**‘Countering Authoritarianism’ Working Group Recommendations**

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**UNITING THE DEMOCRACIES**

**Alliance of Democracies Foundation**

**Coalition for a World Security Community**

The strategic environment is perilously fraught right now, with imminent threats from the autocracies in Russia and China against the democracies in Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively. Russia has now launched an actual invasion of Ukraine.

The situation bears some very alarming similarities to the period in the lead-up to World War II. In 1935, the League of Nations tried to restrain Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia by means of sanctions, but they failed. Just now, the West promised sanctions against Russia if it went ahead with its invasion of Ukraine, but again they failed. Back then, In 1938, Britain and France acquiesced to Hitler’s invasion of the Sudetenland under the Munich agreement of. At present, the West has proved unwilling to pledge any troops to the defence of Ukraine. Back then, World War II began one year later over Hitler’s invasion of Poland. At present, we will possibly see World War III break out within a very few years over Xi Jinping’s invasion of Taiwan.

What can we do to prevent this nightmare scenario? There is an obvious and very urgent need for the democracies around the globe to form a united front, some sort of global alliance. Together, the major democracies dispose of around two-thirds of global military expenditure. This should be enough to overawe and deter the autocracies from continuing their aggression. And in the worst case scenario, if they continue their aggression, it should be enough to defeat them on the battlefield. For more detail, look [here](https://www.allianceofdemocracies.org/).

**Collectively Pushing Back on Authoritarianism – An Economic Article 5**

To counter economic coercion by authoritarian powers, an alliance of democracies should enact an "economic Article 5"- similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Article 5. A state coming under economic attack or facing arbitrary detentions of its citizens due to its democratic or human rights stance could ask for unified support including retaliatory measures of fellow democracies. This would be the answer from the democratic world for dealing with authoritarian powers from a unified position of strength. [See here.](https://www.allianceofdemocracies.org/initiatives/the-copenhagen-democracy-summit/copenhagen-charter/)

Even better would be the formation of a world security *community* of democratic nations after the European model. This would allow more effective decision-making. It would provide a convenient forum for making collective decisions between like-minded democracies, covering not only mutual defence, but a common approach to other global problems, such as climate change. Indeed, this could be a positive first step towards an eventual system of democratic global governance, as the community evolves and enlarges over time. In this way, the present crisis could in fact lead to some good in the end. For more details on these ideas, look [here](https://worldsecuritycommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WSCprojectdescription1.pdf).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

• The Summit for Democracy should become a yearly event, to act as the supreme council of a global organization of like-minded democracies

• A core group of members from around the globe, possibly a ‘D9’ combining the present G7 with the members of the new Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, should agree on the need for an alliance or community of democracies, in order to provide collective security against any aggression from the autocracies, and to collaborate with the United Nations in dealing with other global challenges

• A Commission should be appointed to draft a new Treaty between these initial members, as the founding document of the new institution.

**COUNTERING AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING**

**International IDEA**

(This entry summarizes the recommendations developed as part of the [Global State of Democracy Report 2021](https://www.idea.int/gsod/sites/default/files/2021-11/the-global-state-of-democracy-2021_1.pdf))

Government institutions, civil society and the media, must prevent rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding by investing in democracy education at all levels of schooling, by buttressing the pillars of democracy that ensure accountability, including broad participation and access to information, and by actively learning from other countries’ experiences in fighting disinformation, building democratic cultures and strengthening democratic guardrails.

**Accountability**

* Democracy assistance organizations should revise and reorient their programming to more effectively address new and emerging challenges to democracy, as well as to ensure that it is more evidence-based and long-term in nature. Sharing lessons learned between democracy assistance organizations could help improve efficiency and impact.
* Regional and global organizations with member states should set higher standards for member democracies so that any actions seeking to weaken or dismantle internal democratic bulwarks have serious consequences.
* Regional and global organizations and donors should urgently prioritize sophisticated early warning tools that flag contexts in which serious democratic decay is likely. Such tools should include indicators that measure the full range of democratic attributes and should help alert policymakers, activists and the media to the need for interventions in the short and long term.

**Civil society**

* Civil society organizations (CSOs) must strengthen their capacity to operate and protect civic space in the digital realm, and democracy assistance organizations have a key role to play in supporting such capacity strengthening.
* Governments must conduct risk assessments on money laundering and terrorism financing so that they can clearly identify, assess and understand the risks they face. These assessments should include civil society, and the results should feed into a risk based approach that minimizes unfair restrictions on CSOs that are not at risk of being abused by money launderers or terrorist organizations.
* Government agencies and the private sector must recognize, protect and facilitate CSOs' role as watchdogs and more systematically include these groups in policy dialogue and strategic plans.
* Governments should support civil society’s right to receive funding by following the guidance provided in the [United Nations Human Rights Council’s Resolution on Covid-19: The Road to Recovery and the Essential Role of Civil Society](https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=A/HRC/RES/47/3&Lang=E). This Resolution reaffirms the critical role that civil society plays in society and urges governments to protect and promote the work of CSOs. Governments should ensure that pandemic recovery packages include easily accessible resources for civil society, especially those who operate in local communities.

**Media**

* [Regulators and news publishers](https://theconversation.com/%20facebooks-news-blockade-in-australia-shows-how-techgiants-are-swallowing-the-web-155832) should work together to come up with proposals for ways in which news publishers can gain more control over how and when their content is presented on social media platforms.
* Governments must support independent and public interest journalism, partly by making sure that deals with digital platforms requiring them to pay news outlets for their content do not inadvertently [harm smaller publishers](https://theconversation.com/the-news-media-bargaining-code-could-backfire-if-small-media-outlets-arent-protected-an-economist-explains-155745). They should also design incentives for [philanthropic donations](https://piji.com.au/research-and-inquiries/our-research/taxation-reform-for-public-interest-journalism/philanthropic-giving-for-journalism/) to the news sector and consider the use of [tax concessions](https://piji.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/piji-tax-concessions-for-public-interest-journalism.pdf) to encourage public interest journalism.
* [Governments](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/governance-responses-to-disinformation_d6237c85-en) must prioritize the [protection of journalists](https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=A/HRC/RES/47/3&Lang=E) and other representatives of the media. There must be legal accountability for threats to, intimidation of, harassment of, attacks on and killings of journalists.
* Governments should [support](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2021-04-28/secretary-generals-video-message-covid-19-how-do-we-prevent-the-pandemic-becoming-media-extinction-event%E2%80%9D) the newly created [International Fund for Public Interest Media](https://ifpim.org/), which focuses on strengthening public interest media in low- and middle-income countries.
* Governments must work with social media platforms, human rights experts, tech experts and CSOs to develop regulatory practices that balance free speech principles with the need to combat harmful content, hate speech and disinformation.

**Education**

* National and local governments should prevent democratic backsliding by investing in civic education about democratic values, rights and responsibilities. Schools and universities should offer students exposure to the inner workings of democratic institutions.
* Parliaments, judiciaries, EMBs, government ministries and CSOs should make greater efforts to engage with peer organizations operating in other contexts to learn from each other. Academia, legislative research organs, civil society and think tanks should promote research and knowledge exchange that focus on understanding the causes of democratic backsliding in all kinds of democracies, and develop prevention strategies, such as early warning systems that help practitioners and policymakers design well-timed interventions in advance of serious democratic decline.

**HOW DEMOCRACIES CAN RESPOND TO THE INVASION OF UKRAINE**

**Alliance for Securing Democracy**

(From an [article](https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-democracies-can-respond-invasion-ukraine) by Laura Thornton)

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s passionate speech in Congress underscored the broader consequences of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s brutal war in Ukraine, tying it to the struggle for global democracy. He thanked President Biden for“his sincere commitment to the defense of Ukraine and democracy all over the world” and argued that “Ukrainian people are defending not only Ukraine” but are “fighting for the values of Europe and the world.” He is right. If the world allows such capture, a message is sent to Putin and to autocrats everywhere that democracy is up for grabs.

Russia’s war in Ukraine is about democracy. It is also of course about Putin’s delusions of reclaiming a fallen empire, fantasies of ethno-Russian nationalism, paranoia about the consequences of NATO and European Union expansion, and humiliation of waning global influence. But at the core, Putin’s big fear is democracy, particularly at his doorstep. Democracy is contagious, and any spread at home poses an existential threat to his autocratic rule. His brutal war not only aims to reclaim a sovereign democracy under his autocratic rule but also signals globally the strength of the authoritarian grip. The democratic community’s response sends a message not only to Putin but also to other authoritarians with similar ambitions.

In addition to direct kinetic force, autocrats are acting in other ways to undermine democracies with a [nonkinetic toolbox](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/toolbox/authoritarian-interference-tracker/)—including economic coercion, civil society subversion, cyber operations, information operations and malign finance. Some autocratic countries, like China, are making the case that managed autocracies [represent a better governance model](https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1467089098905063424) and a quicker pathway to economic growth, supporting infrastructure development and, with it, creating built-in dependencies.

Putin had been using the full menu of these tactics in Ukraine. Through domestic and international state media outlets and troll farms, the Kremlin has [flooded](https://www.stopfake.org/en/category/research/) the information space with [narratives](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/russia-ukraine-war-cyber-attacks-disinformation-b2021429.html) aimed at sowing division and undermining democracy. Russia laundered money through oligarchs and businesspeople to support influence operations, including advocacy and destabilization campaigns. Russian intelligence services [recruited](https://www.state.gov/taking-action-to-expose-and-disrupt-russias-destabilization-campaign-in-ukraine/) Ukrainian officials to gain access to information and create instability in the country. But Ukrainian democracy proved resilient to these tactics, so Russia invaded.

And Russia’s not alone. Autocrats are also forging alliances, sharing tactics and technologies to suppress critical voices, and coordinating on information operations. As we have been tracking at the Alliance for Securing Democracy, Chinese narratives today are often in [lockstep](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/chinas-state-media-and-government-officials-are-backing-russia-on-ukraine-war/) with those of the Kremlin and are even [outperforming](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/war-in-ukraine/) Russia’s in frequency. Chinese state media have sung the greatest hits from whataboutism and NATO aggression to depicting Ukrainians as neo-Nazis. They have accused the U.S. and Ukraine of bioweapon development, arguing Putin’s case for him that Russia is the innocent party, though these outward narratives may not reflect subtle evolutions in policy. Russian officials have welcomed the support, [retweeting Chinese officials](https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1507338010056355840).

As I [told](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/director-laura-thornton-testifies-before-european-parliament-on-transatlantic-cooperation-during-russias-war-in-ukraine/) the European Union’s Committee on Foreign Affairs on March 14, Ukraine should be a five-alarm call to take the task of global democracy defense seriously. Authoritarians, from outside and in, are watching closely.

To start, democratic nations must understand democracy as a matter of world security, not simply a values proposition. The world is in the midst of war, piling on top of a global health pandemic and a catastrophic climate crisis that will reshape society through increasing conflict, migration and resource scarcity. Autocrats weaponize such crises to undermine public belief in institutions, governance and democratic processes—the very things needed to address these challenges. How democracies respond both internally and globally matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

* *First, democratic nations must get their own houses in order.* According to [international democracy assessments](https://www.idea.int/our-work/what-we-do/global-state-democracy), old as well as new democracies are under threat. Democratic governance is failing to deliver policies and programs that reflect the needs and improve the quality of life of citizens. Corruption and political finance have thwarted the representative process, resulting in inequality of voice. Polling on both sides of the Atlantic shows [citizens’ belief that the rich control political decision-making](https://www.vox.com/2014/4/18/5624310/martin-gilens-testing-theories-of-american-politics-explained) and [lack of satisfaction in how democracy works](https://www.eesc.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe_read-version.pdf). Information disorder has heightened divisions and fear. This has eroded trust in institutions, leaders, and elections, creating the perfect vacuum for malign actors and strongmen. Democracies like the U.S. must include themselves in democracy promotion, undertaking reforms and learning from each other to ensure democracy delivers.
* *Second, a coordinated global democracy network is needed.* This could be done through the Summit for Democracy framework, a broad coalition of democracies gathered by the Biden administration in December 2021, or other existing global institutions and initiatives. Or perhaps through the establishment of a new commission of democracies, including civil society actors, to provide collective security and early warning systems. It could address democracies’ economic and energy dependencies on autocracies, working together, for example, to offset energy needs and support clean energy alternatives. The U.S. is now, for example, looking to Saudi Arabia—an autocratic country [bombarding civilians in Yemen](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/22/world/middleeast/saudi-yemen-airstrikes-civilians.html)—to make up for Russian oil. Coordination efforts are also needed to ensure accountability for autocratic actors, such as network countries implementing a Global Magnitsky Act.

A network could also formulate a task force on donor engagement to ensure large supporters of democracy assistance, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union, and the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), are better coordinating their strategies. Too often aid agencies duplicate efforts or inadvertently work at cross-purposes when they should be sharing best practices, developing programs that build on one another, and ensuring efficient use of funds. There is also a need for a clearinghouse of successful democracy initiatives to build communities of practice to guide others.

* *Third, democracy assistance should go after the authoritarian playbook.* Democracies must support donor-recipient countries, and each other, to deter and build defenses against mal/mis/disinformation, going beyond a defensive whack-a-mole approach to preemptively recognizing and pre-bunking information operations. For example, countries could learn from the Ukrainian [successes at countering disinformation](https://uacrisis.org/en/66275-countering-disinformation-lessons-learnt) and building their own proactive information strategy. Investments are sorely needed in independent local and investigative media, and foreign aid agencies should prioritize such efforts. Governments need to collaborate on how to collectively challenge the business models of social media platforms that profit from conflict and lies. In addition, policymakers and lawmakers should prioritize efforts to thwart malign finance through greater [financial transparency and disclosure requirements](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/covert-foreign-money/), [restrictions on foreign political activity](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/spies-and-money-legal-defenses-against-foreign-interference-in-political-campaigns/), [regulations on enablers](https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/regulating-the-enablers/), and increased funding to grassroots anti-corruption watchdogs and activists.
* *Fourth, democracy investments, both at home and abroad, should focus on the demand side—building resilient communities and publics.* I’ve worked for decades with democracy promotion organizations providing training and technical assistance to institutions, such as legislatures, political parties, election bodies, and government agencies to make them more transparent, accountable, and democratic. Getting those supply-side institutions in place is critical work. But democracy faces a demand problem, where citizens are vulnerable to authoritarian, illiberal movements and increasingly choosing autocrats through the ballot box.

Local investments in communities help foster faith in democracy and inoculate people against the siren calls of authoritarians. [Research on resilience](https://muchanut.haifa.ac.il/index.php/en/about-eng/first-row/researchers/item/40-kimhi-shaul) has shown that communities with a strong sense of civic life and social cohesiveness through local Girl Scouts, religious institutions, or recreation centers—along with an inclusive and trusted local government—are more durable. When I lived in the country Georgia, I found that our most impactful work fostered citizen agency and civic infrastructure at the local level. I ran programs that created forums in which the public, local media, and town councils could come together to develop solutions to daily problems in the community, from fixing street lights to sheltering stray dogs. Building a more resistant and discerning citizenry also involves investments in civic education and digital and media literacy education and experiments in national civil service efforts.

* *Finally, donor countries and democracy assistance organizations must enhance support to democrats in closed societies.* At the time it took place, my biggest complaint about Biden’s Summit for Democracy was that rather than having an event on democracy—inclusive of people and ideas from anywhere in the world—organizers adopted a [state-based approach](https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/584841-bidens-summit-for-democracy-needs-to-be-democratized) and invited countries they deemed as democracies. This left out democrats struggling in non-democracies. I know firsthand that this is complicated, fraught work. It requires donor nations providing much-needed aid and training to civic actors and journalists working from within. They need to feel part of a broader global democracy ecosystem.

The international foreign assistance programs have already been doing many of these things, including in Ukraine. And it was working—there was progress in the conduct of elections, functions of parliament, participation of women, and capabilities of civil society and media. And the world sees, as Zelenskyy highlighted, the heroism of Ukrainians fighting for their democracy and, thus, ours. Democratic nations now need to manifestly expand these efforts but also coordinate them—working in tandem, sharing best practices, and providing more thorough and multifaceted defenses. Democracy should be woven into national and collective security apparatuses, like NATO, and allies must be quicker to act when the warning signals are all there. For which democracy is next?

**RESISTING SHARP POWER: STRENGTHENING THE FABRIC OF OPEN SOCIETIES**

**National Endowment for Democracy**

**International Forum for Democratic Studies**

Authoritarian sharp power seeks to monopolize ideas, suppress alternative narratives, and exploit partner institutions, according to researchers and activists from diverse regions of the world convened by the National Endowment for Democracy’s International Forum for Democratic Studies. As illustrated by the recently launched Sharp Power Research Portal at [SharpPower.org](http://www.sharppower.org), Beijing and Moscow are leading the authoritarian manipulation of the global information space, shifting public attitudes, behaviors, and actions in ways that favor authoritarian preferences. The leadership of governments and individual firms and institutions that are typically the targets of sharp power are not always well-equipped to respond to safeguard democratic standards and norms.

Strengthening civil society is essential to enhancing democratic resilience to sharp power. Multistakeholder approaches among government, civil society, industry, and the public are needed to build democratic unity and accelerate innovative responses. Bringing together experts and activists from different parts of the world can also help bridge gaps between different local level perspectives. Democracies need to simultaneously refresh and strengthen their own institutions and safeguard them from foreign authoritarian influence. They must prioritize freedom of expression and rights respecting values while exposing authoritarian actors’ malign influence efforts. Democracies of all stripes are in this high-stakes struggle together.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

* Democracies must leverage a [full-spectrum response](https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-and-democratic-resilience-series-a-full-spectrum-response-to-sharp-power/) to effectively counter comprehensive and well developed forms of authoritarian influence targeting vulnerabilities in open societies.
* Governments, including parliaments, need to engage and work with civil society, media, the private sector, and other independent civic institutions to strengthen the [“resilience fundamentals”](https://www.iri.org/resources/china-expands-global-authoritarian-influence-efforts-some-fragile-democracies-show-resilience-against-ccp-aggression/) — democratic institutions, good governance and an understanding of the authoritarian playbook —that safeguard and defend democratic principles of openness, accountability, and institutional integrity.
* Civil society networks that cut across regions, sectors, and areas of specialization can accelerate democratic learning among actors in diverse locales and can implement longer term strategies to engage and inform policymakers, private sector firms, and technology platforms more effectively.

**RESPONDING TO TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION**

**Freedom House**

Transnational repression describes efforts by authoritarian governments to reach beyond their own borders to silence dissent among exiles and diaspora communities. The panelists, Isabel Linzer and Yana Gorokhovskaia of Freedom House, Siena Anstis and Noura Al-Jizawi of Citizen Lab, and Marcus Michaelsen of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, discussed the ways in which transnational repression threatens democracies, existing gaps in international and domestic responses, and recommendations for policymakers as well as civil society. The discussion

highlighted the spectrum of harms caused by physical and digital transnational repression to activists, whole diaspora communities, and the rule of law. Panelists also noted a lack of common language to describe the problem of transnational repression and the ad hoc nature of efforts to ensure accountability through regulation of technology or sanctions on perpetrators.

Recommendations focused on promoting international and domestic forms of accountability, empowering civil society to aid targeted individuals, and spreading awareness of transnational repression among policymakers and law enforcement agencies through training.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

* Strengthen refugee resettlement programs. People are safest from authoritarianism in democratic states with a strong rule of law. Making it possible for people to seek and receive asylum is the key to preventing individuals from continuing to be victimized by autocrats. Increasing settlement quotas, streamlining the asylum process, and reversing the trend temporary protections are crucial in combatting the threat of transnational repression.
* Ensure international and domestic accountability for perpetrators. States should apply consistent, predictable, and targeted sanctions against perpetrators, whether through Global Magnitsky or other authorities. Domestically, criminal laws should be reformed to make prosecutions for malign behavior possible and training for law enforcement should be provided to spread awareness.
* Use international human rights law to guide the export, sale, and use of digital technologies. Democracies should commit to greater transparency in their own dual-use export rules and participate in international efforts to create a regulatory framework for digital technologies that might be used to surveil or censor.

**DEVELOPING A SHARED STRATEGY TO COMBAT THE DIGITAL AUTHORITARIAN MODEL**

**Stanford Global Digital Policy Incubator**

The future of democracy depends, in large part, on the ability of democracies to confront the digital transformation of society — to address the challenges and capitalize on its opportunities. Over the past decade, democracies have struggled to meet this test, while authoritarians have used technology to deepen repression and extend global influence. To combat the digital authoritarian threat, democracies must rally around a shared values-based vision of digital society and a joint strategic technology agenda.

**Understanding the Digital Governance Challenges Facing Democracies**

Despite more aspects of our lives increasingly becoming connected and digitized, democracies have not kept pace in adapting the norms and values of liberal democracy to our new digital environment. Three major factors have stalled democratic progress in addressing these new digital realities: unresolved security vulnerabilities associated with digitization; tensions between democratic allies over what protection of fundamental rights in a digital context actually entails; and growing competition from a rising digital authoritarian model.

1. **Develop and Showcase a Democratic Model of Digital Restraint at Home**
2. Democracies need to get their own tech policy “houses” in order, crafting harmonious, values-driven technology governance regimes. Democratic politics should prioritize regulation to protect privacy and personal data, mandate transparency and accountability mechanisms for private sector platforms, and establish government-wide due-diligence processes to assess human rights impacts of government use and regulation of data
3. Technological transformation necessitates governance innovation. The inherently global, transborder nature of the internet and digital technology requires new thinking about the role of sovereign states, civil society actors, and the private sector in protecting democracy and human rights.
4. **Exercise Leadership in International Tech Diplomacy and Standard Setting**

1. Democracies must reassert leadership in international areas where cyber norms, tech standards, and governance processes are established. To do this, we need to undertake the hard work of articulating how to adhere to our existing international human rights framework, in a radically changed digital context.
2. **Invest in Tech Innovation as a Means of Advancing Democratic Values**
3. In a digitized society, leadership on democratic values is inextricably linked to leadership on technology. Those who lead in development of emerging technologies will hold the ability to shape evolving norms on legitimate applications of those technologies. We must lead in technological innovation, particularly in AI and quantum computing.
4. Democracies need to demonstrate an ability to deploy technology to solve societal problems, restoring a positive vision of what digital technology can do to serve humanity. Solutions can include: making governments more effective and fairer, reducing economic inequality, securing rights to equal protection and non-discrimination, enhancing citizens’ digital security.

**DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY**

**Club De Madrid**

The session “Democratic Leadership in times of uncertainty” organised by Club de Madrid aimed at raising awareness of the specific regional and national challenges to democracy and amplifying key recommendations and strategies that would contribute positively to the strengthening and consolidation of democracy worldwide. Danilo Türk, former President of Slovenia and Club de Madrid President, delved into the topic of decision-making in the face of uncertainty based on his recent work as Commissioner of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies. Consequently, the panel formed by Berta Valle (Nicaraguan human rights activist), Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (Leader of Belarusian Democratic Movement), and Wai Hnin Pwint Tho (Burmese human rights activist), advocated for leadership that fosters democratic resilience based on three main pillars: mechanisms for the protection of democracy, building bridges to prevent polarisation and countering authoritarianism. These are particularly timely topics given the democratic backsliding exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This fruitful dialogue allowed to elevate the recommendations resulting from the individual and collective experience and knowledge of the panellists, a former head of State and democratic activists, to international stakeholders in a position to influence political decision-making at the international and national levels.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

* Early-warning systems are a critical tool for countering authoritarianism and these will need to be accompanied by decisive and timely actions by intergovernmental organizations, democratic governments and civil society.
* We call on democratic governments and their leaders to reaffirm their determination to protect democratic values and support other democracies in countering authoritarianism by activating existing mechanisms to protect democracy and stopping business relationships with authoritarian regimes, who often seek legitimacy and continuance through these kinds of small concessions.
* Democracies should support high-quality journalism to counter the current business models and establish mechanisms to support segments of the information ecosystem that provide quality information but cannot sustain themselves within the free market. We encourage countries to pledge support for public interest media and set budgetary targets and mechanisms to accomplish this. Established democracies should also support developing public interest media in countries that face economic hardship and cannot finance this type of initiative.

**ENGENDERING RESPONSES TO AUTHORITARIAN ENCROACHMENT**

**Parliamentary Centre**

Authoritarian influencers use gender (and other protected identity issues) as a strategic tool to attack and undermine democracy. This is a tactic that is rarely acknowledged in strategizing how to counter authoritarian regimes. Some autocrats manipulate gender narratives to present an illusion of democracy, along with the use of [menus of electoral manipulation](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/17201), [checklists for rigging elections](https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300204438/how-rig-election), and tools of [sharp power](https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report/) that pierce the political environments of the targeted countries. An increasing number of other authoritarian influencers, including Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Pakistan are dropping the trappings of façade democracy/gender equality, and opting for overt misogynistic platforms. For example, Russian foreign influence actors engaged in extensive online gendered disinformation campaigns around Ukraine’s last elections.

Whether it is done covertly or overtly, undermining gender equality and promoting sexism is an effective tool for autocrats: it builds social intolerance, fear of change and the sense of insecurity that autocracy thrives on. Assaults on women’s rights and promoting all forms of intolerance (including homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, racism and the like) pave the way for further [autocratization](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13510347.2018.1479693).

To maintain and advance democratic gains and feminism, we must recognize that authoritarians engage with gender issues for a strategic benefit, not primarily to advance an ideological platform. Autocrats leverage feminist ideology for self-preservation and expansion.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Ensure that gender analysis is integrated systematically across responses to authoritarianism. Advance an *integrated feminist approach to democracy*, instead of continuing to allow parallel, siloed democracy promotion and feminist agendas.
2. Ensure that gender issues are given equal priority in the hierarchy of standard measures of democracy. “Gender exceptions” to hierarchy of laws, standards and measures of democracy are status quo today, especially in regard to sanctions, trade status and determinant of electoral integrity. It’s time to end the double standard in the interpretation of [international electoral standards](https://www.ec-undp-electoralassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/undp-contents-publications-compendium-of-int-standards-for-elections-English.pdf) and other measures of democracy.
3. *Measuring political gender equality in terms of rights and representation.*

Beyond numbers, measures of progress must incorporate indicators of political pluralism and socio-economic diversity, with the goal of ultimately creating new measures of transformative political impact and social change.

1. *Ending impunity for violence against women in politics*.

Democratization is incomplete where half the population is subject to discrimination and political violence. Violence against women in politics is the ultimate expression of the patriarchy and a tool of authoritarian advancement. Until violence, hate speech and gendered disinformation, are systematically addressed, many electoral processes will replicate patriarchal structures that exclude and silence women’s voices and foster authoritarian growth.

Adapting a feminist approach to democracy is vital to countering authoritarian influence and enhancing the quality of democracy worldwide.

**TAMING OLIGARCHY IS INDISPENSABLE FOR COUNTERING AUTOCRACY**

**American Russian-speaking Association for Civil & Human Rights (ARA)**

ARA is an advocacy and organizing network operated by and for Russia’s political exiles in the US and their friends and allies since 2012.

1. **How did we get here? The importance of a historical perspective**

In discussing the present-day advance of autocracies and democratic backsliding
in the West, let us not forget that just 30 years ago it was just the opposite: non-
democratic regimes were collapsing or seemed on the verge of collapse, while
democracies enjoyed a triumphalist momentum described by Francis Fukuyama as ‘the end of history’. In the spring 1989, even in China democratization seemed
possible if not likely, and in spite of the Tiananmen Square crackdown many
mainstream observers of China believed that its free-market reforms were going to lead to some form of democratization. And Russia was viewed by the West as
going through a transition to democracy throughout the 1990s. So when Freedom
House started warning about democracy’s global retreat and its ‘autocratization’,
few were prepared to take it seriously. Without a firm grasp of what happened in-
between the anti-Communist revolutions of 1989 and the rise of the anti-
democratic tide around the world it will be hardly possible to stem and to reverse it.

1. **From inequitable ‘transition to the market’ through populist anger to authoritarian responses**

The key development of the early 1990s were the economic policies of the
neoliberal ‘Washington Consensus’ of the time (which by now has been completely repudiated in Washington and other Western capitals). Their key elements were financial austerity, rapid privatization of government property (often to the benefit of current or former government officials), downsizing of the social safety net, and weakening of the unions. These ‘free-market reforms’ were pursued globally, but with particular intensity in the former Communist and some developing countries. In virtually all of them – from Poland and Russia to India - they were followed by major electoral defeats and long-term loss of influence of the ‘old-style’ liberals and the larger pro-democracy forces that they led. In countries with relatively strong democratic institutions, such as Poland or India, these institutions have become the vessels for illiberal politics. In Russia, democratization gave way first to a ‘liberal’ (Yeltsin’s) and then to illiberal (Putin’s) autocracy. Even China, having experienced its own mild variation of such reforms, ended up with a markedly more autocratic regime than it had in the 1980s.

A major factor behind these developments was the explosion of inequality.1 The
resulting concentration of wealth affected all types of political systems in ways
harmful to liberal values as well as to democratic institutions. In the US and some
other Western countries, these economic trends exacerbated old racial divides and
inequities, while in Eastern Europe they revived ethnic and religious hatreds. The
political arrangements produced by this inequality from Poland to China are both
channeling populist anger against it (by blaming it on the West) and protecting its
beneficiaries. The expansion of Russian and Chinese ‘oligarchs’ into Western
markets and politics (seeking not merely more wealth but international legitimacy
through the assimilation of Western societies to their own) has polluted those
legitimate institutions that chose to collaborate with them for ‘pragmatic’ reasons.

**3. Reducing inequality is key for defending and deepening democracy.**

The realization of the risks posed by extreme inequality both for economic
development and for the political stability of Western democracies has been
perhaps the most significant advance in democratic thought in recent years. It has
informed the Biden Administration strategy of strengthening and defending
democracy in the US and globally, of which S4D is one of the elements. This
includes addressing both economic and political inequality, by providing public
platforms and ‘seats at the table’ to previously neglected or marginalized racial,
ethnic, religious, and other groups, as well as immigrants and political exiles. The
ultimate, long-term success of policies that promote equity - in spite of their likely
electoral ups and downs - is essential for the future of democracy in America and
anywhere else.

In this light, sanctions against Kremlin-connected oligarchs (including the potential
use of their seized assets toward rebuilding Ukraine and providing for its refugees)
are not merely a tool for influencing Moscow but also help address some of the
challenges facing Western democracies. The authorities should go further in
dismantling the channels of influence built by these oligarchs and their enablers
over the years, including through campaign financing, major think tanks,
philanthropies etc. Much of this work overlaps with anti-corruption activities. But it
is important to keep in mind that an excessive concentration of financial power
does not have to have ‘corrupt’ origins in order to be detrimental for the stability
and cohesion of Western societies and their political institutions.

**4. The importance of individual liberals and democrats for democracy’s survival and expansion**

The widespread view that for a democracy “institutions are more important than
individuals” is generally true - as long as these institutions are stable and do not
need to be defended. Yet as we know from many examples, the presence of
‘small-d’ democrats – those willing to stick their necks out in order to defend or to
establish a democratic order – is critical for a democracy to be built or to survive
major challenges. In Communist-ruled and other authoritarian countries before
1989, they tended to be dismissed by the outside world as too marginalized and
irrelevant; yet these same democrats – and first and foremost their liberal variety –
were soon riding the wave of democratization of the 1980-90s. Their personal and
political destinies and their ability to secure continuity for their brand of politics in
the post-Communist world were essential for its future development but were
hastily brushed aside by ‘market reformers’. This served the interests of the illiberal
forces and future autocrats, by demotivating potential liberal democratic leaders
and their supporters.

Today, those of them who still survive, even on the margins of their illiberal and
autocratic societies (or even live in political exile) deserve more attention and
support from the democratic world than was given their predecessors, because
tomorrow they may very well be the leaders of a new democratic wave. the
subsequent generations of politicians from defending them.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is equally important that whatever diversity of opinions and backgrounds exists
within a democratic opposition to an autocracy is recognized and respected by the
international community. American media and democracy activists in particular
should beware of a tendency to focus all attention on the best-known personalities
within such opposition at the expense of other individuals and groups. The US
fixation on individual political leaders and supporting them at any cost even after
they started to veer from the democratic path has already harmed the cause of
democracy in the past, in Russia, Myanmar, and some other countries. It is
advisable to draw appropriate lessons from these past failures and to work with
any anti-authoritarian opposition so as to strengthen its internal diversity including
and especially so its liberal factions, i.e. those most fully committed to the rights of
minorities, human rights in general, and international peace

**DEMOCRACY FOR VIETNAM: OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**Alliance for Vietnam’s Democracy**

Support for democracy and human rights plays a fundamental role in combatting oppression, building democracies, and reducing poverty in all its dimensions. Vietnam’s democracy should be guided by the principles that human rights are universal, interdependent, and indivisible to gain trust and support from overseas and international communities.

About 1.2 million Vietnamese have participated in a referendum with 95% of them in favor of taking legal action in international courts against China’s aggression in the South China Sea. This demonstrates the fundamental and universal human need for a democratic society in which elected leaders listen and carry out the will of the people.

By advocating for a multi-party system, tightening the amendment process, and getting approval from the citizens, we ensure that our constitution model, with 3.1 million responses with the approval rate for each article ranging from 87 to 97%, will be practiced rather than just looking good on paper.

A democratic Vietnam needs to form alliances with other free and democratic countries to stop the expansion of totalitarianism in Asia and the rest of the world. Building an alliance against China’s genocide and other crimes against humanity is a part of the defense of democracy.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

* Direct engagement with the Vietnamese people, through civil societies and organizations, as stakeholders and agents of change for a democratic Vietnam.
* Governmental support for freedom of expression through a free and open internet in Vietnam, with a recognition that Vietnam’s democracy should be guided by the principles that human rights are universal, interdependent, and indivisible.
* International support for free and fair elections in Vietnam, with the right to run for office and right to nominate candidates with a diversity of ideas and political affiliations.

**A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT**

**Albanian Tax Economic Center**

Right now, citizens are tired of ideological, political, economic and social disorientation. Governments seem to have initiated reforms to stay in power and fulfill personal / group ambitions, falling to the level of a governance model that shows more about values ​​than it produces those values ​​and standards.

Political cronyism on the other hand has created a cost of corruption and obstruction of reforms and disorientation of public and private sectors. In the absence of meritocracy, our society does not define daily life in terms of competition and cooperation.

Meanwhile, the disregard for the expertise of civil society, business organizations, and trade unions, unable to discuss and bear the burden of government policies alone, have produced a very harmful situation, allergic to the economy.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. A new social contract based on a new political ideology and action without elements of populism would be the first distinguishing mark of the systematization of the defects of governments and politics in our countries. The new social contract must be based on a partnership that produces value and has a direct impact on tackling poverty and exploitation beyond the standards of the relationship set out in the contracts between the parties and known as universal standards.
2. It is necessary to design a common and clear strategy (with pillars of anticorruption and meritocracy), according to the specifics of different areas of the world to advance democratic development to emerge from the uncertainty of a rapidly changing world.

**MYANMAR AND CAMBODIA'S DEMOCRACY RECESSION: GLOBAL AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

**Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats**

**ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights**

Myanmar and Cambodia reflect the worsening state of democracy and human rights in Southeast Asia. Political developments in Myanmar and Cambodia could trigger a broader democratic recession that reaches far beyond the Southeast Asian subregion. Better understanding of these situations is crucial to understanding how democracy can emerge anywhere and everywhere and to understanding how to challenge and overcome the forces of autocracy threatening the safety of the people and the development of the economies of these countries.