Democratic governance—giving citizens a say in how decisions are made—is fundamental to ensuring that democracy delivers for all of society. Strong democratic governance is characterized by transparency and accountability in both the public and private sectors. An open, participatory governance process responds to citizen and business needs, resulting in better and fairer government policies. To this end, CIPE’s democratic governance programs promote open, informed public decision-making and principled corporate governance.
The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) strengthens democracy around the globe through private enterprise and market-oriented reform. CIPE is one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy and an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Since 1983, CIPE has worked with business leaders, policymakers, and journalists to build the civic institutions vital to a democratic society. CIPE’s key program areas include enterprise ecosystems, business advocacy, democratic governance, and anti-corruption & ethics.

KENYA

With CIPE’s support, Kenya-based think tank the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and five civil society organizations joined forces in a groundbreaking initiative to empower and coordinate civil society groups to engage county governments in developing, implementing, and monitoring budget priorities.

The civil society organizations first developed their ability to analyze county budgets and to find new ways to explain budgets to local citizens. Next, they solicited input from citizens on priorities for improving the public services provided by their county governments. These county coalitions were a first of their kind, bringing together a range of groups that did not usually work together, such as human rights advocates and private sector leaders. Through their work with CIPE, these organizations recognized that they had to work together if they were to have an impact. For example, the rights groups had more history advocating at the local level, but they needed the private sector’s expertise on taxation and infrastructure in order to analyze and explain county budgets.

Through one-on-one technical assistance provided by CIPE and IEA, the coalitions developed county budget score cards and citizen-driven alternative budgets. These practical and innovative tools have been instrumental in the coalitions’ ability to evaluate county budgets, offer clear alternatives, and ensure that taxpayer money is spent in ways that most benefit the Kenyan people.

ARGENTINA

Prior to 2015, Argentina, where politics has traditionally been driven by a cult of personality, was one of only two countries in the Western Hemisphere that had never held presidential debates.

CIPE teamed up with leading Argentinian think tank the Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC) to increase the level of policy discussion by organizing a debate in advance of the 2015 presidential election.

Thanks in large part to CIPPEC’s leadership and cultivation of the “Argentina Debate” initiative, for the first time in Argentina’s history five of the top six candidates participated in a televised debate before the first-round vote, generating massive public discussion. The leading candidate, who chose not to participate in the first debate, responded to heightened public pressure by quickly committing to participate in the runoff debate.

In the second debate, the amount of media coverage soared — with a television audience of more than 16 million in a country with 32 million voters. The goal of the project was to raise the political cost of not participating in the process by raising public demand for debates, something that was clearly achieved based on the record-breaking television audience and social media impressions. Evidence suggests that the decisions that paved the road to Mauricio Macri’s eventual election as President of Argentina included his participation in the debate process. Based on the results of Argentina’s first presidential debates, the role of this important democratic tool will be much more assured in the future.