

Gretchen Birkle

REGIONAL DIRECTOR, AFRICA

Gretchen Birkle currently serves as regional director for Africa at IRI, where she is responsible for developing and managing programs in transitioning African countries. Programs focus on elections and support to issue-based political parties and civil society organizations, and a regional governance program in sub-Saharan African that strengthens linkages between elected officials and citizens.

Birkle has extensive experience managing democracy and governance programs in closed societies and developing countries around the world. During her tenure at IRI, she launched programming for IRI's Women's Democracy Network (WDN), conducted IRI's first in-country programs in Belarus and opened IRI's first offices in Central Asia. Birkle was resident country director of IRI's electoral participation project in Kabul, Afghanistan.

In 2012, Birkle was appointed deputy director of the Middle East and North Africa division at IRI. She managed day-to-day operations of elections, civil society and governance programs in eight countries of North Africa and the Levant.

From 2010-2011, Birkle directed IRI's Afghanistan office where she led local and expatriate staff working from seven field offices and a headquarters office in Kabul. The team was successful in reaching voters via IRI-supported coalitions, providing new campaign techniques to parliamentary candidates and airing cutting-edge media programs with local partners.

Birkle provided strategic and program oversight for WDN, IRI's first global initiative, from 2006-2010. Since its launch in 2006, WDN has reached women all over the world and has become one of the signature initiatives of the Institute.

From 2004-2006, Birkle was senior coordinator at the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, where she represented the bureau testifying before Congress and provided strategic direction for programming and human rights reporting.

Birkle's public service includes her position from 2007-2010 as a board of director representative to the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Birkle was previously a legislative assistant on foreign affairs and defense appropriations to Senator Arlen Specter and worked at the public affairs firm Ogilvy, Adams and Rinehart and at Export Today magazine, where she wrote on business opportunities in Russia.

Birkle has worked and traveled extensively in Ukraine, Belarus and throughout the Middle East. She has observed elections in Africa, Asia, Eurasia and the Middle East. She graduated from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (MA) and Pennsylvania State University (BA).