

Egypt Program Summary

In late January 2011 Egypt was rocked by an unprecedented popular uprising. Sparked by political upheaval in Tunisia, the demonstrations unleashed pent up frustrations of more than 30 years of increasingly authoritarian rule by President Hosni Mubarak. The movement was broad-based and successful in its near singular focus of having Mubarak relinquish power.

Egypt's dramatic events come on the heels of a deeply flawed 2010 election cycle during which Egypt held *shura* council and parliamentary elections that were widely criticized as fraudulent by both Egyptians and the international community. In preparation for those elections, the International Republican Institute (IRI) focused on providing Egyptian political and civil society activists with training on strengthening political parties, conducting broad based advocacy efforts, increasing oversight of local councils and sharing information about the value of public opinion research. Prevented from working in Egypt by the Mubarak government, IRI seminars were conducted in Morocco, Dubai and Jordan, drawing trainers from Canada, Europe and the United States.

Since initiating programming in Egypt in 2005, IRI has seen a dramatic growth in demand for training and technical assistance. In addition to a robust training program, IRI supports exchange visits for Egyptian activists to see firsthand working models of political participation and the role of civil society in elections. In 2010, IRI launched its online Democracy University web portal to make training materials and other information available to a wide audience within the Egyptian activist community.

In 2006, the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that IRI, and similar U.S. democracy organizations, halt program activity within Egypt pending official registration. As of 2011, this registration was still pending, with unofficial word from Egyptian officials that registration would never be given under a Mubarak government. To meet requests for assistance from Egyptian political activists and civil society representatives but remain in compliance with the ministry's directive, IRI began conducting training programs for Egyptians outside the country. With the changes brought about by the January revolution, IRI responded to the requests of Egyptian civil society and political parties by offering trainings in the country.

Political Party Strengthening

IRI conducts trainings on the elements of winning campaigns, including designing and implementing effective communications strategies, utilizing new media and public opinion research and training women candidates. IRI helps prospective candidates in creating effective campaign plans with the hope that they will be able to run in future elections. IRI also trains political party representatives on ways to improve party structure with a focus on platform development, effective grassroots strategies, coalition-building, strategic planning, budgeting and fundraising.

In June 2009, IRI brought a group of Egyptian political party leaders to Belgium and the Netherlands for a study tour and observation mission centered on European parliamentary elections. The participants, representing every major party in Egypt, met with European political party officials, candidates, campaign workers and European Union officials.

In April 2010, IRI conducted a study tour for political party leaders to Taipei, Taiwan that was hosted by the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. The 10-day tour exposed party leaders to how Taiwanese political parties have developed their party structures. The visit also allowed activists to observe modern political party practices related to membership development, voter contact, messaging, strategic communications and party financing.

Survey Research

With the help of Arab polling experts, IRI has conducted workshops on public opinion research focusing on polling and focus group methodology. The workshops have exposed participants to the role public opinion research plays in a democracy, particularly during a political campaign. IRI has also introduced methods that political parties and civic activists can use to implement their own polling programs which will help establish domestic polling capabilities.

Civil Society Strengthening

IRI has a vigorous training program designed to strengthen the role of civil society in the political process. Trainings focus on conducting community needs assessments, communication with citizens, advocacy campaigns, coalition-building, proposal writing, fundraising and budgeting. In addition, IRI sponsors internships for emerging civil society leaders with similar organizations in Europe and elsewhere.

Local Council Oversight

In an effort to promote democratic governance at the local level, IRI trains civil society groups to hold local councils accountable to the public. IRI introduces methods for collecting data to gauge whether councils in their governorates are performing in a way that meets the public's needs.

