

Afghanistan Program Summary

After the fall of the Taliban, the International Republican Institute (IRI) began helping the Afghan people establish their democracy and prepare for the country's first ever presidential election and the first parliamentary elections in decades. Rather than focus on bolstering existing but distrusted political parties, IRI and its local partners decided to assist and organize independent, moderate, pro-democracy candidates. The independents focused on issues important to Afghans and have the potential to one-day evolve into more trusted political parties.

IRI has now supported Afghan candidates and voters through two election cycles, including presidential elections in 2004 and 2009, parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2010, and provincial council elections in 2009. IRI has deployed observer missions to every Afghan election since the fall of the Taliban. Now, in a post-election period, IRI's work has turned to enlarging grassroots and parliamentary issue-based coalitions and improving the responsiveness of Afghanistan's local governments to the priorities of their constituents.

Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

As the country prepared for the 2010 parliamentary elections, IRI again supported voter education and get-out-the-vote efforts to increase participation. Through an IRI-supported campaign academy, candidates, campaign managers and others involved in the elections strengthened their communications skills, message development, voter outreach, campaign organization and finance, voter targeting and get-out-the-vote efforts.

For the 2009 presidential election and 2010 parliamentary elections, IRI supported televised election programming to convey impartial coverage of Afghanistan's politics. Another IRI-supported television program was *The Candidate*, which placed six youth candidates in competition to win a mock presidency. The show focused on contestants' platform development, communications to the electorate and leadership in appointing campaign officials.

IRI also conducts periodic national surveys to assess Afghan sentiment and uses the data to inform elected officials and coalition partners of issues most important to the population. IRI's surveys have been cited widely in international and local Afghan media.

Grassroots and Issues Coalitions

IRI works with grassroots issue-based coalitions to help them advocate for a range of policies. Connecting these issue coalitions to government is essential. To do this, IRI helps parliamentarians form caucuses that can develop legislative solutions to the problems raised by issue coalitions.

IRI works with issue-based coalitions with more than 80,000 members that serve as access points to educate Afghans about the power of organization and political participation. Coalition members from every region of the country include women and under-represented ethnic groups. This bottom-up, issue-based approach encourages Afghans to organize and become voting blocs deserving the attention of prospective candidates.

The Afghanistan Youth National and Social Organization (ANYSO) and the Afghan Parliament Youth Caucus are examples of connecting an issue coalition with a parliamentary caucus. The groups are working together to find solutions inhibiting youth development, such as lack of jobs, education and dowry rules. The Youth Caucus and ANYSO members have become a strong force for issues affecting young people. IRI also supports the Movement of Afghan Sisters (MAS), which advocates women's issues in each of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. During the lead-

up to the September 2010 parliamentary elections, MAS members conducted trainings to support the candidacies of female parliamentary candidates.

Local Governance

IRI's local governance programming improves the cohesion and advocacy skills of civil society groups while promoting the ability of Afghanistan's district and local officials to respond to these groups' requests. Programming bridges the disconnect between citizens and government on Afghan priorities and seeks to improve local government service delivery to show that community improvements are possible when the government and people work collectively. Programs are focused on six provinces throughout southeast Afghanistan and include 18 districts deemed a priority by the international community as it works to improve stability in the country.

