

# Minimum Standards for the Democratic Functioning of Political Parties



**Inside Cover**

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**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

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# NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

Democracy depends on legislatures that represent citizens and oversee the executive, independent judiciaries that safeguard the rule of law, political parties that are open and accountable, and elections in which voters freely choose their representatives in government. Acting as a catalyst for democratic development, NDI bolsters the institutions and processes that allow democracy to flourish.

**Build Political and Civic Organizations.** NDI helps build the stable, broad-based and well-organized institutions that form the foundation of a strong civic culture. Democracy depends on these mediating institutions—the voice of an informed citizenry, which link citizens to their government and to one another by providing avenues for participation in public policy.

**Safeguard Elections.** NDI promotes open and democratic elections. Political parties and governments have asked NDI to study electoral codes and to recommend improvements. The Institute also provides technical assistance for political parties and civic groups to conduct voter education campaigns and to organize election monitoring programs. NDI is a world leader in election monitoring, having organized international delegations to monitor elections in dozens of countries, helping to ensure that polling results reflect the will of the people.

**Promote Openness and Accountability.** NDI responds to requests from leaders of government, parliament, political parties and civic groups seeking advice on matters from legislative procedures to constituent service to the balance of civil-military relations in a democracy. NDI works to build legislatures and local governments that are professional, accountable, open and responsive to their citizens.

International cooperation is key to promoting democracy effectively and efficiently. It also conveys a deeper message to new and emerging democracies that while autocracies are inherently isolated and fearful of the outside world, democracies can count on international allies and an active support system. Headquartered in Washington D.C., with field offices in every region of the world, NDI complements the skills of its staff by enlisting volunteer experts from around the world, many of whom are veterans of democratic struggles in their own countries and share valuable perspectives on democratic development.



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Dr. Susan Scarrow, Professor of Politics at the University of Houston and Sefakor Ashiagbor, NDI Senior Advisor for Political Party Programs, drafted these *Minimum Standards for the Democratic Functioning of Political Parties*.

In February 2008, the document was finalized at a roundtable in Brussels, Belgium that featured senior officials of Centrist Democrat International, Liberal International and Socialist International together with representatives of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, the European People's Party, and the Party of European Socialists. The Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, International IDEA, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy also participated in the event.

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# PREFACE

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“All politics are local,” as the late Speaker of the United States Congress, Tip O’Neill, once observed. At the same time, when functioning properly, political parties help place citizens’ local concerns in a national context. Parties can mediate. They can create common ground. Parties can create grounds for compromise and thus they can help societies unite and remain united. Political parties are not perfect but no other national institution can serve as well to aggregate and represent citizens’ interests or impede government by fiat. In over two centuries, there has been no democracy without political parties. When public confidence in political parties is compromised, the entire democratic process suffers. In all sustainable democracies, the party system must be deeply and durably entrenched in the fabric of society.

For more than 20 years, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has worked with political parties around the world to create more open political environments in which citizens can actively participate in the democratic process. As a political party institute, NDI approaches its work from a practical viewpoint, offering assistance to promote parties’ long-term organizational development, enhance their competitiveness in local and national elections, and help them participate constructively in government. This support takes many forms, from interactive training and guided practice to consultations and tailored resources that help parties become more open and representative organizations.

In its political party development programs, the Institute works closely with international party groupings to build support for democratic political parties. These international organizations of political parties are united by common ideologies and mission statements. The three largest party internationals – Centrist Democrat International (CDI), Liberal International (LI), and Socialist International (SI) – together represent more than 320 parties in over 140 countries around the world. These groups serve as networks for political parties to learn from one another as well as promote their ideology at the global level; provide frameworks for the exchange of ideas as well as for collective action; build fraternal relationships that foster trust amongst parties; offer aid to political parties most often in the form of technical assistance; and help shape nascent political parties in emerging democracies. Over the course of NDI’s work with the party internationals, the number of organizations involved and interested in participating in this partnership has grown to include the European party groups and other political party foundations and institutes. Like NDI, these partners believe that political parties worldwide need to be democratic, inclusive, and responsive.

This initiative arose from the Institute’s discussions with the leadership of the party internationals about the need for democratic, inclusive and responsive political parties

worldwide. In addition, these *Minimum Standards for the Democratic Functioning of Political Parties* were developed in response to requests from the Institute’s political party partners in emerging democracies for universally-accepted guiding principles and norms for open and democratic parties. The joint effort to develop such norms and principles culminated in a February 2008 meeting in Brussels where senior officials from the party internationals and other NDI partners together finalized the document.

In developing norms and principles of any kind, key considerations include aspiration versus current practices and to what extent provisions for enforcement should be made. These norms and principles reflect neither best party practices in the areas addressed nor the maximum behavior that citizens can expect of their parties; indeed, a number of political parties whose operations already exceeded these guidelines have placed additional emphasis on ethics in public office and reformed their structures to allow for higher levels of participation, openness and transparency in their own operations as well as in their political systems more generally. Rather, this effort is an attempt to articulate guidelines that largely reflect the existing, common practices of a range of established and broadly democratic political parties regardless of ideology, geographic location or size. Further, these norms and principles are not intended for use in formally certifying (or withholding certification from) specific parties for purposes of international assistance, legal registration or other comparable recognition. Above all, they are intended as a tool for political parties and those who seek to promote their development. As such, the Institute hopes that the document will better inform the efforts of political parties that seek to make their practices more inclusive and their operations more institutionalized.

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Director of Political Party Programs



# MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING OF POLITICAL PARTIES

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## PREAMBLE

Political parties are a cornerstone of representative democracy and serve a function like no other institution. Democratic political parties contest and seek to win elections in order to manage government institutions. They offer alternative public policy proposals which are shaped by citizens' preferences. Through their choices of candidates and policies, they provide citizens with options for governance. They can strengthen national political institutions when they present these choices at elections and seek to mobilize citizens behind their visions of the national interest. While there are parties without democracy, there can be no democracy without political parties.

Through their actions and their aims, political parties can play vital roles in strengthening democratic regimes. However, the extent of their contribution depends on the ways that they define their roles, and that of their political competitors. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlines the basic requirements for democratic political organization: *The will of the people shall be the basis of authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures* (Art 22.3). In democracies, political parties play a key role in such elections: by helping to structure electoral choices and abiding by the outcome of these contests, parties help to ensure that elections are true expressions of the popular will.

Parties also perform critical functions between elections that serve to promote genuine multi-party systems, support the development of effective sustainable political institutions and contribute to healthy and vibrant democracies. When out of power, many democratic parties provide a constructive and critical opposition by presenting themselves as the alternative government voters may wish to choose – thus pressuring the incumbents to be more responsive to the public's interests. These expressions of conflicting views can actually help to create a better understanding of the issues and to identify solutions. Outside election periods, democratic parties also offer citizens opportunities to participate in political life and encourage active links between citizens and those who represent them.

Political parties that share a commitment to democratic stability and that accept the norm of political contestation can help to deepen common democratic foundations even while they pursue the more particular interests of the citizens and groups whom they represent. This document details some basic behavioral norms which characterize the actions of

democratic parties and their representatives. It also outlines a set of organizational issues that most democratic parties will want to address in their statutes. Because democratic political parties vary greatly in their aims as well as in their political settings, the norms and principles outlined below are not a simple checklist; parties that fail to meet particular details are not necessarily undemocratic, and parties that have democratic statutes may behave in undemocratic ways. However, the features outlined below are not just a normative wish list; they are also politically pragmatic goals.

## 1. PARTY BEHAVIOR

Whatever the values and aims which parties proclaim, what matters most is how they behave – how they deal with internal and external conflicts, and how responsibly they act towards the citizens they claim to represent. Such behavior not only determines a party’s contributions to strengthening democratic practices; it also can affect its success in becoming and remaining an influential political actor.

### 1a. Respect for Human Rights

**At the most fundamental level, all democratic parties benefit from, and should support, the rights that are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.** This is particularly true of rights to free association and free speech – rights which are crucial for the maintenance of democratic politics. Political parties should not try to advance the status of their own constituents by seeking to deprive other citizens of their basic constitutional or human rights (for instance, by advocating discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, or ethnicity). Governing parties should not abuse their position by denying basic government services and protections to individuals or to minority groups that do not support the government. In some circumstances, democratic parties legitimately may endorse restrictions on the rights of parties which seek to undermine the democratic order. But they should do so only in the context of clear legal or constitutional rules about what constitutes impermissible speech or actions, and they should respect the decisions of appellate organizations (courts or other constitutionally designated regulatory bodies) as to whether such violations have occurred.

### 1b. Respect for Legitimate Elections as the Basis of Government

**Democratic political parties agree to accept the will of the people as expressed through legitimate elections as the basis for government.** They agree that the will of the people will be expressed through elections, not through the rule of the street. They also agree that it is possible for them to lose an election, and they behave accordingly in such circumstances. In return, democratic parties have a right to expect that elections will be run fairly, and that governing parties will not make excessive use of government resources to

privilege the incumbents, or to stifle opposition. Parties should respect and accept electoral outcomes in elections that are considered to be generally fair.

### **1c. Respect for Electoral Processes**

**Parties should respect the chosen electoral procedures, including voter registration laws, polling station regulations and vote certification processes.**

Democratic political parties contest elections according to the rules and norms of the state, not engaging in illegal campaign activities, and not improperly undermining the campaigns of their competitors. They may and should encourage their own supporters to participate fully in all stages of the electoral process, but they should not seek to make it difficult for supporters of rival parties to do the same. Respecting electoral processes also means that they should abide by controversial electoral outcomes once legally-sanctioned appeals processes have been exhausted.

Democratic parties have a right to protest perceived violations of fair electoral procedures, but they should not lightly try to overthrow even an imperfect democratic system, nor should they resort to violence to try to overturn elections that are considered to be generally fair, even if somewhat flawed. They may and should press for those flaws to be remedied. But over the long-run, parties can strengthen democratic stability, and the fairness of electoral systems, by upholding the principle that the rules determine the outcome – and that this is true even when rules can and should be improved.

### **1d. Respect for Other Parties and Free Competition**

**All democratic parties have a right to expect that they and their supporters may freely express their opinions; governing parties and state institutions have an obligation to protect these rights, and to safeguard the environment of free competition.** Political parties should demonstrate their commitment to democratic decision-making by showing respect for other parties and other interests in society. Parties, particularly those in government, should recognize that other parties and groups, as well as individual citizens, all have the right to peacefully challenge and oppose them. This means that however fiercely parties campaign, they will not question the rights of others to defend their interests and promote their principles, provided those opponents work within the recognized democratic framework. It means that legislative parties will deal with all other elected representatives, and will recognize their mandates and their rights to take legislative seats. It means that governing parties will not use government resources or legislative authority in ways that make it impossible for other voices to be heard (for instance, by imposing media censorship). Parties may fervently disagree with each other, but at the very least they must tolerate their democratic opponents; of course, parties may even welcome most such disputes as being a key component of democratic politics.

## 1e. Commitment to Non-Violence

**Democratic parties in democratic systems reject the use of violence as a political tool.** Democratic parties should not advocate or resort to violence, maintain their own militias or use hate speech as a political tool. They should not seek to disrupt meetings of rival parties, nor should they hinder the free speech rights of those with opposing views. Parties which make a commitment to non-violence in politics have a right to expect the same from others, and that state authorities will protect them if this is not respected. In addition, they have the right to expect that their supporters will be able to assemble freely, that they will be able to communicate party views in non-violent ways, and that these opinions will not summarily be blocked from receiving proportionate media coverage, especially by the state-run media.

## 1f. Communication of Principles, Policy Proposals and Accomplishments

**Parties should communicate their principles, policy proposals and accomplishments with party members, party supporters, and with other citizens.** Legitimate political parties typically possess some measure of agreement over fundamental values and principles that bind people together. Successful parties generally also articulate a broader vision for society. They may spell out these principles in election platforms and party programs. Such documents can strengthen a party's identity. But whether or not a party has a formal program, the communication of party principles, policy proposals and accomplishments is essential for helping citizens make informed electoral choices that are based on what parties and candidates stand for. Although mass media play a crucial role in this process, parties also bear responsibility for ensuring that citizens have access to the information they need. Parties and their leaders may communicate party messages through press releases and interviews with independent media, through party-controlled media (party newspapers, web pages), and through public or member-only meetings.

## 1g. Encouraging Political Participation

**Parties benefit themselves as well as the broader democratic society when they foster political participation.** Parties which hope to implement their views by winning democratic elections generally aim to mobilize public support. At a minimum, they will seek to ensure that their supporters vote on election days. But often they encourage deeper commitment by recruiting members, by seeking donations, and by engaging citizens in political discussions. Further, parties should not set up structural, political or other obstacles that prevent those who oppose their views from participating in political processes.

**Efforts to cultivate participation by historically excluded or under-represented groups – including women and ethnic or other minorities – can often benefit**



**parties by broadening their support. Simultaneously, they can enhance the legitimacy of the political system within which the parties compete.** Parties may be able to strengthen their overall support and their recruitment of political talent by actively cultivating participation among groups that are historically under-represented in the political realm. For instance, some parties may make special efforts to mobilize women, ethnic or religious minorities, or regional interests. Ways to encourage participation can range from exhortation from the top (a stated commitment to broaden participation), to the establishment of special sections within the party organization (groups for youth, women, etc.), to quotas or other formulas in candidate selection that privilege certain outcomes. Parties may choose some or all of these mechanisms to help them broaden their support base. But whichever tools a party chooses, these are unlikely to have much impact unless there is a strong commitment throughout all levels of the party to expand participation by the targeted groups: commitments that exist on paper alone are unlikely to make much difference.

## **1h. Governing Responsibly**

**Parties that win a mandate to govern alone or in coalition should govern responsibly.** They have an obligation to their voters to try to realize at least some of the aims on which they campaigned. They have an obligation to the nation to balance these aims against other considerations of national welfare, and against the long-term stability of the democratic regime. Parties that lead executive or legislative institutions should act as stewards of these bodies, working to strengthen their effectiveness. They should honor the fact that these institutions generally provide opportunities for opposition parties to articulate alternative viewpoints, guided in part by their awareness that in a democracy party majorities are likely to shift.

## **2. PARTY ORGANIZATION**

Parties' organizational choices are a matter of aspirations as well as of strategy: a party's internal procedures help to define what the party stands for. Clear internal rules and procedures are invaluable for parties which are seeking long-term electoral success. Procedures that regulate internal conflict can contribute to a party's longevity, particularly if rules are transparent, well-publicized, understood by members and followed.

Parties generally adopt party constitutions or party statutes to spell out the relations between different levels of the party, and to define procedures for making decisions. These rules usually detail how local and national party leaders are selected (and often, how they may be de-selected), how candidates for public office are selected, and who is eligible to stand for both types of positions. Parties' organizational choices reflect the environments in which they compete, and because of this they are likely to vary widely over time, and across countries.

Nevertheless, there are some basic organizational issues which most successful democratic parties are likely to confront.

## 2a. Defining and Protecting Party Labels

**Parties may use their statutes to establish their legal name and to specify who may use the party label.** Party names are shorthand messages which help citizens to identify which candidates and which representatives are allied in support of particular principles or leaders. Permanent party names can contribute to party longevity by fostering voters' loyalty to a party in addition to their allegiance to specific leaders.

Parties may also wish to state authorized abbreviations or alternative labels. Specifying the legal name ensures uniformity and continuity on ballots and in media coverage. It also minimizes the risk that rival parties or break-away factions will claim the same name, something that would make it more difficult for a party to preserve its distinctive identity.

In order to protect the party identity, parties may also wish to establish rules about who may use the party label. In some cases these rules may include procedures for expelling elected officials or local or regional branches that are found to be in opposition to the national party leadership or the national party program. Having some kind of control mechanisms about who may speak for the party is important for ensuring that the party label is not hijacked. However, these procedures should not be used to prevent healthy internal debates.

## 2b. Conditions for Party Membership

**Party rules should define membership eligibility requirements and spell out members' rights, roles and responsibilities.** Many political parties enlist their supporters as enrolled members. Having enrolled memberships can help parties to spread their ideas and to solidify their popular roots. Membership dues can also be an important source of party revenues. Parties can use their membership organizations to encourage meaningful political participation and to strengthen ties between supporters and leaders.

Clear membership rules can help facilitate such participation, particularly participation in the selection of candidates and the designation of leaders. These rules should make clear who has the power to admit members, or to refuse admission, and on what grounds; they should also spell out members' rights. Rights that party members commonly enjoy include opportunities to participate in candidate selection procedures, access to party-only forums, and the receipt of special information from the party. Common obligations of members include the duty to pay monthly or annual dues and, in some cases, the requirement to attend a certain number of meetings. Eligibility requirements make clear who may join. Stipulations generally include a minimum age for membership, the incompatibility of membership with membership in

another party, and, in some cases, a residency or citizenship requirement. Party constitutions may also set the length of membership terms, as well as the grounds for termination.

## **2c. Relations between Party Units**

**Party statutes can clarify lines of communication, authority and accountability between a party's various layers.** Most parties exist on several political levels (local, provincial, national), and have several faces (the voluntary organization, the legislative group, and, in some cases, the president and provincial chief executives). This raises the question of who ultimately defines what the party stands for. In many cases, party structures will reflect national political structures: for instance, parties' regional units may be more autonomous in federal states, whereas party organization may be more hierarchical in unitary states. The relative autonomy of provincial parties may make particularly good political sense in countries where regional elections are fought on distinct issues. But even in these situations, it is important to have rules in place to help mediate conflicts between national and regional party leaders.

When a party has multiple organizational levels and multiple governing organs, its statutes should designate the highest authority in the party. In some cases, the highest authority may vary according to the policy area. For instance, the legislative group might have the ultimate authority to select the party leader, whereas the party's annual conference might be the final arbiter for selecting the party's executive board; a special auditing committee might oversee the party's financial affairs. Additionally, parties often have smaller executive boards which oversee day-to-day affairs. These boards may be accountable to the party's annual conference, or they may be selected by the legislative party (or they may represent a combination of the two).

Parties may also want to formally define their relationships with other groups. Many parties have sub-groups and affiliated associations that cater to particular segments of society, and that fulfill specific tasks. Examples include think tanks, organizations for women or young people, or policy-oriented organized factions that lobby within the party. Such sub-groups may be wholly independent of the party itself, linked only informally by shared goals and possibly overlapping memberships. Or they may be formally subordinate to the party's voluntary organization. In order to avoid confusion about who speaks for the party, party statutes may clarify these relationships. They may also clarify formal relationships with non-party organizations, particularly those that are closely linked to the party's origins and ongoing missions. For instance, many social democratically-oriented parties have close ties with trade unions. In some cases, trade unions are organizational affiliates of the party with their own voting rights and their own financial obligations to the party. In other cases, the unions are independent supporters without any formal rights. In parties associated with religious movements, certain religious authorities may have special standing within party circles. By defining the extent and limits of these relations, parties help to define what they stand for, and who may speak for them.

## 2d. Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution

**Party statutes should anticipate conflicts and should provide frameworks for fostering, but also for containing, healthy internal debate.** In democratic political parties, it is both inevitable and desirable that dedicated and ambitious politicians will have clashing perspectives about which policies and approaches are in the best interests of the nation, and of the party. Having rules for the internal adjudication of conflict may prevent disputes from escalating, and may make it less likely that aggrieved members take disputes to the courts. These frameworks should include an independent appeals body within the party in cases where party members or party representatives are expelled from the party, or from the party's legislative caucus. Having an independent appeals body within the party not only leads to more considered decisions; it also should make it more difficult for local or national party factions to use expulsion mechanisms to entrench their power or to settle personal scores.

## 2e. Selection of Party Leaders and Candidates

**Parties benefit from having clear rules about the regular selection (and possible de-selection) of party leaders and party candidates.** Clear rules help to channel and encourage competition among politicians and among advocates of rival policy alternatives. For parties committed to democratic principles, there is some appeal to implementing democratic principles within the party organization, giving party members a voice in important decisions through representative party congresses or through direct membership votes. But however inclusive the decision-making rules, merely having clear and established procedures for making important decisions may make it more likely that losing participants will respect the outcome, and that they will put their energies into winning under existing rules, or into changing the rules, rather than breaking away to found new parties. This channeling of conflict is one of the virtues of transparent rules.

Selection rules need to specify who is eligible to compete for party positions and for candidacies for public office. They also need to spell out who is eligible to participate in the selection processes. For instance, the rules may require that both candidates and selectors are party members, and that they have this status a certain number of months ahead of the election. Rules should specify voting mechanisms (secret ballots? Plurality winners? Run off elections? etc.), and they should set up internal bodies to oversee the process and to hear possible appeals if procedures appear to be violated. Such rules should be clearly spelled out even if the selection panel is a relatively small group (such as the national party executive filling candidate positions on a party's electoral list).

When devising their selection rules, parties often respond to several conflicting pressures. One of these is the desire to make selection procedures more inclusive in order to present candidates and leaders who can claim the endorsement of a broad swathe of party

supporters. In pursuit of this, many parties have developed mechanisms of intra-party democracy that give party members a meaningful role in these important decisions. Another, and sometimes conflicting pressure, is to safeguard the party identity by ensuring that all candidates agree with major party aims. A third pressure may be to ensure that those selected represent a cross-section of constituencies within the party, whether these be geographic regions, linguistic or ethnic communities, women, or representatives of various internal factions. Given these contrasting and legitimate considerations, and given the diversity of electoral systems within which parties compete, there is no single best way for parties to choose leaders and candidates. Indeed, many parties frequently change their selection rules in response to the pressures described above. However, **in order to minimize internal wrangling, and to enhance the legitimacy of those selected, parties should strive to establish clear rules well in advance of each contest.**

## 2f. Adherence to Internal Rules

**Party officials and party employees should adhere to party rules for making decisions, including selection decisions for candidates and leaders.** Procedural frameworks can only contribute to a party's long-term stability if those within the party agree to abide by the stated rules. This does not mean that rivals within a party are permanently stuck with any given procedure. Party statutes should include procedures on how to amend the statutes and generally, party statutes are much easier to amend than national constitutions. It does mean that competitors agree to respect the rules currently in force, and to follow due process unless and until they are able to change the rules to be more to their liking. Internal agreement to abide by set procedures helps to clarify the opportunities and boundaries for legitimate internal dissent. Moreover, parties which follow their own rules strengthen democratic cultures in their country by demonstrating through their actions that rules matter.

## 2g. Accountability in Party Finance

**Political parties should keep sound and proper financial records, which serve to generate confidence, enhance credibility, and encourage contributions to finance party operations. In addition, officeholders and party units need to be internally accountable for party finances within their domains.** Internal accountability means that parties have clear procedures for tracking who gives money to the party and its candidates, and where that money winds up; it also may mean creating party oversight boards which are entitled to audit the accounts of all the party's sub-units, and which can reprimand party officials who fail to provide accurate accounts.

Parties with such safeguards may establish their own rules about how such donations may be given (no anonymous cash donations above a certain amount, for example), and to whom. A primary aim of such rules is to ensure that funds given to party employees and

party representatives are used for party purposes, and not for personal gain. Such tracking mechanisms help protect parties from financial scandals which can seriously damage their credibility. Procedures for financial reporting may also limit the ability of individual party leaders to use illicit funds to enhance their personal power base within the party. In some countries, parties are required to follow such procedures to comply with national laws, but even in the absence of such legislative requirements, parties may find a certain amount of internal financial transparency to be politically advantageous. Where party finance legislation exists, political parties should strive to respect and implement the requirements of the law, even if imperfect, and even as they work to seek improvements to those regulations through legal means.

In addition to establishing procedures to ensure that party revenues are internally transparent, parties may choose to disclose to the public at least some of the details of their audited financial situation. Public disclosure of party accounts is a good way for parties to dispel suspicion about whether some party actions may be more motivated by concern for a few big donors' private interests than by concern for the general welfare. Parties' responsibility to manage funds responsibly increases exponentially when they accept public subsidies. In some countries, particularly those that provide parties with public subsidies, parties are required to disclose audited accounts to public authorities, and often these accounts are made public. But even when parties are not required to publish their accounts, some may choose to do so in order to protect themselves from unsubstantiated suspicions about the sources of their funds.

## **2h. Measures to Tackle Political Corruption**

**Parties should take responsibility for their officeholders and other leaders who abuse their positions for personal gain.** If party representatives are convicted of such offenses, their parties should disown them, not seek to minimize the crime. Even in the absence of convictions, parties which overlook credible charges of corruption within their ranks may harm their own long-term goals, as well as damage overall support for the democracy, because doing so sends the message that self-interest is the parties' primary political aim.

## **CLOSING**

Political parties benefit from having clearly defined goals and procedures, not least because citizens are becoming increasingly wary of parties that do not practice what they preach. As a result, parties that hope to win elections and to strengthen democratic institutions within their countries may help themselves as well as their societies if their actions and internal culture conform to the democratic ideals they espouse. And indeed, democratic political parties have both a right and a responsibility to aspire to the twin goals of promoting their own electoral success as well as promoting the long-term welfare of their societies.



# A LISTING OF MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR THE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTIONING OF POLITICAL PARTIES

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## 1. PARTY BEHAVIOR

- 1a. At the most fundamental level, all democratic parties benefit from, and should support, the rights that are guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- 1b. Democratic political parties agree to accept the will of the people as expressed through legitimate elections as the basis for government.
- 1c. Parties should respect the chosen electoral procedures, including voter registration laws, polling station regulations and vote certification processes.
- 1d. All democratic parties have a right to expect that they and their supporters may freely express their opinions; governing parties and state institutions have an obligation to protect these rights, and to safeguard the environment of free competition.
- 1e. Democratic parties in democratic systems reject the use of violence as a political tool.
- 1f. Parties should communicate their principles, policy proposals and accomplishments with party members, party supporters, and with other citizens.
- 1g. Parties benefit themselves as well as the broader democratic society when they foster political participation. Efforts to cultivate participation by historically excluded or under-represented groups – including women and ethnic or other minorities – can often benefit parties by broadening their support. Simultaneously, they can enhance the legitimacy of the political system within which the parties compete.
- 1h. Parties that win a mandate to govern alone or in coalition should govern responsibly.

## 2. PARTY ORGANIZATION

- 2a. Parties may use their statutes to establish their legal name and to specify who may use the party label.
- 2b. Party rules should define membership eligibility requirements, and spell out members' rights, roles and responsibilities.



- 2c. Party statutes can clarify lines of communication, authority and accountability between a party's various layers.
- 2d. Party statutes should anticipate conflicts and should provide frameworks for fostering, but also for containing, healthy internal debate.
- 2e. Parties benefit from having clear rules about the regular selection (and possible de-selection) of party leaders and party candidates. In order to minimize internal wrangling, and to enhance the legitimacy of those selected, parties should strive to establish clear rules well in advance of each contest.
- 2f. Party officials and party employees should adhere to party rules for making decisions, including selection decisions for candidates and leaders.
- 2g. Political parties should keep sound and proper financial records, which serve to generate confidence, enhance credibility, and encourage contributions to finance party operations. In addition, officeholders and party units need to be internally accountable for party finances within their domains.
- 2h. Parties should take responsibility for their officeholders and other leaders who abuse their positions for personal gain.



**Inside Cover**

The *Minimum Standards for the Democratic Functioning of Political Parties* were finalized in February 2008 at a roundtable in Brussels, Belgium that featured senior officials of Centrist Democrat International, Liberal International and Socialist International together with representatives of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, the European People's Party, and the Party of European Socialists. The Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, International IDEA, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy also participated in the event.

"There is no democracy without political parties. Political parties are crucial to democracy: good, healthy parties lead to good, healthy democracies ... this document could help build support for political party development."

Luis Ayala, Secretary General, Socialist International

"A very solid basis for our work."

Mario David, MP, Deputy Executive Secretary, Centrist Democrat International and Vice President, European People's Party

"An extremely important initiative."

Emil Kirjas, Secretary General, Liberal International

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