

DEMOCRACY YEAR IN REVIEW

1995

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 1995 saw a continuation of the rapid spread and broad acceptance of democracy as the global standard of good governance. Threshold elections, police and military reform, improvements in judicial independence and stricter accountability for public officials were highlights in 1995 in a number of regions. Even in the numerous instances where elections were flawed, inexperience and the absence of a democratic tradition or culture were often as much the culprit as political chicanery.

It was also a year where setbacks occurred in a number of countries. Coups and the use of elections to cover undemocratic practices or decisions continued to occur and opposition parties or groups in many countries still face legal, political or systemic restrictions which hamper their ability to compete on a relatively equal footing with the ruling party. In some cases, opposition pressure to level the playing field forced the government to take remedial measures.

Asia and the Pacific saw important steps forward in the entrenchment and deepening of democratic principles throughout the region. Important elections took place in a number of countries in 1995 reflecting a continuing trend in the region. Efforts to improve public consultation processes and political accountability were also in evidence. At the same time, progress towards democracy remained severely constrained in countries such as China, Vietnam and Burma, and non-existent in Afghanistan and Bhutan.

In the Americas, the process of consolidating new democracies in the region continued with key elections in Peru and Haiti presaging the restoration of democratic rule. Elsewhere, attacks on the long held and democratically corrosive principle of impunity (of the military in particular) continued.

Africa and the Middle East produced mixed results in 1995. Threshold elections (i.e. votes marking the establishment or return of democratic rule or elections undertaken after key constitutional changes) occurred throughout the region, reinforcing a trend now well into its sixth year. Securing relatively equal opportunity for opposition parties was a continuing challenge, threatening the integrity of the electoral process in a number of