deserve special credit for bringing together competent authors who are for the most part from regions in crisis.

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Political parties are recognized as essential components of representative democracy. By organizing voters, aggregating and articulating interests, crafting policy alternatives, and providing the basis for coordinated electoral and legislative activity, well-functioning political parties are not just central to representative government, but are also increasingly identified as crucial agents of democratic development in new democracies.

Yet, in many democracies, particularly emerging ones, parties struggle to play these roles. Instead, parties exhibit a range of pathologies that undercut their ability to deliver the kind of systemic benefits on which representative democracy depends. They are frequently poorly institutionalised, with limited membership, weak policy capacity, and shifting bases of support. Typically organizationally thin, coming to life only at election time, they are often based around narrow personal, regional or ethnic ties, with little in the way of a coherent ideology. As a result, many fail to provide policy alternatives to voters and are widely seen as corrupt, self-interested organizations that are ill-prepared for the complex tasks of governing.

Thomas Carothers, in his latest critical examination of the democracy promotion industry, typifies such deficiencies as a ‘standard lament’ regarding political parties in new democracies. As Carothers notes, the conditions which gave rise to the idealised Western models of ‘good’ parties are highly specific, and mostly absent from new democracies, particularly those in the developing countries. As he details in Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies, the response by donor governments to this problem has been a plethora of party assistance programmes that seek to help political parties in new democracies become stronger, more coherent and inclusive organizations – that is, more like the idealised view of how parties are supposed to operate. Most of Confronting the Weakest Link is a searching and detailed account of the actors, methods, funding, and effects of these party-aid programs.

Carothers distinguishes two main kinds of party aid: bilateral aid based on fraternal relationships between ‘like-minded’ parties, typified by the work of the German Stiftungen and other, mostly European, party-to-party activities; and multiparty aid of the kind preferred by the larger US and multilateral aid organizations. Despite these distinctive models, both approaches tend to focus their assistance to recipient parties on technical assistance, such as workshops and training programmes provided by external experts and, particularly for the fraternal assistance model, regular exchange visits. These activities have grown enormously over the past decade, to
the point where political party aid now represents a significant slice (around $200 million per annum) of the billion-dollar democracy promotion business.

Given this, donors would presumably expect a significant return on their investment. But according to Carothers, party aid rarely if ever has a transformative effect on the fundamental organizational and operational characteristics of recipient parties. In fact, he struggles to identify any clear examples of significant improvements in party functioning as a result of external party aid. While not pointless – party aid clearly brings recipients into the international reform debate, exposing them to emergent standards and norms about good party behaviour, as well as broader norms of inclusiveness, transparency, and equality – the overall message of this book is that party aid has so far delivered meagre returns for an increasingly large investment.

Despite this, party aid continues to flourish. Why? Here Carothers falters. While most of *Confronting the Weakest Link* is a judicious combination of description and analysis, the book struggles to come up with any meaningful prescription to correct the problems it so clearly identifies. This is not surprising, as the gap between analysis and prescription is also the fundamental weakness of the party aid game itself. The fact that so many parties in new democracies are weak, feckless, and unpopular is clear. But it is also clear that many of these deficiencies are the product of complex social and historical factors that are not readily amenable to external influence. What can realistically be done to influence the development of parties in fragile new democracies thus remains unclear, precisely because of the yawning gap between analysing the problem and identifying a viable solution.

None of this detracts from the value of *Confronting the Weakest Link*, which is a genuine must-read for those interested in political party development and especially in the burgeoning democracy-promotion field. But I fear that is unlikely to have a significant impact upon the practitioners at whom it is aimed, because of deeper problems inherent in a supply-driven activity like party assistance. For a start, no one really knows what ‘success’ in this field is, or how to attribute causal responsibility to external players for any developments that occur. Moreover, it is not at all clear that better means of assessing the outcome of party assistance would change this situation, given that the interests of donors, practitioners, and recipients alike are all in supporting the status quo. In the meantime, even if answers are hard to come by, *Confronting the Weakest Link* at least raises the right questions. It is, quite literally, a book with no competitors.

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*Globalising Democracy* is a collection of essays that brings together contributions on a much under-researched and ill-documented area of political enquiry, that is, the relationship between globalization and the development of party politics. More