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Introduction



Diverse activists from all seven regions of Turkey gather at NDI's Ankara office to be trained as local organizers and facilitators for CBN.

In new and emerging democracies, citizens must organize and engage government in order to shape appropriate accountability relationships. In most instances, this means shifting the balance of power, so citizens have more influence. Democratic institutions and processes help enable this shift, but can easily provide a democratic facade that conceals the practices of a government that serves narrow vested interests. The process of democratization requires citizens to organize and act to foster limited government that serves the public interest.

"Power concedes nothing without demand."

Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)

Effectively dealing with transparency, accountability and public integrity issues necessarily involves politics and the competition between values, interests, ideas, preferences and incentives. It also involves power dynamics and, in many instances, the need to manage the possibility of violent conflict. Likewise, the actors are not always "rational" and the tradeoffs might seem unreasonable. These factors preclude linear, mechanistic approaches. Instead, influencing positive change requires exploiting entry points across the entire political cycle, developing alternative centers of power, changing political incentives and building new relationships. Finding the right entry points means making strategic choices about the most viable avenues and opportunities in a given context and choosing the right time.



Activists in Malawi organized debates ahead of local elections where citizens asked questions and candidates presented their platforms.

Elections are a principal democratic process, although they alone do not guarantee citizen influence over policy making, the responsiveness of public officials, or their responsible use of state resources. Quality elections matter a great deal, but only insofar as they put citizens in the driver's seat when it comes to steering the work of government. For this reason, elections should be treated as opportunities that not only allow citizens to choose leaders, but that can also begin to position citizens as informed, organized and active participants in policy making.

The global development community has made significant investments in “social accountability” initiatives over the last decade. One of the primary lessons is that these initiatives are **more likely to succeed when they combine a series of political actions** rather than rely on a single tool or tactic. Success also involves leveraging political opportunities. The idea that **politics is an important factor in determining development outcomes** is becoming conventional wisdom. This is sometimes called “thinking and working politically.” But elections are rarely raised in these discussions despite their prominence.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has helped civic groups in many countries integrate election-related activism into campaigns aimed at holding government accountable. This approach reflects the need for citizens and civic groups to work strategically across the entire political cycle, **in partnership with a range of actors**, to maximize their power and influence over decision makers. It also recognizes the need for a mix of collective action tools and techniques.

NDI's approach is framed by the conviction that citizenship comprises a set of inherently political rights and responsibilities, and implies a certain type of relationship between people and government. In developing countries, this relationship invariably favors government, and citizens have few, if any, opportunities to participate in decisions impacting public welfare. Nonetheless, through informed, organized and active engagement, there is a way for citizens to challenge and change this dynamic. Instead of bypassing government, parliaments, parties and politics, citizens must engage these institutions. Whether advocating for specific policies, providing expertise on public welfare issues, monitoring government performance or raising awareness about needs, collective citizen action can help change political practices and outcomes.

This NDI study describes the value of factoring election periods into strategic campaigns and draws lessons from Malawi, Macedonia and Turkey. In Malawi, organizations from different municipalities identified community priorities and organized candidate debates in the lead up to long-delayed local elections. In Macedonia, groups petitioned candidates and gained commitments on policy actions they would take once elected. In Turkey, presidential elections created space for the consolidation of a broad-based civic network focused on government checks and balances. NDI staff members conducted key informant interviews in each country to



Activist for the Cool Mayors campaign shows off outreach materials.

document how the different campaigns worked. Those interviewed included the local civic partners, as well as candidates, community leaders, journalists, and others involved in the campaigns.

In each case, experienced NDI organizers provided technical assistance to the partners as they developed and ran their strategic campaigns. Assistance included a combination of training, individualized consultations, on-the-job coaching, and facilitated discussions to reflect on their activities, learn from experience and chart next steps. NDI also worked to connect partners with potential allies in the legislature, political parties, government, media, academic institutions and other civic organizations. Groups also received small amounts of financial assistance from NDI to help with their organizing.

Thinking Strategically about Elections



Ward councilor candidate speaks to citizens about his platform ahead of local elections in Malawi.

Elections as Entry Points for Collective Action

Civic organizers and activists work to find strategic political entry points that present the most viable engagement avenues and opportunities in a given context. When they are held, elections provide a viable entry point for individual and collective citizen participation. They are a fundamental democratic process that allows citizens to vote for alternative parties, platforms and leaders. At the same time, election periods offer a unique opportunity for citizen groups to raise policy issues, secure commitments from candidates, build relations with like-minded groups and individuals, mobilize activists, and increase the visibility of their issue or cause.

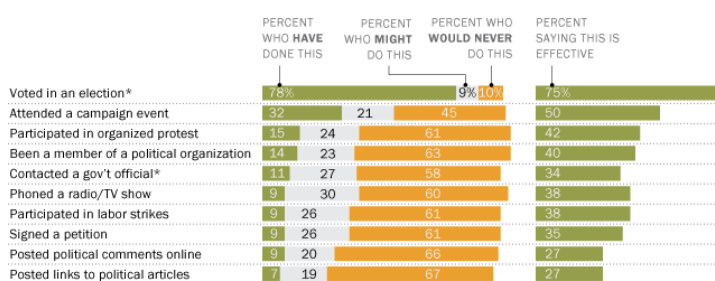
Yet elections are often treated by donors and development practitioners as discrete events requiring process-oriented support (i.e., helping ensure democratic standards are met in terms of registration, campaigning, voting, counting, etc). There has been much less emphasis on putting elections to work to advance the collective socio-economic interests of citizens. Financial or technical support to strengthen an election process may result in one that is more inclusive and fair, but even the most credible elections do not guarantee a government that will address citizen needs.

At an individual level, elections provide a way for voters to elect leaders to represent their interests. A recent Pew survey shows that, in general, citizens in large numbers participate in elections, which are viewed as an effective way to promote government accountability. In the 32 developing countries included in the survey, voting was the most frequently cited mode of political engagement, with a median of 78 percent responding that they had voted in previous elections. Moreover, at 75 percent, voting was most often cited as an effective way to influence government decision making. This statistic indicates that even in less-developed democracies, with immature or vague processes, elections are viewed as a systematic, regular way for citizens to register their satisfaction with leaders or demand a change.

Elections also offer a political space that can be leveraged by citizens and civic groups working collectively on an issue or cause. This might include relationship building by identifying policy priorities and getting voters and candidates together to discuss policy positions.

When political parties and candidates are competing for votes, they are often more open to interactions with citizens, and can be pressed to make commitments. This can set the stage for post-election citizen engagement designed to hold newly-elected leaders accountable for

Aside from Voting, Political Engagement Low in Emerging and Developing Nations
 Median for emerging and developing nations



*Q91e and Q93e are excluded for Tanzania and Q91i and Q93i are excluded for Thailand due to translation error.
 Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q91a-j, Q93a-j.
 PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Citizens in large numbers participate in elections

their campaign promises, or to work with them on agreed upon priorities. According to the same Pew survey, 32 percent of the respondents reported that they had attended a campaign rally, making it the second most popular form of civic participation. These figures indicate that although political participation is relatively low in many countries, when people do seek to engage in politics, they view elections as a primary opportunity.

Elements of a Strategic Campaign

This study sought to document the value of incorporating elections into “strategic campaigns” for accountability. In practice, a strategic campaign combines a variety of actions over time to influence decision makers. This is distinct from an approach that relies on a single type of tool or action, such as a grading public services or tracking expenditures. These approaches may result in some limited progress, such as improved understanding or greater transparency, but often fall short of creating the pressure needed to hold government to account.

Practically speaking, campaigns that succeed are those that focus on the power dynamics surrounding the issue being addressed. To influence those dynamics, campaigns require a strategy and a plan involving an iterative series of actions that might extend across the political cycle, including election periods. The country cases described in this study illustrate how NDI’s local partners developed winning strategies and made plans to take advantage of the space provided by elections. In each case, groups framed the problem, proposed solutions, found evidence to support their position, built alliances, established relationships with decision makers and forced a response through multiple actions.

A Strategic Campaign...	
Combines Multiple Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research ● Public dialogue ● Advocacy ● Monitoring ● Popular mobilization/organizing ● Awareness raising ● Boycotting ● Demonstrating
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Civic groups at local, sub-national and national levels ● Politicians

<p>Builds Multiple Relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Public officials ● Journalists ● Academics ● Business leaders ● Entertainers and cultural icons
<p>Exploits Multiple Entry Points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elections ● Budgeting ● Lawmaking ● Development planning ● Constitutional reform ● Constituency development funding

Malawi: Setting Expectations for Relationships Between Citizens and Elected Leaders



Organizers from Tiphedzane travel to remote communities by canoe for pre-election activities.

Defining the Campaign Issue

In some parts of Malawi, naturally occurring water sources often evaporate in the dry season. And even when water is available, it is not always safe to drink, which forces residents to choose between dehydration or a heightened risk of disease. Citizens living in the southern district of Nsanje are particularly affected by drinking water shortages, but they face other challenges as well: schools are in disrepair and unwelcoming to girls, and the agriculture sector is no longer lucrative.

"I never expected that in my lifetime the problem of water in my area would ever be solved. I am so thankful that our newly elected councilor came together with other leaders to make this happen."

Televina Zuwawo, who lives in Nsanje district in southern Malawi

Like many problems affecting the poor, these have complex roots and elusive solutions, starting with a disconnect between citizens and public officials. Citizens in Malawi have not played an active role in local development policy making. Instead, development plans have been tightly controlled by local executive offices. These officials may consult with councils of un-elected community leaders called Village Development Committees and Area Development Committees, but citizens are rarely consulted. The same is true when it comes to the use of constituency development funds allocated to each member of parliament. These leaders are typically based in the capital city, Lilongwe, so it is challenging for citizens to advocate for collective community needs. Elections for local lawmakers, called ward councilors, held in May 2014 provided citizens a new opportunity to establish a closer relationship with local government. For the first time in 15 years, these elections would reestablish a cadre of leaders mandated to address local development issues.

Strategic Approach

Tiphedzane is a non-governmental organization that has worked on quality of life issues in the Nsanje district since 2003. It had some success addressing community needs through education programs and the provision of basic social services, but recognized that some improvements would never come without support from government officials. To influence the direction of development spending in Nsanje district to align with citizens' priorities, Tiphedzane chose to use local elections to begin building relationships with the new ward councilors, by organizing community members around their priorities and engaging prospective council members in discussions about the issues. Tiphedzane understood that the new local councilors, who often live in their communities after they are elected, could be strong allies. So the 2014 polls provided a practical opening for Tiphedzane to take actions to build political support for the quality of life changes, including clean water.

Tactical Actions

Tiphedzane employed a coordinated set of activities during local election period. It mobilized citizens around a clear set of priorities and encouraged turnout on election day. Tiphedzane also organized a series of debates where local candidates could discuss their plans to address the community priorities and citizens could compare the different positions.

Voter education - Tiphedzane found there was a need to educate citizens on the role and responsibility of the new ward councilors, since that level of government had not existed for 15 years. For example, citizens needed to know that the new councils would be required to address local development issues. In addition, members of the Nsanje community had to be educated on their own roles and responsibilities as citizens of a democracy. This encouraged them to resist attempts to buy their votes, to eschew election violence and to make voting decisions based on candidates' commitments on priority issues. Tiphedzane opted not to emphasize basic voter information, such as how, where and when to cast ballots, since Malawians had participated in numerous elections and were generally well-informed about the process. Furthermore, the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and a well-funded organization called the National Institute for Civic Education (NICE) provided that kind of information.

Issue identification - Once citizens had a better understanding of their role in setting development priorities for the community, Tiphedzane brought them together to articulate key needs. This involved an exercises where community members would create a map of their community that illustrated challenges and identified resources and potential solutions. New boreholes topped the list, but other issues included the need for affordable agricultural inputs, such as seeds or farming equipment, and new textbooks in schools.

Debates and social contracts- Then Tiphedzane worked with citizens to create “social contracts” to assist with their engagement efforts. The social contracts described the citizens’ development priorities based on the results of the previous mapping exercises. The Tiphedzane pre-election program culminated in a series of debates where citizens heard directly from the candidates about their platforms. Community members and the media engaged with the candidates by texting questions to the moderator. During the debates the citizens presented their social contracts and asked each of the candidates to sign a pledge that they would work on the community priority issues if elected.

Campaign Outcomes

As a result, newly elected local officials acted quickly to follow through on the commitments they made to find new sources of clean drinking water. George Dumba was one of the candidates who participated in the debate and signed the social contract with community members from Dinde, a ward in Nsanje district. After winning, Dumba worked with community leaders and their member of parliament to ensure that three boreholes were constructed in the ward.

“As a candidate competing for the position of councilor, the [Tiphedzane] project provided me an opportunity not only to engage with citizens during the electoral campaign, but also to understand that access to water was a top priority for the community,” said Dumba. “This in turn influenced me to rank this as the first issue to prioritize once elected.”

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Community Mapping Exercise



Community Mapping Exercise

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Malawi Human Right Youth Network Social Contract

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National Women's Lobby Group Citizen Manifesto

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The clean drinking water that has flowed from the new boreholes was a welcome improvement in the quality of life. “We are extremely grateful to both our newly elected MP and councilor for providing us with safe water,” said the Mpomba village group headman, also named Mpomba. “This will improve the lives of the people.”

While the new boreholes are an important outcome of Tiphedzane’s organizing efforts, this activity has also begun to transform how politics is practiced and leading to new roles for citizens in setting development priorities and monitoring the follow through of local government.

Citizens have begun to understand that they have both the right and responsibility to articulate their needs to elected officials. Now, citizens are well-placed to hold their new councilors accountable in a way that would not have been possible with voting alone. After the election, citizens said they felt more confident about following up with elected officials to ensure they continued working on other community priorities.

The social contracts played an important symbolic role in this. In a democracy citizens are inherently imbued with the right to hold elected officials responsible for campaign promises. However, in a political environment where power imbalances have stunted the development of citizens’ political influence, signed documents that make explicit the promises of elected leaders help citizens feel more confident as they take initiatives to ensure that these promises are implemented.

Citizens were not the only group that benefited from Tiphedzane’s election activism. Candidates, like George Dumba, reported that they were pleased that communities developed the social contracts because it allowed them to tailor their campaigns to address local concerns. They also described feeling on-notice to follow through with campaign commitments because Tiphedzane and other citizen groups were watching them closely. While on its face, this could be seen as a nuisance, the elected leaders in Nsanje recognized it as an incentivize for on-going efforts to respond to citizen priorities, which helped them retain viability with the electorate.

Tiphedzane’s work also helped it emerge as a stronger organization with new resources and skills. First, Tiphedzane developed new or stronger relationships with candidates during the debate planning that increased its credibility. The successful

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NGO Gender Coordination Network Social Contract

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Thipedzane Social Contract

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candidates know they can turn to Tiphedzane for information and to serve as an interlocutor with community members on key issues.

Second, Tiphedzane has become more legitimate in the eyes of community members as a group that can help them organize and build power to influence development priorities in Nsanje. The recently-dug boreholes are the first example. Moreover, Tiphedzane developed a deeper understanding of the community's needs and priorities through the issue identification activities, development of social contracts and debates. This allows the organization to be a more authoritative influence on local level policy discussions and the development planning process.

Macedonia: Promoting Policy Change on Priority Issues



Activist in Macedonia shares information with potential voter about Cool Mayors campaigns.

Defining the Campaign Issue

Front and GoGreen are environmental organizations that teamed up in 2013 to launch a campaign in advance of mayoral elections to build support for dismantling old industrial sites that are responsible for a significant amount of pollution in Macedonia.

After communism ended in 1991, old factories were privatized and laws were not in place to require the new owners to take over responsibility for past environmental damage caused by the plants. This led to a variety of environmental challenges for localities. For example, waterways were polluted with heavy metals and old landfills were left unattended. Front and GoGreen call these high pollution areas “hotspots.” The issue was particularly pressing in the small town of Veles, where, in 2013, the local government put out a tender to restart production in an old smelting plant that had caused a lot of pollution. The 50,000 residents lived with the risk of soil that had seven times the international safety limit of heavy metal content. To make matters worse, the tender did not require the new owner to take responsibility for pollution caused by the factory when it was state-run.

“Elections are the only time when decision makers are going to be open to ‘people power.’ During campaign times, candidates are interested in what we have to say. It is easier to schedule meetings. It is the time to achieve something. We have to grab our five minutes.”

Aleksandra Bujarovska, environmental lawyer at Front 21/42

Strategic Approach

Front and GoGreen had considerable experience tackling environmental issues through research and education respectively, but they decided to take a different approach to address the local industrial pollution that plagued Veles and other communities. Mayors and other locally elected officials have responsibility over local zoning laws and urban development plans. With a campaign they called Cool Mayors for Environmental Hotspots, Front and GoGreen decided to try to get mayoral candidates around the country to sign pledges to implement environmentally friendly zoning rules for these hotspots once elected.

Tactical Actions

The Cool Mayors campaign leaders knew that it would need to engage candidates in numerous mayoral races and therefore build out local activist networks to be successful. The effort began with information gathering by small teams in each of the municipalities with a hotspot. The teams interviewed their neighbors to learn what

they knew and didn't know about the hotspots in their communities. The coalition also developed other content that helped it recruit supporters and educate community members about the pollution created by the hotspots. And it took advantage of close relationships it had with environmentally-minded creative professionals to develop multimedia content.

Drawing competition - Front and GoGreen also reached out to young people to build community support. The coalition organized a **drawing competition** with the title "In place of the environmental hotspot, I would like to have.." to raise community awareness and recruit volunteers for the campaign. Fifteen primary schools from eight municipalities submitted drawings to put up for a vote through the campaign's **Facebook page**. Eight winners were announced for every municipality represented.

Music video - The coalition produced a **hip-hop music video about environmental hotspots** to circulate through new media and galvanize support from young Macedonians. The video was produced pro-bono by the rappers Puka Kozmetika and Skit Skitara and with the participation of volunteers from the coalition and students from the primary schools that took part in the drawing competition. Prior to production, Front and GoGreen held meetings with the artists to educate them about the environmental hotspots, write the lyrics and conceptualize the video. The video was shot in four days in six locations around Skopje, the capital, and featured 45 volunteers. Within the first 20 days after the video was posted on YouTube, it had 8,000 views.

RESOURCE

Cool Mayors Campaign Drawing Competition



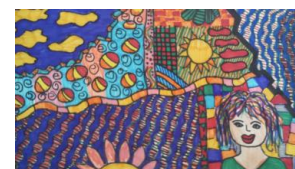
Drawing 1



Drawing 2



Drawing 3



Drawing 4

Visual materials - An advertising agency, sympathetic to their cause, helped GoGreen and Front reach out to the press and develop visual materials for the campaign. An important part of the campaign included grassroots efforts to gain popular support for the movement. Trained activists would go to public places and ask people to sign a letter to candidates demanding that they prioritize pollution once elected.

Candidate education - Front and GoGreen reached out to each of the candidates to educate them on the specific environmental hotspot in their jurisdiction. The coalition sent New Year's cards to each of the candidates, reminding them about the hotspot in their district and asking them to include it among their priorities. They also received the signatures collected by the local activists.

Front and GoGreen also collected letters from citizens and distributed informational leaflets that included a calendar identifying environmental hotspots. On the right side was a detachable message that could be sent to candidates asking them to act. The calendars were distributed in Macedonian and Albanian. The note to the candidate read:

To the mayor of my municipality,

We live in a municipality with an environmental hotspot. I live next to a "shadow" of the formal system. Today this "shadow" forms what we call historical pollution (for which the former state [Yugoslavia] is responsible). The earth in my neighborhood, as well as the water I drink and the air I breathe are not historical, but are my basic needs. The risk of a serious environmental disaster here is also not a historical, but a present danger, which I refuse to ignore. The right to a safe and clean environment is my constitutional right.

RESOURCE

Cool Mayors Campaign Music Video

Cool Mayors Campaign Music Video



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Cool Mayors Campaign Brochure

[DOWNLOAD PDF](#)

It has been years, even decades since the old system expired. I live in a democratic Macedonia in the twenty-first century. What has not changed, however, is the pollution with which I live every day. With which you and I live every day.

You can and must do something to correct this. I do not care whose fault this is and who is responsible for the cleanup of the environmental hotspot in our municipality. I demand that during your mandate to make this historical pollution part of history!

Citizen and voter in the municipality

Candidate meetings - Front and GoGreen organized meetings with the political coalitions and candidates running for office in the target communities. These events were held in all 13 targeted municipalities and the leafleting and signing were done by members of the coalition and volunteers from the 15 primary schools that participated in the drawing competition.

Campaign Outcomes

As a result of the Front and GoGreen campaign, 18 candidates signed the pledge, and five took office. After the election, GoGreen and Front invited the new mayors to a public event where they presented their ideas for addressing the hotspot pollution. In the community of Zletovo, the new mayor made an agreement with the oil company working in the area to clean the soil. According to Front and GoGreen, the mayor said it would be impossible to ignore the pollution in his community given all the information he had received during the Cool Mayors campaign.

The campaign also resulted in some important outcomes for the organizations themselves. Front and GoGreen previously did not know each other's work. But they now work together easily and benefit from each other's strengths: GoGreen's youth committees and Front's research expertise. Moreover, they can generate a great deal of activity through their grassroots networks and publish stories about community members who are affected by the problems. Their election period advocacy has helped them to be seen as credible interlocutors with government officials on environmental

RESOURCE

Cool Mayors Campaign Pledge and Calendar



Cool Mayors Campaign Pledge and Calendar

Macedonia: Taking Advantage of Opportunities in the Election Cycle



Poraka members visit Assembly Speaker Trajko Veljanoski to urge ratification of the U.N. Convention.

Defining the Campaign Issue

Historically in Macedonia, people with disabilities have been segregated in school and faced significant stigma that has made it difficult for them to find work and integrate into mainstream society. Left with few options, many families have institutionalized disabled relatives. The Republic Center for the Support of Persons with Intellectual Disability, or Poraka, launched in 1963 to provide support to the country's 20,000 people with disabilities and their families.

"This campaign was a long time coming and we are so delighted that our hard work paid off. The experience really transformed the way we as an organization think about legislative advocacy and our role in the democratic process."

Vasilka Dimovska, Poraka program manager

Strategic Approach

Poraka's original focus was organizing community chapters around the country to provide services to members and conduct local education activities. Then, in 2009, Poraka decided it could do more and considered having political strategy to advance its goals. At the time, Macedonia focused a great deal of political energy on international issues. In response, Poraka adopted a strategy that tapped into that appeal and developed a campaign to encourage the government to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which it had signed in 2007. Ratification of the convention would be a step toward aligning Macedonian law with international standards on the rights of people with disabilities. Furthermore, it would provide a framework for policy advocacy for Poraka and other groups working to promote the rights and quality of life for people with disabilities.

Then a political crisis in 2011 led to early elections in June that gave Poraka a new opportunity--this time in the heat of the election campaign. At first, Poraka was nervous about getting involved. Politics in Macedonia are highly polarized and Poraka did not want to risk backtracking on the gains it had made by coming across as partisan. At the same time, it knew that there would be few other opportunities to engage elected officials who would be distracted by the campaign. Poraka opted for a pledge card campaign as a way to tap into the desire of political parties to attract voters without formally endorsing any one party.

Tactical Actions

The effort began as a multifaceted lobbying and education campaign to build support for the initiative among members of parliament, government officials and the public before evolving into a pledge campaign aimed at political parties in the lead-up to the elections.

Education for members of parliament - Local Poraka chapters proved to be valuable assets for reaching out to MPs. To assist their efforts, Poraka prepared educational packages with easy to read brochures and newsletters for the local chapters and planned a week of action when it organized events to educate MPs about the CRPD and the needs of people with disabilities. To ensure the chapters were all moving in the same direction, Poraka leaders held briefing sessions around the country and discussed how to lobby members of parliament in their home districts. Poraka developed and disseminated campaign materials to the chapters, including posters, leaflets and an informational brochure featuring its slogan: "So that Rights Become a Reality!"

Media outreach - To reinforce these local efforts, Poraka pushed its message at the national level. It wrote an opinion article in one of the biggest daily newspapers,

Dnevnik, arguing for immediate ratification of the convention.

National conference - Poraka also organized a conference on the rights for people with disabilities and ratification of the CRPD. It was scheduled to take place while Macedonia was the chair of the Council of Europe, which facilitated international attention on the issue and incentivized the government to participate in the event. Poraka drew on leaders' interest in presenting a positive international image and demonstrating support for marginalized groups, which is among the key European Union priorities. Using this messaging strategy, Poraka saw some success in building support among lawmakers for the CRPD, but found passage of legislation ratifying the convention elusive.

Campaign pledges - Two weeks before the election, Poraka approached leaders of each of the 10 political parties in Macedonia and asked them to sign a pledge to ratify the CRPD within 100 days of the convening of the new parliament. The campaign was widely covered by the national press; Poraka representatives appeared on TV, radio and in national newspapers almost every day. As election day drew near, nine parties signed the pledge, but the largest ruling party in the government coalition resisted making a commitment. Shortly before the election Poraka held a press conference. While it did not publicize which party had not signed, it was able to raise awareness among citizens about the ratification campaign and put pressure on the ruling party to commit to joining the effort.

Campaign Outcome

Although it took longer than 100 days, eventually the parliament did ratify the convention, by unanimous vote, in December 2011 – in time to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. But the work did not end there for Poraka. The signed CRPD has become the framework for ongoing advocacy efforts to fight for rights for people with disabilities. The CRPD commits signatories to providing status reports on implementation of domestic laws related to the rights of people with disabilities. Poraka has found that working with the government to meet this requirement has been an effective way to maintain access to decision makers as well as further its efforts to improve the policy environment for people with disabilities. In 2013, Poraka completed a survey on the status of people with disabilities and provided

RESOURCE

Poraka Pledge



Poraka Pledge

it to the government to use in its status report. With its new level of access, Poraka also began to push for reforms to domestic laws on disability issues to bring them into line with the CRPD.

Through Poraka's education efforts during the fight for ratification, it developed relationships with government officials that have resulted in better access to the decision making process. Moreover, fitted with information about the needs of people with disabilities and obligated to meet the requirements of the CRPD, decision makers have been more open to working with Poraka. "This campaign was a long time coming and we are so delighted that our hard work paid off," said Vasilka Dimovska, program manager at Poraka. "The experience really transformed the way we as an organization think about legislative advocacy and our role in the democratic process."

Turkey: Building a Network and Establishing a Political Presence



Ahead of the June 2015 general election, residents of the southeastern city of Mardin receive materials on checks and balances issues during community outreach by local CBN members.

Defining the Campaign Issue

Despite some democratic gains, Turkey's parliamentary political system remains highly centralized, lacking institutional checks and balances. This has stunted pluralism, openness and accountability in government, while precluding meaningful political participation by civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens. Politicians have used divisive political issues to exploit tensions and CSOs have been largely unable to overcome their own prejudices to work in common cause. When geopolitical considerations are factored in, Turkey becomes a very complicated place for civil society to push for government reform.

In 2010, NDI partnered with the Istanbul Policy Center of Sabancı University (IPC) and conducted a public opinion survey of citizen perceptions of democracy. This revealed deep concerns about the country's democratic institutions, including political parties, parliament and the judiciary. When parliament launched an effort in 2011 to draft a new constitution, IPC brought together 120 diverse political, civic, government, media and academic representatives to provide input. Through a series of facilitated discussions, the group agreed on 108 recommendations to limit government through more political competition, a stronger parliament and a more independent judiciary. The effort helped inform debate and introduced the principle of "checks and balances" into the discourse.

After some initial progress, the constitutional reform process stalled over disagreements on key structural issues, including transitioning from a parliamentary to a presidential system of government. However, the process helped give rise to a broad-based citizen demand for more open and accountable government. A new civil society network emerged to express this demand and encourage political reform.

With 92 initial members, and the IPC playing a secretariat role, the Checks and Balances Network (CBN) took shape in 2012. CBN's members represented a cross section of society, including faith-based organizations, think tanks, disabled persons organizations, youth groups, community service providers, and lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) groups. In addition to sending strong symbolic messages about tolerance and working together for collective interests, the network developed a multi-pronged strategy that included using election periods to prompt dialogue on reforms and garner campaign promises. Using election periods also allowed the group to elevate its profile and strengthen its base by organizing provincial level activities and raising awareness about the appropriate relationship between government and citizens in a democracy.

Network members have different interests in checks and balances and became involved for different reasons. While they are closely aligned on the principles of limited government, they have different perspectives on when and where it should be practiced. For this reason, it is not possible, practical or necessary to get the entire network to act in unison at all times. Groups can work individually or in various

configurations on the aspects of the checks and balances agenda that correspond to their particular interests. Some groups have an interest in campaign finance, while others care more about legislative oversight of health care or environmental protection. These differences are reflected in the organizing approach, which focuses more on coordinating a social movement under the heading of checks and balances, rather than creating a stand-alone organization. In this way, day-to-day leadership is more distributed and there are multiple initiatives and a wide array of relationships.

Strategic Approach

The CBN sought to galvanize widespread support for principles and practices that would limit government. Its strategy was to raise public awareness surrounding checks and balances issues, build consensus on the need for changes and provide precise reform ideas. At the same time, it worked to expand the network of civic groups with a shared commitment to accountable government. The strategy involved coordinated campaigns managed by a steering committee and carried out by different elements of the network.

During 2013, the CBN continued to focus on the constitutional reform process and pushed parliament to draft a new version. Through policy briefs and public forums, CBN worked to frame the debate and coined the term *denge ve denetleme* (Turkish for “checks and balances”). These steps began to shift how politicians, public officials, civil society and media talked about limits on government. Parliament did reconvene a committee tasked with constitution drafting, but little progress was made. Other political events, including protests in Gezi Park and a corruption scandal, overshadowed these efforts and deepened political polarization. At the same time, demand for more accountable government increased. This set the stage for 2014 elections where the president would be directly elected for the first time.

The 2014 elections offered the CBN an entry point, and it developed a two-pronged strategy that involved securing political party commitments to constitutional reforms with checks and balances provisions, and working to improve the transparency of political financing.

Tactical Actions

In the two years leading up to the 2014 elections, CBN’s organizing and activism had helped it build the relationships and credibility needed to engage directly with politicians and election officials. The network had also expanded to more than 150 organizations, which allowed it to reach all parts of the country. CBN leveraged these assets and undertook a series of actions to influence electoral actors.

Policy Briefs – With a series of policy briefs related to establishing check and balances in different aspects of governance, CBN focused on political finance and disclosure in anticipation of the electoral period. These briefs helped frame the issue for public dialogues.

Voter education – CBN pushed information out to its membership and used social media (including [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#)) to make the case for greater transparency in political finance. The network encouraged voters to choose candidates based on their positions on transparency and accountability.

Public dialogues – Through seven policy forums, CBN brought together political leaders, academics and civil society actors to discuss the need for political finance reform and to consider steps that could be taken before the 2014 elections. As a result, CBN offered 10 specific recommended actions for political parties and candidates.

Meetings with political party leaders and candidates – CBN delegations met with political party leaders and candidates to explain the political finance reform recommendations and request that presidential candidates disclose campaign contributions. CBN also secured commitments for the parties to pursue constitutional reforms that embraced checks and balances.

Media coverage – CBN engaged the media through press releases and by inviting print and broadcast journalists to cover its forums. CBN also provided its entire membership with talking points, so issues of campaign finance and government accountability could be raised whenever members interacted with the media.

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CBN Call on Candidates July 2014

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CBN Equal Media Access July 2014

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CBN Finance Transparency May 2014

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Campaign Outcomes

Work done by CBN during the 2014 elections is reflected in public statements by top political leaders, including President Erdoğan, then Prime Minister Davutoğlu, Republican People's Party (CHP) Chair Kılıçdaroğlu, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Chair Bahçeli and former President Abdullah Gül. As a result of CBN's call for transparent financing in the presidential election campaign, all three candidates voluntarily disclosed the amount and nature of their contributions and posted the information on their websites. In the case of the CHP, MPs drafted and proposed legislation based on CBN policy recommendations to reform party financing mechanisms. Most notably, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) included a commitment to checks and balances in its 2014 legislative program.

The experience has also demonstrated that checks and balances can serve as a unifying theme for otherwise polarized and competing interests and ideologies. A core group of 30 founding members resolved to work in collaboration with NDI and IPC to build a broad civic movement for democratization through promotion of institutional reform and fostering a new political culture. In 2016, the network comprises more than 250 member organizations representing a range of interests, issues and affiliations. The network is working to strengthen democracy and advance pluralism by formulating recommendations for policy changes and reform of institutions, building public and media support, and engaging public officials and holding them accountable.

CBN has developed into a civic movement that uses sophisticated and effective advocacy techniques and strategies. It has become a point of reference for constructive engagement and a model for how CSOs in Turkey should operate. With designated campaign coordinators and working groups on decision-maker outreach, policy development, communications and political process monitoring, CBN members are well equipped at every stage of the advocacy process. They take a comprehensive approach by recommending changes and reforms, monitoring government responses and holding government accountable to its commitments.

With members in all 81 provinces, the network has an increasingly broad spectrum of supporters who recognize the need for systemic democratic reform. Through digital

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communications and outreach to political leaders of all parties, national and local media, and a broad range of community leaders and opinion makers, CBN has succeeded in bringing the need for checks and balances to the center of public debate. As one network member said, CBN “is spreading democratic literacy.”

Since CBN coined the term *denge ve denetleme*, popular columnists and nightly news anchors have highlighted the phrase, pressing elected officials to discuss what actions they propose to strengthen checks and balances and triggering discussion on a national level. By the end of August 2015, Google search results for *denge ve denetleme* totaled approximately 1.8 million. CBN’s online and social media platforms now have a following of more than 17,000 individuals concentrated in a diverse array of cities and provinces. In cities around the country, more than 1,000 community leaders and opinion makers in addition to CBN members are serving as local advocates for checks and balances.

Recommendations



Citizen poses question about community priorities to candidates during debate for ward councilor elections.

For advocacy efforts to really make sustained improvements in people's lives, activists need to take into account the power imbalances that block change and adopt politically aware strategies to address them. Elections can be an important component of such strategies. The following recommendations are offered to democracy and governance practitioners and development professionals seeking to implement programs that support efforts of civic groups to effect change through politics. For more context, check out the Country Cases on this site.

Understand the Political System

When it comes to making change, context matters. Activists will find little success if they do not understand the basic shape of the political system they are operating in and how to navigate it. To start, groups need to determine which level of government is responsible for addressing their issue. In Malawi, for example, some aspects of community development planning have devolved to the local level, so Tiphedzane targeted its advocacy efforts at ward councilors. At the same time, the group knew that funding decisions were made at the national level, so it sought to build relationships with members of parliament as well. In Macedonia, authority for ratification of the CRPD was held by the national legislature, so Poraka targeted its demands toward national party leaders during the campaign for members of parliament.

Groups also need to be aware of which parts of government have jurisdiction over a given issue. In most countries, this requires an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the executive branch and ministries on one hand and the legislature on the other. Perhaps even more important is to understand how formal and informal power is divided up among these branches and how oversight is (or is not) exercised. For example, in Malawi, the local ward councilors have a formal role to play in overseeing how local development plans are created. However, because local councils had not been elected for so many years, representatives in the local offices of various line ministries had cultivated a great deal of power and influence. These unelected representatives had little incentive to provide civic groups with information about development planning and documents. Following the local elections, however, Tiphedzane was able to leverage its burgeoning relationship with the new ward councilors to gain access to development processes. This new engagement helped to establish greater citizen participation in local decision making and more robust legislative oversight.

Figure Out: How Does Change Happen?

Any effort to fight for progress on issues must begin with a theory about how change

happens. Citizens need to develop an understanding about how power is aligned within the government and how they can enhance their ability to demand change. This requires groups to master a variety of skills and capacities that will help them navigate the contours of formal and informal political processes. These include strategic planning; mapping the political terrain; identifying advocacy targets, allies and opponents; establishing linkages between political events and advocacy issues; building relationships; developing credible narratives; and drawing on evidence to support policy positions.

In many countries, especially those with younger democratic systems, election periods are unique in that they provide fertile ground for groups to sharpen their understanding of how change happens. This opening allows groups to experiment with different forms of activism and engage with voters and decision makers. Civic groups may find the following questions to be helpful in assessing how activism during an election period could fit into a longer-term strategy for change.

- What kind of elections will be taking place (e.g. local, presidential, parliamentary)?
- Which organizations or groups of people have a specific set of issues they have been working on? Or is there a well-defined constituency (e.g. women, youth, specific community)?
- What issues do citizens care most about (e.g., public health, water and sanitation, education)?
- What issues are dominating the political agenda (e.g., EU accession, extractive industry oversight)?
- Are there existing mechanisms for citizen engagement with candidates and/or political parties (e.g. debates, town hall meetings, rallies)?

The Malawi case study illustrates how Tiphedzane took advantage of gains made during the election period to hone its strategy to have new boreholes dug. Through its election activism, it was better able to understand formal and informal processes that drive local development initiatives. At the same time, it built relationships, conducted public outreach and used a variety of tactics to achieve its goal. Looking forward, Tiphedzane will be better placed to navigate the complex dynamics of future social change initiatives because of its election experience. In Turkey, activists knew their demands for more limited government would not be addressed unless they were able to mobilize widespread popular support to pressure leaders for reform. The Checks and Balances Network emerged to cultivate a national movement of groups that possessed the power and influence to fight for government response on these issues.

Plan for the Long Term and Look for Entry Points

Social change takes time and activists need to plan for the long term by taking advantage of a variety of entry points. These can be described simply as opportunities for meaningful engagement between decision makers and citizens. Often they take the form of openings for citizens to access political processes, such as budget deliberations, a constitutional review or an election. Every political environment is different and may present different opportunities for engagement. So activists should consider the political context they are working in and be strategic about choosing which entry points to exploit.

Activists from Poraka in Macedonia demonstrated this skill. They had been doing well building grassroots support for disability issues through their local chapters, but once parliamentary elections were called, they quickly adapted their strategy to take advantage of the new opportunity. By encouraging political parties to sign pledge cards to support ratification of the CRPD, they were able to complement the gains made in their grassroots efforts with decision-maker support. They knew that candidates competing for votes might be more willing to listen to citizen concerns and make commitments to address them.

Develop Relationships and Act Collectively

During elections, when political parties and candidates are competing for votes, they are more likely to be open to interactions with citizens and can be pressed to make commitments. Activism undertaken during election periods has the potential to help groups develop relationships with leaders that can create pathways for change on key issues. In all of the country cases in Malawi, Macedonia and Turkey, for example, the election period offered new and rare opportunities for activists to engage with candidates, political party leaders and the government. Through these interactions, groups came to be seen as credible representatives of their communities or constituent groups and were able to demonstrate expertise on their priority issues. Elected local officials came to view these organizations as solution-driven interlocutors worthy of their time and interest.

Elections also provide a context for activists to build relationships with voters by organizing for change on issues that are important to them. Such collective action can be easier during election periods than at other times in the political cycle. Citizens may be motivated to work together to organize a debate, participate in a community mapping session, publish an issue paper or educate voters because they can see how their efforts connect with and influence the political process. For example, in Malawi, citizens worked together to organize debates for local government candidates. Many citizens chose to participate in these initiatives because it provided a unique opportunity to question candidates and press them to commit to addressing them once in office.

Finally, elections may provide a hook for groups to build alliances or networks with other organizations on issues of common interest. In Turkey, for example, the diverse organizations of the Checks and Balances Network came together around the presidential election to address issues related to limited government and transparency. Each of these groups focuses on its own issues day-to-day, but by working together, they were able to address systemic political challenges that were negatively impacting the potential for quality-of-life reform in many areas.

Consider Organizing Around an Issue or Cause

Research from the Overseas Development Institute shows that citizens, particularly in lower-income countries, tend to value government action on quality of life issues, such as education, health care and employment, over abstract democratic principles. Citizens value democracy, but they are much more likely to demand and defend it if it responds to their needs. For this reason, groups looking to mobilize participation in elections may be more successful if they incorporate voter information and get-out-the-vote efforts into broader issue-focused campaigns. This was the approach taken by Front and GoGreen in their Cool Mayors campaign. They reached out to potential voters on the environmental concern and wove in messages about the importance of participating in the election.

An issue-based approach is distinct from traditional voter education projects that emphasize the quality of the election and voter participation, and employ messages about rights and responsibilities such as, “your vote is your power.” Mobilizing people to vote based on specific issues paves the way for activism that extends beyond the election. In Malawi, Tiphedzane asked candidates to sign social contracts committing them to addressing important community issues if they were elected. After the election, citizens said they felt empowered to hold newly elected lawmakers to account for those promises as a result of the contract.

Conventional wisdom in many countries points to apathy as a common explanation for low voter turnout. In such situations, educating people about how to vote or reminding them that it is their right to vote may not be the most effective strategy. In circumstances like these, activists should consider issue-based approaches to motivate people to go to the polls by connecting quality-of-life priorities to the political process.

Employ a Range of Tools and Tactics

Once a group has decided on a strategy that focuses on issue organizing, the next step is to identify tactics and tools that will help them achieve their goal. The most effective campaigns use a combination of tactics and tools that they deploy strategically

depending on the target audience and the political entry point they are organizing around. Tactics could include participatory research, such as focus groups, surveys or community mapping. Or mobilizing events, such as debates, rallies and marches, may help attract people to their cause. Elections often invite opportunities for voter education when radio broadcasts, group meetings, canvassing, literature drops and social media may be useful tactics. Finally, outreach to the media through press conferences or press release are other ways to engage voters on issues. In Malawi, Tiphedzane chose to focus on mobilizing voters through community mapping issue identification exercises and candidate debates. While in Macedonia, Poraka chose to reach out to candidates with campaign pledges. In Turkey, CBN developed a series of policy briefs aimed at political and media leaders to educate them on the issue of transparency and limited government.

However, it is important not to rush to select tactics and tools before a strategy has been chosen. Tools that take advantage of the Internet and social media can be particularly enthralling with promises to streamline communication or mobilize supporters. While it may be tempting to forgo the difficult work of planning strategy, this preliminary step is essential to ensure that tactics are employed effectively and that they contribute to the desired outcomes. Despite these challenges, choosing tactics and tools provides opportunities for creativity and innovation. Matching them correctly with campaign strategy ensures they will contribute to the campaign goals.

Resources



Activists for the Cool Mayors campaign show off outreach materials.

Civic groups require a variety of skills and capacities for this kind of work, including strategic planning, mapping the political terrain, building relationships, develop credible narratives and drawing on evidence to support policy positions. In addition to these skills, groups must also learn to take appropriate actions at each stage of the political cycle. Understanding how to take advantage of the political openings created by elections is critical to long term organizing strategies. Once you have determined your issue organizing strategy for upcoming elections, the following tools drawn from the country cases presented on this site, as well as those developed by other activists around the world, may provide inspiration as you implement your own activities.

Resources by Case Study

Turkey: Building a Network and Establishing a Political Presence

[PDF: CBN Call on Candidates July 2014](#)

[PDF: CBN Equal Media Access July 2014](#)

[PDF: CBN Finance Transparency May 2014](#)

[PDF: Evaluation Report for the Funding of the Campaign for the Elections of Nov 1 2015](#)

[PDF: Funding of Politics and Election Campaigns](#)

Malawi: Setting Expectations for Relationships Between Citizens and Elected Leaders

PDF: Church and Society CCAP Nkhoma Synod Citizen Manifesto

IMAGE: Community Mapping Exercise

PDF: Malawi Human Right Youth Network Social Contract

PDF: National Women's Lobby Group Citizen Manifesto

PDF: NGO Gender Coordination Network Social Contract

PDF: Thipedzane Social Contract

Macedonia: Promoting Policy Change on Priority Issues

PDF: Cool Mayors Campaign Brochure

SLIDESHOW: Cool Mayors Campaign Drawing Competition

VIDEO: Cool Mayors Campaign Music Video

IMAGE: Cool Mayors Campaign Pledge and Calendar

Macedonia: Taking Advantage of Opportunities in the Election Cycle

IMAGE: Poraka Pledge

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