

Promoting Democracy Backwards



Peter Burnell

About FRIDE

FRIDE is an independent think-tank based in Madrid, focused on issues related to democracy and human rights; peace and security; and humanitarian action and development. FRIDE attempts to influence policy-making and inform public opinion, through its research in these areas.

Working Papers

FRIDE's working papers seek to stimulate wider debate on these issues and present policy-relevant considerations.

Promoting Democracy Backwards

Peter Burnell

November 2006

Peter Burnell is Professor of Politics in the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, United Kingdom. He has published numerous books and articles on democratisation generally and international democracy promotion in particular, and on politics in Zambia specifically. He is founding editor of the international journal *Democratization*.

© Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) 2006.

Felipe IV, 9 1º Dcha. 28014 Madrid – SPAIN

Tel.: +34 915 22 25 12 – Fax: +34 915 22 73 01

Email: fride@fride.org

All FRIDE publications are available at the FRIDE website: www.fride.org

This document is the property of FRIDE. If you would like to copy, reprint or in any way reproduce all or any part, you must request permission. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect the opinion of FRIDE. If you have any comments on this document or any other suggestions, please email us at comments@fride.org

Contents

Democracy Gained and Democracy Lost	1
Active and Passive, Direct and Indirect Promotion and Assistance	3
Promoting Democracy Backwards: A Typology	5
Non-assistance and Non-promotion	5
Perverse Assistance and Perverse Promotion	5
Anti-assistance and Counter-promotion	7
What is in a Typology?	12
Final Reflections	13

The idea and practice of international democracy promotion has gained considerable attention over the last few years. There is now both a substantial multinational industry involved in promoting democracy abroad and a significant accumulation of scholarly studies examining the performance. In the United States, President George W. Bush has given impetus to the cause of promoting freedom and democracy in the Middle East especially, as a major plank in his administration's strategy for countering international terrorism. In Europe, the effectiveness of the European Union's application of democratic conditionalities (the so-called 'Copenhagen criteria') to accession candidates from post-communist Central and Eastern Europe has been widely acknowledged. There is now an attempt by the EU to adapt the lessons and repeat the democratic gains from its enlargement strategy in the context of a new 'European neighbourhood' policy towards countries that will never be considered candidates for membership. In March 2006, the United Nations launched its Democracy Fund, with 26 countries pledging an initial total of 41 million dollars for the initiative. All in all, just as Amartya Sen said at the end of the last millennium – in a much repeated claim – that *democracy* is now a 'universal value', so a more recent suggestion by Michael McFaul declares that *democracy promotion* is a world value, albeit not yet a universal value.¹ According to Sen, democracy's status as a universally relevant system is now accepted and democracy is desired throughout the world, even though some dictators still remain to be convinced. And for McFaul, the promotion of democracy is now an international norm; the normative burden has shifted to those not interested in advocating democracy promotion.

However, democratisation still faces an uphill struggle in many parts of the world even today. *Ipsa facto* the same is true of democracy promotion. Moreover, many of the adverse factors originate in the international environment and they include some that can be found

within the democracy promotion industry itself – as a comprehensive impact evaluation would reveal. The spotlight should concentrate not just on the rights and responsibilities of the world community of democracies to intervene on the side of democracy against enemies inside countries that would erode or destroy it from within.² It needs to be trained as well on threats that international dimensions of democratisation and the international system pose to democracy and democratisation. Accordingly, this paper offers a typology of anti-democracy promotion.

Democracy Gained and Democracy Lost

The wording of 'promoting democracy backwards' takes its cue from Rose and Shin's insightful thesis on 'democratisation backwards'.³ That thesis claimed in many contemporary instances countries seem to be trying to install competitive elections without first ensuring that certain basic institutions of the modern state are in place, most notably the rule of law, civil society institutions and accountability of the government. The authors argued that this departed from the sequence by which liberal democracy came about in the longest established democracies, where the rule of law (and economic growth) preceded competitive elections.

The idea of 'promoting democracy backwards' resonates in two senses, then, while leaving open the question of what kind of future it ultimately heralds for democratisation, just as Rose and Shin allow that 'democratisation backwards' might be a 'low level equilibrium trap' that could lead either to 'broken-back democracies' or alternatively the repudiation of free

¹ Amartya Sen, 'Democracy as a Universal Value', *Journal of Democracy*, 10:3 (1999): 3-17; Michael McFaul, 'Democracy Promotion as a World Value', *The Washington Quarterly*, 28:1 (2004): 147-63.

² Morton Halperin and Mirna Galic (eds.), *Protecting Democracy. International Responses* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Council on Foreign Relations, 2005).

³ Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin, 'Democratization Backwards: The Problem of Third Wave Democracies', *British Journal of Political Science*, 31:2 (2001): 331-54.

elections or, yet again might even be followed by completion of the democratisation process. Rather this paper argues that first, there are different kinds of external factors that make a negative contribution to democratisation and work against the efforts to promote democracy. They push in the direction of de-democratisation or democratic regression. But second, in as much as these factors seem to make it more difficult for societies to undertake and sustain democratic political reform, they bring to mind the old idea that democratisation must involve struggle, or is the product of struggle.⁴ Just as that idea does not necessarily mean *violent* struggle (as in the bloody revolutions that overthrew autocratic regimes) neither does the idea's most usual formulation make it essential for the enemies of democracy to be 'foreign devils', except in case of wars of national liberation. In those wars, national political self-determination has frequently been the occasion for democratic opening, but just as often has ended up giving priority to formal political independence over – and at the expense of – democracy. Nevertheless, the view that *process matters* is quite fundamental. Process influences the kind and level of democracy or 'democraticness' that emerges and/or the sense of public ownership and commitment to upholding the democratic gains, especially by engaging the mass of the people, instead of just relying on a cosy agreement among leading elites, as in so-called 'pacted transitions'. Democracy handed on a plate from the outside may be as inauspicious a foundation as is the imposition of democracy by external force, even though some apparent success stories can be found for both. Democracy can easily be lost, owing to popular apathy, indifference or simply the absence of initial conditions that are most conducive to democratic sustainability. In contrast, democracy that is gained in the face of adversity – international adversity included – might turn out to be more secure.

The difference between 'promoting democracy backwards' and the more familiar 'democratisation backwards' then is not simply one between exogenous

(international) and endogenous (domestic) dimensions of political change. It is a difference between, on the one side, saying something about the climate in which (the process by which) change is made, and on the other side, claiming that certain political steps must come first (for example the rule of law). Promoting democracy backwards makes a statement about how democracy is generated – or impeded or set back – and not about a specific order in which challenges must be addressed. However, the final outcome cannot be known with any certainty. So the notion that, by causing democratisation impulses to 'go back to basics' – the important struggle against adversity –, today's anti-democracy promotion might actually be making a positive if accidental and indirect contribution to democratisation in the longer term, will not be explored further here.

Instead, the emphasis here is on why the current hubris surrounding democracy promotion and protection (sometimes referred to as DPP) should be tempered by a sensitivity to forces of democracy prevention (DP) and democracy destruction (DD) that are present in the international system. At minimum, there are implications for how DPP endeavours should be reconstructed if they are to maximise their chances of success.

However, first it is important to note that by democracy here is meant the kind of democracy that most DPP activities aim to bring about, namely Western-style liberal democracy at most. By drawing attention to democracy promotion backwards the argument does not set out to criticise DPP on the grounds that its model of democracy frustrates – intentionally or otherwise – progress towards some more radical form of democracy. That is a criticism other writers have made, for instance William Robinson who portrays US democracy promotion especially as aiming to introduce elitist democracy, or polyarchy, in order to head off grass-roots demands for more 'progressive' democratic changes – changes that would be less subservient to transnational capital, and more productive of real empowerment.⁵ The

⁴ See for example Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission. Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004).

⁵ William Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

plausibility of Robinson's and the many similar accounts is for readers to judge: it is compatible with, but different from, the arguments about promoting democracy backwards. The same observation could be made about notions of and demands for democracy that are so locally and culturally specific that they owe little to the ideas of the international democracy promoters *or* their Western-based left-leaning intellectual critics.

Secondly, promoting democracy backwards is not a reference to ideational contestation and negative social learning manifested by the rival appeal exerted by those other belief systems that reject all forms of democracy, liberal or otherwise. An example would be those that place the sovereignty of God or divine scripture above the sovereignty of the people and the corollary that rule must be by consent of the ruled, and so bestow special powers and political authority on select (often self-selected) interpreters of the holy writ. These, along with extreme anti-democratic forms of nationalism and Marxism and Maoism in a few remaining outposts like Nepal, continue to have their groups of supporters. But the question of whether they pose a significant threat to democratisation in terms of a sustained ability to capture the hearts and minds of people is, while generally discounted in the propositions that advance 'democracy as universal value', not the subject of the discussion here. That subject is a typology for promoting democracy backwards, intended as a guide to rethinking how international actors should go about trying to support democratisation in the future.

But before moving to such a typology, three useful distinctions should be made first: between active and passive democracy promotion; between direct and indirect promotion; and between democracy promotion and democracy assistance.

Active and Passive, Direct and Indirect Promotion and Assistance

The idea of promoting democracy has both an *active* and a *passive* sense, corresponding to the distinction between the promotion of democracy and democracy being promoted. The *active* sense comprises deliberate actions undertaken with a view to achieving a democratic purpose. It draws attention to which actors in the international democracy promotion 'industry' are doing what, and how, as well as to what effect. The *passive* sense orients more towards how far democratic trends are occurring in prospective, emerging and new democracies, and whether the trends are being influenced by external forces, outside actors and international events. *Intentionality* is central to the *active* sense of promoting democracy. But in the *passive* sense democratic impulses could come about in a country as an accidental by-product of international and transnational dealings. That includes the observations people make of and about political developments occurring inside other countries, including their near neighbours - as captured by such terms as the demonstration effect, democratisation by emulation, and (somewhat perversely given that democracy normally has such positive normative connotations), 'contagion'. All these are part of the international dimensions of democratisation. They are not insignificant.

A second important distinction is between the *direct* promotion of democracy, which involves political strategies, approaches or methods aimed directly at political objectives, and more *indirect* strategies that have the same overall goal of democracy but approach it sideways or through mediating channels.⁶ Attempts

⁶ The former is explored in Peter Burnell, 'Political Strategies of External Support for Democratization', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 1:3

to contribute to the *non-political* requisites and preconditions that enable or facilitate and encourage democratisation illustrate the indirect line of approach. Aiding a country's economic or socio-economic development is a major example. Furthering economic liberalisation or marketisation might be another. All four of the following permutations are possible: active direct promotion; active indirect promotion; passive direct promotion; passive indirect promotion. And in principle, anti-democratic versions of all four permutations are possible too.

Under the direct umbrella democracy is actively promoted in a number of ways, by using different instruments, approaches or methods. These range from influence and persuasion (sometimes called social learning) and 'soft power', through forms of pressure (for instance by shifting the terms of engagement from 'diplomatic dialogue' to 'diplomatic pressure') to threats (or the application) of negative economic and financial conditionalities and other penalties for non-compliance. Beyond economic sanctions lie the more extreme applications of 'leverage', notably 'hard power', in the form of physical coercion. The correct positioning of positive conditionalities (that is, conditional incentives) along this scale can be debated, as can those forms of socialisation that do not employ normative suasion but instead seek to elicit behavioural conformity through cost-benefit calculation (for example weighing the international reputational costs of being seen to reject democracy against the increase in international legitimacy that can come from laying claim to democratic aspirations. While appearances may seem to be everything, even so a regime may become trapped into making substantive democratic concessions). The various instruments or approaches to promoting democracy are probably rarely used in isolation. They tend to be used in parallel or combination, either by the same democracy promoter or by promoters collectively, either at a single point in time or when employed in sequence over a period of time. Judgments made about the political situation in

the 'target' country and its assumed political trajectory will be important determinants.

One of the most tangible and direct forms of democracy *promotion* is democracy *assistance* - the third important distinction. Democracy *assistance* comprises offers of practical, technical, financial and other support in the form of democracy programmes and projects that are invariably grant-supported and, usually, consensual. As such they are the soft option in democracy *promotion*: they are contributory to what Levitsky and Way call 'linkage' - or general ties to the West - as distinct from 'leverage'.⁷ They inhabit only the active and direct category of democracy promotion. However, in so far as projects like those for capacity-building in civil society or strengthening the pro-democracy political opposition form part of the approach to countries with authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, the border between what is consensual (acceptable to the government) and non-consensual can be very fuzzy. The closer assistance to groups who are struggling to advance democratic reform is harnessed to external pressure on the government to allow more domestic political space in which such groups can mobilise popular support (which is a strategy that Thomas Carothers and some others at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace have argued for)⁸, then the further the democracy promotion moves away from soft democracy assistance and towards a harder approach to intervention.

(2005): 361-84. The latter is discussed in Peter Burnell, 'Democracy Promotion: the Elusive Quest for Grand Strategies', *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 3/2004: 100-116.

⁷ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, 'International Linkage and Democratization', *Journal of Democracy*, 16:3 (2005): 20-34.

⁸ As evidenced in for example Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway (eds.), *Uncharted Journey. Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005).

Promoting Democracy Backwards: A Typology

Non-assistance and Non-promotion

While generally-speaking the normative requirement to justify their stance might have shifted towards politicians who argue against the promotion of democracy, not all democracies invest great energy, finance or political capital in promoting democracies abroad.⁹ Needless to say they do more than the non-democracies, merely by choosing to be democracies. But not all countries with authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes (or, in Freedom House terminology, not free and only partly free states) receive much by way of democracy assistance, or are targeted resolutely and consistently by international democracy promotion actors. At least some of the orphans are deserving cases - that is to say the political oppression is great and the people desperately need help - and some of the cases are meritorious in the sense that external support might not be futile, and could have productive consequences.

Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish where non-preferment is the product of deliberation from all the other circumstances where the explanation is unthinking neglect or miscalculation, or the discipline enforced by resource constraints. The special combination of technical know-how, organisational ability and diplomatic skills that certain forms of democracy assistance require are not in infinitely elastic supply. Both the capacity of some potential candidate countries to absorb democracy assistance and the ability of democracy promoters to supply appropriate support are limited. The complexities of

getting it right are magnified in divided societies emerging from violent internal conflict and where state capacity is fragile or weak.¹⁰ The exercise of restraint on democracy promotion and assistance in these circumstances could be a blessing even if it happens as a result of donor meanness or a *realpolitik* calculation that the country is of no special interest.

Perverse Assistance and Perverse Promotion

This category refers to well-intentioned but misguided attempts to assist and promote democracy, where the efforts turn out to be counter-productive.

On the one side there is assistance that is ill-judged, technically flawed, badly planned or poorly executed, for example an international elections observation mission that the election winners use to claim an international seal of approval for an electoral process that was far from free or fair. Perverse assistance chimes with the criticism by Carothers and others that a good deal of democracy assistance has concentrated on transferring material institutions without taking the trouble to consider how such institutions can be made to function for democracy in an alien environment. Put differently, democracy assistance that is not grounded in a valid theory of democratisation – in reflections that explain how democracies come about - will at best not be very effective and at worst may be harmful to the democratic cause.

Similarly, there are democracy assistance interventions that are beneficial to certain democratic objectives but at the same time have negative externalities for some other democratic objectives, such that on balance the overall net effect is harmful. For example, Sardamov argues that notwithstanding the orthodox view that civil society is healthy for democracy, there are societies where external support to it hampers the

⁹ Two recent surveys are Richard Youngs (ed.), *Survey of European Democracy Promotion Policies 2000-2006* (Madrid: Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior/FRIDE, 2006) and Ted Piccone and Richard Youngs (eds.), *Strategies for Democratic Change* (Washington, DC and Madrid: Democracy Coalition Project and FRIDE respectively, 2006).

¹⁰ This is amply demonstrated in Jeroen de Zeeuw and Krishna Kumar (eds.), *Promoting Democracy in Postconflict Societies* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

development of the deeper, longer-term social processes and transformation of human personality that are essential to the democratic representation of differentiated social interests.¹¹ So, not less than with conventional economic forms of international development cooperation, democracy assistance projects are vulnerable to familiar shortcomings like fungibility (where assistance ends up giving support to activities or purposes inconsistent with the original intention) and 'recoil effects' that do harm to the local partner, such as when support to a civic organisation causes it to become a target for increased harassment and repression by the authorities.¹² Capacity-building efforts that serve only to make partners more dependent on and oriented to the international democracy promotion actors and their agendas may be just as damaging in their own way.

On the other side there is poor strategy, an absence of strategy even, in the sense of failure to consider the best combination of methods, instruments or approaches and timing that will promote democracy in the circumstances of a particular case. An example would be an over-reliance on economic sanctions to move a government to change its ways accompanied by too little thought given to the positive incentives that might work even better - and which would not undermine the economic conditions for durable democratic success. Taking sides in a domestic struggle for political change in a way that polarises and prolongs the conflict or prevents an internal accommodation on reform being reached would be another example. Yet another involves creating an expectation among pro-democracy activists that they will receive strong international support - something that US Ambassador Palmer reckons is particularly important to ousting the world's last dictators - and then letting them down.¹³ Apart from damaging the prospects for democratic reform in that country, it

sends a dispiriting message to would-be reformers in other countries too. If Turkey's ambition to join the EU is ultimately frustrated as a result of opposition from some EU member states, then that could yet undo some of the positive steps for democracy and human rights that EU pressure *inter alia* has helped bring about in recent years.

Finally, apart from poorly thought out or badly implemented democracy promotion and democracy assistance, there is the danger that can be done by over-selling democracy as a cure for all problems - a mistake that can only lead to disappointment which in turn may diminish the commitment to reform in prospective new democracies. Whether construed as a strategy for national security in the democracy promoting countries or instrumentalised in the 'target' countries as a gateway to economic development or increased inflows of development aid, there is much potential for disillusionment to set in. *By comparison, promoting democracy purely on the strength of its own political value and ethical strength could be the least risky if not also the most alluring marketing technique.*

In reality, the full extent of the problems that arise under perverse examples of democracy assistance and promotion is impossible to gauge. The evaluation of democracy assistance in particular remains a very imprecise art, bedevilled by doubts over when to attribute causality and the choice of yardsticks against which to assess impact and effectiveness. Impact evaluations in particular are notoriously difficult. Measuring the effectiveness (ineffectiveness, or perverse effects) of all the other approaches to promoting democracy rests on even shallower social scientific foundations. The literature offers contrasting findings from studying sanctions for example, which in some cases are thought to have prolonged resistance, and conditionality. The respective contributions made directly by EU external pressure on prospective new member states and the empowering consequences that such pressure - combined with direct practical support - has meant for pro-democracy reformers in certain EU accession candidate countries, remains very much the subject of

¹¹ Ivelin Sardamov, "Civil Society" and the Limits of Democratic Assistance', *Government and Opposition*, 40:3 (2005): 379-402.

¹² For examples and discussion see Carl Gershman and Michael Allen, 'The Assault on Democracy Assistance', *Journal of Democracy*, 17:2 (2006): 39-46.

¹³ Ambassador Mark Palmer, *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil. How to Oust the World's Last Dictators by 2025* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

an ongoing scholarly debate.¹⁴ Finally, not only is there a well-founded understanding that democracy is being actively promoted *and* welcomed for a variety of reasons many of them far from disinterested or idealistic, on both sides of the relationship, but protestations to the contrary seem bound to stoke cynicism or disbelief – neither being helpful to democracy promotion.

Anti-assistance and Counter-promotion

These are activities that are intentionally adverse to the democratic goal of promoting democracy. They comprise an active form, a passive form, and perhaps most challenging of all to identify, an intermediate category.

The active form comprises endeavours that are intended to prevent, frustrate, oppose or hollow-out movement in a democratic direction or are intended to have democratic reversal as an effect. It is easy to think of actions by governments in some of the world's more authoritarian states that would come into this category of *democracy subversion*, such as when China or President Putin provide political, diplomatic and practical support to governments in non-democracies like Belarus and Myanmar. However, there is also evidence that democracies too engage in such deliberated practice – under the influence of countervailing interests that guide their foreign policies and the way they conceive their national interest. The importance to national security of maintaining this or that friendly dictator in power is one obvious illustration. Another comes from subservience to particularistic sub-national interests at home, where the completion of lucrative business dealings rests on allowing an illiberal regime or undemocratic

government to stay the course. Familiar cases involve support for General Musharraf in Pakistan and autocratic rulers in oil-rich Gulf states, alongside examples of arms exports to governments of dubious democratic or human rights credentials. However, the harm done to human rights for example following the extension of practical help to the intelligence service or military and police forces of a country where the rule of law is not absolute may not be tantamount to damage done to democracy. Final judgment in such matters must rest on how relations of interdependence between democracy, human rights and governance are understood both generally and in the specific instance.

The role of China and Putin's Russia apart, there is some evidence that living in a bad neighbourhood can be harmful to 'democratisation in one country', although the reasons may not be straightforward. But even here it may be useful to distinguish between, on the one side, deliberate attempts to undermine democracy or derail democratisation in a neighbouring country, perhaps as a strategy of self-defence by a regime minded to issue a pre-emptive strike against the chances that its own people might end up importing the impulse to political reform, and on the other side, situations where democratisation is inhibited or retarded simply because of a fear (rational or otherwise) that change might provoke external intervention in the country. Different again is where an external demonstration effect (from a failed democratic transition, for instance), linkage or 'soft power' just happen to transmit influences biased in an anti-democratic direction. For example, the disintegration of the Soviet Union following political liberalisation under Gorbachev sent a clear signal to the rulers of China. Similarly, the instability in post-Saddam Iraq may be read as a warning against attempting substantial political reform by peoples elsewhere in the Middle East. These illustrations of *negative social learning* ('inoculation') are examples not of the active form but of the *passive direct* form of democracy counter-promotion.

A distinctive sub-category of active counter-promotion for which examples may be more hypothetical than

¹⁴ Some prominent examples are Judith Kelley, *Ethnic Politics in Europe: The Power of Norms and Incentives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), Milada Vachudova, *Europe Undivided. Democracy, Leverage and Integration After Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Geoffrey Pridham, *Designing Democracy. EU Enlargement and Regime Change in Post-Communist Europe* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

real is *counter-absorption* - the mirror image of Whitehead's observation that in a few instances territorial incorporation has been responsible for extending democracy's coverage.¹⁵ He cited the addition of Hawaii and the still not fully incorporated Puerto Rico into the United States, and the reunification of Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as post-war illustrations. If communist China were to take control of democratic Taiwan that would be an example of counter-absorption. A different kind of example, perhaps better given the name *perverse absorption*, would be if Korean reunification badly damaged South Korean democracy notwithstanding the fact that South Korea, like West Germany vis-à-vis the German Democratic Republic, is the stronger 'partner' in almost every respect. The accession of European states to the European Union does not strictly provide an example of the full political absorption of countries into an undemocratic state. But as more states in Southeast Europe and perhaps Turkey too join the EU, questions are bound to be asked in those countries about the democratic consequences of exchanging some of their former sovereign independence for inclusion in a larger European political arrangement that has its own distinctive democratic deficit.

The intermediate category of anti-assistance and counter-promotion includes contact and relations where the adverse effects for democratisation were not purposeful but nevertheless could reasonably have been anticipated and decisions could - perhaps should - have been taken to mitigate the chances of producing harmful effects. In these situations claims to ignorance offer no defence when the collateral democratic damage occurs, and protestations of being uninterested in these consequences could be objectionable. This category is probably the most contentious but possibly the most interesting one of all. It is a challenging exercise to identify clear examples. This is not simply because commentators may well not agree about

which international actors should have known what, the degree of understanding and the foresight they should possess and their moral and political (if not also legal) liability to take account of all the possible consequences of their actions. It is also because the way international borders of all descriptions are becoming more porous or are being dissolved in this increasingly globalised world of time and space compression means that even 'purely domestic' or internal affairs in one country or group of countries can have notable consequences a long way away.

For example, at one end of the scale we can examine the precise extent to which the long chain of miscalculations that US policy is said to have made in invading Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein and then continued during the American-British occupation immediately afterwards could have been avoided, in the interests of building stable democracy in Iraq later.¹⁶ At the other end lie the domestic sources of what Nye calls 'soft power', more specifically his reference to the attractiveness of a country's (specifically the US's) 'culture, political ideals and policy'.¹⁷ How far the central authorities in any liberal democracy can be held responsible for the 'culture' and 'political ideals' of the country is an intriguing question (the direction of causality is just as likely to run the other way), especially in a federal country with deeply entrenched traditions of political rights and civil liberties like the US. Similarly, the European Commission's ability to determine the influence that flows to the rest of the world from what goes on inside the EU member states is extremely limited. Nevertheless, certain examples of domestic policy may be sufficiently malleable by government agency to be candidates for this intermediate category of democracy counter-promotion. Thus, for instance in the US, Nye cites the permissive laws on gun control and capital punishment as cases where foreign perceptions possibly weaken the capability of US 'soft power' to promote liberal democratic values abroad. And in Europe the financial

¹⁵ Laurence Whitehead, 'Concerning International Support for Democracy in the South', in Robin Luckham and Gordon White (eds.), *Democratization in the South. The jagged wave* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996): 253.

¹⁶ See Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, 83:5 (2004): 34-56.

¹⁷ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

scandals involving political parties that surface periodically in for example Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain cannot but send unfortunate signals overseas. They tarnish the efforts made by political parties in these countries to share advice on legitimate fund-raising techniques with new parties in emerging democracies, which is an example of democracy assistance. Bribery by multinational companies in return for government favours is an even more blatant example of democracy counter-promotion where various OECD governments may be held responsible for not taking adequate preventative and disciplinary measures soon enough. This brings us back to the international behaviour of Western actors and the governments in particular.

So a yet further distinctive example of this *intermediate category* - and one that illustrates well the difficulties of assigning responsibility - is supplied by Carothers' account of the current backlash against democracy promotion. He claims this is the direct result of the way democracy's enemies abroad are able to conflate democracy promotion with the forcible pursuit of 'regime change' in Afghanistan and Iraq - military adventures that in the first instance were about goals other than the promotion of democracy in those two countries.¹⁸ The invasions have armed anti-democrats around the world with a pretext for mobilising popular support against many forms of genuine democracy intervention. They can present democracy intervention as a threat to government, state and country, thereby exploiting the grounds of sovereignty and emphasising a national imperative to resist foreign imperialism. In some measure then the examples in this intermediate category of counter-promotion are locally *constructed* - constructed by the opportunistic responses that non-democrats make to what they judge are threats to themselves. To what extent that sort of thing could be anticipated and whether the liberal democracies should adjust how they go about doing things are both debatable questions. The second one in particular could risk giving

encouragement to game playing on all sides. But a general inference that would go further than Levitsky and Way's conclusion that because there are limits to the power of leverage linkage offers an essential complement,¹⁹ is that perceptions (distorted or otherwise and irrespective of how deliberate) of excessive uses of hard power by liberal democracies in their external relations might actually undermine soft power - producing sub-optimal consequences for democracy promotion. In Whitehead's words this coercive imposition by outside force - whether the US, the UN or some other external actor - is the turning point where 'the claims of popular sovereignty tend to clash with democratization viewed as an international project'.²⁰

Of course in all such cases hindsight is a wonderful thing; and it is inevitable that arguments will persist over what could (not) have been foreseen easily and what would (not) have been preventable. What is done is done. But as is true with perverse promotion and assistance also, failure to learn the lessons and where possible make appropriate alterations in policy behaviour must be regrettable from the perspective of democracy promotion.

The passive form of anti-assistance and counter-promotion includes contacts and relations by the outside world that prove harmful to democratisation but were framed by other reasoning, objectives or goals and were not intended by anyone to be hostile to democracy. In many of these cases the actors could claim with some legitimacy that the democracy effects (good or bad) are none of their business. While not the whole of it, this occupies mainly the realm of indirect promotion of democracy backwards.

An illustration from the world of non-democracies is the influence that China's growing economic power and

¹⁸ Thomas Carothers, 'The Backlash against Democracy Promotion', *Foreign Affairs*, 85:1 (2006): 55-68.

¹⁹ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, 'International Linkage and Democratization', op. cit.

²⁰ Laurence Whitehead, 'Democratization with the Benefit of Hindsight: The Changing International Components', in Edward Newman and Roland Rich (eds.), *The UN Role in Promoting Democracy. Between Ideals and Reality* (Tokyo and New York: United Nations University Press, 2004): 147.

political diplomacy is said to be exercising increasingly not just in parts of Asia but elsewhere as well. For example, it should not be difficult to model the impact of each extra dollar on the price of a barrel of internationally traded oil which owes to burgeoning energy demands from China, on prolonging the life of authoritarian oil rentier states in the Middle East especially. Similarly there has been much talk recently of China's influence in Africa, where rulers like Uganda's President Museveni have openly welcomed the greater freedom from the West that increasing economic and financial ties with China seem likely to bring. China's pursuit of its own interests rather than any desire to campaign against democracy abroad clearly lies at the heart of such developments. And after all, the West is complicit in China's increasing integration into the global economy and accompanying rise in stature. Nevertheless, it is easy to see where the attraction lies for governments that want to resist external pressures to democratise. And Kurlantzick has drawn attention to China's success in promoting an idea of the world where nations do not aggressively interfere in one another's affairs.²¹ Nevertheless, a focus such as this on the influence of one state like China, whether direct or indirect influence, shares the weakness of all other actor-based frameworks of analysis - a distraction from *large structural features or trends in the international system that lie within the category of indirect effects and make a notable contribution to promoting democracy backwards*. Two manifestations will be mentioned here.

First, there is the influence of those structural forces in the global economy that have the effect of retarding or undermining economic development in a country, together with any which may have as their consequence increased inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth not just between countries but within countries. After all, the proposition that stable democracy benefits from economic development

remains the closest thing we have to an 'iron law', even though democratic transition can happen in its absence and high levels of development are not absolutely necessary (or sufficient) for sustainable democracy. Also, there is the well-established understanding that the distribution of political power and influence broadly tracks the distribution of economic and social resources. And so notwithstanding the formal political equality that might be enshrined in a liberal democracy's system of political rights and civil liberties, significant *de facto* inequalities among citizens can follow from socio-economic inequalities – defeating the purposes of liberal democracy promotion, let alone placing other more radical forms of democracy far beyond reach. The proposition that economic development whose benefits are shared by society as a whole is one of the surest guarantors of democratic sustainability, and the companion idea that economic growth (or decline) accompanied by absolute poverty and gross socio-economic inequality will weaken the quality and sustainability of democracy, remain among the most often tested and widely accepted beliefs in the literature on democratisation. Hence the concern that is currently being expressed by some commentators over the future of democracy in Latin America for instance, which owes precisely to the economic and socio-economic trends there. The predisposition of neo-liberal and market economics to produce further inequality also seems indisputable, as is the increasing extension of neo-liberal economic institutions at all levels - local, national, international and supranational. Democracy loses vital support; would-be dictators take encouragement. In some parts of the US government and in the US National Endowment for Democracy too, Venezuela under President Chávez would be offered as an example and a warning.

Secondly, and perhaps more arguably belonging within the passive form of democracy counter promotion, there is globalisation understood as the growth in global and regional governance, multi-level governance and polycentrism. Increasing power over peoples' lives is coming to be exercised by institutions that are neither internally democratic nor democratically accountable to the world community of states. As a site

²¹ Joshua Kurlantzick. 'The Decline of American Soft Power', *Current History*, 104: 686 (December, 2005): 419-24. The China-Africa summit held in Beijing in November 2006 was attended by representatives from nearly 50 African countries and issued in multi-million dollar trade and investment deals involving Chinese companies and Chinese aid.

of political self-determination, the national state is increasingly exposed to the trans-territorial and supra-territorial governance of a bewildering array of inter-governmental and non-governmental institutions. And while a substantial debate exists over the extent to which the power of the state is simply transforming - or being transformed - in the presence of these developments rather than being eroded or taken away, there is little disagreement that the state-challenging (and thereby democracy-threatening) effects are likely to be more problematic in many parts of the developing world. That is where most of the emerging and prospective new democracies and similar candidates for democracy promotion are to be found. Countries that are heavily reliant on grant-aided support from the international financial institutions, the Bretton Woods institutions especially seem particularly at risk. So are small countries with too little bargaining clout or technical expertise to be able to stand up for their individual interests in bodies like the World Trade Organisation.

That, over the long-run, globalisation and liberal democracy may be at odds has of course been said many times before.²² But social scientists still say remarkably little about how democracy can be preserved, let alone enhanced in a more globalised future, *and democracy assistance practitioners have not even begun to pose the relevant questions*. They have certainly not got as far as adapting what they do and the way they do things in order to meet the main challenges to democracy that are endemic to a globalising world.²³ In the meantime, pessimistic views about globalisation's potential to undermine democracy (reinforcing and reinforced by negative social learning from the established democracies) could fuel a self-fulfilling momentum, whereby democracy loses its lustre, its power to attract and the ability to inspire wholehearted popular support. In an even more sinister but equally plausible scenario, some

governments actively take advantage of globalisation's pressures in ways that concentrate executive power further and increase the state's autonomy vis-à-vis citizens and society, even as certain powers are being surrendered abroad. And the reaction of governments to the anti-globalisation protests made by social movements and other groups in society takes the form of an increasingly illiberal response – tighter restrictions on peaceful demonstrations, increased use of closed circuit television surveillance and the like. At the same time, the authorities may genuinely be unable to control the activities of even more threatening transnational actors who, by taking advantage of porous borders penetrate the domestic economic, social and political spaces. Examples are international criminal gangs such as those involved in the trafficking of illicit drugs and the sex trade. Of course the dissemination of democratic values around the world and sharpening of the appetite for freedom as a result of international democracy promotion activities offer examples of a much more positive sort.

So finally there is the cultural dimension of globalisation, which dwells on the diffusion of values, attitudes and inclinations. By downgrading the norms, principles and sentiments of freedom and democracy some of these highly mobile cultural products could well constitute threats to democratisation almost anywhere. In broad terms this refers to socialisation into an already pervasive culture of material consumption, which is so compelling as to cause indifference to politics and an extreme form of individualism to take the place of an interest in serving the public good, that is, active forms of good citizenship. As a mindset and pattern of behaviour capable of doing damage to democracy and its prospects, the potency of this should not be underestimated, even if the competing cultures of Islamic fundamentalism, nationalist xenophobia and outmoded revolutionary socialism between them will only turn the heads of but a few. Once again, however, the anti-democratic potential that further developments in global media and mass communications might stimulate or reveal through their effects on cultural change is easier to state than it is to know how the concerned promoters of democracy should respond.

²² See for example Marc F. Plattner, 'Globalization and Self-government', *Journal of Democracy*, 13:3 (2002): 54-67.

²³ On this point in relation to international party aid see Peter Burnell (ed.), *Globalizing Democracy: Party Politics in Emerging Democracies* (London: Routledge, 2006), especially chapters 1-3.

What is in a Typology?

Typologies are not theories. However, they can be an aid to theory construction – in this case to explaining how exogenous variables can do harm to democratisation, and the different ways. The scope exists to inquire more closely into the precise relationships between different international dimensions of democratisation and exactly how democracy's progress is affected, in what ways and to what extent. While only very modest claims can be made for the typology of promoting democracy backwards offered here, the implications for both analysts and practitioners of international democracy promotion are worth noting even so. International politics is characterised by nothing if not by asymmetry. It may well be 'doubtful whether an international initiative can create a democratic regime' even where 'local conditions are favourable, international consensus is strong, and adequate resources are provided'.²⁴ But the chances of firm agreement on the exact opposite are far more credible: there are international dimensions that may be harmful to democratisation and do considerable harm to a democracy, especially a fragile or fledgling regime. Looking forwards then, the following inferences should be borne in mind.

First, the typology helps place the democracy promotion industry in perspective. Not only has democracy assistance undergone considerable growth in the number of actors, but recent years have also seen considerable interest shown by academics and other independent commentators alike. Any quick count of relevant articles and books now in print would bear that out. However, not only are the total financial resources committed to democracy assistance still rather small (no one knows the true annual figure but

the world-wide total for democratic governance is certainly not more than 10 billion dollars expenditure, even now, compared with around 100 billion dollars of official development assistance in 2005), but the forces pushing the other way are many, varied, and large. *Notwithstanding its successes, the scale of democracy assistance approximates to 'spitting in the wind'.*

Second, if developed in greater detail the typology could attune seasoned democracy promoters – and their backers – more closely to what they can do and the limits of the possible. More realistic planning could be a beneficiary, for an activity where traditionally an absence of strategy or only poor strategy have been bemoaned by 'insiders' and outside commentators alike. *The ever-present danger of being portrayed as having promised more than can actually be delivered is more likely to be avoided.* That too would be a plus.

Third, the idea of promoting democracy is transported to a different plane and will find application in a larger set of forums, once the concrete activities of democracy assistance are contextualised by reference to the immeasurably greater structural and institutional forces at work in the world today. Anyone seriously committed to seeing democracy make gains should reflect closely on where to direct their attention and energies and on what their overall strategy for promoting democracy should be. Rather like the question that for many years cropped up in popular campaigns against world poverty (Jubilee 2000 for instance) – 'which is more likely to maximise the chances of making a meaningful difference, another new aid project or lobbying the World Bank to cancel third world debt?' – so must similar conundrums be addressed in the field of democracy promotion too. *Externalising responsibility for democracy promotion to the agencies of democracy assistance is at best but a half-hearted response, at worst, pure deceit.*

Fourth, then, the democracy assistance organisations cannot go it alone. Even with bigger budgets the likes of USAID, the National Endowment for Democracy, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy,

²⁴ Laurence Whitehead, 'Democratization with the Benefit of Hindsight: The Changing International Components', op. cit.: 155.

Germany's political foundations, the vehicles chosen by the European Union and all the rest can hope to achieve only so much. Even the UN's new Democracy Fund and the growing budget of the United Nations Development Programme may be able to do little more than 'plough the sea'. The undercurrents promoting democracy backwards may be faster and deeper than the more visible forwards movements, even as we speak. So not only would a more joined-up approach to thinking be worth aiming for, but both a more inclusive and better coordinated approach to action by the different actors in the foreign policy and international affairs establishments - governmental departments and non-departmental bodies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations - would be helpful. *The multifaceted nature of 'democratisation backwards' suggests that the requirements of democracy promotion merit an appropriately multidimensional response.*

Finally and especially in regard to the way international sites of power are being constructed and reconfigured beyond the old system of sovereign states, *imaginative new thinking is required over how to invest democratic values, principles and practices in the structures of global and regional governance that are liable to make democratic gains at the national and local levels look rather hollow.* Otherwise formal advances of liberal democracy may still take place and yet leave behind a good deal of what people in the oldest such democracies used to take for granted as its very substance.

Final Reflections

The surest sign that democracy promotion and protection have arrived as subjects capable of arousing considerable interest is that abbreviations - DPP - have started to become an institution in the literature. But we should not let this evident enthusiasm carry us away. Close observers mostly agree that democracy promotion's actual record of achievement has been modest. And that the fact that there will always be some failures in democracy promotion is inevitable. Devising an 'early warning system' to detect the erosion of unsteady new democracies *from within*, so that timely corrective measures can be instigated by international actors, is one thing to aim for. But the evidence of international factors actually contributing to democracy prevention, hollowing-out, reversal and destruction is also a matter of some urgency. The subject warrants closer investigation even if that means shifting attention away from actors with ostensible responsibility for promoting democracy and towards structures of power embedded in the global political economy, in other words their negative implications for democracy and the promotion of democracy.

Rose and Shin in their account of 'democratisation backwards' posited something like liberal democracy as the most optimistic of the three possible final outcomes. It is achieved almost in spite of the path taken in democratisation, because society is so committed to making it happen. Comparable speculations that liberal democracies will continue to proliferate *notwithstanding* democracy promotion - that promoting democracy will inspire societies to struggle for liberal democracy with greater determination and bring a strong sense of ownership in its wake - are no less intriguing and just as attractive. At the present time, however, events in the real world justify no such confidence. Although not in the sense that Rose and Shin intended, something like a 'low level equilibrium trap' could be the future that awaits democracy assistance and the active direct

promotion of democracy. This is bound to be the case if those involved in the industry dwell only on the more parochial weaknesses and, like the rest of the world ignore the overall impact and the larger international forces promoting democracy

backwards. There are implications for think-tanks and academia too. The analysis here suggests the time has now come not just for the practice of democracy promotion to widen its lens, but for studies of it to broaden their horizons too.

POLICY PAPERS & WORKING PAPERS 2004-05

- 1 Europe in Iraq: from standoff to engagement?, *Richard Youngs*, November 2004
 - 2 Hacia una nueva cooperación española, *Silvia Hidalgo y Fernando Espada*, Diciembre de 2004
 - 3 Uso de la fuerza y responsabilidad de proteger. El debate sobre la reforma de la ONU, *Carlos Espósito*, Junio de 2005
 - 4 A Peacebuilding Commission for the United Nations, *Jessica Almqvist*, June 2005
-
- 1 A proposal for governance of the Gaza strip in the context of the announced Israeli withdrawal, *CITPax, an initiative of Shlomo Ben-Ami*, November 2004
 - 2 Ten years of the Barcelona Process: A Model for Supporting Arab Reform?, *Richard Youngs*, January 2005
 - 3 Political Islam: Ready for Engagement?, *Emad El-Din Shahin*, February 2005
 - 4 Reflexiones sobre la reforma del Servicio Exterior de España, *Carlos Espósito*, Febrero de 2005
 - 5 Which Justice for Perpetrators of Acts of Terrorism? The Need for Guidelines, *Jessica Almqvist*, March 2005
 - 6 Spain and Morocco: Towards a Reform Agenda?, *Richard Gillespie*, April 2005
 - 7 Contribución española a la construcción de la paz. Razones y propuestas para la elaboración de un Plan de Acción, *Luis Peral*, Abril de 2005
 - 8 EU instruments for conflict prevention, *Javier Niño Pérez*, April 2005
 - 9 España y el Magreb durante el segundo mandato del Partido Popular. Un período excepcional, *Laura Feliú*, Mayo de 2005
 - 10 Aggression, Crime of Aggression, Crime without Punishment, *Antonio Remiro Brotons*, June 2005
 - 11 Political Reform and the Prospects for Democratic Transition in the Gulf, *Jill Crystal*, July 2005
 - 12 Building a New Role for the United Nations: the Responsibility to Protect, *Carlos Espósito and Jessica Almqvist*, September 2005
 - 13 Alliance of Civilisations: International Security and Cosmopolitan Democracy, *Kristina Kausch and Isaías Barreñada*, October 2005
 - 14 Helping Castro? EU and US policies towards Cuba, *Susanne Gratius*, October 2005
 - 15 Threats to Human Security: The Need for Action?, *Luis Peral*, October 2005

WORKING PAPERS 2005-06

- 16 The United Nations' Responsibility towards Victims of Terrorist Acts, **Irene Aguirrezabal Quijera**, November 2005
- 17 Transition and Legitimacy in African States: The cases of Somalia and Uganda **Martin Doornbos**, December 2005
- 18 Facing the Victims in the Global Fight against Terrorism, **Jessica Almqvist**, January 2006
- 19 Failing States or Failed States? The Role of Development Models: Collected Works; **Martin Doornbos**, **Susan Woodward**, **Silvia Roque**, February 2006
- 20 Defining 'Terrorism' to Protect Human Rights, **Ben Saul**, February 2006
- 21 Democracy and Security in the Middle East, **Richard Youngs**, March 2006
- 22 Recovering from Armed Conflict: Lessons Learned and Next Steps for Improved International Assistance, **Megan Burke**, April 2006
- 23 Angola: Global "Good Governance" Also Needed, **David Sogge**, June 2006
- 24 Misión de la ONU en la República Democrática del Congo: Imponer y consolidar la paz más allá de la elecciones, **Luis Peral**, Julio de 2006
- 25 The Crisis in Timor-Leste: Restoring National Unity through State Institutions, Culture, and Civil Society, **Rebecca Engel**, August 2006
- 26 When More is Less: Aiding Statebuilding in Afghanistan, **Astri Suhrke**, September 2006
- 27 Respuestas globales a amenazas globales. Seguridad sostenible para el siglo XXI, **Chris Abbott**, **Paul Rogers** y **John Sloboda**, Septiembre de 2006
- 28 Promoting Democracy Backwards, **Peter Burnell**, November 2006

FRIDE

A typology of the diverse ways in which international dimensions of democratisation and democracy assistance itself actually retard and undermine democracy's progress around the world provides a salutary response to currently fashionable ideas of democracy promotion as a world value. The detailed typology presented here offers an aid to thinking and practice concerning what approaches to take to the international promotion of democracy in the future. But as is the case with the already well-established idea of 'democratisation backwards', so it is equally true when looking forward that 'promoting democracy backwards' implies no one determinate eventual outcome. The analysis implicitly raises the question whether the time has now come not just for the practice of democracy promotion to widen its lens, but for studies of it to broaden their horizons too.

www.fride.org