

## United Nations and Democracy Promotion: Liberalism under the Guise of a Neutral Rhetoric

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### Abstract

*The United Nations (UN) has been one of the prominent actors of global democracy promotion efforts, particularly after the end of the Cold War. The UN refrains from openly espousing a certain model of democracy, hence the adoption of a neutral rhetoric by default. However, the UN's neutrality towards different models of democracy is merely a thinly veiled attempt to disguise the inherent liberal character of its democracy promotion agenda. In its essence, democracy is an essentially contested concept, nevertheless, following the end of the Cold War, one specific interpretation of democracy, i.e. liberal democracy has reached a hegemonic status, and UN's democracy promotion agenda has not been spared from this hegemony. Thus, this article's main intent is to show that hegemonic liberal democracy features heavily within UN's democracy promotion, which goes against its neutral rhetoric. The UN's liberal tendency is visible both in UNDP electoral support and in peacebuilding operations which is based on the dual premise of conducting elections along with making target countries' economies more market-friendly.*

**Keywords:** *United Nations, Democracy promotion, Liberal democracy, Essential contestability of democracy*

## Birleşmiş Milletler ve Demokrasi Teşviki: Tarafsız Retorik Altında Liberalizm

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### Öz

Özellikle Soğuk Savaş'ın bitiminden itibaren Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) küresel demokrasi teşviki çabalarının önemli bir aktörü haline gelmiştir. BM, herhangi bir demokrasi modelini açıkça bir şekilde benimsemekten kaçındığından dolayı, BM'nin demokrasi teşviki faaliyetlerinde kâğıt üzerinde tarafsız bir retorik ortaya çıktığı söylenebilir. Ancak BM'nin farklı demokrasi modellerine yönelik takınımış olduğu tarafsızlık BM demokrasi teşvikinin içsel liberal yapısını gizlemeye yönelik basit bir çabadan öteye gitmemektedir. Niteliği itibarıyla demokrasi, özünde tartışmalı bir kavramdır fakat Soğuk Savaş'ın bitimini takip eden süreçte demokrasinin özgü bir formu, yani liberal demokrasi, hegemonik bir statü elde etmiştir ve BM'nin demokrasi teşviki gündemi de bu yükselişten muaf değildir. Dolayısıyla bu makalenin temel amacı, tarafsız retorik aksine, hegemonik liberal demokrasinin BM demokrasi teşvikinde önemli yer tuttuğunu göstermektir. BM'nin liberalizme olan yatkınlığı hem UNDP'nin vermiş olduğu seçim desteğinde hem de seçimlerin düzenlenmesine ek olarak hedef ülkelerin ekonomilerinin pazar ekonomisi mekanikleri etrafında daha fazla şekillenmesi gibi çifte temel dayanağa sahip olan barış inşası operasyonlarında kendini gösterir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Birleşmiş Milletler, Demokrasi teşviki, Liberal demokrasi, Demokrasinin özünde tartışmalılığı*

## Introduction

Ever since the conclusion of the Cold War with the liberal capitalist Western bloc emerging victorious, democracy promotion by international actors has spread like wildfire. Major international actors such as the United States (US), European Union (EU) or relatively minor actors like German *stiftungen* such as Konrad Adenauer or Friedrich Ebert have all set democracy both as an objective and as a condition in their developmental aid. The United Nations (UN) is another major international actor that has been involved in the promotion of democracy in target countries.

It has been stressed that the organization's democracy promotion efforts date back to the decolonization era (Sejdiu and Önsoy, 2014, p. 34). Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996) himself asserted that newly independent states turned to the UN for support in various affairs (p. 2) including legitimation. The UN in return, vowed to respect the "sovereign rights of all peoples" in a UN General Assembly (UNGA) Declaration titled as "Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples" (United Nations General Assembly, 1960).

This "indirect" (Sejdiu and Önsoy, 2014, p. 40) support for the democratic aspirations of the newly decolonized peoples notwithstanding, it is possible to pinpoint the inception of democracy promotion policies as the aftermath of the Cold War, in other words, democracy promotion efforts by the UN did not really take off during the Cold War. In fact, Boutros-Ghali acknowledged that the political atmosphere of the Cold War "effectively truncated" UN's democracy support to its member states (Boutros-Ghali, 1996, p. 13).

The UN conducts its democracy promotion activities mainly through its developmental agency United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). A self-described "global development network" ("Frequently Asked Questions" n.d.), UNDP serves a "lead agency" function for democracy promotion within the UN (Newman, 2004, p. 194) even though other UN bodies, *inter alia*, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Office for Project Services, the UN Development Fund for Women, UN Volunteers, the UN Capital Developmental Fund, the UN Secretariat, are also engaged in the promotion of democratic governance

(Ponzio, 2004, pp. 208-209). As its name suggests, United Nations Electoral Assistance Division (UNEAD) is another important UN body that has provided electoral assistance to many UN members following a formal request. Still, UNEAD's electoral support relies heavily on UNDP's financial and personnel resources (*ibid.*, p. 213).

It has been reported that the UN also engages in democracy promotion through peacekeeping – and also through peacemaking and peacebuilding (Joyner, 1999, pp. 340-341; Santiso, 2002, pp. 555-556) – since democracy is regarded as instrumental in the creation and maintenance of peace (Leininger, 2006, pp. 472-473). However, one could also argue that under certain circumstances, the process of democratization might actually work against the process of peacekeeping. This is particularly the case for countries that are rife with ethnic and sectarian divisions. A notorious example would be Angola. The country saw the resumption of the civil war in 1992, following the failure of UN supervised elections. While not fragmented along sectarian or ethnic lines as was the case in Angola, Algeria could be considered as another example. Algeria plunged into a decade-long civil war following a rapid – and eventually unsuccessful – experimentation with democracy.

This article's main intention is not to examine the UN's democracy promotion in practice, which has been done elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Instead, the emphasis shall be on the conceptual politics of UN democracy promotion. Conceptual politics, as defined by Christopher Hobson and Milja Kurki (2012), are "the ways in which contested concepts – like democracy – are interpreted, used, and fought over by actors, and how certain meanings and definitions come to influence real world phenomena" (p. 3). Democracy is indeed an essentially contested concept in which one conceptualization comes to dominate the others. The other conceptualizations or definitions are branded as radical or simply impractical.

The first part of this article will examine the democracy as a universal but also essentially contested concept and how one interpretation of this universal concept has come to be regarded universal as well. Liberal democracy has reached a hegemonic status for major democracy promotion

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<sup>1</sup> *It goes without saying that the list is not as extensive as the list for other actors of democracy promotion such as the EU or the US (Axelrod, 2005, pp. 19-38; Newman, 2001, pp. 47-64; Leininger, 2010, pp. 63-80).*

actors such as the UK and the US and democracy and liberalism are commonly regarded as complementary despite the fact that these two notions have been historically distinct and early liberals actually had been sceptical towards democracy. The second part will demonstrate how a certain model of democracy – liberal democracy – has come to be regarded as the default model of democracy for the UN, despite the adoption of a neutral rhetoric. This also brings the eschewal of other models. The article will conclude by reaffirming the hegemonic status of liberal democracy both in UN democracy promotion and in democracy promotion in general.

### **Universality of Democracy and Democracy as an Essentially Contested Concept**

In his seminal work on democracy, prominent Indian economist Amartya Sen proclaimed the universality of democracy. According to Sen, democracy has yet to be universally practiced, still, it is now accepted as the right form of governance (Sen, 1999, p. 5). Indeed, many countries, while being authoritarian in nature, try to pass their authoritarian regimes by appealing to democracy. For instance, North Korea, which is infamously known as the ‘hermit kingdom’ for practicing self-imposed isolation, has sustained its totalitarian Juche ideology under the banner of democracy, as the country is officially known as the ‘Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’.

Democracy may have reached a universal status, but this does not necessarily mean that it has become a less controversial concept. Inherently, democracy remains an essentially contested concept. Scottish philosopher and political scientist Walter Bryce Gallie (1955-1956) defines democracy – along with other concepts such as art, social justice and adherence to a religion (p. 180) – as an essentially contested concept, meaning that its usage involves “endless disputes” (ibid., p. 169). Others such as Milja Kurki (2010, p. 364), David Collier, Fernando Daniel Hidalgo and Andra Olivia Maciuceanu (2006, p. 222), Peter Burnell (2000, p. 22) and Michael W. Spicer (2018) also assert that democracy’s conceptualization could take different forms in accordance with one’s very own ideology. We definitely ascribe different, often contradictory meanings whenever we set off to define an elaborate concept such as democracy. As has been pointed out

(Gray, 1977, p. 343) this may very well cast us into the depths of relativism and even nihilism. Nevertheless, we could still find common ground even in an essentially contested concept. For instance, in democracy, this could be the notion 'rule by the people'. Indeed, in Joseph Schumpeter's (2010) elitist model of democracy, people do not rule directly, but they rule nonetheless, in virtue of the representatives they select through free and fair elections. In directer forms of democracy, on the other hand, people rule rather directly.

Democracy is an essentially contested concept, meaning that rival conceptualizations exist side-by-side, with no exact way of determining whichever model is superior over the others. However, one particular understanding of democracy, liberal democracy, has been the dominant model of democracy in world politics including democracy promotion, following the end of the Cold War. Liberal democracy owes much of its 'success' to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the "liberal triumphalism" that followed it (Kurki, 2010, p. 366).

Many authors including Marc Plattner (2010, p. 84) and Kurki (2010; 2014, p. 133) have taken notice of the superiority attached to liberal democracy. While Kurki (2010, p. 365) acknowledges the prominence of the liberal model, she nevertheless stops short of defining liberal democracy as 'hegemonic' particularly pertaining to democracy promotion. Still, attributing a hegemonic status to liberal democracy would not be an exaggeration. Especially the US democracy promotion agenda is replete with the merits of liberalism or liberal democracy. For instance, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), one of the largest developmental agencies in the world as far as budget is concerned, makes use of a liberal democracy index in order to determine whether a country is self-reliant enough to stop receiving aid ("The journey to Self-reliance" n.d.). Likewise, another important US democracy promotion actor, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) openly lists "gradual consolidation of liberal democracy" as one of its objectives – the other being the strengthening of institutions and procedures of electoral democracy in order to make sure free and fair elections take place – ("How We Work" n.d.).

US politicians seem to concur with the US democracy promotion instruments' emphasis on liberal democracy. Barack Obama, the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, for example, never explicitly endorsed promotion of liberal democracy, nevertheless he maintained a stable rhetoric<sup>2</sup> about democracy promotion throughout his tenure, despite some observers such as Fareed Zakaria (2009) were initially sceptical about Obama's commitment to democracy promotion. Obama's outlook for democracy promotion was characterized to be compatible with the liberal internationalist understanding of democracy promotion (Bouchet, 2011, p. 573), which entails spreading of liberal ideas, or liberal democracy in general, through democracy promotion.

Obama's predecessors George W. Bush and Bill Clinton were more eager to link democracy promotion with the spread of liberal values. In the 2000 security strategy that was issued in December 1999, Clinton clearly states that a "genuine, lasting democracy" requires liberal principles such as freedom of religion and belief or open and competitive economic structures (Clinton, 1999, p. 25). Moreover, 'rule by the majority'<sup>3</sup>, which is commonly associated with democracy (Saunders, 2010, p. 148) is labelled as "oppressive" and instead the liberal mechanisms that protect from majority rule are favoured (Clinton, 1999, p. 25). Clinton's priorities provide us a clear picture about the way in which he gives precedence to liberalism over democracy.

George W. Bush's approach towards democracy promotion could be symbolized by instrumentalism and pragmatism. As repeatedly reported by the Bush administration, one of the culprits of global terrorism that manifested itself with the 9/11 attacks was the lack of freedom in the Middle East. For the Bush administration, promoting democracy as a means to deal with the lack of freedom was akin to "draining the swamp" (Alesandri, Hassan and Reinert, 2005). The Bush administration's rhetorical

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<sup>2</sup> Obama continued the legacy of democracy promotion that prevailed during George W. Bush era. For instance, the first security strategy issued by the Obama Administration in 2010 justified promotion of democracy by making a connection between democracy promotion and stability (Obama, 2010, p. 37). Furthermore, in the 2015 national security strategy, Obama reiterated the importance of supporting "emerging democracies" (Obama, 2015, p. 20).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Dahl's (1998) polyarchy, which is offered as the second-best alternative of a democracy, is a portmanteau of two Greek words, which are poly (many) and arkhe (rule) (p. 90).

support<sup>4</sup> for democracy promotion need not warrant further examination, instead we should focus on what the concepts ‘lack of freedom’ or ‘lack of democracy’ – which were being used interchangeably by the Bush administration – entail. What the Bush administration had in mind about democracy promotion in order to overcome ‘lack of democracy’ in the Middle East was clearly a liberal prescription in which procedural aspects of a democracy took the priority. Post-war Iraq clearly demonstrates this prioritization, parliamentary elections took place only one and a half years after Baghdad fell to the US-led coalition.

Whereas the US is more candid about the liberal character of its democracy promotion, the EU remains shy about it (Kurki, 2013, p. 168). According to Kurki (ibid.), the EU is shy in the sense that it deliberately fudges the question of what kind of democracy it promotes by adopting a “fuzzy” discourse (p. 147). In other words, the EU refrains from explicitly adopting a certain model – say liberal democracy – by making peripheral references to other models and/or values such as “solidarity, labour rights, participation and social welfare” (ibid. p. 168) that could be associated with other models such as social democracy. While the EU’s discourse evokes a sense of plurality, the underlying logic of EU democracy promotion, which actually manifests itself in the practice, could be characterized by neoliberalism (Cevheri, 2018, p. 142; Kurki, 2013, 168; Reynaert, 2011, pp. 627-628).

Prioritization of a certain economic politico-economic model of democracy<sup>5</sup> i.e. liberal democracy by the EU and the US does not mean that alternative models of democracy are less viable. While not as common as liberal democracy, other politico-economic models of democracy offer alternatives to liberal democracy, at least on the theoretical level. Kurki (2010) puts forward 3 main models of democracy: 1) the liberal representational model, 2) Marxist/socialist delegative model, 3) social democratic model; and also, four additional models: 4) participatory democracy, 5) radical democracy, 6) deliberative democracy, 7) cosmopolitan democracy

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<sup>4</sup> American democracy support towards the Middle Eastern countries has never been pursued vigorously mainly because of the democratization-stability dilemma. What happened instead was the limited pressure exerted towards friendly but authoritarian regimes such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia, which only led to cosmetic and shallow changes, as was the case in Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> Kurki envisages democracy as something not confined to the political arena alone, all models of democracy have an economic aspect as well (Kurki, 2013, 12; Kurki, 2011, 1574)

(pp. 372-373). Furthermore, Kurki (ibid.) also mentions local/regional challenges to conventional models such as Islamic or Confucian conceptualizations (p. 373).

These alternative models do not feature in the democracy promotion agenda of the UN. Neither the rhetoric nor the actual practice of UN democracy promotion ventures into other alternatives models. Democracy's essential contestability is only implicitly suggested by arguing that the UN – or its respective democracy promotion units – does not favour a certain model of democracy over the others. In other words, the UN adopts a neutral rhetoric in its democracy promotion. The next section shall illustrate that the UN democracy promotion campaign is actually based on the liberal representative model of democracy under the guise of a neutral rhetoric.

### **Rhetoric vs Practice: Liberalism Under the Guise of a Neutral Rhetoric**

*An Agenda for Democratization*, which is a position paper issued by the former Secretary General of the UN, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, provides perhaps the most evident example regarding UN's approach towards different models of democracy. The paper justifies the non-adoption of a specific model of democracy by claiming that "there is no one model of democratization or democracy suitable to all societies" (Boutros-Ghali, 1996, p. 53). This aloofness towards 'one-size-fits-all' mentality is elaborated by asserting that every society's path towards democracy is different, depending on "historical circumstances, economic situation, and the political will and commitment of its members" (ibid.).

This supposed neutrality of the UN was reiterated in another official UN document, issued by the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon. According to Ban (2009), the UN's conceptualization of democracy is "holistic", meaning that it embodies both the procedural and the substantive aspects of democracy (p. 2). Nevertheless, "there is no single model of democracy" and "the organization has never sought to export or promote any particular national or regional model of democracy" (ibid.).

Ban's position towards democracy and its models is partly influenced by an UNGA resolution. UNGA Resolution 62/7 reaffirms that similarities aside, "there is no single model of democracy and that democracy does

not belong to any country or region” (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). However, the same resolution also reaffirms that democracy is based on “the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives” (ibid.). So, the UNGA accepts that all models of democracy differ from each other, but they still have a common ground – the freely expressed will of the people – upon which each model is founded.

We have to remind ourselves that not making a choice is actually a choice in itself. The UN abstains from openly espousing a single model of democracy and it merely notes the multitude of different models of democracy without going into specifics. However, by assuming neutrality, the UN skips all the conceptual debates about democracy and instead embraces the dominant model of democracy in the world politics – and in democracy promotion – that is liberal democracy and the values this model entails. The UN’s tacit acceptance of the liberal or the representative model reveals itself in the actual democracy promotion that the UN conducts. The following paragraphs shall examine the UN democracy promotion agenda in action and how that could be associated with the liberal conceptualization of democracy.

The UN Charter, one of the most fundamental – if not the most fundamental – documents of the UN, does not explicitly make any references to democracy. Still, the document itself starts with the phrase “we the peoples of the United Nations”, thus it has been underlined, for example by Sejdiu and Önsoy (2014, p. 38) and even by Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1996) himself – although rather implicitly – (p. 12) that the UN Charter is conducive to the democracy promotion endeavours of the UN. On the contrary, Simon Chesterman, Ian Johnstone and David M. Malone (2016) believe that the UN Charter does not provide the UN an explicit mandate for promoting democracy (p. 455).

Moreover, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) contends that by virtue of their right of self-determination, every individual has the right to determine their political status. This, again, is an indirect reference to democracy. Nevertheless, another major UN document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is more articulate re-

garding democracy. According to the Declaration, the basis of the authority of a government is the will of the people (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The Declaration still does not enunciate democracy directly, but it is clear that it confers every single human being the right to live under a democratic regime and this could be considered as the closest thing to a mandate for democracy promotion.

How does the UN make use of the mandate, conferred by the relevant UN documents? Or to put it differently, through what instruments or strategies does the UN promote/consolidate democracy in its member states? As has been mentioned before and as was mentioned by the so-called Brahimi Report, peacebuilding is one of the ways promoting democracy in target countries through technical assistance (United Nations, 2000).

Following the end of the Cold War, the UN peacebuilding operations have proliferated, finally breaking free of the Cold War deadlock that effectively incapacitated the UN Security Council. Peacebuilding, which is defined by the UN Secretary-General's Policy Committee as a "range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development" ("What is Peacebuilding?" n.d.) is rather a comprehensive concept that puts emphasis on capacity building and this is what basically separates peacebuilding from other similar concepts such as peacekeeping.

The UN peacebuilding agenda hinges on a liberal mythos that treats dual liberalization as a panacea for pre-conflict and post-conflict societies. By dual liberalization, I mean the liberalization of a target country's political system while at the same time exposing the same country to market economy dynamics. Roland Paris (2010) describes how this dual liberalization logic is infused within UN's peacebuilding agenda, according to him, that agenda has two core elements: 1) promoting liberal democratic governing systems, 2) market oriented economic growth (p. 337). Liberalism has been in the heart of UN's peacebuilding agenda right from the beginning, Paris (2004) reports that a "naive version of Wilsonianism" informed the peacebuilding missions of the 1990s, which the author deemed it necessary to criticize (p. 7). The Brahimi report itself makes references to the liberal representative model of democracy, according to the report,

technical assistance for democracy includes electoral assistance and support for free media (United Nations, 2000). Indeed, a concept such as free media is generally considered as an important component of liberal democratic regimes.

UN's developmental agency UNDP provides another avenue for democracy promotion. UNDP puts a particular emphasis on elections, especially in Africa. According to a report issued by UNDP, in the last two decades, UNDP has assisted more than 80 countries in the organization of elections, amounting to a budget more than \$2.5 billion (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). In order to achieve democratic consolidation, UNDP's electoral support is complemented with support for human rights and political freedoms such as freedoms of expression, association, assembly and movement (ibid.), hence it is safe to assume that UNDP's approach towards democracy is clearly closer to the liberal conceptualization of democracy in which free and fair elections go hand in hand with liberal political and civil rights.

The UN promotes liberal democracy in all but name. While the EU at least rhetorically makes a commitment towards certain aspects of social democracy, the UN's neutral rhetoric is in stark contrast with the actual democracy promotion that it conducts. Strides towards social democracy or social democratic values are not the only missing things in UN democracy promotion, no other politico-economic model of democracy ever features in UN's democracy promotion campaign. This includes radical democracy, which argues for the extension of liberal democracy (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 176). According to Chantal Mouffe (2009), one of the two authors that formulated the idea of radical democracy, our understanding of democracy should extend in the sense that it should not see other conceptualizations of democracy as "enemies to be destroyed" but instead as "adversaries whose ideas can be fought against, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be put into question" (p. 551). So, Mouffe basically argues that different ideas about the meaning of democracy should take the form of "agonism" instead of "antagonism" (ibid.).

Radical democracy's exclusion is accompanied by the exclusion of other politico-economic conceptualizations of democracy. There are no references whatsoever to delegative democracy, which envisions a model that is not as direct as the system in a Greek city-state, but still offers more

responsive political institutions<sup>6</sup> (Kurki, 2013, p. 60). Likewise, local/regional interpretations of democracy such as Islamic democracy or Confucian democracy go unnoticed. Finally, feminist democracy, while perhaps not a separate model of democracy per se, is still important for its criticism towards “institutionalized, hegemonic (often repressive), free-market based” model of contemporary democracy, i.e. liberal democracy “that has often been utilized in the service of repressive national and international state practices” (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997, pp. xxix-xxx). Nevertheless, feminist criticism towards liberal democracy, is also omitted from the rhetoric and practice of UN democracy promotion.

## Conclusion

Liberal democracy is a *sui generis* product of a certain historic interaction between liberalism and democracy. It is a unique combination of these two concepts, specific to a certain region or civilization, i.e. the Western civilization. As Fareed Zakaria (2007) puts it, liberalism and democracy are “interwoven in the Western political fabric” while this is not necessarily the case for the rest world (p. 17). Moreover, even in the West, democracy and liberalism merged only half a century ago (*ibid.*), as has been mentioned, in the past, liberalism has been distinct from democracy, in liberal but non-democratic – or partially democratic – societies, the franchise gradually expanded, it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that many countries started to switch to universal suffrage.

The fact that a certain model of democracy has gained a hegemonic status, particularly among the actors of democracy promotion does not mean that other models or conceptualizations of democracy has stopped being a viable option. This is also not to suggest that liberal democracy itself should be discarded for the sake of other models. Like every other model, liberal democracy contributes to the debate about democracy and

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<sup>6</sup> While Kurki's (2013) understanding of delegative democracy is a directer alternative of liberal democracy inspired by the ideas of Karl Marx (pp. 57-58), different authors may attribute different meanings to delegative democracy. For instance, according to the German political scientist Wolfgang Merkel (2004), delegative democracy is a diminished subtype of a democracy, a ‘defective democracy’ (p. 33), which lacks full legislative and judiciary control over the executive branch (*ibid.*, p. 50).

just like every other model, there could be a context in which liberal democracy's 'rule by the people' core, supplemented by liberal rights, has a democratizing potential. After all, recognizing the essential contestability of democracy does not necessarily mean that the democratic potential of the liberal democracy is lower than the other models.

However, essential contestability of democracy is visibly missing from the agendas of major democracy promotion actors. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of the US. While the US openly accepts the liberal character of its democracy promotion, the EU and the UN are more ambiguous regarding essential contestability of democracy. The EU makes occasional references to other models of democracy such as social democracy, which might give us the impression that the EU indeed recognizes the fact that democracy is an essentially contested concept. As has been mentioned, however, the EU's democracy promotion policy is actually inherently liberal. The UN, on the other hand, conceals the true character of its democracy promotion through the adoption of a neutral rhetoric. Upon closer inspection, however, the UN's neutral rhetoric turns out to be false, just like the EU, the UN's democracy promotion policy is inherently liberal.

We, as scholars of democracy promotion should be aware of the hazards that may arise should the debates about essential contestability of democracy come to a halt. A healthy debate about the meaning of democracy is vital, lest one model of democracy take a hegemonic form. A certain model of democracy taking a hegemonic form might bring the imposition of the values that model entails. This kind of an imposition might not really be democratic if it goes against the wishes of the majority of the people since in its essence, democracy is about the principle 'rule by the people', or if we approach democracy from a Dahlian perspective, it is about the principle 'rule by the many'.

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