

Institution: University of Warwick
Unit of Assessment: Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Shaping European Union Policies on Democracy Support and Human Rights
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>European Union (EU)-Middle East relations are of critical importance to policy-makers, and this case study shows how Professor Richard Youngs' research has changed perspectives and practices among EU elites, informed debates among practitioner groups and shaped public debate about democracy promotion and human rights. As both Professor of Politics at Warwick and Director General of the Madrid-based think-tank FRIDE, Youngs' research findings have challenged conventional wisdom on: the prospects for democratisation in the Arab world; the identities of Islamist interlocutors; and the efficacy of civil society support. The influence of Youngs' research can be observed directly through the numerous commissions he has received from the European Parliament and the uptake of his subsequent reports among key stakeholders.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>EU policy-makers are keen to promote democracy in the changing world order, but until Youngs' research little was known about key stakeholders' attitudes towards EU assistance models and external support strategies. There were two aspects to this knowledge gap: firstly, understanding the level of support within the EU for pursuing such policies among decision-makers and the wider public; secondly, understanding the level of support within Arab nations and attitudes towards relations with the EU. This deficit was of critical importance, because without the support of the affected parties, initiatives to promote democracy are likely to fail, leading to political and societal insecurity. As Principal Investigator, Youngs' work has addressed both dimensions via three packages of underpinning research over a period of 5 years (2009-2013), which have elucidated the views of actors including civil society activists, EU policy-makers and the public.</p> <p>The United Nations, the Arab Democracy Fund, the UK Department for International Development and the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy collectively funded Youngs' first package of underpinning research – a major project entitled 'Demand Driven Democracy Support (2009-2011)'. It was commissioned because existing research had not adopted a fully demand-driven approach to assessing democracy support. By contrast, Youngs' programme of research canvassed the opinions of civil society actors across 17 countries to find out what kind of support for political reform they most seek. Focus group meetings with reformers deepened understandings of their views on democratic models and external support strategies and engaged them in iterative debate with those involved in designing international democracy support initiatives.</p> <p>The second package of Youngs' research, 'Democracy after the Arab Spring' (2009-2010), was funded from sources including the European Parliament. Youngs convened a group of Islamist politicians from Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan and Palestine to discuss their expectations of EU policy. He also oversaw fieldwork interviews with Islamist parties across nine Middle Eastern states. Youngs consulted via interviews with hundreds of Arab reformers to produce the first study of its kind. The research was original in eliciting details on specifically what kind of support these ascendant actors were seeking as the region began to change.</p> <p>Thirdly, Youngs undertook three reports in 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively, commissioned by the European Parliament on different aspects of EU human rights and democracy policies, involving original research in the context of the Arab states noted above and Russia. These reports entailed underpinning empirical research that garnered opinions and information from a wide range of parliamentarians. Youngs has also run a series of roundtables with key policy-makers in Brussels (an average of six per year since 2009 each involving up to 25 invitees) in order to assess their deliberations and stimulate debate about new policy ideas in EU democracy promotion.</p> <p>The main findings from Youngs' extensive research across these three packages between 2009 and 2013 have yielded a range of concrete policy-relevant observations and recommendations that provide the intellectual and practical basis of his impact activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local reformers prefer external support that is more tailored to their specific context, more

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political, less divisive internally, more flexible and agile, and more strongly supported by Western diplomacy;

- The EU should support incipient political reform in the Arab world by widening the circle of civil society interlocutors; including Islamists in a subtle fashion in mainstream development initiatives; exerting non-intrusive pressure through a nuanced use of positive conditionality; bringing security and trade policies more systematically into line with democracy policies; and relying less on exporting the EU's own rules and norms;
- The EU should multi-lateralise its democracy and human rights policies, in a context in which such strategies are no longer solely a matter for the transatlantic community.

3. References to the research

1. R. Youngs (with K. Kausch) (2009) 'The End of the Euro-Mediterranean Vision', *International Affairs*, 85(5), pp. 963-975. [2012 impact factor: 1.062]. Peer-reviewed journal article.
2. R. Youngs (2009), 'Democracy Promotion as External Governance?' *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(6), pp.895-915. [2012 impact factor: 1.197]. Peer-reviewed journal article.
3. R. Youngs (with P. Burnell) (Eds.) (2009) *New Challenges to Democratization*, (London and New York: Routledge). Peer reviewed edited volume.
4. R. Youngs (with A. Echagüe) (2010) 'Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East: The Need for Triangulation', *International Spectator*, 45(3), pp. 27-39. Peer-reviewed journal article.
5. R. Youngs (2010) (Ed.) *The EU and Democracy Promotion: A Critical Global Assessment*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press). Peer-reviewed edited volume.
6. R. Youngs (2010) *The EU's Role in Global Politics: The Retreat from Liberal Internationalism*, (London and New York: Routledge). Peer-reviewed research monograph.

Associated grants

1. R. Youngs (PI) 'Demand-Driven Democracy Support' (2009-2011) (€370,000) from the Arab Democracy Fund, the Taiwanese Foundation for Democracy, UK Department for International Development and the United Nations.
2. R. Youngs (PI) 'Democracy after the Arab Spring' (2009-2010) (€241,000) from the European Parliament, and the Foreign Ministries of Denmark, Norway, Spain and Sweden.

4. Details of the impact

Youngs' position as Director of FRIDE (rated as one of the 'Top 30' think tanks in Western Europe in the 2012 'Go To Think Tanks Survey') offers excellent access to EU policy-makers, both as participants throughout the research cycle and as beneficiaries of the main findings. This access provides mechanisms for achieving a range of impacts beyond the conventional model of producing and disseminating research reports.

The primary impact of the principal observations and recommendations stemming from Youngs' underpinning research, particularly since the Arab Spring, has been twofold:

- To inform political debate about incentivising democracy promotion in the European Parliament (EP); to contribute to the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP); and to stimulate new EU initiatives for democracy support.
- To enhance the mainstreaming of human rights in EU foreign policy and to establish new networks of stakeholders – including civil society leaders – in policy deliberations.

Collectively, these impacts have led to new thinking and defined best practice (as laid out below) on more broad based political engagement, the use of conditionality and holistic security approaches. The main beneficiaries of the research since the Arab revolts began have been EU elites and policy-makers, the European Parliament and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Informing political debate and shaping EU democracy support

The findings of Youngs' research on democracy promotion following the Arab Spring have fed directly into policy debates in the EP. Through the publication of policy recommendations as official EP documents, he has informed and shaped formal parliamentary discussions (sources 1, 2 and 3). One clear illustration of the concrete impact of this input is Youngs' influence on the perspective of elites working in the EEAS.

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The EEAS is the EU's diplomatic service, which, since the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009, has been charged with running the EU's relations with the rest of the world. Youngs has advised key EEAS personnel on: EU policy approaches to supporting democracy promotion; the timing, placement and content of public statements given by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Baroness Catherine Ashton); and on strategies for engaging with the emerging political class across the Middle East. In particular, three policy recommendations stemming from Youngs' underpinning research have been taken up by the EEAS (sources 5, 6 and 7):

- The need for the EU to be more effective in engaging with Islamist parties by down-playing issues of identity and culture;
- The importance of the EU to avoid favouring particular candidates from among communities of reformers;
- The value of the EU switching from a 'lecturing' to an incentives-based discourse.

In acknowledgement of the direct impact of Youngs' research on the work of the EEAS, the EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean, states: "My work representing the EU across North Africa and the Middle East has benefited from the research undertaken by Professor Richard Youngs and his team. This work has been particularly helpful in clarifying the priorities for EU support to the Arab spring in light of the complex nature of sequencing in democratic transitions. [...] We have learnt from his work that sustainable reform requires broad-based coalitions, widely accepted rules of the game, and flexibility in institutional models" (source 5). In her testimonial, the EEAS Policy Advisor from the Directorate for Northern Africa, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula writes: "We have adopted a number of [Professor Youngs'] suggestions on how to build cooperation with Islamists in low profile and context-specific ways" (source 6).

Youngs' research on political reform in the Arab world has also prompted the EU Commission to consult FRIDE in their 2011 review of the EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (source 4). The ENP is the EU's main policy framework for dealing with countries on its borders. Commitments to democracy have by common consent not been highly effective. However, in the light of input from outside experts including Youngs, the ENP has since prioritised support for democracy and human rights. Specifically, the Commission's review adopted Youngs' suggestions on how to reform the ENP in order to support democracy promotion more effectively in line with the three principles outlined above (source 4). The conclusions of his 'Demand-Driven Democracy' project were fed into EU policy documentation, informed and shaped new strategies such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), which aims to enhance responsiveness to local specificities (source 9). Furthermore, in 2009 Youngs provided text and intellectual input into the Founding Charter of the European Partnership for Democracy (EPD), the first pan-European body dedicated to democracy support and in more recent proposals for a new European Endowment for Democracy (source 8). Since these developments, more projects supporting democracy have begun, which has helped civic organisations to survive, to share their experiences in building democracy and to build capacity for such organisations to run democratic campaigns (sources 8 and 10). The President of the Board of Directors of the EPD, considers Youngs to be "one of the leading academic experts on EU foreign policy making" and acknowledges his research as having helped EPD to "develop a distinctive European approach to democracy support, different from that followed by the established American foundations working in this area, based on inclusive multi-party dialogue" (source 8).

Enhancing human rights in EU foreign policy

Another aspect of Youngs' impact is the major contribution of his research to EU policy debate, formulation and implementation around issues of human rights (sources 2 and 3). A 2011 Report commissioned by the European Parliament included his recommendations for greater EU engagement on the question of human rights in Gulf States. In March that year he was invited to present evidence directly to the European Parliament Sub-Committee on Human Rights as part of their session on 'EU Human Rights Policy on Events in the Arab World'. Research findings have been adopted relating to the need to narrow the divide between Gulf and other Arab states; the requirement for EU policy in the Gulf to 'catch up' with other strategic partners; and the importance of diversifying relations beyond the ruling families of the region. Youngs was also commissioned by the European Parliament to write a Report on the EU-Russia human rights dialogue (source 2).

The EP adopted his recommendation that firmer benchmarks should be attached to the dialogue and that the latter should be better linked to other aspects of EU policy in 2010. The EP Human Rights Sub-Committee used these suggestions to press the EEAS for a more proactive human rights policy. These suggestions were also used by the EP Human Rights Sub-committee to press the EEAS for a more proactive human rights policy (source 5).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Evidence of informing political debate in the EP and influencing reform of the ENP:

1. **European Parliament Report**, Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department, 'Workshop: Union for the Mediterranean: The Way Forward' (September, 2012). Evidence of Youngs' direct engagement with policy-makers in the EP and role in stimulating parliamentary debate on the future of EU-Mediterranean relations after the Arab Spring (see pp. 1, 2, 9-11). Available on request and online: <http://bit.ly/H3IRBK>
2. **European Parliament Sub-Committee on Human Rights**. Record of evidence given by Youngs to a session of the European Parliament on 'Place of Human Rights in EU-Russia Relations', 28 February, 2011. Available on request and online: <http://bit.ly/1fFsCYD>
3. **European Parliament Sub-Committee on Human Rights**. Record of evidence given by Youngs to a session of the European Parliament on 'EU Human Rights Policy on Events in the Arab World', 15 March, 2011. Available on request and online: <http://bit.ly/17NBMto>
4. **Senior Political Advisor, Cabinet of Commissioner Stefan Fule**. The source can corroborate claims about the influence of Youngs' research on ideas to reform the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Evidence of informing the views and practices of the EEAS

5. **EU Special Representative for the Southern Mediterranean, EEAS**. In his testimonial (available on request), the source acknowledges the uptake of Youngs' recommendations based on his research (see excerpt in Section 4 above).
6. **Policy Advisor on Political Islam, EEAS**. In her testimonial (available on request), the source corroborates claims about how Youngs' research has shaped the EU's engagement with Islamist parties in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.
7. **European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries** (November 2011). Report available on EEAS website, which acknowledges Youngs' input as a 'Project Expert' (see pp. 2 and 32). Available on request and online: <http://bit.ly/19aGxRn>

Evidence of informing practitioners in EU democracy promotion and human rights:

8. **President of the Board of Directors of the European Partnership for Democracy**. In his testimonial (available on request), the source provides evidence of Youngs' having informed the initial agenda of the EPD and subsequent strategies for enhanced EU democracy support (see excerpt in Section 4 above).
9. **Director, United Nations Democracy Foundation**. In his testimonial (available on request), the source corroborates the significance of Youngs' 'Demand-Driven Democracy' project to shaping international debates about the role of EU democracy assistance: 'Professor Youngs directed a 19-country project that UNDEF supported, which provided us with innovative ideas on how to dovetail our policies to locally-driven demands for democratic reform'.
10. **UNDEF Evaluation Report: Assessing Democratic Assistance** (30 May 2012). Post-project evaluation provides documentary evidence of the uptake of Youngs' findings by the United Nations Democracy Fund (see pp. 11, 14 and 23). Available on request and online: <http://bit.ly/16dpslu>