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Democracy Goes into Reverse

During April, the hottest month of the year in Thailand, all activity in Bangkok slows to a molasses pace. With temperatures rising to well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, many residents leave town, heading north or to the islands east and south of the city, and the slow-moving flow of traffic releases a cloud of smog into the steaming air. In mid-April, the entire country shuts down for a week for the Thai New Year, leaving the few people still in the capital marveling at their sudden ability to drive across the city in minutes rather than hours.

But in the spring of 2010, Bangkok was anything but quiet. Tens of thousands of red shirted protesters descended upon the city to protest against the government, which they viewed as illegitimate and unsympathetic to the working class, and to call for a new election. They mostly hailed from poorer villages in the rural northeast, or from working class suburbs of Bangkok. At first, the protests seemed like a village street party. Demonstrators snacked on sticky rice and grilled chicken, and danced in circles to bands playing mor lam, a northeastern Thai music that, with its wailing guitars and plaintive, yodeling vocals, resembles an Asian version of Hank Williams. Amid a rollicking, almost joyous atmosphere, over 100,000 red shirts soon gathered around a makeshift stage in central Bangkok to demand the resignation of the government.

Within weeks, however, the demonstrations turned violent, leading to the worst bloodshed in Bangkok in two decades. On April 10, some demonstrators fired on police and launched grenades at the security forces. The troops cracked down hard, sometimes shooting randomly into the crowds.[1] By the end of the day, twenty-four people had been killed.

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That was just a warm-up for late May. By that time, the red shirts had been camped out for weeks in the central business district, shutting down commerce and paralyzing traffic. The government and the armed forces, which had rejected the protesters' demands for an immediate election, decided to take a tougher line. Advancing into the red shirts' encampment, heavily armed soldiers created virtual free-fire zones, shooting at anyone who moved and reportedly posting snipers in buildings above the streets to take out red shirts. A prominent general who had joined the red movement was killed by a bullet to the forehead as he stood talking with a reporter from the *New York Times*.[2] The red shirts battled back, setting fire to the stock exchange, the largest mall in the city, and other symbols of elite privilege. On the evening of May 19, flames engulfed the Bangkok skyline, dwarfing the temples of the old city and the glass-and-steel high rises of the financial district.[3] By the end of May, most of the red shirts had gone home, but the battle had ended at a terrible cost. The clashes had resulted in the killing of over one hundred people, most of them civilians, and the government had declared a state of emergency in most provinces, giving it the equivalent of martial law powers to detain people without having to charge them with committing a crime.

Such violence has become increasingly common in a country that was once among the most stable in Southeast Asia and an example to other developing nations of democratic consolidation. Four years before the red shirt protests, a different group of protesters had launched Thailand into turmoil, gathering on the main green in the old city of Bangkok, near the Grand Palace, with its glittering spires inlaid with tiny gems. Then it was thousands of middle-class urbanites from Bangkok—lawyers, doctors, shopkeepers, and others—demanding the removal of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a charismatic populist, mostly backed by the rural poor, who had been elected by large majorities but was clearly disdainful of democratic institutions.

Dressed in the yellow of Thailand's revered monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the middle-class protesters were led by a group with the Orwellian name People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD). Like the Democratic

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People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) or the old German Democratic Republic, the PAD was neither democratic nor representative of many people. Its platform for change called for reducing the number of elected seats in Parliament, essentially to slash the power of the rural poor, who constitute the majority of Thais.[4] "The middle class—they disdain the rural masses and see them as willing pawns to the corrupt vote buyers," said one former U.S. ambassador to Thailand.[5]

Thaksin had used his power to eviscerate the civil service, silence the media, and allegedly disappear political opponents. He declared a "war on drugs" in which more than two thousand people were killed by the security forces, frequently with gunshots to the back of the head, and often despite the fact that they had no links to narcotics.[6] He also cracked down on dissent. In one horrific incident in October 2004, Thai security forces rounded up hundreds of young men in southern Thailand after demonstrations against the government at a local mosque. The security forces stacked them inside stifling, insufficiently ventilated trucks; eighty-five people died of suffocation.[7] On a daily basis Thaksin spread fear among potential critics. At the offices of the *Bangkok Post* its tough investigative reporters, who had survived on cheap whiskey and cigarettes through coups, street protests, and wars, were completely dispirited. One editor said they were scared even to touch stories related to Thaksin, for fear the prime minister's cronies would buy the paper and fire them.[8]

Still, Thaksin had been elected twice, and he dominated Thai politics largely because he was the most compelling, organized, and dynamic politician in the country. In a lengthy cable analyzing Thaksin's appeal—and released to the public by Wikileaks—Ralph Boyce, a former U.S. ambassador to Thailand who was no fan of Thaksin's repressive policies, admitted: "Thaksin's personality, sophisticated media presentation, focused populist message, and traditional get-out-the-vote organizing, combined to allow [Thaksin's party] to leave . . . its closest rival in the political dust . . . Thaksin . . . has no equal in Thailand on how to attract political attention."

In 2005 Thaksin trounced the Democrat Party, which was favored by most yellow shirts, and in 2006, when he called a new election, the Democrats

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simply refused to participate. By that time the Democrats, once the most powerful party in Thailand, had been reduced to a small rump in Parliament, holding less than one hundred out of the five hundred seats in total. Instead of contesting the 2006 election, then, the yellow shirts, who shared political leanings with the Democrat Party, tried to paralyze the country. They stormed Parliament and shut it down, trapping lawmakers and forcing some senior ministers to flee, James Bond–style, over a fence and into a nearby building. Later, they laid siege to the main international airport, throwing commerce into turmoil and severely damaging tourism, one of the country's main sources of foreign exchange.

After months of rallies, Thaksin's government was finally ousted in a coup in 2006, but this only led to more chaos. For nearly a decade now, Thailand has weathered one street protest after another, with both sides disdaining democratic institutions and refusing to resolve their differences at the ballot box instead of in the streets, often with bloody results. After Thaksin and, later, other pro-Thaksin parties were prevented from assuming power despite their electoral mandates, Thailand's working classes formed their own movement. They donned red clothing—Thaksin's color—in response to the yellow shirts. (The red shirts' official name was the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship.) Just as the yellow shirts had tried to create havoc and paralyze the economy, so too the red shirts attempted to destroy what was left of democratic culture and order. They laid siege to Parliament, forcing lawmakers loyal to the yellow shirts to flee. In April 2009, they stormed a meeting of Southeast Asian nations in the resort town of Pattaya, forcing many visiting Asian leaders to hide inside their hotel, and ultimately causing the meeting to be canceled, to the great embarrassment of the Thai government.[9] Finally, in the spring of 2010, the red shirts converged on Bangkok.

In July 2011, despite efforts by Thailand's middle classes and its military to prevent the red shirts from taking power, the red shirts' favored party, called Puea Thai, won national elections again, forming a majority in parliament. The electoral victory handed the prime ministership to Yingluck Shinawatra, the party's leader—and the youngest sister of former prime

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minister Thaksin. Soon, Thailand was boiling again, as Thaksin's opponents revolted against his sister's government, warning that if Thaksin returned to Bangkok—and to power—they might well riot in the streets again, shutting down the city once more.

In the late 1990s, the possibility of such a breakdown of democracy in Thailand seemed remote. After a massive popular demonstration of hundreds of thousands in Bangkok ousted a military regime in 1992, Thais believed they had finally created a stable democracy. At the *Bangkok Post,* young reporters often seemed downright jubilant. During the day, they crawled through traffic in their cars to research investigative pieces unthinkable under past dictatorships; at night, they often attended informal strategy sessions about how to make good on the promises written into the new, progressive constitution passed in 1997. That groundbreaking constitution guaranteed many new rights and freedoms, created new national institutions to monitor graft, and strengthened political parties at the expense of unelected centers of power—the palace, the military, big business, and the elite civil service—that together had run Thailand since the end of the absolute monarchy in the 1930s. It also set the stage for elections in 2001 that were probably the freest in Thailand's history. Meanwhile, the media utilized its new freedoms, along with new technologies like the Internet and satellite television, to explore formerly taboo topics like political corruption and labor rights.

By the early 2000s, many Thais felt great pride in their nation's democratic development. Outsiders noticed, too. "Thailand's freedom, openness, strength, and relative prosperity make it a role model in the region for what people can achieve when they are allowed to," U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly declared in 2002.[10] Besides Kelly, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and then Secretary of State Colin Powell, among others, heaped praise on Bangkok. Powell declared in 2002, "Thailand has lived up to our expectations in so many ways."[11] In its 1999 report, the international monitoring organization Freedom House ranked Thailand a "free" nation.[12]

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Today, Thailand looks almost nothing like a model emerging democracy. The never-ending cycle of street protest, by both the middle class and the poor, paralyzes policy making, hinders economic growth, and deters investment at a time when authoritarian competitors like China and Vietnam are vacuuming up foreign capital. Few Thais now trust the integrity of the judiciary, the civil service, or other national institutions. Even the king, once so revered that Thais worshipped him like a god, has seen his impartiality questioned.[13] The Thai military now wields enormous influence behind the scenes, a dramatic reversal from the 1990s, when most Thais believed the military had returned to the barracks for good.[14] A once freewheeling media has become increasingly shuttered and servile. The government now blocks over one hundred thousand websites, more than in neighboring Vietnam.[15] Once-groundbreaking Bangkok newspapers now read like Asian versions of the old Pravda, lavishing praise on the red shirts or the yellow shirts depending on the paper's point of view.[16] The Thai government even began locking up Americans visiting the country who'd written blog posts about the Thai monarchy years earlier. Even after Thaksin's sister took the reins of power, little changed, with arrests and Web blocking continuing as before.

Many middle-class Thais, faced with the breakdown of their once-vibrant democracy, seem to believe their country is somehow singular—that its collapse is due to a coincidence of factors that are unique to the country and hard for a foreigner to understand: the end of the reign of Bhumibol, who'd long played a stabilizing role; the Asian financial crisis, which pushed the country toward populism; and the unfortunate rise of Thaksin, a man with little commitment to the rule of law. "We were just unlucky," a senior Thai government official said. "If we'd not had Thaksin, if His Majesty could have been more involved, like in 1992, things would have been much different. . . . It's a Thai situation." [17]

But democratic meltdowns like Thailand's have become depressingly common. In its annual international survey, the most comprehensive analysis of freedom around the globe, Freedom House, which uses a range of data to assess social, political, and economic freedoms in each nation, found that

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global freedom plummeted in 2010 for the fifth year in a row, the longest continuous decline in nearly forty years. At the same time, most authoritarian nations had become more repressive, stepping up their oppressive measures with little resistance from the democratic world. Overall, Freedom House reported, twenty-five nations went backward, in terms of freedom, in 2010 alone, while only eleven made any gains; among the decliners were critical regional powers like Mexico and Ukraine. This despite the fact that in 2011 one of the most historically authoritarian parts of the world, the Middle East, seemed to begin to change. The decline, Freedom House noted, was most pronounced among what it called the "middle ground" of nations, primarily in the developing world—nations that have begun democratizing but are not solid and stable democracies.[18] Indeed, the number of electoral democracies fell in 2010 to its lowest number since 1995.[19] "A 'freedom recession' and an authoritarian resurgence have clearly emerged as global trends," writes Freedom House's director of research, Arch Puddington. "Over the last four years, the dominant pattern has been one of growing restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of expression and association in authoritarian settings, and a failure to continue democratic progress in previously improving countries."[20] Freedom House also found an increasing "truculence" among authoritarian regimes. This truculence actually was only made stronger by the Arab Spring, which led autocratic regimes like China and Uzbekistan to crack down harder on their own populations. The International Federation for Human Rights, an organization that monitors abuses around the world, found in its late-2011 annual report that the Arab uprisings had little impact on a dire, deteriorating climate for human rights defenders worldwide.[21]

Indeed, in the fall of 2011 Russia, which along with China is one of the most powerful authoritarian nations, made clear that any hopes of change were just a mirage, as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has dominated Russia for more than a decade, announced that, in a secret deal with President Dmitry Medvedev, Putin would once again assume the presidency in 2012 and potentially serve two more terms, which would keep him in control of the Kremlin until 2024, longer than some Soviet leaders had lasted. Putin had been constitutionally barred from serving another presidential

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term after his first two terms ended in 2008, and once Medvedev assumed the presidency some Russian liberals had hoped that he would introduce reforms, despite his history as a close confidante of Putin's. Indeed, in office Medvedev declared that Russia's criminal justice system needed to be overhauled, and that the country should open up its political system, but his announcement that he had secretly agreed with Putin to manipulate the presidency and prime ministership to put Putin back in power showed that he, too, was at heart hardly a democrat. When Russia's finance minister questioned the handoff of power from Medvedev back to Putin, he was summarily fired, in a clear message.

The stagnation of democracy predates this five-year period, Freedom House noted; since 2000 democracy gained little ground around the world, before sliding backward beginning in the mid-2000s. "Since they were first issued in 1972, the findings in *Freedom in the World* have conveyed a story of broad advances," Freedom House reported. "But freedom's forward march peaked around the beginning of the [2000s]."

Even as some democrats were celebrating the Arab Spring and hoping that, as in 1989, its revolutions might spread to other parts of the world, a mountain of other evidence supported Freedom House's gloomy conclusions. Another of the most comprehensive studies of global democracy, compiled by Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation, uses data examining democracies' ability to function, manage government, and uphold freedoms to produce what it calls the "transformation index." The overall goal of the index is to analyze the state and quality of democracy in every developing nation that has achieved some degree of freedom. To do so, Bertelsmann looks at a range of characteristics including the stability of democratic institutions, political participation, the rule of law, and the strength of the state, among other areas. And the most recent index found "the overall quality of democracy has eroded [throughout the developing world]. . . . The key components of a functioning democracy, such as political participation and civil liberties, have suffered qualitative erosion. . . . These developments threaten to hollow out the quality and substance of governance." The index concluded that the number of "highly defective democracies"—democracies

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with institutions, elections, and political culture so flawed that they no longer qualified as real democracies—had roughly doubled between 2006 and 2010. By 2010, in fact, nearly 53 of the 128 countries assessed by the index were categorized as "defective democracies."

Sixteen of these fifty-three, including regionally and globally powerful states like Russia and Kenya, qualified as "highly deficient democracies," countries that had such a lack of opportunity for opposition voices, problems with the rule of law, and unrepresentative political structures that they were now little better than autocracies. The percentage of "highly deficient democracies" in the index has roughly doubled in just four years. And in Africa, which had been at the center of the global wave of democratization in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the deterioration was most pronounced. Between 2008 and 2010, Bertelsmann found, sub-Saharan Africa was home to nine of the thirteen nations in the developing world that suffered the greatest deterioration in the quality of their political systems. Among these backsliders were Senegal, Tanzania, and Madagascar, which once were among the greatest hopes for democracy on the continent.

Even nations that have been held up as democratic models have regressed over the past five to ten years, according to both the Freedom House and the Bertelsmann studies. When they entered the European Union in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia were considered success stories and would join the older democracies of Western Europe as solid, consolidated democratic systems. But in their decade inside the EU, all of these new entrants actually have been downgraded repeatedly by Freedom House, showing that their democratic systems, election processes, and commitments to civil liberties have deteriorated.[22] Populist and far-right parties with little commitment to democratic norms gained steadily in popularity; public distaste for democracy in these supposed success stories skyrocketed, so much so that in one 2006 survey publics in Central Europe showed the most skepticism about the merits of democracy of any region of the world.[23] Hungary deteriorated so badly that its press freedoms reverted to almost Soviet-type suppression, with its government using harsh new laws and other attacks to silence the media.[24]

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The third major international study of democracy, the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) "index of democracy," only further confirmed the decline. The EIU's annual survey of the entire world analyzes democracy using categories for electoral process, pluralism, political participation, political culture, functioning of government, and civil liberties including press freedom and freedom of association. In its most recent study, it found that democracy was in retreat across nearly the entire globe. "In all regions, the average democracy score for 2010 is lower than in 2008," noted the report. In ninety-one of one hundred sixty-seven countries it studied, the democracy score had deteriorated in that time period, and in many others it had only remained stagnant. Of the seventy-nine nations that it assessed as having some significant democratic qualities, only twenty-six made the grade as "full democracies," while the other fifty-three were ranked only as "flawed democracies" because of serious deficiencies in many of the areas it assessed. "Democracy is in retreat. The dominant pattern in all regions . . . has been backsliding on previously attained progress," the survey concluded.

In some of the specific categories that it examined to assess democracy, such as media freedom, the EIU found that backsliding was even more severe than the broader decline in the democracy index. More than thirty nations, including regional powers—and onetime examples of democratization—like Russia, Hungary, Mexico, and Turkey, witnessed sharp increases in media and online repression between 2008 and 2010. The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2011 Democracy Survey, released roughly a year after the Arab uprisings began, had just as much gloom. As in 2010, it similarly found that "democracy has been under intense pressure in many parts of the world," and that the quality of democracy had regressed on nearly every continent in 2011.

Like Freedom House and the Bertelsmann Foundation, the EIU found that, with only a few exceptions, backsliding was occurring in nearly every developing region of the world. It found that authoritarianism was becoming more entrenched in Central Asia, democratization was being reversed in Africa, authoritarian populists were emerging in Latin America, and political participation was plummeting in the former Soviet states of Eastern and Central Europe, undermining the region's democratic transitions.

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Assessing the data, and the severe reversals, the EIU was glum about the future, though it recognized that the Middle East had nowhere to go but up, given its long-entrenched authoritarianism. "The threat of backsliding now greatly outweighs the possibility of future gains [in democratization worldwide]," the survey concluded.

Old-fashioned coups also have returned. In Latin America, Asia, and even most of Africa, coups, which had been a frequent means of changing governments during the Cold War, had become nearly extinct by the early 2000s. But between 2006 and 2010 the military grabbed power in Guinea, Honduras, Mauritania, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Bangladesh, Thailand, Fiji, and Madagascar, among other states.

In many other developing nations, such as Mexico, Pakistan, and the Philippines, the military did not launch an outright coup but managed to restore its power as the central actor in political life, dominating the civilian governments that clung to power only through the support of the armed forces. Freedom House, in fact, notes that the global decline in democracy in the past five years has been the result, in part, of weakening civilian control of militaries across the developing world. The civilian Thai prime minister in the late 2000s, Abhisit Vejjajiva, who took power in 2008, owed his survival in office to the military's backing, and senior army officers made clear to him, in private, that if they withdrew their support, his government could easily collapse. Unsurprisingly, the Thai military's budget more than doubled between 2006 and 2011, with much of the expenditures going toward tools to control Thailand's own population, rather than toward fighting potential foreign enemies. After Thaksin's sister became prime minister, the armed forces negotiated a deal with her that gave the military total control over its own budget, with little civilian authority—and which essentially preserved its ability to interfere in politics indefinitely. Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo relied upon the armed forces to enforce a crackdown against opponents. According to several local human rights groups, more than a thousand left-leaning activists, opposition politicians, and other government opponents were killed between 2001 and 2010, and one comprehensive study found that "the [Philippine] military [is] an important veto actor in the competition among the country's political elites."[25]

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"It's almost like we've gone back to the [Ferdinand] Marcos era," prominent rights activist and lawyer Harry Roque Jr. said as he waited in his office for the security forces to come and interrogate him.[26] "There's the same type of fear, the same abuses, the same attitude by the military that their actions will never face consequences." Within months of the election of Arroyo's successor, Benigno Aquino, in 2010, the Philippine military seemed ready to bolster its power even more. Several prominent former military officers reportedly launched a new movement called "Solidarity for Sovereignty," designed to step in if the president's government, as one of them put it, "self-destructed."[27]

Similarly, in Pakistan, though General Pervez Musharraf, who took power in a coup in 1999, eventually returned leadership to a civilian government nearly a decade later, Pakistan's army clearly had reestablished itself as the central power in policy making. After interludes of civilian control in the 1990s, the army has again "assumed control as well as oversight of public policy. . . . The military has carved out a role and position in the public and private sectors, including industry, business, agriculture, education and scientific development, health care, communications, and transportation," reported military analysts Siegfried Wolf and Seth Kane. In early 2010, when the Pakistani leadership held talks in Washington on the future of the bilateral relationship with the United States, there was no doubt about who was the key player on the Pakistani side: not civilian president Asif Ali Zardari but army chief of staff Ashfaq Kayani.[28] Similarly, after American Special Forces swooped into Pakistan in the spring of 2011 to kill Osama bin Laden, it was Kayani who essentially enunciated the Pakistani government's response to America.

Indeed, in another recent comprehensive study, this time of Asia, researchers from the Institute for Security and International Studies in Thailand concluded, "Any short-term prospects for civilian control in the young democracies of South and Southeast Asia are gloomy indeed." Yet support for democracy has become so tepid in many parts of the developing world that many of these coups or military interventions were cheered. After the coup against Thaksin in Thailand in 2006, many urban Thais openly celebrated.

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"Academic contacts [of U.S. diplomats] could only be described as ebullient [about the coup,]" reported the American embassy in Bangkok in one cable written after the coup.

Across the Middle East, armed forces also have dominated the Arab Spring and Summer, putting the lie to the idea that the Arab uprising is going to bring democracy to the region. Instead, in the near term the Arab uprisings appear to be entrenching the power of militaries in the region, sparking massive unrest, scaring middle-class liberals into exodus, and potentially empowering Islamists. Protesters may have challenged leaders from Yemen to Egypt, but the loyalty of the military has determined whether these rulers stay in power, and during any transition the militaries have, by default, become the dominant—and sometimes only—national institutions. In Bahrain, the military's willingness to continue to support the regime of Sheikh Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa allowed the royal family to crush protests, to enlist the support of armies from other Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, and to maintain a tight grip on power after antigovernment protests flared in early 2011.

As in Bahrain, armies have used this power to ensure that they will remain at the center of politics for years to come, in part because middle classes in the region fear that the end of dictatorships like Hosni Mubarak's could usher in chaos, insecurity, and bloodshed if the military does not step in. Egypt's generals, write political analysts Jeff Martini and Julie Taylor, "are determined to . . . protect their privileged position. . . . The generals now hope to create a system of carefully shaped [institutions] that will preserve their power and reduce the chances that any single political group can challenge them." Indeed, they note, during Egypt's transition the generals have insisted the military be exempted from parliamentary scrutiny, enjoy power over an elected president, and maintain the legal right to intervene in politics under a broad array of circumstances.

By the summer and fall of 2011, as this book was being written, the Egyptian military increasingly demonstrated that it had no interest in giving up the power it had amassed over decades, and that it had learned how to use a political vacuum to bolster its own power, as it had many times in the

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country's past. In 2011, the Egyptian military controlled nearly every aspect of the country's supposed transition. It passed legislation outlining the terms of potential new elections without consulting with the public, a move that led some protesters to rally again, in central Cairo, to demand that the military remove itself from politics. The army also has expanded laws used to jail dissidents, imprisoning many who have criticized the military since the fall of the Mubarak regime, and has helped ensure that the armed forces' business interests, which are vast, will remain protected under any future Egyptian government. When liberal Egyptians, including some Christians, protested against the military's power in post-Mubarak Egypt in early October 2011, chanting, "The people want to bring down the field marshal," riot police and other armed security forces beat protesters mercilessly and ultimately opened fire, killing at least twenty-four people and wounding some two hundred.[29] Ultimately, the antiarmy sentiment grew so fierce that, in November, crowds gathering once again in Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo battled with riot police and other security forces, as they demanded that the military release its hold on power and ensure that, in the future, it could not dominate an elected government. Thousands, possibly even tens of thousands of demonstrators, packed into the square, which had been the site of the initial protests that toppled Mubarak nearly a year earlier. The security forces attacked the crowds with rubber bullets, tear gas, and batons, killing at least one person and injuring more than a thousand, according to press reports.[30] Though the military appeared to cede some ground after these protests, allowing the constitution to be altered to place the military formally under civilian control, it retained broad powers that seemed inimical to democracy, including, essentially, the right to overturn civilian governments if it desired.

Meanwhile, in the autumn of 2011 Islamists made significant gains nearly everywhere in the region. The first elections held, post-Arab Spring, in Tunisia, were a triumph for democracy in the Arab world. People across Tunisia waited patiently in long lines to vote, and monitors reported that polling was free, fair, and peaceful, which was hardly expected—anticipating chaos, Tunisia had deployed some forty thousand policemen at polling sites.[31]

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Following the voting, many Tunisians took to public spaces to celebrate the fact they voted, despite difficulties in the year since they had toppled their autocrat: Tunisia's economy had weakened, partly because of the war next door in Libya, and in a freer political climate grievances about economic inequality increasingly bubbled to the surface in poorer parts of Tunisia. But in October 2011, Tunisians defied many predictions of a disastrous election. Overall, nearly 90 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot, a huge turnout. Because of quotas imposed in the electoral laws, some 30 percent of seats in the new parliament would go to women. Still, when the results came in, it was clear that Al Nahda, the main Islamist party, had won a sizable victory, mostly at the expense of the secular, liberal Progressive Democratic Party. Al Nahda's leadership, which openly styled themselves after Turkey's progressive Islamists, said all the right things about their commitment to building Tunisian democratic institutions, upholding individual freedoms, and separating mosque and state.[32] (Before the election, the transitional government had banned parties that theoretically did not demonstrate a commitment to democracy, and so prevented a more avowedly Islamist and Salafist party from even contesting the poll.)[33]

But unlike Turkey, where Islamists took decades to demonstrate their allegiance to the secular state, and today have been governing for more than ten years, in Tunisia, which was less than a year from autocratic rule, many middle- and upper-class Tunisians had doubts about Al Nahda's real long-term commitment to the secular state. (Al Nahda had been banned under Tunisia's dictatorship.) Before the election, groups of activists allied with Al Nahda had stormed a private Tunisian television station, trying to close it down for showing what they deemed sacrilegious content; in the past, Al Nahda activists had attacked rivals by throwing acid in their faces, among other tactics.[34] And in the run-up to the election, hard-line Salafists clearly enjoyed something of a renaissance in Tunisia, making their presence felt throughout society. In June radicals attacked people attending a film in Tunis, and they also have attacked some artists whom they have deemed "un-Islamic."[35] Many liberal, middle-class Tunisians continued to express doubt about Al Nahda despite its leadership's vows to uphold democracy;

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applications to leave Tunisia and gain passports more than doubled in 2011. These doubts boded poorly for the country's future, since these middle classes and elites would be critical for growth, development, and democratic consolidation.

Perhaps Al Nahda's success would be fleeting. A study released in early 2011 in the *Journal of Democracy* found that, by surveying parliamentary elections in twenty-one countries, Islamic parties tended to do best in the initial elections after the end of authoritarian rule, a period when they tended to be the most organized group in the country. Over time, as elections became more regular, their support tended to wane, and wound up averaging about 15 percent of the vote.[36] Islamist parties also tended to become more moderate over time, as they tried to appeal to less religious swing voters, in order to possibly gain enough votes to govern. Still, this study does not necessarily predict the future: Islamist parties in the post—Arab Spring countries tend to be better entrenched, better organized, and even more dominant than in places where they have competed in the past, such as Indonesia, where religious-oriented parties were hardly as powerful as a group like Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood or Salafists, who adopted a harder-line position than the Brotherhood. In the initial rounds of Egypt's parliamentary elections, held in December, the Brotherhood and the more extreme Salafists gained overwhelming victories, even in areas long considered some of the most liberal parts of Egypt, such as Cairo; liberal and secular parties generally placed very poorly, split among themselves and unable to sometimes garner even enough votes to make it into Parliament. The Islamists' dominance of the voting set them up in prime position to write Egypt's new constitution.

In Libya the death of Muammar Qadaffi led, in the short run, to chaos in Tripoli and other towns, and a clear rise in the power of Islamists in what was already the most religiously conservative country in north Africa. The post-Qadaffi interim leadership quickly brought up the possibility of legalizing polygamy in order to create a more pious nation, infuriating some Libyan women's groups.[37] They further suggested that sharia should be the basis of law in the new Libya, and many Libyans agreed that, in post-Qadaffi elections, Islamists would dominate, since as in Egypt they had built

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a strong underground organization in Libya during the authoritarian period. Youssef Sherif, a leading Libyan intellectual, told reporters, "Every day the Islamists grow stronger. When there is a parliament, the Islamists will get the majority."[38] Indeed, despite having worked through NATO to end Qadaffi's regime, many senior American officials essentially accepted that by ousting the Libyan dictator they were likely to empower an Islamist government, given Libya's religious conservatism—and they had little trust that Islamists in Libya would uphold a semblance of a secular state. Militias wielding Soviet-designed Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket launchers roamed the country, often engaging in banditry to support themselves, and the weak transitional government had trouble disarming anyone.[39] One of the most powerful post-Qadaffi leaders to emerge, with his own group of armed backers, was a man who previously had led a hard-line organization linked to Al Qaeda.[40] As in Egypt, some Libyan liberals now are wondering whether the Libyan transitional government will turn into an autocracy of its own—or whether perhaps it actually should, since holding elections anytime soon could lead to more chaos or to an Islamist takeover.[41]

The strengthening of military rule in many developing nations has been disastrous for reform, despite the militaries' contention that they are the only institutions standing in the way of civil strife or Islamist rule. Indeed, human rights groups such as Amnesty International found that, since the winter of 2010–11, human rights abuses actually have increased in nearly every Middle Eastern nation, including Syria, Egypt, and Bahrain, where at least five hundred people were detained for protesting between February and September 2011.[42]

Despite the fact that militaries could hardly be called agents of reform, middle classes in many developing nations, both in the Middle East and in other parts of the world, often continued to support the armed forces as potential antidotes to popular democracy—democracy that might empower the poor, the religious, and the less educated. In this way, Egyptian liberals' concerns about the fruits of democracy were not unique. Overall, in fact, an analysis of military coups in developing nations over the past twenty years, conducted by my research associate Daniel Silverman and myself, found that in nearly 50 percent of the cases, drawn from Africa,

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Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, middle-class men and women either agitated in advance for the coup or, in polls or prominent media coverage after the coup, expressed their support for the army takeover.

Although the uprisings in the Middle East have led to unrest, civil strife, and renewed military rule, they have had little impact on other parts of the world—a sharp contrast to 1989, when the revolts in Eastern Europe helped catalyze change in other parts of the Soviet Union, as well as in China. Picking up from the Tunisian uprising, a small group of Chinese liberals in early 2011 attempted to launch their own "jasmine revolution," beginning with an online manifesto calling for protests. But their numbers likely never exceeded a few hundred people, and the Chinese government quickly quashed their movement, closing down websites and arresting organizers. More important, these protests gained little traction with the Chinese public, which knew relatively little about the demonstrations in the Middle East and, as we will see later, is far more satisfied with their country's leadership than Egyptians or Tunisians were with theirs. In sub-Saharan Africa, too, the Arab uprisings ultimately had minimal impact; protests broke out in places from Malawi to Burkina Faso to Uganda, but none succeeded in toppling rulers; in response to the uprisings, the militaries in many of these African countries were able to further entrench their power. In Zimbabwe, the military has come to dominate the power structure of Robert Mugabe's regime, making him and his allies even more indebted to the armed forces. Overall, concluded Northwestern University's Richard Joseph in a survey of the current state of politics in sub-Saharan Africa, "the electoral authoritarian regime," not democracy, has become the most prevalent political system in Africa—a system that includes not only Mugabe but some of the other most entrenched autocrats, such as Angola's Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who has ruled his country since 1979.[43]

In addition to these studies showing the return of coups, opinion polling from many developing nations shows not only that the quality of democracy is declining but also that public views of democracy are deteriorating as well. The international public opinion group Program on International

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Policy Attitudes uses extensive questionnaires to ask people in a range of Latin American, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern nations about their views on democracy, as compared with other potential political systems. The regular "Afrobarometer" survey of the African continent has found declining levels of support for democracy throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa; in Nigeria, the largest nation on the continent, support for democracy has plummeted over the past decade. In several polls only 16 percent of Russians said that it was "very important" that their nation be governed democratically. Even in Kyrgyzstan, which despite its flaws remains the most democratic state in Central Asia, one comprehensive Gallup poll found that a majority of the population did not believe that a political opposition is very or somewhat important, and a sizable plurality said democracy was not important to their country. Shortly after Kyrgyzstan's presidential elections in the fall of 2011, this disinterest in democratic politics became clear: losing candidates and their supporters massed in public areas around the country, trying to use protests to bring down the supposed victor.[44]

"Latinobarómetro" polls and studies of South America showed similar dissatisfaction with democracy. In Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Colombia, Peru, Honduras, and Nicaragua, either a minority or only a tiny majority of people think democracy is preferable to any other type of government. Overall, in the most recent Latinobarómetro survey, only a small majority of people across Latin America supported democracy as a political system, and less than 40 percent said they were satisfied with the way that democracy works in practice in their country.[45] In most countries in Latin America, these figures have either remained stagnant or slumped from where they were a decade ago. Many Latin Americans now say they do not even have a functioning democracy at all.[46] Meanwhile, in Pakistan, roughly 60 percent of respondents in a comprehensive regional survey said that the country should be ruled by the army, one of the highest votes of support for military rule in the world.

The global economic crisis, which continued to hit Europe hard in 2010 and 2011, only weakened public support for democracy in new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. A comprehensive study of Central and Eastern Europe by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

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(EBRD), released in 2011, found that the crisis had severely lowered people's support for democracy.[47] "The more people were personally hit by the crisis, the more they turned away from democracy," it found.[48] Support for democracy had declined, since 2006, in all of the new European Union nations except Bulgaria. In some of these countries, such as the Slovak Republic and Hungary, support for democracy fell, in the EBRD's surveys, by as much as twenty percentage points compared to 2006. This decline provided an opportunity for stronger, even authoritarian, leaders. "Those who enjoyed more freedoms wanted less democracy and markets when they were hurt by the crisis," the EBRD report noted.[49]

Even in East Asia, one of the most economically vibrant and globalized regions of the world, polls show rising dissatisfaction with democracy. In fact, several countries in the region have developed what Asian democratization specialists Yu-tzung Chang, Yunhan Zhu, and Chong-min Park, who studied data from the regular "Asian Barometer" surveys, have termed "authoritarian nostalgia." "Few of the region's former authoritarian regimes have been thoroughly discredited," they write, noting that the region's average score for commitment to democracy, judged by a range of prodemocratic responses to surveys, has fallen in the most recent studies. An analysis of the Asian Barometer data by Park found that, even in South Korea, one of the supposed success stories of democracy in the developing world, the percentage of South Koreans saying that under certain circumstances an authoritarian government was preferable doubled between 1996 and 2006. "An upward trend is unequivocal," Park writes. "In times of crisis these halfhearted citizens may not be mobilized to defend democratic institutions and processes." Similarly, in Taiwan, another supposedly stable democracy, the Asian Barometer survey found that only 40 percent of respondents agreed that democracy was "preferable to all other kinds of government," a low figure. Only slightly more than 50 percent of Mongolians and Filipinos, two other supposedly vibrant democracies, thought democracy was preferable to all other kinds of government.

Even in developing nations where democracy has deeper roots, and seems to be stronger, disillusionment with its political processes, and with democratically elected leaders, has exploded in recent years, as these leaders

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have seemed unable to develop effective solutions for global and local economic crises, other than biting austerity measures. From Indians demonstrating in Delhi in support of hunger strikers attacking corruption in Indian politics, to Israelis camping in the streets of Tel Aviv in the biggest demonstrations in the country's history to protest their leaders' lack of interest in basic economic issues, to the Occupy movement across the United States and countries of Western Europe, people in even more established democracies are increasingly turning to street protests to make their points, since they believe they cannot be heard at the ballot box. They have become convinced, they say, that the democratic process has become so corrupted, so dominated by entrenched interests, and so disassociated from popular issues, that they can change their countries only through massive rallies, even if those protests use the street to bring down leaders fairly elected. "Our parents are grateful because they're voting," one young woman told reporters in Spain, where tens of thousands of young people also have launched full-time street protests against politicians' lack of interest in the country's long-term unemployment crisis, which has led to unemployment of nearly 40 percent for recent university graduates of both sexes. "We're the first generation to say that voting is worthless."

This democratic decline is not concentrated in one region or one continent, and, unlike previous waves of democracy regression such as those occurring in the 1920s and 1930s, today's decline includes a far wider array of nations, from more regions of the globe, and is much less likely to be stopped. More important, many of the countries that are regressing from democracy are regional powers, including Russia, Kenya, Thailand, Argentina, Senegal, the Philippines, Hungary, Venezuela, Mexico, Nigeria, and many others. Their examples matter more to their regions than those of smaller, less influential states. One of the key factors in determining whether a country will democratize is the international and regional climate, according to a study of democracies' endurance by political scientists Adam Przeworksi, Michael Alvarez, Jose Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi. So, when powerful countries fail to democratize, this diffusion effect works in reverse, hindering the cause of democratic change in their entire regions.

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In many of these regionally important countries, the decline of democracy has been so sharp that it has shocked people who lived through the initial period of democratization. In the Philippines in the 1980s, crowds of nonviolent Filipinos thronging Manila's Edsa Avenue invented the "people power" movement that inspired uprisings from the "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to the Iranian Green Movement of 2009, to the Arab Spring of 2011, which swept through Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and other nations. Now, as one democratically elected Philippine government after the next becomes mired in corruption and self-dealing, Filipinos are increasingly disenchanted with democratic rule.[50]

African nations that had made major progress in the previous decade also have regressed badly. Kenya, where, after the rule of longtime dictator Daniel arap Moi, many people believed that the country—the wealthiest and most globalized in east Africa—would become a vibrant democracy, has collapsed into interethnic battles and newly repressive governments. This decline is being repeated in Nigeria, the most vital nation in west Africa. In Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, who had amassed enormous popular goodwill for ending conflicts and rebuilding the economy after the disastrous regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin, had promised to only serve only four years when he became president in 1986. Yet he kept finding reasons to stick around, until he finally forced through a constitutional rewrite in 2005 that removed presidential term limits altogether.[51] By 2011, after he won another presidential term in a fraudulent election, his security forces had to repeatedly clear the streets of Kampala with massive shows of force.

Under Vladimir Putin and his protégé Dmitri Medvedev, Russia, which in the 1990s had developed a vibrant media and a robust if chaotic democracy that provided an example to many other former Soviet states, has discovered a nostalgia for Soviet repression. The last truly independent Russian political party, the Union, or Right Forces, merged with pro-Kremlin parties several years ago, leaving virtually no opposition in the Duma.[52] "Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the basic idea that political opposition is a useful, legitimate political phenomenon remains remarkably weak in much of the [post-Soviet] region," noted Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in a study of democracy's

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global challenges. "Dominant political elites treat political opposition as inherently disloyal."[53]

By 2009, according to an analysis by Freedom House, the former Soviet Union was one of the least free regions of the world—-even before Putin announced that he would again be taking total control of Russia, the most important post-Soviet state.[54] Belarus, the country closest to Russia politically and culturally, flirted with reform but, by the end of the 2000s, had retreated into an authoritarian, statist regime little different from the Belarus of the early 1990s. Its long-serving leader, Alexander Lukashenko, won reelection in 2010 with a farcical 80 percent of the vote; protesters who gathered to demonstrate, sometimes simply by standing in public places and sarcastically clapping their hands, were beaten and jailed.[55] Two of the greatest hopes for the former Soviet states, Georgia and Ukraine, also are going backward, with Ukraine's president, Viktor Yanukovych, installing Putinesque policies that crushed any opposition and resulted in the arrests and jailing of many politicians, including, in the summer of 2011, the opposition leader and former presidential candidate Yulia Tymoshenko, who was given seven years in prison in a trial that was clearly predetermined. Along with Tymoshenko's trial, the Ukrainian government passed new measures giving the president nearly unlimited powers and curtailing the country's vibrant civil society, and launched investigations of eleven other opposition figures. Yanukovych simultaneously emasculated the Ukrainian parliament, made much of the country's court system subordinate to his decrees, and had the country's constitution altered to give the president domineering power.[56]

In Asia, other supposed success stories have regressed as well. The Malaysian government, which once had vowed to uphold total freedom for online media in order to promote the country as a high-tech hub, began developing new ways to censor both the print and the online media. The regime started arresting political opponents, whistleblowers, and civil society leaders, including opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim, who himself faced jail on dubious charges of sodomizing an aide.[57] (Anwar ultimately was acquitted and then hit with new charges related to organizing a political protest.) Once such people are in custody, strange things can happen. In July 2009, a man named Teoh Beng Hock visited the offices of the country's anticorruption commission in order to testify about witnessing the misuse of

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public funds. The next day, he was found dead on the roof of the adjacent building. Officials said he'd jumped from the anticorruption headquarters to his death. Independent forensic scientists later found evidence that Teoh had been beaten and sodomized with an object before he "leaped" to his death.[58] In Cambodia, after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge and the end of years of civil war, some 93 percent of eligible voters came to the polls in a landmark first free election in 1993, and the international community, which oversaw—and paid for—the largest reconstruction effort to that time in Cambodia, exulted in the turnout. But since then the country's political system has gone steadily downhill. Prime Minister Hun Sen, a rugged survivor of the Khmer Rouge years, has silenced nearly every opposition group, intimidated the media, and overseen beatings and outright killings of many political rivals.[59]

Meanwhile, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, like Thaksin an elected leader with little dedication to constitutionalism or the rule of law, has pushed his "Bolivarian revolution" closer to outright authoritarianism, as has Evo Morales in Bolivia and Peruvian president Ollanta Humara.[60] And in Mexico, the security forces, working in collaboration with the president, have taken advantage of the war on drugs to basically take over many Mexican states, turning them into essentially army-run fiefdoms. Military personnel now occupy hundreds of positions traditionally held by civilian personnel, especially those in law enforcement. "The military is becoming the supreme authority—in some cases the only authority—in parts of some states," said Mexican political analyst Denise Dresser.

So many countries now remain stuck between authoritarianism and democracy, reported Marc Plattner and Larry Diamond, co-editors of the *Journal of Democracy,* that "it no longer seems plausible to regard [this condition] simply as a temporary stage in the process of democratic transition."[61]

Despite the democratic recession of recent years, and the destructive impact of the global economic crisis on democracy, even today most Western leaders more or less unthinkingly assume that democracy will eventually triumph worldwide. At the end of the Cold War, nearly all Western leaders

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and political scientists believed democratic values had triumphed. The notion of democratic victory was captured most famously in Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History," in which he claimed, "The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism."[62] This view, though seldom so baldly stated, dominated most Western discourse on political change in the 1990s and early 2000s and, despite the changes in the world, still dominates today. The enormous relief triggered by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of five decades of tightrope diplomacy between the great powers seemed, as Robert Kagan noted, "to augur a new era of global convergence. The great adversaries of the Cold War suddenly shared many common goals, including a desire for economic and political integration."[63] Human progress, constantly marching forward, would spread democracy everywhere.

Of course, there is no consensus on the definition of democracy, but nearly all such definitions include certain components of democracy. In discussing democracy, this book uses a relatively widely accepted definition also utilized by the Economist Intelligence Unit in its analyses of the quality of democracy around the world. As the EIU notes, democracy means "government based on majority rule and the consent of the governed, the existence of free and fair elections, the protection of minorities and respect for basic human rights. Democracy presupposes equality before the law, due process and political pluralism." This book adds another component not included in this basic definition: democratic political culture, which includes respect for the concept of a loyal opposition, support for democratic political institutions, and interest in and access to political participation, among other components.

For a time, the rosy predictions of global democratization seemed warranted. Political freedom indeed blossomed in a "fourth wave" of democratization in the developing world in the 1990s and the early part of this century. The old great-power adversaries, the United States and Russia, worked together on challenges ranging from the first Gulf War to the safe decommissioning and storage of nuclear weapons. While authoritarians still ruled most of Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia in 1990, by 2005 democracies

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had emerged across these continents, and some of the most powerful developing nations, including South Africa, South Korea, and Brazil, had become solid democracies. By 2005 more than half the world's people lived under democratic systems.[64] With the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, the fall of Saddam Hussein, the overthrow of the Taliban, the apparent end of military interventions in Turkey, the stirrings of reform in small Persian Gulf nations like Bahrain, and even a reformist presidency under Muhammad Khatami in Iran, the Middle East and Central Asia, long the exception to global democratic change, seemed ready to make the transition.

Increasingly confident Western leaders came to assume that liberal democratic capitalism would conquer every nation on earth. President George H. W. Bush promised a "new world order" in which "freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations."[65] George W. Bush declared in his second inaugural that the United States would promote the democratization of the world, saying, "We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler and every nation—the moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right."[66] In a meeting with China president Jiang Zemin, Bill Clinton told Chinese leaders that they stood "on the wrong side of history" by perpetuating authoritarian rule, and later warned the Chinese leadership that trying to control the liberating effects of new technologies was like trying to "nail Jell-O to the wall."[67]

Of late, the Jell-O has been nailed. Not only has democracy experienced its longest and deepest rollback in forty years, a confluence of political, economic, and social changes could halt global democratization indefinitely. Autocracies seem to be gaining not only strength but legitimacy, with authoritarian regimes like China posting high growth rates and powerful new democracies like Brazil and South Africa unwilling to join the West in pushing for democratic change in the developing world.[68] From Thailand to Russia, middle classes and many leaders in developing nations that have regressed from real democracy appear to have little appetite for a return to democratic rule. Seeing the rise of Islamist parties, new sectarian rifts, and the flight of many religious and ethnic minorities, the middle classes in many of the countries in the Middle East and Africa where new revolts have occurred in the past two years already have begun to doubt the value

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of democracy, leading them to support renewed types of authoritarian rule, including continued powers for the military.

To be sure, when viewed against the entire expanse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, or against even longer periods of human history, the world today appears to be highly democratic. At the start of the twentieth century, as we will see in the next chapter, only a tiny fraction of the countries in the world could have been called true democracies. Nearly all of these democracies were in Western Europe, North America, and the former overseas territories of the British Empire.[69] Together they constituted no more than one-tenth of the world's population. Empires ruled much of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Even as recently as 1988, before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a small minority of the world's people lived under democracy; Central Asia and Eastern Europe had no democracies, and sub-Saharan Africa had virtually no true democracies as well.

Compared with those bleak periods, the number of democracies in the early twenty-first century seems like a great advance. Many African nations have made the beginnings of a transition to democratic rule, and real democracy is increasingly entrenched in Eastern Europe, the Baltics, and many parts of East Asia. No one expects that democracy will backslide to its weak global position in 1900; the prospect of democracy being wiped away completely, as seemed possible in the 1930s, now appears all but impossible. Indeed, the point of this book is not to suggest that democracy is in its death throes, but that it is in decline over the past decade—a decline that should be worrying because of its vast impact on human rights, economic freedoms, and the international system. If policy makers do not recognize this decline, and understand the complex reasons, examined later on, for democracy's current weakness in many developing nations, they will fail to reverse this trend. Worse, as the economic crisis lags on, publics in many developing regions may become far more distrustful of democratic rule—a prospect that could indeed help set the world back to the situation in 1988 or before.

Choosing to look at democracy's decline over the past decade is not arbitrary. Just as 1974, and then 1989, were watershed years for democratization,

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so too was 2001 such a year, although not in a positive way. Over the subsequent decade certain trends, which were less apparent in the 1980s or 1990s, clearly indicated weakening democracy throughout the developing world. Those trends began to materialize in 2001, and they would grow stronger throughout the 2000s and into the early 2010s, as surveys such as those done by Freedom House and the Economist Intelligence Unit, as well as my own research, would show this distinct decline in democracy in many nations.

The global landscape that had begun to be transformed in 2001 included the weakening of American power. In the months after the September 11, 2001, attacks, American power seemed to be at its zenith, but as the United States became entangled in two long wars stemming in some ways from that day, its power would ebb, with significant consequences for America's ability and willingness to attempt democracy promotion in the developing world. In 2001, too, both Russia and China would begin to consolidate their leadership transitions, and in that year the foundations would be set for the authoritarian great powers to reassert their dominance both at home and in their near neighborhoods, where they would lead a backlash against democracy. Also in 2001, broadband Internet began to become available to a growing number of homes in developed countries, the first step toward what would become its widespread use, and would impact democratic change in many developing nations. The early 2000s also saw the height of the antiglobalization movement and the questioning of the Washington consensus regarding economic liberalization, a change that would reverberate through young democracies, as many citizens who had linked economic and political reform would come to question whether democracy was necessarily the best system to produce growth and development. Finally, in 2001 the initial signs of conservative, middle-class revolts against electoral democracy would begin to emerge in many key developing nations, including Pakistan, the Philippines, Venezuela, Russia, and others.

Though Thailand is not as unusual as many Thais seem to believe, every country certainly has its own political history and circumstances. Democracy was imposed by an occupier in Japan, midwifed by a king in Spain, and fought over for decades in Timor-Leste. Reversals of democracy

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in each nation likewise have unique characteristics. In Thailand the king's prolonged illness has hurt democratic consolidation, while in Russia the anarchy of the Boris Yeltsin era, in which a proud country teetered on the brink of bankruptcy while oligarchs plundered its wealth, soured many Russians on the freedoms of democracy. But the broad—and dangerous—reasons for the global democratic rollback today differ relatively little.

Democracies have faced many challenges in the past, and at other times countries that seemed to have democratized suffered serious reversals, occasionally regressing, as in the case of Germany in the 1930s, to outright totalitarianism. But those reversals tended to be relatively isolated, and eventually global democracy progressed once again. That progression can no longer be taken for granted: today a constellation of factors, from the rise of China to the lack of economic growth in new democracies to the West's financial crisis, has come together to hinder democracy throughout the developing world. Absent radical and unlikely changes in the international system, that combination of antidemocratic factors will have serious staying power.

Yet Western leaders do not seem to recognize how seriously democracy is threatened in many parts of the developing world. Though some observers, like Freedom House, have begun to recognize how democracy has become endangered, few have systematically traced how a form of government once thought to be invincible has been found lacking in so many places and consequently tossed aside, often by the very middle-class reformers who once were democracy's vanguard. Among senior American officials, few are willing to accept that the current climate is anything more than a blip in democracy's ultimate conquest of the globe, that the Arab Spring and Summer might not turn out to be like 1989's year of democratic revolution—or that a prolonged democratic rollback would have severe consequences for global security, trade, and American strategic interests, not to mention the well-being of millions of men and women across the developing world. The official national security strategy developed by the George W. Bush administration, which enshrined democracy promotion as a central value of U.S. foreign policy, carried the unstated assumption that, with U.S. backing,

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democracy would continue to spread around the world. Although the Obama administration's 2010 national security strategy acknowledged that this progress had met obstacles, experts within the administration seemed to assume that, given the right adjustments in American policy, the United States would soon be leading a renewed wave of global democratization.[70]

The United States is not the only entity that does not comprehend that democracy's progress may have stalled. In 2008, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean), the main regional grouping in Southeast Asia, passed a new charter that made respect for human rights a core component of membership. Even in private, senior Asean officials argue that the region is moving toward shared democratic values.[71] This despite the fact that, except in Indonesia, democratization and human rights have regressed throughout Southeast Asia in the past ten years, as well as the fact that the region is still no closer to having real shared values than it was when Asean was formed more than four decades ago.

African nations in 2001 agreed to a "New Partnership for Africa's Development," a continent-wide compact to instill norms of human rights and good governance that was greeted with much celebration by Western donors and many African leaders. Capturing this mood in 2006, the Sudanese communications entrepreneur Mo Ibrahim launched a prize for the African leader who best focused on development, governance, and education of his or her people. Ten years into the "New Partnership," African officials continue to cite the compact and claim that the continent is moving toward shared values of good governance and democracy, but this trend is hardly evident. In 2010, unable to find a leader who exemplified reform and good governance, the Ibrahim board decided not to award its annual gift.[72]

Prolonged democratic rollback will have serious implications. Evidence suggests that one of the major reasons countries democratize is that nations around them are democratizing.[73] A halt to this process—particularly if middle-class men and women lead this democratic breakdown or flee places like the Middle East and Africa rather than standing for democracy—could call into question many of the assumptions of the post–Cold War world and could lead to a new era of conflict. Though there have been ex-

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ceptions, in general the theory that democracies do not go to war against other democracies has held true, while authoritarian states find it much easier to go to war, whether against democracies or against other autocracies. Even without actual war, a divergence of core political values will make it harder for nations around the world to make progress on critical international issues, from climate change to free trade. Democratic rollback could impede commerce: despite the facile assumption by some Western business leaders that authoritarian regimes provide more stable environments for investment, in reality autocracies generally fail to provide the rule of law and impartial judiciary that most Western investors require; prolonged democratic rollback could thus worsen the global business climate. Finally, a global democratic rollback will undermine perhaps the most critical foundation of American soft power—its ideology—as competing ideologies like China's model of development grow more powerful.

Perhaps most important of all, a prolonged democratic rollback could condemn the citizens of many of these countries, from Russia to Cambodia to Venezuela, to increasing repression under ever more confident autocrats. Already, over the past four years, activists not only in China but in Vietnam, Thailand, Venezuela, Russia, and many other countries whose governments once allowed greater degrees of freedom have seen a much tighter, less predictable political climate.

Grappling with this democratic decline and its potentially severe international consequences will require not only outlining the problem but also gaining a deeper understanding of why democracy has faltered. To do so, we must first look back at the previous three waves of democratic change in the twentieth century, as well as at the post–Cold War era of optimism and Western triumphalism in the 1990s and early 2000s, the time of the fourth wave of democratization in the developing world. By examining mistakes made during the high point of the global democratic revolution, we may understand how democracy has declined so rapidly and dramatically in a number of developing nations across several continents. This decline has included not only the rise of elected autocrats but also stark shifts in the views of the general public about democracy in many countries—even those in the Middle East. (We will not, however, examine the weakening of democracy

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in the established democracies of North America and Western Europe; even though these nations' political systems have many flaws, unlike many developing nations they do not face regression to autocratic rule, and a full study of the United States and Western Europe is well beyond the scope of this book, though we will examine Central and Eastern Europe.)

To be sure, we must recognize that, particularly in the Middle East, revolt and reform are in progress and sometimes can be hard to predict; this book was written as the Arab Spring and Summer began to curdle, but its outcomes remain very much uncertain.

Just as the democratic decline extends to nearly every part of the developing world, so too the reasons for the democratic rollback are diverse and, often, intertwined. To understand why democracy has struggled over the past decade, and to consider ways to put global democratization back on track, we have to examine not only why leaders like Putin and Chavez were able to destroy democratic institutions, but also why the middle class allowed these elected autocrats to do so, or accepted militaries reasserting their political power. The fact that the middle class, long considered the linchpin to successful democratization, actually has turned against democracy in many countries is perhaps the most striking and unsettling trend in democracy's global decline, and later on we will see in great detail how the middle class has changed from a force for reform to an obstacle. In many countries, the middle class acquiesced for a number of reasons: fear that democracy would produce chaos, corruption, and weak growth; anger at the rise of elected populists who disdain the rule of law; and worry that their own power will be diminished. And as the middle class revolts, the working class often fights back, only further damaging democratic politics.

We also have to understand the international system. We have to ask why today, even as middle- and working-class men and women in developing nations have allowed democracy to fail, many established democracies, including the United States and emerging powers like South Africa and Brazil, also have abandoned democracy promotion and human rights advocacy. Indeed, with authoritarians like China wielding more power, with established democracies in the West and the developing world reluc-

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tant to stand up for their values, or pursuing democracy promotion strategies that too often focused on rhetoric, elections, and process, the international environment has become far more complicated and challenging for democracy in the new millennium. And far too often, men and women in the developing world have paid the price for these failures of democracy promotion.

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