

“Electoral Assistance: Critical to American Interests, Essential for the Future of Democracy”

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House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
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To support electoral assistance and democracy, rights and governance (DRG), we ask that in fiscal year (FY) 2020, Congress again provide \$2.4 billion for democracy programs under Title VII – General Provisions (including “shall” language that protects DRG funding from reprogramming to other sectors). This funding is directed to both the United States (U.S.) Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Credible elections are the cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Ensuring fair elections globally requires considerable support, especially in new, transitioning and fragile democracies. As President and CEO of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), I respectfully urge this Subcommittee and the U.S. Congress to continue its tradition of bipartisan support for democracy and human rights.

Modern electoral assistance has contributed to a more prosperous, secure America. Around the globe, however, domestic and international bad actors are working to manipulate elections in ever more innovative ways – they are learning at a rate that far outpaces the ability of many governments to react effectively. The U.S. Government (USG) must look to new programming and funding that prepares America and its allies for an ever-evolving set of challenges.

Electoral Assistance: A Global, Long-Term Development Commitment

It is thanks to USG leadership that electoral assistance has evolved into a sophisticated development discipline. In addition to the U.S., countries from all parts of the globe fund democracy assistance – IFES’ international donors have included Australia, Canada, the European Union, Germany, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and others. Several of our programs – including in Tunisia, Ukraine and Myanmar (Burma) – are funded by multiple donors working toward a shared goal.

No matter the donor, effective electoral assistance demands investment years in advance of an election date and in the period between elections. Consistent, long-term support throughout the electoral cycle also enhances stability during uncertain democracy-building processes. Shorter-term or immediate assistance does not allow for capacity building, the introduction of technology (or the training and public education necessitated by it) or strategic planning.

How Electoral Assistance Advanced American Interests in 2018

More stable democracies support American interests by becoming better trade partners; improving global health and environmental outcomes; cultivating more inclusive societies; and

About IFES: “A Vote for Every Voice:” For over thirty years, IFES – a 501(c)3 nonpartisan nonprofit – has worked in over 145 countries to support citizens’ right to participate in free and fair elections. Currently, IFES works in over 30 countries to strengthen democratic processes across the electoral cycle. Our core service lines include the long-term capacity building of election commissions; the broadening of citizen participation and inclusion; the empowerment of marginalized groups; and research and surveys that inform our work and further the DRG discipline. IFES works with champions of democracy to enhance political competition, transparency, accountability and the legitimacy of outcomes. Our approach is firmly grounded in international norms, best practices and treaty obligations concerning human rights, democratic governance and genuine elections.

promoting regional stability and international cooperation. Failing states benefit terrorist, criminal and drug networks and those who commit human rights abuses; restrict space for civil society to operate; give rise to corruption and the subsequent squandering of assistance dollars; spread unfair economic practices that undermine U.S. businesses; and leave the world unprepared for the crises – natural disasters, terrorism, disease and migration – that transcend borders.

In 2018, IFES' work supported stability and prosperity across the globe:

Innovative Tools to Promote Electoral Integrity Worldwide

The legitimacy of an election depends in large part on the actual and perceived integrity of the process – if voters and candidates believe that an election is fraudulent or has been poorly administered, they may not accept the outcome. With donor support, election managers can take important steps toward avoiding these outcomes by conducting exhaustive and systematic assessments of likely vulnerabilities. For examples, IFES' Electoral Integrity Assessment (EIA) combines qualitative and quantitative methods to identify, map and prioritize vulnerabilities to fraud, malpractice and systemic manipulation. The analysis focuses on what could go wrong in future elections if action is not taken, rather than on what happened in the past. In 2018, IFES conducted four comprehensive EIAs in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Tanzania and Kenya.

Additionally, IFES' Holistic Exposure and Adaptation Testing (HEAT) process aims to secure automated or digitalized electoral processes – as far as possible – against unanticipated threats, illicit incursions, system failures or unfounded legal challenges. The HEAT process focuses on the types of exposure an election management body (EMB) may face when implementing different types of technology systems (technology, human, political, legal and procedural exposure). This process encourages a more holistic assessment of what could go wrong in data and technology management and allows the EMB to identify strategies to reduce or eliminate different types of exposure in a systematic manner. The HEAT process is guided by international best practices on data management and cybersecurity, as well as transparency, open data and privacy.

Strengthening Cybersecurity in Ukraine

Ukraine is on the frontlines of efforts to combat Russian influence and interference. In preparation for the March 2019 presidential and October 2019 parliamentary elections, IFES in Ukraine, with the support of USAID and UK aid, has been working closely with the Central Election Commission (CEC) to strengthen their cybersecurity capabilities. IFES has supported CEC institutional capacity through targeted trainings, technical assistance and the sharing of best practice around areas of potential vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian electoral system. The program includes crisis simulations, a cybersecurity playbook, highly specialized information technology and cyber hygiene trainings for the CEC and other electoral stakeholders, expert roundtables, international conferences and study visits. IFES also established and manages the cybersecurity experts group comprising embassies, the CEC, security services and international technical assistance providers.

Combating Violence Against Women in Politics and Hate Speech

The Women, Peace and Security Act – signed into law in October 2017 – states “the political participation, and leadership of women in fragile environments, particularly during democratic transitions, is critical to sustaining lasting democratic institutions.” IFES has pioneered the movement to end violence against women in politics through cutting-edge research and programming on four continents. For example, in 2018, IFES and our local Zimbabwean partners launched an initiative to end impunity for violence against women in elections. With support from

the USG and Canada, IFES and partners worked with survivors to seek justice by helping them document their cases and bring them to the police and court.

IFES is also at the forefront of combating hate speech in elections. In 2018, using IFES' white paper *Countering Hate Speech in Elections: Strategies for Electoral Management Bodies* as its basis, an IFES roundtable in Jakarta, Indonesia, brought together 28 actors to learn about strategies to minimize the effects of hate speech and communal incitement. Among the participants were representatives from the Election Oversight Body (Bawaslu), General Elections Commission (KPU), Ministry of Home Affairs, Executive Office of the President and national civil society groups. Following the roundtable, Bawaslu, the KPU and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology signed a memorandum of action, agreeing to work together to curb the spread of fake news and hate speech in preparation for the June 2018 regional elections.

Promoting More Inclusive Societies

DRG promotes American values. Electoral assistance helps such traditionally marginalized groups as women, youth, LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities gain equal access to public institutions, win economic and political self-determination, and fully realize their individual rights. Inclusion and empowerment activities also help strengthen the credibility and stability of democracies more broadly, as democratic institutions flourish when all groups of society are represented.

In 2018, IFES' Intersectionality Assessment Framework was piloted in the Dominican Republic, Armenia, Tunisia and Lebanon. IFES' framework identifies barriers and opportunities related to political participation of people with multiple social identities, such as gender, disability, religion and age. One key finding revealed a lack of political leadership opportunities for youth with disabilities. In response, IFES launched the semester-long "Engaging a New Generation for Accessible Governance and Elections" (ENGAGE) course in the Dominican Republic, which strengthens the leadership skills of youth with disabilities through classroom learning, interactive group work, guest lectures, site visits and internships with government stakeholders. Findings from the assessments also identified a lack of opportunities for women with disabilities to influence public policy. IFES' "Power to Persuade" training methodology addresses this critical gap by empowering women with disabilities to advocate with policymakers and political parties for reform.

Looking to the Future: The Next Generation of Electoral Assistance

At the global level, the DRG community must conduct research and build evidence-based tools and approaches that tackle next generation challenges. I encourage this Subcommittee, when directing funding, to consider:

- The manipulation of new media platforms that has created an information war in which democratic institutions struggle to ensure citizens' access to accurate electoral information;
- As new challenges stemming from advancements in artificial intelligence, deep fakes and quantum computing arise, EMBs and other stakeholders in the electoral process are ill-equipped to cope or respond;
- Studying the intersection between rule of law and DRG. Development agencies and implementers often treat these fields as distinct, and the result can be siloed assistance rather than a more integrated or cross-sectoral approach that could have more impact. There is much to be gained by bridging this divide;

- Increasingly, election outcomes are swayed well ahead of Election Day. The USG must explore forms of corruption in the electoral process that bleed into governance challenges and state capture; and
- Inclusion is critical to full democratic representation and participation. More attention must be given to the political and electoral rights of women, people with disabilities, indigenous persons and LGBTI persons. An intersectional approach to program design would help address the multiple facets of marginalization citizens experience.

Key Accounts and Recommendations for FY2020

I thank the Congress – and particularly this Subcommittee – for its continued support of DRG in even the most challenging budget environments. In keeping with FY2019 language, I ask that Congress again provide \$2.4 billion for democracy programs (less than four percent of the total International Affairs Budget) under Title VII – General Provisions – including critical “shall” language that protects DRG funding from reprogramming to other sectors. The full funding of DRG programs is necessary to address democratic backsliding, consolidate gains made and begin to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Additionally, IFES asks the Subcommittee to consider the following crosscutting issues to optimize U.S. electoral support:

Robust Funding for the Economic Support Fund

The Economic Support Fund (ESF) supports many of IFES’ programs both directly and through USAID’s “Elections and Political Transitions (EPT) Leader with Associates” award. The EPT – held by IFES, the International Republic Institute and the National Democratic Institute – is a pre-competed mechanism that allows USAID missions to respond rapidly to urgent needs across the globe. We support robust funding for ESF, particularly to build local capacity to conduct credible elections and strengthen civil society.

National Endowment for Democracy

The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) is a critical component of the USG’s foreign aid strategy. However, the vast majority of its funding is reserved for its four core institutes and does not support many critical organizations, like IFES, that have emerged in the more than three decades since its initial legislative establishment. To this end, it is vital that the other accounts for DRG remain amply funded.

Re-Establishing Support to “Graduated” Countries

We support USAID’s “Journey to Self-Reliance.” However, some middle-income countries that have “graduated” from traditional, technical electoral assistance are now facing next generation challenges that require new and advanced electoral assistance and peer support in the areas of disinformation, foreign interference and cybersecurity. The FY2020 State and Foreign Operations (SFOPs) bill should mandate electoral assistance to countries at risk of democratic backsliding; we also encourage the Subcommittee to consider new funding set aside for innovative tools to combat emerging threats.

Appropriate Asia Reassurance Initiative Act Funds in Full

The Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) authorizes \$210 million per year (over 2019-23) to promote democracy, civil society, human rights, rule of law, transparency and accountability, and an additional \$100 million per year for cybersecurity in the Indo-Pacific region. We encourage

SFOPs to appropriate these funds in full, with a focus on the development of tools to address pervasive new challenges, such as systemic manipulation in the electoral process and disinformation in elections.

Countering Chinese Influence in Elections

Increasingly, China is propping up authoritarian regimes by reinforcing incumbent advantage; providing kickbacks to corrupt politicians and officials as part of large infrastructure projects; delivering direct financial assistance to partisan EMBs; and covertly funding election campaigns. Meanwhile, China is also advancing an alternative narrative to democracy that prioritizes economic development and stability over democratic principles of human rights and good governance; endorsing sham elections in client states; and exporting tools of censorship and repression (e.g., “the Great Firewall” and high-tech surveillance tools). Withdrawal of DRG and electoral assistance from countries at risk of resurgent authoritarianism has been ineffective. Instead, we encourage SFOPs to reengage and fund both civil society and state officials in countries in danger of adapting the Chinese model.

Congressional Oversight of State/USAID

IFES encourages Congress to exercise its oversight of State and USAID to ensure appropriated funds are spent in a timely manner, with special consideration of the following:

- Trafficking in Persons Sanctions: I applaud the President’s efforts to hold governments accountable for human trafficking. However, the development community is concerned about the unintended consequences of all nonhumanitarian, nontrade assistance being withheld from some “Tier 3” countries. In particular, democracy assistance is critical, as democratic countries with robust institutions are more likely to effectively combat human trafficking. We ask that Congress encourage State and USAID to publish and operationalize a Trafficking in Persons sanctions policy, particularly in regard to obtaining waivers for the democracy assistance programming critical to American interests;
- Increased Use of Broad Agency Announcements (BAAs): BAAs and the accompanying co-creation process can provide a more field- and results-driven approach. However, they can be lengthy and cumbersome, hindering USAID’s ability to respond nimbly and quickly; prohibitively expensive; and raise concerns about intellectual property sharing. I ask that Congress encourage USAID to continue to work closely with the development community to improve the BAA and co-creation process; and
- Disability Rights: Development programs are more impactful if the estimated 15 percent of the world’s population that has a disability are included. To this end, we respectfully recommend that the Subcommittee encourage the development of a new USAID policy on disability-inclusive development (the first and last policy was in 1997); mandate that all State and USAID grants be made disability-inclusive and include the development of a monitoring mechanism to track progress; and that State and USAID review the integration of disability across their grants, policies, contracting and hiring.

With the continued support of the U.S. Congress, democracy assistance will further promote American interests and values abroad, while targeted investment in the electoral assistance of tomorrow will prepare the global community of democracies for future threats. Again, I thank the Subcommittee for its continued dedication to electoral assistance.