
FROM THE EDITORS

The year 1996 was a watershed in terms of the number of democratic elections held around the world. As James S. Robbins points out in his introduction to our Special Features section, elections are the cornerstone of democracy. If so, 1996 should also be considered a banner year for democracy.

In a sense, the fact that elections occurred at all in several of the nations examined in this issue is nothing short of monumental. As Nigel Purvis observes, this was certainly the case in Bosnia. Further, Michael Stoddard notes that the municipal elections in South Africa, which were surprisingly fair and free of violence, can be seen as a model for other new democracies with divided populations. Detailing Guatemala's history of political violence and oppression, Stefanie Ricarda Roos stresses how the 1995 elections and 1996 runoff election were defining events in that country's political development.

Although democratic elections were not new to Israel, the 1996 election had far-reaching implications for the Arab/Israeli peace process. Nachman Shai offers his interpretation of those events. And, James Yahya Sadowski points out that the political climate in Kuwait is shifting towards the development of a meaningful democracy.

Meanwhile, some of the year's elections fell far short of fulfilling the ideal concept of democracy as envisioned by political philosophers and scholars. In Bosnia, for example, Purvis says elections that were externally imposed by the international system revealed numerous instances of behavior that was inconsistent with the pillars of democracy. Also, Mikhail Alexseev notes that Russia's fledgling democracy saw several popular politicians calling for a domineering Red Army and a return to czarist Russia. Even in the United States, which is sometimes considered a model democracy, the current two-party system of government seems to be at odds with the multiparty system described by the framers of the U.S. Constitution. John B. Anderson, who was once himself a third-party U.S. presidential candidate, and Jeffrey L. Freeman examine that discrepancy.

Rather than criticizing the electoral process of any of these nations, it is our hope that lessons can be learned from the analysis of these events. *The Fletcher Forum* encourages readers to contact us with comments, suggestions and constructive criticism. We can be reached via e-mail at forum@emerald.tufts.edu. Also, we welcome visitors to our home page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.tufts.edu/fletcher.forum/html>.

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