

## Jan Hornát, 'Democracy assistance policies of the US and the EU: different approaches and their causes

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This is an interesting and many regards erudite thesis. It shows evidence of considerable research, in both primary and secondary sources, of reflection, and the delivery of structured information and analysis.

As ever, many questions arise as to why the thesis was constructed in the way that it was. Also arising are questions pertaining to what was not done, and if considered reasons exist for them. If I were present in a viva voce I would investigate the following questions with the candidate, and, of course, to provide the candidate with the opportunity to respond. These are similarly intended as an expression of views on thesis itself.

### The overall approach

Why was actual EU and US democracy promotion not specifically identified first in the thesis? By that I mean and ask: why not identify what are the policies and practices of democracy promotion, and then tackle them through the vast political-historical accounts we receive.

How do we know which references to history, to American found fathers and so on, and the substantial amount of second works, are explanations for recent and contemporary democracy promotion. Can we be certain of the selection process? Is it possible that statements and quotations are sought or found that suit purposes? This is again done in the context of reading the thesis as having started with political-historical statements, rather than an identification of the forms of democracy promotion themselves.

The rather large and meandering historical references are therefore very broad and even vague. More importantly, are we clear on how we know their selection and therefore their argumentative relevance to democracy promotion today, and expressly to the institutional (EU) or governmental (US) aims.

### The (non) uses of theory

We could benefit also from knowing the role – and indeed, the specificity – of constructivism.

Constructivism makes sense, but is this perhaps not a tautological approach. The thesis wants to examine and explain democracy promotion in terms of (political) identity; constructivism is an identity-based theory. Would we not be struck if a counterintuitive theory did as well - or better?

And, by now, has not constructivism evolved into a field itself? Is it appropriate to ask what strands of constructivism do we mean? Perhaps that does not matter. But should we not know that? Is this not an opportunity for the thesis to tell us how much it knows about constructivism and other theories, and to demonstrate that by structured and comparative approach to (what becomes) its ultimate choice of theory?

In terms of what is used, we have '3.1 The constructivist approach to studying democracy promotion'

But that is a very short (2.5 pp) section, and also seem uncritical of constructivism. In addition, we have what seems a rather significant claim on p. 97: 'in a White Paper dedicated to improving democratic governance in the EU, the Commission (vindicating our use of constructivist approaches when examining democracy assistance)'

That is the last time constructivism is mention until the start of the conclusion on p.205. If constructivism is the lens for the thesis, why does it disappear? How do we know and see that constructivism is expressly being used in the body of the thesis (and specifically in 100+ intervening pages)?

The conclusion tells us:

by adopting a constructivist lens for our research in which identity plays a consequential role in foreign policy-making, we have identified that the models of democracy that the US and the EU employ in their democracy promotion agendas are directly related to their democratic identities

Could we press on how constructivism was used to do this? In other words, might we ask 'did the thesis simply look for expressions of political identity to expand democracy promotion?', that is, with no reference to constructivism.

#### Who makes democracy promotion – the choice of focus

That is before we deal with some of the challenge of determining democracy promotion. The thesis is right to identity that especially in the US case we have, call them, multiple producers of democracy promotion. It is also right to have selection but even so, the inclusion of government -funded yet party affiliated entities (NDI, IRI) is potentially problematic, even if they are not funded by their titular parties (It seems also that the latter receives some specific attention and sourcing in the thesis (p. 13, 182, 205), where NDI gets rather less).

It means, at least in detail if not more broadly in the tenor of US democracy promotion, that we have various aide practices. The matter is easier, as the thesis essentially recognises, because with the EU we can ignore national imperatives, and focus on outputs. Nevertheless, as a more minor point, more activism might be still identifies as EU if the sweep applied to the US is allowed (i.e., funding).

I wonder also about more on the role of the European Parliament, including in election observation. Yes, we do have some references, and use of statements, but how do we measure that and relate it overall to an expressly 'EU' democracy promotion.

Simply put, I think preference in the US case would be to stick with government agency activity, rather than government funding, as the determinant. In the EU case, the potential multiplicity of activity may be greater than suggested. I myself do not know, but would be interested in a view on such, and how we come to that view.

In short, I would be interested to hear more on this.

### The (non) use of case studies

I am also interested in theses generally as to what and why they choose not to undertake and use. In this case it may be particularly relevant to ask about (non) case selection.

Thus: are there grounds for not having taken specific comparative case studies. Yes, we do get historical notes on instances of democracy promotion, but the approach is not one structured around case selection and comparison. There may be reasons for this – but for this and more broadly would we not benefit from a self-reflexive section on the methods and approaches and chose – and especially those not chosen? The latter could include why there is no (comparative) case study selection. That would also help to address the mention but functional absence of constructivism.

As a separate point, I think that case studies would have also allowed for consideration of major variables (time periods, political administrations (especially US presidential), geographical area of interest/democracy promotion)) that the thesis itself notes.

Indeed, the thesis identifies the problem of comparison but I wonder if there were opportunities for direct comparison – say a country or region, or a common time period, a contested election, and so forth.

A few sentences of clarification might be highly beneficial and reinforce why the thesis has the research design that it has, and works as it does.

### Where there is convergence and why this is neglected

Cases studies aside, the thesis remains about comparison. Does that necessarily mean a concentration on contrast, on divergent approaches? Do we have an absence in the thesis of cases of convergence on democracy promotion? If so, at least shall we say that thesis's express focus is on divergence but noting what might well be a massive geographic area and timeframe where there is lockstep agreement?

Might we posit a case for cooperation and indeed convergence between the US and the EU on democracy promotion in the OSCE, and especially through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. This might fit the thesis's definition of democracy

promotion, because, at least simply put, this is government-agency funded and it clearly supports activism. Although of course EU states are individual participating States, the EU rather than individual member states routinely issues its own statements and EU bodies participate in and endorse ODIHR statements and EOM reports.

Additionally, both the EU and the US back (bar a few recalcitrant, individual politicians in the OSCE PA) the position of ODIHR and endorse each other. This could be an ideal case because of the wealth of material and the tangibility (over 300 EOMs) and the sharp contrast between the US and the EU together, and in contradistinction to Russia and other post-Soviet governments. Again, perhaps we should acknowledge that there is agreement on what democracy promotion should look like in at least one larger geographic area and over a significant amount of time.

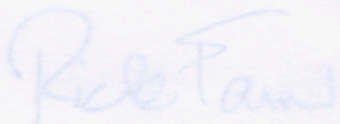
#### Tables / mechanics

On a smaller note, I like the tabular constructions, including and especially for topological comparison. Elsewhere specific reference may be made clearer as to sourcing (such as p. 203 - very literally assigning the sources to the tables.

It would help the reader to know how much of this is the thesis and how much it is not derived from other sources. So for 'Table 6 Typology of approaches to democracy assistance' and where we read '(Source: Author, adapted from Carothers, 2009)', initiative here should be credited. 'Table 10 Democratic identities and their implications for democracy assistance' on pp. pp. 122-3 is very informative and makes much material highly accessible and is a thoughtful and useful contribution.

#### Concluding comment and assessment

As said, the thesis identified an interesting topic worthy of study and demonstrates erudition in matters pertaining to democracy promotion by the EU and the US. It is coherently and fluently written and offers a strong sense of the grounding of divergent approaches on democracy promotion in historical-political identities.



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