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# From Evaluating Democracy Assistance to Appraising Democracy Promotion

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Organisations involved in delivering international democracy assistance are engaging increasingly with questions about how to assess their activities. A double shift in the terms of reference, from the *ex post* evaluation of assistance projects or programmes to *ex ante* appraisal of the broader democracy promotion strategies, could make democracy promotion more effective. This does not mean abandoning the former; on the contrary its status would be enhanced. Improving the chain of learning that leads from assistance evaluations to the formulation of promotion strategies could improve decision-making over how and whether to promote democracy abroad. Because strategies for democracy promotion are constitutive of the political relationship with countries, different strategies have different implications for the possibilities of political self-determination. For that reason and because democratisation and hence effective democracy promotion may be beneficial for human development, international peace and national security, strategies that reflect informed appraisal would be an improvement on a defective status quo. The challenges include: more systematic data gathering; innovative ways of comparing the various democracy promotion options; and institutional changes that connect the research findings to the high politics of policy-making.

International democracy promotion has become an increasingly prominent activity. Significant efforts are currently under way to evaluate more rigorously the results of one particular version of democracy promotion, namely past projects and programmes in democracy assistance. However, to achieve the greatest possible benefit from these efforts the findings should be linked to a fuller, more systematic approach to comparing all the various ways of promoting democracy. The point of giving more attention to appraising democracy promotion is to inform decisions on democracy promotion strategy in advance. After first providing reasons why a more effective approach to promoting democracy is desirable, referring to the goals, major actors and limitations in the state of the art, the analysis then explores the politics of a double shift, from *ex post* to *ex ante* assessment and from democracy assistance to democracy promotion. Subsequent sections explain why this is a formidable yet feasible challenge. They also acknowledge how difficult it is to accommodate the appealing proposition that assessments themselves should function as vehicles for democratisation by employing participatory approaches, while recognising that democratic reform must be an exercise in national political self-determination.

## Why Democracy Promotion?

International support for promoting democracy has increased substantially over the last two decades, and reported democracy assistance is now in excess of US\$5



billion dollars annually. The US government and the European Union (EU) are well-established actors and March 2006 saw the inauguration of the United Nations Democracy Fund: 26 countries pledged an initial sum of \$41 million, for distribution through other United Nations (UN) organisations. Meanwhile the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) claims to be the largest spender on democratic governance, amounting to US\$1.4 billion in 2005. All these figures refer only to expenditures on projects and programmes that have been categorised as democracy or democracy related. They do not reflect the much larger cost of the many other ways in which democratic objectives are promoted, such as through diplomacy and political forms of action that extend right up to attempted coercion.

The case for promoting democracy has been much rehearsed. Aside from what readers might believe is democracy's intrinsic desirability and, if the 'democratic peace' thesis is valid, the possibility that a world of democracies would be a world at peace, more mundane arguments cite the economic well-being and welfare of societies that experience democratisation. Take for instance the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Nowhere do the MDGs mention democracy. And yet the UNDP's *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World* (UNDP, 2002, p. v) proclaimed itself to be primarily about the idea that politics is as important as economics to successful development. Where the goal is human development, defined as the promotion of the freedom, well-being and dignity of people, democratic participation is deemed a critical end, not just a means. No less a figure than Mark Malloch Brown (2006, p. 20), Administrator of the UNDP 1999–2005 and currently Chef de Cabinet of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has argued that 'Assisting countries in their efforts to confront the challenges of democratization lies at the core of the UNDP's work'. In fact, contrary to the original idea that developing countries face what Jagdish Bhagwati (1966) called a 'cruel dilemma', which meant they could pursue either economic development or democracy but could not prioritise both, more recent thinking reconciles democracy and 'good governance' with the sustained economic development that is essential to attaining the MDGs. Bhagwati subsequently revised his earlier view, as social scientific understanding of the relationship between the type of political regime and development underwent a double paradigm shift. It moved away from economic determinism and the suspicion that if regimes do influence development then authoritarian polities have certain advantages, towards a conviction that political institutions make a difference and in the long run democracies possibly do it better.

Larger debates over the comparative economic performance of democratic and authoritarian regimes remain unresolved. But many international development agencies now behave as if movement towards democratic governance can be positive. That does not mean all non-democracies now receive less aid, or that all democratising countries are being rewarded with more aid. However, they know

that political shocks such as military coups and civil war greatly harm economic growth, and they do appear to punish countries for 'de-democratisation' (Headey, 2006, p. 7). And if we assume that development aid is normally beneficial then those countries' chances of enjoying the MDGs will diminish. Aid volatility itself significantly reduces aid's value. The evidence that development aid increases the rate of human development more in democracies than in autocracies (Kosack, 2003, p. 14) also supports the view that democratisation should be encouraged.

Of course some aid analysts claim that development aid inflicts harm, in a similar manner to the oil resource curse. They say that where aid reduces the tax burden society is less interested in securing governmental accountability and political representation. They say it can undermine state capacity by increasing corruption and rent seeking by officials and politicians. Executive dominance is increased. If these criticisms are true then they add further weight to the developmental case for external actors to try to promote democracy, in order to counter aid's harmful side-effects.

While the actual policy drivers behind international democracy promotion remain a matter of conjecture, the actors currently engaged in this activity span a range from intergovernmental organisations such as the European Union and United Nations to government departments and quasi- and even non-governmental actors, many of them funded almost entirely by government but some of them claiming complete independence. Prominent actors in the US are the government's Agency for International Development (USAID), whose Office of Democracy and Governance oversaw \$1.2 billion of spending on electoral support, civil society strengthening, media development and human rights in 2004, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), founded in 1983. The NED describes itself as a private, non-profit organisation. It enjoys an annual congressional appropriation. It provides direct support to civic groups and political parties overseas as well as through grants to its four core institutes, of which the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI) are especially well known. In Europe the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (IMD), established in 2000 as 'an organisation of political parties for political parties', is funded by the Dutch government. In Britain the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) describes itself as an independent public body sponsored by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Established in 1992 it too focuses on parties and civil society. Germany's political foundations (*Stiftungen*) have the longest experience of working with political actors in other countries and are increasingly engaged in democracy assistance activities. Their combined income from the federal government dwarfs that of other European counterparts. Such is the number and variety of organisations that nowadays have some sort of involvement in promoting democracy that not just the resources but the mandates, legal restrictions and access to specific tools or instruments differ greatly among them. Hence they avail themselves of different approaches. Thus whereas military intervention might be used by war/defence ministries to topple



an autocratic regime, and the UN deploys peacekeeping/enforcing forces to create a stable environment for democratic peace building after civil conflict, the specialised democracy foundations concentrate on practical democracy projects, such as offering political training, advice and material support.

Regardless of the type of organisation, an effective strategy for promoting democracy is more worthwhile than an ineffective strategy or no strategy at all. That means working out an appropriate choice of means to secure the sought-after end.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, if, as is claimed by Steven Radelet *et al.* (2005, p. 16), aid interventions aimed at securing democratic reform, while ultimately positive for development, do not produce their economic dividends quickly, then it is important to establish in advance which strategic choices are likely to deliver most on their *political* promise. The longer it takes to determine the most effective approach to supporting democratic progress, the longer will be the lead time before the full developmental benefits can materialise. This is especially true if, as Steven Finkel *et al.* (2006, p. 60) claim in regard to USAID, the cumulative democratic dividend from democracy support is a lagged effect. That compounds the delay before democratisation produces developmental benefits.

To help minimise the likelihood of such a double drag, then, the efforts recently initiated by democracy assistance practitioners to improve their evaluation of democracy assistance activities must be welcomed.<sup>2</sup> Attempts to assess the state of democracy are far from new, but sustained attempts to go beyond identifying the outputs of democracy assistance projects or programme and accountancy-style audits of expenditure to assessing their effectiveness and impact are relatively recent. The significant methodological and other problems outlined by Andrew Green and Richard Kohl (2007) help explain the tardiness.

Yet even these endeavours do not go far enough, particularly in respect of what the governmental and intergovernmental democracy promotion actors could be doing, for two main reasons. First, the investigations so far have largely concerned democracy assistance, such as practical support to the electoral process, strengthening civil society and horizontal mechanisms of executive accountability like the judiciary. But democracy assistance is only one of the instruments, tools or approaches that democracy promotion uses to promote democracy. So, even a sound methodology that is well executed would provide at best only partial information. Second, the evaluations dwell on past performance. They become worthwhile only when the knowledge and understanding gained from analysing what works and what does not work, and under what conditions, feeds into the making of future policy. This is where appraisal differs: appraisal provides an analysis on which decisions to do things are based; it is a planning tool, logically prior to the making and remaking of policy, or policy revision (Carlsson *et al.*, 1994, p. 11; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2004, p. 103).

For two reasons then there needs to be a double shift in the terms of reference: from the evaluation (*ex post* assessment) of democracy assistance projects and

programmes, to the appraisal (*ex ante* assessment) of the broader democracy promotion strategies. Democracy assistance is but one means to an end; the value of doing assessment derives from connecting it to the larger purpose. That means thinking about how to compare the likely performance of different approaches to promoting democracy, which means the instruments or tools, as well as trying to measure the record of democracy assistance, namely activities already undertaken. For policy deliberations to benefit, an enabling institutional environment must exist as well.

The argument as it is developed below is confined to *political* strategies for promoting democracy abroad. Logically it could be extended to *economic* strategies such as those that aim to establish the economic ‘conditions’ or ‘preconditions’ of democratisation. However that would make modelling the relative strengths and weaknesses of what are fundamentally very different ways of trying to promote democracy even more complex, as well as invite debate over whether variables like social equality are part of democracy, a consequence of democracy or part of democracy’s conditions instead.

### **The State of the Art**

Considerable concern has been expressed on both sides of the Atlantic that strategic thinking concerning how to promote democracy has been weak. In the democracy promotion organisations and at senior political levels this is now coming to be recognised. Part of the reason is a growing belief that the easy victories for democracy promotion and for democratisation more generally have been won. Extending democracy to remaining countries, or even just preventing its erosion, will be more difficult. A willingness to commit more public money to promoting democracy supplies another ground, and is fuelled by notions that democratisation can contribute to fighting the ‘war on terror’.

The evidence for claiming dissatisfaction with the state of the art of policy-making towards democracy promotion is not hard to find. For example criticisms of the EU’s European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and its Euro-Med Partnership or Barcelona Process for not actually furthering democracy have been widely voiced. Richard Youngs for instance noted a ‘lack of overarching “systematic thinking”’ (Youngs, 2003, p. 131), ‘arbitrary accidentalism’ (Youngs, 2004, p. 13) and a palpable disconnect between EU democracy assistance and the high politics instruments of democracy promotion. A recent report commissioned by the European Parliament calls for a ‘more “upfront” and strategic approach to democracy and human rights support’ (Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy [NIMD], 2005, p. 30). Overall, EU policies ‘are widely judged to have fallen short of fulfilling their potential’ (NIMD, 2005, p. 14), notwithstanding the ‘unparalleled potential for coordinating and integrating different policy instruments’ such as trade, diplomacy, development assistance and security policy tools, as well as separate member state efforts (NIMD, 2005, p. 12).



The EU must go 'beyond simply assessing whether individual projects have fulfilled their internal objectives' (NIMD, 2005, p. 26). And although the EU is widely credited with having furthered political reform in those Central and Eastern European countries that were required to meet and have now met the EU's 1993 Copenhagen criteria for membership, the relevance to future strategy is questionable. Judith Kelley (2006, p. 49) for example expresses reservations about the 'mechanical borrowing' of the template of conditionality and socialisation from the enlargement process and its application to the very different situation of the countries in the European Neighbourhood. Perhaps it is hardly surprising that Edward McMillan Scott, who is Vice-President of the European Parliament and chair of its Democracy Caucus, says the EU 'needs a new strategic approach to democracy and human rights' (cited in Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2006). As for the democracy promotion policies of individual states, a 2006 survey of seven EU member states as well as the EU Commission, Council and Parliament establishes that many are still at a very preliminary stage in strategic thinking and commit few personnel to the task (Youngs, 2006).

In the United States Thomas Carothers (1997; 2004) has repeatedly argued that the actors need to adopt a more strategic approach while at the same time explaining why this has been slow to emerge. In 2006 the US State Department and USAID together with the intelligence community began to initiate a thoroughgoing consideration of how to promote democracy, and revealed some sharply divided opinions (as reported in Dinmore and Stafford, 2006). Just as in Europe, political demands by a comparatively small number of legislators are part of the background to this, with motives that appear to vary from a genuine concern to see democracy promoted more successfully to worries about wasteful public spending and the potential for harming other foreign policy goals. A keen interest in rigorously evaluating USAID democracy support is now part of this ferment. Thus although Finkel *et al.*'s (2006) evaluation was confident that a statistically significant positive relationship exists,<sup>3</sup> it was intended to be but the first stage in a more in-depth programme of analysis. The study also contrasted the absence of comparable data for other major donors and urged them to undertake similar research. A separate investigation into the international influences on democratisation with a particular interest in the role of democracy promotion is to be led by the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at Stanford University.

Finally, private communications with personnel involved in democracy promotion confirm what has also been said in public: not only do we need more credible information about what kinds of assistance work and in what circumstances, but we cannot be confident that the insights travel upwards in the decision-making hierarchy, rather than simply gathering dust. For example, despite receiving contrasting reports, the second one more favourable than the first, both the WFD and IMD were criticised in recent institutional evaluations for either not doing enough self-evaluation or for treating assessment as an end in

itself (River Path Associates, 2005; European Centre for Development Policy Management, 2005, respectively). If shortcomings like this exist within individual organisations then how much more likely are they to characterise the lines of communication between organisations as different as political foundations and the government departments that sponsor them, and the private external consultants who sometimes execute the assessments? If Green and Kohl (2007) with their US 'insider' experience can say that many donors feel there is a breakdown in the feedback from assistance evaluations to assistance programming, then how much more likely are there to be gaps between such evaluations and the larger consideration of alternative approaches to promoting democracy where assistance provides just one option, in other words future policy appraisal? The questions are of course rhetorical. In the EU's case an answer can be found in the 2005 report commissioned by the Parliament (NIMD, 2005, p. 14, emphasis in original): 'A common and well documented area of concern in all Commission programmes is the *weak link between programming and political analysis*'.

### **Politics of Democracy Promotion**

Democracy assistance, which consists of the concessionary and, usually, consensual provision of practical, advisory, technical and financial support through projects and programmes, is not the only game in town. The instruments, tools or approaches that are associated with efforts to promote democracy abroad are wide-ranging and can be described or categorised in a number of ways. Thus we could make use of Joseph Nye's (2005) distinction between 'soft' and 'hard power', the former being the ability to get what you want through attraction, and the latter employing coercion or payments. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2005) offer an alternative typology: 'leverage' and 'linkage'. Leverage plays on governments' vulnerability to external pressure; linkage operates via general 'ties to the West'. A more flexible way of capturing the diversity rests on the idea of a continuum expressing different gradations of power, where power is understood as an umbrella concept that contains non-coercive ways of exercising influence at one end and physical coercion at the other. In the context of democracy promotion the middle ground is occupied by a cluster of more or less coercive relations such as diplomatic pressure, the attachment of political conditionalities to offers of commercial, financial or other concessions, and sanctions or threat of sanctions in the event of non-compliance. 'Diplomatic pressure' is an often-used term that while something of a black box to onlookers refers to more than just 'political dialogue' and 'quiet diplomacy'. Conditionalities can be either negative, which means a threat of penalties in the event of failing to comply, or positive, in which case they resemble incentives. How far the actual conditionalities resemble coercion in practice depends in part on the baseline expectations, including any sense of entitlements that might normally have been in place, and how constrained are the choices facing the party on the receiving end. A positive conditionality can be compelling if the party is desperate and no alternatives are



available. Diane Ethier's (2003, p. 100) notion of pseudo-conditionality adds a further twist, describing situations where the targeted party believes the threat of penalties is not credible, perhaps because the rewards for compliance are delivered early and cannot be reversed.

The literature on democracy promotion suggests yet further refinements are needed to capture the full variety. Thus for example Milada Vachudova (2005) analysed EU relations with post-communist states in Central-Eastern Europe around a distinction between 'passive' and 'active' leverage. The first is exercised merely by virtue of the EU's existence and its usual conduct whereas the second consists of deliberate interventions. The operation of socialisation which features in many accounts of the EU's approach to promoting democracy and human rights has also been dissected. Socialisation can be understood as normative suasion but there is also socialisation through strategic calculation, where the 'target' party conforms to externally indicated norms, rules or standards when it reckons the benefits such as greater international stature will outweigh the costs of non-conformity, for instance loss of international legitimacy.

An important point to note in all of this is that instruments and approaches employed in promoting democracy are necessarily constitutive of the political relationship that the external actors have with countries and with different political constituencies within those countries. The implications for the possibilities of political self-determination by countries can differ quite drastically from one approach to another. To illustrate, there is the view that true democratisation by definition has to come from within society, or else the democracy's authenticity and legitimacy will be impaired. In many accounts the reasoning is more functionalist: processes that are endogenous to the society, popular struggle, even, are a necessary condition if the new democracy is to stand much chance of being maintained. Democratisation is not something that can be done to a people or for a society. And so outside special circumstances, attempts to impose democracy from outside might be doomed to fail. Historical surveys of US military intervention by Mark Peceny (1999) and Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper (2003) support this inference, as does much of the record of European decolonisation in Africa. Afghanistan and Iraq now seem to offer further confirmation. Democracy assistance projects of the most consensual kind appear much less liable to be self-limiting in this way.<sup>4</sup> Democracy promotion strategies that fall somewhere between the soft and hard ends of the power continuum are the most difficult to call in terms of their compatibility with democratic self-determination. But it is worth bearing in mind that although the argument for a double shift might address weaknesses that have been identified in the policy processes of the democracy promoters and facilitate more effective strategies, the promoters' perspective must also take account of the implications different approaches have for political self-determination and hence for the end of democratic self-rule.

## The Double Shift

The reasoning behind a double shift from activities to instruments and from past performance to future policy is not revolutionary although the context is new. Over twenty years ago an experienced aid manager concluded about economic development assistance, 'One lesson I consider that we have learnt from the conduct of evaluations is the importance of the initial appraisal ... One cannot over-stress the importance of a very careful, if necessarily lengthy, appraisal of the project before you actually agree to take it on' (Browning, 1984, pp. 138–9). The advantage is self-evident: why risk having to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted if forethought could prevent mistakes in the first place? Where appraisal has been so negligent that it fails to specify policy goals and measures clearly then attempts to assess the performance later will be blighted anyway. Sound appraisals of strategy towards democracy promotion are crucially important to help minimise the potentially high costs of avoidable policy failure. Such costs should be calculated not just in terms of money squandered or, even, damage to the democracy promoter's reputation, but the dashed hopes and disappointments in societies where people cherished hopes that international involvement would help them achieve greater freedom and democracy. An increase in punitive reprisals of the kind that repressive regimes visit on their political opponents and pro-democracy activists may add to the cost. A different manifestation of democratic collateral damage arises when international sanctions that undermine autocracy also depress the socio-economic conditions essential to stable liberal democracy.

Of course the first part of the double shift, from *ex post* to *ex ante*, does not mean evaluations can or should be substituted by appraisal. On the contrary, just as Basil Cracknell (2000, p. 146) concluded from great experience in development aid that evaluations can help counter the undue 'appraisal optimism' found among development planners pushing their favourite schemes, so appraisal could help counter the evaluation pessimism encountered among democracy assistance practitioners impressed by the problems besetting accurate measurement of the results of their activities. They know how high the hurdle called the 'significance test' can be. Judgements about democracy assistance's impact that try to take in unintended and future consequences are bound to be more speculative than commenting on a project's more narrowly defined objectives or expenditures alone. And yet impact is what matters most in the long run. As exercises, then, both appraisals and evaluations are important: the value to be gained from the second is enhanced where the findings can be compared rigorously with findings from investigating other ways of promoting democracy and when the conclusions inform the policy process. This is nothing more than a dynamic perspective on the assessment procedure (Carlsson *et al.*, 1994, p. 11).

The significance for goal achievement of the second part of the double shift, from assistance to promotion, can be illustrated by posing some questions. If the

various instruments ranged along the continuum of power and which writers have dichotomised into linkage versus leverage and soft versus hard power, can be employed in different combinations or used sequentially, then how do we know which options will work best and under what conditions? For example, when does a decision to invoke democratic conditionalities offer greater promise than investing funds in some form of democracy assistance, or what will be the optimum mix? Take for instance the EU's approach to employing 'active leverage' prior to accession by new member states, supplemented by processes of socialisation into democratic norms and practices acting once the full force of leverage has obsolesced. Kelley (2006, pp. 41–8) is right to question whether a strategy of this sort will work in respect of countries now being offered economic incentives by the EU's new European Neighbourhood Policy without prospect of accession, in return for making democratic progress.

Furthermore, although the seemingly simple distinction between democracy assistance and all other approaches to promoting democracy superficially aligns with the organisational distinction between democracy foundations or related bodies such as the NED, NDI, IRI, IMD, WFD and *Stiftungen* on the one side and governmental departments and intergovernmental organisations on the other, it can easily lose purchase, for two reasons.

First, clear-cut analytical distinctions between forms of power and influence including those between the different versions of conditionalities can become muddy in practice. A particular relationship may be interpreted differently by the different parties. For instance what one side offers as dialogue or incentive certain partners may perceive as a form of pressure, perhaps a 'throtter', which contains an implied threat. Conditionality might be received as 'pseudo-conditionality', contrary to intentions. In communications between democratic and authoritarian regimes, misunderstandings abound. Even where one party has little option but to agree to the conditionalities that are indicated by the other there may be no agreement over how this situation came about. So, by denying responsibility, or, perhaps, claiming to operate in accord with international law, the democracy promoter admits only to trying to influence whereas the recipient views the relationship more like a coercive form of power.

Secondly, the different approaches to promoting democracy do not function independently of one another and democracy promoters seek to take advantage of the interactions especially when dealing with authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes. Thus in Levitsky and Way's (2005) reasoning, 'linkage' draws strength by enhancing the opportunities for 'leverage': the two are not mutually exclusive alternatives. 'Leverage' alone is deemed unlikely to change competitive authoritarian regimes into sustainable democracies. Conversely linkage without leverage will not transform autocracies presiding over closed societies, North Korea for example. And contrasting with Vachudova's (2005, p.

259) claim that the EU's 'active leverage' derives its effectiveness from 'passive leverage' there is much talk now about how America's 'soft power' around the world is being degraded by its deployment of hard power in the Middle East. Even the seemingly soft option of providing democracy assistance to pro-democracy activists can be perceived by the power holders as a serious personal threat. That explains why in many countries the authorities are now pursuing imaginative counter-strategies to cut down, contain and neutralise the international support being offered to civil society, however exaggerated may be their estimate of the society's potential to force radical change.

In reality assistance to human rights advocacy groups, democracy demonstrators and, even, democratically inclined political parties is far from being just a technical or bureaucratic approach. It may be no less political than is diplomatic pressure on governments to relax the restrictions on such freedoms as political association, organisation and expression. All these efforts are very much part of that conflict between interests and values and between the power holders and the rest as well any conflicts among power holders and among reformers, from which the struggle for political change takes its character, and which will determine whether change becomes self-sustaining. The effects of support and of pressure can resemble one another; the two approaches can be complementary, mutually serving halves of what might be called a 'nutcracker approach'. Just such a unified approach forms part of what Carothers (1997; 2004) means by a more strategic approach to promoting democracy. However, we do not know for certain that it will work better than the alternatives.

Nevertheless the literature does give some confidence that broad-based comparative assessments of different approaches to promoting democracy offer a practicable way of informing strategic thinking and policy appraisal. To mention but two examples in a growing body of scholarship, Ethier (2003) sought to compare the results of conditionality and incentives as democracy promotion strategies in the EU's negotiations with prospective members, while Kelley (2004) compared the effectiveness of conditionality and socialisation-based methods used by the EU, Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in efforts to improve the status of national minorities in post-communist countries. But neither pretended to assess the relative contributions available to the two sides of the 'nutcracker' approach, let alone measure that against the effects of socialisation, however defined. Vachudova's (2005) study comes closest to doing that. She attached greater weight to the consequences of EU empowerment of local reform activists, through 'active leverage', than to the pressure exerted on recalcitrant governments. However even these findings were drawn just from limited EU experience. None of these or similar studies denies the existence of considerable unfilled scope to do more comparative analysis of democracy promotion strategies, that will draw on a wider body of evidence and improve the defective policy status quo. However, the challenge will not be easy.



### No Easy Challenge

A methodological framework for appraising strategies for promoting democracy must cope with several sets of variables. Because the contents of each set contain alternatives where there are significant qualitative differences and no standard metrics, comparative assessments are unlikely to be straightforward.

First, there are the inputs into democracy promotion. These include: money; managerial ability; organisational expertise; professional competence; technical know-how; insights from political science; diplomatic skills; what President Bush calls 'political capital'; trust or social capital among partners; military intelligence; and the ability to make credible threats and a capacity to coerce. In addition to such resources, all of which have played some part in attempts to promote democracy, there is the more passive side of international influence, where democracy effects have occurred but were not intended. Much of Nye's (2005) idea of soft power probably works in this way. It is not obvious how rates of return to the different inputs to active promotion of democracy could be compared scientifically. There is no common unit of value for measuring them. Moreover whereas some of the inputs must be regarded as consumables that are used up in the exercise, like money spent, other inputs could be self-generating and actually accumulate through use. In certain circumstances an exercise of power or influence begets yet more of the same, whereas different circumstances will see the stock drawn down.

Second, there are the different tools, instruments or approaches. Assigning individual responsibility for an outcome to just one category of these, a particular form of leverage, say, is tricky when as is often the case different approaches are used together, by democracy promoters individually or collectively. The problem is mitigated where the different approaches are aimed at different objects. But even that does not exclude the possibility that there will be external effects. A further problem arises when trying to compare the approaches. Just how do you compare the effectiveness of: assistance intended to transfer formal institutional models; measures such as conditionalities whose purpose is to secure behavioural change; attempts to bring about social learning or a shift in norms, values and beliefs; and interventions directed at altering more directly the dynamics of group struggle for political power? Analysts must determine what weight to attach to changes at the elite level *vis-à-vis* those that involve greater numbers of ordinary people, and the relevant time horizons.

Third, because the situations where democracy promoters are actively engaged vary so greatly, differences among the objective possibilities and among actual policy objectives are similarly diverse and hard to compare, at least in the short to medium terms. So questions about what works or will work should be treated as several distinct questions, catering for democracy recovery and advance, for challenging a well-established autocracy and preventing regression towards authoritarian rule, for furthering transition to democracy and helping new

democracies consolidate or become more democratic. It may be unreasonable to expect just one set of indicators to do all the work of capturing performance. A more realistic course would be to devise functionally equivalent sets of non-identical indicators for the purpose of comparison, while at the same time taking account of differences in the degree of difficulty or magnitude of the challenge. Post-conflict situations for instance could merit a special weighting. Indicators of achievement can be made sensitive to the fact that even authoritarian regimes vary in respect of whether they enjoy some measure of legitimacy among their citizens and do not rely on force and fear alone. The differences in the sources from which they derive that legitimacy, of which nationalist hostility to external political interference is one example, is a secondary consideration, but it too could be accommodated. Thus persuading a hereditary ruler to order some limited political opening might be reckoned to be less daunting than convincing a highly bureaucratic regime to change. The democracy promoters' ideas of success and failure as well as the actual prospects of achieving success should relate to local context, and in turn find reflection in the structure of assessment. Similarly the way threats to democratic sustainability, the countermeasures and their effectiveness are identified can factor in the different vulnerabilities between fragile new and stronger, longer-established democracies (Brimmer, 2005, p. 254). Sound appraisals of democracy promotion should anticipate that similar approaches will produce different results in different political environments. And the way that given or expected results are interpreted and their apparent significance will very likely differ too.

All things considered, the conclusion Finkel *et al.* (2006, p. 84) arrive at from evaluating USAID assistance applies every bit as much to international influence on democratisation and its assessment: there is still 'much that social scientists do not yet know about how democracy grows or is eroded'. And yet in the progression of endeavour from devising better ways of evaluating forms of democracy assistance to assessing the other ways of promoting democracy and, finally, to making broad-based comparisons, some building blocks have already been laid. At the lowest course, the next steps could include refining the definition of what counts as democracy assistance and comparing more closely the performance of individual sub-sectors, such as support to civil society and to legislatures, or specific combinations and sequences of sub-sectoral support. Given that prior to Finkel *et al.*'s research USAID was tending to do fewer programme evaluations as its democracy expenditures grew and UNDP's Democratic Governance Group does not evaluate its own activities, improvement should be easy: more and increasingly sophisticated evaluations, winnowing out activities that are freely admitted to have been wrongly labelled as democracy assistance in order to inflate the appearance. The dividing line with governance projects is especially confused.

At the next level, assessing democracy promotion more broadly, again some foundations already exist, most notably in the substantial literature on the EU.



There are also several recent studies of individual countries and studies of distinctive types of regime where a focal point of political inquiry has been the impact of external factors (examples are Åslund and McFaul, 2006 on Ukraine; Adesnik and McFaul, 2006 on the US's autocratic allies). Historical process tracing is one of the methods used. Finally much could be gained by revisiting the established international relations literature examining the record of similar instruments of influence and power used in pursuit of objectives other than democracy promotion, so long as the limits to transferability of knowledge to the democracy promotion arena are recognised. The experience of economic sanctions for instance has been studied in a variety of situations, from combating apartheid in South Africa to trying to unseat Cuba's President Castro. Bringing all the information together in a structured way so as to enable systematic and meaningful comparison of lessons for democracy promotion is feasible. Exploring the potential of simple modelling techniques to comprehend the findings may provide a method, although in combining the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative or case study research the relative weightings would still have to be decided. But if economists can create an economic production function out of a mixture of capital, labour and land then it may not be fanciful to envision an international democracy promotion production function formulated along similar lines. And if the sort of collective action problem that formerly held back investment in finding ways of gauging the performance of democracy promotion is now reducing, because of increasing interest from both supporters and opponents of democracy promotion, then attention naturally turns to the question of who will do it.

### **Beyond In-House Assessment**

No single organisation has the capability to review democracy promotion *tout court*. The devising and executing of methodologies for assessing democracy support can be done on as multinational a basis as are the activities themselves. The available academic capital could be exploited more heavily in the democracy promotion policy process, alongside the growing number of independent think tanks and policy research institutes with relevant expertise.<sup>5</sup> One of the most intriguing issues is how far participant methods of assessment involving 'stakeholders' in countries 'targeted' by democracy promotion can be embedded in the process.

One view is that the purpose of assessing activities directed at supporting democratisation is not simply to learn how to do things better or, even, to make practitioners more accountable to the politicians and taxpayers who authorise and fund their work. Instead the point should be to exercise, display and share the democratic ethos. Assessment itself becomes a tool of socialisation into democratic values, by setting an example and through the chosen methods of involvement. The aim is to establish shared ownership of both process and results. The act of evaluation becomes an act of democratisation (Crawford, 2003, p. 17). It

helps democratise the relationship between 'donor' and 'recipient', compelling *both* sides to commit more fully to such values as inclusiveness and mutual respect. In its more technical aspect it can be an exercise in capacity building in democratic governance too. The procedures for designing, implementing and analysing the results from assessments and for evaluating the assessment process itself may all be fashioned to reflect these high ambitions. In the words of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2004, p. 19), participatory evaluation expresses the right for ordinary people to have a voice in matters that significantly affect their interest. If this is so important to assessing economic development cooperation then its relevance to external efforts to promote democracy can hardly be overstated. Indeed for Gordon Crawford (2003, pp. 8–10) democracy assistance misses both an opportunity and a democratic obligation if informed local actors do not control the impact evaluation and if their knowledge and understanding are not incorporated as key components. The fact that certain approaches to promoting democracy involve some measure of coercion, coupled with the idea that democratisation is not something that can be imposed from outside, suggests that the role of assessing democracy promotion cannot be left to the democracy promoters. As the construction of assessment methodologies must bear some relation to the policies and the methods for promoting democracy then the case for participant appraisal of strategies begins to look unassailable. However that is easier said than done.

For one thing there are objections even in respect of institutionalising participatory approaches to the evaluation of democracy assistance (see Green and Kohl, 2007). Local partners might be reluctant to 'bite the hand that feeds them'. Non-partners might offer a more independent evaluation but could be influenced by resentment at having been excluded from projects and programmes or simple ignorance. In conducting evaluations the answers you get may still depend on precisely who is asked, as well as who sets the questions and who does the asking. But if for these reasons participatory assessment of democracy assistance is still fairly unusual, then no-one has even inquired whether it could be made feasible for democracy promotion appraisal, notwithstanding the potential significance if external shows of power really can be self-limiting as ways of helping a country become more democratic, and if democratic legitimacy and sustain-ability depend on ownership that must come from within.

There is no obvious answer to the question 'who should do appraisal?' once we move away from the more consensual world of democracy assistance to more politically contentious approaches to promoting democracy like conditionalities, threats of sanctions and forms of pressure. The 'primary stakeholder' of democracy promotion is society, but society as such cannot be asked. If the public was free to undertake a credible participatory appraisal of strategies aimed at promoting democracy in their country, then democracy promotion from outside would not be necessary. Barometric surveys that establish popular attitudes about democracy's condition are one thing, and some of these receive support from



democracy assistance budgets like USAID's. But informed judgements about the comparative merits of different strategies for promoting democracy require a different order of reflection. The diplomatic manoeuvring involved in such activities is often shrouded in secrecy and hard to appreciate. Nevertheless there have been some examples of oppressed peoples signalling their informal 'consent' to being the victims of double jeopardy, where they believed that the punishing imposition of measures like foreign investment embargoes could help bring down their oppressors and judged the resulting misery in the interim would be bearable. The informal support that black South Africans voiced for sanctions against the apartheid state in the 1980s is an example that lent moral authority to international sanctions at that time. There have also been numerous cases of pro-democracy activists lobbying international donors to suspend or withdraw their development aid support, where the benefits were seen to accrue primarily to the government or regime. Evidence of this sort can, and presumably sometimes does, enter into the democracy promoters' reflections on strategy, although it is not the kind of information that tells us which approaches to promoting democracy will be most effective. And although leading political opponents of an authoritarian government might be best placed to offer the nearest thing to an 'expert' opinion on that, the dangers such as being branded unpatriotic and arrested as traitors could be a deterrent. The opinions of any who are enjoying political asylum abroad may be out of touch with the realities on the ground, and they may not be authentic representatives. Ahmed Chalabi's misleading advice to the US government about what would happen in Iraq after the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein is testament. Consultations by senior figures in countries or organisations promoting democracy with regime opponents who are personal friends may not be characterised by the tension that could exist between 'goal-oriented' appraisal and 'user-oriented' evaluation, but they are a long way from full participatory assessment. The potential for conflict between foreign supply-driven and local demand-led approaches to democracy assistance, which even some practitioners regard as a serious concern, at its worst may cast doubt on the compatibility with democratisation of something more fundamental than disagreements over approaches to promoting democracy, namely competing visions of the democratic end itself.

The high-level debates going on in the US about how to obtain good 'intelligence' on politics inside foreign countries, following the serious intelligence failures over Iraq and continuing absence of stable democracy there, illustrate many of these points. But the challenge of preventing debacles happening elsewhere requires going beyond amassing more reliable information and accurate analysis. For good policy appraisal these materials must find their way into the policy-making process. If a more joined-up approach that links *ex post* assessment of assistance and *ex ante* appraisal of democracy promotion strategies is actually to benefit strategy, then a key element must involve an institutional solution. The absence of bridges or feedback 'loops' between democracy support practitioners on the one side and the policy-makers is probably no less damaging than is

the 'attribution gap' that signifies the difficulty of proving causal connections between known assistance inputs and observed outcomes. The dilemma is compounded by the resistance of leading democracy promoters to sharing strategic thinking about their activities. And the presence of 'firewalls' that help the democracy foundations operate at arms' length from the official bodies that fund their activities adds yet one more inter-organisational dimension to the institutional barriers inside governments and intergovernmental bureaucracies that impede knowledge transfer and institutional learning on democracy promotion.

Firm connections downstream from the appraisal/reappraisal of ways to promote democracy to the evaluations of democracy assistance and upstream to high-level deliberations on the very policy goal of promoting democracy are necessary if strategic thinking is to be kept under review. Recent developments in the US and EU suggest some appreciation of this point. In the former the reorganised intelligence community has been directed to conduct more analysis of democracy-related activities and extend its outreach to academic specialists. Moves are well under way to integrate the aid planning, coordination and implementation mechanisms of USAID and the Department of State. In the EU a report commissioned by the European Parliament (NIMD, 2005, pp. 23–31) makes extensive suggestions for institutional reforms to improve the capacity for strategic decision-making on democracy and human rights support. These include for instance an Advisory Committee mandated to offer recommendations to all three: the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament.

While it is too early to predict the outcome of such developments they are certainly not without risk. Historically in international development cooperation a familiar argument for exposing projects and programmes to rigorous *ex post* evaluation is to insulate the professional management from disruptive interference by self-seeking political and commercial lobbies. In democracy promotion a free-moving transmission belt from assistance evaluations to policy appraisals should be accompanied by safeguards that monitor flows travelling in the reverse direction and render assistance practitioners vulnerable to misguided political interference. Such an out-turn would contradict, not serve the aim of bringing value to assessments by feeding their findings into more broadly based attempts to appraise democracy promotion in advance. The risk is hardly academic. Attempts to align more closely the activities of USAID and the State Department have triggered some contrasting anxieties in Washington circles: USAID's economic development cooperation could lose credibility if political objectives are thought to gain the upper hand; and democracy promotion will be tarnished by perceptions that it is being tied more closely to narrow US security interests. In Europe, where a campaign to establish a new European Foundation for Democracy through Partnership has support from the President of the European Commission there are concerns that such a proposal could yet fall foul of the 'strategic realism and alliance-building' that has so coloured EU democracy support in the past (Youngs, 2006, p. 24).



## Conclusion

Recent endeavours to improve the assessment of democracy assistance are commendable. Closer specification of the variables and substantial investment in data recovery would contribute further momentum. The case for being even more ambitious, incorporating the assessment findings into more considered, systematic and wide-ranging appraisals of different approaches to promoting democracy has been framed here by a statement of the potential benefits. Not just among their critics but even inside the democracy promotion organisations there is an acknowledgement that we do not know enough about what works, and why. There is a shared recognition that democracy promotion policy could be more effective if it was informed by a better understanding. The rationale for making the effort is to be found in the ultimate goals that are posited for democracy promotion. These can be couched in terms of democracy as a good in itself and because of the instrumental worth that democratisation may have for human development generally, the promotion of the UN's Millennium Development Goals particularly and the returns to development aid specifically. If the prospects for international peace and security among nations are also enhanced in a world of democracies, then aspiring to more effective strategies for democracy promotion becomes even more worthwhile. Debates about the policy goal of democracy promotion should also benefit from sound appraisal. The fact that the strategies for promoting democracy are constitutive of political relationships with countries such that different strategies have different implications for the possibilities of democratic self-determination certainly merits closer consideration.

Although assistance evaluations may aim to realise some of the advantages claimed for participatory assessment, making the appraisal of democracy promotion policy more participatory seems much more problematical. This underlines the importance of making a full inventory of the benefits and costs of the different approaches to promoting democracy and bringing the findings of comparative analysis into the policy-making process. Neither the methodological difficulties, some of them generic to social science and unlikely to be solved by democracy practitioners on their own, nor the institutional obstacles should be underestimated. Nevertheless some major players in democracy promotion now show some awareness that new or more strategic approaches to decision-making are required if they are to promote democracy successfully in what is generally seen as an increasingly challenging environment. The willingness to commission more research on assessment is a healthy sign, as are the growing exchanges between those who work in democracy promotion and others who merely study it. Some building blocks for the comparative examination of different approaches to doing democracy promotion already exist. Now the agenda should be pursued more systematically, in a more integrated fashion and with greater coverage. However it remains to be seen whether institutional changes involving the democracy promotion actors themselves really will

convert the potential benefits into a more informed approach to policy-making on democracy promotion. And even if that does happen, there is no guarantee that the high value benefits claimed for democratisation and so by implication for successful democracy promotion will then be achieved.

(Accepted: ● ● ● ●)

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## Notes

- 1 The meaning and merits of strategy in regard to democracy promotion are elaborated in Burnell (2005, pp. 364–5).
- 2 Examples include jointly staged workshops involving North American and European democracy assistance actors such as USAID and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency plus a few academics: 'Measuring the Impact of Democracy and Governance Assistance' (The Hague, March 2005); 'Methods and Experiences of Evaluating Democracy Support' (Stockholm, April 2006); and 'Evaluating International Efforts at Democracy Promotion: Concepts, Measurement and Causality' (Madrid, June 2006). Non-attributable comments from these and events in Washington DC help inform this article.
- 3 Finkel *et al.* (2006) concluded from examining USAID democracy and governance aid to all countries over 1990–2003 that US\$10 million additional dollars would produce a five-fold increase in the amount of democratic change that the average country could be expected to achieve, *ceteris paribus*, in any given year.
- 4 In its new 'Strategic Framework', US Agency for International Development (2005, p. 3) says, 'We recognize that democracy must be home-grown. Thus, the centrepiece of our efforts remains our strong and enduring partnership with local actors'.
- 5 Leading examples are the private, non-profit, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, whose Thomas Carothers (2006) gave evidence to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on responding to the democracy promotion backlash, and in Europe the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterio (FRIDE), an institutional member of the Club of Madrid. FRIDE's Youngs was lead author of the strategy paper on democracy and human rights support commissioned by the European Parliament (NIMD, 2005).

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