

INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY PROMOTION:  
THE END OF THE ROAD OR THE DISCOVERY OF  
NEW PATHWAYS?

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers the current condition of democracy promotion against the background of changing Western priorities and changing conditions in the recipient countries. It argues that democracy promotion faces problems in both extending democracy further into currently non-democratic countries, and in deepening democracy where a degree of pluralism has already been established. Many of the current non-democracies are inherently more difficult to democratise than those that were transformed during the 'third wave', and in some cases Western strategic priorities conflict with democracy promotion. In the countries that have undergone a transition to at least a crude electoral democracy, elites are learning how to make concessions to external demands while preventing the sort of 'democratic consolidation' that might threaten their own domination. Yet despite the obstacles, it is in the interests of the West to continue to promote democracy, at least rhetorically, in order to highlight the legitimacy of democracy as the only acceptable political creed. This is increasingly important in the face of threats from ethnicity, religious fundamentalism and plain alienation from the political order. The paper suggests a classification of types of democracy promotion, and speculates on their achievements, problems and prospects.

## Introduction

The success of democracy promotion so far can hardly be doubted. Before 1990 most of Eastern and Central Europe, Central and East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America were under authoritarian rule. Today most countries in these regions have democracy at least to the extent of holding competitive elections and enjoying a degree of freedom of association and expression. One may question the quality of democracy, but the quantity is undeniable. The extent to which the expansion was due to external democracy promotion is hard to determine. It would hardly have come about so easily if the West, and especially the United States, had continued to sustain authoritarian rulers. If one is no longer 'with' the authoritarians it is difficult to be 'against' the indigenous democrats who seek a new order. At a minimum, the Western powers might stop condoning executions, torture and arbitrary imprisonment. Beyond that, they might be more discriminating in their trade and investment policies; and further along the road they might give positive encouragement to the building of a democratic environment.

This paper will look at the current state of play in relations between the West and authoritarian, semi-authoritarian and democratic regimes. It will consider the diversity of democracy promoters and their objectives, and the extent to which these have changed over time. We then go on to consider the various types of democracy promotion and their effectiveness, and attempt to assess the sort of legacies that international democracy promoters have left to the countries that have emerged from authoritarian rule since the 1980s. Has the whole process run out of steam, or has it enabled democrats in diverse countries to establish a lasting new order?

### The Current State of Play

Table 1 suggests a rough classification of the current state of countries that were under authoritarian rule in the 1980s, partly in terms of their own status and partly in terms of the attitude of the West towards them.

**Table 1: The current condition of regimes which were under authoritarian rule before 1990.**

|   |
|---|
| 1. <b>Authoritarian or anarchic lost causes.</b> Western powers make little attempt to promote democracy beyond sporadic attempts to subvert the regimes. China, Cuba, Libya, Myanmar, North Korea, Somalia.  |
| 2. <b>Acceptable authoritarians.</b> Western powers condone the existing order for strategic or economic reasons. Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Singapore.  |
| 3. <b>Acceptable semi-authoritarians.</b> Western powers again condone the existing order, though they may give some encouragement to democratisation when it does not conflict with their strategic or economic interests. Malaysia, Russia, much of Central Asia.   |
| 4. <b>Possible candidates for (greater) democratisation or consolidation.</b> Democracy may be hampered by internal conflict, weak governmental capacity or a reluctance of rulers to make democratic concessions. Western powers seek to achieve at least electoral democracy and the rule of law, though often with little success. Afghanistan, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Iran, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe.   |
| 5. <b>Apparently successful cases of transition to democracy.</b> Opposition parties are free to contest elections without being fatally handicapped by ballot rigging, gerrymandering or suppression of freedom of expression. The rule of law, for the most part, prevails, though the military, the police or the judiciary are sometimes used in partisan ways. There is relative freedom to participate in civil society. Western powers wish to 'consolidate' democracy and to eliminate the undemocratic blemishes, but the 'cost' of doing so may be too high. Most of Eastern Europe, East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. |
| 6. <b>Apparently successful cases of democratic consolidation.</b> Democratic structures and processes have been institutionalised. Undemocratic deviations are generally punished. The rule of law prevails. The military and police are accountable to elected governments. Civil society enjoys relative autonomy, and some voice in government. But there is not necessarily equality, social justice, effective control over the economy or freedom from foreign interference or exploitation. Western powers consider their mission to have been accomplished. Much of Central Europe, Uruguay, possibly Chile, South Africa and Ghana.   |

There is a danger of presenting 'democracy promotion' as a one-dimensional activity. There are clearly a variety of democracy promoters and a variety of aspects of democracy which they may seek to promote. Western governments seek to promote democracy, but so too do NGOs, churches, lawyers and trade unions. Governments will have to balance democratic ideals with more immediate strategic and commercial needs, yet they will also have to give an appearance of propriety and respect for legal norms, whereas an NGO such as Amnesty International can focus on a particular aspect of democracy, such as freedom from arbitrary detention, without having to face the consequences of the policies it advocates. International financial institutions may see greater democracy as a means to other ends such as economic

development, whereas the Westminster Foundation for Democracy will see democracy as an end in itself. But for all these variations of beliefs, interests and objectives, there does appear to have been a broad coalition of forces which have seen democratisation as a means to material and human benefits for both the promoters and the recipients.

Table 1 suggests some of the objectives, inconsistencies and perhaps hypocrisies in democracy promotion. The victims of authoritarianism or anarchy in some countries (category 1) are left to their fate because it is calculated that little short of a revolution or foreign invasion would establish democracy. China and North Korea cannot be bullied or nudged along the democratic path in the same way as Ghana or Kenya, given the former countries' more limited dependence on the West. There is less desire to bully or nudge the 'acceptable' authoritarians or semi-authoritarians in categories 2 and 3. There is no obvious practical reason why Egypt or Pakistan should not be subject to the sort of carrots and sticks that were used to end authoritarianism in Ghana and Kenya, but political expediency gives a higher priority to Western strategic interests and the 'war on terror'. Economic sanctions could conceivably be imposed on the Central Asian republics, Singapore, Malaysia or even Russia, in the pursuit of demands for greater democratisation, but the cost would be greater than that of imposing such sanctions on weak countries in Tropical Africa. Western governments and diplomats may plead that they are still working behind the scenes to pursue individual cases of election rigging, police brutality or government interference with the judiciary, but they do not threaten any major sanctions in pursuit of their demands. The absence of democracy is sometimes condoned on the grounds that there is little demand for it (how many Singaporeans care if a few dissidents are persecuted?) or that it would open the door to election victories by non-democrats such as religious fundamentalists or tribalists (what would happen if Islamists gained control of Algeria or Egypt?).

At the other end of the continuum are countries in which little attention is paid to democracy promotion because this objective has largely been achieved (category 6). For all their imperfections, countries such as the Czech Republic, Chile or Uruguay might be seen as cases where external democracy promotion, in co-operation with indigenous institutions and civil society, have established a consolidated order which can now look after itself. The political process now takes place within the boundaries of democratic procedures and institutions; civil society is allowed substantial autonomy and influence, and transgressions from the democratic ethic are generally punished. This is not to equate the concept of democratic consolidation with democratic utopia. These countries may be lacking in equality, social justice, effective control over the economy, or in freedom from foreign interference and exploitation, but such objectives were seldom in the minds of most of the democracy promoters.

In between the lost causes and the acceptable authoritarians at one end, and the already consolidated democracies at the other, are countries where democracy promoters still see themselves as having a significant role. The candidates for (greater) democratisation in category 4 are mainly countries that were by-passed by the 'third wave' of democratisation in the 1990s. Authoritarianism was sufficiently entrenched to resist the wave in Iran and Zimbabwe, and internal conflicts in the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone made it difficult to build any democratic foundations. In Equatorial Guinea and the Gambia, the explanation may be that these

countries were too small to merit the attention of outsiders when they had bigger beasts to hunt, though Equatorial Guinea borders on the ‘acceptable authoritarian’ category in view of the desire of foreigners to use the government as a means of access to the country’s mineral wealth. Competitive elections have now been held in most of these countries, with varying degrees of order, honesty and fairness, but any democracy that exists does not stretch far beyond ‘electoral democracy’. Governments (except in the case of Iran) have very limited capacity beyond dispensing favours to their supporters; few checks and balances exist, and civil society is rudimentary. The would-be promoters face a daunting challenge.

The challenge is somewhat different for the countries in category 5. They approximate to Schmitter’s model of unconsolidated democracy.

It is difficult to detect and analyse ... what I propose to call *unconsolidated* democracies. Regimes trapped in this category are, in a sense, condemned to democracy without enjoying the consequences and advantages that it offers. They are stuck in a situation in which all the minimal procedural criteria for democracy are respected. Elections are held more or less frequently and more or less honestly. The various liberal freedoms exist – multiple political parties, independent interest associations, active social movements and so on – but without mutually acceptable rules of the game to regulate the competition in the formation of governments and policies. Each party considers itself uniquely qualified to govern the country and does what it can to perpetuate itself in power. Each group acts only in the furtherance of its own immediate interests, without taking into consideration the impact upon the polity as a whole. Whatever formal rules have been enunciated (in the constitution or basic statutes) are treated as contingent arrangements to be bent or dismissed when the opportunity presents itself (Schmitter in Tulchin and Romero 1995: 16).

Schmitter’s use of the word ‘stuck’ suggests that ‘unconsolidated democracy’ is not necessarily a transitional phase between authoritarianism and consolidated democracy, but is an indefinite resting place for many countries. Democracy has been grafted on to many of the countries in category 5 through a mixture of internal demands and external support, but without many of the social and economic changes that might be conducive to democracy. Democratic processes are therefore used when it is expedient or unavoidable, but many political conflicts are still resolved through violence, corruption or the manipulation of the machinery of state for personal or partisan ends. For the democracy promoter who wants democracy to be ‘the only game in town’, the challenge is to make the rougher alternative games less easy to play, and to advocate democracy something morally superior.

What does all this tell us about the current condition, and future prospects, of democracy promotion? Do promoters, flushed with their perceived success in democratising most of the Second and Third Worlds, go on to displace yet more authoritarian regimes, and to fine tune the existing democracies that require consolidation? Do they find means of displacing even the ‘lost causes’ in China and North Korea, just as they previously helped to dislodge apparently impregnable regimes in South Africa and East Germany? Do they even persuade their authoritarian allies in Egypt or Saudi Arabia that democracy would be in their own interests?

Alternatively, has democracy promotion now run its course? While various surveys have suggested that most people in the newly-democratised countries prefer the new order to the old, democracy has not necessarily brought greater prosperity or security (Flanagan and Lee 2000: 626-59; Gyimah-Boadi in Diamond and Plattner 1999: 105-21; Logan et. al. 2003: 17,21; Shin 1999). Attempts to deepen democracy might therefore meet with little enthusiasm amongst the citizenry, while many of the original indigenous pioneers of democratisation now enjoy the fruits of political office, and may not want constraints on their own powers. Where power has been retained by former authoritarians, who have learnt to ride the third wave in competitive elections, as has been the case in much of Africa, external attempts to strengthen democracy may now be more difficult. The rulers now claim a mandate from the people, despite some dubious electoral practices. It is harder for democracy promoters to arouse indignation about the intricacies of polling day organisation, party patronage or media bias than it was to condemn preventive detention, torture or the outright prohibition of opposition. As for the war-torn countries where democracy has not extended far beyond going through the motions of competitive elections, other papers at this conference will fill in the details, but if elected governments lack the capacity to deliver much to voters in return for their votes, even in terms of basic security, any consolidation of democracy seems a long way off.

All this speculation has been based on the premise that the beliefs and resources of the democracy promoters have remained constant. In terms of professed beliefs, it is difficult to detect any great changes since the early 1990s. Western rulers still claim to want to spread democracy, and democracy is still seen as linked with such alleged goodies as economic development, good governance and the spread of Western culture. NGOs such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the German stiftungen remain equally enthusiastic (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2003: 2-3, 150-1; Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2001; Friedrich Naumann Stiftung n/d; Westminster Foundation for Democracy 2002: 1). Democracy promotion will, they claim, strengthen civil society, extend human rights, make governments more accountable, reduce poverty and combat corruption.

Sceptics will argue that such rhetoric masks the real motives for democracy promotion, which include continued economic exploitation through the advancement of global capitalism, the pre-empting of more radical forms popular democracy, and an ideological expression of triumphalism by the victors in the Cold War (Abrahamsen and Williams in Adar and Ajulu 2002: 307-28; Hearn 2000: 815-30. Hearn 2001: 45-53; Hearn and Robinson in Burnell 2000: 241-6; Howell and Pearce 2001: 230-1, 187-233; Robinson 1996: 29, 64, 317-85). To these objections we now need to add the growing concern with security and the 'war on terror' (see especially Buxton 2006: 709-23). There are at least three strands to the latter concern.

**1. 'Democracy promotion will make the world more secure'.** This argument is partly a survival from the Cold War, when each potential victory for the other side was seen as a threat to the West as a whole. Cuba and North Korea keep the heretical flag flying, but are now joined by Iran and Palestine promoting other brands of anti-Western ideology, and by countries such as the Congo and Somalia where chaos can provide a cover for terrorist bases or create problems of mass migration. In the absence of order, or under the influence of anti-Western leaders, an enemy has emerged that can bring death to the streets of London, Madrid or New York in a way

that Stalin did not. While the enemy is in many ways more immediate than in the Cold War – possibly lurking on a local bus or train with a home-made bomb – it may also be seen as more easily displaceable. We can point to modest successes in establishing pluralist political systems in Afghanistan, the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and even Iraq. They may still be a world away from Western liberal democracy but, with the possible exception of Iraq, these countries may pose fewer problems for Western rulers than when they were subject to greater authoritarianism or anarchy. If this is the Western perception, it might encourage the expansion of attempts at democratisation in Iran, Somalia or the Sudan.

**2. ‘Democracy promotion will create allies for the promoters’.** The assumption is that competitive elections will be won by politicians who are either pro-Western or who see little alternative but to collaborate with the West. Supporters of dependency theory might see this as the latest in a long line of devices for Western domination. Wealthy countries have devised a variety of means of extracting wealth from poor ones over the years. Worthless trinkets have been exchanged for gold; colonial governments have been imposed with the power to adapt overseas economies to serve metropolitan needs; labourers have been enslaved and tortured; Africans have been prohibited from going into businesses that might compete with Europeans, and governments have been compelled to open their markets to imports from the West while being denied reciprocal rights. Most of these practices, apart the last one, would not be feasible today, on account of the resistance they would provoke from both within the exploited countries and amongst liberal opinion in the West. Democracy promotion might be seen, at its most cynical, as the latest and most acceptable means of legitimising economic exploitation. From the ‘micro’ level of agreeing to a particular structural adjustment package, or passing ‘anti-terror’ legislation drafted in America, to the ‘macro’ level of accepting a (subordinate) place in the global economic order, governments are deemed to be consenting to their station in life, with the blessing of constituents who chose them in democratic elections. They are ‘allies’ of the democracy promoters, not just in the formal sense of strengthening security in a ‘war on terror’ but in co-operating in maintaining the status quo.

**3. ‘Democracy not only strengthens the legitimacy of the rulers in the democratised countries, but bolsters the legitimacy of rulers in the West.’**

Elections have conferred a legitimacy on the new rulers which had not been enjoyed by military rulers, warlords, priests or even hereditary monarchs. Democracy is clearly not yet the only game in town, and political expediency requires democrats to continue to support authoritarians much of the Middle East and Central Asia. But as far as possible it is important for the West to show that democracy is the only feasible system for a ‘modern’ country, and that anyone who challenges such a notion in word or deed is a potential ally of religious fundamentalism, narrow nationalism or chaos. Yet, paradoxically, democracy in its Western heartlands in the early twenty-first century finds itself under growing strain. The declining capacity of Western governments, either to meet the material aspirations of their constituents or to retain their loyalty and confidence, has raised questions about the legitimate bases of liberal democracy. There has been a visible erosion of the very basis on which democracy was supposed to rest – the constructive participation of citizens. Fewer citizens in the West now vote, fewer take part in communal activities, and fewer have confidence in the institutions of their countries (see especially Barber 2002; Beetham 2003: 597-609; Berman 2000; Diamond 1999; Scharpf in Pharr and Putnam 2000: 101-20).

While Fukuyama was proclaiming an ‘end of history’ in which liberal democracy had eliminated all its ideological challengers (Fukuyama 1991: 659-63), the foundations of that democracy were being gnawed away. If democracy, for all its faults, can be presented as the only acceptable political order, the foundations might be rendered more secure (this argument is pursued in more detail in Pinkney 2005: 5-7).

### **The Strategies of Democracy Promotion and their Effectiveness**

Table 2 suggests some of the ways in which democracy is promoted, and the impact and responses which it may generate (much of what follows is taken from Pinkney 2005: 90-5. The main sources used in discussing these strategies are Burnell 2000: 11-25; Carothers 1999; Crawford 2001; Schraeder 2002: 217-35 and the individual democracy promotion bodies. I acknowledge Schraeder's useful scale of degrees of legitimacy and illegitimacy in relation to different strategies).

**Table 2. Types of Democracy Promotion: Targets, Persuasion, Coercion and Legitimacy.**

| <b>Activity</b>   | <b>Direct or indirect impact on democratisation</b> | <b>Help, persuasion or coercion</b> | <b>Legitimate or illegitimate</b>   |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Creating conditions conducive to democracy                             | Indirect  | Help                                | Legitimate  |
| 2. Aid with few strings: courses, conferences, research.                  | Direct  | Help                                | Legitimate  |
| 3. Opinion forming, preaching, observing, reporting back.                 | Direct  | Persuasion                          | Mainly legitimate, depending on content.  |
| 4. Moulding political institutions: capacity building, accountability.    | Mainly direct                                       | Largely persuasion                  | Mainly legitimate, depending on content.  |
| 5. Developing civil society: parties, NGOs, CSOs and community groups.    | Variable  | Help; some persuasion               | Mainly legitimate, but governments question the legitimacy of some recipients.        |
| 6. Diplomatic pressure.   | Direct  | Persuasion                          | Variable  |
| 7. Sanctions against democratic lapses.                                   | Direct  | Persuasion and coercion             | Variable  |
| 8. Weakening authoritarians: economic sanctions, subversion and invasion. | Variable  | Coercion                            | Seen as illegitimate by authoritarians, and sometimes by the international community. |
|   |   |                                     |   |

1. **Creating conditions conducive to democracy** can be related to arguments about economic development being a prerequisite of democracy. Aid for local

development has a history going back many years before democracy promotion. It has the advantage of not involving any compulsion beyond using resources in the prescribed manner, and the legitimacy of aiding the prosperity of local communities could hardly be questioned. How far such aid does actually contribute to democracy is difficult to determine. Thriving local communities living above the breadline may be a necessary condition for democracy, but are hardly sufficient. But where governments treat more intrusive forms of democracy aid as unjustifiable interference, as in a country such as Malaysia, aid to local communities may prove the safest point of entry.

2. **Aid with few strings** can also be offered for more explicitly democratic projects, but without directly demanding that political actors change their ways. Everybody enjoys attending a course or conference, preferably with food and drink laid on at someone else's expense, and then ticking boxes to show that the function has turned the participants into better democrats. Kelsall takes a particularly sceptical view of such activities in Tanzania, Taylor a more optimistic one (Kelsall in Barrow and Jennings 2001: 138-48; Taylor 1999: 77-91). The German *stiftungen*, in particular, have acquired a reputation for organising courses and conferences, often in co-operation with indigenous NGOs. Another form of aid that avoids upsetting anyone in authority is to organise research projects on activities that might enhance democracy, such as drafting constitutions or reforming local government (Burnell 2000: 24-5). It is another area in which it is virtually impossible to 'prove' that particular inputs have produced particular outputs, but there may at least be emerging a clearer philosophy of how public servants, whether they be politicians, bureaucrats or police officers, should behave in a democratic society.
  
3. **Opinion forming** implies a more assertive role on the part of democracy promoters, and an implication that political actors are required to change their ways (Schraeder 2002: 219). Western leaders at international conferences may preach the need for democratic reform, or election monitors may be despatched, as a condition of aid to administer elections. The monitors are often accused of being too lenient in their assessment of electoral malpractices, yet they establish or sustain the principle that outsiders have a right to assess the merits of democracy in someone else's country. At this point a delicate path has to be trodden between demanding basic democratic standards and not offending indigenous governments to the point where monitoring and reporting are deemed to be illegitimate interference.
  
4. **The moulding of political institutions** is not an exclusively 'democratic' preoccupation. Institutions can be strengthened to meet a variety of objectives, but there has been an emphasis in recent years not just on 'capacity building' but on attempts to strengthen such areas as parliamentary scrutiny, governmental accountability, electoral impartiality and military and police behaviour within the law (Burnell 2000: 24-5; Schraeder 2002: 219). Some of this can be done through courses and conferences, as outlined above, but a point may be reached where donors begin to point out discrepancies between the norms imparted and actual behaviour, sometimes with an implicit threat to reduce aid if the norms are disregarded.

- 5. Developing civil society** raises comparable opportunities and limitations outside the state sector. The main difference here is that particular groups in society, and not just particular practices, may be deemed illegitimate by indigenous governments. Particular NGOs may be branded as ‘tribalist’, ‘sectarian’ or even ‘revolutionary’. Promoters often steer clear of more loosely structured ‘civil society organisations’ (CSOs) in which the poor and the dispossessed are involved directly. This might be attributed to the difficulties in dealing with groups with little formal organisation, but the alternative view is that CSOs are too far outside the consensus between donors and indigenous elites, and would destabilise Western democracy promotion. Political parties also raise particularly thorny problems. Much Western democracy promotion is premised on the need for multi-party competition, but for donors to single out a particular party might be seen as interference in, rather than the promotion of, democracy. Yet the alternative of giving aid to all the parties in a country might leave the ruling party even stronger. In some cases, any form of explicit aid to parties is prohibited, and more indirect strategies have to be employed. While one might believe that the best way of promoting democracy in Zimbabwe would be to support the main opposition party in challenging Mugabe’s authoritarian rule, the law blocks this path. The alternative is to work through NGOs, such as the Zimbabwe Election Support Network, which may at least moderate the worst forms of ballot rigging and intimidation.
- 6. Diplomatic pressure** takes us further into the area of ‘persuasion’, sometimes with the threat of coercion in the background. At its most innocuous, it may be little more than a friendly suggestion by an ambassador that less violent policing or greater tolerance of dissent might yield better results, but in much of Africa the pressure has been more explicit. It often began with demands for more honest and competent use of economic aid, which shaded into good governance, but the message became increasingly ‘democratic’ by the 1990s. Rulers who were dependent on aid and debt relief might resent interference in internal politics, but it would be costly refuse to listen to demands for fairer elections, fewer human rights abuses or greater governmental accountability. The boundaries of legitimate external criticism were thus pushed back, and meetings between diplomats and African politicians on the advancement of democracy often became an institutionalised part of the political process.
- 7. Sanctions against democratic lapses** may occur when persuasion or negotiation fail. The EU cut much of its aid to Togo when Togo’s progress to democracy was deemed too slow, British aid to Zanzibar was curtailed after the disputed 1995 election, and both Pakistan and Zimbabwe have been expelled from the Commonwealth. But we can also point to contrary examples where Western economic and strategic interests overrode concern with democracy. Authoritarian governments in Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Nigeria and even Pakistan have, or have continued to, receive Western support, and some critics have argued that Uganda and Zanzibar have been let off lightly for human rights abuses and electoral malpractices. There is certainly no clear tariff of punishments for undemocratic transgressions, but it is arguable that all but the most hardened authoritarian rulers would prefer to keep on good terms with donors and to avoid international ostracism. The choice is not usually between

giving way to all Western demands and giving way to none, but to seek a balance between political survival and continued foreign goodwill. The willingness of rulers to accept defeat in Malawi, Zambia and much of Latin America, or to avoid overstaying their welcome in Ghana and Kenya, may not be due entirely to external pressure, but it may reflect a climate in which it is seldom possible to cling to power undemocratically without both the rulers and their constituents incurring enormous costs.

- 8. Weakening authoritarian regimes** may be attempted as a long-term strategy by building up such economic activities, autonomous groups and human rights organisations as the regime will permit, without demanding anything as ambitious as free elections. This has largely been the technique of the National Endowment for Democracy in the Congo (NED n/d). But if the patience of outsiders is exhausted by the behaviour of the authoritarians, there are the more drastic alternatives of economic blockades, subversion or invasion. United States policy towards Afghanistan, Cuba and Haiti might fall into these categories. If one is convinced of the virtues of democracy, and the desire of citizens to be rid of their oppressors, why waste time on the other measures we have described? One answer is that more aggressive tactics might be seen as illegitimate not only in the recipient countries but in international law. It would also raise questions as to how many authoritarian regimes merited this treatment, and what distinguishes them from those receiving milder punishments. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 may have had democratisation as only a secondary objective, but it pointed to the practical, as well as the moral and legal, problems in trying to impose democracy in a country with few indigenous foundations for it. If the authoritarian regime is the product of a range of social, cultural and economic conditions, and not merely some chance seizure of power, a more effective strategy might be to nurture such democratic roots as exist and wait for the regime to implode.

Which of these types of democracy promotion are becoming more, or less, effective? Activities 1 and 2 in table 2 do not present many obvious problems. Democracy promoters can go on aiding economic development, organising courses, conferences and research projects, though diminishing returns may begin to set in as political actors acknowledge the desirability of democratic behaviour but wonder what good it will do them if the actual environment remains hostile to democracy. As regards activities 3 to 8, there are doubts as to whether the democratic door can be pushed much further open. It is this question that divides what we shall call the ‘who’d have thought it?’ model from the ‘diminishing returns’ model. The former model asks, rhetorically, who would have thought twenty years ago that much of East Asia, South Africa, and most of Tropical Africa, Latin America and Central Europe could have become democratic? Yet they have, so why should we play down the prospects for democracy anywhere (or everywhere) else? The ‘diminishing returns’ model retorts that the democratisation achieved in the ‘third wave’ was relatively easy compared with the task of transforming the remaining non-democracies. Democracy came to South Africa more on account of world revulsion against apartheid than because the world demanded democracy per se. Much Latin American democratisation was a return to the status quo ante, as the United States switched off its life support system for military dictators. Most African rulers were too desperate for aid to reject democratisation packages. But transforming the remaining non-democracies would involve climbing much higher mountains. Some of the non-

democracies lack effective states, some are strong enough to ignore external pressures, and in others the rulers are willing to destroy their institutions and economies to ensure their own survival.

If the further advance of democracy into new territories proves too daunting, what of the prospects for further consolidation of existing democracies and semi-democracies, using the devices in table 2? The ‘who’d have thought it’ model can point to obvious successes. Not only have dictators been overthrown, but free elections have been held, and sometimes produced defeats for incumbent rulers. Human rights are better respected, the press is freer and the proliferation of NGOs has facilitated greater participation in society and new means of articulating a variety of interests. So why not expect an onward march from Schmitter’s unconsolidated democracy to an order in which democratic norms are universally respected and observed? Supporters of the ‘diminishing returns’ model might respond that, while more of the same promotional medicine might help to preserve the democratic territory already gained, it will do little to achieve any advance to democratic consolidation. Let us look at some aspects of life in many of the countries with largely unconsolidated democracies: the nature of society, the nature of power structures, and the economic opportunities and constraints.

The relevance of **economic opportunities and constraints** need not detain us long. ‘Creating conditions conducive to democracy’ (activity 1 in table 2) through fostering local development, continues to occupy many donors, and no doubt democracy is better at taking decisions on how to share the fruits of growth than on how to cope with economic decline but, for the most part, economic change in the nascent democracies has not been comparable with the industrial revolutions in the West.

‘**Developing civil society**’ (activity 5) has been regarded as a major requirement of democratic consolidation, by donors and by many academics. The argument is partly ideological and partly practical. The ideological argument ties (or tied) in with the ‘Washington consensus’ that states were over-bearing and that, in addition to giving a wider role to the private sector, development requires a strong ‘voluntary sector’. On a more philosophical plane, there was a notion that such a sector would produce the sort of flourishing civil society that Tocqueville had found in the United States in the nineteenth century (Igoe and Kelsall 2005: 279-301), and that this in turn would form the basis of a liberal democratic order. On the practical side, there often appeared to be little alternative but to use NGOs as vehicles for development and welfare in the face of crumbling states, economic decline and growing poverty. While much of the initiative came from within society (see especially Tripp 1997; Tripp 2000: 191-214), much also came from donors who saw aid to ‘civil society’ as an efficient means of channelling resources and a means of facilitating public consultation and participation (Kaldor 2003: 79-84; Broad and Cavanagh in Broad 2002: 56-8; Wood in Deacon 2000: 46-50). Even if the primary objective was not democracy promotion, the additional resources and channels of communication could stimulate participation in societies where previously there had been little between an ineffective or predatory state and small local communities (Woollacott 2005: 25).

The ‘diminishing returns’ model puts a less charitable gloss on the effects of trying to strengthen civil society. At the extreme end is the view that the whole concept of civil society has been perverted into creating conditions in which Western domination

will continue, and in which any form of democracy that challenges that domination will be crushed. In this view, donors are selective in the groups they support, freezing out any that might mobilise radical protest, and in some cases even treating NGOs as agents of Western governments (Dicklitch and Lwanga 2003: 482-509; Hearn 2001: 43-53; Klein 2003: 15; Mlama in Semboja et. al. 2002: 122-4). Donors, it is said, are not only trying to crush popular democracy, but to crush politics itself by encouraging charitable and paternalistic NGO activity while ignoring the reality of social conflict (Chandhoke in Kaldor et. al. 2003: 4111-12; Lipschutz in Baker and Chandler 2005: 171-85; Van Arkadie in Semboja et. al.: 2002: 50; Mlama in *ibid*: 122-4). Western businesses, as well as Western governments, seek to legitimate their activities by emphasising their co-operation with NGOs (Husselbee in Eade and Lighteringen 2001: 127-30). At the end of these processes, NGOs often become not so much a manifestation of civil society, but elite groups detached from that society, as they conform to the requirements of donors in terms of bureaucratic organisation and priorities, and the requirements of indigenous governments which want to fend off any challenge to their authority (Igoe 2004; Igoe and Kelsall 2005: 279-301). Even if one rejects the view that the outcome is the result of a Western conspiracy to maintain its domination, the (understandable) search for immediate solutions still leaves us with the problem that the cut and thrust of political debate which one normally associates with democracy has been largely bypassed in favour of a search for 'good governance', with its implicit assumption that sound administration must not be undermined by political conflict. Such public dissent as occurs tends to come from ad hoc protests over land rights, environmental degradation or working conditions, if not from dissatisfied ethnic or religious groups, rather than the articulation of alternative political programmes.

An examination of **power structures** might again suggest diminishing returns. Basic formal democratic structures have generally ensured relatively free elections, greater freedom of expression and association, and the protection of civil liberties and human rights. But there is a fear that while democracy promotion has helped to clarify the rules and protect the players in the democratic game, the game itself is often unable to get underway in the manner envisaged. Opposition parties exist but, with the constraints imposed by debt, structural adjustment and the global economy, are often unable to articulate alternative programmes. Means of holding the executive to account exist, but the players are often more interested, in a neo-patrimonial environment, in extracting resources from the state than in making it play by the rules. If we return to the democracy promoting activities in table 2, election monitoring (activity 3) has either tended to gloss over the lapses in polling day organisation and ignored the longer term handicaps of opposition parties, or it has been abandoned as useless (the Gambia) or largely prohibited by the regime (Singapore, Malaysia, Zimbabwe). The moulding of institutions (activity 4) brings us back to the gap between formality and reality. On paper, parliamentary select committees can grill governments, policemen can be disciplined for acting outside the law, and public officers can be punished for corruption, but the reality of elite power and the strength of incentives for unconstitutional behaviour suggest that these outcomes will not be the general rule. Diplomatic pressure (activity 6) may have made modest progress, as diplomats try to impress on governments the need for 'civilised' behaviour that will earn them continued aid and greater prestige in the world of nations. While many human rights abuses continue, the governments responsible have at least been put on the defensive as the searchlight is shone on them. But again much happens below the

surface that makes everyday politics less democratic, yet largely beyond the reach of democracy promoters. The Tanzanian police make it difficult for opposition parties to hold rallies, the Ugandan police arrest journalists for exercising their nominal right to criticise the government, or party thugs harass opposition candidates and supporters, without any intervention from the government. Finally sanctions against democratic lapses (activity 7) appear to have been less visible than in the days when Presidents Moi and Eyadema were threatened with reduced aid. There is again reason to doubt whether more of the same treatment will yield results against the remaining hard core of non-democratic rulers.

Aside from questions of the ability of democracy promoters to strengthen the democratic elements in political structures is the question of whether the promoters are looking in the right direction. There has been a shift of emphasis in the literature from formal structures to the dynamics of political behaviour. Contrast the prescriptions of the early 1990s from those of a decade later. Huntington (1991) was happy to prescribe a no-frills liberal democratic model, with free elections, competent political institutions and basic civil liberties, while leaving issues of poverty, inequality and limited scope for participation for another day. Gills, Rocamora and Wilson (1993: 11) required democracy to be 'participatory' and 'progressive', with a need for greater equality, and the reorganisation of the political and judicial systems to make them more independent and representative. The military should be reduced in size and made subordinate to political authority. Representative organs should be strengthened, power should be devolved, global capitalist institutions should be made more accountable, and democracy should be extended to the workplace and the community. Although this prescription came from the opposite end of the political spectrum to Huntington's, both had in common an optimism about the capacity of formal structures which had largely evaporated by the end of the twentieth century. At the beginning of the new century, Hertz's book on 'the death of democracy' brushed representative governments aside as 'ineffective', and was more concerned with direct action protests, consumer boycotts and ethical investment (Hertz 2001). Luckham et al offered a more measured approach, but it is still remarkable that their 'spaces for democratic politics' are to be filled mainly through changes in public attitudes and behaviour, with relatively little reference to formal structures, beyond the need for 'robust parliamentary processes' and devolution. Their concerns are more with 'grassroots organisations', 'social movements', 'consensus on the rules of the political game', 'internally democratic parties', 'civil society groups able to articulate democratic values' and 'independent media' (Luckham et al in Bastian and Luckham 2003: 26-7).

This disillusionment with formal structures may be merely a passing fad, but if it is a widely held fad it has implications for democracy promotion. Gone, it seems, is the earlier faith in quick institutional fixes, where reformed parliaments, judiciaries, armies and even global institutions would usher in a new order. Persuading people to participate more in grassroots organisations, social movements or political parties, or to build a consensus, would be a much more gradual process, taking us back to 'developing civil society'. But it would be a very different civil society from that populated largely by NGOs allegedly dancing to the tune of donors. This is not to argue that external democracy promoters could not aid such a process, but it is difficult to envisage official bodies in the West wanting to do so, or to envisage more independent groups having sufficient resources to do so.

## Conclusion

While acknowledging the substantial progress that democracy promotion has made, this paper has dwelt on the limited scope that it may now possess, either to extend the number of democracies or to deepen existing democracies. Sometimes it is a matter of a lack of will, sometimes a (possibly realistic) view that in some cases it is not worth trying, and sometimes the priority given to alternative pursuits such as the ‘war on terror’. Some of the countries that were not carried along by the ‘third wave’ of democratisation may have been left behind on account of the obstinacy of individual rulers, but in many other instances they were left behind because they were inherently difficult cases. What worked in Chile or Ghana had less chance of success in China or Uzbekistan. As for the deepening of democracy in the countries that were carried along by the third wave, democratisation often reflected the determination of indigenous actors as well as external supporters, but the mere wish to enhance democracy was not always sufficient. It had to be balanced against the reality of societies that were not emerging ‘civil societies’ on the early nineteenth century American model, economies that were not undergoing transformations on the late nineteenth century European model, and political structures that could not disguise the continuation of elite power and dependency.

If diminishing returns have begun to set in for democracy promoters, it is still difficult to envisage the substantial democratic gains being lost in the foreseeable future. Such gains may be underwritten by Western aid in the broad sense. But the preservation of democracy may now be less in the grasp of democracy promoters and more in the hands of indigenous political actors. Citizens in some countries have succeeded in holding their rulers to account or removing them, while in other countries authoritarians or semi-authoritarians have learnt how far it is prudent to drag their feet. Election rigging, corruption and occasional heavy policing will not generally provoke serious foreign intervention, as long as they are carried out within a nominally pluralist system. Democracy promoters may have become more willing to accept half a democratic loaf and to avoid direct intervention in cases of relatively moderate violations. This raises the possibility that, just as birds that saw less reason to fly regularly eventually lost the power of flight, so democracy promoters might evolve into more passive creatures, better at barking than biting.

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