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978-1-107-06964-0 - The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators

Sarah Sunn Bush

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The Taming of Democracy Assistance

Few government programs that aid democracy abroad today seek to foster regime change. Technical programs that do not confront dictators are more common than the aid to dissidents and political parties that once dominated the field. What explains this “taming” of democracy assistance? This book offers the first analysis of that puzzle. In contrast to previous research on democracy aid, it focuses on the survival instincts of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that design and implement democracy assistance. To survive, Sarah Sunn Bush argues that NGOs seek out tamer types of aid, especially as they become more professional. Diverse evidence – including three decades of new project-level data, case studies of democracy assistance in Jordan and Tunisia, and primary documents gathered from NGO archives – supports the argument. This book provides new understanding of foreign influence and moral actors in world politics, with policy implications for democracy in the Middle East.

SARAH SUNN BUSH is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Temple University, Philadelphia, and a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. Her research focuses on democracy promotion, non-state actors in world politics, and gender and human rights policy, and has been published in several journals, including *International Organization* and *International Studies Quarterly*. Dr. Bush was the 2014 winner of the Deborah Gerner Grant for Professional Development.

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of tables</i>	viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xiii
Part I Introduction and argument	1
1 Introduction	3
2 The argument: structure, agency, and democracy promotion	22
3 Tame democracy assistance: what it is and why it matters	53
Part II Testing the argument	77
4 Delegation and the allocation of democracy assistance	79
5 Changes in American grant-making	106
6 Creating the democracy establishment	131
7 Jordan: aid in the shadow of geopolitics	159
8 Tunisia: reform after revolution	187
Part III Conclusions	209
9 Should democracy promoters be set free?	211
Part IV Appendices and references	233
<i>Appendix A: Descriptions of categories of democracy assistance</i>	235
<i>Appendix B: List of interviewee affiliations</i>	238

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06964-0 - The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion
Does Not Confront Dictators
Sarah Sunn Bush
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

vi	Contents	
	<i>Appendix C: Major organizations in the democracy establishment</i>	241
	<i>Appendix D: Data appendix</i>	244
	<i>Bibliography</i>	248
	<i>Index</i>	268

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06964-0 - The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion
Does Not Confront Dictators
Sarah Sunn Bush
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Figures

1.1	The rise of democracy assistance	<i>page 8</i>
2.1	An example of the transnational delegation chain in democracy assistance	33
4.1	Bilateral democracy assistance, by freedom level	93
4.2	Tame democracy assistance and delegation dynamics	96
5.1	The growth of the National Endowment for Democracy	110
5.2	NED grants, by freedom level	111
5.3	NED grant commitments, by category	115
5.4	The rise of tame democracy assistance	116
5.5	Changes in USAID democracy and governance aid	128
6.1	Network connections in democracy assistance	135
7.1	Freedom in the world and in Jordan, 1972–2012	163
7.2	American aid to Jordan, by sector, 2006–2012	164
7.3	Democracy assistance in Jordan, 2009, by category	166
8.1	Freedom in the world and in Tunisia, 1972–2012	190
8.2	Democracy assistance in Tunisia, 2011, by category	196

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-06964-0 - The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion
Does Not Confront Dictators
Sarah Sunn Bush
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Tables

3.1	Categories of democracy assistance	<i>page</i> 56
3.2	Classification of categories of democracy assistance	57
4.1	The largest bilateral democracy donors, 2010	92
4.2	How delegation relationships affect democracy assistance	98
5.1	How rising NGO competition and professionalism affect NED grants	120
6.1	The most socially powerful organizations in democracy assistance	137
6.2	Perceptions of the main benefits of democracy assistance	140
7.1	Summary of variables in Jordan	160
8.1	Summary of variables in Tunisia	188

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-06964-0 - The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion
 Does Not Confront Dictators
 Sarah Sunn Bush
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface

My interest in democracy assistance began in 2007 when I had the opportunity to travel to Rwanda as part of a policy workshop sponsored by the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. The workshop was on the subject of “Managing Elections in Fragile States” and was led by brilliant elections guru Jeff Fisher of Creative Associates International, Inc. In 2007, Rwanda was preparing for a three-year electoral cycle that would determine whether the country would match its post-genocide strides in terms of good governance with strides in terms of liberal democracy. At the time, there was cautious optimism about the leadership’s democratizing intentions. As of 2014, that optimism is gone.

Observing international aid to promote democratization in Rwanda was eye-opening. I remember visiting the country’s shiny new National Electoral Commission, which was filled with desks and computers, but hardly any staff members. The electoral institutions were ready to hold technically sound elections, but they were not empowered to ensure that the campaigning environment was genuinely open and competitive. I also became intrigued by the buzzwords on the lips of international donors – observers, gender quotas, early warning systems – and their limits. The Rwandan government was mightily concerned with international legitimacy at the time, depending heavily on foreign aid, but the goals targeted by foreign-assistance programs did not seem to be fundamentally altering the political environment. Why was the international community not seizing the opportunity to push hard for the institutional reforms that might lead to meaningful democratic change, I wondered. More generally, what accounts for the prevalence of technical programs that do not confront dictators in fundamentally undemocratic environments? Why is democracy assistance so often tame?

This book represents the fruits of my efforts to answer those questions over the ensuing years. The argument that I develop in it focuses on the survival instincts of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that

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Sarah Sunn Bush

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x Preface

design and implement democracy assistance. In Chapter 1, I develop the puzzle that the book seeks to address in more detail; and then in Chapter 2 I develop my argument. In a nutshell, my key insight is that in order to survive and thrive, NGOs seek out tamer types of aid, especially as they become more professional. Diverse evidence – including three decades of new project-level data, case studies of democracy assistance in Jordan and Tunisia, and primary documents gathered from NGO archives – supports the argument in Chapters 3–8. In Chapter 9, I conclude the book by discussing its implications for how we understand foreign influence, transnational activism, and ongoing policy debates about world politics.

Many people and institutions supported me as I worked on this project. I am delighted to have the opportunity to acknowledge them and express my gratitude.

I began this project as a graduate student at Princeton University. There, I had the great fortune to be advised by a dissertation committee consisting of Robert Keohane (chair), Mark Beissinger, Amaney Jamal, and John Ikenberry. Miles Kahler generously became the dissertation's fifth reader through the Miller Center fellowship program. All of my advisors are notable for their careful, engaged scholarship and warm mentorship. I aspire to follow their examples during my career. Special thanks are due to Bob Keohane, who had the uncanny ability to send me from our meetings feeling both challenged and excited. His fundamental insights into world politics, including transnational actors' significance and the importance of incomplete information, have influenced this project in countless ways. I am proud to be one of his advisees.

While in graduate school, I began the field research in Washington, DC, Jordan, and Tunisia that is reflected in the later pages of this book. Many people that work in democracy assistance were generous with their time and expertise. I sincerely thank the more than 150 people who agreed to be interviewed for this book. Though I am sure that not all my conclusions are ones that they would share, I am indebted to them for their insights. I hope that my research does their difficult and important work justice.

I transformed my dissertation into a book manuscript first as a research fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School and then as an assistant professor at Temple University. Colleagues at both institutions provided key advice and support. I am particularly grateful to Richard Deeg, Orfeo Fioretos, and Mark Pollack for their guidance on the last stages of publishing this book. While at Temple, I also benefited from a book conference

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-06964-0 - The Taming of Democracy Assistance: Why Democracy Promotion Does Not Confront Dictators

Sarah Sunn Bush

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xi

sponsored by Marc Lynch's Project on Middle East Political Science. My readers at that conference, Sheila Carapico and Susan Hyde, each read the full manuscript and offered critiques that forced me to sharpen my thinking and writing in significant ways. Mark Buntaine, Judith Kelley, Amanda Murdie, Tsveta Petrova, and Hans Peter Schmitz also provided detailed and highly constructive comments on the penultimate draft of the book. I am fortunate to work in a field with such smart and generous colleagues.

Comments benefited this project at a number of other venues. I am especially indebted to seminar attendees at Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale Universities and to practitioners in attendance at a seminar on my research organized by the Project on Middle East Democracy in Washington, DC. In addition to those seminar presentations, I presented portions of this book at the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, the International Studies Association, and the Midwest Political Science Association. The discussants and attendees at all of those venues provided feedback that influenced my thinking in significant ways.

In addition, many friends and colleagues provided feedback and fun along the way. From Princeton, I especially thank Lamis Abdel-Aaty, Jeff Colgan, Lauren Davenport, Andrea Everett, Jessica Green, Kristen Harkness, Marina Henke, David Hsu, Mareike Kleine, Noam Lupu, Michael McKoy, and Mike Miller. From Jordan, I especially thank Eleanor Gao and Yael Zeira. In Philadelphia, I especially thank Jennifer Dixon and Erin Graham. I would also like to acknowledge Ian Hurd, my undergraduate mentor at Northwestern, who got me excited about international relations and research in the first place. What he taught me continues to shape my research.

In addition to receiving support from many individuals, I have also received generous support from a number of institutions. Grants and fellowships during graduate school came from the American Center of Oriental Research in Jordan, the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice, and Princeton University. Since Princeton, I have benefited from support from the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Harvard Kennedy School, the Project on Middle East Political Science, and Temple University.

Finally, thank you to my family. My late mother Grace inspired me with my early memory of her completing a PhD. I miss her and hope that she would be proud. My father Julian has constantly supported me. His belief in me continues to be the force that enables me to take risks and achieve my goals. He has also provided helpful feedback on my research

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Sarah Sunn Bush

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii Preface

and writing. My husband David has patiently served as a sounding board for all the major ideas in this book and many of the minor ones, too. I could not be more grateful to have such a game partner in all of life's adventures. Thank you, everyone.

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[More information](#)

Abbreviations

AFL–CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIPE	Center for International Private Enterprise
DG	democracy and governance
DRL	Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (US State Department)
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ERIS	Electoral Reform International Services
EU	European Union
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GDP	gross domestic product
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
IDEE	Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IO	international organization
IRI	International Republican Institute
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MEPI	Middle East Partnership Initiative
MP	member of parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Foundations

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xiv List of abbreviations

OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID)
RONGO	royal non-governmental organization
UN	United Nations
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development