

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

EXTERNAL ACTORS IN DEMOCRATIZATION

Lessons from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Sarah Bush and Julian D. Melendi
October 2024



The study reviews the role of external actors, specifically international democracy promotion organizations including the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), in supporting democratization efforts in target countries.



The study draws out lessons from the academic literature on the conditions under which democracy assistance is most effective, considering factors such as the international environment and the characteristics of external actors, democracy assistance itself, and target countries.



The study explores the role of FES in five countries: Peru, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, and Tunisia. It highlights the successes and challenges faced in promoting democratic transitions, offering insights into how international support has influenced political reform and democratic deepening.



DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

EXTERNAL ACTORS IN DEMOCRATIZATION

Lessons from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Content

INTRODUCTION 2

A THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN DEMOCRATIZATION 3

| | |
|---|---|
| The Tools of Democracy Promotion | 3 |
| The Conditions for Effective Democracy Promotion | 5 |
| The Effects of De-Democratization on Democracy Promotion..... | 6 |
| The Literature on the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Democracy Promotion..... | 7 |
| Research Methods and Design | 8 |

B THE ROLE OF THE FES AND THE OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN AIDING DEMOCRACY IN FIVE CASES 11

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Portugal | 11 |
| South Africa | 13 |
| Serbia | 14 |
| Peru | 15 |
| Tunisia | 16 |

C LESSONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES 19

| | |
|--|----|
| FES Programs: Distinctive but Not Always Different | 19 |
| Intuitions about the Conditions for Effective Programs | 20 |
| Contemporary Challenges for the FES Approach | 21 |
| Conclusion..... | 22 |

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Bibliography..... | 23 |
|-------------------|----|

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the role of external factors in democratization with a special interest in the efforts of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). Our study reviews the relevant academic literature on this topic and then presents findings from case studies of the role of the FES in five regime transition case studies: Peru, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, and Tunisia. Based on this research, we identify unique features of the FES's approach to democracy assistance while also highlighting points of continuity with other types of international democracy promotion. We conclude by offering insights into the features of the FES approach that are associated with successes in the five case studies and suggest directions for future research that might build on our findings.

A

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN DEMOCRATIZATION

External (i.e., non-domestic) factors are increasingly recognized as important determinants of countries' democratic trajectories. This study considers the role of a specific subset of external factors: those associated with international democracy promotion.¹ Following previous research, we define democracy promotion as "as any attempt by a state or states to encourage another country to democratize, either via a transition from autocracy or the consolidation of a new or unstable democracy."² As this definition articulates, international democracy promotion involves an actor or set of actors taking deliberate and intentional steps to advance democracy in a target state.

THE TOOLS OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

There are four general tools of democracy promotion: (1) military intervention; (2) conditionality; (3) assistance; and (4) monitoring and reporting. These tools can be used together or individually. All tools of democracy promotion

with the exception of military intervention became more common after the end of the Cold War due to growth in both the "supply" of democracy promotion by Western states and international organizations, as well as the "demand" for it by democratizing states.³ The expansion of international democracy promotion includes an increase in the number of countries and international organizations that use its tools, an increase in the amount of money spent on it (and thus in the number of countries where it takes place), and an increase in the issue areas touched by international democracy promotion.⁴ Given this expansion, whether the various tools of international democracy promotion are effective is a topic of considerable interest in the growing academic literature on democracy promotion. We discuss research on the effectiveness of each tool of democracy promotion in turn.

First, most research tends to be quite pessimistic that military interventions can successfully promote long-term democratic change.⁵ According to the cited studies, foreign-imposed regime change does not reliably impart lasting democratic institutions, even when it seeks to do so.

¹ We note that there are also many other external factors that may affect a country's democratic trajectory either directly or indirectly beyond international democracy promotion. These factors include the nature of the international system see Seva Gunitskiy, *After-shocks: Great Powers and Domestic Reforms in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), whether a country is linked economically and socially with democratic vs. authoritarian countries see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change," *Comparative Politics* 38, no. 4 (2006): 379–400, how much foreign economic assistance a country receives see Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, "Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change," *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 167–197; Kevin M. Morrison, "Oil, Nontax Revenue, and the Redistributive Foundations of Regimes Stability," *International Organization* 63, no. 1 (2009): 107–138; Faisal Z. Ahmed, "The Perils of Uneared Foreign Income: Aid, Remittances, and Government Survival," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (2012): 146–165; Cesi Cruz and Christina J. Schneider, "Foreign Aid and Undeserved Credit Claiming," *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2017): 396–408, and whether a country has been targeted by purported "autocracy promoters" like China and Russia see Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker, *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). To keep this study relatively focused and given our interest in the efforts of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, which is a democracy promotion organization, we focus our literature review on the role of deliberate international attempts to promote democracy.

² Sarah Sunn Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6.

³ On the shift toward democracy promotion see Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Carnegie Endowment, 1999); Susan D. Hyde, "Democracy's Backsliding in the International Environment," *Science* 369, no. 6508 (2020): 1192–1196; David J. Samuels, "The International Context of Democratic Backsliding: Rethinking the Role of Third Wave 'Prodemocracy' Global Actors," *Perspectives on Politics* 21, no. 3 (2023): 1001–12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722003334>.

⁴ For example, democracy promotion is now a significant component of United Nations peace operations, see Roland Paris, *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Aila M. Matanock, "External Engagement: Explaining the Spread of Electoral Participation Provisions in Civil Conflict Settlements," *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2018): 656–670, efforts to promote economic development via the "good governance" agenda see Emilie Hafner-Burton, John Pevehouse, and Christina Schneider, "Enlightened Dictators? Good Governance in Autocratic International Organizations," *IGCC Working Paper* (June 2023), <https://ucigcc.org/publication/enlightened-dictators-good-governance-in-autocratic-international-organizations/>, and efforts to advance gender equality, see Saskia Brechenmacher and Katherine Mann, *Aiding Empowerment: Democracy Promotion and Gender Equality in Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

⁵ Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (Penn State Press, 1999); Jeffrey Pickering and Mark Peceny, "Forging Democracy at Gunpoint," *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006): 539–559; Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, "Forced to be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 90–131.

Second, the literature on the effects of conditionality draws mixed conclusions but is much more positive than the literature on military intervention. Conditionality refers to when some benefit is only given to states that meet minimum democratic standards. It encompasses both membership in international organizations (e.g., the European Union) and various other economic sanctions and rewards (e.g., foreign economic assistance that is only given to countries that meet minimum democratic standards). In terms of the former, becoming a member of the European Union, and to some extent other regional or international organizations, has created powerful material and social incentives for states to become more democratic, although these organizations' approaches to promoting democracy have also had some unintended negative consequences for member states after accession, such as increased executive power, which can lead to democratic backsliding.⁶ In terms of economic conditionality, research suggests that democracy-focused sanctions are positively associated with democratization in target states.⁷ Likewise, conditional foreign economic assistance is associated with democratization at least in certain types of authoritarian regimes.⁸

Third, there has been a substantial amount of research on the effectiveness of democracy assistance. Democracy assistance refers to aid programs that are "given with the explicit goal of advancing democracy overseas."⁹ Most of the statistical research identifies a positive association between a country's receipt of democracy assistance and its level of democracy as measured according to indices such as Freedom House, Polity, and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem).¹⁰ Some qualitative case studies of democracy assistance are also positive (e.g., on countries in Central and Eastern Europe), although many others are more critical (e.g., in former Soviet states and countries in the Middle East and

North Africa), perhaps reflecting the ways that qualitative research can uncover limitations in international programs beyond what is possible to identify in a highly-aggregated index such as Polity.¹¹ Thus, the picture is mixed but trending positive in the case of democracy assistance, similar to that in the conditionality literature.

Fourth, the research on monitoring and reporting in the realm of democracy promotion is largely, but not exclusively, positive. This research includes studies on the effects of credible international election monitors.¹² Although high-quality international monitors may encourage substitution dynamics whereby autocrats replace overt electoral fraud with less-detectable forms of cheating,¹³ the general thrust of the literature is that these groups can successfully discourage election fraud and advance democracy by helping the public hold politicians accountable. Other studies examine the effect of "naming and shaming" states for their performance on human rights and democracy; this literature is generally positive, too, although it has identified the potential for backlash in settings where foreign criticism plays into larger narratives about foreign meddling.¹⁴ In addition to public criticism of democratic performance in the form of naming and shaming, researchers have also demonstrated that private diplomatic pressure on states to address human rights violations can be effective.¹⁵

6 Jon C. Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Daniela Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Paul Poast and Johannes Urpelainen, *Organizing Democracy: How International Organizations Assist New Democracies* (University of Chicago Press, 2018); Anna M. Meyrose, "The Unintended Consequences of Democracy Promotion: International Organizations and Democratic Backsliding," *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 10–11 (2020): 1547–1581.

7 Christian von Soest and Michael Wahman, "Are Democratic Sanctions Really Counterproductive?," *Democratization* 22, no. 6 (2015): 957–980; Daniela Donno and Michael Neureiter, "Can Human Rights Conditionality Reduce Repression? Examining the European Union's Economic Agreements," *The Review of International Organizations* 13, no. 3 (2018): 335–357.

8 Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph George Wright, *Foreign Pressure and the Politics of Autocratic Survival* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

9 Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance*, 4.

10 A recent review attempted to identify all cross-national statistical studies on this topic and coded their findings. 29/32 studies found a positive relationship between democracy assistance and at least one indicator of democracy, while 11/32 identified a negative relationship. (Note that the same study could identify both a positive and negative relationship since many studies included multiple outcomes). Rachel M. Gisselquist, Miguel Niño-Zarazúa, and Melissa Samarin, "Does Aid Support Democracy? A Systematic Review of the Literature," *WIDER Working Paper* No. 2021/14 (2021): 15–16.

11 Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*; Sarah E. Mendelson, "Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia: Between Success and Failure," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 68–106; Sarah Henderson, *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia: Western Support for Grassroots Organizations* (Cornell University Press, 2003); Yury V. Bosin, "Supporting Democracy in the Former Soviet Union: Why the Impact of US Assistance Has Been Below Expectations," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2012): 405–412; Sheila Carapico, *Political Aid and Arab Activism: Democracy Promotion, Justice, and Representation* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sungmin Cho, "Why Non-Democracy Engages with Western Democracy-Promotion Programs: The China Model," *World Politics* 73, no. 4 (2021): 774–817; Erin A. Snider, *Marketing Democracy: The Political Economy of Democracy Aid in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

12 Susan D. Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm* (Cornell University Press, 2011); Judith G. Kelley, *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works, and Why It Often Fails* (Princeton University Press, 2012.); Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms*; Susan D. Hyde and Nikolay Marinov, "Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy: The Role of International Election Observation," *International Organization* 68, no. 2 (2014): 329–359.

13 Alberto Simpser and Daniela Donno, "Can International Election Monitoring Harm Governance?," *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (2012): 501–13, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002238161100168x>.

14 Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jamie J. Gruffydd-Jones, "Citizens and Condemnation: Strategic Uses of International Human Rights Pressure in Authoritarian States," *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (2019): 579–612; Rochelle Terman, *The Geopolitics of Shaming: When Human Rights Pressure Works and When It Backfires* (Princeton University Press, 2023).

15 Rachel Myrick and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Making Sense of Human Rights Diplomacy: Evidence from a US Campaign to Free Political Prisoners," *International Organization* 76, no. 2 (2022): 379–413.

THE CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Thus far, we have addressed the question of whether international democracy promotion is correlated with democracy in target states. Across all four tools of democracy promotion, however, an important question from the perspective of both theory and practice is not merely *whether* there is a positive relationship between democracy promotion and democracy but *under what conditions* are external actors' democracy promotion efforts more likely to support democratization in target states.

Democracy promotion faces many constraints on its effectiveness. Democracy promotion initiatives like international democracy assistance programs or a monitoring effort around an election are often limited temporally or in scope, and therefore we might expect them to have small effects on democracy, especially given the significance of domestic factors in shaping countries' trajectories. Moreover, many of the countries that are the targets of international democracy promotion have good reason to resist it, especially if they are led by authoritarian regimes.¹⁶ Resistance can take many forms, including the passage of laws restricting international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign funding to civil society organizations.¹⁷ Autocrats may also shift the tactics they use to stay in power (e.g., engaging in less-detectable forms of election manipulation or adopting political reforms in areas like women's rights that give the appearance of democratization but can be accomplished without destabilizing a regime).¹⁸

Bearing in mind these dynamics, researchers have argued that four sets of variables condition the effectiveness of democracy promotion: (1) international characteristics; (2) donor characteristics; (3) democracy promotion characteristics; and (4) target country characteristics. The research we discuss below largely pertains to the conditions that make conditionality, assistance, and monitoring and reporting more likely to be associated with democracy, since analysts are generally less optimistic about military interventions' democratizing potential regardless of the conditions under which it takes place.

First, in terms of the international environment, scholars argue that democracy promotion efforts are more likely to successfully promote democratization when the broader international system is pro-democracy. Given the percep-

tion that the present international system is less supportive of democracy than it was ten or twenty years ago—due, in part, to the rise of China, efforts to promote counter-norms to democracy by Russia, and the de-prioritization of democracy in the foreign policy of many Western states—researchers have sounded the alarm for global democracy.¹⁹ For example, changes to the international system may make conditionality less effective by diminishing the rewards associated with democracy.

Second, in terms of donor characteristics, a common argument is that democracy promotion initiatives are less likely to be effective when the target state is geopolitically important to Western states.²⁰ For such countries, the pressure to democratize may be much weaker since other governments are more accepting, if not encouraging, of continued authoritarian rule, making conditionality less effective. Similarly, monitoring and reporting may be less effective in countries that are of geopolitical importance because external actors tend to be less comfortable criticizing such countries.²¹

Third, how international democracy promoters go about their work is also a significant factor in promotion outcomes. For example, democracy assistance has been faulted for putting too much emphasis on a “top-down” approach that involves support to governments that can easily be redirected toward activities that are compatible with continued authoritarian rule, especially in post-conflict countries.²² Investing too much energy toward order and stability and “regime compatible activities” at the expense of activities that may be more directly confrontational toward the government (e.g., aiding civil society organizations, free media, and political parties) is often criticized.²³ Likewise, conditionality that puts too much power into the hands of executives may end up contributing to democratic backsliding.²⁴

16 Inken von Borzyskowski, “Resisting Democracy Assistance: Who Seeks and Receives Technical Election Assistance?,” *Review of International Organizations* 11, no. 2 (2016): 247–282.

17 For a more detailed exploration of anti-NGO laws and civil society restrictions in authoritarian regimes, see the *Contemporary Challenges for the FES Approach* section of this paper.

18 Simpser and Donno, “Can International Election Monitoring Harm Governance?,” Sarah Sunn Bush, Daniela Donno, and Pär Zetterberg, “International Rewards for Gender Equality Reforms in Autocracies,” *American Political Science Review* (2023): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001016>

19 Hyde, “Democracy’s Backsliding in the International Environment,” Samuels, “The International Context of Democratic Backsliding.”

20 Steven E. Finkel, Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Michael Neureiter, and Chris A. Belasco, “Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990–2014: An Update,” *Kellogg Institute for International Studies Working Paper* 436 (2020).

21 Judith Kelley, “D-Minus Elections: The Politics and Norms of International Election Observation,” *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (2009): 765–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818309990117>; K. C. Kavakli and P. M. Kuhn, “Dangerous Contenders: Election Monitors, Islamic Opposition Parties and Terrorism,” *International Organization*, 74, no. 1 (2020): 145–164, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081831900033x>.

22 Leonie Reicheneder and Michael Neureiter, “On the Effectiveness of Democracy Aid in Post-Civil War Recipient Countries,” *Democratization* (2023): 1–23, doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2268536.

23 Jeroen de Zeeuw, “Projects do not Create Institutions: The Record of Democracy Assistance in Post-Conflict Societies,” *Democratization* 12, no. 4 (2005): 481–504; Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance*; Charlotte Fiedler, Jörn Grävingholt, Julia Leininger, and Karina Mross, “Gradual, Cooperative, Coordinated: Effective Support for Peace and Democracy in Conflict-Affected States,” *International Studies Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2020): 54–77.

24 Meyerrose, “The Unintended Consequences of Democracy Promotion.”

Finally, scholars have argued that the nature of the target regime matters, with countries that are already transitioning toward democracy sometimes being more welcoming environments than countries with more firmly entrenched authoritarian regimes. Research suggests that democracy assistance is more likely to be associated with improving democratic conditions in countries that are experiencing political transitions (when “formerly binding rules of access to and exercise of state powers are no longer operational, and a new order has not been fully institutionalized”) than in “intact regimes” because it is less likely to threaten the survival of a government with the will and capacity to resist it.²⁵ Relatedly, democracy assistance is more likely to be associated with democracy in authoritarian regimes that are party-based (which are regimes that already have some competition in the form of elections) than in ones that are personalist or military-based (which rarely, if ever, face electoral/organized competition).²⁶ Similarly, economic and political conditionality is less likely to support democratization in hegemonic authoritarian regimes (where “the incumbent or ruling party enjoys overwhelming electoral dominance”) than in competitive authoritarian ones (where “opposition parties pose greater electoral challenges and garner a larger share of votes”).²⁷

THE EFFECTS OF DE-DEMOCRATIZATION ON DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Given these findings, there is reason to suspect that recent global trends with respect to democracy are making it less likely for democracy promotion to occur in the conditions that promote its success. Although the extent of democratic backsliding in recent years is subject to debate, the most common view is that global democracy is in a state of regression, with many countries going through periods of de-democratization.²⁸ Democratic backsliding has the additional effect of making some target regimes less welcoming toward democracy promotion efforts (e.g., by engaging in various forms of crackdown against international and domestic NGOs).²⁹ It may also have made the international environment and donor countries less supportive of democracy promotion as an objective (given that democratic backsliding has arguably occurred in the United States and other democracy promoting-states).

Analysts suggest there are a few ways that international actors might productively respond to these developments. One approach is to shift emphasis from promoting democracy in closed regimes to instead trying to protect democracy in previously transitioned states that are in danger of backsliding to autocracy. For example, this strategy could be pursued by discouraging executives from circumventing their term limits—a strategy thought to be effective in cases like Senegal in 2012, when president Abdoulaye Wade attempted to run for an impermissible third term, but international donors successfully supported civil society groups that were backing his opponent in the election.³⁰

Another approach is for democracy promoters to work in the limited ways that are possible in non-democratic countries—especially via the tool of democracy assistance—in the hopes that their efforts will pay off eventually if and when countries eventually experience a period of political opening. In other words, the focus shifts to the long-run instead of the short-run and accepts the possibility that a period of political opening may not materialize. In a recent literature review on this theme, scholars suggested that democracy assistance in closed settings may be able to fruitfully promote democratic values among the public as well as promoting non-electoral cooperation among political elites (including those in opposition parties).³¹ Some observers express concern that democracy promotion initiatives in authoritarian regimes will end up legitimizing undemocratic rulers, but experimental research in Cambodia demonstrates this is not necessarily the case.³² Likewise, there is suggestive evidence from Egypt that domestic NGOs more focused on service provision (as opposed to issues of democracy and human rights) can nevertheless indirectly promote democratic values among the citizenry.³³

Within this context of global democratic backsliding, it is important to generate new insights into the role of pro-democracy external actors in the democratization process. This study does so by focusing on the work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), which is a German political foundation that has an association with the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

25 Anna Lührmann, Kelly M. McMann, and Carolien Van Ham, “Democracy Aid Effectiveness: Variation Across Regime Types,” *V-Dem Working Paper* 40 (2018): 10.

26 Agnes Cornell, “Does Regime Type Matter for the Impact of Democracy Aid on Democracy?,” *Democratization* 20, no. 4 (2013): 642–667.

27 Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms*.

28 Andrew T. Little and Anne Meng, “Measuring Democratic Backsliding,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57, no. 2 (2024): 149–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909652300063X>; Carl Henrik Knutsen, et al. “Conceptual and Measurement Issues in Assessing Democratic Backsliding,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57, no. 2 (2024): 162–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909652300077X>.

29 Suparna Chaudhry, “The Assault on Civil Society: Explaining State Crackdown on NGOs,” *International Organization* 76, no. 3 (2022): 549–590.

30 Daniel Nowack and Julia Leininger, “Protecting Democracy from Abroad: Democracy Aid against Attempts to Circumvent Presidential Term Limits,” *Democratization* 29, no. 1 (2022): 160.

31 Oren Samet, Jennie Barker, and Susan D. Hyde, “Political Parties and Civil Society During Windows of Opportunity,” *Working Paper*, April 2024.

32 Susan D. Hyde, Emily Lamb, and Oren Samet, “Promoting Democracy under Electoral Authoritarianism: Evidence from Cambodia,” *Comparative Political Studies* 56, no. 7 (2023): 1029–1071. This study involved a randomized control trial of a donor-funded program seeking to encourage members of parliament to interact with their constituents in Cambodia, an electoral authoritarian regime. Although the program increased citizens’ political knowledge and efficacy, it did not lead them to become more confident in the Cambodian regime as feared by some critics of democracy promotion.

33 Catherine E. Herrold, *Delta Democracy: Pathways to Incremental Civic Revolution in Egypt and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

THE LITERATURE ON THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

The FES has a lengthy history of engaging in democracy promotion on the global stage. The foundation was established in 1925 after the first democratically elected German president and namesake of the FES, Friedrich Ebert, directed in his will that funeral proceeds go toward the establishment of a foundation to work against the discrimination of workers in the area of education. Although banned by the Nazis, the foundation was reconstituted after World War II. Since then, the FES has provided logistical and economic support and policy advice to both NGOs and government actors in a number of states with varying regime types and at different stages of democratic transition. It also continues to support research and education, including in the form of educational grants. In this study, we focus on the role of the FES in democracy promotion and democracy assistance, defined earlier as involving explicit attempts by external actors to advance democracy in target countries.

The modern German political foundations, including the FES, grew in part out of a Cold-War era desire in West Germany to counter communist and East German influence in both the West and the world at large.³⁴ Moreover, the foundations were seen as essential elements in enabling political parties to influence policy in emerging democracies, with the FES focused on supporting social democratic parties and trade unions. Each political party represented in the German Bundestag has an affiliated foundation; these groups are sometimes referenced collectively as the *Stiftungen*. Their approach supplemented the German government's state foreign policy by offering an approach that one of our interlocutors described as "complementary *social* [emphasis added] foreign policy."³⁵

Today, the FES is a German political foundation that plays a dual role in furnishing civic education initiatives domestically and engaging in democracy promotion and international development assistance abroad. The FES, like all the German political foundations, receives funding from the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, or the BMZ, among others. The amount of money available to a foundation is determined by its size and the long-term representation of its affiliated party (the Social Democrats in the case of the FES) in the Bundestag. Notably, however, this does not mean the foundations are beholden to the German executive, the Bundestag, or the Foreign Ministry. Rather, the funding scheme makes the foundations independent of government interference, as well as ensuring that their activities and products are publicly available. In turn, the foundations give advice on the foreign policy activities of the political parties.³⁶

Primarily employing the democracy promotion tool of "assistance," the FES has, among other things, aided local labor unions, provided training to democratic political parties in autocratic regimes, and supported the development of free presses. The FES has engaged in both short and long-term initiatives, such as small projects on an ad hoc basis, as well as longer programs like regional media development projects that have lasted more than 20 years.³⁷ In this section, we provide an overview of the literature about the FES and its work in the field of democracy promotion. From the outset, we must note that the English-language secondary literature on the FES is small when compared to that on government democracy assistance programs, especially in terms of research published in the past two decades. Bridging this gap in knowledge sharing is one of the goals of our study, and continued efforts in this regard would be helpful for future scholars.

First, we must understand the broader context in which the FES is situated in and, by extension, the philosophical underpinnings of its approach to policy. Although there is debate as to the extent of variation across countries in terms of their democracy assistance approaches,³⁸ Holthaus argues that, unlike other democracy promoters such as the United States that employ unilateral, more top-down, strategies that stress the importance of democratic electoral victories as headwinds for institutional democratic development, German outlooks on democracy and state building are quite different. As a "civilian power,"³⁹ Germany takes a more cautious approach to foreign policy and democracy promotion that reflects an understanding rooted in a national conception of democratization as a long-term socio-political process focused on supporting the rule of law, rather than mere electoral assistance. Under the German model of democracy promotion, strong economic and political linkages, as well as domestic redistribution, are understood as preconditions for a lasting, and legitimate, social democracy.⁴⁰

With this context in mind, we turn to a review of the notable English-language secondary literature on the FES. First, we explore the institutional organization and operation of the FES. Although the FES operates with a high degree of autonomy, all German foundations are restricted from directly sponsoring political parties or electoral candidates.⁴¹

34 Michael Pinto-Duchinsky, "Foreign Political Aid: The German Political Foundations and Their US Counterparts," *International Affairs* 67, no. 1 (1991): 33–63.

35 Personal communication with FES staffer.

36 Stefan Mair, "Germany's Stiftungen and Democracy Assistance: Comparative Advantages, New Challenges," *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization* (2000): 128–149.

37 Mair, "Germany's Stiftungen and Democracy Assistance." See the case studies in Part B for insights into how the FES supported media development projects as part of its democracy promotion strategies.

38 Amichai Magen, Thomas Risse, and Michael A. McFaul, eds., *Promoting Democracy and the Rule of Law: American and European Strategies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Milja Kurki, *Democratic Futures: Revisioning Democracy Promotion* (Routledge, 2013).

39 Leonie Holthaus, "Is there difference in democracy promotion? A comparison of German and US democracy assistance in transitional Tunisia," *Democratization* 26, no. 7 (2019): 1217.

40 Holthaus, "Is there difference in democracy promotion?" 1216–1234; Jonas Wolff, "Democracy Promotion and Civilian Power: The Example of Germany's 'Value-Oriented' Foreign Policy," *German Politics* (2013): 477–493.

41 Gero Erdmann, "Hesitant Bedfellows: The German Stiftungen and Party Aid in Africa. An Attempt at an Assessment," *CSGR Working Paper* 184, no. 5 (2005): pp. 1–31.

This does not mean, however, that the FES cannot aid political parties through training or civic education initiatives, two activities which it performs. In addition, the foundations engage in contracts and exchanges, build networks, host programmatic debates, and support academic studies, among other programs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must also scrutinize all projects, but rarely does the Ministry interfere directly. This high degree of autonomy has enabled the FES to pursue a variety of short and long-term projects with speed and efficiency. The partnerships that the FES has forged over the years reflect its social democratic orientation. Although the FES has global reach, Africa and Latin America have been regions of historic focus for the organization.⁴²

A small, but robust, secondary literature concerning the operations of the FES in various target countries for democracy promotion also sheds light on the approach of the foundation and its impact. As a case in point, let us consider the literature on FES's work in Africa as an insight into party aid, an approach that has changed significantly over time. In the 1970s, the FES supported socialist-oriented political parties in Zambia, Tanzania, Senegal, and South Africa in practically all feasible ways absent weapons sales. However, the scale of support was reduced over time, limiting funding to civic education initiatives. As of 2005, the FES had the largest presence in Africa out of all the German political foundations. In an effort to increase the professionalization of its Africa programs, the FES has made efforts to define, stock-take, and systematize party related activities on the continent.⁴³

In addition to party aid, the FES has a strong tradition of supporting democratic trade unions in pursuit of its socio-economic approach to democracy promotion. The FES plays an important role in global labor movements; it believes that strong social and economic rights will incentivize positive democratic outcomes following a revolution and transition to democracy.⁴⁴ For example, in the wake of the Arab Spring, the FES saw an opportunity in Egypt and Tunisia. The FES hosted training programs and financed labor conferences in the newly liberalized post-revolution atmospheres. Moreover, the FES's involvement may have indirectly encouraged other organizations, such as Oxfam, to increase their presence in the region, suggesting the importance of the foundation in bolstering external linkages to global democratic support structures.⁴⁵ Lastly, because of the FES's primary focus on social issues, like labor rights, in places like Tunisia, the foundation may be viewed differently or with greater legitimacy among the citizenry than

democracy promoters who focus on market reform, like the US.⁴⁶ The FES is an experienced voice in the global labor space, and understands assistance to unions to be critical to its democracy promotion strategy.

The FES also engages in direct education and training initiatives.⁴⁷ Some of its democratic education work concerns educating party leaders about the importance of democratic institutions and a strong rule of law. Outside of party training, the FES engages in civic education training directly with the people. However, this direct advocacy tends to ebb and flow with the political climate of the target nation. For example, prior to the Arab Spring in Tunisia, the FES took a more cautious approach to democracy promotion under the Ben Ali regime, which was highly repressive. Direct themes of democracy and human rights were substituted for a focus on social and cultural affairs, in order to strike a balance between providing support and protecting local partners. After the political opening that occurred in 2011, the FES felt more comfortable addressing democratic topics, like human rights.⁴⁸

Based on the above review, it is clear that the FES approach has several distinctive features vis-à-vis other democracy promotion actors. Yet its model overlaps necessarily with that of other German political foundations given their common institutional framework, and other international (e.g., American and European Union) actors similarly engage in activities such as trainings to political parties and civil society organizations. That there are different approaches to democracy promotion in the same country may be beneficial for democracy in that it provides "choice" to local actors in terms of their international partners and promotes pluralism,⁴⁹ though there is also some risk from fragmentation and a lack of coherence.⁵⁰ With these general trends in mind, we now describe our approach to conducting original research on the FES's effort in selected country cases.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This study involves original research on the FES's efforts to support democracy globally, placing the FES's initiatives within the broader context of debates about the effectiveness of international democracy promotion as described above. A primary goal of the study is to make *descriptive inferences* about the nature of FES programming. These descriptive inferences are based on original research on FES activities as well as a close reading and synthesis of the

⁴² Wolf Grabendorff, "International Support for Democracy in Contemporary Latin America: The Role of the Party Internationals," *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas*, 2nd ed., ed. Laurence Whitehead (Oxford University Press, 2001), 217.

⁴³ Erdmann, "Hesitant Bedfellows."

⁴⁴ Holthaus, "Is there difference in democracy promotion?" 226.

⁴⁵ Ian M. Hartshorn, "Global Labor and the Arab Uprisings: Picking Winners in Tunisia and Egypt," *Global Governance* 24, no. 1 (2018): 119–138.

⁴⁶ Leonie Holthaus, "Furthering Pluralism? The German Foundations in Transitional Tunisia," *Voluntas* 30 (2019): 1284–1296.

⁴⁷ We note that this emphasis is less strong in FES's approach today than it was historically based on our conversations with FES staff.

⁴⁸ Holthaus, "Is there difference in democracy promotion?"

⁴⁹ Sebastian Ziaja, "More Donors, More Democracy," *Journal of Politics* 82, no. 2 (2020): 433–447.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Fiedler, Jörn Grävingholt, Julia Leininger, and Karina Mross, "Gradual Cooperative, Coordinated: Effective Support for Peace and Democracy in Conflict-Affected States," *International Studies Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2020): 54–77.

broader literature on international actors' role in supporting democratization. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What features make FES programs unique? In what ways are FES programs similar to or different from those pursued by other organizations in the international democracy promotion field?
- How do FES programs vary across countries according to contextual factors, especially the level of democracy and restrictions on civic space?
- How has the approach of the FES changed over time?

Based on this analysis of FES programming, the study also seeks to inductively develop hypotheses about the *effects* of FES programming with some tentative answers based on the selected cases. Although full tests of the hypotheses remain a task for future research, we conclude the study by proposing some *lessons learned* for future FES programs based on our synthetic review of the literature and FES programs in selected cases.

These research goals inform the proposed case selection strategy. For research that is primarily descriptive, that is to say “not organized around a central, overarching causal hypothesis,” it is useful to adopt what is referred to within political science as a “diverse” set of cases.⁵¹ With this approach, the idea is to identify a set of cases (for this paper, countries) that provide variation along several relevant dimensions and thus comprise a “diverse” grouping.⁵² Ensuring that the cases are at least minimally representative of the full population in this manner is useful for developing new theoretical propositions that can then be explored in future research.

There are two dimensions along which variation is particularly useful for case selection in this research study. The first is temporal. Many scholars have identified the end of the Cold War as a significant break point when it comes to both democracy and democracy promotion. This period was one of democratization in most world regions. Perhaps relatedly, the international rewards associated with being democratic significantly increased due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and there was a substantial growth in support for democracy in foreign aid programs as well as international institutions throughout the 1990s.⁵³ Thus, it is valuable to study country cases where the FES was active that experienced a democratic transition during the earlier (i.e., Cold War) era of democracy promotion, as well as cases of democratic transition during the twenty-first century. It is possible that international politics has entered a new era vis-à-vis democracy that is more like the

Cold War in that the great powers are putting less priority on democracy promotion, which may make some of the Cold War lessons more relevant to the present day than would have been expected some years ago.

The second relevant dimension is pre-existing regime type. Non-democratic countries vary considerably in their characteristics, and the type of autocratic regime type in a country has significant bearing on whether it is likely to transition to democracy. One prominent approach to classifying non-democracies divides this category of countries into four types: party-based regimes, military regimes, personalist regimes, and monarchical regimes. Party-based and personalist regimes are the two most common non-democratic regime types in the twenty-first century.⁵⁴ Thus, it is useful to examine country cases where the FES was active that had a democratic transition after a period of both party-based and personalist rule.

Guided by these principles, and in conversation with FES staff, we decided to study five country cases that together represent a diverse set: Peru; Portugal; Serbia, South Africa; and Tunisia.⁵⁵ Their values on the two dimensions of interest are displayed in Table 1 below. Within the full population of country cases that could fit into each quadrant of the table, the proposed countries have several additional attractive features that guided their selection. These features include that several of them are “emblematic” cases for international democracy promotion in general and the FES specifically, and several also match some of our pre-existing country knowledge. Being emblematic cases comes at a cost in the sense that the cases are fairly well known and so our knowledge base on them is relatively strong (with the caveat that much of the published record on the FES's programming is in German, and the English-language literature on the FES's role in the below cases is fairly limited in several instances). But being emblematic cases is as much as an asset as a bug when the case selection strategy is to choose a diverse set of cases. That is because in this type of research design, we want to understand countries that are emblematic of the quadrant that they represent. That the cases are fairly well known also means there will be more material on the countries to draw on, making it more feasible to paint a fuller picture of (for example) how the FES approach in each setting was or was not unique when compared to that of other democracy promotion actors. A final note on the cases is that we deliberately chose to focus on countries where a democratic transition occurred. That decision poses some challenges in terms of generalizability to the full population of countries that are the targets of international democracy promotion insofar as FES programming may have been unusual in these coun-

⁵¹ John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 22.

⁵² Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 61, no. 2 (2008): 300, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077>.

⁵³ Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma*.

⁵⁴ Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, “Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set,” *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 313–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592714000851>.

⁵⁵ Case selection was therefore also shaped by FES staff assessments of country contexts in which the current political situation might prove too sensitive for our research to be conducted.

| Case Selection | | |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| | 1970s – early 1990s | 2000s – 2010s |
| Party-based | South Africa | Serbia ⁵⁶ , Tunisia |
| Personalist | Portugal | Peru |

tries in ways that ultimately led them to have democratic transitions. That said, the cases certainly do not represent unambiguous success stories when it comes to democracy. Although Portugal is now a longstanding consolidated democracy, Tunisia has now fully backslid to autocracy, and democracy has faced challenges in Peru, Serbia, and South Africa to varying degrees as well. This variation in the countries' ultimate democratic outcomes was intended to prove useful in terms of using the cases to generate lessons learned, as well as generating hypotheses about the effects of FES programming that can be studied in future research.

Our research included three steps. First, we conducted a review of the published literature on the FES, international actors, and democracy in each case. In some cases, relevant sources were available only in German, and these sources were translated (albeit imperfectly) via Google Translate for inclusion in our study when feasible. Second, we conducted a review of available internal FES documents on the case, including in the institutional archive (where older materials are housed) and documents shared with us by FES staff. Third, we conducted seven interviews with current and past FES Resident Directors in the countries of interest, as well as communicating in two cases with long-time in-country staff members. These semi-structured interviews probed participants' perspectives on the countries of interest (including the most important successes and primary challenges). Since FES Resident Directors circulate from country office to country office, as well as to the FES headquarters, we also used the interviews as an opportunity to gain their broader views on FES and democracy (including how they draw upon lessons from different countries and how they view changes over time in terms of the environment in which FES does its work).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Geddes et al., "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions" code Serbia as a party-personalist regime so it is not a pure personalist regime but still has some of these characteristics.

B

THE ROLE OF THE FES AND THE OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN AIDING DEMOCRACY IN FIVE CASES

We consider the cases in rough chronological order in terms of when their period of democratic opening occurred.

PORTUGAL

Portugal was ripe for a revolution. In 1974 and 1975, tensions, disillusionment, and frustration from nearly 50 years of authoritarianism and class struggle cascaded into a socialist uprising with an intention to democratize the nation. Portuguese fascism suppressed independent unions, undermined economic transformations, and waged colonial wars.⁵⁷ A military coup carried out by left-leaning revolutionaries on April 25, 1974 (the so-called “Carnation Revolution”) paved the way for a transition to a parliamentary democracy and a modernization of state institutions and the economy. Portugal’s democratic transition was a pivotal moment globally as it helped begin what Huntington would call the “third wave of democracy,”⁵⁸ with subsequent transitions occurring in Spain and Greece and then spreading to other regions. Out of the five cases included in this study, Portugal’s transition to democracy is the earliest, and by our account, the most successful. Although the relative success of the democratic transition in Portugal is likely best explained by the country’s underlying characteristics (e.g., its location in Western Europe where many economic, institutional, and social conditions support democracy), we also observe that the FES and other external actors played a valuable role in political party support, among other areas. Part C of this study contains additional comparative analysis.

The FES was active in Portugal long before tensions spilled over to a democratic revolution in 1974.⁵⁹ Early FES involvement traces back to collaboration with the *Acção Socialista Portuguesa* (ASP), a group of democratic opponents to the right-wing dictatorship that criticized colonial politics, the secret police, censorship and the persecution of politi-

cal opponents. By 1964, the ASP established contact with the Socialist International (SI), as well as other socialist and social democratic parties across Europe, soon gathering the attention of the FES. The ASP leader and future president of Portugal, Mário Soares, developed a strong relationship with the FES, and the ASP became a member of the SI in 1972.⁶⁰ With support from the ASP, the foundation helped establish cultural cooperatives and the daily newspaper “República.” Abroad, the FES had already established contacts to Portuguese migrants or gathered scholarships to Portuguese students. The FES played a prominent role in the development of social democratic parties, leading to the democratic transition.

While most of the international community was “[c]aught by surprise by the coup,”⁶¹ the FES played several important roles in supporting the Portuguese democratic transition.⁶² Mário Soares (eventually the prime minister and president of Portugal) had founded a movement called Portuguese Socialist Action in 1964. With funding from the FES, exiled activists from this group met secretly in the German town of Bad Münstereifel in 1973 where they voted to create a political party (the Socialist Party of Portugal) despite the government’s ban on political parties, which had been in place since 1933.⁶³ On April 25, the day of the Carnation Revolution, Soares was scheduled to meet with SPD leader Willy Brandt in Bonn, but had to quickly return to Portugal. Once there, Soares, along with other members of the Socialist Party, called for elections.⁶⁴ The Socialist Party would win the 1975 Constituent Assembly election as well as the 1976 National Assembly election.

⁵⁷ Ronald H. Chilcote, *The Portuguese Revolution: State and Class in the Transition to Democracy* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012).

⁵⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ The source for much of the discussion in this paragraph is our exchanges with FES staff.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Sequeira, “Mário Soares: A Politician and President of Unwritten Constitutional Competences,” <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bibliothek/bestand/70850/soares.pdf>, 7–8.

⁶¹ António Costa Pinto, “Political Purges and State Crisis in Portugal’s Transition to Democracy, 1975–76,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008): 311, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036508>.

⁶² A German-language history of the FES in Portugal that we were unable to translate but reference for future researchers is Peter Birle and Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, *Partnerschaft für die Demokratie. Die Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Brasilien und Portugal* (Dietz, 2020).

⁶³ Tereixa Constenla, “50 years of the Portuguese Socialist Party: from underground activists to stalwarts of European social democracy,” *El País*, April 21, 2023, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-04-21/50-years-of-the-portuguese-socialist-party-from-underground-activists-to-stalwarts-of-european-social-democracy.html>.

⁶⁴ Constenla, “50 years of the Portuguese Socialist Party.”

After the 1974 Carnation Revolution, the FES continued its characteristic multi-actor approach to provide economic and social structure support with the aim to promote the development of participatory organizational forms in key areas of the Portuguese economy and politics. The FES sought to facilitate a more equitable and participatory economy through strong and independent trade unions, small and medium sized business and development support, and media projects to harness the power of mass media and the television. The FES's multi-actor approach therefore was quite distinct in its orientation from that of other international actors, which concentrated their efforts primarily on providing political party support via training to actors on the center-left and center-right.⁶⁵

Beyond supporting democratic parties and politicians, the FES also founded and helped operate organizations focused on policy research and advocacy. The FES contributed 20 percent of the budget for the Institute for Development Research (IED), an academic think-tank to bolster research in the social sciences, which existed until the 2000s. The Center for Municipal Studies and Regional Action (CEMAR), which coached local politicians and administrative staff, was wholly funded by the FES until the early 1990s. The active involvement of multiple actors (government, civil society, academic, private) was important to FES goals and objectives.

Important to its trade union support, the FES brokered an important partnership with the Jose Fontana Foundation (JFF), an institution for socio-political education work in Portugal. Since January of 1979, the JFF coordinated the entire trade union educational work of the newly founded democratic trade union: Uniao Geral de Trabalhadores (UGT). With institutional and monetary support from the FES, the JFF organized seminars and study trips, as well as information and motivational campaigns to strengthen the democratic trade union movement in Portugal. A monthly trade union newspaper was also published.⁶⁶

Moreover, the FES provided direct support to trade unions through the organization of international trade union conferences and seminars. Conferences were also held in Germany for Portuguese employees to acquaint Portuguese union leaders with German union practices. Moreover, the FES financed trade union consultants of Portuguese origin, alongside scientific and technical assistants to assist the JFF with on-the-ground union support initiatives.⁶⁷ Local consulting groups and cooperatives also played a key role in the FES's mission. In 1977, the FES founded "Servicoop" as a registered cooperative. Servicoop offered business consult-

ing, decision making aids for investment and loan applications through profitability analyzes and feasibility studies, and the creation of training materials for central, regional, and local actions. In 1982, the FES established a revolving fund to aid with access to credit to purchase livestock or modern agriculture infrastructure. Moreover, the FES established "CONSERA" and held 49 percent of its shares. CONSERA advised on the use of funds from the European Union for adapting small business and cooperatives to the requirements of the common market.⁶⁸ In short, the FES understood the importance of supporting the development and emergence of democratic trade unions while also bolstering the economic conditions in which the unions operated.

Lastly, as we shall see that it did in South Africa, the FES aided Portugal in the development of its communication and media institutions. In early 1975, the FES sent a representative to Radiotelevisao Portuguesa (RTP) to assess the public broadcaster's needs and requirements.⁶⁹ The RTP had almost no trained workers and looked to the FES for training measures and resources. The FES delivered. The FES provided RTP with technical and training support, as well as monetary assistance for the installation of video recording systems and color television cameras.⁷⁰ By November of 1979, the new training center was complete, and the FES continued its support of Portugal's budding modern public media broadcasting functions in the years to come.⁷¹

Many analyses of the Portuguese transition also emphasize the importance of external factors in the country's transition beyond the role that they played as providers of direct assistance. While acknowledging the significance of domestic forces in the "triumph of moderate civilian forces and the final withdrawal of the military from the political arena," Costa Lobo et al. also emphasize the attraction of membership in the European Economic Community as a contributor to Portugal's successful democratic transition.⁷² Meanwhile, Portugal's membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is thought to have encouraged it to defer to parliament.⁷³ Thus, we see the significance of membership conditionality in and socialization via international institutions.

⁶⁵ António Costa Pinto, "The Legacy of the Authoritarian Past in Portugal's Democratisation, 1974-6," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9, no. 2 (2008): 270.

⁶⁶ "Förderung von Entwicklungsländern durch Maßnahmen der gesellschaftspolitischen Bildung, Kap. 2302, Tit. 68604: Gesellschaftspolitische Maßnahmen in Portugal 1979 bis 1981," *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, 1979.

⁶⁷ "Gesellschaftspolitische Maßnahmen in Portugal 1979 bis 1981."

⁶⁸ Jürgen Eckl and Norbert von Hofmann, *Kooperation mit Gewerkschaften und Förderung von Wirtschafts- und Sozialentwicklung: Zentrale Tätigkeitsfelder der internationalen Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung seit Beginn der 1960er-Jahre* (Dietz, 2012).

⁶⁹ S. Bangert to Dr. Gördel, November 23, 1976.

⁷⁰ Dr. Ernst-J. Kerbusch to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, April 7, 1979.

⁷¹ Manuel Faria de Almeida to Otto Manfred Weinger, December 7, 1979.

⁷² Marina Costa Lobo, António Costa Pinto, and Pedro C. Magalhães, "Portuguese Democratisation 40 Years on: Its Meaning and Enduring Legacies," *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 2 (2016): 168, doi:10.1080/13608746.2016.1153490. See also Marina Costa Lobo, *Em nome da Europa: Portugal em mudança, 1986–2006* (Principia, 2007) as cited in Costa Lobo et al. 2016.

⁷³ Alfred G. Cuzán, "Democratic Transitions: the Portuguese Case," in *Comparative Democratization and Peaceful Change in Single-Party-Dominant Countries*, ed. Marco Rimanelli (St. Martin's Press, 1999), 129–130.

SOUTH AFRICA

The 1990s were a time of change in South Africa. After 46 years under apartheid rule that had effectively legalized and entrenched segregation into the state, Nelson Mandela won South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, effectively ending Apartheid and ushering in a new era of democracy in the country. The extent to which international actors played an important role in the end of apartheid via the imposition of economic sanctions is hotly debated.⁷⁴ Regardless, and despite the successful transition to democracy in the 1990s, South Africa's massive economic inequality poses continued threats to its democracy and often-praised democratic institutions.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, South Africa remains widely regarded as meeting the minimum criteria to be considered a democracy (e.g., it is classified as "free" by Freedom House as of 2024).

Historically, the FES had a rich history of furthering social-democratic ideas abroad, and its support of the anti-apartheid liberation movement and its chief political flagship, the African National Congress (ANC), furthered this institutional spirit. Despite fairly friendly relations between the West German and apartheid governments,⁷⁶ the FES supported the ANC while it was in exile in Lusaka during the 1970s and 1980s, funding scholarships for ANC members to visit Germany and bringing Mandela to Bonn to meet with representatives from the FES and SPD after his release from prison in 1990.⁷⁷ Some of the FES's efforts during this period were also directed at improving the ANC's reputation in the West.

When apartheid ended in 1994 and democracy came to South Africa, the German government provided support to civil society primarily through the political foundations, including the FES.⁷⁸ The FES's relationship with the ANC continued once it became the ruling party. It provided advice about economic policies and political institutions that was informed by its perspective on the German experience as well as FES staffers' experiences working in other regions.⁷⁹ In fact, the FES's success in South Africa convinced conservative German governments that the Foundation was

well-equipped to respond to socio-economic concerns of countries that Germany was interested in becoming involved.⁸⁰ The FES had a partnership with the ANC and was most heavily involved in political party aid and institutional reform efforts.⁸¹ The FES funded "office equipment and security services" and later expanded to work with the ANC parliamentary group.⁸² It offered training courses and workshops aimed at local politicians, employees of the city and municipal administrators, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations. FES party assistance to the ANC was particularly successful due in part to the highly institutionalized nature of the ANC and other South African parties.⁸³

The relationships that the organization built with the ANC and trade unions more broadly during the transition period of the 1990s continue to be relevant today, as FES staffers working in the country are often reminded in their conversations with local partners who remember working with the organization more than three decades ago.⁸⁴ After the transition, many external government donors "began to lose interest" in aiding democracy in South Africa, although both the FES and some other private foundations largely stayed the course.⁸⁵ Whereas other international actors may have had some bias toward supporting relatively professionalized local organizations,⁸⁶ the FES retained its focus on civil society actors and political party groups that may have been less "palatable" politically to other external groups, according to one staffer.⁸⁷

Fostering public-private partnerships was also of importance to the Foundation. The National Small Business Conference, for instance, supported small and medium sized business with connections to local economic development.⁸⁸ It was important for the FES to consider the social and communal ramifications of its work. The Foundation sought to create an economic environment that was fair and just, pairing development with strong support for labor rights.

In addition to party support, the FES recognized the power of public media to bolster democratic support among the people. Broadcast television, along with radio, was the primary means of information dissemination in South Africa and acted as a powerful force in shaping opinions and

⁷⁴ Philip I. Levy, "Sanctions on South Africa: What Did They Do?," *American Economic Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 415–420, doi: 10.1257/aer.89.2.415.

⁷⁵ Brian Levy, Alan Hirsch, Vinothan Naidoo, and Musa Nxele, "South Africa: When Strong Institutions and Massive Inequalities Collide," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 18, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/03/south-africa-when-strong-institutions-and-massive-inequalities-collide?lang=en>.

⁷⁶ Bolade M. Eyinla, "West German Political Foundations and Their Activities in Sub-Saharan Africa," *International Studies* 36, no. 2 (1999): 201.

⁷⁷ Kristina Weissenbach, "Political Party Assistance in Transition: The German 'Stiftungen' in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Democratization* 17, no. 6 (2010): 1238–39, doi:10.1080/13510347.2010.520556.

⁷⁸ Christopher Landsberg, "Voicing the Voiceless: Foreign Political Aid to Civil Society in South Africa," in *Funding Virtue*, ed. Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 117–19.

⁷⁹ Interview with Hubert Schillinger, April 17, 2024.

⁸⁰ Holthaus, "Is there difference in democracy promotion?"

⁸¹ Gero Erdmann, "Hesitant Bedfellows: The German Stiftungen and Party Aid in Africa. An Attempt at an Assessment," *CSGR Working Paper* No. 184/05 (2005): 1–31.

⁸² Weissenbach, "Political Party Assistance in Transition," 1239.

⁸³ Weissenbach, "Political Party Assistance in Transition."

⁸⁴ Interview with Uta Dirksen, April 2, 2024.

⁸⁵ Simon Stacey and Sada Aksartova, "The Foundations of Democracy: U.S. Foundation Support for Civil Society in South Africa, 1988–96," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 12 (2001): 373–397, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013922716105>.

⁸⁶ Stacey and Aksartova, "The Foundations of Democracy."

⁸⁷ Interview with Sebastian Sperling, April 2, 2024.

⁸⁸ Eckl and von Hofmann, *Kooperation mit Gewerkschaften und Förderung von Wirtschafts- und Sozialentwicklung*.

spreading knowledge about the harms of apartheid, the message of the ANC, and pro-democratic material. The FES worked with media broadcasting consultants in Johannesburg, as well as the South African Broadcasting Company to improve institutional support.⁸⁹ Specifically, the FES was interested in institutionalizing mass-broadcasting and harnessing the power of mass-media to propagate democratic messages. The FES brought expertise, as it was known for its media projects in professional circles and understood the importance and potential for mass media in the region.⁹⁰ To that point, Friedrich-Wilhelm Freiherr von Sell, a prominent German journalist and jurist, delivered a speech to a South African Broadcast Company panel in 1993, arguing for the important role of the public broadcaster as a “pillar of democracy.”⁹¹

SERBIA

In the late 1980s, Slobodan Milosevic emerged as the definitive Serbian leader and exploited the power of nationalism to solidify his power.⁹² The Yugoslav Wars, a collection of ethnic conflicts and struggles for independence, began in 1991 and saw Serbian paramilitary units commit atrocities and war crimes as part of an ethnic cleansing campaign spearheaded by Milosevic.⁹³ Throughout his reign, Serbia under Milosevic maintained a democratic façade, but was in practice an authoritarian state. Government controlled all aspects of society, from the media, to elections, and the economy. Milosevic opposition throughout the 1990s was weak, due to factors like a failure to create a multiparty coalition, a lack of a clear program, and a failure to include all the major opposition forces.⁹⁴

After the February 1994 Market Square Bombing in Sarajevo that killed 69 people and wounded 200, NATO issued an ultimatum to Milosevic. The United States pushed for NATO intervention to end the Bosnian War. NATO informed Milosevic it would continue airstrikes unless Serbia withdrew its forces from the region.⁹⁵ In December of

1995, peace talks in Dayton, Ohio culminated in the Dayton Accords, ending the Yugoslav Wars and establishing Serbia and Montenegro as an independent state.

Despite attempts to overthrow Milosevic throughout the 1990s, it was not until the end of the decade that anti-Milosevic and democratic forces could successfully organize against the authoritarian government. In October 1998, a group of students founded an organization called Otpor, meaning ‘resistance.’ The group aimed to transform national political culture, to increase the political consciousness of the Serbian people. After Milosevic’s defeat in the 2000 elections, he refused to accept the results. Nationwide protests and nonviolent demonstrations, including ones organized by Otpor, proved successful. In early October, Milosevic stepped down and Vojislav Kostunica ascended to the presidency.⁹⁶ It was thought that the country had overcome authoritarianism and had successfully started down the road to democracy. In many ways, the political victory for democratic reformers in 2000 was the culmination of ten long years of struggle by Serbia’s democratic opposition and civil society.⁹⁷

Serbia is often cited as an example of successful international democracy promotion. The U.S. and European governments provided considerable democracy assistance (including funding for activists’ salaries and trainings) as part of a broader goal of seeing Milosevic removed from office. This aid helped Otpor mobilize voters and then after the stolen election bring protesters to the streets.⁹⁸ Democracy assistance continued in large amounts during the years immediately following 2000.⁹⁹ An overall context in which Serbia had many links with democratic countries and, after Milosevic’s ouster, strong material interests to become eligible to accede to the European Union (EU) provided further external support for democracy.¹⁰⁰ Although the carrot of EU membership is often interpreted as contributing to political freedom in the country during the 2000s and early 2010s, observers are more critical of the EU’s role in forestalling some democratic backsliding in the country more recently.

Like other democratic and international institutions nations, Germany and its political foundations played an important

⁸⁹ “Agreement between the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Media and Broadcasting Consulting,” February 3, 1993 and Willie Currie, David Dison, and Michael Markovitz to Hubert Schillinger, February 5, 1993.

⁹⁰ “Projektbezeichnung: Beratungs- und Ausbildungsmaßnahmen für Medieninstitutionen im südlichen Afrika,” July 3, 1991.

⁹¹ “Address by Friedrich-Wilhelm Freiherr von Sell, Germany to the SABC Panel Hearing,” May 5, 1993.

⁹² On April 24th, 1987, Milosevic traveled to Kosovo to stir up Serbian nationalism, telling large crowds of Serbs that “no one shall dare to beat you.” In December of that year, sensationalized televised trials of Serbian leaders Pavlovic and Stambolic labeled them as anti-Serb, clearing the way for Milosevic to dominate Serbian politics. In November of 1988, Milosevic capitalized on Serbian nationalist fervor to keep the disputed territory of Kosovo firmly under Serbian control, a move that “sounded the death-knell for Yugoslavia.” Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (Penguin Books, 1997).

⁹³ Ibid., 244.

⁹⁴ Florian Bieber, “The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society: Roots of the Delayed Transition in Serbia,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 73–90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20020198>.

⁹⁵ Little and Silber, “Yugoslavia Death of a Nation,” 309.

⁹⁶ “Otpor and the Struggle for Democracy in Serbia,” *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/otpor-struggle-democracy-serbia-1998-2000/>.

⁹⁷ Ivan Vejvoda, Franz-Lothar Altmann, Misha Glenny, Gerald Knaus, Marcus Cox, Stefan Lehne, Jacques Rupnik, and Romana Vlahutin, “Serbia after Four Years of Transition,” *The Western Balkans: Moving On*. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2004, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07054.6>.

⁹⁸ Mark R. Beissinger, “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 259–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707070776>.

⁹⁹ Aaron Presnall, “Which Way the Wind Blows: Democracy Promotion and International Actors in Serbia,” *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (2009): 661–81, doi:10.1080/13510340903083026.

¹⁰⁰ Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112–13.

role in Serbia's democratic transition. The FES began working in Serbia in 1996 in a somewhat under the radar manner,¹⁰¹ shortly after the Dayton talks ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unlike the FES's engagement with other countries, there were no established partner relationships since at the time of engagement; the nation of Serbia was a mere six years old and lacked a robust civil society and institutions. For example, initial FES reports excluded parties and party-affiliated institutions, since Milosevic opposition parties were either weak or nonexistent.¹⁰² Eventually, the Democratic Party (DS) grew to become Serbia's main democratic force and the primary partner of the FES.¹⁰³ The FES concentrated on initiatives with the party's youth organization, such as political education and training.¹⁰⁴

During the early years of Otpor and pro-democracy movements, Otpor members participated in FES events and educational programs. The FES also provided Otpor and DS with practical and material support during the elections, such as the procurement of phones and computers, to make it easier for election observers to monitoring the voting process.

The FES partnered with the Nezavisnost, or Independence, trade union led by Branislav Canak. Trade union work was complicated by disastrous economic conditions of the nation, such as high unemployment, which greatly diminished the bargaining power of trade unions in Serbia.¹⁰⁵ The FES has also been a partner of civil society groups in Serbia, such as the European Movement in Serbia, the Belgrade Open School, the Democratic Party, and the Center for Modern Skills.¹⁰⁶ The FES worked with the academic community, commissions opinion polls, develops studies, and establishes forums for scientific discussions.¹⁰⁷ It also supported regional programs that brought leaders and parliamentarians from social democratic parties across the Balkans and beyond in Europe.

After the transition, the FES maintained a close relationship with Zoran Dindic, the prime minister of Serbia from 2001–2003, who was assassinated a week before he was scheduled to speak at a forum organized by the FES about organized crime in the country.¹⁰⁸ As a result, the FES began intensifying political education and training work in Serbia. It had become clear to the FES that Serbia's three-year-old democracy was greatly threatened by becoming dangerously dependent on Dindic, necessitating an expansion of political education programs.¹⁰⁹

The FES was concerned by the 2012 Serbian elections, which put Tomislav Nikolic into power, a far-right Serbian politician and Srebrenica genocide denier.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, the FES views its contributions to Serbia since 1996 as positive, bringing professionalization and internationalization to a new democracy.¹¹¹ The foundation continues its close relationship with the DS as a means of shaping political discourse in Serbia toward a pro-democracy direction.

Concern has grown in recent years over an authoritarian resurgence in Serbia, and the FES's strategy in the country has been designed to combat democratic erosion, as it has also been throughout the Western Balkans via the FES's shared approach within the region.¹¹² The government has cracked down on civil society and activists in the country. In 2020, the government passed "anti-terror" legislation that targeted civil society organizations and imposed reporting and registration requirements on groups that receive funds from abroad. Elected in 2012, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has faced corruption allegations and has cracked down on free speech in the country.¹¹³ According to Freedom House, Vucic's party, the Serbian Progressive Party, has eroded political and civil rights and liberties and continues to make it difficult for civil society to operate in the country.¹¹⁴

PERU

During the 1990s, as democratic transitions reverberated throughout Latin America, with democracy taking hold in countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, Peru was an outlier. On April 5, 1992, President Alberto Fujimori took control of the government, closed the Congress, suspended the constitution, and purged the courts through a military-assisted coup. Despite holding elections throughout the 1990s, Fujimori's Peru was highly undemocratic, as civil liberties were consistently violated, electoral institutions were politicized and corrupted, and the armed forces lacked any civilian oversight or accountability.¹¹⁵ Political opposition was weak and fragmented, unable to prevent Fujimori from solidifying his power and crippling any institutional checks on that power. The leading non-Fujimori parties and politicians also avoided direct confrontation with the government and the democracy movement. By the time the 2000 election arrived, the ineffective opposi-

¹⁰¹ Interview with Ana Manojlovic Stakic, April 1, 2024.

¹⁰² Michael Ehrke and Elmar Römpczyk, *The Rocky Road to Europe: The Work of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Serbia and the Baltic States* (Dietz, 2013), 46.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 60–61.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 88–89.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 122.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 127.

¹¹² Interview with FES staffer, April 10, 2024. In addition to maintaining its Serbia country office, FES maintains the FES Dialogue Southeast Europe (SOE) office in Sarajevo to coordinate their work in the region since 2015. Among other issues, this office provides an overarching framework for "democratic consolidation, social and economic justice and peace through regional cooperation" as outlined at <https://soe.fes.de/about-us/dialogue-southeast-europe.html>.

¹¹³ Antonio Prokscha, "Standing Up for Democracy: How Serbian Civil Society is Fighting for Survival," *GMF*, 2023, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/standing-democracy-how-serbian-civil-society-fighting-survival>.

¹¹⁴ "Serbia," Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia>.

¹¹⁵ Steven Levitsky, "Fujimori and Post-Party Politics in Peru," *Journal of Democracy* 10.3 (1999): 78–92, https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/levitsky/files/SL_fujimori.pdf.

tion was virtually powerless to prevent Fujimori's unconstitutional third term bid for the presidency.¹¹⁶

Opposition parties and candidates also faced considerable social and institutional challenges in the 2000 election. Fujimori's popularity afforded him strong incumbent advantages. Moreover, he controlled most of the country's television and newspaper outlets and directed them to "systematically [assault] opposition candidates," leaving political opponents at a massive disadvantage before election day had even arrived.¹¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, Fujimori won a third term in office and was sworn in on July 28, 2000. A large protest against Fujimori and the unfair election, the March of the Four Suyos, coincided with the swearing in ceremony, and both the Organization of American States and the U.S. government declared the election unfair. According to Donno, "unusually harsh international condemnation was essential for validating the opposition's claims of fraud and convincing the government to accept internationally mediated talks on political reform."¹¹⁸

Despite the popular mobilization against his rigged election victory, Fujimori held on to power for a few more months until November 2000, when he resigned in the face of ongoing bribery and corruption scandals and fled to Japan.¹¹⁹ With his ouster, authoritarianism in Peru had come to an end. New elections and institutional reforms put Peru on the path toward democracy. Unfortunately, Peru has witnessed democratic backsliding in recent years and is considered a fragile democracy today.¹²⁰

The FES's involvement in supporting democracy in Peru began long before Fujimori came to power. Studies about the collapse of the Fujimori regime do not generally highlight the role of external actors, beyond the key role that international organizations and states are thought to have played in condemning the fraudulent election and thus legitimizing the opposition's claims. However, the FES can still be observed as playing a supportive role for democratization in Peru when viewed over the longer term.

Throughout the 1970s, the FES collaborated with the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), the social democratic party in Peru. This collaboration was part of a larger FES program in the country that focused on socio-political reforms through research, education, and con-

sulting initiatives. The party support was aimed at strengthening democratic parties in preparation for future democratic elections, as Peruvian politics throughout the 1970s was defined by two coup d'états in seven years.¹²¹ Thus, when an APRA candidate, Alan García, won the presidency in 1985, the nature of FES cooperation shifted toward government advice. The FES office in Lima sought to ensure that after taking office, APRA was able to present a consistent and immediate economic policy program that would halt the collapse of the economy.¹²²

However, by 1990, political and economic conditions in Peru made it difficult for the FES and other international organizations to operate. In a project application submitted to the BMZ on June 25, 1990, a month before Fujimori came to power, the FES complained that "The inability of democratic political parties to use democratic conditions to increase the general welfare and not just to enrich and accommodate their own clientele, has brought them into great disrepute among the Peruvian public."¹²³ The application also noted what it called "the most spectacular case" of corruption, when an APRA member of parliament was caught by the German criminal police withdrawing funds from a drug account and evaded prosecution by going into hiding.

More recently, the FES has worked on a variety of issues in Peru's political development. A long-time staffer highlighted as some of the organization's recent major successes as including support to union and informal workers, strengthening the progressive party (Tierra y Libertad) via its programmatic orientation and grassroots youth committee, and contributing to Peru's decentralization.¹²⁴ In terms of labor activities, the organization has brought together workers from the informal economy like domestic workers, taxi drivers, and others (who make up the majority of workers in the country) to negotiate with authorities regarding the laws governing the sector. At the same time, the dominance of right-wing political parties (as well as a political party system that is generally weak) in recent years has made it difficult for the FES in Peru to find powerful political partners with which it is a natural ideological fit.

TUNISIA

The Tunisian Revolution, lasting about four weeks from late 2010 to early 2011, is perhaps best remembered for jumpstarting the so-called Arab Spring, a wave of pro-democracy protests that rattled Middle Eastern dictatorships

¹¹⁶ Steven Levitsky and Maxwell A. Cameron, "Democracy Without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori's Peru," *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 3 (2003): 1–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177157>.

¹¹⁷ Levitsky and Maxwell, "Democracy Without Parties?," 17–19.

¹¹⁸ Donno, *Defending Democratic Norms*, 176.

¹¹⁹ John Crabtree, "The Collapse of Fujimorismo: Authoritarianism and its Limits," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 20, no. 3 (2001): 287–303, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3339730>.

¹²⁰ Julio F. Carrión and Patricia Zárate, "Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Peru Report," *NORC at the University of Chicago* (2023), https://norc.org/content/dam/norc-org/pdfs/LACLEARNS%20-%20Analysis%20of%20Trends%20in%20Democratic%20Attitudes%20-%20Phase%20II%20-%20Peru_508.pdf.

¹²¹ Fernando Belaúnde, the 49th and 52nd president of Peru, was deposed by General Juan Velasco Alvarado in 1968 in a coup d'état. Alvarado was overthrown in a military coup by Francisco Morales-Bermúdez in 1975. Belaúnde re-gained the presidency in 1980.

¹²² Erfried Adam, *Vom mühsamen Geschäft der Demokratieförderung: Die internationale Entwicklungszusammenarbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (Dietz, 2012).

¹²³ Erfried Adam, *Vom mühsamen Geschäft der Demokratieförderung*, 388.

¹²⁴ Personal communication with FES staffer in Peru, April 22, 2024.

and brought a shimmer of democratizing hope to a region long ruled by autocrats. Unlike the protests in Serbia and Peru that led to regime change, which took place after fraudulent elections that were condemned by international actors, the protests that erupted in Tunisia seemingly occurred out of the blue. High unemployment, a lack of civil rights and liberties, and rampant corruption all motivated people to take to the streets to demand change.

Prior to the revolution, Tunisia was not a focus of international democracy promotion, as it received little democracy assistance and was not the target of major diplomatic or conditionality initiatives.¹²⁵ However, despite the critical role that large-scale protests and popular mobilization played in overthrowing the long-ruling dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's government, Tunisia's path to democracy was not exclusively a domestic affair, but rather at least partially the product of international actor engagement with domestic civil society groups. Some international actors flew "under the radar" of the repressive Ben Ali government by operating quietly and partnering with political activists who operated outside of public view.¹²⁶ Indeed, the German political foundations, including the FES, arguably played a valuable role in creating platforms for political debate, facilitating political training, and ultimately aiding in the transition to democracy.¹²⁷

The FES has a rich history in supporting Tunisian civil society. The FES first held a field office in Tunis from 1970–1973 and operates its present field office that opened in 1988. Prior to the revolution in 2011, the FES employed a cautious approach in its support, focusing on social and cultural affairs, rather than democracy and human rights projects in order to balance providing support and protecting local partners. Throughout FES's involvement in Tunisia, the country has harbored a vibrant civil society, enabling the FES to find and engage with a variety of actors.¹²⁸ One area of successful collaboration has developed between the FES and the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT). The FES saw the UGTT as critical in supporting pro-democracy protests, and in addition to FES funding for small grassroots organizations that monitored socio-economic protests in the country, the FES leveraged its legitimacy in the global labor movement to foster collaboration.¹²⁹

Indeed, FES staff credit their long-standing relationships with the UGTT and others – along with the organization's willingness to be flexible and responsive in disbursing funds – to successful partnerships during the transition period.

The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet was a group of four civil society organizations including the UGTT that won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 for their successful role in mediating a 2013 constitutional crisis in the aftermath of the revolution. FES staff told us that the Quartet participants turned to the organization for help even though other international actors would have also been happy to provide assistance because they trusted the FES.¹³⁰

The FES's focus on supporting labor movements was based in the belief that strong labor organizations, in addition to yielding intrinsic social justice value, can aid in democratization following a democratic revolution. The liberalized post-revolution atmosphere enabled the FES to increase its union support; the FES supported independent unions in not only Tunisia, but also Egypt, by hosting training programs and financing conferences, although support for unions in the latter had to be substantially downsized beginning in 2012 due to pressure from the regime, which curtailed the activities of independent trade unions. FES success also had a ripple effect, leading to other organizations like Oxfam increasing their presence in the region.¹³¹

It is worth noting the important lesson that can be discerned from the FES's support of local labor. To aid in democratic change, the FES was dependent on domestic institutions and actors to an extent to complete its goals. Moreover, the FES did not act alone. During Tunisia's democratic transition, the German government through the BMZ, the German Development Bank, and the German Federal Foreign Office (AA or *Auswärtiges Amt*) administered millions of Euros for democracy assistance projects.¹³² It would seem, then, that successful democracy aid requires a pluralist and collaborative approach, an approach that the FES embraces.

During the immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolution, international aid flooded into Tunisia and supported the creation of massive numbers of new civil society organizations.¹³³ Yet these initial commitments were not sustained indefinitely. Some observers felt that outside actors reverted to a pre-revolution mode of engagement with Tunisia that prioritized stability and security cooperation over democracy.¹³⁴ Tunisian president Kais Saied's "self-coup" in July 2021 and subsequent repression of civil society was roundly met with condemnation from pro-democracy international audiences. However, Tunisia remains a case where pro-democracy international linkage and leverage remains weaker than in a case like Serbia.

¹²⁵ Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance*, 191.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 192.

¹²⁷ Pietro Marzo, "Supporting Political Debate While Building Patterns of Trust: The Role of the German Political Foundations in Tunisia (1989–2017)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 4 (2019): 621–37, doi:10.1080/00263206.2018.1534732.

¹²⁸ Mohammad Dawood Sofi, *The Tunisian Revolution and Democratic Transition: The Role of al-Nahdah* (Routledge, 2021).

¹²⁹ Hartshorn, "Global Labor and the Arab Uprisings"; Leonie Holthaus, "Furthering Pluralism? The German Foundations in Transitional Tunisia," *Voluntas* 30, no. 6 (2019): 1284–96.

¹³⁰ On the relationship between the FES and Quartet participants, see Holthaus, "Furthering Pluralism?", 1289–90.

¹³¹ Hartshorn, "Global Labor and the Arab Uprisings."

¹³² Holthaus, "Is there difference in democracy promotion?"

¹³³ Laryssa Chomiak, "The Making of a Revolution in Tunisia," *Middle East Law and Governance* 3, no. 1–2 (2011): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1163/187633711X591431>.

¹³⁴ Brieg Tomos Powel, "The Stability Syndrome: US and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia," *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 1 (2009): 57–73, doi:10.1080/13629380802383562.

In the more-open post-revolution atmosphere, the FES was able to return to direct advocacy and address topics of democracy and human rights more openly. One such initiative saw the FES cooperating with the human rights advocacy organization the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH), which was another member of the influential Quartet with whom the FES's relationship had existed for some time. Through this collaboration, the FES promoted socio-economic and human rights reforms, as well as a professionalization of civil society advocacy.¹³⁵ The FES was also able to leverage its longstanding presence in the country as a source of legitimacy and develop patterns of trust with political and civil groups within a context where many other international initiatives were new and had only begun after the revolution.¹³⁶ Although the space for the FES's work in Tunisia as of 2024 has been restricted given the country's return to autocracy, it remains able to operate in the country and conduct activities with its partners.¹³⁷ The FES's approach in Tunisia is a particularly illustrative example of the foundation's ability to regionalize its work, networking with various actors at the regional level, including unions, parties, civil society groups, and more. Regionalization has been increasingly crucial to the foundation's approach, as we also saw in the case of Serbia.

¹³⁵ Holthaus, "Furthering Pluralism?"

¹³⁶ Marzo, "Supporting Political Debate While Building Patterns of Trust."

¹³⁷ Interview with Johannes Kadura, April 1, 2024.

C

LESSONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

Based on the above case studies, we draw out lessons about FES programs for the broader international democracy promotion literature. We begin with thoughts about what makes FES programs distinctive compared with other actors in democracy promotion, including their orientation in terms of social democratic values, long-term presence in countries, and track record of working even in countries that are relatively closed and authoritarian. We then offer some hypotheses about the conditions under which FES activities in particular, and international democracy assistance more generally, may be likely to succeed based on the case studies. We emphasize the importance of the international and geopolitical environment, while noting that there is no positive correlation between party-based regimes and effective democracy assistance in our cases, contrary to our expectations from the literature. Hypotheses about the conditions for FES success can be tested more systematically in subsequent research. We conclude this section by noting some of the contemporary challenges for the FES's approach in an international environment that is increasingly hostile to democracy and democracy assistance.

FES PROGRAMS: DISTINCTIVE BUT NOT ALWAYS DIFFERENT

It is clear from the above case studies that FES programs share some features with other international actors engaged in democracy assistance. Similar to other democracy assistance organizations, including both the other German political foundations and also state and non-governmental actors in the United States and Europe, the FES emphasizes working with non-governmental organizations in target countries. Moreover, within the realm of democracy assistance, it prioritizes issues such as support to civil society and civic education, as well as dialogue, networking, and exchange.

In this way, FES (and the German political foundations more generally) is more associated with a bottom-up approach to democracy assistance than some other entities, including American organizations, that are active in democracy promotion and known for a greater commitment to a top-down approach.¹³⁸ However, we see this as a difference of

degree more than a difference of kind. Most major international actors support certain activities that are more top-down (e.g., supporting good governance or institutional capacity) and others that bottom-up (e.g., supporting political parties, the media, or civil society organizations).¹³⁹ Likewise, FES prides itself on building long-term partnerships with local actors and groups, while also engaging in short-term initiatives as appropriate. These features are again not wholly unique to FES, but more challenging for organizations that are funded through short-term projects to enact since the grant or contract cycle may not allow them to maintain a long-term presence in a country.

There are additional ways that FES programs are unique vis-à-vis other international actors. Writing in 2000, Mair differentiated the German political foundations from other types of international democracy assistance in three ways: “long-term presence of field representatives; a combination of long-term partnerships and short-term initiatives; [and] value orientation, partisanship and pluralism.”¹⁴⁰ More than two decades later, this observation rings true to us based on our case studies. Whereas the philosophical or ideological foundations of some other democracy promotion actors are not expressly stated (or perhaps even fully understood by practitioners),¹⁴¹ this is not the case for the FES. Within the FES's bottom-up programming, for example, we observed support of trade unions throughout our case studies. Although support for trade unions is not absent in the activities of other democracy assistance organizations that are viewed as more associated with traditional liberal (vs. social democratic) values,¹⁴² it clearly enjoys greater emphasis in the FES than peer organizations. The FES sees strong labor organizations as both an intrinsic social justice value and as a positive democratizing force following a democratic revolution.

A further feature of the FES's programs that stands out, particularly in comparison to some other international de-

¹³⁸ Holthaus, “Is there difference in democracy promotion?”

¹³⁹ Reicheneder and Neureiter. “On the Effectiveness of Democracy Aid in Post-Civil War Recipient Countries,” 2.

¹⁴⁰ Mair, “Germany's Stiftungen and Democracy Assistance,” 136.

¹⁴¹ Kurki, *Democratic Futures*.

¹⁴² On liberalism in democracy promotion, see Christopher Hobson, “The Limits of Liberal-Democracy Promotion,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 34, no. 4 (2009): 383–405.

mocracy assistance entities, is their ability to take place even in environments that are not democratic and have in place significant restrictions on civic space. FES was active, to varying degrees, in all five countries in our analysis even prior to democratization and political opening, including in Tunisia where few other international NGOs or donors were present. Official government entities like those sponsored by USAID find it much difficult to conduct or sponsor activities related to democracy in such environments because it creates such problems for their relationships with the host governments. By contrast, the FES utilizes its long-standing ties with local democratic groups and its global reputation to operate even in environments hostile to democracy or with harsh restrictions on civil society. This is not to say that the FES can successfully operate in all environments hostile to democracy, however, as the *Contemporary Challenges* section below argues when state restrictions make it immensely difficult, or impossible, for civil society to thrive, the FES may be unable to pursue its signature pluralistic and bottom-up approach to democracy assistance.

Some of the specific strategies that the FES used in such settings based on our research included bringing key personnel to other countries to participate in programming (e.g., in Portugal and South Africa) and identifying pro-democratic activities that could occur in a sufficiently discreet manner within the country so as not to be repressed (e.g., in Serbia). In some cases, the individuals who participated in the FES's activities during the authoritarian era were involved in the ouster of a dictator or the immediate political aftermath, although we note that this was not uniformly the case in our five cases, and there are other cases that we did not examine where regime change did not occur. Moreover, the example of Peru highlights that external foundations may only be able to do so much absent decent opposition parties and avenues for influence.

As noted earlier, there have been changes to the FES's approach over time that previous researchers have noticed. Some of these changes are a consequence of the FES's changing funding levels, which are related to the changing long-term status of the SPD in Germany. Yet looking within our case studies at the FES's strategies over time, that funding consideration was emphasized less often by our interlocutors than the changing political circumstances they have had to deal with. The relevant changes are most importantly domestic ones in the countries where the FES works and to a lesser extent international changes in terms of the environment for democracy. Similar to other organizations in the democracy assistance field, we observe that the FES has also become more professional over time.¹⁴³ Furthermore, its approach reflects changing norms and political priorities globally, with the FES in Peru taking on issues such as climate change in advance of the Conference on Parties that was held in Lima in 2014 or putting greater emphasis on gender equality and political masculinities.¹⁴⁴

INTUITIONS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

As discussed in Part A, the literature on democracy promotion identifies several factors that make external efforts to advance democracy more effective. These include an international system that is encouraging of democracy, a geopolitical environment in which external actors are supportive of democratic change in a target state, an approach to democracy assistance that does not put too much emphasis on support for governments and executive (vs. aiding civil society), and certain institutional features of the target state. Our case studies do not challenge these conclusions.

The cases of greatest success (Portugal and South Africa) were ones in which the international system and (eventually, in South Africa's case) geopolitics were supportive of democratization. As discussed in more detail in Part A, the international environment has arguably become less supportive of democracy over the time period covered by our study. Most of the FES staffers interviewed for this project who had worked in the field for a substantial length of time observed this trend and noted that it made their efforts more challenging.

There is a tentative temporal pattern in our study wherein the cases of transition when the international and geopolitical environment was more supportive of democracy have become more stable, consolidated democracies. Yet we cannot conclude from our research that democracy assistance (either in general or from the FES) is of declining effectiveness; this is a hypothesis that future research would need to test more systematically. After all, the temporal pattern we discern may not generalize to other cases. Moreover, we suspect that countries that democratized during the third wave of democratization may have had various underlying characteristics (e.g., economic development; economic, social, military, and cultural linkages with other democracies) that made democratic transition and consolidation more likely. By contrast, countries that were not already democratic at the start of the twenty-first century may have fewer underlying characteristics that support democracy, making them more difficult cases for external actors to successfully aid democracy.

In terms of the types of activities supported by external actors, and as observed earlier, the FES's approach to democracy assistance can generally be understood as one that is much more bottom-up than top-down. As discussed in Part A, this is the strategy that some studies in the literature suggest is more effective. As such, it may shed light on the relatively strong track record of democracy assistance in the five cases examined for this study. Yet insofar as this feature is essentially a constant of the FES's approach, it does not provide an explanation for variation in the relative effectiveness across the cases.

Finally, our case studies support the notion that the institutions of the target state are relevant for the effectiveness of democracy assistance, although not all the institutions

¹⁴³ Erdmann, "Hesitant Bedfellows."

¹⁴⁴ Personal communication with FES staffer in Peru, April 22, 2024.

identified by previous research turn out to be important in our cases. As we described in Part A, previous research has found that democracy assistance is more effective in authoritarian regimes that are party-based rather than personalist or military-based. We do not identify a correlation between party-based regimes and effective democracy assistance in our five cases of FES support. Although this null finding may be a consequence of the cases we chose for the study, it may also reflect the ways that FES's programs are unique when compared to other international democracy assistance efforts. Whereas "intact" authoritarian regimes may find it relatively straightforward to restrict or coopt high-profile, government-funded democracy assistance initiatives, this type of response may be more difficult for smaller-scale foundation activities, some of which take place outside of the target country (as when opposition leaders are brought to another country for trainings and networking).

Another finding from the literature is that researchers have argued that democracy assistance can prove most pivotal in countries that are experiencing political transitions, whereas sometimes it stalls in countries that are stable autocracies. In several of our cases, we found that the FES's long-standing partnerships with political leaders and local civil society allowed these groups to mobilize quickly once a political opening occurred. Additional research that examines political outcomes in the immediate post-transition period in countries with and without FES support (as well as other forms of international assistance) would enable the identification of this relationship with greater confidence.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR THE FES APPROACH

Although the FES's pluralistic and bottom-up approach to democracy promotion has often coincided with and supported positive democratic change, certain facets of the foundation's strategies may face challenges going forward. As the case studies in this study show, successful transition to democracy often depends on the presence of some legitimate, unified democratic or at least anti-regime opposition within an otherwise authoritarian country. While the FES has supported strong, multi-stakeholder partnerships across civil society, parties, and institutions within such settings, this approach is much more difficult to enact when at least some of those actors do not exist or are hampered by significant legal or normative restrictions on their operations. Although our case study of Tunisia highlights how long-standing relationships with opposition actors in staunchly authoritarian regimes can pay dividends in the event of an eventual opening, there are other countries where such an opening has not yet occurred despite being targeted by external democracy support, raising the question of how often such investments are likely to pay off.

Take, for example, some of the most repressive and powerful societies in the world today. Russia and China, for in-

stance, have little in the way of substantial, organized anti-regime opposition or pro-democracy groups. Repressive legal environments make it difficult for civil society to identify actors, institutions, and other targets for democratic interventions.

Moreover, "foreign agent" laws in China, Russia, and elsewhere have the practical effect of stifling nearly all aid and support from foreign NGOs and democracy promoters like the FES from making it into the country. This is crucial, as foreign investment and international collaboration in democracy monitoring efforts are essential for local civil society to effectively operate. Since the early 1990s, civil society groups around the world have been subject to regulation that seeks to manage and control their presence and operation. Control comes in the form of both repressive laws and subjection to tight government control.¹⁴⁵ A prominent example is the "foreign agent law" in Russia, which effectively outlaws NGOs from receiving foreign funding or working with international groups.¹⁴⁶ In addition to crippling operations and choking access to funding, denigrations of civil society have a chilling effect on societal trust of NGOs as trustworthy institutions. As we point out in each of our case studies, building trust with local actors and populations is critical to the success of FES's multi-stakeholder approach.

Perhaps this should come as little surprise; in the first section of this study exploring conditions for effective democracy promotion, we point out that the nature of the target regime matters, with countries that are already transitioning toward democracy sometimes being more welcoming environments for democracy promotion than countries with more firmly entrenched authoritarian regimes. Moreover, scholars argue that democracy assistance is generally more effective when targeting party-based authoritarian regimes, rather than ones that are personalist or militaristic. These insights are important for recognizing environments wherein the FES might be less successful, especially as the number and severity of foreign agent laws and crackdowns on civil society in authoritarian regimes around the world continue to grow. An important but open question is the extent to which international democracy assistance in these unpropitious settings is likely to be challenging or in fact likely to reinforce existing authoritarian regimes. Although some analysts have cautioned about the possibility of the latter dynamic, the scant research that we have that directly addresses this question is relatively opti-

¹⁴⁵ G. B. Robertson, "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁴⁶ Despite the foreign agent law, some scholars have like Moser and Skripchenko provide a nuanced perspective on NGO operation under legal restrictions in Russia. They find that although the foreign agent law has been incredibly repressive and destructive to Western and foreign funding of Russian civil society, some NGOs inside Russia have tried to survive by seeking domestic funding and support, although even these efforts have not, and probably cannot, make up for foreign aid. See Evelyn Moser and Anna Skripchenko, "Russian NGOs and Their Struggle for Legitimacy in the Face of the 'Foreign Agents' Law: Surviving in Small Ecologies," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 4 (2018): 591–614, doi:10.1080/09668136.2018.1444145.

mistic.¹⁴⁷ The case studies in this study do not allow us to draw a conclusion since they all experienced transitions eventually; we therefore suggest it as a direction for future research.

Another contemporary challenge raised by our case studies concerns the trustworthiness of FES-supported groups in authoritarian environments. The FES's pluralistic approach depends significantly on building strong relationships with actors and institutions across civil society. However, it can often be difficult to tell whether an individual or organization is sincerely committed to democracy. A prominent example is the rise of Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Orbán started his political career as a budding democratic activist, staunch opponent to Soviet rule, and a strong proponent of free and fair elections. Accordingly, he was a recipient of funding from international human rights organizations in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the Orbán that Europe and the world knows today is a far cry from the liberal democratic activist of the 1990s. Under Orbán's leadership, Hungary has witnessed significant democratic backsliding, observing restrictions on the press, speech, and free and fair elections. His erstwhile foreign supporters rued having helped him in the past.¹⁴⁸ In short, when once-trustworthy democratic activists or partners become co-opted, either willingly or by force, by anti-democratic groups, the FES's influence might subsequently suffer.

A final future challenge for the FES, as well as the other German political foundations, is its funding model.¹⁴⁹ As we point out in the beginning of this paper, the FES, like all the German political foundations, primarily receives funding from the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation, or the BMZ. The amount of money available to a foundation is determined by its size and the long-term representation of its affiliated party in the Bundestag, whose vote share has been steadily shrinking in the last two decades, impacting the budget of the FES. The funding system was designed to make the foundations independent of government interference, as well as ensuring that their activities and products are publicly available. However, heavy reliance on government funding creates vulnerabilities given the fundamental uncertainty of politics. How to respond to financial strains is a question that we view as important for organizations engaged in international democracy assistance.

Lastly, we emphasize the limited state of English-language secondary literature on the FES and its democracy promo-

tion activities, which we hope this study helps ameliorate. Despite the foundation's rich history of democracy promotion around the world, most of the research in this paper has relied on German to English translations of primary, secondary, and archival sources, in addition to interviews and a review of the scant English-language secondary literature. The FES is a pivotal and historic actor in the democracy promotion space, and more English-language research into the foundation and its activities would be highly beneficial to democracy scholars and practitioners alike. We believe our study is an important step in this direction. We hope more research will build off this study as well as pioneering research by Leonie Holthaus that examines the German political foundations in a comparative context.

CONCLUSION

Overall, while the FES's approach to democracy promotion shares some features with the programs of other organizations and nation states, our case study of FES activities in the democratic transitions of five countries reveal unique components. These factors include a diverse array of project types, partners, and strategies, as well as the ability to work in various social and political climates. We also note the growing professionalization of the FES over time, allowing it to increase its legitimacy and capacity for additional projects. Moreover, the bottom-up nature of the FES's approach to democracy assistance enables it to forge successful relationships with local partners even when facing relatively strong authoritarian regimes.

While our assessment of the FES and its democracy promotion activities is largely positive, we also offer some critical commentary. Of special note, we find that the success of FES programs depends largely on cultivating strong and trustworthy relationships with local partners across civil society, government, and politics. In a regime where these actors do not exist, are severely stifled by "foreign agent" laws, or are untrustworthy, the FES approach may be infeasible.

By learning from its past, we hope that this study will help the FES and other democracy promoters further professionalize, institutionalize, and increase the effectiveness of democracy assistance programs. We also think there is ample room for additional research based on the preliminary conclusions of this study and hope that future researchers continue to investigate the FES and its important role in democracy promotion, research that will only grow in importance as nations around the world risk democratic backsliding and creeping authoritarianism.

¹⁴⁷ Hyde, Lamb, and Samet, "Promoting Democracy under Electoral Authoritarianism."

¹⁴⁸ Sarah Sunn Bush and Sarah S. Stroup, "Stay Off My Field: Policing Boundaries in Human Rights and Democracy Promotion," *International Theory* 15, no. 2 (2023): 282.

¹⁴⁹ In fact, the ability to secure funding is a challenge that affects programming for all international democracy assistance organizations, given issues ranging from economic recessions to growing competition between providers to receding public support for democracy promotion in many Western countries. Though funding pressure makes democracy assistance less effective remains an open question, research suggests that it may transform it in ways that could be problematic. See Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Erfried.** *Vom mühsamen Geschäft der Demokratieförderung: Die internationale Entwicklungszusammenarbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.* Dietz, 2012.
- "Agreement between the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Media and Broadcasting Consulting."** February 3, 1993.
- Ahmed, Faisal Z.** "The Perils of Unearned Foreign Income: Aid, Remittances, and Government Survival." *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (2012): 146–165.
- Bangert, S.** S. Bangert to Dr. Gördel, November 23, 1976.
- Beissinger, Mark R.** "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 259–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592707070776>.
- Bieber, Florian.** "The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society: Roots of the Delayed Transition in Serbia." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17, no. 1 (2003): 73–90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20020198>.
- Birle, Peter, and Antonio Muñoz Sánchez.** *Partnerschaft für die Demokratie Die Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Brasilien und Portugal.* Dietz, 2020.
- Brechenmacher, Saskia, and Katherine Mann.** *Aiding Empowerment: Democracy Promotion and Gender Equality in Politics.* Oxford University Press, 2024.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Alastair Smith.** "Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change." *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 167–197.
- Bush, Sarah Sunn.** *The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators.* Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Bush, Sarah Sunn, Daniela Donno, and Pär Zetterberg.** "International Rewards for Gender Equality Reforms in Autocracies." *American Political Science Review* (2023): 1–15. [Doi:10.1017/S0003055423001016](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001016).
- Bush, Sarah Sunn and Sarah S.** Stroup. "Stay Off My Field: Policing Boundaries in Human Rights and Democracy Promotion." *International Theory* 15, no. 2 (2023): 263–290.
- Bosin, Yury V.** "Supporting Democracy in the Former Soviet Union: Why the Impact of US Assistance Has Been Below Expectations." *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (2012): 405–412.
- Carapico, Sheila.** *Political Aid and Arab Activism: Democracy Promotion, Justice, and Representation.* Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Carrión, Julio F., and Patricia Zárate.** "Analysis of Trends in Democratic Attitudes: Peru Report." *NORC at the University of Chicago* (2023). https://norc.uchicago.edu/content/dam/norc-org/pdfs/LACLEARN%20-%20Analysis%20of%20Trends%20in%20Democratic%20Attitudes%20-%20Phase%20II%20-%20Peru_508.pdf.
- Carothers, Thomas.** *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve.* Carnegie Endowment, 1999.
- Chaudhry, Suparna.** "The Assault on Civil Society: Explaining State Crackdown on NGOs." *International Organization* 76, no. 3 (2022): 549–590.
- Chilcote, Ronald H.** *The Portuguese Revolution: State and Class in the Transition to Democracy.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012.
- "China: New Law Escalates Repression of Groups."** *Human Rights Watch*, April 28, 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/28/china-new-law-escalates-repression-groups>.
- Cho, Sungmin.** "Why Non-Democracy Engages with Western Democracy-Promotion Programs: The China Model." *World Politics* 73, no. 4 (2021): 774–817.
- Chomiak, Laryssa.** "The Making of a Revolution in Tunisia." *Middle East Law and Governance* 3, no. 1–2 (2011): 78. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187633711X591431>.
- Constenla, Tereixa.** "50 years of the Portuguese Socialist Party: from underground activists to stalwarts of European social democracy." *El País*, April 21, 2023. <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-04-21/50-years-of-the-portuguese-socialist-party-from-underground-activists-to-stalwarts-of-european-social-democracy.html>.
- Cornell, Agnes.** "Does Regime Type Matter for the Impact of Democracy Aid on Democracy?" *Democratization* 20, no. 4 (2013): 642–667.
- Costa Lobo, Marina.** *Em nome da Europa: Portugal em mudança*, 1986–2006. Principia, 2007.
- Costa Lobo, Marina, António Costa Pinto, and Pedro C.** Magalhães. "Portuguese Democratisation 40 Years on: Its Meaning and Enduring Legacies." *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 2 (2016): 168. [doi:10.1080/13608746.2016.1153490](https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2016.1153490).
- Costa Pinto, António.** "Political Purges and State Crisis in Portugal's Transition to Democracy, 1975–76." *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008): 311. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036508>.
- Crabtree, John.** "The Collapse of Fujimorismo: Authoritarianism and its Limits." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 20, no. 3 (2001): 287–303. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3339730>.
- Cruz, Cesi, and Christina J. Schneider.** "Foreign Aid and Undeserved Credit Claiming." *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2017): 396–408.
- Currie, Willie.** Willie Currie, David Dison, and Michael Markovitz to Herbert Schillinger, February 5, 1993.
- De Almeida, Manuel Faria.** Manuel Faria de Almeida to Otto Manfred Weinger, December 7, 1979.
- De Zeeuw, Jeroen.** "Projects do not Create Institutions: The Record of Democracy Assistance in Post-Conflict Societies." *Democratization* 12, no. 4 (2005): 481–504.
- Diamond, Larry, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker.** *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy.* Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.
- Donno, Daniela.** *Defending Democratic Norms: International Actors and the Politics of Electoral Misconduct.* Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Donno, Daniela, and Michael Neureiter.** "Can Human Rights Conditionality Reduce Repression? Examining the European Union's Economic Agreements." *The Review of International Organizations* 13, no. 3 (2018): 335–357.
- Downes, Alexander B., and Jonathan Monten.** "Forced to be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization." *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 90–131.
- Eckl, Jürgen, and Norbert von Hofmann.** *Kooperation mit Gewerkschaften und Förderung von Wirtschafts- und Sozialentwicklung: Zentrale Tätigkeitsfelder der internationalen Arbeit der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung seit Beginn der 1960er-Jahre.* Dietz, 2012.
- Ehrke, Michael, and Elmar Römpczyk.** *The Rocky Road to Europe: The Work of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Serbia and the Baltic States.* Dietz, 2013.
- Erdmann, Gero.** "Hesitant Bedfellows: The German Stiftungen and Party Aid in Africa. An Attempt at an Assessment." *CSGR Working Paper* No. 184/05 (2005): 1–31.
- Escribà-Folch, Abel, and Joseph George Wright.** *Foreign Pressure and the Politics of Autocratic Survival.* Oxford University Press, 2015.

- Eyinla, Bolade M.** "West German Political Foundations and Their Activities in Sub-Saharan Africa." *International Studies* 36, no. 2 (1999): 201.
- Fiedler, Charlotte, Jörn Grävingholt, Julia Leininger, and Karina Mross.** "Gradual, Cooperative, Coordinated: Effective Support for Peace and Democracy in Conflict-Affected States." *International Studies Perspectives* 21, no. 1 (2020): 54–77.
- Finkel, Steven E.,** Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, Michael Neureiter, and Chris A. Belasco. "Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building, 1990–2014: An Update." *Kellogg Institute for International Studies Working Paper* 436 (2020).
- "Förderung von Entwicklungsländern durch Maßnahmen der gesellschaftspolitischen Bildung, Kap. 2302, Tit. 68604: Gesellschaftspolitische Maßnahmen in Portugal 1979 bis 1981." Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1979.**
- Frymark, Kamil.** "Germany: Law on the financing of party foundations." *Centre for Eastern Studies*, November 15, 2023. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2023-11-15/germany-law-financing-party-foundations>.
- Geddes, Barbara, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz.** "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 313–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592714000851>.
- Gerring, John.** *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Gisselquist, Rachel M.,** Miguel Niño-Zarazúa, and Melissa Samarin. "Does Aid Support Democracy? A Systematic Review of the Literature." WIDER Working Paper No. 2021/14 (2021).
- Gruffydd-Jones, Jamie J.** "Citizens and Condemnation: Strategic Uses of International Human Rights Pressure in Authoritarian States." *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 4 (2019): 579–612.
- Gunitskiy, Seva.** *Aftershocks: Great Powers and Domestic Reforms in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
- Hafner-Burton, Emilie, John Pevehouse, and Christina Schneider.** "Enlightened Dictators? Good Governance in Autocratic International Organizations." *IGCC Working Paper* (June 2023). <https://ucigcc.org/publication/enlightened-dictators-good-governance-in-autocratic-international-organizations>.
- Hartshorn, Ian M.** "Global Labor and the Arab Uprisings: Picking Winners in Tunisia and Egypt." *Global Governance* 24, no. 1 (2018): 119–138.
- Henderson, Sarah.** *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia: Western Support for Grassroots Organizations*. Cornell University Press, 2003.
- Herrold, Catherine E.** *Delta Democracy: Pathways to Incremental Civic Revolution in Egypt and Beyond*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Hobson, Christopher.** "The Limits of Liberal-Democracy Promotion." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 34, no. 4 (2009): 383–405.
- Holthaus, Leonie.** "Is there difference in democracy promotion? A comparison of German and US democracy assistance in transitional Tunisia." *Democratization* 26, no. 7 (2019): 1216–1234.
- Holthaus, Leonie.** "Furthering Pluralism? The German Foundations in Transitional Tunisia." *Voluntas* 30 (2019): 1284–1296.
- Huntington, Samuel P.** *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.
- Hyde, Susan D.,** Emily Lamb, and Oren Samet. "Promoting Democracy under Electoral Authoritarianism: Evidence from Cambodia." *Comparative Political Studies* 56, no. 7 (2023): 1029–1071.
- Hyde, Susan D.** "Democracy's Backsliding in the International Environment." *Science* 369, no. 6508 (2020): 1192–1196.
- Hyde, Susan D., and Nikolay Marinov.** "Information and Self-Enforcing Democracy: The Role of International Election Observation." *International Organization* 68, no. 2 (2014): 329–359.
- Hyde, Susan D.** *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm*. Cornell University Press, 2011.
- Inboden, Rana Siu.** "China at the UN: Choking Civil Society." *Journal of Democracy*, 32, no. 3 (2021): 124–35. <https://journalofdemocracy.org/articles/china-at-the-un-choking-civil-society/>.
- Kavakli, K. C., & Kuhn, P. M.** "Dangerous Contenders: Election Monitors, Islamic Opposition Parties and Terrorism." *International Organization* 74, no. 1 (2020): 145–164. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081831900033x>.
- Keck, Margaret E., and Kathryn Sikkink.** *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Kelley, Judith.** "D-Minus Elections: The Politics and Norms of International Election Observation." *International Organization* 63, no. 4 (2009): 765–87. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818309990117>.
- Kelley, Judith G.** *Monitoring Democracy: When International Election Observation Works, and Why It Often Fails*. Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Kerbusch, Ernst-J.** Dr. Ernst-J. Kerbusch to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation, April 7, 1979.
- Knutsen, Carl Henrik, Kyle L. Marquardt, Brigitte Seim, Michael Coppedge, Amanda B. Edgell, Juraj Medzihorsky, Daniel Pemstein, Jan Teorell, John Gerring, and Staffan I. Lindberg.** "Conceptual and Measurement Issues in Assessing Democratic Backsliding." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57, no. 2 (2024): 162–77. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909652300077X>.
- Landsberg, Christopher.** "Voicing the Voiceless: Foreign Political Aid to Civil Society in South Africa." in *Funding Virtue*, ed. Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012, 117–19.
- Levitsky, Steven.** "Fujimori and Post-Party Politics in Peru." *Journal of Democracy* 10.3 (1999): 78–92. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/levitsky/files/SL_fujimori.pdf.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Maxwell A. Cameron.** "Democracy Without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori's Peru." *Latin American Politics and Society* 45, no. 3 (2003): 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177157>.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan A. Way.** *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Levitsky Steven, Way Lucan A.** "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change." *Comparative Politics* 38, no. 4 (2006): 379–400.
- Levy, Brian, Alan Hirsch, Vinothan Naidoo, and Musa Nxele.** "South Africa: When Strong Institutions and Massive Inequalities Collide." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, March 18, 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/03/south-africa-when-strong-institutions-and-massive-inequalities-collide?lang=en>.
- Levy, Philip I.** "Sanctions on South Africa: What Did They Do?" *American Economic Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 415–420. doi: 10.1257/aer.89.2.415.
- Little, Andrew T., and Anne Meng.** "Measuring Democratic Backsliding." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 57, no. 2 (2024): 149–61. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104909652300063X>.
- Lührmann, Anna, Kelly M. McMann, and Carolien Van Ham.** "Democracy Aid Effectiveness: Variation Across Regime Types." *V-Dem Working Paper* 40 (2018).
- Mair, Stefan.** "Germany's Stiftungen and Democracy Assistance: Comparative Advantages, New Challenges." *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization* (2000): 128–149.
- Marzo, Pietro.** "Supporting Political Debate While Building Patterns of Trust: The Role of the German Political Foundations in Tunisia (1989–2017)." *Middle Eastern Studies* 55, no. 4 (2019): 621–37. doi:10.1080/00263206.2018.1534732.

- Matanock, Aila M.** "External Engagement: Explaining the Spread of Electoral Participation Provisions in Civil Conflict Settlements." *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2018): 656–670.
- Meyerrose, Anna M.** "The Unintended Consequences of Democracy Promotion: International Organizations and Democratic Backsliding." *Comparative Political Studies* 53, no. 10–11 (2020): 1547–1581.
- Mendelson, Sarah E.** "Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia: Between Success and Failure." *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 68–106.
- Morrison, Kevin M.** "Oil, Nontax Revenue, and the Redistributive Foundations of Regimes Stability." *International Organization* 63, no. 1 (2009): 107–138.
- Moser, Evelyn, and Anna Skripchenko.** "Russian NGOs and Their Struggle for Legitimacy in the Face of the 'Foreign Agents' Law: Surviving in Small Ecologies." *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 4 (2018): 591–614. doi: 10.1080/09668136.2018.1444145.
- Myrick, Rachel, and Jeremy M. Weinstein.** "Making Sense of Human Rights Diplomacy: Evidence from a US Campaign to Free Political Prisoners." *International Organization* 76, no. 2 (2022): 379–413.
- Nowack, Daniel, and Julia Leininger.** "Protecting Democracy from Abroad: Democracy Aid against Attempts to Circumvent Presidential Term Limits." *Democratization* 29, no. 1 (2022): 154–173.
- "Otpor and the Struggle for Democracy in Serbia."** *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*, <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/otpor-struggle-democracy-serbia-1998-2000/>.
- Paris, Roland.** *At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict*. Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Peceny, Mark.** *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets*. Penn State Press, 1999.
- Pevehouse, Jon C.** *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Pickering, Jeffrey, and Mark Peceny.** "Forging Democracy at Gunpoint." *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006): 539–559.
- Pinto-Duchinsky, Michael.** "Foreign Political Aid: The German Political Foundations and Their US Counterparts." *International Affairs* 67, no. 1 (1991): 33–63.
- Poast, Paul, and Johannes Urpelainen.** *Organizing Democracy: How International Organizations Assist New Democracies*. University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Powel, Brieg Tomos.** "The Stability Syndrome: US and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 1 (2009): 57–73. doi:10.1080/13629380802383562.
- Presnall, Aaron.** "Which Way the Wind Blows: Democracy Promotion and International Actors in Serbia." *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (2009): 661–81. doi:10.1080/13510340903083026.
- "Projektbezeichnung: Beratungs- und Ausbildungsmaßnahmen für Medieninstitutionen im südlichen Afrika."** July 3, 1991.
- Prokscha, Antonio.** "Standing Up for Democracy: How Serbian Civil Society is Fighting for Survival." *GMF*, 2023, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/standing-democracy-how-serbian-civil-society-fighting-survival>.
- Reicheneder, Leonie, and Michael Neureiter.** "On the Effectiveness of Democracy Aid in Post-Civil War Recipient Countries." *Democratization* 31, no. 2 (2023): 1–23. doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2023.2268536.
- Risse, Thomas, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink, eds.** *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Robertson, G. B.** "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia." *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (2009).
- Samet, Oren, Jennie Barker, and Susan D. Hyde.** "Political Parties and Civil Society During Windows of Opportunity." *Working Paper*, April 2024.
- Samuels, David J.** "The International Context of Democratic Backsliding: Rethinking the Role of Third Wave 'Prodemocracy' Global Actors." *Perspectives on Politics* 21, no. 3 (2023): 1001–12. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722003334>.
- Seawright, J. and J. Gerring.** "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options." *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2008): 294–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077>.
- "Serbia."** *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia>.
- Sequeira, Rebecca.** "Mário Soares: A Politician and President of Unwritten Constitutional Competences." <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bibliothek/bestand/70850/soares.pdf>.
- Silber, Laura, and Allan Little.** *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation*. Penguin Books, 1997.
- Simpser, Alberto, and Daniela Donno.** "Can International Election Monitoring Harm Governance?" *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (2012): 501–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002238161100168x>.
- Snider, Erin A.** *Marketing Democracy: The Political Economy of Democracy Aid in the Middle East*. Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- Sofi, Mohammad Dawood.** *The Tunisian Revolution and Democratic Transition: The Role of al-Nahdah*. Routledge, 2021.
- Stacey, Simon, and Sada Aksartova.** "The Foundations of Democracy: U.S. Foundation Support for Civil Society in South Africa, 1988–96." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 12 (2001): 373–397. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1013922716105>.
- Terman, Rochelle.** *The Geopolitics of Shaming: When Human Rights Pressure Works and When It Backfires*. Princeton University Press, 2023.
- "They Target My Human Rights Work as a Crime": Annual Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in China.** *Chinese Human Rights Defenders* (2017).
- Vejvoda, Ivan, Franz-Lothar Altmann, Misha Glenny, Gerald Knaus, Marcus Cox, Stefan Lehne, Jacques Rupnik, and Romana Vlahutin.** "Serbia after Four Years of Transition." *The Western Balkans: Moving On*. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2004. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07054.6>.
- Von Soest, Christian, and Michael Wahman.** "Are Democratic Sanctions Really Counterproductive?" *Democratization* 22, no. 6 (2015): 957–980.
- Weissenbach, Kristina.** "Political Party Assistance in Transition: The German 'Stiftungen' in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Democratization* 17, no. 6 (2010): 1238–39. doi:10.1080/13510347.2010.520556.
- Wolff, Jonas.** "Democracy Promotion and Civilian Power: The Example of Germany's 'Value-Oriented' Foreign Policy." *German Politics* (2013): 477–493.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sarah Bush is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research examines how international actors try to aid democracy, promote women's representation, and influence elections globally, as well as the politics of climate change. She is the author or coauthor of *The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and *Monitors and Meddlers: How Foreign Actors Influence Local Trust in Elections* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). Her research has also appeared in academic journals such as the *American Political Science Review* and *International Organization* and been covered in outlets such as the *Economist*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Washington Post*. Bush received a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University and a B.A. from Northwestern University.

Julian D. Melendi is a J.D. candidate at the University of Chicago Law School. Julian is a graduate of Yale University where he studied Political Science with an Interdisciplinary Concentration in Law, Technology, and Society. While at Yale, he was an Undergraduate Fellow at the Arthur Liman Center for Public Interest Law at Yale Law School and a Student Fellow at Yale Law School's Information Society Project.

IMPRINT

Publisher:
FES Regional Office for International Cooperation
Democracy of the Future
Reichsratsstr. 13/5
A-1010 Vienna
Contact: info.vienna@fes.de

Responsibility for content:
Johanna Lutz, Director, Democracy of the Future

Contact/Orders: democracy.vienna@fes.de

Design: pertext, Berlin | www.pertext.de
Photo Copyright: Fotoagentur SVEN SIMON

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works. Commercial use of media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES. Publications by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung may not be used for electioneering purposes.

ISBN 978-3-98628-610-1

© 2024



EXTERNAL ACTORS IN DEMOCRATIZATION

Lessons from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung



The study reviews the role of external actors, specifically international democracy promotion organizations including the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), in supporting democratization efforts in target countries. It draws out lessons from the academic literature on the conditions under which democracy assistance is most effective, considering factors such as the international environment and the characteristics of external actors, democracy assistance itself, and target countries. Recent global trends with respect to democracy are making it more difficult for international democracy promotion to occur in the conditions that promote its success.



The study explores the role of FES in five countries: Peru, Portugal, Serbia, South Africa, and Tunisia. It highlights the successes and challenges faced in promoting democratic transitions, offering insights into how international support has influenced political reform and democratic deepening. The case studies highlight how the FES distinguishes itself within the area of international democracy promotion by its bottom-up approach, long-term engagement, and flexibility.



FES programs are unique vis-à-vis those of other organizations in democracy promotion in how they are grounded in social democratic values, rooted in long-term presence and partnerships, and more likely to take place in closed environments. However, they also share many features with other organizations, such as supporting civil society groups, promoting civic education, and conducting political party trainings.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
<https://democracy.fes.de/>