

In our country, with its long tradition of self-government, we tend to forget how difficult democracy is to create and sustain. But the fact remains that the instruments of a civil society, i.e., voluntary associations, a free press, and channels for citizen participation, as well as those institutions that enable democracies to deliver honest and effective government, take many years to develop. Moreover, democracy requires rules that are just, mechanisms for enforcing them in ways that protect the rights of all, and a culture that accepts opposing viewpoints. And we should not lose sight of the fact that democracy's ability to sustain itself indefinitely is never a given, since it requires constant rejuvenation.

In countries where rulers have exercised control through intimidation and exploiting people's worst fears, or countries where social, political, and cultural differences have led to bloody conflict, the idea that divided societies will take a rapid, uninterrupted route to democracy is simply unrealistic.

As events in the latter part of 2007 in countries as diverse geographically and politically as Georgia, Kenya, and Pakistan have underscored, the path toward true democracy is fraught with difficulty, even where encouraging signs of progress have been demonstrated.

In a fascinating article that appeared last year in the *Journal of Democracy*, Sheri Berman of Barnard College takes a historical look at the development of democracy and puts to rest any notion that democracy came with ease to Western Europe and North America. We are all familiar with our own history, of course, and the long struggle to recognize the rights of all our citizens. In much of Europe, as Berman points out, it took a full century between the stirrings that marked the liberal-democratic revolutions of 1848 and the end of the Second World War before democracy could be consolidated.

Berman notes that "the political backstory of most democracies is one of struggle, conflict, and even violence." Still, she argues, "problems and even failures did not preclude the eventual success of democracy." What is most interesting in her analysis is the idea that even where uprisings fail to result in consolidated democracy, they often set in motion events that create momentum for future changes.

The programs described in the following report offer only glimpses of well over a thousand inspiring and instructive stories of patience, hard work, creativity, and, above all, commitment to the ideals that will determine the long-term democratic development of societies worldwide. That there are no quick fixes, since building the institutions of democracy is a daily effort, is an assumption deeply rooted in the Endowment's operating philosophy.

Experts who study democratic transitions tell us that we are currently experiencing a reversal of the great wave of democracy that swept across the world during the 1970s and 1980s. Following Ukraine's Orange Revolution, observers were hopeful that the forces of democracy were beginning to reassert themselves, and some were even forecasting a new democratic wave. Nevertheless, from Central Asia to the Middle East and

parts of Africa and Latin America, authoritarian leaders, sometimes working in concert, have found new means to crush civil society and silence dissent, even in countries where political space had been opened enough to allow independent voices to be heard.

Still, we should be encouraged by several developments that occurred during the past year.

In Burma, a country whose peaceful citizens long ago expressed their preference for democracy over the ruling military dictatorship, a series of demonstrations led by monks responding to the suffering of the people powerfully symbolized the junta's loss of legitimacy. Although their calls for political reconciliation were met with a murderous crackdown and mass detentions, the protests captured the imagination of the Burmese people and the international community. There is no doubt that the rule of the generals will never be what it was before the monks took their courageous action.

The world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia, continued its process of democratic consolidation, which included a number of initiatives in both the public and private sectors to combat corruption. Watchdog groups have been particularly successful in investigating corrupt officials and in pushing for legal reforms to improve accountability and to lift public confidence in the country's relatively new democratic institutions.

And in a boost to the rule of law in our own hemisphere, Venezuelans rejected a referendum in Decem-

ber that would have enabled President Hugo Chávez to perpetuate himself in power indefinitely, further centralize control over the country's political and economic institutions, and weaken civil liberties. An important and very encouraging development was the emergence of a broad-based student movement, unconnected to any previous regime, which had mobilized earlier in the year in response to the government's crackdown on independent broadcasting. Many experts believe the referendum's defeat marks what the *Economist* calls "the beginning of the end of Mr. Chavez' Bolivarian revolution and its influence in Latin America."

In all three cases, the road to genuine democracy will be slow and undoubtedly difficult. The monks of Burma, the civil society activists in Indonesia, and the students of Venezuela did not need outside forces to move them to act. Nevertheless, we at NED, with the much appreciated bipartisan support we receive from both the Administration

and the Congress, can continue to assist their peaceful grassroots initiatives to defend human rights, expand political space, and strengthen democratic institutions and processes. Their struggles should give us hope that seeds planted today will one day bear fruit.



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