

**Democracy Support Strategies in Africa
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights,
and International Organizations
House Committee on Foreign Affairs**

May 18, 2016

**Questions for the Record from Representative Eliot Engel
for Acting Assistant Administrator Thomas H. Staal**

Question 6:

One of the critiques that has been made against the United States' support for democracy in Africa is that we tend to have a narrow interpretation of success; once an election is held, we downsize our programs in-country and focus elsewhere. What programs or lines of effort does the Administration plan to implement that would focus on critical issues such as electoral reforms, political party strengthening, and civic education that need to occur between elections? And what plans does the Administration have to build upon relatively successful elections (i.e., Nigeria in 2015) and improve upon deeply flawed electoral processes (i.e., Uganda and Republic of the Congo)?

Answer:

The United States Government approaches electoral assistance as part of a larger effort to provide ongoing support to democratic political processes, which includes diplomatic outreach, public engagement as well as foreign assistance programs. USAID provides a wide array of electoral and political process assistance tailored to each country's needs. This includes, for example, technical assistance to electoral management bodies, civil society strengthening, encouraging robust citizen participation—including by women, youth and traditionally marginalized groups, increased and improved oversight of electoral and political processes, political party development, legislative strengthening, electoral security and election violence prevention. Specific areas of focus are implemented based on the U.S. Government's policy priorities, a country's level of democratic development, opportunities for impact, and available resources. While assistance levels often peak in the lead up to an election, efforts to steal or influence electoral processes no longer center on election day. In order to avoid or mitigate threats to democratic electoral and political processes, assistance to build the foundations of democratic development continues in many countries between elections, when the political stakes are lower, and/or after national elections take place. This assistance is tailored to build on any democratic gains made during an electoral process, and to prevent democratic backsliding.

For example, in Nigeria, USAID has supported successive elections for 17 years, recognizing the critical role credible elections would play in consolidating Nigeria's democracy, and in battling corruption. Nigeria's historic 2015 election was an important example in which citizens voted against reelecting the incumbent, their will was respected, and a peaceful transition to a new, democratically elected President took place. The United States Government developed and successfully implemented a comprehensive diplomatic and assistance strategy to support the 2015 electoral process. USAID supported this process by building the capacity of the electoral commission, assisting civil society groups to observe the entire process, and independently verify the outcome using statistical observation methods to increase the accountability,

transparency and credibility of the process. The current portfolio of U.S. Government election programming in Nigeria began one year prior to the 2015 election and will continue over the next several years, building on the democratic gains made in the 2015 elections. These programs continue to provide technical assistance to Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission to better manage elections; support political parties to develop issue-based platforms; assist civil society to advocate on important policy issues including between elections; and build the capacity of domestic observers. USAID assistance is also supporting various electoral reforms that are being tested in the crucible of off-cycle gubernatorial and other elections, as the country prepares for the 2019 general election cycle. In addition to electoral assistance, USAID supports responsive, transparent, and accountable governance at state and local levels, and increased capacity and opportunities for civic engagement between elections.

In contrast, in countries lacking genuine political competition and an environment conducive to free and fair elections, the U.S. Government often uses a more limited approach that avoids or minimizes support to government institutions and election commissions. Instead, in these environments, assistance focuses on creating space for political dialogue, debate and fair competition. Also important in restrictive political environments is assistance to civil society to help build consensus for reform and ensure an informed and active citizenry. Election observation to provide citizen oversight and evidence-based monitoring of electoral processes are also important, as is media monitoring to assess bias.

In the run up to Uganda's February 2016 election, USAID supported voter education campaigns with an emphasis on marginalized groups and sustained inter-party dialogues that reduced tensions and contributed to greater citizen participation. USAID also provided limited assistance to the electoral commission that ensured a more transparent and accessible voter registry, minimizing voter disenfranchisement. Additionally, by strengthening a network of citizen election observers to witness and report impartially on the recently concluded general elections, USAID support helped civil society use evidence based observation to propose electoral reforms that were echoed by the Supreme Court in both its preliminary and final judgment on the elections, which proposed ten specific reforms to the electoral acts.

In preparation for the 2021 elections in Uganda, USAID is focused on preserving space for citizens and opposition forces to voice their issues and advance the electoral reform agenda. Support includes strengthening civil society's capacity to provide objective, data-driven observation and to effectively advocate for electoral reforms. Ongoing civic education programming and support for citizen-government dialogue aims to build public confidence in the process and enhance accountability. In addition, the U.S. Government will continue to monitor the performance of the Ugandan government against post-election reform milestones in order to help gauge political will and the need for additional electoral assistance in the lead up to the elections.

USAID did not support election activities in the Republic of Congo. The Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) remains USAID's major investment in the country. USAID provides funding to the World Health Organization's Regional Office for Africa, based in Brazzaville.