



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Documents on Democracy

Journal of Democracy, Volume 14, Number 1, January 2003, pp. 183-186 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0001>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/38528>

# DOCUMENTS ON DEMOCRACY

## *Iran*

*Akbar Ganji is one of Iran's leading investigative journalists. He is the author of the bestselling 2000 book **Dungeon of Ghosts**, in which he implicated leading Iranian conservatives in the murder of intellectuals in 1998. He was convicted in April 2000 on charges of collecting confidential information that harms national security and spreading propaganda against the Islamic system, for which he is currently serving a seven-year prison sentence. The following is excerpted from "A Republican Manifesto: A Model for Overcoming Iran's Political Deadlock," which Ganji recently wrote from the Evin prison. The manifesto is a fervent appeal for the establishment of secular democracy in Iran and has had great impact on Iranian political debate. The text was translated from the Persian by Amir Nejat.*

After many years of struggle, Iran's reformist movement is still unable to attain its goals. Despite winning several important elections and gaining control of both the executive and legislative branches, reformists have made no significant gains, while political deadlock has paralyzed their leaders. There is no hope that these reformists will bring real freedom to Iran, and consequently despair pervades vast sections of Iranian society. Any model for replacing the existing condition must be incisive, detailed, and clear. Otherwise, the problems of the 1979 Revolution will only be repeated. . . .

As history teaches, democratic means can empower people to remove despots without recourse to violence. . . . Whenever laws and policies are not equitable or just, and there is no hope for democracy within the framework of existing laws, "civil disobedience" is the only way to open the door to reason, justice, and morality. . . . Such circumstances require brave and heroic figures, willing to sacrifice themselves on democracy's behalf—people such as Nelson Mandela, Václav Havel, and Aleksander Dubček, who demonstrated the power of people to rule themselves. . . .

Boycotting elections is a peaceful manner in which people may powerfully demonstrate their dissatisfaction. . . . Accordingly, in order to achieve a legitimate republic, people should not participate in any election until a popular referendum is held. There is no political statement available to the Iranian people more powerful than an election boycott.

Who can provide the necessary leadership for such civil disobedience? Reformists in government cannot, since they have both accepted the framework of the existing laws and followed too-minimal a set of demands. The threat by some to leave the government will come to nothing, since the majority of reformists do not support this threat. The minority who do are simply waiting for an opportunity that will never materialize.

The alliance between the forces of the opposition is the necessary condition for the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. To begin with, the opposition outside the government should create extensive alliances. Negotiations should be pursued with reformists, but the key is not to leave the fate of the Republic in their hands. In the longer term, we need a modern market-based economy. Poor countries have a low probability of becoming democratic while those that are democratic are generally wealthy. A market economy leads to the dispersion of wealth and resources, which in turn leads to competition in politics and prevents monopolies on power. Such an economic organization gives people a sense of sovereignty and independence, which are values intrinsic to democracy.

### *The Americas*

***On September 30, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) presented its fifteenth annual W. Averell Harriman Democracy Awards to Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas of the Varela Project—a petition to amend the Cuban constitution by collecting more than 10,000 signatures—and to the Organization of American States (OAS). For more information on the Varela Project, see “Documents on Democracy” in the July 2002 issue of the Journal of Democracy.***

***Opening remarks by NDI president Kenneth Wollack:***

Tonight NDI breaks with 14 years of tradition by recognizing two recipients from the same region. This was a deliberate decision by NDI’s board of directors. International attention and resources are all too often directed to other parts of the world—both in moments of democratic breakthrough and during times of crisis. This event tonight, with its focus on the Americas, was designed to send a message to Washington, and to the family of nations throughout the hemisphere: that we must rededicate ourselves to the vision of democratic governance for every citizen of the Americas.

In many ways Latin America was a vanguard for the democratic revolution that swept the world during the past decade. The people of this hemisphere defied the so-called experts who claimed that democracy was somehow alien to inheritors of Spanish patriarchy. Millions of citizens in this hemisphere reclaimed their fundamental political rights and in doing so, demonstrated to other societies, each with their own distinct history, culture and religion, that democratic aspirations are universal.

Democracy is never a given. In every generation, it is always earned anew. So it is now, as the people and governments of Latin America confront the new challenge of governing. A generation ago, the threat came from entrenched dictatorships. Now it emanates from weak political parties and legislatures, from public cynicism about the possibility of change. Parties and legislatures must do more than look democratic; they must be democratic in their daily existence. They must be open, accessible, ethical, and accountable. They must orient their services toward their constituents and define their constituency as the general public and not a privileged elite. This is the next democratic challenge and it has arrived.

***Acceptance speech by César Gaviria, OAS secretary-general:***

Democracy in our hemisphere is at a critical historical juncture. Massive citizen disenchantment with government performance has led to hard questions about the very viability of democracy. Our actions, then, will have to go farther than applying passively the principles of the [Inter-American Democratic] Charter. We need a new political ethic, a new social policy, better organized political parties, a more decisive commitment to fight poverty, better income distribution, more competitive economies, and better education systems. We need more social discipline to solve fiscal problems. We must demonstrate that we can navigate the sometimes-raging waters of globalization; we must not be impotent in the face of its consequences or challenges. The current crisis underscores the need to reclaim the confidence of our citizens in public institutions. We need stronger public institutions that are more effective, more respected. They must possess the capacity to check, to control, to regulate, to supervise. We need democratic state institutions respectful of the rights of all our citizens. . . .

In the last year we have discovered the linkages among our goals of democracy, growth, and prosperity, as well as the enormous challenges that lie ahead. We will need many more democratic reforms. We can do more. We are prepared to do more. We will fulfill this task with determination, to bring peace, prosperity, equity and justice to all our people.

***Acceptance speech by Oswaldo Payá Sardiñas, the Varela Project:***

I am speaking to you from Cuba to thank you for this award. . . . I'd like to say that it is an honor to share this award with the Organization

of American States and with Mr. César Gaviria. Also the presence of Madeleine Albright and all the others in this room whose presence I appreciate. Paradoxically, the only one not in attendance is the recipient of the award. My country's government will not let me participate. It will not allow me to come and go.

People like Aung San Suu Kyi receive this award. So far away from us, geographically, and so united in the spirit of fighting peacefully for democracy. You see, there is a growing global solidarity among those of us working peacefully for democracy, for rights, for peace. This is a universal language. Our circumstances have not changed, but the hearts of the Cuban people have. And that is where change must begin.

With signatures or without, with a referendum or without, the Varela Project will continue as a civic movement until we achieve our rights and a democracy. There are two things that are inseparable: our determination to achieve these changes, and our determination to achieve them peacefully. The Cuban civic movement is growing amidst difficult circumstances. But finally we see a light: the light of solidarity.

I thank you. I thank God that there are people like you in the world. Dedicated to democracy. Dedicated to fight for those who have no voice. Dedicated to peace. Because the foundation of peace is freedom and justice.

### *International*

***On November 10–12, 145 governmental delegations convened in Seoul for the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Community of Democracies (see below, p. 188). Excerpted below is the “Community of Democracies Statement on Terrorism,” which was adopted by the conference:***

The democratic principles and institutions promoted by international and regional organizations and reiterated by the Community of Democracies are crucial elements in endeavors to combat terrorism. Democracy provides a solid foundation for peaceful thriving societies by empowering people, holding governments more accountable and responsive to the people's needs, facilitating sustainable economic development, and, above all, enhancing respect for and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. To protect societies from the scourge of terrorism and to create equitable, stable and secure societies, the participants reiterate their determination to strengthen sound democratic institutions and good governance as well as to promote their underlying principles. . . .

The Participants underline that the fight against terrorism requires cooperation between and among states. They reiterate their resolve, expressed in the Warsaw Declaration, to strengthen cooperation to face transnational challenges to democracy such as state-sponsored, cross-border and other forms of terrorism.