

Challenges to Democracy Promotion
Introductory Remarks
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1. Challenges to *democracy* are the most obvious challenges to *democracy-building*, democracy assistance or democracy promotion. Authoritarianism, in all forms and shapes, is from that point of view *the* challenge to democracy promotion, the threat to and the obstacle for democrats in every national and international context, within any State and across all borders. For instance, those who oppose women's suffrage are some of the toughest challengers of democracy and of democracy promoters; those who support non-elected rulers provide a semblance of legitimacy where there is none, and defeat democracy assistance providers.
2. Although one could try to find an exception, it is probably true that *only democracies promote democracy* – for instance, the more democracies there are within the UN, the more democratic the UN will be and the more it will promote democracy itself. The fact that the EU is composed only by democratic countries transforms the accession in a democratic aspiration, in a democratisation process and in a democratic validation of the accessed. Also, the more democratic a society is, the less its public opinion, its published opinion and its parliament will tolerate double-standards, i.e. the eventual support for geo-strategic or economic reasons, of authoritarian regimes, and the more it will promote democracy abroad, especially amongst its neighbours.
3. A third challenge is the myth, beloved by dictators, that democracy implies a degree of indiscipline that is somehow the enemy of development rather than an essential ally of welfare. We need therefore to make the case, time and again, that *freedom not only is right*, as Margaret Albright says, but that *it also works*. A more sophisticated species of the “need for an authoritarian smack”-thesis is one that doesn't question the democratic values, but just appeals to a “better” *sequencing* between what is again presented as “a period of order” (during which to build infrastructures and rein in deficits), and time that will come later for elections, political pluralism, parliamentarianism, local governance, free press and other such processes, that allegedly slow down growth. There is also a need for recalling that authoritarianism is disorderly economics of prodigality and privileges for the few without any accountability; and that democracy can be “fast

and furious” in bringing about development, or in words of Amartya Sen, that countries need not to wait to be fit for democracy, but rather become fit through democracy.

4. Additional challenges to democracy promotion, nested in the democracy assistance strategies’ own shortcomings, can be identified as follows:
 - a. The difficulty of maintaining a balance between respecting *national ownership on political transitions* while providing support to democrats and democratic values.
 - b. The existing and sometimes interested confusion between democracy assistance understood as respectful support to those values, and *regime change* strategies that do not respect national sovereignty but rather interfere in another nation’s internal affairs. Democracy promotion is indeed seen as a threat by numerous countries, many of them democratic, insofar they fear that the product to be exported would be a western and northern blueprint, imposed by rich countries on the poorer ones, and ultimately not guaranteeing any further respect towards the free decision of the developing world’s citizens.
 - c. For the UN, active democracy promotion is an only recently admissible part of our mandate. Even if democratic values have been at the centre of the international instruments that enshrine Human Rights, promoting democracy, eventually against the will of the non-democratic representative of a member state, has always been problematic for an inter-governmental organisation.
 - d. Democracy promotion becomes complex too for any given state when allied governments are not democratic – instead of searching for a reformist champion within, one develops double standards, demanding democracy where the government is hostile and looking the other side where authoritarian friends rule. The UN’s own standards are under pressure: while democracy promotion has become more acceptable as a North-South transfer mechanism and part of a development strategy, it is more difficult when it affects donor countries or permanent members of the Security Council. This is incidentally why the UN GA Resolutions insist that while democracy is based on shared values, there is no universal model of democratic institutions or processes that should be adopted by all nations - and that democracy assistance should only be provided at a member state’s request.
 - e. Democracy promotion and protection of democrats in hostile environments presents another challenge that we all know about: the trap of the kiss of death, the risk of playing to the authoritarians’ argument that democrats are not representative of the national community, therefore supported from abroad and financed by obscure interests. There is there a challenge of utmost transparency and care for democracy assistance providers.
 - f. Democracy building when building a state is more difficult than it seems. All reconstruction efforts are now coupled with institutional development

and democratic recovery. Post-crisis democracy promotion presents however specific challenges: to rebuild a democratic system with a leadership and an opposition that has been responsible for and actively involved in violence immediately before... We are seeing today several Parliaments where the brand-new MPs have just been or still are warlords, guerrillas, military or paramilitary.

- g. Democracy promotion in criminalized states or in countries where politics are under partial control by criminal groups faces specific challenges – and very serious threats, as we know from Colombia or the Balkans.
- h. My last challenge to democracy promotion is the absence of instant formulas. It is a long-term effort, just as democracy is a process and not an event. Carothers' metaphor of painting the San Francisco Bridge is relevant here: once you have reached one side, you need to start again. The sense of historic time is therefore one of the absolute musts in democracy promotion, and the lack of patience or the urge for quick fixes, some of the great challenges to it.