



## **FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2009: SETBACKS AND RESILIENCE**

*By Arch Puddington*

Global freedom suffered its third year of decline in 2008, although the pace of erosion seemed less severe than in previous years. Most regions experienced stagnation, with sub-Saharan Africa and the non-Baltic former Soviet Union experiencing the most acute deterioration. The decline in freedom has coincided with a forceful reaction against democratic reformers, international assistance to those reformers, and ultimately the idea of democracy itself by a number of powerful authoritarian regimes in the wake of the “color revolutions” of 2003–05. Significantly, the countries that have been most aggressive in suppressing political opposition and civil society either showed no evidence of positive change in 2008 or—as with Iran, Russia, Zimbabwe, and Venezuela—demonstrated enhanced anti-democratic tendencies.

The United States and other established democracies will face serious challenges in developing strategies to counter the gathering authoritarian pushback against opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations, and the press. For the incoming U.S. administration, these challenges will be complicated by the worldwide economic crisis, whose effects on the state of democracy are still unclear. The new administration will also face pressure from those who contend that the promotion of freedom should be abandoned as a foreign policy goal in order to improve relations with authoritarian adversaries.

To be sure, the picture of global freedom as measured by *Freedom in the World*, Freedom House’s annual survey of political

rights and civil liberties, reflects a number of positive developments along with the worrying setbacks. The number of country declines, 34, was greater than the number of gains, 14, but many of the declines were modest.

One of the most significant changes was Afghanistan’s decline in status from Partly Free to Not Free. At the same time, five countries in South Asia experienced gains during the year, a hopeful sign for a subregion that has been subject to political volatility and upheaval in recent years. In contrast, 12 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, one-fourth of the regional total, experienced setbacks. These included status changes for Mauritania, which moved from Partly Free to Not Free, and Senegal, which moved from Free to Partly Free, as well as notable declines in Nigeria and Zimbabwe. In the non-Baltic former Soviet Union, fully half of the 12 countries suffered a decline.

Among other developments and trends were the following:

- Continuation of a decade-long trend of regression for the countries of the non-Baltic former Soviet Union, including declines for Russia and Georgia. For the first time, South Ossetia was included in the roster of territories evaluated separately in *Freedom in the World*. It received a designation of Not Free and ranks among the world’s most repressive regimes.
- Stagnation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with

conditions exacerbated by the fighting in Gaza at year's end.

- Continuation of a negative global trend with respect to freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the rule of law.
- Declines in civil liberties in two European countries, Italy and Greece.
- Declines in four politically significant Latin American countries: Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, and Nicaragua.
- China's failure to make human rights improvements during its year as host of the Olympic Games.

### Results for 2008

The number of countries judged by *Freedom in the World* to be Free in 2008 stood at 89, representing 46 percent of the world's 193 countries and 3,055,885,000 people—46 percent of the global population. The number of Free countries declined by one from the previous year's survey.

The number of countries qualifying as Partly Free stood at 62, or 32 percent of all countries assessed by the survey, and they comprised 1,351,014,000 people, or 20 percent of the world's total. The number of Partly Free countries increased by two from the previous year.

Forty-two countries were judged Not Free, representing 22 percent of the total number of countries. The number of people living under Not Free conditions stood at 2,276,292,000, or 34 percent of the world population, though it is important to note that over half of this number lives in just one country: China. The number of Not Free countries declined by one from 2007.

Three countries, all from the South Asia subregion, moved from Not Free to Partly Free: Pakistan, Maldives, and Bhutan. Three other countries experienced declines in status: Afghanistan, which moved from Partly Free to Not Free; Mauritania, from Partly Free to Not Free; and Senegal, from Free to Partly Free.

The number of electoral democracies dropped by two and stands at 119. One country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has been under the political control of officials appointed by the international community, qualified to join the world's electoral democracies. Bangladesh also achieved electoral democracy status due to

### **FREE, PARTLY FREE, NOT FREE**

*Freedom in the World* provides three broad category designations for each of the countries and territories included in the index: **Free, Partly Free, and Not Free.**

A **Free** country is one where there is broad scope for open political competition, a climate of respect for civil liberties, significant independent civic life, and independent media.

A **Partly Free** country is one in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil liberties. Partly Free states frequently suffer from an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and often a setting in which a single political party enjoys dominance despite the façade of limited pluralism.

A **Not Free** country is one where basic political rights are absent, and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied.

## **WHAT IS AN ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY?**

In determining whether a country is an electoral democracy, Freedom House examines several key factors concerning how its national leadership is chosen. To qualify as an electoral democracy, a state must have the following:

- A competitive multiparty political system
- Universal adult suffrage for all citizens\*
- Regular elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy and reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud that subverts the public will
- Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning

The designation reflects a judgment about whether the most recent elections, for both the executive and legislative branches, were free and fair. A country cannot be listed as an electoral democracy if a single party or movement enjoys consistent and overwhelming dominance over national elections. Nor can a country be an electoral democracy if significant authority for national decisions resides in the hands of an unelected power (whether a monarch or a foreign or international authority). A country is removed from the ranks of electoral democracies if its last national election has failed to meet the criteria listed above, or if changes in law significantly erode the possibility of free electoral choice.

\* With exceptions for legitimate sanctions placed on citizens for criminal offenses

improvements in its electoral processes and national elections that were widely judged to be fair and competitive. Developments in four countries—the Central African Republic, Georgia, Mauritania, and Venezuela—disqualified them from the electoral democracy list. The decline of these countries is significant given their regional importance and the fact that two, Mauritania and Georgia, were previously hailed as new additions to the democratic world. Georgia was the site of the first in the recent spate of color revolutions and represented one of the few bright spots in the former Soviet Union; its erratic course, including a state of emergency in 2007 and war with Russia in August, ranks among the more disturbing developments of the past two years.

### **Freedom and the “Freedom Agenda”**

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush made American support for democratic movements abroad a centerpiece of his administration’s foreign policy. Yet even as Bush stressed the importance of freedom as an American value, his administration was widely and often harshly criticized for several of its counterterrorism policies, including the use of torture, extraordinary renditions, and the treatment of detainees at the Guantanamo Bay military base. Others criticized Bush for employing a rhetoric of freedom that was not supported by consistent policies, especially with regard to the democratic performance of key American allies and the conflation of democracy promotion with military action in Iraq. On the other hand, policy changes that linked U.S. aid to democratic governance and made the expansion of democracy in the Middle East a priority were important steps forward.

Clearly, the Bush record will stand as a source of controversy for some time to come. It is worth emphasizing here that domestic actors are always the main force for change in a given society, and no outside entity can take the lion's share of credit for a country's democratic progress. Moreover, to the extent that the policies of the international community do make a difference, their effects do not always correspond neatly to the terms of particular U.S. administrations. That being said, there may be some utility in assessing the fortunes of global democracy during the Bush presidency, as measured in *Freedom in the World*.

For the period between 2000, the year prior to Bush's first term, and 2008, his final year in office, the record shows modest change in terms of overall status, with three more countries ranked as Free and six fewer countries designated as Not Free. The number of electoral democracies for 2008, 119, is actually one fewer than for 2000.

At the same time, an assessment based on the numerical scale employed by *Freedom in the World*—a subtler indicator than the Free, Partly Free, and Not Free designations—suggests a more positive record during the Bush years. A total of 81 countries, over 40 percent of the world total, registered overall numerical improvements between 2000 and 2008, with 36 moving backward during the period. On a regional basis, the most notable gains were registered in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic, with 13 logging overall improvements in freedom and none showing regression. These advances, it should be noted, are essentially a continuation of the progress that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall and was supported by the common policies of at least three U.S. presidents.

Significantly, the only area to show outright decline during the Bush years was the non-Baltic former Soviet Union, potent evidence of a steadily growing "freedom divide" between those former communist countries that have joined, or sought to join, the European Union, and those which have yet to cast off the Soviet legacy.

Other regions that showed notable gains during the period were sub-Saharan Africa, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East and North Africa. In the last of those three, nine countries, or half of the regional total, showed gains, while two countries registered declines.

### **Post-Color Revolution Setbacks**

While data from *Freedom in the World* indicate that freedom moved in a positive direction during the Bush years, those gains were concentrated in his first term, and the same data show a turnaround in democracy's fortunes beginning in 2005 and continuing through 2008. Early 2005 marked the culmination of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the most significant, and thus far the most enduring, of the three recent color revolutions—largely nonviolent protest movements that succeeded in supplanting corrupt and autocratic governments in the former Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the events in Ukraine, a number of governments took measures to repress domestic opposition, weaken independent media, and hinder democracy assistance efforts by nongovernmental organizations based in the United States and elsewhere. A reflection of this antidemocratic resurgence is the global decline in freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the rule of law over the past three years.

The full impact of this pushback against freedom remains unclear. But it is indisputable that the effort has had an effect in a number of regions. The countries whose governments have been the most outspoken in denouncing internal democratic forces and alleged subversion by outsiders, and the most aggressive in repressing opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations, and independent media—namely China, Egypt, Iran, Cuba, Russia, and Zimbabwe—also

rank among the more repressive states in *Freedom in the World*. While leading authoritarian regimes have succeeded in implementing more sophisticated and less obviously brutal methods to silence alternative voices and prevent the development of a credible democratic opposition, they have also demonstrated a willingness to use whatever means are necessary to maintain total political control.

### WORST OF THE WORST

Of the 42 countries designated as Not Free, eight have been given the survey's lowest possible rating of 7 for both political rights and civil liberties. Among the eight worst-rated countries, one, North Korea, is a one-party Marxist-Leninist regime. Two, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are Central Asian countries ruled by dictators with roots in the Soviet period. Libya is an Arab country under the sway of a secular dictatorship, while Sudan is under a leadership that has elements both of radical Islamism and of a typical military junta. The remaining worst-rated states are Burma, a tightly controlled military dictatorship; Equatorial Guinea, a highly repressive regime with one of the worst human rights records in Africa; and Somalia, a failed state.

There are two worst-rated territories: Tibet, under Chinese jurisdiction, and Chechnya, where a repressive pro-Kremlin regime continues to struggle with a guerrilla insurgency.

An additional 11 countries and territories received scores that were slightly above the worst-ranked countries, and received ratings of 6,7 or 7,6 for political rights and civil liberties: Belarus, Chad, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Laos, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Zimbabwe, South Ossetia, and Western Sahara.

### The Russian Neighborhood: Conflict and a Widening Democratic Divide

While many interpreted the quick and overwhelming military defeat of Georgia in the conflict over Abkhazia and South Ossetia as additional evidence of Russia's regional aggression, the past year was equally notable for a further consolidation of authoritarian rule within Russia under the leadership of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Although he stepped down as president in keeping with constitutional term limits, he continued to function as the dominant presence in Russian politics, and the methods of political control introduced during his presidency were, if anything, intensified. Putin's successor as president, Dmitry Medvedev, won an election in which opposition candidates were marginalized through laws and regulations that have effectively made Russia a one-party state and rendered effective international vote-monitoring impossible. At year's end, the parliament approved a law that would extend presidential terms from four to six years—a move seen as a prelude to Putin's return to the presidency—and was giving serious consideration to measures that would pose further threats to nongovernmental organizations and restrict access to jury trials in cases involving charges of terrorism and other high-profile crimes.

Among Russia's neighbors, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova all experienced some degree of decline. Armenia's political rights rating dropped because of obstacles placed in the way of the political opposition during the presidential election, as well as the use of violence to disperse opposition protesters and the incarceration of over 100 people after the voting. Azerbaijan declined due to the increasing monopolization of power by President Ilham Aliyev and the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party; the flawed elections in October were boycotted by the opposition, and the leadership began pursuing measures to eliminate presidential term limits. Georgia declined due in part to growing authoritarian tendencies in the governing style of President Mikheil Saakashvili. Moldova suffered a decline in political rights due to increased official corruption, while Kyrgyzstan suffered from new constraints on freedom of the press and freedom of assembly.

The decline of Kyrgyzstan bolstered the perception of Central Asia as one of the world's most authoritarian subregions. Two other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, rank among the most repressive regimes on the *Freedom in the World* scale. The wealthiest Central Asian country, Kazakhstan, has thus far failed to implement any significant liberalizing measures in advance of its assumption of the chairmanship of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Conditions in the non-Baltic former Soviet Union have deteriorated to the point that the area ranks at the very bottom on a number of indicators measured by *Freedom in the World*. Its average political rights score has dropped sharply over the past three years and is now worse than that of any region, including the Middle East and North Africa.

The non-Baltic former Soviet Union lags far behind sub-Saharan Africa on the average scores for political rights and civil liberties, as well as on the majority of individual indicators, including freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the rule of law.

The dire condition of democratic freedoms and individual liberties in the countries of the non-Baltic former Soviet Union contrasts sharply with the strength of democratic institutions in the former communist countries of the Baltic and Central and Eastern Europe. When the averaged political rights and civil liberties scores for this subregion are compared with those of the world's main regions, it ranks second, behind only Western Europe. However, several of these countries have shown signs of modest decline, primarily due to corruption and problems with the rule of law. In 2008, Bulgaria suffered a decline in political rights due to its inability to stem corruption and organized crime, a problem that caused the European Union to suspend aid payments. Macedonia also faced a setback due to flawed parliamentary elections.

### **Sub-Saharan Africa: Year of Regression**

After several years of modest improvement, sub-Saharan Africa experienced a year of substantial reversals for democracy. The decline affected several of the continent's largest and most influential countries and stemmed in part from military coups, ethnic conflict, and violent attempts to suppress civil society. While the countries in question included one with an impressive record of adherence to democratic standards, the dominant trend was setbacks, or maintenance of the status quo, in countries that already had well-established patterns of poor governance, authoritarian rule, and repression.

Thus, deterioration was registered in Burundi, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Somaliland, and Zimbabwe—all of which have relatively poor rankings in *Freedom in the World*. The reasons for decline varied: the undermining of pluralism in Burundi, a crackdown on the political opposition in Cameroon, civil strife in the DRC, severe media restrictions and an enhanced environment of fear in Equatorial Guinea, crackdowns against civil society in Gabon, threats to freedom of expression in Gambia, and brutal attacks on the opposition in Zimbabwe. There were also two coups during the year: in Guinea, where military officers seized control after the death of the country's long-ruling dictator, and more significantly in Mauritania, where the military ousted a democratically elected leader and imposed restrictions on the press and freedom of assembly. The action caused Mauritania, which had been designated an electoral democracy the previous year, to be dropped from Partly Free to Not Free status.

Senegal, a country that enjoyed a reputation for adherence to democratic standards, dropped from Free to Partly Free due to a growing authoritarian trend in the policies of President Abdoulaye Wade, exemplified by the postponement of municipal elections. Another country with a record of democratic achievement, Namibia, experienced moderate decline due to the authorities' intimidation of a new opposition party. Nigeria suffered a drop in its political rights rating because of the ruling party's increasing consolidation of power and marginalization of the opposition, as evidenced by the Supreme Court's ruling against opposition challenges to the results of the deeply flawed 2007 presidential election. One territory, Somaliland, experienced a decline in political rights

when the upper house of parliament extended President Dahir Riyale Kahin's term in office and postponed the presidential election.

There were also positive developments in the region during 2008. Zambia's civil liberties rating improved, as did the political rights rating for Comoros. The political rights rating for Cote d'Ivoire also gained ground, a possible sign of overall improvement in a society that has been mired in civil conflict for a number of years. Angola, another country with a history of civil war, registered gains thanks to legislative elections that were judged to be credible despite irregularities.

#### **Asia-Pacific: Welcome Gains for South Asia**

The year's most significant gains for democracy took place in South Asia. Despite generalized political strife and continued terrorism in its tribal areas, Pakistan advanced from Not Free to Partly Free status due to the end of military rule and the election of a parliament and president in balloting that was widely considered free and competitive. Bangladesh, which had also been under military rule, experienced an improvement in its political rights rating due to successful balloting conducted under reformed electoral laws. Other countries in South Asia that registered gains were Bhutan, which moved from Not Free to Partly Free after holding its first competitive elections; Maldives, which moved from Not Free to Partly Free due to an opposition victory in the first multiparty presidential election; Nepal, also after successful national elections; the territory of Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, amid greater openness for opposition parties; and the territory of Indian-controlled Kashmir, where

opposition candidates made gains in legislative elections. One other country, Malaysia, showed notable progress thanks to expanded opportunities for the political opposition, fewer restrictions on public protest, and greater pluralism in the media. Thailand experienced a modest upgrade in its political rights rating, though at year's end the country remained in a state of political turmoil and faced serious threats to the future of its democratic institutions.

In addition to Afghanistan's fall to Not Free status, declines were registered in Burma, due to an intensification of political repression; Fiji, due to government harassment of the press; Papua New Guinea, due to the increased domination of the government by patronage networks; Singapore, due to the politically tinged handling of defamation cases by the courts; and the territory of Tibet, due to a deterioration in freedom of movement stemming from the increased military presence, roadblocks, and other forms of restriction that followed antigovernment demonstrations.

Perhaps the most disappointing development in the region was the failure of China to enact significant democratic reforms, or even gestures toward improved human rights, during its year as the host of the Olympic Games. In the run-up to the games, the leadership of the Communist Party had issued generalized pledges of political change as part of the overall Olympics process. During the games, however, the government strengthened the existing array of restrictions by cracking down on bloggers and internet journalists, placing human rights lawyers under house arrest, jailing democracy activists, and persecuting protesters. The Chinese authorities tightened control over key elements of the judiciary as well as internet portals, and increased the

use of extralegal forms of detention, such as reeducation through labor and psychiatric arrest. Of particular note was the persecution of minorities, including Tibetans and Uighurs, with the latter suffering severe restrictions on their freedom to practice Islam. Other religious believers, including underground Christians and Falun Gong adherents, were also subject to stepped-up controls.

Asia is a complex and varied region whose democratic achievements are often overshadowed by the volatility of certain countries, particularly in South Asia, and the unfortunate presence of some of the world's most repressive regimes. China, North Korea, Burma, Vietnam, and Laos have all resolutely resisted political change, suppressed the opposition, persecuted human rights advocates, and refused to institute anything approaching an independent judiciary. Standing in contrast to these dictatorships are the successes of relatively new democracies like Indonesia, Taiwan, and South Korea, and the ability of India to maintain its democratic standards despite ethnic and religious diversity, widespread poverty, and the serious challenges of political violence and terrorism. During 2008, nine countries in the Asia-Pacific region held successful national elections, collectively refuting the theory that democracy is not compatible with Asian culture.

### **Middle East and North Africa: Hopeful Signs, But Authoritarianism Prevails**

After several years of modest gains for freedom in the early part of the decade, the MENA region has experienced a period of stagnation. The trend continued in 2008, with little significant movement arising from a part of the world that has proven most resistant to democratic change.

The only country to register a gain, albeit small, was Iraq. The country benefited from ebbing violence, the decline of government-sponsored Shiite militias, and a reduction in political terror. Meanwhile, declines were registered in Jordan, whose civil liberties rating dropped due to greater restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly; Bahrain, due to declines in freedom of expression and attempts to dilute the strength of the Shiite majority; Iran, due to the nullification of numerous candidacies for political office and the closure of many media outlets; the Palestinian Authority, due to the persecution of political opponents by both Fatah and Hamas as well as restrictions imposed by Hamas on independent civic organizations; and the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories, which suffered from border closures, restrictions on freedom of movement, and increased civilian insecurity during the fighting between Israel and Hamas in December.

Since the MENA region was the centerpiece of the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda, the lack of more significant and durable gains for freedom stands as a major disappointment for American policy. During the Bush years, 9 of the region's 18 countries experienced some improvement on the *Freedom in the World* scale, including Saudi Arabia and several of the Gulf states. There were, however, no major breakthroughs: in 2008, as in previous years, Israel was the only country in the region to enjoy a status of Free, although as the occupying power in the Palestinian territories, Israel is largely responsible for the Not Free status of the areas under its control. The countries of the Middle East have had to grapple with the rise of terrorism and religious extremism, the repercussions of the Iraq conflict, and the continuing strife between Israel and the Palestinians, which flared anew at year's

end. But for decades, the authoritarian leaders of the region have justified their antidemocratic policies by pointing to such threats. In shining a spotlight on the Middle East's freedom deficit, the United States has insisted that the countries of the region be evaluated according to the same standards that are applied to the rest of the world. This in itself is a step forward.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean: Status Quo Despite Turmoil**

Even as they have experienced economic turbulence, an increase in violent crime that has reached epidemic levels in some countries, and the rise of populist demagogues, Latin America and the Caribbean have largely succeeded in maintaining the democratic achievements of the 1980s. As measured by *Freedom in the World*, the Americas region has actually undergone a modest degree of progress during the past three years, a time when most other regions suffered varying levels of decline. This overall progress has featured an impressive improvement in political rights scores, offset by a decline in civil liberties scores, with the most worrying trends involving the freedoms of expression and association.

During 2008, declines were noted in four countries of political significance: Colombia, whose civil liberties rating dropped due to increases in internal displacement and a rise in extrajudicial killings; Nicaragua, whose political rights rating declined due to a growing centralization of control by the government and harassment of opposition parties during municipal elections; Mexico, due to the government's failure to control violent drug cartels; and Venezuela, due to the politically motivated disqualification of opposition

candidates and abuse of state resources during state and local elections.

Two improvements were noted: Paraguay, due to free and fair elections that led to the first peaceful transfer of power from the Colorado Party; and Cuba, which saw a modest improvement in civil liberties due to expanded economic rights and social freedoms for homosexuals. Cuba, however, remains among the world's most repressive regimes.

### Western Europe and North America: Press Freedom, Immigration, Economic Crisis

The countries of Western Europe and North America continued to register the highest scores on the *Freedom in the World* scale despite problems in Southern Europe, growing challenges to freedom of the press and expression, the ongoing struggle to assimilate large numbers of immigrants from developing countries, and the financial crisis that emerged toward the end of the year.

In the United States, the electoral victory of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, a black member of the Senate, represented a historic moment for a country with a legacy of racial injustice. The election's outcome was greeted with international enthusiasm, and some expressed the hope that it would trigger an enhanced role for nonwhite political figures

in Europe and elsewhere. Obama's victory, and the sweeping gains for the Democratic Party in congressional elections, also augured major changes to American counterterrorism policy. During his campaign, Obama pledged to close down the detention facility for terrorism suspects at Guantanamo Bay and institute other reforms that would improve America's adherence to civil liberties standards. While the Bush administration continued to draw sharp criticism for tactics it has employed in the war on terrorism, it has apparently ended certain practices, such as the extraordinary rendition of terrorism suspects to third countries, and has met with further reversals in the U.S. court system on matters affecting the rights of terrorism suspects. Meanwhile, European countries continue to grapple with terrorism-related issues; high-profile cases have gone to trial in Germany, Britain, and Denmark, and an alleged terrorism network was broken up in Belgium.

Two European countries experienced declines in 2008: Italy, whose civil liberties rating dropped due to increased media concentration under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the growing influence of organized crime on private business; and Greece, due to an upsurge in violence during riots that gripped the country in December.

The year's developments also suggested that freedom of the press and expression, along with the economic health of the media, would loom as important challenges in the

#### REGIONAL PATTERNS

	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
<b>Americas</b>	25 (71%)	9 (26%)	1 (3%)
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>	16 (41%)	15 (38%)	8 (21%)
<b>Central and Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union</b>	13 (46%)	8 (29%)	7 (25%)
<b>Middle East and North Africa</b>	1 (6%)	6 (33%)	11 (61%)
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	10 (21%)	23 (48%)	15 (31%)
<b>Western Europe</b>	24 (96%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)

future. Canada faced threats to freedom of expression as government agencies brought charges against journalists who wrote commentaries that were critical of Islam. In Britain, several cases emerged in which journalists and scholars were brought to court on libel charges by individuals from foreign countries—most often countries under authoritarian rule. The problem has prompted press freedom advocates to cite “libel tourism” as a serious menace to intellectual inquiry and the robust exchange of ideas. In the United States, meanwhile, the newspaper industry confronts an economic crisis that has threatened the survival of established, high-circulation papers in a number of major cities.

### **Conclusion: Under Pressure, Democracy and the Democratic Idea Endure**

While 2008 marked the third consecutive year of decline in global freedom, this should not be interpreted as a major abandonment of democracy or the democratic idea. Recent years have brought a series of dire developments: terrorism, religious extremism, genocide in Darfur, chaotic failed states, civil conflict, the growing influence of economically powerful authoritarian states, America’s loss of influence and prestige, and a financial panic whose full impact has still not been felt. Yet despite these and other problems, the setbacks in global freedom have for the most part been modest in nature, driven more by Not Free countries becoming less free than by new or well-established democracies falling under authoritarian rule. Similarly, new democracies have been more likely to fall short in the consolidation of an independent judiciary or other institutions of democratic governance than to engage in wholesale press censorship or the imprisonment of the opposition.

Furthermore, democracy remains the only system of government that commands global respect. While Russia, China, Iran, and Venezuela all represent challenges to the spread of democracy, none has succeeded in creating a political system that can truly compete with democracy and its freedoms. There is in fact no China model or Russia model, and practically no one would want their societies to be governed by Vladimir Putin or the Chinese Communist Party. Indeed, authoritarian leaders routinely insist that their states are democracies, though they often attach qualifying words to indicate the supposed distinctiveness of their systems: sovereign democracy, democracy in formation, managed democracy. In the Middle East, where many disdain the word “democracy,” surveys show that when asked whether they prefer dictatorship or elections, free expression or censorship, the right to protest or constraints on that right, a clear majority prefer the rights that, taken together, define political democracy.

It is not the purpose of this report to recommend a course of action to policymakers in the United States or elsewhere. But the new administration in Washington will be assuming office at a time when many voices are proclaiming a global retreat of democracy. Some have argued that emphasizing support for democratic change is contrary to the American national interest and should be jettisoned. In fact, an honest analysis of the state of freedom suggests that democracy is not in disarray or experiencing rollback. Rather, democracy has suffered declines in several parts of the world that are in most cases reversible, even as it faces a major challenge in powerful authoritarian states whose leaders are committed to retaining power at any cost.

As the new administration decides on its own approach to the task of expanding freedom's reach, recent developments, and the data from *Freedom in the World*, suggest certain propositions for policymakers to consider:

1. While, as many have argued, elections are not in themselves sufficient to build successful democracies, they are certainly a prerequisite. Even flawed elections, such as those conducted in Venezuela, can contribute to a democratic resurgence or prevent a potential dictator from consolidating control.

2. More attention must be paid to the suppression of civil society, freedom of association, and freedom of expression. Increasingly, it is nongovernmental organizations and democracy advocates that constitute the most effective societal forces for reform in authoritarian states. Democracies should monitor the state of freedom of association and labor rights with the same scrupulousness that the United States currently employs in monitoring global religious freedom. This also applies to restrictions on the free flow of information, especially on the internet and other new media platforms.

3. Dissidents and freedom advocates deserve the support and protection of the world's democracies. The emergence of a movement of democracy advocates in China at year's end, under the banner of Charter 08, offers hope that something like a genuine community of dissidents is in formation. But Charter 08 and similar groups will fail to gain a foothold if their programs and personalities are ignored by their allies in established democracies. President Bush set a good example by meeting regularly with dissidents, bloggers, women's rights advocates, and other champions of freedom.

It is an example that other democratic leaders should follow.

4. Authoritarian regimes should not be rewarded. When the International Olympic Committee designated Beijing as the host city for the 2008 games, many predicted that the honor would lead to a better human rights environment and enhanced democratic freedoms. These changes never materialized; what the world saw in August was a self-confident totalitarian spectacle. Now Russia has been designated to host the 2014 Winter Olympics, and Kazakhstan will soon assume the chairmanship of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, an entity that has played a significant role in monitoring democratic performance in the post-Soviet world. While the isolation of dictatorships may prove counterproductive, engagement does not require rewards and honors for governments that imprison the political opposition, close down newspapers, suppress minority cultures, and intimidate neighboring democracies.

5. The leaders of the world's democracies, and especially President Obama, should reject the premise, often unstated, that engaging with authoritarian adversaries means ignoring their policies of domestic repression. Democracies have numerous and nuanced instruments—including the tools of traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy, and assistance programs—that can be deployed to register disapproval, censure acts of persecution, or shine the light of publicity on a regime's dark corners. In a period when democracy's antagonists are increasingly assertive and its adherents are filled with doubt, the American leadership in particular should develop creative strategies to carry forward the struggle for freedom.

*Katrina Neubauer assisted in the preparation of this report.*

## Appendix—Freedom in the World 2009: Status and Ratings Changes, Trend Arrow Explanations

<b>Status Changes</b>	
<i>Improvements</i>	
Bhutan	Bhutan's political rights rating improved from 6 to 4 and its status improved from Not Free to Partly Free due to largely successful national elections held in 2008.
Maldives	The Maldives' political rights rating improved from 6 to 4, civil liberties rating improved from 5 to 4, and status improved from Not Free to Partly Free due to the country's first multiparty presidential election, which was generally considered to be free and fair, as well as the approval of a new constitution that protects a wide range of civil liberties.
Pakistan	Pakistan's political rights rating improved from 6 to 4 and its status improved from Not Free to Partly Free due to the end of military rule and the election of a new president and parliament.
<i>Declines</i>	
Afghanistan	Afghanistan's civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 6 and its status declined from Partly Free to Not Free due to rising insecurity as well as increasing corruption and inefficiency in government institutions.
Mauritania	Mauritania's political rights rating declined from 4 to 6, its civil liberties rating declined from 4 to 5, and its status declined from Partly Free to Not Free due to the military's ouster of the democratically elected president, the arrest of top civilian officials, and the imposition of restrictions on assembly and the media.
Senegal	Senegal's political rights rating declined from 2 to 3 and its status declined from Free to Partly Free due to the growing authoritarian power of the president and ruling party as well as the increasing marginalization of the opposition, exemplified by the postponement of municipal elections and the arbitrary reduction of the National Assembly president's term.
<b>Ratings Changes</b>	
<i>Improvements</i>	
Bangladesh	Bangladesh's political rights rating improved from 5 to 4 due to elections in December that were held under reformed electoral laws and were judged to be relatively free and fair.
Comoros	The Comoros' political rights rating improved from 4 to 3 due to the restoration of legitimate government to Anjouan, one of the country's constituent islands.
Cote d'Ivoire	Cote d'Ivoire's political rights rating improved from 7 to 6 due to progress in the distribution of identity cards and voter registration, particularly among religious and ethnic minorities, in advance of the upcoming presidential election.

Cuba	Cuba's civil liberties rating improved from 7 to 6 due to new rules allowing greater access to consumer goods, the implementation of economic reforms, and the approval of social freedoms for homosexuals and transsexuals.
Kashmir (Pakistan)	Pakistani-controlled Kashmir's political rights rating improved from 7 to 6 due to the end of military rule in Pakistan as well as the transformation of the Northern Areas Legislative Council into the Northern Areas Legislative Assembly, which was given increased legislative, financial, and budgetary powers.
Nepal	Nepal's political rights rating improved from 5 to 4 due to relatively free and fair elections held in 2008.
Thailand	Thailand's political rights rating improved from 6 to 5 due to the transition from a military administration to an elected civilian government in 2008.
Zambia	Zambia's civil liberties rating improved from 4 to 3 due to continuing improvements in judicial independence, including increased assertiveness by the courts vis-à-vis the government and the government's appointment of highly qualified individuals to judicial posts.
<b><i>Declines</i></b>	
Armenia	Armenia's political rights rating declined from 5 to 6 due to the inability of the opposition to successfully compete for political power in the 2008 presidential election, as well as the violent dispersal of opposition protesters and continued detention of more than 100 people arrested in the aftermath of the voting.
Bulgaria	Bulgaria's political rights rating declined from 1 to 2 due to backsliding in the government's efforts to combat corruption and organized crime, which prompted the European Union to suspend substantial aid payments in July.
Colombia	Colombia's civil liberties rating declined from 3 to 4 due to a rise in internal displacement and extrajudicial executions as well as a series of violent acts against protesters and protest organizers.
Congo (Kinshasa)	The Democratic Republic of Congo's political rights rating declined from 5 to 6 due to President Joseph Kabila's increasing repression of the political opposition, including the excessive use of violence by authorities against the political-religious group Bundu Dia Kongo.
Equatorial Guinea	Equatorial Guinea's civil liberties rating declined from 6 to 7 due to an intensification of the environment of fear stemming from the widespread use of torture, as well as the denial of visas to foreign journalists seeking to cover the May legislative and municipal elections.
Guinea	Guinea's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7 due to a military coup in December and mounting concerns that international drug cartels were gaining influence within the government and military.
Italy	Italy's civil liberties rating declined from 1 to 2 due to the further concentration of media ownership under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and persistent interference by organized crime networks in the functioning of private businesses.

Jordan	Jordan's civil liberties rating declined from 4 to 5 due to a series of arrests that brought citizens' rights to speak freely into question.
Moldova	Moldova's political rights rating declined from 3 to 4 due to signs of serious political bias in budget allocations, new restrictions on access to information, and the apparent politicization of anticorruption investigations.
Nicaragua	Nicaragua's political rights rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the increasing centralization of power by the government and the harassment of opposition parties during municipal elections.
Nigeria	Nigeria's political rights rating declined from 4 to 5 due to the ruling party's increasing consolidation of power and marginalization of the opposition, as evidenced by the Supreme Court's rejection in December of opposition challenges to the results of the deeply flawed 2007 presidential election.
Papua New Guinea	Papua New Guinea's political rights rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the government's failure to address increasingly widespread instances of corruption and official abuse of power.
Somaliland	Somaliland's political rights rating declined from 4 to 5 due to the upper legislative house's extension of President Dahir Riyale Kahin's term in office and the subsequent postponement of the presidential election until 2009.
<b>Trend Arrows</b>	
<i>Up</i>	
Angola	Angola received an upward trend arrow due to the holding of long-delayed legislative elections that were considered to be credible despite some irregularities.
Iraq	Iraq received an upward trend arrow due to an improvement in the security situation and the Sunni community's increased participation in the political process.
Kashmir (India)	Indian-controlled Kashmir received an upward trend arrow due to the holding of largely peaceful legislative elections in December in which opposition parties achieved notable gains.
Malaysia	Malaysia received an upward trend arrow due to the opposition's significant gains in general elections, greater pluralism and discussion in the media, and the peaceful conduct of major public protests.
Paraguay	Paraguay received an upward trend arrow due to the increased ability of the opposition to participate in the political process during the presidential election, which led to the first peaceful transfer of power from the long-ruling Colorado Party.
<i>Down</i>	
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan received a downward trend arrow due to the increasing monopolization of power by President Ilham Aliyev and the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, as reflected in flawed presidential elections in October and measures to eliminate presidential term limits.

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Bahrain	Bahrain received a downward trend arrow due to increasing restrictions on freedom of speech, the government's practice of resettling Sunnis from other countries in Bahrain to offset the Shiite majority, and evidence that Shiite political prisoners have been subjected to torture.
Burma	Burma received a downward trend arrow due to increased crackdowns on political activists.
Burundi	Burundi received a downward trend arrow due to the lack of progress on the establishment of an independent electoral commission as well as the authorities' crackdown on opposition political activity.
Cameroon	Cameroon received a downward trend arrow due to the authorities' imposition of additional restrictions on the political opposition and President Paul Biya's increasing centralization of power.
Fiji	Fiji received a downward trend arrow due to the government's harassment of the media through intimidation tactics, including the deportation of two senior staff members at major newspapers.
Gabon	Gabon received a downward trend arrow due to the authorities' crackdown on nongovernmental organizations and the harassment of civil society leaders.
Gambia	The Gambia received a downward trend arrow due to increased corruption, the government's harsh responses to criticism, and President Yahya Jammeh's threats against homosexuals.
Georgia	Georgia received a downward trend arrow due to flaws in the presidential and parliamentary election processes, including extensive reports of intimidation and the use of state administrative resources, which resulted in a markedly unequal playing field in favor of the ruling United National Movement party.
Greece	Greece received a downward trend arrow due to countrywide riots in December that posed a serious threat to the general population and to economic activities, as well as the inability of the government and security forces to control the situation.
Israeli-Occupied Territories (Israel)	The Israeli-occupied territories received a downward trend arrow due to the continued expansion of Israeli settlements, increased restrictions on Palestinian economic activity because of the West Bank security barrier, settler attacks on Palestinian farmers, and the Israeli military's economic blockade and late-December attacks on the Gaza Strip.
Iran	Iran received a downward trend arrow down due to the mass disqualification of candidates for elected office, as well as the closure of numerous media outlets under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyzstan received a downward trend arrow due to new legislative constraints on the media and freedom of assembly, as well as moves by the authorities to enfeeble the political opposition and silence civil society.
Macedonia	Macedonia received a downward trend arrow due to increased harassment of and violence against political party members during the country's June parliamentary elections, which domestic and international observers deemed the worst since independence.

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Mexico	Mexico received a downward trend arrow due to the government's inability to implement an effective response to the power of organized criminal groups that have spread violence and terror through significant portions of the country.
Namibia	Namibia received a downward trend arrow due to the ruling party's harassment and intimidation of a new opposition party, including the disruption of the group's meetings and rallies.
Palestinian Authority–Administered Territories (Israel)	The Palestinian Authority–administered territories received a downward trend arrow due to crackdowns by Hamas on Fatah in Gaza, as well as crackdowns by Fatah on Hamas in the West Bank, with the use of violence and torture during arrests and interrogations common on both sides.
Russia	Russia received a downward trend arrow due to a presidential election that was neither free nor fair.
Singapore	Singapore received a downward trend arrow due to the politically motivated handling of defamation cases, which cast doubt on judicial independence.
Tibet (China)	Tibet received a downward trend arrow due to deterioration in freedom of movement caused by the increased military presence, roadblocks, and greater bureaucratic restrictions that followed antigovernment protests.
Venezuela	Venezuela received a downward trend arrow due to the politically motivated disqualification of opposition candidates and the abuse of state resources by incumbent politicians during state and local elections.
Zimbabwe	Zimbabwe received a downward trend arrow due to the heavy involvement of security forces and government-aligned militias in a campaign of political violence, as well as the government's crackdown on independent Anglican churches.