

## Democracy Promotion in Africa

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Most African countries were democracies at the time of their independence, but by the late 1980s very few democracies remained. In the early 1990s, Western governments announced that democracy promotion would be a cornerstone of their aid to countries in Africa and elsewhere. However, twenty years later, remarkably few African countries can truly be described as democracies. Why did Western aid donors suddenly emphasise democracy in the early 1990s? Why is the track record of democracy promotion so poor? How serious are donors about promoting democracy when faced with competing foreign policy objectives? What enables African countries to resist pressure to democratize? And why has democracy promotion declined in the past decade?

This chapter attempts to answer those questions. First, it examines the rise of democracy promotion and the various forms it can take. Next, it analyses the lack of success and the factors that have contributed to it, including inherent limitations, donors’ overall failure prioritizing it and African governments’ means of resisting the pressure. Then, it explains the decline of democracy promotion, before concluding with a discussion of the main factors that make advancing democracy abroad so difficult, the sincerity of the efforts of foreign actors and the potential future impact of international assistance.

### The rise of democracy promotion in Africa

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, as most African countries moved towards independence, the departing British and French colonial officials left in place democratic constitutions and institutions, albeit ones that were hastily assembled with minimal input from domestic

populations.<sup>1</sup> In most countries, democracy did not last long, generally attributable to weak state institutions, a lack of experience with and commitment to democratic procedures, especially among elites, as well as intense political rivalries, often along ethnic lines. Single-party regimes or military dictatorships soon replaced democratic governments. For the most part during the Cold War, Western countries cared little about domestic governance issues in Africa; their main concern was African countries' foreign policy. Western countries, especially the United States, the United Kingdom and France, were preoccupied with maintaining the stability of their client states and seeking to prevent those states from allying with the Soviet Union.

In the context of intense superpower rivalry, the excesses, corruption and widespread human rights abuses in client states mattered little to the major Western countries. A democratic façade – and sometimes not even that – was all that was required to escape pressure to democratize. The superpowers continued to support dictators such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (today's Democratic Republic of Congo), providing vast amounts of foreign aid and, in some cases, military assistance. Despite some relatively weak condemnations of human rights abuses and pro-democratic rhetoric, the American government's attitude towards authoritarian rulers in Africa could be summed up by US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's comments about a Nicaraguan dictator: 'He may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he is our son-of-a-bitch.'

During this period, France and the United Kingdom also maintained close economic and commercial ties with their former colonies, with little concern for the regime type. Other Western European countries, including the Netherlands and the Nordic countries, had fewer economic, political and security interests in Africa than did the US, UK and France and adopted a more humanitarian approach. They focused more on local social and economic needs, sometimes emphasizing the importance of human rights but not democracy per se.<sup>2</sup> From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, they provided special economic support and development assistance to the largely undemocratic 'Frontline States' that in turn were supporting the struggle against the *apartheid* regime in South Africa.

In 1989, military, autocratic or single-party regimes governed 38 out of 45 Sub-Saharan African countries (Ake 1996: 135). At that time, only three African countries had remained democratic uninterruptedly since independence: Botswana, the Gambia and Mauritius (and the Gambia succumbed to a military coup a few years later). With low rates of literacy, high levels of poverty and entrenched authoritarian rulers, African countries seemed unlikely to democratize, which made any normative suggestions of democracy promotion appear rather futile and potentially counterproductive strategically (if it meant losing useful authoritarian allies).

Contrary to expectations, following the end of the Cold War in 1989 a continent-wide wave of democratization began in Africa with the end of single-party rule and the completion of democratic elections in Benin, and proceeded to spread across the continent. According to Radelet's calculations, the number of democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa 'jumped' from 3 to 23

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<sup>1</sup> By way of contrast, armed insurrection in the 1970s forced the Portuguese to withdraw much more quickly from their African colonies, leaving in place newly independent single-party Marxist regimes, some plagued by civil war, notably Angola and Mozambique.

<sup>2</sup> Though at times they advocated greater freedom of expression and association and other civil rights that are essential for democracy, these donors applied little or no pressure for the short-term dismantling of one-party states.

between 1989 and 1998 (2010: 93). This trend followed closely the end of single-party and authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the USSR, events that many Africans followed closely, especially regime opponents.

Western governments had engaged in some democracy-promotion activities prior to the early 1990s. However, they recognized an historic opportunity in the fall of Communism as an alternative model to political and economic liberalism. With the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the disappearance of the Cold War rivalry, along with the triumphalism that accompanied that ‘unipolar moment’, democracy promotion rose to the top of Western countries’ agendas, especially with regards to Africa. The next section of this chapter examines why.

### **Why promote democracy?**

Interpretations differ on why many Western countries (though not France or Japan) suddenly began to promote democracy proactively abroad. Some saw it as part of a package in which ‘all good things go together’: political and economic liberalization, free votes and free markets. Especially to many Americans, the end of the Cold War heralded the definitive victory of Western liberalism and the defeat of alternatives. Henceforth, by this reasoning, economic and political development would go hand in hand. Though scholars have disputed the premise that democracy brought about a higher rate of economic growth, politicians and policy advisors continued to present the combination of economic and political liberalization as the joint path to global peace and prosperity.

Critical voices considered Western democracy promotion a component of capitalist imperialism, epitomized by the US. They saw the West’s newfound concern for domestic governance as an extension of attempts to impose neoliberal economic models to the political realm. Some interpreted it as a means of replacing entrenched rulers in Africa with leaders more friendly to West and, perhaps more importantly, more favourable to Western economic interests, including opening up profitable opportunities for private sector actors. Others worried that the emphasis on democratization would justify the reduction of aid to Africa.

The truth lies somewhere in between these two caricatures. Many donor governments and aid officials value political and civil rights, including democratic competition for political power, in and of themselves. Such rights are beneficial to citizens, even if not accompanied by social and economic rights.<sup>3</sup> Those concerns, the argument goes, were always present, but it was the New World Order that was born in 1989-90 that virtually eliminated some competing threats and allowed democracy promotion to move up on Western countries’ list of priorities. Their domestic media and development NGOs often supported the belief that countries that respected human rights and democratic principles should receive more aid than those that do not. Some civil society organizations in African countries have supported donors’ decisions to freeze aid to their country until the domestic democracy movement succeeds in dislodging their dictator. In a few cases, they actually lobbied for aid sanctions. Also, the accusations of donor self-interested behaviour are sometimes overstated. Donors have taken their strongest and most concerted efforts to promote democracy in some countries, such as Malawi, whose democratization would

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<sup>3</sup> Democracies, however, do not necessarily provide more social and economic rights than non-democracies – and those rights may have a greater impact on citizens’ wellbeing.

provide very little benefit, if any, to Western countries. Despite fears to the contrary, aid levels to Africa have in fact increased; some donor countries have in fact recently doubled their assistance to Africa or plan to do so within the next few years.

Some scepticism about the sincerity of democracy promotion, however, is also warranted. Clearly, pressure is not applied evenly to all countries. Western countries still support many non-democratic regimes that have pro-Western foreign policies or provide the West with important natural resources. The hypocrisy in the application of pressure to democratize is undeniable. Moreover, democracy promotion is often applied together with pressure for economic liberalization. Donors, especially the United States, are often content with only cosmetic political reform, and sometimes economic reform is all that is required to regain the status of aid-worthiness. Often, they openly express their desire to see African countries integrated fully with the global capitalist economy and open their markets to Western businesses. African countries are usually more accountable to aid donors than they are accountable to their own citizens, which is highly problematic for the application of the democratic label. For governing elites of developing countries, democracy promotion is a reminder of the international asymmetry of power. It is an infringement on their sovereignty and a display of Western claims to moral and intellectual superiority. In sum, Western countries undertake democracy promotion in Africa for a mix of normative and self-interested reasons that vary over time and by context. The following section examines the different forms that democracy promotion can take.

### **Forms of democracy promotion**

Most Western aid donors issued statements in 1989-90 that future aid allocation levels would depend on the extent to which recipient countries had democratized. They used a combination of the carrot (increased development assistance) and the stick (aid sanctions) to promote democratization in African countries. This connection of aid flows to domestic modes of governance is generally referred to as political conditionality.

Donors applied negative political conditionality (the stick) to a number of authoritarian regimes – that is to say, they reduced or suspended development assistance, pending the authoritarian regimes' political (and often economic) liberalization. For example, Western countries adopted wide-ranging sanctions against *apartheid* South Africa in the 1980s and, two decades later, suspended aid to the Zimbabwean government and instituted 'smart sanctions' against its ruling elites, for instance freezing their bank accounts abroad and denying them and their families visas to travel to Europe or North America.

Alternatively, positive political conditionality (the carrot) refers to the provision of aid to countries selected for their higher levels of democracy and good governance. The best example of this preferential treatment is the US Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which provides extra assistance to countries that meet a certain number of criteria. Political indicators include civil liberties and political rights, as well as voice and accountability. MCA funds provide incentives for developing countries to reach the eligibility threshold on these and other indicators.

Most democracy assistance is focused on technical goals. It seeks to strengthen institutions that are essential for democracies to function. In the 1990s, the US channelled significant amounts of funding through a number of American democracy-promotion organizations founded in the 1980s, namely the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute. To provide specialized assistance, some other donors also established government-funded, arm's length organizations, including Canada's International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (1988), the UK's Westminster Foundation for Democracy (1992) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (2000). During this period, other specialized institutions were also created, notably the Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (1987) and the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (1995). Together, these organizations, along with UN bodies, German political party foundations, private foundations and numerous international NGOs, provided support to parliamentarians, political parties, independent electoral commissions, the judiciary, the media and local civil society organizations, among others, in African countries.

As Thomas Carothers (2009) has noted, that type of technical approach, which he calls 'political assistance', is predicated on the assumption that democracy can emerge almost anywhere with the right knowledge and institutions. This type of aid tends to be provided over a relatively short period of time, after which the country is expected to have acquired the necessary tools to make democracy work. That is the dominant perspective of US government policies. It relies on an optimistic conception of democracy highly based on human agency: the right people with some specific knowledge and abilities can not only overcome authoritarian rule but also replace it with a durable democracy. It also assumes that citizens favour democracy and, more problematically, that political, economic and military elites will act democratically, rather than undermine democratic institutions when it might suit their interests.

Another form of assistance, which Carothers calls 'developmental', adopts a more structural approach. From this perspective, democracy would depend more on the underpinnings that would sustain it than the people who would usher it in and sustain it. In other words, it sees democracy as the result of greater literacy and education, the rise of the middle class and other benefits of successful development that have been found to be associated with the survival of democratic regimes (see Przeworski *et al.* 1996). Democracy promotion would thus best be served by more holistic support to social and economic development, that is to say indirectly and over a long period of time. That is a more pessimistic outlook for democratization in Africa and one generally adopted by the European Union and its member states.

### **The effectiveness of democracy promotion**

Understanding the rationale for democracy promotion is merely the preface to analysing its real effects. This section explores whether democracy promotion was able to achieve its objectives and what difficulties it continues to encounter.

#### *The impact of democracy promotion*

It is difficult to determine the exact impact of democracy promotion efforts because of the mix of complicated factors contributing to political change. Still, carefully researched qualitative case studies can assess the relative importance of Western donors in the democratization process. One such study identified 18 cases of aid suspension in Sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 1995 and none north of the Sahara. It found that only in two of them did political conditionality clearly make a ‘modest’ or ‘significant’ contribution to democratization: Kenya and Malawi, discussed below. Elsewhere, the contribution was either unclear or absent (Crawford 1997). Bratton and van de Walle state that of the 25 cases of politically conditioned aid in Africa, eight resulted in transition to democracy, constituting a modest success rate. However, their analysis also suggests that domestic factors are far more important than international ones (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 219-20). Further complicating the efforts to quantify the impact of political conditionality is the fact that a ‘large number’ of authoritarian regimes pre-emptively enacted democratic reforms specifically to avoid a suspension of aid (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 182), though many of those reforms were merely cosmetic.

According to Freedom House (2012: 14-18), only nine out of 49 Sub-Saharan African countries and none in North Africa could be classified as ‘free electoral democracies’ in 2012.<sup>4</sup> From this, one can conclude that 20 years of democracy promotion has had little visible impact in Africa, especially since two of those nine had been democratic since independence and donors played little or no role in the democratic transitions of most of the others. All too often, emerging ‘success stories’ were ruined by authoritarian backsliding, a military coup or the resumption of civil war.

The first successful use of negative political conditionality occurred in Kenya. Donors coordinated a joint suspension of new development assistance in 1991, to last until the government had carried out important economic and political liberalization. Within a few weeks’ time, authoritarian ruler Daniel arap Moi announced that the constitution would be amended to return Kenya to a multiparty system. Donor pressure was nonetheless insufficient to ensure that the 1992 and 1997 elections were reasonably free and fair, allowing Moi to remain in power, aided by a divided opposition. Donors undermined their own democracy-promotion efforts when they settled for economic and minor political reforms and a promise of more to take place at a later date. On more than one occasion, Moi made sufficient changes for aid to be renewed and then reneged on his commitments to further liberalization, eventually triggering renewed donor sanctions. It was only in 2002, after Moi retired, that the opposition – buoyed by massive defections from the ruling party and rallying around one main presidential candidate – was able to win. In that stage of the protracted democratization process, donors played a relatively minor part, though they may have influenced Moi’s decision to retire (Brown 2007).

Malawi stands out as a case where Western countries unequivocally play a very important role in the democratization process, though domestic actors played crucial parts as well. First, donors acted in concert and suspended new non-humanitarian assistance in 1992, demanding political liberalization. This quickly prompted a severe economic crisis and weakened the regime of ‘Life President’ Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who announced that a referendum would be held to determine whether Malawi should adopt a multiparty system. Donors supported the referendum

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<sup>4</sup> Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, and South Africa.

process and ensured its fairness, leading to a two-to-one victory for the advocates of multipartyism. The following year, with key support from donors, free-and-fair general elections led to Banda's defeat. For the first time, power was passed peacefully to a newly legalized opposition party. Though this was a great and rapid achievement, two decades after the groundbreaking referendum, Malawi's transition to democracy is still incomplete and the process seems to have stalled, leaving in place a hybrid regime (Brown 2004).

Perhaps more time is needed for African countries to continue in a slow process of democratization. Indeed, democracy-promotion activities might have made positive contributions, especially by strengthening the structural underpinnings of democracy. That kind of impact, however, is even more difficult to measure than the more immediate effects of political conditionality.

#### *The inherent difficulties of democracy promotion*

Democratization follows a very uncertain and highly contingent path. Moreover, scholars almost unanimously agree that it is primarily a domestic process, nearly impossible to impose and depending above all on domestic actors, institutions and conditions. As a result, effective democracy-promotion efforts are inherently very difficult to design and implement. Only a relatively rare combination of circumstances is conducive to international pressure tilting the balance of forces in favour of a transition to democracy. Levitsky and Way describe these as strong 'Western *leverage* (governments' vulnerability to external pressure) and *linkage* to the West (the density of a country's ties to the United States, the European Union, and Western-led multilateral institutions)' (Levitsky and Way 2005: 21, italics in original). Thus, Western countries are most likely to promote democracy successfully in countries that are highly dependent on foreign aid, even if they do not have particularly close ties with the West. This level of leverage is found more often in Africa than other regions and certainly applies to Malawi and Kenya in the early 1990s.

There are nonetheless several important impediments to the use of political conditionality in Africa. Among others, political conditionality is a very blunt instrument. Aid flows are not easily turned on and off – and doing so can be extremely disruptive to development efforts, potentially harming the poor more than authoritarian elites. Even if donors agree to suspend aid jointly (which is required for maximum impact), it is hard for them to agree on the minimum needed for aid to be resumed, especially if both economic and political liberalization are required, and even more difficult to reach a consensus on how much backsliding will warrant another suspension. In addition, recalcitrant authoritarian rulers in Africa rapidly discerned how to enact enough cosmetic reforms to please donors but not threaten their own hold on power (Brown 2005: 184-5).

#### *Competing objectives and other donor deficiencies*

Arguably, the most important donor characteristic that undermines their democracy promotion is the multitude of competing objectives that each donor government has. A study by Schraeder *et al.* (1998) examined the allocation of American, French, Japanese aid to 36 African countries in the 1980s and found that the donors' own strategic interests were more important than the

recipients' needs and that economic interests – especially commercial ones – were very important determinants of how donors distributed their aid budgets. It would be unrealistic to expect those Western interests to disappear with the rise of democracy-promotion activities in the early 1990s.

Not all Western foreign policy objectives can become top priorities, and tradeoffs become necessary. Not all donor governments will agree which ones to rank highest, so barring exceptional coordination efforts some donors may well undermine others' efforts. Moreover, Western governments can be internally divided over the relative importance of democracy. For instance, a Western ministry of defence will generally care less about the level of democracy in a strategically important recipient country than the ministry of foreign affairs or the official aid agency. The ministry of commerce might focus instead on economic reform, especially commercial policies such as tariffs and other barriers to trade.

Since the 1980s, economic liberalization has been the most important policy change required by Western donors in Africa, especially the international financial institutions, and constitutes the core of structural adjustment programmes and their latest reincarnation, poverty reduction strategy papers. Donors thus identify compliant economic reformers, including Ghana, Uganda and most recently Rwanda, as 'success stories'. Since they are so few in number, many donors are reluctant to tarnish their star pupils' positive image with loud governance-related complaints.

Security has also been a major consideration in Western relations with African countries, especially for the United States and since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. The importance of security alliances often overshadows any efforts to promote democratization. In countries emerging from conflict, more emphasis is often placed on reconstruction and reconciliation, sometimes involving interim power-sharing arrangements, instead of rapid democratization.

There are other ways that donors often hamper their own democracy-promotion efforts. For instance, they tend to have a shallow commitment to democratization beyond the holding of periodical elections and a semblance of basic civil rights. In many cases, Western countries endorse elections that are blatantly 'unfree' and unfair (for illustrations from Kenya, see Brown 2001). Moreover, after a formerly authoritarian country holds its first democratic elections, donors are less likely to invoke conditionality in response to subsequent backsliding.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the US and other donors tend to focus too much on the provision of technical assistance that treats the lack of democracy as if it were a technical problem, the result solely of a lack of institutional capacity, rather than a very deliberate lack of will at the political level (Brown 2005: 185-7).

#### *Recipient countries' counter-leverage*

Recipient countries can often play donor interests off each other and evade pressure for reform in a specific area. As mentioned above, during the Cold War, African 'client-states' could satisfy their patrons through their actions on the international stage and thus avoid the scrutiny of their domestic political behaviour. African countries also held a variety of bargaining chips after the

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<sup>5</sup> The widely reported the abuses in Zimbabwe and their extreme nature help explain why it constitutes an exception.

end of the Cold War. For example, the government of Kenya – both the authoritarian regime of the 1990s and early 2000s and the more democratic governments since 2003 – has often benefited from donors’ tolerance of corruption, important human rights abuses and undemocratic behaviour because of ‘counter-leverage’ it has had over the West. Among other things, Kenya is an important player in regional politics and home base for numerous humanitarian and development efforts of Western countries, UN agencies and NGOs in East Africa and the Horn. Kenya also provides access to air and naval bases for the United States, the United Kingdom and other Western countries, especially important for surveillance of and operations in neighbouring Somalia. Kenya tries pirates that are arrested in the Indian Ocean by Western countries, which do not want to put them on trial at home, in part for fear of refugee claims. Western powers consider good relations with the Kenyan government key to their foreign policy objectives in that region.

Authoritarian African countries that are important to Western – and especially American – global security interests are highly unlikely to be subjected to strong pressure to democratize. Mauritania, for instance, rehabilitated itself almost overnight as an ally in George W. Bush’s ‘war on terror’. For decades, Western countries applied only feeble pressure on Egypt for support of its ‘moderating’ influence on Middle East politics as well as for fear of Islamists winning free-and-fair elections (as they had in the 1992 elections in Algeria, which were annulled as a result). Donors are also wary of criticizing the Ethiopian government’s undemocratic behaviour, also because of its role in fighting terrorism and Islamism, notably in Somalia. Actions against the Sudanese government for its major human rights abuses in the Darfur region are restrained because of its contributions to fighting Al-Qaida.

Thus, a relatively high degree of linkage to Western countries does not necessarily increase the latter’s capacity to influence African countries’ internal politics, as Levitsky and Way (2005) suggest. Instead, various bargaining chips can create counter-leverage and serve as a means of reducing the West’s influence on domestic political matters. For instance, if the Kenyan government is displeased by European criticisms of its undemocratic behaviour, it can credibly threaten (and in fact has done so) to disband the European Union–funded special tribunals in Kenya that deal with the Somali pirates, whose kidnappings and extortion constitute a threat to donor countries’ commercial and strategic interests.

Given the numerous inherent difficulties of political conditionality, the limitations of purely technical assistance, instances of feeble donor commitment and authoritarian regimes’ means of resistance, it is not surprising that democracy promotion slipped down donors’ agendas.

### **The decline of democracy promotion**

Democracy promotion proved to be a much harder task than many democracy promoters had expected. The euphoria that followed the fall of the Berlin wall and numerous authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe and Africa soon gave way to a more sober and realistic set of expectations, if not outright pessimism. In the second half of the 1990s, the wave of democratic transitions in Africa slowed and many African countries adapted to – and often circumvented – political conditionality, producing a large number of hybrid regimes, that is, countries with multiparty systems and periodic elections, but ones that were generally not free enough to remove the incumbent via the ballot box.

The New World Order that was to follow the crumbling of the Soviet empire would be described more accurately as a New World Disorder, with civil conflagrations erupting across Africa and elsewhere, most horrifically in the African Great Lakes region. Faced with such pressing issues, only smaller and less influential donors retained a focus on democracy promotion; the major ones reverted to outright economic and especially strategic self-interest.

The Al-Qaida attacks in the United States in September 2001 accelerated this trend. The US and other Western countries increasingly viewed foreign policy through a security lens, including democracy promotion, even if sometimes merely instrumentally. For instance, to justify the subsequent US-led invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), donors invoked democracy and human rights, but the regimes that Western countries help set up after ‘regime change’ sorely lacked credibility in those areas. That in turn contributed to a further delegitimization of democracy promotion – even when not carried out through coercion. Instead, donor countries focused more on state building.

Other factors also contributed to the decline of Western democracy promotion. Western countries relied on natural resources from authoritarian African states, notably oil from Angola and increasingly Equatorial Guinea, thereby reducing their leverage or rather increasing African countries’ counter-leverage. Several African countries could rely more on private investment and less on foreign aid. The rapid rise of China as an alternative source of aid, trade and investment further reduced the strength of many African countries’ linkages with the West, facilitating their circumvention of political and economic conditionality. What then to conclude on the West’s experiences of democracy promotion on the African continent?

## **Conclusion**

Democracy promotion in Africa reached its apogee during the brief period of time in the early 1990s when the Soviet threat had disappeared and Western liberalism appeared to have triumphed. Western countries used the window of opportunity to try to accelerate change elsewhere. Even at its height, however, democracy promoters could point to very few cases where they had made an important contribution, especially in Africa. Democracy promotion proved to be a more complicated task and African authoritarian leaders more resilient than most Western governments had realized. Faced with disappointing results – for reasons both endogenous and exogenous to their efforts, described above – and the resurgence of other priorities, especially security, donors soon returned to its prior rhetorical role, raised in speeches and grand statements, but usually superseded by other priorities on the ground, especially for the more important players on the international stage, such as the United States.

Given the serious flaws in donors’ democracy-promotion strategies even in the first half of the 1990s, including lack of consistency and half-hearted efforts, one may wonder how committed Western countries ever were. Though some might be tempted to dismiss democracy promotion as a purely cosmetic and hypocritical endeavour, many Western actors involved were sincere, if perhaps somewhat naïve, in their desire to support the pro-democracy movements that appeared across the African continent. However, donor governments are fractured and different branches have different goals and priorities. As Crawford (1997: 103) notes, ‘human rights and democracy

principles appear to be always at the bottom of the pile.’ Only in countries where donors have precious few interests at all, of which Malawi is the best example, will they apply political conditionality strongly and long enough to obtain results.

It is nonetheless too soon to dismiss democracy-promotion efforts as ineffective. The fruits of the more technocratic or ‘political’ democracy assistance to date have indeed been meagre. However, in some cases over the longer term, those efforts may yet encourage and facilitate local actors’ efforts to democratize their countries. In this they may be aided by slower structural changes, including those promoted through developmental assistance, which can not only facilitate transitions to democracy in Africa, but also improve its odds of survival.

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