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Rising Powers and the Future of Democracy Promotion: the case of Brazil and India

OLIVER STUENKEL

ABSTRACT The dominant position established powers have traditionally held in global affairs is slowly eroding. One of the issues profoundly affected by this process will be democracy promotion, an area traditionally dominated by the USA and Europe on both the policy and the academic level. While several rising democracies—such as Brazil and India—may seem, from a Western point of view, to be ideal candidates to assist the USA and Europe in promoting democracy in a ‘post-Western World’, emerging powers like these are reluctant to embrace the idea. What does this mean for the future of democracy promotion once the USA’s and Europe’s international influence declines further?

The dominant position established powers have traditionally held in global affairs is slowly eroding. The group of those countries with the power to make a difference internationally, for better or worse, is changing. The world’s decision-making elite is becoming less Western, with fewer common interests, and more ideologically diversity. Emerging powers are beginning to play a key role in the global debate. This creates a need to understand their views. Yet, on many important questions of international affairs, there is uncertainty about the ideas and perspectives that inform emerging powers’ agendas as they seek greater visibility and capacity to influence the global agenda. One of the issues profoundly affected by this process will be democracy promotion, an area traditionally dominated by the USA and Europe at both the policy and the academic level. While several rising democracies—such as Brazil and India—may seem, from a Western point of view, to be ideal candidates to assist the USA and Europe in promoting democracy in a ‘post-Western World’, emerging powers such as these are reluctant to embrace the idea. What does this mean for the future of democracy promotion once the USA’s and Europe’s international influence declines further?

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This article starts out by explaining, with the help of a series of theoretical approaches, why the West promotes democracy, and analyses the contemporary debate between Western supporters and Western critics of the concept. Using two examples of rising democracies, it then proceeds to describe Brazil’s and India’s foreign policy vis-à-vis democracy promotion and describes their views on the issue. Finally, considering the evidence gathered, the article seeks to assess how emerging powers’ positions on democracy promotion may influence the global debate about the subject. Do current trends in the global distribution of power imply the end of democracy promotion as we know it? The article will also ask whether there is room for cooperation between the USA and Europe, on the one hand, and Brazil and India, on the other.

Why promote democracy? The debate

Political theorists usually explain states’ desire to promote democracy by variants of the democratic peace theory,\(^9\) which finds its origin in Immanuel Kant’s vision of a ‘federation of republics’.\(^10\) Kant argued that the division of power would prevent leaders from launching wars without strongly reasoned arguments framed in terms of collective interests. According to the democratic peace proposition, established democracies not only have a normative claim to, but also a genuine strategic interest in extending democracy around the globe.\(^11\) A world of democracies will probably be more peaceful and better for trade and investment (as the rule of law is usually weaker in authoritarian regimes), providing the basis for international peace and mutually beneficial cooperation.\(^12\) By mitigating the security dilemma, democracies thus enable the maximisation of economic welfare through far-reaching interdependence.\(^13\) In addition, proponents of democracy promotion argue that it is ‘the right thing to do’, spreading universally conceived values, and helping all human beings obtain political rights and representation.\(^14\) The promotion and defence of democratic values, ideas and concepts is thus one of the most powerful legacies of liberal thought.

From a realist point of view, on the other hand, international norms are mainly seen as instruments for great powers to project their influence and advance their interests. Realists may agree that promoting democracy can be well intentioned, but argue that countries only promote democracy if this is aligned with other interests in the strategic or economic realm. They point out that the USA promotes democracy because democracies are more likely to trade with it and integrate into the US-led global system, thus becoming less likely to cause instability. Whenever democracy promotion collides with economic or geopolitical interests, it will become a secondary issue.\(^15\) Democracy promotion has thus been a US tool to legitimise its hegemony. As Pratap Mehta argues:

> Nations typically appeal to some form of philanthropy for external legitimation. The delicate trick in any imperial intervention is to make this philanthropy—be it saving the world, making it safe for democracy, or safeguarding socialism—coincide with the best and most enlightened expression of the national interest. An expansionary power needs an ideology that can
connect its national interest to its philanthropic aims. And its philanthropic aims must represent an idea of international order that other nations can accept.16

According to this logic, democracies—no matter whether long or recently established—will promote democracy themselves if doing so is aligned with their overall strategic and economic interests, and if they are willing to adopt democracy promotion as means to legitimise their growing influence.

Emphasising the legality aspect of sovereign right, many thinkers are also critical of the practice, pointing out that it invariably violates another country’s sovereignty and self-determination.17 Foreign intervention of any kind, even benevolent advice, is thus generally considered an inappropriate intrusion into another’s domestic affairs, something democracy promoters often overlook, as they are seduced by a notion of ‘unity of goodness’, according to which responsible institutions and all other desirable things flow from democracy.18 In addition, excluding non-democratic regimes, eg by launching the idea of a ‘League of Democracies’, creates an ‘insider vs outsider’ dynamic that sows mistrust and possibly even conflict, reducing the space for dialogue. Concerns about the internal character of regimes may provoke resistance and endanger world order.19 Accordingly, US foreign policy during the Cold War reflected American policy makers’ conviction that it was safer to ally oneself ‘with elites one could trust rather than the masses whom one could not’.20

Many critics of democracy promotion also use Marxist arguments and describe democracy promotion as a continuation of colonialism.21 From this perspective Western democracy promotion can be understood as a new form of transnational control accompanying the rise of global capitalism. William Robinson describes it as ‘an effort to replace coercive means of social control with consensual ones in the South within a highly stratified international system, in which the US plays a leadership role on behalf of an emergent transnational hegemonic configuration and a “transnational elite”’.22 In the general debate critics describe democracy promotion as incoherent, insincere and only thinly veiling economic interests. With frequency they point to the West’s reluctance to elevate the objective of democracy promotion above all other interests at all times. For example, critics ask why the Bush administration did so little to promote democracy in autocratic Saudi Arabia, while targeting Venezuela with democracy assistance, even though its president was elected democratically.23

Who decides which country needs to democratise and which dictatorship is allowed to persist? One often used argument is that, seen from a historical perspective, rather than acting as a force of democratisation, the principal political form that the USA has promoted is that of authoritarian regimes.24 This double standards argument, of course, is not confined to Marxist thought alone.

Yet when speaking about US foreign policy, democracy promotion is generally regarded as more than a fig leaf that merely exists to disguise true US national interests. Rather, democracy promotion is part of a greater American narrative, an important element of the USA’s ‘mission’ in the world.25 US culture is thus an important factor in explaining democracy promotion.26 Thomas Carothers confirms this by referring to the ‘inherent assumption that the United
States is especially qualified to promote democracy’, recommending that US foreign policy makers ‘get over the tendency to see democracy…promotion…as the special province of the United States’. In addition, Rick Travis argues that promoting democracy strengthens democracy’s identity and, in the case of the USA, helps it ‘reconnect with its core historical traditions’. There seems to be a strong collective conviction that US democracy remains one of the most advanced in the world. Similar observations can be made about European democracy promotion. This may explain why one of the main problems of both US and European democracy programmes is that they seek to recreate the world in their own image, rather than accepting that democracy may look different in different places.

Practical experience also has a strong influence on the debate, and evidence suggests that efforts to strengthen democracies often have limited success. Those engaged in democracy promotion on the ground often complain that, while costs are immediate, effects are uncertain and often take decades to appear—if they appear at all. For example, the objective of establishing a liberal democracy in Afghanistan has been quietly substituted with simply leaving behind a stable central government that can defend itself against the Islamic insurgency, after even the keenest optimists can see very little progress. Ten years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan can hardly be considered a stable democracy. As scholars warn, competitive elections may lead to sectarian violence and deepen animosities in ethnically divided societies. Kenya, Rwanda and Burundi are examples where elections have indeed unleashed inter-ethnic violence. For decades the USA has worked to strengthen civil society capacity building and political party development in the Arab World, but little suggests that the uprisings that have shaken the latter over the past months are in any way the result of Western democracy promotion. The opposite is at times true: being associated with Western organisations is often a burden for opposition groups; in June 2009, for example, the Iranian opposition explicitly distanced itself from the West to prevent a loss of credibility and legitimacy.

An additional critique of democracy promotion used frequently is that democracy is a ‘contested concept’, and difficult to measure, making it at times hard to decide whether certain countries (such as Venezuela, Iran or Russia) are democratic or not. US or European democracy promotion is often based on an idealised Western liberal democratic model, which is difficult to apply anywhere in the world, including in the West itself. People who work in democracy promotion usually know what it means to live in a democracy, but they have rarely experienced democratisation in their home countries, thus often having little practical understanding of the process. In addition, seeking to emulate specific characteristics of US or European democracy may have negative consequences as it does not allow for local peculiarities: ‘Many Americans confuse’, one specialist writes, ‘the forms of American democracy with the concept of democracy itself’. In order to emulate Western-style voting cycles, democracy promoters are often in favour of rushing to an election, even in post-conflict societies. Yet elections can have an inherently disruptive effect, in particular in winner-take-all scenarios. As Carothers points out, being impatient to organise elections ‘reflects the tendency of the international actors engaged in aiding the conflict
resolution to view elections as a strategy for an early exit. Yet at least sometimes, early elections can be a recipe for failure. The next section analyses which of the arguments laid out here are used by rising democracies, and how this informs their foreign policy.

**Do rising democracies promote democracy? The case of Brazil and India**

Western democratic governments and organisations spend billions of dollars every year on democracy-related projects, turning them into the dominant actors in the field of democracy promotion. Yet a notable shift of power is taking place towards countries that are more hesitant when it comes to systematic democracy promotion. Have Brazil and India promoted democracy in the past? How do analysts and policy makers in emerging democracies—using Brazil and India as an example in this analysis—think about democracy promotion? How can we characterise their arguments in relation to the critiques cited above?

**Brazil and democracy promotion**

Brazil accounts for over half of South America’s wealth, population, territory and military budget, which suggests that it is relatively more powerful in its region than China, India and Germany are in their respective neighbourhoods. Yet, despite this dominant position, it shied away from intervening in its neighbours’ internal affairs before the 1990s. The preservation of national sovereignty and non-intervention have always been and remain key pillars of Brazil’s foreign policy, so any attempt to promote or defend self-determination and human rights abroad—a commitment enshrined in Brazil’s 1989 constitution—stands in conflict with the principle of non-intervention. The tension arising from these two opposing visions—respecting sovereignty and adopting a more assertive pro-democracy stance, particularly in the region—is one of the important dilemmas in Brazilian foreign policy of the past two decades.

In fact, particularly during the 1990s, Brazil abstained several times from promoting or defending democracy. In 1990, under President Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–92) and largely because of economic interests, Brazil blocked calls for a military intervention in Suriname after a military coup there. A year later it opposed military intervention to reinstall President Aristide in Haiti. In 1992 it remained silent over a political crisis in Ecuador. In 1994, when a member of the UN Security Council—it abstained from Security Council Resolution 940, which authorised the use of force in Haiti with the goal of reinstating President Aristide, who had been removed from power in 1991 through a coup.

However, contrary to what is often believed, Brazil has defended democracy abroad in many more instances, and over the past two decades its views on intervention have become decidedly more flexible. Even under indirectly-elected President José Sarney (1985–89), the first president after democratisation, Brazil supported the inclusion of a reference to democracy in a new preamble to the Organization of American States (OAS) Charter. Under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002), Brazil intervened in neighbouring Paraguay in 1996 to avoid a military coup there—working
through Mercosur and the OAS to obtain higher leverage, and ultimately convincing General Lino Oviedo not to stage a coup d’état against then President Juan Carlos Wasmosy. The Brazilian president again played an important mediating role during political crises in Paraguay in 1999 and 2000. When then Peruvian President Fujimori falsified the election results in 2000, Brazil’s President Cardoso refused to criticise him and Brazil was the major obstacle to US and Canadian efforts to condemn Peru at the OAS General Assembly. Yet, in an important gesture, President Cardoso stayed away from President Fujimori’s inaugural ceremony, and a year later Brazil supported the Inter-American Democratic Charter, largely aimed at Fujimori, which includes the norm of democratic solidarity.

Following the coup in Venezuela Brazil has assumed a more assertive pro-democracy stance in the region. In 2002 it actively engaged in Venezuela when a group sought to illegally oust Hugo Chavez, who was reinstated 48 hours later. Looking back over the past decade, Santos argues that Brazil has played an exemplary and fundamental role in strengthening democratic norms and clauses across the region. In his memoirs Cardoso reflected on the issue by saying that ‘Brazil always defends democratic order’. Burges and Daudelin argue that ‘one can say that Brazil has been quite supportive of efforts to protect democracy in the Americas since 1990’. This tendency has been further strengthened in the 21st century. In 2003 President Lula (2003–2010) swiftly engaged to resolve a constitutional crisis in Bolivia and, in 2005, he sent his foreign minister to Quito to deal with a crisis in Ecuador. In the same year Brazil supported the OAS in assuming a mediating role during a political crisis in Nicaragua, including financial support for the electoral monitoring of a municipal election there. In 2009 the international debate about how to deal with the coup in Honduras was very much a result of Brazil and the USA clashing over the terms of how best to defend democracy, rather than whether to defend it.

Over the past two decades Brazil has systematically built democratic references and clauses into the charters, protocols and declarations of the sub-regional institutions of which it is a member. The importance of democracy in the constitution and activities of the Rio Group, Mercosur and the more recent South American Community of Nations (Unasul) can to a large extent be traced back to Brazil’s activism. At the same time Brazil has sought to ensure that the protection of democratic rule be calibrated with interventionism, combining the principle of non-intervention with that of ‘non-indifference’. This term’s policy relevance remains contested, yet it symbolises how much Brazil’s thinking about sovereignty has evolved. For example, when explaining why Brazil opposed a US proposal to craft a mechanism within the OAS’s Democratic Charter, which permits the group to intervene in nations to foster or strengthen democracy, Celso Amorim argued that ‘there needs to be a dialogue rather than an intervention’, adding that ‘democracy cannot be imposed. It is born from dialogue.’ It thus positions itself as an alternative and more moderate democracy defender in the hemisphere than the USA, and one that continuously calibrates its interest in defending democracy with its tradition of non-intervention.
Brazil’s decision to lead the UN peacekeeping mission, Minustah, in Haiti, starting in 2004, cannot be categorised as democracy promotion *per se*, yet the mission’s larger goal did consist in bringing both economic and political stability to the Caribbean Island, which has been the target of US American democracy promotion for years. In the same way Brazil’s ongoing involvement in Guinea Bissau, a member of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) proved to be a yet another important moment for Brazil’s role as a promoter of peace and democracy. Brazil had provided some electoral assistance to Guinea-Bissau from 2004 to 2005 and it continued to support efforts to stabilise the country by operating through the UN peacekeeping mission there. During a CPLP meeting in 2011 Brazil signed a memorandum of understanding to implement a Project in Support of the Electoral Cycles of the Portuguese-speaking African Countries and Timor-Leste. In addition, in the lead-up to the anticipated elections in April 2012, Brazil made further financial contributions to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) basket fund in support of the National Electoral Commission for assistance in the execution of the election.

Brazil’s pro-democracy stance became most obvious in 2012, when President Dilma Rousseff—together with the leaders of Uruguay and Argentina—suspended Paraguay from Mercosur after the impeachment of Paraguay’s President Fernando Lugo, which most governments in the region regarded as the equivalent of a *coup d’etat* or a ‘parliamentary coup’. The Brazilian government thus set a clear precedent that anti-democratic tendencies in the region would cause a rapid and clear reaction from leaders in Brasília. President Rousseff’s decision to work through Mercosur—rather than the OAS—is consistent with a growing preference to use local regional bodies, possibly in an effort to strengthen projection as a regional leader.

Yet there are also critical voices. Summarising Brazilian foreign policy over the past two decades, Sean Burges argues that ‘Brazil has not behaved consistently in support of democratic norm enforcement’, and that decisive action to preserve democracy has been ‘tepid’. Ted Piccone reasons that ‘when it comes to wielding...influence in support of democracy in other countries...Brazil has been ambivalent and often unpredictable’. Both these evaluations were made before Brazil’s assertive stance in Paraguay in 2012. Nevertheless, despite this strategy, the term ‘democracy promotion’ is not used either by Brazilian policy makers or by academics when referring to Brazil’s Paraguay policy. In the same way Brazil does not promote any activities comparable to those of large US or European nongovernmental organisations, whose activities range from political party development, electoral monitoring, supporting independent media and journalists, capacity building for state institutions, and training for judges, civic group leaders and legislators.

This brief analysis shows that Brazil is increasingly assertive in its region, and willing to intervene if political crises threaten democracy. Brazil is most likely to intervene during constitutional crises and political ruptures, and less so when procedural issues during elections may affect the outcome—as was the case during Hugo Chavez’ re-election in 2012, when several commentators criticised Brazil’s decision not to pressure the Venezuelan government to ensure fair
elections. Yet, despite this distinction, it seems clear that the consolidation of democracy in the region has turned into one of Brazil’s fundamental foreign policy goals.

This development must be seen in the context of Brazil’s attempt to consolidate its regional leadership. In the 1980s Brazilian foreign policy makers perceived the need to engage with the country’s neighbours, principally its rival Argentina, a trend that continued and strengthened throughout the 1990s. At the beginning of Cardoso’s first term, the president began to articulate a vision that fundamentally diverged from Brazil’s traditional perspective—a vision that identified ‘South America’ as a top priority. This trend has continued ever since, and was intensified under Cardoso’s successor, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Over the past few years, as Brazil’s economic rise has caught the world’s attention, the region has firmly stood at the centre of Brazil’s foreign policy strategy. This trend continues under Brazil’s current administration, with a focus on reducing a growing fear in the region that Brazil could turn into a regional bully; over the past few years anti-Brazilian sentiment has been on the rise in South America.

Yet, while Brazil may de facto defend democracy with frequency in the region, it rarely engages in the liberal rhetoric so common in Europe and the USA. It may be precisely because of Brazil’s traditional mistrust of the USA’s attempts to promote freedom that Brazilian policy makers refrain from using similar arguments. Rather, Brazil can be said to be defending and promoting political stability above all else, a key ingredient of Brazil’s interest in expanding its economic influence on the continent. Rather than the strength of its neighbours, it is their weakness that is now a threat, as weak nations may not be able to provide basic levels of public order. For example, the violence and chaos that ensues in Bolivia could spill into Brazilian territory, and it may scare away investors who are contemplating engaging in Brazil. Brazil is strong and getting stronger—but its neighbours are weak and some appear to be getting weaker. It is within this context that Brazil faces its biggest security challenges.

While Brazil usually acts swiftly in face of political instability, it is far more reluctant to intervene in places where democracy suffers from procedural problems—such as in Venezuela, where President Chavez used the state apparatus to promote his campaign, leading to an uneven playing field between him and his opponent, Henrique Capriles. One way to explain Brazil’s reluctance to intervene in such cases is that they do not affect Brazil’s economic interests in the region. Democracy promotion can thus be seen not necessarily as an end in itself, but rather as an important element of Brazil’s strategy to strengthen its growing economic presence in the region. Similarly to the USA, democracy promotion thus largely aligns with Brazil’s national interests as an emerging power.

The case of India

Considering the immense domestic challenges it faces, India is a great democratic success story. Yet the country, democratic since independence in 1947,
has been traditionally reluctant to actively promote democracy abroad, and it continues to value the preservation of sovereignty over democracy promotion. Like Brazil’s, Indian foreign policy thinking features a realist strand and an idealist one, which stand in continuous tension. During the Cold War, India’s non-alignment and relative proximity to the USSR made democracy promotion impossible, particularly because the idea was strongly associated with the Western struggle against communism at the time. In addition, democracy promotion carried a connotation of intervention, another anathema to India’s foreign policy perspective. The US intervention in Chile in 1973 in particular had a profound impact on India’s foreign policy thinking.

Finally, relations between India and the world’s leading promoter of democracy, the USA, were difficult and marked by misunderstandings for most of the second half of the 20th century. In 1971 India intervened in East Pakistan to end genocide there committed by the Pakistani army, playing midwife in the creation of a democratic nation—a strategy for which it was, at the time, severely criticised by both the USA and the United Nations. Indeed, this move was motivated by India’s desire to weaken Pakistan rather than to spread democratic rule—yet the episode is continuously mentioned by Indian analysts in the context of democracy promotion. Siddarth Mallavaparu, for example, calls India’s intervention a ‘success notwithstanding trials and tribulations of politics in the new state of Bangladesh since then’. Pratap Mehta writes that ‘India in effect applied what we would now call the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) principle, and applied it well’.

In the 1980s India intervened in Sri Lanka to protect the Tamil minority there, yet this occurred largely as a result of political pressure in Tamil Nadu, so it hardly counts as a case of democracy promotion. In 1988, in what can be regarded as the country’s first pro-democracy intervention, India’s Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi sent Indian troops to the Maldives to avoid a coup d’état, helping the country’s democratically elected president reassert power. This move was both a genuine attempt to defend democracy as well as a way of reaffirming India’s strategic presence in the Indian Ocean. More recently India has turned into a significant provider of aid in Afghanistan, where it paid for most of the construction of the parliament in Kabul. It has also carefully engaged Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, providing economic aid that is likely to contribute to a strengthening of democratic institutions in these countries.

In most instances India has been reluctant to promote democracy. The country has for over a decade followed a so-called ‘constructive engagement’ policy with Burma’s military junta in which it has not criticised the regime’s human rights abuses even as it hosts large numbers of Burmese refugees and political exiles on its soil. Nor did New Delhi take much of a position one way or the other on the political turmoil in Burma in 2007, disappointing pro-democracy activists. Raja Mohan argues that ‘democracy as a political priority has been largely absent from India’s foreign policy’, something which may be partly explained by the fact that India is surrounded by unstable and often autocratic regimes. Delhi has no choice but to engage with its autocratic neighbours, and it is sceptical that outside factors can democratise its largest neighbour, China. The growing Chinese presence was also one of the main reasons why New
Delhi was unwilling to openly condemn the military regime in Rangoon over the suppression of the Saffron Revolution in 2007.

Nevertheless Indian policy makers frequently express their commitment to democracy promotion, particularly in multilateral fora. In 2005 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh argued that ‘liberal democracy is the natural order of political organization in today’s world’, saying that ‘all alternative systems...are an aberration’. He also stated that ‘as the world’s largest democracy, it is natural that India should have been among the first to welcome and support the concept of a UN Democracy Fund’. Dan Twining points out that ‘Indian officials recognize that the widespread appeal of their country’s democratic values is a strategic asset for Indian diplomacy’. This notion has also extended into the Indian public debate. Raja Mohan argued that democracy was as much an Indian value as a Western one, and that this convergence of values could be the key foundation of a strong bilateral partnership. India participated in the first Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies organised in Warsaw in June 2000 but observers pointed out that, rather than genuinely promoting democracy, India saw the initiative as a means to strengthen US–India ties.

Indian policy analysts see India’s regional geopolitical context as one of the principal reasons why the country does not promote democracy—providing a stark contrast to Brazil, which faces far fewer regional constraints. For example, Pratap Mehta argues that:

> sheer economic necessity requires that India be circumspect in its policies regarding the Middle East. Countries in this region not only supply a large share of India’s vast and growing energy needs, but also host millions of Indian workers. Thus whatever India’s level of commitment to Middle Eastern democracy as a value, that commitment must be tempered by a weighing of concrete risks.

In sum, we can argue that, contrary to Brazil, where defending democracy is aligned with Brazil’s project of regional hegemony by benefiting its strategic and economic interests, such logic does not apply to India in South Asia. Despite its dominant size and its theoretical capacity to exert influence over its neighbours’ regime type, promoting democracy could potentially destabilise India’s still largely non-democratic region. In South America, on the other hand, democracy has largely taken hold, and Brazil’s task of merely keeping its neighbours from backsliding is far easier and safer than India’s challenge to help its neighbours actually democratise.

What does this mean for the future of democracy promotion?

In his address to the UN General Assembly in September 2010 US President Barack Obama made an appeal to rising democracies, declaring that the ‘we need your voices to speak out’, and reminded them that ‘part of the price of our own freedom is standing up for the freedom of others’. And, in fact, as stated above, Brazil has turned into quite a reliable defender of democracy in the region. India, for its part, has been far more cautious, but acted in some rare
instances, such as when a coup d'état occurred in the Maldives. Thus, rather than a clash between countries that support democracy promotion and those who reject it outright, a more nuanced and complex debate is emerging about when and how democracy promotion is legitimate, and how it should take place. Not the concept as such, but its interpretation and application will increasingly be open to contestation and competition between established and emerging democracies—as seen in Venezuela in 2002 or Honduras in 2009.

It is likely that, in the context of the redistribution of global power, it will be increasingly difficult for US and European actors—both state and non-state—to control the international debate about democracy promotion. While democracy as an international norm remains strong—the call for democracy being one of the important issue during the recent revolutions in the Arab World—Europe’s and the USA’s relative decline may soon cause them to promote democracy less openly, or only in specific circumstances. This stands in stark contrast to the early years after the Cold War, when analysts marvelled at an ‘unprecedented movement towards democracy’. Even in 2000 Cox et al confidently asserted that democracy was ‘increasingly the only legitimate means by which we can manage our political affairs effectively’.

One of the most striking differences between US or European democracy promotion, on the one hand, and Brazilian and Indian democracy promotion, on the other, is that the latter’s civil societies are far less involved in the process. Neither Brazilian nor Indian civil society or government have developed the capacity to allocate thousands of democracy aid workers around the world, as is the case with European and US NGOs. As so-called ‘emerging donors’ neither Brazil nor India use democracy-related conditionalities in their aid programmes, while the USA and Europe have in several instances integrated democracy promotion efforts into their development aid schemes. Democracy promotion seems neither to be part of a greater Brazilian or Indian ‘liberal narrative’, nor an important element of Brazil’s or India’s ‘mission’. Rather, both countries are, by nature, suspicious of any pursuit of ideological convergence among states. Neither India nor Brazil has developed any kind of mission civilisatrice or interest in expanding their particular ideological narratives across the world, and they are unlikely to elevate their own success into an ideological basis for their foreign policy.

One could assume that ‘new’ democracies are not yet convinced enough of the strength of their own democratic system to promote democracy themselves. According to this logic, only ‘consolidated democracies’ are interesting in promoting democracy themselves, and India and Brazil will slowly adopt Western-style democracy promotion as their political systems mature. However, India has long been a consolidated democracy, and its national identity is very much shaped by Enlightenment values. The same can be said of Brazil, whose culture is based on the respect for human rights, democracy, constitutional government, and government by public reason. Fundamental differences are therefore likely to remain.

The normative approach used to explain Western democracy promotion, which notes that one of the main drivers is the urge to project one’s democratic identity and recreate the world in one’s own image, thus does not apply to
emerging democracies like Brazil and India. This may suggest that, in an increasingly multipolar world order, Western-style grassroots democracy promotion, partially driven by non-state actors, is bound to play a much less significant role. It also indicates that the space for cooperation at the non-state level is limited. Brazil prefers to take preventive action on a political level, for example through treaty clauses that punish countries which do not uphold democratic standards (Brazil in South America), or on the multilateral level. Not only is this high-level ‘political approach’ of defending democracy less invasive, it is also much cheaper and involves lower risk than having thousands of development workers—employed either by state or non-state actors—working in other countries.

Conclusion

As the analysis makes clear, a realist approach is best at accounting for rising democracies’ behaviour. Brazil and India promote democracy as long as doing so is aligned with their overall strategic and economic interests, and if they are willing to adopt democracy promotion as means to legitimise their growing influence. In this respect their approach is similar to the Western practice. While promoting democracy may endanger India’s foreign policy goal of maintaining regional stability, it is increasingly aligned with Brazil’s national interests as a regional hegemon. Given that autocratic leaders are more likely to endanger Brazilian investments in the region, for example by expropriating Brazilian investments, democracy promotion has become a key tool with which to contain threats against the legitimacy of the established order and to defend Brazil’s growing economic presence in South America.

Yet rising democracies fundamentally differ from established actors in that they rarely justify their democracy-related activities in the context of the larger liberal narrative often used by European and US policy makers. Both Brazil and India remain suspicious of the at times sweeping Wilsonian liberal rhetoric and concepts used by European and US democracy promoters, a rhetoric which policy makers in Brasília and New Delhi consider to be both ineffective and smacking of cultural imperialism. It is worth noting that, despite their democracy-related activities, no Indian and Brazilian policy maker or civil society representative describes these as ‘democracy promotion’—very much contrary to Europe and the USA, were the term is common. Therefore it is no surprise that neither Brazil nor India has embraced US ideas such as the ‘League of Democracies’. As a consequence, observers in Europe and the USA have generally seen the scope for cooperation with rising democracies on democracy-related activities as limited.

Nevertheless comparisons between Western and non-Western views about democracy promotion often overlook the fact that there is ample room for cooperation. Emphasising the more technical terms—such as ‘good governance’—rather than the ideology-laden liberal ‘democracy promotion’ may be an important step to facilitate cooperation, particularly on the multilateral level. In this context the ‘European approach’, which often seeks to avoid the term ‘democracy promotion’ in order not to estrange the host government105
(for example by promoting ‘good governance’ or by strengthening ‘civil society’), may provide more room for collaboration between established democracy promoters and rising democracies. For example, when US President Barack Obama visited India, the USA and India signed an Open Government Partnership to start a dialogue among senior officials on open government issues and to disseminate innovations that enhance government accountability. These less visible approaches are likely to be more acceptable to rising democracies than being asked to join established powers in condemning autocrats openly.

Emerging powers’ position matters greatly because they are located in regions of the world where democracy’s footing is not yet firm. In addition, there are indications that Brazil’s and India’s credibility among poor countries may exceed that of the rich world—perhaps precisely because they are rarely perceived as overly paternalistic or arrogant. Perhaps most importantly Brazil’s and India’s societal structures—high inequality, a high degree of illiteracy (in India’s case) and pockets of poverty—are similar to those in many countries that are struggling to establish democracy. Seen from this perspective, Brazilian and Indian policy makers have much more experience in making democracy work in adverse environments. In Brazil’s case an additional asset is a very recent experience of successful transition to democracy. Emerging power such as Brazil and India are therefore in a much better position to share their experience of democracy than Europe or the USA, whose democratisation lies in the distant past, and whose societies look very different from those in the rest of the world. Finally, in a world where an increasing number of national leaders look to China as an economic and political model to copy, India and Brazil provide powerful counter-examples that political freedom is no obstacle to economic growth. In this sense, as Pratap Mehta points out, Brazil’s and India’s own success may do far more for democracy promotion than any overtly ideological push in that direction could ever hope to accomplish.

Notes
6 The term ‘rising democracies’ refers to emerging powers under democratic rule. The term is used by, among others, T Piccone, ‘Do new democracies support democracy?’, Journal of Democracy, 22(4), 2011, p 139.

7 Serfaty, ‘Moving into a post-Western world’.


9 Democracy promotion can take many different forms, ranging from the enactment of pro-democracy clauses in regional bodies, political party development, electoral monitoring, supporting independent media and journalists, capacity building for state institutions, training for judges, civic group leaders and legislators, and offering development aid if the recipient takes steps towards democratisation to, in rarer cases, imposing sanctions on non-democratic regimes. Rather than merely by governments, democracy promotion has started to be undertaken by specialised government agencies (such as USAID) or nongovernmental organizations such as Freedom House, the National Endowment for Democracy or the German Stiftungen.


22 Ibid.


24 Robinson, ‘Globalization, the world system, and “democracy promotion”’.


28 Ibid, p 349.


30 The actual quality of democracy is unlikely to be the actual cause here: political deadlock, low voter turnout (in both the USA and Europe), complex gerrymandering, highly controversial campaign finance laws and potentially result-changing errors in the vote counting during presidential elections in the recent
past are clear signs that US democracy is in crisis. From an organisational point of view, US democracy may indeed be more advanced, yet it is far from clear whether the sophisticated techniques used by candidates in US elections—advanced polling methods and aggressive ways to raise money—are proof of a better democracy.


32 Carothers points out that democracy promotion remains remarkably understudied by academics. *Ibid*, p 3.


38 Thomas Carothers admits that one of the principal problems of democracy promotion is that ‘most people on the receiving end have an instinctive and wholly understandable suspicion about anyone who comes to their country claiming to be sincerely dedicated to helping build democracy there’. Carothers, *Critical Mission*, p 9.


40 In the early 1990s, for example, India was rated by Freedom House as only ‘partly free’, questioning its democratic credentials. See L. Diamond, ‘Promoting democracy’, *Foreign Policy*, 87, 1992, pp 25–46.


46 R. Schweller, ‘Emerging powers in an age of disorder’, p 293.


48 Brazilian Constitution, Title 1, Article 4, number 2, at http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituciao/ constituciao.htm, accessed 1 November 2012.

49 Santiso, ‘Promoção e proteção da democracia na política externa brasileira’, p 397.


54 Santiso, ‘Promoção e proteção da democracia na política externa brasileira’, p 408.


56 The norm of democratic solidarity postulates that the peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it. See Representative Democracy, ‘Resolution adopted at the fifth plenary session’, held on 5 June 1991.


58 Santiso, ‘Promoção e proteção da democracia na política externa brasileira’, p 415.


61 Santiso, ‘Promoção e proteção da democracia na política externa brasileira’, p 422.

65 Carothers, Critical Mission, p 15. Others have argued quite the opposite, charging that Brazil did in fact help legitimise the ouster of a democratically elected government, yet most admit that the case falls into a grey area. See, for example, Burges & Daudelin, ‘Brazil’, p 8.
71 Burges & Daudelin, ‘Brazil’.
73 Piccone, ‘Do new democracies support democracy?’, p 140.
74 See, for example, M Spektor, ‘Silêncios’, Folha de São Paulo, October 3, 2012.
76 Ibid, p 145.
78 O Stuenkel, Strategic Threats Surrounding Brazil, International Reports, Berlin Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 30 September 2010.
79 Mehta, ‘Do new democracies support democracy? Reluctant India’.
81 This sentiment is not only limited to India. See, for example, Carothers & Young, ‘Looking for help’.
85 Mallavapar, ‘Democracy promotion circa 2010’, p 49.
89 Ibid, Introduction.
92 Ibid.
95 Mehta, ‘Do new democracies support democracy?’, p 98.
96 Carothers & Young, ‘Looking for help’, Introduction.
97 For an interesting case study of US democracy promotion in Venezuela, see Cole, ‘Hugo Chavez and President Bush’s credibility gap’.
98 McFaul, ‘Democracy promotion as a world value’.
99 Diamond, ‘Promoting democracy’.
102 Mehta, ‘Do new democracies support democracy? Reluctant India’.
103 Ibid.
104 Carothers, Critical Mission, p 17.
105 As Carothers points out, ‘it is telling that the oldest and perhaps most widely recognised European organizations significantly engaged in democracy aid—the German Stiftungen or political foundations—consider themselves to be development organizations, not democracy-promotion organizations’. T Carothers, ‘Democracy assistance: political vs developmental?’, Journal of Democracy, 20(1), 2009, pp 5–19.
106 Schatz, ‘Access by accident’.
109 Mehta, ‘Do new democracies support democracy? Reluctant India’.

Notes on contributor

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