

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

What We Can Learn from History for Securing the
Future of Democracy

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Democracy promotion should become more political, more historically aware and capable of dealing with conflict, and in doing so should reflect more strongly the wealth of historical experiences accumulated by democratisation processes.



Democracy promotion must devote more attention to the relationship between democracy and capitalism.



„Embedded“ democracy promotion is needed in order to better understand the dynamic of social conflicts.



Democracy is a story. Successful democracy movements require powerful narratives.

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1

IS WINTER COMING? EXTERNAL DEMOCRACY PROMOTION FACES NEW QUESTIONS

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 seemed to mark the end of the conflict-ridden 20th century. In the years that followed, an optimistic view of the future of global democracy prevailed. The 'third wave' of democratisation processes gained renewed momentum with the Central and Eastern European countries and a number of African and Asian countries. The southern European dictatorships and the authoritarian regimes in Latin America had already fallen in the 1970s and 1980s. The hope that liberal democracy would triumph throughout the world was reflected in popular worldviews. According to the thesis that enjoyed widespread currency at the time, the Western model of democracy, supported by targeted democracy promotion, would prevail as a further universal language alongside capitalism.

However, this optimism barely lasted a decade. Today the talk of a 'crisis of democracy' is omnipresent. The symptoms of such a crisis are manifold: restrictions on civil liberties or power shifts in favour of the executive branch are becoming permanent in many countries. Both young and old democracies face challenges to their legitimacy, since they do not seem to be adequately fulfilling the hopes for participation, social justice and security placed in them. While democratic processes are increasingly being reduced to efficient techniques of governance and clever marketing, the emphatic understanding of democracy as a form of life and a field of experimentation for forms of social coexistence seems to be losing its meaning. Numerous empirical studies of 'defective democracies', 'pluralistic autocracies' and 'antagonistic majoritarian democracies' have shown that a wide variety of constantly changing hybrid political systems exists. Moreover, in contrast the 1990s, today democracy is also being challenged at the discursive level. State leaders and intellectuals are increasingly willing to proclaim the death of liberalism openly. And since many anti-liberal and anti-democratic actors are simultaneously adopting nationalistic stances, the crisis of democracy also appears to be a crisis of multilateralism.

THE LOSS OF DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY AFTER '9/11'

Often enough, the doubts concerning liberal democracy have been fuelled by the West itself. The wars of intervention waged after 9/11 in the name of democracy and aimed at regime change not only destabilised entire regions, but also clearly damaged the reputation of Western-style democracy

and its claim to superiority. Thus, it is hardly surprising that resistance to external interference has taken shape in many countries. In recent years, numerous governments have placed restrictions on the freedom of action of external democracy supporters in their countries. It is estimated that, since 2000, some 50 countries have introduced legislation making it more difficult to provide external support for democracy and human rights.

Moreover, the transatlantic democracies have themselves come under pressure. The former narrative, according to which the democratic practice and knowledge of consolidated democracies legitimise them in helping other countries on their way, is no longer sustainable. Most developments towards authoritarianism are no longer occurring in systems that are already authoritarian, but in democracies. Even the largest and most successful 'democratisation machine', the European Union, is facing problems with anti-democratic developments in its member states.

THE DEEP SLUMBER OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

This overview of the current situation represents a challenge for the international promotion of democracy as this has been conducted for over half a century by international organisations, Western countries, NGOs and political foundations. How can democracy be promoted in hybrid regimes? How can democratic principles be protected from authoritarian rollback? How should democracy promotion respond when universal human rights and liberal social models are placed in question?

In view of the upheavals outlined above, external democracy promotion in Europe and North America should respond with numerous programmatic contributions on democracy and strategies for its promotion. However, we are still feeling the impact of the 1990s, when the liberal democratic spirit of the era led people to believe that democracy promotion would succeed almost automatically and without effort. The doors stood open, there was scarcely a trace of a headwind. The attitude of many institutions towards the promotion of democracy has become more apolitical, ahistorical and narrower over the years: apolitical, because it still tends to reduce democracy to prudent management within the framework of 'good governance'; ahistorical, because it

develops its strategies based on a consideration of ever shorter periods, deriving its criteria of assessment more from the democratic achievements of the West than from the transformations actually being undergone by the partner countries; and narrower, because many approaches are informed by an orientation to stability and security fixated on responding to the recent upheavals in the international order, which pushes the actual issues of democracy into the background.

DEMOCRACY PROMOTION ADAPTED TO CURRENT CONDITIONS REQUIRES AN UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY

It's time to wake up! The challenges of democracy in the 21st century call for democracy promotion which is political, committed, strategic and transformative. To this end a new, more vibrant and critical debate is required. This paper is a contribution to such a debate. Our chosen approach is a historical one. A great deal is being written at the moment about current threats to democracy – ranging from populism to artificial intelligence to growing social fragmentation – and democracy promoters must grapple with them more than they have in the past. However, these contemporary manifestations of crisis are not the focus of this article. Instead, we ask what lessons can be drawn from the historical examination of democratisation processes for democracy promotion adapted to current conditions. We believe that those who wanted to promote democracy in the 21st century must devote as much attention to the historical experiences of the development of democracy as to the current upheavals. Only by combining historical experience with a diagnosis of the present can we derive meaningful requirements for external democracy supporters.

In the first part of the analysis, we identify six lessons from the history of democratisation processes which in our opinion democracy supporters should bear in mind when developing strategies adapted to current conditions. In the second part, we will discuss what conclusions can be drawn from these lessons for a progressive external promotion of democracy committed to providing historically conscious and up-to-date approaches to deepening democratic principles.

2

SIX HISTORICAL LESSONS

Anyone reflecting on the prospects of and strategies for promoting democracy in the 21st century should first examine the wealth of historical experiences accumulated by democratisation processes. This legacy yields six particularly valuable historical insights for democracy supporters in the 21st century.

2.1 'TOO EARLY TO TELL': DEMOCRATISATION HAS A LONG WAY TO GO

When Richard Nixon became the first American president to visit China in 1972, this not only marked the beginning of a new chapter in US-Chinese relations but also gave rise to one of the most famous political quotations of the era. When asked what, in his opinion, was the historical significance of the French Revolution – which at that time was almost 200 years in the past, after all – China's then Prime Minister Zhou Enlai is reported to have responded: 'Too early to tell.' More than three decades later, Zhou's then interpreter expressed doubts about whether these words actually referred to the events of 1789. But by then the quotation had already taken on a life of its own – and rightly so, because it expresses succinctly the insight that societies are in a constant state of flux and that any judgement concerning the results of a political transformation is always to some extent provisional. 'Too early to tell' reflects above all three concrete historical experiences of European democracy: firstly, that the path to democracy is very protracted, secondly, that progress is made in very small steps, and thirdly, that it is always accompanied by setbacks, reversals and periods of stagnation, often including breakdowns, violence and terror. In other words, democratic developments have never been linear or conflict-free, and every democracy remains an open-ended experiment.

The development of democracy in France provides a classic illustration of these experiences. In 1789, with the French Revolution, it initially culminated in a landmark democratic experiment – only to be quickly superseded by terror and later by an imperial dictatorship. This was followed by a monarchist restoration and populist authoritarianism, before the Third Republic of 1870 established a fragile democracy that lasted until the invasion by Nazi Germany. This protracted development was interrupted, in turn, by short-lived democratic departures, experiments or attempts at stabilisation.

The democratic advances and experiments in Germany, Italy and Spain during the 19th and 20th centuries also involved repeated regressions or complete collapses. Thus, in 1848 a powerful wave of democratisation washed over Europe, a European Spring, which, not unlike the Arab Spring 162 years later, ebbed as quickly as it had begun. Between 1900 and 1949, 17 European regimes underwent a phase of accelerated democratisation. But among this group, twelve regimes experienced at least one phase of even more rapid de-democratisation (Tilly 2007: 44). It was only in the second half of the 20th century – after the devastation of the Second World War and more than one-and-a-half centuries of widespread social conflict over democratic principles – that some states managed to enter a comparatively long and still enduring phase of expansion of democratic rights (albeit only in Western Europe). Southern Europe followed much later, and Eastern Europe, 30 years after the collapse of communism, is still basically in the early stages of democratic transformation. The same can be said of the numerous democracies in Asia and Africa whose democratic consolidation is still continuing.

Democracy researchers have traced this dialectical interplay of progress and reversals in the development of democracy (see, e.g., Inglehart 2018, Tilly 2007, Berman 2019). The dynamics of movement and countermovement are fuelled, among other things, by the fact that the actors involved in establishing a new political order are also the heirs of the old political order. Economic structures, political customs, cultural traditions and normative beliefs persist or provide the reference points for all those opponents who are beginning to wrestle with the new institutions and values and to work to overcome them. It is not surprising, therefore, that democratic changes often bear the seeds of counter-movements within them.

It is sometimes claimed that following several waves of democratisation we are now experiencing a wave of authoritarianism. We can find examples of authoritarian change on all continents since 2000. But where contemporary witnesses of these developments suspect a watershed, later historians may recognise only a slight lull. If we only take free elections as our criterion, the thesis that we are experiencing and authoritarian rollback is difficult to uphold. In recent years, there has neither been a significant change in the absolute number of electoral democracies, nor a decrease in

the proportion of people living in democracies. Most of the states that were democratised in the course of the last wave of democratisation since 1950 are still democratic today. Over the past decade, more than 20 states have also managed to take substantial steps towards 'more democracy', including Tunisia, Georgia, Armenia, Côte d'Ivoire and Sri Lanka. Moreover, many of the countries currently cited as evidence of the triumph of the authoritarian have never been consolidated democracies. There were more (semi-)autocracies, such as Russia, Azerbaijan, Burundi and Bahrain, in which, after phases of hesitation and experimentation, authoritarianism became further consolidated. Over the same period, the number of hard-core autocracies and dictatorial regimes underwent a sharp decline. Whereas in 1980 over half of all countries still fell into this category, by 2018 it was only 14 per cent (V-Dem 2019b).

Although this means that there is no empirical evidence of a movement towards authoritarian models and popular support for democracy as a norm remains high, in practice the development of democracy seems to be blocked in many places. A 'democratic recession' (Diamond 2015), i.e. a decline in the quality of democracy, can often be observed. Today many of the more recent democracies appear to be unconsolidated electoral democracies with authoritarian elements. Free and fair elections are often opposed by actors or social dynamics that restrict further democratic development or reverse democratic standards already achieved. At the beginning of the new decade, it is once again evident that democracy is complex, conflict-laden and has many preconditions. It is, in the words of Oskar Negt (2010), 'the only state-organised social form which needs to be learned'. And learning takes time. Democracy can also be unlearned – a process that generally occurs much faster than democratic achievements were built up.

Therefore, restraint is called for when it comes to sweeping judgements about the prospects for the development of democracy on a global scale. At any rate, whether we are currently witnessing the last, long phase of democratisation being followed by a counter-movement in the sense of a sustained phase of de-democratisation is completely open – it's 'too early to tell'.

2.2 'CIRCUMSTANCES TRANSMITTED FROM THE PAST': EVERY DEMOCRATISATION FOLLOWS A DIFFERENT COURSE

An examination of the trajectories of democracy in the European countries raises a number of questions: Why did the democratic awakening of continental Europe begin in France? And why did the democracy movement in Germany in 1848 fail? Why was there an anti-monarchist revolution in France, but not in Britain? Why was democracy able to consolidate itself in Italy after the Second World War, while its southern European neighbours Spain, Portugal and Greece drifted into dictatorships? Why do such diverse paths of democratisation already exist in such a geographically restricted and apparently culturally homogeneous region as Western Europe?

A statement by Karl Marx provides a suitable starting point for addressing these questions: 'People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.' Marx wrote these words in the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in which he dealt with the recent failure of the democratic movement of 1848. The progressive forces of the time had failed to shape sufficiently profoundly the 'circumstances transmitted from the past', i.e. the existing and historically developed configurations of a society. Divided over what they actually wanted to achieve – a constitutional monarchy, a republic or a radical democracy – they allowed the reactionary forces to reorganise and prevent the impending change. But even if 1848 did not initially bring about the hoped-for democratisation, progressive forces throughout Europe learned new forms of protest, organisation and communication during this phase, which they were able to successfully bring bear in later disputes. This applies in particular to the workers' movement, which after the experience of 1848 split off from the alliance with liberals and nationalists and began to establish itself as an independent movement. Thus, 1848 proved to be a valuable learning experience which made an essential contribution to the success of subsequent democratic movements.

The divergent 'circumstances transmitted from the past' of which Marx writes also explain why progressive strategies cannot simply be transferred from one context to the next. One size does not fit all. In late 18th-century France, the democratic movement encountered a political order that proved to be utterly incapable of tackling the necessary structural reforms. The progressive forces of the time were compelled to adopt a confrontational strategy geared to system change, because there could be no accommodation with absolutism. In Great Britain, however, the conflicts that had already taken place over a century earlier were so bloody that, in the period after the end of the 17th century, the various social groups were all the more eager to manage their interest conflicts more or less peacefully in a democratic direction. This created an opportunity for progressive forces to pursue a balancing strategy which was successful in many respects.

Political transformation paths are thus closely bound up with the respective institutional, political and social contexts. Elements of past orders and old regimes persist in every social order and political regime, shaping the norms, values, institutional structures, discourses and power relations, and thus the opportunities, speed and trajectories of democratisation. The fact that democratisation processes are embedded in country-specific, historically evolved configurations, and increasingly are also reactions to transnational – typically, economic – influences means that they always unfold in unique ways. For a long time scholars sought to identify the benchmark of democracy (development/industrialisation, stability, state institutions, multi-party systems, civil society, etc.) and then derive strategies from it. In view of the developmental path followed by democracies, however, this represents a very limited approach. On the contrary, one

could draw up a separate democratisation map for every country which requires bespoke strategies from progressive forces. Drawing up a single blueprint for democratic debates in every country is not a suitable approach.

2.3 DISTRIBUTION CONFLICTS AND POWER RESOURCES: DEMOCRATISATION IS NEVER CONFLICT-FREE

The fact that democratic developments are typically marked by a dynamic of movement and counter-movement and by the coexistence of new and traditional socio-political structures, cultural traditions, institutions and normative beliefs suggests that democratic transformations are not conflict-free and are frequently unstable. The main reason for this is that democratisation processes always involve struggles over the distribution of power, resources, privileges and prerogatives.

In the past decades, we have encountered the conflictual element of democratic debate in multiple waves of protest and social movements. Whether in Tunisia, Brazil, Spain, Iran or France, the 'revolt of the educated' (Wolfgang Kraushaar), especially of the young members of the middle classes, was directed against their perceived dearth of prospects. In many African countries and in countless large cities around the world, conflicts over affordable housing, transport, energy and food led to 'service delivery protests'. Although the protests were triggered by a whole range of concrete events, the protesters' demands focused mainly on issues of distribution. Like the historical struggles of the workers' movement before them, they were directed against the erosion of the elementary foundations of everyday social life and the decoupling of the economy from the needs of broad sectors of society.

The protests also make it clear that in many places the demonstrators consider other channels of democratic articulation (such as elections, plebiscites and involvement in political parties) to be too difficult to access or ineffective. Indignados, enraged citizens, Occupiers and Gezi Park protesters are clear indications of an apparent disconnect between established institutions and the fears and aspirations of significant sections of the population. This is less a matter of a challenge to the principle of 'democracy than of disappointment over its daily practice' (Leggewie and Bieber 2003). Thus, the protests often combined criticism of social grievances with criticism of aloof or authoritarian styles of government.

For authoritarian forces, such protests represent a threat to their claim to power and their privileges, to which they respond with restrictions on civil liberties and increasingly comprehensive technological strategies of control, spying on data flows and censorship. These measures culminate in attempts to undermine the system of checks and balances with the argument that the state leadership has a direct pact with the population which renders the separation of powers superfluous and deems any questioning of this imaginary pact to be an attack on 'the interests' of the community and

treason against the country. In many countries, therefore, democracy is not everywhere uniformly in retreat or blocked, but especially where democracy acquires substance and empowers and protects citizens, social movements and entire societies: in the rule of law, economic and social participation, civil rights and freedom of association and assembly. In other words, democratisation is frequently conflictual where it is 'in danger' of being successful.

These rights, like our current 'democratic achievements', were fought for by democratic movements: overturning aristocratic and ecclesiastical privileges; the recognition of the rule of law and the suppression of the arbitrary police state by the idea of the inviolability of the 'private sphere' which is once again becoming so topical; and the extension of parliamentary rights vis-à-vis the executive, universal suffrage and social civil rights. These achievements first had to be gained through tough social struggles before they could be transformed into compromises and social consensus. Since the late 19th century, the workers' movement was the decisive political force for the expansion of democracy, and the power relations between the workers' movement and the authorities played a key role in the democratic expansion of societies.

Overcoming an undemocratic order is by no means synonymous with a reduction in conflict, however, because the difficulty of abolishing an old order is only surpassed by that of establishing a new one. Overthrowing the dictatorship is always only the first, and often easier, step. Many states in North Africa and the Middle East were able to comprehend the historical experience of European societies during the Arab Spring. Numerous examples of this phenomenon are also provided by the process of state and nation building which is still ongoing in many post-colonial societies. When old orders are overturned, societies often enter a phase that Antonio Gramsci described as an 'interregnum' in which 'the old is dying but the new cannot be born'. Such phases are always marked by conflict, because old and new forces are struggling to determine how many features of the old order should be preserved in the new one. Moreover, the old structures often provide points of reference for all those counterforces that begin to rail at the new institutions and values and to work to overcome them. In every continental Europe country, these confrontations were marked by extreme tensions and at least temporary violence.

2.4 DEMOCRACY REQUIRES STRONG DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS – AND PEOPLE WHO PROTECT THEM

There is no guarantee that the rights and procedures which have been achieved through struggle will survive. Whether a right is preserved depends on how successfully the new democratic rules and achievements are institutionalised. By institutionalisation here is meant anchoring and securing democratic rights and protecting them against arbitrary state action. Democracy can only thrive where individuals do not have to live in fear of arbitrary restrictions and repression, but can assert their rights against those with political power.

Institutionalisation also means that democratic institutions are intertwined through a system of reciprocal controls in such a way that the democratic power of one institution is restricted by that of another. In her comparison between the French and American revolutions, Hannah Arendt (1965) illustrates the importance of such institutionalisation for how a process of democratisation unfolds. In France, a centralised tradition of the appropriation of violence not subject to controls developed under Robespierre, who appealed to virtue and the people, which quickly led to the suppression of civil liberties; in the United States, by contrast, in part due to a decentralised culture of self-government, political violence was contained within a federal structure and civil liberties were institutionalised. In Europe, the period following the First World War in particular brought a surge in the institutionalisation of democracy in the shape of legal codification and the separation of powers. The collapse of the four authoritarian monarchist empires – Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire – paved the way for the extension of the franchise, the strengthening of parliamentarism and restrictions on executive power.

However, the trajectory of democracy during the interwar period provides an important lesson in democratisation which is acquiring unforeseen contemporary relevance when we look at countries such as the USA, Hungary and Poland: for democracies, the risk of deinstitutionalisation is significantly higher than that of violent coups. Even when a democratic norm has prevailed, it cannot count as irreversibly consolidated. The history of democracy has been accompanied by deinstitutionalisation since its inception. In fact, in the 20th and 21st centuries, far more democracies came to an end through the formal democratic channel of the ballot box than through coups d'état (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). The rise and collapse of European democracies between the two world wars merely provides especially vivid examples of the historical insight that democracies can count as being consolidated only as long as a majority respects, supports, demands and lives by democratic principles. Democratic institutions such as elections, constitutional courts and parliaments are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the consolidation of democracies. In this respect, threats to democracies by no means first arise when a constitutional court is side-lined, but manifest themselves much earlier in insidious changes in democratic culture.

What do we have to watch out for? There are a number of symptoms which indicate that things are beginning to slide in a democratic system – for example, when actors in positions of social responsibility begin to reject democratic ground rules in their words and deeds; when they deny legitimacy to political competitors or individual population groups or declare them to be enemies; when they demonstrate their willingness to limit the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary or basic rights; when they introduce institutional changes whose sole aim is to secure the power of their own camp; but above all when such behaviour is not decisively sanctioned by the other political leaders (see Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

This shows that an emphatic understanding of democracy is above all a matter of the informal institutions which are not anchored in the constitution. It is the informal norms, unwritten rules and cultural practices of democracy through which people continually engage with democracy and which stabilise democracies. This means that it is all the more dangerous when only the privileged affluent members of society engage with the formal institutions (elections, participation processes) or the informal norms of democracy. Today the economic exclusion and the unequal educational opportunities of many are already creating a situation in which those who are most deeply affected by life's hardships and risks are the ones who are least involved in the political process. Democracy needs time and resources. Therefore, a democratic renewal of societies is inextricably bound up with the question of how the increase in productivity and prosperity is distributed in a society. The idea of a democracy as a 'way of life' (Dewey 1916) can only be implemented if democracy begins in people's immediate vicinity and assumes diverse forms – in the workplace, in schools, in municipalities and neighbourhoods.

For the workers' movement and other democratic forces, therefore, the relationship between the state and society has always been (and remains) a central issue. In the past, its political goal was not only to democratise the state and rule; rather, with active, democratic public institutions it always also associated the hope of establishing social democracy in the different spheres of society. Its aim was to transform the state into a central instrument of reform with whose help democratic politics would regulate, provide impulses, redistribute and innovate. In the eventful history of the relationship between the state and democracy, there was often more 'tension than contact, more confrontation than identification' (Bracher 1969). Even today, state institutions, as the consolidation of in part already obsolete social power relations, often oppose the forces of democratisation as repressive allies of an elite that reinforce social conditions of exploitation, curtail rights or hinder political work. Authoritarian or pre-democratic conceptions of the state see its central institutions (bureaucracy, judiciary and security apparatuses) as the guarantors of continuity beyond the democratic 'chaos', with its parties and changes of power, as a state above society.

In a whole series of countries, the modern (nation-)state still does not represent the common norm of political organisation, but instead a fragile, precarious form of statehood which is exposed to multiple threats. The most extreme reflection of this is the different histories of state failure, which can almost always be traced back to two causes: social inequality and the discrediting of the state and its institutions. Under the fragile shell of the nation-state, autocratic networks, often accompanied by systematic corruption and neopatrimonial policies, are dismantling the institutions of the state. The lack of statehood and elites oriented to the public good in turn strengthens other, sub-state structures: While in the 'shadow states' the loyalty of 'citizens' is diminishing, ethnic and religious ties and the social control of local power brokers are becoming increasingly important. In extreme cases, the

state, and especially its resources, are becoming the prey of these elites. Ultimately, many of these countries will continue their unfinished and faltering state-building under conditions of dwindling statehood in the age of globalisation.

2.5 'DISEMBEDDED': CAPITALISM IS NOT DEMOCRATIC

'It was supposed to be a match made in heaven' (Reich 2009). The combination of democracy and capitalism was long considered to be the perfect symbiosis. It was also supposed to mark the 'end of history': 'The century that began full of confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an 'end of ideology' or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism' (Fukuyama 1989). Today, however, three decades later, the lines of conflict between democracy and capitalism are becoming progressively clearer. In the euphoria of the triumph over the state-socialist systems, it was often forgotten that the relationship between the two had always been strained.

The historical connection between them is clear: where early forms of a capitalist economic system prevailed, as they did in England, representative democracy developed as a form of state organisation. Apart from democracy, to date only capitalism has been more successful in conquering new geographical regions and permeating new social domains. Despite many crises, today (almost) all modern societies are capitalist. This is a remarkable fact that testifies to the adaptability of capitalism. Similar to democracy, capitalism appears in numerous variants (Hall and Soskice 2001), but it is much more flexible in its choice of partners. For, while capitalism has coexisted with a wide variety of political systems since its inception and is also compatible with authoritarian and dictatorial systems, throughout its history democracy has never tolerated any economic system besides capitalism at its side. One of the reasons for this is that an essential democratic achievement – namely, the limitation of state power and the legally guaranteed extension of the autonomy of society vis-à-vis the state – favoured free economic activity and the acquisition of private property.

It was clear from the very beginning of capitalist development that the freedom associated with private property serves particular interests, whereas democracy requires that these interests be restricted. Capitalism and democracy operate in accordance with fundamentally different logics, which make it possible but difficult to establish a balanced relationship between the two systems (see Kocka and Merkel 2015: 313ff.): Capitalism is based on unequal property rights, democracy on equal civil and social participation rights. Capitalism relies on profit-oriented exchange, democracy on collective procedures, majority decisions and the protection of minorities. Capitalism is a matter of realising particular interests, democracy of promoting the common good. In the tensions between capitalist interests and democratic development, the bourgeoisie generally

supported democracy only when it did not threaten its property privileges.

But the dynamism of capitalism also propelled democracy insofar as a self-confident workers' movement devoted to overcoming social inequality emerged. Economic power and privileges quickly become concentrated in the hands of a minority which knows how to translate its economic power into political power, so that particular interests constantly take precedence over the common good. Politics can counteract this development through redistribution and democratic procedures. Throughout its history, the capitalist system has required repeated democratic corrective and regulatory interventions to prevent it from undermining the basis of its own existence (Streeck 2012). This was achieved, for example, in the United States in the 1930s as part of the New Deal or by establishing welfare state institutions in some Nordic and Western European countries between 1950 and 1970. Where this did not occur and the markets became increasingly independent of their embeddedness in social relations (Polanyi 1978), capitalism contributed to the disasters that marked the beginning of the 20th century.

Today, too, social inequality is why the silent consensus on the economic model that prevailed in recent decades has begun to crumble in many places. The motto of the Occupy movement, 'We are the 99 per cent' is not an exaggeration. Globally speaking, we are living in a true economy for the '1 per cent': one per cent of the world's population owns more than the remaining 99 per cent combined. The trends and structures leading to greater inequality are unmistakable – as are their consequences: inequality impedes the fight against poverty and often prevents the establishment of functioning democratic institutions. The pronounced concentration of wealth makes the global economy more susceptible to crises, which in turn exposes political systems to repeated severe stress tests. The overall result of inequality is to cement social relations of power and opportunity, undermine democracy and political stability and exacerbate social alienation. Already today, many people feel that the high level of inequality is unacceptable and unjust and violates the 'moral economy' (Edward Thompson). A stable democracy presupposes a minimum amount of social cohesion. This does not rule out social inequality, but means that it is in need of justification. The trends towards increasing social inequality that can currently be observed in most countries undermine democracies.

What Göran Therborn has called the 'marriage of liberalism and democracy' lasted only two decades. While during the golden age of the coexistence of capitalism and democracy in Germany from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s the market economy was tamed by regulations and an interventionist welfare state, in the following decades politics released the economy from its democratic grip. The crisis of democracy currently under discussion is often a consequence of this withdrawal of democracy from shaping the economy. Colin Crouch (2008) coined the term 'post-democratic' to describe the development in which formal rules of democracy are maintained, but the power of companies to impose their

interests against those of other social groups continues to grow.

Even if one is unwilling to accept this thesis that democratic rights are becoming a mere illusion, one cannot simply reject out of hand that the balance of power between democracy and capitalism has shifted over the last four decades. Over the decades, globalisation has been celebrated euphorically by governments, global institutions and international forums. The assumption was that innovation, deregulation of financial markets, the unleashing of market forces, technological networking and improved knowledge transfer would not only stimulate new growth, but also level out differences in the global economy and reduce inequality. In the 1990s, these approaches evolved into a unified economic and political conception which imbued economic processes with a higher meaning, while social, environmental and democratic goals, among others, were secondary, and growing inequality had to be accepted as the price of freedom in times of globalisation. TINA – ‘There is no alternative’ – stood (and stands) for a technocratic ideology that renders political action meaningless by suggesting that, in the face of complexity, it no longer has any purchase on reality and must subordinate itself to economic reason. Every alternative was labelled ‘naive’, ‘irrational’, ‘ideological’ or ‘not fundable’. A downright ‘myth of rationality’ developed around markets and market decisions. The global financial markets, the associated institutions and their key indices (e.g. profit expectations, share prices, exchange rates and ratings) in particular have disciplinary effects on societies and the actions of governments. Hans Tietmeyer, the former head of the Bundesbank, captured this in the formula of the ‘beneficial effect’ of the international financial markets, asserting that they are able to quickly correct ‘wrong political decisions’ by national legislators. That the accumulation of economic power goes hand in hand with political influence is made apparent by the strong influence of lobbyists on legislative processes and by the ruthless business practices of transnational corporations in many developing countries, which are often even promoted by the governments of these countries.

In ‘market-compliant democracy’, the results of market-driven economic processes are no longer subject to political oversight and if necessary corrected; rather, the polity is adapted to the needs of the markets. Far from a ‘complement’ to democratic development, however, the striving for social justice is the precondition of the continued existence of every democracy. The democratic and the social question (and hence also how the economy is constituted) are connected from the outset. For the individual rights to liberty and political participation can only be exercised by all if the social problems and risks which are unequally distributed in capitalist societies are contained and are overcome through collective efforts.

2.6 THE POWER OF IDEAS: DEMOCRACY REQUIRES A NARRATIVE

Every successful democratisation process in history fundamentally changed the notions of normality and the dominant values of the society in question. Bringing about normative change is vital for any democratisation process. Progressive ideas which are incompatible with the mental infrastructure of a society remain ineffectual. Conversely, democratisation movements can be very successful if their demands are integrated into the dominant discursive landscape of a society, that is, if they resonate with the broader public.

If emancipatory democratic movements are to take shape in the first place and, as a second step, to influence the dominant evaluative stances in societies, they must project a positive image of an alternative future, a powerful idea of how society can be organised in the future. Today, one would speak of a ‘narrative’. With its programmatic battle cry of ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’, the French Revolution sketched the blueprint of a future that was narratively processed in some form by every subsequent emancipation movement without exception. The British historian Eric Hobsbawm is absolutely right in this connection when he states that European and world politics until 1917 were largely determined by the struggle for or against the principles of the French Revolution (Hobsbawm 1996: 53). The events in France in 1789 provided the ‘vocabulary and issues of liberal and radical-democratic politics for most of the world’ (ibid.).

‘Liberal’ is the word generally used to describe the dominant value system of contemporary democracies in Europe and North America. ‘Liberal democracies’ in the modern sense are characterised by a triad comprising democratic legitimisation procedures, the rule of law and the separation of powers, as well as guaranteed civil and human rights. But even if liberal democracies are currently dominant in Europe, for centuries they played scarcely any role in the history of Western democracy. Most European and North American democracies were ‘defective’ or ‘illiberal’ by present-day criteria, since they excluded essential portions of the population and denied them equal rights. This was legitimised by corresponding narratives about the supposed inequality of ethnic groups, genders, minorities, etc. In the US, for example, it took more than eight decades and a civil war with well over half a million dead to integrate the illiberal regime in the southern states into the federal democracy and to extend the rights enshrined in the constitution at least formally to the black population. Then it took a further hundred years or so before the civil rights movement of the 1960s managed to extend participation rights and make the constitutional claims a constitutional reality. In Western Europe, it also took until the second half of the 20th century for the consensus on the formal features of a democracy to be transformed into a consensus on liberal values. Against this background, it is not surprising that the debate over such a social consensus is continuing in Eastern Europe with its comparatively recent experiences of democracy and independence. What is more remarkable is how peacefully and rapidly the Eastern European political systems have been

going through a process since 1989 which in Western Europe was not only much slower, but above all bloody.

At the same time, however, an examination of Eastern Europe shows how important it is to think in terms of alternatives and engage in debates about normative concepts for the future. It also shows how inadvisable it is to want to cut short the protracted and conflictual process of establishing social consensus by simply importing normative systems. Krastev and Holmes (2019) attribute the rise of authoritarian and populist forces in Poland, Hungary, Russia and other Eastern European countries to the fact that, after 1990, they were presented with (neo-)liberalism as a model for their future to which there was absolutely no alternative. A meaningful, more long-term debate on different concepts for future social coexistence which could have led to normative clarification and the establishment of social consensus was replaced by a simple 'imitation' of the model of order which was dominant in the West at that time. Once the imitated model was beset by crisis or failed to fulfil promises concerning the future, it was child's play for authoritarian nationalists to make their archaic conceptions of the people, nation, guiding culture and 'traditional values' palatable for majorities.

Krastev's and Holmes's analysis exemplifies how dynamic the relationship between the democratic development and a society's value system remains even after the formal establishment of democratic institutions. For democracies can only be considered consolidated as long as a majority respects, supports, demands and lives democratic ideas. Just as changes in the mental infrastructure of a society promote democracies, they can also lead to democracies drifting into authoritarian practices or being transformed into authoritarian regimes. In this way, intellectual advocates of cultural pessimism in the 19th and early 20th centuries contributed to the credibility of the narrative of a weak and decadent liberal democracy in bourgeois circles and to the spread of völkisch-nationalist ideas in milieus whose support a democracy can hardly do without (Stern 1986). Even today, the narrative of the allegedly decadent, meaningless or materialistic life in Western post-modernity is part of the standard narrative repertoire of authoritarian thinkers and movements in the East and the West.

Whether they contribute to democratic progress or to an authoritarian rollback, the impact of ideas as motors of social change is difficult to overestimate. Therefore, the French writer Victor Hugo, whose novel *Les Misérables* contributed to the image of an insurmountable factual social condition, is therefore right when he observes that one can 'resist the invasion of armies, but not an invasion of ideas' (Hugo 1877: 187).

3

SIX GUIDELINES FOR PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

We have derived six lessons from the historical experience of democratic development:

1. Democratisation has a long way to go.
2. Every democratisation follows a different course.
3. Democratisation is never conflict-free.
4. Democracy requires strong democratic institutions – and people who protect them.
5. Capitalism is not democratic.
6. Democracy requires a narrative.

It is helpful to take these historical experiences into account when progressive promoters of democracy actors try to develop strategies appropriate to the times for addressing the democratic challenges facing a society. Taking our orientation from the six lessons identified, we will now go on to outline six corresponding starting points for promoting democracy.

3.1 FROM DEMOCRATIC INTERVENTIONISM TO EMBEDDED DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

The first part of the analysis showed how much the trajectories of democratisation processes are path-dependent, diverse, open and context-specific. Promoters of democracy must do justice to this variability by developing democratisation strategies tailored to the respective social and historical context. For this purpose, they need to acquire a deep understanding of historical developments and social driving forces. If democracy supporters want to understand and contribute to shaping contemporary social conflicts, then they need to familiarise themselves with the complex social and historical texture of these conflicts. To achieve this, they must be embedded in a society and its actors. They must build mutually supportive relationships with progressive forces and a variety of social actors, which calls for staying power and strategic patience. Only in this way can progressive democracy supporters develop an understanding of the relevant room for political manoeuvre – both their own and that of the forces to be supported in the respective country. The political room for manoeuvre of actors who are open to change and its limits mark the opportunities they have to achieve, preserve or defend democratic progress in a specific social context. Precisely mapping these scopes for action enables us to identify promising levers of democratic change. Acquiring such ‘transformative literacy’ (Schneidewind 2018: 33) is the prerequisite for any successful promotion of democracy.

However, embedded democracy promotion not only has the necessary transformation competence, but also important legitimacy resources. These are increasingly important because more and more states have begun to declare the work of democracy supporters to be illegitimate interference in internal affairs or even to enact laws restricting the room for manoeuvre of the promotion of democracy. Democracy promoters operate within the framework of national laws or bilateral agreements, so that their work is generally legally unobjectionable. But they also have to find a political answer to the question of what actually entitles them to actively influence social policy in another country. In addition to a country’s self-commitments within the framework of international sets of rules (international human rights charters, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Social Covenant, various regional human rights conventions, ILO core labour standards, etc.), democracy promoters derive their political legitimacy above all from the fact that they have long-term working relationships with socially legitimised forces, take up their legitimate concerns and respond to societal demands.

Such an understanding of embedded democracy promotion is at the same time a rejection of any approach that is not aimed at longer-term democratic transformations, but instead at short-term democratic or moral interventionism, or even at regime change.

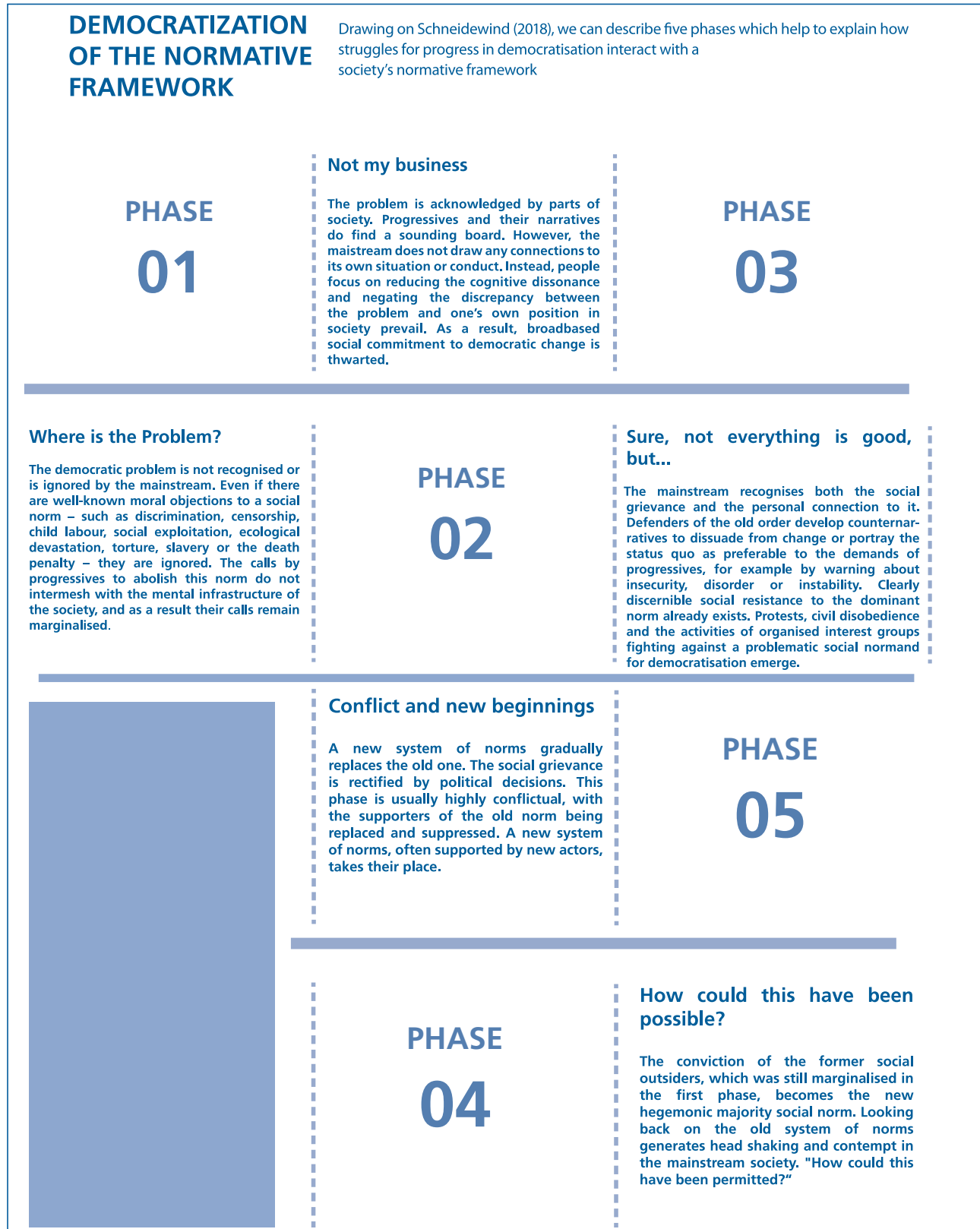
If democratic rights are not to end up as empty formulas on paper, but to be recognised and guaranteed as universalistic rights, a process of social communication is needed which can be very protracted and can assume a confrontational or a cooperative form. These internal social processes can be inspired, influenced and accompanied by external actors and experiences. But if democratic rights are to be permanently institutionalised and become the hegemonic values in a society, they cannot be imposed and controlled from without. A long-standing experience of democrats is that removing old orders does not even lay a foundation for successful democratisation, but initially creates a power vacuum which is used primarily by actors with the corresponding power resources. For example, Berman observes concerning pivotal year 1848: ‘Indeed, perhaps the most striking feature of the 1848 wave was how much easier it was to get rid of the old order than it was to build a new one’ (Berman 2019: 102). This conclusion has lost none of its topicality in view of the regime change interventions in Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan.

3.2 IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE CHANGE AGENTS

In order to be able to support change within the framework of the room for manoeuvre identified, embedded democracy promoters work with change agents who stand for social progress in the respective context. Identifying such agents

calls for an understanding of the current phase of the debate on a democratic change of norms and what types of actors are able to bring about change at what stage in a change process.

The following illustration distinguishes five ideal-typical phases in which normative change towards more democracy can take place.



Of course, democratic transformation is not so schematic. In practice, many of these phases flow into each other and sometimes run in parallel. Individual phases can last a very long time, stagnation and regression can occur, and normative changes can also remain stalled in one phase. Nevertheless, the division into phases is instructive. Among other things, it helps us to answer the question of which actors are the key change agents in democratisation processes. Each of these phases can be correlated with different types of actors who drive progress. While in the third phase, interest groups that are already organised (such as parties, trade unions and NGOs) try to push through a new norm and are thus the most important partners of democracy promoters, in the first phase pioneers, lateral thinkers and nonconformists are the decisive agents of change. They try to demand change and organise collective interests. They are pioneers of change, even though they often go down in history not as victors but as failed heroes – if they are not forgotten entirely. In the second and third phases, another interesting type of actor comes into play who is often able to provide decisive impulses, namely the conformist reformers. They are representatives of the previous order who have understood that the existing state of affairs has to change in order to survive. They advocate controlled modernisation from above, which makes them interesting as potential allies for the progressive opposition. However, their activities may also lead to parts of the progressive opposition losing social support, because reform initiatives by the establishment take the wind out of their sails.

Knowledge of the importance of different types of actors in different phases of the conflict over democratisation is crucial if democracy promoters are to identify the correct change agents and provide them with the appropriate support in the shape of capacity building, networking and political advice. These remarks also show that in every phase of democratisation and in every phase of autocratisation there are progressive actors who can serve as cooperation partners for democracy promoters. They also make it clear that not only those who challenge the status quo, but also representatives of the old order can act as change agents. In this respect, democracy supporters would be well advised to diversify their range of their partners in order to facilitate the formation of unorthodox alliances. Thus, support for a progress party can also consist in anchoring it better in society and involving it in dialogues and networks with different actors, including forces for preservation and conformist reformers.

3.3 STRENGTHEN THE EFFECTIVE POWER OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES

When we read about social struggles in history books, we tend to take the outcomes for granted. It is therefore all the more surprising that, contrary to this empirical knowledge which we also briefly sketched in Chapter 2.3, today democratisations are often seen as linear processes that only need to be rounded off by learning ‘techniques of good governance’. When conflicts occur in young democracies, they are often viewed as an expression of the ‘lack of

maturity’ of a political system. To correct this view, it helps to recall the historical experience that social conflicts are ‘opportunities for progress’ and that democracies have always reinvented themselves in times of crisis.

Conflicts are not expressions of a past era either, but are an essential feature of any democratisation process. For democratic systems are ‘systems of conflict’. They are at best self-critical patterns of a state-social organisation involving competing actors with contrasting views who struggle over influential opinions, political decisions and different solutions. Social and political disputes that are conducted openly are not the mere ‘bickering’ for which they are often denounced, but a prerequisite for a vibrant democracy. What is at stake in many value and interest conflicts over resources and recognition first becomes clear in the dispute.

The aversion to political conflict, the longing for harmony and for an authority that is supposed to settle things from above the fray is also widespread in democracies. But it is only by engaging in conflicts that shared and sustainable solutions can be found for the time being. Especially in turbulent times, more and not less political conflict is necessary. But this presupposes that as many different actors as possible also have the resources to participate in the debate and that controversies are conducted in a civil manner. Public systems of rules and institutions must be able to organise the conflict and consensus and strengthen the commonality of a society without which democracy cannot exist.

A democracy that does not shy away from conflict requires strong and diverse actors who engage in controversies in which people can become involved and which provide orientation. Any substantial further development of democracy will meet with resistance from powerful interests. Promoting democracy therefore means supporting our partners in expanding their power resources in order to be able to withstand political conflict.

Free trade unions are indispensable for achieving social democracy and above all for establishing democracy in the economy. Strong trade unions are uniquely able to make a wide variety of power resources available for furthering the development of democracy: as an organised workers’ movement and opposing force to economic interests in the workplace, as an advocate of interests in state structures and as a partner in broad social alliances. Democracy promotion must support trade unions, which have long been depicted as victims of globalisation, in developing and using these power resources. Five areas are of central importance in this regard: 1. In order to become appealing players, trade unions in many countries need to overcome the separation between formal and informal workers and rethink their mobilisation strategies and organisational models and develop an inclusive conception of solidarity. 2. Democracy promotion should help trade unions to strengthen their power resources vis-à-vis transnational companies, for example through trade union networks or international complaints mechanisms.

3. Sustainable alliances with social movements and political parties are essential prerequisites for anchoring and implementing trade union demands broadly in society. Here the task of democracy promotion is to reduce mistrust and facilitate discourse on joint projects. 4. Trade unions can play an important role in furthering democratic development only if they themselves are democratically constituted. Processes aimed, for example, at including women and migrants in trade union decision-making processes or, more generally, at promoting democratic participation structures within the organisation, are also a field for democracy promotion. And finally, 5. democracy promotion must work towards making trade unions fit for the three major challenges facing the work of the future: shaping globalisation and managing digital and ecological change.

Political parties, on the other hand, regardless of their ideological complexion, have for years ranked at the bottom of the scale of public esteem. They are distrusted whether rightly or wrongly. This resentment is nourished by the widespread perception that parties are not concerned with the actual issues but with their own (power) interests, that they are aloof, that they over-represent the interests of certain social groups while completely neglecting those of others, and have nothing left to contribute to solving problems for the collectivity. This is not good news for democracies, because their fate is inextricably bound up with that of parties. They are the only institutions that operate directly at the interface between the state, society and parliament and can shape all of these areas; they bring together particular and local interests; and they formulate different ideological conceptions of the social commonality – in short: they are at the heart of the democratic dispute.

In order to operate as a link, however, most parties must develop into more clearly social parties. They will have to allow more space for discourses and establish close contacts with people, social movements and organisations. Striking a balance between a state party and a social party is no easy task. Nevertheless, both are necessary, because both also shape our understanding of democratic politics: real change can only be brought about if it is preceded by a politicisation of society. Democratic (counter-)power, in turn, can only exercise enduring effects if it is based on organisations such as political parties (and trade unions) that can operate in central social institutions.

However, stable parties and party systems are difficult to establish in practice. Instead they are outnumbered by unstable patronage and clientele parties, voter associations that lack internal party democracy, have scant popular support and unclear programmes. For democracy promoters, parties are ambivalent actors, because in many countries they are not so much part of the solution, but instead function as obstructionists when it comes to social change. So here it is important to remain realistic. A representative democracy cannot function without political parties, which is why in difficult times they must also enter into dialogue with difficult partners. At the same time, democracy promotion cannot 'conjure up' its own parties, but must work

with the conditions it finds. In many countries, democracy supporters have to deal with party structures that are only weakly developed. Here, the first step must be to strengthen the framework conditions and principles for democratic party work, such as transparency and the ability to handle conflicts and forge alliances. Where the room for manoeuvre is restricted or the parties have become encrusted, it is still possible to bring them together in dialogue with other actors on specific issues. The medium-term goal is to stimulate changes in the parties through the political education of young recruits. As with the trade unions, the promotion of democracy can also involve taking care of groups which are often marginalised in parties (women, migrants and ethnic minorities) in order to strengthen the internal diversity and the social acceptance of parties. Although the number of democratic programme parties worldwide is limited, this is the very reason why one of the tasks of democracy promotion is to support parties in political decision-making and in formulating strategies. This can involve establishing platforms for dialogue on core issues of programme development which bring together party representatives, academia and civil society; but it can also involve exchanging experiences on programmes, election campaign strategies and forging alliances within the framework of an international grouping of parties.

Finally, for many people social movements and NGOs are often their first points of contact with politics and provide information on complex issues beyond political sloganeering. They often function as catalysts for individuals, providing political inspiration and motivation. At the same time, they represent a challenge for democratic government action – for example, because of the diversity of particular formulations of interest. Especially in countries situated between democracy and authoritarianism, they not only embody – in connection with modern social media communication – the 'school of democracy' (Alexis de Tocqueville), but are also the 'watchdogs' who denounce grievances. This makes them the primary target of authoritarian attacks. Here the promotion of democracy begins at a number of different levels simultaneously. It strengthens the role of NGOs in generating political public opinion and creates platforms for dialogue with established forces. 'Indirect' democracy promotion – i.e. influencing the framework conditions for political action (issues of transparency, protection, participation or human rights) – is also especially important for civil society. Above all, democracy supporters often find dealing with 'political' groups in civil society onerous. The key point here is that democracy promotion should always work in parallel to restore and strengthen capacities for social conflict management.

In many countries, the forces that are in principle interested in developing democracy further are fragmented. Their relations are marked by mistrust, misunderstandings and divergent ideological and strategic conceptions. The resource of modern power and its ability to shape society is its capacity for cooperation. A silo mentality in which each organisation is devoted exclusively to cultivating its own area and its own success and defending its territory, is not helpful here. Democracy promotion can help to identify common interests,

integrate them into a shared project, open the alliance up to other forces and find productive ways of dealing with difference (see 3.6).

3.4 ESTABLISH TRANSFORMATIVE INSTITUTIONS

If they are to enshrine democratic rights, balance political power and guarantee participation, democracies need stable public institutions. In times of change, efficient and transparent institutions legitimise transformations and fuel them with ideas. At the same time, as described in Chapter 2.4, the creeping dismantling of democratic institutions has become the customary route to authoritarian forms of government.

The decisive questions for democracy promotion are therefore: How can the erosion of democratic institutions be recognised at an early stage, and how can existing democratic institutions be protected against it? How can the institutions be rehabilitated or rebuilt so that – under the conditions of globalisation – they once again fulfil the task of regulating capitalism, enable scope for democratic action and reduce the pressure of globalisation? This does not mean that the state should take everything into its own hands in a paternalistic way. For another question is: How can public institutions become more of an ‘enabler’ for the various forms of self-organisation and ensure that societies become better equipped to deal with change? Over the past decade, progressive forces in particular have concentrated on positioning the state against neoliberalism and have given less thought to new participatory institutions.

Protecting democratic institutions requires not only democratic values such as the rule of law, human rights and pluralism, but also active public consent. At the very moment when right-wing populists began to attack and ridicule the free press, an independent judiciary or parliaments as institutions, social resistance often failed to materialise. Here, democracy promotion needs to empower more people to participate in the defence of democratic institutions, and specifically in their own localities – this applies as much to the local press as to the local court. Defenders of human rights and NGOs are also important when it comes to documenting the decline of democratic institutions and sounding the alarm in time.

Preserving democratic institutions is an important task, but this must not come at the cost of stagnation. The primary focus of democracy promotion, for example in post-conflict situations, must be on ‘nationalising’ democracy, that is on providing it with robust institutions that have both – democracy and stability – in focus. In the long term, however, it is always a matter of ‘democratising the state’. This calls for an understanding of institutions that views citizens not only as passive recipients of services, but as ‘productive’ members of society. Beyond elections and plebiscites, new participatory and transparent institutions must be created, above all to embrace the élan of many democratic projects and initiatives. The success of such partnerships depends on the relationship between state institutions and active citizens

remaining flexible. It must allow for room to learn from each other, make corrections and respond to impulses. There are already many contemporary examples of ‘mini-publics’ that guide political decisions at the local and national levels, ranging from participatory budgets, citizens’ juries and public audits to the famous ‘Anthill’ in Iceland, which following a massive crisis of confidence drew up proposals for a new constitution on the basis of randomly selected citizens. It is not a question of establishing institutions in competition with parliaments and city councils. Rather, not only can the often local institutions contribute to appropriate and workable solutions, but they can also lead to a community-oriented, political ‘sense of togetherness’ – beyond right-wing identity politics. Democracy promotion can contribute to the diffusion of such innovations, and thereby create more diverse and flexible opportunities for political participation.

Part of the challenges we are facing can only be met through global responses. In recent years, however, there has been a growing disparity between problems and problem-solving capacities. This finding is not new, but it is becoming clearer and the associated grievance is becoming more painful. Shaping the global framework remains the only viable way to reduce the pressure on democratic institutions under complex governance structures. To cite just one example: If restoring confidence in politics and reducing inequality and placing people’s needs at the centre of economic processes once again are essential for the further development of democracy, then joint regulation of the international financial markets must be at the top of the agenda. And even if it is difficult to make the case for this today, the promotion of democracy should be guided by the insight that, firstly, obligatory global regulatory frameworks and sets of rules have contributed to civilising relations between states; secondly, global and regional cooperation does not lead to more but to less complexity (because the trust it creates reduces complexity and uncertainty and recovers scope for action); and, thirdly, for this reason, even in a challenging environment, the aim should not be to free oneself from global rules but to persist in expanding global governance, which until now has been very selective. Even if quick successes are unlikely, what is needed are more, not less, ideas for governance beyond the nation-state.

3.5 DARE TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

As described in Chapter 2.5, the capitalist economy and democracy stand in a tense relationship which is being constantly rebalanced in response to shifts in societal power relations. In recent decades, the economy has been treated largely as a private matter: business takes place within the economy – with consequences for society and every individual. But where people see themselves as mere appendages of developments of ‘the markets’, democracy also atrophies. Democracy is considered to be the norm for good social relations because it spreads power widely and keeps it accessible in principle. However, our current economic system concentrates and consolidates economic power. Bringing the norms of democracy to bear against the markets

therefore goes to the heart of social democracy. Today daring to promote democracy also means daring to promote economic democracy with the goal of distributing economic power.

The economy must be a joint task, because the fate of entire societies depends on investments and on relocations and restructurings. Especially when it comes to restructuring, in the past many people's experience has been that changes in the economy were usually implemented without their participation and often against their interests. Conversely, the creativity and experience of many are needed at every stage of development. Therefore, democracy promotion aims to ensure that many people – in the workplace and in the community – can help shape the economy and have a say in economic decision-making.

Above all, the major crises of capitalist development, in which the modes of regulation and business models become fragile, provide the occasions for re-examining the relationship between society and the economy, and thus the idea of democracy. Digital change and the environmental challenges are being accompanied by a fundamental transformation of the capitalist mode of production with enormous technological leaps, a reconfiguration of economic power and profound changes in the relationship between companies and employees. Many things will be put to the test – in both developing and developed countries. Transformations bring both opportunities and risks. They can make people's work and lives easier or deepen inequalities, enable participation or cement domination, promote sustainability or exacerbate environmental crises. It will therefore be crucial in the coming years to intervene in this reappraisal, to shape the transformation and to ensure fair transitions in the context of change. Economic policy is always at the same time social policy. A just transition is incompatible with the continuation of the previous economic policies of many governments, which are based on more market and more self-interest. The crucial questions – who pays for change, what contributes to the common good, in which areas are profits made and in which not, or what has to be dismantled because it is harmful to the environment – cannot be left to the free play of market forces.

Therefore, democracy promotion must also advance the debate on alternative economic policies and concretise the scope for economic democracy. This applies, first of all, to democracy in the workplace. Strengthening workers' codetermination rights and a debate on increasing the influence of trade unions as well as consumer associations and environmental initiatives in codetermining company policy are starting points. The promotion of democracy must also devote more attention than in the past to stimulating discussions on a mixed economy and it must examine in which sectors of the economy private, state, cooperative and public welfare-oriented approaches make sense. However, approaches to economic democracy reach beyond the company level. We need social debates about, among other things, the areas in which profits must not be made because they are concerned with the provision of existential basic

goods, about how investments can be sensibly managed or about the institutions in which democratic decisions about economic policy can be taken. And finally, although many initiatives can begin in the countries themselves, shaping the global economy, whether in terms of trade, financial and fiscal policy or global social and environmental standards, is central to developing alternative economic policies.

There is no master plan for strengthening democracy at the economic level as well. Here the task of democracy promotion is to make concrete knowledge available, organise the exchange of experiences and thereby promote public reflection.

3.6 DEVELOP NARRATIVES FOR DEMOCRACY PROMOTION FOR OUR TIME

In the first part of this paper, we highlighted the influential role played by ideas in democratisation and autocratisation processes. The level of discourse and narratives should be accepted and shaped as an important field of conflict between democratic and authoritarian forces. Supporters of (semi-)authoritarian models of society have managed over the past three decades to challenge liberal democracy at the discursive level. Authoritarian critics of liberal democracy claim that it lacks problem-solving competence due to inefficient decision-making procedures and party-political sclerosis, or that it no longer has an identity-founding model for social coexistence as a result of postmodern isolation. This critique takes many democracy supporters by surprise because they are spoiled by the discourses of the 1990s in which liberalism was marketed globally as 'without alternative'. At any rate, democracy promotion still has not managed to provide a globally discernible counter-impulse to the supposed attractiveness of authoritarian models of government with a new narrative about the sustainability and performance of democracy. On the contrary, many democracy promoters depoliticise their own work and view it in technical terms. They hide behind a vocabulary which suggests that democratisation is essentially the result of efficient 'governance' or of particularly successful projects conducted with all 'relevant stakeholders'. For progressive democracy supporters who are fundamentally committed to changing existing conditions, an aggravating factor is that optimism concerning the future and progress do not seem to be everywhere in step with the spirit of the times. Climate change, globalisation, robotics and artificial intelligence – for many people today, the future seems more like a dystopia. They are frightened by the looming changes and worried that their own status is under threat. Clinging to the established order, defending one's prerogatives, looking back nostalgically on a transfigured past, resisting the new – all of these reflexes can be observed at present, but they are sufficiently familiar from history and were often precursors of authoritarianism.

What is currently missing, therefore, is what was for a long time one of the most important productive forces of many democracies – namely, a visionary idea of the future which has the power to create realities. This productive power must be revived. Because 'democracy' is no longer an automatic success, democracy supporters must go beyond defending

their ideas of social coexistence in exclusively discursive terms and make them the core of a new idea for a desirable future. There is once again a need for a convincing and powerful narrative of democracy which has a mobilising and alliance-building effect for promoting democracy and unites diverse social forces into coalitions for reform. Such a narrative must highlight the effectiveness of democracy in the face of accelerated social change while at the same time communicating a normative idea for shaping these changes. Progressive promoters of democracy must also explain which form of democracy they are actually fighting for – and which not. It is not a matter of depicting a certain model of order as ‘without alternatives’; on the contrary, the point is precisely to encourage thinking in terms of alternatives. To this end, it is useful to compare and demarcate different concepts of democracy. Not every form of democracy is equally equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The idea of a ‘market-compliant democracy’ or other libertarian conceptions will hardly be able to counter the concentration of wealth which is threatening democracy, the overexploitation of nature or the threats to society posed by the mode of operation of global financial markets. Progressive promoters of democracy must develop the narrative for a form of democracy which, in view of global environmental changes, increasing migration and shifts in economic power, is capable of shaping the transformation tasks ahead in the public interest. Greater attention will have to be paid to transnational democratic decision-making procedures and international rule-making. To this end, the task of democracy promotion should be understood to include the de-commodification of those public goods that have been exposed to excessive pressure in recent decades by profit-driven land grabbing – namely, clean air, an intact environment, public transport, housing, healthcare and education. Over the past three decades, democracy supporters have tended to ignore the problem that the socially destructive side effects of radical market programs have also eroded trust in democracy. In contrast, democracy promotion must use a narrative appropriate to the times to make it clear that democracy is synonymous with a greater orientation to the public interest, codetermination, participation, environmental sustainability and social cohesion – in other words, a democracy that respects political rights as well as social, economic and environmental rights.

4

SUMMARY

What lessons can be drawn from the historical examination of democratisation processes for democracy promotion adapted to current conditions? The six historical experiences discussed made it clear that democracy promoters need not be discouraged by the emergence of anti-liberal forces and contemporary diagnoses of 'crises of democracy'. At the beginning of the 2020s, too, human rights and opportunities for participation are at an all-time high worldwide. Moreover, people have become more vigilant. Colour revolutions and waves of protest do not yet constitute a democratic spring. But they show that, in the 21st century, relying on authoritarian or dictatorial practices is a high-risk strategy. For the political leaders of authoritarian projects, they often end in exile or prison.

But even if there is no reason to write off democracy, at the same time the historical examination of democratic forces and their supporters calls for greater commitment, more vigilance, more self-confidence and an enhanced ability to deal with conflict. Not only the further development of democracy, but also its preservation is a task which demands that democratic forces and democracy promoters engage in social debate. Failure to do so involves the threat of an authoritarian backlash. The historical experience that no democratic development has ever been linear and that every democracy is an open-ended experiment teaches us that not every defeat marks an authoritarian watershed. At the same time, it points to the fact that every backward step must be taken seriously, because it may contain the seed of a deinstitutionalisation of democracy. As regards its content, democracy promotion must devote more attention to the simultaneously productive and strained relationship between democracy and capitalism. Growing inequality and social exclusion are as destructive for democracies as the permanent overexploitation of natural resources driven by profit maximisation. Democracy promotion adapted to current conditions must connect democratic, social and ecological questions. For this to happen, democracy promoters must develop visions for a desirable future and foster thinking in terms of alternatives. For historical experience also shows that there has never been a successful democratic movement without powerful ideas and narratives.

The lessons from the history of democracy development highlighted in this paper call on democracy promoters to approach their work more politically, strategically and with a

heightened awareness of historical and socio-cultural contexts. It makes a plea for an 'embedded' form of democracy promotion which can resonate with progressive forces and a variety of social actors. Such a form of democracy promotion calls for staying power and strategic foresight, and it is the opposite of technocratic support logics and approaches geared to regime change.

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Progressive Democracy Promotion

What We Can Learn from History for Securing the Future of Democracy



Democracy promotion should return to its political roots, become more historically aware and capable of dealing with conflict. In the liberal zeitgeist of the 1990s, many promoters of democracy adopted an increasingly apolitical, ahistorical and technical approach. Now that democracy is coming under pressure globally and anti-liberal forces are on the rise, this situation must change.

Looking into the future, democracy promotion must be conceptualised against the background of the wealth of historical experiences accumulated by democratisation processes. In this paper we will present six historical lessons and derive six corresponding guidelines for promoting democracy adapted to current conditions.



History teaches us that democracies do not develop in a linear fashion, but remain open-ended experiments. Backward steps in democratisation do not immediately signal authoritarian watersheds, but they do entail the risk of deinstitutionalisation. Democratic systems can be endangered when small steps lead to an erosion of democratic rules.

It's the economy, again: As regards its content, democracy promotion must devote more attention to the simultaneously productive and strained relationship between democracy and capitalism. Growing inequality and social exclusion are as destructive for democracies as the permanent overexploitation of natural and human resources driven by profit maximisation.



One size doesn't fit all: Different social contexts call for bespoke strategies. If democracy supporters want to understand and contribute to shaping contemporary social conflicts, then they need to familiarise themselves with the complex social and historical structures of these conflicts. This calls for an 'embedded' form of democracy promotion capable of resonating with progressive forces and different social actors.

Democracy is a story: There has never been a successful democratic movement without powerful narratives. Promoters of democracy must go beyond merely defending their notions of social coexistence in discursive terms and develop new ideas for a desirable future. They need a democratic narrative as a basis for forging coalitions for reform.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
<https://www.fes.de/themenportal-die-welt-gerecht-gestalten>