Working for Democracy and Making Democracy Work
When NDI opened its doors in 1983, programs to support democratic development essentially did not exist. Given a mission but not a roadmap, the Institute built its practice from scratch, creating a unique international network of political practitioners dedicated to sharing their democratic experiences and ideas with others in nascent democracies.

NDI has become a leader in the democracy field by prioritizing creativity and innovation, and crafting programs that account for the unique context of each country. NDI promoted democratic reform in the Philippines and Chile in the 1980s; in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall; and across Africa, Asia and Latin America in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War. We began programming on the inclusion of traditionally marginalized populations such as women, youth, LGBTI and individuals with disabilities in the 2000s. More recently, NDI has supported activists whose homegrown efforts inspired the Arab Spring in 2011, the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in 2014 and other democracy movements in newly formed and fragile states.

We have found over nearly four decades that, whatever its shortfalls, democracy works. While democracy’s success is neither inevitable nor irreversible, NDI has witnessed first-hand that free people in every corner of the world continue to yearn for democracy. We are privileged to work with exceptional individuals whose tireless efforts on behalf of human dignity in their countries – and beyond – seek to make the world a more just, secure and prosperous place.

A century ago, Woodrow Wilson urged us to build a world safe for democracy. Today, we strive for democracy to keep our world safe.

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Madeleine Albright
“Democracy is inseparable from human dignity and peace.”

Derek Mitchell
“The siren song of autocrats will always find an audience, particularly during times of fear and insecurity... But democracy remains the only viable path to true peace and security.”

NDI President
Derek Mitchell
NDI Chairman
Madeleine Albright
Harnessing Digital Technology

New digital technologies and platforms create both challenges and opportunities for democracy. NDI created DemTools, a suite of technology software, to help democracy activists collect and analyze election data, track constituent concerns, manage citizen contacts and organize petition drives. The Design 4 Democracy Coalition facilitates collaboration among organizations dedicated to countering disinformation, improving cybersecurity and promoting democracy-friendly technology platforms. Through its office in Silicon Valley, NDI has developed partnerships with technology companies in an effort to incorporate democratic values into new software as a design principle and mitigate the harm their digital platforms can cause.

Promoting Women’s Participation

When women participate in politics, the results can be socially and economically transformative. NDI helps women overcome barriers to political involvement through the Win With Women campaign, Women Mayors’ Network and “Ready-to-Run” campaign schools. The #NotTheCost initiative collects data on threats women face from violence, and the groundbreaking think10 safety planning tool helps women identify their personal and professional vulnerabilities. Together with the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, NDI is helping women political leaders report instances of violence and build the case for greater global action. NDI is also part of the DISRUPTHER initiative to deepen the pool of adolescent girls with the political skills and aspirations to become political leaders.

Inspiring Youth Leadership

Despite making up more than half the population in many countries, young people are often shut out of mainstream politics and decision-making. NDI helps young people become political leaders and activists by breaking down barriers, developing technical skills and building intergenerational relationships. Through the Change My Community Toolbox, NDI helps young people run grassroots advocacy campaigns. The Youth Leading Debate program hones skills on the art of policy debate. The Ana Usharek (I Engage) program has helped infuse tens of thousands of Jordanian students from universities and public schools with democratic values of civic responsibility and activism so they can become more fully invested in their country’s future.

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Ensuring Electoral Integrity

A pioneer in advancing electoral integrity, NDI:

- Co-led the development of the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation endorsed by over 50 international organizations.
- Helped found the Global Network for Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM).
- Supported non-partisan citizen election monitoring in more than 75 countries.
- Developed new election monitoring methodologies, including the parallel vote tabulation (PVT), a proven statistically-based method for verifying the quality of election-day procedures and the credibility of election results.

Making Democracy Work
Including Marginalized Communities
A democracy can only thrive when it represents all citizens equally. Yet in new and emerging democracies, large portions of the population are often excluded from politics based on their ethnicity, religion, age, disability, gender or sexual orientation. To ensure no citizen’s voice is silenced or democratic rights stifled, NDI helps representatives from these communities run for political office, advocate for legal reforms and pressure governments to implement international agreements protecting their rights, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In Libya, with NDI support, eight disability rights organizations advocate to improve accessibility to public buildings and universities.

Renewing Political Parties
Political parties are an essential building block of democracy, providing a forum for citizens to organize around common interests, choose political leaders and influence policy. Yet, in many developing countries, political parties are unable to deliver every day results for their citizens and fail to build trust. NDI’s 21st Century Party Renewal Initiative helps parties modernize internal operations, be responsive to voters and foster greater inclusion of women and youth. The Cybersecurity Campaign Playbook provides simple, actionable ways for political parties to address online threats.

Young elected leaders from nine Bosnian political parties discuss how to spur business, encourage young entrepreneurs and increase professional skills at a NDI-sponsored event.

Improving Governance and Accountability
Transparent government builds citizen trust and reduces corruption. NDI collaborates on innovative governance programming through the Open Government Partnership to promote global norms of transparency, and Living Cities to deepen citizen engagement in urban government. The Executive Transitions program promotes smooth, peaceful transfers of power in the wake of democratic elections. NDI, together with the International Republican Institute, supports the House Democracy Partnership, a bipartisan commission of the U.S. House of Representatives that facilitates parliamentary exchanges in emerging democracies.

Mayan ceremony at launch of NDI programs to support inclusion and reduce violence in Guatemala.

Working in Conflict Zones and Closed Societies
In conflict-affected states, NDI works to include citizens and end grievances. The Institute helps political parties in countries with histories of ethnic conflict develop constituent-driven policies. NDI programs in the Sahel in Africa focus on local security sector reform to end practices that drive extremism. In post-conflict countries, NDI helps citizens engage in reconciliation efforts that reshape political and social relationships away from those that led to violence in the first place. In closed societies, NDI builds the political capacity of democracy activists for the moment when a more open, democratic society becomes possible.

Encouraging Citizen Participation
NDI helps citizens organize and engage through civic and voter education, advocacy campaigns and oversight of government activities. NDI fosters cross-border dialogue and learning among citizen activists through Civic Forum and Civic Update. By engaging in collective action, democracy is deepened and citizens learn to hold government accountable as watchdogs and advocates.
Democratic development is cost-effective
Whether measured in terms of averting war, humanitarian crises, refugee flows or violent extremism, democratic development pays for itself many times over.

International networks are vital
While there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies. When democracy activists share their experiences with those undergoing similar challenges, it helps nations in transition recognize they are not alone and that obstacles can be overcome.

Inclusion is essential
Democracy thrives when all segments of society participate equally without bias or reprisal. Dialogue, compromise, inclusion and respect for the rule of law are the foundations for sustainable development, national security and internal stability.

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Democracy must deliver
Democratic governments must show results - particularly in improving living standards for the people - if democracy is to be successful.
Supported the efforts of:
- 16,000 civic organizations
- 925 political parties
- 10,000 legislators
- 1,300 women’s organizations

Helped partner groups organize more than:
- 400 candidate debates in over 35 countries

Field Offices in over:
- 50 countries

Worked in more than:
- 150 countries and territories around the world

Fielded over:
- international election observer delegations in more than 65 countries

Helped over:
- 300 citizen election monitoring organizations train and deploy
- 4,000,000 election observers in
- 350 elections and referenda in over 85 countries

Trained more than:
- 600,000 Party poll-watchers in over 50 countries

Join in Support of Democracy

- Check out the DemWorks video and podcast series.
- Sign up for our monthly newsletter.

Please donate at WWW.NDI.ORG/DONATE