

Elections and Political Processes in Asia



The Asia Foundation

Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

The Asia Foundation is one of the largest and most effective providers of election and governance assistance in Asia. Our programs support free and fair elections through voter education, voter registration, election administration, and international and domestic election observation. In addition, we support democratic governance through political party development and legal and regulatory reform. Key to all of our work in the elections and political processes sector is support for a culture of democracy, including the development of an engaged citizenry and a vibrant civil society.



The Asia Foundation approaches election assistance from a development perspective, with a focus on sustainability. We work to build capacity in local organizations so that they can support long-term democratization before, during, and after elections. We understand that a strong civil society sector is an essential element of a developed democracy, so we design our elections and political processes programming in ways that strengthen civil society's capacity to contribute across the board.

Each Asia Foundation election program is unique. We use data from surveys and qualitative assessments to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for elections assistance in that country; this includes identifying realistic possibilities for intervention and taking account of activities planned by other providers to avoid overlap and duplication. Development of the framework is a collaborative process with civil society representatives, election administrators, and other assistance providers and has in many cases become the overarching elections assistance strategy for the donor and assistance community.

The Foundation has a reputation for low-cost and high-impact election assistance. Our country offices across Asia are staffed with local and international development professionals who have deep knowledge of the country context and hold longstanding relationships with key stakeholders in government and civil society. These networks and understanding of the political environment make it possible to conduct programs on more sensitive issues. In this way, Foundation support can reach even the most marginalized members of society with culturally appropriate and effective programming.

AFGHANISTAN

The Asia Foundation has been a major provider of election and democracy assistance in Afghanistan in every election process since 2002. This includes critical and timely technical assistance, international monitors, and logistical support for the Emergency Loya Jirga in 2002, the Constitutional Loya Jirga in 2003, and through every electoral process since Bonn. Currently the Foundation supports civic education to increase public knowledge of democratic rights, and electoral processes; and

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL PROCESSES

The Foundation has supported programs promoting free and fair elections and an informed electorate in more than 20 countries across Asia since 1960.

The Foundation develops and carries out diverse and innovative programs tailored to country-specific electoral environments through the support of active local partners.

the establishment of Election Volunteer Groups in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan to help the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan during electoral events.

In advance of the 2014 and 2015 elections, the Foundation is supporting increased political participation by women through training to women members of parliament, provincial councilors, and prospective women candidates on networking and campaign messaging; and supports efforts to encourage women to run in the upcoming elections. To reach more isolated communities with critical elections and democracy information, the Foundation conducts innovative and effective dialogue forums with traditional and religious scholars (*ulema*) and community members in mosques and community centers.

BANGLADESH

The Asia Foundation supports the 29-member Election Working Group (EWG), the only national domestic observer network in Bangladesh. In 2013, the EWG began implementing an election observation and voter education program focused on the forthcoming parliamentary election. Network members will deploy short-term observers across the country on election day. In the lead-up to the elections, network members are deploying long-term observers in 118 constituencies to monitor the pre-election environment, including election preparation at the local level, campaign practices, and election-related violence. For the forthcoming elections, the EWG is also partnering with minority/indigenous organizations to observe the pre-election, election day, and post-election day environment in areas that are relatively isolated and in constituencies that are most vulnerable to electoral violence.

In 2014, despite widespread violence and challenging conditions, the Foundation undertook the only nationwide observation mission for the 10th National Parliamentary Elections. The Foundation worked with a network of 29 local NGOs to train and deploy 9,490 short-term and 180 long-term observers. For subsequent local-level elections, we supported the use of SMS real-time data collection methodology and statistical sampling to allow for scientific analysis and independent verification of election results. For additional impact, we partnered with the Bangladesh Election Commission in a comprehensive civic education campaign to update the electoral roll.

INDONESIA

Since 2012, The Asia Foundation has been managing the Australia Indonesia Electoral Support Program. Under this program, the Foundation supports civil society organizations, universities, research institutions, and the media in their

efforts to improve voter education and conduct high-quality independent verification of elections through election observation and investigative reporting.

Activities include national voter surveys, capacity building for grassroots organizations to engage their communities in election-related activities, and innovative uses of technology to make election information widely accessible via social media and the Internet. The Foundation also supports in-depth research on access to election information and on electoral corruption.

In Indonesia's 2014 election, the Foundation helped get essential polling information directly to millions of voters and supported the largest source of independent observer and media reporting. With support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, we pioneered the development of an open data and API platform that enabled Indonesian developers to build free mobile applications to provide better voter access to real-time electoral information. It garnered more than 100 million hits. In the first five months, 41 apps were publicly released, and have since been downloaded more than 300,000 times. An interactive election results map built in collaboration with Google Indonesia has been visited by more than 325,000 users.

MYANMAR



The Asia Foundation has been involved in supporting elections in Myanmar since the 2012 by-elections. Through that program the Foundation provided support for the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) international observation, and their training activities for media and domestic observers. The Foundation also provided observation training for observers deployed by several embassies, and for the international observers invited by the Government of Myanmar.

The 2015 general elections were a milestone in Myanmar's transition to a more democratic state. But the vast majority of the 32 million voters in Myanmar were voting for just the first or second time ever, and possessed little or no access to information about the more than 6,000 candidates and 91 political parties. A landmark survey we conducted in Myanmar in 2014 revealed just 12 percent understood how the president was elected, and most had little knowledge of government institutions and processes. Working closely with local software developers, civil society partners, and the Union Election Commission, we created the MaePaySoh (Let's Vote) API, an open-source, public, cloud-based database detailing biographical information on all of the candidates, FAQs about the elections and government institutions, leadership information, and policy platforms of all political parties. Then, we held a "Hack Challenge" engaging over 130 local Myanmar developers to produce 31 mobile and web applications for voters using the data. For two weeks, 23 teams of developers worked long hours, coding through the night. The top prize went to Team PopStack, who developed an elegant, easy-to-use app allowing voters to use their current location to determine the candidates running for office. Launched a month before Election Day, the apps were embraced by the public, government, civil society organizations, the media, and the private sector, resulting in more than 12 million requests for information from the MaePaySoh database in the weeks leading to Election Day.

NEPAL

The Asia Foundation conducted a four-month project to help ensure a free and fair election to a Constituent Assembly (CA) in Nepal on November 19, 2013. Through the program the Foundation supported an observation mission from the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) which deployed 50 observers, including 10 long-term observers and 40 short-term observers for the CA elections. The Foundation, in collaboration with the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN), also organized observation of the elections by high representatives of election commissions from the South Asian and Southeast Asian regions.

As in the 2008 CA elections, the Foundation was again the largest supporter of domestic observation in Nepal: providing support to two domestic observation networks. The National Election Observation Committee (NEOC) deployed more than 10,000 election-day observers to provide comprehensive coverage of polling centers across the country; and the Election Observation Committee (EOC) deployed 300 long-term observers to monitor the pre- and post-election environment. Working in concert, these organizations also conducted an effective advocacy campaign to convince the ECN to reform observation regulations that diminished the transparency and credibility of the election process.

PAKISTAN

The 2013 general election in Pakistan was the most significant democracy strengthening event in the country's history: the first transition from one democratically elected government to another following completion of the government's five-year constitutional tenure. Asia Foundation programs contributed significantly to this historic outcome through election assistance and support to local organizations working toward free and fair elections in the country. Founded with assistance from the Foundation, and currently supported under the Supporting Transparency, Accountability and Electoral Processes (STAEP) program, the civil-society based Free and Fair Elections Network (FAFEN) helps ensure elections are held in a free, transparent, and non-violent manner in Pakistan. Since the start of the program, nearly 40,000 election observers have been trained, and a comprehensive electoral assistance process has been developed—from pre-election monitoring to Election Day observation to post-election results tabulation and monitoring of the acceptance of results.

PHILIPPINES

The October 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro provides the greatest hope in a generation for an end to the long-running conflict in the southern Philippines. But this hopeful beginning will not be sustainable unless the agreement delivers actual improvements in politics and governance in the Bangsamoro.

A key factor will be how the MILF and other groups transition from armed struggle to democratic politics and governance, and there was significant concern that if the MILF, and other armed and unarmed groups, are unable to participate effectively in elections and democratic governance the peace process could be at risk.

To address this concern The Asia Foundation developed, with support from the UK, a program to facilitate four significant changes: 1) armed groups committed to the peace process will transition to or develop political parties that compete democratically to realize their vision of a Bangsamoro; 2) political parties will understand how effective representation and accountability can increase electability; 3) political parties will understand how to compete effectively in the new ministerial (parliamentary) form of government; and 4) provisions in the Basic Law governing political parties will be consistent with international norms, standards, and best practices.

The Foundation is currently working with three local partners to provide critical capacity development for nascent and existing political parties in the Bangsamoro region. In the future, the Foundation anticipates providing additional assis-

tance for party development, and assistance for voter education and election observation for the referendum on the establishment of the Bangsamoro.

SRI LANKA

Since 2010, The Asia Foundation and the People's Alliance for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL) have pursued a range of initiatives to promote free and fair elections in Sri Lanka. This work has included voter education, voter registration, and some elections monitoring activities. Civic education is a cornerstone of the Foundation's partnership with PAFFREL. Regular meetings are held to promote civic consciousness and raise public awareness about electoral activities, the quality of political representation, responsibilities of sub-national government and related services. Information on how to engage in a range of electoral activities is disseminated to citizens through posters and brochures, as well as through a broad media campaign.

In 2015, record voter turnout for a new president vividly illustrated the tenacity of ordinary citizens to make a difference, and signaled a desire for change and good governance. But challenges of rebuilding infrastructure, bridging social divisions, and strengthening local democracy remain. In the first of its kind in South Asia, the Foundation pioneered an electronic citizen report card using Android-based mobile applications in war-affected Batticaloa, a major commercial center where delivery of basic public services like street lighting and trash collection is grossly uneven. The city administration responded to the feedback by providing a separate line item in their annual budget to fund priorities identified through Electronic Citizen Report Card surveys. Spurred by this success, resi-

dents in six cities across Sri Lanka have provided feedback on access, quality, and reliability of public services to their local municipal councils to influence new policies and budgets and to make their voices heard.

TIMOR-LESTE

Timor-Leste has made significant strides in state-building since the country gained its independence from Indonesia in 1999. In a relatively short period of time, national leaders, alongside civil society, bilateral and multilateral organizations, and donor governments have accomplished much in stabilizing the country and in creating formal governance structures. An underlying part of this success is rooted in Timor-Leste's active support for and recent achievement of free and fair elections. The Asia Foundation has supported election programming in Timor-Leste since the popular consultation that led to independence in 1999. In 2009, the Foundation helped to establish and implement an electoral legal framework, educate voters, and monitor elections for newly established elected municipal governments.

Also during the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Foundation provided assistance to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in hosting an election observation mission from the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The Foundation managed all elements of the mission, including pre-election training, logistical and monitoring assistance, and report preparation assistance. As the first-ever initiative to be conducted under the ARF banner, the mission proved instrumental in cementing the government of Timor-Leste's desire to join ASEAN, while demonstrating that Timor-Leste is capable of holding free and fair elections and hosting high-level delegations.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.

ASIA FOUNDATION ELECTIONS PROGRAMS THROUGH THE YEARS

1960s	China	Bangladesh
India	Indonesia	Cambodia
Korea	Mongolia	Indonesia
1980s	Nepal	Pakistan
Philippines	Sri Lanka	Philippines
1990s	Taiwan	Malaysia
Bangladesh	Thailand	Mongolia
Cambodia	2000s	Nepal
	Afghanistan	Timor-Leste



HEADQUARTERS
465 California Street,
9th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94104 USA
Tel: (415) 982-4640
Fax: (415) 392-8863
sf.general@asiafoundation.org

WASHINGTON, DC
1779 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Suite 815
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Tel: (202) 588-9420
Fax: (202) 588-9409
dc.general@asiafoundation.org

www.asiafoundation.org