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The Arab Spring: Democratic Diffusion and the European Union

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University of Essex

Keynote Address

Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia to the European Union

27 September 2012

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Contrasts…

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Seduction of the simple narrative

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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'

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Trends in Democratization

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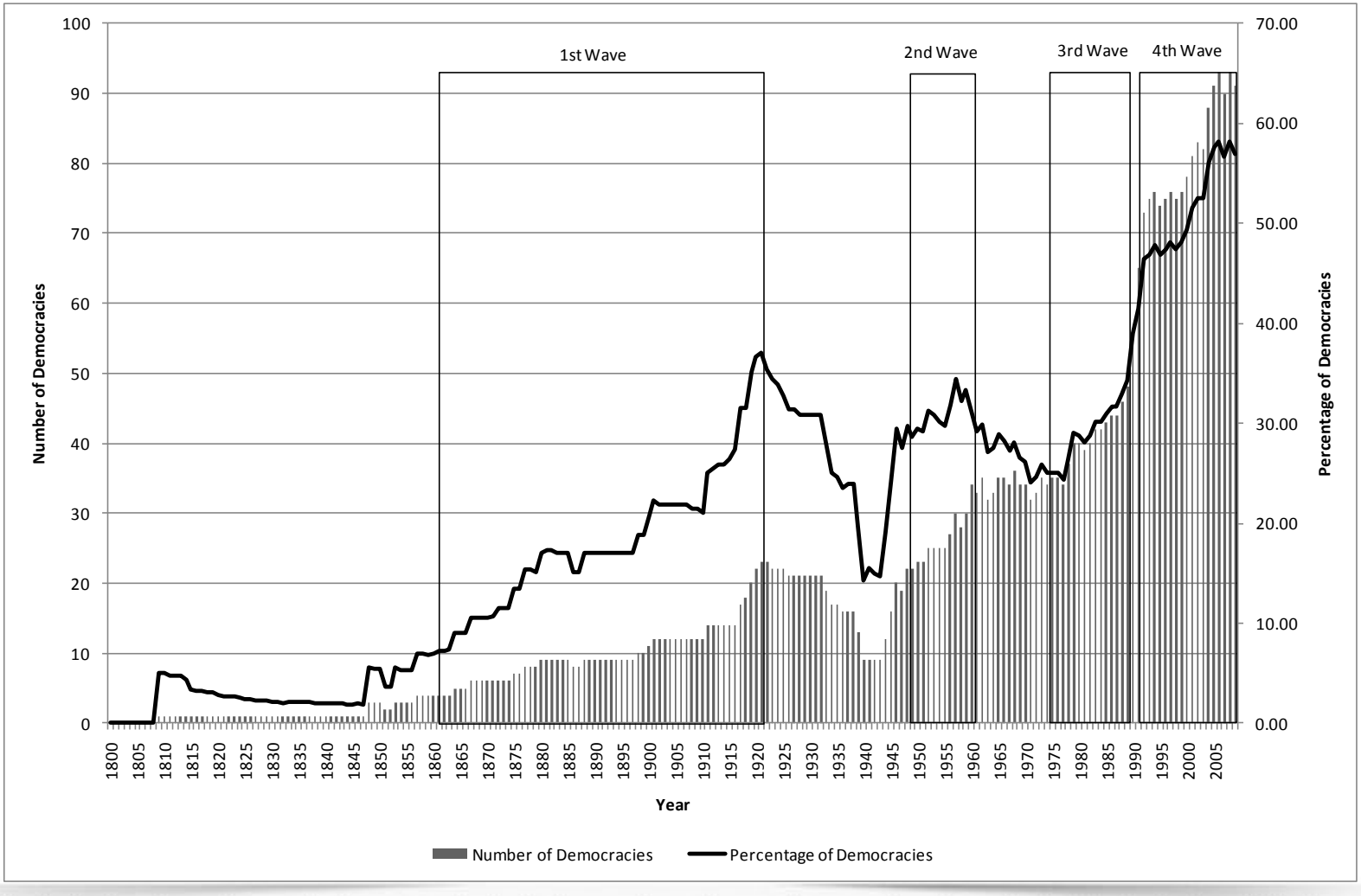

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Development & democracy

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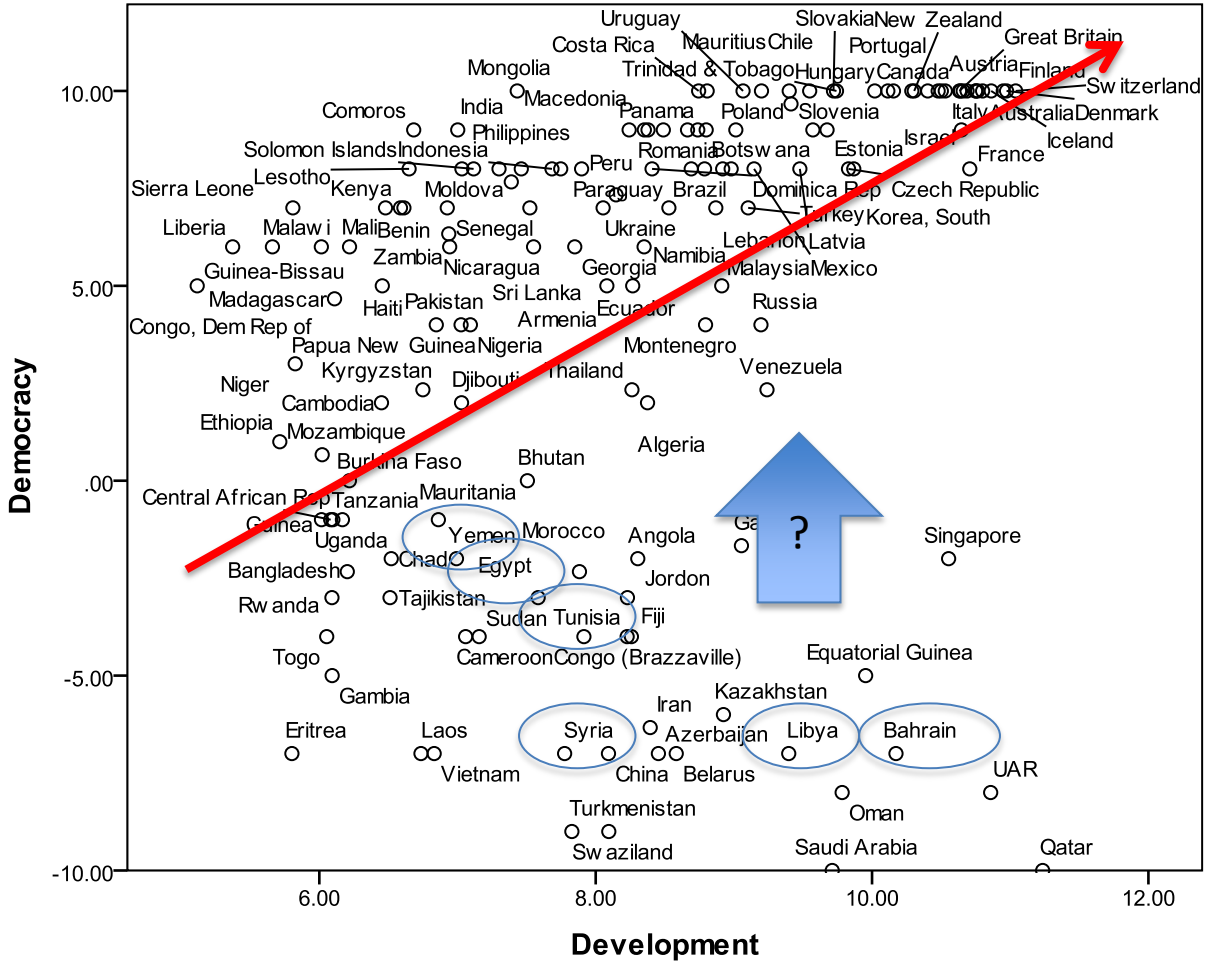

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Democracy & development

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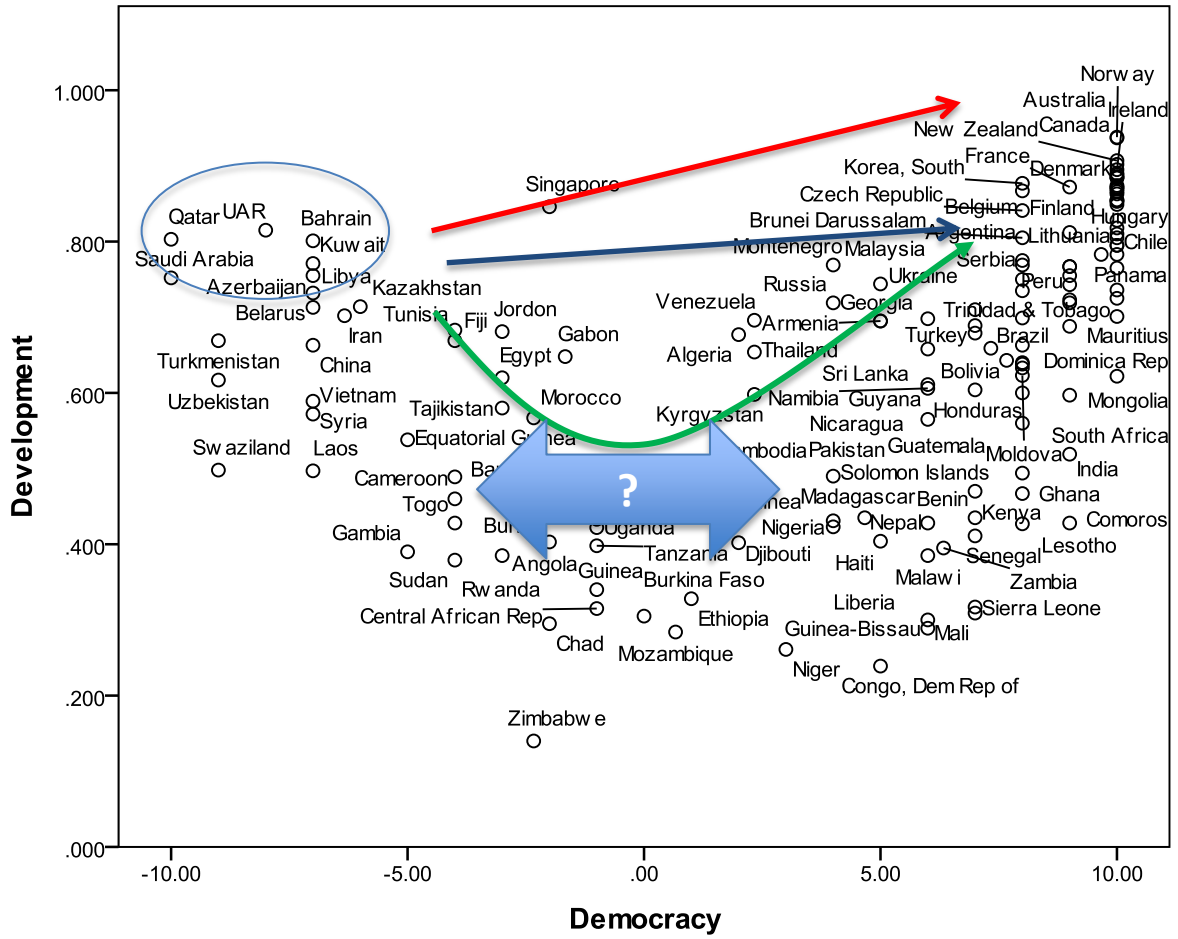

Current economic crisis in US and EU is not a problem *of* democracy but a problem *for* democracy

Economic benefits of democracy also require institutions for good governance

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Democracy & human rights

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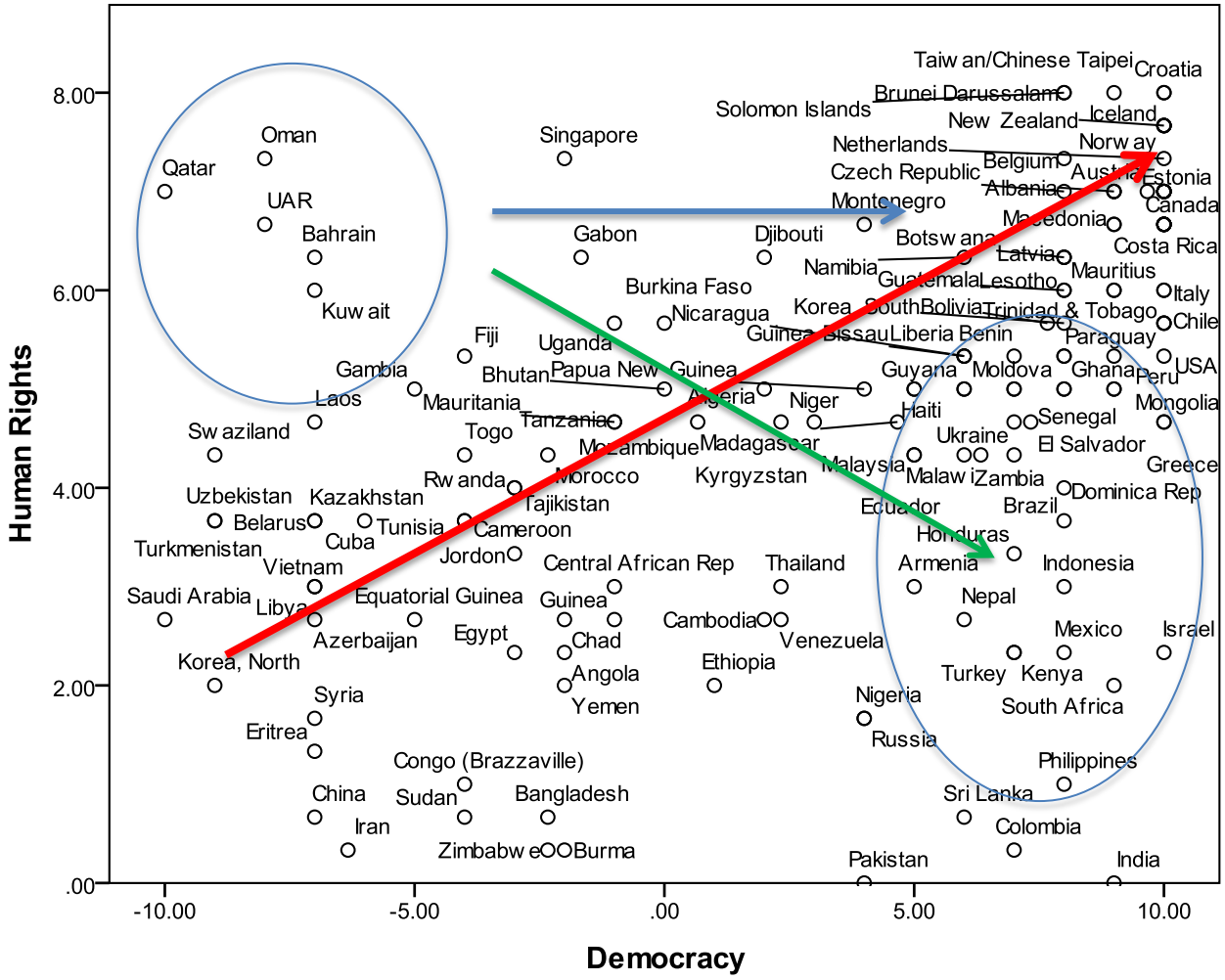

Human rights gap

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Complexity of the Arab Spring

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- 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)

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Complexity of democracy promotion

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- 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

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Democracy Defined*

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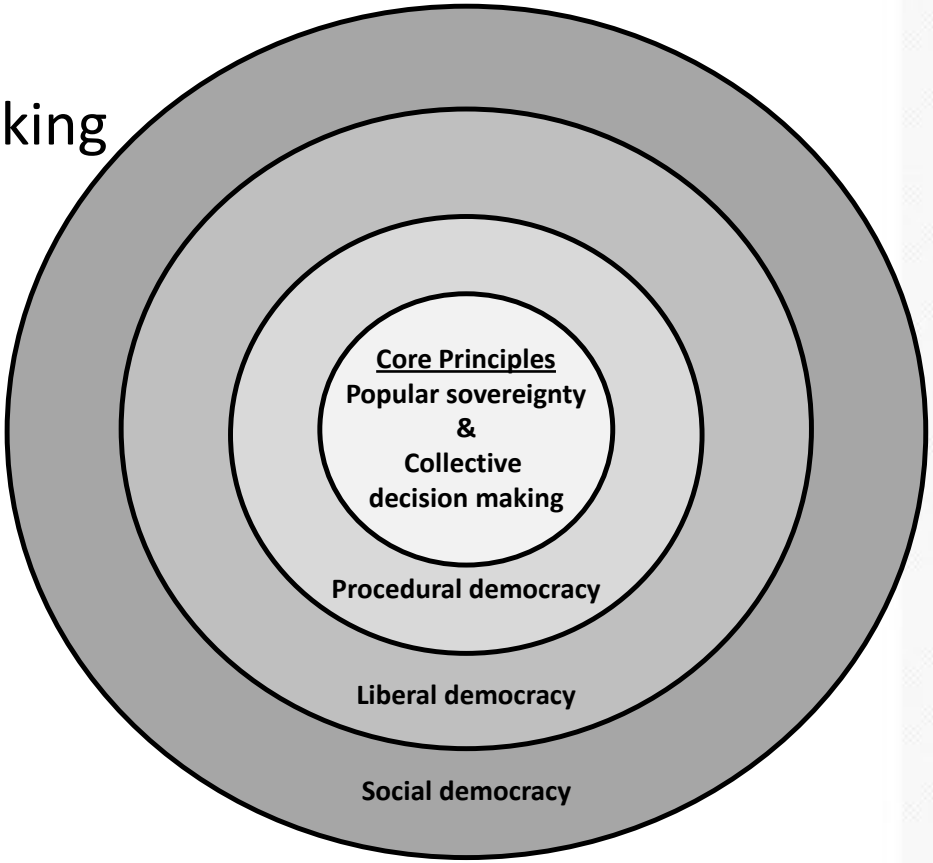
Fundamental principles
- Popular sovereignty
- Collective decision making

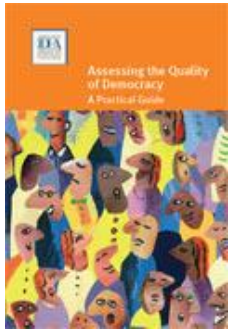
Procedural democracy

Liberal democracy

Social democracy



INTERNATIONAL IDEA INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE



IDEA (2008) *Assessing the Quality of Democracy*

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Domestic explanations for recent democratic 'breakthroughs'*

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Reforms, concessions precede larger challenge

Unified agenda, iconic figure for opposition

Economic crises poor service delivery

Rising expectations

Mass mobilization

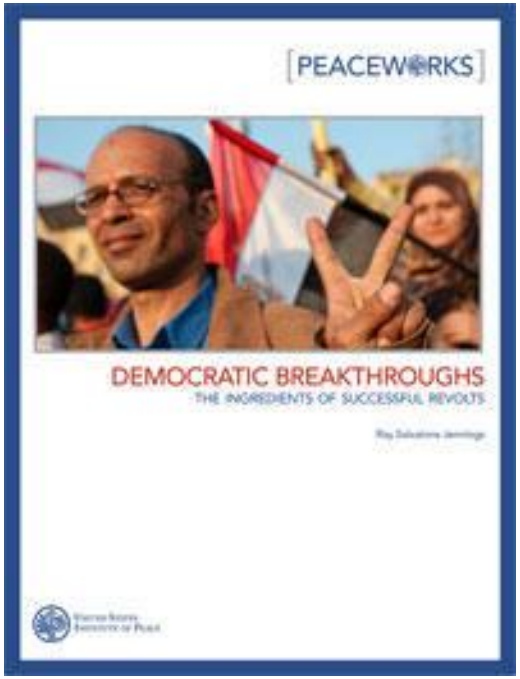
Civil society organisations

Free media

Vulnerable and weak incumbents

Electoral integrity

Non-violent transfer of power



USIP (2012) *Democratic Breakthroughs: The Ingredients of Successful Revolts*

* Turkey 1983, South Korea 1987, Chile 1988, Poland 1989, USSR 1991, Russia 1993, Indonesia 1999 , Serbia 2000, Ghana 2000, Mexico 2000.

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External explanations for recent democratic 'breakthroughs'*

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Passive

Economic shocks and vulnerable regimes

Diffusion (mimicry and emulation)

Norms and ideas (consensus and construction)

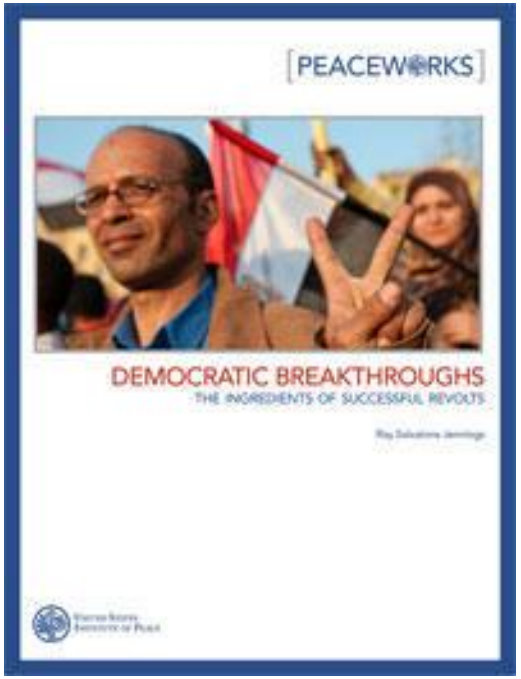
Active

Direct democracy aid and technical assistance

Diplomatic influence

Economic influence (FDI, trade, sanctions)

Reputational influence



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Democratic Diffusion

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<u>Unintentional process</u>

Positive and negative impact

Contagion & contiguity

Contingent & uncoordinated

Globalization & demonstration effects

Normative architecture for human rights

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<u>Intentional process</u>

Democracy assistance (South-South engagement)

Diplomatic influence (transnational advocacy networks)

Economic influence (conditionality & insincere commitments)

Reputational influence (naming and shaming)

Coercion (Afghanistan and Iraq)

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Implications for policy

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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

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Thank you!

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