

## **RISING DEMOCRACIES' PERCEPTIONS OF BRAZILIAN DEMOCRACY POLICY**

**NIRANJAN SAHOO, ANDREAS FELDMANN,  
SENEM AYDIN-DÜZGİT, TJIURIMO ALFREDO HENGARI,  
FEDERICO MERKE, TSVETA PETROVA, AND OLIVER STUENKEL**

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In November 2014, the Carnegie Rising Democracies Network met in São Paulo, Brazil. A core aim of this network is to facilitate the exchange of views among non-Western democratic powers regarding their experiences with democratization at home and with efforts to support democracy outside their countries. In this spirit, several of the group members have offered reflections on the impressions they took away from Brazil—and how these could help inform debates back home.

### **NIRANJAN SAHOO**

*INDIA*

From my Indian perspective, I was most impressed by what I heard from eminent experts about Brazil's vibrant civil society and ever-watchful press. Proof of democratic vibrancy is to be found in Brazil's frequent street protests. Notwithstanding some negative impacts, such citizen activism holds much promise for Brazil's political institutions. Also, I was struck by the priority Brazil gives to incentives such as the Bolsa Família program that are aimed at reducing inequality.

On international human rights support, my impression was that Brazil routinely avoids taking clear positions on rights issues largely owing to its own domestic problems. India and Brazil show similarities in this regard. India's less-than-stellar human rights record in Kashmir and a large part of the north-east and regions affected by left-wing extremism keep the country from speaking out on human rights protection externally.

Perhaps most interesting were Brazil's and India's similar stances on democracy support. These two large democracies share enviable track records of conducting free and fair elections and ensuring peaceful transfer of powers, and they are major role models in their own regions. Yet both have so far shied away from taking a clear stand on supporting democracy in their neighborhoods. Their similar historical experiences, difficulties in dealing with big powers, and continued adherence to principles of sovereignty and non-intervention militate against their taking a firm stand on democracy support.

Considering their positive external images and the goodwill that both countries enjoy in the Global South, India and Brazil have similar opportunities to make a far stronger contribution to global democracy. One way of showing their clear commitment can be by strengthening the IBSA Dialogue Forum, a democracy club imaginatively steered by India, Brazil, and South Africa—at least until the BRICS forum (those countries plus Russia and China) emerged and overshadowed it. In

fact, this would align well with the ambition of both India and Brazil to join the top tier of global powers, notably through permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

## ANDREAS FELDMANN

### CHILE

Our meetings in São Paulo left me with the strong impression that Brazil's approach to democracy promotion is guided by a significant dose of pragmatism, something that contrasts with its purported commitment to developing a principled foreign policy. Brazil espouses a solidarist view of global order that underscores the need to promote a level playing field in the global economy as well as democratic values and human rights.

While it is known that developing a coherent, principled foreign policy is exceedingly difficult because good intentions inevitably clash with other national interests, one cannot help but feel that, given Brazil's diplomatic and political weight in the region, its timid policies constitute a missed opportunity.

The state of democracy in Latin America is worrisome. This warrants a more decisive stance in defense of democracy on the part of Brazil, as the region's first among equals. Brazil has acted inconsistently—defending democratic principles in some countries facing regime crises, such as Paraguay in 2011, while eschewing critical statements about the erosion of democracy in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and particularly Venezuela.

Several Brazilian officials we met during our visit underlined how Brazil's incremental approach based on silent persuasion has rendered positive results in solving acute crises (for example, in Honduras, Paraguay, and Venezuela). But I was left wondering whether this prudent stance entails hypocritical accommodation of unsavory regimes with which Brazil has a strategic relationship.

The trip made me aware that many of Brazil's positions on democracy promotion resemble those of many other Latin American countries—including my own. Chile has dithered over denouncing democratic erosion, particularly in ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our Americas) member countries,

and it has failed to live up to its commitments of protecting and promoting human rights in the Western Hemisphere.

Chile's ambivalence, like Brazil's, reflects the difficulty of reconciling principles and interests. Unlike Brazil, however, Chile's cautious positions derive from power considerations: when facing thorny issues that require criticizing the actions of fellow Latin American countries, Chile normally jumps on the bandwagon and follows Brazil's lead. In this way, it is shielded from criticism and avoids potential diplomatic isolation.

## SENEM AYDIN-DÜZGİT

### TURKEY

Our trip to São Paulo left me with a generally positive view of Brazil's commitment to democracy promotion in its foreign policy. Yet, it was also useful in reminding us of the ways in which the success of a country's foreign policy activism in democracy promotion is closely related to its own democratic performance at home.

We saw, for instance, how fragile Brazil's foreign policy activism is, given the country's domestic economic and political problems. We learned in detail how Brazil is still struggling to make its own democracy inclusive despite a track record of deep and persistent inequality, widespread corruption, and severe violations of human rights and the rule of law. I was particularly struck by the high rates of violence by both police officers and civilians, as well as the huge social and regional splits within the country.

The discussions were also useful in showing the key role that a favorable external environment can play in stabilizing a country's economy and facilitating its foreign policy activism in its immediate neighborhood and beyond.

Listening to the insights from Brazilian policymakers and academics made me more aware of certain similarities between Brazil and Turkey concerning their foreign policies in roughly the same periods. In the first decade of the century, both countries capitalized on favorable external conditions, economic growth, and strong one-party governments by following a more assertive foreign policy, demanding the reform of

the international system, and calling for democratization in their wider regions, with an emphasis on regional solidarity. Both have also experienced new waves of social mobilization and transformation, which helped to reduce poverty but also increased socioeconomic polarization (in the Turkish case, cultural and political gaps also widened).

This endangers the fragile democracies of the two countries. It also risks further weakening Brazilian and Turkish foreign policy activism, which has already been undercut in recent years by the two countries' slowing economies.

Despite this similarity, a major, and perhaps expected, difference between the two is the heavy presence of ideology and sectarianism in the Turkish experience of democracy promotion that has seriously damaged its credibility as an international actor.

## **TJIURIMO ALFREDO HENGARI**

*SOUTH AFRICA*

I came away from our meeting with the strong impression that there is much South Africa can learn from Brazil. It can serve as an example for other rising democracies in how it has used its own democratic experience to demonstrate democracy promotion to other countries and how it has sought to mobilize regional bodies to defend democracy. Two of these regional bodies in particular, the Union of South American Nations and the Organization of American States, offer lessons for the kind of regional mechanisms that South Africa should be pushing in its own neighborhood.

Brazil has used a progressive foreign policy as a catalyst for regional integration in Latin America much more so than South Africa has done in its region. True, I heard in conversations how Brazil's promotion of political stability in the region has at times come at the expense of democratic reforms. Yet its commitment to democracy seems stronger than South Africa's.

Brazil provides an interesting case study with regard to what an emerging power can do in the promotion of democracy abroad. There seems to be open admission of the internal

challenges and opportunities insofar as democratic development and consolidation are concerned. While South Africa does not discuss its own domestic democratic developments in that way, the measured approaches that Brazil favors could be adopted by South Africa, which now operates on the basis of extremes.

At one extreme, South Africa is largely interested in grand declarations without seeking to demonstrate how its own domestic institutions and developments—with all of their own challenges and opportunities—can serve as examples to other countries in the region. At the other extreme, South Africa has demonstrated political brinkmanship and resistance when issues of democracy and human rights are promoted through the prism of “Western-led” institutions. South Africa's inability to assert the principle of democracy abroad when doing so clashes with this “anti-imperialist” posture has turned the country into a weak promoter of democratic norms in the region (indeed, South Africa's position of sitting idle during the 2010 UN-supervised elections in Côte d'Ivoire is instructive).

In addition to learning from the moderate ambition and tone of Brazil's democracy promotion strategy, South Africa should take notice of how Brasília selects its democracy promotion activities. It does so carefully, which allows for well-calibrated strategies that can produce success. In South Africa, whose activities and voice on democracy are stretched and at times inconsistent, this approach alone could serve as a valuable lesson.

## **FEDERICO MERKE**

*ARGENTINA*

The good news is that Brazil is a geopolitically satisfied power, an emerging economy, and a stable democracy. Brazil is also a natural mediator in international conflicts and has consistently avoided the display of hegemonic pretensions in the region in favor of alternative collective power management. Yes, corruption is abundant and violence of all sorts is high, but put into perspective, things are better now than they used to be.

Brazil today is closer to Western culture and values than are other emerging democracies in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East. Both the theory and the practice of democracy and human rights have become an important part of Brazil's national and international identity in a substantive manner. Thus, since the 1990s, Brazil has played a more assertive role to reduce conflict and promote peace and democracy in South America. It has taken important leading actions in resolving some of the democratic crises that took place in the region, namely in Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and Paraguay.

The bad news, however, is that Brazil continues to be divided between a rhetorical international support for democratic principles and a consistent preference for national sovereignty and interest, accompanied by a traditional dislike of supra-nationality. Brazil has consistently been conscious of its peripheral location and the need to make foreign policy an instrument for national development, not for democracy promotion. Brazil's continued rise will make more apparent its own dilemmas in accommodating both order (stability) and justice (democracy and human rights) in South America.

Having said this, however, my impression is that Brazil's bias toward development and national responsibilities is not unique to its diplomatic culture but is part of how South America—including my own country of Argentina—faces the world. So my feeling is that when Brazil acts multilaterally, when Itamaraty (Brazil's Foreign Ministry) displays its soft power, when it seeks development, when it supports democracy, and when it refrains from taking the moral high ground, it is not acting as any other rising state in any other region would act, nor is it revealing a Brazil-style exceptionalism.

Instead, Brazil's approach to global affairs reflects a long-standing diplomatic culture that has been common throughout South America. After all, regional (and not only national) political cultures are crucial shapers of politics, local and global. So my lesson learned in São Paulo is that if democracy-support commitments and activities are not advanced at the regional level, there is little that individual countries can do.

## **TSVETA PETROVA**

*BULGARIA*

Our conversations with participants in and observers of Brazilian democracy promotion efforts suggested that there is not much room for optimism about Brazil stepping up its efforts abroad. I could not help but notice how reluctant many Brazilian foreign policy makers and even democracy activists were to argue that their state should be increasingly active in supporting democracy abroad. These Brazilians worried that given its continuing struggle at home with political polarization, corruption, inequality, and violations of human rights and the rule of law, Brazil is hardly positioned to be promoting democracy in its neighborhood. Their concern is that Brasília does not necessarily have solutions to its own democratization challenges, and, partly as a result, it would not have the moral authority to assist other countries in their transitions.

The contrast with my region was startling. Foreign policy makers and activists in Central and Eastern Europe consider their democracy promotion activism an exercise in which both sides share what they think worked at home as well as what did not, and then they discuss what they think will and will not work for the most pressing challenges in each of the partner countries. To Central and Eastern Europeans, democracy promotion is in large part about legitimating the struggle for democracy and expressing solidarity with the participants in this struggle.

To be sure, as liberal democracy has been challenged in Central and Eastern Europe in recent years, some observers have argued that Central and Eastern European countries no longer represent good democratization models to be exported abroad. But to many others, these challenges were yet another opportunity to revive their participation in various regional pro-democracy networks where they could look for moral support and advice.

Beyond adding to our conversation about the relationship between a country's own democratization and its democracy promotion abroad, these conversations raised another

question that we in the Carnegie Rising Democracies Network have been debating: Given their preference for multi-lateral responses to violations of and support for democracy and human rights abroad, are new democracies shying away from democracy promotion or at best hiding behind regional international organizations? Here, I found striking similarities between Brazil and Central and Eastern Europe.

Like Brazil, Central and Eastern European countries have preferred to keep democracy promotion high on the agenda of various regional international organizations. This is in part because their efforts are perceived to confer this agenda legitimacy and also because they can leverage more carrots and more sticks.

However, an important difference is Brazilian ambivalence about the role of the United States in American regional international organizations versus Central and Eastern European enthusiasm for strong U.S. leadership of European affairs. Also, again like Central and Eastern European countries, Brazil has preferred (much more than Western democracy promoters) to rely on cautious and quiet diplomacy, which favors engagement with autocracies and hybrid regimes, together with behind closed doors persuasion, criticism, and pressure. These similarities suggest that this preference for multilateral democracy-promotion diplomacy actually represents a distinctive approach to democracy promotion.

## OLIVER STUENKEL

### BRAZIL

The points of view presented here from India, Chile, Turkey, South Africa, Argentina, and Eastern Europe greatly reflect the ambiguity that dominates the discussion about whether Brazil succeeds in promoting and defending democracy abroad. The question of whether or not Brazil's contribution to strengthening democracy abroad is successful seems to partly depend on the observer's perspective. It may not be a coincidence that participants from Chile and Argentina tend to have a decidedly bleaker view of Brazil's leadership capacity than observers from farther away. Indeed, that seems to confirm the notion that while Brazil's image is very positive

around the world, its capacity to design and help sustain regional democratic norms remains contested.

There are, as Niranjan Sahoo points out, reasons for optimism; the vigor and energy of Brazil's democracy and civil society are remarkable in a region where democracy still faces some challenges. Indeed, in several countries in South America, political candidates have explicitly attempted to convince voters that they were similar to Brazil's former president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

Yet at the same time, Andreas Feldmann is right in his assessment that Brazil has often failed to take a principled stance in the region, and its strategy vis-à-vis the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights is worrisome. It has struggled to influence internal dynamics in neighboring Venezuela, which remains politically unstable since the failed coup d'état against Hugo Chávez in 2002. Still, as Tsveta Petrova observes, Brazil's focus has been on cautious backdoor diplomacy, a sharp contrast to European countries' more explicit approach.

As is the case with every other country, Brazil's attempts to strengthen democracy abroad seem at times incoherent and contradictory, and yet one cannot deny that Brazil has played a constructive role in some instances.

Senem Aydin-Düzgit, Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari, and Tsveta Petrova underline how important it is for scholars to look beyond their own region, engage in comparative analysis, and attempt to detect the causal factors that influence whether and how countries attempt to defend democracy abroad. In fact, just as in Brazil, the Turkish and South African examples show that the recent wave of policy activism, while encouraging, ultimately proved unsustainable in the face of domestic challenges. After leaders in all three countries began to assume political leadership, a series of challenges weakened their efforts both at home and abroad, and their capacity to project democratic stability is now clearly reduced.

While no two cases are exactly the same, of course, a more detailed knowledge of the Brazilian context may help scholars in other regions of the world gain a broader understanding of democracy promotion and identify common challenges and best practices.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Niranjan Sahoo** is a senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi.

**Andreas Feldmann** is an associate professor in the departments of Latin American and Latino studies and political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Senem Aydin-Düzgit** is an associate professor and the Jean Monnet Chair in the Department of International Relations at Istanbul Bilgi University.

**Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari** is head of the South African Foreign Policy and African Drivers Programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

**Federico Merke** is professor of international relations and director of undergraduate studies in political science and international relations at San Andrés University in Argentina.

**Tsveta Petrova** is an associate research scholar at the Harriman Institute at Columbia University.

**Oliver Stuenkel** is an assistant professor of international relations at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation in São Paulo and a nonresident fellow at the Global Public Policy Institute in Berlin.

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