

The Democratic Recession

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Abstract

According to Freedom House, the number of electoral democracies has declined for three years in a row. This is the first democratic recession since the end of the Cold War. The decline, in part, stems from the policies of the Bush Administration as well as from incomplete democratic transitions. It is also the result of deliberate reforms to strengthen authoritarian regimes. Unless the Obama administration addresses the causes of the democratic recession by focusing more attention on the difficulties of democratic consolidation, it is likely to deepen.

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Introduction

On February 3, 2009, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiev, announced in Moscow that he was evicting the United States from the military base it operates there in return for \$2 billion in aid and loans from the government of Russia.³ The event pithily captures disturbing global trends. Kyrgyzstan and Russia are two of the many countries driving the first rollback of democracy since the end of the Cold War. Both leaders solidify their control under the appearance of political liberalization. Further, the two countries share best practices in authoritarian reform. Finally, both countries' leaders coordinate to form a common foreign policy.

Events in Kyrgyzstan and Russia have parallels around the world. According to Freedom House, the number of electoral democracies has declined for three years in a row.⁴ These setbacks are not surprising as democratic transitions are difficult, nonlinear, and often unsuccessful processes. The present rollback of democracy has more troubling features, however, as autocratic governments are cooperating in novel ways to consolidate their rule.

To be clear, we do not believe that the current authoritarian resurgence is similar to the Great Power rivalries of the 19th century nor the Cold War alignment of the 20th. Even a coalition of the most powerful authoritarian states in the world today – for example, China, Iran, and Russia

³ Luke Harding. 2009. Kyrgyzstan to Close Key US Military Airbase. *The Guardian*. February 4.

⁴ Arch Puddington. 2009. *Freedom in the World 2009: Setbacks and Resilience*. Washington, DC: Freedom House.

– would be no match for NATO’s military capability. We also believe democracy is possible in many of these states. Nevertheless, if the Obama administration fails to respond constructively to the democratic recession, the negative trend is likely to continue.

In this essay, we examine the causes of the authoritarian advance, the mechanisms of its operation, and how democracy assistance strategies can address it. While democracy is unlikely in many resurgent authoritarian regimes in the near future, a large number of democracies remain unconsolidated and, as the democratic recession demonstrates, can backslide easily. Democracy assistance needs to focus on their consolidation.

Why Democracy is Important

The benefits of democracy are clear. Democracy better protects human security than any form of government that has existed in the modern world. It is the only contemporary political system that makes protection of human rights a fundamental government objective. In addition, the electoral accountability and flow of information inherent to free societies mean that democratic governments are better able to identify and respond to humanitarian crises than alternative political systems. For example, Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen observe that no consolidated democracy ever has experienced a famine.⁵

Moreover, the United States has long understood the advantages of democracy for foreign

⁵Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen. 2002. *India: Development and Participation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

policy. The transparency inherent to democracies means that they are more predictable partners than authoritarian states with opaque decision-making procedures. Furthermore, democracies are more likely to respect international agreements because their governments typically need to gain broad consensus before ratifying them while autocrats are less likely to face this constraint. For these reasons it is not surprising that democracies exclusively comprise the most sophisticated international organization in existence today, the European Union.

Causes of the Present Reverse Wave

Twenty years ago, we entered what appeared to be a golden age of democratization. Demand for democracy assistance programs spanned the globe from Central Asia to Central America. Governments sought external assistance in designing democratic institutions, running elections, and developing civil societies.

As with each previous wave of democratization, however, a reversal has followed.⁶ On the one hand, this is to be expected since democratic transitions do not inexorably lead to consolidated democratic regimes, as the collapse of many nascent democracies in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s made clear. On the other hand, US foreign policy in the 21st century has facilitated authoritarian reform in a number of countries.

US Foreign Policy

⁶Samuel P. Huntington. 1992. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

US foreign policy under the administration of George W. Bush deserves part of the blame for the democratic rollback. To begin with, the methods the US employed to fight terrorism, such as extraordinary rendition, secret military prisons, and indefinite detention in Guantanamo Bay, eroded global norms about human rights. Not surprising, many autocrats have forwarded threats to national security to justify their own repressive behavior, such as China's actions in Tibet, Russia's in the Caucasus, and Iran's among its Azeri diaspora.⁷

In addition, inconsistent US support for democracy has directly aided autocratic reform. This was most evident in the Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2005 and the Palestinian elections of 2006. The United States pressured the Palestinian and Egyptian governments to hold free and fair elections, but it failed to respect their results when perceived anti-system parties (the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas in Palestine) performed better than expected.⁸ These actions strongly suggested that US interest in democracy is conditional on who wins an election, that it would countenance abrogation of democratic procedures if the wrong parties prevailed, and that democratic reformers in the region could not rely on support from the US government.

⁷ United States Department of State. 2009. *2008 Human Rights Report: China*. Washington, DC: United States Department of State. United States Department of State. 2009. *2008 Human Rights Report: Iran*. Washington, DC: United States Department of State. United States Department of State. 2009. *2008 Human Rights Report: Russia*. Washington, DC: United States Department of State.

⁸The United States stood by as Egypt's Hosni Mubarak refused to let the Muslim Brotherhood sit in Parliament and arrested many of its members. In Palestine, it agreed with the Israeli policy to isolate the Hamas-led government.

The failure of the US to support democracy extends far beyond the Middle East. In 2002, the United States sent mixed signals about an attempted coup to remove Hugo Chavez from power. More explicitly, in Kenya's 2007 presidential election, the United States permitted incumbent Mwai Kibaki to prevail despite substantial evidence that massive electoral rigging in his favor had occurred. In addition, the Bush Administration lauded the democratic credentials of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili even after he placed the country under emergency rule and shut down independent media. It also continued to support Pervez Musharraf, who came to power through a military coup in Pakistan despite overwhelming support within the country for a return to democracy.⁹

Most damaging, however, was not inconsistent support for democracy but using it as a justification for invading Iraq after the US military failed to find Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. By claiming that the need for democracy was sufficient cause to wage offensive war, the Bush administration gave leaders worldwide reasons to fear and resist US democracy assistance. Moreover, it provided a plausible rationale for autocrats to suppress democratic movements within their own countries, as they could portray these organizations as agents of hostile foreign governments.¹⁰

Incomplete Democratic Transitions

⁹ Georgia: Alexander Cooley and Lincoln A. Mitchell. 2009. No Way to Treat Our Friends: Recasting Recent U.S./Georgian Relations. *The Washington Quarterly* 32(1): 27-41. Kenya: Mike McIntire and Jeffrey Gettleman. 2009. A Chaotic Kenya Vote and a Secret U.S. Exit Poll. *New York Times*. January 30. Pakistan: Gary Thomas. 2008. Pakistan Election Outcome Complicates Relationship with US. *Voice of America*. February 20. Venezuela: Ed Vulliamy. 2002. Venezuela Coup Linked to Bush Team. *The Observer*. April 21.

¹⁰ Thomas Carothers. 2006. The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion. *Foreign Affairs* 85(2): 55-68.

Nevertheless, US foreign policy has played only a small role in the backlash against democracy. More importantly, elections all too often failed to produce effective democratic governments. Many left pre-transition leaders with questionable democratic credentials in office. In others, the leaders went, but corrupt and predatory political styles remained. A number of democratic reversals resulted from these incomplete transitions.

In many countries, elections were the results of external factors in countries where domestic demand for democracy was weak. In the former Soviet Union, political transitions were the result of imperial collapse. In much of sub-Saharan Africa, foreign assistance conditioned on political reform imposed democratic institutions. Absent strong support for democracy in these countries, leaders have been able to roll back previous concessions with ease.¹¹

Autocratic holdovers are most evident in the former Soviet Union. For example, of all the former Soviet republics in Central Asia, only Kyrgyzstan remains partly free, according to Freedom House, and it is the only country in the region whose president was not a powerful official in the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan all have reverted to autocratic rule by Soviet-era leaders. Moreover, the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, is the son of the former president, Heydar Aliyev, who governed Azerbaijan during the Soviet era and also served as a First Deputy Prime Minister of the Soviet Union. Finally, the current presidents of Belarus and Moldova were also prominent Soviet officials.

¹¹Gérard Stoudmann. 2008. Remarks at conference on authoritarian consolidation. Washington, DC. December 10.

Autocratic continuity is not unique to the former Soviet Union. In sub-Saharan Africa, voters have yet to defeat numerous repressive and unpopular leaders. Zimbabwe's only president, Robert Mugabe, in power for close to thirty years, is the most vivid example. Less dramatically, the presidents of Cameroon, Gabon, and Uganda have ruled for decades, elections notwithstanding. Eritrea has had the same president since its independence in 1993. In addition, while a number of countries in the Middle East, such as Jordan, Kuwait, and Morocco, are partly free according to Freedom House, their liberalizations are managed by monarchies with no apparent intentions of yielding power to elected governments.

In other countries, leaderships have changed, but bad governance persisted. According to Larry Diamond, there is a significant link between poor governance – defined as rampant corruption, disregard for the rule of law, and feckless judiciaries – and democratic backslide.¹² The failure of democracy to improve governance has caused people to accept leaders who claim the abilities to solve difficult economic, political, and social problems through non-democratic means. Nowhere is this possibility more evident today than in Pakistan, where the government recently acknowledged the Taliban's *de facto* sovereignty in large parts of the country's Northwest Frontier Province.¹³ If Pakistan's tenuous democracy collapses, we should not be surprised. Its government has not been able to supply prosperity or security. Part of this failure is structural since the capacity of the government to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks is not commensurate with the magnitude of the challenge it faces. At the same time, persistent

¹²Larry Diamond. 2008. The Democratic Rollback. *Foreign Affairs*, 87(2): 36-48.

¹³Ismail Khan. 2009. Pakistan Agrees to Enforce Islamic Law in Violent Region. *New York Times*. February 16.

corruption and politicians who focus on narrow self-interest in the face of an ominous threat permit the crisis to deepen.

Explaining Authoritarian Consolidation

Patterns of authoritarian learning and mutual support are innovative features of the current reverse wave of democracy. These processes are unfolding in many forms. Autocrats are working to undermine existing international institutions and build authoritarian replacements. Further, they share resources and information helpful for defusing pressure for reform. Commonly, they have used the tools of democracy assistance to increase autocratic control. Together, these strategies represent increasingly sophisticated methods of authoritarian governance. Finally, a growing global economy has led to demand for the products many of these countries produce, providing aspiring autocratic regimes with the financial resources to consolidate their rule.

Authoritarian Cooperation

Leading authoritarian governments increasingly coordinate their foreign policies. Dan Brumberg has identified enhanced cooperation among authoritarian states. At the center is a group of powerful actors – Russia, Iran, and China – that actively court allies worldwide. While the diverse interests of these nations inhibit them from formalizing an authoritarian coalition, Brumberg nevertheless asserts that the divide between democracies and non-democracies

represents an important cleavage in the international system.¹⁴

These coalitions also have worked to thwart the operation of international institutions in order to protect each other. Coordination between China and Russia on the UN Security Council, for example, has impeded US and European efforts to sanction Iran, Myanmar, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.¹⁵ Moreover, Kazakhstan will take leadership of the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) in 2010. The OSCE administers a range of democracy assistance programs, including election integrity, rule of law, and media freedom. How Kazakh leadership of the organization will affect these programs is not wholly clear.¹⁶

Autocrats are also institutionalizing their own channels of cooperation. One inchoate organization is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), consisting of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. According to two observers, the SCO has been a “forum for Central Asians to re-align themselves with Russia and China.”¹⁷ In addition, the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) regularly monitors elections in authoritarian countries in the former Soviet Union and certifies them as free and fair. For the CIS, it appears that free and fair elections are those where autocrats friendly to Russia win,

¹⁴Daniel Brumberg. 2008. *Global Authoritarianism and the Challenge of International Order*. Presentation at conference on authoritarian cooperation, December 10, Washington, DC.

¹⁵Daniel Nasaw and Mark Rice-Oxley. 2008. China and Russia Veto Zimbabwe Sanctions. *The Guardian*. July 11. Evelyn Leopold. 2007. Several UN Council Members Wary of Sudan Sanctions. Reuters. May 29. Colum Lynch. 2007. Russia, China Veto Resolution on Burma. *Washington Post*. January 13. Robert McMahon. 2006. Iran, the United Nations, and Sanctions. Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.

¹⁶Freedom House 2008 country report for Kazakhstan.

http://www.freedomhouse.org/modules/mod_call_dsp_country-fiw.cfm?year=2008&country=7421

¹⁷Anna Matveeva and Antonio Giustozzi. 2008. *The SCO: A Regional Organization in the Making*. London: Crisis States Research Centre.

since the only one not to receive such certification was in Ukraine in 2004 where Victor Yushchenko defeated Viktor Yanukovich, the candidate preferred by Russia's then-President Vladimir Putin.

Powerful authoritarian states are also using financial support to solidify their networks.

Currently, Russia is promising close to \$2 billion in aid and loans if the government of Kyrgyzstan evicts the United States from the military base it operates there.¹⁸ Russia also manipulates the prices of energy exports to its near abroad, subsidizing allies like Belarus, while punishing countries in which “color revolutions” brought democratic governments to power.¹⁹

China provides significant amounts of foreign assistance and investment to some of the world’s most brutal dictatorships, such as those in Equatorial Guinea, Myanmar, and Sudan.²⁰

Governments have sought to enhance each other's repressive capacities as well. Twice in 2008, China attempted to ship weapons to Zimbabwe, first through South Africa and then through Angola.²¹ China, Iran, and Russia provide significant military assistance to Sudan.²² China also sells weapons to the government of Myanmar.²³

¹⁸ Luke Harding. 2009. Kyrgyzstan to Close Key US Military Airbase. *The Guardian*. February 4.

¹⁹ Steven Woehrel. 2008. *Russian Energy Policy Toward Neighboring Countries*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

²⁰ Thomas Lum, Hannah Fischer, Julissa Gomez-Granger, and Anne Leland. 2009. *China's Foreign Aid Activities in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.

²¹ Celia W. Dugger. 2008. Zimbabwe Arms Shipped by China Spark an Uproar. *New York Times*. April 19. Celia W. Dugger. 2008. Angola Allows Chinese Ship to Dock, but not Unload Arms for Zimbabwe. *New York Times*. April 27.

²² Andrei Chang. 2008. Analysis: China Sells Arms to Sudan. United Press International. February 15. See also Louis Charbonneau. 2008. Iran, Russia Supplying Arms to Sudan. Reuters. October 14.

²³ Andrei Chang. 2008. *China Arms Myanmar Military Machine*. United Press International. March 14.

Authoritarian Upgrading

During the Cold War, many authoritarian governments defined themselves according to their own ideologies. Today's autocrats, by contrast, often cloak repression in the appearance of democracy.²⁴ Authoritarian upgrading takes various forms, such as using electoral institutions to deny opposition parties meaningful representation, creating government-controlled civil society organizations, and utilizing soft power to undermine support for democracy.

Autocrats increasingly use legal means to rule repressively by law.²⁵ In 2007, Russian ex-President Vladimir Putin secured amendments to the country's electoral law that would minimize opposition presence in parliament.²⁶ Subsequent amendments made getting on the ballot virtually impossible for these parties.²⁷ In both cases, the stated goal was to reduce party fragmentation, while the result was fewer seats for oppositions. Similar authoritarian reforms appeared in nearby Kyrgyzstan later that year.²⁸ Morocco's electoral institutions limit representation of opposition parties, where gerrymandered districts over-represent rural areas where support for these parties is weak.²⁹

Manipulation of civil society is another common form of authoritarian upgrading. There is an

²⁴Steven Heydemann. 2007. *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

²⁵Tom Melia. 2008. *Back to the Future of Human Rights: Mobilize the Democratic Faction*. Washington, DC: Freedom House.

²⁶Oleg Liakhovich. 2007. Putin Delivers His Final State of the Nation Address. *Moscow News Weekly*. April 27.

²⁷Clifford J. Levy. 2007. With Tight Grip on Ballot, Putin is Forcing Foes Out. *New York Times*. October 14.

²⁸Olga Dzyubenko. 2007. Kyrgyzstan Votes in Referendum Seeking Stability. *Reuters*. October 21.

²⁹Andrew Mandelbaum. 2007. The Arithmetic of Authoritarianism. *The Democratic Piece*. September 21.
<http://democraticpiece.com/2007/09/21/elections-for-elections%E2%80%99-sake-%E2%80%9Cthe-arithmetic-of-authoritarianism%E2%80%9D/>

increasing trend among authoritarian leaders to create government-run NGOs and tighten restrictions on those they do not directly control.³⁰ Common tactics include cumbersome and vague registration processes, prohibition from undertaking political activities, funding restrictions, and invasive reporting requirements.

Finally, Russia's use of soft power presents a particularly sophisticated form of authoritarian upgrading. To begin with, the government funds a state-run news agency, Russia Today (RT) that broadcasts globally in Arabic and English. The network carries news stories on Russia that often justify deviations from liberal democracy with arguments about Russian sovereign democracy.³¹ The All-Russia State Television and Radio Company agency also runs *Russia Now*, a monthly, multi-page insert in the *Washington Post*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *Hindu Times*, among other papers, providing similar coverage.³²

Russia has also learned how to use NGOs to subvert demands for political reform. NGOs like Amnesty International, Freedom House, and Human Rights Watch play crucial, unofficial roles in supporting democratic reform by exposing abusive regimes and strengthening opposition movements. Russia demonstrates that authoritarian governments can use this model to improve their image. One transparent example is the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation (IDC), a nominally independent NGO. A lawyer sympathetic to Vladimir Putin founded the IDC.

³⁰International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the World Movement for Democracy. 2008. *Defending Civil Society: A Report of the World Movement for Democracy*. Washington, DC: International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the World Movement for Democracy.

³¹Peter Finn. 2008. Russia Pumps Tens of Millions Into Burnishing Image Abroad. *Washington Post*. March 6.

³²Voice of Russia. 2008. "Russia Now" takes up the torch.
<http://ruvr.ru/main.php?lng=eng&q=42768&cid=187&p=27.03.2009>

Russian businesses finance it, and it has offices in New York and Paris. The main purpose of the IDC is to undermine support for multi-party democracy by highlighting the flaws of existing democratic regimes.³³

One might reinterpret authoritarian upgrading as evidence of democracy's universality and inevitability, as it uses the language of democracy. A more sober assessment is that autocrats have used these tactics to blur boundaries between democracy and authoritarianism.

A Growing Global Economy

Finally, a growing global economy has provided many of these countries with resources their leaders could use to consolidate control. Observers of China argue that support for the Communist Party is closely linked to its capacity to deliver rapid economic growth.³⁴ In addition, many resurgent authoritarian states possess large reserves of gas and oil. Scholars have long noted that resource extraction economies facilitate authoritarian political systems.³⁵

The political consequence of the global financial crisis for these regimes is an open question. Some, like *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, argue that petrostates become democracies when the price of oil falls. The logic is that deteriorating economic conditions erode leaders' abilities to maintain political control.³⁶ Not all observers agree. Dan Brumberg,

³³Alexander Osopovich. 2008. Institute to Delve into US Democracy. *Moscow Times*. January 14.

³⁴Minxin Pei. 2006. *China's Trapped Transition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

³⁵Terry Karl. 1997. *The Paradox of Plenty*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

³⁶Thomas Friedman. 2006. The First Law of Petropolitics. *Foreign Policy* 163: 31-32.

for example, argues that regimes are equally likely to become more repressive as their abilities to buy off opposition leaders diminish.³⁷ Events in Zimbabwe support this hypothesis. Robert Mugabe has responded to ever deepening economic crisis with ever increasing violence. In addition, autocrats in Cameroon, Syria, and North Korea have presided over decades of economic stagnation.

Countering the Democratic Recession

Democracy assistance programs can only respond to the democratic recession constructively if they address the underlying causes of it. Improving the global image of the United States is therefore can facilitate revised democracy assistance programs. More important, democracy assistance needs to address the problems of incomplete transitions by focusing attention on democratic consolidation, especially in countries where crises place them at risk of breakdown.

Renew and Expand Multilateralism

Following the Second World War, the United States played an essential role in creating institutions of global governance to facilitate international cooperation and protect human rights, most notably the United Nations. The Obama administration has committed itself to working through these multilateral channels as a way of solving global problems, such as

³⁷ Daniel Brumberg. 2008. *Global Authoritarianism and the Challenge of International Order*. Presentation at conference on authoritarian cooperation, December 10, Washington, DC.

climate change, terrorism, and financial crises.³⁸ Institutionalizing this cooperation would go a long way in rebuilding confidence that the US is a reliable and responsible ally. Although such programs will not affect the success of democracy assistance programs directly, a world that trusts the United States is less likely to be suspicious of its motives for advancing democracy.

A more direct multilateral strategy to counter the backlash is to strengthen the assistance programs of newer democracies. Mexico, South Africa, and a number of Central and Eastern Europe countries, for example, have created democracy assistance programs, drawing on the lessons of their own transitions.³⁹ Because these countries have democratized recently, their programs may be more sensitive to contemporary difficulties of consolidation than those of long-standing democracies. Moreover, channeling democracy assistance through these countries has the added benefit of making clear that such programs are not simply instruments the US and other powerful democratic countries employ to further their national interests.

Consolidate Existing Democracies

More ambitiously, we need to rethink our own approach to democracy assistance.

Paradoxically, we often fail to provide resources to countries where programs are most likely to be effective, while investing significant effort in countries where reform is improbable. This policy is not only inefficient. It also increases the risk of further democratic backslide.

³⁸ James Traub. 2007. Obama's Guide to Leading A "Post-Post-9/11" America. *International Herald Tribune*. February 2.

³⁹ Gregory Mthembu-Salter. 2007. South-South Cooperation in Action at International Democracy Conference. International IDEA. <<http://www.idea.int/africa/south-south07.cfm>>

The table below shows USAID Governing Justly budgets in 2007 for a select number of countries. We have separated the table into columns of countries that Freedom House rates as free or partly free and those it rates as not free. The table makes clear that consolidating democracies, with the exception of a small number of strategically important countries (Georgia, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, and Ukraine) receive far less democracy and governance funding from USAID than those that are not free.

USAID 2007 Governing Justly Budget (millions of dollars)⁴⁰			
<i>Free/Part Free</i>		<i>Not Free</i>	
Georgia	12	Afghanistan	150
Guinea-Bissau	0	Azerbaijan	13
Honduras	2	Belarus	9
Indonesia	20	Cambodia	18
Madagascar	0	DR Congo	9
Malawi	0.4	Egypt	50
Mauritania	0.4	Guinea	5
Mexico	23	Iraq	63
Mongolia	2	Kazakhstan	6
Mozambique	1	Myanmar	4
Pakistan	28	Russia	34
Peru	3	Somalia	4
Senegal	1	Sudan	51
Togo	0	Tajikistan	6
Ukraine	23	Uzbekistan	6
Zambia	0	Zimbabwe	5

The table strongly suggests that US democracy assistance programs emphasize democratic

⁴⁰ These are the most recent, complete, and available data. <<http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2009/>>

transitions at the expense of democratic consolidation. If consolidation were easy, this policy would make sense. Democratic transition, however, does not guarantee consolidation, as we have demonstrated in this essay. Consolidation requires that government officials, political parties, and non-governmental organizations adhere to democratic procedures over many years. When democracy assistance programs abandon these efforts too quickly, the risk of stalled transitions and reversals rises. Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, and Mauritania are recent examples. In 2007, the total USAID governing budget for these three countries was \$400,000, and Freedom House rated these three countries as partly free. Over the past year, coups have replaced elected governments in each of these countries.

Democracy assistance programs also need to pressure leaders to respect democratic institutions in times of adversity. The record of democratic breakdowns is littered with countries whose leaders acquiesced to authoritarian remedies in the face of economic, security, and/or social crises.⁴¹ Currently, Georgia, Pakistan, and Ukraine require such pressure, as eroding security and/or collapsing economies threaten recent democratic gains.⁴²

By contrast, democracy assistance programs are unlikely to be effective in countries where incumbents resist competition. After all, a central objective of these programs is to create opposition: strengthening legislatures so they can check presidents, supporting NGOs so they

⁴¹Ethan Kapstein and Nathan Converse. 2008. *The Fate of Young Democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴²Agence France-Presse. 2009. Pakistan Government in Crisis a Year in Office. March 26. <<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5glqCvhsEMKCV7lh9p09KOH7M2wfg>>. Philip Pan. 2009. Georgia: Autocracy No More, Not Yet Democracy. *Washington Post*. March 15. Steven Lee Myers. 2007. Stalled by Conflict, Ukraine's Democracy Gasp for Air. *New York Times*. June 1.

can expose corruption and human rights violations, building up political parties so they can win more votes, and training journalists so they can disseminate information. Programs to build oppositions in countries where governments will not concede elections they lose - let alone permit fair contestation - are unlikely to be productive, yet these countries accounted for the vast majority of USAID's 2007 democracy and governance budget.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that the US government stop funding beleaguered democratic reformers in authoritarian countries. Rather, our argument is that we need to focus on preventing further backslide.

Conclusion

Scholars such as Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry claim that authoritarian revival is a myth and that liberal democracy remains the only legitimate form of government in the contemporary world.⁴³ Despite a net decline in democracy worldwide over the past three years, we agree that countries like China, Russia and Iran can become democratic in the long run, especially as they develop their economies. However, this does not mean we can remain complacent during the democratic recession, as recent major setbacks in Georgia, Madagascar, and Pakistan make clear.

Democracy assistance programs are unlikely to reverse the authoritarian reforms that have

⁴³Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry. 2009. The Myth of the Autocratic Revival. *Foreign Affairs*, 88 (1): 77-93.

occurred in many of the countries we have discussed. At least in the short term, autocrats have consolidated their rule by novel means and through innovative networks. Nevertheless, it is possible to prevent the democratic recession from deepening if the US and other donors change their democracy assistance priorities to support consolidation, including putting pressure on governments when crises threaten authoritarian reversions.

In its current form, democracy assistance too often ensures its ineffectiveness by pouring funds into countries where programs are unlikely to succeed and not providing assistance to countries where such help is likely to be productive. Unless the United States changes its perplexing set of priorities, the recession is likely to deepen.