

## **COUNTRIES AT THE CROSSROADS 2007: COUNTRY FINDINGS SUMMARIES**

### **Algeria**

Following a decade of civil conflict, political and economic conditions in Algeria have generally improved since Abdelaziz Bouteflika became president in 1999. The government has reduced internal violence and social spending has increased. The state has also supported a reconciliation process that offers amnesty to government and Islamist forces and provides some compensation to victims. However, the reconciliation process has been widely criticized; public debate on abuses remains weak and investigations into those responsible have been limited. The general post-conflict improvements in respect for civil liberties, rule of law, and transparency account for the slight increase over 2005 scores; however, the concentration of presidential power and limits on political parties and the press account for the very slight decline in the accountability and public voice score.

In 2006, President Bouteflika announced his intention to amend the constitution in order to enable him to run for a third term, a particularly troubling sign, since the legislature and judiciary remain weak in comparison to the executive. Moreover, the government has restricted political party activity, particularly to weaken Islamist groups, and journalists are frequently harassed for criticizing the government. Although systematic abuses by the police have declined, the state's Military Security force continues to use torture. Sporadic political violence continues, and women and the disabled face discrimination. Although the government officially protects property rights, there has been little progress on the privatization of many state assets, and the inner workings of state oil company Sonatrach remain opaque.

### **Angola**

During the 2005-2006 period, the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) continued to dominate politics and political power continued to be centralized in the person of the president. The government's perpetual promise, since 1997, to hold elections "in two years" continues to be pushed back; 2008 and 2009 are now being promised for legislative and presidential elections, respectively. In 2006, voter registration started, and new electoral laws were passed with the consultation of opposition groups, which nonetheless faced restrictions.

Angola's accountability and public voice score improved significantly due to relaxation on restrictions on freedom to organize and protest, new media laws ending the state monopoly on broadcasting, and journalists' enjoyment of a slight reprieve from government harassment. Human rights abuses by the military and police continued throughout 2005, but improved slightly the following year. Despite these gains, and others, non-transparency and corruption continue to stymie democratic advances in Angola. The oil industry, in particular, which provides almost 90 percent of government revenues, has improved its transparency but continues to require further efforts. Rule of law is still weak, owing to the combination of low judicial independence, a scarcity of municipal courts, poorly-paid judges who demand bribes, and problems associated with poverty and illiteracy.

## **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh's political environment remains volatile following a prolonged period of political tension that eventually led to the dissolution of the government in late 2006 and the establishment of a caretaker government under military control in January 2007. Although formal democratic processes have existed since the end of military rule in 1991, instability, corruption, and weak rule of law pose enduring challenges that have contributed to an overall decline in the country's scores between 2005 and 2007.

Elections had been scheduled for early 2007, remained postponed throughout late 2006 and early 2007 as political elites from the two main alliances were unable to reach agreement on electoral rules. In any event, weak campaign finance rules render the electoral playing field highly uneven, which discriminates against smaller parties. Parliamentary oversight bodies and government regulatory agencies, such as the Anticorruption Commission, have proven to be extremely weak. Rule of law scores declined in dramatic fashion, due especially to the military takeover, but also owing to continued executive control over lower courts, as well as increased conflict between the president and the high courts.

Corruption is endemic, particularly among the police, executive, and judiciary; recent surveys indicate that Bangladeshis perceive corruption to be a "fact of life." Although freedom of expression is constitutionally protected, it is reversible in matters relating to security, and journalists occasionally face harassment. The government's creation of a new anticrime and terror security force in 2004 has, to date, increased the frequency of torture and the killing of innocent citizens. However, there have been some concrete advances in women's rights, including parliamentary quotas for female ministers and steady increases in women's labor market participation.

## **Bhutan**

Bhutan's smooth and peaceful transition from monarchy to democracy was reflected in improved scores in all categories of this year's *Crossroads* survey. In a surprise move in December 2006, King Jigme Singye Wanchuck announced his abdication in favor of his eldest son, paving the way for further democratization. Significant changes occurred between 2005 and 2007, beginning with the announcement of a draft constitution, which was subsequently revised following several months of public consultation. Since then, political parties have been legalized, two newspapers founded, and the first parliamentary elections are planned for 2008.

The government is also improving protection of human rights. In 2005 it created the National Commission for Women and Children, which delivered a National Plan of Action to improve women's rights, access to education, and representation in politics and the workplace, all of which are currently substandard. The problem of Bhutanese people of Nepalese descent, known as Lhotshampas, who were legally barred from citizenship in the early 1990s, remains unresolved. Many continue to live in refugee camps in Nepal. International outcry regarding the issue appears to have gone unheeded, as the draft constitution provides no resolution to the nationality issue.

Corruption perceptions are high in Bhutan, although the government has made progress by establishing an Anticorruption Commission and requiring all public officials declare their assets. Corruption cases are more frequently coming before the courts, including prosecutions against a district governor and a former judge.

## **Bolivia**

Amid growing social unrest in 2005, Bolivia elected coca growers leader Evo Morales as president and gave an absolute majority in the lower house of Congress to his political party, the Movement towards Socialism (MAS), thereby peacefully turning power over to Bolivia's indigenous majority. The highly successful elections were the main factor in Bolivia's significant score increase in accountability and public voice. In line with campaign pledges, Morales passed land redistribution legislation, reduced coca eradication efforts, and nationalized the country's energy resources. He also led the campaign for a Constituent Assembly to "re-found" the Bolivian state. Morales' leadership has further polarized the country and conflict has increased; both the MAS and the opposition are quick to use protests to achieve what they cannot politically.

Bolivia continues to suffer from a lack of separation of powers in the branches of government, especially regarding judicial independence. In early 2007 the executive, congress, and judiciary battled over appointments to the Supreme Court. The judiciary is weak, and its underpaid judges are susceptible to both financial and political pressure. Similar to other countries in the region, Bolivia has a high level of corruption, which pervades interactions between citizens and the government, particularly the judiciary, police, and customs officials. Morales made a campaign pledge to attack corruption, but legislation has yet to be passed, and many high profile corruption charges appear to be politically motivated.

## **Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso remains under the rule of authoritarian President Blaise Compaore; nonetheless, scores improved following incremental progress. Elections in 2005 were widely seen as free, although there were some questions regarding their fairness, and the results reinforced the dominance of the President's CDP party. Competition is more open and legitimate at the local level, however. While Burkina Faso has an active media, including outlets that criticize the government and publicize corruption within the regime, improvements were overshadowed by the 2006 dropping of charges in the case of the 1998 murder of prominent journalist Nibert Zongo. As Zongo was a known critic of the government, this was seen as a warning for the media to self-censor.

Despite the authoritarian environment, the rights of minorities, including religious and ethnic groups and women, are largely respected. Corruption continues to be a problem, despite entities created by the regime to fight it, with higher level officials appearing to be immune and reports largely ignored. Also of concern in Burkina Faso is the lack of respect for the rule of law by members of the military as well as the lack of control over the military, as demonstrated by a serious altercation between soldiers and the police in December 2006 that led to six deaths.

## **China**

China's economic development maintained its momentum during the coverage period, while political development continued to lag behind. Scores improved moderately in each category, however, as the regime showed some signs of figuring out how to balance the need for institutional improvements with a clear resolve to maintain absolute control. Regarding accountability and public voice, the Communist Party retains strict control at all levels, but does allow for nominal expression of political choice through elections for village chiefs and delegates to the People's Congresses. While the nongovernmental and media sectors have grown enormously, cyclical crackdowns have a pernicious effect on their room to operate.

With respect to civil liberties, the organization of society into strictly monitored organizations, and the need to join the CCP to advance, has diminished. Still, repression occurs on a massive scale: prison conditions are brutal, demonstrations may be ruthlessly crushed, and the rights of ethnic and religious minorities are often trampled. While a highly inchoate culture of rule of law has begun to take hold, judges and prosecutors remain tools of the CCP. Property rights, while often applied arbitrarily, have measurably improved, largely due to the need to reassure foreign investors. Likewise, the effects of international criticism have been responsible for some of the very mild advances in anticorruption and transparency efforts, which include the punishment—sometimes in capital form—of thousands of officials for graft and the increased, although unsystematic, provision of information in areas ranging from the budget to health threats such as SARS and avian flu.

## **Colombia**

President Alvaro Uribe's 2006 reelection victory, which followed a constitutional change in 2005 allowing him to run for a second term, was approved by international observers as being free and fair. However, later in 2006 information emerged that seemed to provide proof of long-rumored links between paramilitaries and government officials. Subsequent investigations discovered paramilitary influence in the congress, the national prosecutor's office, the military, and the judiciary, highlighting the threats to the rule of law stemming from Colombia's ongoing battle with rebel groups.

These discoveries detracted from Uribe's otherwise notable efforts to improve security and contain paramilitary factions and caused Colombia's scores to fall somewhat. In order to deal with its internal conflict, the government initiated talks with ELN guerrillas and completed the demobilization of 30,000 members of the paramilitary AUC. The demobilization occurred under the terms of the 2006 Justice and Peace law, which offered reduced sentences for ex-paramilitary soldiers in return for the surrender of weapons and ill-gotten assets. However, serious questions remained about the legislation's perceived leniency and whether prosecutors were given enough time and resources to conduct adequate investigations.

The courts retain some independence, especially at higher levels, although legislators occasionally complain about court actions. In 2007 the Constitutional Court legalized abortion in cases of danger to the mother or rape and ruled that inheritance laws were discriminatory because they did not grant equal rights to same-sex partners. However, civil society groups, including NGOs and trade unions, continue to be subject to intimidation and violence from armed groups. While journalist murders have declined, reporters still face serious threats in many areas.

## **Ecuador**

Ecuador is characterized by chronic political instability, as evidenced by its eight presidents in ten years. In April 2005, President Lucio Gutierrez was forced out following clashes with the judiciary and widespread street protests. Elections in late 2006 brought to power President Rafael Correa, who remains popular as he leads an effort to rewrite the Ecuadorian constitution. Although not without controversy, the elections were generally considered free and fair. The government lacks an effective separation of powers. The judiciary, in particular, has been prone to control by a dominant executive branch; indeed, the judiciary remains one of Ecuador's weakest and least independent institutions.

Corruption continues to run rampant in Ecuador, particularly in the civil service and police forces, despite the existence of various plans and organisms created to fight it. Acts of corruption remain largely uninvestigated; with few deterrents, numerous loopholes, and contradictory laws, corrupt officials enjoy effective impunity. Since Gutierrez left office Ecuador's media freedom has improved, with an independent press and civil society allowed to monitor and criticize the government.

## **Egypt**

Between 2005 and 2007, the Egyptian government, led by President Hosni Mubarak and his National Democratic Party (NDP), continued to violate the political and civil rights of the populace through electoral restrictions and fraud, limits on the freedom of expression, the routine use of torture, and rampant public sector corruption. The retrenchment of the government after several years of hinting at a political opening accounts for Egypt's across-the-board decline in scores.

A potential democratic gain was squandered as the country's first direct, multiparty presidential election, held in September 2005, was tainted by accusations of fraud and vote-buying. In the attempt to stem the potential influence of the country's main opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood, the government imposed multiple restrictions on who could run for office and under what conditions, which biased both the 2005 and future electoral playing fields in the NDP's favor.

Press legislation passed in 2006 further tightened an already restricted freedom of expression by identifying over 30 offenses punishable by imprisonment, including the defamation of domestic and international leaders. Egyptians' civil liberties are routinely violated; political prisoners and ordinary citizens often face torture by state agents. In general, civil and political liberties formally enshrined in the constitution are routinely violated in practice; such rights are suspended under the state's emergency legislation, in place since 1981, which President Mubarak announced in 2006 would continue for at least two more years. The judiciary, considered a relative bastion of independence, faces increased pressure following constitutional amendments in 2007.

## **Eritrea**

Described as a country “under siege by its own leaders,” the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front, has maintained a culture of secrecy and absolute power that has led to Eritrea receiving the lowest overall scores in the 2007 survey. President Isaias Afwerki has continually rescheduled national elections and delayed implementation of the constitution. Balloting for regional and local elections has taken place, but political choices are strictly limited by candidate vetting and supervised balloting. Journalists are constantly targeted by the state and held in secret locations without charge. Access to independent information is virtually nonexistent; where internet and shortwave media have been vocal, they have been shut down.

Discrepancies between practice and the as-yet implemented constitution are extreme. Torture is rampant at severely overcrowded detention facilities, which include cargo containers placed in areas of sweltering temperatures. Nonetheless, some progressive social values in terms of women’s rights and children’s education have begun to emerge. Overall, however, repression is the dominant factor. Freedom of movement is limited and the state maintains a stronghold over all business sectors. The economic situation is dire; the regime has imposed strict penalties for using foreign currency without permission and stringent rules on international aid agencies, which led to many closures. Nearly all dissent now originates abroad; there are currently no avenues for substantive change open to the citizenry in Eritrea’s executive-dominated government.

## **Ethiopia**

For Ethiopia the past two years have contained a mix of advances and setbacks. Prior to the 2005 elections, Ethiopia saw a dramatic increase in civil society and media activity. Despite accusations from the opposition of fraud, intimidation, and disappearances, the run-up to the elections was more open than in previous instances, resulting in a small increase in the accountability and public voice score. The aftermath however, sent the country back toward repression. Opposition-led protests concerning electoral grievances resulted in nearly 200 deaths by late 2005, along with mass detentions and the arrest of journalists, activists, and opposition members on allegations including treason and genocide. Since April 2007 many of these people have been released, acquitted, or pardoned. Nonetheless, repercussions are still felt by the press, civil society, and would-be opposition supporters. Media freedom remains highly restricted and most outlets now exercise self-restraint to avoid attention from the government.

Some progress has been made in protecting women’s rights. In 2007 female circumcision was criminalized and conviction now carries up to a 10-year sentence. The courts have also been active, convicting members of the former Marxist-Leninist regime for genocide and crimes against humanity dating back to the Red Terror of the 1970s. However, the government has been unable or unwilling to settle several serious inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts. Corruption, meanwhile, has been on the rise in recent years, as weak checks on the actions of public officials, conflicts of interest between the private and public sectors, and a lack of transparency impede progress in reducing graft.

## **Honduras**

Honduras started 2005 with elections that were deemed free and fair, and although the presidential results were hotly debated, the process ended with a victory for Jose Manuel Zelaya Rosales of the Liberal party. However, due to political struggles, the government has had problems passing legislation and implementing policy even as President Zelaya's approval ratings remained high. Generally, Honduran politics remain stagnant, with allegiance to the two dominant parties based more on personalities and regionalism than ideological differences.

Despite the presence of established processes of democratic rule in Honduras, the government's involvement in curtailing civil liberties is a cause for concern. A number of UN reports released in 2007 raised concerns about disappearances and extrajudicial killings, especially of minors, and the failures of the Honduran administration to investigate. Much of the impetus for such actions relates to the severe problem of gang violence, which has resulted in crackdowns that threaten civil liberties but have been of dubious utility. In addition, press freedom, although constitutionally protected, remains subject to various constraints imposed by both the government and private actors.

The government made an improvement in transparency through the introduction of a sunshine law in 2006; however, it was viewed as containing far too many loopholes to provide comprehensive accountability. Moreover, judicial independence remains tenuous, even as judicial procedures have begun to show signs of increased efficiency.

## **Iran**

The 2005 and 2006 presidential, Assembly of Experts, and local elections in Iran highlighted the continuing problem of interference in the democratic process by unelected bodies. The domination of the Supreme Leader and the Council of Guardians was evident in the vetting process of candidates: all but one reformist presidential candidate was barred from participation, and women, lay people, and reformists were prohibited from standing for the Council of Experts. After the election of conservative president Mahmud Ahmadinejad, overall engagement with the government decreased. Continuing a previous trend, most reformist newspapers were temporarily suspended or shut down and arrests of internet bloggers increased. NGOs also found their access to the government restricted.

Iran's civil liberties record has recently deteriorated. Oppression of adherents to the Baha'i faith has increased in recent years, as have tensions with Sunni minority groups. Women face further discrimination from the incumbent regime, with discriminatory bills in front of the legislature including proposals to limit university places available to them. Iran's most significant score decline occurred in the rule of law category. Vaguely defined national security violations are often used as grounds for political arrests or surveillance. Moreover, the regime has increased pressure on lawyers for activists and those accused of violating national security; these lawyers now risk becoming targets themselves. Further failures to improve are evident in President Ahmadinejad's promised anticorruption efforts. He personally appointed family and friends to government posts and increasing complaints from civilians and the judiciary about corruption in the oil industry fall on deaf ears.

## **Laos**

The last three years witnessed incremental institutional improvements in Laos, even as the Marxist-Leninist government continued to hold a pervasive grip on power. In March 2006, the eighth five-yearly congress was convened and shortly thereafter, National Assembly elections took place. Although the elections were deemed to be relatively fair, those chosen invariably toe the party line. Nonetheless, there was some hope that the LPRP Politburo's and the Party Central Committee's newcomers might leverage their youth and better education and exhibit mild reformist influences. Generally, Lao political and economic life continues to be dominated by the party-based patronage system that is the only channel for professional or political advancement. Civil society and media freedom remain virtually nonexistent concepts.

Some of Laos' 49 ethnic groups, especially the Hmong, have at times been perceived as a threat to the state. However, modest improvements in civil liberties scores were achieved as a result of anecdotal evidence of increasing accommodation, such as the presence of several Hmong citizens in high-level positions. However, rights supposedly guaranteed by the amended 2003 constitution offset by ambiguous legal definitions that make Lao citizens reluctant to test them. While corruption remains endemic, rule of law scores improved somewhat on the strength of a gradually developing body of law.

## **Libya**

Libya's leader, Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, has undertaken modest economic and political reforms, including reforms permitting citizens to buy property for investment, the release of some political prisoners, and the passage of anticorruption legislation. These positive changes, which are at least partially driven by the desire to re-enter the international community, have contributed to a slight increase in Libya's scores from 2005 in all categories. However, Qadhafi's regime has stopped far short of efforts to fundamentally alter the status quo.

Libya remains under the tight control of Qadhafi and his close circle of supporters; abuses of power are largely unchecked and opportunities for free expression are virtually nonexistent. Political parties are banned, and despite the system of "direct democracy," Qadhafi retains control over key decisions and hand-selects high-ranking officials. Abuses of civil liberties are widespread: security forces still employ torture, women and the disabled face discrimination, and the freedoms of association and religion are circumscribed by state interference. Although the 2006 abolition of Libya's People's Courts is a positive sign, the justice system is marred by state control. The government has established severe penalties to punish corruption, and several bodies have been established to monitor such offences. Nonetheless, the entrenched patrimonial structure of Libya's politics renders these reforms inadequate. Given the depth of Libya's economic and political troubles and Qadhafi's firm grip on power, reforms will only emerge and be sustained by a genuine executive commitment.

## **Mauritania**

Mauritania's bloodless coup in August 2005, which ousted Colonel Maaouya Sid Ahmed Taya, initiated a transition to democracy that has the potential to fundamentally alter the country's political system. Since the coup, the conduct of elections and press freedoms have improved, and it is this liberalized political environment that accounts for the fairly significant improvements in all of the country's scores since 2005. Whether liberalization will be sustained or advanced remains uncertain, however. Mauritania still confronts a legacy of weak civilian control of the military, pervasive clientelism, and the marginalization of the country's non-Arabic speaking communities.

The municipal, legislative, and presidential elections held since 2005 were considered generally free and transparent by international observers. Other positive electoral developments include the establishment of an independent electoral commission and the conduct of a new census. However, executive predominance prevails; the president has the power to appoint and dismiss the cabinet, dissolve the National Assembly, and appoint judges to the country's main judicial bodies. Furthermore, while overt censorship has declined, prohibitions remain against criticizing the government. Since 2005, politically motivated arrests and torture have declined, and penal reforms include the right for prisoners to contact a lawyer. Nonetheless, women, the disabled, and members of non-Arabic speaking communities still face social discrimination and political marginalization. Despite international pressure, slavery is still not prosecuted as a criminal offense. Finally, corruption and clientelism remain serious problems, despite the establishment of a new anticorruption body, the State Inspectorate General, and the announcement that Mauritania would join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

## **Mozambique**

Armando Guebuza's December 2004 election and early 2005 inauguration, following eighteen years of rule by the previous president, Joaquim Chissano, marked a turning point for Mozambique. Although Chissano broke with the country's Marxist past and ended a sixteen-year civil war, he left behind allegations of government corruption and a rising crime rate. The Guebuza administration has begun to address many of Mozambique's core problems, including police misconduct, rampant corruption, and human rights abuses, which all persist despite the existence of federal rules and laws. Overall, however, safeguards against these abuses remain weak, while the pursuit and punishment of abuses is even less efficient.

Mozambique experienced moderate score improvements during the late 2004 to early 2007 period, especially in the rule of law. There is evidence that more public officials and police are being prosecuted for crimes they commit. Police violence has slightly decreased, although it remains an obstacle to improved civil liberties, which are further impeded by an inadequate judicial system. Human, and especially child, trafficking is legally guarded against, yet is widespread; the increasing numbers of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS are especially at risk. Combating the rising crime rate has presented a challenge for the government, and the public frequently takes matters into its own hands, lynching criminals released back into their communities. Efforts have been made to improve government transparency, and Mozambique joined the self-evaluation process of the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism.

## **Paraguay**

Between late 2004 and early 2007, Paraguay was characterized by continued Colorado Party political dominance and only incremental progress in strengthening key institutions. 2007 marks the Colorado Party's 60<sup>th</sup> year in power, and as in most countries with similarly infrequent rotations of power, the political system long ago became sclerotic. Although President Nicanor Duarte entered office in 2003 on a platform of fighting corruption and improving social conditions, progress has stalled in recent years.

There have been some positive changes: the military no longer plays an overt role in politics, and Paraguayan civil society has grown significantly since the 1989 transition. Nonetheless, many serious problems persist. Defamation and libel laws are often applied to intimidate and silence journalists; prison conditions are appalling; women continue to face structural obstacles and high levels of domestic violence; and social conditions among the indigenous population remain far worse than for other citizens. Paraguay's rule of law score declined moderately due to the politicization of the courts and increased conflict regarding land and property rights. While corruption and transparency have been areas of focus, progress slowed following the 2005 resignation of Finance Minister Dionisio Borda.

## **Peru**

Between late 2004 and early 2007 Peru was characterized by strong economic growth, a divisive election, and continued institutional fragility. President Alejandro Toledo completed his term in mid-2006 after five years in which reform efforts were largely stalled. The 2006 election to choose his replacement, which polarized Peru along geographic and class lines, resulted in former president Alan Garcia narrowly defeating outsider, anti-system candidate Ollanta Humala in a generally free and fair contest. Early in Garcia's term congress passed a controversial law significantly increasing government oversight and regulation of nongovernmental organizations that drew vocal domestic and international condemnation. This regulation also accounts for most of Peru's mild decline in the *Crossroads* accountability and public voice section.

Institutional weakness continued to be a primary factor inhibiting more rapid development. The 2006 election did not result in substantially improved political party dynamics. Although the justice system began to show signs of improvement – reflected in a small improvement in the rule of law score – Peruvians' faith in such institutions as the police and judiciary remained very low. Anticorruption enforcement, although vastly improved from the 1990 to 2000 Alberto Fujimori-led regime, was not strong enough to act as a credible deterrent to corruption. Impunity also remained the norm for human rights violations that occurred during the internal conflict from 1980 to 2000. Despite the difficulty of institutional reform, Peruvian GDP continued to climb rapidly, reaching 8 percent in 2006, and as of March 2007 President Garcia's approval ratings remained high.

## **Philippines**

Guarded optimism about the Philippines' democratic path turned toward skepticism between late 2004 and early 2007. Many democratic institutions have been established in the Philippines since the 1986 transition to democracy and the 1987 constitution officially guarantees a range of civil liberties. Nonetheless, several features of the Philippine political system tarnish the quality of freedom, including rising concerns about the integrity of electoral institutions, civilian killings, media freedom, and military unrest. These negative trends account for the small decline in measures of governance in the Philippines since the 2005 *Crossroads* report.

In addition to the serious problems regarding political parties that are largely patronage vehicles, serious accusations arose with the 2005 release of audio tapes alleged to contain discussions between President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and an elections commission official regarding guarantees of a one-million vote margin in the 2004 election. Although the Philippine media is free of official state censorship, journalists have faced increases in harassment by local politicians and powerful business interests, including multiple assassinations of reporters. Killings of civilian activists, leftists, and church personnel continued throughout the coverage period, and a government commission implicated military personnel in the murders. A March 2007 anti-terror bill, which permits authorities to detain suspects for three days without charges, sets the stage for potential rights abuses, given the weakness of Filipino rule of law. Moreover, a failed coup attempt in February 2006 served as a reminder that the Philippine military remains a potentially powerful anti-democratic force.

## **Russia**

Troubling developments regarding democratic rights in Russia continued to accumulate between late 2004 and early 2007. Several factors led to a decline in Russia's accountability and public voice score. First, in anticipation of upcoming elections for the state Duma and president, electoral reforms that disadvantage minority parties and entrench the position of the ruling party, United Russia, were passed. In addition, the Russian government's intolerance of criticism was also reflected in further deteriorations in relations with the press, NGOs, and outspoken opponents of the Kremlin. Press freedom decreased as media control continued to flow toward Kremlin-linked businessmen, while the legal definition of extremism was revised to include criticism of government officials. NGOs, meanwhile, were subject to an arduous re-registration process in 2006 and increased scrutiny of their activity. Speculation continues regarding potential government involvement in the assassination of journalist Anna Politkovskaya and Aleksandr Litvinenko, both critics of Putin's government.

Civil liberties scores declined as well due to insufficient human rights protections. The conflict with Chechnya, brutality in the military, and mistrust of immigrants have resulted in annually increasing complaints to the European Court of Human Rights, which regularly finds against Russia. Freedom of association has become more restricted, with licenses for demonstrations much harder to obtain. Corruption in all areas of government and business remains a problem as well. Government anticorruption efforts remain minimal and any action appears to have a political taint, as shown by the investigations of tycoon and critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky and opposition figure Mikhail Kasyanov. Increased state involvement in the economy has led to increased opportunities for rent-seeking and corrupt practices.

## **Rwanda**

Rwanda transitioned from dictatorship to nominal democracy after elections were held under a new Constitution in 2003. However, the ruling RPF party continues to hold power and exert overwhelming influence over Rwandan political and civil rights. Between November 2004 and March 2007 this dominance increased. There is no significant opposition, as most opposition leaders have been targeted for persecution. Neither the legislative nor the judiciary branches are independent of the RPF party or provide oversight of the executive. The government has also shut down or refused to re-register numerous nongovernmental organizations, and has similarly targeted independent media, using intimidation and arbitrary charges to shut down organizations critical of government actions.

Rwanda's civil liberties declined on the basis of an increase in extrajudicial executions and arbitrary killings, as well as the inability of the state to halt a rising crime rate. The 2005 establishment of local *Gacaca* courts to try the cases from the 1994 genocide was supposed to mark an advance, but the courts have been tainted by the perception that they are one-sided (unable to prosecute the RPF's crimes) and that they are used to settle personal scores. *Gacaca* courts also suffer from a lack of training for judges and a lack of trust by the local population. On a positive note, Rwanda's anticorruption and transparency score improved as a result of a continued focus by the government to demand accountability and competence of public officials.

## **Swaziland**

Since gaining independence from Britain in 1968, politics in Swaziland has been dominated by the Swazi monarch, currently led by Mswati III. A decade-long constitutional review and drafting process that was initiated by the king in 1996 culminated in February 2006 with the entry into force of a new constitution that preserves the monarch's supreme authority. Not only is democratic development deficient in Swaziland, socioeconomic indicators are also grim. For instance, over the past several years, economic growth has advanced at only 2 percent per year, and citizens face rising unemployment and prices and one of the world's highest HIV/AIDS rates. The absence of robust political reforms by the monarchy accounts for the only minor improvements in scores since 2005.

Although Swaziland has both a parliament and a judiciary, the king controls the 42 percent of parliamentary seats that are unelected, as well as the country's judges. Swazi law does not ban torture, and reports of abuses of detainees have been rising. Although the new constitution advanced certain rights for women in the areas of property and inheritance, discriminatory practices remain under customary law, such as the ability of men to practice polygamy. Although corruption is endemic, largely associated with the royal family's use of state resources, modest anticorruption reforms have occurred. Most notable is the 2006 Prevention of Corruption Order, which established bodies charged with investigating transgressions and led to the February 2007 arrest of eight senior officials on corruption charges.

## **Syria**

Due to mounting international pressure following Syria's implication in the assassination of Lebanon's ex-prime minister, Rafik Hariri, Syria looked inward between late 2004 and early 2007, with president Bashar al-Asad consolidating his power and increasing efforts to eradicate opposition. The already repressive al-Asad took further steps to secure his leadership, reducing the size of the Ba'ath party Regional Command and filling his cabinet with loyal technocrats and economic reformers rather than democrats.

Despite international and domestic criticism, al-Asad continues to use the judiciary as a primary tool against dissent, applying the Emergency Law to imprison individuals and opposition groups for offences including "weakening national sentiment." 2006 saw intensified arrests and intimidation: twenty-six democracy activists were arrested following the Beirut-Damascus Declaration (calling for relaxed relations with Lebanon) including journalist Michel Kilo and lawyer Anwar al-Bunni. Peaceful protests were met with government violence and arrests. The emerging cyber-community was also targeted, with Syria incarcerating four cyber-journalists.

Superficial reforms did take place that led to very slight score increases in each category. An electoral law was passed allowing political parties to run in the upcoming presidential election; however, the law's definition of a political party means that in practice only certain parties will be tolerated. The announcement of the government's fifth ten-year plan promised economic reform and anticorruption efforts, although these have yet to materialize and corruption remains pervasive throughout government. Sporadic purges of corrupt judges and civil servants indicate that at least some progress is being made at lower levels.

## **Tajikistan**

Despite strong and consistent economic growth since 2001, Tajikistan remains a harsh authoritarian state under the control of President Imomali Rahmon, where political conditions and civil liberties are deteriorating. Upheaval in neighboring Kyrgyzstan in 2005 caused the Tajik regime to tighten its control over the government and the country, a setback to democratic developments. Promising election law reform was passed in 2004, but was largely ignored in both the following parliamentary elections of 2005 and the presidential elections of 2006, causing a slight decline in accountability and public voice scores. The elections were marked by widespread fraud, and were declared to be neither free nor fair by international observers. President Rahmon's party, the PDPT, increased its hold over the legislature; for the presidential elections, the government took no chances and arrested the leading opposition figures prior to the balloting.

Corruption, bribery, and ties to criminal groups remain widespread throughout the country. Civil liberties scores declines slightly on the basis of new waves of arbitrary arrests and a refusal to allow international monitors to visit prisons. Despite forming new anticorruption entities, the government pays little attention to accusations of corruption except when punishing a particular individual serves a political purpose. Beginning in 2005 the government began to crack down on non-governmental organizations and media outlets by requiring financial audits and yearly registrations. This allowed the government to refuse registration to several prominent organizations. Independent newspapers and television stations have been largely shut down and media is now dominated by state-run enterprises.

## **Thailand**

Advances in democratic development in Thailand achieved since the end of military rule in 1992 abruptly ended in September 2006, when a military junta calling itself the Council for National Security (CNS), ousted the country's divisive prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. The CNS selected a former army commander, Surayudh Chulanont, as prime minister; he abrogated the 1997 constitution and established an unelected parliament. Although the coup's leaders initially enjoyed popular support, promising a new constitution and elections, the country remains in crisis: Thaksin's allies have regrouped, and the new government has not yet carried through on its pledge to reestablish democracy.

The military's return to politics and abolition of democracy had a sharp impact on scores, which fell most sharply in accountability and public voice and rule of law. Even prior to the coup, party development was weak in Thailand, with parties defined by leaders' personalities; following the coup, both leading parties—Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party and the Democrats—faced possible dissolution due to accusations of electoral violations. Between 2005 and 2007, political violence continued to shake Thailand's southern border provinces, where the majority of citizens are Malay Muslim; by early 2007, over 2,000 had been killed by either security forces or Islamist extremists. Thailand is a major hub for human trafficking, largely involving women and children in the sex industry, and minority communities face discrimination and uncertain citizenship rights. Although Thailand's judiciary is fairly independent (albeit with a reputation for corruption), there are harsh contempt of court laws that make open discussion of judicial procedures difficult. The strong degree of state involvement in the economy also presents significant opportunities for corruption.

## **Tunisia**

Socioeconomic development has advanced in Tunisia, as illustrated by the country's relatively low poverty and high literacy rates, as well as some progress in advancing women's rights. Political reforms, however, have been extremely limited, and political rule has been authoritarian since independence in 1956. President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who assumed power in a bloodless coup in 1987, commands authority over most state institutions, and while many of democracy's formal trappings exist, such as elections and multiple parties, they serve as a façade behind which executive dominance prevails. Continuity in the authoritarian nature of Tunisia's politics accounts for the relatively minor changes in the country's scores between 2005 and 2007.

The most recent round of presidential and parliamentary elections occurred in 2004. The contests, in which Ben Ali again secured the presidency and his Constitutional Democratic Rally (RDC) took the vast majority of legislative seats, were marked by electoral fraud, media censorship, and restrictions on candidates. The president's power is nearly absolute; he selects the prime minister, cabinet members, and governors of the country's twenty-three provinces, as well as members of the main judicial body, the Constitutional Council. Political violence continues between government and Islamist forces, and the effects of counterterrorism legislation passed in 2003 are strongly felt today, in the form of harassment and arbitrary detentions of regime opponents. Corruption remains a problem; Tunisia's mild drop in the anticorruption and transparency category reflected increased corruption perceptions and the continuation of rent-seeking elite behavior, especially in connection with the privatization of state assets.

## **Turkey**

Although the Turkish government, led since 2003 by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has supported a variety of political and legal reforms leading to improvements in freedom of expression and the rights of Kurds and women, democratic challenges still remain, particularly in the areas of media freedom, judicial independence, and civilian control of the military. Despite the existence of formal democratic structures and processes, a legacy of executive control over other state institutions and enduring discriminatory practices account for the mixed trends in Turkey's scores compared to 2005, with very small improvements in accountability and public voice and anticorruption and transparency, and slight declines in civil liberties and rule of law.

Although the country's 2002 elections, which brought Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power, were considered free by observers, the executive branch wields significant power: executive interference in the judicial system still occurs, and legislative oversight of the executive is weak. Furthermore, the country's penal code prohibits freedom of expression by criminalizing the act of insulting "Turkishness." Although the government has established bodies to monitor the penal system, torture still occurs; women, Kurds, and the disabled still confront discrimination. Corruption remains a significant problem, and has been characterized by the ruling party's weak commitment to carrying through on anticorruption measures. The extent to which Turkey's distancing from the EU following failed membership negotiations will slow the pace and weaken the commitment of the government to reform remains to be seen.

## **Zambia**

Despite widespread poverty, Zambia continued to move incrementally down a path of improved democratic governance. President Levy Mwanawasa's 2006 reelection proved the popularity of his anticorruption campaign, which began in 2001 against his predecessor, Frederick Chiluba, who had hand-picked Mwanawasa. A new Electoral Act in 2006 and the generally free and fair elections that same year are partially responsible for Zambia's slight rise in accountability and public voice scores. Despite improvements in the electoral process, however, the effectiveness of the parliament remains doubtful; members of parliament lack the incentives or ability to serve their constituents, while traditional tribal leadership also creates an impediment to fully integrated constitutional government.

Even as President Mwanawasa fights corruption, social and economic conditions, including the HIV/AIDS pandemic and unequal treatment based on financial disparity stand in the way of improved democratic governance. The overburdened prison system houses almost two-thirds more prisoners than it was built to hold, creating conditions in which malnutrition, tuberculosis, and AIDS are prevalent. A lack of resources and of public awareness creates situations in which Zambians are unable to pursue justice and redress for rights violations, and questionable media freedom limits access to information. The poverty of the judiciary system means that judges are poorly paid, lawyers end up working in other countries, and job-specific training is sporadic. Nonetheless, the judiciary, although serving at the pleasure of the president, exhibits a fair degree of independence in its decisions.