



Deepening democracy by tackling democratic deficits

In earlier times there were lengthy discussions on whether one country or another was yet “fit for democracy”. That changed only recently, with the recognition that the question was itself wrong-headed: a country does not have to be judged fit for democracy, rather it has to become fit through democracy. This is a truly momentous change.

—Amartya Sen¹

The last two decades of the 20th century saw a historic shift in the global spread of democracy. Some 81 countries—29 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 23 in Europe, 14 in Latin America, 10 in Asia and 5 in the Arab states—took steps towards democratization.² Often this meant the overthrow of an authoritarian one-party regime, the introduction of multiparty elections or both—a major advance. But the recent mixed experience with democracy in these countries—and around the world—shows that the process of deepening democracy and making it work for people has barely begun.

Why is there less optimism about democracy today than in the euphoric period just after the cold war? One reason is that many countries that embraced democracy have suffered reversals, while many others have limited political competition and continuing abuse of political and civil rights. Today 47 of the 81 countries are considered functioning democracies.³ Then there’s the disturbing spread of “illiberal” democracies, as in Kyrgyzstan and Zimbabwe, where elected governments act the same as their authoritarian predecessors, depriving citizens of human rights and ignoring constitutional limits on power.⁴ So, why call them “transitional”? They do not seem to be transitioning anywhere.⁵

Even where democracy is more firmly established, people are disappointed by the eco-

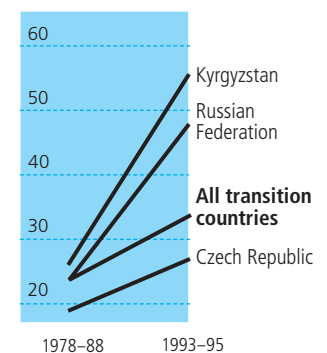
nomics and social results. Many fought for—and won—democracy in the hope of greater social justice, broader political participation and peaceful resolution of violent conflicts. Rightly or wrongly, they expected democracy to bring more effective development. Just since 2000 in Latin America alone, presidents have been pressured to resign in Argentina (twice), Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

Now, 10 to 20 years later, democracy has not produced dividends in the lives of ordinary people in too many countries. Income inequality and poverty have risen sharply in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, sometimes at unprecedented rates (figure 3.1). Poverty has continued to increase in a more democratic Sub-Saharan Africa. And many newly democratic regimes in Latin America seem no better equipped to tackle the region’s high poverty and inequality than their authoritarian predecessors. Political instability and violence have also marred democratic transitions in Indonesia, Nigeria, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere.

Perhaps most serious, people around the world seem to have lost confidence in the effectiveness of their governments—and often seem to be losing faith in democracy. More than 70% of survey respondents in Latin America complain of increasing poverty, crime, corruption and drug trafficking and addiction.⁶ Nor is reduced faith in governments and politics limited to new democracies. Gallup International’s Millennium Survey asked more than 50,000 people in 60 countries, “Would you say that your country is governed by the will of the people?” Fewer than a third said yes. The survey also asked, “Does government respond to the will of the people?” Only 10% said that it did.⁷

The last two decades of the 20th century saw a historic shift in the global spread of democracy

FIGURE 3.1
Inequality is worsening in many transition countries
Gini coefficient of per capita income



Source: Milanovic 1998, p. 41.

The links between democracy and human development can be strong—but they are not automatic

For some people these disappointments mean that democracy is incompatible with economic and social development. History and evidence, as outlined in chapter 2, argue that this is not the case. But history also teaches that democracy, in itself, does not guarantee greater social justice, faster economic growth or increased social and political stability. The links

between democracy and human development can be strong—but they are not automatic. And in almost every country those links need to be strengthened. The best way to achieve this is by strengthening democratic institutions and promoting democratic politics, the focus of this chapter (see the special contribution by President of Iran Seyyed Mohammad Khatami).

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION

The world's future belongs to democracy

رئیس‌جمهوری اسلامی ایران

In the name of God

Humanity, anguished by its journey through the 20th century, marred by bloodshed, calamities and discriminations, is eager for a better future in the new century—a future guided by justice illuminating the gloomy skies of the past and present and based on the dignity and rights of all human beings.

Much has been said about the pains and sufferings of humankind. Too often have victims of all ages paid the price for the power, wealth and deceptions of a privileged few. In one corner of the world people may have attained acceptable living conditions. Yet the rupture between form and content and the ensuing spiritual anguish have tormented their lives. In other, far more populous parts of the world people struggle with a multitude of afflictions—ranging from poverty, ignorance and exclusion to undemocratic rulers who are often subservient to the world's major powers.

Over the past century democracy evolved as a value, inspiring new models of governance. In an age of awakening for people and nations, rulers must come to terms with this value—and allow human beings to realize liberty, spirituality and dignity.

The main features of democracy—which should be clearly distinguished from its various manifestations—include people's right to determine their destinies; the emanation of authority, particularly political authority, from the free will and choice of the people and its submission to their continued scrutiny; and the institutionalization of such accountability. No single form of democracy can be prescribed as the one and final version. Hence unfolding efforts to formulate democracy in the context of spirituality and morality may usher in yet another model of democratic life.

Democratic principles have become the criteria for good governance domestically. They deserve to become the new norm governing global interactions. Thus the exigencies of a few power holders

should not supersede the interests of humanity through now-familiar practices of endorsing undemocratic governments, unresponsive to the will and needs of their people, and applying double and multiple standards in response to incidents around the globe.

The structure of power in our contemporary world must be reformed. In a global society whose constituents are nations with equal rights and dignity—much like equal individuals within nations—diverse cultures and civilizations should work together to build a moral, humane world with liberty and progress for all.

The global community ultimately requires the emergence of a responsive moral society, avoiding the use of force and coercion in national and international disputes. Values and norms that are not codified into laws, and laws that lack enforcement mechanisms, will have no tangible effect. Thus globalization is intertwined with the articulation of new collective rights and ethics, and the ensuing impact on national and international norms and institutions.

The world's future belongs to democracy at all levels of governance, advancing ethical, legal and political values based on dialogue and the free exchange of ideas and cultures. Let us advance the United Nations to promote the equitable participation of all nations and civilizations in tomorrow's global governance.



Seyyed Mohammad Khatami
*President of the
Islamic Republic of Iran*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

If democracies are not always responsive to the needs and concerns of ordinary people, how can they be made to work better? The answer turns on whether people can go beyond simply expressing their views and preferences to check the power of rulers and influence decisions.

Accountability is about power—about people having not just a say in official decisions but also the right to hold their rulers to account. They can demand answers to questions about decisions and actions. And they can sanction public officials or bodies that do not live up to their responsibilities. Today the insistence that public officials be held accountable is extending to corporations, multinational organizations and others who have more power in public decision-making. Because of their influence over the lives of people and communities, they are holders of the public trust—and so answerable for their actions to national legislatures and to the public.

Accountability means different things in different contexts. To whom, for what and by which standards is accountability judged? Often the concern is with sanctions against legal wrongdoing: when a corporation violates environmental pollution standards, for example. If a company can pollute its environment with impunity, there is no accountability because national laws and regulations are weak or poorly enforced. In other cases the concern may be to sanction teachers, doctors and others who are not meeting minimum professional standards. All these kinds of accountability are central to democratic governance—to ensuring that the holders of the public trust are acting effectively and fairly.

In democracies, people can demand accountability in two ways: through action by civil society and through structures of representation and delegation. But apart from elections, most formal mechanisms of accountability are delegated. The most important are the checks and balances between the judiciary, legislature and executive—and specialized and independent oversight entities such as human rights commissions, electoral commissions, public service

commissions, ombudspersons, auditors general and anticorruption bodies.

The problem is, democratic institutions in many countries—especially newer democracies—are overburdened and lack the means to do their jobs. Political parties are disorganized. Representatives cannot keep in close contact with their constituents. Oversight and regulatory agencies lack well-trained staff. And bureaucrats are underpaid, overworked or both. Many countries that held multiparty presidential elections for the first time in the 1980s and 1990s did so with political parties created just months before.

Resource constraints are not the only institutional weakness. Sometimes national institutions are ineffective because real power lies elsewhere. In a more integrated world, weak and indebted states face vast areas of policy-making over which they share control with international actors—if they share it at all. Decisions at the global level can bind states, and national elections and checks and balances lack the reach to hold powerful global actors to account. Or states may have little real authority because subversive groups have taken over: guerrilla movements, international drug traffickers and crime syndicates, powerful rural landowners, slumland gangs.⁸

Even where arrangements for accountability exist, they do not function well in many democracies. They do not promote the interests of most people. And they do an even poorer job of protecting the interests of minorities, women and poor people. There are two main reasons:

- Democratic institutions are subverted by corruption and elite capture.
- Democratic institutions have inadequate reach, and there are gaps in democratic practice.

SUBVERSION OF INSTITUTIONS BY CORRUPTION OR MONEYED INTERESTS

Corruption, abuses of power, intimidations by criminal elements—all weaken democratic accountability. Oversight and regulatory agencies may also fail to act when they have been captured by political or special interests. For example, in the late 1990s South-East Asia suffered from a persistent atmospheric haze—creating

Accountability is about power—about people having not just a say in official decisions but also the right to hold their rulers to account

BOX 3.1

Poor people, poor justice

Judicial systems often seem more diligent in prosecuting crimes committed by poor people than crimes against them. According to its Pastoral Land Commission, between 1964 and 1992 Brazil experienced 1,730 politically motivated killings of peasants, rural workers, trade union leaders, religious workers and human rights lawyers. By 1992 only 30 of these cases had been brought to trial, and just 18 resulted in convictions.

Surveys of poor people find that at best, the police and judiciary are considered unresponsive—at worst, as aggressive abusers of judicial rights. A recent World Bank survey found that around the world, poor people often view police as:

- Unresponsive—absent when needed, coming only when someone has been killed.
- Corrupt—making false arrests, accusations and imprisonments, with release conditioned on large bribes; stealing money from children; threatening, blackmailing and extorting citizens; using illegal drugs; conniving with criminals.
- Brutal—harassing street vendors; confiscating identification documents; raping

women who register complaints; beating up innocent people; torturing and killing homeless boys.

Judicial systems reinforce these biases by failing to punish police abuses. Corruption can also subvert oversight—by police complaint authorities, ombudspersons, independent judicial commissions and national human rights commissions. When the president of Mexico's Human Rights Commission was murdered in 1990, a police commander was accused of the killing. In the course of his trial, six prosecution witnesses were murdered. In 1992 El Salvador established a human rights ombudsperson. But in 1998 the national assembly replaced the activist who had held the position with a man who had nine outstanding complaints filed against him by the same human rights office—including charges of corruption, obstructing justice and violating legal principles. The office was later discredited further by high staff turnover, apparent mismanagement of funds and a reduced emphasis on investigating human rights complaints.

Source: Narayan, Chambers, Shaha and Petesh 2000, pp. 163–64; Goetz and Jenkins 2002; Pinheiro 1999, p. 55.

BOX 3.2

Gender bias subverts legal process

A study of land disputes in Uganda's Kibale District found that gender bias and corruption routinely lead local tribunals to fail to uphold women's land rights in disputes with male relatives over the sale of family and homestead land. These disputes often involve adult sons or male relatives harassing elderly widows to relinquish the land they have inherited from their husbands, or husbands selling family land without consulting their wives. Routinely faced

with officials' demands for "informal" payments, women who tried to pursue their cases were generally unable to outbribe their male relatives. In some cases land sellers colluded with members of the village councils.

The gender bias and corruption are not checked by any type of accountability. The electoral system is particularly inadequate because women face many obstacles to winning seats on local village councils.

Source: Goetz and Jenkins 2002.

serious health hazards—because plantation owners bribed Indonesian officials to turn a blind eye to illegal forest fires. Burning land was much cheaper than clearing it manually. Payoffs flowed into all levels of the administrative hierarchy, almost guaranteeing that supervisors

would not penalize junior officers for failing to enforce regulations. Subordinates returned the favour by not blowing the whistle on those higher up. Only when the haze from the fires began spreading over Malaysia and Singapore in 1997 did international embarrassment catalyse a crackdown.⁹

Transparency International Bangladesh, in a 2000 study of the nation's banking industry, found that people getting credit from the formal banking sector had to pay a direct bribe equal to 2–20% of the loan value. The higher percentages were extorted from uneducated rural applicants, partly because the bribes were being shared with government officials reviewing the loans.¹⁰ Worse, borrowers often paid up to half of a loan's value to secure a promise from branch managers that the loan would not have to be repaid, a promise often breached. When the supposed beneficiaries are left with little choice but to collude in bribery, it undermines their willingness to protest—and corruption becomes harder to expose.

Judicial proceedings can also be undermined, providing little protection to ordinary people, especially poor people. Judicial systems are often inaccessible. They use official language that many people cannot speak or write. And too often they are open to bribes. Where victims have no judicial recourse, their abusers often go unpunished—especially when they are members of the police. Studies in Latin America have shown that minorities, poor people and other marginalized groups (such as homosexuals and street children) are disproportionately the victims of physical abuse and other mistreatment by the police (box 3.1). Gender bias in judicial proceedings is another problem. Male-dominated village councils systematically fail to uphold the rights of women, as in land disputes in Uganda (box 3.2).

Electoral processes can be subverted by fraud. Numerous elections have been contested by opposition candidates charging fraud and irregularities. In 1997 Cameroonian President Paul Biya was re-elected with 93% of the vote—but the three main opposition parties had boycotted the election, and the government had dismissed demands for an independent electoral commission.¹¹ Too many other recent elec-

tions have been similarly marred: among others, Haiti in 2000,¹² Chad in 2001, Zimbabwe in 2002, Madagascar in 2002.

Money in politics is especially serious because it can distort democratic institutions at every level. It can distort the election process and the extent to which elected leaders represent their constituents. And it can distort parliamentary politics and the functioning of the judiciary and the executive. This problem has recently reached the top of the political agenda in many countries, often as a result of scandals at the highest levels of government. In several countries politicians have been charged with accepting money from criminals, for their private benefit or for campaign purposes. The downfall of the Christian Democrats in Italy in the 1990s owed much to accusations that the party was “financially connected to the mafia”.¹³ And in Germany in the early 1980s the “Flick Affair” severely shook the nation as it uncovered illegal contributions from the Flick Company.¹⁴ Senior politicians from all the main political parties allegedly disregarded campaign financing laws.¹⁵ The scandal prompted the passage of campaign contribution laws meant to prevent political financing abuse. Yet in 1999 Helmut Kohl, the former chancellor, resigned as honorary chairman of his party after acknowledging having run a network of secret accounts and receiving clandestine donations equal to \$6.5 million.¹⁶ This scandal later ensnared other members of the Christian Democratic Union.

Electoral processes cannot operate without financing. But where money plays a decisive role in politics, it turns unequal economic power into unequal political advantage and undermines the principle of “one person, one vote”. The problem is not new. But the soaring cost of elections has almost certainly made the situation worse. In 1980 U.S. presidential candidates spent \$92 million—but that rose to \$211 million in 1988 and \$343 million in 2000.¹⁷ Including spending by political parties, the total cost in 2000 was more than \$1 billion.¹⁸ Though a large campaign budget does not guarantee success, it is important in many contests: one study of U.S. campaigns in the 1970s showed that candidates challenging incumbent members of

Congress won an extra 1 percentage point of votes for every \$10,000 spent.¹⁹

Such costs make for an uneven playing field in political contests because they make it almost impossible for an underfunded candidate to enter a race. These costs also increases politicians’ dependence on certain sources of financing, leaving the democratic system vulnerable to the undue influence of special interest groups—particularly corporate interests (box 3.3)

INADEQUATE REACH AND GAPS IN DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

Even well-functioning formal structures of participation and accountability are at best only blunt instruments. Elections and other formal checks enable citizens only to end the tenure of politicians who abuse their mandates. And joining political parties, seeking to influence their agendas and voting in elections have rarely been enough to safeguard the rights of women, minorities and poor people.

Nor do these mechanisms have the reach to tackle injustices that affect people’s daily lives. For example, a recent World Bank review of the weak impact of Colombia’s land reforms concluded that even repeated parliamentary questioning had not gone to the heart of the problem, which was that elites had captured the program and distorted it to their own ends. There was collusion between sellers and buyers to overstate land prices, divide the surplus and let the government foot the bill.²⁰

One solution to such problems is to decentralize power to lower levels of government—bringing it closer to the people. But local officials are no more immune to elite capture than officials in central government. Indeed, far from strengthening local democracy, decentralization can actually reinforce the power and influence of local elites.²¹ In these circumstances citizens may have more luck with officials who are farther away. A recent survey of 12 countries found that in only half was there any evidence—some quite limited—that decentralization empowers more people, reduces poverty, enhances social progress or mitigates spatial inequality.²² Decentralization helps poor people most when local politics are democratic, with strong structures and

Where money plays a decisive role in politics, it turns unequal economic power into unequal political advantage and undermines the principle of “one person, one vote”

Corporate influence on politics

Why do business interests influence public policy in democracies? Sometimes it is a matter of corrupt public officials seeking personal gain. But two other factors are also at work. First, governments serve the public interest by promoting businesses, which create jobs and generate economic growth. Policies that discouraged the success of businesses could not only undermine national economies but could also drive businesses overseas. Second, businesses tend to command resources and access unmatched by other groups—whether representing workers, consumers or environmental causes.

Corporate cash and political patronage

In many countries corporate contributions and lobbying are prominent features of the political landscape. The passage of historic campaign finance reform legislation in the United States in early 2002 owed much to public outrage at the dramatic expansion of corporate campaign contributions, much of it “soft money”. Corporations gave \$1.2 billion in political contributions during the 2000 elections—about 14 times the already enormous amount contributed by labour unions and 16 times the contributions of other interest groups. Although many European countries have tighter limits on corporate funding, similar patterns emerge elsewhere. And in India big businesses provided an estimated 80% of the financing for major parties in 1996.

Corporate donations and lobbies often drown out the voices of workers, consumers, women, environmentalists and other interest and citizen groups. For example, agroindustries have exerted considerable influence on national positions in international trade negotiations. And highly publicized cases—such as Enron’s \$3 billion Dabhol power project in India and the Aguas del Tunari water corporation project in Bolivia—show how the concerns of local people, intellectuals, environmentalists and other groups are often ignored until they develop into protests and major confrontations. In Bolivia hundreds of workers went on a general strike, bringing transportation to a standstill and evoking a violent police response in which a demonstrator was shot. Martial law was declared shortly thereafter.

Cases like these feed public scepticism about corporate accountability, and not just within the antiglobalization movement. Concerns about corporate influence resonate with broader international public opinion. In its 1999 Millennium Survey, Gallup International interviewed

57,000 people in 60 countries—and found widespread suspicion and scorn of corporate conduct and higher expectations of corporations’ social responsibility. Almost four out of five respondents held companies responsible for public health and safety. Two-thirds said that companies are responsible for bribery and corruption. In 12 European countries more than half the people surveyed said that business did not pay enough attention to its social responsibilities.

People are increasingly concerned that corporations are not held accountable for their actions, either because laws are weak or are weakly enforced. Indeed, even when domestic legislation is adequate, it is often not implemented. In the United States white-collar crime receives much less attention from law enforcement than other types of crime. Between 1992 and 2001 the Securities and Exchange Commission referred 609 white-collar cases to U.S. attorneys for criminal charges. But only 187 were prosecuted, with 142 defendants found guilty and 87 going to jail.

Multiple approaches to influencing policy processes

Donations to politicians and political parties are only one way for businesses to influence policies. Corporations engage in a broad range of activities to ensure that their views get a hearing and influence policy. Corporations draft and submit legislation, offer testimony and participate in consultations. They also influence how policies are applied—by negotiating implementation schedules, supporting certain nominees for official appointments and influencing the judiciary through briefing seminars. A recent study of three U.S. trade advisory committees found that of 111 members, only 2 represented labour unions—and none represented consumers (the seat reserved for an environmental advocacy organization had not been filled). But corporations were well represented, with 92 members from individual companies and 16 from trade associations.

U.S. policy debates on climate change illustrate these trends. The U.S. Global Climate Coalition, an industry group that coordinates business participation in international policy debates, has lobbied aggressively to this end, vigorously challenging scientific arguments on climate change. And while most top scientists agree that greenhouse gas emissions have to be reduced, the coalition has argued forcefully that the targets set by the Kyoto Protocol are “unrealistic”.

What can be done?

Asymmetries in resources and access cannot be wished away. So how can undue corporate influence be tackled? Reforming political financing is crucial, and should include:

- Increasing transparency and disclosure of the sources of all election, party and candidate financing.
- Setting clear limits on spending as well as on contributions—by level and by source.
- Providing public funding for candidates and parties.

Many countries are pursuing such measures. Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand have introduced comprehensive legislation requiring transparency and setting limits on spending and contributions. In 2000 the United Kingdom began requiring all parties to disclose the sources of donations above 5,000 pounds at the national level and 1,000 pounds at the local level. Public funding can take different forms—from a “maximalist” approach, where public funding is the main source of party and election finance (as in Germany, Korea and Sweden), to a “minimalist” approach, where only elections are partly subsidized (as in Australia, Canada and Ireland). The United Kingdom does not provide direct state funding, but candidates receive free broadcasting opportunities and free postal service.

Initiatives can also address the flip side of the coin, by introducing norms for socially responsible corporate behaviour in political activity. More responsible political activity includes:

- *Transparency*, with corporations making clear their political activities. Novartis publishes position papers on biosafety protocols, and Astra Zeneca discloses its funding of lobbyist groups.
- *Accountability*, with corporations making an effort to respond to public concerns. Scottish Power invites external comments on its policies.
- *Consistency*, with corporations making their positions consistent with those of groups that advocate on their behalf, such as industry associations or “front groups”.

The most effective—and ambitious—approach would be for corporations to get out of politics altogether. In all likelihood this would require legislation because all businesses would need to act simultaneously. But some businesses are taking steps in this direction. Shell, for example, has stopped making political contributions.

Source: Center for Responsive Politics 2001; Mahhub ul Haq Human Development Centre 1999; Madeley 1999; Human Rights Watch 2002; Parry 2001; Grunwald 2002; Zadek 2001; Leaf 2002.; Korten 1995; SustainAbility 2001, p.14; Global Climate Coalition 2002; Sridharan 2001.

open participatory practices. Only if accompanied by strong support to community groups can decentralization empower ordinary people.²³

Thus formal structures of accountability in democracy are strong in theory but are often undermined by self-perpetuating concentrations of power and influence. In some countries the same prime ministers have alternated at the helm for decades, and dynastic politics continues. In Mexico the same party was in power for more than 70 years until the 2000 elections ended its rule. Despite democratic upheavals and some inroads into politics by underrepresented groups, elites hold on to state power, and unequal power structures prevail.²⁴

Breaking such vicious circles will require strengthening democratic institutions and state capacities. But that is only part of the solution. Political pressure also has to come from outside formal structures, through the emergence of a more vibrant democratic politics.

STRENGTHENING FORMAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Most of the 81 countries that recently took steps towards democratization have yet to shake off the legacies of authoritarian pasts, and democratic institutions and practices have yet to take root. Representative processes appear to be in crisis even in well-established democracies. In the United States the turnout of registered voters in presidential elections fell from 96% in 1960 to 51% in 2000, and in the United Kingdom from 78% in 1992 to 59% in 2001. Though these trends are not universal—voter turnout has been rising in some countries, especially in Latin America—large drops have been seen in eight other OECD countries.²⁵ In France, Italy, Norway and the United States party membership is half (or less) of what it was 20 years ago (table 3.1). According to recent surveys in Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe, far fewer people have confidence in political parties than in the church, the armed forces or television (figure 3.2).²⁶

Countries can start to restore public trust in representative structures and reduce the concentration of political power by:

- Developing stronger vehicles for formal po-

TABLE 3.1
Falling membership in political parties

Country	Period	Change in members	
		Number	Percentage
France	1978–99	-1,122,000	-64.6
Italy	1980–98	-2,092,000	-51.5
United States	1980–98	-853,000	-50.4
Norway	1980–97	-219,000	-47.5
Czech Republic	1993–99	-225,000	-41.3
Finland	1980–98	-207,000	-34.0
Netherlands	1980–2000	-136,000	-31.7
Austria	1980–99	-446,000	-30.2
Switzerland	1977–97	-119,000	-28.9
Sweden	1980–98	-143,000	-28.0
Denmark	1980–98	-70,000	-25.5
Ireland	1980–98	-28,000	-24.5
Belgium	1980–99	-136,000	-22.1
Germany	1980–99	-175,000	-9.0
Hungary	1990–99	8,000	5.0
Portugal	1980–2000	50,000	17.0
Slovakia	1994–2000	38,000	29.6
Greece	1980–98	375,000	166.7
Spain	1980–2000	809,000	250.7

Source: Mair and van Biezen 2001, p. 12.

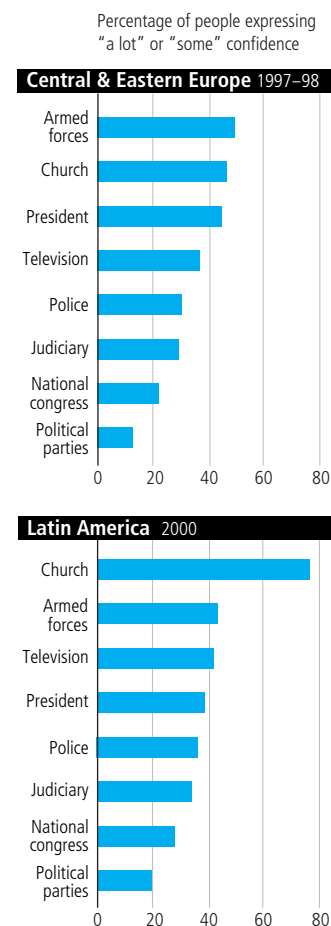
litical participation and representation through political parties and electoral systems.

- Strengthening checks on arbitrary power by separating powers among the executive, judiciary and legislature, and by creating effective independent entities.
- Decentralizing democratically: devolving power from the central government to provinces and villages, underpinned by stronger local democratic institutions and practices.
- Developing free and independent media.

DEVELOPING STRONGER VEHICLES FOR FORMAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

A well-functioning democracy depends on well-functioning political parties responsive to people, but new democracies mean new parties. These parties are not yet able to fulfil their traditional functions of political education, mobilization and representation of diverse interests. In many African countries opposition parties disappear between elections, while ruling parties behave like they used to under single-party systems. A dearth of public funding and limits on fundraising leave parties dependent on a few wealthy individuals to finance their activities and campaigns. And with perks and patronage flowing from ruling parties, politicians are increas-

FIGURE 3.2
Trust in institutions



Source: Lagos 2001; Rose and Haerpfer 1999.

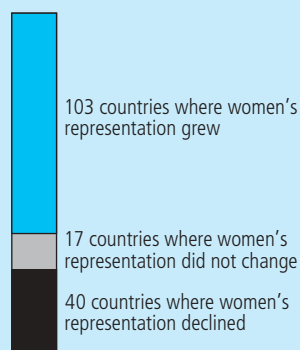
Quotas make a difference in women's political participation

Worldwide, women account for less than 14% of the lower houses of parliaments, a share that is growing at a snail's pace. To accelerate this trend, many countries have introduced quotas. They are in use in all 11 countries that have achieved more than 30% representation by women, from Sweden and other Nordic countries to Argentina—the first Latin American country to introduce a quota, in 1991—to Mozambique. Quotas can be legislated percentages in parliaments or voluntary targets adopted by political parties.

Legislated quotas in legislatures

In India one-third of the seats in local governments (*panchayats*) have been reserved for women since 1993. Local parties and interest groups have had to seek out female candidates to represent them and win their support. In 1998 women won as many as 40% of seats in panchayat elections.

Progress and setbacks of women in national parliaments, 1995–2000



Source: International IDEA 2002b; IPU 2000a, 2001, 2002b; Reyes 2000.

In France a 1999 constitutional amendment required that at least half the candidates for municipal elections be women. As a result women won 48% of elections in 2001, up from 22% in 1995. In national elections, where there is no such requirement, the share of women elected increased from 7% in 1998 to just 9% in 2001.

Voluntary quotas in political parties

In 1994 South Africa's African National Congress introduced a one-third quota for women, triggering impressive gains. With 120 women in the 400-member National Assembly, the country now ranks 8th in the number of women in national parliaments, up from 141st in 1994.

In the United Kingdom the Labour Party introduced all-women shortlists for open seats from 1993 until the 1997 general election. In 2000 the British House of Commons had 121 female members, nearly twice as many as in 1995.

But quotas are not a silver bullet

Quotas are designed to facilitate women's access to elected office. But increasing women's political participation requires a long-term strategy for changing long-standing practices that keep women out of politics. Such change cannot be legislated overnight. Not everyone—including some women's rights activists—considers quotas a sustainable strategy. But without such radical measures it would be difficult to achieve the critical mass of women's representation needed to foster a new culture—one that should culminate in the balanced presence of women both in parliaments and in the governing bodies of political parties. Quotas are primarily a temporary remedial

measure, and are no substitute for raising awareness, increasing political education, mobilizing citizens and removing procedural obstacles to women getting nominated and elected. And being voted into office is merely the beginning of women's struggles for full participation—it does not mean that they acquire a real political base, and inexperience is a handicap for new legislators.

So, improving the quality of women's participation in policy-making is as important as increasing the number of women elected, and many initiatives are under way to support women once elected. In the Philippines the Center for Legislative Development, a non-governmental organization (NGO), provides training in such areas as legislative agenda setting, proposal development, advocacy and participation in committee and floor deliberations. This training has helped female legislators in three provinces pass gender-related ordinances, such as the creation of crisis centres for women, and promoted gender-responsive policy decisions on issues such as violence against women. Forging links between female politicians and women's groups sustains advocacy initiatives to pass laws that promote women's rights.

In Trinidad and Tobago a network of NGOs called Working to Get the Balance Right trained 300 women to run in local government elections in 1999. The goal was to sensitize the women to gender-specific concerns and to how these concerns can be addressed through their participation as advocates or public officials. The number of female candidates nominated to run was 91—an almost 100% increase over 1996. And 28 won seats—a 50% increase.

ingly switching party affiliation—“crossing the carpet”—to join the winning party. This practice has become so common in West Africa that some governments, as in Benin and Niger, have made it illegal.²⁷

Too often the organizational structure of parties is anything but participatory. Parties that are not open and transparent are unlikely to be democratic in their policy commitments. Without internal democracy, parties become individual fiefdoms. Charismatic leadership, more than party platform, often drives party

loyalty. Creating a culture of democracy in political parties is thus vital. At the very least this should involve open, competitive elections for party leadership. Such a requirement would be useful to include in any agenda for political reform—as in Panama's new electoral code, established in 1995.

Elections are complex processes requiring systematic organization. Improving voter registration and rolls and setting up independent electoral commissions are cornerstones of a free and fair system. The inclusion of parties and can-

didates as stakeholders, monitors and defenders of elections, and not just as contenders, can help ensure stability—as in Mozambique in 1994, where party representatives were included in every aspect in the run-up to the elections.²⁸ The media can also contribute to this effort—diffusing information, focusing public debate and increasing civic and voter education (see below). So can civil society. In Indonesia non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played a central role in voter education, explaining to citizens their rights and duties to vote according to their free will and conscience, the value of voting in a democracy and the nature of new election laws. These campaigns also helped convince citizens of the fairness of the system, its new transparency and the new parties and personalities entering into the political life of the country.

Many countries are trying to strengthen systems of representation. Whether in established or new democracies, these efforts tend to have common elements:

- *Improving governance in political parties*, with ethical standards, training, discipline and better financial management. The Democrat Party of Thailand, for example, has embarked on a process to professionalize party management. The Labang Demokratikong Pilipino Party of the Philippines is working on the problem of patronage, establishing a research institute and conducting seminars and policy discussions.²⁹
- *Promoting the participation of minorities and women*. Political parties have been a major institutional factor behind the chronic underrepresentation of minorities and women. The situation is improving, but at a snail's pace. In 103 countries the proportion of women in parliament increased between 1995 and 2000, but around the world it still averages just 14%. Affirmative action is often needed to overcome entrenched obstacles. Quotas, either in legislatures or in parties, have been instrumental in raising representation. They have been used in the countries with the highest representation of women in parliament and are making changes in countries where female participation in politics has historically been lower, such as France and South Africa (box 3.4).

- *Building electoral systems*. Many countries, both long-established and new democracies, are reforming their electoral systems. The success of the 2000 Mexican elections largely rested on the 1996 reform of electoral and political frameworks, as well as the complete reform of the electoral commission, the Instituto Federal Electoral.
- *Limiting the distorting influence of money in politics*. Reform of political finance is under active debate in many countries, aiming to improve transparency, level the playing field (by setting limits on spending and contributions), encourage public subsidies and grass-roots contributions and manage undue corporate and business influences on public policy. In the wake of allegations of political corruption a common response has been new laws—already introduced in some countries such as France and the United States and hotly debated in others such as India. Elements of these initiatives include disclosure laws, spending limits, contribution limits, bans on certain types of donations, direct and indirect public subsidies for parties and candidates and subsidies for political broadcasting (see box 3.3). But a study of 60 countries by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance shows that stricter laws are only a first step—and that when political financing laws are accompanied by silence, indifference and lack of technical training, abuses are best able to flourish.³⁰

STRENGTHENING CHECKS ON ARBITRARY POWER BY SEPARATING POWERS

Democracies suffer reversals when elected governments are overturned. But many elected governments have turned authoritarian, increasingly behaving like their autocratic predecessors. The keys to preventing such abuses of power are strengthening the separation of powers and the independence of the legislature and judiciary—and professionalizing the bureaucracy and the military.

Whether the judiciary can maintain its independence is often the litmus test for whether democratically elected rule can avoid turning autocratic. The fierce independence of India's judiciary is a cornerstone of the country's democracy. Indeed, the tug of war between a ju-

Whether the judiciary can maintain its independence is often the litmus test for whether democratically elected rule can avoid turning autocratic

India's judiciary—**independence and activism** defending democratic institutions and practices

India's judiciary—its Supreme Court and state high courts—has been a cornerstone of the country's democracy since independence. Over the decades the judiciary has rebuffed continued encroachments on its independence. In recent years renewed judicial activism has vigorously defended citizens' fundamental rights. It has also safeguarded environmental and other public goods. And it has tackled issues of democratic accountability and charges of corruption in the executive.

In the 1970s the courts encountered several challenges to their independence. In a celebrated case in 1976, the prime minister at the time tried to eliminate the use of judicial review to limit parliament's powers. The attempt was defeated and the courts ruled that the basic framework of the constitution could not be altered.

In the 1980s the courts started to hear public interest litigation involving the human rights of poor and powerless people, especially in cases of police brutality and torture, custodial rape and inhumane treatment in jails. These cases also protected such public goods as clean air and water and uncontaminated blood supplies. This judicial activism coincided with the rise of civil society organizations and social movements

dedicated to social justice and human rights goals. The synergy built among civil society, reform-minded members of the middle classes and several supreme and high court justices like Justices P. N. Bhagwati and Krishna Iyer helped advance these causes. Legal reforms provided for class action suits on behalf of poor, oppressed and victimized citizens.

In the 1990s the courts sought to uphold the principle of separation of powers and delink the intelligence services from the control of the political executive. They did so to restore the accountability of the Central Bureau of Investigations, the government's main investigative agency. A series of scandals had revealed an unhealthy relationship between the bureau, the prime minister's office and other political elites. The courts restructured authority over the bureau and set its director's tenure to a minimum of two years. There were countermoves in parliament, which alleged that the judiciary was encroaching on legislative and administrative functions beyond its authority, and that judges were exploiting recent corruption trials. A lively debate continues about these institutions, their development and their contribution to the vitality of democratic politics in India.

Source: Kohli 2001; Rudolph and Rudolph 2001.

judiciary fighting to stay autonomous and political parties and the executive is a continuing feature of Indian political life. From the efforts to eliminate judicial review of legislation in the 1970s to the judicial activism of the 1990s in taking up cases of political corruption, the judiciary has vigorously defended the separation of powers and ensured that checks and balances are a reality (box 3.5).³¹ In Egypt the Constitutional Court played a key role in imposing judicial supervision of polling stations in the 1987 and 2001 elections.³² In 1997 Mali's Constitutional Court annulled the first round of legislative elections and ordered new balloting in response to a petition from opposition parties. And in 2001 Gabon's Constitutional Court quashed a presidential decree appointing all the members of the country's Economic and Social Council, saying that the decree violated a constitutional

requirement that 85% of the council's members be elected by their peers from throughout the country.³³

During apartheid South Africa's government used the law and the courts to implement—and defend—its policies, causing the oppressed majority to view the judicial system as a tool of white oppression. But human rights lawyers and a few sympathetic judges kept the judicial process from losing all credibility, which proved crucial to the establishment of a democratic constitution. Today strong measures guarantee an independent judiciary, and the Constitutional Court ensures an appropriate separation of powers between the three branches of government. In addition, the Constitutional Court and the independent Judicial Services Commission have made courts more representative—of 199 superior court judges, 45 are black and 26 are women. In 1994, when apartheid ended, there were no more than one or two of either (box 3.6).³⁴

In many new democracies, however, domination by the executive branch—and excessive influence of security forces, especially the military—remain stubborn legacies. Shifting to a more balanced system, with an independent judiciary and legislature, does not happen overnight. The legislature often plays a limited role in policy-making—for example, with budgets discussed only at their final stage in many parliaments. In South Africa parliamentarians have no power to amend budgets, only to approve what is presented or reject it outright. But rejection is not a realistic option, because it would immobilize the business of government.³⁵ In other countries the controlling majority often amends constitutions without broad debate. As political pressure mounts to challenge their power, rulers may try to maintain their hold on it through, for example, constitutional amendments that reinforce the power of the executive. In Cameroon military tribunals can exercise jurisdiction over civilians in cases involving civil unrest. Establishing civilian control of the military and the police is an enormous challenge in many new democracies (see chapter 4).

In many countries bureaucratic rule continues as well, often conflicting with democra-

tic reforms even in long-established democracies such as Japan. Civil servants may not readily adjust to the role of holder of public trust. Jurisdictional conflicts between electoral commissions and ministries of the interior highlight the difficulties of overcoming bureaucratic rule. So does the reluctance of presidential appointees and auxiliaries to tolerate the emergence of political parties and civil society organizations.

Often the legislature and the judiciary simply lack technical capacity, office space and access to information. A 1993 study of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile and Honduras found that parliamentary committees lacked skilled staff. Parliamentarians in El Salvador and Mexico are also bereft of professional assistance, staffed only by secretaries. Fewer than a dozen of Nepal's 205 members of parliament have any training in economics.³⁶

Many countries are trying to confront these problems, with mixed success. In addition to providing parliaments and judiciaries with equipment, procedures and adequately trained professional staff, they are introducing innovations and structural reforms to reinforce checks on abuses of power. And they are strengthening parliamentary committees to foster more effective decision-making and to monitor the executive. In 1983 Ireland established a committee system that conducts research for members of parliament.³⁷ In Portugal, Romania and elsewhere, opposition leaders are appointed to lead powerful legislative committees, including the finance committee.³⁸ And in Morocco the 1996 constitution introduced a bicameral legislature to promote more pluralistic representation.³⁹

Another approach is to strengthen independent entities—especially ombudspersons, electoral commissions and human rights commissions. All can promote and defend critical reforms and democratic practices in countries with imbalances of power between the executive and the other branches. Independent electoral commissions play a critical role in ensuring free and fair elections (box 3.7). An important condition for their independence is budgetary independence, best secured by legal arrangements—and with budgets not only for elections but also for preparatory processes, then audited.

BOX 3.6

Judicial activism kept the flag of democracy flying—limply—in apartheid South Africa

Until 1994 South Africa essentially had no written constitution and certainly no bill of rights. Parliament was supreme, and no court had the power to strike down its laws—no matter how unjust or unfair. But courts did have the power to interpret legislation, which they used to blunt some of the more notorious apartheid laws.

The Legal Resources Centre, a public interest law firm, was active in using the courts to fight apartheid laws. The centre won rulings from the country's highest courts, bringing relief to hundreds of thousands of black South Africans—such as the court reversal of policies that had prevented the wives and children of urban workers from joining their husbands and fathers in “white” cities. In another case the centre prevented the eviction of black South Africans from areas legally reserved for white South Africans. Another human rights organiza-

tion, Lawyers for Human Rights, provided free defence counsel for hundreds of cases prosecuting illiterate victims of the apartheid system for transgressing oppressive laws.

Without the efforts of these organizations, the lawyers who worked for them and their supporters in other countries, South Africa's courts would have lost all legitimacy in the eyes of black South Africans. That the black majority retained some trust was crucial to the establishment of a democratic constitution. Otherwise the judicial system's credibility in safeguarding the constitutional values of equality and protection of all people's dignity would have been fatally undermined.

In hindsight such efforts might appear to have been obvious. But at the time there was little if any light at the end of the tunnel. The justice and fairness achieved are a credit to the many activists who fought for them.

Source: Goldstone 2002.

BOX 3.7

The role of independent oversight bodies: Mexico's Federal Election Commission

Mexico's 2000 presidential elections marked a major step forward for the country's democracy. This positive outcome has been widely attributed to 1996 constitutional reforms of electoral and political systems—and to the efforts and growing credibility of the Federal Election Commission (Instituto Federal Electoral). These changes were driven by pressure from civil society, the opposition and the international community resulting from the controversial presidential election of 1988 and lingering questions about process in the 1994 election.

In 1990 constitutional reforms established the Federal Election Commission as an independent entity fully responsible for federal elections and an Electoral Court that handles appeals of election-related disputes. Reforms in the early and mid-1990s strengthened the commission's independence and authority. The 1996 constitutional reforms, in particular, eliminated executive oversight by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and created a non-partisan

General Council of nine independent “electoral counsellors”.

Mexico's other electoral innovations include creating observer committees, including judges as members of the election commission and establishing a professional service for supervising elections that is responsible for updating voter lists every year. The election commission has also instituted campaign finance reforms, though critics argue that Congress approved a much higher ceiling than was initially proposed to benefit the wealthy PRI—the party that had been in power for more than 70 years.

These improvements contributed to the opposition winning a majority in the Chamber of Deputies in the watershed 1997 legislative elections—for the first time in Mexico's modern history—and to the 2000 presidential elections bringing an opposition candidate, Vicente Fox, to power. Electoral reforms have considerably strengthened direct democratic participation by all Mexican citizens in government institutions and processes.

Source: Lopez-Pintor 2000; Instituto Federal Electoral 2002; Grayson 2000; Washington Office on Latin America 2000; Maguire 2002; Di Rosa 2002.

BOX 3.8

South Africa's Human Rights Commission—promoting democratic values and practices by investigating racism in the media

South Africa's Human Rights Commission—an independent institution created by the country's 1994 constitution—has turned its attention to racism in the media. Its investigations began with a 1998 complaint from the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa, accusing two newspapers of racism in reports involving black people.

The commission later decided to broaden its inquiry to racism in the media generally. Racial discrimination at every level of society had featured heavily in complaints brought to the commission since its creation, posing risks to a peaceful and integrated South Africa. In broadening its investigation, the commission was not seeking to make a scapegoat of the media. Rather, it was recognizing the media's im-

mense power to shape public opinions and perceptions.

The outcry accompanying the announcement of the inquiry was significant in itself. Critics argued that the inquiry violated the media's right to freedom of expression, undermining the commission's role as protector of all the rights granted in South Africa's constitution and bill of rights.

In its report the commission shared its understanding and interpretation of racism, particularly "subliminal racism". But the commission had already achieved an important objective: it generated a broad public discussion on an issue that threatened to be a major obstacle to building democracy and respect for human rights across South Africa. In doing so, it enhanced the prospect of a popular consensus.

Source: Pityana 2000.

BOX 3.9

China's reform process—expanding participation and accountability

As reform unfolds in China, and the government and the Communist Party retreat from governing all aspects of society and the economy, the country's leaders have taken steps to increase participation and accountability in local government. The first efforts came in the 1980s, with elections for village committees under the 1987 Organic Law of Village Committees, following a series of grass-roots initiatives by villagers.

The law has had mixed results, leading to lively debate among scholars about whether village elections can serve as the basis for more fundamental political reform. According to unofficial central government sources, only 60% of elections meet all the relevant legal requirements. Once elected, village leaders' activities can be constrained by preexisting power structures. Still, most analysts agree that the elections are increasing the accountability, legitimacy and efficiency of grass-roots administration.

The elections are giving greater voice to the people in formulating national reform policies and programmes. This new

form of political interaction will be tested in the coming years by fundamental agricultural reforms. Will the reforms help avoid major hardships for rural populations? And will they enable people to stay in rural areas rather than migrate to cities and towns?

There have also been important changes at the national level, with the party and the government becoming less closely intertwined. Several high-ranking government officials are not party members. In addition, much of the public service system is being professionalized. And there have been ambitious efforts to combat corruption. At all levels of government—central, provincial and below—the state is being downsized and rationalized. The government has also voiced its commitment to strengthening the rule of law and to throwing off the remnants of the old-style "rule by man". In all, major reform of all aspects of Chinese governance has been set in motion, at least with the potential to alter the relationship between the state and its citizens.

Source: UNDP China Country Office 2002; UNDP 1999a.

Independent commissions have been critical to protecting and promoting human rights. By 1998, 40% of the world's parliaments had formal human rights bodies.⁴⁰ South Africa's commission actively monitors the application of constitutionally guaranteed rights. It has tackled a wide range of issues, including the provision of social services, human rights in farming communities and racism in the media. The commission is making the vision of a nation founded on human rights a reality (box 3.8).

DECENTRALIZING DEMOCRATICALLY

In principle, decentralizing power from the centre to provinces, districts or villages enables people to participate in decision-making more directly. But in reality it can simply transfer power from one set of elites to another. Democratic decentralization—truly giving voice to the people—requires more than just decentralizing and devolving power. It also requires widening participation—especially by people who are often marginalized, such as women, minorities and the poor—and increasing the accountability of public officials at local levels.

India's *panchayati raj* illustrate this process. Despite democracy's success at the national and state levels, India's constitutionally mandated local governments—the *panchayati raj*—used to be prone to capture by elites and to subversion by central political authority. The 1992 and 1993 constitutional amendments revitalized the *panchayats* by giving them constitutional status, providing for regular elections and reserving one-third of seats for women and proportional representation for marginalized social groups.

In many parts of India this change dramatically increased the visibility and extent of popular participation. It also enabled marginalized groups to enter political debates—infusing new political resources into the system, enhancing the legitimacy of state institutions and bringing a measure of uniformity to the institutional structure of local governments all over the country. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, two states with low incomes and some of the country's worst schooling and literacy rates, literacy jumped 20 percentage points be-

tween 1991 and 2001. Community involvement in mapping households and identifying children out of school was a major factor in voicing need. Although 80,000 schools had opened in the 50 years since independence, 30,000 more were created within three years of the scheme's announcement in 1997.⁴¹ In addition, enrolments of girls and tribal children increased enormously.

Not all panchayati raj institutions have been affected the same way. Political authorities in several states—Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal—have supported decentralization through the panchayats and effectively decentralized decision-making to local levels. In some states progress has been slower in the absence of resource transfers. And in others, such as Bihar, the reform has exacerbated social divisions and violence, further weakening these institutions.⁴² The successes have been most pronounced in states where democratic principles permeate local political parties and other institutions and processes and are reflected in the strong trust people have in them.⁴³ Where local hierarchies are more deeply entrenched, the reform has made less headway.

Bolivia provides another interesting example of democratic decentralization. Its 1994 Popular Participation Law broadened political participation and decentralized fiscal decision-making. The law created municipalities in rural areas with no previous state presence. It officially recognized local grass-roots organizations. It reduced inequality by redistributing fiscal resources based on population density. And it gave more power to local governments by decentralizing physical infrastructure for health care, education, local roads, irrigation systems and cultural activities. The grass-roots organizations play a key role: the law establishes procedures for them to make proposals to satisfy municipal needs and to oversee municipal government services and projects.

Bolivia's law led to very positive empowerment in some communities but not others. Some critics say that the local organizations are too heterogeneous and disorganized—and that they undermine other civil society organizations, such as labour unions, that represent people's interests.

Others say that elites can still hijack the process. They say that the impact of the law would have been greater had it been accompanied by measures to restructure local party politics and crack down on local corruption. They attribute the law's limited results to the continuing hold of patronage-based political systems and processes in which decisions are made without systematic consultation. Still, this innovative initiative brings civil society groups more clearly into local governance and deepens democratic practice.⁴⁴

Democratic decentralization is also spreading in industrial countries, with moves to devolve power to Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom and to the regions in Italy and Spain. But perhaps one of the most interesting developments in decentralization over the past decade has been the expansion of people's participation and public officials' accountability at the local level in China and Viet Nam.

In 1998 Viet Nam issued the Grass-roots Democracy Decree, partly in response to some farmers' dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in local budget allocations. The decree defines areas of policy where local people need to be kept informed, including administrative procedures and budget planning and spending. It also outlines areas where local people should discuss and comment on government decisions before they are made. Meanwhile, China has introduced elections in villages and in some townships (box 3.9).

DEVELOPING FREE AND INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Perhaps no reform can be as significant for making democratic institutions work as reform of the media: building diverse and pluralistic media that are free and independent, that achieve mass access and diffusion, that present accurate and unbiased information. Informed debate is the lifeblood of democracies. Without it, citizens and decision-makers are disempowered, lacking the basic tools for informed participation and representation.

Free media play three crucial roles in promoting democratic governance:

- As a civic forum, giving voice to different parts of society and enabling debate from all viewpoints.

Informed debate is the lifeblood of democracies

Watchdog media make democratic institutions work

A free press is probably never more important to democratic governance than when acting as a public watchdog. Watchdog and investigative journalism, no longer the preserve of alternative publications, are moving into the mainstream in all corners of the world.

- *Stimulating debates on economic policy.* In Mozambique Carlos Cardoso used his daily fax news sheet, *Metical*, to offer an opposing view of the policy prescriptions contained in the government's agreements with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). His efforts helped spark national and international debates on World Bank and IMF programmes and on the Mozambican government's accountability to its people.

- *Monitoring elections.* In Ghana the transparency of the 2000 election results was partly due to the large number of private radio stations around the country. The stations made it difficult to rig voting and brought credibility to the declared results. Radio personnel monitored the polls and reported irregularities, and ordinary citizens used the stations to report suspicious activities. In the past, citizens could learn about poll results only through official channels, and suspicion was rife that the official results did not always reflect votes cast.

- *Exposing human rights abuses.* A dogged investigation by Daniel Bekoutou, a Chad-born reporter collaborating with human rights groups, led to the arrest and indictment of Chad's former dictator Hissène Habré by Senegalese authorities in February

2000. Bekoutou's investigations revealed evidence of political killings, torture and "disappearances" in Chad when Habre was president. This indictment, unprecedented in Africa, shows how the media can help hold even heads of state accountable for their crimes.

- *Exposing political corruption.* In Peru newsweeklies such as *Caretas*, *Oiga* and *Si* and newspapers such as *La Republica* and *El Comercio* published investigations critical of then-President Alberto Fujimori. The investigations revealed death squads, military involvement in corruption and links between drug lords and the political establishment. Most spectacularly, in 2000 Peru cable television broadcast videos of bribes made in exchange for votes, secretly taped by Peru's head of security. Fujimori resigned immediately after the broadcast.

- *Empowering women.* The Palestinian coalition for women, the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, has raised awareness of women's rights through an active partnership with the media. In the runup to the 1996 elections for the Legislative Council, a biweekly newsletter, *Women and Elections*, advocated for a 30% quota for women. Though the quota did not emerge, the effort raised awareness and helped establish the committee's legitimacy. It has kept women's issues at the fore of national debate by providing speakers for radio, briefing local and foreign journalists and introducing newspaper supplements and radio and television programmes.

Source: Tettey 2002; Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2002b; Sakr 2002.

- As a mobilizing agent, facilitating civic engagement among all sectors of society and strengthening channels of public participation.
- As a watchdog, checking abuses of power, increasing government transparency and holding public officials accountable for their actions in the court of public opinion (box 3.10).

The past two decades have seen major advances in the spread of independent media. Economic and political reforms have loosened restrictions on the media—including censorship and ownership controls—and strengthened constitutional and legal guarantees of freedom of speech and information.

Many countries, from Indonesia to Qatar, have abolished restrictive press laws.⁴⁵ And deregulation and privatization of media markets have made them more competitive and often more diverse and pluralistic—notably through the increased penetration of global and regional multimedia companies, such as CNN and Al-Jazeera, into national markets. Information technology and the Internet have also greatly broadened the scope for mass communications, making it possible for even small media organizations to reach large audiences. The Internet can also break the barriers of state control (box 3.11).

These changes have dramatically expanded the media's nature and scale. Between 1970 and 1996 the number of daily newspapers in developing countries more than doubled, from 29 to 60 copies per 1,000 people (figure 3.3).

In many countries political, economic and technological forces are levelling the playing field in the market for ideas, enabling new voices and viewpoints to be heard. Most people have many more sources of information—both in quantity and diversity—than they did just 10 years ago. Widely available information is crucial to democratic governance because it helps challenge government authorities and provokes more balanced debate on problems and policies. Freedom and diversity are reinforcing the media's roles as mobilizing agents and watchdogs.

Still, many countries are a long way from having a genuinely free and independent media that can serve democratic purposes. State-owned media monopolies persist: for example, Lebanon is the only Arab state that allows private broadcasting. Few countries have freedom of information laws, and journalists often work under strict constraints. According to Freedom House, in only a handful of new democracies is press freedom comparable to that in most established democracies. Making the list are most countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltics, several in Latin America and the Caribbean (such as Costa Rica, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago) and a few in Africa (Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa) and Asia (Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand).⁴⁶

Even where press freedoms are constitutionally guaranteed, governments have invented

new ways to rein in the press. In many countries in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere, libel laws are used to silence critics.⁴⁷ In Chile “contempt of authority” is a crime against state security, and despite the 2001 Press Law, restrictions on freedom of expression still pervade Chilean legislation—where the defamation laws that Augusto Pinochet’s regime used to great effect are still in force.⁴⁸ In several countries the vague crime of “dangerousness” has been used to curtail independent journalism. The Democratic Republic of Congo outlaws reporting that might “demoralize” the public. In Zimbabwe, with a history of a vigorous and independent media, the president has forced through legislation that severely constrains press freedoms.

Journalism also remains a hazardous occupation. In 2001, 37 journalists died in the line of duty. Another 118 were imprisoned.⁴⁹ Worldwide, more than 600 journalists or their news organizations were intimidated or physically attacked—mostly because some people did not agree with what they reported.⁵⁰

BOX 3.11

Internet media—overcoming restrictions

The Internet, with its low entry barriers, provides alternative sources of information, often overcoming restrictions placed on the institutionalized press, radio and television. For thousands of Yugoslavs, in the months leading to the September 2000 elections, the Internet became the only way for opposition parties, independent media and Slobodan Milosevic’s rivals to communicate with the public. The independent radio station, B92, having been seized by the government, broadcast its programme on the Internet—providing daily news bulletins in Serbian and

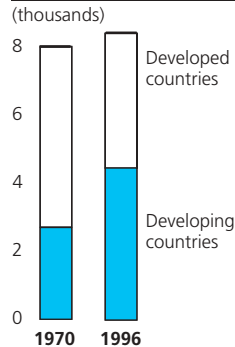
English as well as interviews, video footage and reports from the country and abroad. *The Bosnian Serb Weekly Reporter*, banned by the Serbian Information Ministry, reappeared in the mailboxes of its electronic readers. Non-governmental organizations campaigning for democratic and fair elections offered analysis and pre-election prognoses, and defined the rights and duties of a “real” voter. And the student-led opposition movement Otpor (Resistance) reported on the frequent raids of its premises and the detention of its members by the ruling regime.

Source: Subasic 2002.

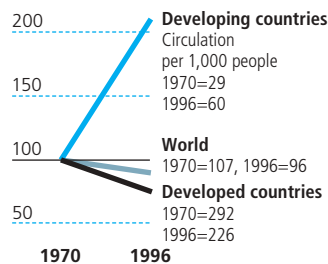
In 1944 writer Albert Camus said, “The press is free when it does not depend on either the power of government or the power of money.”⁵¹ To be free and independent and to produce factual, unbiased information, the media must be free not just from state control—but also from corporate and political pres-

FIGURE 3.3
Developing countries’ spectacular media growth

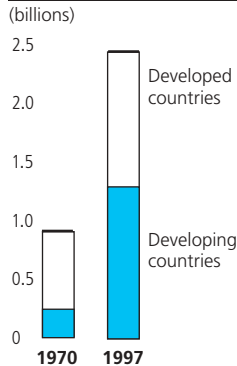
DAILY NEWSPAPERS



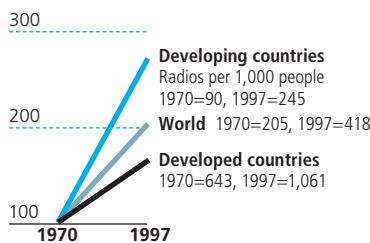
Circulation (per 1,000 people)
Index, 1970 = 100



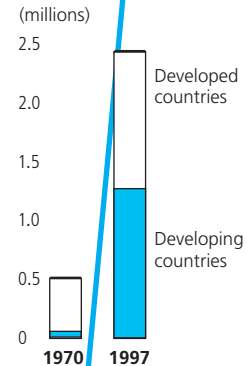
RADIOS



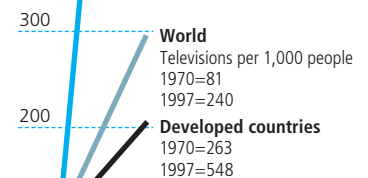
Radios (per 1,000 people)
Index, 1970 = 100



TELEVISIONS

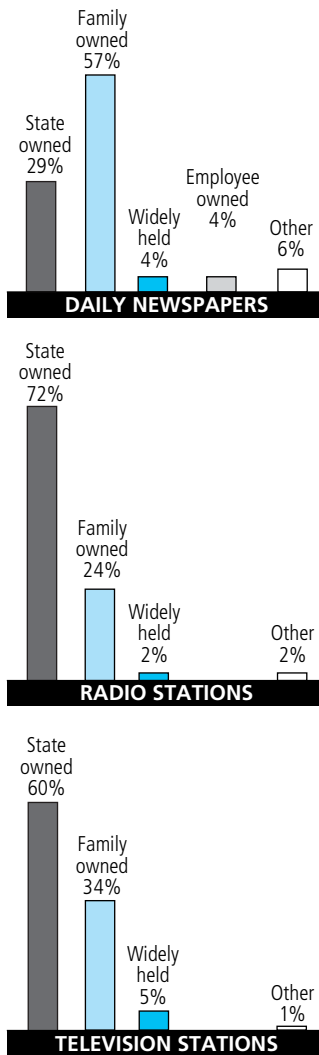


Televisions (per 1,000 people)
Index, 1970 = 100



Source: UNESCO 1999b.

FIGURE 3.4
Who owns the media?



Note: Percentages are average shares of ownership for 97 countries' top five newspaper and broadcast enterprises.

Source: Djankov and others 2001.

ures. With greater media pluralism comes an expectation of greater political pluralism in the media and greater potential for broader, better-informed debate. But commercial and political pressures still skew the market for ideas.

Liberalization, privatization and new technology have taken the media out of government hands and into private hands. Most of the world's publishing media are privately owned, although the public sector still accounts for 60% of television station ownership worldwide (figure 3.4).⁵² However, private ownership of the media is highly concentrated, often by families. In the United Kingdom four groups own 85% of the daily press (accounting for two-thirds of total circulation). In the United States six companies control most of the media: AOL Time Warner, General Electric, Viacom, Disney, Bertelsmann, News Corporation. In Australia Rupert Murdoch's media empire controls 60% of the circulation of daily newspapers.⁵³ In a few countries families of influential politicians are major owners of the media; the most well-known case is Silvio Berlusconi and his family in Italy. Mexico's Televisa and Brazil's Globo are two of the world's greatest media monopolies controlled by individuals and their families, encompassing all aspects of production and distribution of television, radio, film, video and much of the advertising industries in their countries. In Venezuela two large family-owned companies dominate the market: Grupo Phelps and Grupo Cisneros.⁵⁴

From Bolivia to France to the United States, citizens, politicians and journalists are engaging in lively debates about how the media's politicization and poor professional standards contribute to the deterioration of democratic life.⁵⁵ The media can be subjected to overtly political aims, compromising basic professional ethics of providing unbiased, accurate information. Truth is the first casualty of war, but the media are usually the victims, not the aggressors. But not in Rwanda in 1994, when radio—the country's most common media—was used to incite genocide. The journalists involved now face charges of crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Media companies are businesses and can be expected to behave as such. Hence the increas-

ing trend towards "infotainment"—the merging of information and entertainment—also viewed as a threat by many (figure 3.5). Media companies also have a civic role as providers of news and information. The tensions between these two roles will never be eliminated—and the answer to excessive corporate influence over the news cannot be a return to excessive control by the state. Solutions must combine the need to hold the media accountable and responsible with the need to keep it free. The media can be free of both corporate and state control if it serves the public first and foremost and follows higher standards of professionalism and ethics.

A range of mechanisms for promoting higher standards of professionalism and responsibility do not depend on restrictive state controls:

- *Independent media commissions.* Among the handful of independent media commissions is the Ghana Media Commission, which is authorized "to take all appropriate measures to ensure the establishment and maintenance of the highest journalistic standards in the mass media".⁵⁶ Using a combination of moral suasion and professional goodwill, the commission has often ruled against the abuse of power by newspapers and directed them to issue apologies and retractions. So far it has taken on more than 50 cases, and has resolved 28 amicably.
- *Market sanctions—voting with the pocketbook.* The public can always withdraw its support for an offending newspaper or medium by refusing to buy or view it. Zimbabwe's state-owned newspaper *The Herald* lost more than 40% of its readers, from 744,000 in 2000 to 430,000 in 2001, partly because people lost faith in its credibility. By contrast, the private *Daily News* saw its readership grow from 512,000 in 2000 to 582,000 in 2001.⁵⁷
- *Self-regulation.* Self-regulation includes professional standards and internal guidelines by newspapers and news agencies. Press councils that examine complaints about media performance are another key element. Ombudspersons, maintained by newspapers in Brazil, Canada, Japan, Spain and the United States, also belong to this category.⁵⁸ There is greater attention to the need to raise professional standards through codes of ethics, training, education and a broader emphasis on quality.

Many of the above elements come together in Claude Jean Bertrand's Media Accountability System (also known as M*A*S), which emphasizes greater efforts by the media to develop ethical standards, especially through open debates with the public. The system also makes clear that media responsibility does not derive solely from institutional efforts. It starts with the consciences of individual journalists and must be based on socially accepted norms and standards of fair conduct. In recent years there have been positive developments in this regard: the news media are more willing to publicly examine press ethics and performance, and journalism courses are addressing ethics more often.

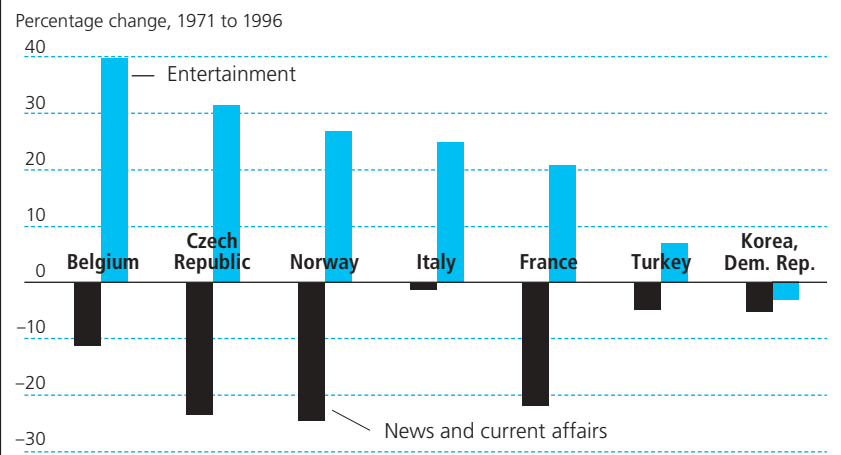
PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC POLITICS TO DEEPEN DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

Though strengthening democratic institutions is essential, it is not enough to promote more effective participation by people and more responsive decision-making by those in power. An alert citizenry is what makes democratic institutions and processes work. Political pressure from below is usually the most effective trigger of change. Major advances in human development over the past two centuries—the abolition of slavery, the recognition of equal rights of women, the advance of democracy itself—would not have been granted from above. They had to be fought for.

While much has been written about the challenges of creating democratic institutions, there has been much less analysis of democratic politics: the struggles of poor and marginalized people to claim their rights and to overcome institutionalized obstacles. These struggles depend as much on strengthening civil liberties, civil society institutions and a free media as on strengthening political liberties and political institutions. "It is quite possible to have accountability in...the high politics of the state, honest rulers and free elections, and yet profound injustice or irresponsibility in the deep politics of society, that is, the relations between rich and poor, powerful and weak."⁵⁹

A trend of the past decade is the expansion of democratic politics, with a groundswell of civic activism around the world demanding greater accountability of government authorities

FIGURE 3.5
Public service broadcasting's shifting focus from news to entertainment



Source: Norris 2000, pp. 107–108.

and of private business and multilateral organizations. These civil society actors are using new and innovative approaches to get their messages heard, and expanding their role from watchdogs that monitor to active participants in setting agendas.

One of the more significant examples is the rise of participatory and accountable budgeting: civil society initiatives to scrutinize public spending and in some cases participate in the development of official budgets. Few government decisions mean as much for ordinary people as those made during the writing of public budgets—especially for poor people who rely on “public incomes” such as schooling, health care, roads, water supply and electricity. Yet ordinary people typically have little say in budget formulation. In most countries the budget process is almost exclusively the prerogative of bureaucrats and the executive branch. Parliaments also participate, but often only at the end. And much of the process is usually shrouded in secrecy unmatched by any other part of government decision-making aside from national security.

But recent initiatives by citizen groups to examine local and central budgets are helping to open this process to the voices of ordinary people. Many of these initiatives start with social audits or impact evaluations—analyses that elicit concerns about spending priorities and the mis-

Gender-responsive budget initiatives—an increasingly popular tool

Gender-responsive budgets are an innovative new tool that empower women's organizations and civil society to hold public spending accountable to international and national commitments for promoting gender equality. In recent years such initiatives have spread to more than 40 countries. They are globally networked with the support of agencies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, United Nations Development Fund for Women and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Still experimental, the initiatives will take time to develop and bear fruit.

What are gender-responsive budgets?

Gender-responsive budgets are not separate budgets for women and girls. Rather, they are analyses of public spending through the lens of gender. They are a way of ensuring consistency between social commitments to achieve gender equality goals—such as in education or work—and the resources being allocated. The key question is, what impact does fiscal policy have on gender equality? Does it reduce gender inequality, increase it or leave it unchanged?

Gender-responsive budgets were started by Australian activists who pushed the government to assess the impact on gender equity of all elements of the national budget between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. Many other countries later adopted the concept to expand participation and accountability in budgeting, especially in light of international commitments to promote gender equality.

Diverse country initiatives

Over the past decade advocates for gender equality began using gender-responsive budgets in a multitude of ways. Some were initiated by government, as in Australia. Others were initiated by civil society groups, as in the Philippines and South Africa. And yet others were initiated by parliamentarians, as in Uganda. Most focus on monitoring, while some engage in preparatory phases, as in Brazil and the United Kingdom. Most work at the national level, but some—as in Uganda—focus on local levels, where traditional and oppressive gender relations are stronger. All point to the effect of this new tool in stimulating a new participatory politics challenging the “power of the purse”.

In *South Africa* the Women's Budget Initiative empowers parliamentarians and others with analysis and information to oversee and critique government budgets. It has been a collaborative venture of the Gender and Economic Policy Group (part of the parliamentary Committee on Finance) and two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on policy research. By linking researchers and members of parliament, the researchers could be assured that their work would be taken forward into advocacy, while the parliamentarians would have a solid basis for their advocacy. From the start the core members of the initiative were also expected to draw in others as researchers and reference people. The initiative published a series of books and, more recently, a series of papers called *Money Matters*, written to be accessible to a broad range of readers. South Africa's government has also introduced gender budget analysis within the government, led by the Ministry of Finance. This and the above initiative have had some positive effects. For example, all sectoral budget reviews now include gender-sensitive analysis.

In *Tanzania* gender budgeting drew inspiration from Australia and South Africa. Initiated by the Tanzanian Gender Networking Programme, an NGO, the programme's main strengths are the alliances created with government, especially its gender equality activists. Teaming up an NGO researcher with a government officer, the initiative has commissioned research on four sectoral ministries (education, health, agriculture, industry and commerce), on the Ministry of Finance and Planning Commission and on the budget process. It has also done research in selected districts.

In *Mexico* the NGO Equidad de Genero (Gender Equality) and the Fundar Center for Analysis and Research, a policy research NGO, have undertaken gender budgeting projects within their states and municipalities, evaluating them in light of decentralization experiences and the transfer of resources for local budgets. They have tried to do so by involving civil society organizations, public servants and statistical institutions, and have encouraged public debate on local budget decisions.

In the *Philippines* the gender machinery—in the form of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women—provides technical assistance to government agencies in devising gender and development plans and budgets, and

monitors the stipulated 5% budget allocations of government agencies for such activities.

Uganda's initiative has been spearheaded by the Forum for Women in Democracy, an NGO that was established by female parliamentarians and has strong links with the special interest groups caucus in parliament. It brings together women occupying seats reserved for them, people with disabilities, youth and workers as well as women who have won “open” seats, to go beyond the monitoring of budget allocations and processes to examine the impact of all spending and revenue, and increase inclusiveness and transparency in official processes.

In the *United Kingdom* the Women's Budget Group, an extragovernmental group of activists, has since 1990 formally submitted a prebudget consultation paper in November of each year, outlining the main policies and proposed changes to the treasury. The group focuses on taxes and benefits rather than on spending because these affect a far larger portion of the population than they do in developing countries.

In *Porto Alegre, Brazil*, the gender budget initiative is part of the broader process of participatory budgeting. NGOs such as Centro de Assessoria e Estudos Urbanos (CIDADE) backstop this process, with CIDADE monitoring and analysing council meetings, holding workshops and training courses for delegates, council members and community leaders, researching participants' perception of these processes and disseminating information through papers, the monthly journal *De Olho No Orçamento* and its Website. Citizens participate in two annual meetings organized by the local government where they rank 5 priority sectors from a list of 14 (sewerage, housing, pavement, education, social assistance, health, transportation, city organization, sports, leisure, economic development, culture, environmental sanitation, street lighting), revising regional or thematic demands and budget allocations. Environmental sanitation and street lighting were added to the list in 2000–01 through this participatory process. Between 1991 and 2001 the number of citizens participating in the budget process quintupled. Although this initiative is not specifically targeting gender issues, the participatory process and the research and advocacy work accompanying it have highlighted several gender-related concerns and provide insights for other gender budget initiatives.

Source: Budlender, Sharp and Allen 1999; Byanyima 2000; Cagatay and others 2000; Esim 2000; Himmelweit 2000; Budlender and others 2002; Sharp 2000; Bakker 2002; Osmani 2002a; Caruso 2002; Hewitt and Mukhopadhyay 2001.

use of funds. These efforts sometimes help reverse official decisions. In Israel the government proposed deep cuts in social spending in 1998. The Adva Centre, a non-partisan, action-oriented policy analysis organization, assessed the potential impact of these cuts. As a result a wide coalition lobbied the government—and cuts in child care and pensions were withdrawn, universal health care was preserved and cut-backs in teaching hours and housing assistance were reduced.

In Rajasthan, India, a grass-roots organization called Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS, or Workers and Farmers Power Association) launched a campaign in 1988 to secure minimum wages for government drought-relief workers. It soon became clear that corruption was at the root of low wages. The MKSS analysed government accounts and discovered that local authorities were billing the central and state governments for wage costs far above what workers were being paid. To combat this and other fraud—including inflated estimates for public works projects and the use of shoddy materials—the MKSS investigations catalysed state agencies to monitor spending and require all village accounts to be scrutinized at village meetings open to all.

These new types of popular participation are spreading across the globe as civil society groups go beyond whistle-blowing and protests to take on oversight functions that are normally the responsibility of state institutions. Argentina's Poder Ciudadano movement monitors the internal workings of political parties—a function previously performed solely by state agencies. Moreover, the movement is forcing change through better enforcement of existing rules and regulations, institutional reform and enhanced transparency and monitoring.

Such initiatives have led to participatory budgeting—more systematic, institutionalized public participation in the preparation of budgets. In 1989 Porto Alegre, Brazil, introduced a process that enables citizens to participate in preparing municipal budgets. In its first seven years the process resulted in remarkable gains in human development spending for poor people: the share of households with access to water services rose from 80% to 98%, the portion of

BOX 3.13

Technology and the power of e-governance

From Asia to Europe to Latin America to Africa, governments are adopting more innovative ways of interacting with citizens by adapting many practices of electronic commerce. Whether it's the 2 million subscribers to the Japanese prime minister's email list or government-sponsored online consultations throughout Europe and Australia, the Internet is encouraging more direct citizen engagement with elected representatives.

The benefits of e-governance for public service delivery have also begun to extend to developing countries. In the Indian state of Karnataka, farmers can download land records and related information from nearby RTC (Record of Right, Tenancy and Cultivation) information kiosks. In the United Arab Emirates the Dubai Courts Project has established a complete online system for tracking and monitoring court cases, from the first filing to the final decision. In Chile an e-government project enables poor people to apply online for housing vouchers and subsidies—avoiding the time, cost and red tape of applying in person at Ministry of Housing offices located only in major cities.

The Internet has also improved transparency and exposed corruption in government departments. Anticorruption Websites are proliferating in and out of government, inspired by efforts such as Latin America's Respondanet (www.respondanet.com), which links professionals, government officials and citizens concerned about the proper use of public funds.

With today's 0.5 billion Internet users expected to grow to nearly 1.0 billion by 2005, governments should expand e-governance for the benefit of all citizens—at least where the required time and financing are not prohibitive:

- Announce all public meetings online in a systematic, reliable way.
- Use comment forms, online surveys and focus groups to obtain the input required for genuine e-government. In South Africa citizens can review policy proposals online and submit comments even before a policy issue reaches the Green Paper and draft law stage.
- Hold government-citizen online consultations. To have a real impact on policy-making, such consultations should be highly structured.

Source: UNPAN 2002; Nua Publish 2002; Clift 2002; Working Group on E-Government in the Developing World 2002.

people with access to sewage facilities jumped from 46% to 85% and the number of children enrolled in public school doubled.⁶⁰ This approach has been replicated in about 100 other municipalities in Brazil. In addition, more than 40 countries have used participatory budgeting to promote gender-responsive public spending (box 3.12).

Participatory budgeting shows that even the veil of technical complexity that has protected budgets from open questioning can be lifted once citizen groups have time, skills and access to information. These new forms of people's participation—from influencing agendas through protests to increasing collaboration in decision-making—are reinforcing democratic institutions. E-governance is another emerging avenue for people's participation in politics, encouraging more direct citizen engagement with elected representatives (box 3.13).

BOX 3.14

Participatory democracy at work—drafting Thailand's new constitution

In drafting Thailand's new constitution, civil society organizations insisted on and were given the opportunity to make substantive inputs. The Constitutional Drafting Assembly was itself a participatory body, with 99 members—76 representing the country's different provinces.

Civil society organizations offered suggestions to the assembly on two occasions. In addition, 28 organizations active in democracy met regularly in early 1997 to formulate draft resolutions on the new constitution. Another set of recommendations was published jointly by the main networks

of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private organizations, the Coordinating Committee on Rural Development (with 300 members), the 28 democratic organizations, the Political Reform and Civil Society Group, the Women and Constitution Network, the Labour Organization of Thailand and the Regional People's Forum for the Constitution.

These initiatives were complemented by others that broadened the debate on the new constitution through mass media campaigns, and by public hearings organized in Bangkok and all the provinces.

Source: UNDP 1999d.

Popular demands for greater accountability no longer stop at the state or at national boundaries. As discussed in chapter 5, global economic integration has reinforced the power and influence of global actors—intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and global corporations. These global institutions and their rules govern important aspects of national economic policies and have enormous impacts on people's lives—creating a global-national gap in democratic participation and accountability.

Global civil society networks are working to redress such gaps, with varying success. They are being aided in their efforts by the Internet, which makes it possible to create formal networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as much looser networks of individuals and organizations that can quickly mobilize collective action. For example, a campaign by Rain Forest Action Network and Greenpeace led Home Depot, the world's largest lumber retailer, to stop buying timber from endangered forests and from suppliers that engaged in unsustainable harvesting. The key feature of this initiative was that it mobilized hundreds of environmental organizations and grass-roots groups.⁶¹

Many such actions abound. If not for the Internet, these organizations and grass-roots groups would have remained isolated, engaged

in dispersed efforts. Chapter 5 discusses in greater detail how such global public action has become a real force in global governance, providing checks and balances on corporations, governments and intergovernmental organizations—and achieving important breakthroughs for human development.

These autonomous efforts offer enormous promise because they offer a more direct channel of accountability—defying conventional constraints on social action, which typically require going through established institutions of accountability. But that disregard for convention also raises difficult questions for accountability and democratic governance. In particular, the ability of these global networks to inflict large and immediate costs on the reputations of public and private actors tends to work against the notion of due process. Criteria for weighing information are usually vague and subject to change without notice, and the scope for malicious misinformation is enormous.

These and other concerns about the proper roles and responsibilities of civil society actors have created demand for these groups to be more publicly accountable for their activities: a demand that many are working to meet. Ethiopian NGOs have adopted codes of conduct for effective self-regulation. The codes emphasize the importance of transparency and accountability and the need to ensure that the NGOs are truly representative of the people whose lives they affect.

Expanding political and civic space for popular social engagement is critical for deepening democracy and building democratic governance. Responsibilities for expanding this space lie both with the state, which must protect civil and political freedoms, and with the members of society who engage in and invigorate this exercise. Over the past decade 68 countries signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, nearly twice the number that signed in the preceding 25 years. But as of February 2002, 39 countries still had not.⁶² And while guaranteeing basic political and civil freedoms is a crucial first step, many countries restrict the activities of trade unions, professional organizations and NGOs. In some countries NGOs can be banned for having political aims. And as

noted, in many countries the media are restricted from voicing dissent or have inadequate dissemination.

Civic activism cannot be said to have failed just because some actions do not lead to change. Some initiatives are bound to fail, just as all but one candidate will necessarily lose an election. What is important in democracies is the spread of democratic practice, where people can voice their views, influence decisions and monitor performance against commitments—both national and international. Thailand's unique approach to drafting its constitution is an example of this kind of participatory democracy (box 3.14).

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Strengthening accountability is central to a larger process of embedding democratic values, practices and principles in every aspect of society—to build strong, durable and inclusive democracies more responsive and accountable to ordinary people. But the gap between democratic aspiration and practice is wide in long-standing democracies as well as new ones. The chronic underrepresentation of women, the neglect of minority interests and the unaccountable and untransparent military and civil service are common issues. Costa Rica's remarkable experiment in public consultations on the state of democracy illustrates this well (box 3.15).

Democratic deficits can mean hollow citizenship. People do not have fully equal rights and entitlements because constitutions fail to guarantee them or because administrative institutions fail to enforce them. And when there is a lag between norms and entitlements, rights are not respected—as is often the case with discrimination against women.

Democratic realists say that this is to be expected of representative democracy, which above all is a system of political competition, not one intended exclusively to empower citizens, generate high or direct participation in gov-

BOX 3.15

Costa Rica—citizens audit the quality of democracy

The Citizens Audit on the Quality of Democracy was a systematic process of public deliberation and analysis conducted in Costa Rica in 1998–2001. It mapped out how democracy works in everyday life for average citizens, identifying where life comes close to their democratic aspirations—and where there are shortfalls.

The process first defined standards for assessing the quality of democracy—a set of shared democratic aspirations. A panel of prominent Costa Ricans—politicians, academics, business leaders and others—was established for this purpose, augmented by surveys and focus group consultations. This was followed by field research involving more than 50 researchers collecting empirical evidence, which panels of citizens then assessed against the standards using an objective methodology.

The audit found that people do not evaluate the quality of democracy as a whole. Instead, using the metaphor of Costa Rica's rugged territory, they emphasized glaring contrasts between different parts of democratic life. Among the peaks are the quality of the electoral system and the constitutional review of public policies. Among the valleys are local governments. The hot spots are the lack of citizen participation in social and political organizations and in public policies, extensive clientelistic practices in social policy programmes and poor treatment of citizens by bureaucrats.

Source: Vargas Cullell 2002; O'Donnell 1999; 2001; Proyecto Estado de la Nación 2001.

By investigating democratic aspirations, the audit brought home an important insight. For Costa Ricans, democracy is more than a democratic regime. Although elections and freedom lie at the democratic core, most people also believe that democracy is a way of exercising political power in daily life. In other words, democracy is a political regime requiring a particular kind of state—one that protects human rights, ensures accountability and the rule of law and treats people with fairness and respect. Citizens view democracy as a way of organizing society so that people do not suffer extreme inequalities that impede the exercise of their citizenship.

The audit also found stark subnational differences in the quality of democratic life, underscoring the importance of going beyond conventional nation-state approaches to democracy. These insights call new attention to the importance of social and economic inequalities and political participation.

The audit has already left its mark. The government's proposal for administrative reform includes a chapter on the rights of citizens, based largely on the audit's findings on widespread poor treatment by public officials. The audit has also helped entrepreneurial chambers and trade unions launch fresh exchanges on the divisive issue of freedom of organization in private firms. Moreover, the audit is inspiring other countries to perform similar exercises.

ernment affairs or produce economic and social justice. And certainly, democratization does not guarantee social justice any more than it guarantees economic growth, social peace, administrative efficiency, political harmony, free markets or the end of ideology. But the institutions, practices and ideals of democracy have the capacity to challenge the concentration of political power and prevent the emergence of tyranny. Thus they play a crucial role in building governance that is by the people as well as for the people.