

# 1 Introduction

---

A decade has now passed since protests in the Middle East captured the attention and imagination of audiences around the world. The story of how those protests began is now familiar to most, but it is no less striking to recall. On December 17, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit seller in the central Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire after enduring harassment from local police. Bouazizi's action quickly sparked a wave of protests throughout the country, finding deep resonance among thousands of Tunisians frustrated by mounting corruption, exclusion, diminished opportunity, and the seeming indifference of their regime. Those protests soon spread beyond Tunisia to cities throughout the Arab world, tapping into similar grievances among citizens vis-à-vis their respective regimes and fronting a major challenge to decades of authoritarian rule. In the span of three months, four long-standing authoritarian leaders were forced from power. The initial euphoria felt by many in the region existed alongside a sense of trepidation about the changes to come both from those eager for change and from those with a stake in preserving the preexisting order. In the years since 2011, that euphoria has been tempered, and the different paths since taken by states are testament both to the difficulties of change and to the struggle of challenging the logic and structure of authoritarianism in the region.

With the initial dust of the uprisings now settled, scholars and analysts have stepped back to reflect critically on the motivations driving protestors and to make sense of the ways in which economic and political factors shaped participation in the 2011 protests. In the heady first months of the uprisings, many scholars and analysts of the region and those watching from afar found it easy to impart their own desires of what they wanted the protests to be and represent, often ignoring earlier histories of protests and geopolitical realities that might obscure their portrait. Early narratives described the protests as demands for dignity, a youth revolt, or expressions against injustices, inequality, and indignities wrought by authoritarian regimes.

Comparisons to 1989 and the revolutions in Eastern Europe were made as well; the symbolic allure was difficult to ignore. Analysts and journalists often sought to find elegant parallels between that era and the shock it then represented to the international system and the monumental changes seemingly underway in the Arab world. Questions also extended to asking whether international support, particularly that from the United States, played an instrumental role in the 2011 uprisings as it had for civil society groups in Europe in the years preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union. The question, on the surface, was not illogical. From 1990 to 2010, the United States alone spent more than \$2 billion on efforts to promote democracy in the Arab world. While most of that aid was directed to Iraq in the wake of the United States' 2003 invasion, funds were also distributed to other states throughout the region.

Attempts to link that aid cleanly to protests in the Middle East were met with challenges. Initial reports noted that many of the protestors who played an active role in organizing and participating in protests, such as members of Egypt's April 6 movement, attended conferences outside Egypt with support from the quasi-governmental US organization, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Others observed that in Tunisia, where protests began, the president had forbidden all US democracy programs. The difficulty of neatly ascribing the 2011 uprisings to that aid reflects a more complicated story that challenges the way we think about the origins and foundations of the protests and the ways in which US democracy programs evolved in the region, and what those programs supported. This book tells that story.

### **Democracy Aid in the Middle East**

The origins of this book extend just over a decade ago to doctoral research I first began in Egypt. In 2007, I arrived in Cairo curious to understand and examine the politics of US democracy aid in the Middle East, but particularly in Egypt. My curiosity was driven initially by new scholarship on the efficacy of democracy aid, as well as by lively discussions in Cairo with aid practitioners, activists, and diplomats engaged with such aid. At the time, the question of whether international actors could promote democracy drew growing interest from scholars. This interest reflected the elevated position democracy aid programs had begun to assume within the foreign policies of predominantly Western governments and the growth of actors such as for- and not-for-profit organizations, contractors, academic institutions, and domestic and

international organizations comprising what scholars have referred to as a “democracy industry” or “democracy establishment.”<sup>1</sup>

Since 1990, the United States has spent more than \$8 billion toward efforts to promote democracy worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Scholars interested in understanding the impact and effectiveness of such aid soon expanded, applying sophisticated methods to explore the link between democracy and democratization. In 2005, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the primary US agency managing such aid, commissioned a cross-national quantitative study to assess the effectiveness of its spending for democracy in its programs worldwide from 1990 to 2005.<sup>3</sup> The study was the first to distinguish aid for democracy from that of general foreign assistance and concluded that spending for democracy “works.”<sup>4</sup> Subsequent studies using similar methods and data also concluded that democracy aid may enhance democratization in recipient states.<sup>5</sup> Findings from those studies though did not seem to resonate with the experience of states receiving such aid in the Middle East. Indeed, the authors of the USAID-commissioned study found that obligations had the largest effects in Asia and Africa and that democracy funding mattered “in ‘difficult contexts’ with the Middle East as the exception to this general pattern.”<sup>6</sup>

What might explain this exception? For nearly two decades, the United States devoted more than \$2 billion on democracy promotion efforts in

<sup>1</sup> Robert Springborg, “The Democratization Industry and the Middle East,” *Paper presented at the Inaugural Professorial Lecture*, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, May 24, 2005; Sarah Sunn Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Pérez-Liñán, Mitchell A. Seligson, and C. Neal Tate, “Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building: Final Report” (2008), [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADL961.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADL961.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Results from that study were also published in *World Politics*: Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Pérez-Liñán, and Mitchell A. Seligson, “The Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990–2003,” *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Knack, “Does Foreign Aid Promote Democracy?,” *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2004); Jakob Svensson, “Aid, Growth, and Democracy,” *Economics & Politics* 11, no. 3 (1999); Sarantis Kalyvitis and Irene Vlachaki, “When Does More Aid Imply Less Democracy? An Empirical Examination,” *European Journal of Political Economy* 28, no. 1 (2012); Joseph Wright, “How Foreign Aid Can Foster Democratization in Authoritarian Regimes,” *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>5</sup> James M. Scott and Carie A. Steele, “Sponsoring Democracy: The United States and Democracy Aid to the Developing World, 1988–2001,” *International Studies Quarterly* 55 (2011); Sarantis Kalyvitis and Irene Vlachaki, “Democratic Aid and the Democratization of Recipients,” *Contemporary Economic Policy* 28, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>6</sup> Steven E. Finkel, Anibal Pérez-Liñán, Mitchell A. Seligson, and C. Neal Tate, “Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building: Results of a Cross-National Quantitative Study” (2006), [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnade694.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnade694.pdf).

the Middle East. This amount marked a significant shift in funding levels from the previous decade and reflected the Bush administration's contention after the attacks of September 11, 2001, that democracy aid was a necessary tool to combat extremism, and hence terrorism. Rhetorically and financially, democracy support soon surpassed that of previous administrations and featured prominently in the United States' National Security Strategy for the first time. New initiatives were launched to augment preexisting democracy programs administered by government agencies like USAID.<sup>7</sup>

That security issues may be part of the story would come as little surprise to scholars and observers of politics in the region. Recent work by scholars Jason Brownlee, Sheila Carapico, and Amaney Jamal relays how democracy programs in the Middle East were often subordinated to strategic concerns, particularly in states like Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Strategic imperatives have long shaped the United States' relationship with states in the region. Securing access to oil and cooperation on issues like counterterrorism often resulted in uncomfortable, if mutually beneficial, arrangements between the United States and authoritarian regimes that were maintained through extensive military and economic assistance.

Understanding why democracy aid efforts may have been limited raised a more pointed question that extends beyond states in the Middle East and one that was curiously absent from scholarly examinations of such aid: Why would an authoritarian regime even allow or tolerate such programs? After all, democracy assistance programs, according to one of the foremost scholars of the field, fundamentally aim to challenge the structure of power within a recipient state.<sup>9</sup> Beyond this puzzle, other fascinating questions soon followed in the early stages of my research in Egypt and later, in Morocco. A marked disconnect existed between the actors and issues engaged at the "high" and "low" levels of democracy aid. Rhetorically, and in practice, many diplomats

<sup>7</sup> Thomas O. Melia, "The Democracy Bureaucracy: The Infrastructure of American Democracy Promotion," in *Paper prepared for the Princeton Project on National Security Working Group on Global Institutions and Foreign Policy Infrastructure* (2005), [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pcaac238.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pcaac238.pdf), 14. From 2000 to 2005, democracy aid funding increased from \$500 million to more than \$2 billion. Melia notes that a significant percentage of this figure included spending for activities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

<sup>8</sup> Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the U.S.-Egyptian Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Sheila Carapico, *Political Aid and Arab Activism: Democracy Promotion, Justice, and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Amaney A. Jamal, *Of Empires and Citizens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

and democracy activists were devoting significant effort to promoting democracy and reform in the region. Those efforts though seldom seemed to make much of a difference on the ground.

Outside diplomatic discussions and those held by democracy aid advocates in conferences abroad, actors on the ground contested both the form and the function of democracy aid projects. A wide divergence also often existed between the conception of democracy held and advanced by outside actors and those for whom such aid was ostensibly directed. In lively conversations with local activists, aid practitioners – both local and international – diplomats, and democracy aid recipients, I heard profoundly different ideas and understandings about the approach and meaning of democracy underlying aid efforts. The meaning of democracy was not inconsequential to many of the Egyptians and Moroccans with whom I spoke, nor were the power differentials that came in negotiating aid projects with international partners. Despite the variety of approaches and understandings of democracy, very narrow conceptions of that term often prevailed.

Audits of democracy projects commissioned by USAID to assess how its democracy projects were working would often conclude that they were ineffective and, in many cases, counterproductive. Yet, despite repeated evidence and learning that such projects were problematic, and even counterproductive, they continued with little change in composition. These early observations and questions suggested a far greater complexity to the politics and practice of democracy aid than that conveyed in the existing scholarship on such aid. In this book, I argue that answering them requires a more complex consideration of the relations between the United States and recipient regimes in the region as well as the voices and practices of the actors involved.

### **The Argument in Brief**

This book is about the construction and practice of democracy aid in the Middle East. In order to understand these questions and puzzles, I argue for a different approach than that used in existing research on democracy aid. To understand why such aid may have had a limited impact in the region, it is important to examine how democracy aid programs were constructed, negotiated, and executed over time. Doing so allows us to open the aperture on the actors and institutions engaged in such aid to explore the motivations and interests shaping aid efforts. I tackle these questions by advancing a political economy framework that considers how ideas, interests, and institutions mediate and shape the form and function of democracy aid programs. I develop this framework to

examine the design and implementation of past efforts in Egypt and Morocco, two of the highest recipients of US democracy aid in the Middle East. In doing so, I show how and why US democracy aid programs have done little to challenge the structure of power in the region. Leveraging over a decade of field and archival research in the Middle East and Washington, DC, I argue that previous studies have paid insufficient attention to the fact that democracy aid programs are often negotiated deals. Recipient governments can, and do, help craft their design.

The implications of my argument are significant for the literature on democracy aid and authoritarian durability. One major implication is that the agency and the strategic behavior of recipient states may explain the null effects of democracy aid in some countries. I show that because authoritarian regimes may choose how to accept aid, democracy aid may reward economic interests tied to incumbent regimes. By consequence of such bargaining, programs that appear to scholars as reform minded may instead enable regimes. Rather than promote democracy, such aid may perversely undermine it. In Egypt and Morocco, democracy programs were framed in terms of their benefit to the economy. This orientation reflected an institutional preference in the United States for a market-oriented democracy as well as a strategy to sell democracy programs to resistant regimes. Since the early 1990s, both states have been able to appropriate elements of democracy aid to bolster their control over society, for example, by using support for civil society to help fulfill government social welfare functions. US programs aiming to promote democracy often reinforced structures they intended to challenge.

My findings suggest that dependency matters in understanding an authoritarian regime's ability to challenge democracy aid programs, but that it is contingent on the availability of other potential patrons to act as a surrogate for donor aid. Beyond suggesting evidence of the limits of linkage politics and foreign aid, this book illuminates why democracy efforts have been limited through both the conceptualization of democracy promoted and the subsequent dilutions regimes were able to make to aid programs.

Examining the construction and practice of democracy aid, I argue, also illuminates the politics of such aid beyond just the level of donor and recipient governments. Previous studies of democracy aid say little about how such aid is constructed, allocated, and executed. My framework shows why particular ideas about democracy win out by examining the practice of democracy aid in the Middle East and in Washington, DC. In both Egypt and Morocco, the ideas about democracy that ultimately prevailed in programs were those reflecting the security imperatives of

the United States and recipient regimes, despite significant contestation over its meaning by locals and practitioners in the field as well as bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

Through archival research and interviews with practitioners, diplomats, activists, and contractors, this book is the first to offer insight into the black box of relations between donor and recipient governments and civil society. I show the evolution of what were rich discussions and debates about how to orient democracy programs in the region. I explain why certain ideas about democracy persist and how those ideas were sustained, challenged, and reinforced by particular interests and institutions to favor donor and recipient governments over local civil society. I also show why those ideas are unlikely to change given the institutional incentives governing actors engaged in democracy promotion. By focusing on the practice and construction of democracy aid, this book contributes to a more enriched understanding of the processes and mechanisms at work on both recipient and donor ends, which scholars note has been underdeveloped in the democracy and civil society aid scholarship.<sup>10</sup>

### **Studying and Theorizing Democracy Aid**

My argument for a political economy approach in understanding the limited impact of democracy aid in the Middle East challenges dominant approaches to the study of such aid. Over the last decade, scholars have become increasingly interested in understanding how foreign aid, and particularly that for democracy, can promote democratization. Important studies such as that commissioned by USAID have employed sophisticated research designs with cross-national data to determine whether and how aid for democracy might work.<sup>11</sup> Though methodologically sophisticated, the actual politics embedded within democracy promotion is often absent from such studies. Indeed, one of the limitations for aggregate cross-national studies is their inability to give sufficient attention to the form or structure of democracy aid programs, the context in which

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Heiss and Judith Green Kelley, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: International NGOs and the Dual Pressures of Donors and Host Governments," *Journal of Politics* 79, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Scott and Steele, "Sponsoring Democracy"; Finkel et al., "Effects of U.S. Foreign Assistance"; Burcu Savun and Daniel C. Tirone, "Foreign Aid, Democratization, and Civil Conflict: How Does Democracy Aid Affect Civil Conflict?," *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2 (2011).

they were executed, and the negotiations between both donor and recipient states.<sup>12</sup>

Evaluating the impact of democracy programs on democracy – a contested concept in itself – has also been a notoriously thorny endeavor for both scholars and aid practitioners. Institutional and bureaucratic pressures by donor agencies and other aid organizations to produce results often involve compromises and trade-offs to generate numbers at the expense of more nuanced understandings of the indirect and time-delayed effects of such aid. For example, one of the most common measures used by scholars to assess progress on democracy is the ordinal scale developed by the advocacy group Freedom House. Ordinal measures like the Freedom House Index (FHI) though often mask complex changes within states receiving aid and relay a superficial understanding of reform trajectories.<sup>13</sup> Scholars using the FHI and similar indices have acknowledged the problems and limitations inherent with such measures yet continue to use them in their research.

Viewed through the prism of analytics sites like Google Scholar and the Web of Science, the dominance of both the FHI and Polity IV, another democracy index used by scholars, is clear. As Michael Coppedge and John Gerring observe, scholars cite the former thousands and the latter hundreds of times.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, trade-offs may exist with particular methods and the reflexive use of such indices. Those trade-offs, I argue, have consequences. Democracy aid studies that use such approaches can assume a certain velocity that may narrow and define the way scholars see, study, and conceptualize democracy. Disciplinary pressures within political science may act as a disincentive to challenge this view and speak in terms other than that defined through the analytically clear, if shallow, neatness of such indices. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink have observed this dimension in their research on international norms, noting

<sup>12</sup> For example, data used in the USAID study on democracy aid was organized by dollar amount and divided by which component of democracy it fell under (aid for governance, civil society, elections, rule of law) and was compiled solely by the study's Democracy Fellow working at USAID. Details about program and project descriptions, grants, contractors, and recipients though were not included. Author's email correspondence with Andrew Green, USAID Democracy Fellow, Spring 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Henrik Knutsen, "Measuring Effective Democracy," *International Political Science Review* 31, no. 2 (2010). For a nuanced discussion on the different indices and problems in measuring democracy, see Michael Coppedge and John Gerring, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (2011). For a thoughtful counter to this argument, see Ilya Lozovsky, "Freedom by the Numbers," *Foreign Policy*, January 29, 2016. See also Sarah Sunn Bush, "The Politics of Rating Freedom: Ideological Affinity, Private Authority, and the Freedom in the World Ratings," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 3 (2017).

<sup>14</sup> Coppedge and Gerring, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy," 248.



a turn away from examining normative concerns within political science due to what they call “the behavioral revolution and its enthusiasm for measurement.”<sup>15</sup> Scholars consequently stayed clear from ideas and normative phenomena that did not lend themselves easily to measurement.<sup>16</sup>

These points are not meant to castigate quantitative approaches to the study of democracy promotion or dismiss findings from those studies altogether; instead, they are meant to attune us to what might be missed as a result. Data shared by donors like USAID, for example, seldom includes project-level details on democracy programs, information about the contractors executing such projects, or information about the recipients of such aid. Finding that data is possible, but difficult. Donor transparency on democracy aid would seem to be an imperative given the nature of that aid and its purported aims. Donor reluctance to share such details though makes it challenging to evaluate how democracy aid works and also implicitly raises questions about a donor’s intentions, even if unintended. Agencies like USAID have made commendable efforts to share more data on programming in the last five years, but the specifics still often remain difficult to capture.

The constellation of actors involved in democracy promotion is vast.<sup>17</sup> Actors may include donor governments, international organizations, advocacy groups, nongovernmental associations, and for-profit development contractors. The expansion of such actors over the last twenty years is often seen as proof of the ascension of democracy promotion and thus its legitimacy. Each of these actors though may hold very different ideas about democracy, how it is conceptualized, and the best approaches to advance their particular interpretations. Careful considerations of such differences and the motivations animating their work are seldom engaged in recent scholarship but are crucial in understanding how democracy aid works in practice. I argue that such details are key in understanding the parameters and possibilities of democracy assistance. The puzzles and questions I found captivating early in my fieldwork were ones that existing approaches to democracy aid were unable to answer meaningfully. Furthermore, they relayed how little we actually know about the mechanisms, practices, and processes shaping democracy aid itself.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 889.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Melia, “Democracy Bureaucracy”; Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, eds., *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

In this book, I underscore the importance of examining the context in which programs are implemented as well as the motivations and imperatives of donor and recipient states, which, as Julia Bader and Jörg Faust note, has been an “untapped source of insights into authoritarian preferences” in thinking about aid effectiveness.<sup>18</sup> This approach pushes us to directly address neglected questions at the heart of the construction and practice of democracy aid. Where and from whom do the ideas informing democracy programs originate? How do those ideas change in response to new information? How are they shaped by political, economic, and social contexts? How might institutional interests shape the construction and execution of that aid? What role do recipient governments play in deciding the ultimate form of democracy programs? How much agency do local actors have in the construction and execution of democracy programs? Why do particular forms of democracy aid prevail over others?

### Constructing Democracy

In the broadest sense, democracy assistance programs are those that aim to foster democracy within a state. Citing the work of de Zeeuw and Kumar,<sup>19</sup> Lappin defines such aid as “the non-profit transfer of funds, expertise, and material to foster democratic groups, initiatives, and institutions that are already working towards democratic society.”<sup>20</sup> This expansive definition describes the multiple forms that such aid can take, with resources directed to local government, human rights groups, election observation, political parties, and civil society groups, among others. Peter Burnell has offered another way of seeing democracy aid, classifying forms of such aid into supply and demand components. For example, aid toward the supply side of governance includes efforts to reform constituencies and legal frameworks and enhance government organization, while those on the demand side focus on assistance to “pressure group networks.”<sup>21</sup> The combination of any of these elements should reflect, as the democracy assistance literature relays, the state of development and the distribution of power within a recipient state. Ideally, a

<sup>18</sup> Julia Bader and Jörg Faust, “Foreign Aid, Democratization, and Autocratic Survival,” *International Studies Review* 16, no. 4 (2014): 583.

<sup>19</sup> Jeroen de Zeeuw and Krishna Kumar, *Promoting Democracy in Postconflict Societies* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Richard Lappin, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Democracy Assistance: The Problem of Definition in Post-Conflict Approaches to Democratisation,” *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 4, no. 1 (2010): 187.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Burnell, “Democracy Assistance: Origins and Organizations,” in *Democracy Assistance: International Cooperation for Democratization*, ed. Peter Burnell (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 57.

donor's chosen form of democracy aid would reflect both the development of a recipient state and the opportunities available in which to maximize the potential for any one component to effect change.

Over the course of my fieldwork though I saw that the reality, in practice, was deeply opaque. Interactions with aid practitioners in Washington, DC, and in the field underscored how the processes and mechanisms shaping democracy aid remain undertheorized and underdeveloped by scholars. Furthermore, they also relayed the constraints donors faced and compromises made while working in restrictive states like those in the Middle East. One of the key contributions of this book is to illuminate what I call the micropolitics of democracy aid.<sup>22</sup> To paraphrase the scholar Sidney Tarrow, if we want to know why the impact of democracy aid in the Middle East may have been limited, then we first need to understand how it evolved.<sup>23</sup> To understand that evolution, I undertake what Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein call "an archaeology of ideas" to trace the emergence and formalization of democracy aid within the foreign aid bureaucracy in Washington, DC, and in the Middle East.<sup>24</sup> Leveraging extensive archival and field research, I show how ideas about democracy were formed and contested and how strategies developed to challenge restrictive regimes against changing institutional contexts. My focus is not limited to bureaucrats within USAID but extends to the larger constellation of actors involved: diplomats, contractors for USAID projects, democracy advocates in the United States and abroad, local activists, and, in diplomatic parlance, local nationals – Egyptians and Moroccans – working within the missions of USAID and the US embassies.

My approach mirrors that taken in Severine Autesserre's important, insightful work on international peacekeeping.<sup>25</sup> Examining everyday practices among peacekeepers, she finds, sheds light on why certain routines, actions, and strategies persist, affecting the ultimate effectiveness of peace interventions.<sup>26</sup> Like her, my research emphasizes that the process of how democracy aid works is just as important for scholars to consider as the substance of programs themselves.<sup>27</sup> By closely

<sup>22</sup> Erin A. Snider, "US Democracy Aid and the Authoritarian State: Evidence from Egypt and Morocco," *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (2018).

<sup>23</sup> Sidney Tarrow, "The Strategy of Paired Comparison: Toward a Theory of Practice," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 2 (2010): 240.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Séverine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention*, *Problems of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

examining the practices, cultures, divisions, routines, and incentive structures that developed among the actors engaged in democracy aid both in Washington, DC, and in the field, I show how values and interests were contested and negotiated. Furthermore, I show that the ideas about democracy that ultimately won were those reflecting the economic and security imperatives of donor and recipient governments rather than those of local stakeholders on the ground.

### **Toward a Political Economy of Democracy Aid**

Understanding how this happens, I argue, and the possibilities and parameters for democracy aid beyond the Middle East is impossible without a consideration of political economy. While the intellectual roots of political economy as a field extend to the nineteenth century, the concerns animating its inquiries about the nature of relations between states, markets, and power in the international system remain vital today. Disciplines within the social sciences have since offered different definitions of political economy aimed to delineate the field and advocated positive and normative approaches to its study.<sup>28</sup> The simplest understanding of political economy though is as a field devoted broadly to understanding the reciprocal effects of politics on economics. Questions of power ultimately lie at the heart of analyses by political economists: Who gets what, when? Who establishes the rules? Who benefits? Who constructs?

Such questions comprise core concerns in the study of politics; in the study of political economy, they help distill the functions, mechanisms, and interactions of multiple actors engaged in domestic and international political arenas. For the purpose of this book, the questions also connect us to concerns about how actors within a democracy establishment interact to shape the form and function of democracy programs. How do ideas about democracy held by individuals influence the approach advocated by an aid institution? What drives the conception of democracy used in democracy programs? How are the recipients of democracy programs selected? How much agency do local actors have in the construction and execution of democracy programs?

<sup>28</sup> For a substantive discussion of these approaches, see Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mark Blyth, "An Approach to Comparative Analysis or a Subfield within a Subfield? Political Economy," in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 193–218; Andrew Gamble, "The New Political Economy," *Political Studies* 43, no. 3 (1995).

Scholars have used ideational, interest-based, and institutional approaches to study political economy.<sup>29</sup> Ideational approaches to political economy seek to understand the role and importance of ideas on political and policy outcomes. Ideas-centered approaches focus on how the ideas held by individuals and groups may influence policy. Those focused on interests are concerned with understanding how the material interests of groups affect policies or how some policies may benefit some groups over others.<sup>30</sup> With institutional approaches, the focus is on understanding the role of organizations in structuring and affecting the role of actors. As political scientist Peter A. Hall notes, such approaches “generally locate the primary causal factors behind economic policy or performance in the organizational structures of the political economy.”<sup>31</sup>

In this book, I integrate these three approaches in developing a framework that explains how democracy aid evolved in the region and how projects have worked to reinforce, rather than challenge the structure of power in Egypt and Morocco despite contestation from actors engaged at different levels in the field and in the United States. As Hall notes, “work that builds from these interfaces can borrow strengths from both sides and avoid the excessive monism that occasionally afflicts those in one school or another. The challenge is to capture some of the complexity of the political world without altogether forsaking the parsimony of which good social science depends.”<sup>32</sup> Insights drawn from all three approaches allow me to capture the richness and complexity inherent in the politics of democracy aid in the Middle East, which are often absent from scholarship on such aid. One of the strengths of a political economy framework for examining democracy aid is that it explicitly confronts questions of power and meaning in the execution of such aid.

Over the course of my fieldwork in both Egypt and Morocco, I saw how disparate actors on both the donor and recipient sides approached the task of democracy aid with very different values and understandings

<sup>29</sup> Kathleen R. McNamara, *The Currency of Ideas: Monetary Politics in the European Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Peter A. Hall, “The Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations,” in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapter 7; Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy*; Kathryn Sikkink, *Ideas and Institutions: Developmentalism in Brazil and Argentina*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey, *From the Corn Laws to Free Trade: Interests, Ideas, and Institutions in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Hall, “The Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations,” 177–178.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 178. <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

of democracy. Some ideas about democracy were deemed more important than others, and the institutional structures governing democracy aid both in the field and in Washington, DC, favored and rewarded some approaches to democracy aid over others. Even if not explicitly stated, there is a normative understanding in the backdrop of the democracy aid scholarship that such aid should reflect indigenous concerns and demands. A political economy approach to democracy aid enriches our understanding of how the interests of actors and institutions involved in the execution of aid work, sometimes unconsciously, to make the orientation of democracy aid programs more reflective of donor and recipient governments, rather than local concerns. As I underscore in this book, the explanation for why democracy aid has had a limited impact in the Middle East is multifaceted. As I elaborate in the next chapter, closely examining how ideas, interests, and institutions interact to mediate and shape the form and function of democracy programs illuminates why authoritarian regimes would allow such programs, why particular ideas about democracy prevail over others, and why obstacles to aligning democracy programs with indigenous demands remain.

### **Methods of Research**

The political economy framework I advance in this book shows us how ideas, interests, and institutions mediate and shape the form and function of democracy aid in the Middle East. To understand how US democracy aid evolved and functioned in the Middle East, I adopt an inductive, interpretative strategy to studying such aid through a paired comparison of past US efforts in Egypt and Morocco.<sup>33</sup> Both countries are two of the highest recipients of such aid in the region. I trace US efforts to aid democracy in both states from 1990 to 2011 through programs managed by USAID, the principal agency managing such programs. Egypt and Morocco are appropriate states to examine US democracy aid as both states have received more than ten years of such aid from USAID.<sup>34</sup> Having a longer record of assistance is critical for assessing potential patterns and trends in how aid has been formulated, distributed, and received in various sectors over time and in different

<sup>33</sup> Tarrow emphasizes the utility of this approach and its analytical leverage as it allows researchers to “triangulate on the same research questions from different angles.” Tarrow, “The Strategy of Paired Comparison,” 250.

<sup>34</sup> This study’s scope is limited to US democracy assistance administered by USAID, which executes the majority of such aid. Other actors include the US Departments of Defense, State, Justice, and the National Endowment for Democracy, which receives funding from the US Congress.

political and economic contexts. Beyond similarities in assistance records, both states represent different types of authoritarian regimes, with Egypt classified as a one-party dominant state until 2011 and Morocco as a constitutional monarchy, though ultimate power rests with its king. Both states also vary in their level of dependence on the United States, and by extension, their strategic importance. Egypt is the second-highest recipient of US foreign assistance, receiving an average of \$2 billion annually in military and economic aid since 1979.<sup>35</sup> Variability on both regime type and strategic importance suggests an explanation for differences in the execution and construction of programs in both states and offers insight for other states in the region.

My approach lends several advantages toward developing a more substantive understanding of how democracy aid programs were constructed, negotiated, and executed in the region. The first is that it more accurately reflects the challenges inherent to my research questions and the realities governing the field of inquiry itself. As Sean Yom observes, “real world research seldom follows elegant deductive procedures ... in reality many scholars move back and forth between theory and data in creating causal explanations, beginning not with hypotheses but hunches and constantly revising their propositions in response to unexpected discoveries.”<sup>36</sup> Transparency governs the practice of inductive iteration as well as that of interpretative research approaches.<sup>37</sup> In the early stages of my research, I approached the question of understanding the limited impact of democracy aid in the Middle East as a problem that could first be solved by finding, assembling, and analyzing data on democracy projects in the region. The reality, as I would discover when I first began field research, was more complicated. Fine-grained data on democracy projects was difficult to find, and US officials involved with such aid in the field were often hesitant to share it, much less discuss it. Aid recipients and civil society activists in both Egypt and Morocco also had very different ideas about the utility of democracy aid and its underlying motivations.

Complications and exclusions, primarily from US agencies and organizations, signaled a far more interesting and complex story, one that was

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, “Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations,” ed. Congressional Research Service (Washington, DC: CRS, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Sean Yom, “From Methodology to Practice: Inductive Iteration in Comparative Research,” *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 5 (2015): 617. See also Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy*, Cambridge Series in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59–60.

<sup>37</sup> Yom, “From Methodology to Practice,” 619.



absent from existing scholarship on such aid. The goal of interpretative research, as scholars Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow note, is “not to ascertain the singular truth of the ‘research world’ but its multiple ‘truths’ as understood by the human actors under study ... including the potential for conflicting and contradictory ‘truths’.”<sup>38</sup> Discussions with diplomats, bureaucrats, technocrats, activists, and development practitioners all engaged in democracy aid over the last decade underscored the depth and divergence of those truths. Interpretative approaches capture this complexity. Democracy assistance in the Middle East has always been politicized, but particularly so in the last decade. Scholars using interpretative approaches are “interested in the front stage as they are in the backstage ... or in what is made publicly legible, on view in the open square, as much as in what is hidden behind the façade or masked in blind sight.”<sup>39</sup> This became an important point guiding my research on democracy aid in Egypt and Morocco.

In my work, I trace how democracy aid evolved in the region with particular attention to the practices of actors I encountered in the field and in Washington, DC. Recent work by scholars shows how studying practices may illuminate our understanding of diplomacy, peacekeeping, and identity in politics among other areas.<sup>40</sup> Vincent Pouliot defines practices as “ways of doing things that are known to practitioners ... [they] are socially meaningful and organized patterns of activities; in pay parlance, they are ways of doing things.”<sup>41</sup> Noting synergies between interpretivist and process-tracing literature, he proposes practice tracing as a “conceptual meeting point for process tracers and interpretivists.”<sup>42</sup> Scholars can study practices through participant observation, interviews, textual analysis, diplomatic cables, meeting and conference minutes and transcripts, and government reports.<sup>43</sup> Close attention to practices sheds light on the ideational and institutional factors shaping democracy aid in the Middle East and the context in which that aid evolved. Examining

<sup>38</sup> Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretative Research Design*, Routledge Series on Interpretative Methods (New York: Routledge, 2012), 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Michael Barnett, *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*; Alexandra Gheciu, *NATO in the “New Europe”: The Politics of International Socialization after the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>41</sup> Vincent Pouliot, “Practice Tracing,” in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed. Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 237.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 237–238. <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.



actors' practices on both the recipient and donor sides of democracy aid helps us understand why one conception of democracy may prevail in aid programs and how institutional incentives may dissuade new forms from emerging. The benefit of examining practices is that it allows me to capture a range of important dimensions – how actors interact with others, how they see themselves within their respective institutions, and the larger constellation of the field they inhabit.

The analysis that follows in this book focuses on democracy aid projects executed by USAID from 1990 to 2011 and draws on archival work, Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests, and over twenty-four months of cumulative fieldwork in Egypt and Morocco as well as in Washington, DC. I conducted more than 150 interviews in Arabic, English, and French with local and international development practitioners and contractors, diplomats, activists, and US Embassy and USAID staff. I began this research in 2007 with the simple, if ambitious, goal of trying to assemble as much programmatic data as I could on US democracy programs in Egypt and Morocco and to speak with as many people engaged with such programs as I could at the diplomatic, programmatic, and field levels to map the fields governing democracy aid efforts.

Most of my interviews were generated through the process of what scholars refer to as the “snowball technique,” where one introduction from a contact can lead to and facilitate other interviews. This approach allowed me to enrich my contacts greatly, opening doors to speak to and learn from individuals working in different capacities in democracy aid. It also allowed me to better construct and capture the institutional history of US democracy efforts in both countries as staff working within the US Embassy and USAID Missions typically serve for two- to three-year rotations in country, making it difficult to develop a nuanced understanding of aid efforts.

US democracy aid has long been politicized in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt, presenting a challenge for researchers. That politicization may make actors at both the donor and recipient ends hesitant to speak with a researcher and, if they do, hesitant to speak with candor. Interviews generated via the snowball technique worked to counter this, with introductions functioning as a filter and signal of trust. Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended to facilitate both ease and trust. Most of my interlocutors would only speak anonymously out of security concerns and, in some cases, as a precaution for the institutional politics within their respective organizations. In this book, they are indicated as such.

A final point is necessary to make. With interpretative research, it is important to reflect on how one's “positionality” – their personal

characteristics and background – contributes to data generation and knowledge claims drawn from it.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, my identity as an American researcher facilitated interviews with diplomatic staff working in the US Embassy and USAID Missions. While I do not think that my identity made me seem more sympathetic to one perspective or another, I believe that it did make my contacts more comfortable sharing their experiences and thoughts with me. As an American who speaks Arabic and who has lived in both Egypt and Morocco, I found local nationals working on democracy aid and engaged in advocacy efforts to be frank and candid in our interviews together. Proficiency in the language and familiarity with the country and culture may have acted to reduce suspicion or apprehension with those I interviewed. In some instances, knowing that I was a researcher on democracy aid made locals engaged in such efforts eager to give their perspective and to “right” what they may have felt was missed in an official capacity with American diplomats or an American supervisor working on their projects.

### **Contributions of the Book**

My work makes several important contributions to the literature on democracy assistance and authoritarian durability. Some scholars may note that, in comparison to overall foreign aid or to foreign direct investment, democracy aid involves a small amount of money. But democracy-aid programs are highly visible and receive disproportionate media attention. Moreover, despite their relatively small size, my research shows that these programs may enhance the strength and efficiency of authoritarian regimes. Understanding how this happens and how democracy programs may unwittingly work to strengthen rather than challenge power in such states is an important task for scholars. Scholarship on democracy aid has expanded significantly over the last two decades, and scholars are tackling important questions about aid impact and how perceptions of that aid may affect notions of success. But it is also crucial, I argue, for scholars to understand and appreciate how particular forms of democracy aid may also have perverse consequences. Doing so requires a different strategy than that used in existing studies.

As Lisa Wedeen observes, the value of ethnographic and interpretative studies is that “they can enrich ongoing debates in the discipline, while also raising questions about the underlying assumptions that structure

<sup>44</sup> Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, *Interpretative Research Design*, 81.

those debates.”<sup>45</sup> To date, little attention has been devoted to understanding how ideas about democracy underlying democracy aid programs are formed and shaped by those executing the projects. While this book is about the construction and practice about democracy aid in the Middle East, it is also about the role of ideas in such aid more generally. The voices of those engaged in policy on democracy aid and those on the ground are seldom engaged in scholarship. Listening to them gives us a richer understanding of the constraints, compromises, and battles fought at the micro, meso, and macro levels of democracy aid provision. Through both archival and field research I show both why some ideas about democracy prevail over others and why those ideas continue even with evidence that they may be counterproductive or are strengthening authoritarian regimes. These findings challenge how many scholars and practitioners think about the practice of democracy aid and are important for refining our understanding about the role of outside actors in the execution of such aid, particularly in restrictive contexts.

Finally, my work echoes injunctions that have been made by critical scholars of development and democracy aid for more attention to the complexities and hidden dimensions of power within democracy aid.<sup>46</sup> The fact that we do not know definitively how democracies emerge is exactly the reason we ought to study how democracy promotion works in practice. One of my goals in writing this book is to enrich the scholarly conversation about the underlying assumptions about this form of aid and, hopefully, our understanding of how this aid works in practice as well. My book offers scholars and practitioners a new approach in thinking about the challenges of aiding democracy in restrictive states while also attendant to making such aid more responsive to indigenous demand.

### **Rethinking Democracy Aid in Authoritarian States**

The goal of this book is to challenge how scholars and practitioners think about effectiveness in democracy aid more broadly, but also the visions of

<sup>45</sup> Lisa Wedeen, “Ethnography as Interpretative Enterprise,” in *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*, ed. E. Schatz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 84.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, work by Jeff Bridoux and Milja Kurki, *Democracy Promotion: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014); William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations 48 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

democracy advanced by donors as well. In critiquing components and strategies of democracy programs in subsequent chapters, my aim is not to say whether democracy aid is good or bad. As Bridoux and Kurki rightly note, “to assume that democracy promotion is a Western-state driven and interest-driven project is to simplify the picture to the extreme.”<sup>47</sup> Instead, it is my intention to show the complexity of the endeavor, especially in restrictive states, and to highlight that it does not lend itself to straightforward solutions. I encountered countless individuals in both Egypt and Morocco who tried to challenge the direction of democracy programs against bureaucratic obstacles and often at risk to their own personal safety. In restrictive regimes, the challenge for donors wanting to aid democracy can be daunting. The space for engagement is often narrow, and regimes hostile to outside interference can make life difficult for donors and even dangerous for local recipients of democracy aid. Donors wanting to make their democracy programs more responsive to and driven by local concerns and priorities are often thwarted by security measures enacted by regimes to control the movement and reach of donors within their country.

Some compromise and concession from donors are inevitable in order to operate in such an environment. In subsequent chapters, I show how regimes in Morocco and Egypt used their strategic leverage with the United States to dilute the substance and direction of democracy programs to enhance their own strength. Such dynamics should not be cause to eliminate democracy aid outright in such countries or abandon the endeavor altogether. Even rhetorical engagement has some value; sustained dialogue about democracy between the United States and a regime may make it less likely to disappear its citizens or enact more repressive measures. They are, instead, cause for donors to rethink the conception of democracy underlying their respective programs as well as their approach to the endeavor. Lessons from the Middle East, in particular, underscore the danger of privileging economic growth as part of a democracy strategy in an authoritarian state. Such strategies, as I show, presume that regimes are invested in the mechanisms by which growth might enhance democratization. The orientation of this strategy in both states had deeply undemocratic effects on citizens in both states, and the grievances underlying the 2011 Arab uprisings are powerful reminders of the need to focus greater attention on the connections between the economic and political in democracy aid. In the last chapter of this book, I discuss the utility of social democratic approaches to democracy, which

<sup>47</sup> Bridoux and Kurki, *Democracy Promotion*.

reflect a deeper appreciation and sensitivity for how citizens are affected by socioeconomic change.

### **Map of the Book**

The remainder of this book proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, I elaborate on the conceptual and methodological framework that I use to examine the construction and practice of US democracy programming in the Middle East. I highlight limitations and weaknesses with current approaches to studying democracy aid and show that existing research on such aid elides the contested meaning of democracy itself as well as the assumptions underlying democracy aid projects, treating such aid as neutral if unconsciously. I argue that a political economy approach to the study of aid takes such meaning seriously while giving us a more nuanced understanding of the motivations and intentions of donor and recipient states. Drawing on Hall's work, I develop a political economy framework that considers how ideas, institutions, and interests can mediate and shape the form and function of democracy aid. Focusing on ideas, interests, and institutions in democracy promotion allows us to capture the complex interaction between actors engaged in such efforts in what I call the "micropolitics" of democracy aid. I describe how this framework helps to explain the practices of disparate actors engaged in democracy promotion, drawing on Fligstein and Adams' concept of strategic action fields.

In Chapter 3, I introduce and trace the practices of the actors, interests, and institutions within the US foreign aid bureaucracy that have played an important role in developing democracy programs. I focus on staff within USAID as the main institutional actors involved in managing democracy aid programs, as well as staff from the US Department of State and the National Security Council. The chapter begins with a discussion of the United States' motivations and role in providing aid for democracy and then moves to examine how that assistance has been managed through various agencies though principally by USAID. Attention is given to the Agency's conception of democracy, how it has evolved over time, and the impact of domestic politics in shaping and constraining its functions. This chapter also explores the institutional battles that emerged over differing ideas about what democracy aid programs were meant to do abroad and tensions that existed over reconciling domestic security interests with those in recipient states. I incorporate novel new data on the professional histories of nearly 2,000 professionals engaged in democracy promotion to map the

influence of individuals in shaping ideas about aid that constitute what some scholars refer to as “the democratization industry.”

In Chapters 4 and 5, my focus moves from the domestic arena of US democracy promotion to that of the Middle East. Chapter 4 examines the evolution of democracy aid in Egypt through two sections. In the first, I examine the impetus for economic and political reform in Egypt, tracing how those reforms were executed and managed by the state and how that reform strategy varied in response to international and domestic pressure. The second section continues with a parallel analysis of US support for democracy aid in Egypt. I focus on when that aid was first executed in Egypt, how it was formulated by USAID, and the negotiations undertaken between USAID in Washington, DC, Cairo, and members of civil society in Egypt toward program construction. This section highlights the Agency’s preference for framing democracy programs in Egypt in terms of their benefit to the state’s existing economic reform program, why this path was chosen, and its effect on limiting the impact of success for democracy programs. Chapter 5 examines the political economy of US democracy aid in Morocco in two sections. In the first, I examine the context in which political and economic reforms began in Morocco. This section describes the foundation of power in the country and traces variations in the state’s strategy over time. The second section discusses the context in which US aid for democracy began in Morocco. US democracy assistance therein was executed later than similar efforts in Egypt and at significantly different funding levels. I discuss reasons for this variation as well as how that strategy was formulated over time. In the 1990s, the Moroccan regime began to aggressively market an image of itself within the region and abroad as a modernized and moderate state with the help of US-based lobbying groups. This section traces the United States’ increasing support through its democracy programs for economic reforms over political aid for democracy that would mirror the regime’s own priorities and traces how its conception of democracy in the country changed to support the commercial and security interests of the regime and the United States.

In Chapter 6, I consider how the 2011 Arab uprisings challenged the strategies adopted by the United States and the Egyptian and Moroccan regimes. I examine shifting aid strategies in the United States and the response from former regime elites and emergent political actors. Drawing from interviews with diplomats and activists involved in transitional support and unreleased data, I consider how the ideas, institutions, and interests that supported a particular form of aid for twenty-five years adjusted with the promise of political change. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the challenges these changes pose for activists and

emerging political actors in the region as well as policymakers in the United States and those embedded within the democracy bureaucracy in Washington, DC. The final section of the chapter revisits the questions raised at the outset of the book and discusses possible mechanisms for enhancing the effectiveness of democracy aid programs. I elaborate on impediments to such programs in authoritarian states and discuss the limitations of mechanisms such as aid conditionality. I discuss ethical points of contention to current debates about such aid that are ignored in scholarly works and examine how a social-democratic approach to aid may circumvent many of the moral hazards associated with democracy aid. I also discuss the difficulty of moving the conversation in Washington, DC, to consider a different form of democracy, despite acknowledgment from former aid workers and diplomats about its ineffectiveness and promotion of a very particular and narrow form of democracy. I conclude by laying out a new research agenda for scholars to consider in deepening our inquiry into the micropolitics and economic interests driving particular ideas about democracy.