

Introduction

■ This book addresses several questions that deal with democracy assistance provided by countries that experienced the “third wave of democracy” and that were recipients of this kind of aid not so long ago.¹ Why does a country that received democracy assistance in the past offer such aid today and when did this shift take place? How does a one-time recipient country go about assisting other countries in their struggles with democracy? How does a young democracy conceptualize democracy and the democratization process and how does its view on democracy assistance differ from approaches used by Western donors? Finally, are democracy assistance efforts effective in terms of their capacity to diffuse democratic norms and practices to other recipient countries?

This book presents a first attempt to investigate the efforts of a young democracy to support democracy in other countries, and it thus contributes to the body of research on democracy assistance. The questions addressed in this work arise largely from ongoing debates in the literature on democracy assistance regarding approaches and strategies used to assist recipient countries with their struggle for democracy. By investigating democracy assistance efforts in an authoritarian versus a democratizing country, this work challenges two major emerging approaches in democracy assistance—political and developmental—and, by presenting cross-border collaborative work between civil societies, it adds to the discussion on how to improve democracy assistance so that it is more in tune with the political reality in recipient countries.

This book also engages many other literatures in political science. It links the concerns of international relations theorists who are interested in the impact of external influences on domestic politics and regional diffusion of democracy with the concerns of scholars of comparative politics in

processes of democratization and consolidation, as well as in civil society. Specifically, this study describes nongovernmental networks of actors operating across national borders, and, given the potential of such networks to effect domestic political change, it is important to know more about how they emerge, function, and sustain. This work also points out that, to improve our understanding of democratization processes, it is important to acknowledge the different roles that civil society groups play in authoritarian versus democratizing environments as well as the challenges these groups face.

External Influences on the Diffusion of Democracy

The comparative politics and international relations literatures on democratization and democratic consolidation abound with different explanations about the ways in which a system becomes democratic and solidifies its democratic features, but there is no consensus among political scientists on what affects these phenomena (Tilly 2007, 49). Prior to the 1990s, studies on democratization and democratic consolidation favored explanations that focused on domestic influences (Schmitter 1986).² This view began to change, particularly in response to transformations in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) taking place as part of the “third wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991).³ The role of external factors in the politics of regime change in postcommunist CEE states made scholars realize that domestic factors do not sufficiently explain how countries democratize. Today, any model exploring the determinants of democratization that does not take external factors into account is lacking in specificity, but the literature devoted to the importance of international forces in democratization is still small.

This study contributes to our understanding of the impact of international influences on democratic change with a special focus on the role of regional diffusion of democracy. Diffusion itself can be defined as a process by which an idea, institution, policy, model, or the like is spread through certain channels to the members of the social system (e.g., within a state or across states) (Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Brinks and Coppedge 2006; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Rogers 1995, 10; Tarrow 1998, 2005). The fact that democracies expanded in “waves” (Bratton and van de Walle 1997, 29) and that democratization “snowballs” (Huntington 1991) in some regions motivated international relations researchers to investigate the impact of neighboring states and to hypothesize that countries sharing borders with democratizing states or new democracies are far more likely

to undergo transition to democracy themselves (Crescenzi and Enterline 1999; Enterline and Greig 2005; Gleditsch and Ward 2006; O'Loughlin et al. 1998; Rasler and Thompson 2004; Starr 1991; Starr and Lindborg 2003). Gleditsch and Ward (2006), for example, find that as the frequency of democracies within a geographic region increases, the more democratic the nondemocratic states in the region become. Thus, the authors argue that "international processes that influence democratization are not particularly to be found at a global level" and that "the global level is an aggregate that masks large regional differences and variation" (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 913). Therefore, it makes little sense to exclude the regional context.

Scholars find that regional diffusion of democracy has significant effects. However, the question arises as to whether we know what regional mechanism is encouraging actors in authoritarian states to undergo transition to democracy. Despite statistical evidence of regional clustering of democracies, it is difficult to identify the particular causal process behind the correlations between neighborhood influence and democratization. Important questions still remain regarding how regional diffusion of democracy takes place and what drives the regional spread of political change. Without specifying the mechanism behind this regional diffusion, we will have a vague understanding about this process, and diffusion will be just "illusion" (Brinks and Coppedge 2006).

This research may contribute to our understanding of what may be behind the observable diffusion of democracies within a region. This project suggests that, in addition to domestic and other external explanations, an active engagement of democratic neighbors may be one of the mechanisms explaining how authoritarian neighbors imitate and learn and how democratic ideas and behaviors spread geographically. Of course, the mechanisms driving diffusion are usually multiple, but the study suggests that the analysis of diffusion cannot neglect the people on the ground involved in this process. It therefore focuses on cross-border interactions of nonstate actors as a mechanism of diffusion of democracy. Scholars of social movements have become aware of the transnational processes that carry contention beyond borders. Social movement theorists argue that transnational challenges, specifically transnational advocacy networks (TANs), including external and domestic actors and groups, may have impacts on domestic political regimes (Smith et al. 1997; Smith and Wiest 2012; Tarrow 1998). Inspired by Keck and Sikkink (1998), scholars have concentrated on the role of "activists beyond borders" in forging links between social movements and international institutions and organizations (see, e.g., Diani and McAdam 2003). A recent work by Tarrow (2005) that proposes a typology

of contemporary forms of cross-border coalitions significantly advances the literature on transnational networks.

Increased scholarly interest in transnational networks can also be observed in the recent literature on postcommunism (Bunce and Wolchik 2006, 2011; Jacoby 2006). Bunce and Wolchik (2006, 288) address the question of why the electoral revolutions in the postcommunist region have taken place since 2000.⁴ The authors argue that the process of diffusion occurred through complex transnational collaborations that included not just US democracy promoters but also regional democracy promoters and dedicated local activists. In their recent work, Bunce and Wolchik (2011) analyze the spread of electoral strategies within the postcommunist region as a case of cross-border diffusion. They find that a transnational network, composed of Western democracy promoters, local opposition and civil society groups, and regional democracy activists, was one of the driving factors behind the diffusion of innovative electoral strategies. However, despite such studies, little is known about cross-border collaborative networks. This book fills that gap, identifies these networks, and presents evidence of their origin, evolution, and character and their potential to diffuse democratic ideas and practices to civil society groups across borders. Also, it aims to demonstrate that the inclusion of NGOs from neighboring democratic countries in transnational democracy assistance networks increases the chances for democratic diffusion.

This book addresses the little-researched topic of how democratic ideas and behaviors are transferred via a particular network of actors: civil society activists from beyond national borders. The transnational activities investigated here focused primarily on strengthening democratization processes in Ukraine and facilitating the emergence of democratization in Belarus. Therefore, this study links the concerns of scholars who are interested in foreign influences on domestic politics with the concerns of scholars studying processes of democratization and consolidation.

Democratization and Civil Society in Comparative Politics

Civil society plays a significant role in democratization and democratic consolidation.⁵ This work demonstrates that it is instructive to identify the characteristics of different civil society actors, as well as roles and functions that civil society plays, within the context of authoritarian regimes, transitioning regimes, and democracies.

Although scholars and practitioners recognize the importance of civil

society, the actual role of civil society in the processes of democratization and democratic consolidation has received little attention in the literature on democratic transition. Scholars have generally agreed that a vibrant civil society is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for the emergence and sustainability of democracy (Bernhard 1993; Diamond 1994, 1996; Hadenius and Ugglå 1998; Linz and Stepan 1996).⁶ Deutsch (1961) emphasizes the importance of social mobilization, occurring when a country is moving from traditional to modern ways of life, in facilitating democratization by pressuring the government to respect citizens' growing demands. Putnam et al. (1983) show that the regions of Italy in which democratic institutions function most successfully are those in which civil society was already relatively well developed. In other words, successful democratization processes are possible "*only* if, and only to the extent that, a civil society . . . predates the transition or becomes established in the course of it" (Pérez-Díaz 1993, 40). O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 48–56) state that the opening of authoritarian rule usually produces a rapid increase in general popular activation—"the resurrection of civil society"—in which diverse layers of society may come together and form a "popular upsurge" that pushes the transition toward democracy further than it would otherwise have gone. Civil society has played a crucial role in undermining authoritarian regimes and facilitating the establishment of democratic rule in Central and Eastern Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Korea.⁷ Linz and Stepan (1996, 9) argue that civil society is crucial in all stages of transition because of the capacity of the third sector to generate political alternatives and to monitor government. A lively and independent civil society can help transitions get started, resist reversals, push transitions to their completion, and consolidate and help deepen democracy.

However, a number of important theoretical questions regarding the role of civil society in supporting democratic institutions remain unanswered. Most authors agree that civil society is the realm between state and family. It is separated from the state (and thus excludes formal "political society" as well as private sector business), is autonomous in relation to the state, and is formed voluntarily by members of society to protect and extend their interests and values.⁸ Nevertheless, I argue that scholars focus too much on the role of nongovernmental organizations as a component of civil society in the process of creating and deepening democracy and seem to neglect the role of nongovernmental actors that are not, or cannot be, formally organized (teachers, students, parents) as well as many less formal networks, such as mass media, clubs, associations, and neighboring communities.

Debate regarding the different components of civil society also relates to the discussion concerning the kind of civil society that is desirable and possible in authoritarian states and democratizing countries and to what degree civil society should act as a partner or adversary of the state. I argue that it is important to distinguish between civil society and uncivil society in authoritarian regimes, especially because in authoritarian regimes there may be groups that support the nondemocratic regime and even facilitate the growth of that regime.⁹ The truly civil society, however, aims to delegitimize a regime or compel it to be more responsive to its citizens and to guarantee individual and collective liberties. The components of civil society performing these functions are often informal entities, and it is important to support linkages between such groups since a united civil society that forms an active opposition to the regime can mobilize a “popular upsurge” and thus overthrow authoritarianism. In other words, in authoritarian states, civil society plays a more oppositional role, and so it is important to define civil society actors and recognize the role they play or may play in a future transition.

In consolidated democracies, however, although civil society puts curbs on government, the state and civil society are seen more as partners than opponents. For example, Geremek (1996, 250) points out that civil society in a consolidating country “should not be based on emotions” and should not act in opposition to the democratic state but cooperate with it in the building of democratic institutions and involve as many persons as possible in public life, in order to construct a democratic mechanism of stability. During the consolidation of democracy, civil society can be the basis of good and effective government, as well as a partner in resolving problems of successful democratic governance, because civil society serves as a bridge between private citizen and public office, aggregates citizens’ interests and articulates their demands, serves as a watchdog for these interests, and widens public debate.¹⁰

However, scholars argue that certain preconditions must be met in order for civil society to be able to penetrate, fragment, and decentralize government’s power. Civil society should be “vibrant” in terms of its pluralism (the number, size, variety, and density of civil society’s networks), have a democratic orientation, participate in politics, and, above all, should be autonomous or independent of the state. The argument regarding autonomy and commitment to democratic values is especially important when taking into account Berman’s (1997, 424) findings that a robust civil society’s alliance with undemocratic elites contributed to the collapse of the Weimar

Republic—Germany's first experience with democracy. I argue that these characteristics should be acknowledged by democracy assistance providers so that civil society can contribute to the consolidation of democracy.

Democracy Assistance Literature

This book focuses on democracy assistance efforts provided by a young democracy, something not previously studied; therefore, the study's major contribution to democracy assistance literature is apparent. The literature abounds with studies on democracy assistance carried out by Western democracies (e.g., Alesina and Dollar 2000; Burnell 2000; Carothers 1999, 2004; Diamond 1992, 1999; Finkel et al. 2006; Kausch et al. 2006; Lancaster 2007; Ottaway 2003; Ottaway and Chung 1999; Pinto-Duschinsky 1997; Schraeder et al. 1998; and Youngs 2008).¹¹ The literature usually focuses on democracy assistance programs run by quasi-governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and international organizations. The major actors examined in the literature are US government-funded and privately run US-based nonprofit organizations: the Office of Democratic Initiatives attached to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF), the Soros Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. Other important actors engaged in democracy assistance efforts have been international organizations, such as the World Bank and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. There is also assistance undertaken by European entities—governmental institutions, civil society organizations, and foundations like Germany's *Stiftungen*—as well as the European Commission programs, such as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) (ACAP 1995).

Although the literature on democracy promotion is vast, there is a gap with regard to the way in which third-wave democracies promote democratic values and practices elsewhere. Carothers (2004) just touches on this subject, mentioning that some democracies, such as Chile, Poland, and Taiwan, are also establishing democracy assistance programs in their regions and that these programs are growing and being institutionalized. Hence, this study examines one of these cases in depth. Using Poland as a case, the analysis addresses the question of to what extent, in giving foreign aid, a third-wave democracy is motivated by the desire to spread democracy. Why does the Polish government engage in democracy assistance?

What are the major recipient countries of this assistance? Since there is no comprehensive study on democracy assistance initiatives undertaken by a young democracy beyond its borders, this work fills a gap in the literature.

There are two major debates in the literature on democracy assistance to which this book contributes: one that revolves around approaches to democracy assistance, specifically, which type of assistance and which target sector receives more attention from donors; and one over the best ways to provide civil society assistance.

In general, the democracy promotion literature shows that there are several forms of democracy assistance programs, and they differ based on their particular focus on economic development, political institution building, elections, civil society and the media, and the rule of law. However, support for elections, institution building, and the rule of law has shown that democracy assistance is unsuccessful without taking into the account the role of citizens in democratization.¹² Therefore, most scholars argue that civil society aid is the most important aspect of democracy assistance strategies, because of the merits in mobilizing citizens' demands and strengthening their political participation.¹³

Civil society assistance was not always a major component of democracy aid. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of opposition from civil society groups in Central and Eastern Europe triggered the expansion of democracy assistance to these groups in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁴ The growth of civil society in the early 1990s came to show its important democratizing potential when donor agencies realized that their focus on electoral systems and state institutions was inadequate and lacked the ability to strengthen citizens' political participation. Since then, there has been a steady increase in interest among Western democracies' governments, foundations, and organizations in assisting civil society. Donors began to sponsor programs identified as "strengthening civil society" across the developing and postcommunist worlds, with the assumption that civil society is crucial in the transition to and consolidation of democracy (USAID Mission n.d.).¹⁵ However, civil society assistance has received little research attention and needs to be better understood.

The literature emphasizes differences among Western donors with respect to which form of democracy assistance should be given priority. Scholars distinguish two major emerging approaches in democracy assistance: *political* and *developmental* (Carothers 2009; Jarábik 2006, 86; Kopstein 2006). Some policy makers and political observers see US democracy assistance as basically political and the European Union's democracy-building efforts as largely developmental. According to the political approach,

democracy aid is directed to political parties, civil society groups, associations, politicians, or politically oriented nongovernmental organizations. Democracy assistance also can be carried out through support to key institutions, such as an independent electoral commission, independent judiciary, or independent media. In Carothers's (2009) opinion, the political approach best corresponds to Dahl's conception of democracy, because this concept highlights the importance of political and civil rights in ensuring that citizens can participate in democratic political processes. The developmental approach, however, perceives democratization as a slow, iterative process of change in a wide range of political and socioeconomic aspects. In Carothers's (2009, 8) opinion, the developmental approach suggests that it is better to achieve a basic level of social and economic development before proceeding with democratization. Thus, particular attention is paid to promoting social and economic development and then building political institutions and good governance rather than strengthening political contestation and openness.

This study helps answer the question of whether democracy assistance provided by a young democracy falls into this typology of approaches to democracy assistance and whether this distinction is still relevant when young democracies provide this support. Moreover, taking into account the importance of civil society assistance and the different roles that civil society plays in generating and sustaining democracy, the question arises as to whether the distinction between political and developmental democracy assistance is equally applicable to both authoritarian regimes and newly democratic recipient countries. For example, if a donor-funded project focuses on strengthening socioeconomic aspects and domestic civil society groups are involved because the project enables them to enhance their role vis-à-vis government, the distinction between political and developmental approaches is not so clear cut. Therefore, this study aims to demonstrate that civil society assistance is a type of democracy assistance that deliberately, directly, and exclusively focuses on societal actors in the recipient country, with the goal of both building their capacity and strengthening their role, regardless of the specific project topic or focus.

Another debate in the democracy assistance literature relates to strategies of providing assistance to civil societies and which methods are most effective in facilitating democratic tendencies in recipient countries. The literature on democracy assistance identifies three strategies, and each has advantages and disadvantages. Carothers's (1999, 257) terminology labels the first strategy the "external project method." This strategy was used by, for example, the USAID for Eastern Europe and parts of the former Soviet

Union at the beginning of the 1990s. This strategy involved providing aid for US NGOs' contractors, such as consulting groups and training specialists (Siegel and Yancey 1992). The proponents of this method may justify it by pointing out that domestic organizations in the recipient countries are poorly institutionalized, lack good reputations and administrative experience, are not developed enough to be able to absorb outside assistance effectively, and thus do not receive direct funds. However, there are also costs associated with this strategy. Much of the funding, instead of being spent in the recipient country, was used by the donor or its domestic contractors. Siegel and Yancey (1992, 52), in their study on assistance to the postcommunist countries, point out that there was "too much of auto-consumption of assistance, because 75 percent of an aid dollar was consumed by the donor." Moreover, such strategies did not find much approval among recipient countries' civil society activists, who were of the opinion that the "Marriott Brigade"—the "fly-in, fly-out" consultants who stayed at Warsaw's five-star hotels—provided training despite having little knowledge about the reality of CEE life (Mendelson and Glenn 2002, 3; Wedel 2001, 1–20). Finally, this strategy is characterized by "lack of local ownership" of assistance projects and a lack of flexibility, when, for example, the real local needs and possibilities turn out to be different from what the donor anticipated (Carothers 1999, 259–65).

The second method of supporting civil society groups in their struggle for democracy is by providing direct grants. US assistance providers have made direct grants to organizations, distributed via a grants competition. In those cases, no American intermediary groups were involved in the implementation of the projects. Direct grants have typically been employed for civil society assistance by the Eurasia Foundation and NED almost from the beginning of their existence (McFaul 2005, 155). The principle in NED work is to provide direct funds for "proposals that originate with indigenous democratic groups."¹⁶ Evaluations of democracy-building work, such as McFaul's writings, seem to favor the NED approach over the USAID model, because the direct grants method has many advantages. Money goes directly into the recipient society, and this method permits greater flexibility in the design and implementation of projects. Although the strategy seems to be more effective in assisting civil society, this approach involves difficulties and limitations as well. In order to avoid any misuse of money, donors might be more likely to finance more Westernized groups that are familiar with grant proposals and are well known by the donor (Carothers 1999, 263, 271–72). It might be difficult to reach local partners, especially in countries with authoritarian governments, and identify whether or not

they are worthy recipients. Finally, donors may be more likely to give bigger direct grants for fewer projects to organizations that are well known in the region (Aksartova 2005, 124–25).

The third strategy is represented by the activity of the Soros Foundation, and this strategy may be characterized as “going local.” Unlike many other foundations, the Soros Foundation does involve local people in its efforts. The Soros Foundation established local foundations in each target country, and each local organization has a separate identity, along with local boards of directors and local staff. However, this method is costly, because of the expense inherent in providing capital to operate the foundations. Using this approach also entails allocating money to local groups through the individual national foundations, which is problematic because funds may be more likely to be distributed within a tightly knit circle of known associates.

This book addresses questions about how young democracies go about delivering their democracy assistance to recipient countries by examining Polish governmental and nongovernmental aid practices. Is there cooperation between governmental and nongovernmental sectors while they engage in supporting democracy in recipient countries? To what extent are strategies employed in Polish democracy assistance similar to or different from Western democracies’ strategies?

The Polish Democracy Assistance Case

In order to examine democracy assistance efforts taken by a young democracy, this study focuses on Polish democracy assistance. The case study method was selected to address the relevant research questions because it allows for fully detailed description, in-depth examination, and explanation of a single example (George and Bennett 2005, 12, 21; King et al. 1994, 4–5). The examination of a single case allows the researcher to look for factors that may not be easily discovered in less detailed studies. With the detailed study of a single democracy assistance case, a researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of why and how such assistance is provided in a particular way and the mechanism by which a young democracy diffuses its newfound approach to governing to other countries. The additional advantage of a case study is that it may reveal elements that demand further research.

There are several reasons why Polish democracy assistance presented itself as an opportune case for answering the research questions posed. First, Poland is known for its active civil society, which was the major force in

bringing down communism and which has influenced other regime alterations in the communist space. The Solidarity movement, which emerged in 1980–81 as an attempt by Gdańsk’s shipyard workers to improve labor conditions, was an autonomous civil society organization, a distinct rarity in the communist region. The movement gave impetus to the Poles’ growing demand for the right to organize and to speak freely. Eventually, Solidarity became a political movement embracing workers, intellectuals, and dissidents who negotiated and then won the first partially free democratic election, on June 4, 1989. The Solidarity movement not only liberated Polish people from communism but also sparked the events leading to the fall of Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism in Central Europe and the Soviet Union, and the end of the cold war.

A new model of political transition emerged from Solidarity’s process of peaceful resistance to communism. The result is the “roundtable talks” model of negotiated (pacted) transition.¹⁷ Solidarity is a symbol of citizens mobilizing to achieve human rights, recognition of the sovereignty of individuals, and freedom of speech and association under dictatorial conditions. This movement provided a model of what is possible if workers, intellectuals, and civil society activists come together en masse to resist authoritarianism. The new model Solidarity generated helped shape thinking about democracy assistance and made civil society an important focus for Western donors.¹⁸

Another reason why Poland is a good case study is that, among the many countries that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it showed that democratization is achievable and contributes to the prosperity of the state and its citizens.¹⁹ Poland was a pioneer in political and economic transformation in the postcommunist region. It is one of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in which political and economic reforms were particularly successful.²⁰

A final reason that Poland makes an ideal case study for this research is that, during the communist era and transformation process, Polish civil society—including opposition groups, civic groups, and intellectual and business elites favoring democratization—was the major recipient of Western aid in the region. Many Polish nongovernmental organizations were established with major assistance from external funds, and these associations played an important role in Poland’s transformation from communism to democracy.²¹

Thus, we can reasonably assume this past experience would impel the government and nongovernmental organizations toward democracy assistance, particularly civil society assistance. Because of Polish NGOs’

prominent role in the democratic changes in Poland, one may expect that they might also be active in assisting other countries with their democratic transformations. Moreover, Poland's future democracy assistance providers had learned the formula from Western donors who had provided democracy assistance to Poland, and they had even learned lessons from the West's mistakes in delivering assistance. Having gone through political and economic transition themselves and having had experience as recipients of democracy aid, Polish NGOs might have a better understanding of which projects are likely to work better and to produce more substantial results in different stages of movement toward democracy—from the beginnings of change while still under authoritarian rule, through liberalization and increased participation in regime change efforts, and then concerted work toward consolidation.

Utilizing Comparisons

Poland's democracy assistance has focused on Belarus and Ukraine—two post-Soviet states that border Poland—because these two countries figure prominently in Poland's foreign policy priorities, for both security and cultural reasons. The role of Polish diplomacy during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine is well acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Åslund and McFaul 2006; Wilson 2006). Poland proved to be both ready and able to play a key role in Ukraine, and, in doing so, the Polish government raised the EU's own profile in the region and helped place Ukraine high on the EU's agenda.²² Belarus and Ukraine are important for the security of the whole postcommunist region, and this situation is acknowledged by both scholars and policy makers. Poland's government has many times emphasized its support for Ukraine's future membership in the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); the Polish government has been actively involved in shaping EU policy toward its eastern neighbors as well. Taking into account these Polish diplomatic efforts, democracy assistance, which is a foreign policy tool, may be used together with other Polish actions. In addition to security reasons, historical and cultural ties with Belarus and Ukraine also are factors influencing the Polish government's decision to grant most of its aid to Belarus and Ukraine.²³

The diffusion literature suggests that the greater the similarity between transmitters and prospective adopters on one or more sociocultural dimensions, the greater the prospect of diffusion (Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Lahusen 1999; Snow and Benford 1999). This book aims to demonstrate that those similarities facilitate closer ties, which in turn make diffusion of

democratic ideas and behavior more likely to happen. A lack of cultural and language barriers, as well as geographical proximity, facilitates the engagement of Polish NGOs to form networks with counterparts in Belarus or Ukraine.²⁴ Through close partnerships and an almost “personal” aspect in their cross-border work, Polish civil society groups may be better informed about the political situation of the recipient countries and the internal factors that might create obstacles for the provision of assistance. Thus, nearby civil society groups giving assistance may be better equipped to address problems of civil society in the recipient country. Finally, geographical proximity may offer a chance for the development of long-term cooperation and thus may improve the work and status of civil society groups in the recipient country.

Moreover, Belarus and Ukraine present an interesting example of countries that have a shared historical past, including similar circumstances that culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but ended up with different political systems in the twenty-first century. Belarus has been labeled Europe’s last dictatorship (Garnett and Legvold 1999; Marples 2005; Schmidtke and Yekelchik 2008). Ukraine, however, has only recently begun a difficult road toward democratic consolidation (D’Anieri 2007b; Flikke 2008). Presenting democracy assistance efforts in an authoritarian country versus in a country moving toward democratic consolidation highlights the challenges that these two countries create for democracy-assistance donors and sheds light on the ways in which the political context and relations between the Polish government and each of the recipient governments affect the selection of Polish assistance strategies. Moreover, taking into account the role of civil society in democratization and democratic consolidation, the study highlights the role of the third sector in Belarus and Ukraine and how international support should adapt in order to influence democratic changes in these countries through civil society.

Finally, by studying Poland’s efforts to support democracy in Belarus and Ukraine, this book contributes to the debate in the postcommunist literature on democratic transition. It addresses the question of mitigating the so-called “postcommunist divide.” Scholars of postcommunist democratization have noted that the communist space in Europe used to be considered “regional,” because some countries within this area were politically, economically, and militarily integrated. It is commonly argued that the postcommunist countries witnessed not only a political transformation, from an authoritarian regime to a pluralistic democracy, but also an economic transformation, from a command economy to a free-market economy (Armijo et al. 1994; Offe 2004). However, the transformation

paths of these formerly communist countries varied, and today there is a significant variation in political outcomes in the postcommunist space.²⁵ The differences between postcommunist countries regarding their democratic transition experiences encouraged political scientists to investigate reasons for this “postcommunist divergence” (Crawford and Lijphart 1995; Ekiert and Hanson 2003; King 2000; Kitschelt 2003; Rupnik 1999). This study investigates the possibility that this gap can be narrowed with the help of postcommunist countries like Poland that were more successful in their political transformations.

Time frame and Methods

This study focuses on the Polish democracy assistance efforts that began in 2003, when the aid program managed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established, as well as on Polish nongovernmental efforts that date back to the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, this project covers the period when Poland shifted from being a recipient to a donor and evaluates the country’s democracy assistance efforts from that time until 2011.

The research findings are based on fieldwork conducted in 2008. The research included interviews with those actors who had the most involvement in democracy assistance activities in Poland. Generating a sample that includes the most important political players who participated in this work—Polish governmental elites and representatives of Polish nongovernmental organizations—avoids selection bias in the research (Tansey 2007, 766–69). Specifically, the book relies on information and opinions expressed in interviews with representatives of the Department of Development Co-operation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who manage Polish aid, as well as with staff members of Polish NGOs responsible for establishing policy guidelines and administering projects. The civil society organizations selected for this project work in at least one of the following areas: strengthening the civil society sector, advancing regional cooperation, advocating for democratic reforms, and shaping public policies in socioeconomic and political development pillars. In addition, the interview pool included representatives of the Zagranica Group, which is an association of Polish nongovernmental organizations involved in cross-border work, as well as two representatives from the National Endowment for Democracy, the US democracy assistance organization that financially supports many projects of Polish NGOs in Belarus and Ukraine. (A list of interviews may be found in appendix 1.)

The purpose of these interviews was to gather firsthand information

and to go beyond the images, official documents, and statements issued by NGOs and governments. A list of questions was composed in order to find out from interviewees whether democracy assistance in Belarus and Ukraine was part of Poland's foreign policy or the goal of the organization; whether assistance was directed toward specific regions in recipient countries; what the aims of the projects were; and why there were programs targeting civil society in the recipient country. Respondents were asked about their evaluation of Poland's assistance programs for NGO development and civil society in Belarus and Ukraine, as well as about any obstacles that impeded the successful implementation of the project. All interviews were semistructured, allowing for flexibility and for new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee said. However, for reasons of safety, I do not identify in the text Polish NGOs collaborating with Belarusian civil society groups, and I do not give the names of the Belarusian partners.²⁶

In addition to in-depth interviews, the analysis is based upon a variety of materials written by policy makers and documents provided by Polish civil society organizations and European and US democracy assistance organizations. Literature collected during the meetings with interviewees included newsletters, journals, publications, reports, internal memoranda of donors, project documents, and evaluations. This material provides additional background on donors' and their partners' profiles and activities and allows for a better perspective on their projects over time. Based on gathered materials, an in-depth analysis is possible by tracing networks (relationships among donors and recipients) and by demonstrating how these networks function, as well as what strategies Polish NGOs use to disseminate democratic ideas and practices.