

**‘Well, what can you expect?’:  
Donor officials’ apologetics for hybrid regimes in Africa**

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**Abstract**

Most sub-Saharan African countries are neither liberal democracies, nor fully authoritarian. Officials from Western governments that provide assistance to these ‘hybrid regimes’ often become apologists for their lack of democracy. Rather than cogently arguing why democracy promotion activities should not be a priority, such donor officials frequently claim either that their host country is more democratic than it actually is, or that it could not be any more democratic for the time being. Drawing on some 70 interviews with donor officials in three African countries – Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda – over a period of more than decade, this article examines numerous individuals’ common use of three methods to deflect criticism of the democratic credentials of their host countries: 1) focusing on election day, rather than the campaign and conditions as a whole; 2) setting the standard very low (don’t expect too much); and 3) setting a long time horizon (don’t expect it too soon). Perhaps equally important, the article also explores the various reasons why these donor officials make such excuses for authoritarian practices.

**Keywords:** democratization; elections; hybrid regime; illiberal democracy; authoritarianism; foreign aid donor; Kenya; Malawi; Rwanda

## Introduction

Donor officials frequently make excuses for the lack of democracy in the country where they are posted, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. In one sense, this is understandable, as donor governments and institutions may extol the virtues of democracy, but still have a significant number of reasons other than democracy promotion to work in less-than-democratic developing countries. Moreover, international actors cannot easily bring about democratization in a country.<sup>1</sup> Very often, other priorities will and arguably should prevail, including national or regional security, stability and economic growth, especially in countries recovering from violent conflict – even if there is no consensus on how best to sequence these goals.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, locally based donor officials rarely explain in a cogent manner why democracy promotion is not a top priority for their own government in their host country, nor do they frequently raise the inherent limits of external pressure or even convey frustration with the country's non-democratic practices. Instead, they often express sympathy for autocratic behaviour – and when they do so, they use a remarkably limited set of faulty arguments and clichés.

In this article, I ask how and why numerous donor officials try to explain away deficiencies in democratic governance in 'hybrid regimes' in sub-Saharan Africa (that is, countries that are neither fully democratic, nor outright authoritarian). I use the term *donor official* as convenient shorthand for representatives of Western countries' diplomatic and aid agency based in the African country in question. The term can also include the staff of multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank or United Nations agencies, though other than the European Union, few have explicit policies on promoting democracy per se. A key distinction between donors and donor *officials* must be kept in mind throughout the article. The former refers to Western governments or international institutions that make and sometimes break policies; the latter, to *individuals*, the employees of donor organizations who work in some capacity with the hybrid regime and whose functions include explaining and justifying their employer's policies to researchers or to the national and international media, i.e., for the public record. Though donor organizations and their policies are widely studied, donor officials themselves are not.

After a brief exploration of the notion of hybrid regimes and their prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa in general and in Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda specifically, this paper analyses the methods of casuistry many donor officials deploy to become apologists for regimes that regularly hold less-than-free-and-fair elections, systematically restrict civil and political freedoms, abuse human rights and otherwise exclude themselves from even the most minimalistic definitions of a procedural democracy. They do so by: 1) focusing on election day (free elections), rather than the campaign and conditions as a whole (fair elections), and ignoring civil and political rights more generally; 2) setting the standard very low (don't expect too much); and 3) setting a long time horizon (don't expect it too soon). I then examine factors that help explain why these donor officials are generally disinclined to be critical of the government of the country where they are posted. The main ones are: short postings with a steep learning curve; the difficulties of effective, coordinated action; career disincentives and concerns over the impact of criticisms on aid allocations; and the need of donor officials to feel good about their own work.

The findings draw heavily on interviews with some 70 donor officials from a range of Western governments posted in three African countries between 1997 and 2010. I am not

suggesting that such officials invariably behave as apologists. Many of them, in fact, demonstrate a great capacity for nuanced analysis of local politics and are indeed very fair in their assessment of their host government. There are also numerous valid reasons not to criticize publicly a host government. Private pressure in some instances might truly be more effective. Moreover, democratization need not and in fact should not always be the top donor priority in Africa or elsewhere. Nonetheless, rather than cogently argue why the hybrid nature of a regime is less important than other considerations, donor officials frequently resort to a small repertoire of faulty rationales to justify authoritarian practices and discredit valid criticism.

### **Hybrid regimes and the cases of Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda**

According to Freedom House, only 10 out of 48 Sub-Saharan African countries could be classified as ‘free electoral democracies’ in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Fewer still have experienced an alternation of power between political parties. Though one can certainly quibble with the exact count and classification of individual countries, a stark fact remains: the vast majority of African countries are neither liberal or consolidating democracies, nor straightforward autocracies, but rather ‘hybrid regimes’ somewhere between the two extremes of the continuum.<sup>4</sup> There is an extensive literature on the classification of hybrid regimes, in which scholars propose various terms to describe variants, including numerous types of democracy-with-adjectives and authoritarianism-with-adjectives.<sup>5</sup> The actual terminology matters little. This paper’s argument theoretically applies to all forms of hybrid regimes, despite the important variations observable in Africa, as it addresses apologetics for the absence of freer, more liberal democracy. The countries need only have some form of multi-party election for the argument to potentially apply.

This paper focuses on three countries: Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda. Together, they illustrate the full range of hybrid regimes, from electoral authoritarianism (Kenya 1992-2002 and Rwanda since its first post-conflict elections in 2003) to illiberal democracy (Kenya 2003-2007), with intermediary stages (Malawi since its founding elections in 1994), as well as a confounding case of power-sharing (Kenya since 2008). They all claim legitimacy derived from multi-party elections, though none can be considered a liberal democracy (or even clearly headed in that direction), nor is any an outright authoritarian regime (one-party state or military dictatorship).

I have made between two and seven research trips to each of these countries between 1997 and 2010, during which I interviewed donor officials on, among other things, the nature of the regime and their relations with it. The donor officials’ statements I cite below are from semi-structured interviews I held with them in their country of posting.<sup>6</sup> Not all of my interviews with Western officials were designed to address these issues directly, so I do not have an equal amount of data on the same themes from the three countries. Still, the consistency in donor officials’ discourse in those three countries suggests that my findings are much more broadly applicable, regardless of the variant of the hybrid regime, the period being discussed, or the country of origin of my interlocutors.

Since the early 1990s, the three countries have been hybrid regimes, though they may have moved one way or the other along the continuum from authoritarianism to democracy. The reasons they cannot be considered procedural democracies, including unfair elections and the lack of respect for basic civil and political rights, have been chronicled in a large number of scholarly works, a few of which I cite below, as well as reports by reputable international human rights organizations (such as Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and Amnesty

International) and local NGOs, which I do not cite for lack of space. Here, I merely try to illustrate how these countries constitute hybrid regimes.

### *Kenya*

From the legalization of multi-partyism in 1991, through the rigged 1992 and 1997 elections, right up to the opposition finally winning in 2002, Kenya was a liberalized electoral authoritarian regime.<sup>7</sup> Though the former single-party regime had permitted opposition parties to form, it did not allow them to operate freely or hold campaign rallies across the country. It intimidated and disenfranchised voters, not least by state-induced violence that killed almost 2,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands more between 1991 and 1998, almost all of whom belonged to ethnic groups that generally supported the opposition, but lived in zones dominated by the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU).<sup>8</sup> After the opposition National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) came to power in early 2003, Kenya could more accurately be labelled an illiberal democracy.<sup>9</sup> Since the disputed election of 2007 and the 2008 power-sharing agreement – that ended the crisis and accompanying violence but undermined the notion of justice and subverted democratic procedures<sup>10</sup> – it now is particularly hard to be clear on what Kenya has become exactly and some have described the result as ‘the politics of collusion’.<sup>11</sup> Regardless, the Kenyan government has clearly been a hybrid regime for the duration of the period discussed here, though the country’s new constitution, approved in a referendum in 2010, now contains additional checks and balances that could curb some remaining authoritarian practices.

### *Malawi*

Malawi quickly transitioned from one of Africa’s most authoritarian regimes to a multi-party democracy where the opposition won the ‘founding’ elections in 1994. Subsequent elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009, however, were somewhat free but rather unfair and returned the incumbent president or party to power. The ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) showed little commitment to democratic principles in the 1999 and 2004 elections, with high levels of intimidation prevailing,<sup>12</sup> constituting at least an illiberal democracy. The legitimacy of the 2009 elections has also been contested, notably for the state-owned media’s bias in favour of the incumbent.<sup>13</sup> However, as it is not clear if the electoral results would have been significantly different if the playing field had been more level, it is debatable whether multiparty Malawi is or has been an ‘electoral autocracy’, and how close it is to being an illiberal democracy. Its status as a hybrid regime, however, is difficult to contest.

### *Rwanda*

Rwanda was a dictatorship from independence from Belgium in 1962 until the 1994 genocide. The 1993 accords, which temporarily ended a civil war, installed a transitional power-sharing government, but plans for multi-party elections were aborted by the genocide.<sup>14</sup> After the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from its base in Uganda and ended the genocide, it set up a RPF-led coalition government. Presidential elections were held in 2003, but the opposition’s main contenders were either imprisoned or forced into exile, giving the incumbent Paul Kagame a staggering – and hardly credible – 95% of the vote.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. State Department’s annual report to Congress cites international observers’ findings that these

elections ‘were marred by numerous serious irregularities... and fraud. There were also numerous credible reports that during the 2003 presidential and legislative campaigns, opposition candidates and their supporters faced widespread harassment and intimidation, including detention’.<sup>16</sup> The scenario has been remarkably similar for the 2010 presidential elections, in which Kagame won 93% of the votes, according to official figures.<sup>17</sup>

The ruling party does not tolerate criticism, be it by opposition parties, NGOs or the media. Critics’ organizations are shut down and they themselves are silenced, imprisoned or exiled, frequently accused of the crimes of ‘divisionism’ or ‘genocide ideology’ (an almost Orwellian thoughtcrime).<sup>18</sup> The crackdown that preceded the 2010 presidential elections brought increased international attention to growing repression, though donors remain loath to criticize publicly the government, which does not hesitate to play the ‘genocide guilt card’.<sup>19</sup> One official from a Western government described Rwanda as having ‘a one-party system with aspects of democracy’.<sup>20</sup> Rwanda may thus be classified as a hegemonic electoral authoritarian regime, rather than an illiberal democracy.

## **Donor apologetics**

Donor officials working with the governments of Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda generally have good relations with them and, as a result, often downplay the deficiencies of these regimes. Donor officials sometimes thus become apologists for partner governments that do not meet their self-professed democratic norms. They do so in at least three major ways. First, their assessment of the quality of the multi-party elections focuses primarily on election day, stressing order and compliance with procedures, to the detriment of often decidedly unfair campaign conditions and the violation of basic civil and political rights. Second, they use ad hoc standards that are far lower than international norms of free-and-fair elections. Third, they invoke the need for more time and patience, asserting that the country is making its way to a democratic destination as fast as it can, ignoring evidence of movement in the wrong direction and that a long time horizon is not always necessary. The first two approaches involve overstating the country’s democratic credentials, while the third argues that the country could not democratize any further for the time being.

Remarkably, even though donor organizations have embraced democracy promotion to different extents, both over time (as a result of learning, as well as changing circumstances and priorities) and compared to each other, and even though their relationships with the three countries analyzed here also varied greatly, the discourse of the numerous apologists among the 70 donor officials I interviewed is surprisingly consistent across time and space. For that reason, I make no particular distinction based on which donor government or organization officials work for, in which African country they are posted, nor the year in which the comments were made. Below, I explore in turn each of the three forms of casuistry, beginning with the privileging of the polls themselves and the relative disregard of the campaign conditions.

### ***1) Focus on election day***

As all hybrid regimes depend on some degree of electoral competition to legitimize their rule, elections are key to the identification of procedural democracies. The belief that good elections are sufficient to constitute a democracy is known as the ‘electoralist fallacy’.<sup>21</sup> What many donor

officials appear to be prone to forgetting – or choose to underplay – is that elections may be free on election day, but take place under patently unfair general conditions and thus fail the test. Donor assessments of elections tend to focus primarily on the vote itself at the expense of the fairness of campaign conditions and broader civil and political rights.

Typically, these donor officials echo electoral observers' emphasis on how voters queued in an orderly fashion, often for hours under a blazing sun. (Do they expect Africans to rush the polling station rather than form a line?) Such commendations on behaviour at the polls and on the day of the election distract from the equally crucial issue of the fairness of the vote.<sup>22</sup> No matter how impeccable the voting procedure, the count and the reporting of results, an election may fail the fairness test before voting even begins. For instance, the ruling party may systematically interfere with voter registration so that the electoral rolls disenfranchise opposition supporters or allow dead or non-existent people to vote for the incumbent; it can deliberately use gerrymandering and disproportionate constituency sizes in its own favour; it may prevent opposition parties from having meaningful access to the media or from campaigning, including holding rallies; it may prevent individual opposition politicians from filing their candidacy papers or reject them arbitrarily; it may harass, threaten or detain opposition candidates and supporters, and even resort to 'ethnic cleansing'. This list is not exhaustive, but all of these techniques have been used in at least one of the three countries being studied here.<sup>23</sup>

Donor officials often shift the blame for subpar elections from the ruling party to a divided opposition or an immature 'tribalist' electorate. If all opposition parties had united behind a single presidential candidate, the argument goes, electoral results suggest that they would have prevailed through a democratic contest. What these donor officials tend to ignore is that, had the elections been any closer, the ruling party had the means to make sure that the count would have been in its favour anyway – or that it could have prevented a transition through unconstitutional means. The 'tribalist' epithet evokes an understanding of Africans and more specifically African voters as identifying primarily with their ethnic group, which they let dictate their voting behaviour instead of policy preferences – 'tribalism' as the cause, rather than an effect, of the political elite's neopatrimonial strategies that undermine democracy.

Most of my discussions with donor officials in Kenya took place in 1998, soon after President Daniel arap Moi, in power since 1978, had won his second multi-party election. At the time, almost all the Kenyans I interviewed, whether working in academe, for NGOs or for the private sector, believed that there was no way Moi would have allowed his party, KANU, to be defeated. However, only a couple of donor officials out of the 20 I interviewed agreed with this assessment.<sup>24</sup> Among those who did not, one Western diplomat asserted that the election results 'confirmed that Kenya is a tribal society and no one can put together a better coalition than KANU'.<sup>25</sup> A former Western official stated that, 'The opposition could have won in '92 if it had not split' because KANU was caught off-guard.<sup>26</sup> However, she recognized that in 1997 KANU officials were better prepared, stating that they 'wouldn't have accepted the results because the stakes were too high. There would have had a self-coup'.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, another Western diplomat recognized that KANU's four-seat majority in parliament may not have been legitimate, but argued that it was 'meaningless because, had it been any less, they [KANU officials] could have bought a few MPs'<sup>28</sup> – as if that made the election rigging any more acceptable.

Despite these admissions, most donor officials – and many Kenya scholars – argued that the Kenyan opposition threw the elections by splitting the vote. However, as recognized above and argued in greater detail elsewhere, KANU had the means and the will to win, even if the

opposition had formed a united front in 1992 and 1997.<sup>29</sup> In both cases, the divided opposition simply rendered additional measures unnecessary. The fact that the Kenyan opposition was far more united in 2002 helps explain its victory, but KANU's implosion over who would lead the party after Moi retired was the crucial factor.<sup>30</sup> By adopting a specious argument, based on the hypothetical possibility of a firmly united opposition's supposed capacity to win, numerous donor officials minimize the importance of the ruling party's abuses and apportion a significant amount of blame to the victims instead, both opposition politicians and the electorate. This contributes to a weakening of the criteria for assessing elections and democratic behaviour, the subject of the next section.

## 2) *Set the bar very low*

Even if elections cannot be said to be free and fair, many donor officials regularly invoke reasons why they are still 'good enough'. Like international election observers, as Thomas Carothers notes, they 'sometimes take the attitude, "Well, what can you expect?"'.<sup>31</sup> Just as Séverine Autesserre describes donor officials in Democratic Republic of Congo as viewing the country as inherently violent, which prevents them from taking more proactive conflict resolution measures,<sup>32</sup> so, too, seem some donor officials' 'frames' regarding ethnicity in Africa to filter their perceptions and limit their actions in the area of democracy. Some donor officials' understanding of Africans as primarily 'tribal', including the example cited above, naturalizes the ethnically based neopatrimonial behaviour of African political elites as almost insurmountable impediments to democratization, rather than something that could change over time – or indeed something that the donors themselves can actually foment, as one donor official explicitly recognized.<sup>33</sup> A large number of donor officials repeatedly downplay concerns regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms and the minimum standards of democracy one should expect in Africa, despite evidence from elsewhere in Africa that high standards of free-and-fair elections and democracy can be reached.

Instead, these donor officials emphasized the achievement of stability, security and order and the (usually exaggerated) spectre of chaos and civil war, often citing a favourable comparison with the country's neighbours and its history of conflict.<sup>34</sup> In Rwanda, a remarkable number of Western officials, while recognizing the authoritarian nature of the Rwandan regime, told me something to the effect that 'At least they [the Rwandans] are not killing each other anymore' or 'Things are far better here than next door in the Democratic Republic of Congo'. With a bar that low, the Rwandan government enjoys almost complete *carte blanche*.

Many donor officials whom I interviewed in all three countries repeatedly fell back on arguments that the government in question simply lacked capacity or that the abuses were not sufficient to warrant antagonizing governments. In 1997, for instance, a Western aid official in Malawi told me, 'We have to work with governments, not against them. Some countries deserve the hard line; Malawi is not one of them.' He recognized the regime's shortcomings, but felt that they were minor: 'Donors tolerate [government] weaknesses, but are not unnecessarily soft on them'.<sup>35</sup>

A Western ambassador, while recognizing the importance of democracy in bilateral relations, suggested that donors should not raise issues of democracy at all: 'Democracy is why [my country] is strongly supporting Malawi. Donors are not to play a watchdog role, even if domestic checks and balances are very weak. [Our] role is to assist Malawians in ways that they request.'<sup>36</sup> This of course fails to problematize which Malawians get to make this request – top-

level government officials, presumably the president or cabinet ministers – and how legitimate and representative their views are. It is hard to imagine an autocratic government requesting donor pressure for democratization.

One unusually critical Western aid official in Malawi told me that Western diplomats grew ‘complacent’ after the first democratic elections in 1994, that ‘Donors rested on their laurels’ and ‘didn’t allow criticism of the government until [an] issue surfaced’ that was ‘too glaring’ to ignore.<sup>37</sup> Another made the same point using almost the same terms: ‘Donors are sitting on their laurels till something really bad happens’.<sup>38</sup> This was however contradicted by a diplomatic official of the same Western government as the first aid official, who claimed that ‘Donors are doing as much as they can to encourage democratic survival.’

In Kenya, numerous donor country officials invoked various forms of feeble reasoning to legitimize the deeply flawed 1997 elections. The two most common clichés were ‘the elections were better than last time’ and ‘it was a step in the right direction’. For instance, a Western embassy official in Kenya made both of these points when he argued that ‘The ’97 elections were better than the ’92 ones, so we are moving in the right direction’.<sup>39</sup> Jon Abbink has called the expression ‘a step in the right direction’, when used to endorse ‘faulty’ elections, ‘one of the worst most worn-out metaphors in this field’.<sup>40</sup> An official from another Western embassy used that exact cliché to describe the ’97 elections.<sup>41</sup> The British high commissioner similarly called the elections ‘a further step in Kenya’s development towards greater democracy’, even if they did not meet ‘normal democratic standards’.<sup>42</sup> Rachel Hayman identifies a similar donor consensus in Rwanda: ‘Although Rwanda is not considered to be ideal with regard to democracy, it is still viewed as going in the “right direction”’.<sup>43</sup>

Though the observations may be accurate, this type of argument represents a clear shift of the goal posts, since the international standard is free-and-fair elections (admittedly hard to define), not somewhat more democratic elections than the previous ones.<sup>44</sup> They also give the impression of the inevitable forward march of democratization. In 2003, a Western diplomat expressed great optimism for Kenya’s democratic future, since ‘Each election gets better. Institutions are stronger: the Electoral Commission, NGOs, etc.’ – even though he recognized that the opposition’s victory was due to numerous last-minute defections of high-level KANU officials. This, he admitted, prevented the re-emergence of ‘ethnic clashes’ similar to those that had accompanied the last two elections: ‘Had the vote been any closer, there would have been more violence, shenanigans’.<sup>45</sup> The closeness of the vote in 2007 and the collapse of the Electoral Commission triggered the massive violence that once again shook Kenya, directly contradicting his scenario of ever-improving elections and ever-stronger democratic institutions.<sup>46</sup>

A Western diplomat recognized in 1998 that Kenya was in many ways ‘moving back to ’91-’93 instead of moving ahead’, yet simultaneously maintained that ‘With the ’97 elections, democracy in Kenya was consolidated. It is now the only game in town. Moi was freely re-elected without massive rigging. His presidency is legitimate, even if KANU’s majority in parliament is not’.<sup>47</sup> That he made the latter remark on the record was surprising, not because it was not true – the donors’ internal joint election observation report documented that finding – but because donor officials had actually deleted any reference to that from the publicly released version, choosing to suppress the evidence.<sup>48</sup> As Carothers notes, this kind of ‘diplomatic massaging’ of technical reports is common.<sup>49</sup> Another embassy official argued self-servingly that the lack of objections in the local media justified donor inaction.<sup>50</sup>

A Western consultant who wrote election observation reports for a Western donor country stated that Kenya’s 1992 elections ‘were obviously not free and fair’, but in 1997 KANU had learned that:

they did not need to be so draconian. The playing field was very unlevel, but there was not as much vote-stealing as most people think. Moi would have won the presidential elections anyway. The opposition could have won 21 [additional] seats if it hadn’t split the vote. Even with half of those, the opposition would have majority in parliament.

When I asked if KANU would have allowed that, she answered, ‘No, they would have fiddled with the count and added [stuffed ballot] boxes’. Even if not free and fair, she still considered the 1992 and 1997 elections ‘acceptable’.<sup>51</sup> This example perfectly illustrates the shift in goals from free-and-fair elections to elections deemed ‘good enough’ for a large number of donor officials. Very often, as I argue in the next section, they hypothesize that, regardless of current imperfections, the country is not able to be more democratic at present, elections will keep improving in quality and over time democracy will take root.

### ***3) Set a very long time horizon***

Cautioning against impatience with the slow pace of democratization in Africa, Western officials often invoke the well-worn cliché that ‘it took democracy 500 years to take root in Europe’ – even if it is unclear to what and whose 500-year period they are referring.<sup>52</sup> Scholars such as Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl argue that new democracies will not reproduce most European democracies ‘gradual historical progression’, but rather ‘live in “compressed time”’ and leapfrog over the stages that their predecessors went through.<sup>53</sup> There is no *a priori* reason to believe that African countries will require centuries, or even decades, to democratize – just as capitalism did not take centuries to develop elsewhere just because that was its initial gestation period in Western Europe.

Nonetheless, while espousing the ideals of democracy promotion, numerous donor officials constantly repeat that ‘democratization takes time’. Of course, one cannot expect democracy to emerge fully formed, like Athena out of her father’s head. In most cases, it will advance in fits and starts or fall prey to resurgent authoritarianism. Democratization does indeed take time. Moreover, according to what Carothers calls the ‘developmental approach’ to democracy assistance, many development actors adopt a vision of democracy that

encompasses concerns about equality and justice and the concept of democratization as a slow, iterative process of change involving an interrelated set of political and socioeconomic developments. It favors democracy aid that pursues incremental, long-term change in a wide range of political and socioeconomic sectors, frequently emphasizing governance and the building of a well-functioning state.<sup>54</sup>

That is a legitimate argument to make, albeit a debatable one. It should not be invoked, however, to justify inattention to the democracy and governance field, nor should it be used an excuse for donor officials to justify blatant autocratic abuses by self-professed democrats.<sup>55</sup>

Western officials often repeated arguments to me to the effect of ‘It is too early to tell if the problem is a lack of capacity or of will’ or ‘you have to give the government a chance’, regardless of which country we were discussing, even if the country’s poor record could be

clearly established, and no matter how many ‘chances’ the government had already been given – or even if conditions were moving in the wrong direction, as is mostly the case in Malawi since 1994 and Rwanda after 2003, as well as Kenya in 1998-99 and arguably since 2008. Despite successful ‘electoral revolutions’ elsewhere, to borrow the term from Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik,<sup>56</sup> an aid official in Kenya told me in 1998 that one had ‘to think of small steps that take time, not everything-or-nothing, immediately. They must have incremental change because they do not have political support for more radical change’.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes Western officials invoked the lack of an alleged prerequisite to describe the quasi-futility in promoting democracy. A certain level of education or a sizeable middle class, one Western ambassador told me, was ‘necessary in my experience’.<sup>58</sup> This may have satisfied Seymour Martin Lipset a half century ago,<sup>59</sup> but hardly a scholar of democracy since then believes that there are such prerequisites. Even if certain conditions may make the survival of democracy more probable, including the ones the ambassador mentioned, democracies can emerge and potentially survive anywhere.<sup>60</sup> In this debate, however, that fact and the examples of successful democratization in Benin, Ghana and Mali were clearly incompatible with his conception of African countries as structurally or ‘naturally’ authoritarian, rendering attempts to promote democracy premature in his view. Setbacks seem just to confirm donor officials’ belief that ‘Africa is not ready for democracy’, on which authoritarian rulers can capitalize.

In Malawi, a donor official informed me that, ‘We must look ahead 30-40 years to a viable middle class, [in order to] to improve prospects for democracy’.<sup>61</sup> I was also told that ‘democratization is a process that takes time... We cannot expect immediate results’.<sup>62</sup> In the meantime, instead of harping on insufficiencies, one should have faith in quasi-inevitable improvements: ‘Progress will come over the long term. It is not always visible. Institutions will get stronger’.<sup>63</sup> As if authoritarianism could never return, several Western officials presented the problem as mainly being a lack of experience. One diplomatic official stated, ‘The government is new at the [democratic] system, sometimes [government officials] must unlearn old ways’. Donor officials’ efforts were hampered by the lack of ‘governmental capacity to absorb more’. In line with a long tradition of Westerners infantilizing Africans, he compared the Malawian government to a ‘little kid in a candy store’, stating that ‘it couldn’t define exactly what it wanted’ and that there ‘was a lot of learning on the job’. He provocatively added, ‘Maybe we should even pare back to make [democratization] more manageable, but donors won’t’.<sup>64</sup> While recognizing that, given the structural weaknesses of the parliamentary opposition and civil society, ‘We [donors] are the checks and balances’, many donor officials felt that ‘Malawi is a young democracy and therefore shouldn’t be punished’.<sup>65</sup>

In Rwanda, one donor official not only raised the cliché of the 500 years Europe required to democratize, but also warned against donors imposing democratization prematurely. She suggested that the RPF government was right to restrict democracy and that Rwandans should not be allowed to vote freely, as they would not mature enough to make responsible decisions: ‘It is not wise to have a full democracy, [the Rwandan] people are not used to it. It would allow extremists to get the upper hand. They would have a lot of appeal. The wounds are too fresh’.<sup>66</sup> Another Western diplomat also invoked the country’s post-conflict status: ‘We must be realistic about how open the country can be 13 years after a genocide’. Though he suspected that the government ‘would not allow a count that would show RPF losing’, he still hoped the dominant RPF would ‘open [political] space’.<sup>67</sup> The trend in the past few years, however, has been in the opposite direction.

Donor officials' are correct that democratization often takes a long time. Nonetheless, the conviction held by many of them that a very distant time horizon is always required flies in the face of successful experiences of democratization elsewhere in Africa, despite the initial lack of supposed prerequisites. Concretely, this translated into and explained their acceptance of authoritarian government practices. Having illustrated *how* donor officials justify working with hybrid regimes and justify their undemocratic ways, I now turn to the question *why* they do so.

### **Donor officials' motivations**

A significant number of scholars have explored why donor governments, international organizations and election observers choose to endorse what Judith Kelley calls 'D-minus elections' (i.e., the lowest passing grade possible) and discard concerns for democratic governance.<sup>68</sup> Many point to priorities more important to donor governments and multilateral institutions than democratization, most notably economic reform, political stability and security,<sup>69</sup> the latter being especially important to donors in the post-September 11 era. Compliance with donor preferences – even if temporary or merely promised – usually wins governments donor leniency when it comes to political conditionality, though donor behaviour is far from consistent in this matter.<sup>70</sup> Carothers notes that the US generally pursues more aggressive democracy promotion when its relations with a country are poor, while it adopts a 'highly indirect, nonconfrontational approach to democracy aid' with countries with which it enjoys more positive relations.<sup>71</sup> In a similar vein, Laurence Whitehead observes that 'Western democracies attempt to celebrate the progress achieved in the countries closest to their control, and to castigate the political deficiencies of those regimes they disapprove of for other reasons', all the more since 2001, while Kelley finds that donors are more lenient on countries to which they provide large amounts of foreign aid.<sup>72</sup>

Few scholars, however, have examined why so many donor *officials* – as individuals and not merely conduits of their government's policy – are so quick to justify the undemocratic nature of the country where they are posted. Of course, rather than being ill-informed or naïve, many officials could simply be toeing their employer's line on foreign policy priorities and the need to avoid sullyng the host government's reputation, regardless of personal beliefs.<sup>73</sup> Still, not all donor officials are uncritical mouthpieces for their governments and they do have a certain degree of autonomy. Nonetheless, many go to great lengths, mobilizing implausible arguments and silly clichés, to argue that a country is more democratic than critics contend it is or that no greater degree of democracy is possible in the short and medium term – rather than recognize that other donor priorities (security or economic reform, for example) actually are more important than democracy promotion, even if that is what one can conclude from an analysis of donor policies.

In many African countries, domestic actors such as the media or civil society organizations are relatively weak, often deliberately kept so by autocratic regimes. In such cases, donor officials constitute the main checks and balances on government, whether they embrace that role or not. Especially under such circumstances, these officials' behaviour matters, including their public pronouncements. Donor officials become actors in the domestic politics of the country where they are posted.<sup>74</sup> Their ostensible belief that further democratization is not desirable or even possible can, like a self-fulfilling prophecy, make it less likely to take place, as autocratic leaders can exploit such statements to their advantage.

I offer here four reasons, based on my interaction with donor officials, which largely explain why they frequently make facile excuses for democratic shortcomings. First, embassies and aid missions tend to have very short memories, mainly due to the relatively short postings of their officials. The typical tour of duty lasts two to four years. Hardly any international staff members will have been present for more than one presidential election in his or her country of posting, since they are typically held every five years. This makes it much harder to witness first-hand a pattern of abuse or track how the situation may be worsening. A succession of new officials are often inclined to favour ‘giving the government a chance’ and ‘the benefit of the doubt’. Of course, careful research could go a long way to provide the necessary background and many officials actually do have a nuanced understanding of the political situation, but the exigencies of ‘hitting the ground running’ at the new posting and meeting urgent deadlines often preclude spending a lot of time seeking out and reading background information. Thus commonly held clichés can replace more historically informed political analysis.

Second, it is easier to tolerate abuses than to make systematic efforts to prevent them. Unilateral action is, in most cases, unlikely to have an important impact. Although donor officials do talk to each other, as suggested by their shared clichés, donor coordination is a difficult and time-consuming task. Donor officials often disagree amongst themselves on the diagnosis, prognosis and recommended action. A consensus might never be possible. There can also be disagreement between the aid and diplomatic wings of the same donor government. In Malawi, for instance, a Western aid official criticized the ambassadors and high commissioners for being ‘unwilling to address the issues head on’.<sup>75</sup>

Third, career incentives in the foreign service and aid agencies discourage officials from ‘rocking the boat’. It is also the path of least resistance. Donor officials earn rewards, including promotion, by ‘getting the job done’, not creating diplomatic incidents or worsening relations with the host government by condemning elections or the lack of democracy rights. Kenyan presidents Moi and Kibaki and Rwandan president Kagame have publicly upbraided several ambassadors, most often the British high commissioner in the case of Kenya, while the Rwandan government has closed the French embassy and expelled a Swedish UN official for publishing a report that it considered too critical. Donor officials therefore prefer to discuss sensitive matters in private and engage in ‘quiet diplomacy’.<sup>76</sup> It is no coincidence that Smith Hempstone, the ‘rogue’ US ambassador who played an important role in Kenya’s return to multi-partyism, was a political appointee and not a career diplomat, sometimes ignoring instructions from his boss back in Washington, DC.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, Sir Edward Clay, best remembered for his condemnation of corrupt Kenya politicians, whose ‘gluttony causes them to vomit all over our shoes’, only made such a harsh public statement during his last year as British high commissioner to Kenya, his final posting before retiring from his country’s diplomatic corps.<sup>78</sup>

Such cases are rather exceptional. More typically, a Western aid official in Malawi described her country’s bureaucrats as being ‘stuck in the rut of spending allocations’.<sup>79</sup> Another Malawi-based official from different Western country confirmed that, ‘Concerns over disbursement rates do influence decisions and make [my government] more tolerant in the D/G [democracy and governance] area’.<sup>80</sup> In Rwanda, most donor officials prefer to keep working in other sectors, where they feel they can achieve concrete development results, than make democratization a priority.<sup>81</sup>

At times, such concerns can make a Western country’s aid officials act as stronger apologists for hybrid regimes than its embassy staff. I noticed this in Rwanda for one of the most important donors. In Kenya, Western aid officials told their consultant ‘tone down the

statements’ in her election observation report ‘on how the elections were not free and fair, so that [the aid agency] would not have its funding reduced’ and jeopardize its ‘good programs with NGOs’.<sup>82</sup> This partly explains why, as mentioned above, her report deemed the elections ‘acceptable’, even if they fell demonstrably short of free and fair. This phenomenon occurs elsewhere, as well, including using some of the same language. Carothers notes that, in ‘important transitional elections’, embassy officials from major donor countries ‘often attempt to persuade observers to tone down their criticisms’ because, in their words, the elections were ‘not that bad considering the country’s atrocious history’.<sup>83</sup> In so doing, they manifest the low-bar syndrome described in the previous section.

Different donor officials can interpret differently their role in the local democratization process. A Western official in Kenya recently wondered what part donors should play in ‘forcing democratic changes’ in a recipient country.<sup>84</sup> One ambassador, cited above, declared that donors should not tell the government what to do. In many instances, however, they have done exactly that. For instance, in the early 1990s, donors collectively suspended new aid to Kenya and Malawi as a means of promoting political and economic reform. In both cases, this led quite rapidly and directly to the end of one-party systems, enhanced political and civil rights and multiparty elections and – though still within a hybrid regime framework.

Fourth, donor officials – like most human beings – feel a strong need to feel good about their work. They want to feel that their efforts are having a positive impact, that they are at least potentially making a difference. This makes it harder to condemn outright a government as non-democratizing or impervious to donor influence, especially for officials working in the area of democracy promotion and good governance. This contributes to them becoming apologists for the government. One could even go as far, in some instances, as calling this a form of ‘Stockholm Syndrome’, whereby donor officials over-identify with the government with which they work to the point where they defend autocratic behaviour in the name a broader goal, most notably in the case of Rwanda’s means of achieving short- and medium-term stability.

## Conclusion

To try to avoid being seen as too one-sided, I must be very clear about what I am arguing and what I am not. This paper analyses how and why many officials from various Western governments, posted in one of the three countries I discuss – Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda – often act as apologists for their host government’s hybrid regime. I do not mean that all such officials do it all the time, nor do I suggest that no defence from excessive or unwarranted criticism is justified. There are numerous valid reasons why democracy promotion may not be a donor priority in an African country. However, rather than explain why other areas should be considered more important or reject the goals of democracy promotion, donor officials often maintain that the country is more democratic than it actually is or that the country cannot reasonably be expected to be more democratic in the foreseeable future.

This article has examined the faulty arguments and clichés donor officials invoke when they do so. I have found that the three main ones are: 1) an excessive focus on the polling day, to the detriment of the period leading up to the elections and fundamental civil and political rights; 2) a shifting of the goal posts so that free-and-fair elections are no longer a requirement; and 3) the emphasis on ‘baby steps’ and need for patience and (a lot?) more time for democracy to be possible. I have also considered why many Western officials use such unsound reasoning, above

and beyond the requirements of defending their own employer's position. I have identified four explanations: 1) their quasi-permanent newness on the job, which promotes naïveté and short-sightedness; 2) the strength of inertia and the lack of political will that prevents more vigorous, concerted action; 3) distinct career disincentives from taking a more critical approach; and 4) a psychological need to feel that their work with the host government is having a positive impact.

Neither of these lists is exhaustive, nor do I claim that these findings hold for all donor officials in all hybrid regimes in all of sub-Saharan Africa. They are the ones I have observed in my interactions with some 70 donor officials in Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda during multiple field visits between 1997 and 2010. I strongly suspect, however, that many of those who have engaged in similar interactions with donor officials in other hybrid regimes will recognize the patterns of apologetics that I have documented and analysed.

I hope that other scholars will be able to build on the arguments I make above, not only to advance our understanding of the phenomenon and how it might undermine pressure for democratization and reinforce authoritarian rule, but also to help others engage donor officials in a productive dialogue on the possibilities of and strategies for supporting the struggle for democracy in Africa. Where lacking, this would include sharpening their analysis and considering how to work more effectively with local actors. Though it would probably be career suicide for donor officials to criticize their employers openly, they could avoid publicly making fatuous arguments in defence of autocratic practices. Armed with a better understanding of democratization in Africa and elsewhere, such officials might even join the ranks of donor officials who already argue internally for better informed and more coherent policies and practices.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Brown, ‘Foreign Aid and Democracy Promotion’. In fact, as Julia Leininger (‘Bringing the outside in’, 76–77) notes, ‘the intense interaction between donors and local actors[] may undermine or even prevent democratization’.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Carothers, ‘The “Sequencing” Fallacy’; Mansfield and Snyder, ‘The Sequencing “Fallacy”’.

<sup>3</sup> Namely Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles and South Africa (Freedom House, ‘Electoral Democracies 2009’).

<sup>4</sup> van de Walle, ‘Africa’s Range of Regimes’, 68.

<sup>5</sup> See Collier and Levitsky. ‘Democracy with Adjectives’; Bogaards, ‘How to classify hybrid regimes?’.

<sup>6</sup> With one exception, a Western ambassador to Malawi speaking under Chatham House rules at a workshop in his home country’s capital city. All interviewees agreed to their comments being cited, though many preferred not to be identified by name. In most cases, the interview was the occasion on which I met the official for the first time. I had met a few of the officials prior to the interview, but they were merely casual acquaintances.

<sup>7</sup> See Barkan, ‘Kenya’; Barkan and Ng’ethe, ‘Kenya Tries Again’; Brown, ‘Authoritarian leaders and multiparty elections in Africa’; Holmquist and Ford, ‘Kenya’; Rutten et al. *Out for the Count*; Southall, ‘Re-forming the State?; Throup and Hornsby, *Multi-Party Politics in Kenya*.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, ‘Quiet Diplomacy and Recurring “Ethnic Clashes” in Kenya’.

<sup>9</sup> Murunga and Nasong’o, ‘Bent on Self-Destruction’.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, ‘Donor Responses to the 2008 Kenyan Crisis’.

<sup>11</sup> Cheeseman and Tendi, ‘Power-sharing in comparative perspective’.

- <sup>12</sup> See Brown, ‘Born-Again Politicians Hijacked Our Revolution’, 713–7; Englund, *A Democracy of Chameleons*; Phiri and Ross, *Democracy in Malawi*.
- <sup>13</sup> Smiddy and Young, ‘Presidential and parliamentary elections in Malawi’, 663.
- <sup>14</sup> Lemarchand, ‘Consociationalism and Power Sharing in Africa’, 4–7.
- <sup>15</sup> Reyntjens, ‘Rwanda, ten years on’, 186.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of State, ‘Rwanda’, n.p.
- <sup>17</sup> Rwandan National Election Commission, ‘Presidential Elections of August 9, 2010’, p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Beswick, ‘Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment’, 236–41; Reyntjens, ‘Rwanda, ten years on’, 184.
- <sup>19</sup> See Brown, ‘The Rule of Law and the Hidden Politics of Transitional Justice in Rwanda’; Hayman, ‘Going in the “Right” Direction?’; Reyntjens, ‘Rwanda, ten years on’ and ‘Post-1994 Politics in Rwanda’; Silva-Leander, ‘On the Danger and Necessity of Democratisation’.
- <sup>20</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2007.
- <sup>21</sup> Karl, ‘Imposing Consent?’, 34.
- <sup>22</sup> See Carothers, ‘The Observers Observed’, 22, 30; Elklit and Svensson, ‘What Makes an Election Free and Fair?’, 36, 38.
- <sup>23</sup> For a more systematic examination of how elections are rigged, see Calingaert, ‘Election Rigging and How to Fight It’.
- <sup>24</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Nairobi, Kenya, June 1998.
- <sup>25</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, March 1998.
- <sup>26</sup> Gisela Geisler (‘Fair?’, 628) cites the U.S. ambassador saying the same thing immediately after the 1992 elections and argues that that is beside the point, since ‘monitors... ought surely to have called a flawed election a flawed election’.
- <sup>27</sup> Author’s interview with a former Western aid official, Nairobi, Kenya, July 1998.
- <sup>28</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, May 1998.
- <sup>29</sup> Brown, ‘Authoritarian leaders and multiparty elections in Africa’.
- <sup>30</sup> Brown, ‘Theorising Kenya’s Protracted Transition to Democracy’.
- <sup>31</sup> Carothers, ‘The Observers Observed’, 25.
- <sup>32</sup> Autesserre, ‘Hobbes and the Congo’.
- <sup>33</sup> Author’s interview with a Western official, Nairobi, Kenya, January 2010.
- <sup>34</sup> Donor officials, as Carothers (‘The Observers Observed’, 25) argues in the case of international observers, will ‘soft-pedal their findings’ if they believe a more honest condemnation ‘could precipitate serious violence or political instability’.
- <sup>35</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, November 1997.
- <sup>36</sup> Author’s interview with a Western ambassador, Lilongwe, Malawi, February 1998.
- <sup>37</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, November 1997.
- <sup>38</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, October 1997.
- <sup>39</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, March 1998.
- <sup>40</sup> Abbink, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Democratization and Election Observation’, 11–12.
- <sup>41</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, March 1998.
- <sup>42</sup> Quoted in Foeken and Dietz, ‘Of Ethnicity, Manipulation and Observation’, 146.
- <sup>43</sup> Hayman, ‘Going in the “Right” Direction?’, 72. Like the other two cases, it is not clear that Rwanda is actually liberalizing.
- <sup>44</sup> Moreover, Abbink (‘Introduction’, 12) argues that such statements of ‘qualified support’ constitute ‘an effort in self-delusion and of justifying the effort of funding and observing itself: a form of damage control (if not downright

cynicism in the eyes of voters in those countries)’. However, Elklit and Svensson (‘What Makes an Election Free and Fair?’, 43) appear to condone using this criterion in assessing an election’s acceptability.

<sup>45</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, June 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, ‘Donor Responses to the 2008 Kenyan Crisis’; Throup, ‘The Count’. On the enduring problems of democratization in Malawi, see Brown, ‘Transitions from Personal Dictatorships’. Rakner et al. (‘Democratisation’s Third Wave and the Challenges of Democratic Deepening’, 20–1) make a stronger case on the decline of Malawi’s democratic institutions.

<sup>47</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, March 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, ‘Authoritarian leaders and multiparty elections in Africa’, 734.

<sup>49</sup> Carothers, ‘The Observers Observed’, 29. See also Kelley, ‘D-Minus Elections’.

<sup>50</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Nairobi, Kenya, March 1998.

<sup>51</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid consultant, Nairobi, Kenya, April 1998.

<sup>52</sup> The beginning and the end of a transition are often hard to identify and thus the duration of the process as well (Brown, ‘Theorising Kenya’s Protracted Transition to Democracy’). The British transition to democracy could be said to span over 600 years, from the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 to the promulgation of the Reform Act in 1832. The timeframe in other European countries, such as France, was much shorter. Germany and Italy, important European democracies, did not even exist as countries until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. India required no transition period after decolonization and has been democratic since it achieved independence in 1947 (arguably with the exception of the 1975-77 state of emergency). Several Eastern and Central European countries, such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, democratized very quickly and rather successfully after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1989-90.

<sup>53</sup> Schmitter and Karl, ‘What Democracy Is... and Is Not’, 80.

<sup>54</sup> Carothers, ‘Democracy Assistance’, 4.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of sequencing and the case of Kenya, see Branch and Cheeseman, ‘Democratization, sequencing, and state failure in Africa’.

<sup>56</sup> Bunce and Wolchik, ‘Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions’.

<sup>57</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Nairobi, Kenya, April 1998.

<sup>58</sup> Discussions with a Western ambassador to one of the three hybrid countries discussed in this paper, held in his capital city, October 2008.

<sup>59</sup> Lipset, ‘Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy’.

<sup>60</sup> Przeworski et al., ‘What makes Democracies Endure?’.

<sup>61</sup> Author’s interview with a multilateral organization official, Lilongwe, Malawi, January 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Author’s interview with a multilateral organization official, Lilongwe, Malawi, November 1997.

<sup>63</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, December 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Lilongwe, Malawi, November 1997.

<sup>65</sup> Author’s interview with a multilateral organization official, Lilongwe, Malawi, July 2003.

<sup>66</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Author’s interview with a Western embassy official, Kigali, Rwanda, August 2007. The U.S. Department of State (‘Rwanda’, 47) reported ‘a contraction in civil and political space’ after the 2003 elections, suggesting that the country was becoming more authoritarian, rather than more democratic.

<sup>68</sup> Kelley, ‘D-Minus Elections’. Joel Barkan (‘Kenya’) was a more generous marker than Kelley and gave Kenya’s 2002 elections the grade of C-minus.

<sup>69</sup> These include Brown, ‘Foreign Aid and Democracy Promotion’; Brown, ‘From Demiurge to Midwife’; Carothers, ‘The Observers Observed’; Crawford, ‘Foreign Aid and Political Conditionality’; Elklit and Svensson, ‘What Makes an Election Free and Fair?’; Geisler, ‘Fair?’; and Kelley, ‘D-Minus Elections’.

<sup>70</sup> See Brown, ‘Authoritarian leaders and multiparty elections in Africa’, ‘Quiet Diplomacy and Recurring “Ethnic Clashes” in Kenya’, ‘Foreign Aid and Democracy Promotion’, 187–9; Crawford, ‘Foreign Aid and Political

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Conditionality’; Hook, “‘Building Democracy” through Foreign Aid’; Olsen, ‘Europe and the Promotion of Democracy in Post Cold War Africa’, 366–7; Rose, ‘Democracy Promotion and American Foreign Policy’, 189.

<sup>71</sup> Carothers, ‘Democracy Assistance’, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Whitehead, ‘Losing “the Force”’, 234; Kelley, ‘D-Minus Elections’, 778.

<sup>73</sup> Democracy promotion has differing degrees of importance from donor to donor, but this has had little or no impact on the observable behaviour of donor *officials*. Where democracy promotion is important rhetorically but less so de facto (e.g., the United States), officials may be hard pressed to ‘explain away’ the democratic deficiencies so as to not appear to be in contradiction with donor’s institutional priorities. This can be done by either arguing that the country is reasonably democratic or, acknowledging that it is not, that there are more pressing priorities (economic reform, stability, security, etc.). Where democracy promotion is more important de facto (e.g., in Scandinavian countries), donor officials can feel strong pressure to become apologists for the host country to justify their being there. They can set the bar low, invoke long timeframes, etc., but they find it more difficult to make the argument for other, more important priorities, since their employer does not do so, at least not publicly. These are theoretical arguments or maybe even assumptions. As noted above, I did not in fact observe any difference from one donor official to the next.

<sup>74</sup> Leininger, ‘Bringing the outside in’, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, October 1997.

<sup>76</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Nairobi, Kenya, April 2001.

<sup>77</sup> See Brown, ‘From Demiurge to Midwife’; Hempstone, *Rogue Ambassador*.

<sup>78</sup> The full text of his speech is available on BBC News Online, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3893625.stm>. It is not clear whose footwear he was referring to, donor officials’ or Kenyans’.

<sup>79</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, October 1997.

<sup>80</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid official, Lilongwe, Malawi, December 1997.

<sup>81</sup> Hayman, ‘Going in the “Right” Direction?’, 72, 74.

<sup>82</sup> Author’s interview with a Western aid consultant, Nairobi, Kenya, April 1998.

<sup>83</sup> Carothers, ‘The Observers Observed’, 29.

<sup>84</sup> Author’s interview with a Western official, Nairobi, Kenya, January 2010.