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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-358](#), a report to the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of the House Committee on International Relations and the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere

Why GAO Did This Study

Supporting democracy abroad is a major U.S. foreign policy objective. To better understand how this assistance has been implemented in Latin America, GAO was asked to review programs in six countries—Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Peru—that have been of particular importance to U.S. interests in Central and South America. Between fiscal years 1992 and 2002, U.S. agencies have funded more than \$580 million in democracy-related programs in these countries. This report discusses the impact of and factors affecting this assistance and the overarching management issues that have affected program planning and implementation.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Departments of State and Justice and the U.S. Agency for International Development

- develop more comprehensive strategic plans at the regional and country level to address cooperation among agencies and other major donors,
- establish a strategy for periodically evaluating projects, and
- establish a systematic mechanism to share information among U.S. agencies and project implementers.

In responding to a draft of this report, these agencies generally agreed with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-358

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

U.S. Democracy Programs in Six Latin American Countries Have Yielded Modest Results

What GAO Found

U.S. programs to strengthen democratic institutions in six Latin American countries have had a modest impact to date. These programs have primarily focused on promoting (1) the rule of law, (2) governance, (3) human rights, and (4) elections. U.S. assistance has helped bring about important reforms in criminal justice in five of the six countries, improved transparency and accountability of some government functions, increased attention to human rights, and supported elections that observation groups have considered free and fair. However, host governments have not always sustained these reforms by providing the needed political, financial, and human capital. For example, host countries often did not support training programs, computer systems, or equipment after U.S. funding ended. In other cases, U.S.-supported programs were limited and targeted, and countries have not adopted these programs on a national scale.

Since host country resources for sustaining democracy programs are difficult to mobilize, it is crucial that the U.S. government and other donors manage available international resources as efficiently as possible for maximum impact and sustainability. Several management issues have affected democracy assistance programs. Poor coordination among the key U.S. agencies has been a long-standing management problem, and cooperation with other foreign donors has been limited. U.S. agencies' strategic plans do not outline how these agencies will overcome coordination problems and cooperate with other foreign donors on program planning and implementation to maximize scarce resources. Also, U.S. agencies have not consistently evaluated program results or shared lessons learned from completed projects, thus missing opportunities to enhance the outcomes of their programs.

U.S. Democracy Funding to Six Latin American Countries, Fiscal Years 1992 through 2002



Sources: GAO (analysis) and U.S. Agency for International Development and Department of Justice (data).