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## **Democracy Support Strategies in Africa**

*House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,  
Global Human Rights and International Organizations  
Remarks by Rep. Chris Smith  
May 18, 2016*

The Administration has increased funding for democracy and governance in Africa in the 2017 proposed budget by more than \$168 million from the actual FY2015 funding. Many of us in Congress, realizing the importance of helping to facilitate free, fair and transparent elections in Africa, have long supported funding increases in this area.

However, there are questions concerning the effective use of such funds. According to the Administration's budget explanation for FY 2017, "Priority countries in Africa are falling behind in democracy, human rights, and governance, showing the deepest declines compared to other regions in the past five years." The Administration feels that priority countries are "showing the deepest declines compared to other regions." The Administration seems to have declined to intervene significantly in countries important to U.S. interests such as Ghana, Equatorial Guinea and Djibouti.

Using Ghana as an example, where the democracy funding request dipped slightly for FY17, this hearing will examine U.S. electoral policy moving forward.

In recent years, there has been a troubling trend in Africa towards leaders changing constitutions to allow them to run for a third term not previously provided for in law. The Administration has urged the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda not to go for a third term. Neither leader heeded the call for restraint in this regard.

In Burundi, the third term has caused serious upheaval and violence, resulting in an attempted coup, the killing of dozens of people, a crackdown on civil liberties and nearly

484,000 people internally displaced or seeking asylum in other countries. This situation was caused by an election many felt was unacceptable.

Other leaders, taking the Burundi and Rwanda example, are trying to seek extensions of their term in office as well. For example, Democratic Republic of the Congo President Joseph Kabila is faced with a constitution that not only limits him to two terms, but prevents him from changing the constitution to accommodate extending his rule. However, President Kabila's government is taking it slow in preparing for scheduled elections in November and is trying to undo the constitution by requiring his continuing in office past the December 19 expiration of his mandate despite the constitutional restrictions.

There was violence caused by an earlier Kabila attempt to change the constitution, and it has been widely predicted, including by our State Department, that even greater violence would result if the Kabila term is extended despite the constitutional bar to a third term.

Even when elections processes improve, problems can develop that cause mistrust, which can lead to rejection of election results and violence. Such results don't fade away easily. In Ghana, extremely close elections in 2008 led to mistrust of the process, especially when one district had to re-vote and held the key to who would be president. Four years later, advanced biometric technology failed, casting further doubt in the mind of some voters. As one of our witnesses today will share with us, there are concerns for the elections later this year based on an accumulation of suspicions from past elections – even though the 2008 and 2012 were not judged by international observers to be particularly problematic.

The case of Ghana points out key questions: when does the international community enter an election process, and when does it exit? When do we know whether elections in a particular country need no further intervention? Does intervention have to be massive, or are there tweaks in capacity building we can provide that will make all the difference between an acceptable election or one in which voters refuse to accept the outcome?

Election support is not merely a matter of money. It involves faith in the transparency and fairness of the election process itself. The international community cannot achieve such trust among voters on our own. The country in question must experience a meeting of the minds between the ruling party and government and the political opposition. There must be clear, effective rules for elections that create a level playing ground for all candidates and parties involved in the election process. Whatever flaws there may be in any election, the losing candidates must accept a legitimate loss and prepare for the next election.

In 1991, Nicéphore Soglo defeated sitting President Mathieu Kérékou, who then won back the presidency in the 1996 elections. Kérékou had held office for more than 15 years when he was defeated, but rather than disrupt the government, he accepted his loss and came back to win again. This is not to say that either election was perfect, but without the ability to accept loss and move forward, none of our election assistance can work.

We look forward to hearing from our government witnesses about their strategies to effectively help government hold free, fair and transparent elections. We look to our private witnesses to tell us how our strategies are working thus far and how they may be improved to make our efforts more efficient and successful.