

# The 2006 Freedom House Survey

## THE PUSHBACK AGAINST DEMOCRACY

*Arch Puddington*

*Arch Puddington is director of research at Freedom House. For more information on the survey, see the box on p. 126; for the rankings of individual countries for 2006, see the Table on pp. 128–29. Beginning this year, the period covered by the survey ends with the calendar year and the report was released by Freedom House in January (rather than December, as in the past). For this reason the survey will now be published in the April (rather than the January) issue of the Journal of Democracy. Although it appears in 2007, we title it the 2006 survey because that is the period which it covers. This report was completed with the assistance of Camille Eiss and Aili Piano.*

The year 2006 saw the emergence of a series of worrisome trends that together present potentially serious threats to the stability of new democracies, as well as obstacles to political reform in societies under authoritarian rule. These trends were among the principal findings of *Freedom in the World* for 2006, Freedom House's annual survey of political rights and civil liberties worldwide. The study notes that the percentage of countries designated as Free has failed to increase for nearly a decade and suggests that these trends may be contributing to a developing "stagnation of freedom." Other major findings include a setback for freedom in a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region, a more modest decline in Africa, and an entrenchment of authoritarian rule in most countries of the former Soviet Union.

One of the most troubling developments is a growing authoritarian "pushback" against organizations, movements, and media that monitor human rights or advocate the expansion of democratic freedoms. While a systematic effort to weaken or eliminate prodemocracy forces is most prevalent among authoritarian regimes in the former Soviet Union, some governments in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America have also taken steps to diminish freedom of assembly, smother civil society, and silence critics.

## FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

---

*Freedom in the World* is an evaluation of political rights and civil liberties in the world that Freedom House has provided on an annual basis for more than thirty years. (Established in New York in 1941, Freedom House is a nonprofit organization that monitors political rights and civil liberties around the world.) The survey assesses a country's freedom by examining its record in two areas: A country grants its citizens **Political Rights** when it permits them to form political parties that represent a significant range of voter choice and whose leaders can openly compete for and be elected to positions of power in government. A country upholds its citizens' **Civil Liberties** when it respects and protects their religious, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and other rights, including gender and family rights, personal freedoms, and freedoms of the press, belief, and association. The survey rates each country on a seven-point scale for both political rights and civil liberties (1 representing the most free and 7 the least free) and then divides the world into three broad categories: Free (countries whose ratings average 1.0 to 2.5); Partly Free (countries whose ratings average 3.0 to 5.0); and Not Free (countries whose ratings average 5.5 to 7.0).

The ratings, which are the product of a process that includes a team of in-house and consultant writers along with senior academic scholars, are not merely assessments of the conduct of governments. Rather, they are intended to reflect the real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals as the result of actions by both state and nonstate actors. Thus a country with a benign government facing violent forces (such as terrorist movements or insurgencies) hostile to an open society will be graded on the basis of the on-the-ground conditions that determine whether the population is able to exercise its freedoms. The survey enables scholars and policy makers both to assess the direction of global change annually and to examine trends in freedom over time and on a comparative basis across regions with different political and economic systems.

For more information about Freedom House's programs and publications please visit [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).

*Note:* The findings in this essay and accompanying table reflect global events from 1 December 2005 through 31 December 2006.

This campaign to stifle civil society and squelch potential sources of prodemocracy activism has thus far mainly played out in those societies already under dictatorial rule, such as Belarus and Uzbekistan, and those clearly moving in an authoritarian direction, such as Russia and Venezuela. The pushback against democracy therefore poses a much greater threat to the progress of freedom in authoritarian settings than in those societies where a strong measure of democratic liberties has already been achieved. Significantly, the past year saw modest declines in freedom in such key authoritarian states as Iran and Zimbabwe.

Globally, the state of freedom in 2006 differed little from that in 2005. The number of countries judged by *Freedom in the World* as Free in 2006 stood at 90, representing 47 percent of the world's independent countries, which are home to around three billion people—46 percent of the global population. The number of Free countries increased by one (Guyana) since the previous survey for the year 2005. The number of countries qualifying as Partly Free remained unchanged at 58, or about 30 percent of all countries assessed by the survey. Around a billion people, 17 percent of the world's population, live in Partly Free societies. The countries judged Not Free numbered 45, a figure unchanged from 2005. These 45 represented 23 percent of all independent countries, and the number of people living under Not Free conditions stood at around 2.5 billion (37 percent of the world's population). It is important to note that about half these people lived in just a single country: China.

The number of electoral democracies also remained unchanged at 123. Three countries joined the ranks: Haiti, Montenegro, and Zambia. Developments in three countries—Nigeria, the Solomon Islands, and Thailand—disqualified them from the electoral-democracy list.

Three countries experienced positive status changes: Guyana moved from Partly Free to Free, and Haiti and Nepal moved from Not Free to Partly Free. Two countries experienced negative status changes: Both Congo (Brazzaville) and Thailand moved from Partly Free to Not Free. The number of countries included in the survey increased by one with the addition of newly independent Montenegro, which was scored as Partly Free.

While only five countries had a change in status, there was considerable movement that did not result in status changes. Thirty-one countries experienced changes in their numerical ratings for either Political Rights or Civil Liberties without a shift in their status, with 15 moving in a positive direction and 16 in a negative direction. In addition, the survey noted developments in other countries indicating positive or negative trends for freedom, although these were not of sufficient magnitude to change a country's numbers. (In the Table on pp. 128–29, these countries are indicated by “trend arrows” next to their names.) These more subtle developments were overwhelmingly negative in 2006,

**TABLE—INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES, FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2007:  
COMPARATIVE MEASURES OF FREEDOM**

COUNTRY	PR	CL	FREEDOM RATING	COUNTRY	PR	CL	FREEDOM RATING
Afghanistan	5	5	Partly Free	Egypt ↘	6	5	Not Free
Albania * ↗	3	3	Partly Free	El Salvador *	2	3	Free
Algeria	6	5	Not Free	Equatorial Guinea	7	6	Not Free
Andorra *	1	1	Free	Eritrea ↘	7	6	Not Free
Angola	6	5	Not Free	Estonia *	1	1	Free
Antigua & Barbuda *	2	2	Free	Ethiopia ↘	5	5	Partly Free
Argentina * ↘	2	2	Free	Fiji	6 ▼	4 ▼	Partly Free
Armenia	5	4	Partly Free	Finland *	1	1	Free
Australia *	1	1	Free	France *	1	1	Free
Austria *	1	1	Free	Gabon	6	4	Partly Free
Azerbaijan ↘	6	5	Not Free	The Gambia ↘	5	4	Partly Free
Bahamas *	1	1	Free	Georgia *	3	3	Partly Free
Bahrain ↘	5	5	Partly Free	Germany *	1	1	Free
Bangladesh *	4	4	Partly Free	Ghana *	1	2	Free
Barbados *	1	1	Free	Greece *	1	2	Free
Belarus	7	6	Not Free	Grenada *	1	2	Free
Belgium *	1	1	Free	Guatemala *	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
Belize *	1	2	Free	Guinea	6	5	Not Free
Benin * ↗	2	2	Free	Guinea-Bissau *	4 ▼	4	Partly Free
Bhutan	6	5	Not Free	Guyana *	2 ▲	3	Free
Bolivia *	3	3	Partly Free	Haiti *	4 ▲	5 ▲	Partly Free
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3 ▲	3	Partly Free	Honduras *	3	3	Partly Free
Botswana *	2	2	Free	Hungary * ↘	1	1	Free
Brazil * ↘	2	2	Free	Iceland *	1	1	Free
Brunei	6	5	Not Free	India *	2	3	Free
Bulgaria *	1	2	Free	Indonesia *	2	3	Free
Burkina Faso	5	3	Partly Free	Iran ↘	6	6	Not Free
Burma ↘	7	7	Not Free	Iraq	6	6 ▼	Not Free
Burundi *	4 ▼	5	Partly Free	Ireland *	1	1	Free
Cambodia	6	5	Not Free	Israel *	1	2	Free
Cameroon	6	6	Not Free	Italy * ↗	1	1	Free
Canada *	1	1	Free	Jamaica *	2	3	Free
Cape Verde *	1	1	Free	Japan *	1	2	Free
Central African Rep. *	5	4	Partly Free	Jordan	5	4	Partly Free
Chad	6	6 ▼	Not Free	Kazakhstan	6	5	Not Free
Chile *	1	1	Free	Kenya * ↘	3	3	Partly Free
China	7	6	Not Free	Kiribati *	1	1	Free
Colombia *	3	3	Partly Free	Kuwait	4	4 ▲	Partly Free
Comoros *	3 ▲	4	Partly Free	Kyrgyzstan ↘	5	4	Partly Free
Congo (Brazzaville)	6 ▼	5	Not Free	Laos	7	6	Not Free
Congo (Kinshasa)	5 ▲	6	Not Free	Latvia *	1	1	Free
Costa Rica *	1	1	Free	Lebanon	5	4	Partly Free
Côte d'Ivoire	7 ▼	6	Not Free	Lesotho *	2	3	Free
Croatia * ↗	2	2	Free	Liberia *	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
Cuba	7	7	Not Free	Libya	7	7	Not Free
Cyprus *	1	1	Free	Liechtenstein *	1	1	Free
Czech Republic *	1	1	Free	Lithuania *	1	1	Free
Denmark *	1	1	Free	Luxembourg *	1	1	Free
Djibouti	5	5	Partly Free	Macedonia *	3	3	Partly Free
Dominica *	1	1	Free	Madagascar *	4 ▼	3	Partly Free
Dominican Republic *	2	2	Free	Malawi *	4	3 ▲	Partly Free
Ecuador *	3	3	Partly Free	Malaysia ↘	4	4	Partly Free

COUNTRY	PR	CL	FREEDOM RATING	COUNTRY	PR	CL	FREEDOM RATING
Maldives ↗	6	5	Not Free	Solomon Islands	4 ▼	3	Partly Free
Mali *	2	2	Free	Somalia	7 ▼	7	Not Free
Malta *	1	1	Free	South Africa *	2 ▼	2	Free
Marshall Islands *	1	1	Free	South Korea *	1	2	Free
Mauritania	5 ▲	4	Partly Free	Spain *	1	1	Free
Mauritius *	1	2 ▼	Free	Sri Lanka *	4 ▼	4 ▼	Partly Free
Mexico *	2	3 ▼	Free	Sudan	7	7	Not Free
Micronesia *	1	1	Free	Suriname *	2	2	Free
Moldova *	3	4	Partly Free	Swaziland	7	5	Not Free
Monaco *	2	1	Free	Sweden *	1	1	Free
Mongolia *	2	2	Free	Switzerland *	1	1	Free
Montenegro *	3	3	Partly Free	Syria	7	6 ▲	Not Free
Morocco	5	4	Partly Free	Taiwan *	2 ▼	1	Free
Mozambique *	3	4	Partly Free	Tajikistan	6	5	Not Free
Namibia *	2	2	Free	Tanzania	4	3	Partly Free
Nauru *	1	1	Free	Thailand	7 ▼	4 ▼	Not Free
Nepal	5 ▲	4 ▲	Partly Free	Timor-Leste *	3	4 ▼	Partly Free
Netherlands *	1	1	Free	Togo	6	5	Not Free
New Zealand *	1	1	Free	Tonga	5	3	Partly Free
Nicaragua *	3	3	Partly Free	Trinidad & Tobago * 2	▲	2	Free
Niger *	3	3	Partly Free	Tunisia	6	5	Not Free
Nigeria	4	4	Partly Free	Turkey *	3	3	Partly Free
North Korea	7	7	Not Free	Turkmenistan	7	7	Not Free
Norway *	1	1	Free	Tuvalu *	1	1	Free
Oman	6	5	Not Free	Uganda	5	4	Partly Free
Pakistan	6	5	Not Free	Ukraine *	3	2	Free
Palau *	1	1	Free	United Arab Emirates	6	5 ▲	Not Free
Panama *	1	2	Free	United Kingdom *	1	1	Free
Papua New Guinea *	3	3	Partly Free	United States *	1	1	Free
Paraguay *	3	3	Partly Free	Uruguay *	1	1	Free
Peru *	2	3	Free	Uzbekistan	7	7	Not Free
Philippines * ↘	3	3	Partly Free	Vanuatu *	2	2	Free
Poland *	1	1	Free	Venezuela *	4	4	Partly Free
Portugal *	1	1	Free	Vietnam	7	5	Not Free
Qatar	6	5	Not Free	Yemen	5	5	Partly Free
Romania * ↗	2	2	Free	Zambia *	3 ▲	4	Partly Free
Russia ↘	6	5	Not Free	Zimbabwe ↘	7	6	Not Free
Rwanda	6	5	Not Free				
St. Kitts & Nevis *	1	1	Free				
St. Lucia *	1	1	Free				
St. Vincent *	2	1	Free				
Samoa *	2	2	Free				
San Marino *	1	1	Free				
São Tomé & Príncipe*	2	2	Free				
Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not Free				
Senegal *	2	3	Free				
Serbia *	3	2	Free				
Seychelles * ↘	3	3	Partly Free				
Sierra Leone *	4	3	Partly Free				
Singapore	5	4	Partly Free				
Slovakia *	1	1	Free				
Slovenia *	1	1	Free				

PR and CL stand for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most-free and 7 the least-free rating.

▲ ▼ up or down indicates an improvement or a worsening, respectively, in Political Rights or Civil Liberties since the last survey.

↗ ↘ up or down indicates a trend arrow.

\* indicates countries that are electoral democracies.

The Freedom Rating is an overall judgment based on survey results. See the box on p. 126 for more details on the survey. The ratings in this table reflect global events from 1 December 2005 through 31 December 2006.

with 18 countries given negative trend arrows and only 6 given positive ones. Thus, if one combines the changes at all these different levels (status, ratings, and trend arrows), there were 35 countries that moved in a negative direction and 21 that moved in a positive direction.

Several of the countries that showed declines during the year are those already counted among the world's most repressive states: Burma, Eritrea, Iran, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. Yet declines were also noted in a number of countries rated Free or Partly Free, but whose democratic institutions remain unformed or fragile, as well as in societies that had previously demonstrated a significant measure of democratic stability: Argentina, Brazil, Hungary, Kenya, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, and Taiwan.

In 2006, Freedom House began publishing a more detailed set of data for the countries assessed by *Freedom in the World*. In addition to the overall political rights and civil liberties ratings that have traditionally been made public, Freedom House released for the first time each country's scores in the seven subcategories that determine our ratings: political process; political pluralism and participation; functioning of government (including corruption and transparency); freedom of expression and belief; associational and organizational rights; rule of law; and personal autonomy and individual rights. This move toward greater transparency in our ratings goes further to convey the "whys" that drive shifts in broader country ratings, both positive and negative.

Moreover, closer attention to *Freedom in the World's* subcategory scores allows for a more precise analysis of global and regional trends in freedom. For policy makers and scholars, this provides a clearer and more detailed window into the performance and trajectory of individual countries, as well as the underlying reasons for political change. This additional set of scores will not be released until later in 2007, but a preliminary assessment points to several discernible trends that affected a substantial number of countries or that presented particular problems in certain regions:

*A decline in freedom of expression and freedom of the press.* Although a decline in press freedom affected both democracies and authoritarian states, it was a particular problem in countries where authoritarian-minded leaders are moving to eliminate or marginalize independent voices. Emblematic of this trend was the announcement at year's end that Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez intends to deny a license renewal to a television station that has been critical of his policies.

*Weakness in the rule of law.* This was reflected in part in an upsurge in violence, street crime, and policing failures, especially in Latin America, as well as in seriously flawed judicial systems in a number of African countries.

*Pervasive corruption and a lack of government transparency.* These problems, deeply rooted in many cases, ranked as a crucial impediment

to democratic governance across many parts of the world, especially in Africa, the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, and Latin America.

## Regional Patterns

**Latin America.** Despite the prevalence of some alarming trends, the past year was marked by an impressive number of fair and competitive elections in relatively new democracies and societies experiencing social turbulence. In Latin America alone, successful elections were conducted in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. The winning candidates included leftist populists, conservatives, and candidates with moderately left-of-center platforms. Still, most of these countries suffer from serious domestic problems that, in many cases, have weakened the fabric of their democratic institutions. Many of them are plagued by disturbingly high rates of violent crime, economic instability, massive inequality, and endemic corruption. Under these circumstances, conducting competitive elections—with a relatively level playing field in which opposition parties are free to campaign, and with guarantees for minority participation—is a worthy achievement. Democracy will remain incomplete and therefore vulnerable, however, if governments fail to curb corruption, strengthen the rule of law, and protect the rights of minorities and the indigenous. Indeed, there is already a disturbing tendency in Latin America for parties or political movements to refuse to accept the results of elections that are generally deemed fair. This trend was evident in this year's developments in Bolivia and Mexico, both countries with serious divisions between those of European descent and indigenous peoples.

**Asia-Pacific.** The dominant event in the Asia-Pacific region was the military-led coup that ousted Thailand's democratically elected prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. The coup occurred without significant violence and, despite the brief ban on all political activity and public demonstrations, the military has subsequently avoided policies of overt repression. While Thaksin's style of governance had led the country's *Freedom in the World* rating to decline in recent years, Thailand had represented an important gain for democracy in Asia, and the coup caused its Political Rights rating to decline to the lowest possible for the survey, dropping its status from Partly Free to Not Free.

Another important setback occurred in Sri Lanka, where the Tamil Tigers' intimidation of civilians and increased harassment of the press led to decreases in the country's rating for both its Political Rights and Civil Liberties. Timor-Leste also experienced a significant decline in freedom as a result of rioting and violent clashes involving both members of the defense forces and civilians, as well as a lack of government accountability. In Fiji, the ratings for both Political Rights and Civil

Liberties dropped because of a coup that replaced the elected prime minister with an interim military government. Taiwan registered a small decline in its Political Rights rating due to concerns over corruption at the highest levels of government. There were also modest but ominous declines in Burma, Malaysia, the Philippines, and the Solomon Islands.

Although China continued to experience dynamic change in the economic sphere, there was little evidence of openings toward political freedom or enhanced individual liberties. Heightened activism among the country's middle class has led some to hope that the ripple effects of economic change may one day transform China's political culture. Unfortunately, the past year was dominated by further repression of the press and the Internet; the prosecution of civic activists and the lawyers who represent them; and increased efforts to keep religion under state control.

The Asia-Pacific's most important positive development occurred in Nepal, where the direct rule of King Gyanendra ended, parliament returned, and improvements were made in the rule of law. These developments led to an improvement in Nepal's status from Not Free to Partly Free.

Although the factors contributing to freedom's decline in the region varied from country to country, ethnic and religious divisions stood out as a major problem in some places—Fiji, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka—and a potential source of discontent in others, including Indonesia, which retained its designation as Free. Perhaps the most disquieting aspect of the year's developments is the fact that three countries previously considered to be models of Asian freedom—Timor-Leste, the Philippines, and Thailand—experienced substantial setbacks.

**Africa.** After several years of steady and, in a few cases, impressive democratic gains, freedom in sub-Saharan Africa suffered more setbacks than advances in 2006. One country, Congo (Brazzaville), saw its *Freedom in the World* status decline from Partly Free to Not Free due principally to a heightened lack of transparency and openness on the part of the government. Other countries suffered declines as well—including some that have made promising gains in the past, such as Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritius, Somalia, and South Africa. More modest declines in freedom were experienced in Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Kenya, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe.

There were also some important gains made during the year. Congo (Kinshasa) saw its Political Rights rating improve because of successful presidential elections, the first in the country's history. Liberia enjoyed a notably peaceful environment during Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's first year as president and showed progress in fighting corruption and expanding government transparency. Conditions also improved in Benin and Malawi, as well as in Mauritania, where important steps were taken toward political pluralism and a functioning electoral framework.

As in Asia, the causes for freedom's decline in Africa varied from



country to country. A regionwide analysis, however, reveals several common factors. One is a lack of transparency and openness in government conduct. A related issue is increased pressure by governments on freedom of expression and of the media, both in countries with high levels of

---

***Russia has gone out of its way to support autocrats and to oppose efforts by the UN and other bodies to condemn or impose sanctions on dictatorships with records of blatant human rights abuse.***

---

freedom (such as Ghana and Mali) and those with generally poor freedom records (including Burundi and Gabon). Another factor is regime pressure on opposition figures and political parties. Perhaps the most significant factor, however, is a weakness in the rule of law, which is reflected in declining scores in a number of countries, including both generally high performers (such as South Africa) and countries with less impressive records in protecting freedom (such as Chad, Ethiopia, and Eritrea).

***Russia and its neighbors.*** The year saw little significant change for freedom in the region. As was the case in 2005, the only relatively bright spots among the non-Baltic countries of the former Soviet Union were Georgia and Ukraine, which have been designated as Partly Free and Free, respectively. Modest declines were noted in Russia, due to its crackdown on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); in Azerbaijan, due to the regime's increasingly tight grip on the media; and in Kyrgyzstan, due to a decline in religious freedom.

Russia's pervasive influence throughout the region bodes ill for reform prospects. President Vladimir Putin has systematically weakened or marginalized independent media, advocates for democracy, and regime critics generally. The murder of crusading journalist Anna Politkovskaya, carried out in gangland-assassination style, is but the latest, albeit the most disturbing, case in a series of journalist killings that have gone unsolved by the government. Putin also placed further restrictions on the ability of opposition parties to campaign effectively for office, while government policies tolerated discrimination against Russian citizens from the North Caucasus and encouraged the mistreatment of immigrants from Georgia.

Russia thus serves as a model for authoritarian-minded leaders in the region and elsewhere. Although Russia's relations with Belarus were briefly frayed due to a dispute over energy prices, it has otherwise gone out of its way to support the region's autocrats and to oppose efforts by the United Nations and other bodies to condemn or impose sanctions on dictatorships with records of blatant human rights abuse. The region has produced three countries whose human rights and democracy records are among the world's worst: Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Leaders in all three of these countries share a ruthless determination to crush independent voices of opposition, whether in the press, the political arena, or civil society.

Both Georgia and Ukraine succeeded in further consolidating some of the reforms that had been instituted after their respective democratic revolutions. Ukrainian democracy, however, was somewhat tarnished by continuing corruption and the political stalemate that occurred during the protracted process of establishing a governing coalition after parliamentary elections had failed to produce a clear winner.

Meanwhile, democracy's roots grew deeper in most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, even as some experienced polarization and difficulties in governance. The only major ratings change occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina, due to its generally successful administration of national elections. More modest improvements were noted in Albania, for enhanced anticorruption efforts; in Croatia, for bolstering laws against hate crimes; and in Romania, due to reform of the judiciary. Hungary experienced a modest setback due to riots and civil unrest that occurred in the country's intensely polarized political environment.

In general, the year brought further evidence of the powerful influence of the European Union (EU) on the postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Throughout the region, countries have improved their political processes, transparency, treatment of minorities, rule of law, and basic civil liberties to meet the strict standards of EU membership. Moreover, EU standards have prevented new member states from backsliding, even as some have experienced political divisions and discontent over economic change.

**Middle East and North Africa.** This region saw little change over the past year. The Civil Liberties ratings of both Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates increased as a result of improvements in freedom of assembly, while Syria's rating rose due to a small improvement in personal autonomy. Modest declines were registered in Egypt for repression of the political opposition, and in Bahrain and Iran for the curtailment of freedom of assembly.

While the Middle East continues to lag behind other regions in the development of free institutions, the fact that progress has been made since the attacks of 9/11 gives some cause for optimism. In 2000, the region had one Free country (Israel), three Partly Free countries (Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco), and 14 Not Free countries. By 2006, the number of Partly Free countries and territories had risen to seven with the addition of Bahrain, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, and Yemen. In the Palestinian Authority, hopes that competitive elections would lead to steps forward were dashed as a result of continued operation of Palestinian militias engaged in violence against Israel and their own political rivals.

Progress in the Middle East occurred under extremely difficult circumstances: the invasion and occupation of Iraq, ongoing conflict be-

tween Israel and the Palestinians, the rise of radical Islamism, increased terrorism, Iran and Syria's encouragement of antidemocratic forces, and generally poor economic performance by states without oil.

Unfortunately, the confluence of these negative trends poses a powerful threat to the gains for freedom in Lebanon. The promising achievements of the Cedar Revolution were seriously jeopardized by the conflict with Israel that erupted as a result of the Hezbollah militia's capture of an Israeli serviceman; by Hezbollah's efforts to bring down the elected government; and especially by Syria and Iran's ongoing campaigns to destroy the country's democracy.

### **New Aspects of the Antidemocratic Drive**

The pushback against democracy, a phenomenon that has been gaining momentum for several years, emerged as a major obstacle to the spread of freedom in 2006. While there is nothing especially new about the suppression of democracy advocates by dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, certain features of the current pushback distinguish it from past methods of political repression.

First, the targets of the pushback are less likely to be political parties or labor unions—the primary targets in the past—than independent non-governmental organizations, other civil society institutions, and the press. Second, regimes are generally less likely to employ the traditional techniques of extreme repression: military rule, mass arrests, assassinations, torture, and coups. Instead, governments often use legalistic tactics to put potential voices of opposition out of business. Critical media are silenced by regime-directed economic pressure (such as discouraging advertisers from doing business with independent newspaper and broadcast outlets), the denial of licenses to privately owned television stations, unabashed state takeovers, and criminal slander charges against reporters who criticize the leadership. Another increasingly common tactic is use of the tax police to investigate and reinvestigate NGOs that are critical of government policies. Moreover, a number of regimes have recently adopted policies that make it difficult or impossible for domestic NGOs to receive support from foreign sources. Such policies are a potent weapon, given the lack of local sources of financial support in impoverished countries.

An element of global cooperation among authoritarian regimes also distinguishes the current drive against democracy and democracy promotion. For example, a 2005 statement issued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—an entity comprised of Russia, China, and several Central Asian countries—attacked democracy assistance, asserting that, “the right of every people to its own path of development must be fully guaranteed.” In addition to China and Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Iran, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe have all adopted

policies designed to suppress NGOs, restrict freedom of assembly, or marginalize the press.

The pushback against democracy is particularly disturbing insofar as it affects societies in which political parties are weak or unformed. In this context, it is often civil society that serves as the principal driving force behind democratic change and the protection of human rights. Organizations that fight for women's rights, demand government transparency, protest police abuse and torture, defend the rights of minorities, and protect academic freedom are what prevent societies with troubled political conditions from declining into despotism.

### **A Stagnation of Freedom?**

The past quarter-century has produced gains for political freedom unprecedented in human history. But as we acknowledge this record of progress, we must also take a hard look at freedom's more recent trajectory. And here, the record gives serious cause for concern.

Since 1998, the proportion of countries designated as Free has essentially remained unchanged at 46 percent. To be sure, this period has witnessed progress in a number of key countries, including India, Indonesia, Mexico, Ukraine, and several countries of the former Yugoslavia. It has also seen significant setbacks, however, most notably in Pakistan, Russia, and Venezuela. In China, the continued denial of essential political rights and civil liberties condemns more than a billion people to life in a Not Free society, while in the Arab Middle East, despite the gains made by some countries, freedom continues to progress at a glacial pace and the region continues to suffer from a "freedom deficit." Globally, a discernible trend has emerged: Countries achieve a modest level of freedom—these are the Partly Free countries of the survey—and then fail to move forward to liberal democracy. Does this apparent halt in progress suggest that we are facing a stagnation of freedom?

It is frequently suggested that many of freedom's gains during the final years of the Cold War and the immediate post-1989 period occurred in what might be considered the easiest cases: Central European countries with historic ties to the democratic world, Latin American countries with (inconsistent) democratic histories, and Asian countries with strong economies and close ties to the United States and Europe.

Yet consider the arguments that many scholars and regional experts made not so long ago. Democracy, they claimed, was not the natural state of affairs in Central Europe or the Balkans; Catholic (and Orthodox) societies were destined to an autocratic fate; and personal freedom was alien to Asian culture. Some even argued that Third World societies generally needed the firm hand of authoritarianism, as opposed to the messiness of democracy, in order to secure development for their people. These arguments have been discredited as the citizens of these coun-

tries have asserted their right to universally recognized political freedoms. Gains have been achieved in such diverse settings as El Salvador, Ghana, Indonesia, and Slovakia, suggesting that relatively recent histories of dictatorship, civil conflict, and weak democratic institutions do not necessarily prohibit progress.

Indeed, while elections themselves are not sufficient, the ability to elect—and remove—political leaders is a fundamental mechanism of democratic accountability. One of the most important achievements of the modern democracy movement is the substantial expansion in the number of countries that regularly conduct fair and competitive elections. Successful elections were conducted throughout South and Central America during the past year, despite an alarming surge of criminal violence, political polarization, and dissatisfaction with economic globalization. Not so long ago, coups were the normal state of affairs in various regions. Today, the significance of the coup in Thailand is magnified by the event's very rarity.

That some two-thirds of the world's countries now choose their leaders through elections is due, in part, to international norms that have been established and to the willingness of the international community to apply them. Numerous private and quasi-governmental entities monitor elections and publicize violations of accepted polling standards. The EU insists on fair and competitive elections as a requirement for membership, while the Commonwealth of Nations and the Organization of American States emphasize elections in their charters and monitoring activities.

Meanwhile, a growing number of organizations monitor and report on several other specific dimensions of freedom: corruption and transparency, minority rights, press freedom, religious freedom, academic freedom, workers' rights, and women's equality. Offenders worldwide may very well be paying more attention as governments and international organizations incorporate assessments of freedom indicators into their processes for allocating foreign aid.

These initiatives should be strengthened and expanded if we are to avoid a continuing stagnation of freedom or even a reversal of recent gains. At the same time, it is essential to identify and protest against the tactics employed by those currently driving the pushback against democracy. Those countries responsible for this campaign against freedom's expansion include some of the largest and most powerful in the world, making a redoubled effort in freedom's defense all the more essential.

- *The Pushback Against Democracy*

[\[Access article in HTML\]](#) [\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

*Subject Headings:*

- Democracy.
- World politics -- 21st century.

*Abstract:*

Freedom appeared in a state of stagnation during 2006, according to Freedom House's annual Freedom in the World survey. The most significant development was the decline in freedom in Asia and continued poor performance in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Globally, many countries showed evidence of problems with press freedom, rule of law, and corruption. Freedom House also pointed to a growing "pushback" against democracy in such countries as Russia, Venezuela, Iran, China, Belarus, and Zimbabwe. Regimes used legalistic methods to smother independent media and marginalize nongovernmental organizations in a broad effort to eliminate sources of potential democratic ferment.

---

Weiss, Herbert F.

- *Voting for Change in the DRC*

[\[Access article in HTML\]](#) [\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

*Subject Headings:*

- Elections -- Congo (Democratic Republic)
- Congo (Democratic Republic) -- Politics and government -- 1997-
- Democracy -- Congo (Democratic Republic)

*Abstract:*

On 30 July and 20 October 2006, less than a year after a December 2005 constitutional referendum, the vast and strife-wracked Democratic Republic of the Congo held its first multiparty elections since 1965. The holding of competitive elections must count as a significant achievement even though voters signaled their disaffection with the entire array of political elites that had been ruling them.

Darmanovic, Srdjan.

- *Montenegro: A Miracle in the Balkans?*

[\[Access article in HTML\]](#) [\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

*Subject Headings:*

- Montenegro -- Politics and government -- 1992-
- Montenegro -- Foreign relations.

*Abstract:*

When 55.5 percent of the citizens of Montenegro voted on 21 May 2006 to sever the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro and make their republic a fully sovereign country in its own right, they set the capstone on a political shift that has been noteworthy for its peaceful and orderly conduct in a region which has

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.