

# CHAPTER TWO

The Evolution  
of Monitoring by  
Nonpartisan  
Domestic  
Organizations

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**T**he February 7, 1986 snap presidential election in the Philippines dramatically altered the then-widely held perspective that election observing was inappropriate or ineffectual. In the Philippines, a well-trained and organized nonpartisan domestic monitoring operation demonstrated that it could, when complemented by large-scale international observer delegations, critically evaluate a fatally flawed process.

The importance of developing and nurturing local monitoring efforts was among the most significant and far-reaching lessons learned by NDI from its observation mission to the Philippine elections. Consequently, since 1986 NDI has encouraged the formation of nonpartisan monitoring organizations, trained thousands of domestic monitors and coordinated pre-election and election-day activities with domestic monitoring groups in more than two dozen countries. Many of the organizations with which NDI has worked in the context of first elections have endured beyond these contests, contributing to the development of democratic institutions in their countries.

### ***The NAMFREL Model***

A team of political and election specialists from NDI and what is now the International Republican Institute (IRI), visited the Philippines before the 1986 presidential election to assess the feasibility of mounting a credible international observer effort. The team's most productive and impressive meetings were held with leaders of the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), an organization formed 30 months earlier to promote electoral reform and to monitor elections. Unlike the many Filipinos who opposed participation in elections run by President Ferdinand Marcos, NAMFREL activists encouraged public involvement in the process as a vehicle for restoring democracy in their country. To this end, approximately 500,000 volunteers were recruited, trained and mobilized to monitor polling sites throughout the Philippine archipelago on election day.

Despite its initial reluctance, the team recommended that both institutes organize an international observer delegation based largely on the positive impression created by NAMFREL. Specifically, in developing a plan of action for the international observers, NDI and IRI relied on NAMFREL volunteers throughout the country to furnish information about political developments and to identify problem areas. NAMFREL's "operation quick count," which sought to collect and tabulate actual election results from all of the more than 85,000 polling sites, provided an essential mechanism for exposing the inaccuracy of the official results announced by the government-controlled Commission on Elections (COMELEC). The international observers, meanwhile, provided much needed support to NAMFREL both before and after the election, when COMELEC sought to revoke NAMFREL's accreditation and when the government alleged that NAMFREL pollwatchers acted in a partisan manner.

The NAMFREL monitoring operation identified and highlighted the electoral abuses committed by supporters of the incumbent president, and reported results suggesting a victory by Marcos' opponent Corazon Aquino. Consequently, a majority of the Philippine population and the international community rejected the official results reported by COMELEC. A military revolt supported by large segments of the public, coupled with international pressure, provoked Marcos to relinquish power and leave the Philippines for exile in the United States less than three weeks after the election.

### ***Building upon the NAMFREL Experience***

Following adoption of a new Philippine constitution in February 1987, legislative elections were scheduled for May of that year. NDI utilized the May polling to familiarize democratic activists in other countries with the Philippine experience. The activists, from nine countries, made up NDI's 24-member international observer delegation.

These delegates studied the work of NAMFREL and many returned home to initiate similar activities in their countries. While some efforts proved more successful than others, the strategy of mobilizing volunteers for a first election and developing nonpartisan approaches to political involvement has provided considerable momentum to democratic tendencies, even where immediate gains are less than obvious.

In Chile, for example, a massive civic education program undertaken by a nonpartisan organization, CIVITAS, encouraged prospective voters to register for the October 6, 1988 plebiscite, which determined whether President Augusto Pinochet, who seized power in a 1973 military coup, would remain in office for another eight years. In the days preceding the plebiscite, CIVITAS organized various activities designed to overcome the anxieties of many citizens who doubted the secrecy of their vote and who feared reprisals if they voted against the government.

CIVITAS also supported efforts by a committee of prominent Chileans to conduct an independent vote count. Although drawing heavily from the Philippine experience, the Chileans did not attempt to monitor every polling site. Instead, they utilized statistical sampling to project the outcome based on results from a randomly selected 10 percent of the polling sites. The highly accurate projection in the presidential plebiscite led monitoring organizations in other countries to employ parallel vote tabulations based on statistical samples instead of, or in addition to, the comprehensive count used by NAMFREL.

The Philippine experience also influenced developments during the period preceding the May 1989 Panamanian national elections. Business and church leaders formed an independent citizens group to pressure the government to conduct fair elections. For the elections, a church laity group implemented a parallel vote tabulation. This independent vote count proved critical in identifying the true winner of the presidential election during which the government initially sought to manipulate the results and ultimately nullified the elections.

Paraguay is another Latin American country where various domestic groups have played important roles in monitoring a series of elections

conducted since the overthrow of President Alfredo Stroessner in 1989. In addition to monitoring the balloting process and implementing parallel vote tabulations, groups such as the Center for Democratic Studies (CED) have been active in developing innovative civic education programs that inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. By 1993, a coalition of diverse civic organizations named SAKA (meaning "transparency" in the native language) was developed to conduct an independent vote tabulation that confirmed the victory of Paraguay's ruling party candidate.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, Eastern Europe became the new democratic frontier. In Bulgaria, a group of student activists constituted the nucleus of the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections (BAFE), which formed 10 weeks before the June 10, 1990 parliamentary elections, Bulgaria's first multiparty contest since 1931. Overcoming government obstruction and a frightened population, BAFE mobilized more than 8,000 volunteers to monitor election-day developments throughout the country and to implement an independent vote tabulation. Though reputed to oppose the ruling party, BAFE insisted on remaining objective and impartial in its work. The parallel vote tabulation conducted by BAFE confirmed the victory by the incumbent, former communist Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP).

BAFE remained active following the elections, changing its name to the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR) to reflect an expanded mandate. Before the October 1991 legislative elections, BAFECR aggressively promoted election law reform and implemented a civic education program throughout the country. The elections resulted in the BSP's narrow defeat, which was confirmed by parallel vote tabulations conducted by BAFECR and other organizations. BAFECR mobilized more than 9,000 election monitors for Bulgaria's 1994 national elections, organized a nation-wide program to encourage voter turnout and conducted numerous "candidate forums" (debates) before election day.

Domestic monitoring organizations have also emerged in other Eastern European countries,

notably Albania and Romania. The Romanian Pro Democracy Association (PDA) actively monitored the 1992 local and national elections, despite efforts by the parliament to deny 7,000 PDA monitors access to the polling sites. Since these elections, the PDA, through its more than 30 chapters throughout the country, has promoted government transparency and communication between the citizenry and its elected representatives. The Albanian Society for Free Elections and Democratic Culture (now known as the Society for Democratic Culture or SDC) formed in February 1992 and played an important role in deterring abuses during the March 1992 elections, which removed from power the long-ruling Albanian Party of Labor (later renamed the Albanian Socialist Party). SDC monitored local elections and the constitutional plebiscite in 1994, and maintains an active program for citizen participation in public affairs.

The 1989 constituent assembly elections in Namibia represented a precursor to the democratic surge on the African continent. Again, domestic monitoring groups featured prominently in this development. The Namibian Council of Churches played a particularly important role in documenting incidents of intimidation during the period preceding the elections. A second organization, Namibia Peace Plan 435, conducted a civic education campaign and monitored the government-controlled media.

The Study and Research Group on Democracy and Economic and Social Development in Africa, a pan-African civic organization known by its French acronym GERDDES-Afrique, also emerged as a leading proponent of domestic monitoring efforts, as part of a general mandate to encourage more democratic development in the region. In 1991, GERDDES-Afrique organized a delegation to observe the Benin's national elections in March, which resulted in the ouster of the incumbent president. With chapters in more than a dozen African countries, principally in the French-speaking west, GERDDES organizes local and regional monitoring efforts and conducts training programs for election officials and pollwatchers. GERDDES played an important role

in the 1995 elections in Niger and Benin, working with international organizations to train nonpartisan domestic monitors, party pollwatchers and election officials.

In English-speaking Africa, the Zambia experience has proven influential. The Zambia Independent Monitoring Team (ZIMT) formed several months before the 1991 presidential and legislative elections, but failed to obtain the trust of key Zambian institutions, most notably the churches. Ultimately, a second organization, the Zambian Election Monitoring Coordinating Committee (ZEMCC), was organized, the board of which included representatives of six Zambian organizations. Both ZIMT and ZEMCC trained and deployed election monitors throughout the country to help implement a parallel vote tabulation. The results of the parallel tabulation were instrumental to the work of the international observer delegation jointly sponsored by NDI and the Carter Center of Emory University.

The Zambian monitoring activity enhanced the confidence of the citizenry, which was participating in multiparty elections for the first time in more than 18 years. In the presidential election, Frederick Chiluba, a long-time labor activist, overwhelmingly defeated Kenneth Kaunda, Zambia's president since the country gained independence in 1964.

The National Election Monitoring Unit (NEMU) in Kenya, the Group of Independent Observers in Burundi and the Public Affairs Committee in Malawi all developed effective domestic monitoring operations for recent election exercises in their countries. Each group relied on the ZEMCC model, whereby church-affiliated organizations assume the leading role in supplying personnel, infrastructure support and recognized credibility to the monitoring operation. Domestic monitoring exercises in Africa have more recently been successful in South Africa and Ethiopia as well.

Despite the success of NAMFREL in the Philippines, Asia represents the region where the experiences of domestic monitoring groups is most mixed. For example, South Korean church groups were unsuccessful in convincing

international observers of the nonpartisan *bona fides* of their efforts during the December 1987 presidential election.

Bangladeshis, however, succeeded in mounting a monitoring effort in 1991. Several nonpartisan groups organized for the February legislative elections, with the number of monitors recruited by each group ranging from a few to several thousand. Some of the groups have remained active following the elections, with changed names and mandates. For example, a coalition of civic organizations, the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance, has made preparations to monitor 1995 national elections.

In the Middle East, the National Committee for Free Elections (NCFE) recruited more than 4,000 volunteers to monitor Yemen's April 27, 1993 elections, the first multiparty elections in the country's history. The government purposely sought to limit the NCFE's effectiveness by creating a competitive organization and denying NCFE representatives access to polling sites. Nonetheless, the operation proved a major success in a region where democratic tendencies are not yet well developed.

### **Consolidating Fragile Democracies**

The summary above illustrates the important contribution made by domestic, nonpartisan monitoring groups in promoting fair election practices in their countries. In accomplishing their objectives, these groups have overcome suspicions by governments and ruling party leaders, established nonpartisan *bona fides*, and obtained the personnel and financial commitments required to implement an effective monitoring operation.

The long-term sustainability of these organizations deserves special emphasis. In January 1993, NDI sponsored a seminar in Washington, D.C. for 15 organizations originally formed to

monitor or support multiparty elections in their countries. The participants addressed the challenges involved in maintaining civic organizations in a non-election setting, including maintaining organizational momentum, retaining volunteers and raising funds. Participants also described various post-election activities that have been undertaken by their organizations.

The collective experience of these groups demonstrates their concrete and sustained contribution to the democratic process in their countries. Those interested in promoting more democratic systems of government, therefore, should place a high priority on supporting the emergence of such organizations, including providing financial and political support. Furthermore, sharing experiences among and furnishing technical resource materials to those interested in organizing a nonpartisan monitoring effort for elections have often proven to be the most direct forms of assistance.

### **POST-ELECTION ACTIVITIES FOR CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS**

- promoting election law reform;
- implementing civic education programs;
- monitoring human rights;
- encouraging the participation of women in the political process;
- providing legal assistance to citizens on issues relating to privatization and land concerns;
- working with nongovernmental organizations to support civic advocacy groups at the provincial and local levels; and
- fostering transparency and accountability in government.

See Chapter Three, Section Z, *Final Considerations* for further discussion of this subject.

