

# Getting Politics Right

## *Democracy Promotion as a New Conflict Issue in Foreign Aid Policy*

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### **Abstract**

The trend of 'modernization through internationalization' has opened doors for the export of western democratic political systems. Even though these ideas are not an invention of the 1990's, their penetration is new. One of the major instruments of this trend is the use of foreign aid as an implementer of democracy promotion. Sweden, as a donor country, has played a dominant role in foreign aid activities throughout the last four decades. Swedish politicians have followed international winds and their opinions on democracy in foreign aid have changed considerably. From its earlier, quite hidden position in foreign aid policy, democracy promotion has today attained the highest prominence.

Using a consensus versus conflict perspective in foreign policy as a point of departure, this study examines the presence of conflict in foreign aid. Among the wide range of actors taking part in foreign aid activities in various arenas, Sweden's political parties and their behavior in the parliamentary arena serve as the primary instrument in the search for conflict behavior. Democratization as a priority and possible conflict generator in Swedish foreign aid policy is studied through an analysis of the ideas expressed by central actors in the Swedish parliament and the extension of these ideas into the implementation stage. Using the arguments of political parties, the aim of this thesis is to test the proposition that democracy-promoting aid constitutes a new conflict issue in Swedish foreign aid policy.

Six different democratization ideologies are found among the seven parties in the Swedish Riksdag. The actual use of these ideologies is studied through the reservation instrument in the Reports to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, focusing on the critical issue of choice of recipient. The results show that as a goal and component of aid policy, democracy has most certainly become an aspect around which Swedish political parties do not try to seek consensus. Rather, it is an issue on which they sharpen their ideological profiles, making use of the 'breathing space' offered by a policy sphere carrying low political risk. It is primarily the Conservative and Liberal parties that adopt a confrontation strategy in their campaigns for democratization in recipient countries.

When taking the project level into account, the notion of democracy promotion as a new conflict issue becomes blurred. While the issue soars in the general debate on aid, no signs of it are found in association with the planning of a major democracy promotion effort in South Africa. Explanations for the relative absence of conflict in this project level case study include a lack of knowledge about potential outcomes and the sensitive relations among implementing actors and the strong domination of the aid bureaucracy. Taking all findings into consideration, democracy promotion nevertheless stands out as a new conflict issue in Swedish foreign aid policy used by the parties as tools in the political struggle. Contrary to notions of Swedish foreign aid as moving towards consensus in the 1990's, conflict is still very present both in terms of democracy and on a general level.

**Key words:** conflict, consensus, foreign policy, foreign aid, development assistance, development co-operation, aid, democracy, democratization, democracy promotion, recipient countries, Sweden, South Africa, political parties, Sida, Partnership

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