

Freedom in the World 2010

Essay: Erosion of Freedom Intensifies

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In 2009, declines for freedom were registered in 40 countries, representing 20 percent of the world's polities. In 22 of those countries, the problems were significant enough to merit downgrades in the numerical ratings for political rights or civil liberties. Six countries moved downward in their overall status designation, either from Free to Partly Free or from Partly Free to Not Free. The year also featured a drop in the number of electoral democracies from 119 to 116, the lowest figure since 1995.

A series of disturbing events at year's end reinforced the magnitude of the challenge to fundamental freedoms, including the violent repression of protesters on the streets of Iran, lengthy prison sentences meted out to peaceful dissidents in China, attacks on leading human rights activists in Russia, and continued terrorist and insurgent violence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen.

There were a few bright spots. Of the 194 countries assessed, 16 experienced gains in freedom. Broad improvements were recorded in the Balkans, as Montenegro moved into the Free category and Kosovo moved up to Partly Free, while ratings increases were seen for Croatia, Moldova, and Serbia. Countries including Iraq, Lebanon, Malawi, and Togo also made noteworthy gains. There were advances for freedom in South Asia for the second consecutive year, and political institutions in major Asian democracies showed impressive strength in the face of global economic upheaval.

By absolute historical standards, the overall state of freedom in the world has improved over the last two decades. Many more countries were in the Free category and were designated as electoral democracies in 2009 than in 1989, and the majority of countries that made major progress 20 years ago have retained those improvements.

Indeed, as the world marks the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the democratic institutions of the post-communist countries of Central Europe, the Baltic region, and the Balkans have shown encouraging resilience despite mounting stresses. The majority of new democracies in Latin America have not seen major ratings declines, and a number of young democracies in the Asia-Pacific region have maintained or improved their ratings.

But over the last four years, the dominant pattern has been one of growing restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of expression and association in authoritarian settings, and a failure to continue democratic progress in previously improving countries due to unchecked corruption and weaknesses in the rule of law.

The continued downward spiral throughout Central Asia in 2009, with Kyrgyzstan moving from Partly Free to Not Free, gave it the dubious distinction of becoming the world's least free subregion. The Kazakh government notably failed to enact the fundamental political reforms it had promised during its campaign to secure the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for 2010.

Sub-Saharan Africa suffered the largest setbacks, with 15 countries registering declines and 4 securing gains. Nigeria and Kenya, both large and influential states that had demonstrated some democratic improvements in the past, saw continued backsliding. They were joined by a number of other African countries that had earned records of democratic achievement, including Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, and Mozambique.

Several parts of the Arab Middle East also saw deterioration, causing three countries in the region—Bahrain, Jordan, and Yemen—to drop into the Not Free category.

Other notable trends in 2009 include:

Authoritarian crackdowns on frontline human rights defenders. In Russia, human rights lawyer Stanislav Markelov, journalist Anastasia Baburova, and human rights advocate Natalya Estemirova were among the victims of unsolved political murders. In China, Liu Xiaobo, an organizer of the Charter 08 democracy movement, received an 11-year prison sentence, though he was only one among dozens of civic activists sentenced to long prison terms during the year. In Vietnam, a group of dissidents were given five-year prison sentences for advocating multiparty politics. And in Iran, hundreds of regime critics were detained, tortured, or killed in the aftermath of the June presidential election.

Attacks on journalists and new threats to new media. The massacre of 29 journalists in a single incident in the Philippines stood out in a year of killings in such disparate locations as Russia, Pakistan, Mexico, and Somalia. Meanwhile, authoritarian governments expanded their efforts to stifle free expression by systematically blocking the use of new media for any activity they saw as a threat to their power. China remained at the cutting edge of this campaign, developing and deploying new forms of internet control and cracking down on bloggers and internet journalists who crossed political redlines. Bloggers in other authoritarian countries—including Iran and Azerbaijan—also faced increased threats, censorship, and prosecution for their activities.

Coups d'etat. Coups have been a rare phenomenon in the last two decades. During 2009, however, a number of countries experienced what amounted to coups. In Guinea, a classic military takeover that began at the end of 2008 took hold during the year, while in Honduras, Niger, and Madagascar, extraconstitutional mechanisms were used to remove or extend the rule of sitting leaders.

Challenges from nonstate actors, including religious extremists and drug lords. Violent Islamic extremism continued to plague a number of countries from Africa to South Asia, including Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. At the same time, regimes continued to use such problems to justify their crackdowns on civic activists or ethnic minorities, as China did with its concerted repression of the Uighur population. Organized drug trafficking contributed to insecurity and corruption in Afghanistan as well as in parts of Central America and Africa.

FIVE-YEAR TRENDS FOR POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

An analysis of *Freedom in the World* subcategories under the broader political rights and civil liberties rubrics from 2005 through 2009 shows that the past year was not an anomaly. Throughout this period, there have been growing pressures on freedom of expression, including press freedom, as well as on civic activists engaged in promoting political reform and respect for human rights, including the rights of workers to organize.

Overall, however, the most significant declines were in the rule of law arena. Judicial systems on the whole remain weak, unable to act independently or apply the law equally to all members of society. Arbitrary detention and human rights violations by both state and nonstate actors continue to hamper progress toward the institutionalization of democratic gains in many societies.

On a positive note, most regions have shown an outright improvement in the conduct of elections over the last five years. Globally, the elections scores in *Freedom in the World* would have improved by a significant degree were it not for a broad decline in one subregion: the former Soviet Union. Asian countries registered a substantial improvement on indicators tied to the conduct of elections and the ability of the political opposition to compete on a level playing field.

Thus, despite the vote-rigging, fraud, and other manipulations that occurred in a number of countries in 2009, the global picture over the last five years suggests that governments are more likely to permit relatively honest elections than to allow an uncensored press, a robust civil society, and an independent judiciary.

THE STATE OF FREEDOM IN 2009: A SNAPSHOT

The number of countries assessed by *Freedom in the World* to be Free in 2009 stood at 89, representing 46 percent of the world's 194 countries and 3,088,704,000 people—46 percent of the global population. The number of Free countries remained unchanged from the

previous year's survey.

The number of countries qualifying as Partly Free stood at 58, or 30 percent of all countries, and they comprised 1,367,440,000 people, or 20 percent of the world's total. The number of Partly Free countries declined by four from the previous year. (Among the Partly Free countries for 2009 was Kosovo, which in previous editions of *Freedom in the World* had been listed as a disputed territory.)

Forty-seven countries were deemed Not Free, representing 24 percent of the total. The number of people living under Not Free conditions stood at 2,333,869,000, or 34 percent of the world population, though it is important to note that more than half of these people live in just one country: China. The number of Not Free countries increased by five from 2008.

Two countries, both in the Balkans, registered positive changes in status during the year. Montenegro moved from Partly Free to Free, and Kosovo rose from Not Free to Partly Free. Six countries experienced declines in status: Lesotho moved from Free to Partly Free, while Bahrain, Gabon, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, and Yemen fell from Partly Free to Not Free.

The number of electoral democracies dropped by three and stands at 116. Setbacks in four countries—Honduras, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Niger—led to their removal from the electoral democracy list. One country, the Maldives, joined the ranks of the world's electoral democracies.

The Global Trend			
Year Under Review	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
1979	51	54	56
1989	61	44	62
1999	85	60	47
2009	89	58	47

Tracking Electoral Democracy	
Year Under Review	Number of Electoral Democracies
1999	120
2004	119
2009	116

ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL TRENDS

Latin America: Regional and Internal Challenges

Declines for freedom in Honduras and Nicaragua were signal developments in a year of general deterioration in Central America.

The elite classes' fear of a power grab by Honduran president Manuel Zelaya provoked a coup that resulted in his forced exile. This clear democratic rupture was complicated by an institutional clash: Zelaya's ouster, though disapproved of in opinion polls, was supported by the country's legislature and Supreme Court, and it came after Zelaya himself had acted in ways that many felt violated the checks and balances of the Honduran constitution. But while Zelaya's actions provided his opponents with much fodder, his forced exile and the restrictions imposed on civil liberties by his successors resulted in declines for the country's political rights and civil liberties ratings.

In Nicaragua, civil liberties declined due to President Daniel Ortega's continued use of violent intimidation and politicized courts to overcome obstacles to his plans for reelection. Guatemala's political rights rating fell as a result of the government's inability to implement policies and legislation in the face of rampant organized crime and related violence. Indeed, the violence perpetrated by nonstate actors, including drug traffickers, have over the years led to declines in civil liberties in a number of countries in Central America, as well as in Mexico and Colombia.

Political rights in Venezuela have deteriorated due to the ongoing concentration of power by President Hugo Chavez and the further marginalization of the political opposition. These developments in turn have influenced politics in the rest of the region. Chavez's populist

message resonates in some places, and left-of-center candidates have scored electoral victories in a number of countries, most notably in the Andean and Central American subregions. Unfortunately, fears of growing Venezuelan influence also helped motivate the coup in Honduras. Nevertheless, many in Latin America have both rejected the populist-authoritarian model of Venezuela and strengthened their countries' democratic institutions. This has been the case in Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay.

There remained one Not Free country in the Western Hemisphere in 2009: Cuba. The Cuban government took no significant measures during the year to open up the political system or allow citizens to exercise their freedoms of expression and association. At year's end, Cuban authorities arrested an American who was in the country to distribute telecommunications equipment to political dissidents. Cuba remains one of the handful of countries worldwide that treats the distribution of laptops and mobile telephones to civil society groups as a crime.

Middle East and North Africa: Some Gains, But Reversals Prevail

News from the region was dominated by the upheaval in Iran, where election rigging, deadly state violence against civilians, and repression of the political opposition were met by a protest movement that impressed the world with its size, courage, commitment to democratic values, and staying power. Overall, the Middle East and North Africa region suffered a number of significant setbacks, and these were often centered in countries that had produced some evidence of reformist intentions in the recent past. Declines in 2009 brought the portion of the region's residents who live in Not Free societies to 88 percent.

Three countries—Jordan, Bahrain, and Yemen—dropped from the Partly Free to the Not Free category. Jordan suffered a decline in political rights due to the king's decision to dissolve the parliament and postpone elections. In Bahrain, political rights suffered as a result of the harassment of opposition political figures and discrimination by the minority Sunni elite against the Shiite majority. Yemen's political rights rating declined due to rapidly deteriorating security conditions and the increased marginalization of the parliament and other political institutions. Although Morocco's status did not decline in 2009, the increased concentration of power in the hands of forces aligned with King Mohammed VI, along with stepped-up harassment of opposition critics, increased concerns about the erosion of political rights in that country.

Improvements were noted in two countries that have experienced conflict in recent years: Iraq and Lebanon. Iraq's political rights rating improved in light of provincial elections, which were generally regarded as fair and competitive, and due to the government's enhanced autonomy as the phased withdrawal of U.S. troops got under way. Lebanon benefited from a decline in political violence, which resulted in an improvement in its civil liberties rating.

Nevertheless, violence remains a dominant theme in the politics of the region and a significant impediment to the exercise of fundamental freedoms in many countries, including Iraq. The beginning of the year was marred by fierce fighting between the Israeli military and the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip. While Israel remains the only country in the region to hold a *Freedom in the World* designation of Free, freedoms of assembly and association came under pressure there during the year. Hundreds of people were arrested during demonstrations against the Gaza conflict, and the parliamentary elections committee passed a measure banning two political parties from national elections, though the ban was quickly overturned by the Supreme Court.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Year of Major Setbacks

While the advances made in sub-Saharan Africa in recent decades have not eroded overall, the region suffered the largest setbacks of 2009, with 15 countries registering declines and only 4 countries marking gains.

Botswana and Lesotho both experienced reversals, with Lesotho moving from Free to Partly Free status. A decline in Botswana's political rights rating was attributed to growing secrecy in the government. In Lesotho, political rights deteriorated as a result of the government's failure to negotiate in good faith with the opposition over flaws in the election system that emerged during balloting in 2008.

Three countries experienced coups: Guinea, Madagascar, and Niger. In the case of Guinea, the military takeover was followed by a terrifying rampage in which soldiers massacred and raped peaceful protesters.

Among the region's most repressive or least free states, declines were recorded in Eritrea, Gabon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Perhaps the most disturbing trend in the region is the decline over several years of some of sub-Saharan Africa's largest and most influential countries, which had previously made important democratic progress. Kenya continued to see declines in freedom stemming from charges of vote-rigging during the 2007 elections, the violence that came in the election's wake, and a failure to hold those responsible to account.

Another regional powerhouse, Nigeria, continued on its downward path of recent years, which have featured flawed elections, pervasive corruption, and troubling levels of sectarian and religious violence. These problems have eroded some of the gains the country made following the transition from military rule in 1999.

Ethiopia's trajectory has also been negative for a number of years, as Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has persecuted the political opposition, tilted the political playing field, and suppressed civil society.

Improvements were noted in four countries: Malawi, Burundi, Togo, and Zimbabwe. While harsh conditions in Zimbabwe eased somewhat after opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai was brought into a unity government as prime minister and a parliament led by his party was sworn in, the country remained among the continent's most repressive. The authoritarian president, Robert Mugabe, remained in office, and his allies in the security forces continued to harass, arrest, and torture opposition figures.

Central and Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union: Balkan Progress, Central Asian Decay

The year 2009 marked the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It was also a year when many of the countries that had won their freedom from Soviet domination found themselves under increased pressure from the global economic downturn. Latvia, Hungary, and Bulgaria were among those most severely affected by the crisis, but the entire region suffered to some degree, with skyrocketing rates of unemployment, increased poverty, financial instability, and waning confidence in free-market capitalism. Despite these pressures, the institutions of freedom remained remarkably resilient throughout Central Europe, the Baltics, and the Balkans.

Five countries in the western Balkans experienced gains for freedom during the year. The most notable improvements occurred in Kosovo, which advanced from Not Free to Partly Free status after holding elections that were deemed to be in compliance with international standards and strengthening the protection of minority rights. The other countries registering gains were Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro, with the last moving from Partly Free to Free.

Meanwhile, the countries of the non-Baltic former Soviet Union continued their decade-long backslide during 2009. Conditions in this subregion have deteriorated to the point that almost every country ranks at the very bottom on multiple indicators measured by *Freedom in the World*. The area's average political rights score—which covers the spheres of electoral process, political pluralism, and functioning of government—has dropped sharply over the past four years and is now comparable to that of 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 dominant regional power, Russia, suffered further deterioration despite assurances from President Dmitry Medvedev that reform is in the offing. While Medvedev announced policies to fight corruption, loosen controls on civil society organizations, strengthen the rule of law, and enhance freedom of expression, the country met with a range of setbacks for political rights and civil liberties. Credible reports suggest that local and regional elections were suffused with irregularities. New restrictions were placed on religious minorities. A

new commission was established to influence the presentation of history in schools and elsewhere, a move consistent with the Kremlin's wider efforts to manage and manipulate information in the public sphere. Human rights defenders and journalists remained vulnerable to persecution and murder, and there was a distinct lack of progress in punishing those responsible for previous politically motivated killings.

Central Asia remained one of the repressive areas in the world. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have long ranked at or near the bottom of the *Freedom in the World* scale. The decline of Kyrgyzstan from Partly Free to Not Free was of particular concern, as the country seemed to have been embarked on a reformist course at various times in the post-Soviet period. Kazakhstan, Central Asia's wealthiest state, also registered a decline. It has made no progress toward implementation of reforms it had promised in advance of its assumption of the chairmanship of the OSCE. During 2009, the Kazakh authorities took a further step backward when they arrested and sentenced Yevgenii Zhovtis, a prominent human rights advocate.

The regimes in other authoritarian states on Russia's periphery, including Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, have shown no signs of abandoning their repressive policies. Ukraine, which has also suffered heavily from the economic downturn and is burdened by enormous corruption problems, remains the only Free state in the non-Baltic former Soviet Union.

Asia-Pacific: Modest Improvements

As the world's most populous region, Asia is home to some of the globe's largest democracies as well as its biggest authoritarian regime, presenting a unique dynamic for democratic development. While most regions experienced various degrees of decline for freedom in 2009, the Asia-Pacific region as a whole experienced modest gains. Three of its most strategically significant countries—India, Indonesia, and Japan—held competitive and fair general elections, with the historic victory of Japan's opposition Democratic Party reconfirming that Japanese citizens can change their government when they choose to do so.

Other gains for political rights were seen in Bangladesh, where an elected civilian government replaced a military-backed administration, and the Maldives, where the first democratic parliamentary elections passed peacefully. Polls in Mongolia and both Indian and Pakistani Kashmir similarly contributed to improvements in the realization of political rights.

Not all election-related developments were positive, however. In Afghanistan, which saw a decline in its political rights rating, a deeply flawed presidential poll exacerbated an already unstable security situation and exposed the prevalence of corruption within the government. And in the Philippines, the massacre of civilians in connection with a local

official's attempt to register his candidacy, and the government's subsequent declaration of martial law in the area, were indicative of heightened political violence in the run-up to 2010 elections.

Among civil liberties, particular pressure was placed on the rule of law and respect for freedom of expression, with reversals noted in both authoritarian and democratic societies. In Cambodia, the government recriminalized defamation and then used the new legislation to intimidate independent journalists. In Vietnam, a prominent independent think tank was shut down and prodemocracy civic activists were imprisoned. In Indonesia, top law enforcement officials were implicated in efforts to undermine anticorruption bodies. In Taiwan, increased government efforts to enforce anticorruption laws were marred by flaws in the protection of criminal defendants' rights, and new legislation restricted the political expression of academics. And in China, Communist Party leaders sought to tighten control over judges, while embarking on a sweeping crackdown against leading human rights lawyers and nonprofits offering legal services.

Indeed, as China's leaders showed greater confidence on the world stage, their actions at home demonstrated continued insecurity and intolerance with respect to citizens' demands for legal rights and accountable governance. The authorities' paranoid handling of a series of politically sensitive anniversaries—such as the 60-year mark of the Communist Party's time in power—included lockdowns on major cities, new restrictions on the internet, the creation of special extralegal taskforces, and harsh punishments meted out to democracy activists, petitioners, Tibetans, Falun Gong adherents, and human rights defenders. Separately, long-standing government policies of altering the demography and repressing religious freedom in the Xinjiang region came to a head in 2009, when an eruption of ethnic violence was followed by forced "disappearances" of Uighur Muslims, a series of executions, and tightened internet censorship. Often at great personal risk, many of China's bloggers, journalists, legal professionals, workers, and religious believers nevertheless pushed the limits of permissible activity in increasingly sophisticated ways. They managed to expose cases of official corruption, circulate underground political publications, and play a role in forcing the government's partial retraction of a policy to install monitoring and censorship software on personal computers. Growing labor unrest and better organized strikes reflected workers' ability to bypass the party-controlled union, sometimes resulting in concessions by employers.

South Asia saw several improvements in 2009. Bangladesh's new civilian-led government enacted important legislation to improve transparency, and while the issue of detainee deaths remained a serious concern, lower levels of politically motivated violence and detentions, as well as fewer restrictions on the media, led to better scores for the country in a number of categories. Scores for the Maldives also improved, thanks to the holding of generally free legislative elections and a series of reforms in the areas of accountability, anticorruption, free assembly and association, and prison conditions.

While Pakistan remained mired in official corruption and extremist violence, positive signs were noted in initial reforms of the administration of the tribal areas and especially in the peaceful resolution of the judicial crisis, which included the reinstatement of the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the restoration of a large measure of judicial independence.

In Sri Lanka, improvements in political freedom following the end of the long-running civil war were balanced by the government's unwillingness to meaningfully address ethnic grievances, the internment in squalid conditions of several hundred thousand displaced civilians for much of the year, and increased hostility toward journalists and nongovernmental organizations.

W. Europe and N. America: Some Change in U.S., Assimilation Crisis Endures in Europe

The countries of Western Europe and North America continued to register the highest scores on the *Freedom in the World* scale despite their ongoing struggle to assimilate large numbers of immigrants from developing countries, the continued tension between security and civil liberties, and problems stemming from libel tourism and other threats to freedom of expression.

In the United States, the presidency of Barack Obama was greeted with enthusiasm by civil libertarians, as his campaign platform had suggested a major rollback of controversial antiterrorism policies instituted by his predecessor, George W. Bush. In some areas, Obama did pursue a markedly different course than did Bush. For example, at year's end Obama issued an order that will result in the release to the public of millions of documents that had been classified during World War II, the Cold War, and other conflict periods. The new administration also issued a policy that forbade the use of torture by U.S. personnel; announced plans to close down the military detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and decided that some of the terrorism suspects held at Guantanamo would be tried in U.S. civilian courts, while others would be brought before military tribunals. More broadly, however, Obama decided against reversing course on many Bush-era security policies. Furthermore, the goal of shutting down the Guantanamo facility was complicated by the revelation that a number of previously freed detainees had joined jihadist groups in Afghanistan, Yemen, and elsewhere; by a nearly successful attempt to destroy an American airliner at year's end; and by political resistance to the relocation of terrorism detainees to facilities in the United States.

In Europe, cultural tensions driven by an influx of immigrants from Muslim countries continued to pose challenges to the region's tradition of tolerance and civil liberties. A number of countries have experienced political disputes over the building of mosques and minarets, the wearing of headscarves and burqas, the treatment of women in Muslim families, and similar issues. Apprehensions over immigration have led to the growth of right-

wing political parties whose platforms are centered on demands for immigration restrictions. Switzerland, home to the region's most politically successful anti-immigrant party, suffered a decline in its *Freedom in the World* score after its citizens voted in a referendum to ban the construction of minarets. Malta also suffered a decline due to its record of often refusing to come to the aid of foundering boats carrying immigrants from North Africa, as well as the poor condition of its immigrant detention centers. Turkey experienced a modest score decline due to a court decision that outlawed a political party representing the interests of Kurds, an action that seriously undermined the government's efforts to end the Kurdish insurgency.

Challenges to freedom of expression remained a problem, especially in the United Kingdom, where journalists and scholars have been 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 such "libel tourism" as a serious menace to intellectual inquiry and the robust exchange of ideas. The controversy deepened in 2009, when libel charges were advanced against scientists who had written critiques of the conclusions of fellow scholars. Meanwhile, several states in the United States have passed laws that would effectively nullify monetary awards for libel or defamation issued by foreign courts in most instances. In a positive development, a court decision in Canada significantly narrowed the conditions under which cases of libel or defamation can be brought before the judicial system.

CONCLUSION

Meeting the Authoritarian Challenge

Despite the record of global setbacks during the past year, the overall state of freedom in the world remains quite positive by any historical measurement. With some exceptions, the societies that embraced democracy during the Cold War's waning years and immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union have retained their array of free institutions. The apparent durability of democracy in a number of Asia's most important countries represents a bright spot, as do the gains for freedom in the Balkans, a region that was mired in civil war and ethnic hatred during the 1990s. The fact that more societies did not seek authoritarian alternatives in the face of a severe worldwide economic crisis last year could be held up as a testament to the strength of the democratic idea.

Still, the notion that things could have been worse is poor consolation for a year in which freedom showed some measure of decline in roughly 40 countries. And the results for 2009 were no isolated occurrence: they marked the fourth consecutive year of overall decline, the longest such stretch of negative data in the history of *Freedom in the World*. This is a phenomenon that should be galvanizing civic leaders and governments throughout the

democratic world, no less than it should be concerning to those men and women elsewhere who aspire to live in free societies. Yet it comes at a time when American public opinion, at least, is experiencing a resurgence of isolationism in key respects.

According to a survey published by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press on December 3, 2009, for the first time since World War II, a plurality of Americans (49 percent) believe the United States should "mind its own business and let other countries get along the best they can." The steepest specific change in general public attitudes surveyed is the decline in interest in "spreading democracy around the world," from 44 percent just after the 2001 terrorist attacks to a mere 10 percent today. As was the case when Freedom House was founded in 1941, the reluctance of American public opinion to support active engagement in a messy world, despite clear infringements on democratic liberties overseas, makes it extremely difficult for American foreign policy to defend democracy from its enemies.

Another source of concern is the growing paranoia of even the largest and most headstrong among the world's authoritarian powers. No country can compete in this respect with China, which—despite its waxing economic and military prowess—behaves as if it were under siege by its own citizens. The prison sentence recently issued to democracy advocate Liu Xiaobo is reminiscent of the anti-dissident campaigns of the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev. Similarly disturbing is Beijing's persecution of lawyers who have represented defendants in politically sensitive cases, including ethnic and religious minorities and independent journalists. While China asserts that its relations with the rest of the world are based on a fundamental principle of noninterference, it recently tried to intimidate foreign cultural officials into silencing regime critics at conferences and exhibition venues in Germany, Australia, South Korea, and Bangladesh. It has likewise badgered foreign countries to return Uighurs seeking asylum abroad, and succeeded in persuading Pakistan and Cambodia to do so despite a credible risk of torture and execution.

While these acts of repression are disturbing, so is the absence of protest from the democratic world. When the Soviet Union arrested a dissident or suppressed religious expression, it drew widespread condemnation by figures ranging from heads of state to trade union leaders, as well as by human rights organizations and prominent humanitarians. China's current actions, by contrast, elicit little more than boilerplate criticism, and just as often they provoke no response whatsoever. Nor is China the only authoritarian power that has managed to avoid global attention for its breaches of democratic standards. Kazakhstan holds the chairmanship of the OSCE for the year 2010 despite a record of fraudulent elections and repression of independent critics in the media and civil society—behavior that only grew worse as 2010 approached. Venezuela's Hugo Chavez has beguiled many and escaped censure by the Organization of American States despite his increasingly contemptuous attitude toward pluralism and his own country's

constitution. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other influential authoritarian states in the Middle East similarly avoid criticism for their assaults on citizens who seek to improve the climate for rights and freedoms in their countries.

The Cold War has ended, but the tendency of authoritarians of various stripes to band together and pursue common strategic, diplomatic, and occasionally economic interests remains a reality of international behavior. Authoritarians prefer alliances with other authoritarians and continue to regard the United States and the world's other democracies as adversaries. They are deeply unsettled by citizen-driven movements for change, such as the one witnessed in the U.S. electoral campaign of 2008, or those that—in very different contexts—currently threaten the forces of repression in Iran and Zimbabwe. Authoritarian rulers fear their own citizens: hence their frequently expressed apprehensions about an American-inspired "velvet revolution." In response, they devote more and more strategic thought and material resources to the challenge of keeping their people under control and the democratic world at bay.

While a "freedom recession" and an authoritarian resurgence have clearly emerged as global trends, they are subject to reversal. Democracy remains the preferred form of government; indeed, no other system or model has gained widespread support. The United States and other democracies should take the initiative to meet the authoritarian challenge, and democratic leaders should make the case to their wary publics about the importance of doing so now, while the balance remains relatively favorable, rather than waiting for a further erosion in the global state of freedom.

This report was prepared with the assistance of Eliza Young.