

Elections in Asia

The Asia Foundation has long supported programs promoting free and fair elections and an informed electorate in countries across Asia. The Foundation has cooperated with countries at varying stages in their transitions to democracy, from promoting voter education and fair elections in relatively new democracies to improving voter turnout and transparency in more established Asian democracies. In recent years, the Foundation has implemented significant elections programs in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste.



The Asia Foundation develops and carries out diverse and innovative programs tailored to countryspecific electoral environments through the support of active local partners. Elections programs are based on the Foundation's basic principles of increasing citizen participation and strengthening responsive transparent governance. A majority of activities focus on voter education, including public service announcements, media campaigns, trainings, and organizing debates, and on the election observation and monitoring of every phase of an election—from voter registration and polling locations, to election procedures and ballot counting.

AFGHANISTAN

The Asia Foundation has provided assistance in the preparation of election sites, candidate and voter registration processes, and the elections and counting for every democratic exercise in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

In 2002, the Foundation provided critical and timely technical assistance, international monitors, and logistical support to the Emergency Loya Jirga Commission and the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA). In 2003, the Foundation provided assistance for the

preparations, logistics, and operations of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, from preparing sites for delegate elections through the completion of the event. For the 2004 Presidential Elections and the 2005 National Assembly and Provincial Elections, the Foundation provided a substantial proportion of the operations, logistics, and contract security personnel. In 2005, the Foundation also provided long-term technical assistance to the elections process on media, capacity building for elections management, legal and political affairs, civic education, monitoring and evaluation, observation, and research.

The Foundation helped to establish the Media Commission to ensure media ethics were upheld, both by media and by candidates, during the 2004 elections, and trained more than 300 journalists and 30 political party campaign directors with the same aim during the 2005 elections. For both elections, the Foundation also deployed international observers in cooperation with the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) to locations not covered by other observer missions.

Since 2005, the Foundation has provided vital capacity-building assistance to the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC), with the goal of supporting a successful transition from

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elections management by the UN-sponsored Joint Elections Management Board (JEMB). Support to the IEC up to 2008 focused on training and provision of technical advice on strategic planning, establishment of an elections resource center, election observation visits, management training, and broad capacity building involving trainings (and training of trainers) related to elections.

Since 2004, the Foundation has remained a major contributor to voter and civic education programs. The Foundation intends to provide focused technical assistance, civic education, and election observation support for the 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections and the 2010 Wolesi Jirga and District Council elections.

BANGLADESH

Elections are a cornerstone of good governance in Bangladesh, and for most voters, their principal mode of engagement in political affairs. With assistance from The Asia Foundation, the 32-member Election Working Group (EWG) coalition implemented a comprehensive national program in preparation for the 2008 parliamentary and *upazila* (local government) elections.

EWG supports free and fair elections; conducts voter and civic education; and promotes public dialogue on electoral reform. Between July 2007 and September 2008, the EWG worked with the Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC) and the armed forces publicize voter registration procedures in conjunction with a new national voter list with photo-IDs.

On election day, December 29, 2008, EWG was the first observer mission to attest to the quality of the election through a Quick Impression Survey report released on election night. Five days later, the EWG summarized the aggregated findings of more than 155,000 polling booth and mobile observers. They joined the international observer missions in affirming that the election met international standards of freedom, fairness, and transparency.

While there were reports from around the country of incidents of violence among rival political factions and administrative irregularities, there was no evidence of any broad administrative failure, systemic fraud, or other problems that would compromise the overall quality of the election. Voter turnout, estimated at 87 percent, was exceptionally high by international standards. There was an especially high turnout of women voters and first-time voters — and a record number of 19 women Members of Parliament elected.

INDONESIA

Indonesia in 2008 is a democratic and highly decentralized state. Building on successfully implemented, high-quality elections in 1999 and 2004, direct election for district heads were introduced in June 2005.

Since 1999, The Asia Foundation has supported the People's Voter Education Network (JPPR) in their efforts to ensure free and fair elections. JPPR has 36 institutional members, many of which are affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah (Islamic mass-based organizations with more than 70 million members), while also including Christian and interfaith organizations and a network of radio stations. JPPR is coordinated by a Jakarta-based National Secretariat which coordinates field activities, produced election materials, and participates in public policy discussions.

To encourage candidates to develop clear policies, JPPR has organized 22 candidate questionnaires since 2005, requiring candidates to make specific policy pledges. JPPR has also hosted 40 non-partisan candidate debates, and since 1999, has produced more than 23 million pieces of voter information materials.

For the 2004 National Assembly elections, JPPR deployed 141,000 election day observers, held voter education meetings, and distributed materials in the country's most remote regions. Since 2005, JPPR has monitored 330 local elections and deployed 80,000 volunteers. Observers provide a deterrence against election fraud, as well as note issues arising on election day.

With the data JPPR receives from the field, it comments on trends and developments that impact the quality of the elections. These findings are disseminated widely through the media and public fora. JPPR is the only national civil society organization in Indonesia still observing elections and providing public comment based on field-based findings.

MALAYSIA

In Malaysia The Asia Foundation works with local organizations to support voter education, elections monitoring, and public opinion polling. Through the National Institute of Electoral Integrity, the Foundation provides communitybased voter education to citizens in Sabah and Sarawak, the country's two largest states. The program also trains community mobilizers to continue voter awareness programs in their villages. The Foundation also supported national and international election monitoring during the 12th General Elections of March 2008 and the by-elections in the town of Permatang Pauh in August 2008. With the Merdeka Centre for Opinion

Research, the Foundation annually surveys young Malaysians to gauge their views on politics, voting, and social and economic issues.

MONGOLIA

Mongolia's fifth Parliamentary election since the nation's independence in 1990 was held on June 29, 2008. More than 400 party and independent candidates vied for 76 seats in a 26 constituencies. Reports of vote buying and ballot box tampering in the 2004 elections indicated significant need for observation and monitoring of the 2008 elections.

The Asia Foundation deployed 17 two-person observer teams, and trained 26 additional teams of locally based embassy and international non-governmental organization staff. Nine overseas teams were deployed under the aegis of the Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership.

Foundation observers monitored balloting in 100 different stations throughout the day. Many of the teams were present for at least part of the vote count, which lasted for up to 30 hours in the larger stations.

Although Asia Foundation teams observed no systemic or widespread irregularities in the opening procedures, in the vote casting, or in the vote counting when monitors were present at the polling stations, the election results were strongly contested. Violence erupted on July 2 when protesters looted and set fire to the majority Mongolian Peoples' Revolutionary Party headquarters. This unprecedented violence led to a two-month-long electoral dispute and undermined the credibility of the election and of elected officials.

In order to shore up the legitimacy of Mongolia's democratic system, the Foundation is preparing a larger program for the presidential election scheduled for the summer of 2009. A reform agenda is being prepared with governmental and non-governmental partners to ensure that future elections are transparent, free, and fair.

NEPAL

Nepal's constituent assembly election in April 2008 was a watershed event in the nation's transition to peace and democracy. Working with local partners prior to the election, The Asia Foundation-supported voter education and registration campaigns, as well as public dialogue on electoral and constitutional issues to make the elections a success. The Foundation provided technical and financial support for the National Election Monitoring Alliance (NEMA) to deploy approximately 20,000 non-partisan domestic election observers, and

assisted the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) to mobilize 100 international observers from 22 countries, its largest mission ever.

The Foundation serves as a member and project manager of the Coalition for Constituent Assembly Support (CoCAS), a group of NGOs formed to promote public awareness, participation, and accountability in the constituent assembly process. Prior to the election, in coordination with government, donors, and other NGOs, CoCAS prepared and disseminated analyses of constitutional issues, conducted civic education, and facilitated public discussion on the constituent assembly process through the broadcast media and more than 7,500 public meetings across the nation.

The Foundation supported the production and broadcast on radio and television of voter registration messages in 16 different languages.

The Foundation also supported NEMA in establishing a national coordination structure and recruit, train, and deploy approximately 20,000 non-partisan domestic observers to monitor the pre-election and campaign period, election day, and the post-election counting and reconciliation processes.

The Asia Foundation's support of these international observers contributed greatly to the legitimacy of the election and the elected constituent assembly.

PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, The Asia Foundation began early efforts in 2006 to ensure a free and fair 2008 election by supporting the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), a coalition of 30 local civil society organizations. In advance of the elections, FAFEN conducted the country's first statistically-valid audit of the voters list and published more than 30 pre-election reports and press statements based on long-term observer reports from around the country. FAFEN also trained longterm observer coordinators in 264 (out of 272) National Assembly constituencies, and published a series of 19 "Election Updates" based on weekly compilations of observers' data from around the country. Nearly 20,000 election observers were deployed on election day.

The Foundation and FAFEN also undertook a robust voter education campaign including a series of public service announcements and discussion programs for radio and television; producing and distributing educational posters and other printed materials; and conducting direct voter outreach that reached approximately 50 percent of the Union Councils across the country.

FAFEN's voter education campaign gave special emphasis to women and youth voters.

The Foundation also supported election-related training for media professionals in every district, as well as outreach to religious leaders and teachers and students in *madrassas*.

PHILIPPINES

For the past two years, The Asia Foundation has worked to promote free and fair elections in the Philippines by supporting elections monitoring activities and voter education programs. Questions about the conduct of the 2004 elections continue to cast doubt about the administration's legitimacy. In the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), elections have historically been marred by violence and cheating. To address these issues, the Foundation has supported civil society groups to work with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and supported monitoring of the 2007 national and 2008 ARMM regional elections.

In 2007, the Foundation provided logistical support for the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) deployment of more than 400,000 trained volunteers on election day. For the 2008 regional gubernatorial and legislative assembly election, the Foundation supported domestic election monitoring and voter education initiatives. More than 4,000 volunteers were deployed by PPCRV and the Legal Network for Truthful Elections (LENTE), a non-partisan nationwide network of volunteer lawyers, paralegals, and law students. PPCRV also worked to better engage Muslims in its voter education campaigns.

In partnership with the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), the Foundation supported 21 election observers for the May 2007 national election and 22 election observers for the August 2008 regional election, including locations in the six ARMM provinces during pre- and post-election periods.

The Foundation also supported the creation of a variety of training materials including the first-ever simplified joint handbook for election workers and volunteer trainers, a manual for international observers of the ARMM elections, and an instructional video on new automated voting technology used in the ARMM regional elections.

TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste gained its independence in 1999 and is still in the process of establishing its democratic institutions. The Asia Foundation managed comprehensive and wide ranging voter education and election programming for the constituent assembly and presidential elections in 2001 and 2002. In 2007, despite serious challenges, the country successfully conducted national and local elections. However, the electoral process and institutions still need to be firmly established. Ensuring that the upcoming local elections in 2009 are credible, fair, and peaceful is critical to the stability of the fledgling state.

The Foundation is working to address these issues and will support the 2009 elections by helping to establish and implement an electoral legal framework, educate voters, and monitor elections.

To establish the legal framework for this electoral process, the Foundation is focusing on issues regarding new laws establishing elected municipal governments, as well as administrative challenges regarding logistics for election of first-term municipal assemblies and second-term suco councils. Planned activities include developing public recommendations on election laws and creating public information strategies for electoral laws and processes.

In addition, the Foundation will support a voter education campaign prior to elections; a civil society coalition to address elections issues; and a domestic election monitoring strategy to ensure transparency and accountability before, during, and after election day.

The Asia Foundation's election programs have been carried out with support from sources including U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of State, the Australian Agency for International Development, the Department for International Development of the British Government, and the Rights, Democracy, and Inclusion Fund.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress.



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