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Emerging trends and developments of democracy promotion in India's foreign policy

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Abstract

India's commitment to democratic principles, both domestically and internationally, has long shaped its foreign policy. As democracy promotion assumes greater significance in global affairs, India's approach to fostering democratic values in its foreign policy has evolved. It examines the emerging trends and developments in India's democracy promotion efforts on the international stage. Firstly, it delves into India's strategic partnerships and collaborations with other democratic nations, highlighting how these alliances contribute to the promotion of democratic norms and institutions worldwide. Secondly, it explores India's role in multilateral forums such as the United Nations, where it advocates for democratic governance and human rights. Furthermore, it analyses India's utilisation of soft power tools, including cultural diplomacy and development assistance, to bolster democratic institutions in partner countries. Additionally, it evaluates the challenges and opportunities India faces in its democracy promotion endeavours, considering factors such as geopolitical dynamics and regional complexities. Overall, this abstract sheds light on the evolving landscape of democracy promotion in India's foreign policy and identifies key objectives aimed at advancing democratic values on the global stage.

Keywords: United Nations, democratic promotion, foreign policy, nation, India

Introduction

India stands as a beacon of democratic success in the developing world, having forged and maintained a robust democratic political system. Over the past two decades, significant transformations have swept through Indian domestic politics, reshaping its landscape. The Congress Party led the transition from a dominant-party system in the early 1990s to a truly multi-party framework, a process that gradually unfolded over sixty years, marking the most notable shift. Today, while the Indian parliament may exhibit greater fragmentation, it also mirrors a richer tapestry of representation, embodying the diverse socio-political fabric of the nation.

In recent years, India's democratic journey has witnessed nuanced developments, reflecting evolving societal dynamics and global influences. With the proliferation of digital platforms and social media, Indian politics has witnessed an unprecedented level of public engagement and activism, empowering citizens to voice their concerns and hold elected representatives accountable. The emergence of regional political forces has further diversified the political landscape, challenging the traditional dominance of national parties and fostering a more decentralised decision-making process. Despite these advancements, India grapples with persistent challenges to its democratic fabric. Issues such as electoral integrity, political polarisation, and the erosion of institutional autonomy continue to pose significant threats to democratic governance. The rise of identity politics and sectarianism has also strained social cohesion, underscoring the need for inclusive and pluralistic approaches to governance.

India's steadfast commitment to democratic principles positions it to play a pivotal role in promoting democracy beyond its borders, particularly among its neighbouring nations. While the United States and Western European countries have long been active in democracy promotion efforts, India's unique perspective and experiences offer valuable insights and resources for fostering democratic transitions in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Recent initiatives by the Indian government and civil society organisations reflect a growing engagement in democracy promotion activities abroad.

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From providing technical assistance for electoral reforms to supporting civil society initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, India is increasingly leveraging its expertise and resources to advance democratic governance globally (Grimm and Leininger, 2012:396) ^[17]. Moreover, India's participation in regional forums and multilateral initiatives underscores its commitment to promoting democratic norms and values on the international stage.

In line with global trends, India recognises the importance of leveraging digital technologies and information dissemination strategies to enhance democracy promotion efforts. By harnessing the power of digital diplomacy and online platforms, India seeks to amplify its advocacy for democratic principles while fostering cross-border collaboration among civil society actors and political stakeholders. India's journey towards democratic consolidation serves as a testament to the resilience of democratic ideals in diverse and complex societies. As India continues to navigate the evolving dynamics of domestic and international politics, its commitment to promoting democracy as a universal value remains unwavering. By engaging in targeted democracy promotion activities and sharing its democratic experiences with the world, India has the potential to shape the future of global governance and foster inclusive democratic transitions across borders.

In the wake of recent developments, India's engagement in democracy promotion abroad has continued to evolve, reflecting a nuanced approach to foreign policy that intertwines national interests with global democratic values. One notable trend is India's increasing involvement in regional and international forums aimed at fostering democratic governance. With the rise of global challenges to democracy, including authoritarianism and populism, India has recognized the importance of actively promoting democratic principles beyond its borders.

One significant development is India's heightened engagement in multilateral organisations dedicated to democracy promotion. For instance, within the Commonwealth of Nations, India has played a more active role in advocating for democratic norms and practices among member states. Additionally, India's participation in the Community of Democracies and its offshoot, the United Nations Democracy Caucus, underscores its commitment to supporting democratic institutions globally (Cartwright, 2009: 405). Through these platforms, India leverages its growing influence to champion democratic values and institutions on the world stage.

Furthermore, India has expanded its bilateral efforts to support democracy in partner countries, particularly in its immediate neighborhood. Recent initiatives include providing development aid and technical assistance to nations like Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal to strengthen democratic governance structures. By focusing on building infrastructure, promoting education, enhancing human security, and fostering civil society, India seeks to lay the groundwork for sustainable democratic progress in these regions. The evolving landscape of international relations, characterised by complex geopolitical dynamics and emerging threats to democracy, has also influenced India's foreign policy calculus. India, a rising global power, acknowledges the close connection between the promotion of democratic values and norms in the international system and stability and prosperity. By actively supporting democracy abroad, India not only contributes to global

stability but also safeguards its own strategic interests in an interconnected world.

Moreover, recent geopolitical shifts, including the resurgence of great power competition and the rise of non-traditional security threats, have underscored the importance of democratic resilience and collective action. India's engagement in democracy promotion reflects a strategic imperative to foster partnerships and alliances based on shared values, thereby enhancing its influence and legitimacy in the international arena. India's evolving approach to democracy promotion abroad reflects a combination of strategic interests, regional dynamics, and global imperatives. As India continues to assert itself on the world stage, its commitment to advancing democratic principles underscores its growing role as a responsible global actor invested in the promotion of peace, stability, and prosperity.

Why reluctant?

Despite historical hesitance, recent developments indicate a shifting landscape in India's approach to democracy promotion within its foreign policy. While traditional concerns over neo-colonial perceptions and the preservation of non-alignment principles persist, contemporary geopolitical realities and domestic imperatives are prompting a nuanced reassessment. One notable factor driving this evolution is India's growing economic and strategic interests on the global stage. As the country emerges as a major player in the international arena, it increasingly recognizes the importance of fostering stable democratic regimes for long-term security and prosperity. This recognition is particularly pronounced in regions where India seeks to expand its influence, such as Southeast Asia and Africa. In these areas, India has begun to leverage its soft power and economic diplomacy to encourage democratic governance and institution-building.

Furthermore, the rise of transnational threats, including terrorism and extremism, has underscored the interconnectedness of global security. India has come to realise that promoting democracy abroad is not merely a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity in combating these shared challenges. By fostering democratic norms and institutions, India aims to create a more secure and cooperative international order wherein nations can effectively collaborate to address common threats. The changing dynamics in India's immediate neighbourhood have also influenced its approach to democracy promotion. In countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka, where India wields significant influence, there has been a growing emphasis on supporting democratic transitions and strengthening democratic institutions (Mallavarapu, 2010: 49) ^[16]. India's recognition of the inextricable link between the prevalence of democratic governance and stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood is evident in this shift.

Moreover, India's own democratic credentials have increasingly become a cornerstone of its soft power projection on the global stage. As the world's largest democracy, India's commitment to democratic values serves as a powerful example and source of legitimacy in its interactions with other nations. Embracing democracy promotion aligns with India's broader narrative of being a responsible global actor committed to upholding liberal democratic principles. However, despite these emerging trends, challenges persist in India's democracy promotion

efforts. Balancing geopolitical imperatives with democratic ideals remains a delicate task, particularly in regions where India's strategic interests may conflict with its democratic aspirations. Additionally, navigating the complexities of internal politics within other countries requires a nuanced and context-specific approach, as seen in India's engagement with military regimes in Myanmar and elsewhere.

While historical factors have shaped India's cautious approach to democracy promotion, recent developments signal a growing recognition of its importance within the country's foreign policy calculus. As India continues to assert its role on the global stage, its evolving stance on democracy promotion reflects a broader strategic shift towards promoting stability, security, and prosperity in an interconnected world. Allegations of widespread human rights abuses by Indian security forces against civilians in some parts of the country have somewhat tarnished India's record of democracy. India has tackled the Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, and Maoist insurgencies with a mix of coercive and accommodative policies. Many domestic and international observers have described the Indian state and political system as repressive and corrupt because of the use of coercive tactics.

India's elites and masses are acutely aware of how its democracy continues to fail its people. They feel that preaching to other governments about democracy would result in uncomfortable questions regarding its own record. Enduring social and economic inequality, endemic poverty, and the continuing weakness of state institutions require India to pay more attention at home than abroad. Therefore, both its desire to focus on internal challenges and a lack of capacity may explain India's limited participation in democracy promotion activities abroad. India is not in a position to 'proselytise' regarding democracy (Jacob: 2013). Despite being the world's largest democracy, India faces significant internal hurdles to fully embodying democratic principles and ensuring the protection of human rights for all its citizens.

India's approach to promoting democracy abroad stands in stark contrast to that of many Western nations. While countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada boast robust institutional frameworks for advancing democracy internationally through agencies like USAID, DFID, and CIDA, India lacks a comparable mechanism (Wagner, 2009: 13) ^[5]. Unlike its Western counterparts, India does not possess dedicated government agencies tasked with spearheading democracy promotion efforts on a global scale. Furthermore, civil society organizations and think tanks in India that focus solely on studying and advocating for democracy abroad are conspicuously absent. In the absence of such institutional structures, India's ability to actively engage in democracy promotion initiatives beyond its borders is significantly limited. While India may support democratic principles and engage in diplomatic efforts to promote democratic governance, the absence of dedicated agencies and organisations hampers its capacity to effectively advance these objectives on the global stage. The dearth of institutional capacity and the absence of robust non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in India pose significant challenges to its endeavours to foster representative political systems abroad. Unlike many Western countries that boast well-established frameworks comprising governmental bodies and NGOs dedicated to

democracy promotion, India finds itself lacking in this regard. As a consequence, its efforts are at risk of being poorly executed, rendering them susceptible to criticism akin to the reproach it once directed towards Western nations during the Cold War era.

Scholars have extensively elucidated the institutional deficiencies plaguing India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) (Baru, 2009: 9) ^[13]. These shortcomings manifest in various forms, including inadequate staffing levels at MEA headquarters and diplomatic missions across Africa and Latin America. Moreover, the IFS grapples with insufficient human resources and a reluctance to leverage external expertise, further hindering its efficacy. Consequently, traditional security imperatives tend to dominate India's existing capacity, relegating democracy promotion abroad to a secondary role. Within the national discourse, initiatives aimed at fostering democratic governance overseas are often perceived as peripheral to core national interests such as security, energy, and economic development. As a result, the allocation of limited resources to this domain hinders India's ability to significantly impact global advancement of democratic principles.

Additionally, the intricate dynamics of India's federal structure, coupled with the entrenched nature of coalition politics, have further amplified the influence of state governments in shaping foreign policy agendas. This decentralisation of power has added layers of complexity to the formulation and execution of foreign policy initiatives, often leading to divergent views and a lack of cohesive long-term objectives.

Promotion of democracy, as a fundamental tenet of India's foreign policy, necessitates sustained investment and unwavering dedication to advancing the rule of law and upholding human rights on a global scale. However, the fragmented nature of India's political landscape poses significant challenges in fostering consensus regarding the scope and methodology of democracy promotion efforts. The absence of prominent national or state-level actors actively championing democracy promotion on the international stage exacerbates these challenges. This dearth of influential voices further impedes India's ability to articulate a cohesive and proactive approach towards advancing democratic principles beyond its borders.

Winds of change?

In recent years, India appears to be gradually shifting from its traditional reluctance to participate in any meaningful foreign democracy promotion activities. Statements from India's leaders, who praise liberal democracy as a model and express willingness to promote and support it abroad without sacrificing old beliefs, provide evidence of this shift:

"Liberal democracy is the natural order of political organisation in today's world. All alternative systems, authoritarian and majoritarian in varying degrees, are an aberration"

"While we are convinced of democratic principles, we have been, and will continue to be, somewhat ambivalent towards the idea that external forces ought to force democratic change... India is ready to assist in the great transformation of the regional political landscapes that are currently evolving in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar and share its experiences on creating a democratic society".

Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry (2006-2009); Minister of State for Power (2008-2009), Government of India.

"As a functioning democracy ourselves, naturally, we feel very comfortable and enthused if there are more democracies emerging. We don't believe in the imposition of democracy or democratic values in any country. But if there is any interest in any country about our democratic institutions or in the institutions, we are ready to share them" (Saran, 2005) ^[15].

Shyam Saran, Foreign Secretary (2004-2006), Government of India.

Beyond mere words, India has actively engaged in various multilateral institutions dedicated to advancing democratic principles worldwide. Beyond mere words, India has actively engaged in various multilateral institutions dedicated to advancing democratic principles worldwide. A significant instance of India's proactive stance occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when it played a pivotal role in rallying support within the Commonwealth of Nations against military coups and undemocratic regimes. In 1999, following a military coup in Pakistan, and in 2000, amidst political upheaval in Fiji, India took a firm stance by advocating for the condemnation of these anti-democratic actions within the Commonwealth framework. The result was the suspension of both Pakistan and Fiji from the organisation, sending a clear message that democratic norms were non-negotiable.

India's response to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a prominent Nigerian dissident and activist, in 1995 further demonstrated its commitment to democratic values (Herman and Piccone, 2002) ^[12]. India supported the suspension of Nigeria's membership in the Commonwealth, aligning itself with the organisation's condemnation of such egregious human rights violations. Moreover, India endorsed the decision of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to suspend Zimbabwe's membership in 2002 due to concerns over the deteriorating democratic situation in the country. By supporting such measures, India demonstrated its unwavering dedication to upholding democratic principles and human rights within the international community.

These actions underscore India's evolution as a champion of democracy on the global stage, marking a departure from its relatively passive stance during the Cold War era. Through its active participation in multilateral forums and decisive advocacy for democratic norms, India has emerged as a key player in promoting and defending democracy worldwide. In addition to its involvement in global democracy initiatives, India has played a significant role in shaping democratic discourse on a regional and international level. Building upon its own democratic foundations, India has been proactive in extending support to nations striving for democratic governance.

Following its hosting of the World Movement for Democracy conference in 1999, India continued to champion democratic ideals by actively participating in the Community of Democracies. Established in 2000, this inter-governmental organisation provides a platform for democratic nations to collaborate and extend assistance to emerging democracies and civil society groups worldwide. In 2004, India, along with other member countries of the Community of Democracies, took a further step towards promoting democratic values on a global scale by forming

the UN Democracy Caucus. This coalition, bolstered by the support of numerous democracy promotion NGOs, seeks to advance a democratic agenda within the United Nations framework (Wagner, 2009: 19) ^[6].

India's involvement in these initiatives underscores its commitment to fostering democratic principles both domestically and internationally. By engaging in collaborative efforts with like-minded nations and organisations, India continues to contribute to the promotion and preservation of democracy on a global scale. In July 2005, India and the US announced a groundbreaking partnership with the unveiling of the Global Democracy Initiative (GDI). This collaborative effort marked a significant milestone in international relations, signaling a shared commitment to bolstering democracy and fostering development worldwide. A multifaceted approach played a central role in this initiative, supporting the United Nations in its crucial role of providing electoral assistance and fostering democratic transitions.

One of the primary objectives of the GDI was to strengthen the capacity of nations to conduct free and fair elections. India and the US pledged to lend their expertise and resources to assist in national capacity building, laying the groundwork for transparent electoral processes. Additionally, they committed to facilitating constitution-drafting processes, recognising the fundamental importance of robust legal frameworks in safeguarding democratic principles. A cornerstone of the GDI was the establishment of the UN Democracy Fund, a pioneering initiative designed to finance projects that promote democratic governance, protect human rights, and facilitate the inclusive participation of all segments of society in political processes. India emerged as a key proponent of the fund, reaffirming its steadfast dedication to advancing democratic ideals on the global stage.

While acknowledging India's historical voting patterns in international forums regarding democracy and human rights, scholars have noted a discernible shift in recent years. Despite occasional inconsistencies, India has demonstrated a growing inclination towards advocating for democratic principles and human rights protections (Piccone, 2011: 142) ^[11]. Notably, India's support for UN resolutions urging Sri Lanka to address allegations of human rights violations underscores its evolving stance on these critical issues. The collaboration between India and the US through the Global Democracy Initiative underscores the power of strategic partnerships in advancing shared values and promoting global stability. By leveraging their collective influence and resources, these two nations have played a pivotal role in shaping the international discourse on democracy and human rights, fostering a more inclusive and equitable world order.

In recent years, India's commitment to fostering democracy within its neighboring nations has been steadfast and tangible, notably in Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal. India, particularly in conflict-ravaged Afghanistan, has extended substantial material assistance to revitalise various sectors crucial for stability and progress. This support encompasses vital areas such as human security, infrastructure development, including roads and highways, the provision of electricity, bolstering agricultural practices, enhancing telecommunications, and improving education and healthcare systems. Working in close consultation with the Afghan national government, India has embarked on

numerous initiatives spanning the breadth of the nation, aimed at stimulating economic growth and societal well-being. Notably, India's contribution of \$200,000 to the multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) underscores its commitment to the country's reconstruction efforts (Kugiel, 2011:5) ^[10]. India's aid strategy in Afghanistan focuses on grassroots development, prioritizing small-scale, locally impactful projects that cater to the immediate needs of communities. This approach aligns with broader international efforts, reflecting India's commitment to collaborative endeavors aimed at fostering stability and prosperity.

One of India's flagship infrastructure projects is the construction of a 135-mile highway, which runs from Delaram in south-western Afghanistan to Zaranj, a pivotal town on the Afghan-Iranian border. Initiated in 2003 and completed in 2009 at a cost of \$80 million, this highway stands as a testament to India's enduring commitment to facilitating connectivity and economic growth in Afghanistan, thereby contributing to the nation's long-term stability and development (Ibid, 7). India's endeavours in Afghanistan extend beyond mere assistance; they represent a profound commitment to fostering democracy and stability in the region. India's aiding in the construction of the Afghan parliament building to imparting critical training to parliamentary members, India's support spans various facets of democratic governance. Moreover, their provision of essential materials, such as Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and indelible ink for elections, underscores a dedication to ensuring fair and transparent electoral processes.

India's readiness to share its rich experience in federalism, village-level administration, affirmative action policies, and women's rights exemplifies a sincere desire to empower Afghanistan in its journey towards sustainable governance. This collaborative effort not only strengthens democratic institutions but also instills a sense of confidence and resilience within Afghan society. The endorsement of India's initiatives by the United States signifies a broader consensus on the significance of such endeavors. By enhancing the capacity of core democratic institutions and cultivating an environment conducive to democratic growth, these efforts align with the shared objectives of fostering stability and progress in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, the collective aim is to ameliorate the law and order situation in Afghanistan, a pivotal step towards realising broader stability and prosperity. Through concerted international cooperation and support, the vision of a democratic, peaceful Afghanistan can gradually transform into a tangible reality. In Bhutan, a steady evolution from absolute monarchy to democracy is unfolding. The kingdom's former ruler, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, initiated this transformative journey. While the shift commenced in the early twenty-first century, catching many, including ordinary Bhutanese, off guard, it was actually part of a series of political reforms orchestrated by the king in the preceding decades. In December 2006, he voluntarily relinquished the throne in favour of his eldest son, the globally educated current monarch, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk.

Under King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk's leadership, Bhutan witnessed the inaugural elections to select members of the National Council, the upper chamber of Bhutan's Parliament, in December 2007. Subsequently, in March

2008, citizens exercised their voting rights to elect the forty-seven representatives of the National Assembly, the more influential lower house of Parliament. The democratic momentum further gained traction with local government elections in 2011. In 2013, Bhutan reached another significant milestone with the recurrence of elections for the National Assembly, resulting in the opposition party clinching victory and assuming governance responsibilities. This progression marks a profound shift in Bhutan's governance landscape, symbolising the nation's steadfast march towards a participatory and inclusive democratic system.

India's role in Bhutan's transition to democracy has been multifaceted and pivotal. Beyond just providing assistance from constitutional experts and electoral commission staff, India has actively engaged in facilitating a smooth transition. The mock elections conducted in Bhutan, overseen by Indian experts, served as invaluable preparation for the electorate, instilling democratic practices and norms. Furthermore, the collaborative efforts extended to practical exchanges, such as inviting Bhutanese election officials to observe state assembly elections in India. The provision of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) by India in 2006 not only demonstrated technical support but also symbolised a commitment to ensuring fair and transparent elections in Bhutan.

India's involvement went beyond electoral matters; it also extended to the legal framework. Bhutan sought the expertise of Indian legal scholars in drafting its new constitution and election laws, drawing from India's rich experience in governance and constitutionalism. These collaborative endeavours underscored the strength of the bilateral relationship between India and Bhutan. India's unwavering support for Bhutan's democratisation process, characterised by a 'top-down' approach, has been instrumental. The economic partnership between the two nations has also flourished, with India emerging as Bhutan's largest trading partner.

India's investment in Bhutan's hydroelectric projects has not only bolstered economic growth but also enhanced stability during the transition to democracy. Similar to its initiatives in Afghanistan, India's infrastructure projects have been catalysts for development, fostering resilience amidst democratic reforms. In essence, India's holistic support, ranging from technical assistance to economic collaboration, has played a vital role in Bhutan's journey towards democracy, underscoring the depth of the enduring friendship between the two nations.

India's involvement in the peace process in Nepal during its decade-long civil war was not just a diplomatic manoeuvre; it was a crucial turning point that steered the nation away from the brink of further devastation. The aspirations of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to establish a one-party system ignited the conflict, plunging the country into chaos and suffering. Mao Zedong's ideology fueled the insurgents, leading to a violent struggle that threatened the very fabric of Nepalese society. Amidst escalating violence and the erosion of democratic institutions, King Gyanendra's decision to suspend democracy and seize authoritarian control exacerbated the crisis. However, India, recognising the perils of such a move, swiftly condemned Gyanendra's actions and threw its weight behind Nepal's political parties advocating for the restoration of democracy. This stance underscored India's commitment to democratic principles

and regional stability.

India's role extended beyond mere condemnation; it actively mediated between the warring factions, fostering dialogue and reconciliation. Through both official channels and unofficial efforts led by prominent Indian politicians like Sitaram Yechury and D.P. Tripathi, India worked tirelessly to bridge the divide between Nepal's political parties and the Maoists. These efforts culminated in a historic peace accord, a testament to the efficacy of diplomacy in resolving conflicts.

The united front of Nepal's political parties, the Maoists, and India proved formidable, compelling King Gyanendra to relinquish his grip on power (D'Souza, 2007: 847) ^[14]. This outcome marked a triumph for democracy and peace, laying the foundation for Nepal's path towards stability and progress. India's involvement in Nepal's peace process stands as a shining example of constructive regional diplomacy, wherein a commitment to democratic values and a dedication to fostering peace transcended national boundaries to bring about positive change.

Afterwards, India expressed its disapproval when the Maoist leadership insisted on integrating the Maoist guerrillas into the regular Nepalese army, as outlined in the peace accord. The Indian government saw the Army as one of Nepal's pillars of stability and feared the inclusion of an ideologically indoctrinated group loyal to a particular political party would have an adverse effect on Nepal's fledgling democracy. The Nepalese political parties, bolstered by Indian support, disagreed with the Maoists over the specifics of the integration plan. Ultimately, the two sides were able to come to a compromise agreement.

Despite initial tensions and concerns, India's involvement in the peace process in Nepal underscored its commitment to fostering stability and democratic governance in the region. As in the case of Afghanistan, India collaborated with the US and other international actors to support Nepal's transition to a multi-party representative democracy. Through diplomatic efforts and strategic alliances, India played a crucial role in navigating the complexities of Nepal's political landscape and advancing the peace process. These cases exemplify an evolving trend in India's foreign policy towards greater engagement in promoting democracy abroad. While democracy promotion may not yet be a primary focus of India's foreign policy agenda, there are clear indications of increased involvement and cooperation with the international community on this front. India has utilised both multilateral forums and bilateral initiatives to support democratic governance and political stability in countries like Nepal, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of democracy as a cornerstone of global peace and prosperity.

Overall, India's approach to democracy promotion signals a departure from its traditionally non-interventionist stance, demonstrating a willingness to actively contribute to efforts aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and fostering political pluralism on the world stage. Through its strategic partnerships and diplomatic interventions, India is emerging as a key player in promoting democratic values and principles in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

Anatomy of democracy promotion abroad

India's evolving stance on democracy promotion abroad reveals several significant shifts in its foreign policy

approach. Firstly, India now actively advocates for liberal democracy as the preferred political system, a change from the Cold War era. This newfound assertiveness aligns with the rhetoric of Western leaders from that period, who championed democracy as the antidote to authoritarianism. Such declarations not only reflect a shift in India's ideological stance but also provide a rationale for its increased involvement in democracy promotion globally.

However, amidst this assertiveness, Indian leaders exercise a degree of caution regarding the imposition of democracy on other nations. Unlike some Western powers during the Cold War, India emphasises the importance of respecting the sovereignty of states and only intervening in the democratisation process when invited by the respective governments. This cautious approach underscores India's commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations while still supporting democratic transitions.

India's response to instances of democratic backsliding, particularly in cases of military coups, highlights its principled stand in upholding democratic norms on the international stage. By joining international condemnations and advocating for the isolation of illegitimate regimes, such as those in Pakistan and Fiji, India demonstrates its commitment to preserving democratic governance and standing against unconstitutional power grabs. Furthermore, India's active participation in multilateral forums, such as the Commonwealth of Nations, showcases its willingness to mobilise collective action in support of democratic principles. India sends a clear message that the international community will not tolerate violations of democratic norms by rallying member states to suspend countries like Pakistan and Fiji.

However, historical and geopolitical considerations have influenced India's more nuanced response to certain authoritarian regimes, like Robert Mugabe's in Zimbabwe. While India's criticism may have been less vocal compared to some Western counterparts, its eventual support for Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth underscores its commitment to upholding democratic values, albeit through diplomatic channels. In essence, India's evolving role in democracy promotion abroad reflects a balancing act between asserting its commitment to liberal democracy and respecting the sovereignty of other nations. Through a combination of principled advocacy, multilateral engagement, and diplomatic manoeuvres, India seeks to contribute to the global advancement of democratic governance while navigating the complexities of international politics.

India's engagement within the Commonwealth of Nations underscores its commitment to promoting democracy in collaboration with the global community. Upholding multilateralism as a fundamental tenet, India leverages international organisations to advance its objectives while upholding the legitimacy associated with collective decision-making. Despite pressure from Western nations to align in condemning human rights abuses in countries like Belarus, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Myanmar, North Korea, and Uzbekistan, India maintains a cautious stance, firmly rooted in non-interventionism (Yadav and Barwa, 2011:112) ^[19]. While India's voting patterns in UN forums indicate growing support for democracy abroad, its approach remains measured.

India's bilateral aid strategy in its neighboring countries exemplifies a blend of direct and indirect democracy promotion efforts. In nations like Afghanistan, Bhutan, and

Nepal, India has played a pivotal role in nurturing democratic institutions and facilitating capacity-building initiatives. India provides bureaucratic officials and political leaders with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of democratic transitions through extensive training programs. Notably, India's involvement in Bhutan's democratic evolution has been integral, with each milestone reflecting a collaborative effort driven by the respective governments' requests. This approach underscores India's commitment to respecting the sovereignty of its neighbours while actively supporting their democratic aspirations in line with their expressed desires. By aligning its efforts with the needs and preferences of partner countries, India ensures that its democracy promotion initiatives are both effective and welcomed.

In the case of Nepal, India's involvement in the transition process extends beyond mere diplomatic engagement; it delves into the realms of security, economic development, and political restructuring. The 1950 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between India and Nepal casts a significant shadow over Nepal's sovereignty, obligating it to consult with India on matters of internal and external threats. In exchange, India grants 'national treatment' to Nepalese citizens, encompassing aspects such as employment, business, and property ownership (Turner, 2011:207) ^[9]. This treaty effectively intertwines the fate of Nepal with India, fostering a dependency that permeates both security and economic domains.

Given its strategic location as a buffer state between India and China, Nepal's stability is of paramount importance to India's security calculus. Given India's historical rivalry with China, the shared border between Nepal and China exacerbates the spectre of instability in this Himalayan nation. Compared to its dealings with other nations, India's approach to Nepal has been more proactive and interventionist. It has played a pivotal role in facilitating dialogue among warring factions during the Nepalese civil war, leveraging its influence to bring opposing sides to the negotiation table. Moreover, India has actively supported reconciliation efforts and the drafting of a new constitution, aiming to redefine Nepal's political landscape.

However, India's intervention hasn't been without controversy. Its open opposition to the wholesale integration of former Maoist guerrilla fighters into the Nepalese Army illustrates the complexities of its involvement (Sarin, 2007) ^[11]. While such actions may seem intrusive, they arguably serve the broader goal of safeguarding democracy in Nepal. The presence of indoctrinated fighters within the national army poses a significant threat to its neutrality, potentially transforming it into a tool for political manipulation by the Maoists. By voicing its concerns, India aims to mitigate these risks and uphold democratic principles in Nepal.

In essence, India's involvement in Nepal's transition process embodies a complex interplay of strategic interests, diplomatic manoeuvring, and efforts to promote stability and democracy. India's overarching goal is to foster a peaceful and prosperous Nepal that aligns with its own strategic imperatives, despite potential controversies surrounding the extent of its intervention. India's recent commitment to supporting democracy worldwide highlights a multifaceted approach that reflects a blend of continuity and change in its foreign policy dynamics. Firstly, India's stance increasingly opposes the misuse of sovereignty as a shield by governments to act with impunity, as seen in its

response to the situation in Fiji. Here, India stands firm against the erosion of democratic values, indicating a departure from traditional diplomatic norms that may have tolerated such infringements in the past.

Secondly, India aligns its democracy promotion efforts with its strategic interests, particularly in regions like Afghanistan, where stability is crucial for its security concerns. In such instances, democracy promotion serves as a means to achieve traditional security objectives, showcasing a pragmatic approach that integrates democratic values with strategic imperatives. Additionally, India's strong internal support for democratic governance drives its commitment to fostering democratic institutions where domestic demand for such reforms exists.

However, amidst these shifts, India maintains a cautious stance towards intervening in the internal affairs of non-democratic states. Despite advocating for democratic principles globally, India refrains from endorsing military actions against non-democratic regimes, as evidenced by its voting record in the UN. This cautious approach reflects a continuity in India's foreign policy, characterised by a reluctance to impose external pressure on sovereign nations, even while advocating for democratic norms.

Overall, India's engagement in democracy promotion abroad reveals a nuanced approach that balances strategic interests with normative commitments. While there are discernible shifts towards a more assertive stance against democratic backsliding and alignment with traditional security objectives, India also maintains a degree of caution in its interventions, reflecting a delicate equilibrium between continuity and change in its foreign policy approach.

Conclusion

Traditional security concerns have primarily shaped India's foreign policy, making democracy promotion a marginal consideration. Factors such as a history of colonialism, Cold War dynamics, and strategic vulnerabilities have relegated democracy promotion to the periphery of India's international engagements. However, in recent years, there has been a discernible shift towards a more proactive stance in supporting and promoting democracy abroad. The evolving geopolitical dynamics, particularly India's changing relationship with the United States and its increasing global prominence, are responsible for this shift.

India has adopted a multifaceted approach to democracy promotion, leveraging both multilateral forums and bilateral relationships to advance its objectives. Through these channels, India has provided various forms of assistance aimed at bolstering institutional capacity and fostering conducive environments for democratic governance to flourish. This approach underscores India's recognition of the importance of democratic governance in ensuring stability, peace, and development globally.

The evolving partnership between India and the United States has played a pivotal role in shaping India's approach to democracy promotion. As India seeks to deepen its strategic ties with the U.S., it has aligned itself more closely with American values and priorities, including the promotion of democracy and human rights. This alignment has translated into tangible efforts by India to support democratic transitions and strengthen democratic institutions in countries around the world.

However, India's engagement in democracy promotion abroad is not without its challenges and contradictions. The pursuit of traditional foreign policy objectives, such as maintaining regional stability and countering security threats, often complicates India's efforts to promote democracy, particularly in its immediate neighborhood. This tension is evident in India's relations with countries like Myanmar, where strategic considerations sometimes take precedence over democratic values.

Despite these challenges, India's evolving approach to democracy promotion represents both continuity and change in its foreign policy. While the primacy of traditional security imperatives persists, there is a growing recognition within India's foreign policy establishment of the intrinsic linkages between democracy, stability, and prosperity. This recognition reflects India's willingness to engage more actively in supporting democratic processes and institutions abroad.

Moving forward, there are several findings and suggestions that could inform India's approach to democracy promotion in its foreign policy:

- **Balancing act:** India should strive to strike a balance between its traditional security concerns and its commitment to promoting democracy. This requires a nuanced approach that takes into account the complexities of regional dynamics while upholding democratic principles.
- **Engagement with Neighbors:** India should prioritise engagement with its immediate neighbors to promote democratic governance and respect for human rights. India can constructively support democratic transitions in the region by fostering closer ties and tailoring assistance to each country's specific needs.
- **Multilateral cooperation:** India should continue to engage actively in multilateral forums to promote democracy on a global scale. By collaborating with like-minded partners, India can amplify its efforts and leverage collective resources to advance democratic governance and institution-building.
- **Capacity building:** India should focus on building institutional capacity and providing technical assistance to countries undergoing democratic transitions. This includes support for electoral processes, rule of law initiatives, and the strengthening of democratic institutions to ensure their long-term viability.
- **Human rights advocacy:** India should integrate human rights considerations into its foreign policy framework and advocate for the international protection of fundamental freedoms and rights. This entails speaking out against human rights abuses and supporting efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.

In conclusion, while democracy promotion may not have been a central tenet of India's foreign policy in the past, its growing engagement in this sphere reflects a shifting geopolitical landscape and a recognition of the importance of democratic governance in today's world. By navigating the complexities of regional politics, strengthening partnerships, and upholding democratic values, India can contribute meaningfully to the promotion of democracy and human rights on the global stage.

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