

**NDI REPORTS: A REVIEW OF POLITICAL
DEVELOPMENT IN NEW DEMOCRACIES
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The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, works to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI Programs are supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, the U.S. Agency for International Development and private donations.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Elections Will Be a Crucial Test for Zimbabwe

The optimism that accompanied Zimbabwe's independence 20 years ago has long since faded. During the last decade, the country's democratic development stalled in a region where many of its neighbors have begun genuine transitions to democratic government.

President Robert Mugabe has enjoyed almost absolute power since 1980 when the Lancaster House Agreement led to the ouster of the white minority ruled government of Rhodesia. While Zimbabwe is constitutionally categorized as a multiparty state, the ruling ZANU, and later ZANU-PF, has dominated the political environment at the expense of competition or dissent. Mugabe has governed with an increasingly heavy hand and is blamed for the country's economic dislocation. Zimbabwe suffers from one of the world's highest AIDs infection rates, widespread government corruption and the enormous financial toll of its intervention in an unpopular war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. With little governmental transparency or accountability, demands for reform have risen amid growing civil unrest.

Unprecedented challenges to Mugabe and his ZANU-PF government prompted several reform initiatives. The most notable effort, led by a coalition of civic organizations, pressured the government to undertake reform of a constitution that provided the president with unchecked authority. The ensuing government-sanctioned Constitutional Commission, however, was not immune from the country's polarized political environment; major opposition forces boycotted the work of the Commission, which it considered biased, and conducted parallel public consultations as a countervailing force to the official proceedings.

The Commission's draft constitution contained a number of changes including the addition of a bill of rights, presidential term limits, a second chamber of parliament, partial proportional representation and an independent election commission. Among other issues, however, human rights groups and opposition parties criticized the draft for retaining too many presidential powers and allowing Mugabe to run for two more terms. In a major defeat for Mugabe and his ruling party, the proposed constitution was then rejected in a mid-February national referendum.

Parliamentary elections later this year are adding fuel to the already politically charged situation. If the elections do not allow for meaningful alternatives to Mugabe's regime, many Zimbabweans fear that the president will continue to pursue political, military and economic

increasing discontent. In September, a new political party, the Movement for Democratic Change, was launched with the backing of the trade unions. More than 20,000 supporters attended the inaugural rally of the new party, expected to represent ZANU-PF's most serious challenger among the country's 28 registered parties.

NDI's program in Zimbabwe has supported electoral reforms that can create genuine competition for the upcoming polls. These include: equal access to the media by all contestants and balanced news coverage of the electoral campaign; new or significantly revamped voter rolls; a truly independent election commission; and the accreditation of local election monitors. In an effort to expose Zimbabwean political party leaders from across the political spectrum to electoral advances in the region, NDI sponsored a series of delegations that observed recent, national elections in Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. The Zimbabweans examined codes of conduct for political parties, formal mechanisms to promote inter-party dialogue, the development of consensus on election laws, the workings of independent election commissions and efforts to ensure equitable access to the media by political contestants.

Following the visits, NDI reinforced the lessons learned through a series of public forums in Harare at which the Zimbabwe participants shared their observations. The NDI program has already helped promote broad agreement on the need for an independent election commission. Additional forums, which will include political leaders from the southern African region, will be held to spur further electoral reforms before parliamentary polls.

NDI is also conducting Southern Africa programs in Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. A regional program supports efforts by governments to combat corruption. Another area-wide program assists an association of southern African parliamentarians with developing the capacity to observe elections and adopt electoral standards for the region.



Jabulani Mbambo, chief elections officer for Matebeleland South province in Zimbabwe, inspects ballot boxes and seals with presiding officer in Sofala province, Mozambique during general elections in December. Mbambo was a member of an NDI delegation observing electoral advances in the region.

CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE

Political Opposition Triumphs in Croatia

On January 3, two coalitions of opposition parties won more than 60 percent of the seats for Croatia's lower house of parliament. The opposition triumph offers the country an unprecedented opportunity to

the former Communist general received a hero's funeral for his role as father of the nation he had led since independence in 1991. Three weeks later, however, the citizens of Croatia voted overwhelmingly for change and against Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).

The opposition message was a marked departure from the nationalist stance of the HDZ government, which had long sought to gain control of Croat-populated portions of neighboring Bosnia. In fact, Croats living in Bosnia are allowed to vote in the Croatian elections and are represented in the Croatian parliament. The opposition, which focused on efforts needed to reverse the country's economic decline, promised to end Croatia's international isolation, cooperate with the international war crimes tribunal, reduce the power of the presidency, curtail subsidies to ethnic Croats living in Bosnia, and respect the rights of Serbs and other minorities in Croatia.

In a run-off election on February 7, Stipe Mesic was elected Croatia's new president, garnering 56 percent of the vote compared to 43 percent for rival Drazen Budisa. Both Mesic and Budisa, who had earlier defeated the HDZ candidate in the first round of the presidential election, represented the opposition coalitions.

While the remarkable change of fortune for the democratic opposition movement was accomplished soon after Tudjman's death, the victory was not an overnight success. Rather, the opposition parties realized such an achievement only after years of building their organizational capacity in a hostile political environment and *de facto* one-party state.

NDI began working in Croatia in 1995, helping democratic parties build strong local branches supported by effective communication with their national headquarters. Institute programs in seven regions emphasized active local networks that could represent citizen interests. As HDZ's popularity receded amid economic stagnation and increasing international isolation, opposition parties struggled with developing themselves into vehicles that represented a viable political alternative.

The parties gradually learned how to turn increasing public discontent with the ruling party into electoral support--from knocking on doors and delivering literature to developing questionnaires that asked Croatians what they wanted from their public servants. Parties also began to hold successful fundraising events, publish newsletters and devise strategies to recruit new members.

NDI worked principally with seven opposition parties, providing consultations on branch organization, strategic planning, volunteer recruitment, fundraising and communication. NDI also brought Croatian party leaders to Canada and Northern Ireland where they were able to witness grassroots organization before elections there.

By June 1998, the opposition started to gain electoral momentum in county by-elections, winning pluralities in all three of the contested municipalities. Galvanized by these victories, the largest six opposition parties formed an alliance to contest Dubrovnik county by-elections in October. A united electoral strategy, combined with improved grassroots efforts produced another opposition victory in 25 of 40 contested seats. The Dubrovnik elections are regarded by many as the turning point for the opposition.

As parties began preparing for the parliamentary elections, NDI

smaller parties. In 1999, NDI trained more than 1,100 political party activists including 74 who stood for election, having been selected for placement on their respective party lists. Although the campaign period was truncated by an official mourning period for Tudjman and subsequent holidays, the SDP-HSLS opposition rallied voters with their central theme--"Choose Change." On January 3, with an exceptionally high turnout of close to 80 percent, voters responded to this message by choosing the opposition coalitions over the HDZ in nine out of 10 electoral districts, which translated to two-thirds of the parliamentary seats. Ivica Racan, the leader of the SDP, became the country's new prime minister.

Cause for hope was also reflected in efforts by the country's foremost election monitoring organization to provide Croatians with a more open and transparent election process. Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG) prevailed in its intensive lobbying campaign to ensure that its election monitors be allowed inside polling centers for the parliamentary polls, which was not the case during the 1997 presidential election nor explicitly guaranteed during 1998 by-elections. After GONG succeeded in gathering more than 25,000 signatures in a petition drive supporting its cause, a new electoral law sanctioned domestic observers.

NDI previously worked closely with GONG during elections in 1997 and 1998, and helped the organization revitalize its national network in preparation for the January polls. For the parliamentary polls, close to 6,000 GONG volunteer monitors covered 75 percent of the country's polling stations. GONG further increased public confidence in the electoral process by conducting independent vote tabulations for the parliamentary and presidential elections in order to deter or detect fraud in the official tabulation. GONG's preliminary results for both presidential rounds virtually matched official tallies announced later.

NDI is also conducting Central & Eastern Europe programs in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia.



Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections (GONG) in Croatia features a stylized "eye" in all its literature. A detail (pictured above) from GONG's volunteer recruitment brochure declares that "We, the citizens, are observing."

ASIA

Civic Groups in Thailand Combat Corruption With Innovative Outreach Programs

Since its transition to constitutional government in 1932, Thailand has alternated between civilian and military rule, experiencing a succession of *coups*, *coup* attempts as well as unstable and short-lived governments. While the parliamentary system has grown more rooted, the democratic process continues to be marred by corruption, which has impeded economic development, replaced formal rule of law with cronyism and diminished the influence of elected representatives. However, there is now hope that with growing citizen involvement, new efforts to curb corruption will have an impact.

Political corruption in Thailand has pervaded day-to-day existence where illegal exchanges of money affect transactions from the price of food to the provision of electricity in schools. Many Thai citizens believe that politicians rob them of their tax money for personal gain. Prevalent as well is vote buying during elections.

Attempts to design solutions to the problem have included reforming ministries, establishing anti-corruption commissions, and training government officials. Few efforts have addressed the role of civil society in combating corruption, even though it is widely believed that only through the application of public pressure can sufficient political will be created to implement reforms and challenge the entrenched system of money politics.

Last year, NDI began working with the People's Network for Elections in Thailand (PNET)--a network of public and private organizations committed to election monitoring and democratization--on a project to strengthen local efforts to combat corruption in Buriram province. The success of the Buriram program prompted NDI to continue the work there while expanding the program to four more provinces where civic groups develop solutions to local problems of corruption especially as they relate to parliamentary and local elections this year.

Through village forums, akin to town hall meetings, the program acquaints the public with the proper role of a representative government, the rights and duties of citizens under the new Thai constitution, and the implications of political corruption. At the forums, villagers assemble to discuss their concerns, while trained facilitators help them develop strategies to advocate change to their elected officials. These forums, often broadcast on community radio, have encouraged group activism and greater involvement in the political process. For instance, in Lamplimas district, following the village forum, several community members began gathering in what they have dubbed the "coffee cabinet," which meets every other week to discuss local concerns and brainstorm solutions. The popularity of the cabinet forced it to move to larger quarters to accommodate heightened interest.

In addition to village forums, the civic groups have designed educational presentations using community radio and various art forms. The format for these programs grew out of informal surveys and interviews that found that people absorbed more information from entertainment-oriented educational programs, such as songs and plays than from written material or "talking head" lectures.

Through street drama, live and recorded music, posters, puppet shows and student art contests, participants and audiences examine such issues as the link between local concerns and the voting

Nangtaibong puppets, a traditional southern Thai art form that can still draw a crowd. In Chiang Mai province, another group has identified local artists and is working on a script for street drama programs. The songs and print materials also address new constitutional provisions, such as decentralization, and the long-term benefits of policy oriented voting over the short-term gains of vote-selling.

Radio shows in Buriram province are gaining in popularity as judged by the increasing number of "call ins" to the station and letters of support. Popular as well are education programs broadcast by regional radio that play cassettes of local musicians who have recorded songs about corruption and politics. The civic groups had invited the artists to tape the tunes, which use traditional Thai and Lao music, and also helped provide guidance on lyrics. More than 500 copies of the cassettes have been distributed to radio stations across the Northeast, which subsequently prompted hundreds of listeners to ask for information on acquiring the tapes.

In advance of local elections last November in Songkhla province, civic groups hosted a candidate debate to encourage issue-oriented campaigns and voting. Approximately 2,000 people turned up in the pouring rain to watch the candidates discuss their positions, a rare occurrence in Thailand. More such forums are taking place before local and provincial polls, which are being conducted intermittently throughout the first three months of 2000. Before elections for Senate in March, some of NDI's local partners plan to monitor the behavior of candidates during the campaign period by compiling corruption "report cards."

NDI is also conducting Asia programs in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Nepal and Malaysia. A regional program assists the development of an Asia election monitoring network.



As part of its anti-corruption program, a civic group in Phitsanlok sponsored an art contest that invited students to illustrate problems facing democracy in Thailand. The winning entry, created by a 14-year-old, depicts a ballot box that can only be reached by braving a fierce crowd of "canvassers," a recognized category of Thai citizens who buy votes and intimidate voters on election day. Pictured above the ballot box is Democracy Monument, which represents the country's transition from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary political system in 1932.

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

Civic Group Expands Role of Women in Egypt's Political Process

Egypt has been extolled recently in international financial circles for an economic liberalization program that has fueled unprecedented growth. These reforms, however, have not been matched by political

Progress is stalled, in part, by a lack of public pressure on the government in favor of additional democratic reforms. Whether through apathy, despair, or fear, many Egyptians believe that they can play no meaningful role in their country's political life. Without constructive avenues for popular participation, no middle ground exists between a government with autocratic tendencies and the rhetoric of religious extremism.

Some civic organizations, such as the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), are working to overcome these obstacles. The Center, which organizes women in poor areas of metropolitan Cairo to influence public policymaking, got its start in the aftermath of parliamentary elections in 1996 that were marred by widespread fraud and voter indifference. Nehad Abul Komsan, a member a coalition of civic activists monitoring the conduct of the vote, took note of the particular estrangement of women from politics, which was even more acute than that of their male counterparts. She then founded the ECWR as a means of opening the door to more women's involvement in political affairs.

From its inception, the Center has focused on grassroots civic education. With NDI's assistance, the ECWR has convened and moderated several thousand community based meetings, involving more than 18,000 women, in various districts of the capital. For most participants, these forums provide the only opportunity to openly express political views. At the same time, ECWR's civic moderators, trained by NDI, structure the meetings to provide educational information on such topics as the importance of elections in a democratic society, the steps involved in registering to vote, how to maneuver through the local bureaucracy to get things done, and the role of municipal councils and their obligations to constituents. The Center supplements this work with its own civic education materials. Among the most popular and successful of these is *The Story of Nabawiya and the Electoral Card*, a pamphlet that describes the crusade of a poor, illiterate woman as she learns the importance of voting and the procedures for obtaining a voter registration card.

The ECWR views civic education as both the foundation of its work as well as a means to encourage women to participate in politics. During Egypt's annual voter registration period, for instance, ECWR staff accompany discussion-group participants to the local police station, where voters must register, and help them with the necessary paperwork. As a result, more than 3,000 women have added their names to the rolls.

The Center also assists women who are interested in organizing themselves to solve community problems. In Dar es-Salaam, one of Cairo's poorest neighborhoods, the ECWR worked with a committee of women to arrange a series of meetings to discuss local issues with municipal council members. The women initially expressed skepticism about the council's response, an apprehension that appeared to be well founded when only one councillor accepted their invitation. When other members learned of this initial meeting, however, many of them contacted the ECWR to ask if they could participate. Eventually, the women's committee conducted three meetings with all their local representatives, which opened a dialogue on many pressing issues. In another neighborhood, al-Waraq, a group of women attending the civic education sessions decided to discuss with local officials how municipal authorities could alleviate garbage accumulation in their area. As a direct result of their efforts, the municipality established a special unit for regular garbage collection.

expand its activities to assist women interested in running for office. Currently, women represents only 2 percent of parliamentarians; at the municipal level, their numbers dwindle further. Training will focus on exposing prospective candidates to the techniques and practices needed to seek elective office.

NDI is also conducting Middle East & North Africa programs in Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen.



A series of civic education materials published by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights acquaints women with obtaining an electoral card, registering to vote and the role of parliament. Each brochure features a fictional character named Nabawiya who learns about democratic practices and ways she can participate in the political process.

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Political Party Leadership Program Combats Apathy in Latin America

Political parties in Latin America have been viewed as ineffective, corrupt and out of touch with their constituencies; young people, in particular, are hesitating to join or to associate themselves with political parties. At the same time, support has risen for independent candidates, special interest parties and anti-party movements. Disenchantment with parties has given rise to political leaders with authoritarian tendencies, threatening democratic institutions in the region.

Political parties can restore their credibility in a variety of ways, from emphasizing issues of ethics in public office to modernizing party structures and broadening citizen participation. To assist this effort, NDI has developed a long-term regional initiative--the Leadership Program--to train young political leaders, help foster relations among parties in the hemisphere, and support political party reform and revitalization. NDI inaugurated the program last March with a two-week leadership development seminar for 27 emerging party leaders from Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela. The seminar is being followed by a year-long series of party building

Using Training Skills and Materials

A Mexican participant affiliated with the National Action Party is now developing a curriculum and materials for a training course for congressional candidates. It will cover internal party regulations regarding the election of members of Congress by proportional representation. Mexican participants from all three major parties are also designing and implementing youth voter mobilization campaigns for the 2000 elections, which have incorporated lessons learned from the NDI program.

Modernizing Party Structures and Practices

A Venezuelan participant, a member of the Baruta municipal council and secretary general of the Baruta executive committee of Accion Democratica (AD) party, founded the Social Democratic Alliance as part of his commitment to the Leadership Program. The Alliance promotes the modernization of AD by using the Baruta-AD branch as a model. The project trains mid-level and grassroots leaders and sponsors working groups to discuss party renewal. Since its creation last May, the Alliance has conducted workshops with 300 youth leaders on party renewal and negotiation techniques, and strategic campaign planning.

New Generation of Reform-Minded Leaders

A Colorado Party participant currently serves as spokeswoman for the president of Paraguay. Her follow-up project for the Leadership Program involves conducting workshops on conflict management, party renewal techniques and effective group communication for hundreds of young leaders from the Colorado Party.

NDI plans to conduct a second round of the Leadership Program in March with a new class of participants from Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela. Selected members of the 1999 program will be invited to attend the seminar in Washington, D.C. to share lessons they have learned during the past year.

Political Party Website

As part of its long-term efforts to encourage an exchange of experiences among political party activists throughout the hemisphere, NDI launched a new [political party website](#).

Available in English and Spanish, the website allows anyone in the world with an Internet connection rapid access to an index of more than 600 publications in NDI's international library of party platforms, training manuals and other resources, which are available in hardcopy form from NDI.

NDI plans to convert documents into an electronic format for placement on the website directly. The site includes a Leadership Program link, containing information about 1999 and 2000 program participants, as well as Internet links to political parties throughout the hemisphere.

NDI is also conducting Latin America & Caribbean programs in Bolivia, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru.



A young Guatemalan party activist (left) from the National Advancement Party (PAN) shares proposals to broaden indigenous political participation during a party training workshop organized by two Leadership Program participants. Also pictured is Julio Ruiz with the Latin American and Caribbean Indigenous Peoples' Fund, who joined with NDI to acquaint PAN members with comparative information about advances made by indigenous leaders throughout the hemisphere.

NDI DEMOCRACY AWARD

NDI Honors Georgia President Eduard Shevardnadze and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

"I see many familiar faces in this audience. I also feel a special warmth toward those I do not personally know, because we all serve a common cause, the lofty and noble cause of making a better future by promoting democracy."

--Georgia President Eduard Shevardnadze

"...I am honored by this recognition, but I really accept it on behalf of those hundreds and thousands of women and men whom I have seen in countries throughout the world... Because it is they who are doing the work of democracy, and it is we who owe it to them to do all we can to make sure that their journey to democracy is a successful one."

--First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

Georgia is dramatic proof to all nations that democracy and stability are within reach, and that one good leader can make all the difference," remarked Senator Edward M. Kennedy upon presenting NDI's 13th annual W. Averell Harriman Democracy Award to Eduard Shevardnadze, president of the republic of Georgia. Kennedy was a recipient of the Harriman Award in 1997.

NDI presented its democracy award to Shevardnadze and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at a dinner on September 23 in Washington, D.C. Nearly 800 guests attended the event including Administration officials, members of Congress, business and labor leaders, and friends of NDI. President Bill Clinton accompanied the First Lady to the ceremony and addressed the audience following the award presentations.

In honoring Shevardnadze, NDI paid tribute to his courageous leadership and contributions to building democratic government. Mrs. Clinton was recognized for her efforts internationally to support democratic transitions and political participation by women. NDI has assisted political development efforts in Georgia since 1992, working to strengthen political parties, encourage citizen participation in political and governmental processes, and build an accountable and effective parliament.

night in Washington. McWilliams was a co-recipient of the Harman Award in 1998 along with the seven other political party leaders from Northern Ireland who negotiated the "Good Friday" peace agreement. Kirk read from remarks prepared by McWilliams for the occasion.

McWilliams recounted the first time she saw the First Lady and how her visit to Belfast galvanized women in the divided society of Northern Ireland. "Shortly afterwards, we won our place at the negotiating table, became signatories to the Good Friday Accord and ran for office in the new Assembly," said McWilliams who also described the "abuse and humiliation" women met by those who believed that they had no place in the new political landscape. "At every step of the way," said McWilliams, "Hillary Clinton encouraged us, supported us and became our friend." McWilliams cited similar and sustained efforts initiated by Mrs. Clinton around the world to provide women with opportunities and skills that "have enabled them to become key decisionmakers, peace activists and agents of change."

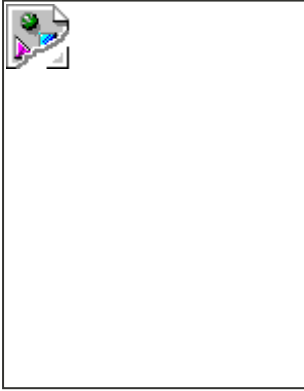
I sing the praises of the lion-like hero," said Senator Kennedy about Shevardnadze, quoting the words of a 13th century poem by medieval Georgian philosopher Shota Rustaveli. Kennedy commended Georgia's success in establishing democratic institutions and choosing democracy over communism. "President Shevardnadze...refused to put off reforms in the name of stability...he rejected the view that democratic change takes generations," said Kennedy. "As the example of Georgia so vividly demonstrates, these great goals can be achieved, if the political will and the political leadership exist."

Shevardnadze delivered an emotional speech about a personal journey on "the road that brought me to this rostrum." He spoke movingly about his formative years that "coincided with the most horrific period in the 20th century," noting the death of his brother in World War II and his previous faith in communist ideology that he was eventually moved to abandon. Shevardnadze became convinced that reforming the Soviet system would not be possible through gradual or incremental means, such as incorporating elements of a market economy. "[T]he system had to be utterly dismantled and new democratic states had to emerge in its place," he said. "I never since lost the hope that the family of man would ultimately prevail over barriers erected by fanaticism, paranoia and greed..."

In her remarks, Mrs. Clinton paid homage to those people "laboring as we speak tonight--often without recognition, without drawing any headlines--who put themselves and their families at risk because they are willing to speak out and stand up for democracy." She reiterated her wish that she could take every American on her international travels to witness firsthand democracy's expansion, and shared with the audience her own experiences abroad with political reformers. In summing up her stories, she underscored the importance of providing democratic advocates with more than abstract talk and lofty ideals. "[I]t is giving them the tools...and assistance to implement their own ideas," she said, "and the support that is required to make the transition."

At the conclusion of the dinner, President Clinton reminded the audience about the responsibility of those in positions of power to continue to help proponents of democracy and continue to be vigilant against those who seek to "twist it" for their own ends. He recalled

travails of a man like President Shevardnadze who puts his life on the line when he shows up for work," said Clinton, "...and the courage of people...who believe they could change the world if they only had a voice."



Senator Edward M. Kennedy presents NDI's 1999 Democracy Award to Georgia President Eduard Shevardnadze.



On stage at NDI's Democracy Award Dinner, Presidents Bill Clinton and Eduard Shevardnadze, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Senator Edward M. Kennedy.



First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton accepts NDI's Democracy Award from NDI Board Chairman Paul G. Kirk, Jr.

WEST, CENTRAL & EAST AFRICA

Legislature Poised to Play Key Role in Nigeria's New Democracy

Last May, Nigeria inaugurated retired general Olusegun Obasanjo as the country's first elected president following 15 years of uninterrupted

be an anchor of stability for the continent.

The newly elected bicameral National Assembly is poised to play a key role in Nigeria's democratic consolidation, but lacks practical experience with legislative organization including rules of procedure, the role and function of committees, legislative analysis, oversight of the executive branch and public participation in legislative decisionmaking. NDI works closely with the members of the House and Senate to build an effective and accountable institution that promotes public confidence in the country's new political system.

Immediately upon assuming office, Obasanjo identified corruption as the country's major obstacle to political and economic reform, a conviction widely shared by the international community and many Nigerians. New measures, including a government crackdown on corruption and investigations into allegations of public fraud and embezzlement, have drawn widespread attention.

While the country's chief executive has dominated headlines with a popular agenda of reform, the National Assembly has struggled to assume its new constitutional responsibilities. Members devoted their first weeks in office to handling administrative responsibilities such as electing their leadership, and establishing rules of procedure and standing committees. Shortly thereafter, the Senate and House lost its president and speaker respectively due to ethical improprieties, which fueled negative publicity for the Assembly. Inaction on draft legislation submitted by the executive has brought further criticism from Obasanjo and other Nigerian leaders, and added to the legislature's credibility problems.

Many Nigerians contend that the National Assembly's initial activities should be viewed in a more positive light. Spending time addressing seemingly mundane "housekeeping" duties of a new legislature can lay the necessary groundwork for handling future legislative business. Quickly ridding the legislature of members guilty of misconduct or other wrongdoing was a sign of legislative accountability, a departure from past practices and the legacy of cronyism. Also, while the Assembly seemed to have been preoccupied with addressing organizational issues, legislators have boldly asserted their body's independence. The legislature is attempting to pursue deliberations apart from the executive branch, which totally monopolized government authority under military rule. Unfortunately, this approach has unintentionally delayed passage of some important legislation, and created the perception of inefficiency among some Nigerians.

In July, NDI provided members of the National Assembly with technical assistance on budget analysis and oversight. Discussions in Abuja focused on the role of the legislature in the budget process as the Assembly awaited receipt of the president's supplemental budget later in the month--Nigeria's first budget to be subjected to legislative scrutiny since 1983. Since Nigeria's National Assembly is modeled on the U.S. Congress, NDI's experts included two former U.S. Members of Congress and a former senior advisor to the House Appropriations Committee, all possessing significant appropriations, budget and rules expertise. In addition to examining methods for reviewing and evaluating budget legislation, Assembly members and committee staff solicited guidance on a range of procedural issues including establishing more efficient rules for legislative debate, developing an organizational calendar for considering bills, allocating time for floor debates and conducting hearings. Follow-on work will include the

Efforts initiated by NDI's permanent staff in Abuja will be augmented by an international team of legislative experts who will visit Nigeria regularly and offer ongoing advice through a customized email network. Future work will focus on providing practical information on legislative organization, including legislative oversight, internal rules of procedure, effective utilization of legislative staff and communication with constituents.

NDI is also conducting West, Central & East Africa programs in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali.

EURASIA

Civic Groups Organize to Advance Democratic Process

The conduct of recent elections has raised serious concerns about the democratic process in countries of the former Soviet Union. Election day in Ukraine and Russia produced few major irregularities, but the pre-election environment was marked by biased media coverage and government interference. Polls in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan experienced partisan electoral boards and faulty voter rolls in the pre-election period, and blatant ballot stuffing and other fraudulent practices at polling stations on election day. Despite recent democratic advances in Georgia, the parliamentary contests were marred by irregularities in many areas. Electoral manipulation was particularly egregious throughout Ajara, the semi-autonomous region ruled by opposition leader Aslan Abashidze.

While troubled polls continue to challenge democratization in the former Soviet republics, a more hopeful process is underway at the grassroots level. Networks of civic monitors sprang up this electoral period in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, and older groups grew stronger and more outspoken in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine. As it has elsewhere, NDI provided most of these groups with financial support as well as technical advice on their organizational development and election monitoring mission. Courageous democrats in these countries have mobilized thousands of citizens to demand meaningful polls, expose electoral manipulation and unfair campaign practices, and promote popular political participation.

Armenia

Since 1996, It's Your Choice (IYC) has grown from a hastily organized coalition into an established national organization. More than 3,000 IYC volunteers monitored parliamentary elections in May, which were conducted under a new election law that provided for nonpartisan, domestic monitors inside polling places. This provision represented a major victory for It's Your Choice, which had successfully advocated its inclusion. In its post-election statement, IYC concluded that the extent of violations recorded by its observers, "affected the eventual results." IYC reached a similar conclusion following municipal polls in October. Between elections, It's Your Choice organizes an extensive civic education program that includes conducting public forums about democratic principles and promoting citizen involvement in the legislative process.

Azerbaijan

Two civic organizations mounted voter education and election monitoring activities for Azerbaijan's first municipal elections in December. The Organization for the Protection of Women's Rights (OPWR) promoted expanded political opportunities for women. At

permanent observer corps, which is also prepared to monitor parliamentary elections later this year. ACI's post-election statement noted the "character and scale of...violations" were such that the local polls could not be labeled "free and fair according to the demands of the law." With the introduction of local government bodies, ACI and OPWR plan to establish ongoing links between citizens and municipal officials.

Georgia

During parliamentary polls, a network of more than 3,000 activists from the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy allowed the quick dissemination of election-related information. Society literature outlined balloting procedures while its radio and television ads stressed to voters the importance of making informed choices. For the first round of elections in October, Society volunteers monitored 94 percent of polling stations, during which time they were often approached by international observers for their objectivity and expertise. The Society highlighted violations of the "basic principles that provide for fair and democratic elections," including media restrictions, interference by government officials and biased electoral administration. Between elections, the Society's civic education programs have exposed many Georgians to the political process for the first time, including their involvement in newly created "citizen advisory committees," which bring together citizens and local government officials to solve community problems.

Kazakhstan

Two civic groups united to establish the country's first domestic election monitoring group--the Kazakhstan Nonpartisan Domestic Election Monitoring Program--and recruit, train and deploy 2,500 observers. Program volunteers collected and published election results and analysis, and registered complaints with the Central Election Commission. Describing the polls as "dishonest, unfair and not transparent," the Program's post-election report offered constructive suggestions for future elections that would "increase the people's trust in the electoral process." While the flawed polls failed to meet minimum international standards, the domestic monitoring effort earned commendations from international organizations for its extensive election reporting.

Kyrgyzstan

For local elections in October, the Coalition of NGOs for Democracy and Civil Society fielded 2,000 pollwatchers in 45 cities. This effort marked the country's first-ever nationwide civic monitoring campaign. In those same cities, the Coalition organized candidate debates and citizen forums called "My Voice--My Choice" as part of its long-term civic education program. The Coalition's post-election statement highlighted electoral deficiencies, including government interference and partisan election commissions. It concluded that the polls had "not been conducted in a free, honest and just manner." In non-election periods, the Coalition promotes citizen participation in government decisionmaking through town hall meetings with elected officials, televised public affairs programming and training for local officials unfamiliar with citizen involvement in the political process.

Russia

A diverse coalition of seven civic networks conducted voter education and pre-election monitoring for December's parliamentary polls in Russia. Women and youth organizations in Chelyabinsk hosted a series of forums to inform candidates and parties about important civic

pre-election campaign environment and the conduct of election day itself. With the Russian presidential election scheduled for March 26, the coalition plans to continue voter education activities as well as develop a "Voter's Bill of Rights" that outlines the demands of voters as articulated by civic groups. The coalition will also conduct an extensive grassroots effort to monitor campaign violations and to pollwatch on election day.

Ukraine

During two rounds of presidential elections in October and November, the Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU) conducted an independent vote count and mounted a major monitoring operation with more than 17,000 volunteers. While the Committee's vote tabulation coincided with official results, the group announced that "interference by state administrations considerably increased" during the runoff and "more violations" were reported, especially in opposition strongholds, than in the first round. In the runoff, many Committee monitors were barred from polling places, and the group received no election-night coverage in the state-controlled media. Since 1993, CVU has gained increased national visibility and credibility with a wide range of civic and voter education programs. New plans include the creation of regional information centers to help citizens better understand and work with local government.



"Together we are strong!" is the central message on a poster produced by the Coalition of NGOs for Democracy and Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan. The poster was used to recruit volunteers for the Coalition's monitoring effort and publicize public meetings about the local elections.

NDI to Host International Political Leaders at Democratic Convention

NDI will host more than 500 international leaders at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. The program, entitled the International Leaders Forum, will take place August 13-17, 2000. The Forum will gather heads of government, cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, political party leaders and Washington, D.C.-based foreign ambassadors from more than 100 nations. The international leaders will observe the convention proceedings and participate in a series of bi-partisan seminars on the U.S. political process. Leading Administration officials, members of Congress and other elected officials, journalists, and political experts will lead panel discussions on the elections, and U.S. domestic and foreign policy issues.

would like additional information or are interested in sponsorship opportunities, please call (202) 797-4733 or email ilf@ndi.org.

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