

# **The State of the Art in International Democracy Promotion: Results of a Joint European–North American Research Network**

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The international dimension of democracy promotion remains at best under-studied and poorly understood, and in the extreme, hotly debated and criticized by its contemporary detractors. The primary purpose of this article is to offer an overview of the ‘state of the art’ in international democracy promotion by drawing on the conclusions of a five-year joint European–North American research project devoted to this topic that was funded by the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA). Specifically, this article draws upon our collective research endeavour to codify the principal questions, issues, and themes that are characteristic of international democracy promotion efforts to date, and to assess what we have learned in terms of further strengthening democracy promotion efforts and therefore global democracy itself.

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During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, two political events – the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789 – signalled the strengthening of a burgeoning democratic norm in international affairs. In North America, the American Revolution’s political slogan of ‘no taxation without representation’ underscored the importance of rule by the consent of the governed and the rights of a people to seek self-determination from oppressive colonial rule. In Europe, the French Revolution’s political slogan of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) laid claim to a growing belief in the universality of the democratic ideal. In both cases, an international environment that was hostile to democratic forms of governance served as the basis of repeated attempts to extinguish these democratic experiments in their very cradles, contributing to a bloody and drawn-out war of independence in North America and a series of conflicts between the French Republic and its neighbours.

More than two centuries later, however, international norms related to democracy promotion have been radically altered. In a historic meeting held

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in Warsaw, Poland in 2000, foreign ministers and other representatives from more than half the world's countries gathered together to discuss a common interest in advancing an international 'community of democracies'. The resulting Warsaw Declaration committed its signatories to a wide array of pro-democracy actions, from the strengthening of democratic practices where they already exist to the promotion of those practices in countries where they are absent. This gathering and the declaration it spawned captured two critical dimensions of international relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century: first, democracy's status as the predominant form of political governance within the Westphalian nation-state system; and second, the emergence of an international norm that considers democracy promotion to be an accepted and necessary component of international behaviour.

The international dimension of democracy promotion nonetheless remains at best under-studied and poorly understood, and in the extreme, hotly debated and criticized by its contemporary detractors. The purpose of this article is to offer an overview of the 'state of the art' in international democracy promotion by drawing on the conclusions of a five-year, joint European–North American research project devoted to this topic that was funded by the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA).<sup>1</sup> Specifically, this article draws upon our collective research endeavour to codify the principal questions, issues, and themes of international democracy promotion efforts to date, and to assess what we have learned in terms of further strengthening democracy promotion efforts and therefore global democracy itself.

### **Codifying Existing Knowledge: Contemporary Debates over International Democracy Promotion**

An important outcome of the global spread of the 'third wave' of democratization<sup>2</sup> during the last quarter of the twentieth century is that scholars and practitioners alike are increasingly prone to speak of democracy as a universal value whose roots can be nurtured in all regions of the world.<sup>3</sup> As a result, discussions within both the academic and the policy making worlds have gradually shifted from a cold war focus on whether democracy constitutes the best form of governance to whether and to what degree state and non-state actors should be actively involved in democracy promotion efforts abroad. In an effort to codify existing knowledge within this realm, our joint European–North American research network detailed five sets of debates that continue to set the parameters of contemporary democracy promotion efforts.

*Primacy of Internal or External Factors in Democracy's Spread?*

The first debate revolves around academia's understanding of the relative importance of domestic versus international factors in promoting democracy's spread. The traditional consensus concerning this 'internal-external' debate is that domestic factors are decisive. Such analyses at best neglect the importance of international factors and in the extreme argue that they exert little if any influence. It should therefore come as no surprise that the majority of the scholarly literature devoted to understanding the third wave of democratization has emphasized a wide variety of domestic factors, most notably the degree of unity among ruling elites or opposition movements, the vibrancy of civil society, the receptivity of political culture, the degree of state control and the strength of the national economy.<sup>4</sup>

With the benefit of more than a quarter-century of hindsight, scholars increasingly have argued in favour of re-examining the neglected international dimension of democracy promotion. Philippe C. Schmitter, one of the most noted scholars associated with the so-called 'transitions' literature that emphasizes the overriding importance of the internal dimension of democratization, constitutes part of this new body of scholarship. 'Perhaps, it is time to reconsider the impact of the international context upon regime change', explains Schmitter. 'Without seeking to elevate it to the status of prime mover, could it not be more significant than was originally thought?'<sup>5</sup> Schmitter's reassessment is characteristic of retrospective analyses that often underscore an important difference between the initial transitions that took place in southern Europe and Latin America between 1974 and 1989, and those that took place in eastern Europe and Africa beginning in 1989. According to this viewpoint, the post-Cold War transitions on average may have been more influenced by international phenomena, most notably the fall of the Berlin wall and the ultimate demise and disintegration of the former Soviet Union. In the end, however, external factors remain secondary in such analyses.

The most comprehensive reassessment of the internal-external debate is provided by Laurence Whitehead, who points to three sets of international dynamics to argue that it can be 'seriously misleading' to treat the international dimension of democracy promotion as 'generally secondary in importance'.<sup>6</sup> The most basic is the simple process of 'contagion' – the extensive and unintentional spread of an idea within a given geographical region, due to the socio-economic, political-military, or cultural similarities and channels which link its member states.<sup>7</sup> An interesting case in Africa has been the spread of the 'national conference' model of democratic transition, in which a broad coalition of leaders from all sectors of society, including elders and the heads of women's organizations, ethnic and

religious leaders, labour and student activists, and ruling and opposition political leaders, hold an extended national gathering that serves as the basis for debating the outlines of a new democratic political order.<sup>8</sup> A second dynamic revolves around how explicit acts of intervention by a foreign power can result in the successful imposition of some form of democracy within another country. The classic cases emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, when the victorious Allies imposed democratic forms of governance on the defeated Axis powers of Germany and Japan. Together these two countries, which constitute the second and third most economically powerful democracies within the contemporary international system, offer proof of the democratic gains that can be achieved through a wide range of interventionist practices, including the use of military force, discussed further below.

A final dynamic involves the promotion of democracy through 'consent', and examines the complex interaction between international and domestic actors that generate new democratic norms and expectations from below. According to this perspective, foreign influences provide an international context that can either facilitate or hinder the development of democratic practices within a given country. A noteworthy example is the European Union's requirement that aspiring countries must embody a certain level of democratic standards before being considered for membership. This requirement has provided a powerful incentive for countries to refashion their political systems in a more democratic direction.<sup>9</sup>

Together these three sets of literature at the bare minimum underscore the value of further exploring the circumstances under which international influences play a decisive role in the transition to and consolidation of democracy. The literature on international democracy promotion nonetheless still pales in comparison to the voluminous literature on the domestic origins of democracy, and in any case suffers from two shortcomings: an emphasis on the democracy promotion efforts of individual countries, most notably the United States as the world's most powerful and influential democracy,<sup>10</sup> and an emphasis on the democracy promotion efforts directed against individual regions, such as eastern Europe.<sup>11</sup> Even the most comprehensive study to date constitutes an edited volume of case studies largely focused on southern Europe (three chapters) and Latin America (seven chapters), with little attention to eastern Europe (one chapter) and no case studies on Africa.<sup>12</sup> The limited focus of these studies hinders our ability to apply conclusions across the entire range of democracy promoters, as well as the regions that are the targets of democracy promotion efforts.

*To Intervene or not to Intervene? The Normative Debate*

A second debate revolves around the normative issue of whether the international community should be actively involved in democracy promotion efforts. According to its most erstwhile proponents, democracy promotion should serve as the guiding foreign policy principle of the northern industrialized democracies.<sup>13</sup> Some even argue that 'exporting democracy' will allow the northern industrial democracies to 'fulfill their destinies' within the international system.<sup>14</sup> Yet even more sanguine observers, who recognize that it is neither likely nor desirable that democracy promotion will override other foreign policy goals, cautiously argue that it should serve as a foreign policy priority of the northern industrialized democracies.<sup>15</sup>

The opposition to democracy promotion is equally varied.<sup>16</sup> Arguments range from the isolationist perspective that the northern industrialized democracies should focus on their own affairs, including a recognition that other foreign priorities (for example, economic self-interest and national security) should predominate, to the belief that the ability to influence the democratic character of other countries is extremely limited. Others are more concerned with the negative consequences of democracy promotion programmes, regardless of how well-intentioned their proponents may be. A corollary to this argument is that democracy promotion serves as a rhetorical veneer for the pursuit of economic self-interest on the part of the international system's most economically powerful countries, which also happen to be democracies. Some add a cultural dimension to this debate, denouncing democracy promotion as the attempted westernization of the developing world, and in the extreme arguing that it serves as a form of 'neo-colonialism' in the international system.

The advocates of democracy promotion clearly have the edge in the normative debate. In its broadest sense, democracy promotion is perceived by policy-makers within the northern industrialized democracies as a normative good that is worth pursuing. It is precisely for this reason that the last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a virtual democracy promotion industry, the hallmark of which has been the willingness of the northern industrialized democracies to channel vast amounts of democracy assistance to the developing world. In the case of the United States, for example, it has been estimated that more than a half-billion dollars was devoted annually throughout the 1990s to some form of democracy promotion by the various agencies of the US government.<sup>17</sup> An equally important component of the democracy promotion industry has been the growing involvement of a wide array of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The

United Nations and its affiliated organs have progressively sought to codify democratic values and expand opportunities for democratic government throughout the world. As a result, international law has undergone a gradual transformation in favour of recognizing democracy as an 'entitlement' to be both defended and promoted.<sup>18</sup> At the local level, a wide array of quasi-governmental 'political foundations' and think-tanks within the northern industrialized democracies both set the democracy promotion agendas of their respective governments and serve as important conduits for official government aid.<sup>19</sup> These politically-based foundations and think-tanks, of course, are but one component of a larger network of NGOs that seeks to link the civil societies of the northern industrialized democracies with those of the developing world.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Which Weapons to Include in the Democracy Promotion Arsenal?*

The emergence of what constitutes essentially a global consensus in favour of democracy promotion has prompted a third debate among its proponents that revolves around the following question: what forms of intervention should constitute part of the global arsenal in seeking democracy's spread? To answer this question, one can explore a 'spectrum of violence' in which a variety of interventionist tools have been employed in democracy's name. The most prominent of these, listed in order from the least to most coercive, are the following:

- The pursuit of *classic diplomacy*, ranging from a leader's use of the executive office as a 'bully pulpit' for promoting democratic values abroad, to the dispatch of observer teams to oversee elections;<sup>21</sup>
- The provision of *foreign aid* to fund activities ranging from the holding of democratic elections to the strengthening of civil society;<sup>22</sup>
- The attachment of *political conditionalities* to the foreign policy relationship, as in the case of the European Union (EU) making democracy a precondition for membership;<sup>23</sup>
- The adoption of *economic sanctions* to punish the undemocratic acts of authoritarian regimes and promote transitions to democracy, especially in countries where democratic governments have been illegally turned out of office;<sup>24</sup>
- The pursuit of *covert intervention* against authoritarian regimes, including assassination plots, coups d'état, and propaganda and psychological warfare;<sup>25</sup>
- The use of *paramilitary intervention* in which the funding of a guerrilla insurgency seeks to overthrow an authoritarian regime through the proxy use of force;<sup>26</sup>
- The use of *military intervention* to directly overthrow an authoritarian regime and install a democratic regime in its place.<sup>27</sup>

The least coercive end of the interventionist spectrum not surprisingly includes the least controversial and most widely adopted forms of international democracy promotion: the pursuit of classic diplomacy and the provision of foreign aid. Foreign aid particularly has emerged as the 'most common and often most significant tool' in international democracy promotion.<sup>28</sup>

As one proceeds along the interventionist spectrum, however, questions increasingly are raised as to whether specific interventionist tools are both proper and effective in securing democratic norms. Many who question whether democracy should or can be 'forced upon' another country not surprisingly are critical of the middle tier of the interventionist spectrum, in which political conditionalities and economic sanctions are imposed on another country in the name of democratic values. This middle tier nonetheless enjoys widespread support, particularly within the policy making establishments of the northern industrialized democracies, as a useful 'middle road' in between the two coercive tools at the ends of the interventionist spectrum. The most coercive end of the interventionist spectrum, which includes the use of covert, paramilitary and military force, not surprisingly generates the greatest level of concern among many supporters of democracy promotion. For these individuals, the critical question is whether the ends justify the means. For example, is it both acceptable and proper to impose democracy at the points of bayonets? For many, the answer is no, due to the fact that, in their opinion, the use of force is simply antithetical to the democratic ideal.

#### *What Should be the Guidelines for Democracy Promotion?*

A fourth debate focuses on what should constitute the proper guidelines for democracy promotion. Several questions are important in this regard. Are unilateral interventions more effective, or should attempts be made to foster multilateral initiatives? Although the last quarter of the twentieth century clearly demonstrated that the vast majority of democracy promotion efforts have constituted unilateral interventions, recent scholarship has underscored the promise associated with multilateral efforts.<sup>29</sup> How important is the degree of support for such actions within the general population of the target country? If such support is lacking, how justified is foreign action regardless of the undemocratic nature of the regime in question? What about the regional dimension? Should democracy promotion policies be pursued in the absence of support among the regional neighbours of the target country? Finally, what should be the roles of international law and support for democracy promotion efforts within the wider international community? In short, the challenge for the international

community revolves around determining the circumstances in which intervention will be both legitimate and effective, an increasingly difficult task as one moves to the more coercive end of the interventionist spectrum.

The historical record as codified within a wide-ranging literature on intervention<sup>30</sup> demonstrates that scholars and practitioners are wise to keep at least three sets of guidelines in mind as they ponder the more precise interventionist practice of democracy promotion.

- *Determine the degree of popular support within the target country.* Foreign efforts not surprisingly stand a greater chance of success if they are embraced by the overwhelming majority of the target population. The efficacy of such efforts clearly declines in situations marked by less than majority support, and is particularly compromised when an undemocratic leadership for whatever reason enjoys majority support.
- *Seek majority support within the region and the international system.* Foreign efforts also stand a greater chance of success if they are embraced by the majority of countries within the region and the international system. Such support not only signals sensitivity to often specific regional concerns as well as important international norms, but in its ideal form (that is, unanimous support) suggests the existence of a well-crafted coalition of regional and international forces that transcends ideological, ethnic and religious differences.
- *Construct policy within the framework of international law.* Although international law prohibiting intervention may be ignored with relative impunity by countries pursuing self-interested policies, there is no denying its importance as a legitimizing factor, particularly in terms of creating international coalitions.

Although the combination of these guidelines cannot, of course, guarantee a successful interventionist episode, they at least enhance the possibility for success and ensure that any democracy promotion effort will enjoy a high degree of legitimacy. If these guidelines are applied to the international community's response to the authoritarian apartheid regime that ruled South Africa from 1948 to 1994, for example, it becomes clear why the international community's imposition of a vast array of sanctions was both successful and legitimate. The vast majority of the South African people, most notably its black majority, desired an end to the apartheid regime and its replacement with a more inclusive form of governance. The imposition of comprehensive sanctions was overwhelmingly supported both regionally in Africa and throughout the international system; and, according to accepted precepts of international law, the apartheid regime was in violation of numerous international conventions and treaties. In short, the key to success of the anti-



apartheid sanctions effort, which should be taken seriously by advocates of democracy promotion, was the creation and gradual strengthening of a popularly supported, multilateral anti-apartheid coalition that was crafted under the auspices of international law and that transcended the specific ideological, religious and security interests of individual countries.<sup>31</sup>

*Democratic Consolidation or Democratic Decay?*

A final debate revolves around whether the third wave of democratization will be marked by the further spread of democratic regimes, or if setbacks in individual countries during the 1990s are indicative of democratic decay which will accelerate in the future. Africanists who are more optimistic, for example, often point to South Africa's transition to a multiparty democracy in 1994 as proof of the growing strength of a democratic 'renaissance' on the African continent.<sup>32</sup> Africanists who are more pessimistic, however, have focused on the rise of authoritarian 'warlords' in African countries beset by civil war, such as Sierra Leone.<sup>33</sup> Such debates are fairly typical and in fact intensifying within the area studies literatures in general as regional specialists attempt to make sense of democracy trends within their specific regions.

As part of his elegant treatment of this question, Huntington notes that the first two waves of democratization within the international system were followed by 'reverse waves' of democratic break-down, and that democracy's third wave more likely than not will follow this same pattern.<sup>34</sup> Larry Diamond, a co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*, applies the concept of reverse waves to one case study – democratic break-down in Pakistan in 1999 – to provide a sobering analysis of the third wave's prospects.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the April 2002 issue of the *Journal of Democracy* captures an increasingly pessimistic outlook within academia by focusing on the growing strength of 'hybrid' regimes that have adopted the form of democracy with little of its substance,<sup>36</sup> harkening back to Fareed Zakaria's much-celebrated analysis of the rise of 'illiberal' democracy at the end of the 1990s.<sup>37</sup> Still others have concentrated on undertaking statistical manipulations of democratic trends. One of the most recent analyses of this genre suggests that the metaphor of reverse waves needs to be reconsidered: 'many researchers simply expect a reverse wave in the near future and are waiting for it because they think that each wave is inevitably followed by a reverse wave', explains Renske Doorenspleet.<sup>38</sup> His statistical analysis suggests that the answer to the question – 'are we on the edge of such a reverse wave'? – is 'no'. According to Doorenspleet, the more likely short-term trend is the emergence of a 'democratic equilibrium' in which the 'overall number of democracies in the world neither increases or decreases'.<sup>39</sup>

The debate over democratic consolidation versus democratic decay at the bare minimum has fostered the sharpening of the analytical tools designed to understand the process of democratization. An ironic outcome of this debate is that *both positions* have been seized upon by democracy promoters to urge the northern industrialized democracies to take a more proactive role in fostering democracy throughout the world. Scholarly analyses citing the consolidation of democratic practices are heralded as proof of the need to continue and even intensify existing efforts. Scholarly analyses citing the decay of democratic practices are equally brandished as demonstrative of the need for greater international involvement, so as to prevent even further slippage in democratic gains. In short, democracy promoters simultaneously use both sides of the consolidation–decay debate to favour their position.

### **What Have We Learned? Assessing Contemporary Democracy Promotion Efforts**

An implicit theme linking each of the contributions to our joint European–North American research endeavour is that the twenty-first century has been marked by the strengthening of an international norm that favours intervention in the pursuit of democracy promotion on behalf of the international community. The widespread acceptance of this international norm is clearly demonstrated by its embodiment in the activities of the United Nations (UN), the largest and most far-reaching international organization that enjoys almost universal membership of independent nation-states. As aptly noted by project contributor Christopher C. Joyner,<sup>40</sup> the UN has served as the bellwether of an international norm that considers democracy promotion to be an accepted and necessary component of international behavior.

- As an institutional organization, the UN was *conceived and constructed on fundamental democratic principles*. The UN Charter is clearly grounded in democratic values and aspirations, and most UN organs, with the notable exception of the Security Council, operate mainly through democratic decision-making procedures and processes.
- The UN actively *promotes democracy through its norm-creating ability*. UN organs have promulgated considerable international law embodying cardinal principles and values of democracy, especially through human rights treaties and the progressive codification of democratic principles into international legal norms.
- The UN actively *facilitates democratic principles and institutions* internationally. It does so by promoting a democratic culture in states

through electoral assistance (including monitoring and verifying national elections), holding referenda, and sponsoring plebiscites – all of which foster freer and fairer opportunities for the democratic process to work more openly and efficiently in newly emerging national societies.

Our collective research endeavour nonetheless concluded that the future success of democracy promotion efforts – and therefore the strengthening of global democracy – is anything but certain, and in fact is confronted by a variety of challenges.

*Undue Optimism about the 'Democratic Environment'*

One important challenge is associated with the erroneous tendency of many scholars and especially policymakers to link the transition to democracy with the emergence of other political–military and socioeconomic ‘goods’ – the so-called ‘democratic environment’ already achieved by the northern industrialized democracies and presumably aspired to by the developing world in which it is assumed that ‘all good things go together’. Among the major outcomes implicitly (and often explicitly) associated with the spread of democracy, which in turn have served as the basis of democracy promotion, are the following:

- the emergence of a more *stable international system* – the so-called ‘democratic peace’ hypothesis – in which democracies do not go to war with each other;
- greater levels of *internal domestic political stability* in which potential and existing conflicts are resolved peacefully;
- the emergence of a more *prosperous international system*, due to the greater proclivity of democracies to engage in free trade;
- rising levels of *national economic growth*, often measured in terms of rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Gross National Product (GNP);
- the promotion of *social development*, typically measured in terms of a decline in social inequalities based on caste, ethnicity, race, religion, or gender;
- greater *protection for human rights* such that individuals and groups at the bare minimum are able to lead lives free from state coercion or persecution.

An important finding of our collective research endeavour is that, contrary to the most optimistic assumptions of academics and practitioners alike, the empirical evidence linking the spread of democracy with these various outcomes of the ‘democratic environment’ is far from conclusive, and in some cases, suggests outcomes contrary to the expectations of

democracy promoters. As detailed by project contributors Charles W. Kegley, Jr and Margaret G. Hermann, for example, the democratic-peace hypothesis is often characterized in the scholarly literature as the closest one can get to an 'iron-clad' law in international relations theory. Although this hypothesis for the most part holds when one focuses on the most coercive form of intervention – the launching of direct military intervention by one democracy against another – it becomes empirically less sound as one descends the spectrum of interventionist tools available to democratic states.<sup>41</sup> The historical record clearly demonstrates that the US launched a wide number of covert interventions against democratically elected governments during the Cold War, and in at least three cases – Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), and Chile (1973) – played a key role in their overthrow.<sup>42</sup>

The often overly optimistic expectations associated with the other dimensions of the democratic environment must also be tempered by the historical record. As concerns the ability of democracies to quell domestic violence, extensive research has demonstrated that both consolidated democracies and extreme dictatorships exhibit low levels of domestic violence – the former due to peaceful avenues of conflict resolution and the latter due to strong state control – with the greatest level of internal conflict often found in countries making the transition from one form of governance to another.<sup>43</sup> In the economic realm, project contributor Juliet Johnson demonstrates that recent research does suggest a greater proclivity for democracies to engage in free trade, thereby potentially contributing to a more prosperous international system. However, it refutes the claim that democracies do better than non-democracies in terms of ensuring rising levels of national economic growth.<sup>44</sup> Whether democracies do a better job of protecting human rights depends on how those rights are defined. The answer is yes when human rights are defined in terms of their civil and political and components, including the right to free speech and the ability to vote in free and fair elections. The answer is no when they are defined in terms of social and economic rights, including access to adequate housing, medical care, and economic security.<sup>45</sup> Democracies typically have not fared well in reducing social inequalities, and in some cases – such as the transitions to democracy in eastern Europe in which female representation in national legislatures has actually declined – democracies have actually fared worse than their authoritarian predecessors.<sup>46</sup> In short, policymakers within the northern industrialized democracies would be well advised to engage in democracy promotion only if democracy is perceived to be a noble good in and of itself, rather than as a means to something else.

*Clashes Between Democracy Promotion and Other Foreign Policy Interests*

A second conclusion of our collective research endeavour, which confirms much of the literature devoted to the democracy promotion activities of individual states, is that democracy promotion has never achieved the status of principal foreign policy interest of the northern industrialized democracies, official rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding. In each of our country studies, project contributors focusing on the US (Steven W. Hook), Japan (Tsuneo Akaha), and Germany (Jürgen Rüländ and Nikolaus Werz) as the three largest providers (in descending order) of Official Development Assistance (ODA), as well as the special case of the nordic world of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden (Liisa Laakso),<sup>47</sup> clearly demonstrate that democracy promotion has played at best a secondary role behind more self-interested foreign policy pursuits. US foreign policy during the Cold War era was principally driven by strategic interests derived from an intense, ideologically based competition with the Soviet Union. Although the pursuit of economic interests, most notably the expansion of US trade and investment, gradually replaced fading ideological interests during the post-Cold War era, the Bush administration's global anti-terrorism campaign in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 clearly demonstrates the continued salience of strategic interests in US foreign policy. Japanese and German foreign policies are similar in that both have been clearly dominated by the pursuit of economic self-interest. As rising economic superpowers with the world's second and third largest GNPs, Japan and Germany have pursued neomercantilist foreign policies in their quest for global economic supremacy. In the case of the nordic countries, largely progressive nordic political cultures have fostered the centrality of humanitarian-based foreign policies highly infused with ideological values. Specifically, the nordics traditionally have demonstrated an overriding foreign policy predilection to support progressive, socialist-oriented regimes in the developing world.

Each of the case studies of our collective research endeavour further demonstrates that when democracy clashes with more central foreign policy interests, democracy promotion is often compromised. Whenever the ideal of democracy clashed with the US national security objective of containing communism during the Cold War, for example, both Democratic and Republican administrations were willing to downplay the authoritarian shortcomings of a variety of US allies, such as Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, and Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi of Iran, in favour of their strong support for US anticommunist policies. This trend continued during the post-Cold War era, as witnessed by the tendency of Democratic and Republican administrations alike to emphasize

US strategic and especially economic interests over democracy promotion in the US-Chinese foreign policy relationship.

The case of China is equally illuminating as concerns Japanese and German foreign policy priorities. Germany was the first European country to make an official break with EU-sponsored sanctions imposed in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre. This break was signalled by President Helmut Kohl's official head-of-state visit to China in 1996 – including a much criticized visit to a garrison of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the Chinese town of Tianjin. For its part, Japan remained unwilling to publicly criticize, let alone join in any sanctions campaign against the Chinese government after Tiananmen, a reflection of the determination of Japanese leaders to scrupulously avoid any actions that could threaten Japan's lucrative trading relationships in Asia and other parts of the developing world.

Contradictions have also emerged in nordic democracy promotion policies, a finding that contradicts the dominant literature which typically underscores the selfless nature of nordic foreign aid policies and those of the other so-called 'middle powers'.<sup>48</sup> Especially during the Cold War, when the normative goal of promoting democracy clashed with the ideological imperative of supporting progressive regimes, nordic governments were willing to downplay the authoritarian shortcomings of a variety of nordic aid recipients, such as Tanzania's leader Julius Nyerere and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, in favour of their strong support for progressive national policies. The case of Sweden is particularly illuminating. A foreign policy approach known as 'assist rather than abandon' often characterized Sweden's unwillingness to terminate foreign aid relationships even in cases of severe human rights violations. This was particularly true when aid recipients had established progressive socialist or Marxist regimes. Indeed, the case study of the nordic countries clearly demonstrates that the willingness to compromise democratic values in favour of more 'important' foreign policy interests is not limited to either a political-military superpower such as the US (in which security interests predominate) or economic superpowers such as Germany and Japan (in which economic interests predominate), but instead is characteristic of the northern industrialized democracies as a whole.

#### *Clash of Interests among the Northern Industrialized Democracies*

One of the most fascinating advancements of our collective research endeavour is that one can fairly well hypothesize the overarching democracy promotion patterns of a northern industrialized democracy by analyzing the interaction between how its policy makers define the national interest and how they perceive the nature of the 'democratic environment'

(see Table 1). In the case of the United States, an overriding focus on security interests and ensuring both domestic and international stability has fostered an approach that emphasizes the *political liberalization* of developing countries. US policy makers generally agree that stability is best served by fostering a regularized political process that has as its basis the holding of free and fair elections, as well as the nurturing of effective state institutions, most notably an independent legislature and judiciary and a civilian-controlled military. One result of this approach is that US policy makers are often prone to portray even significantly flawed election results, especially in allied countries, as nonetheless constituting 'important starting points' in the transition to democracy, which can be improved in later rounds of more democratic elections. It is precisely for this reason that critics have often criticized US democracy promotion as placing too much faith in the election process, in essence favouring a 'top-down' approach to democratization that is too elite centred.<sup>49</sup>

TABLE 1  
DETERMINANTS OF APPROACHES TO DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Principal foreign policy thrust	Principal assumptions associated with democratic environment	Principal targets of democracy promotion programmes
Security interests (political–military stability) Key example: United States	Stable international system (democratic peace hypothesis) Internal domestic political stability (peaceful resolution of conflicts)	Emphasis on political liberalization (opening up the political system) • Regularized political process (free and fair elections) • Effective and independent state institutions (legislature, judiciary, and civilian-controlled military)
Economic interests (trade and investment) Key example: Germany and Japan	Prosperous international system (free trade) National economic growth (rising GDP and GNP)	Emphasis on economic liberalization (opening up the economic system) • Free market economy (reduced barriers to free trade and privatization of parastatals) • Good governance on the part of 'developmental states' (transparency, accountability and efficiency)
Humanitarian interests (social welfare) Key example: nordic countries	Social development (reducing levels of socio-economic inequalities) Protection for human rights (especially social rights)	Emphasis on social liberalization (opening up the social system) • Strengthening civil society (popular participation in decision making) • Social welfare programmes (e.g. gender equality)

German and especially Japanese policy makers remain hesitant to stress the political dimensions of democracy promotion. An overriding focus on economic interests and the need to ensure both national economic growth and a prosperous international system has instead prompted these policy makers to approach democracy promotion from the vantage point of *economic liberalization*. Developing countries are encouraged to embrace a free-market economy that is based on reducing barriers to free trade and selling off failing and inefficient parastatals. Toward this end, Japanese and German leaders have typically argued that democracy aid should be targeted toward fostering 'good governance' (transparency, accountability and efficiency) within strong, centralizing (and often authoritarian) states, perceived as important precursors to economic development and subsequent political liberalization. This approach has been criticized as placing too much stock in the ability of the free market to lead enlightened despots to transform their authoritarian societies. As is the case with the US approach to democracy promotion, those of the Germans and the Japanese have also been criticized as being too elite centred.

In the case of the nordics, an ideologically infused focus on humanitarian interests, including a more recent focus on the protection of human rights, has fostered an approach to democratization that emphasizes the *social liberalization* of developing countries. The nordic vision of democracy promotion, unlike the top-down approaches of the Americans, Germans and Japanese, is based on a bottom-up, popular approach that traditionally has favoured the strengthening of civil society. Nordic policymakers are strongly committed to making social welfare programmes intent on reducing socio-economic inequalities the centrepiece of democracy promotion. Given the prominent role of women at all levels of political power within nordic political systems, it should come as no surprise that programmes devoted to reducing gender inequalities are especially prominent in nordic democracy promotion. Indeed, as project contributor Laakso notes, 'gender analysis is mandated in every development project or programme at the earliest possible point'.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the divergent nature of national interests, however, a certain degree of convergence has occurred in democracy promotion efforts. The Nordic countries and especially the United States have increasingly recognized the importance of paying attention to the economic dimension of the democratization process. Japanese policymakers have committed Japan to playing an enhanced role in the security dimension, most notably through involvement in a variety of conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the UN Security Council. And Germany and the United States have significantly strengthened their democracy promotion portfolios in a wide range of activities designed to strengthen civil societies



in developing countries. These changes notwithstanding, the essential thrust of democracy promotion policies undertaken individually by each of the four country studies of our project basically remains the same: a US emphasis on political liberalization, most notably the holding of multiparty elections, in the pursuit of security interests; a German and Japanese focus on economic liberalization as reflective of economic interests; and a nordic emphasis on social liberalization reflective of the special, social welfare dimension of nordic democracies.

As is the case with much of the literature devoted to international democracy promotion, our collective research endeavour concludes that the principal dilemma for policymakers revolves around the degree to which the policies of the northern industrialized democracies can be co-ordinated. Although policy co-ordination is increasingly heralded among many within both the academic and policy-making worlds as the key to consolidating recent democratic gains, our study concludes that policy co-ordination remains elusive at best. Unlike their US and to a lesser degree nordic counterparts, German and Japanese policymakers are extremely reluctant to impose economic sanctions to punish recalcitrant regimes. German, Japanese and nordic policymakers similarly have been highly critical of the US willingness to use even more coercive measures, including covert, paramilitary and military intervention, in the name of democracy.

Even something seemingly as simple as systematically assessing the human rights record of a developing country as the means for co-ordinating policy is fraught with obstacles. In the case of the US, for example, the State Department compiles an annual assessment of human rights practices (*Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*) that is submitted to and jointly published with the Committee on International Relations in the US House of Representatives and the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate. An emphasis is placed on assessing civil rights and civil liberties. In sharp contrast, the Japanese government neither compiles nor publishes any such list, an indication of their rejection in principle of attaching political conditions to foreign aid. Although the nordics jointly publish an annual assessment of human rights practices (*Yearbook on Human Rights in Development*), nordic policy makers are quick to note important differences, and therefore perceived problems, with the US approach. The most notable is that the nordic assessment is compiled by independent research institutes to avoid the inherent bias that is claimed of government-prepared reports (as in the US case). The German government initially disagreed with the qualitative nature of both the US and nordic approaches, attempting at first to compile a statistical checklist that would facilitate an unbiased ranking of human rights abusers. This approach was ultimately dropped in favour of a largely disregarded assessment that simply focuses on very general political

trends. In short, if agreement is unlikely in terms of classifying all but perhaps the most egregious violators of human rights (for example, clear-cut cases of government-sponsored genocide), how difficult will it be to formulate common policies?

*Impact of State Interests on the Efforts of Intergovernmental Organisations and Nongovernmental Organisations*

Our collective research endeavour also offers insights into the growing roles of IGOs and NGOs in international democracy promotion. One of the most intriguing trends within the northern industrialized democracies, for example, has been the creation of quasi-government institutes often referred to as political foundations. Such government-funded foundations, although technically independent, often play an important role in advancing the democracy promotion agendas of their respective governments.<sup>51</sup> From the perspectives of the governments that created them, the political foundations allow for the pursuit of democracy promotion efforts that otherwise might not be possible. Specifically, governments often turn to these foundations in three sets of circumstances:

- when time is of the essence and a reliance on 'official' channels would require lengthy bureaucratic debates and reviews;
- when a recipient country desires democracy aid but wishes to avoid the stigma and domestic political ramifications of receiving such aid from a particular donor government;
- when a donor government wishes to undertake a democracy promotion initiative but wishes for whatever reason to avoid the legal and political ramifications of direct intervention in the target country.<sup>52</sup>

The desire to ensure political flexibility on the part of donor governments is particularly demonstrated by the German model of *politische Stiftungen* (political foundations), which in turn inspired the creation of a similar model in the United States. 'In those cases where, due to strategic, economic, or diplomatic concerns, the "official" hands of the German government are tied, political foundations serve as the ideal vehicles for democracy promotion', explain project contributors Rüland and Werz. 'Moreover, in case the political foundations go too far and their programs collide with the host government, the German government can reject responsibility for their activities and therefore avoid any rupture in official relations'.<sup>53</sup>

The political foundations and a wide variety of northern-based NGOs and civil society groups constitute part of a growing web of international interaction – what project contributor James M. Scott refers to as a

'transnational democracy issue network' – that informs, guides and in some cases structures the democracy promotion efforts of the northern industrialized democracies.<sup>54</sup> Their most important function is the generation of new ideas and approaches that otherwise would not have emerged from a solely state-centric approach. 'This contribution, which includes policy recommendations and technical advice, continues to expand our knowledge base about the techniques, procedures, and problems of democracy promotion', explains Scott. 'In effect, these actors behave much like an "epistemic community" in the issue area of democracy promotion, developing specialized knowledge, expertise, and policy preferences and disseminating them through various national and international channels'.<sup>55</sup> The activities of these groups are ultimately hindered, however, by their lack of an independent financial base capable of funding large-scale democratization programmes. At least for the near future, democracy promotion efforts that require substantial infusions of external financial support invariably will remain dependent on the generosity of governments within the northern industrialized democracies.

The continued centrality of states in international democracy promotion is clearly demonstrated by their impact on the democratization policies of regional organizations, with the EU serving as a noteworthy case. The EU clearly provides a powerful incentive for aspiring members to rethink their domestic political arrangements by making democracy a precondition for membership. This political conditionality has greatly influenced the further democratization of late southern European joiners to the EU club, as well as providing a powerful incentive for many aspiring states in central and eastern Europe to refashion their political systems in a more democratic direction. Indeed, these developments have prompted some scholars to argue that the policy impacts in southern, central and eastern Europe of the EU's imposition of political conditions for membership serve as the single most effective contribution to meaningful democratization worldwide.<sup>56</sup>

As indicated by project contributor Gorm Rye Olsen, however, the democracy promotion activities of the EU and other regional organizations are in fact significantly constrained by the interests and concerns of their individual members.<sup>57</sup> The EU requirement of achieving consensus prior to taking action has ensured that recent policies have been representative of the least common denominator of the extremely varied foreign policy interests of EU member states. Equally important, there is a tendency for EU democracy promotion policies to follow the foreign policy lead of one of its members, if that member 'demonstrates a special interest or historical involvement in a particular country'.<sup>58</sup> It is for this reason that the EU response to the derailment of democracy in Algeria during the 1990s, which included support for rather than criticism of the military regime led by

General Liamine Zeroual, essentially reflected the foreign policy interests of France, the former colonial power. Indeed, the tainted national elections of 1997, not surprisingly won by Zeroual, ultimately were characterized and legitimized by an EU election observer group as a 'milestone in Algerian political history'.<sup>59</sup>

The continued centrality of state interests in international democracy promotion is also demonstrated by the role of international financial institutions in this realm. As clearly demonstrated by project contributor Béatrice Hibou, the democracy promotion policies of the World Bank are clearly reflective of the capitalist norms promoted by the major northern industrialized democracies, which also happen to be the international system's leading capitalist powers.<sup>60</sup> The World Bank and other such institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), however, are predominantly focused on the economic dimensions of the democratization process, as witnessed by the imposition of a wide array of structural adjustment programmes designed to promote liberal, free-market economies in which the state plays a limited role. Indeed, despite rhetoric to the contrary, there exists a clear tendency for these institutions to 'circumscribe' (that is, to downplay) the political dimensions of the democratization process. In the case of the World Bank, for example, such an approach is theoretically mandated by its founding charter which prohibits interference in the internal politics of member states. The 'unintended' impacts of World Bank policies on the political systems of developing countries are nonetheless substantial, concludes Hibou, most notably in terms of the tendency of liberalization reforms to often reinforce existing power structures in favour of incumbent (and often less-than-democratic) elites and governing coalitions.<sup>61</sup>

### **Toward the Future**

The global spread of democratic forms of governance has reached levels unparalleled in global history. This development has been strengthened by the rise of a far-reaching democracy promotion industry that is equally unparalleled in global history. State and non-state actors alike have vigorously contributed to the emergence of a new international norm that considers democracy promotion to be an accepted and necessary component of international behaviour. Although a wide number of debates, such as those dealing with the precise *forms* of intervention that should constitute part of the global democratic arsenal, continue to divide the northern industrialized democracies, the advocates of democracy promotion clearly have the edge in both the academic and policy making worlds.

The future success of global democracy is nonetheless potentially constrained by several realities of democracy promotion efforts to date. First,

democracy promoters often maintain overly optimistic assumptions concerning the linkages between the emergence of democracy and other politico-military and socio-economic outcomes associated with the 'democratic environment'. An important corollary of this undue optimism is the hotly debated possibility that the globe has entered a 'reverse wave' in the Huntingtonian sense, in which electoral authoritarianism and hybrid regimes will be on the increase at the expense of their democratic counterparts. Second, democracy promotion is typically compromised when the normative goal of democracy clashes with other foreign policy interests. Especially in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, several northern industrialized democracies are clearly willing to adopt a *realpolitik* approach to international politics that compromises democratic values in favour of national security interests, as witnessed by the Bush administration's strong support for undemocratic allies where convenient as part of Washington's global war on terrorism. Competing foreign policy interests *among* the northern industrialized democracies have also affected democracy promotion efforts, most notably in terms of hindering effective co-operation. Such differences have carried over into a wide number of non-state actors, such as the EU, where democracy promotion policies are representative of the least common denominator of the varied interests of its member states. Indeed, despite the rise of an international democracy network among a wide variety of NGOs and IGOs presumably beyond the reach of individual state interests, democracy promotion efforts at the beginning of the twenty-first century largely remain dominated by northern industrialized 'states'. In short, states remain the key actors in democracy promotion.

One simple fact, however, provides the basis for optimism among the contributors to our collective research endeavour as concerns the future of democracy promotion efforts, even in the absence of enhanced co-operation either among the northern industrialized democracies or between state and non-state actors. Each wave of democratization, regardless of whether one counts three, four or even more waves that have occurred in the last two hundred years, has contributed to the further strengthening of the international democratic context within which individual democracy promotion policies are pursued. Specifically, the international democratic environment at the beginning of the twenty-first century is much stronger, nurturing, and protective of existing democratic practices than was the case at the beginning of either the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Democratic reversals and the decline of democracy promotion efforts are therefore much more unlikely in today's international system.

## NOTES

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