

The Diverse Challenges of International Democracy Promotion¹

What has the international community done recently to advance democratic transition and consolidation in specific countries around the world? And how could it do better? These are the essential questions addressed by this review of how the community of democratic nations has pursued the thorny challenges of promoting democratic change in seven countries — Burma, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

A key reference point for this volume of case studies in democracy promotion is the Warsaw Declaration adopted in June 2000 by the Community of Democracies, a new global forum of more than 120 governments. The Warsaw Declaration commits participating governments to uphold a core set of democratic principles and “to work together to promote and strengthen democracy.”² Since then, the international debate over democracy promotion has intensified dramatically. The United States under President Bush has promulgated a muscular strategy to “spread freedom” while member states of the European Union and a range of other donors and international organizations have resolved with less fanfare to continue to encourage democratic gains made since the 1980s. Indeed, as this book is being finalized, a new United Nations Democracy Fund and a UN Democracy Caucus have been launched, breaking a long taboo at the world body against the “d” word. This growing international concern and funding for democracy assistance is leading to a backlash from certain authoritarian regimes determined to block external resources for domestic groups pressuring for democratic change. Against this background, the collection of seven case studies offered here provides an extensive range of material designed to inform a judgment on

1 Theodore J. Piccone, DCP and Richard Youngs, FRIDE.

2 See “Final Warsaw Declaration: Toward a Community of Democracies,” Warsaw, Poland, June 27, 2000, http://www.demcoalition.org/2005_html/commu_cdm00.html; see also M. H. Halperin and M. Galic, eds., *Protecting Democracy: International Responses*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005.

how far the international community of democratic states is meeting its own commitments to support democracy.

The book is the product of a joint venture between the Democracy Coalition Project, based in Washington, and the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE), based in Madrid.³ Over the last five years, each organization has been deeply involved in monitoring the democracy promotion strategies of governments and international bodies around the world.

This volume builds upon the foundation laid by an investigation carried out in 2002 by the Democracy Coalition Project entitled *Defending Democracy: A Global Survey of Foreign Policy Trends, 1992-2002*.⁴ This survey of the foreign policies of 40 democratic governments from around the world, all of which have pledged to defend and promote democracy, assessed how well these governments had lived up to their commitments in general and in relation to 16 states in particular. The study concluded that the trend of state behavior favored the spread of democracy; as new democracies became entrenched internally they became more willing to lend support externally to the establishment of constitutional democracies as neighbors. The survey documented how the foreign policies of democratic governments were increasingly oriented toward widening the democratic circle. This new approach to statecraft was grounded in the “democracy advantage,” recognized by a growing body of scholarship,⁵ finding that states which function with transparency and accountability, with adequate checks and balances on executive power, offer natural advantages. While the impact of transition and of changes in political structures is complex, under the right conditions democracies are less likely to spawn famine, terrorism or war.

Along with this trend, both newer and more mature democracies are signing more rhetorical commitments at the global and regional levels to work together to defend and promote democracy. There are also some signs that they actually mean it. Most democratic states are speaking out against

3 In addition to the two editors, research was undertaken by analysts at the two institutions: Ana Echagüe and Susanne Gratius at FRIDE; Jeff Stacey, Muthoni Kamuyu and Elizabeth Marquez for DCP. We also benefited from the input of expert reviewers, to whom we wish to express our gratitude (a full list can be found in the appendix). Angel Alonso Arroba of DCP provided invaluable assistance as production coordinator.

4 R. G. Herman and T. J. Piccone, *Defending Democracy: A Global Survey of Foreign Policy Trends 1992-2002*, Washington: Democracy Coalition Project, 2002.

5 See, e.g., A. Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1999; M.H. Halperin, J. Siegle and M. Weinstein, *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace*, New York: Routledge Press, 2005.

coups, for example, while democratic donors are linking development and trade assistance to benchmarks for democratic behavior. On the other hand, the DCP survey also concluded that democratic states routinely put economic and security interests ahead of a desire to promote democracy and human rights when such interests were seen to be in conflict.

This same delicate balance between genuine and purely rhetorical commitment has also been uncovered through the detailed monitoring of European democracy strategies carried out by FRIDE. The first comprehensive assessment of European democracy promotion policies reveals that EU member states and the European Commission have increased resources available for political reform support; have in some cases used democracy-related conditionality; and have revised aspects of their conceptual approaches to democracy-building. At the same time, it highlights examples of persistent support for autocrats, institutional shortcomings and an acknowledged need to understand better how policies play out in relation to complex political trends in individual 'target' states.⁶

This shared concern with deepening the study of concrete case studies of democracy promotion against this rapidly changing backdrop was what motivated DCP and FRIDE to join forces to prepare this new volume. The book's overarching aim is to assess – six years after the Warsaw Declaration and in the wake of more recent democracy commitments from individual governments and regional bodies such as the European Union, the African Union and the Organization of American States – how far the democratic community has fulfilled its own promise to accord the goal of democratic change greater priority. What strategies of democracy promotion have been favored? How different have been the approaches adopted by the various members of the Community of Democracies? Are there clear cases of democratic states acting in a manner inimical to democracy? In which circumstances has the international community found it easiest to influence democratic development, and in which has it most struggled to gain traction?

Rather than taking a broad scope, the purpose here is to assess democracy promotion strategies in detail in relation to a selected number of countries supposedly on the 'receiving end' of international democracy promotion efforts. By digging deeper into these dramatic stories of democratic development, we seek to draw some conclusions about the inherent challenges democracy promoters face as they seek to influence events on

⁶ R. Youngs (ed), *Survey of European Democracy Promotion Policies 2000-2006*, Madrid: FRIDE, 2006.

the ground. There are some notable successes, but also a string of failures that demonstrate how difficult it can be for external actors to assist reformers working for peaceful political change.

As the seven cases illustrate, the policy dilemmas - for all the players involved - are real and complex. Should the international community continue humanitarian aid to Burma even if it means bolstering the autocrats in power? Should the EU continue to open the door for Turkey's accession even when European public opinion currently appears so opposed? Should the United States take the lead in confronting Hugo Chávez, or Great Britain in challenging Robert Mugabe, even though it gives these elected autocrats an excuse to rally their supporters against the "hegemony of the West"? Should local civil society groups take aid from governments labeled as enemies of the state? The tradeoffs are messy, and getting messier. With the Bush Administration's full-bodied embrace of "ending tyranny in our time" as the centerpiece of its national security strategy, the very notion of democracy promotion has become laden with the baggage of staring down the superpower.

The volume approaches the topic from a transatlantic perspective in part as a reflection of the DCP-FRIDE collaboration, but also because the main actors driving international cooperation for democracy are the United States and the members of European Union. However, the chapters also look closely at the role of other actors, particularly those newer to the democracy promotion arena - certain member states of the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Organization of American States and the United Nations - to help us draw a more comprehensive picture of the state of democracy promotion. While a critical assessment of governmental behavior was the primary focus of the book, a key concern was also to consider what role civil society can play in working across borders to stimulate democratic change. The analysis then led us to make a number of specific recommendations to policymakers on steps they can take now to address the evident shortcomings of multilateral responses to date.

The seven case studies were carefully selected to represent different types of regime from different regions. In (arguable) order of democratic optimism, these case studies are:

- Ukraine, as a case of dramatic democratic revolution in 2004, close to the heart of a unified and free Europe;
- Turkey, as a case of less dramatic, protracted and still incomplete democratization, intricately intertwined with the prospect of European Union accession;

- Yemen, as a case where some limited democratic gains have slowly stagnated and even been reversed, albeit with a continued formal governmental commitment to reform;
- Venezuela, as a case of gradual democratic reversal, in which a slide into soft authoritarianism has occurred with apparent electoral legitimation;
- Togo, as a case where a new democratic opportunity in 2005 was interrupted by a military coup turned back through concerted international pressure;
- Zimbabwe, as a case of increasingly despotic “strongman” rule that has turned up pressure on a vibrant democratic opposition;
- Burma, as a case of militarized authoritarian stasis, that has so far resisted any meaningful opening of political space.

In short, the case studies chosen allow us to investigate the nature and efficacy of external actors’ democracy promotion policies in relation to a range of circumstances: in countries moving in both democratic and anti-democratic directions; in countries subject to both incremental change and dramatic rupture; and in countries both (geographically, strategically, economically, socially) close to and more distant from key Western powers.

Each of the seven states selected has been subject to an array of international tools and mechanisms designed to support democratic transition and consolidation, from funding of civic nongovernmental organizations and election monitoring to more punitive measures like economic sanctions and visa bans. It is not our goal to evaluate in any mechanistic sense whether these international efforts have succeeded or failed in their intended result; to do so would presume that a cause and effect relationship could be measured as in a scientific laboratory. That is most definitely not the case when complex national historical processes are at work that would require years of in-country presence and expertise to understand. Moreover, it should be well-understood that democratic change, to be successful, must be led and owned by the body politic in each particular society, and not by external forces: this study of international actors is categorically not designed to imply that either the possible or rightful role of such external forces is primary. Indeed we begin each chapter with a description of the domestic actors leading or blocking democratic change and secondarily turn to the role of international actors.

Rather, we hope to evaluate whether those governmental actors that claim to care about the democratic evolution of other countries have actually behaved in a way that favors democracy over the status quo. Given the

policy options before them, have democratic states, alone and together, condemned fraudulent elections or accepted the results, or both? Have they assisted democratic reformers through financial aid and training, or focused their aid on other priorities? Have they seriously used the incentives of economic and trade packages to encourage democratic reforms or let governments off the hook?

To assist comparison, the research carried out for this book was structured around a common investigative framework for each case study. A set of questions was drawn up to guide research on each of the seven countries, at the level of both secondary source research and the collecting of primary source material, in particular through interviews with policy-makers, analysts and civil society representatives. The views expressed by the different authors were not necessarily fully shared by the entire research team or indeed the editors; but each case study was crucially made to conform to the same structure, comprising:

- a **Background** overview of recent political events in the country concerned;
- a detailed factual account of the **International Response** to these changing events;
- a more analytical section **Assessing the International Response**;
- and a final section of **Recommendations** for future policies.

Country Synopses

Burma: For over 15 years, a variety of efforts has been made to force the military junta to accept the results of elections they lost to a party led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. Nonetheless, the regime appears more isolated and entrenched than ever. More recently, however, a new dynamic is unfolding in which Burma's ASEAN neighbors are collaborating to demand a transition to democratic rule. In addition, the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries are pushing for action by the United Nations Security Council. To break the stalemate, a concerted strategy is needed to authorize the UN Secretary General and his envoy to serve as a credible intermediary between the opposition and the junta that would lead to a power-sharing agreement and the eventual departure of the military from the scene, even if it means offering some tangible incentives. A tighter international sanctions regime, tolerated by China and coupled with this kind of top-level intervention, would build on ASEAN's new-found voice and help spur the kind of collective action needed to find a negotiated transition package.

Togo: The stalled democratic transition in Togo presents a promising example of the influence the international community can have in reversing a military coup while simultaneously offering a lesson in its abject failure to change the fundamental balance of power on the ground. A rare window of opportunity to move Togo toward democracy opened in 2005 when the long-ruling dictator died suddenly of a heart attack. Taking a page from some bad Cold War script, the military seized power and declared the ruler's son as president. In one of the early tests of African governments' commitment to reject such unconstitutional maneuvers, Togo's neighbors, supported by Europe and the United States, roundly condemned the power grab and demanded new elections, only to watch the ruling elite manipulate these elections to its advantage. It is not too late, however, for the international community to construct a long-term strategy for the democratization of Togo through support for the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, consistent assistance to civil society, repatriation of refugees, and security sector and constitutional reforms.

Turkey: The carrot of EU membership has undeniably provided a key external impulse to Turkey's democratization. Recognizing progress made in particular under the (nominally) Islamist-oriented government elected in 2002, the EU agreed to open entry talks with Turkey in October 2005. At the same time, more nuanced lessons emerge from the Turkish example. Democracy promotion itself rarely seemed the primary goal of EU conditionality, while the US's policy consisted mainly of pushing European governments to admit Turkey largely regardless of whether democracy entry standards had been met. Concerns remain on the part of some Western governments over how far further democratization might undermine some of the basic tenets of a pro-Western Kemalist state, and in particular the role of Turkey's army. And, of course, just as Turkey has made such significant democratic progress, doubts have been raised more openly in some quarters in the European Union about whether the country should even be allowed to join the EU club regardless of how much progress it makes to consolidate democracy. The EU needs to send more positive signals and offer concrete rewards to Turkey as it moves down the long road towards possible accession.

Ukraine: Ukraine represents one of the most successful cases of international democracy promotion, with the US and European states having provided support for the Orange Revolution in 2004 and thereby helping to ensure a democratic outcome to initially rigged elections. At the same

time, international policies were subject to significant limitations both before and after December 2004. External actors intervened decisively only when a clear “tipping point” in democracy’s favor had already been reached within Ukraine. While the EU acted as a factor broadly shaping Ukrainian pro-democracy identities, the concrete incentives offered by the European Union prior to the Orange Revolution were not generous, and have not been meaningfully upgraded since the action plan negotiated with autocratic President Kuchma in 2004. Until very late in the day, states such as France and Germany were reluctant to intervene to back democracy for fear of upsetting relations with Russia. The EU role, played in particular by the Polish and Lithuanian presidents, focused on mediating a negotiated solution that ensured the prospect of continued influence for the Russian-backed losers of the 2004 elections. The US role was felt more in active support for civil society organizations leading up to the “revolutionary moment.” The limitations to international backing express themselves in the depth of Ukraine’s post-transition travails, symbolized by the resurgence of the anti-Orange Revolution camp in March 2006’s legislative elections. The international community needs urgently to step up its political reform assistance in Ukraine, while the EU should creatively design an enhanced policy framework short of membership, as long as some member states are opposed the notion of Ukraine joining the EU.

Venezuela: Since the election of Colonel Hugo Chávez in 1998, Venezuela’s corrupt and dysfunctional democracy has given way to a form of military-dominated semi-authoritarianism. Problematically for the international community, Chávez has dismantled democratic checks and balances but has also gained several relatively genuine electoral mandates in recent years. The strategy of the US in particular initially focused on the issue of democratic elections and supported Venezuela’s democratic opposition but has grown more openly hostile towards Chávez. A failed coup attempt against Chávez in 2002, tacitly supported by the US, demonstrated the limits to this approach, with Chávez subsequently succeeding in using the electoral route to consolidate his power. More recently, an increasingly prominent role has been taken on by the Organization of American States and the Carter Center, focused rather on mediating between the government and opposition. At the same time, Spanish policy has shifted dramatically away from confrontation towards engagement with Chávez. The international community needs to work more assiduously in tempering the polarization between chavistas and anti-chavistas, as a precursor to reversing the undermining of democratic rights.

Yemen: Formal democratic reforms implemented in the early and mid-1990s ensured Yemen a reputation as one of the most notably reformist of Arab states. However, international support for such democratic potential was limited and undercut by other strategic considerations. Indeed, the international community of democratic states has been relatively inactive as Yemen's reform commitments have remained at the rhetorical level. Intensified international attention has been paid to Yemen as a result of post-September 11, 2001 counter-terrorist concerns. This attention has revitalized some European and US political reform initiatives in Yemen, but has also imbued the perspective on democracy promotion with a strongly short-term security slant. On the verge of failed state status, non-democratizing and desperately poor Yemen provides a salutary lesson to the international community of how an apparently encouraging case of formal reform commitment can slide into an acutely worrisome situation. Western states should take advantage of possible entry points to provide assistance on governance reforms, while ensuring that security co-operation with the Yemeni government does not undercut the prospects for democratization.

Zimbabwe: This once promising southern African state is mired in economic and political ruin thanks to the policies of Robert Mugabe, a former hero of the independence movement now building a legacy of autocracy and despair for his country. While Europe and the United States have complained about Mugabe's behavior, they have failed to win over Zimbabwe's African neighbors, a division which Mugabe has effectively exploited. With the opposition under threat and internally divided, there is little hope at present that the international community, even if it were to get its act together, could move the 81-year old Mugabe out of power. His reign will come to an end at a time of his choosing. Nonetheless, given the financial crisis, much more could be done to put pressure on Mugabe to ease restrictions placed on independent media and civil society. In addition, democracy promoters must turn their attention to a post-Mugabe era by working closely with democracy and human rights advocates in and outside of Zimbabwe to prepare themselves for a transition scenario.

General Conclusions and Recommendations

While each of the cases is unique and therefore is accompanied with its own policy prescriptions, a set of general conclusions and recommendations can also be extracted from the volume. A number of reflections and questions of strategy emerge that could usefully inform debate amongst the

international community of democratic states and all those concerned with advancing democracy:

1. International democracy promoters must *always* follow the lead of domestic reformers when shaping strategies for democratic change. While this is a rather obvious observation, it must be stated repeatedly in light of the mistakes made by the United States, United Kingdom and their allies in Iraq. There are plenty of other examples, in this volume and elsewhere, that underscore how vital this prescription remains. The phenomenon of rapid globalization has sharpened the appeal of nationalism as a force to counteract the imposition – real and perceived – of external demands on domestic actors. Autocrats are effectively using arguments couched in the language of democracy and the mechanics of electoral legitimacy to reassert the doctrine of non-intervention in sovereign affairs. As a result, external actors genuinely committed to helping local democrats exercise their fundamental rights must step very carefully when setting a democracy assistance policy. At times, a more outspoken approach should be taken to protect local reformers; at other times a quiet strategy of dialogue and mediation may be more effective. In the end, the signals for if and how to help must come from domestic actors genuinely committed to a peaceful transition.

2. Democracy promoters are under increasing attack from leaders throughout the former Soviet Union, in parts of Africa and elsewhere. To ensure continued support for reform, a grand coalition led by democratic reformers in transitional states and supported by democracy promoters in more consolidated countries is needed to develop international norms for democracy assistance. The starting point for such a discussion should be the Warsaw Declaration which sets forth a clear statement in favor of international cooperation to support democracy. The Community of Democracies should host a forum for discussion and elaboration of norms and principles that would improve the international environment for democratic change.

3. Sanctions and other punitive tools are a mixed bag and should rarely be employed in isolation. In some cases, as in a more vulnerable country like Togo, economic sanctions or the threat of them can influence the direction of events, but only if economically important states take a coordinated approach. In general, however, experience shows that governments will try to protect their own economic interests first and will rarely coordinate an effective enforcement scheme. Targeted sanctions like visa bans and asset freezes that seek to punish the transgressors are increasingly being utilized as the next best option; while their effectiveness requires fur-

ther study, at least they offer an appropriate tool to deny certain privileges to specific offenders without harming their victims.

4. Coordination of democracy assistance among relevant actors both within and among governments remains highly underdeveloped. This is a consistent theme in all the chapters and deserves more attention. The primary locus of activity should be in the country of concern, where embassies can coordinate action in real time, as in the case of Ukraine. What is lacking is a counterpart mechanism in capitals that would facilitate greater collaboration. The European Union by its nature is ahead of other multilateral organizations in this regard. Other regional organizations concerned with democracy promotion need to develop in-house expertise and other tools both to respond to and prevent crises or backsliding in democratic governance. Where no regional organization is relevant, as in Asia or the Middle East, the Community of Democracies should step in to provide guidance and support to countries which have chosen the democratic path. As for policymaking within governments, much more work needs to be done to convene regular inter-agency meetings with all relevant agencies, including defense, finance and law enforcement departments, to ensure a unified approach.

5. The timeliness of international responses can be a critical factor in tipping the balance in favor of democratic reformers. Democracy promoters should engage, therefore, on two levels: first, with an eye to the long-term work of patiently helping to build the values and infrastructure of democracy, and second on the shorter timeframe needed to react when a window of opportunity opens for historic change, e.g., the sudden death of a leader, flawed elections, or the eruption of street protests. In order for the latter to function effectively, the infrastructure for the former must be in place, i.e., democratic states need to have a cadre of experienced professionals and technocrats available to seize the opportunities with discretion, speed and skill.

6. In most cases of political stalemate and inertia, the international community can play a useful role as a third party guarantor of dialogue and negotiation among competing factions. Often this is best done quietly, though there may be occasions that demand more overt efforts. The international community, including seasoned experts in conflict prevention and mediation, needs to take more initiative to offer political actors a forum for democratic dialogue before fighting erupts.

7. Key importance in many cases lies in moving away from a primary focus on direct US and European efforts towards a greater engagement of regional actors. The case studies offered here demonstrate the potential

that exists for Latin American states to play a more influential role in relation to Venezuela, ASEAN states in relation to Burma, southern African states in relation to Zimbabwe and West African states in relation to Togo. Some changes have been forthcoming in such regional actors' erstwhile stances of non-intervention, although significant caution remains on their part. It is unlikely that without efforts to strengthen such regional action, Western governments will themselves have significant impact in many challenging cases of democratic shortfalls. Efforts at this level remain an under-developed dimension of international democracy promotion and should receive greater attention within multilateral bodies, such as the Community of Democracies.

8. International reactions have often been strong in times of dramatic change, and useful support has often been provided where political developments have clearly begun to move in a democratic direction. Responses have been less effective to incremental reversals in democratic rights, or in relation to the vexed question of carving out credible strategies where (semi-) authoritarian leaders are able to gain (even flawed) electoral legitimacy as a base for their subsequent dismantling of democratic checks and balances. The election of Hamas in the Palestinian elections is just one of many examples that point to the urgent need for greater vigilance of anti-democratic actions of nominally legitimate rulers. The international community of democracies needs to be more alive to such cases to complement the traditional focus on dramatic points of rupture or media-targeted instances of egregious human rights abuses.

9. The international community's response to post-transition challenges remains less than impressive. The cases studied here of Ukraine and Turkey, in particular, suggest that the much-repeated warning that international actors should not scale down their efforts once formal transition has – or has largely – taken place is one that still needs to be fully heeded. A tendency persists to mark down as “success stories” cases where challenges to democratic quality remain acute, and even sometimes *more* difficult to address in the fractured domestic political landscapes that commonly beset the aftermath of democratic transition. At such junctures, intensified efforts are urgently required at just the moment when some international actors begin moving their focus away from democracy support. The fact that so many countries can labor for many years after transition without approaching the consolidation of stable and high quality democracy calls for this salutary lesson to be incorporated more systematically into international democracy promotion planning.

10. Much more could be done to link development assistance to standards of democratic accountability and transparency in the receiving country. The trend is, finally, moving in the right direction, as evidenced by the increasing demands from the multilateral development banks for progress against corruption and other “good governance” benchmarks. The Millennium Challenge Account promulgated by the current US administration is another positive example of the way in which development aid can be used as an incentive to mobilize support for improvements in rule of law, civil society consultation and political reforms. A global approach along these lines would be the logical next step to engender support for a grand bargain in which development assistance is dramatically increased in exchange for tangible progress on democratic governance.

11. While debates amongst the international community of democratic governments have rightly focused on the macro-level questions of diplomacy and political dialogue, the case studies here reveal that much remains to be done in fine-tuning democracy assistance projects at the micro-level. While these are rarely the subject of high-profile attention, the shortcomings of existing on-the-ground support can undermine the efficacy of overall international democracy promotion efforts. The cases offered here highlight a number of such weaknesses in democracy assistance aid projects: their limited funding levels; the fact that they often come on stream too late in the day to impact on finely balanced domestic political dynamics; their overly technical nature in many contexts; and their failure to embrace a broad range of actors that include those groups with strongest local legitimacy. More rigorous debate is warranted on these questions within multilateral bodies.

The case studies that follow offer a range of recommendations related to each of the seven individual countries. The general observations suggested here represent cross-cutting concerns pertinent to the broad design of democracy promotion strategies. As the international debate for and against democracy promotion intensifies, this volume seeks to contribute to and inform the elaboration of policies better able to give substance to the founding spirit of the Community of Democracies.