8. Models and problems of democracy promotion

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Problems of democracy promotion (Carothers, 2006)

1. **Problems of sovereignty.** Strongmen—some of them elected officials—have begun to publicly denounce Western democracy assistance as illegitimate political meddling.

2. **Defending stability.** [After the Color Revolutions] politicians from China to Zimbabwe have publicly cited concerns about such events spreading to their own shores as justification for new restrictions on Western aid to NGOs and opposition groups.
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3. Anti-imperialistic resistance. Some autocratic governments have won substantial public sympathy by arguing that opposition to Western democracy promotion is resistance not to democracy itself, but to American interventionism (or Western interests).

4. Hypocrisy and the need for a democratic testimony. The damage that the Bush administration has done to the global image of the United States as a symbol of democracy and human rights by repeatedly violating the rule of law at home and abroad has further weakened the legitimacy of the democracy-promotion cause.
Two approaches: political vs. developmental

We have to consider 4 dimensions:

1. Value of democracy
2. Concept of democracy
3. Concept of democratization
4. Method of supporting democracy
The political approach
1. Value of democracy

- Democracy has a positive value in itself, as the political system most likely to ensure respect for basic political and civil rights, and for political dignity generally.
- They also usually believe that the advance of democracy in a country will contribute to social and economic development.
- They hold to that belief primarily out of an instinctive faith that “all good things go together.”
- This additional socioeconomic reason to support democracy, however, is secondary to the core political one.
2. Concept of democracy

- Dahlian conception of democracy
- It highlights the importance of genuine, competitive elections and sufficient respect for political and civil rights to ensure that citizens can participate meaningfully in democratic political processes
- Some democracy promoters add to this core of “elections plus rights” additional institutional features, such as an independent judiciary, strong legislature, or independent media, which they believe (usually from their own national experience) to be crucial to democracy
- Wary of diluting their purely political conception, adherents of the political approach rarely extend such institutional additions to include social or economic elements
3. Concept of democratization

- The political approach sees democratization as a process of political struggle in which political actors who can be clearly identified as democrats contend with nondemocratic forces.
- Democratization advances when the democrats gain the upper hand and recedes when they lose out.
- Although democratization may extend over a long period of time, it is a process of struggle often marked by key junctures - breakthroughs, reversals, crises, and resolutions.
4. Method: a political struggle

• The central task of democracy aid is to help the democrats in a country (that is, the actors perceived as such by external democracy supporters) in their struggle against the nondemocrats.

• This can be done directly through assistance (whether training, advice, moral support, or funding) to the political actors themselves - political parties or associations, politicians, or politically oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

• It can also be done indirectly through support to key institutions - an independent electoral commission, an independent judiciary, or independent media, for example - that help to level the political playing field by securing and guaranteeing fair procedures for the democratic actors and by checking the power of the nondemocratic actors.
4. Method: adaptive strategies

- In an authoritarian setting, outside actors may support political dissidents, exiled opposition groups, or offshore political broadcasting that reaches into the country.

- In semi-authoritarian contexts, the political approach sometimes takes the form of political-campaign training for a coalition of opposition parties competing against an entrenched strongman in an upcoming election. Such pro-oppositional support is usually combined with assistance to politically active civic groups working to mobilize citizens to participate in the election, as well as to independent media trying to broaden access to political information.

- In many transitional countries, however, the political approach is not pro-oppositional or otherwise directly challenging to an incumbent regime. Instead, it focuses on helping to strengthen all sides of a nascent or troubled democratic political process.
The developmental approach
1. Value of democracy

- Adherents of the developmental approach believe in supporting democracy based on the conviction that basic features of democratic governance - such as transparency, accountability, and responsiveness - contribute to more equitable socioeconomic development overall.

- The developmental approach thus values democracy as a contributing factor in the larger process of national development.

- Democracy is valuable in its own right for the political principles that it enshrines, but they tend to see this as secondary to a core developmental rationale.

- When a developing country is able to make substantial socioeconomic progress without democracy, supporters of the developmental approach are usually quite forgiving of its shortcomings on the democracy front.
2. Concept of democracy

• The developmental approach looks beyond an exclusively political definition of democracy to broader conceptions that incorporate socioeconomic concerns.

• In other words, it looks past political procedures to substantive outcomes such as equality, welfare, and justice.

• In contrast to the view of most adherents of the political approach, supporters of the developmental approach tend to see economic and social rights as being no less important than political and civil rights.
3. Concept of democratization

- The developmental approach conceives of democratization as a slow, iterative process, measured in decades and marked by the gradual accumulation of small gains.

- Democratization is wound in a double helix of causality with socioeconomic development.

- Some adherents of the developmental approach rely on a belief in sequencing to sort out this complex causal picture. They worry about whether some countries are ready for democracy, and they hold that it is better to achieve a certain basic level of social and economic development, including an effective state and the rule of law, before proceeding with democratization.
4. Method: indirect strategies

- Developmental approach is inclined toward indirect methods of assisting democracy, in two senses of the term.

1. First, out of the belief in a causal relationship between the two domains, they see value in promoting social and economic development as a way of supporting democracy.

2. Second, when they give attention to political institutions, they emphasize building state capacity and good governance (usually in a technocratic, apolitical fashion) rather than strengthening political contestation and openness.
4. Method: avoiding to be too political

• Almost always stresses the importance of partnership with the host government and steers clear of activities that might be seen as politically confrontational or even “too political.”

• When adherents of this approach support civil society development, for example, they typically concentrate on local-level projects aimed at addressing social and economic problems, not on national-level political advocacy or watchdog work characteristic of civil society support under the political approach.
4. Method: the primacy of human rights

- Aid providers who follow the developmental approach frequently tie their work on democracy to human rights and sometimes even cast their efforts to promote democracy as a subset of human rights work.
  - An emphasis on human rights, thought to be more clearly rooted in universal legal principles than is democracy, appeals to supporters of the development approach as being more easily defensible against charges of external interventionism.
  - They also see human rights as a useful gateway for integrating the political with the socioeconomic through the parallel categories of political and civil rights on the one hand and social and economic rights on the other.