

and now, **to** Govern

A former head of USAID's Europe & Eurasia Bureau discusses the new directions of international democracy assistance and makes the case for a flexible approach to the challenges of building lasting democratic governance.

by Don Pressley



As I watched the dramatic events unfold in Ukraine this December, I reflected on the important work of democracy groups in similar situations throughout post-communist Europe and Eurasia since 1989. Given the significant political successes in the region, I feel considerable pride in having led USAID's Europe & Eurasia Bureau, which provided millions of dollars to fund democracy proponents in formerly communist countries.

With U.S. government assistance, the region's champions of democracy have organized campaigns, developed media messages, created coalitions around important issues, and spoken out for reform in the face of stiff, brutal and often violent opposition. In countries like Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia and, now, Ukraine, the assistance provided by the U.S. government has enabled others to hear these voices for reform and helped the reformers to effect democratic change.

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However, despite the significant impact of U.S. democracy assistance over the last 15 years, the policymaking community is engaged in an ongoing debate about the relative utility of international democracy assistance. In fact, it appears that in FY 2006, U.S. support for democracy assistance is projected to level off or actually decrease, despite increased funding in other assistance categories. Policymakers and practitioners now face a critical task: we must demonstrate the measurable results of democracy assistance so that the U.S. Congress and the decision makers at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, the State Department, USAID and the National Security Council can see its value and importance.

In particular, future assistance programming should more clearly emphasize democracy as a form of governance rather than continue the perception that democracy is merely about electing governing officials. Policymakers often divide assistance into economic and political aid, but this division does not characterize citizens' lives. Human society—with its political, economic, and social elements—is clearly a dynamic system with parts that interact in complex and nonlinear ways. Governance—the practice of administering the state's services and obligations—is a critical institutional skill that cuts across assistance categories and, when developed in one arena, can influence others. Over the long term, the success of democracy is measured by the extent to which citizens can tangibly appreciate the efficiency and benefits of their institutions.

As USAID's new Fragile States Strategy illustrates, within the U.S. government a growing consensus has emerged to direct existing support in transitioning states toward the underlying sources of political instability. In failed or recovering states especially, political stability is often directly linked

to how quickly and effectively state institutions can deliver the basic public services associated with health, education, security and the rule of law. Unless these services are provided in a relatively short period, distraught citizens are more willing to give up on democracy, or even initially reject it—as experience in Venezuela, Serbia and Iraq, among other places, seems to suggest.

In my career with the U.S. government and, now, with Booz Allen, I have increasingly come to the conclusion that democracy promotion, like many development priorities, is best characterized by complexity theory, which captures its interdependent nature (described above). Accordingly, our

Law and Governance group at Booz Allen has adopted a *complex adaptive systems* approach that recognizes and capitalizes on the ways a change in one aspect of a social system can serve as the impetus for reform in another.

For example, in Central America, our team is supporting more effective governance by advising governments on the development of regionally focused free-trade strategies, thus linking traditional development subjects such as trade and investment policies with related topics like property registration and court administration to produce more effective governance. In another example, in our commercial law work, we specifically seek the input of civil society and work to understand the impact of this work on civil society in order to grasp the true "social dynamic" of legal reform.

We seek to improve governance by purposely linking legal reform with the provision of public services because our work has taught us that the rule of law is a prerequisite for both stable democratic government and economic growth. Moreover, reforming laws and improving institutional performance in tandem with supporting democratic reformers that can apply bottom-up pressure on public officials to abide by the laws in place is a formula for achieving lasting democratic governance.

The issues facing developing and transitional countries in the post-communist era are extremely complex. To meet these challenges, the tools to assist the leaders of these countries in overcoming obstacles need to be equally adaptive, flexible and multi-dimensional in order to enable them to surmount the hurdles that face their democratically elected governments.

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