

## **What Democracy? Exploring the Absent Centre of Post-Conflict Democracy Assistance**

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## **What Democracy?**

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#### **Abstract**

Democracy assistance is at a crossroads. The backsliding of several post-conflict states from democracy to authoritarianism, or even to violent conflict, has prompted a serious revision of the merits of democracy assistance. It is contended that a lack of reflection on and consideration of the very values and assumptions that both practitioners and academics attach to democracy represents something of an ‘absent centre’ in our understanding of post-conflict democratisation; a situation that has precipitated a movement towards considering democracy more as a ‘product’ rather than as a ‘process’. It is asserted that it is only through exploring the assumptions inherent in democracy assistance programmes to post-conflict states that we can begin to take steps to make the process more coherent, more comprehensible and more sustainable for all the actors involved.

**Key Words:** Democratisation, Democracy, Peacebuilding, Post-Conflict

#### **Introduction**

Since the end of the Cold War, one of the most striking aspects to emerge in post-conflict peacebuilding has been the prime position assumed by democracy assistance. This focus has hinged on an unerring belief that democratic governance, provided through periodic and genuine elections, offers the most effective mechanism for managing and resolving societal tensions without recourse to violence.

In recent years though, this faith in democracy assistance to post-conflict states has dwindled considerably. Several gleaming examples of democratisation, such as Cambodia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, have proved less entrenched than first thought. Meanwhile, so-called interventions to bring democracy to Iraq and Afghanistan have been met with scepticism and resulted in an overall tarnishing of the concept of democracy and external efforts to assist democratisation. A loss of public faith in democracy assistance has been further compounded by a closer inspection of examples of democratic peacebuilding, where countries such as Angola, Rwanda and Liberia have all experienced a return to widespread violent conflict following initial democracy assistance efforts. The unfulfilled expectations of democracy assistance to post-conflict states has thus become a point of intense debate as academics and practitioners alike seek to enhance the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

Multiple studies have broached this topic with several authorities claiming that the emphasis on democratisation within peacebuilding has been skewed to such a degree that the outcome is usually only a pseudo-democracy; a regime that restricts the exercise of democratic freedoms, yet allows periodic multiparty elections. Furthermore, it has also been contended that although democratic states may be more peaceful, this is not necessarily true for *democratising* states which have tended to be more aggressive and war-prone.<sup>1</sup> There are also continuing arguments that specific pre-conditions, such as a certain level of GDP or the development of a middle-class, must be in place if democracy is to take root<sup>2</sup>; prerequisites that are often glaringly

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<sup>1</sup> Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, "Democratisation and the Danger of War," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995).

<sup>2</sup> For example: Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959). And

lacking in post-conflict societies. Finally, amongst those who believe democracy remains vital to peacebuilding, there is a growing acknowledgement that there has been too heavy a focus on elections and that more attention should be paid to civil society<sup>3</sup>, institution building<sup>4</sup> and, more recently, to the role of political parties.<sup>5</sup>

However, whilst the literature on democracy assistance to post-conflict states has mushroomed in recent years, very few writers have scrutinised the underlying assumptions that underpin the design and conduct of these operations. For this reason, although the deficiencies and assets of many recent post-conflict programmes have been examined extensively by social scientists, the normative component of democratic peacebuilding – that is to say, the very rationale and understanding behind the relationship between democracy and peace – has been neglected and remains something of an absent centre. What do *democracy* and *peace* mean to those who are designing and implementing democracy assistance programmes for states emerging from conflict? And what models or theories of democratisation, if any, do international agencies make use of in their efforts to assist democratic transition?

This article intends to provide insights to these questions in the following four sections. First, the strategic rationale behind democratic peacebuilding, comprising security, development and human rights components, is outlined. Second, it is contended that a specific *democracy as product* paradigm has become predominant in

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Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Krishna Kumar, "International Political Party Assistance: An Overview and Analysis," *Conflict Research Working Paper, Clingendael Institute, Netherlands* 33 (2004).

democracy assistance strategies. Third, the article highlights the limitations that are inherent in this *democracy as product* paradigm and suggest that these are influential in precipitating unfulfilled expectations of post-conflict democracy assistance. Finally, the article concludes by proposing the adoption of more participatory models of democracy – a *democracy as process* paradigm – as a means to increase the likelihood that international assistance will contribute positively to democratic consolidation and sustainable peace.

### **The Strategic Rationale of Post-Conflict Democracy Assistance**

The strategic rationale behind post-conflict democratic assistance is threefold; encompassing security, development and human rights justifications. A review of the key arguments in each of these domains will now be outlined

#### ***Security***

The relationship between democracy and security has been expounded on both the international and national levels and the connection has been embraced at the highest strata of peacebuilding. In 2000, for example, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan declared: “There are many good reasons for promoting democracy, not least – in the eyes of the United Nations – is that, when sustained over time, it is a highly effective means of preventing conflict, both within and between states.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kofi Annan, *Un Secretary General Kofi Annan's Closing Remarks to the Ministerial Meeting, 'Towards a Community of Democracies' Conference (2000 [cited October 2005])*; available from <http://www.democracyconference.org/kofiannan.html>.

It is on the international level that the primacy of democracy to post-conflict peacebuilding has received its strongest support with reference made typically to the so-called 'democratic peace theory.' This theory derives from one of the most striking results to emerge from empirical research on war and peace and posits that dyads of democratic states are considerably less likely to fight one another than dyads made up of non-democracies, or a combination of a democracy and a non-democracy.<sup>7</sup> Although research into this proposition has grown exponentially since the mid 1980s, the basis of the theory can be traced back to Immanuel Kant's 1795 essay, 'Perpetual Peace.' Kant contended that in democracies, those who pay for wars – that is, the public – are the ones who make the decisions, and are therefore understandably more cautious about commencing a war as they are the ones who ultimately have to foot the costs through both blood (fatalities) and treasure (taxes).<sup>8</sup> More recent explanations of the theory include arguments that democratic countries have internalised values of peaceful bargaining and conflict resolution which are externalised into their international relations,<sup>9</sup> that substantial trade links between democracies make war an economically crippling proposition,<sup>10</sup> and that democratic leaders avoid fighting wars because they fear it will damage their chances of staying in power.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs: Part 1 and 2," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12, no. 3-4 (1983)., and Nils Petter Gleditsch and Havard Hegre, "Peace and Democracy: Three Levels of Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 2 (1997). p.307

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, trans. M. Campbell (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1992). For a more recent version of this argument, see: Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). p.30

<sup>9</sup> Spencer R. Weart, *Never at War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett, "Assessing the Liberal Peace with Alternative Specifications: Trade Still Reduces Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 4 (1999).

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Bruno De Mesquita and Randolph M. Siverson, "War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 4 (1995).

Although the democratic peace theory has periodically been contested on the grounds of statistical significance,<sup>12</sup> what qualifies as a democracy,<sup>13</sup> and what qualifies as an international conflict,<sup>14</sup> it has proved remarkably robust over the decades. Several contemporary scholars, such as Tony Smith, maintain that “a democratic society operating under a market economy has a strong predisposition to peace”<sup>15</sup>, whilst many internationally peer-reviewed articles declare in their introductions that the majority of research now accepts the democratic peace theory as an empirical reality.<sup>16</sup> As Jack Levy writes, “the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything to an empirical law in international relations.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, in order to achieve a more peaceful international system, acceptance of the democratic peace theory suggests that the more democratic states that exist, the lower the chances of international violence.<sup>18</sup> This is a factor that should not be underestimated in post-conflict environments, and one only has to look at the ‘spill-over’ of internal conflicts in places such as Liberia, Sudan and Rwanda to understand the necessity of promoting regional peace zones if security is to prove sustainable.

Moreover, the reasoning behind the democratic peace theory has also influenced the assertion that democratic government is superior to other forms of government in positively managing internal security. Rudolph Rummel has

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<sup>12</sup> Joanne Gowa, *Ballots and Bullets: The Elusive Democratic Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Rosato, "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review* 97 (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Layne, "Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace," *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994).

<sup>15</sup> Tony Smith, "Democracy Resurgent," *Sea Changes*, no. 152 (1992). p.157

<sup>16</sup> See for example: David Kinsella, "No Rest for the Democratic Peace," *American Political Science Review* 99 (2005). and John M. Owen, "Democratic Peace Research: Whence and Whither?," *International Politics* 41, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>17</sup> Jack S. Levy, "Review: The Democratic Peace Hypothesis: From Description to Explanation," *Mershon International Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (1994).pp.661-662

<sup>18</sup> Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs: Part 1 and 2."

demonstrated that democracies are significantly less likely to experience domestic

disturbances such as revolutions, guerrilla warfare and civil war.<sup>19</sup> Rummel claims

this is because:

Social conflicts that might become violent are resolved through voting, negotiation, compromise, and mediation. The success of these procedures is enhanced and supported by the restraints on decision makers of competitive elections, the cross-pressures resulting from the natural pluralism of democratic... societies, and the development of a domestic culture and norms that emphasise rational debate, toleration, negotiation of differences, conciliation, and conflict resolution.<sup>20</sup>

The notion that democracy can bring domestic peace to a post-conflict state is supported by several other important writers. Samuel Huntington asserts that democracies “are not often politically violent” due to constitutional commitments which guarantee at least a minimal protection of civil and political liberties.<sup>21</sup> William Zartman argues that democracy “transfers conflict from the violent to the political arena”, by providing mechanisms to channel dissent and opposition peacefully, thus reducing the incentive to use violence.<sup>22</sup> This is endorsed by Hans Spanger and Jonas Wolff who emphasise that the openness and freedoms in democracies to express discontent and to protest circumvents the need for widespread violence. Moreover, the very articulation of discontent through the freedom of speech and freedom of press can act as an early warning system for the state to identify issues that may become

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<sup>19</sup> Rudolph J. Rummel, *Power Kills: Democracy as a Method of Nonviolence* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1997).p. 85

<sup>20</sup> Rudolph J. Rummel, "Democracy, Power, Genocide, and Mass Murder," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, no. 1 (1995).p.4

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991).p. 28

<sup>22</sup> I. William Zartman, "Changing Forms of Conflict Mitigation," in *Global Transformation in the Third World*, ed. Robert O. Slater, Barry M. Schutz, and Steven R. Dorr (Boulder: Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1993).p.327. See also: Luc Reyhler, "Monitoring Democratic Transitions," in *Peacebuilding: A Field Guide*, ed. Luc Reyhler and Thania Paffenholz (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2001). p.216



overly divisive and to respond accordingly.<sup>23</sup> Judith Large and Timothy Sisk, amongst many, have emphasised how democracies extend the protection of rights to minority groups,<sup>24</sup> which, according to Ted Gurr, “inhibits communal rebellion”<sup>25</sup>.

Finally, it has also been recently argued, to mixed reaction, that promoting democracy in post-conflict states can be a distinct and vital method in combating international terrorism. The theoretical argument is simple and attractive and rests on the belief that the disregard for political participation and civil liberties endemic in undemocratic and conflict-torn societies can serve as a breeding ground for international terrorists.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, it is considered that democracy lowers the costs of achieving political goals through legal means and, thus, deters groups from pursuing costly illegal terrorist activities.<sup>27</sup> The acceptance of this argument has been widespread in policy circles and is reflected in statements such as George W. Bush’s claim that democracy promotion is necessary “to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror.”<sup>28</sup> However, a closer examination of the empirical connection between terrorism and democracy illustrates that the relationship is much

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<sup>23</sup> Hans Joachim Spanger and Jonas Wolff, "Why Promote Democratisation? Reflections on the Instrumental Value of Democracy," in *Democracy: Europe's Core Value?*, ed. Marieke Van Doorn and Roel Von Meijenfheldt (Delft: Eburon, 2007). p.38

<sup>24</sup> Judith Large and Timothy D. Sisk, *Democracy, Conflict and Human Security: Pursuing Peace in the 21st Century* (Stockholm, Sweden: International IDEA, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflict* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993).p.138

<sup>26</sup> See: Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13 (1981)., Edward Newman, "Un Democracy Promotion: Comparative Advantages and Constraints," in *The Un Role in Democracy Promotion: Between Ideals and Reality*, ed. Edward Newman and Roland Rich (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Joe Eyerman, "Terrorism and Democratic States: Soft Targets or Accessible Systems," *International Interactions* 24 (1998), Jeffrey Ian Ross, "Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model," *Journal of Peace Research* 30 (1993).

<sup>28</sup> George W. Bush, *War on Terrorism Requires the Advance of Freedom* (5th March 2005 [cited 11th March 2009]); available from <http://www.uspolicy.be/Article.asp?ID=C2CE8581-CEFD-4EB3-99AC-392B38D0CA37>.

more complex and that it is probably too premature to confidently attribute any future reduction in international terrorism to the promotion of democracy overseas.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Development***

A second theoretical motivation lies in the relationship between democracy and socio-economic development. It was traditionally thought that democracy depended on development and that specific preconditions such as a large middle class or a certain level of per capita income were required before democracy could take root. However, in recent years, there has been a growing recognition that the relationship between development and democracy is much more interdependent. Amartya Kumar Sen has expressed this viewpoint concisely in his assertion that talk of whether a country is 'fit *for* democracy' is misplaced and should be replaced by an acknowledgement that countries become 'fit *through* democracy.' Democracy from this viewpoint becomes not the spoils of development but the means to develop and, by consequence, the means to peace.<sup>30</sup> This shift is particularly salient to post-conflict peacebuilding where democracy will often be attempted irrespective of conditional factors such as per capita income.

In 1989 the World Bank took one of the first widely noted steps in this direction, declaring that bad governance was a key factor in Africa's underdevelopment and stressing that private sector initiatives and market mechanisms

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<sup>29</sup> See: Quan Li, "Does Democracy Promote Transnational Terrorist Incidents?," in *Annual Meeting of International Studies Association* (Montreal, Canada: 2004)., F. Gregory Gause III, "Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005).

<sup>30</sup> Amartya Sen, "Democracy as a Universal Value," *Journal of Democracy* 10, no. 3 (1999): p.3.

“must go hand-in-hand with good governance.”<sup>31</sup> In subsequent years, the United States and many other bilateral donors followed suit and incorporated democracy as part of their overall development agendas.<sup>32</sup> The attitude towards the relationship between democracy and development is perhaps best expressed by an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) policy document, which stated:

It has become increasingly apparent that there is a vital connection between open, democratic and accountable systems of governance and respect for human rights, and the ability to achieve sustained economic and social development... this connection is so fundamental that participatory development and good governance must be central concerns in the allocation and design of development assistance.<sup>33</sup>

More recently, it has been argued that improved economic development can create a further peace dividend. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler have argued that the capacity to fund an insurgency is pivotal to explaining violent conflict and that financing a war is easier in regions with lower average incomes because the threshold of financial incentive for attracting recruits is much lower.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, a rise in per capita income provides a firmer tax base for post-conflict countries. James Fearon and David Laitin claim that a high per capita income is associated with higher financial, administrative, and police capabilities, a terrain more ‘disciplined’ by roads and agriculture, and a wider diffusion of state power. Such a societal context, it is argued, is hugely advantageous for proactively countering potential insurgencies and thus reducing the possibility of civil war.<sup>35</sup> Michael Mousseau also believes that a link

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<sup>31</sup> World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth. A Long-Term Perspective Study* (Washington World Bank, 1989). P. xii

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999) p.46.

<sup>33</sup> (OECD) Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Participatory Development and Good Governance, Development Cooperation Guidelines Series* (Paris: OECD, 1995). P.5

<sup>34</sup> Collier and Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War."

<sup>35</sup> Fearon and Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." p.10

exists between development, democracy and peace, and contends that it is the values inherent in a market economy that provide for democratic consolidation and a subsequent reluctance to resort to violence in international affairs.

If individuals in developed market economies tend to share the social and political values of exchange-based cooperation, individual choice and free will, negotiation and compromise, universal equity among individuals, and universal trust in the sanctity of contract, then individuals in developed market economies tend to share democratic values. The same market norms are incompatible with using military force in foreign affairs.<sup>36</sup>

Although several authors have noted that it must be a sustained development with a wide distribution of benefits if democracy is to endure,<sup>37</sup> the positive relationship between democracy and development has nonetheless become an established feature in both academic literature and policy circles. Indeed, the mainstreaming of democratisation into development strategies has occurred to such an extent that Thania Paffenholz and Luc Reyhler argue that ‘governance’ and ‘peace and conflict’ can now be viewed as two of the most important cross-cutting themes considered by development organisations.<sup>38</sup> This is a position shared by the UN, with former Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali proclaiming that “peace, development and democracy are inextricably linked.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mousseau, "Market Prosperity, Democratic Consolidation, and Democratic Peace," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 4 (2000). pp.480-481

<sup>37</sup> Ethan B. Kapstein and Nathan Converse, "Why Democracies Fail," *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (2008). p.66

<sup>38</sup> Thania Paffenholz and Luc Reyhler, *Aid for Peace: A Guide to Planning and Evaluation for Conflict Zones* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2007).p.118

<sup>39</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Democratization* (New York: United Nations, 1996). p.116

### ***Human Rights***

A final component of the rationale behind democratic peacebuilding can be found in the growing legal acceptance of democracy as a basic human right and an international norm that should be both respected and expected. The UN, in particular, has consistently sought to strengthen and promote democratic processes since the signing of the UN Charter in 1945. The UN position is clearly articulated in the UN Vienna Declaration of 1993:

Democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives. In the context of the above, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels should be universal and conducted without conditions attached. The international community should support the strengthening and promoting of democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the entire world.<sup>40</sup>

UN member states further demonstrated their commitment to democracy as a ‘universal value’ with the establishment of the UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) in 2005; founded with “the primary purpose to support democratisation throughout the world”<sup>41</sup> The normative position of the UN is augmented by several articles in international law, in particular Article 21 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights which states: “periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”<sup>42</sup> These rights are buttressed by Article 25 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which emphasises that elections must guarantee “the free expression of the will of the

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<sup>40</sup> United Nations, "Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action, a/Conf.157/23, 12," (1993).

<sup>41</sup> United Nations, *The United Nations Democracy Fund (U.N.D.E.F.)* (2005 [cited April 3 2009]); available from <http://www.un.org/democracyfund/XWhatIsUNDEF.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> UN Commission on Human Rights, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," (1948): Art 21

electors.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Thomas Franck has argued convincingly that democracy is fast becoming an international entitlement due to the evolution of an international system which increasingly only recognises the legitimacy of a state if it can demonstrate its coming to power by democratic means.<sup>44</sup> Examples of this can be found in the EU and OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) which are explicit in their support and promotion of democracy, both as a condition of membership and as a foreign policy priority.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, the OAS has made several declarations and agreements which commit members to promoting democratic consolidation and preventing backsliding. For example, the 1992 Washington Protocol provides for the expulsion of any state in which a democratic government has been overthrown.<sup>46</sup> Although, the position of democracy in international law is still to be fully enshrined – making it difficult to dispense with the term ‘emerging’ in describing its place in democracy assistance<sup>47</sup> – the connection is of sufficient strength to provide a further rationale for the promotion of democracy to post-conflict states.

### **The Rise of the ‘Democracy as Product’ Paradigm**

Beginning with external interventions in conflicts such as Angola, El Salvador and Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, post-conflict democracy assistance quickly

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<sup>43</sup> UNTS, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," (1976).: Art 25

<sup>44</sup> Thomas M. Franck, "The Emerging Right to Democratic Governance," *The American Journal of International Law* 86, no. 1 (1992). p.46

<sup>45</sup> See for example, in respect of the OSCE: CSCE, "Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference of the Human Dimension of the Csce," (1990). And for the EU: European Council, "Conclusions of the Presidency - Sn 180/93," (Copenhagen: 1993).

<sup>46</sup> Organization of American States, *Protocol of Amendments to the Charter of the Organization of American States: "Washington Protocol"* (1992 [cited 12th March 2009]); available from <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-56.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Roland Rich and Edward Newman, "Introduction: Approaching Democratization Policy," in *The Un Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideals and Reality*, ed. Edward Newman and Roland Rich (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2004).p.8

acquired a central and undisputed role within wider peacebuilding operations. Such an emphasis is evident in the very formulation of peace agreements, for example, the 1992 Chapultepec Agreements of El Salvador and the 2002 Global and All-Inclusive Agreement of the Democratic Republic of Congo. These agreements not only stress the role of democracy, but also affirm that popular elections will be held within a given timeframe as an illustration of a country's transition towards democracy and peace. This increasing demand for democracy assistance was supported by the creation of formal institutions. The Electoral Assistance Unit was established by the UN in 1991 whilst in 1990 the OSCE created a similar organ, the Office for Free Elections, with an understanding that "pluralistic democracy [is a prerequisite]... for progress in setting up the lasting order of peace, security, justice and co-operation."<sup>48</sup> The very naming of these institutions gives an early indication of the predominance that elections would gain within democracy assistance strategies.

The rise in democracy assistance to post-conflict states was both rapid and unprecedented. Previously constrained by Cold War geopolitics, the international community, and particularly the UN, was increasingly expected to aid democratic transitions in a range of post-conflict countries despite little existing experience with democracy assistance. Moreover, everyday media coverage of new outbreaks of conflict during the 1990s ensured that the international community was kept increasingly occupied with attempts to foster democratic futures in an ever-growing number of war-torn states.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> CSCE, "Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference of the Human Dimension of the Csce." *Supra* Note, Preamble

<sup>49</sup> Between 1989 and 1999, there were 14 major international peacebuilding operations. Each one involved the administration of elections.

The international community would inevitably find the new responsibility of democracy assistance challenging. However, the situation of assisting states emerging from conflict – states often with little experience of democracy – added further complexity to their task. Post-conflict democracy assistance is by its very nature a highly-charged, dynamic and often dangerous process. Operating in hostile environments, with limited infrastructure and under significant pressure to illustrate a positive move towards peaceful, democratic governance, practitioners face a daunting task. What is equally true, though, is that this atmosphere provides little space for reflection or a broader consideration of what type of democracy the international community might actually be encouraging. We are all too familiar with the career international workers who are preoccupied by their next posting, the desk officers who appear distant and insensitive to field realities, and the NGO workers who see international organisations and agencies as bureaucratic and ineffective. However, rarely is an explicit link made between action and the end goal of a specific type of democracy, or a consideration of the diversity inherent in differing discourses of democracy. Academics are also far from blameless, with a noticeable scarcity of efforts to translate research findings into tangible recommendations for policymakers.<sup>50</sup>

Without any serious theoretical engagement with the assumptions and values underlying democracy assistance, the practice has drifted to an imbalanced focus on what Richard Youngs has called ‘democracy as product.’ This paradigm invariably entails the promotion of “a particular institutional end-state of formal liberal

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example: Peter J. Schraeder, "Promoting an International Community of Democracies," in *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric Vs. Reality*, ed. Peter J. Schraeder (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002)., Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Perez-Linan, and Mitchel A. Seligson, "The Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990-2003," *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007).



democracy”<sup>51</sup>, which holds elections – the very embodiment of a formal product of democracy – alongside allied efforts to ensure that the voting process is free and fair at its core. Thomas Carothers, one of the leading authorities on democracy assistance, argues that election assistance “is the best-established, most visible, and often best-funded type of democracy related assistance.”<sup>52</sup> Whilst Youngs, a respected authority on European approaches to democracy assistance, has noted that although funds allocated solely for electoral assistance are gradually diminishing, this focus still dominates democracy assistance.<sup>53</sup> As Ho-Won Jeong explains, elections have become “the overriding objective under which all other international activities are subsumed.”<sup>54</sup>

This emphasis on the *ends* of democracy is not altogether surprising. Wary of becoming embroiled in costly, lengthy – and, at times, politically damaging – interventions, elections can provide a useful exit strategy for foreign organisations. Additionally, a donor preference for easily quantifiable, highly visible and politically attractive outcomes of democracy assistance programmes naturally lends itself to a focus on ‘democracy as product’ programmes and elections in particular.<sup>55</sup> For instance, it is much easier to assess the number of voters registered, election turnout, and number of polling staff trained than it is to measure levels of accountability, civic involvement and representation. Moreover, democracy assistance programmes have

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<sup>51</sup> Richard Youngs, "Democracy as Product Versus Democracy as Process," in *Democracy: Europe's Core Value?*, ed. Marieke Van Doorn and Roel Von Meijenfeldt (Delft: Eburon, 2007).p.68

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The Observers Observed," *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 3 (1997). p.18

<sup>53</sup> Youngs, "Democracy as Product Versus Democracy as Process." p.68 See also: William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, U.S. Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>54</sup> Ho-Won Jeong, *Peacebuilding in Postconflict Societies: Strategy & Process* (Boulder: Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005). p.103

<sup>55</sup> Gordon Crawford, "Promoting Democracy from without - Learning from within (Part I)," *Democratization* 10, no. 1 (2003).

traditionally been staffed by Western consultants, who may well be knowledgeable about how a consolidated democracy functions, but are unlikely to have experienced a democratic transition themselves, and as such are less appreciative of the dynamics and subtleties involved in the actual *process* of democratisation. Finally, the heavy emphasis placed, especially by the US, on democracy assistance as a means of national security for Western states rather than one of liberation for non-democratic states<sup>56</sup> is congruent with a mentality where democratisation is seen as a valued product to the West rather than a process to assist the livelihoods of those actually living in the targeted states.

### **The Limitations of Democracy ‘as Product’ Assistance**

Nevertheless, this focus on elections, and whether they are ‘free and fair’, has acquired an importance that has no sound basis in either democratic theory or post-conflict peacebuilding. As David Chandler has observed, “democracy and political autonomy are... seen as the end goal, rather than crucial aspects of the process of state building itself.”<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, elections can play an important role in post-conflict peacebuilding. The presence of international groups can boost public confidence that the political future of the country will be determined fairly and peacefully. Such enhanced confidence can, in turn, play a crucial role in mobilising domestic civil society groups

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<sup>56</sup> For a fuller discussion see: Laurence Whitehead, "Democratization with the Benefit of Hindsight: The Changing International Components," in *The Un Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideals and Reality*, ed. Edward Newman and Roland Rich (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2004), p.162

<sup>57</sup> David Chandler, "Back to the Future? The Limits of Neo-Wilsonian Ideals of Exporting Democracy," *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006). p.478 See also: Charles-Philippe David, "Does Peacebuilding Build Peace? Liberal (Mis)Steps in the Peace Process," *Security Dialogue* 30, no. 1 (1999).

and helping to convince other groups that participation in the democratic transition is preferable to civil disobedience or continued violence.<sup>58</sup> Additionally, international presence can provide much-needed domestic and international legitimacy to the election winners by verifying the credibility of the electoral process. Moreover, in post-conflict countries, elections do not only signal an opportunity for a new government to gain legitimacy, but also for the whole peace process to be legitimised. Peace agreements are the product of a few – usually armed – elites, which do not receive legitimisation from the wider public. As such, peace agreements can only be considered provisional and it is only at elections that the people have the opportunity to sanction the peace process.<sup>59</sup> A focus on elections can also assist wider post-conflict reconstruction by providing a useful ‘time-out’ from conflict; a window of opportunity in which conflict can be transformed peacefully under the watchful eye of impartial organisations.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, the focus on civilian rather than military issues can provide competing parties with incentives for cooperation and accommodation that bridge cleavages among different ethnic groups. Finally, the administration of genuine and professional elections can also help to develop a wider respect for the rule of law and encourage democratic habits such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and transparency.

Despite these advantages, democracy remains about much more than elections. However, the rapid rise of international democracy assistance and its concentration on the products of democracy, has seen the practice become anchored in electoral-based,

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<sup>58</sup> Hrair Balian, "Odih's Election Work: Good Value?," *Helsinki Monitor* 3 (2005): p.280

<sup>59</sup> Benjamin Reilly, "Electoral Assistance and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding - What Lessons Have Been Learned?," in *WIDER Conference on Making Peace Work* (Helsinki: 2004).

<sup>60</sup> Vikram K. Chand, "Democratisation from the Outside In: Ngo and International Efforts to Promote Open Elections," *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1997): p.551

minimalist definitions of democracy without due consideration of the theoretical implications. This minimalist model of democracy was famously described by Joseph Schumpeter as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”<sup>61</sup> Schumpeter is supported by Huntington who claims that a political system can be defined as democratic “to the extent that its most powerful collective decision-makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates clearly compete for votes and in which virtually all the adults are eligible to vote.”<sup>62</sup> Several other influential writers on democratisation, such as Robert Dahl and Adam Przeworski also favour the minimalist approach.<sup>63</sup> Their writings have had a significant impact on democracy theories and have assisted a general theoretical movement towards electoral-based, minimalist definitions of democracy, both within academia and foreign policy communities.

As the likes of Giovanni Sartori have shown, the minimalist conception’s emphasis on competitive selection does help to protect against tyranny; an aim fundamental to any democracy.<sup>64</sup> However, the prevailing acceptance of the ‘democracy as product’ approach as unquestionable and largely uncomplicated has become ever more contested.<sup>65</sup> Mark Duffield has noted how such an approach accommodates and coexists with continual instability and inequality in post-conflict

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Haroer & Brothers, 1947) p.269.

<sup>62</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* p.7.

<sup>63</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1971), Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*.

<sup>64</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (New Jersey: Chatam House Publishers, 1987) pp.156-63.

<sup>65</sup> See: Oliver P. Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

countries,<sup>66</sup> whilst Michael Pugh and Neil Cooper highlight the role of international organisations in perpetuating such a context through a blinkered focus on domestic causes of violence to the exclusion of their own role.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the danger of applying this narrow minimalist model is that it can act as a veneer which presents an appearance of democracy, but with very little substance to support the claim. As Susan Hyde notes, “although elections are a necessary condition for democratization, they do not guarantee the development of other democratic processes.”<sup>68</sup> The consequence, as noted earlier, is pseudo-democracies; regimes possessing a few procedural features of democracy whilst retaining significant elements of autocracy. The preservation of autocratic elements is at odds with the high expectations of democracy assistance and represents a scenario far removed from the lofty aims of policymakers. However, this is an outcome that is becoming increasingly common. Daniel Calingaert estimates that there are now up to sixty regimes in the world which “restrict the exercise of democratic freedoms, yet allow periodic multiparty elections.”<sup>69</sup> Ominously, Roland Paris has argued that these governments will often lack the institutional strength needed to limit political competition to peaceful means.<sup>70</sup> A claim supported by the research of Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder who have convincingly demonstrated that although democratic states may be more peaceful, this is not necessarily true for *democratising* states; those states who have

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<sup>66</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> Michael Pugh and Neil Cooper, *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004).

<sup>68</sup> Susan Dayton Hyde, "Explaining Internationally Monitored Elections: Foreign Democracy Promotion, Norm Development and the Domestic Consequences of International Intervention," in *Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association* (Chicago, Illinois: 2004): p.27

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Calingaert, "Election Rigging and How to Fight It," *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 3 (2006): p.138. This estimation is supported by Freedom House data which, in 2009, classified 62 countries as 'partly free'. See: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* (2009 [cited April 18 2009]); available from [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw09/FIW09\\_Tables&GraphsForWeb.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw09/FIW09_Tables&GraphsForWeb.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict*.

held elections but have yet to consolidate a democratic culture. Mansfield and Snyder explain that “in this transitional phase of democratisation, countries become more aggressive and war-prone, not less, and they do fight wars with other democratic states.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, we only have to look at the Balkans during the mid-1990s and Russia’s war in Chechnya to concur with Luc Reychler’s contention that ‘the devil is in the transition.’<sup>72</sup> Fareed Zakaria concurs, arguing that, despite the holding of elections, such governments should not be classed with the liberal democracies associated with the West, but rather as *illiberal democracies*, which produce tyranny rather than peace.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to the association with pseudo-democracies, minimalist conceptions are normatively antithetic to notions of peacebuilding and reconciliation. By stressing that democracy’s intention should be to “reduce the friction that occurs when individual freedom and statist power... touch”<sup>74</sup> – essentially a buffer, or a bargain, to prevent conflict – the minimalist school suggests a negative view of democracy which “permits us to tolerate conflict but not to transform it into cooperation.” Moreover, as Benjamin Barber notes, it presents a view of man who “is unable to live cooperatively with his fellow humans for a single good reason but [who] can live with them coercively for a dozen bad reasons.” This view imbues democratic theory with “a belief in the fundamental inability of the human race to live

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<sup>71</sup> Mansfield and Snyder, "Democratisation and the Danger of War," p.5.

<sup>72</sup> Luc Reychler, *Democratic Peace-Building & Conflict Prevention: The Devil Is in the Transition* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999).

<sup>73</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: Norton, 2004). See also: James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984) p.17-19.

at close quarters with members of its own species.”<sup>75</sup> This assertion of the need to keep men apart rather than to join them together is of fundamental variance with peacebuilding efforts to reconcile competing groups and foster an ownership of shared and collaborative governance. The damaging effects of this approach were all too obvious in 2008 with Kenya suffering from severe electoral violence in January and Georgia suffering from a debilitating conflict despite the promise of its recent Rose Revolution. Minimalist. ‘Democracy as product’ assistance on its own, therefore, does not accomplish the much fêted objectives of democratic peacebuilding.

### **Towards Democracy ‘as Process’ Assistance**

Arguably, the whole democracy assistance project can be considered patronising insofar that it implies a transfer of enlightened knowledge to those who lack the capacity or fundamental understanding to reach peaceful democratic governance themselves. However, as Oliver Richmond has indicated, the alternative of complete non-engagement is much less palatable.<sup>76</sup> Yet, this predicament is heightened because the solutions currently offered by democracy assistance often bear little relation to the lived realities of those seeking to reconstruct their society following violent conflict. This contradiction is increasingly recognised in the broader peacebuilding literature with John Paul Lederach, for example, arguing that peacebuilding must pay attention to stakeholders at a grassroots level as well as to elites.<sup>77</sup> Engagement with a variety of stakeholders is important, as within a given

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.21.

<sup>76</sup> Oliver P. Richmond, "Critical Research Agendas for Peace: The Missing Link in the Study of International Relations," *Alternatives* 32, no. 2 (2007). P. 268

<sup>77</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Publishing, 1997). See also: Wim Van Binsbergen, "Aspects of Democracy

conflict each actor will come from a different background and, as such, will see the conflict differently.<sup>78</sup> One of the core challenges of peacebuilding, therefore, is to create a social space where these contrasting perspectives can meet and where the actors can recognise their interdependency and negotiate a shared and mutually attractive peaceful future.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, as each of these viewpoints interact conflict is transformed from being the *product* of broken relationships to the *process* of negotiating a peaceful future through interdependent relationships, joint participation and dialogue.

However, although these sentiments of negotiation, toleration and rational debate are echoed in the strategic rationale for post-conflict democracy assistance, they are also attributes that are blatantly excluded from the minimalist models of democracy that have dominated international assistance strategies. Indeed, it is precisely the substantive qualities – the very characteristics that make democracy so appealing to peacebuilding – which are ultimately neglected; a disjuncture which can be said to represent the absent centre of post-conflict democracy assistance. Boutros-Ghali once stated that “democratic culture is the culture of peace fundamentally.”<sup>80</sup> Perhaps talk of a ‘participatory democratic culture’ would have been more accurate.

Indeed, if the true potential of democracy to peacebuilding is to be harnessed, the alternative is for democracy assistance organisations to embrace a ‘democracy as process’ approach that focuses on more participatory forms of governance through

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and Democratisation in Zambia and Botswana: Exploring African Political Culture at the Grassroots," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 13, no. 1 (1995). p.28

<sup>78</sup> See for example: Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>79</sup> Luc Reyckler and Anton Stellamans, "Peace Building Leaders and Spoilers," *Cahiers of Centre for Peace Research* 66, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>80</sup> Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Democratization*. p.8



greater collaboration with governments, political parties, the media, civil society organisations and academics.<sup>81</sup> From this perspective, democracy is not seen as something that can be achieved through a single event such as a successful election, but rather as an iterative and gradual process. As such, assistance efforts should be concentrated on improving the foundations of democracy including civic involvement, improvement of wider socio-economic conditions and the promotion of civil liberties. This also requires an acknowledgement that democratic development cannot simply be equated to any movement away from the initial chaos of a post-conflict state and that democracy assistance can not be evaluated effectively through quantitative indicators. As Gordon Crawford and Iain Kearton have suggested, donors should adopt more participatory forms of evaluation and make more use of the perspectives of domestic actors on external actions.<sup>82</sup> In a similar fashion, academics must embrace qualitative research into the interpretations, meanings and values attached to post-conflict democracy assistance. Indeed, one of the key challenges for democracy assistance practitioners and theorists alike is to not only to reconsider their own assumptions about democracy, but to explore how persons in the states they target perceive external efforts to assist democratisation.

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<sup>81</sup> Many contemporary theorists call for more participatory forms of democracy both at home and abroad, see: Barber, *Strong Democracy*, Jurgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy: Liberal, Republican, Procedural," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), David Held, "Cosmopolitan Democracy and the Global Order: Reflections on the 200th Anniversary of Kant's Perpetual Peace," *Alternatives* 20, no. 4 (1995), Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (New York: Verso, 2005), Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> Gordon Crawford and Iain Kearton, *Evaluating Democracy and Governance Assistance* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

Associating democracy more closely with themes of participation, citizenship and political activity is no easy task and important discussions remain to be held over the exact relationship between participatory elements (process) and political decision-making (product). This is fundamental and illustrates that democracy assistance predictably necessitates a balance between the processes and products of democracy; a balancing act that is ultimately dependent upon the country targeted. However, what is vital is that these questions receive the attention they deserve and are brought to the forefront of academic and practitioner thinking on the subject. The current lack of engagement with the values and assumptions that are attached to democracy by international organisations represents a debilitating absent centre of our understanding of post-conflict democratisation which has precipitated confusion over what exactly is being aimed for in a post-conflict country and, by implication, if this is indeed congruent with sustainable peacebuilding. Academics and practitioners should, therefore, take meaningful steps to explore the assumptions inherent in post-conflict democracy assistance programmes – both within the organisations and within the targeted states – so that steps can be taken to make the process more coherent, more comprehensible and more sustainable for all the actors involved.

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