CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

CARNEGIE RISING DEMOCRACIES NETWORK

THE LONG ROAD FOR RISING DEMOCRACIES AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

THOMAS CAROTHERS AND RICHARD YOUNGS | JULY 12, 2016

INTRODUCTION

At the start of the 2010s, the role of democracies outside North America and Western Europe in international democracy support began to attract attention among Western policymakers and aid practitioners. Thanks to their economic growth and the broader relativization of power in international life, countries such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey were pursuing increasingly active foreign policies. And as they did so, they professed at least a formal commitment to supporting democracy beyond their borders. In addition, Japan, South Korea, and various Central European countries began funding aid projects relating to governance and political reform.

The growing contributions of all of these countries to the democracy cause were much welcomed by the Western policy community. They were a potential antidote to the growing view in some quarters that the rebalancing of power between the West and the Rest would mostly be about tensions between Western democracy and non-Western authoritarianism, led by China and Russia. Their actions opened up the beguiling prospect of democracy support becoming a truly global international concern, pursued not just by established Western democracies but by democracies in all parts of the world. In contrast to some analysts writing off democracy support as anachronistic in the emerging new global order, Western democracy promoters sensed a chance that democracy support might be usefully de-Westernized and thus revitalized.[1]

To examine this emergent topic, in 2013 we established the Carnegie Rising Democracies Network, in partnership with the Robert Bosch Stiftung and with additional support from the Ford Foundation and the UK Department for International Development. The network comprises a set of policy scholars from a range of democracies in Africa, Asia, Central and Southeastern Europe, and Latin America, with expertise in the policies and programs of their own countries related

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Thomas Carothers *is vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He directs the Democracy and Rule of Law Program and oversees several other Carnegie programs, including Carnegie Europe in Brussels, the Energy and Climate Program, and the D.C.-based Europe Program.*

Richard Youngs *is a senior associate in the Democracy and Rule of Law Program, based at Carnegie Europe. He works on EU foreign policy and on issues of international democracy.*

to supporting democracy abroad. We convened the group in Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Turkey, meeting in each of those countries with policymakers, NGO representatives, scholars, and journalists to discuss those countries' actions on the international democracy front. And we brought the group to Berlin, Brussels, and Washington to meet with Western policymakers and aid officials.

Network members have produced a series of articles illuminating and assessing democracy-related policies of rising democracies in particular countries or regions. With the first phase of activity of the Rising Democracies Network now almost completed and plans for the next phase in gestation, we thought it useful to put forward reflections about non-Western democracy support that we have gathered so far.

Initial enthusiasm for this topic in Western policy circles has noticeably diminished since it first gained wide attention—rising democracies' support for democracy outside their borders has proved more hesitant and inconsistent than some Western democracy promoters had hoped. And cooperation between non-Western actors and Western counterparts has turned out to be complicated and often elusive. Yet while it is important to be fully aware of the limits and complexities of the role of non-Western democracies in international democracy support, premature fatalism should be eschewed in a policy domain that is still in a very early phase of development.

WHAT ARE RISING DEMOCRACIES ACTUALLY DOING?

Compared to the high expectations some Western observers had when this topic emerged, rising democracies have given only partial and sporadic attention to issues of democracy support. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that these countries have no real interest in trying to foster democracy in their neighborhoods or more widely.

Thus while Brazil has disappointed many observers with its reluctance to take a strong stand relating to Venezuela's long-unfolding political crisis, it has tried to play a positive role in Haiti's political and economic reconstruction, helped head off a coup in Paraguay in 2009, and has supported strong democracy protection clauses in Latin American regional bodies. To the frustration of many Washington and London diplomats, South Africa has not stood up for democracy in Zimbabwe, but it has contributed to a positive resolution of Côte d'Ivoire's 2010–2011 electoral crisis and dispatched election observers across the continent. Indonesia maintains an extremely cautious approach to asserting its interest in democracy in Asia but continues to host the annual Bali Forum on the development of democracy in the region. India has many foreign policy irons in the fire relating to security issues that have little relationship to democracy concerns, especially with Pakistan and China. But in some of its immediate neighbors, including Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, India has in recent years contributed diplomatically and with technical assistance to processes of democratic change. Though its external policies have recently evolved in a less pro-democratic direction, Turkey did initially approach the Arab uprisings of 2011 with some genuine efforts to support democratic change where it appeared to be occurring.

One cannot understand the overall foreign policies of these countries without at least some attention to the issue of democracy support. Of course, it is only one issue among many and is often outweighed by countervailing economic, security, and diplomatic interests that point those countries in other directions. Their democracy rhetoric often falls greatly short of policy reality. But this is the same with Western democratic powers, many of which talk about democracy as an overarching interest, often in rather grand terms, but in fact include it as only one of many interests they pursue in their external relations and very often subordinate it to other concerns.

When they do give attention to democracy outside their borders, rising democracies act on the basis of one or more motivations:

- They may judge democracy support to be advantageous for their own geostrategic position or interests. For example, both Japan and Indonesia see a pro-democratic stance in Asia as a useful way to nurture alliances capable of restraining China.[2]

- They may assert an interest in democracy as part of an expression of their national identity and ideals. In talking about their country's commitment to democracy in its neighborhood, for example, Indian officials make frequent reference to India's status as the world's most populous democracy and also a democracy that has thrived despite the challenges of extensive poverty and an extremely diverse polity in religious, linguistic, and ethnic terms. South Africa evinces support for democracy in Africa as a natural extension of its own historic achievement of democracy.

- They may be acting on the basis of a defined set of regional norms. Brazil, for example, defines its pro-democratic intentions in the region as an integral part of various regional agreements and mechanisms establishing a regional norm for the defense of democracy.

- They may be responding to requests for democratic solidarity and support from governmental or nongovernmental actors in nearby countries. Some reformers in Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have urged India to engage more deeply in helping them build democratic reforms. Some Venezuelan NGOs have sought more democratic solidarity from Brazil. Many Arab reformers had hopes that Turkey could help dislodge Middle Eastern autocrats and facilitate transitions to elected civilian rule.

Rising democracies' positions and perspectives on democracy support are multidimensional and far from uniform. This multiplicity of motivations parallels the diverse drivers of democracy engagement by Western democracies, where the reasons for such engagement tend to vary quite widely across different contexts.

A DISTINCTIVE APPROACH?

When asked how they support democracy outside their borders, officials and aid practitioners in rising democracies almost always insist that they have a distinctive approach. This approach, they emphasize, consists of not being confrontational or punitive, not pushing a particular model of democracy, not undermining the sovereignty of others, and not being supply driven but instead demand driven in partner countries. They iterate this minor cascade of "nots" as an intended contrast to Western democracy support, or at least to what they think are cardinal features of Western democracy support.

Hearing this oft-repeated description of a distinctive non-Western approach, one is struck with how similar it is to the principles that most European democracy supporters cite as pillars of their own approach (which Europeans often do in intended contrast to what they assume are very different features of U.S. democracy promotion). Thus what Europeans hear when officials from non-Western democracies' capitals talk about their distinctive principles is not a divergence of views, but rather an affirmation of what the Europeans think of as core European principles. Furthermore, when American democracy supporters hear the non-Western litany of distinctiveness, the principles enumerated sound like those that have animated U.S. democracy policies in recent years, in the wake of the emphasis on military intervention and regime change during the presidency of George W. Bush. Thus, U.S. officials also tend to hear what colleagues from non-Western democracies intend as statements of their essential distinctiveness instead as affirmations of shared principles.

In short, misunderstandings easily accumulate in discussions over basic approaches between non-Western and Western counterparts. When Western officials emphasize apparent similarities of Western and non-Western approaches, non-Western officials can feel that their own distinctiveness is not being appreciated or that their Western counterparts are hypocritical about their own countries' conformity with principles such as nonintervention or respect for local values.

It is notable that while officials in rising democracies frequently stress that they do not push a particular national model—in intended contrast to what they believe is a habitual Western tendency to impose Western national models on others—in practice they draw very much on their own national democratic experiences at least as much as Western powers inclined toward their respective models.[3] As mentioned above, for

example, Indian officials describing India's pro-democratic role outside the country's borders frequently highlight India's special democratic qualifications and experience. When the Election Commission of India describes its active program of assisting election administrators in other countries, it emphasizes its ability to draw directly on India's rich electoral experience. When Indonesians engaged in democracy support programs in Southeast Asia talk about their country's role, they emphasize their ability to share experiences from Indonesia's particular transitional experience. In this way too, non-Western democracy supporters resemble their Western counterparts more than they seem to realize: though Western democracy promoters insist that they do not push particular national models on others, it is extremely common in Western democracy programs, whether emanating from Denmark, Spain, or the United States, for the experts involved to refer significantly to their own national experiences while working abroad.

While the differences between Western and non-Western stances on democracy support are more nuanced than often presumed, variations of approach among non-Western powers themselves are often underappreciated. Officials in different rising democracies describe their approaches to democracy support in strikingly similar terms, yet there is considerable variability in practice among their efforts. India's active role in helping shape a new constitution in Nepal or in trying to head off democratic decay in Sri Lanka in recent years, for example, was much more hands-on and intrusive than almost anything Japan or Indonesia has done in the name of democracy support. Turkey's efforts during the Arab Spring to find ideological partners and support them closely in contexts of considerable political flux are very different from Brazil's very hesitant approach to helping find resolution to the political turmoil in Venezuela.[4] Argentina's approach to supporting critical resolutions at the UN Human Rights Council, such as with regard to North Korea, Syria, and Ukraine, contrasts markedly with South Africa's hesitancy in the same forum.

Such differences, together with the diversity of motivations driving different non-Western actors in specific contexts, work against these countries coordinating their pro-democratic policies. A striking characteristic of conversations in non-Western capitals about these issues is how little officials of any one rising democracy refer to the efforts of other rising democracies on the same topic, and how little they seem to know about them when asked. Important opportunities for effective coordination or collaboration are thus missed. This is true, for example, with the potential role that major Asian democracies might have taken up together in condemning the 2014 military coup in Thailand and attempting to pressure the military to return the country to democratic rule.[5] It is similarly true of the major Latin American democracies with regard to pressing for adherence to democracy in Venezuela or advancing with political reforms in Cuba.[6]

DEMOCRATIC TROUBLES AT HOME

When the topic of democracy support by rising democracies first gained attention, the domestic situation of the main rising democracies was fairly strong, not only in terms of democratic progress, but also with regard to their economic progress, giving these countries potential status as exemplars of how developing countries can combine democracy with successful socioeconomic development. Turkey, for example, appeared both as a heartening example of democracy gaining ground in a major Muslim country and as a democratizing economic powerhouse. Brazil was going from strength to strength both domestically and on the international stage, including landing the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games while becoming a darling of international investors.

This situation has greatly changed. Turkish politics are now dominated by democratic backsliding and conflict. Brazil has been wracked by a fundamental political crisis. South Africa has gone from democratic watchword to democratic watch list. Indonesia's 2014 presidential transition was not a showcase of fidelity to democratic norms. The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India has attracted criticism both at home and abroad for troubling signs of political intolerance. Poland has shifted rather suddenly from an apparent democratic success story to a country radiating democratic warning signals.

Of course, not all the news about democracy in the developing and post-Communist worlds is bad. Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Tunisia have all made important democratic progress in recent years, and they are not alone. Yet overall, the situation of democracy in these regions is much more uneven than it appeared even just five years ago—and the countries that laid claim to pro-democracy foreign policies are among those that have stuttered most alarmingly.

The consequences for democracy support by rising democracies are significant. Serious troubles with or question marks about democracy at home mean less credibility for rising democracies as sources of wisdom about transitions. They also mean that these countries are more wrapped up in their own domestic situations and have less time and energy to devote to the travails of democracy beyond their borders. Moreover, political transitions in these countries have sometimes entailed a loss of institutional memory about commitments on the democracy front abroad. The strong commitment, for example, of the administration of former Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to the Open Government Partnership has not been taken up by his successor. And in simple terms, a much less democratic government at home is almost certain to be less interested in supporting democracy abroad as an expression of national character.[7]

Democratic troubles of recent years are of course not confined to non-Western democracies. It hardly needs saying that Europe has been experiencing its own troubling patterns of rising intolerance, antidemocratic populism, and political paralysis, while the United States is afflicted with an ever-increasing set of democratic woes, from institutional gridlock and political polarization to manifest intolerance and demagoguery on the national political stage as well as the seemingly unstoppable flood of plutocratic financing of political campaigns. Thus the weakening of the position of rising democracies as international democracy supporters is unfortunately matched and in some ways magnified by the broader sense of democracy being under siege globally.

THE WEAK ROLE OF REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In discussions about their democracy support policies and programs, officials in rising democracies often refer to regional organizations as important venues for such efforts. Their tendency in this regard clearly reflects their desire to work within shared normative frameworks and not be too far out in front on their own. Yet in discussions with such officials and other experts on this issue in rising democracies, it is quickly evident that their view of the role of regional organizations is aspirational at best, and that they are acutely aware that such organizations are generally in a troubled state with respect to any ability to be effective actors on democracy issues.

In Latin America, the main institutions and mechanisms that once made the region a leader in the developing world with regard to regional approaches to democracy protection have been greatly damaged by the political polarization and conflicts in the region over the last fifteen years. This is true with respect to both the Organization of American States and the inter-American human rights system, institutions originally designed to advance a wide regional agreement on basic political and legal norms. Moreover, these pro-democratic mechanisms were crafted to reverse antidemocratic coups and have proved a poor fit for devising for regional responses to the problem of democratic decay in multiple Latin American countries, such as Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Furthermore, new regional groupings or institutions created as alternatives to the troubled older ones, such as the Union of South American Nations, have not proved to be effective alternatives for regional democracy support.

The African Union has been attempting to grapple with the challenge of regional democracy support. But ideological differences in Africa, including the persistence of nondemocratic rule in multiple important African countries, such as Angola, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and others, have militated against the achievement of effective African Union actions on democracy support.

In Asia, the role of regional institutions with regard to democracy is even weaker than in Latin America or Africa. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has taken only baby

steps toward any embrace of norms relating to the protection of democracy in the region. Ideological rifts in the region, including of course the powerful role of China, prevent significant evolution in this regard. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, although initially intended to pursue some role on democracy issues in South Asia, remains paralyzed by the political and strategic differences between its two most important members, India and Pakistan.

While Western powers profess their support for regional mechanisms, they have rarely focused on the democracy support instruments of these bodies. Rather, Western support concentrates on the economic and strategic dimensions of regional organizations far more than on their role in defending democracy. This compounds the tendency for regional organizations to introduce formal democracy clauses without becoming active in pro-democracy initiatives of a practical nature on the ground in states where democracy needs support.

LIMITED COOPERATION WITH WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

Accompanying the rise of interest in the Western democracy support community about the growing role of rising democracies in democracy support was a strong hope that new forms of cooperation between Western and non-Western actors in this area would become increasingly possible as rising democracies became more engaged. So far, at least, that hope has not been very much fulfilled.

Some joint efforts on democracy aid have been established. For example, multiple Western funders have worked cooperatively with the Indonesian Institute for Peace and Democracy in its efforts to support democratic change in Southeast Asia. The EU and South Korea have agreed to coordinate democracy and human rights initiatives in Asia. Diplomatic cooperation between Western and non-Western governments in democratic breakdowns or crises sometimes takes place. Washington and Pretoria worked effectively together during the negotiations to help resolve the political standoff in Côte d'Ivoire in 2012. France and Turkey struck up an extremely close coordination in the early days of the Syrian conflict, together pushing other countries for a more active engagement to support democratic opposition forces.

Yet these examples stand more as exceptions than as examples of common practice. The unfortunate fact remains that on the whole, cooperation between Western and non-Western governments on democracy issues remains thin. Western democracies have not made the issue a systematic priority or created significant new policy structures or mechanisms focused on such cooperation in those parts of their diplomatic and assistance bureaucracies devoted to democracy work. They have often been skeptical about what capacities rising democracies bring to the table—not always recognizing the value of the in-depth regional perspective or experience that such countries may have. To the extent that major Western donors have sought sustained cooperation with new non-Western donors, China has occupied much more of their attention than have non-Western democratic donors.

For their part, rising democracies remain tremendously hesitant about working closely with Western powers on issues of democracy support. It is hard to overestimate how deep-seated and persistent this hesitation is. It is rooted in the conviction that Western democracy support is much more about the assertion of Western strategic and/or economic interests than about democratic principles. It also emanates from a broader sense of disjunction between Western interests writ large and the interests of non-Western states. When a Brazilian foreign ministry official speaking to the Rising Democracies Network in São Paulo was asked how Brazil's voting on the side of Russia with regard to political developments in Ukraine fitted with Brazil's adherence to support for democracy and human rights, the official replied that it fitted with a more basic habit of Brazilian foreign policy—opposing whatever the United States supports. The core of this hesitation or wariness is directed at the United States, but it spills over to affect all potential cooperation with Western democracy supporters.

The most promising new forms of cooperation between Western governments and rising democracies on issues having at least something to do with democracy are multistakeholder

initiatives, such as the Open Government Partnership, that bring together a wide range of governments, Western and non-Western, as well as private actors. These initiatives have two characteristics that make them of greater interest to non-Western governments than other forms of cooperation on democracy issues. First, they consist of commitments by governments to focus on their own domestic reforms, less on giving advice to or asserting pressure against others. And second, they are explicitly about open government issues rather than democracy as such, giving them a somewhat more technocratic rather than ideological profile.

ERASING THE LINE

In brief conclusion, the overall domain of democracy support emanating from rising democracies has not moved forward as quickly or decisively as some Western democracy supporters initially hoped. It remains a domain marked by hesitation, partiality, obstacles, and contradictions. This is a result of several factors, including the complex mix of interests that rising democracies have with regard to democracy support, their own domestic struggles with democracy, and their continued ambivalence about cooperating directly with the West on democracy issues.

But the topic is not moribund—and there is a clear downside in terms of lost opportunities for cooperation to policymakers acting as if it were. The broader trajectory is still one of increased activity and engagement by rising democracies in political reform issues compared with ten or twenty years ago, and increased cooperation with Western democracies both diplomatically and with respect to assistance programming. Patience is very much in order here, especially if one thinks about the long road over the last half century that Western democracies themselves have been struggling along to establish credible, effective policies and programs to support democracy abroad. Arriving at any definitive verdict on the commitment, effectiveness, and importance of rising democracies' work in this area after less than a decade of meaningful engagement would be a serious mistake.

There remains a tendency—on the part of officials and experts both in rising democracies and in Western democracies—to talk about the democracy support efforts of rising democracies as a domain different and apart from Western democracy policies and programs. Yet examining the record of this domain, it is striking that there are strong similarities between the core issues that rising democracies face and those with which established democracies have grappled over the last several decades. These include the difficulty of navigating very complicated relationships between commercial interests and a democracy interest, the tendency for pro-democracy rhetoric to exceed policy reality, the challenge of being a credible pro-democracy actor externally when tackling significant democratic deficiencies at home, and the need to reconcile the natural tendency to want such actions to reflect a particular national democratic character yet not be seen as trying to export a particular national model.

For both the Western democracy support community and those engaged in the topic in rising democracies, erasing the line of thinking as well as action regarding Western and non-Western democracy support is perhaps the most important step needed to help the field as a whole advance. It is a step that would help ensure that the vitally important issue of non-Western powers' stances on global democracy does not disappear from the international policy agenda.

The line between Western and non-Western democracies needs erasing especially in relation to geopolitical challenges. Geopolitical instability and tensions now exert greater sway over the foreign policies of both rising and established democracies than five years ago. As Western powers address apparently intractable security dilemmas, so too rising democracies are today faced with acutely difficult security problems in their own regions. The new global order is not simply about non-Western states' empowerment but also about their entrapment in problematic geopolitical configurations. In this context, democracy support can sometimes be a geopolitical advantage and sometimes cut against strategic imperatives for both Western and rising democracies.

Today's debates need to focus not simply on how a reshaped global order propels rising democracies toward greater power but also on how that new order produces turmoil with which all powers must grapple. For non-Western and Western democracies alike, the relationship between democracy and geopolitics will be a crucial factor in foreign policy debates and decisions ahead.

NOTES

1 See generally Ted Piccone, *Five Rising Democracies and the Fate of the International Liberal Order* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016).

2 Maiko Ichihara, "Japan's Strategic Approach to Democracy Support," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 7, 2014.

3 Thomas Carothers, Richard Youngs, et al., "Non-Western Roots of International Democracy Support," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 3, 2014.

4 Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "The Seesaw Friendship Between Turkey's AKP and Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 24, 2014; Oliver Stuenkel, "Can Brazil Defend Democracy in Venezuela?," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 9, 2014.

5 Maiko Ichihara, Jeong-Woo Koo, Niranjan Sahoo, and Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "Asian Democracies and Thailand's Military Takeover," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 13, 2015.

6 Andreas E. Feldmann, Federico Merke, and Oliver Stuenkel, "Venezuela's Political Crisis: Can Regional Actors Help?," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 30, 2015; Federico Merke, "The New Cuba Moment: Can Latin American States Help Spark Reform?," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 28, 2015.

7 Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "Turkey Has Given Up on Democracy Outside Its Borders, Too," *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2016.

The Carnegie Endowment is grateful to the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the Ford Foundation, and the UK Department for International Development for their support of the Rising Democracies Network. The opinions expressed in this article are the responsibility of the authors.

RISING DEMOCRACIES NETWORK

The Rising Democracies Network is an initiative of the Carnegie Democracy and Rule of Law Program, which rigorously examines the global state of democracy and international efforts to support democracy's advance.

@CarnegieDROL

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, India, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance the cause of peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

@CarnegieEndow **facebook.com/CarnegieEndowment**