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## Beyond contestation: conceptualizing negotiation in democracy promotion

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### ABSTRACT


This article presents an analytical framework that guides the contributions to this special issue and, in general terms, aims at enabling a systematic investigation of processes of negotiation in the international promotion of democracy. It first briefly introduces the rationale for studying democracy promotion negotiation, offers a definition, and locates the general approach within the academic literature, bringing together different strands of research, namely studies of negotiation in international relations as well as research on democratization and democracy promotion. The larger part of the article then discusses key concepts, analytical distinctions and theoretical propositions along the lines of the three research questions that are identified in the introduction to this special issue. More specifically, the article (1) offers a typology that facilitates a systematic empirical analysis of the issues that are discussed in democracy promotion negotiations; (2) takes initial steps towards a causal theory of democracy promotion negotiation by identifying and discussing a set of parameters that can be expected to shape such negotiations; and (3) introduces key distinctions and dimensions that help guide empirical research on the output and outcome of negotiations in democracy promotion.

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### Introduction

Democracy promotion denotes the practice of fostering the establishment, improvement and stabilization of democratic regimes from the outside. After 1990, promoting democracy became a common strategy pursued by many governments, international organizations and nongovernmental actors, in particular from members of the OECD, to the point of being considered an established international norm at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, however, democracy promotion has been increasingly contested. A growing number of governments and political movements question the liberal model of democracy and many openly defend illiberal and/or authoritarian practices. These governments may do so largely to pursue their

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own interest such as maintaining power or increasing regional influence. But frequently, the contestation of liberal democracy in general and of democracy promotion in particular also finds resonance in local populations, as does the criticism of liberal values associated with a “Western” culture.<sup>2</sup> These challenges go hand in hand with debates about non-Western conceptions of democracy, which may diverge from the liberal conception that informs most of the practice of democracy promotion.<sup>3</sup> In response, scholars have argued that democracy promotion research should turn attention to the conceptual politics involved in the promotion of democracy.<sup>4</sup> Politically, this has reinforced calls for context sensitivity and, more specifically, for more dialogical approaches to democracy promotion that would systematically include the supposed recipients in the conversation about the model of democracy that is to be promoted.<sup>5</sup>

However, there is still a lack of solid empirical evidence on how and to what extent global and local contestation of liberal democracy challenges and shapes the contents, practices and results of democracy promotion. In most studies on democracy promotion, the interaction between external and local actors is still largely treated as a “black box”, and this includes potential controversies over the concepts and norms that underlie the very endeavour to promote democracy.<sup>6</sup> The analysis of negotiations in democracy promotion addresses this research gap. By focusing our attention on the communicative interaction between external democracy promoters and local “recipients” (governments and beyond), the study of negotiation processes allows us to analyse when and how democracy (promotion) is contested by local actors, how democracy promoters respond to such challenges, and whether and how the ensuing controversy is resolved. More generally, investigating negotiations in democracy promotion offers a means to analyse to what extent and how the broad range of challenges or outright resistance to democracy promotion that is discussed in the literature actually manifests itself in the interaction of external and local actors. In this sense, as we argue in this article, the analysis of democracy promotion negotiation promises to contribute to empirically grounding current debates about the conceptual politics of democracy promotion in particular and about the contestation and localization of international norms in general.

In this conceptual article, we propose an analytical framework that allows scholars to systematically study negotiations in the area of democracy promotion. It provides a set of relevant concepts that will help to analyse negotiations but does not address questions of measurement and methodology. In the following, we first define negotiation and briefly situate our approach in the broader academic literature, bringing together studies of negotiation in international relations as well as research on democratization and democracy promotion. In the main part of the article, we develop the analytical framework as such. Given the lack of theoretical approaches to, and empirical knowledge on, democracy promotion negotiation, this framework is of an exploratory nature. Drawing on empirical and theoretical findings from related fields, we offer key analytical distinctions as well as some preliminary causal propositions. In line with the three overarching research questions outlined in the introduction to this special issue, we do so in three steps. With a view to (1) the *issues*, we develop a typology that facilitates a systematic empirical analysis of what is discussed in democracy promotion negotiations. This, as we argue, is a key question that should be asked at the very beginning of each analysis of negotiations in democracy promotion. In identifying and discussing (2) the *parameters* that can be expected to shape negotiations, we offer initial steps towards a causal theory of democracy promotion negotiation. Finally, with a view to (3) *results*, we propose key distinctions and dimensions that help guide empirical

research on the output and outcome of negotiations in democracy promotion. The conclusion summarizes the article's main contribution of the article and provides an outlook on the future study of democracy promotion negotiations.

## Defining negotiation in democracy promotion and situating our approach

In line with common usages of the term, we define democracy promotion as comprising all efforts of external actors explicitly aimed at supporting the liberalization of authoritarian regimes as well as the establishment, deepening and stabilization of democratic regimes.<sup>7</sup> Such activities range from development aid (democracy assistance) and diplomatic appeals (democracy diplomacy) to material incentives and sanctions (democratic conditionality) as well as military intervention (coercive democratization). The common feature of these activities is that they are pursued by external actors with the declared aim to promote democracy. The label "democracy promotion" requires neither that promoting democracy is genuinely the primary or even only aim pursued by the external actor, nor that a given activity actually promotes democracy in the recipient country.

The term negotiation usually denotes "a sequence of actions in which two or more parties address demands, arguments, and proposals to each other for the ostensible purpose of reaching an agreement".<sup>8</sup> Processes of negotiation, therefore, involve "some action of mutually overcoming a conflict between the parties, each of whom holds a veto over the joint outcome".<sup>9</sup> The shared purpose of any negotiation, in most general terms, is to reach an agreement. Communication is the key mode in which this joint aim is pursued.<sup>10</sup> Our attention here focuses on political negotiations, that is, negotiations in which the parties are collective entities (if represented by individuals) with a claim to authority or political leadership. For our purposes, this particularly means negotiations between national or international governmental organizations (states, ministries, state agencies, international organizations). But our framework is designed so as to also include negotiations that involve nongovernmental organizations, whether for-profit or not. Still, it is important to note that this focus does not cover negotiations that take place at the level of everyday encounters between individuals (for instance, in the context of a given democracy aid project, or within aid agencies, ministries or embassies).<sup>11</sup>

Systematically, we distinguish between official and unofficial negotiations. In the former case, negotiation takes place in official, institutionalized settings (such as inter-governmental negotiations) and is concerned with reaching explicit agreements. These agreements may, for instance, define areas, establish programmes and distribute resources of democracy assistance in the recipient country at hand or include democracy-related clauses in a trade agreement. Such official negotiations usually take place during distinct and delimited periods of time, for instance during regular inter-governmental aid negotiations or during the negotiation of peace agreements.<sup>12</sup> Unofficial negotiations include a broad range of communicative processes that can be direct and even institutionalized (for example, in the case of track-two diplomacy) or indirect and ad hoc (for example, public exchanges via the media). Negotiations, in this case, can lead to explicit, if informal agreements, but may also produce or affirm merely a common understanding, such as in tacit or implicit agreements. Such factual agreements may at times only be identifiable indirectly, for instance, through observing

their effective prevention of a breakdown in diplomatic relations and/or development cooperation. As argued in the introduction to this special issue, unless democracy promotion operates on the basis of either pure coercion or entirely passive acceptance, democracy promotion is always dependent on the existence of – at minimum – an implicit exchange that enables a factual agreement between a promoter and a “recipient”. Generally speaking, democracy promotion requires a constant process of re-negotiation: while implementing democracy assistance programmes; while contextualizing and applying previously negotiated issues to specific circumstances; and while adjusting democracy promotion policies to changing context conditions.

The focus on negotiation in democracy promotion responds to broader academic debates in both International Relations (IR) and democratization studies. With a view to the former, IR scholars interested in the promotion and/or diffusion of international norms have increasingly emphasized the relevance of processes of norm contestation, appropriation and localization.<sup>13</sup> As regards the latter, comparative research on the characteristics and transformation of political regimes has demonstrated the importance of going beyond simple dichotomies (democracy versus autocracy) and linear notions of political change (as in the much-criticized transition paradigm).<sup>14</sup> Taken together, these two strands of research reinforce the basic assumptions laid out in the introduction to this special issue: to the extent that international norms, including those relating to democracy and human rights, are contested and have to be appropriated or localized, and insofar as democratization is a process that neither follows a predefined path nor has a clear-cut end, the question of whether and how the very aims and strategies of democracy promotion are negotiated between the actors involved becomes crucial. At the same time, studying the negotiation of democracy promotion also promises insights into the interrelated dynamics of international norm diffusion and democratization.

As noted in the introduction to this special issue, one key rationale behind our approach to democracy promotion as negotiation is to take the interactive nature of democracy promotion seriously – even if the special issue’s focus on the governmental dimension implies a fairly narrow perspective on recipient countries *as represented by governments*.<sup>15</sup> As we turn to the process of negotiation between promoters and “recipients”, we seek to uncover the latter’s often-overlooked agency – a goal that is regularly acknowledged as central but only rarely followed through.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, we clearly follow a different approach than the one taken, for instance, by neo-patrimonial and rational choice perspectives on negotiations in the field of foreign aid. As Whitfield and Fraser summarize, these approaches have assumed the existence of a “technocratic ‘best policy’” and have read conflicts and debates within a “recipient” society as “deviations from an assumed rational-bureaucratic norm”, thus understanding “resistance by recipient governments to donor prescribed policies [...] as a ‘policy failure’ reflecting the nefarious motivations of elite network whose interests are threatened”.<sup>17</sup> This is not to deny that contestation of democracy promotion by recipient governments does frequently reflect narrow interests in power and elite survival; but so do the very policies of democracy promotion. Studying negotiations in democracy promotion precisely aims at deciphering the aims and strategies, norms and policy proposals that local and external actors bring to the table as well as the ways in which disagreements are dealt with in the communication between these actors.

In theoretical terms, therefore, the analytical framework proposed below allows for a wide-angled view on different types of factors that characterize, shape and influence the

negotiation process – in contrast to pure rationalist and game-theoretical approaches, which tend to assume symmetrical relationships and ignore cultural and other context factors.<sup>18</sup> Our approach in principle acknowledges the relevance of agency and structure as well as their mutual co-constituency, and, in line with our interest in negotiation as communication, we consider language a significant dimension of policy.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, the focus on negotiation turns our attention to the ways in which meaningful (communicative) action on the part of both democracy promoters and local actors is structured by, and in turn shapes, the relationship, including the power relation, between the two as well as the dominant ideological assumptions, aims and operating procedures that guide democracy promotion in a specific context.

### **Conceptualizing negotiation in democracy promotion: towards an analytical framework**

In this section, we draw upon empirical and theoretical findings from the literature on international negotiations, democracy promotion and democratization in order to develop an analytical framework for studying negotiations in democracy promotion. When theorizing international negotiations, the literature frequently draws on the analogy of a board game. Negotiations, in this sense, take place in the context of a specific setting (the “board”), concern a set of contested issues (the “stakes”), involve two or more actors (the “players”), which use different strategies and tactics (the “moves”), and produce certain results (the “outcomes”).<sup>20</sup> The analytical framework that is presented below addresses the key components of this conceptualization.<sup>21</sup> We begin (following the order of the research questions as outlined in the introduction to this special issue) with the stakes, which we call “issues”. Here, we propose a typology that allows a systematic empirical analysis of what is negotiated in democracy promotion negotiations. The second part of the analytical framework addresses the parameters that shape negotiation processes, distinguishing between features that characterize the actors or players and the structural setting in which the negotiations take place, hence the board. Third, with a view to the results of negotiations, we suggest key distinctions and dimensions that help guide empirical research on the output and outcome of democracy promotion negotiations.

It is important to note that the analytical framework presented is of an exploratory nature: As a research heuristic, it is meant to enable and stimulate systematic comparative, theory-building research. This said, the second part does take initial steps towards a causal theory of democracy promotion negotiations in that it not merely develops a set of key parameters but also identifies preliminary causal propositions: Where existing research allows us to do so, we consider how the different parameters might affect democracy promotion negotiation.

#### ***(Non-)Issues in the negotiation of democracy promotion: a typology***

Given that an important part of democracy promotion comes in the shape of democracy assistance, meaning the disbursement of financial aid for the purpose of democratization, existing research on foreign aid negotiations offer a useful starting point for our endeavour. In terms of the issues, therefore, negotiations will plausibly deal with the formulation of specific policies, the distribution of material resources, and the implementation of agreements and programmes.<sup>22</sup> Yet, two issues are missing from this list of

potential topics: the problem definition, that is, the identification and interpretation of the situation in the recipient country, including the problems that are to be addressed by democracy promotion; and the normative premises, that is, the basic concepts and norms that underlie democracy promotion, including potentially contested conceptions of democracy and of legitimate external interference. These two issues are crucial not because they are necessarily dealt with extensively during democracy promotion negotiations, but because the question whether and, if so, how they are addressed is important in light of the above-mentioned intrinsic contestedness of both the concept of democracy and the practice of democracy promotion. For the recipient country, which is confronted with an explicitly political, even if perhaps well-intentioned interference, both topics are obviously of immediate relevance. And if one takes democracy promoters' constant repetitions about not having a "blueprint" for democracy at face value,<sup>23</sup> then a real debate about what democracy promotion should mean in a specific context also constitutes a necessity from the perspective of the external actor. In short: if democracy is not about exporting a predesigned set of norms and institutions but about supporting the emergence of home-grown democratic regimes, then the contents of democracy promotion have to be negotiated.

These considerations lead to a typology that distinguishes between five potentially contentious issues. As Table 1 suggests, these issues relate to different dimensions of the policy-making process and imply different levels of depth that negotiations can have. Negotiations may remain at a relatively superficial level and deal with how to distribute resources on generally agreed upon democracy promotion activities or with the ways in which stipulated projects are to be implemented (note that disagreements can still be massive and hard to solve at this level). At an intermediate level of depth in which negotiations concern policy formulation, the rationale, aims and design of democracy promotion activities may be controversial. Finally, negotiations can touch upon fundamental disagreements that concern the very interpretation of the context that underlie policy formulation or even the basic concepts and norms that inform the definition of the problem and the thinking about appropriate solutions to it.

**Table 1.** Issues of negotiation in democracy promotion.

Policy dimension	Issues of negotiation	Depth
Resources	Negotiation concerns the (re-)distribution of material resources in the area of democracy promotion (allocation and channels of democracy aid, democracy-related material incentives and sanctions).	 Increasing level of depth of negotiation
Implementation	Negotiation concerns the ways in which generally agreed upon democracy promotion activities (democracy aid projects, democracy-related dialogues, political conditionalities) are implemented.	
Policy formulation	Negotiation concerns the strategies, aims and priorities, the programmes and partners of democracy promotion, including the role of democracy promotion in other policy areas (e.g. trade).	
Problem definition	Negotiation concerns the definition of the situation in the recipient country, including the problems that are to be addressed by democracy promotion.	
Normative premises	Negotiation concerns basic concepts and norms that guide and regulate democracy promotion, including competing conceptions of democracy and contested notions of legitimate external interference.	

Any attempt at deciphering democracy promotion negotiation needs to begin, in a first step, with identifying the areas in which a potentially relevant disagreement or conflict between the involved parties exists. This will allow for an illustration of what negotiation is about and what issues are left out. Whether or not these disagreements and conflicts then actually lead to a substantial exchange of arguments between the negotiation parties, is, of course, an empirical question. The typology offered here enables research to not only systematically identify the topics and aims, the levels and methods that democracy promoters and local actors negotiate about, but also to assess the profundity of negotiations: is democracy promotion negotiation indeed a relatively surfcial and unidirectional affair? Or are general debates about ownership and context sensitivity, resistance and contested norms actually reflected in concrete and substantial practices of contestation?

### ***The parameters: towards a causal theory of democracy promotion negotiation***

After identifying and describing what democracy promotion negotiation is actually about, two causal paths can be pursued: to analyse the parameters that shape negotiations (and that explain why certain issues are negotiated, while others are not) or to analyse the results of these negotiations (with a view to the [non-]agreements as well as the practices of democracy promotion). In this section, we take a look at the former based on the assumption that negotiations are dynamic processes that are shaped by the intentional moves of the negotiating parties (the players) which, however, do not operate in a vacuum but under specific structural constraints (the board). For the sake of the analytical framework, we focus here on general actor characteristics, on the one hand, and structural context conditions, on the other. But, when analysing actual processes of negotiations, it will be important to consider that, in the real world, neither the players nor the board are fixed entities but that internal and external situational factors also matter: Negotiations, as Starkey et al. note, “can be affected by a variety of factors, such as domestic elections, outbursts of conflict, misguided public statements, and economic and environmental crises”.<sup>24</sup>

#### ***Actor characteristics***

In international relations, negotiations in a government-to-government setting are still the most common and relevant ones.<sup>25</sup> This also holds for democracy promotion, at least when we include international governmental organizations and the partially supranational entity European Union.<sup>26</sup> Negotiation in and about democracy promotion, of course, can and does include many more parties, including semi-independent para-state agencies and non-state actors on the “donor” side as well as political parties and civil-society organizations in the recipient country.<sup>27</sup> Still, in order to reduce complexity, we will focus here on negotiations between governmental organizations. Drawing on existing research on democracy promotion,<sup>28</sup> we assume that three actor characteristics will be particularly relevant for shaping their positions and moves in democracy promotion negotiations:

Most obviously, (1) the regime type of the recipient country will play a crucial role for negotiations over democracy promotion. On the one hand, the more a democracy-promoting government considers its counterpart to be democratically legitimized, the more it will plausibly be willing to seriously consider and make concessions to diverging views and demands in the name of country ownership or



collective self-determination. From the perspective of the recipient government on the other hand, the less democratic it is, the higher the risk associated with democracy promotion in terms of its own political survival and the smaller arguably its willingness to seriously discuss or even accept democracy promotion on the terms defined by the external actor.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, however, the more democratic the recipient regime, the lower the probability that the parties hold significantly diverging views on issues to be articulated and dealt with during negotiations in democracy promotion. In sum, therefore, we expect a curvilinear relationship: in the extremes, in-depth negotiations over democracy promotion are unlikely because they will either be perceived as of no avail (because a potential agreement on the substantive aims and norms of democracy promotion is out of reach) or as unnecessary (because there is nothing substantial to talk about).

A related, but independent factor on the part of the recipient country concerns (2) the domestic strength of the recipient government, measured in terms of domestic support. While democratic legitimacy may contribute in this regard, the extent to which the elites, on the one hand, and the general population, on the other hand, support the government in a given country are also shaped by factors such as, for instance, the performance of a given government. Arguably, stronger recipient governments will negotiate differently with democracy promoters than weaker ones. And for the external actors, the question whether the position of the government is supported by the country's political and economic elites or even the population at large will also likely shape its stance on negotiations. Given that the declared aim is to support democratic self-determination, democracy promoters, for instance, have a hard time openly challenging a recipient government that plausibly claims to represent the majority will of the population.<sup>30</sup> Again, therefore, the overall causal effect of this factor can be expected to be curvilinear: in-depth negotiations are particularly likely to emerge when the recipient government is neither as strong domestically as to deter external actors from putting significant demands on the table, nor as weak as to prevent the recipient government from openly challenging such demands.

Finally, research has shown that democracy promoters differ greatly in the (3) relevance they attach to the very aim to promote democracy in their foreign and development policies.<sup>31</sup> For each democracy promoter, in addition, the relevance of democracy promotion varies significantly between different recipient countries.<sup>32</sup> Given that states that promote democracy abroad have democratic regimes themselves, this relevance is shaped, amongst other things, by the demands and priorities of the population of these countries vis-à-vis external democracy promotion.<sup>33</sup> Also, states and international organizations have institutionalized democracy promotion in different ways. For instance, democracy promotion may be rather centralized (for example, in the US State Department) or quite fragmented (for example, in the German case with the organizational division between Foreign Office and Development Ministry and the complex aid architecture). Generally speaking, both the relevance and the degree of centralization of democracy promotion can be expected to increase the probability of in-depth negotiations. If democracy promotion is an important and visible element of a promoter's agenda and its degree of centralization high, this increases the likelihood that (a) a recipient government will contest a given democracy promotion agenda and that (b) the resulting controversy will be dealt with in the context of a high-level policy dialogue in which fundamental disagreements can be addressed.

### Context conditions

With a view to the context conditions that shape the interplay of the negotiating parties, we have identified three specific and two general parameters that we expect to be relevant:

Existing research considers (1) (perceived) power (a)symmetries as a key factor shaping any type of international negotiations.<sup>34</sup> The general argument is that an asymmetric distribution of power resources and asymmetric forms of interdependence between negotiating parties, whether measured in objective terms or as perceived by the parties involved, shape negotiations because they enable one actor to put pressure on the other.<sup>35</sup> Power asymmetries in negotiations are of particular interest for our research because many scholars assume – implicitly or explicitly – that democracy promoters’ leverage to promote democratic reforms is based on their financial and political power relative to the international power position of the country to be influenced.<sup>36</sup> Empirical research similarly suggests that high power asymmetries increase the likelihood that democracy promoters apply a relatively consistent and, if need be, confrontational approach.<sup>37</sup>

At first sight, one might assume that the more the power balance is skewed in favour of the democracy promoter, the less likely that the recipient government will openly articulate concerns with democracy promotion. Yet, research on international negotiations suggests that a basic feature of negotiation is that they have an equalizing effect: As the shared aim to reach an agreement grants a veto power to all participants, the initiation of negotiations empowers the less powerful.<sup>38</sup> This argument is supported by studies on democracy promotion and aid negotiations that show how less powerful states have proven fairly successful in shaping, or entirely rejecting, the democracy promotion agenda of much more powerful states.<sup>39</sup>

As a result, we expect rising power asymmetries to increase the likelihood of in-depth negotiations. High power asymmetries increase the probability that democracy promoters adopt policies and make demands that challenge interests and values on the part of the recipient government, while their negative impact on the probability that the latter will actually articulate such resistance is mitigated by the equalizing effect of the negotiation game.<sup>40</sup>

To be sure, this causal proposition becomes much less clear-cut when considering that the concept of power asymmetry is a diffuse and “slippery notion”.<sup>41</sup> Beyond power asymmetry in material capabilities, asymmetries can, for example, apply to different actor types that negotiate with each other – for example, governmental agencies with NGOs – or to different types of goals that negotiation partners pursue – for example, the democratization of another state versus the receipt of foreign assistance. To make matters more complicated, the objective quality of power has long been questioned and has made way to acknowledging the relevance of how negotiators *perceive* power relationships<sup>42</sup> as well as to “ambiguity” as a normal condition.<sup>43</sup> Habeeb suggests a distinction between structural and issue-specific power<sup>44</sup>, and, in a similar vein, Pfetsch and Landau argue for resources and power to be treated as “relational phenomena” which should “include both the structural component of power as well as the dynamic or behavioral dimension of actors”.<sup>45</sup> Instead of the unidirectional causal proposition outlined above, these considerations rather suggest an analytical perspective on the complex interaction of power relations and negotiation dynamics.

Another notorious cluster of “slippery concept[s]”<sup>46</sup> – that of identity, norms, and culture – plays a significant role in negotiation and negotiation analysis.<sup>47</sup> “[A]ny

reasonable explanation of what happens in international negotiation”, Faure and Rubin maintain, “must include the cultural aspects of the negotiation relationship”.<sup>48</sup> Teasing out what the cultural and normative aspects relevant for negotiation processes are is thus a necessary but often difficult task. The literature so far has predominantly focused on the question of which norms guide the negotiation process on the one hand, and on different negotiation styles and expectations in light of different cultural backgrounds on the other. In this sense, we distinguish between two types of normative context conditions: the norms that guide a particular negotiation process (the normative setting), and the extent to which cultural differences between the negotiating parties may lead to normative convergence or divergence between the negotiating parties.

Regarding (2) the normative setting, scholars sometimes distinguish between process-oriented and result-oriented norms or make a distinction between procedural and substantive norms.<sup>49</sup> According to Zartman, however, equality, for example, as “a processual and structural characteristic” is “a value that hovers over both process and outcome”.<sup>50</sup> Specific normative features that characterize international negotiations in general, and foreign aid negotiations in particular, include the norm of sovereign equality of states, the non-interference norm as well as the notion that the stronger have a moral obligation to help. The overall effect of these norms is that they strengthen the position of the weaker party and, thus, reinforce the equalizing effect of the negotiation game mentioned above.<sup>51</sup> In the contemporary world, there are however also norms that have an opposite effect: international norms that imply general commitments to human rights and democracy-related norms as well as norms that provide for measures of democracy promotion and protection strengthen the negotiating position of the external democracy promoter. Given that such norms vary across regional organizations, functional regimes and specific bi- or multilateral agreements, the overall normative setting in which democracy promotion negotiations take place varies. In general terms, the stronger and more precise the democracy (promotion)-related norms to which all relevant parties have previously agreed to, the lower the need as well as the potential and, therefore, the probability of in-depth negotiations that go beyond issues of implementation and resource distribution.

As regards (3) the other way in which norms matter for international negotiations – the relevance of “cultural traits”<sup>52</sup> – scholars have focused prominently on intercultural communication and the differences in low- and high-context negotiation styles.<sup>53</sup> For analysing democracy promotion negotiation, it is especially important to pay attention to conceptions and norms that pertain to this particular policy. Scholars, in particular, emphasize potentially competing conceptions of democracy,<sup>54</sup> controversial rules and principles that enable or constrain democracy promotion, such as the right to sovereignty and non-interference or universal human rights,<sup>55</sup> as well as societal values and political attitudes more broadly conceived.<sup>56</sup> The overall question is whether the conceptions of relevant norms pertaining to either the substance or the process of promoting democracy converge or diverge between the parties that negotiate. The general expectation in this case is straightforward: with increasing normative divergence, the likelihood that negotiations will touch upon fundamental (normative) issues should similarly increase.

In addition to these three specific parameters that define the context in which democracy promotion negotiations take place, there are two additional sets of parameters. These are likely to be relevant, even if – at this stage – no specific causal proposition can be formulated. The first one concerns the larger (historical) context of the

relationship. In terms of government-to-government relations, since democracy promotion is regularly just one of many policies that characterize the political relationship, one needs to identify other stakes and negotiation objectives that might qualify or interfere with democracy-related goals.<sup>57</sup> Do we, for example, see trade-offs between objectives related to democracy promotion and other goals such as economic or security gains on either side? Can we make an informed speculation about the interference and effects of other valuable objectives that may not lie visibly on the proverbial negotiation table? How have previous (democracy promotion) encounters shaped the current relationship? But, even more generally, the negotiation partners' overall relationship irrespective of democracy promotion needs to be considered and relevant historical legacies identified. For example, does a colonial past or previous interference characterize, possibly even strain current negotiations, maybe particularly so in the field of democracy promotion and its teacher-student-impetus? Have previous negotiations created an atmosphere of trust and reliability – or the opposite?<sup>58</sup>

Finally, just as the practice of democracy promotion itself, the bilateral negotiation of democracy promotion between a given democracy promoter and a recipient government is embedded in a larger regional and global context. Very generally speaking, this includes the potential role of other actors outside the bilateral relationship (other states, international organizations or transnational non-state actors), (shifting) regional and global balances of power as well as regionally or globally established international norms and practices.<sup>59</sup> For instance, there is broad agreement that changing global power relations and, in particular, the rise or rising assertiveness of countries such as China or Russia have important effects on the interaction between democracy promoters and recipients.<sup>60</sup> As regards the normative dimension, the global discourse on ownership (and related concepts) also plausibly has an impact on bilateral negotiations in democracy promotion.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, these are very broad categories of relevant parameters shaping the actors and the context of democracy promotion negotiation (Table 2); there are, of course, many other potentially relevant factors – often subsumed under these categories but not explicitly discussed in this section. Take, for example, the question of whether or not and how negotiations are embedded in an institutional framework.<sup>62</sup> Considering how all these questions may or may not take meaning in specific cases, there is no point in spelling out the entire range of options in too great detail. The purpose of this framework is to allow for a sufficient honing of the analytical mind to be able to

**Table 2.** Parameters that shape negotiation in democracy promotion.

	Parameters
Actor characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regime type of recipient country</li> <li>• Domestic strength of the recipient government (elite alignment, popular support)</li> <li>• Relevance and institutionalization of democracy promotion in donor's foreign policy</li> </ul>
Context conditions (specific)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power (a)symmetries</li> <li>• Normative setting</li> <li>• Normative con/divergence</li> </ul>
Context conditions (general)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larger (historical) context of the relationship</li> <li>• Regional and global context</li> </ul>

delve into empirical cases with a keen eye for potentially significant dimensions in democracy promotion negotiation.

### **The results: conceptualizing the output and outcome of democracy promotion negotiations**

The third part of our analytical framework is not aimed at facilitating research into the factors that shape negotiations but rather with how the negotiation process and the moves and decisions it consists of shape the output and outcome of democracy promotion. As said above, in this dimension we can merely offer a research heuristic consisting of key conceptual distinctions and a set of important questions in order to stimulate and guide empirical research (Table 3).

(1) With a view to the immediate results (*output*) of the negotiation process, the first question is whether a (partial) agreement could be reached or not. If yes, key questions concern (a) the type of agreement (official or informal; explicit or tacit), (b) its scope (full or partial) as well as (c) its substance (what has been agreed? Who has managed to push which kinds of demands? Which common understandings or compromises have been reached?). When deciphering the (failed) agreement, additional and complementary questions include these: how has the negotiation process shaped the ensuing agreement or how has it led to failure? Has the negotiation affected the (perceived) power asymmetry between the negotiation partners and is this visible in the agreement or possibly a cause for failure?

(2) With a view to results in terms of the *outcomes* of negotiations, we suggest to focus on the (non-)agreement's positive and/or negative consequences for the policies and practices of democracy promotion as well as for the political regime of the recipient country. With a view to the former, a key question is which types of (more or less substantial or deep) negotiations leading to which kinds of agreements have which kinds of effects on the design and/or implementation of democracy promotion: Under which conditions, for instance, does democracy promotion become less contested and less confrontational, thereby increasing mutual ownership and sustainability? As regards the impact on the political regime in the recipient country, it is to be investigated whether these consequences also render democracy promotion more effective. As mentioned in the introduction to this special issue, a question of specific interest is whether a negotiation outcome that increases the mutual ownership of democracy promotion practices also has positive effects on the effectiveness of democracy promotion and, thus, on the regime type in the recipient country – or whether there is, rather, a trade-off because negotiations produce a common denominator that effectively tames democracy promotion.<sup>63</sup> Further related questions include these: Does democracy

**Table 3.** Results of negotiation: output and outcome.

Results of negotiation	
<i>Output</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence/failure of agreement</li> <li>• Type of agreement (official or informal; explicit or tacit)</li> <li>• Scope of agreement (full or partial)</li> <li>• Substance of agreement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact on democracy promotion policies and practices</li> <li>• Impact on effectiveness of democracy promotion/on political regime in recipient country</li> </ul>

promotion negotiation lead to long-term solutions in terms of differing norms (and interests) or do partners regularly ignore, gloss over or not even recognize divergence? If a shared set of normative premises indeed emerges between negotiation partners, does this have a positive impact on democracy promotion practices and/or outcomes? In general, does more substantial negotiation regularly lead to more context-sensitive policies and better policy outcomes or is there a tendency, maybe even intended, to drag out the process and end in limbo?

It is important to note that the idea of a clear-cut sequence of steps that is implied by notion of “results of negotiation” is based on analytical distinctions only. When official, inter-governmental negotiations serve to launch new (phases of) democracy aid programmes, the empirical dynamics may indeed follow such a temporal logic. But, in general, as emphasized above, we consider the negotiation of democracy promotion to be a continuous process, just as the promotion of democracy normally does not stop during negotiations. What is more: from the perspective of the “donor”, the very process of negotiating democracy promotion may be seen as part and parcel of the democracy promotion portfolio (“political dialogue”). In the end, therefore, democracy promotion negotiation and democracy promotion itself will often be simultaneous, interacting and even partially overlapping processes.

## Conclusion

The negotiation processes that accompany, characterize and shape democracy promotion constitute a research field that has yet to be explored. In fact, we know very little about the communicative interaction between external and local actors in the promotion of democracy. As we know from research on international negotiations, negotiation processes are complex and dynamic; they are influenced by a complicated interaction of cost–benefit calculations, norms of appropriateness and cultural predispositions; and they may involve learning processes and even shifts in the identity of the negotiating parties. This complexity, however, should not prevent us from trying to improve our understanding of the phenomenon at hand. This article has therefore sought to better equip scholars that aim at doing so with conceptual tools and theoretical expectations. We have, first, briefly made the case for the need to study democracy promotion negotiation, have offered definitions, and have brought together different research strands in order to locate our general approach within the broader literature. In the second and main part of the article, we have proposed an analytical framework that focuses on the different dimensions of democracy promotion negotiations that one needs to take into account when investigating them.

This said, the analytical framework presented in this article is to be understood and applied as a research heuristic that enables scholars to systematically distinguish between and study key dimensions of the negotiation process in democracy promotion: the issues at stake, the parameters that shape the process, and the output and the outcome that results from the negotiations. Given the lack of reliable empirical knowledge of and theoretical approaches to the phenomenon at hand, our framework is of an exploratory nature. Yet, as regards the parameters that shape negotiation processes, we have also taken first steps towards a causal theory of democracy promotion negotiation, which need to be further explored. Expanding our empirical and theoretical horizon along these lines promises important insights into the persisting black box that is the interaction between external and local actors in the field of democracy promotion

and, in particular, into the potential controversies over the concepts and norms that underlie the very endeavour to promote democracy.

## Notes

1. See Poppe and Wolff, "Normative Challenge of Interaction," 381–82; Schraeder, *Exporting Democracy*.
2. The literature on recent challenges to international democracy promotion is already quite rich. For key contributions, see Babayan and Risse, "Democracy Promotion"; Burnell and Youngs, *Challenges to Democratization*; Carothers, "Closing Space for Democracy," 358–77; Carothers, "Continuing Backlash Against Democracy," 59–72; Dupuy et al., "Hands Off My Regime!," 299–311; Kurki, *Democratic Futures*; Poppe and Wolff, "Normative Challenge of Interaction," 373–406; Poppe and Wolff, "Contested Spaces," 469–88; Whitehead, "Losing 'the Force'?", 215–42.
3. Youngs, *Puzzle of Non-Western Democracy*.
4. See, in particular, the contributions to Hobson and Kurki, *Conceptual Politics of Democracy*. See also Bridoux and Kurki, *Democracy Promotion*; Ish-Shalom, "Democracy"; Poppe and Wolff, "Normative Challenge of Interaction".
5. See Kurki, *Democratic Futures*; Poppe and Wolff, "Normative Challenge of Interaction," 373–406.
6. Groß and Grimm, "External-Domestic Interplay," 912–36. A note on terminology: As explained in the introduction to this special issue, we use "local" – as opposed to "external" – actors to refer to all those governmental and non-governmental actors that are home to countries in which democracy is being promoted; these countries will be called "recipient countries".
7. See Leininger, "Democracy Promotion".
8. Odell, "Negotiation and Bargaining," 379.
9. Zartman, "Negotiating Identity: Metaphor," 137.
10. See Albin, *Justice in International Negotiation*, 1; Mühlen, *International Negotiations*, 25; Zartman, "Justice in Negotiation".
11. These kinds of everyday interactions have, for instance, been fruitfully studied in the area of international peacebuilding, see Autesserre, *Peaceland*; Hughes et al., "Struggle versus the Song," 817–24.
12. See Whitfield and Fraser, "Negotiating Aid"; Leininger, *Kontextsensibile Demokratieförderung*, 160–65.
13. See, instead of many, Acharya, "How Ideas Spread"; Jetschke and Liese, "Power of Human Rights"; Wiener, *A Theory of Contestation*; Zimmermann, *Global Norms Local Face*.
14. The former is, for instance, reflected in debates about the varieties of both democracy (Coppedge and Gerring, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy") and authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*). The latter critique has been prominently summarized by Carothers, "End of Transition Paradigm."
15. Still, as emphasized above, our framework does allow for investigating to what extent and how other collective entities – political parties, "the opposition", or civil society organizations – directly participate or indirectly shape negotiations over democracy promotion. In this sense, "the local" enters our analysis in more comprehensive ways than the focus on governments might suggest.
16. See for an exception Hackenesch, "It's Domestic Politics, Stupid!". In contrast to democracy promotion research, the "local turn" in the scholarship on peacebuilding has brought about an array of studies on the views and the agency of (different types of) local actors (see Mac Ginty and Richmond, "Local Turn in Peace Building"; Hughes et al., "Struggle versus the Song").
17. Whitfield and Fraser, "Negotiating Aid," 345.
18. Jönsson, "Diplomacy, Bargaining and Negotiation," 218–19; Whitfield and Fraser, "Negotiating Aid," 345. See also Zartman, *Negotiation and Conflict Management*, 15.
19. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society*.
20. Starkey et al., *International Negotiation*.
21. The only component we deliberately refrain from conceptualization concerns the "moves". While certainly important when empirically tracing processes of negotiation, in the area of democracy promotion the potential strategies and tactics are so manifold that it just does not

- seem very promising to propose a general framework in this regard. See, for instance, the complex set of “instruments” of external and local actors compiled by Groß and Grimm, “External-Domestic Interplay,” 920–24.
22. See Whitfield and Fraser, “Negotiating Aid,” 28.
  23. Leininger, “Democracy Promotion”; Youngs, *European Democracy Promotion Policies*.
  24. Starkey et al., *International Negotiation*, 7.
  25. See Kremenyuk, “Emerging System,” 23; Starkey et al., *International Negotiation*, 4–5.
  26. See Bridoux and Kurki, *Democracy Promotion*, Chapter 2.
  27. For the relevant actors in the field of development aid, see Gibson et al., *The Samaritan’s Dilemma*, 63.
  28. The following actor characteristics draw, in particular, on the results of a comparative project on US and German democracy promotion. See Wolff, “Democracy Promotion,” 267–72.
  29. See Schimmelfennig, “Strategic Calculation”.
  30. See Wolff, “Democracy Promotion”.
  31. See Schraeder, *Exporting Democracy*.
  32. See Wolff, “Democracy Promotion”.
  33. See Faust, “Policy Experiments”.
  34. See Starkey et al., *International Negotiation*, 41; Zartman and Rubin, “The Study of Power”.
  35. See Zartman and Rubin, “The Study of Power,” 12–4.
  36. Levitsky and Way, “International Linkage and Democratization”.
  37. See Schraeder, *Exporting Democracy*; Wolff, “Democracy Promotion”.
  38. Zartman and Rubin, “The Study of Power,” 290. See also Spector and Wagner, “Negotiating International Development,” 328.
  39. Furtado and Smith, “Ethiopia: Retaining Sovereignty”; Hayman, “Rwanda: Milking the Cow”; Wolff, “Negotiating Interference”; see also Habeeb, “US-Egyptian Aid Negotiations”; Kivimäki, “US-Indonesian Negotiations”.
  40. See Hulse, *Cultural Values*.
  41. Zartman and Rubin, “The Study of Power,” 286.
  42. *Ibid.*, 13–23.
  43. Zartman, “Justice in Negotiation,” 4.
  44. Habeeb, “US-Egyptian Aid Negotiations”.
  45. Pfetsch and Landau, “Symmetry and Asymmetry,” 32.
  46. Kowert, “National Identity,” 4.
  47. Elgström, “Norms, Culture, Cognitive Patterns”.
  48. Faure and Rubin, “Lessons for Theory,” 212.
  49. Elgström, “Norms, Culture, Cognitive Patterns,” 148.
  50. Zartman, “Justice in Negotiation,” 5.
  51. Elgström, “Norms, Culture, Cognitive Patterns,” 149–50.
  52. *Ibid.*, 152.
  53. Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures*; Elgström, “Norms, Culture, Cognitive Patterns,” 153–57.
  54. Hobson and Kurki, *Conceptual Politics of Democracy*; Kurki, *Democratic Futures*.
  55. Carothers, “Continuing Backlash Against Democracy”; Poppe and Wolff, “Normative Challenge of Interaction”; Poppe and Wolff, “Contested Spaces”.
  56. See Hulse, *Cultural Values*.
  57. See Schraeder, *Exporting Democracy*.
  58. Wolff, “Negotiating Interference”.
  59. See Wolff, “Democracy Promotion,” 267.
  60. See Carothers “Democracy Aid at 25,” 69; Hackenesch, “US Democracy Promotion Strategies”.
  61. Whitfield and Fraser, “Negotiating Aid. Structural Conditions,” 342–3.
  62. Jönsson, “Diplomacy, Bargaining and Negotiation,” 223.
  63. On the taming of democracy assistance, see Bush, *Taming of Democracy Assistance*.

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