

Institutional Impediments and Reluctant Actors

The Limited Role of Democracy Aid in Democratic Development

Agnes Cornell

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Cornell, Agnes. “The Limited Effects of Democracy Aid on Regime Change.”

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Abstract

Poverty reduction and societal modernization have traditionally been the main goals for development aid but increasingly, since the early 1990s, democracy and human rights have ascended in importance and democracy aid has been growing steadily, both in total amounts and as a share of the total aid package. This dissertation contributes to the understanding of the role of democracy aid in democratic development. It includes four papers, three of which analyze the role of democracy aid in democratic development and a fourth one which develops why, and tests whether, a meritocratic-based administrative structure is important for democratic survival and therefore a key aspect to take into consideration for future efforts of promoting democracy. The first two papers of this dissertation show that democracy aid may have positive effects on democracy levels and regime change but that the effects are limited to certain contexts: when recipient rulers perceive that they have more to gain than to lose from implementing democracy aid activities. Democracy aid only has a positive effect on democracy levels in one-party regimes and in preventing democratic breakdown in existing democracies. Democracy aid does not contribute to democratization in authoritarian regimes. The third paper develops a theoretical framework for understanding why democracy aid could be difficult to implement in democracies with unstable bureaucracies and, in particular, in bureaucracies where this instability is due to a high rate of turnover caused by political appointments. The fourth paper shows that democracies with meritocratic types of bureaucracies survive longer than democracies with patronage-based administrations. The main joint conclusion is that democracy aid may alter things on the margin but only under some fruitful conditions when donors' and recipients' interests coincide. In other circumstances institutional impediments and reluctant actors are likely to limit the role of democracy aid in democratic development. Moreover, the fruitful conditions imply political stability; therefore the prospects of radical change, as a result of aid projects, are small. This is a paradoxical conclusion given that the very aim of democracy aid is rather to promote political change than the status quo. The research design is mainly oriented towards performing large N-empirical tests of hypotheses (Papers I, II, and IV) but it also includes more qualitative accounts on how theoretical mechanisms play out in practice, both based on field interviews (Paper III) and historical examples (Paper IV). This empirical contribution, in comparison to previous research on democracy aid, broadens the analytical scope in terms of time frame, and the recipients and donors included. The qualitative accounts, on the other hand, explore mechanisms not studied previously in relation to the novel hypotheses developed in this dissertation.

Key Words: authoritarian regimes; Bolivia; democracy aid; democratic governance; democratic survival; democratization; democracy; foreign aid; Peru; public administration; regime change; staff turnover.