“Democracy? That’s so last year”:
exploring the backlash against democracy promotion

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A. Introduction

The objective of the paper is to explore democratic development and democracy promotion from a constructively critical perspective. The context of the paper is a backlash against democracy and democracy promotion, mainly but not entirely originating in the political right wing.

The paper begins by establishing a working definition of democracy, and tracing the trend towards democratisation over the past two hundred years. The framework for democratisation is established through the cumulative clarification of international standards and norms through various treaties and agreements. The paper then goes on to explore the logic and practice of democracy promotion, focusing particularly on the approaches pursued by the United Nations, the US government, the European Union and the UK. The recent backlash against democracy promotion is described and critiqued. A critical perspective in favour of democracy and democracy promotion is presented. Finally, the paper proposes an approach to democracy promotion built on the concept of thought styles that responds to the various normative and practical criticisms of existing practices.

B. Defining and enshrining democracy

There is no universally accepted definition of democracy. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a relatively widespread view that the most important feature of ‘democracy’ was the common ownership of the means of production, protected by a dominant political movement that reflected the inherent interests of the population. The disappointing results of that system both in terms of economic well-being and genuine social equity meant that the ‘people’s democracy’ model was essentially defunct by 1991. The majority of the remaining countries ruled by Communist Parties rest their legitimacy on the necessity for social order and managed development rather than on egalitarian claims. As a result, the liberal democratic model has become predominant (although not without its critics, as will be discussed later in the paper).

The American government-funded democracy-promotion NGO Freedom House defines the key features of electoral or liberal democracy in terms which are relatively cautious and can form the basis for discussion without being presented as definitive:

- A competitive multiparty political system
- Universal adult suffrage for all citizens
- Regular elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy and reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud that subverts the public will
- Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning (Puddington, 2010)

Based on Freedom House’s criteria, there has been a long-term trend towards liberal democracy since the beginning of the nineteenth century (Barkan, 2009). The overall trend has itself been characterized by several ebbs and flows, whose best known characterization is in terms of Samuel Huntington’s so-called ‘three waves’ (Huntington, 1991). From the mid-nineteenth century to 1922, there was a gradual increase in the number of democracies, and in the universality of suffrage,
ended when Mussolini’s rise to power marked the onset of fascism’s challenge to democracy. From 29 democracies in 1922, by 1942 only twelve remained. After the end of the Second World War, a second impetus began for democratic transformation, so that by 1962 there were 36 democracies. Once again, this high-water mark receded in the 1960s and 1970s, with increasing prevalence of military regimes, so that by the mid-1970s there were only 30 democracies. However, in the twenty subsequent years there was an unprecedented burgeoning in the number of democracies: the celebrated ‘Third Wave’ of democratisation. The hold-out fascist regimes in Europe collapsed, most Latin American dictatorships gave way to multi-party democracies, the Soviet Bloc collapsed with many countries adopting liberal democratic systems, and even in Africa numerous countries replaced authoritarian rule of the ‘right’ and ‘left’ with democratic constitutional systems. According to the American NGO Freedom House, by 1995, there were 119 electoral democracies. However, subsequent to 1995 there has been a consolidation, and by 2009 only 116 countries of 194 met the criteria for electoral democracy (Freedom House, 2010).

The trend towards democratic governance coincides with a burgeoning of international commitments to democracy, often dating to before the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of electoral democracy in the majority of countries; the Communist regimes’ acceptance of democratic principles was presumably based on their claim to practise an ‘organic’ democracy in which the will of the people was mediated through the Party.

A number of global and regional treaties and conventions commit signatory governments to democratic and representative governance in general, and/or to specific democratic institutions such as parliaments. Most governments in the world, both developed and developing, are committed to at least some of these treaties.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) provides for popular participation in governance, either directly or through elected representatives. The UDHR is further strengthened by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted in 1966, Article 25 of which is interpreted as requiring governments to provide for elected legislative bodies that will share responsibility for governance with the executive. Conventions on the elimination of racial discrimination (1965) and discrimination against women (1979) underline the universality of these democratic rights.

The UN Millennium Declaration of 2000, which established the Millennium Development Goals¹, also endorsed “democratic and participatory governance based on the will of the people”. Subsequently, the 2005 UN World Summit reaffirmed that, “democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives”. Finally, the United Nations General Assembly, in its 2007 resolution A/RES/62/7, sets out a global “framework for democracy based on universal principles, norms and standards”, asserting that, “democracy, development and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing”.

Democratic principles have also been enshrined at the regional level, often with specific details of governance forms considered democratic. In the case of Europe in particular these have played an

¹ The Millennium Development Goals are a set of eight broad development goals that in 2000 all 192 UN member states agreed to achieve by 2015.
important part in embedding democracy as a requirement for countries wishing to participate in the various steps towards European integration including of course, the European Union. The European Council’s Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) came into force in 1950, with protocol 11 of 1952 confirming the right of citizens to democratically elect a legislature. The 1991 Copenhagen Document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which played an important part in facilitating the democratic transition in central and eastern Europe, outlines some basic principles for the operation of a democracy, including the presence of legislatures in which at least one of the houses must be elected directly through a popular vote, as well as the free operations of political parties.

A similar process of institutionalization of democratic governance has followed more recently in other continents. In Africa, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) of 1981 includes among other human rights the right to free association, freedom of speech and political participation. The ACPHR has been followed by a number of treaty and non-treaty agreements on the content of democratic governance, including the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development of 1990 and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) declaration of 2002. There has been a shift in emphasis towards formal representative democracy in recent years; while the 1990 Charter emphasizes popular participation in development through civil society and other popular processes without reference to parliaments, the NEPAD declaration, while continuing to emphasize the importance of participatory democracy, embeds this within the context of a strong parliamentary institution and balance of powers, with article 7 calling for “adherence to the separation of powers, including the protection of the independence of the judiciary and of effective parliaments”. In 2007 the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) was adopted. The ACDEG combines the 1990 Charter’s emphasis on popular participation with NEPAD’s concerns for the rule of law and the respect for democratic institutions. ACDEG calls for the separation of power between executive, legislature, and judiciary.

Further regional and subregional treaties and agreements in Africa and Latin America particularly emphasize the necessity of effective legislatures as part of democratic good governance and as a balance to the potentially overweening power of executives. Article One of the West African regional ECOWAS Protocol on democracy and good governance, for example, places parliament as the first priority as guarantor of democracy, calling for the “Separation of powers – the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary”, and “Empowerment and strengthening of parliaments and guarantee of parliamentary immunity”. The treaty establishing the Organization of American States (OAS), requires member states to be democratic, and places the objective “To promote and consolidate representative democracy” as one of its key priorities. OAS has established the Office for the Promotion of Democracy to support democratization in the region, among whose activities include the sponsorship of a special programme, ‘PAFIL’, which supports efforts to promote and consolidate strong democratic legislatures.

C. Democracy Promotion – the Main Actors

The international commitment to democracy has been underpinned by support to democratisation on the part of the United Nations through UNDP², regional governance institutions such as the European Union and the Organizations of American States, and a number of national governments

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² United Nations Development Programme
including the United States and many west European countries including notably Britain, Germany, Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. We will focus particularly on UNDP, the United States, the European Union, and the UK, and will briefly discuss here the democratic development programmes operated by each.

The United Nations Development Programme is something of an all-purpose development agency. It emerged in the 1960’s as the result of a merger of earlier UN technical assistance programmes, and has established itself as effectively as both a development delivery agency itself and as the UN’s coordinating agency for technical development assistance (Murphy, 2006). UNDP’s competitive advantage is its ubiquitous presence; by 2007 it had offices in 166 countries, far more than any other development agency. Its disadvantage is that its areas of professional competence have varied over time. Initially it focused mainly on economic development support, especially during the era of planned development. However as the World Bank and IMF shifted to structural adjustment in the 1970’s, tying large grants and loans to acceptance of their economic advice, UNDP became marginalized in that field. The agency diversified its interest, focusing on issues including the environment and human development – the latter reflecting a desire for a broader measure of well-being than per capita GDP. Human development emphasized broad social and economic development and has been popularized through UNDP’s highly successful Human Development Reports, launched in 1990, which measure overall social and economic progress in UN member states. The human development rubric focuses attention on governance quality; the ability of countries to channel economic growth into broader well-being of citizens. This provided an opportunity to take up the issue of democratic development, a popular theme during the Third Wave period beginning in the 1970s as discussed above, which provided the agency with a new focus area for technical support. UNDP’s attention to democratic development peaked during the period when the UN was headed by Kofi Annan(1997 – 2006) and UNDP by the British political scientist Mark Malloch Brown (1999 – 2006), who briefly became Annan’s deputy secretary general.

UNDP’s interest in democratic development has continued since the departure of Annan and Malloch Brown, although the agency (with the UN in general) has suffered from declining resources and somewhat less dynamic leadership. UNDP spends about $1.5 billion annually in what it describes as democratic governance, though the bulk of those resources are expended on public administration reform and decentralization rather than support to democratization per se:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNDP Cumulative Programme Expenditure (2004-2007) for Democratic Governance</th>
<th>US$ millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public administration reform and anti-corruption</td>
<td>2,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralisation, local governance and urban/rural development</td>
<td>990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral systems and processes</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy support for democratic governance</td>
<td>576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice and human rights</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary development</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-governance and access to information</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other governance activities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Table One: UNDP democratic governance expenditures 2004 – 2007 (source: UNDP, 2008)
UNDP programmes vary from country to country. As noted, the largest funds are provided to help organize democratic elections, but UNDP also operates programmes supporting parliamentary development in over 60 countries, and, less frequently, works in political party development. UNDP programmes are delivered with the consent of the government of the recipient country, and as a result tend to be fairly cautious, often failing to address fundamental problems of power imbalance.

The United States is the oldest – and most controversial – actor in democratic development. It has several vehicles through which democracy support is provided; the two largest are the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and USAID. NED was created as an initiative of Ronald Reagan in 1983, and operates through providing grants to non-governmental organizations. About half of NED’s funds go to four US-based international democracy-advocating foundations; two associated with the US Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO labour central respectively, and two with the main American political parties, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI). The other half of NED support is provided as small grants to mainly local democracy promotion organizations. In 2009 NED had a budget of $135 almost exclusively from the US government.

NDI and IRI are involved in a range of activities in support of democratic development. Unlike UNDP they are not constrained to get along with government, though in most countries they require permission to operate, which is occasionally denied. Much of their work is carried out training political parties to organize and campaign more effectively, and they also work in parliamentary development in a number of countries. NDI and IRI often support greater participation of marginalized groups such as women and youth in the democratic system, often in association with local civil society groups. They carry out some work on elections, most often to support domestic election observers, and also to encourage political parties to respect democratic norms in election campaigns.

Despite the affiliation of the two US political party two foundations with US parties, their work in democratic development is supposed to be non-partisan, and in most cases this is respected. However NDI and IRI have from time to time come under severe scrutiny by governments in countries where they work, usually because of the perception that they are supporting the opposition, or even the overthrow of the government. In one of the most notorious recent cases, there is evidence that IRI supported opposition groups planning a coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and then boasted of their role in the coup which, unfortunately for them, collapsed after 48 hours due to mass public opposition (Kurlantzick, 2004). The same organization is also accused of helping foster a coup in Honduras against another leftist President (Dominguez, 2009). NDI and IRI were active in several countries that underwent ‘Colour Revolutions’; notably Ukraine and Georgia, and earned themselves substantial criticism from autocratic leaders in Russia, Ethiopia, and elsewhere (Carothers, 2006).

USAID is the United States’ official bilateral development agency and works in numerous areas, with an overall annual budget in the region of $10 billion. Its broadly defined democratic governance area has annual expenditures of between $1 billion and $2 billion. In 2008 it spent $1.4 billion in this area, including the following subareas (in $000s):
Within the area most closely associated with democratic development, ‘political competition and consensus-building’, much of USAID’s funds are channelled through CEPPS, the Consortium for Elections and Political Processes Strengthening. The Consortium comprises NDI, IRI and a third US NGO, IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems), which focuses primarily on support to electoral processes (USAID, 2010). In addition, unusually for bilateral development agencies, USAID channel substantial democratic development resources through specialized for-profit agencies such as ARD, Chemonics, and Development Alternatives, Inc.

USAID’s democratic development work follows similar patterns to that supported by NED, but tend to be less ambitious and less inviting of controversy, given that activities are directly US government funded: “Many USAID democracy programs are cautious, technocratic efforts to support incremental political change, often in the governance domain”. (Carothers, 2009). A substantial proportion of USAID democracy funds is expended ‘building democracy’ in countries where the US has a military engagement, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. These programmes have been subject to criticism on a variety of grounds, which will be discussed below.

The European Union has come to play an increasingly important role in democratic development, although its focus has until recently mainly been on financing democratic elections in countries emerging from dictatorship and/or turmoil. The European Commission, the administration arm of the EU, is the world’s largest development agency and thus the EU has the potential to make a major impact in democratic development. However at the same time the EU is a coalition of 27 states with often widely diverging interests and perspectives, and the Commission has been notoriously cautious in taking political stands. Conversely, however, democracy is a fundamental building block of the European Union and a requirement for membership of the Union. The EU has a 100% success rate in insisting on respect for democracy among its members; no successful coup d’état or democratic reversal has occurred in an EU member state.

EU development assistance is concentrated in three areas: 1) Pre-accession or candidate states, that is, countries that are formally negotiating to join the European Union. Substantial assistance and policy advice is concentrated on these countries. Given the recent substantial enlargement of the EU from 15 to 27 states, and in light of ‘enlargement fatigue’, the current list of formal candidate countries is shorter than it has been for many years, comprising at the end of 2010 Croatia, Iceland, Macedonia and Turkey. 2) The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) states. These are countries to the east and south (Mediterranean region) of the European Union with whom the EU wishes to engage in close collaboration. Several Eastern European ENP states, particularly Georgia, have expressed a wish to join the EU. 3) The so-called Africa, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) region,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Area</th>
<th>Funding (US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rule of Law and Human Rights</td>
<td>143,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Governance</td>
<td>754,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Competition and Consensus-Building</td>
<td>167,477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society</td>
<td>345,001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Governing Justly & Democratically Total**     | **1,410,122**  (source, USAID, 2008)
encompassing many of the world’s poorest countries. The EU’s relationship with the ACP countries is closer to a traditional development assistance position than the other two groupings.

The EU has overwhelming power to influence the behaviour of candidate and accession states, mainly as a result of the substantial economic advantages that EU membership has provided to all its member states. Effectively, countries have proven willing to make whatever reforms are necessary in order to join the EU, including the entrenchment of democratic practices acceptable to the Union. Turkey, for example, has made major reforms, including abolishing the death penalty and reducing the power of the military in political life, in the – thus far unfulfilled – expectation of EU membership.

A similar impact is not noted in the other categories of EU development assistance. In regard to the ENP states, EU assistance to democratic development has been cautious, typically designed primarily by the recipient country, and in general EU assistance has not been associated with significant improvements in democratic functioning:

“… democratic shortfalls have not halted the deepening of ENP co-operation in the southern Caucasus or the southern Mediterranean. In Arab states democratic conditionality has been particularly absent. … Decisively unfree elections in Azerbaijan in 2005 and Armenia in 2008 met with no critical EU response. The EU has been silent on Mikhail Saakashvili’s gradual undermining of checks and balances to his power [in Georgia].” (Youngs, 2009: 897)

Schimmelfennig and Scholtz (2008: 187) note that there is a significant difference between the impact of ENP on democratic development between those states (mainly in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus) that harbour ambition of eventual EU membership, and those, mainly in the Mediterranean region, that do not: “Absent the offer of membership … EU incentives such as partnership and cooperation do not reliably promote democratic change.”

EU democracy assistance to the ACP region has been more directive, and based on clearly articulated instruments that specify the expectations of each signatory. The partnership between the EU and ACP has been governed by two successive long term agreements, each updated approximately every five years. The Lomé Convention, originally signed in 1975, was updated five times before finally being replaced by the Cotonou Agreement of 2000. The first two iterations of Lomé maintained strict political neutrality, reflecting the diverse range of governance models then being practiced in the ACP countries. Beginning with the 1984 and 1990 revisions of the Convention an increasing emphasis, cautiously worded, was placed on ‘policy dialogue’, with the language of rights adopted reflecting both the desires of the ACP states to condemn apartheid and the EEC’s wish to encourage democratic development in the ACP region. In the final 1995 revision to Lomé, many ACP countries had undergone democratic upheavals, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and liberal democratic norms were widely accepted across the world. The language of the 1995 revision placed shared respect of the EEC and ACP for democratic principles at the forefront, with Article 5 noting that, “Respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, which underpins relations between the ACP States and the Community and all provisions of the Convention, and governs the domestic and international policies of the Contracting Parties, shall constitute an essential element
of this convention”. It is not coincidental that this clear evocation of the centrality of democracy occurred in the same year as the high-water mark (to date) of democratisation, as noted above.

The 2000 Cotonou Agreement retained the same principle as Lomé IV. Article 9 of the Agreement commits signatories to promote “democracy based on the rule of law and transparent and accountable governance” as “an integral part of sustainable development”. The democratic tenor of the Agreement is built on the European Union’s own 2000 Charter of Fundamental Rights which establishes a pan-European human rights and democratic regime, including rights of free speech, the right to petition the European Parliament, administrative review, and a range of other democratic protections. The significance of the Charter for EU development policy is underlined by the 2001 Communication from the Commission on “The European Union’s Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in Third Countries”, that emphasizes the centrality of the EU’s goal to “promote democracy and human rights” through its development policy. The Communication also emphasizes the role of the European Parliament as part of democratic development, and particularly the institution’s ability to encourage, “the development of democratic parliamentary institutions in third countries”.

The second revision of the Cotonou Agreement, approved in March 2010, specifies in more detail the institutional necessities of democratic systems, probably in response to criticism from the European Parliament and external democracy advocates that a number of ACP countries had formal democratic systems but in essence were executive dominated with minimal or no potential for transition of power. The revision emphasizes the role of parliaments and civil society as key actors in development, and specifically notes that ACP parliaments are to be involved in the regular political dialogue on the development objectives of Cotonou, including on mutual actions to promote a stable and democratic political environment.

In practice, the EU has played a less decisive role in supporting democratisation than might have been expected from the Lomé and Cotonou agreements. To begin with, member states have different interests (Carbone, 2010) and for some, particularly those such as France with a colonial history, stability and close ties appears frequently to trump uncertain prospects for democratic transition. On clear breaches of democratic practice, such as the unconstitutional seizure of power, the EU has become more consistent, for example in suspending development cooperation and downgrading political ties when Niger’s President dissolved parliament and attempted to rewrite the country’s constitution in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to hold on to power after his term in office had exceeded constitutional limits (Bleck and van der Walle, 2010). However, in cases where executives have limited democratic freedoms without overtly and decisively overturning the constitutional order, the European Union has tended not to take action, or even to publicly criticize governments. Several ACP countries ranking extremely poorly on international rankings of democracy and human rights continue to receive EU development assistance, and even ‘democratization’ assistance (EuropeAid, 2010). Beyond the question of political will and courage, the EU approach has been criticised as highly administrative, focused on technical capacity-building rather than addressing the dynamics of political economy in developing countries: “Fundamental problems of state capture, ethnic relations, human rights violations and extreme inequalities are beyond the purview of policy makers in the European Union” (Hout, 2010).
Britain is a major actor in international development, with the second largest bilateral aid budget, and a cross-party commitment to continue expanding its aid programme. Further, British democratic tradition is well known throughout the world, giving the country a platform to speak on democracy. Britain’s colonial history left a legacy of a strong tradition of development studies and development management scholarship. Many new concepts in development and indeed in democratic development originate in Britain, most recently in focus on ‘political economy’ of development and specifically on ‘drivers of change’ (Unsworth, 2009).

At the same time, unlike UNDP, the US, and the EU, Britain has at least until recently never had a clear globally-applicable focus on democratic development as part of its development agenda. The election of the New Labour government in 1997 changed the dynamics, with Britain newly prepared to take a more muscular stand in favour of human rights and democracy. The new government’s involvement in four military interventions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq were all at least partly justified by Prime Minister Blair and others as being motivated by support of human rights and democracy (Blair, 2007). DFID also began supporting democratic development on the grounds that democracy was helpful in the battle against poverty (DFID, 1999).

DFID also began developing a political analysis and explanation for supporting democratic governance, work led by a small group of intellectuals including Sue Unsworth and Carlos Santiso. Santiso, a Johns Hopkins University PhD who worked at DFID between 2002 and 2007 before moving to the African Development Bank, has written extensively on democracy and government accountability. Shortly before arriving at DFID he published an article in which he considered the merits of democratic development, taking into account criticisms that had begun to be aired with the high tide of democratisation already waning (Santiso, 2001). While acknowledging the international community’s support to democracy, reflected in the various international resolutions and conventions mentioned above, Santiso notes that the dramatic increase in the number of countries holding election had in many cases not created full-fledged democracies:

“These regimes are characterized by unstable politics, hollow democratic institutions, weak governance, economic uncertainty, fluid political processes and unconsolidated party systems. The institutional structures, when they exist, remain weak and the processes by which power is exercised are often contested.” (Santiso, 2001: 388)

He appears ambivalent about the merits of democratic development programming. He argues that several mistakes have been made by democracy promoters: 1) they have focused excessively on elections and not deeper democratic development processes, 2) they have tended to assume that building democracy involves technical processes of institution-building whereas the process is inherently political, 3) they have exaggerated the ability of civil society in developing countries to push effectively for democratisation, and 4) they have failed to understand that a democratization needs to be a largely domestic process, which will be driven by elites.
Santiso makes two main proposals for reform of the democratic development process; first, that political and economic reform should be considered together in a comprehensive approach, modelled for example on the World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework (Pender, 2001). Also, along with Unsworth, he argues for a focus on understanding the politics of good governance, and specifically in Unsworth’s words, on the “drivers of change”. The drivers of change approach has enjoyed considerable popularity within DFID and has also been taken up by various ‘like-minded’ donors such as the Swedish and Danish official development agencies (DFID, 2003).

![Diagram of the Drivers of Change Model](image)

**Figure 2: The Drivers of Change Model, showing causal links between different aspects of the social system (DFID, 2003)**

Despite the popularity of the drivers of change model, there is a paucity of examples of the model guiding development policy, especially in the sphere of democracy support, perhaps because the roadblocks to democratic transformation are similar to those that have always been encountered, in Western countries as well as those of the South; elites do not wish to relinquish power, and they are unlikely to willingly organize a political system that is likely to lead to that result. The drivers of change process may thus paradoxically undermine the will of development agencies to support democratic development projects which are readily dismissed, as in Santiso’s critique, as naïve.

Nevertheless, political enthusiasm for democratization continued to build within the British government, particularly during the 10 years between 1997 and 2007 when DFID was led by Clare Short and Hilary Benn respectively. In 2006, shortly before being shuffled out of the position, Benn launched a White Paper titled *Making Governance Work for the Poor*, which underlined the importance of good governance to development. Good governance required state capability, responsiveness, and accountability, which depended not just on government, but also on political parties, parliament, the judiciary, the media, and civil society, and “ultimately, the opportunity to change leaders by democratic means.” (DFID, 2006). Promoting the White Paper, Benn, scion of a prominent parliamentary family, identified three reasons DFID should support democracy (Benn, 2007). The first, borrowed from Amartya Sen’s *Development as Freedom*, is that democracy is an essential feature of development, and thus instrumental arguments about whether democracy leads to economic growth are beside the point. Secondly, there is overwhelming evidence that people throughout the world want democracy. Thirdly, democracy is the best way to decide how differences in interests and beliefs can be mediated and ultimately resolved. Benn also emphasized the importance of building parliament’s strength as part of democratic development, because of their key roles of government oversight and representation of the population. During Benn’s tenure...
at DFID, the ministry launched the Governance Trust Fund, a £130 million grant programme geared to improving governance in developing countries, with a strong emphasis on increasing accountability to southern civil society, and an emphasis on building grassroots capacity rather than funding northern organizations. Although only a minority of the programmes directly support democratic development, parliamentary development was included in the call for proposals, and one large such project was funded, coordinated by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WfD), a British multi-party democracy support foundation.

As in several donor countries, Britain supports democratic development both through its development ministry – DFID, and through the foreign ministry, reflecting multiple objectives of democratic development. WfD, for example, is primarily funded by the UK Foreign Office. Democracy – perhaps within limits – is seen as by foreign ministries as contributing to stability and as insurance against political extremism, whereas it is also (sometimes grudgingly) also viewed as an underpinning aspect of social and economic development, and thus eligible for support through official development assistance. This tension, and the fact that neither the diplomatic corps nor development professionals could really be seen to wholeheartedly ‘believe’ in democracy creates a major roadblock in the way of disinterested support to democratic development (Carothers, 2009).

Douglas Alexander, Benn’s replacement as DFID minister after Gordon Brown took over from Tony Blair in Downing Street, wasted little time in demoting democracy to, at best, a side interest. In its place, security became the watchword, a formulation in which physical security and social development are considered facets of ‘human security’. In the White Paper on DFID’s new policy orientation, produced under his watch (DFID, 2009), the term security appears 90 times compared with democracy’s meagre four mentions.

The next section explores the logic underpinning current democracy promotion programmes.

D. The thinking behind democracy promotion

Despite the predominance of liberal democracy as the preferred contemporary governance mode, there is surprisingly little scholarly thinking about how it might be fostered. As is often the case, academicians tend to focus too narrowly to consider broad implementation issues, while practitioners rarely retreat from ‘action’ for long enough to consider the logic of action. Much of the writing on democracy promotion appears in Journal of Democracy, an initiative of the National Endowment for Democracy. The journal’s pages tends to be dominated by an uncritical American liberal worldview.

There are a number of smaller European-based democracy promotion foundations and institutes such as the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and the FRIDE think-tank based in Madrid³, but European thinking on democratic development is mainly comprised of individual academics publishing independently in a variety of political science journals. A critique, therefore, necessarily builds from a consideration of the ‘American school’ of thinking.

The political scientist Robert Nakamura has grouped parliamentary development work into three broad types; institutional capacity building, party strengthening, and civil society-based approach (Nakamura, 2008). Although his analysis relates specifically to parliamentary development, it is an

³ FRIDE: Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (www.fride.org).
analytical framework in some ways better suited to broader thinking around democratic development.

Institutional strengthening is based on the logic that emerging democracies lack the technical capacities necessary to effectively deliver democratic governance, and strengthening may focus on some or all democratic institutions. There are numerous possible entry points. The infrastructure for democratic governance may be lacking (poor facilities, absence of networks, inadequate access to internet knowledge sources, poor media coverage facilities, etc), and/or there may be a lack of technical expertise and understanding amongst both staff and elected officials. Electoral commission officials might be unaware of appropriate recruiting practices to ensure competent election-day officials are hired, or they may need advice on what role party scrutineers can legitimately play. More broadly, awareness may be lacking of democratic norms – for example what information parliamentarians should expect to be able to obtain from governments, or what are the principles of parliamentary budget oversight, etc. Although there are often skill and resource shortages in democratic institutions in many developing countries, these tend to derive from choices about priorities for resource allocation, also often facilitated by donors, rather than from absolute lack of access to expertise and operational funds. For example, the resources allocated to finance ministries are typically much greater than those provided to parliaments, there is usually greater prestige accorded to worker in Finance than at the legislature, and thus democratic institutions are typically caught in a cycle of poor resources, limited motivation, and weak results. Democracy assistance is usually relatively limited in material impact and thus fails to break the systemic weakness.

Party building works from the perspective that successful democracies depend on active and engaged political parties that act as a transmission belt between citizen and government. Whether governmental party or opposition, the effective political party acts as relay of local and sectoral concerns to the decision-making level. Opposition parties will typically use the media and parliamentary oversight mechanisms to raise issues on behalf of supporters, interest groups, and constituents, while government parties will tend to rely on quieter lobbying to influence decisions within the corridors of power. There can be a variety of issues hampering political parties’ capacity to act effectively in emerging democracies. In the case of a dominant political party, it may not feel it is necessary to respond to grassroots concerns in order to retain power. Opposition parties may be resource poor and unable to connect effectively with grassroots, and in less developed political systems the concerns of opposition parties may in any case be systematically ignored. In developed countries, parties go to great lengths to appeal to potential supporters, but this situation is commonly reversed in developing countries, where party ‘barons’ are seen as sources of resources and government largesse – a situation described as clientelism. Voting decisions may not be made on the basis of good governance or even wider community interest but rather on whether the politician has or can deliver some personal benefit to the voter. A particularly dangerous type of clientelist politics is where the political parties effectively represent different ethnic groups, as was noted for example in the elections held in Guinea-Conakry in late 2010.

The party structure in developing countries varies widely from situations where there are numerous poorly implanted and unstable parties that are unable to present coherent majority platforms, to dominant party models, and situations where there are a small handful of major parties as is the case in most western countries. Obviously strategies for party support as a vehicle for democratic development will vary according to the situation on the ground.
Only certain development actors are likely to work with political parties. This type of work is often seen as political even if all parties are invited to benefit, and it is rare for the United Nations and most bilateral donors to directly deliver party-strengthening programmes. Key actors are the National Endowment for Democracy and its NDI and IRI grantees, and a number of political foundations of European states including Britain’s WfD, and most prominently, Germany’s political foundations (Stiftungen). Each party represented in the German parliament has an international development Stiftung which is entitled to a state allocation dependant on its size. Party foundations are free to work either with parties they sees as ideological partners, such as the Social Democrats with affiliates of the Socialist International, or on general party development work across the spectrum, and many foundations work more broadly, for example in support to media coverage of politics or in voter education programmes.

Nakamura’s third category of democratic development work involves work with and through civil society organizations. The philosophy underpinning this work is that democracy is as fundamentally dependent on demand for democracy as it is on the supply of democracy though the formal political system and democratic state institutions. By supporting civil society organizations, particularly in helping them to channel their policy lobbying activities through the democratic system (whether through legislatures or local councils or direct pressure such as through petitions and referenda), donors hope to force political systems to become more responsive and thus more democratic. A wide range of donors provide support to civil society strengthening, though it would often be difficult to categorize activities as specifically targeted to democratic development as opposed to wider social development. For example, in the area of women’s rights, donor-supported programmes would often include activities directly related, indirectly related, and unrelated to democratic development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Institutional Model</th>
<th>The Party Model</th>
<th>The Civil Society Model</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective use of legislative powers require institutionalized support</td>
<td>Political parties are needed to organize and channel popular participation</td>
<td>A democratic political system Requires vibrant and active civic participation</td>
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<tr>
<th>Ideas</th>
<th>Legislative strengthening movement in the American states</th>
<th>Historical development of party systems in US and UK and the Responsible Party Model</th>
<th>Citizen power movements Invigorated societies by infusions them with new participants and perspectives</th>
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<tr>
<th>Basis for Scenarios</th>
<th>If you build legislative capacity, members will use it to fulfil the institutional mission to represent, make laws, and exercise oversight</th>
<th>Parties seeking power will build stronger ties between citizens and representatives, and promote and advance competing programs through legislatures</th>
<th>Parties and legislatures cannot be expected to advance policy concerns of citizens so civil society should serve as a surrogate for missing public involvement in making and implementing laws</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targeted groups</td>
<td>Secretariat, and institutional work groups (committees, etc.)</td>
<td>Party leaders, caucuses, opposition mps, public accounts committees (in Commonwealth)</td>
<td>Civil society organizations (particularly drawn from or representing the marginalized: the poor, women, children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacities to be built</td>
<td>Policy analysis, Party cohesion, Advocacy skills, institutional management</td>
<td>Support for members’ capacity to articulate ideological differences</td>
<td>In CSOs, the development of legislative venues for expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key events</td>
<td>Consideration of the budget bill supported by analysis</td>
<td>Ministerial questioning, adversarial politics</td>
<td>Legislature as arena for public debate. Committee hearings on prospective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative benchmarks</td>
<td>Parliamentary budget and Management acts</td>
<td>A party connected to grass roots by votes and structures, vigorous scrutiny by public accounts committees</td>
<td>Transparency legislation to Increase access to information, pro-poor legislation, etc.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>Stable democracy requires institutions capable of representing and containing conflict</td>
<td>Better choices, more competition, more meaningful choices and capacity to enact preferences</td>
<td>Better societal input from most informed segments. Better choices ‘and more attention to policy implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table One: Three approaches to parliamentary development (Nakamura, 2008)

**E. The backlash against democracy promotion**

One key challenge for democracy promotion has been the undermining of unrealistic expectations based on the “transition” model. The transition concept derives from millenarian perspectives on the inevitability of the victory of liberal democracy as the predominant governance system in the world, particularly popular in the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union and articulated by writers such as Francis Fukuyama (1989). Under the transition scenario, once countries had started along the path towards democracy, normally by holding multi-party elections, it was highly likely that they would continue to democratize and eventually become liberal democracies. This has been shown to be an inaccurate presumption. Many countries, particularly in the period since the collapse of the Soviet Union, have not continued to further democratize; there is no inevitable logic that they will do. Numerous states are ruled by relatively stable semi-authoritarian regimes. While these states possess ostensibly democratic institutions including multi-party elections and parliaments, power is effectively concentrated in the hands of the executive, and there is no real prospect that power could change hands through democratic elections (Carothers, 1989).

Disappointment at the failure of a democratic teleology to take hold has provided open space for a backlash within the development field against democratic development support. Three incidents occurred to me personally in 2009 and 2010 which underlined how unfashionable democracy promotion has become. In a meeting with a governance official of a major bilateral donor, I was told that ‘democracy is so last year’. Then, at a major development conference, a senior official of the same bilateral agency responded to a question about the role of democracy in development by waxing eloquent about the positive role of various developing country ‘benevolent autocrats’, concluding that, “we find democracy is not really relevant to development”. Finally, in another meeting the next year with officials from the same agency, one mentioned in passing, “lessons we learned from the democracy catastrophe”. These ephemeral comments coincide with a general sentiment on the part of democratic development professionals that democracy promotion is under pressure. There may also be a sense among the democracy promotion community that the democracy ‘movement’ has stalled.

Longstanding discomfort with democratic development within official development circles has been given voice by a number of recent scholarly and popular development publications calling democracy promotion and even democracy itself into question.

The Oxford University development economist Paul Collier, who achieved fame with his prescriptive volume on improving the lot of the Bottom Billion (Collier, 2007), followed up with a book attacking
the belief that democracy was beneficial in poor countries (Collier, 2009). Essentially, Collier claims that the most important public good is security, and that democracy is directly correlated to societal violence at average incomes below $2700. For poor countries, therefore, democracy is likely to result in more harm than good (although he claims that democracy reduces violence in more affluent societies. Collier rejects the commonly held view that national sovereignty should be respected, asserting that dictators do not have the right to harm their own populations (as an advisor to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, he supported Western military intervention in Iraq). At the same time, Collier argues that good governance can be introduced by benevolent autocrats (such as Ethiopia’s Zenawi and Uganda’s Museveni). Therefore, rather than encouraging social disruption and wasted resources caused by democratic political competition, Western donors should be prepared to support (or turn a blind eye to) coup d’états that may bring reformers to power. He presents various scenarios in which Western governments can use their military power actively or passively to discipline bad governments and facilitate their violent overthrow and replacement by development oriented governments. Collier takes a negative view of the capacity and potential of developing country states and argues in line with neoliberal economic fashion that provision of services should be privatized to NGOs and private corporations, with the state providing security, a broad policy framework, and ensuring accountability.

Like Collier, the Zambian-born economist Dambisa Moyo has achieved fame and notoriety for her book *Dead Aid* (2009), which is primarily devoted to attacking foreign aid, which she believes causes much more harm than good, but she also opposes democracy for poor countries. Moyo argues that aid diverts developing country attention from productive activity towards aid-seeking. Productive private capital is crowded out by foreign aid. Aid distorts developing country economies, for example by putting local producers out of business, swamping domestic absorption capacity, and fuelling inflation. It is often misused and thus leads to corruption. At worst, aid can lead to civil war as different elite factions seek to capture aid resources. Instead of foreign aid, Moyo argues for developing countries to seek resources through private capital investment, and cites the example of China’s relationship with Africa as a preferable model.

Moyo is sceptical about the merits of democracy in developing countries: “It matters little to a starving African family whether they can vote or not” (2009: 44) … “democracy, at the early stages of development, is irrelevant, and may even be harmful” (42). It is harmful because governments that must account to an electorate are typically unable to push through needed economic (neoliberal) reforms, catering instead to interest groups. She argues that:

> “what poor countries at the lowest rungs of economic development need is not a multi-party democracy, but in fact a decisive benevolent dictator to push through the reforms necessary to get the economy moving” (p.42).

In line with Collier, she argues that democracy is likely to thrive only in middle to higher income economies, and goes further, claiming that economic growth is the prerequisite for democracy, rather than vice versa. She acknowledges that state institutions are important to growth but that these are not synonymous with democracy. For example, she claims that autocratic governments can have effective accountability institutions.

Criticism of democracy in developing countries does not only come from the neoliberal political right. There is a strong NGO lobby that dismisses traditional representative democracy as elite...
captured (Murphy, 2005). Kumi Naidoo, then head of the world civil society federation Civicus, argued that “the meaningful interface between citizens and the elected is minimal between election periods,” “the [political] parties themselves are characterized by a lack of internal democracy or fail to address issues that citizens believe are important,” and “the influence of monied interests in many political systems is also turning citizens away from traditional engagement in favor of new forms of participation” (Naidoo, 2003). Naidoo and other civil society actors call for, “a shift from representative democracy to what is often called participatory democracy”. Many donors overtly or covertly support this position, particularly by establishing parallel civil society-led accountability institutions in developing countries, rather than helping to strengthen existing democratic bodies such as parliaments (Murphy et al., 2007).

F. Considering criticisms of democracy and democracy promotion

The critiques of democratic development can be classified in two categories; the argument that democracy is undesirable (either in general or at a particular stage of societal development), and the claim that attempting to support democratic development is wrong (either because it is normatively illegitimate or because it is practically impossible). These points of view will be discussed in turn.

The most disturbing claim is that democracy is a bad thing. As we have seen, this perspective is presented both from the left and the right; from the left with the argument that they have a ‘better’ model, and from the right because it is argued that democracy has undesirable consequences.

The argument that ‘participatory democracy’ is preferable to representative democracy is founded on legitimate disappointment with the operation of traditional democracy, in particular in many developing countries. As noted earlier, many countries that began democratisation as part of the ‘Third Wave’ that began in the mid-1970s ceased to develop fully democratic polities and remained caught in semi-authoritarian rule. As Carothers has noted, there is no teleological necessity that ‘full’ democracy should be the end result of the installation of some aspects of democratic systems. Limited democratic reform can actually entrench authoritarian regimes by providing them with some legitimacy and reducing internal and external pressure for reform. For example, Sadiki (2009) has shown that in the past two decades many Arab states have successfully introduced regular multi-party elections without introducing either genuine democratic competition or broader social democratisation. It is unfortunate that genuine democratic transition has proven not to be the inevitable outcome of states introducing some democratic features whether in theory or indeed in practice. However this does not demonstrate that democracy - or in the civil society critique, representative democracy - is undesirable. In countries where even the basic prerequisites for representative democracy have not been introduced and authoritarian rule continues, the problem is not democracy but rather a lack of democracy. There is a considerable body of research demonstrating superior quality of life and improved economic performance in countries with performing democracies (Rodrik, 2010; Siegle et al., 2004; Easterly, 2010; Beetham, 2009), which will be discussed in more detail below.

The argument in opposition to the particular form of representative democracy - on the grounds that participatory democracy represents a more authentic form of democracy - is also based on a false dichotomy. Many of the criticisms of representative democracy put forward by Naidoo and others are legitimate – democratic systems are often inadequately responsive to citizen needs and dominated by elites. Again, however, the solution is not to contrast one form of democracy with
another as mutual exclusives As Doherty (2001) points out, participatory democracy can only operate within a framework of free speech and human rights which must be provided through the institutional framework of representative democracy. Further, the objectives of participatory democracy are presumambly, broadly speaking, to achieve changes in governance. Without a formally entrenched system whereby the outcomes of participatory processes can be implemented in laws, programmes and policies, the implementations of the decisions of participatory processes will be dependent on the whim of an ultimately unaccountable executive. In these circumstances ‘participation’ is of little more significance or weight than that of a marketing survey designed to tell a corporation how we feel about our latest transaction. Of course, it will be impossible to find countries where there is not a well-entrenched system of representative democracy but where participatory democracy is flourishing independent of government and donor domination. Participatory democracy is a means to broaden formal representative democracy rather than an alternative, just as the struggle of the suffragettes was not to eliminate elections but rather to ensure women had equal rights to vote and be elected.

The participatory critique of democracy is extended and provided philosphic clothes by the popular contemporary essayist Slavoj Zizek (Zizek, 1989, 1991), a perspective clarified and perhaps pushed beyond its original purpose by the American political scientist Jodi Dean (2009). Essentially, Zizek and Dean argue that the fundamental character of Western democracy is that rather than providing a vehicle for change, it acts as a roadblock to ‘real’ change by restricting the scope of debate to domesticated issues of contemporary capitalism, and dismissing as undemocratic and thus illegitimate more radical social and economic restructuring. This is largely a reprise of an old debate within the Left on reform versus revolution, integrated with a Hegelian dialectical perspective in which social transformation occurs through the process of radically overcoming the existent. However, Zizek’s overall position on democracy is somewhat ambivalent. For example as well as attacking the falseness of Western democracy, he asserts that “the universal notion of ‘democracy’ is none the less a ‘necessary fiction’” (Zizek, 1989: 148). Indeed, even the most authoritarian and undemocratic of ‘leftist’ governments insists on their democratic character. Aside from the Hegelian perspective on social change, the Zizek/Dean position is really saying the same as the advocates of participatory democracy – traditional democracy is not democratic enough, and its arena of debate is too narrow (Gills and Rocamora, 1992). This is a completely legitimate and sustainable position that is most obviously furthered through an expansion of both the intensity and scope of democratic decision-making, rather than by abolishing institutions of liberal democracy. Laclau and Mouffe (1985), among many others, have elegantly outlined the authoritarian derive entailed in radical critiques of democracy; power ends up in the hands of a small elite acting ‘in the interests’ of the people.

It is important to explore below the surface of the debate about forms of democracy in order to understand more fundamentally why the nature of democracy is an important value and governance form to be promoted. Here, the perspectives of Blaug (2000, 2010) and Mouffe are particularly valuable.

The second and potentially more difficult aspect of the critique of democracy promotion relates to the legitimacy of democracy promotion. A compendium of the arguments against democracy promotion are put forward by a fellow panellist at this session (Lazarus, 2010), and I will take unfair...
advantage of his timely posting, and the comprehensive nature, of his paper as a vehicle to structure
the next section.

After canvassing most of the standard criticisms of democracy (interestingly of both left-wing
inspiration: ‘not democratic enough’ and right-wing inspiration: ‘inefficient nuisance’), Lazarus
compiles a similar list of all possible criticisms of democracy promotion. These include:

- Top down approach contradictory to the meaning of democracy
- Professionalize political parties and thus make them less accessible to grass roots
- Civil society organizations supported by democracy promoters become dependent on
  Western donors, competitive with other domestic organizations, and ultimately
  undermine democracy
- Like all aid, external democracy assistance competes for scarce domestic human capital
  with existing domestic organizations, thus undermining endogenous development
- Excessive focus on working with elites whose objective at best is a stable system of
  power distribution within elites
- Low Western standards for regimes qualifying as democratic discredit democracy
  promotion (and democracy)
- ‘Gunboat’ escapades to spread democracy also discredit democracy and democracy
  promotion
- Exaggerated belief in the possibility and potential of conditionality

Somewhat in contradiction to his earlier airing of the many critiques of democracy from all
directions, and the list of faults and roadblocks in democracy promotion, Lazarus ends by suggesting
that ‘real’ democracy is after all fundamentally desirable, representing, “tolerance of a plurality of
visions of both the individual and the common good”, which is something he presumably believes is
worth encouraging. However, democracy promotion is, ”servant of transnational capitalist
interests”, bereft of “tolerance of a plurality of visions of both the individual and the common good”,
but (presumably happily), “will fail in its mission to secure a consensual hegemony for neo-liberal
globalisation”. Furthermore (and possibly inconsistent with the plea for tolerance and plurality)
democratisation is only possible with a “model and system capable of generating greater social
equality”, although we have only a few earlier reference’s to Chavez and allies’ Bolivarian socialism
as a hint about what form that ‘model and system’ might take.

Lazarus’s critique of Western democracy promotion is something of an amalgam of criticisms of
democracy itself, of the motivations of democracy promoters, and the content of democracy
promotion programmes. The critiques of democracy itself have largely been addressed earlier in the
paper, so the focus of my discussion will be on the points specific to democracy promotion.

In regard to the motivations of democracy promoters which are assumed to be the spread of
neoliberal globalization, there is probably a much wider range of motivations than Lazarus
acknowledges (or has awareness of). Undoubtedly, official development agencies sponsor
democracy promotion at least partly as a means to pursue their governments’ foreign policy
interests which will often include expanding ‘free market democracy’. This policy frame structures
what is done in the field, impacting both effectiveness and direction. However, democracy practitioners are often motivated by broader goals exactly along the lines Lazarus demands; expanding tolerance for plural visions of social good. To dismiss their work is equivalent to dismissing education because it prepares students for their roles in capitalist society, which it does, but this does not mean that all work within universities merely contributes to neoliberal hegemony. It would be more helpful to suggest ways to work ‘inside and against the state’ (Mario Tronti, quoted in Wright, 2002: 87) if the objective is to further progressive ideals rather than promote “pessimism”.

Lazarus’s insistence in his article’s last sentence on a “model and system capable of generating greater social equality” implies a contradiction with the tolerance and plurality he also describes as essential parts of the democratic vision. Are those who believe in democracy but don’t necessarily seek greater social equality not really democrats?

Lazarus’s critiques of the actual effectiveness of democratic development assistance are generally well-defined, though it should be noted that the criticism is almost exclusively from secondary sources. Most of the authors of these sources, such as Carothers, Youngs, and Diamond are firm advocates of better democracy promotion rather than abandoning the field, suggesting a somewhat selective reading by Lazarus.

The most substantial critique of democracy promotion, mentioned in relatively low key terms by Lazarus, is that of ‘gunboat democratization’. Beetham (2009) points out in relation to Iraq that it is absurd for occupying forces holding a gun in one hand to proffer the ballot box with the other. More broadly, the enforcement of particular forms of democracy by powerful states such as the US and the European Union implies a type of imperialism that is inconsistent with the inherent meaning of democracy as popular self-rule. Surprisingly, Lazarus presents the problem more as one of efficacy (only in rare cases do national elites in client states actually introduce democracy at the prompting of powerful states).

G. Critical perspectives in favour of democracy and democracy promotion

There is a long tradition on the Left of ambivalence towards democracy, and scepticism regarding the idea of democracy promotion. There are various underlying reasons which are often present in an undifferentiated amalgam. From Marxism there is doubt about ‘bourgeois democracy’, related to the view that the state is the ‘armed wing of the bourgeoisie’. In other words, the state is not a neutral arbiter between different interests but systematically acts to repress the common interest in favour of the ruling class. Marx was ambivalent about the potential of democracy and although his schema of socioeconomic progress involved the overthrow of bourgeois rule and the installation of a dictatorship of the proletariat, he also indicated that in established democracies such as Britain, transformatory change might be possible through democratic elections. This ambivalence solidified into a full-blown split in the socialist movement in the first years of the twentieth century with the communist wing arguing that only revolution could bring about real change, while social democrats proposed change through constitutional means, rejecting the concept of revolutionary transformation in favour of democratic gradualism; evolutionary socialism (Bernstein, [1911] 1961).
It is important to historically contextualize the debate within the socialist movement about democracy. Universal suffrage was not instituted in any country prior to the beginning of the 20th century, and thus the battle for social justice was waged against largely authoritarian regimes. Once democratic systems were established in the most developed countries, it became crucial to understand why socialists did not automatically win elections. Much of early twentieth Western Marxism was devoted to understanding the phenomenon of workers apparently acting against their self-interest by voting for — and supporting — anti-socialist political parties. In this context, the work of Lukacs ([1920] 1967) and Gramsci (1989) on class consciousness, reification, and hegemony is particularly significant. Despite the continued application by Leftist movements and leaders of the Bonapartist model for several decades, particularly in the developing world, there was a gradual acknowledgement within the Left that hegemonic orders in complex contemporary societies depend on multi-faceted consent. The democratic institutions in contemporary society are only one of the markers of consent, but political movements need to dominate those institutions in order to secure the formal and symbolic legitimacy required to implement a political programme. Therefore, notwithstanding an acknowledgement of the structured disadvantage faced by progressive social movements in the democratic system, engagement with the democratic system is a necessary component of leftist strategy, and rejectionism is likely to disengagement and apathy (Laclau, 2000: 290).

Moving beyond instrumental reasons for democratic engagement I would like to present two normative arguments in favour of democracy as an important aspect of the critical governance agenda. First, democracy provides an opportunity for engagement in debate about the nature of society. It is not necessary to accept the arguably naïve precepts of Habermas’s deliberative democracy to comprehend that a social order based on non-violent resolution of conflict is more likely to present opportunities for egalitarian social change than one enforced by violence that is more likely to be held by elites, or more definitively, violence defines elitism. Mouffe (2000) describes the objective of democratic engagement as agonism. Agonism essentially entails acknowledgement of irreconcilable difference between political programmes, but common acceptance that debate should remain within the institutional framework of democracy.

More fundamentally, one of the experiences of actually existing socialism has been that the practice of power is problematic notwithstanding the overt objective with which power is sought and held. Blaug (2000, 2010) argues that the exercise of power leads inevitably to a form of anti-social madness. Power has a metamorphic effect on personality; “emergence of an overestimated self”, in which its holders tend to lose touch with others’ interests, and tend to disparage and oppress subordinates.

Power corrupts both leaders and subordinates, corrupting elites and creating collusion in subordinates through a practice of learned helplessness. Power is internalized and tends to be unseen and internalized. Power holders are generally unaware of the changes in their perspectives and subalterns unaware of their subordination.

Hierarchies do have efficiency benefits in certain circumstances, but they have costs in terms of the corruption of power. Complete elimination of hierarchy is impossible, but Blaug believes we can have less hierarchy and more democracy and still achieve organisational effectiveness. Transposing this general argument on the nature and abuse of power to the political arena, it is clear that
Democracy is necessary to have any possibility for achieving egalitarianism, and further, that the progressive struggle is for the extension of democracy to ever wider domains.

Within the development community there is a common tendency to present democracy in terms of its instrumental value in facilitating economic development. There is significant evidence – albeit contested – that democracy facilitates economic growth (Olson, 1993; Siegle et al., 2004; UNDP, 2002). Those who dispute this relationship normally argue not that democracy reduces economic growth but that there is no clear relationship between the two, or that democracy only benefits certain parts of the population such as the middle class (Ross, 2006). Further, there is significant evidence that democracy improves outcomes for measures of human development when controlled for factors such as per capita income, in a wide range of domains including overall population longevity, reduced child mortality, improved nutrition, better child welfare, and improved educational attainment (Harding and Wantchekon, 2010).

The logic of the mutually supportive relationship between democracy and development is presented below:

![Mutually reinforcing capabilities](image-url)

**Figure 3:** The logical interdependence of democracy and development (UNDP, 2002: 53)

However, a stronger argument in favour of democracy is that it is an indissoluble part of development, a perspective made famous by Amartya Sen (1999). Indeed, Sen turns the democracy-development debate inside out in arguing that without political rights we cannot define what development means for us and therefore determine our own economic needs:

"Political rights, including freedom of expression and discussion, are not only pivotal in inducing social responses to economic needs, they are also central to the conceptualization of economic needs themselves." (Sen, 1999: 154)
An important consideration in justifying support to democracy promotion is the perspective of citizens. Numerous surveys have been carried out on public attitudes to democracy, with results that are surprisingly consistent across regions. A great majority of the population, whether living in democracies or under dictatorship, support democratic governance, notwithstanding frequently-expressed disappointment in the actual performance of democracies (Shin and Tusalem, 2007).

In this section we have considered the merits of democracy from a critical or Leftist perspective. The preference of democratic transformation over revolutionary change is argued on the grounds of the necessity of securing consent through broad legitimacy in complex contemporary societies. From an instrumental point of view, violent overthrow is an unlikely vehicle for improving social equity because by definition the tools of violence are primarily controlled by elites. It is preferable to promote and insist upon non-violent debate, which does not require a naive presumption that consensus can be achieved.

The work of Ricardo Blaug is helpful in explaining why authoritarian orders of either the Right or Left are unlikely ultimately to benefit the majority of the population. Hierarchical power leads to a type of madness in which leaders lose touch with the needs of the subaltern, and the subaltern in turn tends to become dependent on the Leader. The result will be political decisions consistently benefiting the elite over the masses, with a diminished capacity of subalterns to understand and combat their own repression. This psychological explanation is buttressed with empirical evidence showing improved human development outcomes for democracy, explained by Sen as others as deriving from the necessity of freedom to identify and strive for the realisation of economic needs.

Finally, and importantly, a considerable majority of the population, whether living in democracies or dictatorships, consistently supports democracy over authoritarianism.

H. Conclusion: a constructive critical approach to democracy promotion

This paper opened with a survey of the development of international norms of democratic governance, and the trajectory of democratic development, marked by waves of democratic transition followed by periods of stagnation or regression. It then examined the international democratic development programmes that have been implemented by the UN, US, European Union, and the UK, as well as the development strategies underlying those programmes. The paper then explored and critiqued contemporary opposition to democracy and democratic development. Finally, a critical perspective in favour of democracy was presented. In this final section, I present a brief proposal for a constructive critical approach to democracy promotion, based on the concept of the ‘thought style’ (Fleck, [1935] 1979).

Ludwik Fleck, a biologist involved in the development of a test for syphilis, became interested in the process whereby scientific facts emerge. He concluded that the development of knowledge is a necessarily social process which is driven by groups involved in the exploration of particular fields of knowledge, which he describes as thought collectives. Thought collectives drive a broader common social understanding of the particular field, through the establishment of a thought style, a way of looking at the world which not merely structures answers to existing questions within a field, but also determines the questions that are considered meaningful and relevant. In the case of democratic development, the backlash against democratic development could be ascribed to a powerful neoliberal developmental economics thought collective, whose genesis and gradual ly
achieved domination has been well documented using the thought collective approach (Mirowski and Plehwe, eds, 2009). The neoliberal thought style, although from a critical perspective leading to development policies that are both authoritarian and highly regressive, has become the dominant viewpoint within the development industry. Support for democratic development emerged independently from mainstream development agencies and initially evaded neoliberal criticism, not least because it was presented as part of the battle against Communism. However, as the profile of democracy promotion rose and the threat of Communism receded, democracy promotion became a target of the neoliberal development thought collective, in the same way as mainstream Keynesian and neo-Marxist development strategies had previously been attacked and ultimately marginalized.

The thought style / thought collective approach is particularly helpful in exploring strategies for building social transformation. I have argued in this paper that progressives should support democracy and that support to democratisation is justifiable. However, there are a number of legitimate concerns about democracy promotion that have been discussed. These include, normatively, the misuse of democracy promotion as a tool of foreign policy by Western powers, and practically, the weak strategic underpinnings of democracy promotion as well as the questionable commitment of many of the agencies that support democracy promotion.

In order to counter the risk of democracy promotion being subordinated to state foreign policy objectives, the democracy promotion thought collective should be transnational and not beholden to a particular state. This was difficult in the early years of democracy promotion because the US dominated the field, and funding for democracy promotion was closely linked to the US state’s struggle with the former USSR for global hegemony. However, the emergence of Europe as a more cohesive political force in which democracy is a fundamental principle, provides an opportunity to build a broader pro-democracy thought collective.

The democratic thought style is increasingly entrenched in international conventions, as discussed above in this paper. The thought community has had growing success in establishing best practices or norms which establish minimum requirements for the functioning of democratic institutions, whether in elections (EISA, 2004) or parliamentary functioning (CPA, 2006). Democracy has also become more generally accepted among citizens around the world (McMahon, 2008), such that non-democratic governments are essentially forced to at least perform sham ‘free elections’, in turn risking a crisis of legitimacy when the democratic ‘performance’ is clearly faked. Over time, and through a combination of formal rules and informal norms, a democratic thought style has come to predominate the governance field. However, as has been discussed, this thought style is under pressure from authoritarian neoliberalism, with demonstrable impact already on British support for democratisation.

For progressives, the challenge is on two fronts. How to ensure the continuing entrenchment of democratic norms, while also broadening the agenda to extend democracy beyond the formal institutions liberal democracy? The growing pressure from participatory democracy needs to be incorporated within the democratic thought style, rather than the current competition and conflict between participatory and representative democracy. Beyond participatory democracy, a key challenge is the instauration of democratic norms in global institutions which increasingly limit choices available at the national level but which are essentially unaccountable and which govern in the interests of transnational elites (Murphy, 2008).
The success of neoliberals over the past generation demonstrates what can be achieved through the building of a cohesive but flexible thought collective. While the Left has splintered into ever smaller fragments of thought collectives, each with a virtually indistinguishable thought style, the political right has been able to coalesce around some basic principles such as the primacy of market economics, free trade, marketization and privatization, and circumscribing the welfare state. Through advocacy of cohesive positions – a cohesive thought style – on these core principles, the neoliberal thought collective has achieved consent for pursuing its programme that would have been unthinkable a generation ago. The challenge for the next generation is for progressives to push back as cohesively and coherently with a thought style built around the principles of democracy and mutuality.
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