
Chapter 1: Introduction

THE RATIONALE

The Community of Democracies was convened in Warsaw in 2000 to find ways “to work together and strengthen democracy.” As Cambridge scholar John Dunn has observed, while democracy has come to “dominate the world’s imagination”, it has also aroused fear and suspicion.

Democracy is not an end in itself. As a form of governance relying on the consent of the governed, democracy is a means of fulfilling individual lives and pursuing common purposes. As such, democracy expresses human aspirations which are judged to be universal.

By most counts, the number of “free” states has more than doubled in the last few decades, while the number of states considered “not free” has dramatically declined. Observers point, however, to a negative trend beginning to emerge. Democracy has suffered recent reverses.

Also, some authoritarian regimes are banding together in their own form of cooperative resistance to democratic change. Some of them laud the stability of “liberal authoritarianism” over the dangers of “illiberal democracy”. But it is hardly plausible that humans anywhere would prefer governments which ignore the principle of consent of the governed in favor of coercion. Moreover, repressive government in the longer run is counter-productive: as Gandhi observed, “Even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled”, truer than ever now, when democratic models are much more universally apparent because of the information revolution.

While no single model of democracy has pride of place, the essential positive components of democracy can be defined. Among the most prominent are: elected, accountable government; the transparent rule of law; independent media; protection of human rights and freedom of speech; and equal participation by all in selecting political representation. These democratic values represent achievable ideals which today do depict the political cultures of most of the world’s peoples and the aspirations of many others.

Favorable evolution proceeds on every continent; notable examples of democratic restoration, consolidation, or advance in recent years include Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Taiwan, and Ukraine – and, as Chilean novelist Isabel Allende declared, “Latin America has opted for democracy.”

John Menru of Tanzania was thinking of a new political climate for Africa when he cited these goals to the late Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski, but his aims were universal:

- a. adopt as binding the principle of dialogue;*
- b. ensure society’s participation in public life;*
- c. observe fundamental human rights;*
- d. begin democratization.*

Orderly succession of democratically selected political leadership is also a universal need. In announcing the winner of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for African Leadership in October, 2007, Kofi Annan cited particularly Joaquim Chissano’s efforts to build Mozambique democracy on conciliation among ex-opponents.

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND NON-VIOLENT CHANGE

Of course, each democratic culture emerges from civil society in a singular way. But many of the challenges in achieving and consolidating democracy are shared, especially the always challenging transition from a non-democratic society toward democracy, via the building blocks of civil society.

The most successful route for transformation by civil society of authoritarian repression has been that of organized civil resistance. Gandhi created the model for nonviolent civil disobedience against unjust laws in the first campaigns for human rights he launched in South Africa, which he then applied in subsequent campaigns for the self-determination of India.

Of course, democracy activists and members of civil society struggling to create democratic conditions under non-democratic regimes often face the harsh dilemma of finding the most effective methods for wresting change from unbending authoritarians. Impatient partisans of change are tempted sometimes by the option of violent direct action. But repressive state security machinery can impose a cruel upper hand against violent insurrection which, in any case, can alienate the majority of citizens concerned about safety.

John Dunn records the history of democracy's triumphs as a "history of political choice." To succeed, the choice must be a demonstrably effective one, not just for the majority reaping the spoils of electoral victory, but across society as a whole. Democracy relies on the realization of certain basic human needs and must aim for their improvement. The test of the democratic process is at the intersection between the participation of citizens in their own governance, and the effectiveness of governance in confronting practical challenges individuals face.

For example, freedom from extreme poverty has been termed the first of the essential freedoms – or, as Amartya Sen put it succinctly, "Freedom and development are inextricable."

It has been charged that democracy can impede the firm conduct of foreign relations or the organization of defense especially at a time of peril, but the record of free peoples on both accounts is eloquent. In recent years, democratic societies have debated the need to constrain some measure of civil liberties in the interests of national security and counter-terrorism. The outcome is often one of dissatisfaction, as this can be a long and winding road.

It is also debated whether specific economic conditions and models favor democracy taking roots in a society. Paddy Ashdown has speculated that "democracy is what people choose when they have enough prosperity that they want a system of government that would protect it". The rule of law which is favored by democratic government is certainly an essential legal framework for free market economies. Socially responsible private investment can undoubtedly support democratic transformation. But the rewards need to be felt generally by the population as a whole. What is clear is that to sustain public confidence, governments must be able to show positive economic achievement with public benefit.

Democratic practice has to be learned. Even once embarked, the democratic journey is an on-going and changing process. Dr. Jennifer Welsh of Oxford University reminds us that elected and accountable government provides the ability of a society to "self-correct" in its pursuit of such policy goals. Or, as Senora Allende observed, "A country, like a husband, is always open to improvement."

THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES

While the Community of Democracies has no ambition to be a bloc defined by or formed in antagonism to non-democratic states, member states have made clear they applaud further peaceful progress toward democratic governance in the world. If this general preference is contradicted by selective support for non-democrats as a function of energy, economic, or security interests, there are costs to credibility. As UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband recently said in Oxford, "We must resist the arguments on both the left and the right to retreat into a world of *realpolitik*".

This is not to dismiss lightly the merits of foreign policies grounded in realities as well as aspirations. But the adage "do no harm" also has merit. There is a harmful "*realpolitik*" history, especially during the Cold War, of democracies intervening to influence democratic outcomes elsewhere, or of subverting democratically elected governments for perceived reasons of international competition.

More recently, there have been efforts to force democracy on others. Ill-prepared attempts to democratize unstable states without the support of the people can lead to ethnic or sectarian conflict. This *Handbook* favors outside arms' length support for the long-term development of civil rights and civil society, with the emphasis on responsive support for citizens, democracy activists, or human rights defenders already engaged in the peaceful effort to realize empowerment.

There is, of course, something of a paradox involved. On the one hand, there is a long international history of democrats aiding each other, from the inter-mingling of the American and French revolutions, to the waves of change which swept over Europe in 1848, or in 1989. On the other hand, democracy is about people developing popular self-government for themselves.

Diplomats from democracies need to carry on the tradition of supporting democrats and sharing practical know-how, while being respectful that ultimately democracy is a form of self-rule requiring that things be done by a domestic civil society itself.

It is in this spirit that Community members greatly value being able to respond to the support for reform-minded groups and individuals struggling to introduce and improve democratic governance and human rights in their own societies, and to working with governments and nongovernmental groups everywhere to improve democratic governance. As the *Handbook* will set out, the rights to help and be helped are consistent with the aims and obligations of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

THE ROLE OF DIPLOMATS AND THE HANDBOOK

In seeking such help, civil society groups have often turned to Embassies or Consulates of Community of Democracies' member states for advice and assistance. There is no codified set of procedures for diplomats to follow in order to respond effectively. Each situation is different, presenting unstructured problems and opportunities which diplomats need to interpret according to local as well as general merits, including the bilateral relationship itself. However, there has been considerable past experience which might be helpful on a case-by-case basis in the field. The *Handbook* attempts to record it.

This *Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support* is accompanied by a representative variety of case studies documenting and explaining specific country experiences. It also identifies creative, human, and material resources available to Missions, the ways in which Missions and diplomats have supported requests in the past, and describes how such support has been applied. The *Handbook* means to cover a full range of conditions and situations, from regimes which are flatly undemocratic and repressive to post-conflict recovery to democratic consolidation.

It is important that each case study be seen for its specific contextual properties. Every case is different, but there are characteristics which obviously recur. Moreover, it should always be borne in mind that activities and outcomes in one locale can have ripple effects in the region and on wider or specific other relationships.

We hope in future to collect a growing number of examples of "older" democracies adapting democratic techniques from "younger" ones; the democratic learning experience is not all one-way. For example, innovative Brazilian methods for enabling citizens to participate in budget-setting exercises in local government have been adapted for use in the United Kingdom.

A review of all these experiences bears out the validity of our belief in our inter-dependence. It will hopefully also provide practitioners with encouragement, counsel, and a greater capacity to support democrats everywhere.