their peers around the world innovative ways of engaging with citizens. Since the democratic roles of political parties remain unchanged, politicians need to take the initiative to regain citizens' trust.

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## **Conclusion**

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The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and facilitates cooperation among the people, institutions and organisations of Asia and Europe. ASEF enhances dialogue, enables exchanges and encourages collaboration across the thematic areas of culture, economy, education, governance, public health and sustainable development. ASEF is a not-for-profit intergovernmental organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). Together with about 700 partner organisations ASEF has run more than 650 projects, mainly conferences, seminars and workshops. Over 17,000 Asians and Europeans have actively participated in its activities and it has reached much wider audiences through its networks, web-portals, publications, exhibitions and lectures. For more information, please visit <http://www.asef.org>.

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The Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) is an official German Political Foundation. It is entrusted by the German Parliament with a mandate, which lies at the core of the task of promoting democratic and sustainable structures worldwide. This mandate involves the strengthening of the relevant institutions and persons, procedures and norms and the requisite attitudes enabling such development to take place. HSF is represented with project offices in more than 60 countries, conducting more than 100 projects globally. For more information, please visit <http://www.hss.de> or <http://www.hss.de/southeastasia>.

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The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. Its primary mission is to support sustainable democratic change by providing comparative knowledge, assisting in democratic reform, and influencing policies and politics. In particular, this includes convening political dialogue on democratic change at the request of national actors. The Institute aims to ensure that democratic outcomes are consistent with the full and equal political participation and representation of women and men; are inclusive with regard to the many expressions of diversity in society; and minimize conflict and consolidate peace and security. The Institute's work on political parties takes place under the framework of an institution-wide programme on Political Parties, Participation and Representation and focuses on improving the credibility, effectiveness and delivery capacity of political parties. For more information, please visit <http://www.idea.int>.



In recent years, and under the influence of new telecommunications and social media, citizen movements have emerged as an alternative to political party membership for citizen participation in democratic decision-making processes. Diverse groups of citizens, often including high numbers of youth, have made an increasing impact on democratic processes in Asia and Europe. By using social media to organize and stage their protests, they manage to circumvent political parties and CSOs as the traditional entry points for political participation and representation.

A joint project of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the Hanns Seidel Foundation and International IDEA, this publication looks closely at initiatives and activities undertaken by political parties in Asia and Europe to relate to CSOs and citizen movements. Political parties in the two regions operate in different domestic political contexts and different socio-economic conditions. Different approaches and a myriad of experiences are analysed in this book: from complete non-alignment between citizen movements and parties, as in the case of Spain, to a very formalised party-CSO engagement in Sweden and Norway, to a watchful approach from the incumbent government toward protest movements in Vietnam, to CSOs-turned political parties in India and the Philippines. This book offers valuable lessons to any political party wishing to rebuild public confidence in a world of rapidly emerging citizen protests.

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