



U.S. Election Support in Africa

Testimony of William R. Sweeney, Jr.
President & CEO, International Foundation for Electoral Systems

House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,
and International Organizations

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Karen Bass, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: on behalf of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, I deeply appreciate this opportunity to discuss the impact of U.S. electoral support in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Since 1987, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, better known as IFES, has worked in over 145 countries to support citizens’ right to participate in free, fair, transparent and accountable elections. Our active programs in Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe empower the individuals and institutions that make democracy work at every turn of the electoral cycle. IFES provides technical assistance to strengthen local capacity and electoral inclusiveness in societies that aspire to realize their full democratic potential.

Mr. Chairman, given that American resources and interests are at stake, it is both right and important to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of American electoral assistance in Sub-Saharan Africa. Has U.S. assistance had a positive impact? Are the long term needs of Africa’s electoral systems being met? How can assistance, moving forward, be as efficient and effective as possible? What recommendations can implementing organizations share to improve political and electoral processes in Africa?

After all, we are all well aware of the many obstacles to democracy in Africa. The electoral landscape is complex, but I ask you to frame this troubled picture with all of the recent, remarkable triumphs of African democracy, victories in nations like Liberia, Ghana, and Guinea that would have seemed unlikely 10 or twenty years ago: the peaceful transitions we’ve seen; the millions that are increasingly choosing ballot boxes over coups as a vehicle for change; the fledgling culture of trust emerging from the dust of terrible, violent conflicts.

This is why, Mr. Chairman, the recommendation I respectfully make today is that the U.S. Congress maintain and even increase American engagement with democracy and governance programming, particularly such public institution building as the strengthening of electoral management bodies (EMBs) and electoral cycles. Such support directly aids the institutions and individuals best positioned to promote peaceful change, and arms them with the necessary knowledge to tailor democratic ideals to each unique nation.

Kenya’s 2013 elections speak to the progress that can be made when the U.S. Government partners with Africa’s public institutions. The Kenyan election of December 27, 2007, resulted in over 1,200 deaths,

thousands injured, over 300,000 people displaced and around 42,000 houses and businesses looted or destroyed.¹ After the Kriegler and Waki Commission Reports, the country spent years rebuilding its public institutions to prepare for the 2013 elections. Mr. Chairman, Kenya did not burn on March 4, 2013, and the elections' results were certified by the Kenyan Supreme Court. I would like to believe that investments by USAID, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development and others, as well as the technical support by IFES to Kenya's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, played an important role Kenya's triumph.

Robust support from the U.S. government is critical now, more than ever, as continued U.S. support of elections in Sub-Saharan Africa will incrementally help stabilize emerging democracies and will be the bedrock upon which new democracies are be built. I say "incrementally," as elections are not in themselves change incarnate, but rather a medium for the transition from tyranny to stable representative government. Democracy is not a one-time inoculation against despotism, violence and corruption, but a journey, Mr. Chairman, which our own great country and all other mature democracies took decades, and wars, to muddle through. IFES is proud of the progress being made in Africa, particularly given the cost-effectiveness of our programming: for example, our 18-month program in Burkina Faso is projected to total \$1.3 million and our 15-month program in Uganda, \$1.15 million. These projects are a drop in the Foreign Assistance bucket, and are none the less producing significant results.

For all of the challenges Africa has and will continue to face, the story of elections in Africa—while still unfinished—is one of success, and one written by and with the African people with the technical support provided by IFES and our partners. IFES is backed by USAID and the U.S. Department of State, as well as global bilateral partners such as the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which have also identified the potential for democratic change in Africa.

Introduction: Africa's "Democracy Deficit"

Make no mistake—African citizens endorse democracy. Nearly 87 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's eligible population is registered to vote; over 45 million ballots were cast in the region in 2014 alone²; and a recent Afrobarometer publication based on more than 51,000 face-to-face interviews in 34 countries reveals that the demand for democracy in Africa exceeds supply.³ This "democracy deficit" felt amongst the vast majority of citizens is not surprising, given the oftentimes predatory political ambitions of the elite. It is

¹ "REPORT ON POST-ELECTION VIOLENCE IN KENYA - UN Human Rights Team." Ushahidi RSS. N.p., 20 Mar. 2008. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.ushahidi.com/2008/03/20/report-on-post-election-violence-in-kenya-un-human-rights-team/>>.

² The total number of votes casts in sub-Saharan Africa in 2014, as reported by International IDEA, is 45.134 million. "International IDEA." Voting from Abroad Database. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2015. <<http://www.idea.int/elections/vfa/search.cfm>>.

³ "Demand for Democracy Is Rising in Africa, But Most Political Leaders Fail to Deliver", Michael Bratton and Richard Houessou, 23 April 2014 Afrobarometer Policy Paper #11; http://www.afrobarometer.org/files/documents/policy_brief/ab_r5_policypaperno11.pdf

particularly evident in a number of countries, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The survey further found that although less than half (43 percent) consider their country a democracy, they were nonetheless satisfied with the way democracy works. The demand and desire for democracy by the African people also provides hope that the so-called "democracy recession"—as described by various scholars who argue that there is a steady erosion of global levels of democracy and freedom—can and should be countered.

Mr. Chairman, a robust rule of law not only protects the institutional policies and electoral frameworks that provide the foundation for a healthy democracy, but also fosters confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. However, credible elections are only possible if an election management body is constitutionally independent and capable of managing the full electoral cycle. To accomplish this, it must be equipped with qualified leadership, a competent cadre of election officials and support staff, sound election management procedures and an adequate budget. A successfully-managed electoral cycle⁴ establishes expectations that the next cycle will yield equal levels of satisfaction and credibility, as well as engenders confidence in the process and acceptance of the outcome. Collectively, these factors strengthen a country's political and constitutional processes and deepen the expectation that regular conduct of elections is the norm—a sentiment that we in the United States are fortunate enough to take for granted.

Two Pan-African Charters define the opportunity for voter enfranchisement to continue to grow. Article 13 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights provides citizens with "*...the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law*". The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance obliges signatories to "*Nurture, support and consolidate good governance by promoting democratic culture and practice, building and strengthening governance institutions and inculcating political pluralism and tolerance*", as well as to "*Promote the holding of regular free and fair elections to institutionalize legitimate authority of representative government as well as democratic change of governments.*"

In 2015 alone, some 311 million people in Africa are registered to participate in 40 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections, as well as three referenda. The electorates range in size from the island state of São Tomé and Príncipe's 92,000 registered voters to Nigeria's 73 million. The extent to which these voters exercise their franchise is a function of confidence in the democratic process and evidence of their belief in the election management body's institutional integrity. Elections in the Sub-Saharan countries of Burundi, Guinea, Mali and Nigeria will be of particular importance, as they will not only test the countries' commitment to the rule of law, but also the institutional capacity of the respective election management bodies. In addition, elections in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire will mark the transition from post-conflict governance to democracies.

⁴ "What Is the Electoral Cycle?" Electoral Cycle —. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2015. <<http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/electoral-assistance/electoral-cycle>>.

As partners in the pursuit for credible elections, we are acutely aware that the challenges African nations face are as diverse as the region itself. Mr. Chairman, I am honored to testify today on the significant—but not insurmountable—hurdles African nations face in the pursuit of free, fair, accountable and transparent elections, as well as new, cost-effective opportunities to harness both the power of grassroots engagement and cutting-edge, yet accessible, technology to strengthen election management, mitigate and prevent electoral violence, fortify the integrity and transmission of electoral outcomes, and empower the individuals that make democracy work day-to-day, and election-to-election. IFES takes pride in its unique ability to tailor global best practices in election administration to local needs and provide the tools, training and technical assistance required to carry out credible elections. We envision a world in which every individual has a voice and a vote. The continued support of the U.S. Government—particularly USAID—is imperative to this goal.

Burundi: Harnessing Grassroots and Technology to Mitigate Violence

In June 2015, Burundi has scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections that will test the viability of the country's political institutions. Many analysts fear that incidents of violence will mar the country's 2015 elections. The threat of electoral violence is very real in Burundi, particularly because the concepts of citizen participation in and the selection of leaders through elections have not yet been fully woven into the country's political culture. Regardless of the elections' credibility, electoral violence has the potential to undermine results and spark widespread conflict.

In response to these challenges, IFES has implemented a comprehensive program to encourage reform and provide the tools that can assist local officials in conducting credible and secure elections. In addition to providing technical assistance to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), IFES supports a peaceful electoral process through civic and voter education, as well as through the implementation of Early Warning/Early Response (EWER) technology. EWER works on a grassroots-level to help isolate and deescalate electoral violence by collecting, analyzing, and producing public reports on local instances of violence, as well as providing recommendations to electoral commissions, police, civil society organizations, and community leaders on preventing future incidents. In another promising effort to prevent and monitor electoral conflict, later this month, IFES will launch an open source, *Ushahidi*-based mapping platform for nationwide monitors to report occurrences of electoral violence through mobile communications, and will pair the platform with the implementation of peace committees as a community-based early response measure. These exciting advancements will proactively mitigate the risk of electoral violence and help contain instances of violence that may occur—they may save lives as well as elections, Mr. Chairman, and are worthy of American support.

To complement IFES' efforts to mitigate electoral violence, and as part of its support to and in collaboration with the CENI, IFES has facilitated communication with relevant stakeholders and drafted a proactive work plan to effectively manage the electoral process. In order to encourage an active and informed citizenry, IFES also continues to work with several civil society organizations and radio stations to conduct grassroots civic and voter education sessions that enhance widespread understanding of the electoral process.

The Central African Republic: A Fragile Opportunity for Change

Although the intensity of the civil war between Séléka and anti-Balaka militia in the Central African Republic has subsided, the country remains highly unstable, as starkly illustrated by an almost complete lack of state presence outside the capital, Bangui. Following the cessation of most conflict, an 18-month transitional period overseen by an interim council was established, with the intention of concluding with presidential and legislative elections. However, thousands of ex-Séléka militia are still armed, and maintain significant influence in several of the country's 16 prefectures. This faction has prevented the National Election Authority (ANE) from establishing offices in these regions, going as far as brazenly abducting ANE officials conducting voter education activities. Further, the ANE has opened only 83 of the 141 planned offices as a result of the severe security situation.

Despite some promising developments, including the adoption of a new electoral code, the original February/March 2015 deadline for parliamentary and presidential elections has delayed (by the consensus of the ANE, the Transitional Council, and other stakeholders) to July/August 2015, effectively extending the transitional period to its 24-month maximum. The conduct of these elections is recognized as a central condition to restoring a democratic process in the CAR. However, some key local stakeholders maintain that disarmament is a necessary prerequisite; absent this, many believe the electoral process will likely be derailed. In addition, budgetary limitations, including a nearly 90 percent shortfall, continue to delay election preparations.

Notwithstanding all of these challenges, the international community's short- and long-term support to local stakeholders will eventually yield results. Last fall, when I met with leaders of the ANE, it was very clear that they were aware and entirely transparent about their many difficulties, nonetheless, passionately pled for electoral support. Like citizens in many African nations, they are weary of the power-hungry games played by the elite, and have the courage, resolve and pragmatism to implement democracy—they simply lack the resources.

This is why IFES is proud that since September 2014, through its U.S. Department of State-funded "Electoral Support to the Central African Republic," or ESCAR, program, we have worked with the ANE to provide targeted, rapid-response technical support in the pre-election period via the deployment of high-caliber technical experts. For example, IFES has deployed electoral law and voter registration experts that have developed subsequently-adopted changes to the country's electoral code, as well as a provisional operational plan for the ANE to facilitate an organized and efficient electoral process. The entire budget for this 5 month program (which we expect to be granted a no-cost extension to June 2015) was \$297,000.

Several challenges, both political and organizational, lay ahead for elections in the CAR. The transitional government is soon expected to conduct a forum in Bangui on issues of reconciliation, political challenges and next steps on the transition process; the decisions made during these talks will undoubtedly have a significant impact on the election timeline and implementation. Additionally, the details of the voter registration process have yet to be finalized, and a recent decision by the electoral commission to suspend biometric identifiers in registration has sparked confusion on appropriate registration methodology and

documentation—particularly with regard to the large internally displaced population and refugees in Chad and Cameroon—which will inevitably affect the efficiency of the electoral process. The elections ultimately have the potential to be credible and transparent, but their success will depend on the ability of the ANE to efficiently and comprehensively manage the registration and polling process amidst political instability.

Burkina Faso: Great Expectations

Burkina Faso's presidential and legislative elections in October 2015 will conclude a precarious 12-month transitional period under a military-civilian government, established after the resignation of former President Blaise Compaoré, which, after his 27 years in office, was widely regarded as a democratic success.

Popular expectations for change are high in the post-Compaoré era, and IFES and its partners are working to fulfill the hopes of Burkinabé citizens. The October 2015 elections offer an unprecedented opportunity to deepen citizens' involvement in electoral and political processes, increase citizens' confidence in the integrity of voting processes and systems and enable young people to channel their new-found activism into peaceful political participation for the first time in over a generation. To capitalize on this environment, and with USAID funding, IFES will conduct a rapid assessment of Burkina Faso's National Independent Electoral Commission's (also known as CENI) needs, so that we may provide targeted technical assistance in support of the upcoming elections. Currently, IFES also plans to work with the CENI to address gaps in key areas such as securing electoral materials, as well as election results tabulation and transmission. In addition, IFES and the CENI will collaborate with local civil society organizations to bolster and disseminate civic and voter education messages that emphasize the need for peaceful elections, especially among youth.

While the Burkinabé population's expectations for transparent and credible elections are high, they are not unrealistic, and are in fact consistent with other Sub-Saharan democracy-deficit countries. However, along with great opportunity, the October elections also carry the potential for great risk. Unless they are viewed as credible, and the results are accepted as a legitimate expression of popular choice, alienated Burkinabé citizens could mobilize as they did so effectively in 2014 to unseat Compaoré.

This popular sentiment lends promise that IFES' key activity in Burkina Faso—assisting the CENI with transparent results tabulation and transmission procedures—will be critical to the public's acceptance of the results and the potential, as well as welcome, return to a popularly-elected democratic government. It is precisely at this juncture when an emerging democracy such as Burkina Faso is most in need of continued support from the United States and organizations such as IFES, to allow the potential for peaceful political change to occur, and for the seeds of democracy to take root.

Mali: After Turmoil, Democracy

Although the deployment of nearly 10,000 U.N. peacekeepers to Mali is credited with permitting the presidential elections of 2013 due to continued insecurity, voter rolls could not be accurately updated and the presidential and local elections scheduled for April 2015 have been delayed until October 2015.

With funding from USAID, IFES provided technical assistance for the 2013 transitional elections to all three electoral management bodies in Mali, with an emphasis on support to the Ministry of Territorial Administration. Included in this support were assistance with results tabulation and transmission and poll worker training.

Under a newly USAID-funded program, IFES is strengthening the capacity of Mali's National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) through poll worker trainings in Bamako's six communes, with a goal of reaching an estimated 10,860 poll workers. These trainings are "cascade-style," meaning we teach individuals to train others in their community to become poll workers. By embracing this efficient, cost-effective, and sustainable model, IFES has successfully trained over 1 million poll workers worldwide. Likewise, IFES is developing an elections supervision platform, and anticipates supporting the electoral reform process by organizing a workshop that would include participants from the Government of Mali and the three election management bodies to discuss the results of their studies of the changes to the legal framework.

Côte d'Ivoire: A Vital Post-Conflict Milestone

With funding provided by USAID, IFES is conducting an assessment of the Ivorian legal and regulatory framework governing elections in anticipation of the November 2015 presidential elections, which represent a crucial post-conflict milestone as well as an enormous test for the country's Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). Specific areas under review include voter registration, boundary delimitation, electoral campaigning, political finance regulations, electoral dispute management, and the compilation and publication of results. The analysis will provide a comprehensive list of recommended reforms and used as a basis for inclusive discussions between stakeholders.

In addition, IFES is undertaking a strategic planning exercise with the CEI to outline roles and responsibilities and clarify election administration and operations procedures. One of the global best practices of the IFES Strategic Planning tools is the engagement by election commissions with all electoral stakeholders: parties, candidates, civil society, religious leaders, media; with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of women, indigenous populations, and persons with disabilities. IFES will also deploy an Election Integrity Specialist to train Commissioners on the development and implementation of robust fraud and malpractice control procedures.

Because scars from the 2010 post-election violence are still relatively fresh, IFES is also conducting a Conflict Sensitivity Analysis in order to better understand the actors, causes, history, dynamics and direction of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire—especially in the realm of political dialogue and the holding of national-level elections in 2015 and 2016. As IFES programming is not limited to specific electoral events, but rather on the entire electoral cycle, activities in Côte d'Ivoire will include milestones and anticipated timelines through the 2018 elections.

Conclusion: Heeding the Voices of Change

Mr. Chairman, the electoral process in multiple Sub-Saharan countries is threatened by a plethora of factors. Among the most ominous are insurgencies and violent conflicts causing mass internal displacement in countries where the state is unable to convincingly restore order—CAR, Nigeria, and Mali—and the potential for post-election violence in Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria and Burundi. In other instances, violence can erupt from an election result, as evidenced by Burundi and Côte d’Ivoire. Although the electoral process itself is not always a direct target, in some instances it is the clear target. In Nigeria, for example, Boko Haram’s continued public threats to disrupt the February 2015 elections resulted in a six-week postponement.

Advancements in election technology are allowing for greater enfranchisement, especially among such traditionally marginalized groups as women, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities. Biometric voter registration and voter identification systems used in Kenya and Nigeria are more sophisticated and capture more information than any system deployed in the United States. These technologies have the capability of reducing ballot-stuffing and voter misidentification, and even mitigating the possibility of post-election violence resulting from allegations of vote tally manipulation. When the appropriate technology is identified and properly deployed, these emerging tools have the potential of engraining new democratic norms where they are absent, and permanently establishing national trust in the conduct and outcome of elections.

Empirical data from the Afrobarometer survey demonstrate the strong desire among Sub-Saharan countries for democratic governance through elections. In Liberia, for example, although the Ebola outbreak that ravaged the country in 2014 instilled such fear that the elections were postponed, the country’s determination to hold the constitutionally-mandated elections was unwavering. With IFES’ technical and material support, Liberia’s National Elections Commission conducted a nearly flawless election under unprecedented conditions. Having only recently emerged from the rule of Charles Taylor and a devastating civil war, Liberia’s progress in election management is remarkable. Liberia had 10 years of civil war. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is in her second term and the country is already preparing for the next presidential election in 2017, in which Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf will not be running per the constitutionally-mandated term limits.

The quality of elections not only embodies the integrity of the democratic process and the rule of law, but also creates expectations that transparent and free elections should be the norm, not the exception. It is therefore imperative that continued technical and material support be provided to those countries that seek to engrain these practices in their political cultures until they are able to fully manage the process independently. Looking forward to 2016, there are a number of pivotal Sub-Saharan countries that will have the opportunity to further establish democratic norms through elections, including: Uganda (President and National Assembly), Benin (President), Djibouti (President), Chad (President), Democratic Republic of the Congo (President and National Assembly), and Côte d’Ivoire (National Assembly), among others.

IFES is proud of its record of partnership in Sub-Saharan Africa. We are both honored and grateful for the confidence USAID, the U.S. Department of State and our international partners have demonstrated in our capacity and commitment through their continued support. Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee, democracy in Africa will certainly be tested in 2015 and beyond. The real tests are ahead of us. In 2014, there were more South African voters who came of age since Nelson Mandela's first election in 1994 than remembered the apartheid era. This demographic challenge of the next generation—their aspirations and their fears—were made personal to all of us by another investment in their future by the U.S. Congress: the Mandela Washington Fellows attending last summer's U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit.

There are no final victories in politics, or elections, or democracy. The challenges will always be ahead of us. Democracy is not measured in one moment, one election, one success, or one failure—it is an ongoing process, and one that the International Foundation for Electoral Systems is committed to support. Thank you.



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