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The Role Of Global Civil Society In Restoring Citizens' Trust In Democratic Elections

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Abstract

Elections and electoral assistance have come close to meeting the criteria for a "global public goods challenge," the consequences of which affect both the developed and developing worlds. This paper argues that by seeing elections not as the end result but rather a periodical reevaluation of effectiveness, NGOs can better develop programs that measure long-term effectiveness. Based on both the literature and examples of a handful of NGOs, this essay describes the nature and scope of the problem with elections and election assistance. It then looks at the ways in which transnational civil society could contribute to addressing and solving this challenge. It concluded that transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs) could have a greater impact on this global public goods challenge by: educating stakeholders on the relationship between elections and democracy; linking electoral assistance to election observation; taking sides to uphold international electoral standards yet steering clear of partisanship; engaging national and local civil societies in long-term campaign and coverage monitoring; empowering local poll-watchers; and, using their leverage to take action against election fraud and candidate prosecution.

Introduction

In the Philippines, despite competitive elections over the past decade and a half, several features of the political system tarnish the quality of freedom, including rising concerns about the integrity of electoral institutions, civilian killings, and military unrest. (Walker & Kelly, 2007, p. 7)

In Colombia, President Alvaro Uribe's 2006 reelection victory, which followed a constitutional change in 2005 allowing him to run for a second term, was approved by international observers as free and fair. However, later in 2006 information emerged that seemed to provide proof of long-rumored links between paramilitaries and government officials. (Walker & Kelly, 2007, p. 8)

The model of pursuing economic growth while eroding the independence of critical institutions has been adopted by three oil-rich states in the former Soviet Union: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. (Walker & Goehring, 2008, p. 32)

Philippines, Colombia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia are hardly exceptions: According to the 2009 Freedom in the World Survey (Freedom House, 2009), an alarming number of nations that otherwise meet the criteria of electoral democracies has been strengthening state control over their civil societies, media, and judiciary (Puddington, 2009). Political and civil unrests followed "free and fair" elections in Kenya in December 2007, in Bangladesh in December 2008, and in Moldova in April 2009, to name a few. As a consequence, citizens of those nations grow more distrustful not only of state officials and institutions but also of the power of elections and the benefits of democracy in general.

Within two decades having turned from a stepping stone toward national development into a questionable indicator of democratization, the democratic electoral systems and processes have become a focus of controversy among members of the international development community. This paper seeks to demonstrate that the controversy around elections has come close to meeting the criteria for an actual challenge of global public goods—similar to such challenges as ethnic and territorial conflicts or human trafficking. While the costs of the challenge with elections are seemingly immaterial—especially in comparison with the price tag of conflict resolution or human trafficking prevention—its explicit and implicit consequences affect both developing and developed societies around the world.

Based on the literature and examples of a handful of NGOs, this paper describes the nature and scope of the problem with elections and election assistance. It then looks at the ways in which transnational civil society could contribute to addressing and solving this challenge.

What Makes Elections a Global Public Goods Challenge?

Elections in the Context of Democracy, Governance and Human Rights

Elections assistance is a relatively recent area of international development. It emerged in the 1980s as one of the three core components—in addition to civil society and rule-of-law—within the broader developmental field that is usually referred to as democracy promotion or democracy building (Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 2002, 2004; Chand, 1997; Elklit & Svensson, 1997; Hart, 2007). As a result of the fall of several Southern European and Latin American military dictatorships in the mid 1970s and 1980s, the U.S. and British foreign policy communities saw a growing need for assistance with establishing democratic systems and processes in those post-authoritarian nations. Following the collapse of most Eastern European and Soviet communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the entire donor community embraced democracy promotion as a separate field of international development.

Since the early 1990s, it has become customary—in particular, among the Western governments—to view the post-authoritarian nations as being in transition toward democracy (Carothers, 2002, 2006, 2009). Correspondingly, in the mid 1990s, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)—both previously reluctant to impose non-economic conditions—introduced political and institutional prerequisites such as having a democratically elected government in place for a nation to receive aid (Chhotray & Hulme, 2007). To reflect these trends, a more comprehensive label has recently been adopted to describe international, multilateral and bilateral programs that deal with political parties, civil societies, elections, and governments—i.e., democracy and governance (e.g., United Nations Development Program/UNDP, 2009; European Commission, 2008; United States Agency for International Development/USAID, 2009).

Within this broader context of democracy and governance, elections assistance is featured rather prominently due to the role that electoral systems and processes play in determining whether and to what extent a society is democratic. For instance, the UNDP sees the development of electoral systems and processes as a way to uphold the cornerstone of democracy (UNDP, 2009). The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) asserts that poverty, conflict and terrorism cannot be eliminated without enhancing the reliability and transparency of democratic electoral processes (European Commission, 2009). USAID regards free and fair elections indispensable to democracy (USAID, 2009).

Normative and Practical Outcomes of Elections

In an attempt to explain why elections are important for democracy, scholars look at the concept of elections from both normative and practical perspectives.

Normatively, free and fair elections are: (1) a principle of democracy—i.e., there is no democracy without free and fair elections (Carothers, 2002; Elklit & Svensson, 1997; van Beuningen, 2007); and (2) a factor conducive to democracy—i.e., elections have a democratizing effect (Howard & Roessler, 2006; Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002; Teorell & Hadenius, 2008). On the other hand, elections are not sufficient for democracy to exist (Carothers, 2002; Elklit & Svensson, 1997; Harcourt, 2007; van Beuningen, 2007). Moreover, elections do not miraculously democratize societies (Teorell & Hadenius, 2008).

From the developmental practice's perspective, free and fair elections are: (1) a goal of democratic transition (Hart, 2006); (2) a catalysts to greater democracy (Bjornlund, 2004); (3) a measure of democratization in transitional nations (Elklit & Svensson, 1997; Machangana, 2007; van Beuningen, 2007); (4) an opportunity to broaden citizen participation in public life (Bjornlund, 2004); (5) a peace-building factor (Chand, 1997; Hart, 2006; Schwedler, 2007; Van Beuningen, 2007); and (6) a condition for getting additional developmental assistance—not only in the areas of democracy and governance aid, but also in the areas of economic and social life (Carothers, 2002, 2006).

In other words, while scholarly literature tends to be cautiously optimistic vis-à-vis the normative implications of elections for democracy, it recognizes the role of elections for the international development industry as a whole. Nevertheless, the current state of affairs in the areas of democracy and governance in general—and in the elections assistance in particular—is increasingly characterized as going through a crisis (Carothers, 2002, 2006; Schedler, 2002).

Crisis in the Areas of Democracy Promotion and Election Assistance

Indeed, the democratization enthusiasm of the late 1990s has faded away. Less than ten years into the new century, both the international donor community and the nations in transition are having reservations about democracy and democracy promotion. Specifically, the worth of electoral programs is questioned (Carothers, 2002, 2006; Schedler, 2002). Van Beuningen (2007) observed:

Free elections are essential but not sufficient for the makeup and well-functioning of democracy. In order to avoid perversion, respect for human rights… and for the rule of law is indispensable, as are effective institutions and checks and balances. (p. 52)

The Secretary General of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), a Stockholm, Sweden-based intergovernmental organization, summarized, "Globally we see democracy today being challenged in various ways, and in new ways" (Helgesen, 2008). Among those new challenges Helgesen (2008) mentioned: (1) doubts that democracy is good for development; (2) perceptions that democracy promotion is a cover-up for regime change; (3) doubts that democracy is good for conflict resolution; and (4) distrust of political parties and parliaments.

In a number of countries not long ago considered to be in transition toward democracy (e.g., Bolivia, Malawi), undemocratic regimes have seized power through democratic elections (Carothers, 2006, 2009; Puddington, 2009; Walker & Goehring; 2008; Walker & Kelly, 2007). In addition, some of those regimes (e.g., Russia) have profited from high oil and gas prices to consolidate their influence both at home and abroad (Carothers, 2006; Walker & Goehring, 2008). Although election fraud and intimidation of opposition are common, most international observers conclude that by and large the elections that take place in those countries are free and fair (Golder, 2005; Howard & Roessler, 2006; Puddington, 2009).

Also, in many nations the transition toward democracy and free market has not produced the expected economic improvements (e.g., Ukraine), whereas some non-democratic states (e.g., China) have been able to achieve great economic successes (Puddington, 2009). Moreover, internal and international conflicts have erupted in a number of newly established democracies (e.g., Serbia and Kosovo).

Furthermore, some of the major democracy promotion donor countries (e.g., USA and UK) have embraced interventionist foreign policies in Iraq and elsewhere. Therefore, their support of democracy promotion programs have been increasingly perceived as hypocritical: "Washington's use of the term 'democracy promotion' has come to be seen overseas not as the expression of a principled American aspiration but as a code word for 'regime change'" (Carothers, 2006, p. 6).

Additionally, some donor organizations have tended to overrate the importance of elections in promoting democracy. Carothers (2002) summarized the problem with electoral assistance:

Democracy promoters have not been guilty—as critics often charge—of believing that elections equal democracy… Nevertheless, they have tended to hold very high expectations for what the establishment of regular, genuine elections will do for democratization. (p. 7)

Electoral Assistance's Landscape

Major Actors

Several levels of actors provide electoral assistance: from bilateral developmental organizations (e.g., USAID, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit/ GTZ, UK Department for International Development/ DIFD) to bilateral political organizations (e.g., National Endowment for Democracy/NED, the German Stiftungen, the Westminster Foundation), and from regional intergovernmental organizations (e.g., Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/OSCE, the Organization of American States, the Organization of African Unity) to international multilateral organizations (e.g., UNDP, International IDEA). In addition, a number of foundations and NGOs list electoral assistance among the development services they provide worldwide (e.g., the Carter Center, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems/IFES) or in specific regions (e.g., the Asia Foundation, the African-American Institute).[1]

Among the latter category of actors—i.e., nonprofit nongovernmental organizations—U.S.-based groups seem to predominate (Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 2004). A handful of those NGOs make the headlines of international news media more often than not: IFES, the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Asia Foundation, and the Carter Center.

NGOs that make up this "vanguard group" (Bjornlund, 2004) receive funds from a variety of donors, including U.S. and non-U.S. bilateral organizations (e.g., USAID, NED, DFID, AusAID, Canadian International Development Agency/CIDA), Japan International Cooperation Agency/ JICA), as well as multilateral organizations (e.g., European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/OSCE, UNDP, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank/ADB) and private sources (e.g., Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Open Society Institute).[2]

Frequently, these NGOs enter into alliances among themselves (e.g., IFES, IRI and NDI in the Consortium of Electoral and Political Processes Strengthening/CEPPS) or with other organizations (e.g., IFES with UNDP, International IDEA and others in the Electoral Knowledge Network/ACE[3]) in order to implement electoral assistance programs.

Electoral Assistance's Phases and Activities

Typically, support to the election systems and processes in a country involve the efforts of a few or several donor organizations--depending on the country size and its political situation. Generally, at least two development agencies (e.g., a bilateral such as USAID, and an international such as UNDP) focus on a comprehensive, long-term assistance that includes three major phases: (1) pre-election; (2) the election day; and (3) post-election (Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 2004; Hart, 2006). Several other donor organizations come into play around the election day only, by funding short-term election observation missions (Bjornlund, 2004; Chand, 1997).

The objectives of the long-term assistance differ from those of the election observation missions. The long-term assistance seeks to (1) strengthen the political prerequisites for elections; (2) solidify an independent media; (3) establish and develop a legal and institutional electoral infrastructure that assures free and fair access to all eligible voters; (4) monitor the elections to decrease the probability of widespread fraud; and (5) strengthen the democratization process and promote the reconciliation between the parties (Hart, 2006).

The objectives of the short-term observation are limited to visiting polling stations and reporting on the observed irregularities during balloting and counting (Chand, 1997). Occasionally, the terms *monitoring* and *observation* are used interchangeably. However, the monitoring process is somewhat more engaged and long-term whereas the observation process is rather passive and short-term (Bjornlund, 2004). Monitoring begins a year before and ends months after the election and involves quite a few actors (e.g., political parties, media, governments, etc.), whereas the election-day observation usually focuses on voters and polling station workers only.

Pre-Election Activities

During the pre-election phase, the implementing NGOs or coalitions of NGOs assist with (a) the development/amendment of the electoral law; (b) institutional-building activities for/with the national election commission;

(c) monitoring of the candidate registration and other administrative processes; (d) surveying the political climate, candidates' campaigns, and media coverage; (e) mobilizing/training local poll watchers; and (f) facilitating public education and get-out-the-vote campaigns.

Typically, two or three different implementers would be responsible each for one type of pre-election activities (e.g., legislative, administrative and political). For instance, the CEPPS NGOs would divide the responsibilities among them with IFES taking the lead in the administrative process, and NDI and IRI handling the legislative and political processes.

Transnational NGO Example: According to its website, IFES (2009a) seeks to bring transparency to elections by involving local civil societies in the process (e.g., providing observer training, facilitating negotiations with national election commissions, etc.) and by incorporating anti-fraud mechanisms (e.g., developing political finance instruments, providing transparent ballot boxes, etc.). In September 2003, IFES (2009b) launched the EVER project, which helps civil society organizations (CSOs) in a given country develop a toolkit to effectively monitor and prevent election violence in conjunction with election management bodies and security forces. The EVER project also tracks incidents of electoral violence in a global journal to which CSOs contribute source material (IFES, 2009b).

Election Day Activities

Right before the election, several teams of international observers arrive. It is not unusual to have dignitaries among international observers (e.g., parliamentarians, government officials, etc.). As mentioned earlier, their responsibilities are limited to visiting poll stations on the election day, observing/monitoring the process, and issuing initial assessments and final reports (Carothers, 2004; Chand, 1997).

Referring to the expansion of election observation activities in the 1980s and 1990s, Chand (1997) described five observer functions: (1) the presence of observers improves the credibility of the election process by deterring fraud; (2) observers provide technical assistance to improve electoral process; (3) observers can mediate disputes; (4) observers help open up the electoral process by bringing problems into the open and pressuring for their ratification; and (5) outside organization involved in monitoring are usually part of a wider peace-building strategy (pp. 546-547).

The NGOs implementing the pre-election assistance occasionally bring in their own international observation teams but, by and large, they provide support to local teams of poll watchers (Bjornlund, 2004; Carothers, 2004). With

reference to how transnational NGOs utilize their elections assistance resources, Chand (1997) observed, "The crucial role of NGOs in international election monitoring has contributed to greater pluralism in global civil society, and produced a web of largely cooperative ties based on niche specialization between IGOs and NGOs" (p. 559).

Transnational NGO Examples: According to its website, the Asia Foundation (2009) views elections as opportunities through which broader democratization objectives, including strengthening of civil society, can be advanced. Therefore, the organization focuses on training domestic monitors and facilitating regional observers rather than bringing international teams.

The Carter Center (2009a) doesn't send its representatives unless invited by a country's election authorities and welcomed by the major political parties to ensure it can play a meaningful, nonpartisan role. Long before election day, observers are expected to analyze election laws, assess voter education and registration, and evaluate fairness in campaigns. The Carter Center also believes that the presence of impartial observers when votes are cast can deter fraud. Before, during, and after an election, the Center's findings are reported to the international community through public statements.

Post-election Activities

During the final, post-election stage, development NGOs assist the election commissions and civil society organizations with the processes of vote tabulation, claim adjudication, and results assessment.

Transnational NGO Example: Following the contentious presidential elections in December 2007, IFES (2009c) continued its work with the Election Commission of Kenya (ECK) under a grant provided by the Open Society Institute's East Africa Initiative. A number of specific recommendations for the ECK itself, as well as the country's legislature, were issued by the NGO and subsequently adopted by the Kenyan government.

Achievements and Setbacks of Electoral Assistance

The outcomes of electoral assistance and observation are said to have both positive and negative aspects. "[E]lection monitoring, both domestic and international, can contribute to democratization but can also be counterproductive," argued Bjornlund (2004, p. 14).

Carothers (2004) praises election programs for: (1) helping draw attention to and publicize electoral fraud; (2) occasionally preventing fraud albeit it is hard to prove; (3) working closely with domestic groups to detect manipulations

of voter registration, strategic ballot tempering and distortions in vote tabulation; (4) encouraging citizens to vote and the opposition to run for office; (5) improving the standards of election administration; and (6) training domestic poll watchers.

Bjornlund (2004) emphasizes the following positives outcomes of electoral assistance: (1) improved public confidence in politically uncertain environments; (2) fairer election rules; (3) better campaign practices; (4) better informed public; (5) moral support to democratic activists; (6) increased transparency, which in turn deters fraud and helps reduce irregularities in the election administration.

Among the negative aspects of electoral assistance Carothers (2004) mentions: (1) the ineffectiveness of outside monitors and observers in detecting fraud beyond the blatant ballot-stuffing; (2) the inevitable limitations of observing—i.e., by definition, observers are not allowed to intervene; (3) implementers cannot force political factions to cooperate; (4) implementers can't guarantee that the international community will back up their findings of election fraud; (5) the proliferation of amateurish groups and unprofessional observers; (6) disproportionate attention to election day itself while fraud occurs before and after; (7) monitoring reports praise the authorities for order during the election and avoid criticizing biased media coverage or unequal resources; (8) reports focus on technical conditions rather than political problems (e.g., don't recognize that sometimes elections legitimize the power of undemocratic leaders); (9) the standard of "free and fair" elections is a "sound bite;" (10) observation missions find it difficult to criticize governments (e.g., OSCE can't criticize its member states); (11) some implementers are partisan; and (12) some donors and implementers underemphasize the role of domestic monitors.

Bjornlund (2004) adds the following negatives outcomes: (1) "too much is expected of elections and election monitoring," (p. 12); (2) "too much emphasis on election mechanics and election day itself" (p. 13); (3) observation missions are often superficial; (3) monitoring missions often have objectives other than democratization (e.g. national interests of sponsoring countries); and (4) international monitors attract more attention and funds than domestic. Bjornlund (2004) concluded: "A focus on form rather than substance and a failure to adhere to universal standards encourage Potemkin village democracies, as authoritarian governments pretend to hold real elections to please donors or others in the international community" (p. 14).

The double-edged-sword effect of elections assistance

in authoritarian states is also discussed in van Beuningen (2007) and Howard & Roessler (2006). Van Beuningen stressed:

> Non-democratic governments might feel that pro-democracy activities in their countries undermine their hold on power, and the fact that these activities are sponsored by external agents may provide them with sufficient argumentation for repressive measures, adducing threats to national sovereignty and stability (p. 55).

Although in the recent years many authoritarian regimes hold regular, competitive elections between a government and an opposition, "the incumbent leader or party typically resorts to coercion, intimidation, and fraud to attempt to ensure electoral victory," argue Howard & Roessler (2006, p. 365). Nevertheless, Howard & Roessler found that such elections occasionally result in a liberalizing electoral outcome, which often leads to considerably less authoritarian new governments.

On the other hand, Van Beuningen observed, pro-democracy activists in those countries and their western sponsors sometimes do not "clearly separate their goal from more immediate and profane partisan objectives, thus providing substance to the autocrats' claim of illegitimate political meddling" (2007, p. 55). By *western sponsors* Van Beuningen meant not only donor organizations but also transnational NGOs implementing electoral assistance. At times, their explicit or implicit partisanship undermines their good intentions of promoting democracy.

NGOs' Efforts to Address the Problems with Electoral Assistance

NGOs seem to understand that a democratic election alone does not change the political culture of a society overnight. Asia Foundation (2009), Carter Center (2009a) and IFES (2009a), for example, stress the importance of long-term efforts to build an inclusive democratic society, promote respect for human rights and laws, and encourage full citizen participation in government.

While recognizing the shortcomings of their current elections work, NGOs are not ready to give up their electoral efforts. For example, the Carter Center's (2009a) elections program is rooted in a deep conviction that more governments than ever recognize democratic elections as essential to establishing their legitimate authority. Soudriette (2008) of IFES believes that electoral assistance is necessary in

particular in those countries where electoral chaos not only triggers internal conflicts and violates basic freedoms of their citizens but also threatens regional peace and stability.

As the election observation component has been criticized the most, NGOs are joining efforts with multilateral and bilateral organizations to adopt a set of fundamental principles that would guide election observation. At a meeting at the United Nations in October 2005, 22 inter-governmental and nongovernmental organizations endorsed the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and pledged to further the goals of harmonization and cooperation in the field of election observation (United Nations, 2005). Since its initial signing, an additional 10 organizations have endorsed the Declaration.

Echoing development and political science scholars, NGOs themselves engage in scholarly research to analyze and improve their electoral assistance. For instance, a recipient of the William and Kathy Hybl Democracies Study Fellowship used the IFES's funding to critically assess the current rating of countries based on a set of common democratic principles and develop an alternative, multivariable index that measures the quality of elections and countries' democratic progress (IFES, 2009d). Similarly, the Carter Center (2009b) is working on developing a single set of criteria for assessing democratic elections based on public international law.

The Role of Transnational Civil Society

The sources reviewed in this paper not only confirm that elections is indeed an actual "global goods challenge" affecting both the developed and developing worlds, but also suggest that transnational civil society–and specifically, transnational NGOs–could play a greater role in tackling this challenge.

Electoral Assistance Community

As donor and recipient communities increasingly question the effectiveness of electoral assistance, some transnational NGOs join forces with bilateral and multilateral organizations in an attempt to disperse doubts (e.g., the above mentioned collaborations between IFES and UNDP). NGOs and other concerned organizations advocate for a long-term commitment on the part of the implementers to address electoral assistance problems in a holistic manner that involves not only recipient governments but also the civil societies of recipient countries.

Yet, evidence seems to show that most of the efforts to improve electoral assistance are carried out by a handful of

U.S.-based transnational NGOs (e.g., Asia Foundation, Carter Center, IFES, IRI, and NDI). Whether the quality of their electoral assistance is praised (Bjorlund, 2004; Carothers, 2004, 2009; van Beuningen, 2007) or criticized as partisan and meddling (Carothers, 2004, 2009; Van Beuningen, 2007), theirs are almost *de rigueur* names in debates about elections and democracy promotion. Most of these transnational NGOs are members or partners international networks and initiatives that bring together those concerned with the state of affairs in electoral assistance (e.g., the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network[3] or the Global Initiative Enfranchise People with Disabilities[4]).

It seems virtually impossible to identify the plethora of other NGOs frequently criticized as a whole for their failure to understand the importance of electoral assistance and lack of commitment towards supporting democracy in recipient countries. Although scholars and development practitioners disapprove of those "shortsighted" types of NGOs, they usually abstain from naming names (Bjorlund, 2004; Carothers, 2004).

Thus, it appears that the community of electoral assistance NGOs is, in fact, not so large. Its core NGOs, therefore, could begin addressing the problems with elections by reaching out to the lesser-known transnational NGOs and encouraging their participation in the electoral assistance initiatives such as, for example, the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network or the Global Initiative Enfranchise People with Disabilities. Once included in the electoral assistance community, smaller NGOs would have an opportunity to understand the challenges this community faces and either improve the quality of their assistance or be deprived of donor funds. The inclusion of weak NGOs may precipitate their subsequent exclusion. As simplistic as this method sounds, apparently it has worked in other development areas.

Tackling the Global Elections Challenge

The literature (e.g., Carothers, 2009; Chhotray & Hulme, 2007; van Beuningen, 2007) and the analyzed NGO cases demonstrate that the global elections challenge consists of two components: (1) political—i.e., the problems with elections both in democratic and in authoritarian states; and (2) developmental –i.e., the problems with elections assistance. The elections assistance NGO community, with or without its less-experienced actors, could play a role in addressing both.

Some Political Solutions

Possible political solutions to the elections challenge include

education and attitude change regarding the relationship between elections and democracy. While elections do not equal democracy, they are indispensable for democracy—that is, for all citizens to have access to power and enjoy rights and freedoms.

Although the suspicions of cooptation by Western governments are almost inevitable, the transnational NGOs seeking to promote democratic ideals and support universal rights would have to expand their reach to those communities that feel disenchanted with election outcomes. Unlike some governments and donor organizations, principled NGOs can under certain conditions "uphold international standards rather than advance bilateral policy interests" (Carothers, 2004, p.95). Moreover, in some situations, certain NGOs can take sides, show their support to local democrats, and avoid faking impartiality that is said to breed cynicism (Bjornlund, 2004).

In other cases, influencial transnational NGOs would want to demonstrate their impartiality. The latter, along with their host-nation counterparts, could concentrate on tailoring election education to the political and cultural environments of recipient countries. Regardless of sources of funding, transnational NGOs should to engage the entire political spectrum--from undemocratic to democratic political parties and politically-active civil society groups. By steering clear of partisanship, NGOs could establish credibility and, ultimately, enhance effectiveness of their programs.

Some Developmental Solutions

Possible developmental solutions involve changes and improvements both inside and outside of transnational NGOs. Donors and NGOs involved in electoral assistance and elections observation would have to design more comprehensive programs in which elections are not the end but rather the means to a periodical reevaluation of effectiveness.

Although some NGOs' strengths are in electoral systems and processes only, their activities would have to be incorporated into the overall assistance process, focusing on equality and justice, governance, and capacity building. The before- and after-election-day efforts would have to be stepped up, in particular work on election law, media coverage, campaign financing, and adjudication of complaints. Moreover, the current initiative to link electoral assistance with elections observation (International IDEA, 2009) would have to be pursued more aggressively to achieve continuity and avoid overlapping.

In addition, transnational NGOs would have to improve their cooperation with national and local NGOs,

media and political parties. The empowerment of national and local civil societies to monitor election campaigns and their coverage would improve assessment of the pre- and post-election environments while deterring gross and subtle election fraud that is best detected with local monitors and observers.

Some transnational NGOs could also take a more active position vis-à-vis elections fraud. On the one hand, they could plead the case of opposition parties and candidates before international organizations that have leverage with governments and could persuade or compel governments to recognize or correct fraud. On the other hand, transnational NGOs—not obstructed by diplomatic protocol—could go beyond mere observation and focus on strategies to prevent fraud, shame authorities involved in or overlooking fraud, and publicize the cases of fraud or candidate persecution internationally.

Finally, transnational NGOs could do a better job self-regulating in the field of electoral assistance. Adhering to a set of international standards would prevent NGOs from engaging in "electoral tourism" (Carothers, 2004) and raise prospects of providing meaningful assistance.

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Endnotes

1. From the late 1990s to 2006, the author participated in several international election observation missions and campaign-related assignments with a number of the NGOs and intergovernmental organizations listed.

2. Major funders and donors for the NGOs listed can be accessed at: IFES, http://www.ifes.org/working-fundingpartners.html; IRI, http://www.iri.org/annualreports.asp; NDI, http://www.ndi.org/who_supports_our_work; the Asia Foundation, http://asiafoundation.org/about/donorsandpartners.php#Government; the Carter Center, http://www.cartercenter.org/homepage.html.

3. Information about the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and its partner NGOs can be found at http://aceproject.org/about-en/organisations/partners/default.

Information about the Global Initiative to Enfranchise 4. People with Disabilities is available at http://www.electionaccess.org/.