The Arab Spring: Democratic Diffusion and the European Union

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Keynote Address
Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the European Union
27 September 2012
Contrasts...
The Arab Spring is the 5th Wave of democratization
The popular uprisings are all about democracy
Democratization enhances human rights
Democratization enhances economic development
Freedom of speech is universally understood
Democracy promotion ‘works’
Current economic crisis in US and EU is not a problem of democracy but a problem for democracy.

Economic benefits of democracy also require institutions for good governance.
Popular mobilizations against authoritarian regimes
Economic critique coupled with political critique
Desire for regime change, but not necessarily democracy
Residue of prior regimes remain
Variation of outcomes:
- Regime change and new elections (Tunisia, Egypt)
- Government resignation and violent conflict (Syria)
- Intervention and regime change (Libya)
- Other governments challenged (Yemen, Bahrain)
Complexity of democracy promotion

- Assumes a model of democracy
- Democracy is ‘contested’ but not ‘contestable’
- Export, import, support
- Domestic needs are primary
- Outcomes may not be satisfactory to geostrategic interests
- Democracy takes time
- Democratization is not sequential
Fundamental principles
- Popular sovereignty
- Collective decision making

Procedural democracy
Liberal democracy
Social democracy

IDEA (2008) Assessing the Quality of Democracy
Domestic explanations for recent democratic ‘breakthroughs’*

Reforms, concessions precede larger challenge
Unified agenda, iconic figure for opposition
Economic crises poor service delivery
Rising expectations
Mass mobilization
Civil society organisations
Free media
Vulnerable and weak incumbents
Electoral integrity
Non-violent transfer of power

External explanations for recent democratic ‘breakthroughs’*

Passive
Economic shocks and vulnerable regimes
Diffusion (mimicry and emulation)
Norms and ideas (consensus and construction)

Active
Direct democracy aid and technical assistance
Diplomatic influence
Economic influence (FDI, trade, sanctions)
Reputational influence

Democratic Diffusion

**Unintentional process**
Positive and negative impact
Contagion & contiguity
Contingent & uncoordinated
Globalization & demonstration effects
Normative architecture for human rights

**Intentional process**
Democracy assistance (South-South engagement)
Diplomatic influence (transnational advocacy networks)
Economic influence (conditionality & insincere commitments)
Reputational influence (naming and shaming)
Coercion (Afghanistan and Iraq)
Implications for policy

Diverse routes to democracy
Domestic conditions ‘matter’
Neighbours matter
Incumbent concessions
Civil society networks
Political parties
Free media/social media/information flows
Electoral integrity but avoid ‘electoral fallacy’
Respect for outcomes
Patience and the policy cycle
Thank you!

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