

THE UNFREE WORLD

What the demise of Soviet communism can teach us about the prospect for democracy in Iraq

As this issue goes to press, the Russian people are poised to re-elect Vladimir Putin under circumstances somewhat reminiscent of the Soviet era. In the years since he succeeded Boris Yeltsin, Putin, a former KGB agent, has made Russia less and less democratic. He has reined in the country's regional governors, cowed its vocal business elite, and squelched political opposition in the press. Late last year United Russia, a political party created to support Putin, crushed the liberal opposition in parliamentary elections that were neither free nor fair.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. In the euphoria that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall (in 1989) and the collapse of the Soviet Union (in 1991), some Western politicians, pundits, and political scientists anticipated that

democracy would break out everywhere, including Russia. Francis Fukuyama, then a political scientist at RAND, famously proclaimed the "end of history," asserting that liberal market democracy had demonstrated its superiority as a species of polity, and would become the world's "final form of human government." Fukuyama, of course, was making a long-term prediction; he did not expect the whole world to become democratic overnight. But it is now nearly fifteen years since the Iron Curtain was lifted. Has democracy since made significant or enduring progress?

Nominally, it has: according to Freedom House, a nonpartisan research organization, from 1989 to 1996, forty-nine nations were added to the tally of electoral democracies—the largest such growth over any comparable period in history. Though the rate of democratization has slowed since 1996, the trend continued through 2002. Today more than 60 percent of the world's 192 countries can technically be classified as electoral democracies.

Yet fewer than half the regimes that have become electoral democracies over the past fifteen years can properly be called *liberal* democracies—systems in which the rights of citizens are truly protected against the power of the state. According to Freedom House, which annually assesses each country's level of freedom by examining political rights and civil liberties, of the 117 electoral democracies in the world, only eighty-eight are liberal democracies, or "partly free" countries. The remaining seventy-five countries are not democracies, and Freedom House classifies all of them as either partly free or "not free" on the basis of their lack of political and civil rights. All the not-free countries, with the exception of Haiti and Cuba, are in the Eastern Hemisphere (as indicated by the map to the right)—and the only free country in all of the Middle East and North Africa is Israel. Even after the great strides toward freedom of the 1980s and 1990s, 56 percent of the world's population (down from 61 percent in 1989) still lives in partly free or not-free countries.

The map provides only a snapshot of a moment in time—but the underlying

ing trends are disturbing. Although the number of free countries has doubled in the past thirty years, over the past five years the number of free countries has plateaued at eighty-eight. Moreover, since September of 2001 the Middle East, North Africa, and much of Asia have become less free, as governments have used citizens' fears of terrorism as justification for eliminating political liberties and becoming less democratic. And last year four nations that Freedom House had officially classified as electoral democracies—Armenia, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, and Fiji—lost that designation.

In the former Soviet bloc, meanwhile, two patterns have emerged. When the USSR fell, twenty-seven countries were released from communist rule. But only in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States—which had a tradition of republican governance before succumbing to postwar Stalinist expansion—did this produce liberal democracy. In the rest of the former Soviet empire liberal democracy remains completely unknown: seven of the former Soviet republics are not free, and five are only partly free. And all of them have become less free over time. In fact, after Russia's parliamentary elections in December, Freedom House announced that the country may lose its nominal status as an electoral democracy. Ukraine, too, is in danger of soon falling off the list.

One lesson of the post-Soviet experience seems to be that communism did not create authoritarianism; rather, it reinforced pre-existing forms of illiberal governance, such as those found under the czars. All this suggests a major obstacle in the quest for global freedom: most of the world has no tradition—ancient or modern—of liberal democracy. This rare form of governance was mainly the product of a very specific time (the nineteenth century) and place (a small number of North Atlantic nations, including England, France, and the United States). Before this period and outside these places, authoritarianism was the rule in large states.

The Bush Administration has wagered that the United States, by force of

THE WORLD'S MOST REPRESSIVE REGIMES

As identified by Freedom House in 2003

The Worst of the Worst*

Burma	military dictatorship
Cuba	communist dictatorship
Iraq	personal dictatorship until April of 2003
Libya	personal dictatorship
North Korea	communist dictatorship
Saudi Arabia	monarchy
Sudan	military dictatorship
Syria	military dictatorship
Turkmenistan	personal dictatorship

The Rest of the Worst*

China	communist dictatorship
Equatorial Guinea	military dictatorship
Eritrea	party dictatorship
Laos	communist dictatorship
Somalia	anarchy
Uzbekistan	party dictatorship
Vietnam	communist dictatorship

*In alphabetical order



PUTIN AND THE PRESS

It's hard to be a journalist in Russia. In 2001 Evgenii Kiselev—a renowned news anchor and government critic—was fired after his network, NTV, was taken over by a Putin proxy. Kiselev then moved to TV-6, which was closed by the government in 2002. Next he went to TVS, only to see it replaced last year by a state-run sports channel. Kiselev had nowhere else to go: TVS was the last independent network in Russia. But at least he has not been charged as a criminal; more criminal cases were brought against reporters during the first three years of Putin's presidency than during the ten years of Yeltsin's.

ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY

Though half the world's Muslims live in electoral democracies (most of them in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Indonesia), only eight of the forty-six Muslim-majority countries are electoral democracies, leading some political scientists to wonder if Islam is antithetical to democracy. Experts wondered the same thing about Catholicism in the early 1970s. They needn't have worried. In 1974 more than 70 percent of states that had Catholic majorities were not electoral democracies—but today about 80 percent of such states are.

MONEY AND FREEDOM

Unsurprisingly, a strong correlation exists between a country's wealth and the freedom afforded its citizens. According to Freedom House, 84 percent of low-income countries are partly free or not free. In contrast, 80 percent of high-income countries are free. The exceptions are countries so rich in oil or other resources that they do not require taxes from their citizens—and therefore do not feel compelled to offer representation and rights. All five of the high-income countries on Freedom House's not-free list—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Brunei, and the United Arab Emirates—derive their wealth from natural resources.

arms and aid, can transform Iraq into a liberal-democratic regime and thereby set an example for other countries in the region. The history of such efforts is not encouraging. Liberal democracy has been successfully imposed on major states only twice before—in Central Europe after World War I, and in Germany and Japan after World War II. Except for Japan, these countries were in or near Western Europe; all, including Japan, had significant internal liberal-democratic movements before occupation. Neither condition exists in Iraq. —JEN JOYNT AND MARSHALL POE

DEMOCRACY'S (FALTERING) PROGRESS

The Soviet collapse increased the number of democratic countries—but since most of those states were small, it did not substantially increase the number of free people

