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# More Than Elections

# HOW DEMOCRACIES TRANSFER POWER

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# About This Issue

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President-elect John F. Kennedy (left) shakes hands with Vice President Richard M. Nixon after a joint press conference in Miami, Florida, on November 14, 1960, six days after Kennedy narrowly defeated Nixon.

The 1960 presidential election was among the most closely fought in U.S. history. So close that supporters of Vice President Richard M. Nixon urged him to challenge the results. Nixon declined. "Even if we were to win in the end," he explained, "the cost in world opinion and the effect on democracy in the broadest sense would be detrimental."

Nixon instead performed his duty as vice president, and officially reported to the Senate the election of John F. Kennedy. "This is the first time in 100 years," he began,

> that a candidate for the presidency announced the result of an election in which he was defeated and announced the victory of his opponent. I do not think we could have a more striking example of the stability of our constitutional system and of the proud tradition of the American people of developing, respecting and honoring institutions of self-government.
>
> In our campaigns, no matter how hard fought they may be, no matter how close the election may turn out to be, those who lose accept the verdict and support those who win.

Nixon's critics saw in his words the opening shot of a future campaign. Why they might view a gracious concession as politically shrewd is the subject of this *eJournal USA.*

This month we explore how democracies transfer power in accord with the will of the people, expressed through free and fair elections. In the two decades since the Cold War ended, many nations have held elections, but not all are genuine democracies. Sometimes elections are rigged, incumbents enjoy unfair advantages, or — with military support — they overturn the results. But in healthy democracies, as Nixon and his critics understood, citizens expect that elections will be fair and insist that the results be respected, beginning with a peaceful transition of power from one leader to the next.

Our contributors link peaceful transitions to a vibrant civil society. These voluntary civic and social organizations, they argue, engage and inform citizens, and instill a shared expectation that democracy is legitimate and undemocratic action is not. The essays gathered here explore transitions of power in the United States and other nations. We also examine a 21st-century development: how new social media technologies can strengthen civil society and thus bolster democracy.

A number of contributors point out that democracies are stable because election losers know that no victory is permanent, that winners cannot change the rules of future contests, and that losers can compete and win another day. Among those competitors was Richard M. Nixon, elected in 1968 the 37th president of the United States.

— *The Editors*

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# More Than Elections

Eric Bjornlund

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Outside the Pan African Parliament in South Africa, a Zimbabwean opposition Movement for Democratic Change supporter calls for the Parliament to pressure President Robert Mugabe to make democratic reforms in neighboring Zimbabwe.

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*In a healthy democracy, elections are the starting point for a stable government that protects minority rights, ensures free speech, respects the rule of law, and promotes a strong civil society.*

Democratic elections are widely recognized as a foundation of legitimate government. By allowing citizens to choose the manner in which they are governed, elections form the starting point for all other democratic institutions and practices. Genuine democracy, however, requires substantially more. In addition to elections, democracy requires constitutional limits on governmental power, guarantees of basic rights, tolerance of religious or ethnic minorities, and representation of diverse viewpoints, among other things. To build authentic democracy, societies must foster a democratic culture and rule of law that govern behavior between elections and constrain those who might be tempted to undermine election processes. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton remarked recently at Georgetown University, "Democracy means not only elections to

choose leaders, but also active citizens and a free press and an independent judiciary and transparent and responsive institutions that are accountable to all citizens and protect their rights equally and fairly. In democracies, respecting rights isn't a choice leaders make day by day; it is the reason they govern." (Washington, D.C., December 14, 2009)

Smooth political transitions after elections are essential. In a healthy democracy, candidates who lose elections relinquish power gracefully and peacefully. By doing so, defeated candidates can emerge with their dignity intact and through their example contribute to the strength of their nation's democratic traditions, practices, and customs. Likewise, by reaching out to and showing respect for their political opponents, winning candidates help bridge differences and minimize the potential for conflict that can undermine democracy and development.

In a true democracy, the rule of law, democratic political institutions, and independent civil society organizations help ensure respect for electoral outcomes. These institutions and values in turn bolster people's faith in their governments and their willingness to support peaceful political transitions.

## The Rule of Law

Democracy requires respect for the rule of law, which survives regardless of the outcome of elections. The United Nations Security Council defines the rule of law as when "all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards."

The rule of law comprises legitimacy, fairness, effectiveness, and checks and balances. Legitimacy requires that laws reflect a general social consensus that they be enacted in an open and democratic process. Fairness includes equal application of the law, procedural fairness, protection of civil liberties, and reasonable access to justice. Effectiveness refers to the consistent application and enforcement of laws.

Fairly enforced laws that protect all citizens help establish a democratic state's legitimacy. Because such laws in a healthy democracy command public respect and loyalty, citizens accept disappointing election results. A nation where laws are implemented fairly and disputes adjudicated impartially is more stable. Unjust or discriminatory laws, on the other hand, undermine public respect. If sufficiently egregious, such laws risk public disobedience or even revolt and create a climate less tolerant of unsatisfactory electoral outcomes. This is why U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower observed, "The clearest way to show what the rule of law means to us in everyday life is to recall what has happened when there is no rule of law."

Rule of law implies respect for fundamental civil rights and procedural norms and requires that these transcend the outcome of any given election. In a democracy, the election returns cannot affect protections for freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or the independence of the judiciary. New leaders, regardless of how broad their electoral mandate, should neither call these norms into question nor threaten the rights of any citizen, including those who supported a losing candidate.

As a result, respect for the rule of law encourages peaceful election transitions. A defeated candidate who refuses to accept election results simply will find himself lacking support; citizens instead will view such a figure as an outlier, possibly a lawbreaker, and definitely a threat to their shared civic culture. Again, citizens are less likely to support revolts or to back candidates who refuse to accept election results in a country where legal processes are respected and the state is seen as legitimate.

## Political Institutions

Well-developed political and electoral institutions similarly increase the likelihood of peaceful election transitions. Institutions provide the resilience that democracies require to withstand potential conflicts following controversial or contested elections. Instead of taking their grievances to the streets, defeated candidates or opposition groups can challenge election results or the fairness of election procedures through institutional mechanisms, such as electoral complaint commissions or courts. The broad expectation that these institutions will adjudicate the disputes fairly makes a peaceful, democratic transition more likely and diminishes the likelihood of conflict as an avenue for contesting election results.

Strong and effective electoral institutions enhance electoral process credibility and reinforce the public expectation that electoral results will be respected. They assure defeated candidates that the victors' terms of office are limited and there will be opportunities to compete again.

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A member of the Rwandan National Election Commission stands inside a ballot station in Kigali in August 2003 amid preparations for an election the next day.

Political institutions that restrain, or check, governmental power also contribute to stability. This is especially important in new and developing democracies, where election outcomes can produce uncertain political environments or moments of crisis. If a political leader refuses to accept the election returns, a strong, independent judiciary capable of resisting that recalcitrance is crucial. When an incumbent is defeated at the polls, it helps greatly if the government bureaucracy does not rely on political leaders for patronage or for its members' livelihoods. Civil servants thus will have less incentive to support any efforts of a defeated leader to reject a democratic process. Established political institutions channel dissent and create incentives for leaders, lawmakers, and bureaucrats to govern democratically.

Effective governance — including public accountability, responsiveness, transparency and efficiency — helps build political legitimacy for democracy. As President Barack Obama said to the parliament of Ghana, "In the 21st century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success — strong parliaments and honest police forces, independent judges and journalists, a vibrant private sector, and civil society." (Accra, Ghana, July 11, 2009)

## Civil Society

Like political institutions and the rule of law, a strong civil society — supported by a free press — enhances the legitimacy of democratic practices and reinforces expectations that electoral winners and losers will respect the "rules of the game." Civil society organizations can act as a check on governmental power and deter election losers tempted to thwart the democratic process.

Genuinely independent and broadly representative nongovernmental organizations and other civil society institutions help ensure that candidates and elected officials respect election results and democratic processes. They can facilitate important dialogue between citizens and their government and supply information that democratic, representative governments need. By articulating a society's issues and concerns, advocacy groups contribute to transparency and accountability. By pressuring the government to follow through on its campaign commitments, they enhance government responsiveness. Civil society organizations can shape government behavior and can help define people's expectations of how their government will operate.

Internet and social media technologies now provide civil society groups new platforms from which to organize, exchange information, and push for greater government transparency and accountability. Blogging, text messaging, online social networking, and similar Web-based tools enable civil society groups to expand their audiences, rapidly increase their membership, and leverage international support for local or national causes. During the post-election controversy in Iran, for example, the online microblogging platform Twitter enabled Iranians to question election results and to inform the world about unfolding political events.

Secretary Clinton has linked these organizations and networks to government accountability and responsiveness. Civil society, she says, "pushes political institutions to be agile and responsive to the people

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On October 24, 2000, in Belgrade, ministers of the new Serbian transitional government read their oaths during a session of Parliament. Followers of the new president, Vojislav Kostunica, agreed to share power with Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party until new elections that December.

they serve." (Morocco, November 3, 2009) Civil society organizations help citizens develop new ways to call for government accountability and transparency and increase the incentives of governments to adhere to democratic norms and principles.

### Respecting and Moving Beyond Elections

Democracy creates certain public expectations and understandings, including respect for the rule of law and for the outcomes of elections. It requires respect for values beyond elections. Speaking in Cairo, President Obama emphasized these fundamental truths:

> So no matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy.(Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt, June 4, 2009)

Respect for the rule of law, well-developed political institutions, and strong civil society engagement together reinforce expectations for and the likelihood of peaceful political transitions. States where institutions represent diverse interests, channel public demands, facilitate political discourse, and implement laws effectively and impartially are more likely to command respect. In these nations, the possibility of effecting change through peaceful means discourages extra-constitutional challenges to election results and helps ensure that elections are a first step to broader democratic governance. ■

*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Ingredients of a Resilient Democracy

Valerie Bunce

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Ukrainians cheer for opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko during a 2004 Kiev rally. Tens of thousands protested against election fraud and voter intimidation. The "orange revolution" forced annulment of the election results. A free and fair runoff election followed.

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*Elections in a healthy democracy hold governments accountable to the governed and facilitate peaceful transfers of power.*

Democratic elections require more than the casting and counting of ballots. In a healthy democracy, elections hold governments accountable to the governed. This happens when:

- Citizens are free to select their political representatives;
- Citizens can choose among candidates seeking their support;
- Officeholders must be re-elected to retain their positions after a specified interval. They face regular electoral verdicts on their performance and risk losing power at the ballot box.

Competitive elections promote uncertainty among political aspirants and thus encourage their responsiveness to citizens.

Elections will only produce accountability when they are regularly held and when they are free and fair. In many new democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa and post-communist Eurasia, electoral competition has not ensured accountability. Sometimes this is because electoral procedures are irregular, rather than transparent and in full conformity with constitutional guidelines. In some nations, incumbents dominate the political playing field by dispensing patronage to established and potential supporters, or they manufacture "fake" oppositions, and harass their "real" opposition. Moreover, seemingly democratic regimes can prolong their hold on power by controlling voter registration, voter turnout, and vote tabulation.

The gap between simulation and actual democratic practice narrows when opposition parties and candidates run vigorous campaigns. These mobilize citizens and civil society groups, which in turn organize to register voters, get out the vote, and monitor elections. This is precisely what happened in the pivotal elections that took place in Slovakia in 1998, Croatia and Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, and Ukraine in 2004. In each case, citizens employed democratic methods, including voting and protests, to force authoritarian incumbents or their anointed successors to admit defeat.

Transitions challenge any political system. Healthy democracies handle the dilemma smoothly and peacefully. Clean elections and peaceful transitions demonstrate that today's losers might be tomorrow's winners, and vice versa. Winners and their supporters must remain responsive to the opinions of their rivals, keeping an eye on the next election cycle. Losers and their advocates can focus on present and future possibilities, rather than past resentments. Confident that the rules can work for them next time, they more easily accept the existing political order and are less likely to seek a democratic government's violent overturn.

Every transition to new leadership implies change, and hence a challenge to political stability. Democracies minimize this challenge by holding regular and competitive elections that open genuine opportunities for emerging new leaders and through transparent power transfers that help winners and losers accept their fates. However, democracies differ in how they weigh the benefits of stability against the need for political dynamism and change, and even against the voters' desire to return the same candidate to office over and over again. For example, in the United States, Russia, Armenia, and more than 30 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are constitutional limits on how long leaders can serve. These limits guard against autocracy by preventing any one individual from holding power too long, but also deprive citizens of the opportunity to vote for a "termed-out" candidate.

Elections therefore serve two vital functions in a democratic order. They hold government accountable to the governed, and they facilitate peaceful transfers of political power. These two effects, in turn, legitimize democracy. Citizens of a healthy democracy view representative government as the "only way" to conduct politics. ■

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# The Lasting Impact of Digital Media on Civil Society

Philip N. Howard

© AP Images

June 2009: Cell phone cameras document Tehran, Iran, demonstrators protesting elections results.

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*Digital media and social networking supply citizens and civil society institutions with tools for communication and mobilization. They provide arenas where individuals can offer opinions and express dissent and thus strengthen trends toward political democracy.*

New information technologies are profoundly reshaping political culture. Twenty-first-century civil society relies upon the Internet and other communication devices for its infrastructure, and for a digital "safe harbor" in which civic conversations can incubate. This is especially true in countries where the national print and broadcast media are heavily censored. In short, technology has empowered new and vital means of political communication and acclimated citizens to democratic thought and action.

Civil society is often defined as the self-generating and self-supporting community of people who share core values and voluntarily organize political, economic, or cultural activities independent of the state. Civil society

groups come in many sizes, from Amnesty International to neighborhood bowling leagues in the United States and the online communities around the world.

Civic groups are especially important during election season because they represent diverse perspectives and disseminate them widely through communications media. The breadth of expressed views assures citizens that in a democracy no one group can claim to represent all of society. Instead, a multitude of groups contributes to the defining of national goals and the shaping of policies.

## Creating Virtual Communities

Civil society groups use the Internet as a logistical tool for organization and communication. The Web affords them an information infrastructure independent of the state, one in which social movements can grow. For example, Tunisian citizens monitoring state corruption organized themselves to create YouTube videos of the Tunisian president's wife using the state plane for shopping trips to Milan and Paris. The Internet thus has altered the dynamics of political communication in many countries. There, cyberspace is the forum where civil society challenges the state. In some nations, it is where secularism and Islamism compete, in others the forum for political disputes of every stripe.

After an election, the virtual communities that have taken root are almost always independent of state control, though they can be monitored and sometimes manipulated by the state. While political elites do start some virtual communities in an effort to control online conversation, these typically are not successful. In countries like Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, these are sometimes called "Astroturf" movements. They are artificial, rarely take root, and tend not to last long after voting day.

What do last are the more genuine ties forged between a nation's civic groups, and between international nongovernmental organizations and like-minded in-country associations. These virtual communities are particularly prominent in countries where state and social elites harshly police offline communities. In nations where overt political opposition is restricted, cyberspace emerges as a substitute forum. Even online bulletin boards and chat rooms dedicated to shopping for brand-name watches become sites that practice free speech and where the defense of free speech supplants timepieces as a topic of conversation. The Internet allows opposition movements based outside an authoritarian-ruled country to reach into and become part of the political communication system. Banning political parties simply means that formal political opposition is organized online, from outside the country. It also means that civil society leaders turn to the other organizational forms that network technologies afford.

## Aiding Civic Engagement

Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey all recently held elections and, according to most observers, the elections went well. Digital media played a role in political campaigning, and democracy seems stronger for it. Despite these countries' diverse histories, political culture across all three has taken on similar features:

- Citizens have increased international content in their news diets;
- Family and friends employ Twitter, Facebook, and Orkut networks in their communications, independent of direct state control;
- Civil society actors have flourished online — even when the state has cracked down domestically;
- Women are drawn into cyberspace discourse in ways not always available in "real" space.

Identity politics — particularly for cohorts of urban, technologically savvy youth — are digitally mediated. From Palestinians to Greeks, Armenians to Hmong, young Internet users learn much about their culture and politics in their diaspora. These new forms of political communication contributed to largely positive election campaigns. Even rigorously Islamist parties needed to moderate their message and employ new information technologies to attract and motivate voters.

Twitter, blogs, or YouTube do not cause social unrest. But today, it is difficult to imagine successful social movement organizing and civic engagement without them, even in countries like Iran and Egypt. Many people in these countries have no Internet or mobile phone access. But those who do — urban dwellers, educated elites, and the young — are precisely the population that enables regime change or tacitly supports an electoral outcome. These are the citizens who support or defect from authoritarian rule, and these are the people whose connections to family and friends have demonstrably changed with the diffusion of new communications technologies.

When an election is over, new media habits remain. Elections have become sensitive moments in which student leaders, journalists, and civil society groups experiment with digital technologies. Even if their preferred candidates are not elected, the process of experimentation is important because, by using digital media, citizens construct an information infrastructure that is largely independent of the state. Digital media leave a lasting imprint on civil society, one that continues after elections. The Internet allows youth to learn, for instance, about life in countries where faith and freedom coexist. Over time, more citizens are learning to use the Internet, developing their online search skills, and becoming more sophisticated in how they obtain, evaluate, and use information.

## Strengthening Civil Society

Pundits are right to point out that the Internet also is used to support terrorist networks. They note that some ruling elites seek — by censoring new media — to achieve more sophisticated means of social control. But there is more to the story than what is sometimes called "e-jihad," "terrorism online," "cyberwar," and "digital fatwas." Over time, social media's role in strengthening civil society will likely prove its most lasting contribution to political culture.

During politically sensitive moments like elections or political or military crises, tools such as mobile phones and the Internet enhance political communication in three ways:

- First, technology users display unusually strong norms of trust and reciprocity in times of crisis. They are likely to share images, help each other stay in touch with family and friends, and help outsiders by supplying information on the ground.
- Second, civil society groups often copy each other's digital campaign strategies. In part this is because democratic activists will travel from country to country and help local groups during elections. But elections also are an opportunity for groups to learn about each other's strategies for getting ideas out to the public.
- Third, elections are opportunities to debate all kinds of public issues, including the role of new communication technologies. Questions about technology standards — such as public spectrum allocation, government censorship, and digital access — become topics of discussion. The public may insist that political candidates explain their plans for promoting technology use and for closing the digital divide between technology haves and have-nots.

Statistical modeling of Malaysia's recent legislative elections shows that challenger candidates who blogged were more likely to defeat incumbents who did not. And opposition party candidates who blogged were more likely to defeat government candidates who did not. Today, it is hard for a political candidate to seem "modern" without a digital campaign strategy.

Information infrastructure is politics. In many nations, it also is far more participatory than the prevailing traditional political culture. As a result, the new technology-based politics democratizes the old, elite-driven arrangements. Every time a citizen documents a human rights abuse with her mobile phone, uses a shared spreadsheet to track state expenditures, or pools information about official corruption, she strengthens civil society and strikes a blow for democracy. Digital media's most lasting impact may be that it acclimates citizens both to consuming and to producing political content. ■

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# Democracy's Rhetoric of Defeat

Paul Corcoran

©AP Images/Michel Euler

Socialist candidate for the French presidency, Ségolène Royal, concedes defeat in Paris, on May 6, 2007. While sharing the disappointment of her supporters, she said she hoped the winner, Nicholas Sarkozy, "will accomplish his mission at the service of all French people."

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*Concession speeches after hard-fought elections are more than empty rituals. They help establish the legitimacy of the results, reinforce national unity, and pave the way for peaceful and effective transitions of power.*

With the votes still being counted on November 4, 2008, the two leading candidates for the U.S. presidency played their roles in the concluding act of an established political drama. The first to speak was the defeated candidate, John McCain. His concession speech followed a time-honored rhetorical formula:

> My friends, we have come to the end of a long journey. The American people have spoken, and they have spoken clearly. A little while ago, I had the honor of calling Senator Barack Obama to congratulate him … on being elected the next president of the country that we both love. In a contest as long and difficult as this campaign has been, his success alone commands my respect for his ability and perseverance. But that he managed to do so by inspiring the hopes of so many millions of Americans who had once wrongly believed that they had little at stake or little influence in the election of an American president is something I deeply admire and commend him for achieving.

In his victory speech, Barack Obama responded, emphasizing "that we have never been just a collection of individuals or a collection of red [predominantly Republican] states and blue [predominantly Democratic] states. We are, and always will be, the United States of America." The president-elect's next words offered a tribute to his rival:

> A little bit earlier this evening, I received an extraordinarily gracious call from Senator McCain. Senator McCain fought long and hard in this campaign. And he's fought even longer and harder for the country that he loves. He has endured sacrifices for America that most of us cannot begin to imagine. We are better off for the service rendered by this brave and selfless leader.

Versions of this drama are performed in every healthy democracy. Ségolène Royal wished Nicholas Sarkozy "the best in accomplishing his mission in the service of all the French people." Defeated Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso announced, "I believe that this is the judgment of the public and we will have to reflect on that sincerely." Similarly cordial exchanges signal the end of democratic

© AP Images/Laura Rauch

John Kerry campaign staffers watch their candidate's 2004 concession speech.

political campaigns throughout the world. One might dismiss these remarks as mere formalities: insincere, gratuitous, at best old-fashioned gallantry. But they play a crucial role: in the concession speech the defeated candidate accepts the legitimacy of the election results. The victor's response signals that supporters of all candidates remain a valued part of the national polity. Each election, no matter how bitterly contested, thus ends with an expression of national unity.

## A Formal Rite of Transition

Surprisingly, the losing candidate has the greater rhetorical opportunity and significance in the election night drama and in the democratic process. The victor inevitably returns to campaign promises. By acknowledging his opponent's graciousness, he easily appears chivalrous, even as his praise for a formidable opponent magnifies his own achievement.

The rhetoric of defeat has a more important task to perform in the formal rite of political transition in a democracy. Delivered with a minimum of preparation by a strong personality in a time of great emotional stress, a concession speech personifies the requisite civilities for social stability and legitimate political authority. It ceremonially resolves the symbolic crisis (the election) that democracies regularly and purposefully experience, and thus visibly reinforces popular sovereignty and constitutional order. For the vanquished, the rhetorical drama translates electoral defeat into a narrative of triumph: The defeated party renews its commitment toward future victory. The language of combat, partisan loyalty, and opposing principles is rendered into metaphors of ancient virtue, chivalry, and sport – that is, onto a plane where playing the game is fundamental and the rules of the game are more important than winning or losing a particular contest.

Some dramatize a U.S. presidential election as a campaign of organized combat between enemies. Like warfare, it is noisy and passionate. The media tends to reinforce this military theme by emphasizing division and conflict, with winners and losers pronounced in weekly opinion polls. Candidates cast doubt on their rivals' competence, character, and leadership qualities. The record of incumbent candidates is sharply questioned. Candidates are probed for signs of weakness. Candidates who already hold office enter "election mode," devoting great effort to running for office.

Modern presidential campaign organizations work to divide the electorate into segments and then ideologically consolidate the majority of these voting blocs. This strategy fragments the nation by party, state, region, and more. Each successive presidential election is proclaimed the most divisive, hard-fisted, negative campaign ever. The nation, many commentators conclude, ends up polarized as never before.

The stress on democratic norms is real. Old loyalties, grievances, and prejudices re-emerge. Passions run high. Finally, all but one of the candidates and nearly half of the electorate will be disappointed, their hopes dashed, illusions crumbled.

This happens when things are working well.

The rhetorical task of the concession speech is to begin healing the wounds and salving the bruises inflicted and suffered by both parties. Only the defeated candidate can acknowledge loss, declare the victor's triumph, issue a call for national unity, and urge patriotic support for the candidate he campaigned against for months. This sacrifice of personal hope and ambition is justified by a call for national unity, renewed party loyalty, and a reassurance that the prospect is bright for future victory. Thus in 2004 the vanquished John Kerry spoke to his loyal supporters about

> the danger of division in our country and the need — the desperate need for unity, for finding the common ground, coming together. Today, I hope that we can begin the healing. … We are required now to work together for the good of our country. In the days ahead we must find common cause. We must join in a common effort, without remorse or recrimination, without anger or rancor. America is in need of unity and longing for a larger measure of compassion.

Four years later, John McCain evoked the identical theme:

> Senator Obama and I have had and argued our differences, and he has prevailed. … I urge all Americans who supported me to join me in not just congratulating him, but offering our next president our good will and earnest effort to find ways to come together, to find the necessary compromises, to bridge our differences, and help restore our prosperity, defend our security in a dangerous world, and leave our children and grandchildren a stronger, better country than we inherited. Whatever our differences, we are fellow Americans.

## Orderly Transition: A Global Challenge

This ritual of gracious acceptance of defeat with a plea for unity and cooperation is well-established in the United States, with its long tradition of competitive electioneering. However, a similar ritual has developed to greater or lesser degrees in other democratic nations. Its features were partly visible in the 2005 British parliamentary elections. The BBC reported that Michael Howard, leader of the Conservative Party, 'conceded defeat' in these peremptory terms:

> It looks as if Mr Blair is going to win a third term for Labour, and I congratulate him on that victory. I believe that the time has now come for him to deliver on the things that really matter to the people of our country. … When he does, then he will have my support.

The democratic themes of Ségolène Royal's concession were clearer in the 2007 French presidential election:

> Friends, compatriots … universal suffrage has spoken, and I hope that the new president of the republic will be able to accomplish his mission, and I thank the 17 million from the bottom of my heart. … I gave my utmost, and I will carry on … I would like to thank all the people who fought, and let's keep intact the energy and the joy…the election has renewed democracy …what we have begun together we will carry on together.

Post-election concession speeches occur in South America, Africa, Asia, Europe and Australia, but only rarely do they follow the formal courtesies and media-driven framing devices of American presidential elections. This is especially true in nations with numerous parties or a parliamentary system where a coalition of parties often forms a governing majority.

The orderly transition of office and power from one political party to another cannot be taken for granted. It requires a framework of law and widespread confidence based on practical experience that elections are fair. In new or evolving democracies, especially those beset by deep cultural divisions, the lack of experience or trust in the electoral process is inevitably a challenge. Regimes established by coup d'état, peaceful or otherwise, may seek democratic legitimacy in an election, only to defy electoral defeat by force of arms. In such cases, rather than concede defeat, party leaders may denounce the result, claiming fraudulent ballots, censorship, and violent intimidation. They may urge their supporters to resist, fight, and die. For a nation attempting to build and consolidate democratic institutions, the challenge facing rival leaders is to accept defeat as a bridge beyond personal ambition and party interest.

The ritual of concession and victory does more than heal. The formal exchange of tributes may seem like nostalgic gestures from a more genteel, less cynical era, but the participants reenact a classical political dramaturgy. In the aftermath of a hard-fought battle, the speeches are a ritual display of very abstract concepts: 'democracy at work' and 'voice of the people.' Fierce opponents are restored as a citizen body, reunified and renewed in commitment to values that transcend rivalry.

Communicated by pervasive mass media, the ritual of conceding defeat and declaring victory becomes the election's cathartic dénouement. As officials count the vote, journalists furiously analyze their computer projections and impatiently speculate: When will the apparent loser 'concede'? Will the candidate deny the winner a triumphant election-night celebration? And will the defeated candidate, yield to bitterness and emotional breakdown or appear 'gracious' at a moment of ultimate disappointment and despair? This ceremony of defeat is a symbolic transfer of power. When viewed over time and in the context of the increasingly powerful mass media, these speeches have become an established democratic practice that broadens our understanding of how national sovereignty is institutionalized and symbolically reinforced. ■

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*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Civil Society, Democracy, and Elections

Bruce Gilley

© AP Images

Free to Demonstrate: Indonesian students burn former President Suharto in effigy. They were protesting the dropping of corruption charges against the former president.

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*Strong civil societies empower healthy democracies. By assuring fair elections and then holding the victors to standards of good governance, they cultivate the political conditions within which democracy can thrive.*

Recent years have shown that elections alone do not assure democratic rule. Nations that hold fair elections where the winners are accountable to clear standards of good governance share a key advantage: strong civil society institutions. A study of real and would-be democracies reveals that civil society and democracy are mutually reinforcing.

## Indonesia

Since the overthrow of long-time authoritarian ruler Suharto in 1998, Indonesia has experienced four peaceful electoral transitions — in 1999, 2001, 2004, and 2009. Its democratic gains in that period have been stunning. From a 1997 score of 6 on the Freedom House political and civil liberties scale (with 7 being the worst), the country has joined the ranks of the world's relatively liberal democracies with a score of 2.5 in 2009.

Despite widespread fears of conflict and political ruptures, an active and organized civil society has supplied much of the glue that helps Indonesians adhere

to democratic expectations and norms. Groups such as Democracy Forum, the University Presidents' Forum, and the University Network for Free and Fair Elections ensured fair elections. Just as important, other Indonesian civil society institutions forced politicians to play by the rules, keep their promises, and remain accountable to voters in the periods between elections.

Dr. Hadi Soesastro, executive director of the Jakarta-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, told a U.S. audience in 2001 that the country's new democracy "is still so fragile and, of course, the major risk is that we might see a reversal in the process." Civil society in Indonesia, he declared, "defines its main function as trying to prevent this reversal. It is the number-one priority for us." Nine years later, Indonesian civil society can declare a tentative mission accomplished. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton congratulated civil society leaders in Jakarta in February 2009 for their role in forging a tolerant, democratic, and rights-respecting country. "As I travel around the world over the next years, I will be saying to people, if you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity, and women's rights can coexist, go to Indonesia," she said.

It has become widely understood that a healthy democracy requires more than elections. That is why most democracy promotion and assistance focuses instead on other activities — from supporting civil society to strengthening effective legislative processes. But the electoral and non-electoral aspects of democracy are mutually dependent: You cannot have one without the other, and they tend to evolve in tandem. A vibrant civil society, supported by a free press and other independent organizations, not only supports electoral outcomes by ensuring fairness, legitimacy, and compliance, it also supports post-electoral follow-through, in the form of government accountability, transparency, and rule-following. U.S. President Barack Obama, in speeches in Moscow and Accra in 2009, referred to the role of civil society as democratic change from the "bottom up." As he put it in Accra: "This is about more than just holding elections. It's also about what happens between elections."

## Ethiopia

Ethiopia also reflects these "bottom-up" processes of democratic consolidation. The nation achieved its first truly competitive national election in 2005, helped by Ethiopian civil society organizations previously

© AP Images/Anita Powell

During the 2008 local and parliamentary elections, Ethiopians being trained in how the election process works.

concerned mostly with relief and development efforts. Opposition parties increased their share of the national legislature from 9 to 173 of the 547 seats, the first serious dent in the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF) decade-long dominance. During the elections, civil society organizations such as Fafen Development and Vision Ethiopian Congress for Democracy offered civic education training for citizens and deployed election observers.

The regime tried to fudge the election results. Protests and an attempted clampdown in the capital, Addis Ababa, followed. Civil society organizations united in a common front, forcing the regime to accept the true results under a pact reached in May 2006. Civil society leaders who had been arrested were released.

Since then, civil society groups have pressed the EPRDF to respect opposition and to rule by consent rather than coercion. A whole new sense of accountability has emerged. In response to a major concern of advocacy groups, a former prime minister and a former defense minister were charged and convicted on corruption

charges in 2007. Meanwhile, in 2008, the Ethiopian parliament, which, thanks to the efforts of civil society groups, now included members of different political parties and persuasions, adopted a new media law. It prohibits government censorship of private media or the detention of journalists — providing an example of how civil society and competitive elections are mutually reinforcing. As President Obama noted in his Accra speech: "Across Africa, we've seen countless examples of people taking control of their destiny, and making change from the bottom up."

## Other Examples

Between 1998 and 2004, five post-communist states — Georgia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia — experienced successful "democratic revolutions." Civil society played a similar role in each. Again the initial mobilization of civil society was grounded in the desire to uphold fair and clean elections. So-called "free election movements," which energize civil society and orient it toward a more overtly political function, are seen across the globe as nations struggle to transition to democracy. Recent examples include the Philippines, Ghana, Iran, and Kenya.

## After the Election

After free and fair elections, civil society turns to the less dramatic, less telegenic, but arguably far more important everyday good governance. Civil society engages in a daily struggle to head off repressive laws, expose corruption, and ensure the fair representation of all groups, interests, and ideas. It strives to compel government accountability, and to assure that officeholders continue to play by the rules of the game. As President Obama put it in Cairo in 2009: "You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy."

In her award-winning 2005 book *From Elections to Democracy*, Yale University professor Susan Rose-Ackerman considered a number of factors that might ensure policy-making accountability. Only a vibrant civil society, she concluded, held the potential to consolidate democracy. "Creating institutions that channel and manage public participation by individuals and groups in policy making should be high on the reform agenda of the post-socialist states and of consolidating democracies throughout the world," she said.

## In the Absence of Civil Society

Recent years also have supplied examples where there are elections but no active civil society. Scholars coin phrases like "feckless democracy," "control democracy," "illiberal democracy," and "competitive authoritarianism" to describe countries featuring semi-competitive elections and civil societies too weak or insufficiently developed to assure government accountability. This has been most evident in the post-communist states where democratic revolutions have failed — such as in Belarus (2005) and Kyrgyzstan (2008). Civil society in these countries has been highly donor-dependent, and extends only minimally beyond capital cities. As a result, when civil society activists in these nations have risen up in "free election movements," no one has followed. Other countries where a shallow or weak civil society has abetted the entrenchment of elected authoritarians include Malaysia, Russia, and Cambodia.

In Venezuela, by contrast, a strong and vibrant civil society has simply not been up to the task of maintaining the vibrant liberal democracy that the country knew in the late 1990s. The Venezuelan case, like that of Zimbabwe, is a reminder that sometimes "bottom-up" forces are insufficient: International pressures, state institutions such as the judiciary and electoral commissions, as well as decisions by key political elites, are all needed to protect democracy. And sometimes, indeed, it is elections alone that can muster sufficient social momentum to win the battle.

Fortunately, political liberalization has its own momentum. Once civil society is unleashed, it is very hard to contain. President Obama and Secretary Clinton rightly emphasize the importance of civil society in strengthening democracy, both during and after elections. Both proudly aim to strengthen U.S. civil society and democracy. President Obama personifies this quest — a community organizer himself, our nation's leader understands deeply the symbiotic relationship of civil society and effective democracy. ■

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# The 2008-2009 Presidential Transition: Successful Cooperation

Martha Joynt Kumar

© AP Images/Evan Vucci

Less than a week after the 2008 election, President George W. Bush and President-elect Barack Obama on their way to a private meeting in the Oval Office.

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*Long months of preparation on the part of the outgoing and incoming administrations made the handover from George W. Bush to Barack Obama among the smoothest of U.S. presidential transitions.*

Incumbent U.S. presidents have gathered and provided executive branch information to their successors since 1952. The practice began because a U.S. system requires that a president-elect make many important decisions before taking office, particularly with regard to appointments. The 2008-2009 transition from George W. Bush to Barack Obama proved one of the smoothest and most effective. Even before the election, both sides had focused on achieving a productive transition. One measure of the transition's effectiveness was the Obama Administration's ability to achieve a number of its objectives during its first days in office.

In the approximately 75 days between his election and inauguration, the new president establishes his policy priorities. Before he can act on his planned initiatives, he needs to have in place:

- The information he requires to make informed presidential decisions;
- Senior White House staff members with their assignments;
- A plan for prioritizing and selecting personnel for his White House and top level officials in 15 executive branch departments.

With these ingredients in place, in his first 10 days in office President Barack Obama signed nine executive orders and nine presidential memoranda covering a broad range of subjects. Soon after, he signed legislation relating to equal pay, children's health insurance, and an economic stimulus program, thus delivering on significant campaign promises early in his administration.

Three developments empowered President Obama's fast start. First, President Bush made an early and personal commitment to a successful transition. In late 2007, long before the election, Bush instructed White House Chief of Staff Joshua Bolten to assure the transition's effectiveness. Second, early in 2008 and again long before the election, candidate Barack Obama assigned knowledgeable and appropriate people to plan for a change of power. Finally, following the September 11, 2001, attacks, all parts of the federal government had become very sensitive to threats on government operations and prepared to make the next change in executive power a smooth one. President Bush recommended and Congress passed legislation addressing the national security information needs of an incoming president.

## Early Transition Planning by Bush Administration Officials

While most incumbent presidents only turn to transition preparations in their administration's final months, George W. Bush began over a year in advance. Joshua Bolten recalled how President Bush in 2007 instructed him to "go all-out to make sure that the transition is as effective as it possibly can be, especially in the national security area." That early start gave the administration the opportunity to communicate with representatives of the presidential campaigns after the primary season and well before the election.

With 15 departments and around 7,000 positions to ultimately fill — including the most important 1,200 posts that require Senate confirmation — a president-elect needs a great deal of information about the jobs, how the various executive branch departments operate, and the status of specific policy initiatives. By mid-spring 2008 Bush administration officials had begun to gather and correlate this information for whoever would win the presidency.

Coordination among executive branch agencies and officials is a key component of an effective transition. At a spring meeting of the President's Management Council (PMC), a collection of 22 key agencies, PMC Chair Clay Johnson talked to agency representatives about the transition. The agencies worked together to establish common agency priorities and templates for their work. Johnson instructed the agency staff to focus on priorities, "not hot and spicy items, but the high priority items or the items, the trend, the specific transactions that the new leadership group will have to deal with …"

In the national security area, President Bush personally reviewed a series of 40 memoranda prepared under the direction of National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley to help the incoming president and his team understand significant issues and situations around the world. Hadley also prepared a series of 17 contingency plans. "If the worst happens, here are some responses," he explained. While the contingency plans were an ongoing operation, Joshua Bolten commented that "impending departure … really helped focus our minds on making sure those things were right before we left."

## President-Elect Barack Obama's Transition Operation

Barack Obama brought in an experienced Washington hand, John Podesta, to manage his transition organization. Podesta had served in the Clinton administration as White House chief of staff. While he knew Obama well, Podesta was not personally close to Obama and he did not want a job in an Obama administration. Those aspects were important because everyone knew Podesta was not spending time trying to get a job for himself. Chris Lu, executive director of the Obama transition, indicated that the Obama transition officials were mindful of the need to rely upon people who were not angling for a job in the coming administration. "You don't want them jockeying for their future jobs," Lu said — a lesson learned through the experiences of those serving in earlier transitions and administrations.

© AP Images/J. Scott Applewhite

The co-chairs of the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism, former Florida Senator Bob Graham (left) and former Missouri Senator Jim Talent (right) brief Vice President-elect Joe Biden and Homeland Security Secretary-designate Janet Napolitano on December 3, 2008, at the presidential transition headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Podesta elaborated on how the agency review teams supplied practical, easily digestible information for new administration officials: "You could take a program, an agency, the budget, [and say] 'these are the challenges, how do you move forward and produce the results Obama had promised, both during the campaign and then fleshed out in the transition and into the early parts of governing?' Cabinet secretaries and White House staff "got [a] strategic product that was more digestible," Podesta continued. "In my conversations with the incoming cabinet secretaries, they very much appreciated that they, were getting focused, well-written, reviewed, third-draft, 30-page memos, not 5,000 pages of junk [as] had been practiced in the past." That is the type of information and assessment that incoming officials need as they assume government positions.

## Anticipating a Post-September 11th Transition

A third factor shaping the 2008-2009 transition was a broad consensus that national security required a smooth transition. The government adopted recommendations of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the 9-11 Commission) to improve the national security clearance process and to gather and provide information on security threats so that a new administration could handle an early crisis if one were to arise. The slow pace of the clearance process, many believed, had caused previous administrations undue delay getting all their appointees into office.

To speed up the nomination process for executive branch personnel, Congress provided for an early clearance process, and the Bush team facilitated the early national security investigations for key transition personnel. In order to get President-elect Obama up to speed on crisis preparation, President Bush and his officials organized a crisis-training event on the White House grounds on January 13, 2009, a week before the Obama inauguration. This proved a valuable opportunity for incoming officials to discuss responses to possible emergency situations firsthand with their predecessors.

## Conclusion

The 2008-2009 transition illustrates the benefit when a president orders early and thorough transition preparations. At the direction of President Bush, Chief of Staff Joshua Bolten guided a government-wide effort to define and then meet the needs of the new administration. Barack Obama contributed to the process by establishing early on a mechanism for defining and managing a possible transition, and then wisely naming a disinterested figure to head his transition team. Post-9/11 security challenges focused all involved on the need for an orderly and efficient transfer of power. Today's American presidents cannot afford to let preparations wait until after the elections. Through legislation, executive direction, and individual effort, the Congress, President Bush, and career and political officials in the departments and agencies all worked hard at preparing the next president and his team for the responsibilities of governing. ■

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# Implementing the Will of the People

*South African State President Frederik Willem de Klerk (left) and Deputy President of the African National Congress Nelson Mandela prior to talks between the ANC and the South African government, Cape Town, May 2, 1990.*

F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela effected possibly the most difficult peaceful transition of political power in modern times. Upon assuming the presidency of apartheid South Africa, de Klerk released Mandela, then 71 years old, from prison after nearly three decades of confinement. The negotiations that followed assured South African blacks that they would be permitted to assume power in free and fair elections and convinced whites that they could rely upon democratic legal protections even after ceding power to the very people they had oppressed.

© AP Images

Czech dissident and playwright Václav Havel speaks at a roundtable discussion among political parties and opposition groups about forming a new government, Prague, December 8, 1989.

The 1989 "Velvet Revolution" — the nonviolent overthrow of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia — was led by dissident groups that hand-published underground pamphlets (*samizdat*) opposing the regime. Václav Havel, imprisoned for several years by the Communists, was elected president of the Czechoslovakian republic in the country's first free postwar election, in 1990. After the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, he became first president of the Czech Republic.

**"Western journalists kept telling us: you are just a small group of intellectuals fighting with one another, the workers are not behind you, you are not supported by millions of people and are just banging your heads against a brick wall. And I used to respond that in a totalitarian system we can never tell what is hidden under the surface because it can't be verified. We didn't have opinion polls or free media but we knew something was brewing in the social subconscious. I sensed with greater and greater intensity that sooner or later something would explode, that things could not go on like this for ever, because you could see how everything was bursting at the seams. It was obvious that a random event could provoke great changes. And the whole thing would snowball and turn into an avalanche."**

*— Václav Havel speaking about conditions leading up to the Velvet Revolution, interviewed by Adam Michnik, Salon, 2008*

Image by © Witold Rozmyslowicz/epa/Corbis

March 10 1981, Warsaw, Mazowieckie, Poland: Solidarity movement leader Lech Walesa (right) meets with Polish Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski.

Civil Society Proved More Powerful: Lech Walesa, an electrician in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, Poland, co-founded Solidarity, the first independent trade union in the Soviet bloc, in 1980. As the union's strength and influence grew, the Polish military, led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, imposed martial law. Even so, the Polish people's support ensured Solidarity's survival as a non-violent social movement. In 1989, the regime held semi-free elections. Walesa was elected President of Poland in 1990.

© AP Images/Manish Swarup

Nepalese citizens read a statement by King Gyanendra during the 2006 pro-democracy demonstrations that brought 150,000 protestors into the streets of Kathmandu, Nepal.

Nepal is freer since a massive 2006 general strike empowered pro-democracy activists to strip King Gyanendra of his oppressive powers. A new constitution abolished the monarchy and established a parliamentary republic, paving the way for relatively free and fair elections in 2008. Although the elections were marred by violence, and journalists are still targets of attack, significant improvements in rule of law have been made.

© AP Images/Marco Ugarte

Mexico's Federal Electoral Tribunal meets to decide the outcome of the highly contested 2006 presidential election that pitted Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN) against Manuel Lopez Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Calderón won by a razor-thin margin. Lopez Obrador lodged complaints of irregularities and demanded a recount, while he led supporters in a huge, peaceful protest in Mexico City. The tribunal is the highest court in Mexican electoral matters, and after examination it declared Calderón the winner, with a final vote tally of Calderón 35.89 percent (15,000,284 votes) and Lopez Obrador 35.31 percent (14,756,350 votes).

*Supporters of Mongolian presidential candidate Elbegdorj Tsakhia gather in Ulaanbaatar in April 2009.*

*© AP Images/Batsukh*

After a close parliamentary election that saw post-election violence in 2008, Elbegdorj Tsakhia defeated Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party incumbent Nambaryn Enkhbayar 51.24 percent to 47.44 percent. Despite the narrow margin, the incumbent gracefully conceded defeat and the election did not spark protests.

*© AP Images/D. Rentsendorj*

*Former president Nambaryn Enkhbayar (front right) and Elbegdorj Tsakhia shake hands during a swearing-in ceremony at Parliament House in Ulan Bator, Mongolia.*

© AP Images/Eraldo Peres

The Internet serves all levels of civil society in Brazil. Here an activist from the indigenous Kayapo tribe uses his laptop computer during a 2009 public hearing. Natives of the Amazon rainforest are protesting the Brazilian government's decision to build a large dam in the Xingu River.

An artist's rendering of the three most recent presidents of Ghana: (left to right) current president John Atta Mills, Jerry Rawlings (1993-2001), and John Kufour (2001-2009).

© Kwaku Sakyi-Addo/Reuters/Corbis

Ghana's 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections heralded a smooth, democratic power transfer. A series of coups d'état and fraudulent elections dominated Ghanaian politics after independence from Britain, until the 1996 election. Since then, apart from sporadic violence and poll irregularities, elections have been relatively free and fair. Freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and other basic civil rights are respected in Ghana.

© AP Images/Martin Mejia, File

August 2003: Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission presents a report to President Alejandro Toledo. The commission united community leaders, academics, journalists, and others to fix responsibility for massacres, disappearances, and other human rights abuses by the Shining Path and Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement rebel groups and by the Peruvian military.

# Herbert Hoover to Franklin D. Roosevelt: Transition in a Time of Crisis

Donald A. Ritchie

© AP Images

March 4, 1933: U.S. President Herbert Hoover and President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt greet each other in front of the White House. A constitutional amendment ratified two months earlier moved subsequent inaugurations to January 20.

*Donald A. Ritchie is historian of the United States Senate and author of several books, including his recent* Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932 *(2007), and* Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps *(2005).*

*The Depression Era handover of the presidency from Herbert Hoover to Franklin D. Roosevelt was among the most politically difficult, but it remained peaceful, and the lessons learned have influenced subsequent U.S. presidential transitions.*

Few events have tested democracy as deeply and profoundly as the Great Depression. Some democracies did not survive the challenge. In Germany, the unloved Weimar Republic gave way to Nazi tyranny. Not two months later, the U.S. presidency transferred from Herbert Hoover to Franklin D. Roosevelt. No American transition had occurred under more dire circumstances. American democracy emerged stronger for the experience.

The U.S. economy, which had slid into the Great Depression after the stock market crash of 1929, fell even further during and immediately after the presidential campaign of 1932. Over the winter following that

election, thousands of banks failed, businesses shut down, and a quarter of the national work force was left unemployed. Voters blamed President Hoover for their plight and turned to his challenger in a landslide. But while a pending constitutional amendment would later halve the transition time between administrations, the existing system still required a four-month waiting period before the new president could be inaugurated.

In that long interim, President Hoover invited his successor to the White House to discuss the troubling economic conditions. Roosevelt accepted and met personally with Hoover three times prior to his inauguration. However, the two men had vastly different ideas about how to handle the crisis. Hoover had sponsored some creative programs in response to the Depression, but he remained adamantly opposed to direct government aid to the unemployed. FDR (as the headlines dubbed him) pledged a "New Deal" for the American people, and promised a more experimental approach to resolving the economic crisis and creating a more secure society. Hoover told voters that the campaign was not between two men but between two philosophies of government, and warned that Roosevelt's reliance on government solutions would lead to regimentation.

In their meetings, Hoover sought to commit Roosevelt to the outgoing administration's economic policies, even though Roosevelt had just won an election by campaigning against them. Roosevelt explained that he came to learn, not to consent to specific policies. He felt that he lacked authority to assume responsibility for government actions before he officially took office. As the banking crisis deepened, the two met again on Hoover's last day in office. Roosevelt declined Hoover's request to sign a joint proclamation closing all U.S. banks. Hoover could have issued the proclamation on his own authority but, politically defeated and personally unpopular, he did not. FDR would wait to act until he became president the next day. For Roosevelt, Hoover's insistence on joint action suggested a failure to grasp how differently the new administration planned to operate.

Yet at the same time, Roosevelt accepted an offer from Hoover's top Treasury Department officials to remain on the job to draft emergency banking legislation for the new administration. Under that plan, Roosevelt declared a bank holiday, closed all the banks, and then reopened those that were solvent, following government scrutiny of their books. Hoover's indecisiveness handed his successor a triumph at the very start of his presidency. Roosevelt's New Dealers regarded the bank holiday as the turning point of the Depression. Public confidence rebounded with the reopening of the banks in sound condition.

The transition between Hoover and Roosevelt had been peaceful but not productive. Observers faulted both men: Hoover for asking Roosevelt to do more than he should have; Roosevelt for not finding some room for cooperation. Lessons learned from that experience have in some ways affected all subsequent presidential transitions, through to the 2009 transition between George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Outgoing presidents now work to facilitate the transfer of power to their successors, offering assistance and making recommendations but not trying to force their future course of action. ■

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## Did You Know?

Number of users of Orkut social network: over 100,000,000
Nations accounting for most Orkut traffic: (1) Brazil; (2) India
Nelson Mandela's age at imprisonment: 44; at release from prison: 71
Nelson Mandela's age upon assuming the South African presidency: 75
First U.S. President to be defeated in a campaign for re-election: John Adams (1800)
Tyrannical Roman emperors to which Adams' supporters compared his opponent, Thomas Jefferson: Tiberius, Nero, Caligula
Number of employment positions a new U.S. president must fill: approx. 7,000
Number of days between Winston Churchill's electoral defeat and his vacating the Prime Minister's residence: 1
Number of days between U.S. President Herbert Hoover's electoral defeat and his vacating the White House upon the swearing in of Franklin D. Roosevelt: 116

# How a Partially Free Election Altered Poland

Anna Husarska

Courtesy University of Maryland

A poster encourging voters to support Solidarity in communist Poland's first partially free elections. It features Gary Cooper, star of the 1959 Hollywood western *High Noon*. The Polish text reads: "High Noon: 4 June 1989."

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*This first-hand account of how Poland's 1989 election turned the tide toward democratic government describes the powerful impact of a determined civil society, even when an election is by agreement only partly free and fair.*

The famous image of Hollywood star Gary Cooper from the 1952 western "High Noon" was used during the Polish elections of June 1989, with Cooper sporting a "Solidarity" badge in his lapel. But the true hero in the election, which brought down Poland's Communist regime, was not a town sheriff killing the bad guys, but the civil society organizations whose dozen years of patient work were bearing fruit. This work started in 1975 when intellectuals defended workers imprisoned for a strike and created the Workers' Defense Committee, KOR.

KOR trained and prepared Polish workers introducing them to their own rights; when a strike broke out in 1980 in the Gdansk shipyard, they successfully demanded the creation of Solidarity, the first free trade union in the Soviet bloc. As the Communist regime had always suppressed most other segments of Polish civil society, Solidarity emerged as an umbrella organization representing many civil society currents. The regime found it necessary to engage Solidarity in a round table discussion. A bargain was made to hold a partly free parliamentary election, the regime reserving for itself 65 percent of the seats in the lower house.

With 10 million members — almost one third of Poland's population — Solidarity was probably one of the most popular per capita movements in the world's history, and yet the result of the election was difficult to foretell because there were no opinion polls that one could trust.

I was working then at the opposition's, i.e. Solidarity's, daily newspaper, aptly called *Gazeta Wyborcza* or *Electoral Gazette*. On election day, June 4, 1989, Solidarity was far from sure of winning. But we were very well prepared for the battle at the ballot box.

The Communists had been cheating their own people for several decades so there was the expectation that they would do the same at these elections. For decades, civil society groups such as an informal "Flying University," clandestine publishing houses, theater ensembles that performed in churches, and ad hoc groups of sociologists or economists opposed the policies of the regime. These groups helped prepare a whole parallel society through

underground education, publications, cultural events, sociological studies, and proposals for economic recovery. So civil society was ready for the challenge of this partly free ballot. Although there were no nongovernment organizations per se, the joke went that "the only nongovernment entities in Poland are the Communist rulers."

The electoral slogans were entirely positive because civil society had to prove that it was nobler, and also because the hatred of the Communists needed no fuelling. The most famous was a catchy song "So that Poland be Poland" (i.e., not a Soviet satellite country), and of course the memorable type font, which depicted the word "Solidarity" as a tight crowd marching with a flag.

Civil society's access to state television was restricted, and the regime surrounded Solidarity's few advertisements with spots designed to mislead, to confuse citizens into ultimately voting for a candidate other than the one they meant to cast their ballots for. We knew this, so we distributed little reminders: "If you are with Solidarity, cross out everyone but these" — and the names of our candidates followed. We were only partly surprised when the regime found people of the same last names as our candidates and ran them as Communist candidates for the same seats.

We expected that the Communists would play dirty, so we told Solidarity's electoral observers to carry flashlights, lest the Communists cut off the power and stuff the ballot boxes — and extra pens, lest officials claim they had none so people could not vote.

My own role was minimal but very telling: I was on the "toilet-visit-relay-squad." We visited all the voting stations in one district, allowing the Solidarity observer to go to the toilet. This way we made sure that authorities were not stuffing ballot boxes during the observer's brief absence. It was a tiny contribution to prevent the Communists from cheating us once more, but I'm very proud of it.

After Solidarity's victory, came the dissolution of the Communist Party and democratic reforms swiftly followed. Repressive departments in the Ministry of Interior — of "fight against the intellectuals," "fight against the Church," "fight against trade unions" and "fight against disobedient peasants" — were abolished, and local elections in spring 1990 were free and fair. At the end of the year, Solidarity leader Lech Walesa — a man who collaborated with intellectuals, was supported by the church, headed a trade union and cooperated with disobedient peasants — was elected president by the Polish people.

But for me the June 1989 election remained a crucial turning point. When it was announced that Solidarity took all but one seat it was allowed to compete for, I could see why: The entire society had become a civil society. ■

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*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*

# Authoritarian Rule to European Union Membership: Romania and Moldova

Grigore Pop-Eleches

© AP Images

In December 2006, a woman at a Bucharest, Romania, flag factory sews European Union and Romanian flags in preparation for Romania's joining the E.U. on January 1, 2007.

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*Two formerly Communist-bloc lands have followed diverse political paths. Romania successfully sustained democratic governance and is now a member of the European Union. Moldova's democratic process has been more difficult. A study of events in these two nations reveals the contribution of civil society and democratic institutions to stable transitions to newly elected governments.*

Since the demise of communism in the Soviet Union and its East European satellite states, those nations have established democracy at different paces and with varying degrees of success. One means to explore the reasons for this divergence, and to learn more about the conditions in which democracy thrives, is to study how comparable nations fared in one of the crucial tests of genuine democracy: the peaceful transfer of power between opposing political parties and leaders. A comparison of two post-communist states suggests that domestic reforms, driven by a desire to achieve greater integration with other democratic nations and monitored by an active civil society, strengthen a country's capacity to transfer power peacefully and to sustain democratic governance.

## Electoral Dynamics

One revealing comparison is between the electoral dynamics of Moldova and Romania, from 1989 through their most recent elections. The comparison is justified by their shared culture and history, as well as by their comparable levels of socio-economic development at the outset of the post-communist transition. Moreover, the two countries had (at least superficially) comparable trajectories, with the early 1990s dominated by reformed ex-Communists, who were eventually defeated by broad center-right coalitions, first in Romania (1996) and later in Moldova (1998). While these defeats marked important milestones in each nation's democratic development, the euphoria was short-lived as the center-right coalitions were undermined by deep economic crises and political infighting. Each suffered a crushing defeat in 2000-01.

However, this is where the parallels end. In Romania, a reformed ex-Communist Party continued economic and political reforms, made significant progress towards European integration, and achieved European Union membership. Moldova became the first European country to return unreformed Communists to power through democratic elections. While the Moldovan Communists moderated their initially shrill anti-market and anti-imperialist rhetoric, their eight years in power nevertheless marked a significant erosion of democratic freedoms. By contrast, the influence of international expectations and the demands of domestic civil society groups significantly contributed to Romania's more rapid progress in transitioning beyond elections into post-election good governance.

## Transfers of Power

In 2009, the results of this divergence became apparent in how each nation responded to hotly contested and very close elections. In each case — the aftermath of the April 2009 Moldovan parliamentary elections and the November/December 2009 Romanian presidential elections — the losing side alleged fraud, but with very different results.

In Moldova, the fraud allegations — at least partially substantiated by foreign observers — triggered massive political protests that turned violent in the capital, Chisinau, and resulted in the destruction of the parliament building and the presidential palace. The reactions of the main Moldovan political parties and mass media reflect the deep divide running through Moldovan politics and society. President Vladimir Voronin and most of the state-run media blamed opposition parties and the Romanian government for supporting the "criminal bands" that they held responsible for the violence. The Moldovan opposition, along with much of civil society and parts of the private mass media, argued that the protests instead represented a spontaneous expression of frustration by anti-communist, pro-Western youths, especially students. Moreover, they insisted that pro-regime instigators initiated the violence to delegitimize protest and pave the way for a restored dictatorship. The heavy-handed official repression that followed resulted in hundreds of arrests and allegations of widespread police violence. While the government eventually agreed to new elections that produced a narrow opposition victory, the Communist Party continues to command enough support to block the economic and political liberalization that could assure peaceful transfers of power in the future.

By contrast, in Romania, the electoral dispute was resolved peacefully after a partial recount of voided votes. The loser, Mircea Geoana, accepted defeat and congratulated his opponent, though he vowed to pursue a parliamentary investigation into the fairness of the presidential contest. The Romanian political elite's willingness to assert its interests within the framework of Romania's (admittedly imperfect) democratic institutions explains why the election outcome has sparked few protests and no violence.

Several interrelated factors explain why the potential for post-election violence was greater in Moldova than in Romania. First, Romania's successful application to and subsequent membership in the European Union (E.U.) encouraged all the main political players to accept shared democratic standards. In 1993, the Copenhagen European Council stipulated that candidate nations for E.U. membership must have achieved "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities." Because an overwhelming majority of Romanians favored membership, a number of significant reforms followed. These reforms restrained significantly the ex-Communists' ability to bend the rules in their favor, and helped explain why they agreed to turn over power peacefully after their electoral defeat in 1996.

While Moldova has increased its collaboration with the European Union since 2005, its government's formal commitment to political, economic, and institutional

reforms has not yet produced significant actual results. While reforms are likely to accelerate under the new government, the nation still faces Russian opposition to closer Western integration. Moreover, its civil society institutions by most measures are less deeply rooted than in Romania, in part because Moldova has suffered from much more extensive emigration in the last decade.

Second, a combination of international and civil society pressures has produced a gradual but significant reform of the ex-communist Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD) whereas the Moldovan Communists are both rhetorically and politically more attached to the Soviet past. The resulting lack of reform has deepened partisan differences between the Communists and the anti-communist opposition, and has narrowed the scope of possible political alliances and compromises to a much greater extent than in Romania.

Finally, the development of an independent mass media started much earlier in Romania than in Moldova because of that country's greater variety of private media sources and lower government control over the public media. As a result, the dissemination of political information was more balanced in Romania. This in turn lowers the potential for manipulation of information as means of stoking conflict.

## New Tools

Looking ahead, modern communication technologies may hold a key to strengthening civil society in both nations. Twitter, Facebook and SMS (Short Message Service) helped Moldovan protesters coordinate and mobilize in a remarkably short time during the 2009 parlimentary elections. The Western media even dubbed the events in Moldova the "Twitter Revolution." Likewise, in Romania, social media appears to have affected turnout of diaspora voters, who overwhelmingly supported President Traian Basescu and ended up deciding the election.

While the future of these new tools remains unclear, their importance to civil society groups will likely grow. The consequences for democratic elections, and for the freedom of expression they require, may prove an important part of democracy's story in the 21st century. ■

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"No Fraud": A Moldovan protester in front of the Chisinau election commission headquarters prior to the July 2009 parliamentary election.

# "Serbian Autumn" Delayed: A Lesson in Uncivil Democracy-Building

Zoran Cirjakovic

© AP Images/Darko Vojinovic

March 2001: Posters call for former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's arrest. They depict him behind bars with the question "When?"

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*Political realities differ in each nation. Here, a first-hand observer of the "Serbian Autumn" that brought down the autocrat Slobodan Milosevic attributes democracy's gain not primarily to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society institutions, but to cold-blooded politics.*

Autumn is often a risky time of the year for Serbian leaders. Faced with a bitterly cold Balkan winter and frustrated by personal and economic hardships, Serbs tend to look for change. In the last days of September 1987, Slobodan Milosevic ousted his long-time mentor Ivan Stambolic and changed the course of Balkan history. Mindful of autumn frustrations and spring hopes building during his decade-long rule, Milosevic customarily called elections in the dead of winter, when harsh weather might preempt some opposition outrage. He ultimately did lose an election, but not through the work of Western-funded nongovernmental organizations or independent trade unions, which played marginal roles. Instead, Milosevic's chief nemesis was an unlikely

coalition of seasoned politicians and a grassroots students' movement.

It was a huge surprise when Milosevic called elections for September 24, 2000 — in autumn, not winter. The outcome was not in Milosevic's favor. Milosevic attempted to manipulate the election's results by trying to coerce the Serbian electoral commission and the Supreme Court into calling the second round instead of declaring Vojislav Kostunica the new president after the first round. His attempts to alter its results led to a series of mass protests and strikes throughout Serbia, even in places that had been considered Milosevic's strongholds. Main streets were blocked in most big cities, garbage was not collected for days and opposition supporters organized daily protest walks. The unrest paralyzed most of the country and culminated in what is often referred to as the "October 5 Overthrow" or simply "The Revolution." Two lessons emerged from these events. One is that elections, even when they are neither free nor fair, can be dangerous for autocrats. Another is that "established" civil society organizations are not always the best catalysts for overturning autocratic rule.

Instead, the unlikely key player in the odd cast of characters and groups who secured the longed-for change was Kostunica, the man who defeated Milosevic at the September polls. Strongly nationalist like Milosevic, he appealed to Serb voters disgusted by Milosevic's failures. Kostunica had not adopted Western values and ideas. The soft-spoken, lackluster Kostunica drew little attention from Milosevic's vicious propaganda machine.

The incumbent's efforts instead were trained on Zoran Djindjic, the regime's most formidable opponent and Kostunica's rival turned reluctant partner. State-run media had so successfully demonized Djindjic that he stood no chance at the polls. Djindjic was neither ruthless nor irresponsible. He was courageous, Machiavellian, pragmatic possibly to a fault, and ready always to cut corners and make deals. Those traits made him indispensable during those autumn days, when the future of Serbia hung in the balance.

Instrumental for the success of the revolution was Otpor, a grassroots students' movement that overnight became Milosevic's adversary. Otpor benefited from the advice of retired U.S. Army Colonel Robert Helvey and generous funding from the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy. Otpor was not a typical NGO, but a fast-growing students' movement with a collective, highly decentralized leadership, which made it more effective than the typical, Western-funded Serbian NGO. Equally important, infinitely more surprising — and less funded — were the coal miners of Lazarevac, a small town south of Belgrade. Once loyal to the regime, their strike was the first sign that Milosevic's government would not survive the election, tampered results or not.

I realized that Milosevic was "finished" on October 5th, as chanting protestors gathered in the early morning in Belgrade. I saw groups of football fans joining the crowd at the huge square in front of the Yugoslav parliament. Milosevic had deftly channeled the destructive energy and zeal of these "football hooligans" into paramilitary units for almost a decade. Now they finally turned against him. The most fervent fans were those who crashed police lines and turned the tide during the brief eruption of violence that saw both the parliament and state television burning.

This uncivil end of Milosevic's decidedly uncivil rule is a sobering testament to the failure of civil society and the deficiencies, at least in the Serbian context, of trying to build democracy by channeling aid through NGOs. Instead, many citizens have grown suspicious of those organizations whose support of reform has too often been either tepid or counterproductive. To this day, many Serbian NGOs are run by a single leader more occupied with securing and retaining Western sponsorship than with addressing complicated and often unpleasant political realities in a land where progress sometimes depends upon disagreeable political bargains. Without the "uncivil" compromises and unsavory alliances, we would still be waiting for the "Serbian Autumn." ■

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# Additional Resources

**Books, articles, Web sites, and films on the peaceful transition of power**

## Books and Articles


**Burke, John P**. *Presidential Transitions: From Politics to Practice*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

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**U.S. Congress**. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement. *Passing the Baton: Preparing for the Presidential Transition: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 110th Congress2nd session, September 24, 2008*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009.


## Web Sites

**Brookings Institution: Governance**
*http://www.brookings.edu/governance.aspx*

**In-Depth Coverage: Obama's Transition to Power**
*http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/white_house/transition2008/*

**The Presidential Transition**
*http://www.govexec.com/specialreports/transition.htm*

**Transition: 2008 Presidential Campaign**
*http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2008/chrntran08.html*

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