



Advancing Democracy Worldwide

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**QUARTERLY/SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT**

**GRANTEE NAME:** International Republican Institute

**GRANT/COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT#:** CCN-0007-A-00-4095-00  
Kyrgyzstan Project

**PERIOD COVERED IN THIS REPORT:** January 1-June 30, 1995

**1. Program Goals and Purpose**

Two trainers for the International Republican Institute (IRI) were deployed for two months to Kyrgyzstan to provide pre-electoral assistance to the democratically-oriented political parties and candidates competing in the Central Asian country's first free parliamentary election. The primary goal of the program was to assist these parties and candidates in their efforts to run effective, winning campaigns, which would contribute to the overall objective of helping Kyrgyzstan in its transition to democratic processes and institutions.

**2. Output/Activities**

Preliminary Activities

Prior to departing the United States, IRI trainers received extensive briefings on Kyrgyzstan's politics, political history, current affairs, past IRI training, and expectations for this mission. Trainers met with IRI staff, USAID and State Department staff, Kyrgyzstan Embassy representatives, former IRI staff in Central Asia, and IFES, NDI, and NED representatives. Upon arrival in country, IRI, NDI, and IFES staff met jointly with the U.S. Ambassador and Embassy staff to discuss each organization's plans and perspectives. These organizational meetings were very useful in coordinating a variety of different plans.

In order to determine the most appropriate plan of action, IRI trainers conducted early and extensive meetings with political parties to evaluate the current political environment from the parties' perspectives and assess their immediate needs. Given the fluidity of Kyrgyzstani politics, these early meetings also provided an invaluable "on the ground" orientation for the IRI trainers. Trainers also met with the Kyrgyz-American Bureau on Human Rights to learn of the Bureau's perspectives on the political environment, the wide variety of parties and candidates, and the needs of the parties and candidates. Additionally,

IRI trainers believed it was particularly useful to interact as much as possible with "average" Kyrgyzstanis--housewives, workers, young people, pensioners, taxi drivers, businessmen, and others--in order to get a variety of perspectives on the Kyrgyzstani way of life, culture, and world view.

#### Party/Candidate Consultations

After extensive discussions with parties and candidates, IRI determined the most effective training approach would be to work with the parties and candidates on an individual basis. Party leaders and candidates generally did not want to attend joint seminars held with others; rather, they preferred separate consultations during which they could discuss their respective needs, challenges, and strategies.

During most of January, IRI conducted almost 50 separate consultations with approximately seven different parties and numerous independent candidates. Parties included: Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DDK), Asaba, Ata-Meken, Republican Party of Unity, Social Democrats, Erkin Kyrgyzstan, and the Kyrgyzstan Women's Congress. There was a considerable amount of follow-up consultations with parties and candidates. The issues discussed most frequently were local campaign organization, strategy, and tactics; message development; communicating the message; developing campaign literature; targeting voters in one's district; distinguishing oneself from the many other candidates running in same district; maximizing very limited campaign resources; poll watching and other monitoring issues; successfully dealing with Central and Regional Election Commissions; working creatively within the confines of restrictive campaign laws; and election day activities.

Although not a frequent or widely practiced campaign tool in Kyrgyzstan, IRI trainers strongly urged candidates to include door-to-door campaigning in their efforts. The standard response was that nobody did door-to-door work because of crime. IRI urged the candidates and volunteers to be sensible about how they approached this task (don't go out after mid-evening, leave the literature if no one answered the door, etc.). Although it is difficult to measure how many candidates actually employed this tool, several candidates did knock on the IRI trainers' apartment door (not knowing where the trainers lived) and many more left literature behind. All were from parties or candidates with whom IRI had worked.

IRI's trainers also assisted parties and candidates in obtaining maps of their electoral districts. Most candidates did not know exactly where their district's boundaries were and could not get adequate responses from the Central Election Commission. IRI obtained electoral district maps for approximately 20 candidates. IRI also obtained maps for candidates with whom the Kyrgyz-American Bureau on Human Rights was working.

#### Democracy 2000

One of the most significant activities IRI trainers undertook during this mission was to sponsor and conduct a public political education forum, dubbed "Democracy 2000." The purpose of the forum was to provide parties and candidates an opportunity to share with the

voting public their respective platforms and plans and to do so on a completely equal basis with no party or candidate having any particular edge (money, for example) over the others. At that point, most of the campaign activity allowed under the election laws had forbidden candidates from discussing anything but their biographies. This restriction (which was lifted by the CEC two days before the forum) caused great confusion among voters regarding party platforms.

During this forum, conducted in January, seven parties and four independent candidates spoke for about 10-12 minutes each, describing their platforms and addressing the general question, "How will your platform help Kyrgyzstan become a strong democracy by the year 2000?" According to participants, never before had a public event of this nature taken place in Kyrgyzstan. The forum was well attended, both by citizens and the media. It received ample media attention, which expanded and multiplied its impact.

#### Poll Watcher Training

Prior to the second round of voting later in February, IRI and NDI jointly conducted poll watcher training. During the first round of voting on February 5, it became very obvious that the majority of poll watchers did not understand their proper role or their rights and obligations as poll watchers. IRI and NDI conducted two training sessions for approximately 80 poll watchers. Furthermore, numerous attendees requested additional handouts that they could distribute to other volunteers in their respective campaigns and/or regions. Although concrete numbers are not available, these requests for more copies suggest a certain multiplier effect (training the trainers) with the poll watcher sessions.

#### Working with Central and Regional Election Commissions

Another important function performed by the IRI trainers was to serve as an effective conduit between the parties and candidates and the Central Election Commission. Many of the parties and candidates did not believe that the Election Commission seriously considered their concerns and formal complaints. Many did not even know how to formally present their concerns and complaints to the Commission. In addition to explaining the complaint and appeal process to parties and candidates, IRI also assisted them in filing these complaints. On a number of occasions, IRI trainers conveyed to the Commission information presented to it by parties and candidates. Never taking a position on how specific cases should be adjudicated, IRI often urged the Commission to address matters with which they apparently were otherwise not dealing.

#### Journalists' Association

IRI worked with independent Kyrgyzstani journalists to help them establish an organization to serve as an unofficial clearinghouse for reporting violations of election laws. As an organized grouping, the association would be better able to coordinate and document the reporting of alleged violations, both to official channels as well as through the media. IRI assisted the group in validating its credentials under the law as an official association, which lent greater credibility and validity to their findings. IRI believed that establishing a local organization for this purpose increased the probability that the important role it fills

would endure after international observers had left the country. IRI's trainers also encouraged and facilitated cooperation between the journalist organization and the Kyrgyz-American Bureau of Human Rights, which together compiled a database of violations to be filed with the Central Election Commission.

After the first round of voting, IRI sponsored a press conference with the association of journalists to inform the public about violations that were observed and outline how to file additional complaints with the Central Election Commission. The press conference received above-the-fold headline coverage in the February 9 edition of Vercherny Bishkek, one of the capital city's major newspapers.

#### General Journalism-related Activities

In other journalism related activities, IRI became a resource for national and international media that covered the elections. IRI was sought out as a credible source of neutral information and analysis because it had trainers in country earlier than other international NGOs, was the only organization to conduct extensive pre-election monitoring, and had first-hand accounts of candidate, party, and electoral commission activities. This interaction with the media helped to educate journalists, which in turn helped produce more meaningful and accurate coverage. IRI conducted a number of interviews and participated in two formal press conferences in addition to a substantial number of off-the-record meetings with local and international journalists.

#### Regional Work

IRI trainers traveled three times to regions outside of Bishkek: Issyk-Kul, Osh, and the outskirts of Bishkek. In each region, IRI trainers met with party leaders, candidates, and local officials (including election officials). With the parties and candidates, IRI trainers discussed and assisted on many of the same issues as with the regional leaders' Bishkek counterparts. As in the capital, IRI also served as a conduit of information between parties and candidates and regional and local electoral officials. IRI conveyed complaints on issues pertaining to the lack of information about polling sites, poll worker training, voting rules, among many others. This service by IRI provided an entree to the electoral officials that the parties and candidates believed they otherwise did not have.

#### Uzbekistan

In activities indirectly related to the mission in Kyrgyzstan and at the request of the U.S. Department of State and USAID, IRI trainers, in cooperation with IFES representatives, spent several days in neighboring Uzbekistan to observe the late-December elections there. Observing these elections proved especially useful in focusing trainers' attention on post-Soviet and Central Asian electoral practices and traditions. Of particular benefit for the mission in Kyrgyzstan was the experience of observing the following:

- election day procedures followed by Electoral Commission staff and poll workers;
- importance of domestic observers;
- essential need for pre-election monitors;

- traditionally festive atmosphere at polling sites;
- use of mobile ballot boxes; and,
- opportunities for fraud during vote counting and tabulations.

### Overall

Throughout the mission, there was especially productive cooperation among IRI, NDI, and IFES. Each institute's program complemented that of the others, and there was extensive information sharing among the three groups. Because IRI representatives were in country for the longest period, they were able to provide a substantial amount of information--contact lists, political updates, etc.--to the others upon their arrival in Kyrgyzstan.

Prior to departure, IRI trainers held an extensive series of follow-up meetings with many of the parties and candidates with whom they had met and worked with during the mission. These meetings provided a valuable opportunity to learn more about the parties' and candidates' perspectives on the elections, areas of strength and weakness and future plans.

### **3. Inputs/Financial Report**

See attached.

### **4. Impact/Assessment**

#### Party/Candidate Consultations

Although only one candidate with whom IRI directly worked (Boris Vorodyev) won a seat in the new parliament, numerous other trainees informed IRI that they believe they ran better, more effective campaigns than they otherwise would have had they not received any assistance from IRI. At least one other candidate (Arabaev Arap) did make it to the second round run-offs, where he lost a close race. One should note, however, that statistically, given the number of candidates running for office, fewer than 10% of the candidates could possibly win under any circumstances. Approximately 10 candidates ran for each of the 105 seats. However, several candidates told IRI trainers that although they did not win, they planned to run in future elections.

Several candidates creatively utilized IRI assistance with some effectiveness. For example, one candidate believed her greatest need was to increase her name recognition. Restrictive campaign laws, however, inhibited her ability to do so. IRI suggested a variety of approaches from which the candidate developed her own ideas. In one instance, the candidate used chalk to write her name on sidewalks and walls throughout her district. In another, she purchased a newspaper advertisement, which included an outline of her electoral district so people would know if they belonged to her constituency (which was a problem for

many voters) and a list of all the candidates running for that seat, with her name printed boldly and prominently at the top.

Another candidate with whom IRI worked sought creative ways to distinguish himself from the numerous other candidates running in the same district. By law, all campaign posters had to be printed using the same format and content: the candidate's picture in one corner and biographical information as monochromatic text. Policy positions or advocacies were not permitted. After much discussion with IRI trainers, the candidate designed his own color logo, which included his name. Restrictive as the campaign laws were, they did not seem to prevent candidates from modifying their respective posters once they received them from the official sources. The candidate had his newly designed color logo printed on the existing poster before displaying them as widely as possible throughout his district. Although this candidate did not win, he told IRI trainers that he received far more votes than he anticipated, and attributed that to having creatively (and affordably) tried to distinguish himself from other candidates.

Eventually, several other candidates with whom IRI had worked made similarly creative efforts with their campaign posters and other literature. IRI trainers observed numerous IRI-inspired "individualized" campaign posters around Bishkek. In one case, a local election commissioner complained about this practice but eventually acknowledged that it was legal, although she could not believe that anyone would actually think about doing something like that.

As noted, several IRI-assisted candidates overcame their initial opposition to doing door-to-door campaign work and succeeded in speaking with voters and dropping off campaign literature. This practice had apparently never been tried before in Kyrgyzstan.

In other cases, IRI trainers read in the local papers about candidates whom they had advised to challenge certain rules actually doing so. Although difficult to confirm, it is reasonable to suggest that these candidates were not likely to have challenged the rules had they not received assistance and encouragement from IRI.

#### Democracy 2000

As stated above, IRI's forum "Democracy 2000" was the first ever such public political event in which parties and candidates could openly and amply speak about their respective platforms and agendas. The platforms and agendas were published in two newspapers--the Kyrgyzstan Chronicle and the Evening Bishkek. Publication in both papers significantly expanded the dissemination and, therefore, usefulness of the information presented at "Democracy 2000."

Additionally, in the immediate aftermath of the forum, many of the parties and candidates met to discuss overlaps and consistencies in their platforms and various forms of cooperation that they previously had not explored. Numerous participants told IRI trainers

that the parties and candidates had never before sat in the same room together, much less discussed areas of agreement and potential cooperation. Even an hour after the forum, participants were still exchanging telephone numbers and discussing cooperative efforts. It also appeared that a number of university students who were in the audience approached different parties with whom they agreed to ask how they could get involved in the campaigns.

Anecdotally, one participant profusely thanked IRI for having sponsored and promoted the event because they learned that they have much more in common than they realized and that there is real value and tangible benefit in cooperating with each other wherever possible. Areas of cooperation included dividing up sites for poll watchers to cover as many sites as possible and working together in dealing with the CEC to have a greater impact collectively rather than individually.

In a longer term perspective, several participants said that they hoped such forums would become standard elements of future campaigns. They seemed to understand that it did not require an international organization to host this type of campaign activity, and that the only reason it had never been done before is because nobody ever thought to do it.

#### Poll Watcher Training

Especially after the first round of voting, it was clear there was a tremendous need for additional poll watcher training for the second round. IRI and NDI jointly conducted training for poll watchers, the utility of which was concretely demonstrated in a number of cases. In several instances, IRI trainers observed poll watchers who had participated in the joint training actually use what they had learned to challenge certain occurrences at polling sites. In one case, a woman succeeded in changing the whole physical set-up of the polling site within the first hour of opening because the ballot boxes were situated out of the poll watchers view. She displayed a copy of a sample polling site layout she received at the joint seminar and persuaded the local officials to change the set-up.

In another instance, a poll worker was charged with stuffing the ballot box after an IRI-NDI trained monitor demanded that all the workers remove their coats to prove they did not possess extra ballots. One worker had 100 pre-marked ballots in each inner pocket of his jacket. He was charged by the Central Election Commission with attempting to influence the election through voter fraud. His case was sent to the courts, where it received considerable publicity, serving as a solid example to the citizens of Kyrgyzstan that a domestic monitor, when armed with proper training and a greater understanding of the monitors' rights and obligations, can make a difference (and more importantly, cannot be ignored by the government).

### Working with Central and Regional Election Commissions

In addition to assisting parties and candidates in their efforts to work with the CEC, IRI also directly worked with the CEC and its regional counterparts to inform the Commissions of election violations and urge them to address and resolve complaints and appeals expeditiously. IRI wrote several letters and had numerous meetings with CEC and regional representatives. IRI believes that this type of interaction elevated important issues and encouraged the Commissions to deal with them, an incentive they may not otherwise have had.

### Journalists' Association

As noted above, at IRI's urging, independent Kyrgyzstani journalists formed an association to serve as an unofficial clearinghouse for reporting violations of election laws. As an organized grouping, the association, in tandem with the Kyrgyz-American Bureau of Human Rights, was able to coordinate and document the reporting of alleged violations, both to official channels as well as through the media. Together, these two groups compiled a database of violations that they filed with the Central Election Commission. They also publicized these alleged infractions to put more pressure on the Commission to address them seriously and expeditiously. The cooperation between these two organizations, which IRI encouraged and facilitated, strengthened their ability to influence government officials and CEC to follow up on complaints and fairly resolve documented violations.

## **5. Overall Narrative**

As President Askar Akaev has stated, Kyrgyzstan is in a stage of "pre-democracy," a transitional period in which fair elections and movement toward a market economy are just beginning to see results. Relatively speaking, Kyrgyzstan is making notable progress on both fronts, although there remains much ground to cover.

IRI offers the following observations based on its election assistance program:

### Political Climate

In Kyrgyzstan's first free parliamentary election, IRI trainers found the mood of the electorate to be extremely apathetic. Mistrust of the authorities and a pervasive belief that the elections would have little effect on their lives contributed to voter disinterest and diminished participation. Additionally, the proliferation of parties and candidates with few distinguishable attributes led to greater voter confusion about for whom to vote. Taking into account this high number of candidates as well as geographic, communications, and transportation obstacles, IRI decided to work with parties and candidates pursuing seats in a relatively small number of districts in and around Bishkek. This enabled IRI to concentrate its limited resources in fewer areas and to follow and assist with the process more closely and in greater depth.

Many parties and candidates expressed similar frustrations about their inability to publicize their message; the difficulty in submitting complaints or appeals to the Election Commissions and the Commissions' inability or unwillingness to address these concerns seriously; inconsistent adjudication of complaints and application of the laws; difficulty in obtaining electoral district maps from election officials; lack of financial resources; and others.

### Political Parties

Democratic political parties in Kyrgyzstan are new and generally very weak. Many lack substantial organizations and financial resources. Almost all lack credibility with the public. Typically, in more mature democracies, political parties provide resources, infrastructure, and other assistance to its candidates. In Kyrgyzstan, few if any parties claimed to be helping their candidates. Rather, the parties tended to recruit candidates who already had local organizations of their own (local administrations, unions, businesses, etc.). As such, at least to a certain degree, Kyrgyzstan experienced a reverse phenomenon: strong candidates often helped weak parties establish themselves.

Although many factors contribute to the parties' lack of public credibility, IRI trainers suggest the absence of positive platforms and the public's misunderstanding about parties' proper roles in a democracy substantially contribute to the credibility problem. Throughout the mission, and highlighted extremely well during the "Democracy 2000" project, IRI consistently encouraged parties and candidates to emphasize positive platforms. That is, to discuss what they stood for, including real alternatives and solutions to problems, instead of simply opposing whatever or whomever.

### Electoral Law

One of the most significant challenges to overcome in pursuing this mission was the restrictive election law, which prohibited candidates from expressing issues-oriented positions, advocacies, and ideas. The law permitted candidates to provide information only about their biographies; it prohibited issue-oriented campaigning. This restriction created an obviously (from IRI's perspective) undesirable emphasis on personalities rather than issues. It severely inhibited the electorate's ability to make informed, educated decisions.

These restrictions challenged IRI trainers and Kyrgyzstani candidates to think creatively about overcoming this obstacle. IRI trainers urged parties and candidates to abide by the law and develop effective campaigning and communications tactics that could be considered acceptable under the law. About 10 days prior to the election, in large part because of the number of complaints it received and did not have the capacity to process, the Central Election Commission lifted many of the restrictive and controversial provisions of the election law.

Additionally regarding the election law, the very low threshold for candidates to be placed on the ballot led to a proliferation of candidates, approximately 10 for each seat.

Although emerging democracies should be encouraged to facilitate the formation of new political parties and the ability of candidates to participate in elections, IRI believes that these positive developments must be balanced against the need to maintain a manageable and meaningful number of parties/candidates engaged in electoral competitions. Unavoidably, the proliferation of political parties, movements, and candidates, many with no clearly distinguishable platforms, leads to a significant degree of voter confusion and hinders voters' ability to make informed choices. As one voter commented to IRI trainers, "We have been given the right to vote, but not the opportunity to choose."

## **6. Projected Activities for Next Reporting Period**

Although IRI currently does not have specific plans for future activities in Kyrgyzstan, the Institute, based on its experiences with the election assistance program, suggests that the following types of programs might be useful.

### Strengthening the Political Parties:

Political parties can serve as critical pillars in any democratic system. Although still in their nascent stages of development, Kyrgyzstani parties have the potential to perform much more useful functions than they did during the February elections. Training and other forms of assistance, if welcomed by the parties, could significantly increase their utility as Kyrgyzstan continues to develop democratically.

### Political Parties--What To Do When The Election is Over:

IRI trainers met with virtually all of the political parties in Bishkek after the first round of elections in order to learn, among other things, what the parties believed their role would be beyond the elections. Many of the party leaders did not understand the role of political parties outside the context of an election. With proper preparation and action, parties in Kyrgyzstan can play an important role in public debate and in representing the views of its citizen members.

### Orientation for New Members of Parliament:

Based on IRI's observations in Kyrgyzstan and experiences in other emerging democracies, a program designed to orient new members of parliament could be particularly valuable. Such a program should include orientation about fundamental principles of parliamentary democratic systems, new members' duties and responsibilities, and such assistance as might be desired about establishing parliamentary structures, processes, and procedures:

Domestic Monitor Training Schools:

As noted above, there was a tremendous need in these elections for more extensive and effective training of domestic poll watchers. Although there were many domestic monitors present at most polling sites, very few appeared to understand their proper role. Those monitors who did receive IRI/NDI training were observed to be more effective and assertive in performing their legitimate duties.

General Public Political and Citizen Education Programs:

As is the case in many former Soviet republics, there exists a general apathy among voters in Kyrgyzstan. By educating voters about democracy and the rights and responsibilities that accompany it, citizens are more likely to become involved in the election process. Technical information about how to register and how and where to vote would also be very useful. IRI would recommend that such education programs take place on a continuing basis without regard to election cycles.