

“Electoral Assistance: A Cost-Effective Investment in a More Stable, Prosperous World”
Written Testimony Submitted by the Hon. J. Kenneth Blackwell, Chairman of the Board of
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House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

April 3, 2018

To support electoral assistance and democracy, rights and governance (DRG), we ask that in FY2019, Congress provide \$2,308,517,000 for democracy programs under Title VII – General Provisions (including “shall” language that protects DRG funding from reprogramming to other sectors) and \$215,500,000 for the Democracy Fund under Title III – Bilateral Economic Assistance. These accounts are directed to both the U.S. Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This request represents “status quo” funding and language from FY2018.

As Chairman of the Board of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a former Ohio Secretary of State responsible for election administration, and a former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, I respectfully urge this Subcommittee and the U.S. Congress to continue its tradition of bipartisan support for DRG. Relatively small, strategic investments in electoral assistance will continue to contribute to a more prosperous, secure America.

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. Credible elections are the cornerstone of a healthy democracy and enable all persons to exercise their basic human right to have a say in how they are governed.

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. Unique IFES methodologies include Election Integrity Assessments (EIA), the Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE) Framework (to identify and address gender-based election violence), the Electoral Process Diagnostic (EPD) and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for key elections.

In FY2017 alone, IFES trained 137,165 election officials and reached 45,180,498 people via civic and voter education campaigns.

IFES achieves its goals by providing targeted technical assistance to local partners on electoral frameworks; election operations; accurate and timely vote counting and results transmission; election dispute resolution; fraud and malpractice mitigation; campaign and political finance

regulation; civic and voter education; electoral security; tools to address electoral violence, extremism and hate speech; the constructive relationship between the media and electoral stakeholders; effective, transparent communication (including through social media); and codes of conduct that support professionalism and high standards of ethical behavior.

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.

Electoral Assistance Advances American Interests

More stable democracies support American interests by becoming better trade partners, providing new market opportunities for U.S. businesses, improving global health outcomes, and promoting economic freedom and regional security. 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 (terrorism, disease, migration) that transcend borders.

IFES' work has supported stability and prosperity across the globe:

- **Kenya** is critical to the fight against terrorism¹ and is East Africa's largest and most important business, financial, and transportation hub. The U.S. is the third largest destination for Kenya's exports and the seventh largest source of its imports.² In 2017, IFES' multifaceted Kenya project included direct technical assistance to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and judiciary on strengthening internal governance systems; developing election regulations; promoting voter education and registration; and election technology. Our project also included a sub-grant component to engage civil society on voter registration and voter education; participation of women and youth; and dialogue, consensus-building and conflict early warning and response.
- **Ukraine** is on the frontlines of efforts to combat Russian influence and interference. IFES' multifaceted Ukraine program provides technical assistance to the Central Election Commission; promotes electoral law and political finance reform; and supports civil society activism and the inclusion of underrepresented populations. For example, IFES works to engage elected officials on issues pertinent to the 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine. IFES has worked with 197 civil society representatives to support development of a draft law guaranteeing voting rights, as well as trained 300 civic actors and election officials on international standards and national legislation for the inclusion of IDPs in the voting process.
- **Syria** remains one of the world's most challenging and destabilizing humanitarian and security crises. IFES works to prepare Syrian youth for the inevitable transition, while constructively engaging them in a peaceful, democratic way. IFES' Building Leaders program develops adolescents' capacity to be leaders in their communities through concrete skill building, such as public speaking, combined with exercises to increase self-confidence and develop knowledge. Participants have gone on to create and implement independent projects and propose new activities.

“Until IFES recruited chama [community microfinance] women to become voter educators, I never imagined my role as a change agent ... This new role earned me the honored community title of mwalimu – meaning teacher in Swahili. I now realize I have a role beyond elections in helping women understand why they need to participate in civic issues and help reduce ethnic intolerance. Each day grants me an opportunity to restore optimism.” -Ann Kutswa, Kenya.

¹ <https://www.heritage.org/africa/report/kenyas-stability-important-us-priority>

² <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2962.htm>

- **Guatemala.** After Mexico, the largest number of unauthorized immigrants to the U.S. come from Guatemala.³ Credible elections contribute to a more stable Guatemala; stability and rule-of-law help people feel safer and more connected to their communities, and less likely to leave home. In 2017, IFES programming was timely in the fight against impunity and corruption. Providing technical assistance to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), our work advanced second-generation electoral reforms to increase accountability, enhance the transparency and inclusivity of the electoral system, and expand the TSE's mandate as a political finance regulator. IFES also worked with the National Council of People with Disabilities to improve the advocacy capacity of disabled persons' organizations and with IFES' assistance, the TSE incorporated accessibility and participation measures in their electoral law reform proposal.
- **Nepal** – despite its tough geopolitical neighborhood – is rapidly becoming a democratic success story. During an intense 12-month period, the people of Nepal voted in local, provincial and national elections. It was the first time in 20 years that successful local elections were held, and the first-ever simultaneous provincial and national elections. IFES supported the Election Commission of Nepal in their efforts to register three million new voters, simplify complex ballots and improve transparency around campaign spending. IFES also supported large-scale, multilingual voter education reaching diverse populations.

Electoral Assistance Advances American Values

In addition to the tangible benefits, DRG promotes American values. For example, electoral assistance helps such traditionally marginalized groups as youth, women 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.

IFES works to strengthen political participation and inclusion by conducting civic and voter education activities via diverse media, including face-to-face, radio, social media, mobile apps, creative print mediums, and street theater; providing technical assistance to government officials on how to implement international standards; empowering civil society organizations; and assisting citizen-led efforts to define best practices.

Key Accounts and Recommendations for FY2019

We thank the Congress – and particularly this Subcommittee – for its continued support of DRG in even the most challenging budget environments. Since FY2016, Congress has mandated that State and USAID spend no less than \$2.3 billion on democracy programs – which represents less than half of one percent of the total International Affairs Budget.⁴ Congress' provision of a funding floor protects critical programming. The full funding of DRG programs is necessary to address democratic backsliding, consolidate gains from economic development efforts, and contribute to a more stable and prosperous world. We ask for Congress to continue funding for DRG at existing levels.

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/06/us/politics/undocumented-illegal-immigrants.html>

⁴ <http://www.usglc.org/the-budget/>

Development Assistance

Development Assistance furthers USAID's goal of promoting resilient, democratic societies. DRG assistance supports new and fragile democracies by helping them develop policies and practices to build effective, transparent, and accountable governments that can deliver political and socioeconomic benefits to their citizens.

Unfortunately, the proposed FY2018 and FY2019 budgets eliminated entirely the Development Assistance account. This would severely restrict the U.S.' ability to achieve its longer-term development goals.

Economic Support Funds

Through Economic Support Funds (ESF), State and USAID help partner countries meet short- and long-term political and economic needs so that they can transition to developed economies. Programs address the economic despair and lack of political participation that violent extremist groups exploit among youth, the unemployed and marginalized members of society. DRG assistance empowers citizens to ensure broad-based participation; strengthens the rule of law; mitigates conflict; and cultivates respect for the democratic process.

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 (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) – 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.

Democracy Fund

Through the Democracy Fund, State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor and USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance support democracy activists worldwide, minimize human rights abuses, including human trafficking, open political space and enable positive transnational change.

The Democracy Fund allocates specific amounts for State and USAID. In recent years, increasing amounts have been shifted to State and away from USAID. We respectfully encourage Congress to split the Fund evenly between the two agencies, to ensure each agency's unique approach and priorities are honored.

Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AEECA)

This account – discontinued at the previous administration's request in FY2013 and reinstated in FY2016 – was also "zeroed out" in the current administration's FY2018 and FY2019 budgets. The AEECA is critical to strengthening our allies in the region, particularly via DRG.

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.

Empowerment and Inclusion Division/Special Programs to Address the Need of Survivors

USAID's Empowerment and Inclusion Division (EI; listed in the administration's budget as Special Programs to Address the Need of Survivors, or SPANS) helps individuals achieve their full, effective inclusion in society. SPANS/EI funds the Leahy War Victims Fund, as well as USAID's Disability Fund, which supports IFES' inclusion programming in Libya, the Dominican Republic and a regional initiative with the Eastern Partnership countries.

The current administration recommended eliminating SPANS/EI funding in FY18 and FY19.⁵ SPANS/EI funding is drawn from multiple appropriations accounts, and is mostly discretionary: the FY18 Omnibus mandates a set aside of \$7.5 million from ESF for international disability rights, but there's no language protecting the SPANS/EI division – this office exists at the pleasure of the USAID Administrator. Given its critical and unique role at USAID, we recommend a firm appropriation for international disability rights funding, to be spent only by SPANS/EI.

Congressional Oversight of State/USAID

IFES is deeply concerned by State's failure to fully spend appropriated funds: last year, State spent just 79 percent of the money that Congress had authorized for the conduct of foreign affairs, the lowest level in at least 15 years and well down from the 93 percent spent in the final year of the previous administration.⁶ This has impacted IFES programs. For example, projects to counter Russian influence in Central/Eastern Europe and the Balkans, which were ready for implementation in March 2017, are still awaiting funding. This delay of almost a year has significantly postponed the achievement of objectives critical to American interests. IFES encourages Congress to exercise its oversight of State and USAID to ensure appropriated funds are spent in a timely manner.

Electoral Assistance: A Global, Long-term Development Commitment

Electoral assistance has evolved into a sophisticated practice undertaken by most democratic countries. IFES receives the about 70 percent of its support from State and USAID. However, countries from all parts of the globe fund DRG – IFES' international donors include Australia, Canada, European Union, South Korea, India, Mexico, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and others. Several of our programs – including in Tunisia and Myanmar (Burma) – are funded by multiple donors.

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.

Looking Ahead: The Continued Need for Electoral Assistance

With the continued support of the U.S. Congress, DRG will further promote American interests and values abroad. Investment in electoral assistance simply cannot wait, and must be advanced in FY2019. Such pressing challenges include general elections in Nigeria, Guatemala, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Georgia; Tunisia's long-awaited local elections; and Indonesia's 2019 presidential elections (Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim democracy and holds the largest single-day elections in the world).

Again, I thank the Subcommittee for its continued dedication to DRG.

⁵ The previous administration recommended at least some SPANS/EI funding in FY16 and FY17.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/world/europe/state-department-russia-global-engagement-center.html>