



Language

[F. External Support: Opportunities, Problems and Debates about 'Democracy Assistance' \[1\]](#)

Historically, most authors on strategic nonviolence from Gandhi on have warned against dependency on external aid. As Gene Sharp (Sharp, [The Politics of Nonviolent Action](#) [2] ([0. Not listed](#) [3]) , p. 663) puts it, 'Overconfidence in the the potential of aid from others may distract resistance efforts from their own most important tasks. In fact, third-party support is more likely to be forthcoming when nonviolent struggle by the grievance group is being waged effectively.'

At the same time, there are strong traditions of internationalism that have linked movements and also relationships between, for example, the colonised and opposition groups living near the centre of colonial power. Increasingly, internal movements - whether resisting specific policies or the regime as a whole - seek transnational support from similar movements, sympathetic networks and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). These linkages have increased with greater globalization, and have had a significant impact, for example on human rights issues. See for example the seminal study:

, [Activists Across Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics](#) [4] Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, , 1998, pp. 240 .

The generally positive role of regional and transnational solidarity is also explored in Clark, [People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity](#) [5] ([A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements](#) [6]) , where various dangers are also discussed. Carter, [People Power and Political Change: Key Issues and Concepts](#) [7] ([A. 1.a.ii. Theories of Civil Disobedience, Power and Revolution](#) [8]) briefly explores the advantages and problems of external support at all levels in Chapter 7. The flow of resources into a conflict can have unintended consequences, and while interchange between activists from different contexts can be invaluable, it is never a simple question of skills transfer: the essential work of analysing the local context, drawing up appropriate demands, and devising a strategy has to be done by the local movement.

The growth of international governmental organizations with an official commitment to human rights and political democracy - for example the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Europe Union (EU) and the UN and its agencies - has also influenced the international context in which movements operate. This includes the expansion (and increased acceptance) of international monitoring of elections and the strengthening of international human rights instruments. Indeed, current strategic debates about how unarmed or nonviolent resistance can achieve success include emphasis on the role of international pressure of various kinds - see in [A.1.b](#) [6], Chenoweth; Stephan, [Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict](#) [9] ([A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements](#) [6]) , Martin, [Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire](#) [10] ([A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements](#) [6]) .

Intervention by governments of other countries is clearly much more questionable, but can also be positive. Diplomatic pressure and the special status of foreign embassies can sometimes assist movements and individuals struggling against repression and threats of torture and death. Groups intervening nonviolently, for example Peace Brigades International, can gain significantly in effectiveness by liaising with sympathetic diplomats. National parliaments can also play a constructive role in some cases (though now international parliaments, notably the EU Parliament, probably have greater impartiality and influence).

Major problems arise, however, when national and great power interests are closely involved in promoting or preventing internal resistance movements, and especially when national governments work with or through supposedly autonomous nongovernmental organizations. The conflicting roles of Russia and western governments



were noted under [Section D](#) [11], where electoral struggles also offer particular opportunities for external funding and intervention. But external governments have played a significant role in other struggles (for example in Lebanon) as noted under [E.V](#) [12].

These issues are not new - they are intrinsic to the nature of the international system, and Gene Sharp's warning to nonviolent movement still stands. But debates about the role of external governmental and quasi-governmental aid have become more ideologically divisive since the US government decided to use 'democracy assistance' to internal resistance and opposition movements as a major tool of US foreign policy. The Second Reagan Administration created the National Endowment for Democracy - and decided to aid the Chilean opposition to General Pinochet (whom US agencies had helped to install in 1973). President Bush Jr. also endorsed a neoconservative policy of promoting 'democracy' round the world, sometimes through force of arms, but also through diplomacy and aid to opposition groups sympathetic to the west. The association of 'democracy assistance' with US governments has led some on the western left to view support to opposition movements in other countries (unless like the Palestinian Intifada they are clearly opposed to western government policies) with extreme suspicion. Critiques have been regularly articulated in The Guardian by commentators such as Mark Almond, Seumas Milne and Jonathan Steele, and more extreme views are circulated on various websites - for instance, Jonathan Mowat, 'The New Gladio In Action? Coup d'État in Disguise: Washington's New World Order "Democratization" Template', at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/MOW502A.html> [13].

Debates about governmental 'democracy promotion' are relevant to this bibliography at two levels: 1. because it is important to assess whether US and western governmental intervention through funding and technical advice has been on so large a scale as to invalidate (or at least undermine) the autonomy of the internal opposition campaigns involved; 2. because provision of nonviolence training and strategic and tactical advice on nonviolent resistance has in some cases come to be associated with 'democracy promotion'.

The references in this section therefore reflect a range of ideological perspectives. Since western 'democracy assistance' has been a source of particular controversy in ex-Soviet and ex-Communist states, major comparative studies under [D.II.1](#) [14] are referenced here under 'See also'.

The website of Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, Stanford University - <http://cddrl.stanford.edu/publications> [15] - lists a series of working papers published in 2008-9 on external influences in transitions to electoral democracy in Chile, Mexico, Poland, Serbia, Turkey and the Ukraine, also many of the articles by Michael McFaul (see below).

Beissinger, Mark, [Promoting democracy: Is exporting revolution a constructive strategy?](#) [16], Dissent, Vol. 53, issue 1 (Winter), 2006, pp. 18-24

A critical assessment that notes the role of neoconservatives in endorsing export of democracy, the dangers of compromising the impartiality of human rights bodies, or intensifying internal ethnic and other conflicts, and the danger of 'packaging, exporting, and spreading democratic revolution like a module across a broad array of settings, irrespective of local circumstances'.

Carothers, Thomas, [The backlash against democracy promotion](#) [17], Foreign Affairs, Vol. 85, issue 2 (March/April), 2006, pp. 55-68

Carothers has written widely on US democratic assistance - see for example , [Revitalizing Democracy Assistance: The Challenge of USAID](#) [18] Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment, , 2009, pp. 66 - and tends to the view that such aid is positive but necessarily limited in its effects.

Dudouet, Véronique ; Clark, Howard, [Nonviolent Civic Action in Support of Human Rights and Democracy](#) [19], EXPO/B/DROI/2008/69 PE407.008, Brussels, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2009, pp. 53

Scholarly study commissioned by the Human Rights Subcommittee of the European Parliament, evaluating EU practice and making recommendations on principles that should guide EU support for nonviolent action for democratization, including concrete proposals on how to make it more effective.



Eriksen, Tor Linne, [Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa](#) [20], Uppsala, Nordiska Afikrainstitutet, 2000, pp. 410

Companion to Morgenstjerne and Sellstrom, below.

Gershman, Carl ; Allen, Michael, [New threats to freedom: The assault on democracy promotion](#) [21], Journal of Democracy, Vol. 17, issue 2 (April), 2006, pp. 36-51

Gershman is the president of the US National Endowment for Democracy. This article lists restrictions introduced by a number of governments on receipt of democracy assistance.

Gratius, Susanne, [Assessing Democracy Assistance: Venezuela](#) [22], Madrid, FRIDE, 2010, pp. 16

Johansen, Jørgen, [External Financing of opposition movements](#) [23], In Clark, [People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity](#) [5] (A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements [6]), London, Pluto Press, pp. 198-205

Critical assessment of external financing in historical perspective.

Kinsman, Jeremy ; Bassuener, Kurt, [A Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support](#) [24], 3rd edition, Washington, DC, Council for a Community of Democracies, 2009, pp. 450

Tips for diplomats on how they can more effectively support local pro-democracy groups facing repressive regimes. Case studies from South Africa, Ukraine, Chile, Belarus, Burma/Myanmar, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

Lahey, George, [Nonviolence training and charges of Western imperialism: A guide for worried activists](#) [25], In Clark, [People Power: Unarmed Resistance and Global Solidarity](#) [5] (A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements [6]), London, Pluto Press, pp. 206-213

Experienced activist trainer poses questions for trainers to ask themselves about their work, and suggests questions for those who denounce nonviolence training as 'pro-imperialist'.

McFaul, Michael, [Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why We should and How We Can](#) [26], Lanham MA, Rowman and Littlefield, 2009, pp. 304

Before becoming US ambassador to Russia (January 2012) McFaul was a professor at Stanford University. A firm advocate of democracy promotion (which he distinguishes from advancing US geostrategic interests), he also argued for the USA re-establish its own civil rights credentials (e.g. after Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo). See: , [Importing revolution: Internal and external factors in Ukraine's 2004 democratic breakthrough](#) [27] In Bunce; McFaul; Stoner-Weiss, [Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World](#) [28] (D. II.1. Comparative Assessments [14]) New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 189-225 .

McKie, Kristin, [The process of donor funding as the cause of social movement decline: A case study of the Barabaig Land Rights Movement in Tanzania](#) [29], Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, IL, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, 2007

Morgenstjerne, Christopher Munthe, [Denmark and National Liberation in Southern Africa: A Flexible Response](#) [30], Uppsala, Nordiska Afikrainstitutet, 2003, pp. 142



Companion to Eriksen and Sellstrom, this section.

Roessler, Philip G., [Donor induced democratization and the privatization of state violence in Kenya and Rwanda](#) [31], *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 37, issue 2 (January), 2005, pp. 207-227

Sellström, Tor, [Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Volume II - Solidarity and Assistance 1970-1994](#) [32], Uppsala, Nordiska Afikrainstitutet, 2002, pp. 912

Companion to Eriksen and Morgenstjerne, above.

Youngs, Richard ; Boonstra, Jos ; Vizoso, Julia Choucair ; Echagüe, Ana ; Jarábik, Balázs ; Kausch, Kristina, [Is the European Union Supporting Democracy in its Neighbourhood?](#) [33], Madrid, FRIDE, 2008, pp. 150

EU 'neighbourhood plans' agreed with neighbouring states link economic cooperation with human rights and democratization. This report includes case studies of how this has been implemented - or not - in Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Ukraine, Belarus and Azerbaijan. [FRIDE](#) [34] has published a range of reports and policy briefs - all available online - with critical analyses of 'democracy promotion', especially by the European Union and its members, including in the context of the 'Arab Spring'.

Zunes, Stephen, [Nonviolent action and pro-democracy struggles](#) [35], *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 24/01/2008,

See also:

Valerie J. Bunce; Sharon L. Wolchik, [Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries](#) [36], ([D. II.1. Comparative Assessments](#) [37]), which discusses fairly sceptically how far even substantial external intervention can influence internal politics and also discuss possible dangers as well as advantages of 'democracy assistance', and some Russian criticisms of western aid: see esp. pp. 21-26, 335-38 and 347-52.

Valerie J. Bunce; Michael McFaul; Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, [Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World](#) [28], ([D. II.1. Comparative Assessments](#) [37]), Part II examines the role of the EU in promoting electoral democracy and economic liberalization in Eastern Europe: pp. 59-104.

Source URL (retrieved on 05/07/2022 - 07:09): <https://civilresistance.info/section/f-external-support-opportunities-problems-and-debates-about-democracy-assistance>

Links

- [1] <https://civilresistance.info/section/f-external-support-opportunities-problems-and-debates-about-democracy-assistance>
- [2] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1973/politics-nonviolent-action>
- [3] <https://civilresistance.info/section/0-not-listed>
- [4] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/1998/activists-across-borders-advocacy-networks-international-politics>
- [5] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/people-power-unarmed-resistance-and-global-solidarity>
- [6] <https://civilresistance.info/section/introduction-nonviolent-action/1-theory-methods-and-examples/1b-strategic-theory-dynamics>
- [7] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2012/people-power-and-political-change-key-issues-and-concepts>
- [8] <https://civilresistance.info/section/introduction-nonviolent-action/1-theory-methods-and-examples/1aii-theories-civil>



- [9] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2011/why-civil-resistance-works-strategic-logic-nonviolent-conflict>
- [10] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2007/justice-ignited-dynamics-backfire>
- [11] <https://civilresistance.info/section/d-resisting-authoritarianism-post-communist-and-post-soviet-regimes>
- [12] <https://civilresistance.info/section/e-resisting-oppressive-dictatorial-military-or-authoritarian-rule/e-v-middle-east-and-north>
- [13] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/MOW502A.html>
- [14] <https://civilresistance.info/section/d-resisting-authoritarianism-post-communist-and-post-soviet-regimes/d-ii-electoral-0>
- [15] <http://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/publications>
- [16] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2006/promoting-democracy-exporting-revolution-constructive-strategy>
- [17] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2006/backlash-against-democracy-promotion>
- [18] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/revitalizing-democracy-assistance-challenge-usaid>
- [19] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/nonviolent-civic-action-support-human-rights-and-democracy>
- [20] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2000/norway-and-national-liberation-southern-africa>
- [21] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2006/new-threats-freedom-assault-democracy-promotion>
- [22] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2010/assessing-democracy-assistance-venezuela>
- [23] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/external-financing-opposition-movements>
- [24] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/diplomats-handbook-democracy-development-support>
- [25] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/nonviolence-training-and-charges-western-imperialism-guide-worried-activists>
- [26] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/advancing-democracy-abroad-why-we-should-and-how-we-can>
- [27] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/importing-revolution-internal-and-external-factors-ukraines-2004-democratic-0>
- [28] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2009/democracy-and-authoritarianism-postcommunist-world>
- [29] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2007/process-donor-funding-cause-social-movement-decline-case-study-barabaig-land-rights>
- [30] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2003/denmark-and-national-liberation-southern-africa-flexible-response>
- [31] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2005/donor-induced-democratization-and-privatization-state-violence-kenya-and-rwanda>
- [32] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2002/sweden-and-national-liberation-southern-africa-volume-ii-solidarity-and-assistance>
- [33] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2008/european-union-supporting-democracy-its-neighbourhood>
- [34] <http://fride.org/publications>
- [35] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2008/nonviolent-action-and-pro-democracy-struggles>
- [36] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2011/defeating-authoritarian-leaders-post-communist-countries>
- [37] <https://civilresistance.info/taxonomy/term/37>