

Barack Obama and the Deepening of Democracy

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On no recent president have more hopes rested than upon Barack Obama. After eight years of war, partisanship, and economic strife Americans are desperate for a saviour. And so they and the media have taken an ambitious and talented politician from Chicago – a principled activist, an eloquent mind, a multiethnic persona promising racial transcendence, and a youthful figure that inspires a generation of Americans never before invested in political life – and created one. Barack Obama's meteoric success represents not just 'change we can believe in,' but the belief that we can, indeed must, change.

But what, exactly, will change on January 20? There will certainly be a sharp break from the Bush administration on important issues like tax policy, healthcare, climate change, and foreign affairs. However, to judge only from campaign platforms, similar change would have occurred had primary voters made Hilary Clinton or John Edwards president, or if John Kerry or Al Gore had defeated Bush in the previous two elections. So why Barack Obama, by many measures the least likely of these contenders?

Obama's talents are one part of the explanation, the changing politics of race another. But it seems there must also be something visceral in Obama's promise to bring a 'new kind of politics' to America. And this appeal is puzzling, because to the extent Obama's new politics have been clarified, they amount to little more than an emphasis on non-partisanship, commonsense, and opposition to narrow interests – the boilerplate of countless political speeches. Can this be all Obama means to change?

The columnist Paul Krugman, a reluctant Obama supporter, has asked if the Illinois senator will be a transformative president, like Reagan, or merely a competent tweaker, like Clinton. [1] Clinton succeeded in ameliorating some of the excesses of the Reagan Revolution but not undoing it. Obama's sensible, moderate policy statements are those of a competent tweaker, and after the Bush years a return to Clintonism would seem like a drastic change indeed. But even fixing vast problems

like the healthcare crisis or climate change do not add up to a transformative political project. And Obama's rhetoric promises transformation.

What would it mean for a progressive president to transform politics today? It is far from clear that Barak Obama or anyone else has a compelling answer to that question. That voters embraced Obama's fuzzy ideas about a 'new politics' indicates that not even those most excited about change know precisely what they want. This gap between rhetoric and policy could ultimately poison 'Obamania.' But it also presents a major opportunity for progressives, and for Obama himself. We have an opportunity to set out a progressive agenda for the beginning of the 21st century.

I.

First, it is important to identify the source of the demand for change. Certainly this desire stems most immediately from the blunders of the Bush era and the economic crisis now weighing on the public mind. But the Bush presidency is as much a symptom of political institutions in decay as a cause. Indeed, it seems likely that much of the hope surrounding Obama's promises of change emerges from disillusionment with the political system as a whole.

Though political leaders rarely speak of it, there is a broad, popular and intellectual consensus that liberal democracy, as it exists in the United States and elsewhere, is troubled. The sociologist Robert Putnam has put the issue quite starkly: 'As American democratic institutions begin their third century, a sense is abroad in the land that our national experiment in self government is faltering.' [2] In 1964 almost two-thirds of Americans believed that government was run for the benefit of all, while one-third believed it mostly served the interests of the powerful. By 2000 the ratio had reversed. [3] Last month's exceptional election aside, voter participation has declined steadily over the post-war period in the US, and across the industrial democracies trust in government has fallen to worrying levels. These trends, while briefly reversed in a wave of national solidarity after September 11th, intensified under Bush as confidence in governance in the United States reached a historic low.

Scholars have suggested various causes for the crisis of democracy. For some it is the triumph of transnational capitalism, in which citizens are reduced to consumers, power to wealth, and government to a minimal provider of property rights and other market-enabling institutions. For example, in *Downsizing Democracy*

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Matthew A. Crenson and Benjamin Ginsberg argue that government has been reduced to an exercise of ‘customer service,’ with public policy outsourced to private contractors and politics vitiated of all meaningful collective action. Colin Crouch agrees, arguing in *Post-Democracy* that even if the formal vestiges of democracy remain, the overwhelming power of commercial interests means they can no longer be considered meaningful expressions of the people’s will. And in *Supercapitalism* Robert Reich, a former Secretary of Labor, notes that as capitalism has grown ever more responsive to our needs as individual consumers, democracy has grown less responsive to our collective needs as citizens.

For others, the triumph of the market over the political is itself symptomatic of a broader shift toward an atomised society in which various identities and experiences trump former notions of mass politics. Pierre Rosanvallon argues that the ‘public will’ democratic institutions are designed to enact is increasingly disaggregated into various sub-segments, or diffused to civil society. [4] Instead of ‘the people,’ we now have a proliferation of overlapping identities that divide society into increasingly autonomous spheres.

Whatever the diagnosis, it is clear that the ability of existing democratic institutions to provide meaningful self-rule to their citizens is in question. And because democratic institutions are the political technology that makes liberty possible, the crisis of democracy becomes a crisis for freedom as well.

Freedom was much discussed under the Bush government, but rarely served. Instead, liberty became the packaging of choice for conservative causes ranging from tax-cuts for the wealthy to military adventurism in the Middle East. Even secret prisons and ‘coercive interrogation practices’ – torture – were wrapped in this Orwellian language. So complete was the rhetorical onslaught that, absurdly, freedom seems an unlikely theme for progressives today.

It is time to reclaim liberty for the Left. The great cause of the 21st century is not, as the neoconservatives would have it, to defend our existing way of life and to make the world safe for democracy. Rather, it is to renew and strengthen freedom by amplifying our conception of liberty and creating new types of politics to realise it. For too long freedom has been a largely negative project, posited against, variously, the ‘ancien regime,’ imperialism, fascism, communism, authoritarianism, imperialism, racial prejudice, sex discrimination, etc. These were all worthy enemies.

But it is time to reassert liberty as a positive project, the ever-fuller realisation of human potential.

The 18th century political technology we use today must be updated with new ideas and institutions for rule by the people in order to make democracy work in the 21st century. An enlarged freedom agenda would require more than merely fine-tuning the policies of the modern, liberal state. First, it would require a notion of freedom and democracy that treats economic and social deprivation as a central form of oppression. Such a notion of freedom could provide a compelling new underpinning for the core progressive cause of social justice.

Second, an enlarged freedom agenda would require progressives to recommit themselves to institutional innovation. Current political institutions – the mechanisms of democracy, like legislatures and elections – were invented and fought for by progressives, but are today inadequate to provide truly meaningful liberty to citizens. New tools will be needed to enrich democracy now and into the future.

Third, an enlarged freedom agenda will require democracy to confront the globalised nature of politics. Policymakers are scrambling to find solutions to transnational problems as diverse as economic instability, terrorism, and infectious disease. Creating institutions that can solve global problems while also giving people control over their own fates is a major challenge to progressives in a globalised world.

Intellectuals and activists have insisted on these themes for some decades now. The question is how to build them into a coherent political project. The Left has largely missed the opportunity to make the expansion of human freedom its central organising motif. And yet that goal is the (only?) common thread running through the disparate collection of causes that make up the progressive movement today. Placing the expansion of human freedom at the center of the progressive cause provides the kind of simple, powerful narrative the Left has lacked. This is change we can believe in.

Leadership is needed to take the diverse, innovative thinking that is happening on the Left, name it, weave it into a coherent political project, and push it forward. Political transformation requires more than just good ideas. Obama has today

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perhaps what will be the only opportunity in this generation to exercise that kind of leadership. Will he take it?

II.

It would make sense to begin with economic freedom, the great unfinished project of the 20th century. Today freedom and democracy are understood almost exclusively in narrow political terms – the right to not be oppressed by the government or others and to participate in collective decision-making. But what about the corresponding ability to take advantage of those rights? Isaiah Berlin famously distinguished between negative rights – freedom from – and positive rights – freedom to. Plenty of thinkers have challenged this distinction, but, even if it ultimately breaks down, there is a sense, particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries, that negative rights – free speech, voting, etc. – are essential while positive rights – health, education, etc. – are secondary or not really rights at all.

Perhaps the most persuasive and best-known argument for a broader conception of freedom is the economist Amartya Sen's notion of freedom as capacity. [5] Simplified, his point is that if freedom is about realising oneself, then we must be concerned not only with political restrictions on liberty but also the material conditions in which people live. Which is more restrictive to your freedom, not being able to vote or not having enough food to eat? The idea can be found in such diverse thinkers as Gandhi, Sun Yatsen, Dewey, Marx, Roosevelt, Tocqueville, and Jefferson. And it is surely a sentiment that most would find intuitive; for freedom to be real, we must be able to take advantage of it. But what should a society that takes freedom seriously do to ensure people are just as free in the Senian sense as in the conventional sense?

In the American context, the law professor Cass Sunstein has persuasively resurrected FDR's mid-century proposal for a second 'Bill of Rights' to provide, in the classic formulation, freedom from want. [6] Roosevelt's proposal, never enacted, was simple: add a new Bill of Rights to the American social contract that would provide the following: jobs, food, clothing, adequate recreation, a decent life for farmers, the right to do business, shelter, health, security in old age, and education. We might change some of those particulars today, but the fundamental idea is to ensure a basic set of living conditions to every citizen as an inalienable right. Roosevelt did not necessarily see these rights as amendments to the Constitution, but rather as elements of what Sunstein calls America's unwritten 'constitutional understanding.'

Indeed, some of them, like social security and education, are already so engrained into political culture today as to be, like formal rights, nearly inviolate, even if they do not appear in the Constitution.

Still, others like health care are not. The United States is the only wealthy country whose citizens are not free from the arbitrary insecurity of illness. This is puzzling. Social and economic rights, as Sunstein argues, need not seem strange to American political culture. Indeed, they appear in numerous state constitutions. For example, every state but Iowa guarantees its citizens the right to an education. A good number go much further; New York, for example, promises, ‘The aid, care, and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state...as the legislature may from time to time determine.’ [7]

These examples aside, public opinion polling shows Americans to support fewer social safeguards than many other countries. [8] But what better reason for progressives to speak about social justice as economic freedom? Conventional wisdom holds that pursuing social and economic rights in America is quixotic. But placing social and economic rights in the context of a broader freedom-promoting agenda might just turn that conventional wisdom on its head.

The nub, of course, is enforcement. If we guarantee all people certain rights like healthcare, we may expose the public to financial liabilities that could restrict the economic freedom of others via excessive taxation. This is a valid concern, but ultimately a resolvable one.

First, the magnitude of funds required to supply a basic minimum of economic rights – health care, subsistence, housing, education, social security – is simply not that large compared to the size of the American economy or current government spending. For example, Obama’s universal healthcare plan has been estimated to cost around \$100 billion per year, less than four percent of what the government spent in fiscal year 2007, less than five percent of what Americans spend on health care, and about what the U.S. government has spent annually in Iraq since 2003. [9]

Second, the experiences of India and South Africa – democracies whose constitutions promise their citizens social and economic rights – show that even developing countries can provide a meaningful version of economic freedom. In India, economic rights are enforceable in courts, but the government is given substantial scope in their fulfilment in view of its fiscal ability to do so. In South

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Africa the government has less leeway to refuse the provision of economic rights, but concession are still made to feasibility. Citizens in both these countries have used the legal process to gain access to essentials like shelter and water, while judges have built a careful jurisprudence that balances justice with public finances.

Even more encouragingly, evidence from state-level courts suggests that American judges would not use economic and social rights to raid the public purse. The New York courts have walked a fine line between providing remedies to social needs – e.g. striking down a law that prevented those under 21 from collecting full welfare benefits – and paying deference to legislative priorities – e.g. allowing the state to deny assistance to welfare recipients who had failed to seek employment.

The United States, in other words, has little to fear from a broadened conception of freedom. Indeed, with regard to education and social security, it already tacitly exists. Progressives should build on this base, placing economic freedom at the core of American political culture.

III.

It is common to think of the constellation of institutions that make up liberal democracy – elections, rights, legislatures, judicial review, etc. – as if they were the highest form of politics. Indeed, all of them mark important advances over previous political institutions. But it would be curious and unfortunate if the late 20th century marked the highpoint of political development. An expanded freedom agenda requires democratic institutions that build on the achievements of liberal democracy to create a deeper liberty than exists today.

Two major and intertwined strands of thought drive most contemporary proposals to deepen democracy – deliberation and participation. Representative democracy, by only allowing citizens to approve or disapprove of their representatives' general performance at regular intervals, provides minimal opportunities to influence policy. Benjamin Barber's influential 1984 'Strong Democracy' termed this sort of arrangement 'thin' democracy, and called for new forms of citizens' assemblies to give people more opportunities to participate directly in political debate.

The great deficiency of calls for the renewal and expansion of democratic institutions has been the relative lack of workable policy proposals to realise them. At the academic level, this lacuna perhaps reflects the dominance of normative theory in

the project of democratic renewal. While normative theorists have best posed and analysed the problem of contemporary democratic weakness, normative analysis needs to be joined to positivist insights into the workings of political institutions and, critically, creative thinking about what sorts of institutions might be possible in the future. Positivists, however, have remained largely uninterested in calls to renew democratic institutions, perhaps because they remain hypothetical. This is unfortunate. Social science need not limit itself to description, explanation, and exhortation. Invention is also possible.

One of the cleverest examples of political invention is Stanford law professor James Fishkin's idea of deliberative polling. The idea is simple. A random, representative sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a single place for a weekend in order to discuss the issues. Carefully balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and are also made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues. [10]

Just as not everyone is able to serve on the jury of every trial, not every citizen has the ability to learn about and discuss a certain political issue. And just as juries are meant to serve as a representative sample of one's peers, so too can deliberative polls produce representative samples of what people would think if democracy worked ideally.

Fishkin and others have been able to test this idea several times, with impressive results. A deliberative poll has even been conducted – and its findings implemented! – in China. [11] It is a pragmatic political technology that progressives could incorporate into American politics. What if, for example, the President or a certain number of congressmen could insist on holding a deliberative poll before passing particularly contentious legislation? Or if citizen groups conducted their own such poll? The results could carry significant moral weight that, if given enough publicity in the media – and here the support of top political leaders would be key – could prove influential in legislative debates.

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Ethan Leib has expanded on this idea to propose an entire deliberative branch of government. [12] Where Fishkin's deliberative polls offer only recommendations, Leib would imbue them with substantive decision-making authority. How exactly such a 'popular branch' would share power with the existing legislature, executive, and judiciary is a delicate question, and it is unlikely Americans would approve so drastic a change in the immediate future. But the idea of supplementing existing structures with these kinds of deliberative, citizen-based mechanisms offers real progress toward a deeper version of democracy.

However, perhaps the most promising ideas for making democracy more deliberative and participatory are emerging far below the level of national politics. In 'The Next Form of Democracy' Matt Leighninger extols what he sees as a shift toward citizen involvement in local governance. [13] Through a series of anecdotes about town planning, education reform, and racial reconciliation, Leighninger shows how local governments are creating more effective and more democratic policy by giving citizens expanded opportunities to debate and participate in decision-making. Unfortunately he is unable to say with authority exactly how widespread the trend toward local participation and deliberation is, a general deficit of this literature. We know that deepened democracy is happening in the country, but we lack a sense of the larger picture.

Here, again, is an opportunity for progressives. In order for deliberative and participatory mechanisms of democratic participation to truly transform American politics, they cannot be applied in a piecemeal fashion. A progressive president could vastly enhance the freedom of every American citizen by creating federal incentives – grants and training programs, for example – for municipalities to adopt such tools. Even simply using the bully pulpit to advocate community-involvement programs and linking them to a broader agenda of democratic innovation could inspire efforts across the country.

Another institutional front for the expansion of democracy is the realm of so-called network governance. Increasingly, public policy is formulated and implemented not by traditional bureaucracies but by networks of various government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and private corporations. [14] Such arrangements create both new challenges and opportunities for democracy, which the academic literature is just beginning to explore. [15] On the one hand, networks may deepen democracy by giving civil society a direct role in policy. On the other hand, it may also give non-representative private actors undue authority over what ought to be

public decisions. Government, as the principle convoker and ultimate authority over these networks, must ensure they are the former, not the latter.

The free and easy flow of information – transparency – is necessary for all these proposals. Indeed, as Archon Fung, Mary Graham, and David Weil document in ‘Full Disclosure,’ transparency is increasingly used as a regulatory tool itself. The Toxic Release Inventory, for example, requires corporations to publish information on certain pollutants they release. Communities and civil society groups can then make use of this information to name and shame egregious polluters, creating incentives for environmental protection without actual government mandates and enforcement. This too is in innovative form of democracy – information gives citizens the power to alter decisions that affect their lives.

The democratic institutions we invent in the 21st century are likely to draw from the above trends: a shift from formal voting or adjudication to quasi-formal participatory or deliberative processes; overlapping, perhaps transnational jurisdictions that may be defined not just by geographic space but also by industry, issue area, social group, or other epistemic community; the free flow of information, and horizontal network structures as opposed to vertical hierarchical ones. Information technology has already made many of these approaches more effective – by rapidly dispersing information, for example – and is thus also likely to play a key role.

Progressives need to place such mechanisms at the center of their agenda, and the best way to do so is with the enlightened leadership of the federal government. Centralised, mandatory schemes would likely be politically unpopular and practically lacklustre. Rather, a progressive administration should create incentives for experimentation. It is not important that progressives commit to any one scheme; instead, they should commit to the idea of innovation and experimentation on a large scale.

IV.

From the economy, to the environment, to health, to crime and terrorism, almost every issue of public concern today spans national borders. In response, governments are creating ever more international organisations and treaties. And even these traditional approaches to international cooperation are fast being supplemented by new forms of transnational governance, some of which have very little to do with government itself. Echoing trends in the domestic sphere, government agencies and

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bureaucrats who previously had nothing to do with foreign relations are linking up in cross-border networks to discuss and enact global public policy. [16] And outside the traditional public sphere, NGOs and private corporations are creating their own governance structures, ranging from corporate codes of conduct for labor standards to a whole system of law and arbitration between transnational corporations, a modern ‘lex mercatoria,’ that exists beyond the boundaries of any nation.

Transnational problems and transnational governance in both its traditional and non-state forms creates concerns for democracy. Formal democracy exists only within nation states, with the notable but relatively weak exception of the European Parliament. The policies of international organisations like the World Bank or the United Nations are thus only democratic to the extent the member-countries that control them are democratic. There is also an enormous disjuncture between who actually gets to control the policies that come out of international organisations – powerful countries, either through special voting rules that privilege them or de facto influence – and whom is most affected by their policies – often people in the rest of the world. This perceived ‘democratic deficit’ has led social and environmental activists to protest some of the most prominent international organisations like the World Bank, the WTO, and the IMF.

Similar democratic problems are reflected in the newer modes of global governance, but with these the connection to elected officials is even more tenuous. For example, the bureaucrats who make up transgovernmental networks are public servants but, to the extent the network itself is guiding policy, such nominal democratic control can have little practical meaning. And as for private transnational governance, there is of course no public control at all.

Making transnational governance effective is a daunting challenge; making it also democratic is essentially untried. The worst ideas seek to replicate the democratic institutions we see in nation states at the global level – e.g. a global parliament, a global bureaucracy, etc. Few observers consider such proposals sufficiently feasible in the foreseeable future to merit serious discussion, and rightly so. [17] However, it is incorrect and defeatist to conclude that our inability to transpose domestic structures to the global level makes transnational democracy impossible. Rather, democrats must invent and implement creative answers to the question: how can policy made beyond the nation-state reflect the wishes of those it affects?

A first step would be for powerful countries to engage citizens around the world more directly in their foreign relations. The United States or any other country that professes a belief in the universal value of freedom must consider how its actions abroad affect the liberty of people beyond its borders. This is not to say that the American government must necessarily weigh the opinions of others as much as it does those of American citizens, but it must at least be aware of foreign opinions and respect them to the extent possible.

One idea would be to expand public access to embassies and consulates, traditionally elite bastions. What if people in any country could attend a U.S.-government sponsored town hall meeting to make their opinions known to U.S. diplomats? They would be able to ask questions and the American government would be able to give answers. Such dialogue would not be able to resolve intractable policy disputes, and could become an arena for vitriol. But it would also be a way for the United States to give voice to the voiceless, to set a powerful example for repressive regimes, and, perhaps, to make American foreign policy a bit more effective by helping diplomats respond to the needs of foreign audiences. If done in good faith such a policy would likely prove to be far more effective 'public diplomacy' than slick advertising campaigns.

Second, a progressive president could similarly insist that international organisations take their stakeholders seriously. Some progress has already been made on this front. Thanks in large part to the U.S. Congress (and the civil society groups that lobbied it), the World Bank is today far more open and transparent than it was 15 years ago. Bank staff must now publicise their plans and consult with relevant civil society groups before implementing projects, and should things go awry affected people can challenge the Bank through an independent review mechanism. But few other international organisations live up even to this modest standard. More political pressure from powerful states is needed to push international institutions to democratise.

A similar strategy should be applied to the growing number of more innovative transnational governance mechanisms, including exclusively private arrangements. Progressives should encourage such initiatives where they address real policy problems in a way traditional government cannot. But at the same time we must find some way to preserve the public interest in a world of non-public governance. Again, government and international organisations could play a key role as facilitators and conveners of such initiatives, providing incentives for mechanisms

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that serve the public interest and acting as a watchdog for those that instead advance narrow interests.

Global governance today and in the foreseeable future will not take a hierarchical form akin to a nation-state, but rather resemble a chaotic patchwork of public and private institutions. In such a context, formal democratic mechanisms like voting are likely to be unrealistic and ineffective in the vast majority of situations. But this is no reason to give up on transnational democracy. Instead, progressives should strive to ensure that citizens can monitor transnational policymaking and voice their preferences in a meaningful way.

V.

Expanding freedom at home and in the transnational sphere could also reinvigorate the United States' efforts to promote democracy in those parts of the world where liberty remains to be claimed. After the Bush 'freedom agenda' the United States' credibility on this front is highly compromised. A radical shift is needed, and a broader conception of freedom points the way forward.

First, a concept of democracy that takes Senian capacities and socio-economic rights seriously – and that links such ideas to civil-political rights and freedoms – would be much more attractive and attuned to the world than the minimalist version. Nancy Soderberg and Brian Katulis make a strong case for this approach in 'Prosperity Agenda,' noting that for the billions of people living in poverty around the world, economic security is a far higher priority than formal freedom.

As with promoting economic freedom domestically, the costs involved in freeing the world's people from the oppression of disease or hunger are not particularly high relative to global GDP. For the United States to reach the U.N.-established goal of spending 0.7 percent of GDP on development assistance it would only have to augment spending by about \$100 billion – the same cost as guaranteeing health insurance for all Americans. If all rich countries followed suit, seemingly intractable scourges like HIV/AIDS and malaria might be eradicated.

Second, cosmopolitan conceptions of democracy may counteract resentment of democracy promotion based in nationalism. In much of the unfree world (e.g. China, the Arab countries), people who support democracy sometimes resent what are seen as Western efforts to lecture them on how to create a good society. The

undemocratic nature of Western and particularly American foreign policy – either during the colonial era or more recently – has created a strong sense of hypocrisy in such countries. Transnational forms of democracy promise a modicum of justice to societies that see themselves as historically oppressed by foreign powers because they promise to give people influence over the decision taken abroad that affect them. To the extent democracy promotion can link control over one's own government to control over the impact of global issues on societies, it will be seen as more credible and desirable – a tool of national liberation as opposed to a Western imposition.

Third, recognising the various forms that democracy can and should take in addition to minimalist notions of elections expands the terms of debate. For example, competitive multiparty elections are a non-starter for the Chinese Communist Party. But consultative policymaking may not be. Indeed, it is already practiced at the local level in a number of Chinese cities. Baogang He describes how the city of Wenling, in the coastal province Zhejiang, has created a 'ketan' ('sincere discussion') system through which the city government solicits the opinion of citizens in open debates when making local planning discussions. [18] Wenling has even conducted a deliberative poll about municipal budgeting priorities, and, significantly, implemented the results.

Institutionalised over the course of several years, the 'ketan' is largely similar to the most advanced community-based planning initiatives in the United States and other democracies. Conversations with China and other autocracies about democracy and human rights should recognise and encourage these sorts of initiatives while still insisting on free elections, press freedom, and civic and political rights. While these 'basics' are no doubt essential, progress toward democracy can take other forms as well.

In this way, recasting democracy as a positive project of enlarging human freedom can change the overall terms of the democracy promotion debate. The narrow conception of democracy only allows us to think about democracy promotion as a vanguard of enlightened countries helping along the laggards – not a particularly compelling or accurate narrative. By reimagining democracy in a more holistic way we make democratisation instead a common challenge that unites all nations. This view is a far more compelling project for progressives in the West and elsewhere to take up.

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Last, the idea of expanding democracy makes spreading it not just an act of institutional replication, but of invention. I have already mentioned how the United States might learn from the experiences of India and South Africa with regard to economic freedom. The Brazilian state of Porto Alegre and the Indian state of Kerala have also, like Wenling city in China, created participatory budget-setting processes that go beyond what currently exists in the United States. As various societies adopt democracy to their own needs they expand it, introducing new mechanisms and practices that may be instructive to other countries seeking to make rule by the people effective.

VI.

The specifics of an expanded freedom agenda are not the stuff of political campaigns. Obama has won this election on the stalwarts of health care, economy, seniors, education, and energy, to cite the five first issues listed on the ‘Blueprint for Change’ posted on his website. These will be the bread and butter of his administration.

To inaugurate a ‘new politics,’ however, Obama and the movement he represents will have to reach beyond the major policy issues of the day. Altering the way democracy works in the United States and elsewhere is necessary to protect the core values that progressives care about as well as the more immediate concerns – health, economic security, a just foreign policy – that dominate electoral contests. Directing the nation toward a deeper idea of freedom is the kind of transformation that would put an Obama administration at the head of a major progressive expansion for the 21st century. And there we might find more change than we ever believed possible.

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Notes

- [1] Krugman 2008b.
- [2] Putnam 1994.
- [3] See *The American National Election Studies*, University of Michigan, at <http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/topable/tab5>.
- [4] Rosanvallon 2003.
- [5] Sen 1999.
- [6] Sunstein 2004.
- [7] Quoted in Sunstein 2004, p. 213.
- [8] See, for example, Sunstein 2004, pp. 130-1.
- [9] Jonathan Gruber, cited in Krugman 2008a.
- [10] Fishkin nd.
- [11] Leib and He 2006.
- [12] Leib 2004.
- [13] Leighninger 2006.
- [14] Goldsmith and Eggers 2004.
- [15] The most comprehensive recent statement of the issues is given in Eva Sorensen and Torfing 2007.
- [16] So-called 'transgovernmental networks' have been documented by Slaughter 2004.
- [17] A notable exception is Falk and Strauss 2001.
- [18] Leib and He 2006.