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Feature Articles



Political Finance Regulation: The Global Experience Political finance is a vital issue for democracy, governance, and development. No matter how flawless are the country's elections, how active its civil society, how competitive its political parties, and how responsible its local authorities, the role of money in politics undeniably influences the quality of democracy and governance. ... [read more »](#)



Experts Gather in Ghana to Develop Improved Standards for African Elections Leaders of civil society, the media, election management bodies, security services and political parties from 25 sub-Saharan African countries gathered in Accra, Ghana from November 12 to 14, 2009 to assess recent elections across the continent and develop recommendations for raising standards of professionalism among election administration officials, political parties, civic groups, security services and media in order to mitigate conflict and improve electoral processes. ... [read more »](#)



Two Decades Later: Democratic Progress and the Fall of the Berlin Wall The 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall is receiving the attention it deserves: ceremonies, books, and scholarly conferences acknowledging the historical import of the event which marked the end of communism's grip on the countries of Central Europe and the beginning of the end of communism in the Soviet Union. ... [read more »](#)



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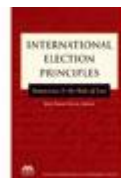
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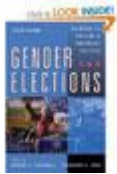
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Election Calendar

Chile Presidential, December 13

Guinea Presidential Second Round (Postponed), December 13

Croatia Presidential First Round, December 27

Guinea Presidential Second Round (Postponed), December 27

Uzbekistan Parliamentary, December 27

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Political Finance Regulation: The Global Experience

“Political finance is a vital issue for democracy, governance, and development. No matter how flawless are the country’s elections, how active its civil society, how competitive its political parties, and how responsible its local authorities, the role of money in politics undeniably influences the quality of democracy and governance. Only through greater transparency will one fully understand the extent and nature of this influence”¹

It was in recognition of this influence that the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) came to include an appeal that all countries should strive to “enhance transparency in the funding of candidatures for elected public office and, where applicable, the funding of political parties” (article 7(3)).

As the question of what role money plays in the affairs of political parties and the conduct of election campaigns has received increasing attention worldwide, much experience has been gathered through practical involvement, regulation or monitoring of political finance, and by scholarly attention and international assistance to such activities.

In their efforts to learn from experience, several organizations have developed lists of key lessons learned and understandings relating the issue of political finance. While each such list reflects different experiences and approaches to the issue of political finance, there are recurring themes. In the below table, the various key understandings have been categorized under common headings, and we have subsequently reached the following synthesised common understandings that have influenced the project and this publication;

1. *Money is necessary for democratic politics, and political parties must have access to funds to play their part in the political process. Regulation must not curb healthy competition*
2. *Money is never an unproblematic part of the political system, and regulation is desirable*
3. *The context and political culture must be taken into account when devising strategies for controlling money in politics*
4. *Effective regulation and disclosure can help to control adverse effects of the role of money in politics, but only if well conceived and implemented*
5. *Effective oversight depends on activities in interaction by several stakeholders (such as regulators, civil society and the media) and based on transparency*

In spite of these good intentions, much work remains to be done. Of the 136 countries that were parties to UNCAC by 1 September 2009, sufficient information is available to judge their compliance regarding candidate disclosure in 107 countries. Of these, 61 countries or 57% *do not* have formal disclosure requirements for the income and expenditure of candidates.² We

¹ Office of Democracy and Governance (2003) *Money in Politics Handbook: A Guide To Increasing Transparency in Emerging Democracies*. Technical Publication Series. U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington. p 5.

² The situation is somewhat better for political party disclosure. Data is available for 120 countries, out of which 39, or one-third, lack formal reporting requirements. The situation for each country and data sources are available in the concluding chapter of this book.

also need to acknowledge the often significant gap between formal rules and practical application and note that the number of countries that de facto lack effective oversight mechanisms is much higher. Indeed, no country can be said to have finally overcome all difficulties related to political party and campaign finance disclosure.

With regard to enhancing transparency through disclosure, the first step that countries should take is to decide what their normative goals are: more informed voters, more equal footings on which parties and candidates compete, or more equitable access to politics across socioeconomic groups, for example. From this decision, reformers can envision an ideal disclosure system in terms of key regulatory dimensions: what is disclosed, who discloses, how often, and to what type of regulatory body. Finally, one must consider what requirements make sense in the country context and what will be feasible for regulators, political parties and campaign actors to live by, given the resources available to them. The process of developing these procedures should as much as possible be conducted in dialogue both with those who will be required to submit reports and with those who will be the intended users of the disclosed information (regulators, media, civil society, and ultimately the electorate).

Given that different regulatory frameworks foster different normative outcomes, there is no model political finance disclosure system. Formal political institutions have further implications for each of the key system variables, such as variation in constitutional designs and the characteristics of electoral systems. Beyond that, levels of technology, literacy, social peace, and civil society development will vary. Every context has its own set of best practices.

One aim of IFES' study of political finance regulation has been to start thinking about practical solutions, the place of political finance reform in a hierarchy of needs, and its implications for reform priorities. Some countries may need electronic disclosure while others need more far-reaching reforms of accounting conventions. On examining the variables in disclosure systems and how they might operate in different countries, we learn that the list of best practices is fairly short. To ratify a generic disclosure law is simple. Meaningfully implementing the UN Convention against Corruption, however, requires identifying country specific goals and problems. Once those are agreed upon, reformers can design disclosure systems that maximize their goals and minimize the pitfalls.

The article above is an extract from *Political Finance Regulation: The Global Experience*, edited by Magnus Öhman and Hani Zainulbhai. The book draws together experiences from over 2 years of IFES work on a project funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund aimed at working towards global standards for political finance. This book is available for download on IFES.org. Print copies available upon request.

Political Finance Regulation: The Global Experience



International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

Experts Gather in Ghana to Develop Improved Standards for African Elections

Leaders of civil society, the media, election management bodies, security services and political parties from 25 sub-Saharan African countries gathered in Accra, Ghana from November 12 to 14, 2009 to assess recent elections across the continent and develop recommendations for raising standards of professionalism among election administration officials, political parties, civic groups, security services and media in order to mitigate conflict and improve electoral processes.

The *Colloquium on African Elections: Best Practices and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration* focused on Ghana's 2008 elections, which were universally viewed as credible despite heated political tensions and a razor-thin margin between the candidates. Participants drew on lessons from the experience in Ghana, where for the second time in less than a decade, political power has changed hands from the ruling to an opposition party through the ballot box. Effective collaboration among all sectors of the electoral process helped ease tensions, enhanced transparency and built voter confidence in the election results. Drawing on this example, the participants identified the following as key prerequisites for peaceful, participative and credible elections: inclusiveness, transparency and accountability.

Participants also explored the differences between the Ghanaian experience and elections in other countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, which experienced gross irregularities, fraud and conflict. They identified the factors that contributed to different outcomes in each of these cases and discussed how to foster credible elections on the continent based on these case studies.

"This is an opportunity for Africans to reflect on our own experiences and build upon our successes. As a regional initiative, this conference will bolster electoral reformers, and civic and political stakeholders on the continent," said Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, chair of the Electoral Commission in Ghana, ahead of the event.

Participants deliberated on best practices of elections in Africa and recognized the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration, trust and effective communication between all election stakeholders as essential ingredients for peaceful and credible elections. Participants shared concrete experiences and mechanisms, including inter-party dialogue platforms/multi-party liaison committees and cross-sectoral codes of conduct and their enforcement mechanisms.

During the Colloquium, participants recognized the need for a holistic approach to elections that includes all sectors of society in their conduct, including civil society, the media, election management bodies, security services and political parties. Participants acknowledged the yearning and demand for democracy from the populations of countries across Africa, and believe that the political will exists to advocate for credible elections, even if the electoral process in many countries continues to fall short of citizens' expectations.

Participants also assessed the successes and the challenges of competitive elections in Africa over the past two decades. In many countries, successful elections strengthened democratic institutions and enhanced opportunities for economic growth and political development. In other countries, credible elections paved the way for national reconciliation and return to civilian rule after decades

of armed conflict and civil war. But flawed elections in other countries resulted in violence, further polarized divided societies and eroded public confidence in the political process.

Finally, participants discussed the importance of the African Union's Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, adopted in 2007. Article 17 of the Charter "reaffirms the commitment to holding transparent, free and fair elections in accordance with the 2002 OAU/AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa," and calls on states to take concrete actions to fulfill their responsibilities. Article 22 of the Charter commits governments to "create a conducive environment for independent and impartial election monitoring or observation mechanisms."

At the conclusion of the colloquium, participants released a communiqué summarizing these discussions. The communiqué shared recommendations for election standards in Africa including recommendations to African governments, election management bodies, political parties, domestic and international election monitoring and observer groups, the media and security and military services.

Co-organizers of the colloquium include the National Democratic Institute, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, International Foundation for Electoral Systems, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, Open Society Initiative for West Africa and United Nations Development Programme.



Two Decades Later: Democratic Progress and the Fall of the Berlin Wall

by Michael Svetlik

The 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall is receiving the attention it deserves: ceremonies, books, and scholarly conferences acknowledging the historical import of the event which marked the end of communism's grip on the countries of Central Europe and the beginning of the end of communism in the Soviet Union. Yet, as the fall of the wall was only part of a decades long struggle to expand democratic processes in Eastern Europe and beyond, this anniversary also compels us to assess the legacy of the revolutions of 1989 and rededicate our efforts in support democratic freedom.

Two decades have now passed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The event remains a powerful symbol for those of us dedicated to supporting the expansion of democratic processes to ensure respect for fundamental human rights and enable human development. The people power which resulted in the destruction of the wall that literally and figuratively divided a nation continues to stand out as a poignant demonstration of the human urge for self-determination and freedom. We recall the exhilarating images of the cheering crowds of Berliners that celebrated as the wall came down around them. We shared their euphoria then and we are buoyed by the recollections of their triumph.

For an organization like IFES that is involved in supporting the institutionalization of democracy and political freedom, the fall of the wall provided an impetus for change and reform across the Soviet bloc and beyond. The inevitability of democratization in the absence of a competing system, propelled the expansion of public space, the development of free media, the blossoming of civil society, and the institutional development required for open, democratic societies in country after country.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was clearly just the beginning of a process of social and political change across the former Eastern bloc that continues to this day. The fall of the wall unleashed forces of change that continue, in starts and fits, to provide open democratic societies for citizens of countries ranging from Moldova to Mongolia and from Estonia to Albania. In hindsight, the reunification of Germany and the expansion of the European Union were, while formidable outcomes, the easy part. In most instances the raw materials needed to promote change— institutions, aptitude, and political will—were readily at hand.

Not surprisingly, the transition towards more liberal economic and political systems has not been smooth or easy, even for those infused with the euphoria of 1989. As a recent public opinion research by the Pew Foundation reveals, two decades of reform have taken a toll on attitudes toward democratic freedom in Central and Eastern Europe. While majorities of people in most former Soviet republics and Central European countries are pleased with the emergence of multiparty

systems and free markets, enthusiasm about these changes has diminished in most of the countries surveyed by Pew.³

This is especially true in Russia and Ukraine, and other parts of the former Soviet Union, where a longer history of communism have made advancing democracy more challenging. An uneven and rocky transition to democracy in many former Soviet republics has confronted the promise and potential unleashed by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The struggle to undertake dual economic and political transitions upon the wreckage of institutions designed to serve a command economy and a one party state has illustrated the complexity of the liberalization process. The starting point, or the antecedents, for transforming institutions of governance and the relationship of a citizen to the state, were varied and thus results have differed.

As we marked this important anniversary, its significance as a force for change and the expansion of freedom is undisputed. The occasion also reminds us that the transition to greater democracy is complex and requires constant attention and support in order to succeed. The democracy movement remains indebted to the events of 1989, but they also mindful of the work that remains before us both within Europe, the former Soviet Union, and beyond.

Michael Svetlik currently serves as IFES' Vice President of Programs, responsible for IFES' technical assistance and democracy promotion programs. His areas of expertise include political change, institutional development, election system design, civic awareness and activism, and project management, evaluation and design.



³ Two Decades After the Wall's Fall: End of communism cheered but now with more reservations, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/267.pdf>


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ACE reaches 1 000 000 visitors!

ACE reaches 1 000 000 visitors! The ACE website has now reached over one million individual visitors per year, representing virtually every single country in the world. This is an increase of 70% as compared to the same period last year. New and more accessible content, improved Google rankings and translations of key material in Spanish, French and Arabic are likely to be the main reasons for the increase. The ACE server will be updated in November to meet the new demands and increase the speed of the website.

As you may have noticed, technical improvements and new features have been implemented throughout the ACE website over the past few months. Among other things, the ACE website now offers an RSS news-feed function for easy access to the latest electoral news, a new and highly advanced search function, newly updated comparative data from around the world and regional pages displaying regional electoral news and events and provides direct access to country pages.

A new design of the ACE website will be launched first half of 2010. In the lead up to this launch new technical improvements, such as structural changes and new features, will be systematically implemented.

We hope that you enjoy the developments of the site and look forward to receiving your feedback at info@aceproject.org so that we can continue our efforts to always improve ACE.