

# The Globalization of Democracy and Its Implications

The character of international affairs today is shaped by the coincidence of three key factors: the primacy of American global power, the global appeal of democracy, and the seeming success of the free-market economic system's triumph over its statist competitors.

—Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Democracy's Uncertain Triumph"

With the onset of the current era of globalization, there has been a concomitant rise in the number of democratic states in the world. This increase can be largely attributed to the interrelationships between American primacy, the universal allure of democracy, and the success of the free-market economies that Brzezinski has identified as the defining character of international affairs prior to September 11, 2001.<sup>1</sup> Add to that the backlash that has arisen against these dimensions of the era of globalization, and one arrives at a close portrayal of the post-9/11 international system.

In this chapter, I assume that the causal relationships between these four phenomena flow in multiple directions. In particular, I presuppose that globalization of the international system has contributed to the spread of democracy throughout the world; yet this assumption is not meant to detract from the admitted influence that domestic variables have on democratization, nor from the reality that the initial spread of democracy preceded the era of globalization by more than a century.

That said, not only has globalization heightened international pressure on domestic political systems to conform to what is widely considered a universal system of democratic government, but the increased interconnectedness of communications through advances in technology has provided citizens of closed and semi-open states with a taste of what democracy has to offer. As a likely consequence, domestic demand for democratization has risen, along

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with the stability, peace, prosperity, and protection of human rights that many expect it to yield.

This increase in domestic and international pressure to democratize has arguably led to unprecedented growth in the number of democracies in the world. In 1991, Samuel Huntington famously contended that the international system was in the midst of the "third wave" of democracy.<sup>2</sup> By this he meant that more states were in transition toward democratic governance than were moving away from it toward authoritarianism. Five years later, Larry Diamond asked whether the third wave was over and concluded that there was neither a wave moving toward nor away from further democratization, but instead an emergent trend of illiberal democratic stagnation.<sup>3</sup> Along the same lines, but more recently, Marina Ottaway and Howard J. Wiarda have argued that the 1990s ushered in an upsurge in the number of semiauthoritarian regimes that institutionalized hybrid or mixed systems with elections and some degree of protection for civil and political liberties, but no room for real political competition or genuine pluralism.<sup>4</sup>

The globalization of democracy and the idea that it has yielded a large number of semidemocratic states raises several issues that I seek to address in this chapter. In order to do so, I will first discuss definitional challenges and provide a brief overview of the state of democracy in the world today; then I will consider in greater detail area-specific experiences in democratization, with a view to assessing the universality of democracy; and finally I will evaluate the merits of Diamond, Wiarda, and Ottaway's assertions that the third wave has given way to the rise of semidemocracy, consider the implications of an increasing "gray zone," and conclude with policy recommendations.

### **Democracy Defined**

Any discussion of the globalization of democracy must first address definitional challenges. Democracy can be defined, based on its Greek roots, as rule by the people. However, this definition has many variants. Locke argues that people have natural rights to life, liberty, and property in the state of nature. Legitimate government must be created by consent of the people through a social contract in order to ensure protection of those rights.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, Rousseau contends that the only way individuals can be truly free is to subject themselves to the "general will" of the community.<sup>6</sup> Thus, each person should yield freedom to a sovereign who will rule on behalf of the general will for the good of the community, a formula often used to justify authoritarianism. This Rousseauian assertion, widely adhered to throughout Latin America, is in contrast to Locke's participatory social contract and proposal that government can protect rights by effective institutional design.

Conceptions of democracy have evolved and expanded over time, as exemplified in those offered by Dahl, Schumpeter, Huntington, and Diamond.<sup>7</sup> In the tradition of Schumpeter, Huntington offers a procedural definition. He defines a system as democratic to the extent that leaders are elected through fair and competitive, nearly universal elections. Dahl goes further in his description of democracy as a system of open and inclusive government, constituted by several components: effective participation based on organized contestation through fair and free elections, as well as freedom of speech and assembly; voting equality; enlightened understanding; and the right of virtually all adults to vote and run for office.

More recently, Diamond has argued that democracy must be broken down into different types, because a singular definition does not reflect reality. As a baseline, he proposes two types: electoral democracy in accordance with Schumpeter and Huntington, and liberal democracy in accordance with Dahl. Electoral democracies select leaders via universal popular vote in multiparty elections that are both regular and competitive. In contrast, liberal democracy goes further, to include vertical and horizontal accountability, spheres of civil society and private life that are insulated from state control, provisions for civic and political pluralism, and the rule of law with a supreme constitution. Countries that exhibit most or all of these elements of liberal democracy, that have built mature democratic institutions, and that govern relatively effectively are considered to be consolidated democracies. In them, power has typically been transferred between opposing parties at least twice through free and fair elections, and there is no other means through which authorities seek to attain power.

The number of further subtypes is as large as the number of democracy experts who conceptualize them. However, it is important to at least distinguish between democratizing states and semidemocracies. Both categories of regimes are captured in the "partly free" subgroup identified by Freedom House and used throughout this chapter.<sup>8</sup> It includes states that are in the process of democratizing, but also includes semidemocracies that lie somewhere in between autocracy and mature democracy, and are not moving toward democratic consolidation. These semidemocratic states are identified, for example, by Diamond as "electoral authoritarian" regimes and by Ottaway as "semiauthoritarian" regimes.<sup>9</sup> Such mixed states are stuck in a seemingly permanent limbo between democracy and authoritarianism. They feature elections and some liberal institutions, but opposition candidates have no chance of winning. In addition, governance is often weak, and although there is some room for political opposition, there is wide variance in the protection of civil liberties and the objective rule of law. Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East are full of such partial or semidemocratic regimes. Indeed, such mixed sys-

tem is the majority in the third world and constitute what Carothers refers to as the "gray zone."<sup>10</sup>

The discussion that follows uses data compiled by Freedom House that categorizes states as "free," "partly free," and "not free." This is arguably an oversimplification of the status of democracy throughout the world, but it serves the purposes of this chapter well. Although all states categorized as free are not necessarily consolidated liberal democracies, they are well on their way to that point, with not only competitive elections but also many if not all of the characteristics of democracy identified by Dahl and liberal democracy identified by Diamond. The category of partly free states does not distinguish between semidemocratic and democratizing states. However, it does provide an estimate of semidemocratic states, because the number of semiauthoritarian and illiberal democracies is not likely greater than the number of states categorized as partly free. It is safe to assume that the gray zone is at most as large as the partly free category; indeed it is probably smaller given the number of democratizing states that this category includes. Finally, those states listed as not free have many of the characteristics of authoritarian regimes, with at most only nominal elections as well as minimal if any protection of civil liberties and political rights. Based on these conclusions and for the sake of simplicity, the sections that follow interchange the terms *democracy* and *liberal democracy* with the free category, *semidemocracy* with the partly free category, and *authoritarian states* with the not free category.

### The Record: An Overview of the State of Democracy in the World Today

Currently, 46 percent of the countries in the world are liberal democracies, 30 percent are semidemocracies, and 24 percent are authoritarian.<sup>11</sup> That is a 21 percent increase in the number of liberal democracies since the third wave began in 1974 as marked by Huntington, with the overthrow of the Portuguese dictatorship and Portugal's subsequent democratic consolidation. It is a 4 percent decrease in the number of semidemocratic countries, and a 17 percent decrease in the number of authoritarian countries.

Further, in the ten years since Diamond proposed the end of the third wave and the beginning of a period of stagnation, the number of democracies in the world has continued to rise. From 1995 to 2005, there was a 6 percent increase in the number of liberal democracies, a 2 percent decrease in semidemocracies, and a 4 percent decrease in authoritarian countries. Strikingly, of those countries that have broken through to become liberal democracies in the past ten years, only one, Ghana, has made the leap all the way from authoritarian state to liberal democracy, and none have made the entire reverse slide to au-

thoritarianism. The trend has in fact been one of partial movement toward freedom, without an overall stagnation in the gray zone of illiberal democracy and semiauthoritarianism.

In sum, the world is still being transformed by the third wave of democracy. Neither a reverse wave nor a period of illiberal or semiauthoritarian stagnation has begun. However, the question remains whether democratic government is universal. If so, it is expected that globalization will continue to contribute to the further expansion of democracy. If democracy is not universal, the world is probably more likely to reach a democratic saturation point and experience a rise in backlash to democracy before the onset of another reverse wave. At that saturation point the gray zone may begin to increase in size as autocrats yield to global pressures of liberalization but resist the full leap to liberal democracy. Although the record indicates that we have yet to reach that point, such a growth of the gray zone would have dangerous implications. The following sections address each part of this proposition in turn.

### Is Democracy Universal?

As the review of the record above revealed, since the start of the third wave, more democracies have emerged by far than other types of regimes. However, there has also been positive and negative movement in and out of the gray zone. While some states have remained semidemocratic, several have made their way into liberal democracy. Although the net results are gains for freedom, the question remains whether liberal democracy is universal.

The Western world was the birthplace of democracy and is now composed entirely of liberal democracies. However, the rest of the world has had a far more mixed experience with this form of government. Many view the future of democracy in Africa as hopeless, in the Middle East and north Africa as dim, in Asia as uncertain, in Latin America as fragile, and in Central and Eastern Europe as a combination of continued success and regression. Does this mean that democracy is not universal? The answer to this question will be based on the following review of the democratic experience in each of these regions.

#### Africa

Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind most of the rest of the world, with the exception of the Middle East. The vast majority of countries in this area (77 percent) is either only partly free (48 percent) or not free at all (29 percent).<sup>12</sup> This percentage is far greater than the 54 percent of states worldwide that fall into either of those categories. Botswana, South Africa, and per-

haps now Namibia serve among the best examples of freedom in the region, but authoritarian states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo that have attempted to democratize have been plagued with violence and instability.

The bleak picture of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa is often attributed to the ethnic division and economic underdevelopment that plague the region.<sup>13</sup> A record of ineffective (even failed) governance, corruption, and ethnic violence puts the future of democracy there in question. However, despite the disadvantages that ethnic divisions and underdevelopment may pose, the region is arguably liberalizing at no slower a rate than that of the rest of the free world.

As Woldemariam suggests, "the single most significant fact of political existence in Africa [is] the artificiality of the national borders and the consequent problem of cultural and linguistic disunity."<sup>14</sup> Berman et al. likewise contend that "the issue of how sub-national ethnic communities and identities can co-exist with the development of universal citizenship, national identity and strong national democratic institutions remains the enduring dilemma of African politics."<sup>15</sup> Ethnicity in Africa poses a significant challenge to democratization on two dimensions.<sup>16</sup> Ethnic groups there are dominated by a hierarchical system of responsibilities that contrasts sharply with the equality and liberty dimensions of Western liberal democracy. Further, ethnic leaders are by necessity resource-maximizing patrons for their own groups; therefore, they are generally not interested in combating corruption or protecting minority rights. Colonialism reinforced and even worsened this reality through ethnically defined (and in some cases artificially created) administrative units. The resulting "politics of the belly" has created clientelist institutions and patronage relationships that make ineffective governance and what Westerners call corruption the norm.<sup>17</sup>

Although arguably reinforced by ethnic clientelism (and vice versa), low levels of economic development pose a further challenge to the prospects for democracy in sub-Saharan Africa. As Rostow's theory of the preconditions for democracy asserts, states must progress through several stages of economic development before democratic liberalization and effective governance can concomitantly be achieved. He contends that "the break-up of traditional societies is based on the convergence of motives of private profit with a new sense of affronted nationhood and of enlarged human horizons."<sup>18</sup> Although many scholars have refuted the existence of economic preconditions for democracy, the mutually reinforcing paucity of democracy and development in sub-Saharan Africa are hard to ignore. As long as the resource curse continues, in which the export of vast natural resources such as diamonds continues to support kleptocratic regimes, it is only natural to remain skeptical about the advance of freedom in the region.<sup>19</sup>

That said, one must not forget that independence in sub-Saharan Africa was achieved only about forty years ago. Ethnic division and economic underde-

velopment pose great challenges to liberal democracy in the region; however, democratic consolidation usually takes several decades at the least. Although much of Africa appears currently fixed in authoritarianism and semiauthoritarianism, Africans must find their own distinct solutions for the hurdles that lie in their path toward democratic development. The way forward may not resemble other democratic success stories in the world, but it is premature to conclude that liberal democracy is not likely to be achieved throughout the region eventually.

### *The Middle East and North Africa*

Skepticism over the prospects for democracy in the Middle East and North Africa has been rooted in beliefs in the resource curse and Islamic exceptionalism. Although the West supports oil-rich but authoritarian Saudi Arabia and questions unfair elections in semiauthoritarian Egypt, skepticism has been further compounded by instability and violence in democratizing Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon.<sup>20</sup> Only one state, Israel, accounts for the 6 percent of free countries in the region. Partly free countries make up 33 percent, whereas the remaining 61 percent is not free.<sup>21</sup>

As with Sub-Saharan Africa, the resource curse is an often-cited impediment to advancements in democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. With economies dependent on the export of oil, nondemocratic governments function without taxing citizens. High incomes and small populations enable governments to provide for the basic needs of their citizens. Officials thus have little incentive to be representative, and the citizens make few demands for government accountability.

Although high levels of per capita income often tend to be correlated with democratic development, this is not necessarily the case in the Middle East and North Africa. Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, for example, each have a per capita income greater than 12,000 U.S. dollars.<sup>22</sup> This is well above the threshold typically thought to aid, if not lead to, democratization from within. Of these, only Bahrain and Kuwait are partly free or semidemocratic, but without competitive elections. The rest remain authoritarian.

The other key factor thought to contribute to the lack of democratic governance in the region is Muslim exceptionalism—the idea that Islam and democracy are incompatible. However, the Quran does call for mutual consultation among leaders and governments. This can have, and in practice has had, divergent interpretations. These range from the idea that kings must seek the advice of a small group of elites to a call for consultation of the citizenry through representative government. Those who believe in the latter construct deem democracy not only compatible, but required by Islam.

Further, Stepan and Robertson have made a strong case that the challenge to democracy in the Middle East is Arab exceptionalism, not Muslim exceptionalism.<sup>23</sup> They find that states with non-Arab Muslim majorities have greater electoral competition than do states with Arab Muslim majorities. Their evidence suggests that non-Arab Muslim states are twenty times more likely to be electorally competitive than their Arab counterparts. Prime examples of this are Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Mali—all of which hold competitive elections and are considered to be free, but are neither Arab nor in the Middle East. Although this is a compelling argument, Iran is notable as a critical outlier. This non-Arab Muslim majority, authoritarian, and potentially nuclear state is one of the most powerful in the Middle East. Further, the idea of Arab exceptionalism only stokes the fire of skepticism regarding the potential for democracy to succeed in the Middle East.

#### Asia

Democracy has been far more successful in Asia than in Africa or the Middle East. By now, 41 percent of the region is free, 31 percent is partly free, and 28 percent is not free.<sup>24</sup> The idea of Asian exceptionalism based on the "Asian values" of hierarchical social structures and communitarianism has been largely rejected as democracy continues to spread in the region. The "Confucianism of everyday life" in East Asia seems to have a higher probability of continued longevity than does "political Confucianism" in governance.<sup>25</sup> However, obstacles to democracy remain. The majority of countries in Asia continue to be either partly free or not free, and the political fate of communist China, arguably the rising world superpower, is yet to be determined.

The greatest challenge to a concise overview of the state of democracy in Asia lies in the diversity of the region. The Asian values debate gained momentum in the early and mid-1990s, when exceptional levels of economic development occurred despite—or as some argue, because of—strict authoritarian control over societies and economies, particularly in East and Southeast Asia. However, the Asian financial crisis that started in Japan and then Thailand in 1997 led many in the region to question the tight and opaque relationships between government, business, and banking sectors. The crisis has been blamed not only on international demands for austerity and privatization by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, but also on corruption protected by nontransparent authoritarian and weak democratic institutions.<sup>26</sup> Discontent with mismanagement and corruption yielded increased demands for democratic reform following the financial crisis, most notably in Muslim-majority Indonesia with the 1998 revolution that toppled the authoritarian Suharto regime and began the process of democratization.

Further, Japan, although free and prosperous, has been governed almost continuously by the same political party since 1955.<sup>27</sup> Democracy in the Philippines has recently lost ground as a result of rampant election fraud and political intimidation. Indonesian democracy remains shaky. China has transitioned to a market economy over the past thirty years but remains an authoritarian, centralized, one-party government that allows almost no space for any sort of political participation. In the south, India is the lone free state, despite pervasive poverty and a traditional society based on an antiegalitarian, hierarchical caste system. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are semidemocratic electoral democracies while the rest of South Asia, from Pakistan to Tibet, remains staunchly authoritarian.

Despite many social and, in some cases, economic obstacles to democratization, the Asian region as a whole continues to experience the spread of democracy. The challenges posed by authoritarian and communitarian values of Confucianism, as well as the hierarchical caste system of India have been largely overcome as several unique brands of Asian democracy have emerged. There is no reason to believe that this trend will not continue, although China, the giant red elephant that cannot be ignored, shows little prospect for political liberalization in the near future.

#### Latin America

Democracy has spread like wildfire throughout Latin America and the Caribbean during the third wave. The percentage of free countries in the region more than doubled, from 33 percent in 1975 to 67 percent today, as that of partly free countries has declined from 48 percent to 27 percent.<sup>28</sup> Only two countries remain not free: Haiti and Cuba. On the surface, the gains for freedom appear impressive. However, this apparent victory for democracy has failed to meet expectations insofar as it has not alleviated the harsh reality of widespread social inequality, racism, crime, corruption, and poverty.

Howard Wiarda has long argued that academics and U.S. politicians who embraced the Washington Consensus approach to the region—democracy, free trade, and open markets—were overzealous in their optimism.<sup>29</sup> This is because, like Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean are caught between the pulls of globalization/modernization and a centuries-old colonial legacy. The shortcomings of democracy in the region may very well be traced back to the colonial legacy of authoritarian political structures, hierarchical divisions between classes, and a very minimal capacity for effective governance. Vestiges still remain of the church-military-landowners triumvirate that dominated political and social life throughout the area following independence; so does the Latin American version of the political philosophy and system of corporatism that grants control of civil society to a strong state.<sup>30</sup>

However, unlike Africa, much of Latin America and the Caribbean built the foundations of Rousseau-style democracy nearly two hundred years ago, following independence. Many attribute the region's embrace of democracy in the third wave to this prior experience with democratic governance. Although the public is dissatisfied with democracy's frequent ineffectiveness and meager economic and social reform, so far that has not been reflected in a repudiation of democracy itself.<sup>31</sup> Despite a rise in support for populist political leaders, a reverse wave in the region does not appear eminent. One must not forget that democratic development takes time, even multiple generations, and most of the region started the process this time around less than thirty years ago. Thus far, democracy throughout Latin America and the Caribbean has taken its own unique form—one that incorporates a mixture of strong-man politics, corporatism, patrimonialism, and now populism.

It may be hard to turn a blind eye to several discouraging realities in the region: Chávez allows almost no space for political opposition in Venezuela and is cozying up to authoritarian leaders throughout the world; Haiti is a failed state; Castro has recently lived through major surgery to rule Cuba another day; and the drug trade continues increasingly to infiltrate politics throughout the Eastern Caribbean. However, more than two-thirds of Latin America and the Caribbean lives in freedom. Democratic Mexico, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic, to name a few, have survived devastating economic crises, and populist movements have yet to give way to a radical Left that might potentially destabilize the region. Democracy may not be progressing as quickly as initially expected, but it is by no means in retreat. The possibility remains that current discontent with democratic governance in Latin America and the Caribbean may yield positive results, if stability holds and governments more often respond with capacity-building and reform measures.

#### *Eastern Europe and Eurasia*

From Poland's solidarity movement and Czechoslovakia's velvet revolution in the late 1980s to the more recent color revolutions of Georgia (2003 Rose Revolution), Ukraine (2004 Orange Revolution), and Kyrgyzstan (2005 Tulip Revolution), revolutionary democrats have transformed the former Soviet Union and its satellite states, by relatively peaceful means. However, it should not come as a surprise that, in the short time since regional frontrunner Poland ousted its communist leaders from power through elections, much of eastern Europe and Eurasia still has a long way to go on the path toward democratic consolidation. Democracies account for 48 percent of the region (which as defined here extends from Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to Russia and central Asia); however, 26 percent of the countries remain partly free, and 26 percent remain not free.<sup>32</sup>

With the accession of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania to the European Union, as well as the candidacy for accession of Croatia, the democratic fate of these states has likely been sealed. Democratic governance was a condition of integration, and the incentives to continue the consolidation process are probably too great to disregard.

However, the color revolutions have only just begun the process of democratization. For countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, every couple of steps forward seem to be followed by a step back. The Ukraine, for example, succeeded in voting authoritarian President Yanukovich out of office in 2004. However, the coalition that replaced him with President Yushchenko has been unable to maintain solidarity in the midst of corruption allegations. In the summer of 2006, Yanukovich returned to power as prime minister of the Ukraine, in what many regard as a setback for democracy and a disappointment for those democratic revolutionaries who experienced their first real taste of freedom.

Even more disappointing has been Russian regression once again to a repressive and increasingly authoritarian state. Uzbekistan and Belarus have likewise regressed in recent years. Belarusian President Lukashenka has sponsored death squads against political opposition groups. Uzbek President Karimov has imprisoned dissidents and destroyed any semblance of civil liberties and political rights. Although Serbia and Montenegro are now considered to be democratic and Slovenia has joined the European Union, the violent breakup of the former Yugoslavia has left Kosovo in limbo and Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia in semidemocratic systems.

Proximity to Western Europe may be a factor in the likelihood of successful transitions to liberal democracy in the region. Perhaps even the peoples of the former Soviet states prefer or need a strong, centralized government to maintain stability in the face of great ethnic divisions and to shepherd them through the painful reforms required to further economic development. However, it may be too soon to tell.<sup>33</sup> The reality is that Central and Eastern Europe began the transition to democracy less than twenty years ago. Although some states have experienced exceptional success in this regard, as well as strong economic growth, the potential for democratic success in those states that currently appear to be stuck in authoritarian or semiauthoritarian systems remains to be determined.

In sum, democracy has advanced on every continent in varying degrees since the start of the third wave. Some regions have faced greater challenges in the process of democratization than others; however, there are not any absolute cultural, societal, or geographic variables that preclude a given country from democratic transition and democratic consolidation. Ethnic division, being Arab, poverty, and the resource curse seem to be the greatest hurdles, but it is

premature to declare that democracy is not universal. It may instead be the case that no singular form of democracy is universal and that it takes time for any specific country to work out its own unique democratic institutions and practices. This certainly has been so in the more democratically successful regions of Latin America and Asia, where in many states democracy has taken a decidedly non-Western hierarchical, corporatist, and/or communitarian form. Perhaps this is why many states tend to fluctuate between being not free and partly free before they pass through to the free category. There is no straight line to liberal democracy, and it often takes generations to develop truly democratic institutions, recent European success stories not withstanding.

### Semidemocracy Is Not on the Rise

A review of the record has not revealed a new global wave of semidemocracy, but instead an overall decrease in the number of semidemocratic states since the start of the third wave. That said, the perception that semidemocratic states are on the rise is understandable. It appears that as states enter the gray zone, they may pause there and start to consolidate semidemocratic institutions. However, the past thirty years alone have proven that long interludes of partial freedom are not indicative of an inability to become more democratic. If international pressure has sometimes inadvertently encouraged semidemocratic consolidation, domestic pressure for greater liberty may eventually have an overriding effect.

Semidemocratic consolidation and fluctuation between authoritarianism and some elements of democracy could arguably be but part of a relatively common pattern of democratic development: proponents of seemingly nondemocratic values and pressures to advance freedom play tug-of-war as they work out differences until uniquely indigenous and workable forms of democracy emerge. Kleptocrats may find a hiding place in the semidemocratic interim, but it remains to be seen whether they will be able to maintain such positioning in the long run. That said, 30 percent of the globe is partly free. If indeed the world has not reached a saturation point of democratization and the third wave continues, that percentage is likely to continue to shrink. In the meantime, this gray zone of halfway houses or partly free countries remains quite large.

### Danger in the Gray Zone

The gray zone has important implications on multiple levels. Fortunately, the literature provides much guidance on the relationship between regime type and the generally expected benefits of democracy. Here I consider four of these ex-

pectations: decreased interstate conflict, increased domestic stability, increased protection of human rights, and increased economic development. Large-scale quantitative studies that tested hypotheses relevant to these expectations were analyzed to determine whether the findings therein support them.<sup>34</sup> The results are as follows.

**Interstate Conflict.** Although there is nothing closer to a universal law in politics than that democracies do not fight each other, democracies still fight non-democracies. Most disturbing is the evidence that semidemocracies or mixed regimes are more likely to engage in interstate conflict than all other regime types. In addition, states in transition are more prone to conflict than states that are not.<sup>35</sup>

**Domestic Stability.** Although it was found that mature democracies are stable in terms of violent domestic conflict, they are not more so than authoritarian regimes. The greatest instability occurs between these two poles, as semidemocracies and states in transition toward democracy are the most unstable of all regimes. Transition to democracy increases the likelihood of political violence and even civil war.<sup>36</sup> Witness, in spades, Iraq.

**Human Rights.** Democratic states are definitively the best protectors of human rights. However, this is the case only in those that have achieved maturity. Counterintuitively, it was found that transitioning and semidemocracies violate human rights more than authoritarian regimes do. This is owing to semidemocratic leaders' heightened perceptions of threat and possible instability, as well as the absence of institutions through which citizens' civil rights are ensured.<sup>37</sup>

**Economic Development.** There is not sufficient, consistent, or robust enough evidence to conclude that democracy causes economic development. Studies that find a positive relationship between democracy and economic development are contradicted by an equal number of studies indicating otherwise. There are, however two important results around which a consensus has emerged. First, democracy does not have a negative effect on economic development. Second, economic development has a positive effect on transitions toward democracy and the sustainability of democratic regimes. Therefore, the spread of democracy and economic development do have a positive relationship, albeit not necessarily one that flows in the causal direction proponents of democratization might expect.<sup>38</sup>

When considered collectively, the evidence partially supports some popular expectations of democracy. *Mature* democracy tends to meet three of the four



expectations—decreased interstate conflict, increased domestic stability, and increased protection of human rights—considered here. In sharp contrast, the more that states are transitioning toward democracy or stuck in the middle between autocracy and consolidated democracy, the greater the negative implications are. Time and again, the evidence points to a dangerous gray zone composed of transitioning and semidemocracies that are most likely to engage in interstate conflict, erupt in civil war, and violate human rights.

### Conclusions and Policy Implications

Where does this leave us? This chapter has found that the era of globalization continues to be characterized by the spread of democracy. The third wave has yet to end, and the universality of democracy cannot be ruled out. Semidemocracy is not on the rise, but perception of such is understandable, because attempted semidemocratic consolidation can be a prolonged stopping point in the difficult tug-of-war process of developing unique forms of democracy. That said, the gray zone remains unacceptably large, given that the route through it to freedom is too often paved with bloodshed.

Sharansky has said: "There is a universal desire among all peoples not to live in fear. Indeed, given a choice, the vast majority of people will always prefer a free society over a fear society."<sup>39</sup> However, this study has revealed that people striving toward a free society are likely to live in a fear society until the transition is complete. This transition, like Rostow's stages of development or the emergence of Lipset's prerequisites, can take a very long time.<sup>40</sup> It could be generations before fear gives way to freedom, if at all. Increased security and peace will only emerge as democracies near completion of the long process of maturation. Given the results of this study, it is no wonder that the citizens of many semidemocratic states throughout the world are increasingly skeptical about the benefits of democratic institutions.

Because of this, U.S. foreign policy should seek *not only* to spread democracy, but to push transitions all the way through to consolidation. Policymakers must be attuned to the reality that the transition is dangerous and that semidemocracy is *not* an acceptable stopping point. Elections alone are not enough. A thriving civil society is not enough. A free press is not enough. Spreading democracy may actually in the short run increase threats to U.S. national security in the form of backlash, interstate conflict, and instability abroad—that is, until most states that have started the transition complete it.

Although more research is necessary to determine how best to minimize the dangerous gray zone, policymakers should make it a top priority. That may mean allowing some states to remain authoritarian while we invest primarily in the consolidation of states that have already begun the transition toward

democracy or those that seem fixed somewhere in the middle. Democratization is far from an antidote to conflict, instability, human rights violations, and poverty. At the same time, a world dominated by mature democracies is likely to be by far more peaceful, stable, and protective of human rights. It is in such a world that the United States is likely to be most secure.

### Notes

1. The epigraph is from Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Democracy's Uncertain Triumph," in *Globalization, Power, and Democracy*, ed. Marc F. Plattner and Aleksander Smolar (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).
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3. Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).
4. Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003); and Howard J. Wiarda, *Comparative Politics: Theoretical Approaches and Research Issues* (Boulder, Colo.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).
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