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| **Strengthening democracy in Latin America NGO’s efforts and perspectives** |
| Submitted in partial completion of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in International Relations at San Francisco State University |

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**Strengthening democracy in Latin America**

**NGO’s efforts and perspectives**

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# 1. Introduction

This paper is an analysis of my internship experience from January 2017 to May 2017 at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), in Washington, DC. With this paper, I want to highlight how the theory that I learned during my academic studies combines with the practical world in a professional setting. During my studies for my master’s degree at San Francisco State University, I directed my academic curriculum to studies related to Latin America and courses that could help explain the challenges faced by the region. Following this line of thinking, I looked for internship opportunities where I could exercise the knowledge I obtained at school. That was when I learned about the NED and its Latin America & Caribbean program, which I joined as an intern.

The main goal of the NED is to support freedom around the world. This freedom includes issues related to democracy, such as the strengthening of democratic institutions, freedom of expression, the rule of law, free and fair elections, among others. This paper will focus on democracy itself, highlighting its different concepts and characteristics, the main challenges democracy faces in Latin America, and what the NED has done to help improve the democratic phenomena in the region.

There is no unique concept for what democracy is. Various authors attempted to define the word throughout contemporary history, with especial attention to the works of Dahl and O’Donnell. In general, and after all the expansions of the term, democracy involves three dimensions, which are the citizen’s rights, liberties and freedoms; the democratic institutions and the democratic political process; and social benefits. Different authors include some of these aspects in a larger or lower degree when defining democracy, and what is most challenging is that democracy varies from region to region, or even country to country, as specific traditions, history, and needs allow different momentums for the democratic processes.

With the use of three case studies in different Latin American countries, this work will exemplify these various notions of democracy, the degree of democratization of a country, the different challenges faced by the governments, and what has been done to help improve the situation in these places. The countries chosen for this analysis are Cuba, Paraguay, and Nicaragua. This selection was made on purpose, as all of these countries show traces of authoritarian backsliding in recent years or even months.

The work of the NED’s grantees is essential in these countries. In Cuba, the Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos provides technical assistance for Cubans to learn about international standards for free and fair elections, as Raul Castro is supposed to leave power in 2018 and elections might take place. In Paraguay, a recent attempt of the President to extend the presidential terms resulted in violence and showed that the country’s authoritarian past is not completely overcome. The work of the Centro de Informacion y Recursos para el Desarollo seeks to promote citizen-driven accountability in the country, strengthening the role of civil society in being the protagonists of change. In Nicaragua, Ortega’s rule has many characteristics of a dictatorship, and the work of the Asociación Hagamos Democracia seeks to promote legislative oversight and free and fair elections in the country.

Despite all these initiatives being fundamental for democracy in these countries, what this work wants to emphasize is that they can be more efficient if they use theories of change in their design, monitoring, and evaluation phases of their projects. Theories of change add accuracy and transparency, clarify project logic, highlight assumptions that need to be tested, and help identify appropriate participants and partners for a project. Its use can only benefit an organization and help clarify the logic and assumptions of a project. This work will show how the chosen organizations can individually improve when using theories of change.

This work is divided in four sections. The first one is an organizational background of the National Endowment for Democracy, highlighting its history, purpose, structure, areas of action, and my responsibilities as an intern for the Latin America & Caribbean team. The second section is a detailed literature review on democracy, highlighting concepts, types, challenges, and opportunities it faces, especially in Latin America. The third section is composed of three case studies, one in Cuba, one in Paraguay, and one in Nicaragua. These case studies emphasize the historical background in these countries, the work of NED’s grantees and how they can be more efficient when using theories of change. The conclusion section will summarize the findings of this work and leave further suggestions of areas that need more study.

# 2. Organization

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)[[1]](#footnote-1) is a nonprofit, private organization that seeks to advance democracy in the world. Annually, the NED produces more than 1,200 grants funding NGOs projects overseas that support democratic goals. Currently, the NED works in more than 90 countries. Since its foundation in 1983, the NED evolved into a multifaceted organization that combines assets, activities, and intellectual discussion for scholars, practitioners, and activists of democracy from all over the world.

Currently, the NED aids countries that are trying to consolidate democracy, and countries where it eroded, always considering the dynamic changes of the international arena. The NED’s philosophy is based on the principle that freedom is a collective human desire that can be achieved by the growth of democratic ideals, processes, and institutions. Democracy is a phenomenon that evolves according to the specific circumstances of different political cultures. It is not a model that can be imposed because it worked in a place. The history, needs, and traditions of a country influence the way democracy might take place in it. Nonetheless, the NED believes that freedom and a representative government are essential aspects of democracy.

The NED has a unique profile. The NED remained bipartisan since its creation by Democrats and Republicans. The NED functions with an elevated amount of accountability and transparency, as its founders believed that the advancement of democracy worldwide should be open and public. The NED is subject to many levels of oversight by the Department of State, US Congress, and independent financial audit. The NED’s nongovernmental profile allows the flexibility necessary to operate in the world’s most problematic contexts, being able to react rapidly when there is a chance of political change. The NED supports various democratic institutions, such as business organizations, political parties, free markets, trade unions, as well as civil society groups that foster human rights, the rule of law, and independent media. This far-reaching approach addresses multiple aspects of democracy and is effective and practical, as proven through the history of the NED.

With the consolidation of its grants program, the NED became an established and multifaceted organization that wants to promote a unified global effort for democratic change and help democratic activists with research, exchange, network, and recognition. To strengthen its grants program, the NED created the Center for International Media Assistance; the International Forum for Democratic Studies; the World Movement for Democracy; the Journal of Democracy; and the Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program.

The grants program is the center of the NED’s work. The NED’s strategy is to work on a global scale, which implies that no region struggling for democracy is ignored. The NED’s independent Board of Directors meets quarterly to approve grants for six regions: Asia, Africa, MENA, Eurasia, Central & Eastern Europe, and Latin America & Caribbean, besides global projects. The Board takes into consideration if the program matches the NED’s priorities, the program’s urgency, its relevance for the country’s needs and conditions, and the experience and commitment to democracy of the applicant. The NED funds projects that encourage economic and political freedom and participation, independent media, a strong civil society, the rule of law, and human rights.

The NED’s major funding source is the US Congress. 45% of the budget goes to the NED, while 55% goes to the core institutes. Those are the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center). The NED’s and the core institutes relationship offers institutional balance, and assures that the NED is open to different strategies to democratic development. The NED also directly supports indigenous, women, and youth groups that promote democracy building.

The NED’s grants program prioritize organization that work on highly repressive societies, such as Cuba, China, Uzbekistan, and North Korea; transitional countries; new democracies; semi-authoritarian countries; and war-torn or failed states, such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan and South Sudan, and the DRC.

As an intern for the Latin America & Caribbean team, my responsibilities included: assist program staff in project management duties; attend relevant meetings on key democracy issues affecting the region; review and summarize proposals for NED program staff review; assist in the preparation of grant cycle materials; help map out NGOs and donors working in key countries; carry out research on research-related issues and countries in Latin America, and attend meetings with visiting grantees. During my time at NED I fulfilled all of these duties and others that arose.

The work of the NED is vital for the promotion of democracy worldwide. Its nongovernmental character allows independence in where and how to act, reaching the most sensitive regions of the globe. As the NED works with its grantees partners in different countries, it does not impose a way of approaching or dealing with an issue. Instead, the NED respects and supports the work its grantees produce, guaranteeing that the local approach and way of seeking solutions prevail in the countries. The following section is a detailed literature review of the main issue tackled by the NED, which is democracy and the challenges it faces around the world, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean.

# 3. Literature Review

This literature review will analyze democracy in Latin America over the past 30 years, which Samuel Huntington calls the Third Wave of Democratization and Francis Fukuyama calls the end of history. This section is divided into conceptualization of democracy, types of democratic regimes, quality of democracy, and vices of democracy, focusing on clientelism.

## 3.1. Concept of Democracy

It is possible to define democracy in three dimensions. The first relates to citizen rights, civil liberties, and freedoms, including “freedom of speech, political liberty, protection of individual rights, or freedom to participate.” The second relates to “*democratic institutions* or the *democratic political process,* which includes rule by the people, elections, majority rule, or open and accountable government.” The third relates to social benefits, including “social and economic development, equality or justice, or peace and stability” (Dalton, Shin & Jou, 2007, p. 145-146).

Robert Dahl (1971) argues that it is possible to meet the standards of democracy “if citizens can participate equally in free and fair elections, and if elections direct the actions of government.” The essential goals of democracy are liberty and freedom, and to achieve them it is necessary to have democratic institutions. The main democratic values, according to Diamond (1999), are “political liberties, participation rights of citizens, equal justice before the law, and equal rights for women.”

According to Robert Dahl (1956), it is possible to define democracy through the concept of polyarchy, which entails universal suffrage, free elections, and political and civil liberties to guarantee competitiveness. The most well developed version of the expanded definition of democracy is O’Donnell’s conceptualization of the difference between democratic state and democratic regime. For O’Donnell, democratic regime correspond to Dahl’s definition of polyarchy, whereas “democratic state is the sum of the attributes included in a democratic regime, plus at least two extra attributes: “horizontal accountability” and “formal institutionalization”” (Mazzuca, 2010, p. 338). Democracy’s expanded definition entails reconstructing the process of democratization, including the transition to democracy and improvement of its quality.

Przeworski (1991) defines democracy “as regimes in which governmental offices are filled as a consequence of contested elections.” This definition assumes that elections happen at regular intervals, and the results are uncertain, and irreversible. Przeworski differs from Dahl and O’Donnell in the sense that he focuses in electoral aspect of democracy, while the other authors developed a broader definition. In a minimalist view of democracy, the existence of institutions is enough and the outcomes do not matter. In a substantive view, “institutions are seen as necessary but not sufficient to characterize a political regime” (Cheibub et al, 2010, p. 72). For Hershberg (2009, p. 200), “it is one thing to have established competitive political regimes and quite another to have forged the sorts of representative mechanisms required to ensure public voice in matters political.” Hershberg expands Przeworski definition of democracy when he considers other mechanisms as essential for civil rights and freedom.

For O’Donnell, democracy is based on the existence of formal institutions that properly operate when their legal, political, and civil rights are extended to citizens (O’Donnell, 1996). For the democratization school, democracy can evolve anywhere, as long as it has an organizational structure and the right management. It was believed that Latin American democracy could progress into polyarchy, but that was not what happened. Alternatively, democracy in Latin America could be seen as a result of a struggle, not something granted or given. It is the product of challenging authority, sometimes violent clashes, and break down of established sociopolitical orders (Arias & Goldstein, 2010).

Despite the different conceptualization of these major authors, democracy is an evolving and transformative process that requires constant analysis. For Palestini (2017, p. 1), “there is no single, uncontested definition of what democracy is… The understanding of what democracy is varies a great deal between and within regional organizations.” These organizations decided to maintain the definition imprecise, and that undermines chances of complete “collective commitment to democracy.” For the Americas, the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter is a reference for the meaning of democracy. Several organizations in the Americas include various principles and values they defend, but they do not link those to the concept of democracy or highlight procedures for violations of these principles. In the case of the Americas, the governments themselves interpret and enforce rules related to democracy. Mainwaring and Anibal Perez Linan (2005) highlight the role of OAS in setting guidelines for domestic political relations, and preventing authoritarian reversal.

This first subsection put together the concepts of democracy developed by the main authors of the subject. Concepts vary from a minimalistic view that considers the existence of institutions as enough for democracy to exist, to expanded definitions like O’Donnell’s, which includes not only institutions operating properly, but also accountability and citizen participation. The following subsection highlights the major types of democratic regimes, especially the ones seen in Latin America.

## 3.2. Types of Democratic Regimes

There are five elements in Latin America’s political culture: elitism, hierarchy, authoritarianism, corporatism, and patrimonialism. Those have affected the way democracy evolved in the region in various ways and levels. Authoritarianism declined, as well as Marxism-Leninism, while populism and social democracy are mainly used by political leaders. “Democracy is overwhelmingly the preferred form of government of Latin America, even though democracy does not always work well or quickly enough, and it is still threatened by upheaval, corruption, and vast social problems” (Wiarda & Kline, 2013, p. 4). Democracy in Latin America has its own peculiarities, including a more executive-centered and centralized approach, and the state is the main force in social and economic programs. For Levine and Molina (2007, p. 19), “Las definiciones procedimentales de la democracia descansan en una concepción liberal y pluralista de la política y del proceso político. La democracia es vista como un sistema de representación, con participación libre y universal de la población adulta en un marco de igualdad de derechos y reglas del juego también iguales” meaning “The procedural definitions of democracy rest on a liberal and pluralistic conception of politics and the political process. Democracy is seen as a system of representation, with free and universal participation of the adult population within a framework of equal rights and equal rules of the game” (Author’s translation). This definition implies that competitiveness, political participation, and accountability are essential for the government’s legitimacy.

O’Donnell (1996) argues that some countries are democracies but they are not representative democracies. A representative democracy is democratic because its government results from relatively fair and institutionalized elections and is willing to end its terms in the constitutionally proposed manner. Nonetheless, countries following that path have particular characteristics, which led to O’Donnell’s concept of delegative democracy. In delegative democracies, democracy is not consolidated, but it is enduring. There is no indication either of any forthcoming threat of an authoritarian regression, or of progresses toward representative democracy. These countries are living a ‘second transition’ towards democracy. This transition is long and complex, and it needs the support of institutions that become important decisional points in the flow of political power to succeed. In addition, political strategies and governmental policies must share the interest and work together to build democratic institutions, as they can cope with economic and social problems inherited from the authoritarian regimes.

The premise of delegative democracy is that the president elected can govern as he/she thinks is appropriate, limited only by existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office. The President is the embodiment of the nation and the main custodian of the national interest, which it is incumbent upon him to define. What he does in government does not need to have any resemblance to what he said or promised during the electoral campaign; he has been authorized to govern as he sees fit. Since this paternal figure has to take care of the whole nation, his support cannot come from a party; his political basis has to be a movement, the supposedly vibrant overcoming of the factionalism and conflicts that parties bring about. In this view, other institutions, such as congress and the judiciary, are nuisances that come attached to the domestic and international advantages of being a democratically elected President. Accountability to those institutions or to other private or semiprivate organizations appears as an unnecessary impediment to the full authority that the president has been delegated to exercise.

Delegative democracy is more democratic, but less liberal than representative democracy. What defines this type of democracy are the long-term historical factors, and the degree of severity of the socioeconomic problems. Delegative democracies have weak institutions, no apparent horizontal accountability, and the additional apparent advantage of allowing swift policymaking, but at the expense of a higher likelihood of gross mistakes, of hazardous implementation, and of concentrating responsibility for the outcomes on the president. The main difference between representative and delegative democracy is having or not a network of institutionalized powers.

Merkel (2004) builds on the topic and analyses the elements that constitute a liberal democracy. These are an electoral regime, political liberties, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern. The author’s argument concurs with O’Donnell’s when saying that in delegative democracies the judiciary and the legislature have only partial control over the executive branch. The actions of the president are rarely tied to constitutional norms. The checks and balances system is undermined by a disequilibrium in favor of the executive.

Luna and Vergara (2016) reviewed O’Donnell’s delegative democracy essay and encountered aspects that they judged correct, such as the idea that political regimes are not linear, but they also criticize O’Donnell’s claim that delegative democracy and socioeconomic conditions are intrinsically linked. They argue that despite the economic booms seen in the past decade in Latin America, delegative dynamics were fostered. Going deeper in the analysis, Luna and Vergara argue that socioeconomic incorporation has little to do with vertical or horizontal accountability, even within countries in Latin America. They focus their analysis in the vertical accountability, arguing that “free elections occur and office changes hands, but the institutions that aggregate, mediate, and arbitrate interests and conflicts are ineffectual and lack legitimacy” (Luna & Vergara, 2016, p. 162). That goes against O’Donnell’s trust in vertical accountability. Then, the authors developed the concept of “uprooted democracy”, meaning “a democracy with a decent level of horizontal accountability and democratically elected officials who represent different policy programs, but in which representative institutions such as parties are so weak and dysfunctional that democracy’s legitimacy is threatened” (Luna & Vergara, 2016, p. 163). They explain the loss of capacity of representative institutions to mediate and aggregate society’s interests because of segmentation in society, rise of single-issue citizens, and the lack of long-term commitment between politicians.

In a different perspective from the previous authors, Mazzuca (2010) argues that autocracies or authoritarian regimes are defined so because they do not allow fair elections and they exclude adult groups from participating in them. For Mazzuca (2010, p. 351), “patrimonial exercise of power—under democratic or authoritarian regimes of access—is a problem with deep historical roots in Latin America.” For him, most Latin American countries are democratic but patrimonial. Political parties leaders that benefited most of the transition to democracy in the 80’s are the most resistant in implementing full detachment to patrimonial behavior, which highlights that democracy and bureaucracy interest distinct groups of political actors.

Smith and Ziegler (2008) discuss about liberal and illiberal democracies in Latin America. Based on Zakaria’s description (as cited in Smith and Ziegler, 2008, p. 31) that concurs with Merkel’s, liberal democracy consists in free and fair elections or electoral democracy, and constitutional protection of the rights of the citizens. Illiberal democracy respects the component of free and fair elections but denies constitutional rights. In contemporary Latin America, illiberal democracy is the widespread model of political organization, despite being perverse. “By the year 2004, more than 310 million people (nearly 60 percent of the regional total) in ten countries were living under illiberal democracy” (Smith & Ziegler, 2008, p. 36). Their study shows that high levels of inflation is the main determinant of the conversion from illiberal to liberal democracy. In addition, citizens’ demonstrations of dissatisfaction have meaningful political consequences. The path for full democracy relies in a strong civil society, available channels for expression, and leadership’s (president) responsiveness.

Different authors developed ways of classifying Latin America’s history of democracy. For Palestini (2017), it is possible to identify three recent moments. The liberal moment (1988-2001) was marked by the end of the military regimes and civil wars, and the transition into democracy endorsed by the US and European Union. The post-liberal moment (2002-2013) started with the Inter-American Democratic Charter (OAS) creation and was characterized by the rise of leftist governments with a reformist agenda. The illiberal moment (2013-present) experiences the erosion of leftist leaders and resurface of right governments. It seems like there is currently a lack of democratic commitment consensus in the Americas, as ideological transformation brings heterogeneity and the US declined its reinforcement of democratic values (Palestini, 2017).

In the same sense, for Hershberg (2009) there are three distinctive moments as well. First was the transition to democracy from late 1970’s until 2000 with Mexico’s defeat of PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). The second phase started in the 1980’s with the neoliberal transformation and its consequences all over Latin America until recent years. Although social inequalities and poverty rates deteriorated during those years, society’s support for democracy remained high. The third moment started in the 2000’s with pressures for social inclusion influencing democratic politics.

This second subsection exposed different types of democratic regimes, most of them seen in Latin America. Even though the concept of each type might be different, there is consensus that democracy in Latin America followed a unique path and that the transition to Dahl’s polyarchy was not fulfilled. Despite the problems Latin America faces, democracy outlasts in its own defective way. The following subsection will briefly expose about quality of democracy, a topic broadly debated in the democracy literature and a subject that attracted much interest and discussion amongst scholars.

## 3.3. Quality of Democracy

There is an underlying assumption that polyarchy is an essential, but not sufficient, factor for high quality democracy. In a political regime, quality of democracy is different from level of democratization. To measure quality of democracy, Altman and Pérez-Liñán (2002) highlight three dimensions to be observed. The first one is effective civil rights, which requires “mass participation and free opposition to the ruling elite.” The second is the right to participate in the democratic process, and the third is effective competition of the process. Any violation of these dimensions might undermine the quality of democracy (Altman and Pérez-Liñán, 2002, page 88).

According to the democracy barometer, “a democratic system tries to establish a good balance between the normative, interdependent values of freedom and equality, and that this requires control. Control is also valuable in a democracy because it is the institutionalized checking of the political authorities that distinguishes democratic systems from autocracies” (Buhlmann et al., 2011, p. 521). These three principles can be transformed into functions, as shown on the following figure. It can be assumed from the model that quality of democracy varies in different degrees, depending on the level of development of the nine functions.

In a simple concept map, Quality of Democracy forms the top level, branching down to the second level, Principles, which in turn branches to the third level, Functions.

From left to right: Quality of Democracy flows down into the Principle of Freedom which flows into the Functions of Individual Liberties, Rule of Law, and Public Sphere. The next Principle Quality of Democracy flows into is Control which flows into the Functions of Competition, Mutual Constraints, and Government Capability. Lastly, Quality of Democracy flows into the Principle of Equality which flows into the Functions of Transparency, Participation, and Representation.

Source: Buhlmann et at., 2011

This brief subsection touched on quality of democracy, a topic widely debated in the literature. While quality of democracy is not the main focus of this paper, this author found it essential to at least mention it for the purpose of showing the evolution of debates related to democracy. The final subsection of this literature review will analyze ways of strengthening democracy and the challenges to democracy in Latin America, especially issues related to clientelism. Finally, this author will explain how the organizations for the case studies were chosen and what criteria will be used to analyze their work.

## 3.4. Challenges to Democracy

Moving on with the discussion, this section focuses on forms to strengthen democracy and the challenges Latin America faces. Mainwaring and Scully (2008) introduce the concept of democratic governance. It relates to the capability of democratic governments in creating policies that improve society’s welfare. It is a top-down aspect related to the performance of the state, it checks the outcomes of policies implemented and how effective they are. This author believes that one of the challenges faced by countries in Latin America is to create democratic governance that is effective. Latin America history has shown that there is no perfect, unique formula that works for the region. Attempts to reproduce successful scenarios do not guarantee success either, meaning that it is not possible to recommend policies based on what worked in other countries. The context and history of each country in Latin America is unique, and it is better to develop its own way of dealing with problems instead of copying pre made formulas.

Continuing with the argument of Mainwaring and Scully, an OAS study found out that transparency is one of the core principles to good governance. Strong relationships between governments and citizens grant better policy-making and innovative sources of ideas. Government openness allows the development of trust in the society, which raises the quality of democracy and strengthens civic capacity. Successful public governance is a factor measured by the citizens, because they are the ones asking for government’s accountability, transparency, and more public voice in developing policies that directly influence their lives (OECD/OAS, 2002).

There was hope that civil society would be better represented in Latin America after the emergency of democratic governments, as predicted by O’Donnell and Hershberg. However, the link between citizens/civil society and political institutions/authorities was not well developed. Groups within the society seek reliable and stable representation sources. The middle class relies in the media to contest the state apparatus, while lower classes have no other choice than relying in the state itself and in its clientelistic behavior (Levine & Molina, 2007).

Latin America in recent years has seen democratic innovations regarding civil society’s participation as an active accountability actor. In the literature of “quality of democracy”, there is consensus that defective accomplishment of accountability agencies is connected to institutional deficits. To fix this issue, bottom-up civic initiatives and top-down reforms were implemented, strengthening legal and political dimensions of accountability. The traditional understanding of democratic accountability presumes that success lies in elections and horizontal state mechanisms, as argued by O’Donnell. This view is contested by recent developments based on “active civil society and more participatory forms of governance” (Peruzzotti, 2012, p. 629).

Innovative mechanisms of accountability aim to involve citizens in monitoring functions. In concrete terms, it is possible to see engagement between state agencies and civil society in fighting for accountability and exposing the wrongdoings of the government. According to Peruzzotti (2012, p. 631), “social accountability highlights a series of civic initiatives to expose and denounce different forms of governmental wrongdoing, from corruption to human rights violations. Usually, initiatives of social accountability involve three different types of actors: protest movements, NGOs, and watchdog journalism. A scenario where social mechanisms are strong provides an important source of “stimulation” for horizontal agencies to fulfill their responsibilities. If properly designed and implemented, institutionalized participation can replace clientelism with more public forms of political intermediation.”

Hershberg builds on this idea when he argues that “the tendency of some elected leaders toward bending the rules and undermining existing frameworks for democratic competition may open the way to new forms of participation and representation more amenable to engaging popular demands for democracies that privilege social justice” (Hershberg, 2009, p. 203).

Mazzuca (2010), in an alternative perspective, differentiates the notion of access and exercise of power. He argues that “whereas democratization in its original meaning of transition and consolidation involved changes in the form of access to political power, clientelism and government by decree are forms of exercise of power. Clientelism, corruption, and other manipulations of political power for private gain are manifestations of what Max Weber called patrimonialism, a form of exercise of power that can coexist in a country with both authoritarian and democratic regimes of access to power” (Mazzuca, 2010, p. 335-336). The transition from authoritarianism to democracy or democratization is the access side, whereas in the exercise side bureaucracy replaces patrimonialism. Mazzuca infers that in Latin America, democracy is deficient because in the exercise side of it there is more patrimonialism as bureaucratization is weak. Mazzuca’s argument complements O’Donnell’s idea that democracy can exist as a political system, while not having all the characteristics of good governance.

In Latin America, nations are marked by insecurity, criminality, and violence. Considering the mentioned factors that characterize good governance, Latin America faces serious challenges to democracy, as clientelism, corruption, government by executive orders, inefficient checks and balances, among others, are common behaviors. Governments are a product of inclusive and free elections, there is a change in parties in power, and democracy is the main regime in place. Nonetheless, there is also abuse of political power, corruption is generalized all over the region, and clientelism evolves, reinvents itself and becomes more resilient.

From 1985 to 2000, the number of countries that have competitive elections went from 53 to 101 (*Database of Political Institutions*; Beck et al. 2001). Keefer (2007) makes some interesting points regarding clientelism in young democracies. He argues that candidates in non-credible political settings try to get credibility either through vote buying or the use of patrons. As a result, “political incentives to provide public goods are weak, incentives to provide private or targeted goods are strong, and the electoral costs of corruption or rent seeking are lower, since most voters are roughly indifferent to candidate performance, believing neither challenger nor incumbent promises. Younger democracies pursue more targeted, less public, and more corrupt policies” (Keefer, 2007, p. 806). When there is no credibility in politicians, patronism emerges in politics.

Clientelism is a distortion that affects autocracies and democracies in different levels and contexts. It makes it hard for citizens to hold authorities accountable, and allows dictators and corrupts to stay in power. Clientelism deflects resources destined for economic development, maintaining dependent and poor constituents and undermining trust in democratic institutions. Clientelism in democracies aims to create a net of trusting supporters, while in autocracies it creates socioeconomic dependence and political subservience on the regime. What explain these differences is the lack of political competition in autocracies. Clientelism has some unique characteristics. One is contingency, meaning reciprocity amongst patron and client; hierarchy, as clientelism is a vertical dyadic alliance; iteration, meaning the anticipation of future interactions; and volition, meaning the cost to end the client-patron relationship (Hicken, 2011).

Per Hicken (2011, p. 300), “the cost of clientelism increases as development and mobility increase. To maintain a given level of support via clientelism, politicians must increase the benefits they distribute. As the cost of clientelism rises, the negative externalities for politicians also increase.” In the literature, there is consensus that clientelism has deep negative consequences for the functionality of democracy, society’s perception of democracy’s quality, and government’s capacity to create the necessary public policies. In addition, clientelism relates to the politicization of bureaucracy and to the lack of effective systems of oversight and administrative control. “Similarly, clientelism has been linked to larger public deficits and public sector inefficiencies. Numerous studies have found a strong link between clientelism and corruption or perceptions of corruption” (Hicken, 2011, p. 303).

This literature review brought together the main concepts of democracy, types of democratic regimes, touched the literature on quality of democracy, and highlighted forms of good governance and the main challenges to democracy in Latin American, especially clientelism. Considering what was discussed and the work the NED does in promoting democracy across the world, the next section of this paper is a selection of case studies from three different organizations based in three countries in Latin America.

One of the main focus area the NED promotes is the strengthening of electoral processes. I believe that free and fair elections are essential to ensure good governance, accountability, and democracy in Latin American countries. Because of that, I chose organizations whose projects focus is elections as a way of strengthening democracy. It is a relevant issue, as it affects society as a whole and is in the center of attention of public debates nowadays. As argued in this literature review, to ensure free and fair elections there are powerful tools such as social accountability and horizontal accountability to constrain clientelistic behavior and other dysfunctions seen in Latin American countries. As noted, clientelism and elections are deeply interconnected.

My argument is that the organizations the NED support are usually able to carry out what they propose to do to strengthen democracy in different countries. However, their strategies and activities can be much more effective if they implement theories of change in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of their projects. Through the analysis of reports and evaluations, I want to suggest ways these organizations can improve their effectiveness and strategies, benefiting themselves and the NED as a grantor.

During my time at NED I noticed a lack of strong tools for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), as it is the smallest department of the organization. My assumption is that usually it is hard to change an organization culture, and especially in the case of M&E, it is hard to develop quantitative and qualitative mechanisms to measure effectiveness in improving democracy. Also, organizations can be afraid of change and self-reflection. Some questions remain unanswered, like how are the grantees’ efforts strengthening democracy in Latin America? What actions are making a difference? Is NED being effective in promoting democracy across the globe?

# 4. Case Studies

## 4.1. Cuba

### 4.1.1. Historical Background

Cuba was discovered in 1492. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the island became a colonial society, based on sugar, plantation, and slavery. Spanish language, culture, institutions, and religion predominated. In the end of the nineteenth century, a Creole rivalry with Spaniards to control the government and the rise of a Cuban nationalism led to a ten years’ war (1868-1878) against Spain for independence, which failed. A second attempt (1895-1898), more organized and ideologically stronger because of the influence of José Martí, succeeded after the US got involved in 1898. The US occupied Cuba until 1902, partly reconstructing it and at the same time creating frustration. With the approval of the Platt Amendment in 1901 which allowed the US to intervene in internal affairs of Cuba, the island became an American protectorate instead of a sovereign nation. The American presence created political schism in the island, causing a weakening in its nationalism (Wiarda, 2014).

The political system of the beginning of the 20th century in Cuba was based on patronage and clientelism. The electoral system was corrupted and fraudulent. There was no accountability, and politicians favored personal gains. Despite having elections, this system cannot be fully called democracy, because it does not contain all the elements that define a democratic regime according to all the authors mentioned in the literature review above. A reformist group defended democratic values and a cleansing of the political culture. After the election of Gerardo Machado in 1924, the political situation in Cuba deteriorated. Machado became a brutal dictator and the institutions were not able to solve political clashes. The opposition, aligned with the military under the leadership of Fulgencio Batista took power in 1933, seeking democratic politics, economic independence, and nationalism. Despite those wishes, the system in Cuba remained authoritarian and personalist, even after the establishment of the 1940 Constitution that guaranteed similar freedoms and rights of contemporary democratic systems. In 1952, Batista carried out a coup, ending the constitutional regime and ruling through political authoritarianism. His dictatorship was marked by oppression and corruption (Wiarda, 2014).

Fidel Castro took power in 1959 after his victorious guerrilla revolution against the Batista dictatorship. The state appropriated the means of production, industries, commerce, transportation, media, education system and turned Cuba in a one-party communist system, aligning the country with the URSS. All measures taken by the government were top-down. US-Cuba relations deteriorated fast, resulting in the imposition of an embargo by the US in 1960 and a break of all diplomatic relations in 1961. A socialist constitution was only established in 1976 to ensure a political process and institutions, however it did not supplant Castro as the center of power and influence. Despite the existence of democratic institutions, they were not allowed to fulfill their roles, as Castro was the one dictating the system. The alliance between Cuba and the URSS offered protection to Castro, who intervened in many parts of the world in support of Marxist insurgencies. The collapse of the URSS caused a major economic crisis in Cuba and the populations’ life standards dropped considerably. Castro introduced a few market reforms, but rejected to open any economic or political processes. The legislative is a rubber-stamp body, not exercising its function (Wiarda, 2014). There are no real democratic elements in Cuba, as its institutions and processes are subordinated to the will of the executive power.

Illegal immigration from Cubans to the US became a rising problem. Tensions between both countries continued during the 2000’s. Internally, the situation is no better, even nowadays. Repression is brutal, there is no freedom of expression, and any form of anti-Castro manifestation results in imprisonments. For example, in 2002, Oswaldo Payá started the Varela Project, which consisted of a petition with 11,000 signatures submitted to the National Assembly calling for democratic political reforms in Cuba. In reaction, Castro mobilized popular support and amended the constitution, which was ratified by the National Assembly, declaring the socialist system to be “untouchable,” permanent, and “irrevocable” (Bond, 2003). Payá died in 2012 under suspicious circumstances.

In 2008, Raul Castro took over the presidency, as Fidel’s health deteriorated. Cuba tried to revitalize its economic situation, approving a few economic reforms to encourage private enterprise and reduce state bureaucracy. In 2015, Cuba and the US normalized diplomatic relations, and Washington eased some travel and trade restrictions. Fidel Castro died in November 2016. After Fidel’s death repression increased considerably. In January 2017, the US ended the wet feet, dry feet policy, which allowed Cubans who arrive in the US without a visa to become permanent residents (Morris, 2017).

### 4.1.2. The work of the NED

Even though Cuba undertook some small changes since the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the US, the country did not start a phase of democratic transition. As Dalton, Shin & Jou (2007) state, democracy requires protection of individual rights; political participation and speech freedoms; elections with diverse parties; government accountability; and social benefits, such as justice, equality, and economic development. None of these characteristics are observable in Cuba, meaning that democratic transition is not a reality yet. “The Castro regime has aggressively sought to secure greater legitimacy and economic advantages for Cuba without liberalizing politically or reducing its repression of Cuban dissidents” (Gershman, 2016). The Cuban Communist Party is the only one allowed in the country, the citizens do not participate in elections, there is no freedom of association, as most NGOs in Cuba operate unregistered and illegally in the eyes of the government. Any form of manifestation is oppressed using coercive forces, and the military controls the majority of strategic economic sector, such as tourism, transportation, and retailing (Feinberg, 2012).

Cuba has experienced a rising number of human rights violations since it normalized relations with the US. According to Levitsky and Way (as cited by Gershman, 2016), “a less confrontational international context can undermine the cohesion of a revolutionary dictatorship, which explains why the Castro regime has stepped up repression in the period since the opening with the United States. The number of political arrests in the first nine months of 2015 was 5,146, well over twice the number of arrests recorded in all of 2010. There were 882 arrests in September alone. Again, this does not indicate a strong regime but a vulnerable one”. Some features might indicate the Cuban regime is weakening. The death of Fidel and Raul’s transfer of power to a younger generation indicates a shift from a personalized regime to a more institutionalized one. The economic system implemented by Fidel reached exhaustion and a restricted liberalization took place. These changes indicate a weakening, but that does not translate into a transition that is democratic (Mujal-León & Langenbacher, 2009).

Cuba is a priority for the National Endowment for Democracy, which supports various human rights defenders and activists inside and outside the island. The NED’s work in Cuba aims to encourage actors to present civic and human rights violations to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and the United Nations. Also, the NED supports trainings to increase the capacity of different actors to documents cases and share the knowledge with other actors. Some programs supported by the NED promote cooperation and consensus between democratic actors in Cuba, provide access to uncensored information to common citizens, support the rights of underrepresented communities and Afro-Cubans, foster religious freedom, and advance solidarity globally with Cuba’s pursuit of democracy (NED, Region Latin America and Caribbean).

For the purpose of this case study, the organization picked up for analysis is the Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos – IIDH (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights - IIHR). The IIHR is an autonomous international academic institution. It was created in 1980 under an agreement signed between the Republic of Costa Rica and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Today it is one of the most important centers of academic education and research in human rights, with a multidisciplinary approach and with an emphasis on the problems of America. Because of its academic nature, since its establishment, the IIHR promotes respect for the rights enshrined in the treaties of the Inter-American system. It does not recognize cases of human rights violations nor does it make or support formal denunciations against any state. Also, it does not give statements regarding the compliance or non-compliance of a state with its human rights international obligations (About IIHR, IIHR).

The IIHR mission is to promote and strengthen the respect for human rights enshrined in the American Convention on Human Rights and other treaties. It also contributes to the consolidation of democracy through education, research, political mediation, training, technical assistance and the dissemination of information, such as the knowledge of the doctrine of human rights through specialized publications and the use of information and communication technologies. The IIHR is based on the principles of representative democracy, the rule of law, ideological pluralism, and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms (Mission, IIHR).

The IIHR has been involved in a wide range of issues. These range from the legal and doctrinal aspects of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and its relation to domestic law, to the theoretical and investigative approach to situations in which legal precepts become reality. Different programs have been established throughout the institutional history, such as the human rights of women, indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, migrants and refugees, support for victims of torture, NGOs, human security, ombudsman, security and human rights, human rights education, among others. In addition, through the Center for Electoral Assistance and Promotion (CAPEL), the Institute has contributed to the strengthening of representative democracy in the countries of the region (History, IIHR).

The main goal of the IIHR in Cuba is to “strengthen the capacity of Cuban civil society activists to promote democratic and pluralistic elections on the island” (Cuba 2016, NED). The IIHR proposed to “provide technical assistance to local partners to educate citizens on internationally recognized standards for free and fair elections” (Ibid). After Raul Castro announced that he plans to step down in 2018 and a younger generation is supposed to take his place, it was urgent to provide Cuban civil society with information regarding democratic electoral standards. It is also important to give pro-democratic activists the technical skills and expertise to be involved in the election. The Inter-American Institute of Human Rights’ Center for Electoral Training and Promotion (CAPEL) has the necessary expertise to train these Cuban activists. CAPEL exists to promote technical assistance in elections and foster free and fair elections, democratic values and a complete political participation with no discrimination (About CAPEL, IIHR). That is why the NED and IIHR collaborated to make this training happen.

On April 24, 2016, the IIHR representation in Colombia held a specialized workshop entitled “Human Rights in Perspective: Dialogue on Citizen Participation for the Promotion of Political Rights in Cuba in the Framework of Transition Periods”. The goal was to generate and improve the conceptual and methodological capacities of the participants for active negotiation and promotion of political rights in their advocacy actions from civil society, hoping to shape an agenda focusing on participation, civic action, and search for peace and social inclusion in Cuba (Taller sobre promoción de derechos políticos en Cuba, IIHR).

### 4.1.3. Analysis

IIHR was able to carry out what it proposes to do, which is “provide technical assistance to local partners to educate citizens on internationally recognized standards for free and fair elections”. IIHR first year as a NED grantee was 2015, and a new grant was renewed for 2016. Organizations are only renewed if they are fulfilling the activities they proposed to do. IIHR trained a small number of Cuban activists in electoral international standards and democratic elections, so they can be active participants in the future elections. The question that remains unanswered is how these trained Cubans can carry on what they learned. At this moment, there is no freedom of expression or association in Cuba. Raul Castro promised to step down in 2018 and allow elections, but nobody knows if that is going to happen or in what terms elections will be hold. There is too much uncertainty. The trained Cubans cannot organize other training workshops inside the island to teach other activists without the risk of being jailed.

Following this logic, it seems that there is a lack of evaluation tools in IIHR proposal. There is a hope that the knowledge transferred to the trained Cubans will be passed away to other activists in the island, but there is no plan on how to do that. It is an issue that brings a lot of concern, because all the resources invested in IIHR, including money, time, training workshops, might be wasted or not fully used if there is no mid or long term planning. And that exemplifies the importance of theories of change, which can help the design, monitoring, and evaluation of projects, improving planning and increasing effectiveness.

Theories of change is a process carried out by project designers where they articulate long-term goals and identify the conditions to meet them. It is the program logic. It defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify changes that need to happen earlier. Theories of change add accuracy and transparency, clarify project logic, highlight assumptions that need to be tested, and help identify appropriate participants and partners for a project. Theories of change represent a testable hypothesis on how planned activities will contribute in achieving desired results, highlighting inefficiencies and inadequate assumptions. Their use allows projects to be reviewed and challenged constructively and then adjusted to a better approach (Taplin, 2013).

In practice, the IIHR needs to establish first what is its long-term goal in Cuba. Then, the project design team creates a road backwards from that long-term goal, highlighting what conditions are necessary to achieve it. It is a long and complex process, that requires deep knowledge of Cuba. A complete map involves all aspects required to achieve the long-term goal, however the IIHR is probably not able to implement all of them. Then, the organization should focus on the activities that it can implement, always considering the big picture clarified by the theory of change. This perspective is interesting, especially for the actors involved in the implementation. It keeps them motivated and the process clear, because even though the organization is working in only a section of the whole, you can see it contributing to the bigger picture.

In the case of the IIHR, there was no strategy developed for the phase after the training workshop they carried out. It is obvious that the work they proposed to do is essential to strength local efforts for Cuba democratization, however without a strategy for how to make use of the knowledge gained, the project might be incomplete or unable to reach its full capacity. If the participants of the workshop were supposed to share their obtained knowledge with other activists, that strategy should have been thought in advance, and a plan should have been developed. If the effort cannot happen in Cuba, the new participants would have to go to another country to receive training. If the effort happens in Cuba, it should be prepared with extreme caution and secrecy. Nonetheless, the lack of planning would derail the potential of the IIHR effort.

The theories of change approach requires seeing the bigger picture before focusing in specific activities. Its use would have allowed the IIHR to see the Cuban situation as a whole, and then develop its project focusing on the organization’s limitations and capabilities. What is interesting about theories of change is that they can be implemented in any phase of a project. That means that the IIHR can review their project and strategy, learn from their hits and misses, and do better on the next phase of its effort.

## 4.2. Paraguay

### 4.2.1. Historical Background

In 1537, the Spanish arrived in Paraguay and founded Asuncion, which was Spain’s administrative center from 1537 to 1617. After that, Spain neglected Paraguay because it was isolated, had no precious metals, and its economy was reliant on subsistence agriculture. The mix of Spaniards and native Guaranís created a unique egalitarian and homogenous society, and a strong sense of nationalism, which led to the country’s independence in 1811 (Wiarda, 2014).

Paraguay has a tradition of authoritarianism, militarism, lack of democratic institutions, and isolationism. Between 1814 and 1870, Paraguay had 3 dictators in power. They boosted agriculture, industry, infrastructure and a strong army. Francisco Solano López, the last of these 3 dictators, got involved in the War of the Triple Alliance, where Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil formed a coalition against Paraguay, resulting in the death of half of the country’s population and loss of parts of its territory (Wiarda, 2014).

After almost 60 years of tyranny in Paraguay’s first generations, society developed a tradition of caudillismo (strongman rule) and some intolerance to opposition. The following 60 years after the war were called Liberal Republic, marked by a liberal constitution adopted in 1870 that limited the power of the state and guaranteed individual rights. It caused political instability, as Paraguay had no tradition democracy or citizen participation. It is hard to democratize a country that had no tradition of citizen rights, civil liberties, or democratic institutions, defined by Dahl (1971) and Dalton, Shin & Jou (2007) as some essential characteristics for the existence of democracy. Paraguay’s two major parties were formed during the Liberal Republic, the Colorados and the Liberales. Despite being institutionalized, both parties followed the tradition of patronage and personalismo, and paid no attention to democratic ideals. As an example of Paraguay’s political and democratic instability, the country had 34 presidents between 1870 and 1938, being two assassinated and three overthrown (Wiarda, 2014).

Paraguay went to war with Bolivia in the begging of the 20th century, causing social mobilization and demand for better living standards. A coup in 1936 started a phase of military rule in Paraguay that imposed a regulatory state and presidential dictatorship. The most notorious dictator was Alfredo Stroessner, who ruled from 1954 to 1988. Stroessner took control of the National Republican Association - Colorado Party, the military, and most social institutions, building a strong mass base of support, mobilizing forces against any signs of Communist subversion, and undermining democracy. In 1989, a violent coup organized by military rebels led by Andres Rodriguez sent Stroessner to exile (Wiarda, 2014).

Elections secured the government of Rodriguez who started substantial political reforms, and inserted Paraguay back in the international system. Despite the reestablishment of democratic aspects, corruption remained one of the biggest challenges for the country. In the elections of 1993 a civilian won, however the ingrained mix of Colorado politicians, the military, and powerful economic actors prevailed. The transition from authoritarian rule to democracy was hard for Paraguay. Even though social groups became more organized and started to mobilize, the dominant elite paid them little attention and remained uncommitted to democracy. The situation in Paraguay continued instable and violent, with another attempt of coup in 1996, the assassination of the Vice President, and the impeachment of the President in 1999 (Wiarda, 2014).

As the economic situation deteriorated in the country, social mobilization intensified with the support of the Catholic Church. According to Transparency International, in 2002 Paraguay was the most corrupt country in the Americas and third in the world. Even though Stroessner’s dictatorship ended in 1989, his model continued with the Colorado party in power until 2008. After 61 years in power, the Colorado party legacy was characterized by political liberalization aligned with generalized corruption, chronical social and economic conditions, and a preference for the elites and military interests (Wiarda, 2014). Political instability was a constant with internal party clashes and little respect for the rule of law. Following the definition of democracy created by Dahl (1956), Paraguay can be considered a democracy because there are free, regular elections, universal suffrage, and competitiveness. Nevertheless, if we expand the definition and include other aspects, such as horizontal accountability, and social benefits, Paraguay is not as democratic as other Latin America countries.

Lugo’s election in 2008 represented a victory of the Liberal Party; however, most of the Congress was Colorado, causing a gridlock in the government. In addition, there was pressure from the peasant movement, Catholic church, and minority groups for better socioeconomic conditions. Lugo was unable to carry out his campaigns promises, such as land, judicial, and military reforms, corruption and patronage combat. Sondrol (2014) argues that Paraguay was a semi authoritarian regime until the defeat of the Colorado party in 2008. Colorados tried to stay in power indefinitely, holding hybrids regimes characterized by free elections and democratic institutions, but no considerable transfer of political power, and institutions operating weakly. With Lugo, there was hope for a strengthening of the democratic process and implementation of redistributive policies. However, socioeconomic inequalities, popular dissatisfaction, feeble political institutions, drug trafficking, and corruption led to political turmoil, and Lugo was impeached in 2012 for “poor performance of his duties”. The Colorado party took power again in the 2013 elections (Wiarda, 2014).

Political crisis erupted again in April 2017 after the president tried to amend the Constitution to be able to run for reelection in 2018. As a reaction, protesters set the Congress on fire. The 1992 Constitution does not allow reelections, as a safeguard against dictatorship (Blair, 2017). The path for full democratization in Paraguay is still under construction, and the risk of a dictatorship was not eliminated. Nonetheless, society became active, a sign of strengthening. A strong civil society is key to ensure the prevalence of democracy.

### 4.2.2. The work of the NED

With the fear of democratic regress in Paraguay, the NED has been keeping up with the political events in the country. The work of the NED in Paraguay focuses on the fight against corruption, the weakening of democratic institutions, and the deterioration of freedom of expression. The grantees supported by the NED in Paraguay seek to monitor national and local governments, fortify the judiciary and the legislative, and fight for freedom of expression. Regional programs tackle other subjects, such as the promotion of political parties’ use of information technology, and the enhancement of unions and the rights of workers. Grantees also worked with the challenges faced by Afro-Latino communities, reinforcement of the Inter-American System, and boosting regional solidarity for countries dealing with authoritarian setbacks (Latin America and Caribbean, NED).

For the purpose of this case study, the organization picked up for analysis is the Centro de Informacion y Recursos para el Desarrollo – CIRD (Center of Information and Resources for Development). CIRD is a non-profit organization founded in 1988 with the purpose of supporting civil society organizations (neighborhood commissions, NGOs, civic associations, companies, foundations, etc.), so that they become protagonists of Paraguay’s development, promoting social responsibility and the ability to effectively influence the public decision-making process. The CIRD’s mission is to promote the construction of social capital to increase the impact and sustainability of development programs, through the strengthening of capacities and competencies, and the articulation of civil society organizations, the private sector and the government sector (About, CIRD).

The combination of secure information, specialized human resources and agile and reliable management capacity allowed the CIRD to achieve an efficient level of participation in solving Paraguay’s social and economic problems by promoting changes and reforms through effective and timely actions. Among the fields of action of the CIRD, the strengthening of civil society seeks to mobilize resources and transfer useful and timely information to citizens and civil society organizations, promoting social responsibility and the ability to effectively influence public decision-making. Also, the CIRD wants to promote dialogue and debate between civil society and political and public sectors by measuring and disseminating the process of political culture and democratic governance in Paraguay (About, CIRD).  
 Since its creation, the CIRD has concentrated its efforts on actions that aim to promote civil society’s participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies in order to promote a positive and sustained change in Paraguay. The CIRD’s proposal submitted to the NED seeks to promote citizen-driven accountability. The project proposes to “strengthen mechanisms for citizen oversight of public officials at the national and municipal levels in Paraguay. The organization will engage its national citizen network to interview local election candidates about their priorities, and conduct public events on transparency, open government, and the implementation of Paraguay’s new access to information law” (Paraguay 2016, NED).

The NED is funding the CIRD since 2007. The projects produced by the CIRD are entitled “A Quienes Elegimos – Elecciones Municipales 2010” (Who do we choose - 2010 Municipal Elections), “A Quienes Elegimos – Monitoreo Ciudadano de las Propuestas Electorales” (Who do we choose – Citizen Monitoring of Electoral Proposals), “A Quienes Elegimos – Promoción de la Participación Ciudadana en las Elecciones Generales 2013” (Who do we choose – Promotion of Citizen Participation in the General Elections 2013), and “Conociendo a Quienes Elegimos 2013-2014” (Knowing who we choose 2013-2014). The main goals of these proposals are to develop and strengthen mechanisms for access to public information and citizen monitoring (social accountability); promote civic education, responsible voting, and decisive and informed citizen participation in the electoral process; and develop performance indicators to measure compliance of elected officials to their electoral promises and public management (Currículo de proyectos, CIRD).

As highlighted by the literature review, important steps to combat patronage, clientelism, and corruption involve the participation of civil society as an agent of monitoring and accountability. Social accountability exposes and denounces governmental wrongdoing, stimulating more effective horizontal accountability. The CIRD’s proposals tackle these issues, as they seek to promote citizen monitoring, access to public information, and measurement of elected officials’ performance after the elections.

### 4.2.3. Analysis

According to the CIRD’s report of its concluded projects funded by the NED, the development of the website [www.aquieneselegimos.org.py](http://www.aquieneselegimos.org.py/) allowed the promotion of a culture of transparency and accountability, the support of a new generation of citizens with democratic values, better access to public information, the implementation of monitoring mechanism for compliance with electoral promises, and the diffusion of the obtained data (Currículo de proyectos, CIRD). The latest advance proposed by the CIRD is the use of information technology to spread information about management and public policies, improving citizen capacity of monitoring and control of elected authorities (Currículo de proyectos, CIRD).

The CIRD was able to implement its proposal, which is to “strengthen mechanisms for citizen oversight of public officials at the national and municipal levels in Paraguay”. With the development of the “A Quienes Elegimos” website, the CIRD was capable of offering Paraguayan citizens access to public information, and monitoring of elected authorities and their performance. This initiative strengthens social accountability, and develops a new generation of Paraguayans with democratic values that are interested and informed about the electoral process and their candidates.

The work of the CIRD is essential for the democratic future of Paraguay, as the country has a long tradition of dictatorship and disrespect for democratic institutions. With the CIRD’s effort, society can react and engage in positive changes for the country, as demonstrated by the latest events, where citizens responded to the President’s attempt of amending the constitution to modify presidential term limits.

The CIRD is an established and well-organized nonprofit organization. Its internal structure is well developed, and the organization presents clear mission and values. The CIRD has a diverse range of partners in Paraguay and internationally. The organization concluded multiple successful projects and workshops all over Paraguay, showing commitment to its cause and resourceful capabilities. The CIRD developed monitoring standards to evaluate their own efforts, which is a sign of attention to design, monitoring, and evaluation aspects of a project. The CIRD might have put some thought to the main aspects of the theories of change. The CIRD has a clear long-term goal established which is to promote the construction of social capital to increase the impact and sustainability of development programs, through the strengthening of capacities and competencies, and the articulation of civil society organizations, the private sector and the government sector. This goal involves a wide range of conditions, which the CIRD is tackling in different projects with various partners.

Some of the conditions observed by the CIRD are the strengthening of civil society, health sector reform, youth development, political culture and governance, social capital, and social responsibility. This shows a thoughtful and well-designed portfolio of projects that takes into consideration most pre-conditions necessary for achieving the CIRD’s main goal. The CIRD’s staff is probably well qualified and must possess a good knowledge of design, monitoring, and evaluation or even theories of change. The only recommendation for the CIRD is to create a backwards map including its long-term goal and all the conditions identified to achieve it, so it becomes clear what strategy is being implemented. This helps keep staff motivated, adds accuracy and transparency, clarifies the project logic, highlights assumptions that need to be tested, and helps identify appropriate participants and partners for the projects. With this effort, it becomes clear how the planned activities will contribute in achieving the desired results, highlighting inefficiencies and inadequate assumptions.

Finally, the CIRD’s effort is important to bring change to Paraguay and the projects implemented so far have been effective in achieving their main goals. It is clear that the democratic process does not change in a few years, but the CIRD is setting the ground for the next generation of citizens who embraced democratic values. It is important that the NED keeps supporting these efforts and helps democratize the country.

## 4.3. Nicaragua

### 4.3.1. Historical Background

The history of Nicaragua is a history of international conflicts and interference. First were the British competing with the Americans, as there was prospect of constructing a canal route. Then, William Walker, an American irregular military adventurer, ruled the country for a brief period in the 19th century. It happened mainly because of the rivalries between the Conservative and Liberal parties, which preferred international interference rather than giving victory to its rival (Wiarda, 2014).

In the beginning of the 20th century, the relationship between Nicaragua and the US deteriorated when Americans decided to build a canal in Panama instead of Nicaragua. The fear that the Liberal party would give a canal concession to another country led to the Marine intervention in 1912, where the US aligned with the Conservatives guaranteeing their rule. A bigger intervention happened in 1927 due to internal conflict after a failed US effort to promote fair elections and retract the Marines. As a solution, the US imposed a peace accord, encouraged disarmament, and created a US-officered National Guard. Augusto Sandino, a Liberal general, rejected the American proposal and started a guerrilla war against the National Guard and the Marines, that resisted until 1933. After the Marines departed, Sandino negotiated peace terms, but he was assassinated by the National Guard a year later (Wiarda, 2014).

In 1936, the National Guard commander, General Anastasio Somoza Garcia, took the power and started forty-two years of his family rule. Through the control of the Liberal party, power over the National Guard, and US alliance, the Somozas kept themselves in power. Their rule was marked by personal enrichment, corruption, and no observation of democratic principles. Popular discontent progressively accrued, and combined national and international support for the Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) finally ousted Somoza in 1979. The Sandinistas established a government that controlled the economy, supported other uprisings in Central America, and developed ties with the URSS and Cuba. National political instability augmented in Nicaragua, and the US started supporting the Contras, an armed resistance against the Sandinista ruling. The Contras never managed to win, but they caused major economic damage. In the 1984 elections, FSLN tried to consolidate its power with Daniel Ortega as the president and the implementation of a new constitution with socialist characteristics. However, the mix of a US boycott, the Contras war, and economic mismanagement undercut FSLN attempt to establish control (Wiarda, 2014).

The FSLN lost the 1990 elections to Chamorro, but remained as majority in the Congress. The Chamorro administration was marked by economic and political disorder combined with citizen insecurity and legislative war. Amendments to the constitution depoliticized the military, reduced executive powers, forbidden reelection for presidency, and protected private property. Even though some aspects of democracy were respected, such as regular elections, the system in Nicaragua did not respect most democratic values highlighted by this work’s literature review. The following governments were characterized by political paralysis, as parties were fighting against each other. Ortega won the elections again in 2006, this time with the majority at the National Assembly. He ruled by making deals with the opposition; controlling the judicial courts, legislative and local elections; improving ties with Venezuelan Hugo Chavez for cheap oil; and suspending the constitution ban to allow his reelection. In 2012, his power was consolidated even more with FSLN wining most municipal elections (Wiarda, 2014). Since then, the situation in Nicaragua deteriorated significantly. Ortega won a third time in the end of 2016, raising concerns about a possible dictatorship. He has no equal opponent, as FSLN took control of all the government branches. Nicaragua has no real checks and balances, the opposition has no power, and democratic institutions are feeble. The 2016 elections were held without political competition or transparency, and the election of Ortega’s wife as vice president qualifies as nepotism. There are also reports by the US State Department of human rights violations (Cerda, 2017). Overall, the country is sliding back to authoritarianism with no respect for democratic institutions or the rule of law. One of the biggest challenges to Nicaragua is to develop competent economic and political leadership that is more concerned with the nation than personal interests. Nicaragua has no tradition of such a thing, as corruption and political rivalry characterized its history (Wiarda, 2014).

### 4.3.2. The work of the NED

The work of the NED in Nicaragua focuses on monitoring the legislative and creating a unified approach to support democracy, foster knowledge concerning constitutional rights, and promote independent media. NED is worried about the escalation of authoritarianism in the country, with the government controlling major media outlets, non-respect for electoral term limits, and opposition against international and national independent NGOs (NED, Region Latin America and Caribbean).

For this case study the organization chosen is Asociación Hagamos Democracia (Let’s Make Democracy Association). This legally accredited, nonprofit and civil character organization was created in 1995 to promote the dissemination and exercise of democratic values ​​in Nicaragua. Hagamos Democracia is a nonpartisan organization that seeks to strengthen democratic processes in Nicaragua through the education and continuous communication with citizens and public officials. The organization also wants to promote direct participation of the citizens in the exercise of their civic responsibilities, such as the monitoring and civic control of authorities (Quiénes somos, Hagamos Democracia). The organization’s mission is to promote the values ​​of a full democracy, which guarantees the civil and political rights of the Nicaraguan citizens (Misión, Hagamos Democracia).

The main goal of the Hagamos Democracia project funded by NED is to promote “legislative oversight and free and fair elections” (Nicaragua 2016, NED). To achieve this goal, Hagamos Democracia works on trying to stimulate accountability and transparency in Nicaragua’s National Assembly as well as free and fair elections. Hagamos Democracia planned on releasing two publications stressing topics that were being discussed in the National Assembly, and developments in democratic governance. The organization planned on training election observers to detect anomalies and monitor the general elections that took place in November 2016 (Nicaragua 2016, NED).

Since 1995, Hagamos Democracia has been present in all electoral processes in Nicaragua that it was allowed to observe. In the 2016 national elections, the organization’s request to be accredited as national observers was denied by the Supreme Electoral Council. Nonetheless, Hagamos Democracia decided to participate as observers in the national elections 2016, fulfilling its role of promoters of democratic values in the Nicaraguan society. With a network of volunteers at the national level, and within the limits imposed by not being officially accredited, the organization carried out its work as observers, leveraging the means and resources that were available. The criterion used by the organization as a strategy to evaluate the electoral process was the compliance with the electoral law. Having a legal framework of reference allowed the organization to generate indicators, which were later processed and analyzed. The data’s most important result was the high level of abstention, a figure around 67%. This leads to the conclusion that many Nicaraguans lost interest in the electoral process. Also, from the data collected in the report it is possible to conclude that this electoral process was far from free and fair (Informe Final, Barometro Electoral, Hagamos Democracia).

In a previous year, Hagamos Democracia worked on promoting accountability and transparency in the National Assembly as well as identifying favorable circumstances and threats for democracy in the country. The organization also proposed to “coordinate a network of citizen reporters to report on human rights and democracy issues, conduct a series of events to promote interaction among various political and civic actors, and develop a joint civil society strategy (Nicaragua 2015, NED).

### 4.3.3. Analysis

Hagamos Democracia published several reports on legislative, democratic, accountability, and electoral issues, highlighting the work of the National Assembly, the judiciary, and the executive. Their reports are up-to-date and precise. They pay close attention to what is happening in the National Assembly. Although there is no information in the organization’s website regarding the trainings and workshops they carry out, their Facebook page is updated with that information and other initiatives they do.

The organization proposed to promote legislative oversight and free and fair elections. Hagamos Democracia monitors the National Assembly daily, as well as the electoral processes. In general, their goals were fulfilled, considering the organization’s capacity to interfere in such political issues. Hagamos Democracia by itself cannot guarantee free and fair elections, but their work is essential in monitoring the process and informing the citizens, through widespread information and training. The organization is doing the best it can, considering the tough political environment in Nicaragua nowadays, and authoritarian backsliding.

Despite Hagamos Democracia achievements, the organization can become more efficient and effective. They have a clear purpose, which is to promote the values ​​of a full democracy, guaranteeing the civil and political rights of the Nicaraguan citizens. To achieve this goal, many aspects of Nicaragua must be considered and multiples steps are required. Hagamos Democracia by itself cannot fill all the preconditions necessary to accomplish its main goal, so the use of theories of change in this case is fundamental for the organization. Theories of change can help Hagamos Democracia to establish a clear strategy and visualize which preconditions they can tackle. Theories of change can keep the implementation and evaluation processes transparent and define indicators of success. They also can add precision and transparency, clarify the project logic, highlight assumptions that need to be tested, and help identify appropriate participants and partners.

For Hagamos Democracia, a detailed hierarchy of outcomes would make it clear how lower level results influence higher level ones. Also, the development of indicators to measure progress and assess performance would be interesting for the organization. The use of theories of change can only bring benefits for an organization. Despite being a complex and time consuming exercise, the results it brings are worth the effort. For Hagamos Democracia, it can show how their electoral, democratic, accountability, and legislative barometers interrelate and how they can help achieve their main goal.

# 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this work was to highlight the efforts the NED’s grantees are carrying out in Latin America and how they can be more effective through the use of theories of change. My experience as an intern for the Latin America and Caribbean team at the National Endowment for Democracy was unique, as I was able to see in practice the fight for democracy and freedom around the globe. In general, the NED’s work is vital for democratic activists in the most complex countries and regions, as it offers the necessary support for these people to resist and continue their efforts. Nonetheless, the NED cannot live by its philosophy only. Effective indicators to measure progress and evaluate performance are essential for the organizational development.

The discussion about design, monitoring, and evaluation is becoming increasingly important and relevant in nongovernmental organizations’ agenda. After intense decades of overseas initiatives, questions about the effectiveness of the results achieved are gaining space. Donors are interested in seeing numbers and concrete measures to evaluate if their money was well spent and brought about meaningful change. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative indicators represent a well thought design of a program, and consideration of a diverse range of aspects.

This worked showed that three of the NED’s grantees are being effective in the sense that they are able to carry out what they proposed to do. Nonetheless, most grantees do not have the knowledge or specialized human resources to include theories of change in their design, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. This work showed how important theories of change can be to bring about effectiveness for these efforts. What the NED can do in this sense, is to inform their grantees of the existence of these tools, in case they never heard about them before and encourage their use. This initiative could benefit the organizations and the NED itself, which can translate into a benefit for democracy and all of its aspects in Latin America and across the globe.

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1. All the information provided in this organization section is available at the NED’s website ([www.ned.org/](http://www.ned.org/) and the NED’s brochure. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)