



## **Political and Electoral Integrity Program**

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In the words of Transparency International: “Corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division and the environmental crisis.” This is particularly true of political corruption. Illicit and opaque political financing opens the door to state capture, beginning with the capture of political parties by kleptocrats seeking political cover to pillage the state’s coffers, oligarchs seeking political favors and contracts, and/or organized crime syndicates seeking access to human-trafficking or drug-trafficking routes. Countering political corruption through greater political and electoral integrity is critical.

Political and electoral integrity reform efforts can: 1) allow voters to make educated choices at the polls; 2) hold political actors accountable to the electorate and to the law; 3) make it more difficult for aspiring kleptocrats, oligarchs, and organized crime syndicates to employ informal means to influence political decision-making in their favor; 4) reduce the prevalence of vote-buying schemes and abuse of state resources that undermine voters’ long-term interests at the polls; and 5) inhibit the flow of money that supports electoral violence designed to skew the voters’ preferences through coercion and intimidation.

### **Political Finance Integrity**

Political corruption, in which political actors are captured by large-scale private sector interests and/or are not allowed to compete on a level playing field due to abuse of state resources, is often the result of inadequate regulation of money in politics. Political finance (i.e., both campaign finance and political party finance) controls can increase accountability of political contestants and elected officials. Features of effective political finance systems often include: 1) disclosure, 2) public funding and subsidies, as well as guaranteed media time, 3) contribution and expenditure prohibitions, 4) contribution and expenditure limits, 5) campaign time limits, and 6) oversight, compliance, and enforcement. Comprehensive, detailed, regular, and timely disclosure is the foundation upon which a transparent and accountable political finance system is built. To identify the effectiveness of these features, it is critical to understand the existing legal and regulatory framework, a country’s readiness for reform, and the capacities of state and non-state actors.

**Catalyzing Reforms:** Political finance systems are built over time. Reforms require political will and an enabling environment such as a political finance scandal which is often a driver for reform. Reforms are also best taken in the period between elections and not immediately before an election. In order to identify and report on such scandals, investigative journalists need to understand the role of money in politics. It is also important for reformers to identify and seize these windows of opportunity to facilitate collaborative, trust-based relationships and build consensus among key stakeholders – legislative champions, political finance regulators (PFRs), political actors, civil society groups, media, academics, and, ultimately, the public.

**Legal and Regulatory Framework:** Once the purpose of the political finance system is identified and defined, it is important to work with legislative champions and regulatory bodies to review and support legal, regulatory, and procedural reforms. Such reforms are often grounded in developing an affective disclosure regime. Disclosure, particularly if public, generates greater accountability to the voters by encouraging more informed decision-making and political debate. Further, it encourages compliance with applicable laws and regulations by providing regulators with the political financial account information to enforce the laws that define the features of the system and better apply public funding mechanisms.

**Political Finance Regulatory Institutions:** It is also critical to support independent institutions for effective oversight, monitoring, and enforcement by working with PFRs such as election commissions, audit agencies, and other similar bodies tasked with implementation and enforcement of political finance laws and regulations. In so doing, their capacities can be built through training, mentoring, and technical assistance to support their operational and financial independence.

**Compliance, Oversight, and Enforcement:** To ensure appropriate, timely, and fair enforcement, political party agents need to comply with the laws and regulations, and prosecutors and judges need to understand the political finance regulatory systems. Doing so allows the latter to effectively work with PFRs, particularly auditors, to identify and address transgressions through prosecution or other remedies (e.g., fines, arbitration). Further, non-state actors in civil society and the media can use disclosure and other means (e.g., expenditure counting, tracking abuse of state resources) to monitor political finance, hold political actors to account, and educate the public.

**Political Finance Reform:** Reform requires a feedback loop that starts with an enabling environment (i.e., window of opportunity) which recognizes the political finance priority and encourages key stakeholder to assess and analyze the current state of the political finance system, and ends with an evaluation of the political finance system once the dust settles from an election. Working with a coalition of political finance stakeholders can bring about greater transparency and accountability among electoral contestants and politicians tasked with reflecting the will of the people.

**UNISHKA’s Program Approaches**

Through technical assistance, training, and mentoring, UNISHKA supports coalitions of political finance stakeholders to ensure greater transparency and accountability during each step of the Reform Cycle. To do this, we:

- **Conduct Political Finance Assessments** that analyze the legal and regulatory framework, readiness for reform, and institutional capacities, while mapping out political actors and civil society.
- **Train investigative journalists** on the role of money in politics and in how to identify and report on political finance scandals in an accurate and impartial manner.
- **Identify and seize upon windows of opportunity** to facilitate collaborative, trust-based relationships and build consensus among key stakeholders – legislative champions, political finance regulators (PFRs), political actors, civil society groups, media, academics, and, ultimately, the public.
- **Conduct collaborative multi-party, political finance stakeholder workshops** to define the purpose and direction of political finance reforms by examining comparative practices from other countries facing similar challenges.
- **Review and support legal, regulatory, and procedural reforms** by providing comparative practice, model laws, and technical advice to legal reformers and regulatory bodies.
- **Introduce transparent political finance account disclosure, asset disclosure, and review and audit mechanisms** through technical assistance and digital solutions.
- **Provide comparative practice guidance** in the introduction or enhancement of direct and/or indirect public subsidies for political parties and candidates.
- **Collaborate with local civil society partners** to conduct monitoring of routine political party and campaign finance account information.
- **Promote effective oversight, monitoring, and appropriate, timely, and fair enforcement** among PFRs and the judiciary by training and mentoring political party agents in compliance, and prosecutors and judges to better understand the political finance regulatory systems.

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