

The background features a series of concentric circles in light grey and dashed lines, creating a ripple effect. A large, solid red rectangle is centered on the page, containing the main text. The text is white and centered within the red box.

Beyond parties

Populism as challenge and opportunity
for democracy support

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What are the opportunities?

- Need to distinguish between different regions, based on the existing political system and nature of populist movement
- Are there opportunities to use populism to reconfigure broken political systems?
- Can populist pressures lead to more pro-poor policies in elitist and unequal political systems?
- Can populist movements build inter-communal bridges in countries fragmented along ethnic and religious lines?

A new form of politics

- If the greatest challenge to democracy and redistribution is ethnicity, populism may be able to play a role
- In this context, the overall impact on accountability may be negligible
- Many African populist leaders have avoided exclusionary ethnic appeals
- However, populism often struggles to overcome these barriers where they are entrenched (ethno-populism)

A force for
fairness?

There are few examples of populist government in sub-Saharan Africa, but in Zambia the government did make changes:

- National minimum wage
- Greater investment in healthcare
- Some improvement on key development indicators

→ Similar effects are likely in Tanzania, but there are major political cists

And what is the
cost?

- Much of the discussion has assumed that parties at one point or another exist in a meaningful way
- But in much of the world parties are essentially badges for collections of individuals lacking ideological cohesion
- Where party weakness is extreme, the implications for parties are less significant simply because parties are currently doing little valuable work
- In these countries, going beyond parties may be the best option ...

New forms of civil society (and more of it)

- Online campaign groups: Avaaz, 38 Degrees, GetUp!
- Civil society that looks a lot like a political party, but claims not to be.
- Civil society that's clearly **not** apolitical, but also doesn't map neatly onto a left-right spectrum.
- Civil society as both counter to, and part of populism.
- Civil society that doesn't want to work with political parties.
- Civil society that's more deeply polarized.

These create challenges, but also opportunities... IF providers of democracy support can figure out how to work with them.

Haven't we been
here before?

“In the future, it is essential that providers of civil society aid abandon their notion that civil society is mostly about NGOs and instead strive to understand how civil society is already structured in each recipient country and assist it accordingly.”

“Donors must recognize the profound heterogeneity of attempted transitions and try to understand the forms and roles of civil society, and of civil society aid, in light of it.”

**Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers in
Funding Virtue (2000)**

The talk VS The walk

WHAT DONORS SAY

- “All donors now acknowledge that the term [civil society] includes other associational forms [than NGOs]....” *INTRAC review of donors’ civil society strategies, commission by DFID in 2010.*
- “It is often smaller, grassroots organisations that are best able to make the connections on the ground and achieve lasting impact.” *DFID’s Civil Society Partnership Review, 2016*

WHAT (MOST) DONORS DO

- Working with NGOs remains the “default” position.
- Encourage civil society to speak with “one voice” to increase impact.

What's stopping change?

- Pressure to account for funds.
- Risk of “freelancing” in less hierarchical organizations.
- Desire to avoid perception of being partisan.
- A belief (arguably justified) that political institutions remain essential for entrenching political reforms over the long-term.
- Not all the risks are risks to donors/providers of support...

Help or harm?

Being more inclusive comes
with risks



VIACHESLAV SHILOV

AGENTS OF THE PEOPLE

FOUR YEARS OF "FOREIGN AGENTS" LAW IN RUSSIA:
CONSEQUENCES FOR THE SOCIETY