

Chapter 1

Rethinking Transatlantic Responses When Democracy is Under Threat

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Introduction

This book will examine whether leading liberal democracies have a responsibility to respond when democracy is under threat. The United States, the European Union and its Member States pride themselves on their commitment to liberal democracy. They cherish it at home and claim to support it internationally. Americans tend to accept the Kantian notion that the internal conditions of a country help shape its foreign policy. Immanuel Kant presented the idea that democracies do not go to war against each other. Americans have embedded the democratic peace theory in their foreign policy outlook. The fact that the United States and the United Kingdom made a historic shift into strategic alignment across the twentieth century reinforced the notion of a commonality of interests among liberal democracies. A basic premise of American foreign policy in the twentieth century is the notion that as a liberal democracy based on values, the United States should advance certain values in its international affairs. Having always cared about freedom of the seas and freer access for American exports, the republic began to care about freedom itself. Even before the U.S. was committed to international human rights, it supported democracy, albeit imperfectly and inconsistently. America's emergence to the top table of international affairs after the First World War was complemented by President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. The United States cloaked its military might in the finery of democracy. Yet, this was not mere rhetoric: the U.S. did advance a conception of democracy in the form of self-determination as part of the peace settlement. President Wilson, and his successors in both political parties, understood that grand strategic engagement needed to be underpinned by a philosophical objective.

The Wilsonian school of American foreign policy derives from the tenets of a president who asserted that America's entry into the world war would "make the world safe for democracy." As Walter Russell Mead notes, there were "Wilsonians" before Wilson; the term describes a longer historical tradition.¹ Wilsonians are the vanguard of America's tradition of engagement in international democracy issues. They can be found in both political parties and on the Left and the Right.

Europeans, too, have a deep commitment to liberal democracy, which, after all, was developed in Europe. After the Second World War, liberal democracy was reconstructed in some parts of Western Europe that had been consumed by Nazism or Fascism. The historic process was complemented by the recreation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe after the end of the Cold War and the demise of Communism. By the end of the twentieth century liberal democracy flourished across Western and Central Europe. Aspirations to join the EU helped solidify Central and Eastern European states' progress to democracy after the end of the Cold War. As part of the "Copenhagen Criteria" for accession, the EU requires that states be democracies. Indeed, European democracy has flourished as the EU blossomed from the original Six in 1957 to twenty-seven members in 2007. As states solidified democracy they joined the European institutions. The process was repeated from the accessions of Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1980s through Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. Both the U.S. and the EU have benefited from the spread of democracy in the Euro-Atlantic region. Both the U.S. and EU would claim that their policies have helped that transition.

Yet democracy is not a steady state in which political stability is achieved for all time. Democracy is not a linear progression with one step on a path to progress following neatly behind the other.² Instead democracy is a constant process of balancing interests and objectives by allowing the populace to govern itself and to choose its leaders. It requires diligence, transparency, honesty and an informed, active citizenry. Even Americans, heirs to a written constitution of more than two centuries standing, describe their polity as the "American Experi-

¹ Mead, Walter Russell, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 134.

² See Carothers, Thomas, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), pp. 255-280 and Carothers, Thomas, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, January 2002.

ment.” Countries in all regions of the world have developed democratic processes in recent years. However, in some countries democratic gains have receded, actively undermined by leaders intent on regaining power. Having supported the deepening of democratic elements in countries ranging from aid recipients to accession countries, the U.S. and the EU have a stake in the health of democracy in countries with which they have a connection.

This paper considers how the U.S. and EU have responded when democracy falters, undermined by the intentional actions of local leaders. This is a somewhat different approach than usually taken by analysts. The international community is attuned to dramatic interruptions in democratic governance. Regional, international, and nongovernmental organizations and others monitor conditions. Many have mechanisms to call attention to *coups d'état*. For example, the Organization for American States was a pioneer creating the Resolution 1080 process to convene foreign ministers if the government of an OAS Member State was the victim of a coup. Yet, rather than seize power all at once, a canny potential autocrat may slowly undermine the democratic processes in his country. By slowly eroding democracy, he could gain enough control without triggering coherent domestic opposition or significant international resistance.

The idea of the erosion of democracy is an increasingly important policy concern for several reasons. First, happily, the number of democracies has increased dramatically in the past two decades. How to measure the level of democracy is a difficult and sensitive question. Many of the international evaluations are performed by organizations with headquarters in the “West” leading some critics to charge a western bias. However, leading organizations such as Freedom House base their evaluations on the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, an internationally acceptable benchmark. Freedom House posits that there were ninety “free” countries in 2006 covering 47 percent of the world’s political entities and 46 percent of its population.³ A further fifty-eight were judged “partly free” and fifty-five “not free.” These numbers are a significant increase from a generation ago. In 1986, Freedom House labeled fifty-seven countries “free,” another fifty-

³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2007: Selected Data for Freedom House’s Annual Global Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*. For the full data see the previous year’s 2006 report: Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2006: The Annual Global Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

seven “partly free,” and fifty-three “not free.”⁴ The increase in “free” states reflects the spread of democracy in various forms. However, not all democracies are smoothly-functioning entities. Having more democracies, especially newer, less stable ones, provides scope for some countries to lose the democratic gains so recently won.

Although democratization does not follow a lock-step linear process in each country, there are several common contours that describe a democratic landscape, including universal suffrage, equality before the law, respect for basic human rights of life and liberty of person, independence of the judiciary, and freedom of the media. This paper accepts that each society will develop its own ways to manifest these features. Still, if an important element is removed from the mix, then the quality of democracy can fairly be said to have declined. The paper refers to this diminution of democracy as “erosion.” If the reduction in democracy returns that factor (media, judiciary, etc.) back to a previous poor condition, then the notion of “backsliding” may be employed. Such terms do not presume a single, linear democratic process, but they do highlight the deterioration of democracy within the local conditions the country *has already accepted for itself*.

This paper will argue that as leading democracies, the countries of North America and Europe need to respond to the deterioration of democracy in other countries. It is not adequate to provide aid to build democracy or object when it fails. Interested outsiders need to develop a more calibrated response, because the threat to democracy will often not be a dramatic coup, but a slow, often methodical, process of constraining democratic liberties until they disappear.

The paper will begin by discussing types of democracies and theories of democratization. It will then present U.S. and European approaches to supporting democracy and their reactions to encroachments on democratic practices in various countries. In this section, the paper will draw on themes developed by experts at the conference on “Defending the Gains” hosted in Washington, D.C. by the Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations in partnership with the European Studies Centre at St. Antony’s College at Oxford University and University of Paris II’s Centre Thucydide. The event was held on September 25, 2006, with the support of the German Marshall Fund of the United States.

⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2007: Selected Data*, p. 18.

The paper focuses on the United States and the European Union. These are not the only relevant international actors that could respond to the erosion of democracy. International organizations, non-governmental organizations, and national governments, including the EU's member states, all can play roles as well. Still the U.S. and the EU can wield diplomatic power and significant development aid making their input an important part of international action.

The paper builds on a framework I developed in a book chapter entitled "Vigilance: Recognizing the Erosion of Democracy," which was published in *Protecting Democracy: International Responses* edited by Morton Halperin and Mirna Galic.⁵ The September 2006 conference elaborated on ideas developed in that chapter. Speakers were invited to consider the idea of the erosion of democracy in the context of different regions. Speakers included experts on four countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Russia, Venezuela and Zimbabwe as well as specialists on democracy policy or the relevant regions. I selected the countries with a view towards considering cases in which the challenges to democracy have been serious and commanded significant international attention. In addition, either the U.S., the EU or both have important relationships with these countries. Therefore, the U.S. and the EU are aware and care about the internal conditions in these countries. These are not countries on the margins of international affairs; developments in each have at least a regional impact. If the U.S. or the EU were to act in difficult areas of democracy erosion, that action could carry a larger significance for international affairs. Conversely, these countries have their own political and economic resources, making them able to withstand pressure and, perhaps, making U.S. or EU leaders cautious. The conference and the chapters in this book explore these issues in the context of specific cases.

Types of Democracies

The analysis assumes that all democracies are in a constant state of change. There is always room for improvement even in well-established polities. Democracy itself provides a way to accommodate change. My analysis posits that there are at least three types of democ-

⁵ Brimmer, Esther, "Vigilance: Recognizing the Slow Erosion of Democracy" in Halperin, Morton H. and Mirna Galic, eds., *Protecting Democracy: International Responses*, A Council on Foreign Relations Book (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 233-258.

racies: established, incomplete, and transitional.⁶ The former already enjoy the rule of law and orderly changes of power among leaders elected through universal suffrage. Incomplete democracies may be stable, but their institutions are only partly democratic. Transitional democracies include those that are new, or in the process of becoming democracies. Categorizing countries is a difficult endeavor, but established democracies include the United States, Canada, the members of the European Union, Australia and Japan. Incomplete democracies include Turkey and Singapore. New or transitional democracies include countries in Eastern Europe (some inside, some outside the EU), Latin America and South Korea. Countries do change their status. Eastern European countries that might have been considered transitional a decade ago are now more stable “new” democracies and EU members.

All types of democracies can deteriorate. Supporters of liberal democracy should borrow the phrase of Cold War conservatives: the price of freedom is eternal vigilance, not just against communism, but against authoritarians who would undermine civil liberties even in established democracies. Fears about security threats or social tensions can make publics accept encroachments on their civil liberties. After the trauma of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Americans tolerated extreme infringements on civil liberties. The Patriot Act and other legislation eroded democracy in the republic with the oldest written Constitution. Respect for the law is important, but democracy also needs respect for the spirit of the law.⁷ Incomplete and transitional democracies, too, can experience setbacks. The examples addressed in this paper (and this volume) consider democracy under threat in both of these categories.

Theories of Democratic Development

Analysis of the erosion of democracy can be placed in the context of an overall view of the nature of the democratization process. The concept of erosion suggests that practice has deteriorated from a standard previously attained. Over millennia experts and observers have tried to analyze the

⁶ Ibid, p. 235.

⁷ Brimmer, Esther, “Safeguarding Civil Liberties in an Era of In-Security: A Transatlantic Challenge” in Dalgaard-Nielsen, Anja and Daniel Hamilton, eds., *Transatlantic Homeland Security? Protecting Society in the Age of Catastrophic Terrorism* (Routledge, 2006), pp. 147-171.

nature of democracy or representative government from Plato to John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Alexis de Toqueville and Amartya Sen.

In recent years, analysts and policy makers have become especially interested in how countries become democratic. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed waves of democratization including Germany and Japan in the 1940s and 1950s. The decolonization movement of the 1950s and 1960s also brought the promise of democracy to new states previously subjects of empires. The disillusionment after some of these states collapsed fed questions about the complexity of democracy and development as early as the 1970s. Still, the 1980s saw Greece, Portugal and Spain emerge from authoritarian rule and deepen their democracies enough to join the European Union. Latin America also experienced historic waves of democratization with Argentina and Chile and others making dramatic changes. The fall of the Berlin Wall released another wave of democratization across Central and Eastern Europe. The new era also enabled other countries to recalculate global conditions, which contributed to the end of apartheid in South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela to the presidency.

We have lived through extraordinary times. Yet some regions, including most parts of the Middle East, have not yet benefited from these political changes. Can this process be extended to regions that have not yet been bathed in this great wave of change? Is it really a wave? Or is it a series of separate eddies and flows that follow different courses in different places? Local reformers and international democracy advocates alike have been grappling with these questions. They have been joined by security specialists as well. After the September 11 attacks, American officials and analysts attributed the support for al-Qaeda to a lack of democracy in the Middle Eastern countries with inadequate local channels for dissent-fueled radicalization. Under the Bush Administration, democracy promotion in potentially dangerous regions became a security issue. Problems in this policy would eventually lead to a backlash against many forms of official democracy advocacy.

Yet, the question remains, how do countries make the transition to democracy and what role should outsiders play when the process falters? This paper focuses on the erosion of democracy, a particular type of failure of democratization.

One way to address these questions is to examine the nature of democratic transitions. The rapid change in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere since 1989 contributed to an optimistic model of democratic development. Thomas Carothers identifies the “transition paradigm” which has dominated many advocates’ perceptions of democracy. He critiques five “core assumptions” of this paradigm, which are paraphrased below:⁸

1. If a country moves away from dictatorship it is necessarily moving towards democracy;
2. Democratization is a “set sequence of stages;”
3. Elections have “determinative importance;”
4. Underlying socio-economic or structural elements are not factors in the transition process;
5. The latest wave of democratization is based on “coherent, functioning states.”

He argues that the efforts to qualify a democracy as “weak democracy” or “partial democracy” assume that the given country is stalled between stages of a democratic process. He elaborates a “gray zone” of “feckless democracies,” which have the trappings including elections and a rotation of offices among a small elite, but are “shallow.”⁹ In contrast, other countries in the gray zone suffer from “dominant-power politics.”¹⁰ In the latter, the state and the dominant party are intertwined; power does not change hands.

This book will suggest that both feckless democracies and dominant-power democracies can experience an erosion of democracy. However, dominant-power models may be more prone. Strong leaders who are in office a long time can implement policies that erode the quality of democracy over time. They must compete in regular elections, but face little real opposition. Moreover, the perpetrator of such a program assumes that he will be in office to benefit from the recen-

⁸ Carothers, Thomas, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (January 2002, pp. 5-21), pp. 6-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

tralization of power. It may be harder to sustain a long, concerted process of undermining democracy if parties alternate office-holding as in a feckless democracy.

Yet similar elements may be perceived in successful as well as “feckless” and “dominant-power” democracies. These would each have a similar pattern: awakening by elite or public to the need for change, period of dissent, period of action, resolution and a new steady state. The awakening may be accepted by the people in charge, which may accommodate the demands. However, the demands for change probably require that leaders relinquish some element of power; and, therefore may be resisted. Thus, the period of action may be more tumultuous. How they arrive at the new steady state can differ dramatically. Looking at this process can show the complexity of political change. The process of peaceful change could follow several paths which may be grouped into categories for analysis:

1. Revolution—CEO model
2. Revolution—popular uprising
3. Evolution—gradually expanding franchise
4. Decolonization—sever connections with metropolitan power

While these are not the only categories, they have appeared in many countries. In the CEO model, the public or outsiders believe that by changing the very top leadership they can change the direction of the country. This model borrows from the structure of large American businesses where the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is held responsible for the profits of the company. Boards of directors and shareholders in poorly performing companies often fire the CEO and hire a new one to change the fortunes of the given company. However, too often the underlying corporate culture and structure remain the same and the old problems reemerge. Similarly, just changing the president or prime minister does not necessarily release a tide of democracy across the shores of political practice. The Administration of George W. Bush pursued a version of the CEO model when it argued that removing Saddam Hussein would open the way for democracy in Iraq. The original plan for the 2003 invasion presumed that once Saddam was removed the rest of the government would continue to function while democratic structures were installed. Karen von Hippel, complement-

ing Carothers's work, labels this the "Evil Man" syndrome.¹¹ Opponents assume that once the evil dictator is removed, the democratic impulses of the oppressed people will emerge and support the emergence of a new functioning democracy. As Jeffrey Kopstein notes in this volume and elsewhere, the lesson many American policy makers took from 1989 was that removing oppressive forces freed publics to build democracy. In contrast, the conclusion that many European policy-makers drew from the experience of Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 was that the process of securing democracy takes years.¹² Indeed, fifteen years passed from 1989 to the accession of several states from this region to the EU in 2004.

In the popular uprising model, the public takes to the streets to demand change. This may be done peacefully. The 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe largely followed this model. Other examples include the "color" revolutions, the Orange in Ukraine and the Purple in Georgia. These approaches build on the idea of liberal democracy in which even the majority is constrained. The *demos* alone does not rule; and the rights of minorities are respected. The CEO and popular uprising models may be combined leading to profound social and political change. However, the CEO model can occur without the popular uprising leaving old power structures in place, which may lead to incomplete democratization of the feckless or dominant power variety.

The evolutionary model allows for gradual change. It can still be a period of action, but it might span several years or even decades. The expansion of the franchise in the United Kingdom in the 19th century would be an example. Although there was violence and controversy, there was gradual change over the course of nearly a century from the Reform Act of 1832 to the full enfranchisement of women in 1928.¹³

Decolonization offers another model. It addressed political empowerment in the context of independence from a colonial power. This branch of analysis tends to focus on the process of severing old ties and forming new governments. A comprehensive approach includes

¹¹ Von Hippel, Karin, *Democracy by Force: US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 172.

¹² Kopstein, Jeffrey, "The Transatlantic Divide over Democracy Promotion," *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2006, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 85-98, pp. 86-87.

¹³ Unmarried women over thirty years old gained the right to vote in 1918.

analyses of how well democratic institutions survive in the post-colonial era. One person, one vote, one time is not a sustained democracy. Simply throwing off the colonial mantle does not guarantee democracy. Indeed decolonization can lead to successful new democratic states; but it can also fall into the feckless or dominant power models.

Idea of Erosion of Democracy

The idea of the erosion of democracy suggests that there is a process of democratic deterioration distinctive from the either the dramatic coup and or the effects of disorganized poor governance. The erosion of democracy is a more concerted process. It may be carried out by a single anti-democratic leader or an influential group. The implication is that the erosion of democracy can eventually be as significant as a coup. It can undermine local efforts at political change and international programs of democratic support. The international community, and especially the leading liberal democracies, have stakes in the process of democratization in many countries. The United States, the European Union and its member states, and other countries are major aid donors. They need better ways to understand the phenomenon of the erosion of democracy.

If the erosion of democracy is systematic, there may be ways to identify it. In an earlier book chapter, I delineated indicators of democratic erosion. I argued that identifying the types of threats posed to democracy could help clarify which factors to track when examining the phenomenon of democratic erosion. I presented four areas of concern:¹⁴

1. Violent or nonviolent;
2. Occurring in the public or private sector;
3. Perpetuated by identified government agents or covert sympathizers;
4. Occurring in the political, economic, or social sector of society.

I argued that the “key factors to watch are whether the government is acting, whether the actions affect the basic tenets of democracy, whether there is violence involved, and finally, whether the actions

¹⁴Brimmer, “Vigilance: Recognizing the Slow Erosion of Democracy,” *op cit*, p. 237.

continue or worsen over time.”¹⁵ This analysis would lead the observer to ask four key questions:

1. Are the actions being conducted by a government entity?
2. Do the actions affect the core institutions of democracy?
3. Has the situation turned violent?
4. Are the actions sustained or augmented over time?

Actions perpetrated by government entities are a more serious threat to democracy than those conducted by a private entity. Actions that undermined core institutions of democracy are particularly egregious forms of democracy erosion. Core institutions of democracy include, “elections through universal suffrage, freedom of speech and media, the right to assembly and to form labor unions, equality before the law, security of person, and the protection of private property.”¹⁶

It is also important to distinguish between a brief period of bad government and the long-term deterioration of democracy. Judging how long is too long is difficult, but important for policy makers and analysts. Sustained or increased pressure on democratic institutions is more serious than a brief period of poor policies. The international community should focus its responses on the former. The serious erosion of democracy is more important. Also, there are many demands on international attention. Key democracies and democracy supporters should direct their limited amounts of political will towards the cases in which they can identify systematic democratic erosion.

Examining the Examples

The earlier book chapter discussed types of democracy erosion. The conference and this book endeavor to compare the notions of democracy erosion with real cases. The conference focused on four countries: Côte d’Ivoire, Russia, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. Regional experts were also invited to provide context. Conference speakers were invited to convert their presentations into papers, which are included in this volume. Three of the speakers on specific countries

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 243.

submitted papers. Each author presents his or her own argument; they do not necessarily agree with each other about the nature of democratization. This paper presents my conclusions about the theory of democracy erosion and about the roles of the U.S. and the EU based on the case studies presented at the conference and in these papers. Chart 1 summarizes the analysis.

Chart 1. Cases and Categories

Country	Carothers' Term	Brimmer's Change Processes
Russia	Dominant power	CEO model
Venezuela	Fleckless democracy	Erosion after shock
Zimbabwe	Dominant power	Decolonization, then CEO model

Russia

Celeste Wallander’s chapter analyzes the vagaries in Western approaches to democratic change in Russia. A mix of security and ideological concerns has driven policies in the 1990s and after 9/11. She explains that both the will to construct democracy and its erosion were generated from within Russia. When the Soviet Union ended, democracy did not form. Yeltsin acted unconstitutionally by dissolving parliament; meanwhile oligarchs grew rich. To Russians, Yeltsin’s show of political force, the decline in social well-being and the concentration of wealth were all part of the experiment with “democracy.” Many Russians became dissatisfied with a system that they had not really tried. Yet Western countries, including the U.S., continued to support Yeltsin even during his actions in Chechnya and as corruption corroded initial reforms. Dr. Wallander’s analysis stresses the need for the U.S. and the EU to support institutions not just specific individuals. Subsequently, President Putin has tightened controls. Moscow was still dominant and was able to reassert political control in the regions. Dr. Wallander explains Russian efforts describe their system as “sovereign democracy,” thereby using the language of democracy for a distinctively different process.

Using Carothers’ term, I would categorize Russia as a “dominant-power” democracy. Power does not really change hands. Yeltsin picked his successor; Putin is likely to do the same in 2008. Using my frame-

work, the Russian case most closely follows the CEO model. The head of state changed, but the underlying structures and sources of power remained. The U.S. and the EU clung closely to the CEO model, backing Yeltsin even as he made anti-democratic moves. In a reversal of the “evil man” theory having a “good man” in charge was supposed to overcome the mistakes made by his government.

We may also answer yes to the four democracy erosion questions. In the Russian case, the repressive actions were conducted by government agencies, state-owned companies or other institutions close to the government. The judicial system has been used. Oligarchs that the government sees as hostile have found themselves in court. The actions affect core institutions of democracy including the media. The situation has turned violent with leading journalists and others killed. The erosion has been sustained over time.

Venezuela

Jennifer McCoy details the tenure of President Hugo Chávez Frías. She discusses the public’s long-standing dissatisfaction with the two main parties. Lt. Col Hugo Chávez had gained national attention as early as 1992 after leading an attempted coup in which he expressed frustration with the system. As Dr. McCoy notes, middle class anger increased as many slipped into poverty when real per-capita oil revenues decreased. Hugo Chávez won the presidency in 1998. He enjoyed high popularity ratings after his inauguration in 1999. He soon altered the constitution and installed military officers in civilian posts. He was briefly deposed in an attempted coup in 2002. While most international observers criticized the coup attempt, the Bush Administration in the U.S. and the conservative Aznar Administration in Spain initially welcomed it. Afterwards, there was a two-year peace-building effort led by the Organization of American States, the United Nations Development Program and the Carter Center. Eventually Chávez was reelected for a third term. Dr. McCoy notes that for many Venezuelans overcoming social exclusion is an important feature of their interpretation of democracy; Chávez has responded to this need. Dr. McCoy suggests that the U.S. might have more impact if it engaged on economic and social issues that Venezuelans value. The Bush Administration and Chávez’s government have been entangled in a rhetorical clash in various international fora proposing alternative

candidates for posts at the OAS and UN and criticizing each other's initiatives. Dr. McCoy notes that the Chavez government restricted free speech, political dissent and NGO activity, which caused concern in the NGO community but less in official circles. Still, the EU and OAS monitored the 2005 National Assembly elections and the 2006 presidential elections.

Venezuela before Hugo Chávez's election may be described as a "feckless democracy," with two political parties, but both seemed unresponsive to public needs. The Chávez government took many of the steps identified as signals for the erosion of democracy including constraining the media. Venezuela had prided itself on its democracy, but frustration mounted after the collapse in living standards. This suggests another category, "erosion after shock." A dramatic change in circumstances can make people willing to accept changes in the quality of their democracy. In Venezuela enhancing social inclusion became important after the economic downturn impoverished many in the middle class. Even in the U.S. the shock of the 9/11 attacks made Americans acquiesce to infringements on civil liberties. We may answer yes to the four democracy erosion questions. The repression was conducted by government entities whose actions affected the core institutions of democracy including the freedom of the media. There has been violence and the repression has been sustained over time.

Zimbabwe

As David Monyae explains, the British-brokered 1979 Lancaster House agreement set the stage for the transition from Ian Smith's white minority government to a multiracial democracy. Yet, the political and economic guarantees for white Zimbabweans that enabled the transition to occur also instilled resentment in the black population. The continuation of apartheid in South Africa for another decade and the civil war in Mozambique enabled Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe to strengthen his control at home in the face of perceived threats from abroad. He concentrated the powers of the President and Prime Minister. He gained international prestige as a vocal critic of apartheid in South Africa. With the end of the Cold War and the demise of apartheid, the priorities changed. Mugabe's Zimbabwe was no longer a front line state in the moral crusade against apartheid. It was a government that was tinged by corruption and unable to deliver

services. As the economy deteriorated; the ruling party tried to gain support of war veterans and land-starved peasants. The regime used violence to stay in power.

The United States did impose targeted sanctions and a travel ban on certain people, but to little avail. Given the historical links it is not surprising that Great Britain has been the most active outside power pressuring Zimbabwe's government, but the colonial past retards European engagement. Europeans are reluctant to be seen to pressure an African government. Some EU countries felt that the UK should deal with the issue. Yet the UK could be portrayed as defending the white privileges in the Lancaster House agreement. Mugabe skillfully played the race card and divided the Commonwealth; then he pulled his country out of the organization. He was able to use the U.S. and UK invasion of Iraq to imply that the two countries' criticisms were really calls for regime change.

Using Carothers' categories, Zimbabwe is a "dominant power" state. Using my framework, Zimbabwe began as a story of decolonization and devolved into the CEO/"evil man" model. We may answer yes to all four of the democracy erosion questions. The suppression of democracy has been conducted using the instruments of government (as well as mobs outside of government). The actions affect core institutions of democracy including the integrity of elections. Violence has occurred; and the repression has been sustained over time.

Analysis and Recommendations

In all three cases, the erosion of democracy was accelerated by a strong leader who believed that it was in his interest to concentrate power in his own hands. Enhancing the powers of the executive was a key feature of all three examples. In all three cases, the strongman was able to claim that he was protecting the nation. In each example, a dramatic change in circumstances made the public willing to look for a savior who would deliver them from the disorder and inequality of their current system. President Putin could claim he was restoring dignity after the Yeltsin years which witnessed a dramatic drop in Russian living standards and life expectancy and the rise of a small cadre of oligarchs. President Chávez could claim that he was expanding social inclusion in a country where many people had fallen out of

the middle class after the decline in oil prices in the 1980s and 1990s. President Mugabe could deflect attention from his government's failures by pouring the potent poison of race politics into a state where vast inequalities persisted and whites did enjoy privileges.

These examples reinforce the notion that the international community should be particularly alert for political deterioration after an economic shock. It expands upon the analysis in my earlier work to highlight the issue of concentration of power in the executive. This may be done using "legal" channels. Chávez, Mugabe and Putin all rewrote their constitutions. In the examples of Zimbabwe and Russia, Western states were reluctant to criticize the anti-democratic moves of leaders who otherwise commanded international respect for leading liberation struggles. Mugabe has gained credit for his anti-apartheid stance. Yeltsin was the hero who had stood on a tank to defend democracy.

In all three cases positive answers could be given to the key questions identified at the outset:

1. The actions were perpetrated by government entities.
2. The actions affected the core institutions of democracy.
3. The situation had turned violent in some ways (ranging from killings in Zimbabwe, to imprisonment or expulsion of opponents in Russia—and possibly poisonings—to suppression of opposition elements in Venezuela).
4. The actions have been sustained and augmented over time.

This analysis leads to the following recommendations:

- **Improve transatlantic tracking of democratic erosion.** The United States and the European Union need to be more attuned to the erosion of democracy in countries in which they have influence. Ignoring early signs could lead outsiders to do too little too late. The U.S. and the EU are more effective if they take complementary action against the deterioration in democratic practices. Therefore, U.S. and the EU should exchange and discuss indicators. In addition to tracking failed states, they could use their extensive diplomatic networks to watch for signs of democratic deterioration. The EU could play an important role in this regard as

its twenty-seven members have links in a wide variety of countries.

- **Watch for key signs.** Outside observers should be particularly attentive to effort to concentrate power in the executive. Such actions tend to weaken the indigenous mechanisms intended to forestall the collapse of democracy.
- **Criticize even respected leaders.** Western democracies need to criticize the anti-democratic maneuvers even of leaders whom they otherwise support.

Conclusion

The erosion of democracy is difficult to observe, but efforts to develop useful indicators can help policymakers improve their insight into this problem. As proponents of liberal democracy and major donors, the “West” has a responsibility to monitor the on-going health of democratic structures. We comment on the state of democracy and civil liberties in our countries in the transatlantic community (often in shrill tones). We should also follow the situation in new and transitioning democracies. Happily, there are more democracies in the world, but that does not mean that liberal democratic structures are secure everywhere. The international community has become somewhat more critical of military coups. Therefore, clever potential autocrats may use subtler measures instead. In the future, international supporters of peaceful democratic life need to be attentive to the steps taken to undermine democracy.