



## Strategy #7 – Change through Elections Listening Guide

*Elections determine who will represent the will of the people in a democratic society. The right to vote in free and fair elections is critical to having voice in a representative system. Elections hold governments accountable and are an important vehicle for advancing policies and interests. These are the voices of people who sought to promote change through elections. Please review the quotations and answer the questions below.*

	Gela Kevlishvili, Georgia	Larry Rubin, United States	Akbar Atri, Iran	Bissoon Sumera, South Africa	Bat Uul, Mongolia
What influence did the elections have?					
What challenges were confronted?					
Who was involved in the action?					
What was the intent of the action?					

*For further discussion:*

Why did these activists choose elections as a vehicle for making change?

What conditions are necessary for free and fair elections?

What are the implications when those conditions are not present?

Provide a contemporary example of an election changing society.

## Change through Elections Quotations

### **Gela Kevlishvili, Georgia**

My participation in those demonstrations was due to the election fraud in our district committed by the Citizens' Union in the parliamentary elections of November 2, 2003. Traditionally, bunches of ballot papers were dropped into booths there. The elections went on very badly, and we applied to the regional commission, to the court, calling on them to take appropriate measures concerning those places where election fraud occurred. Neither the regional commission nor the court considered our application, and we could do nothing but to go into streets; unfortunately, it was so. That conditioned my active participation in those demonstrations.

### **Larry Rubin, United States**

It was voter registration work and what that meant was walking down red clay roads in very rural communities, and knocking on people's doors, on African American people's doors, and encouraging them to go and register to vote. Often we had to go back to the same person many, many times. Often we had to go to friends who we knew who were a little bit braver than the first and ask the friends to encourage their friends. We organized what we called mass meetings at churches, the only purpose being to build the courage of people. We did organize groups to go down to try to register to vote, as a group, 'cause there's certain protection in groups...But it was rather boring, tedious work, just repeating the same thing over and over again to people who were absolutely justified in being afraid to try to register to vote because what would happen to them is generally they would lose their jobs, maybe they would have their house burned down, maybe they would get beaten up. Several got killed. When you went to register to vote, your name appeared in the paper for two weeks. Everybody that even tried, for two weeks their name was in the paper. So everybody knew who went down to the courthouse, just to try to register, even if they were turned away.

### **Akbar Atri, Iran**

And now this regime is delegitimized by people, by Iranian people. It is a very, very huge achievement. Now we -- our [societal] boundaries, you know, people crossed the boundaries. The last election, you see people from inside the regime, to outside the regime, religious, non-religious they all came together, and they all opposed, you know, Khamenei or supreme leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran]...But, this time it is the society pushed the government under pressure to, you know, bring -- to end discrimination in Iran. It is the big -- a huge achievement for Iranian woman that you know, speak up in public, they unified, they have their own organization. Under very horrible times, many of them were arrested, imprisoned -- they are in prison but they have not give up -- given up. It means it's successful; it means we are the right process because not the -- if one day we hope -- I hope this happens soon, we have the chance to change this regime.

### **Bissoon Sumera, South Africa**

You know, its such a difficult thing, but I didn't tell you one thing- that to fight apartheid when they told us that the ANC [African National Congress, the main opposition to the government during apartheid] has won and it's going to be the government people had — do you know that there was a referendum. We went, I personally and a group, we went house to house, getting people involved, showing them how to vote and that's how we were able to win the elections for ANC. Lot of hard work we did, every, take Unkomaas, we visited every home to educate the people because politics was not a thing that was discussed at the homes, but this brought about awakening.

### **Bat-Uul, Mongolia**

This means that we believe that people must freely elect the person who will lead our country. We will never elect a dictator. As for you it means that you will freely elect for yourself who will lead us. If you chose the wrong person, it is your fault and if you chose the right person, it is to your credit. Some people say that these people in state and government do nothing at all, which might be true. But the people have chosen them themselves, you know? Nobody grabbed their hand forcefully and made them sign, nobody demanded them by force to choose. In old times, dictators made us elect someone by force. There were elections held, but we chose only one person's name. Elect this one [laughs] and that is it, and we could not give another person's name. Now they give us names of a lot of people, you know? They tell us to elect who we like, you know? I guess democracy means choosing on your own, maybe.