

Cambodia Program Summary

The International Republican Institute (IRI) began working in Cambodia in 1992, conducting political party training in anticipation of the UN-sponsored elections in May 1993. Since then, IRI has strengthened the capacity of political parties, conducted election monitoring, supported independent media, conducted nationwide polling, and provided country-wide civic education initiatives in coordination with local partners.

IRI's current programs in Cambodia assist political parties to understand and be more responsive to citizen demands and to equip youth with the knowledge and skills to be active and engaged citizens. As the country opens to democratic practices the expectations of ordinary Cambodians are increasing and they are demanding that their voices be heard.

Political Party Youth Wings

IRI works with all of the political parties represented in the Cambodian Parliament. IRI trains hundreds of political party youth wing members across the country on leadership, policy research, public speaking, and networking. IRI has also created opportunities for the next generation of Cambodian leaders to develop and showcase their skills through debates, youth forums, and youth policy discussion.

In advance of the 2008 national assembly elections, IRI sponsored five public debates in which the parties' youth wings were invited to participate on the condition that the representative be elected by their peers. Six parties participated in the youth wing debates, most of them holding their first internal elections in party history to qualify. The final debate, in Phnom Penh, was broadcast for two hours on the most popular television station in the country. One youth debate participant was subsequently appointed Deputy Secretary of State of an important government ministry.

This was followed up by a pair of televised [youth policy discussions](#) in advance of the May 2009 indirect elections for provincial and district councils. Elected youth representatives from the two largest parties presented solutions to the top five problems facing Cambodians, as determined by an IRI [November 2008 poll](#).

Public Opinion Research

Since January 2004, IRI has sponsored national surveys of Cambodian public opinion, measuring attitudes toward democracy and identifying what citizens deem Cambodia's most pressing issues. Political parties used results from an [IRI February 2008](#) public opinion poll to develop party platforms and messages in advance of the July 2008 National Assembly elections.

IRI works directly with a group of people within each political party to understand what their party can get out of polling, how to understand data, and how to draw actionable conclusions.

Youth Leadership Development

The majority of Cambodia's population is under 25 years old. IRI's programming teaches youth democratic practices and skills to be effective community leaders, informed members of political parties and civil society, and active participants in the political process.

Youth Council of Cambodia

IRI partners with the Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC) to implement civic education and youth governance education training programs throughout the country. YCC's goal is to educate and encourage responsible civic action and to equip young people with the skills to be committed participants in civil society. YCC maintains offices in nine provinces and conducts trainings for youth ages 13 – 27. YCC has trained more than 100,000 Cambodian youth on democratic principles and methods for civic engagement in the democratic process and maintains an active nationwide network of approximately 2,500 motivated and capable young leaders that are making a difference in their communities.

Youth Leadership Challenge

IRI created and produces the groundbreaking Youth Leadership Challenge, a reality-TV show which teaches young people how to be strong leaders in a democratic society through an entertaining format. Young leaders featured in the program gain national prominence as they establish themselves as role models who compete on the merits of their performance and set an example of good citizenship. The show is one of the most popular on Cambodian television.

Youth Festivals

Twice each year, IRI organizes a youth festival in a provincial town to motivate and teach young people about the impact they can have on their government and society. IRI's first festival in Battambang highlighted the success of youth in drawing attention to the arrest of human rights activists, resulting in their eventual release. Subsequent youth festivals have been held in Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, Takeo, Pursat and Prey Veng provinces. Youth attendance at the festivals currently average 60,000 during the two-day event.

