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Muslim Countries and the Democracy Gap

Adrian Karatnycky

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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The 2001 Freedom House Survey

Muslim Countries and the Democracy Gap

Adrian Karatnycky

As the year 2001 drew to a close, the international community confronted a widespread terrorist threat emanating from a fanatical global revolutionary movement. While one terror base, the Taliban's Afghanistan, appeared about to be eliminated, the international community faced a troubling future in which dispersed political fanatics and movements will seek to export terror into stable states and to topple politically weak Middle Eastern governments in order to foment international Islamist revolution.

While turmoil wracked parts of the Islamic world and threatened the tranquility of the advanced democracies, the year saw modest trends toward the further consolidation of young democracies and the deepening of democratic practices in a wide variety of settings. Democratic governments and market systems appeared resilient in the face of terrorist and extremist challenges, thanks to the strength derived from the sense of ownership that citizens have in these governments.

At the same time, Islamist terrorism and the popularity of extremist ideas in some quarters of the international Muslim community posed a serious threat to the spread of political freedom in the Islamic world. This year's survey shows a dramatic gap in the state of freedom and democracy between majority-Muslim countries--particularly the Arab states--and the rest of the world.

As 2001 drew to a close, the world reached a new high-water mark in the number and proportion of democratically elected governments, with 121--or 63 percent--of the world's 192 countries qualifying as **[End Page 99] [Begin Page 101]** "electoral democracies." By comparison, the 1987-88 survey found that just 66 of 164 countries (40 percent) could be thus classified. In short, the number of democratically elected governments has increased by 55 over the space of 14 years, with an average of nearly four countries moving into the "electoral democracy" column each year. While some electoral democracies have poor human rights records, they do afford considerable space for political opposition movements, allow opposition parties and view-points access to the media, and meet the minimum standards of relatively free and fair elections.

In all, there are 86 Free countries, in which basic political rights and civil liberties are recognized. Such countries are home to 2.5 billion people--41.4 percent of the global population. There are 57 Partly Free countries, in which there is limited respect for political rights and civil liberties, often in an environment of corruption, weak rule of law, ethnic and religious strife, and single-party dominance. (Approximately 22.2 percent of the world's population, 1.4 billion people, lives in Partly Free societies.) There are 2.2 billion people (36.4 percent of the global population) living in the 49 Not Free countries, where basic political rights are absent and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied.

The trend in 2001 was mixed, as 17 countries marked significant gains in freedom while 18 registered setbacks. Among countries making important gains was Peru, which reentered the ranks of Free countries after the victory of Alejandro Toledo in an open and democratic presidential election. Peru's democratic gains came after a period of terrorism, instability, and corrupt authoritarian rule under President Alberto Fujimori. The Gambia's status improved from Not Free to Partly Free after the government lifted a controversial decree barring opponents from political activity in the run-up to nationwide elections. Mauritania registered gains and saw its status improve from Not Free to Partly Free as a consequence of local and national parliamentary elections. Advances for freedom were also registered in Albania, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Grenada, and Yugoslavia.

Among the 18 states where freedom suffered significant setbacks was Trinidad and Tobago, which declined from Free to Partly Free as the country's parliamentary system broke down in the face of a disputed national election and growing corruption. Ethiopia entered the ranks of [End Page 101] Not...

The 2001 Freedom House Survey

MUSLIM COUNTRIES AND THE DEMOCRACY GAP

Adrian Karatnycky

Adrian Karatnycky is president of Freedom House and coordinator of its annual survey of Freedom in the World. For more information on the survey, see the box on the following page; for the rankings of individual countries for 2001, see the Table on pp. 108–9. The survey will be published in book form as Freedom in the World 2001–2002 in the spring of 2002.

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
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