

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress made at least \$2 billion available to agencies annually for democracy assistance abroad in fiscal years 2015 through 2018. State and USAID are the primary U.S. agencies funding democracy assistance. This assistance supports activities related to enhancing rule of law, good governance, political competition and consensus building, civil society, independent media, and human rights.

Congress included a provision in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the fiscal year 2015 Continuing Appropriations Act for GAO to review agencies' roles and responsibilities in promoting democracy abroad. This report examines (1) State's and USAID's democracy assistance allocations, (2) State's and USAID's roles in providing democracy assistance and the extent to which their projects in selected countries are consistent with their defined roles, and (3) how State and USAID coordinate on democracy assistance. GAO reviewed State and USAID data and documents for fiscal years 2015 through 2018 and interviewed officials in Washington, D.C., and in the DRC, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Ukraine. GAO selected these countries because they received relatively high amounts of democracy assistance funding from State and USAID, among other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State direct DRL to develop a mechanism for the sharing of democracy assistance project information between DRL and relevant embassy staff. State concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-20-173](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

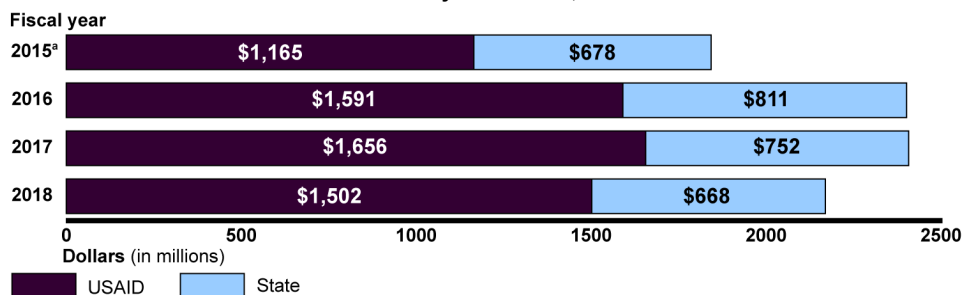
DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

State Should Improve Information Sharing with Embassies

What GAO Found

The Department of State (State) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated more than \$8.8 billion for democracy assistance in fiscal years 2015 through 2018.

State and USAID Allocations for Democracy Assistance, Fiscal Years 2015-2018



Legend: State = Department of State; USAID = U.S. Agency for International Development.
Source: GAO analysis of State data. | GAO-20-173

^aAccording to agency officials, language in the 2015 appropriations act permitted State and USAID to allocate less than the full amount directed to democracy programs by the act.

State and USAID have defined roles for democracy assistance and have obligated funding for projects in selected countries accordingly. State has identified its Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) as the U.S. lead for promoting democracy and protecting human rights abroad and has identified its Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) as the lead for promoting the rule of law. In fiscal years 2015 through 2018, DRL's and INL's obligated funding for democracy assistance in the countries GAO reviewed—the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Tunisia, and Ukraine—generally reflected their defined roles. For example, 24 to 77 percent of DRL's obligated funding in these countries supported human rights, and at least 90 percent of INL's obligated funding for democracy assistance in the countries supported the rule of law. USAID's democracy assistance strategy states that USAID has the leading role in U.S. development assistance. USAID's obligations for democracy assistance in the four countries supported multiyear, multimillion-dollar projects, consistent with what USAID officials told GAO was needed for long-term development.

State and USAID coordinate on democracy assistance in various ways, but embassy officials reported gaps in information about DRL assistance. Examples of coordination mechanisms include budget allocation discussions at headquarters and working groups at embassies to help avoid project duplication. However, State officials in all four selected countries said they generally lacked information about DRL democracy assistance projects, including project descriptions and funding amounts. State's existing information-sharing mechanisms, including data systems and strategies, do not consistently address these gaps. Overseas officials' lack of complete information about DRL's projects may inhibit State's efforts to coordinate with other agencies, implementing partners, and other donors.