

**TASK FORCE ON US STRATEGY**  
**— TO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY AND COUNTER AUTHORITARIANISM —**

# *Reversing the Tide*

## *Towards a New US Strategy to Support Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism*

Report of the Task Force on US Strategy to Support  
Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism



# Reversing the Tide

Towards a New US Strategy to Support Democracy  
and Counter Authoritarianism

April 2021

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**ON THE COVER:** People in Belarus participate in protest against after the country’s flawed 2019 presidential election.  
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# Letter from the Heads of the Partner Institutions

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An alarming global decline in respect for democratic freedoms, coupled with rising autocracy, is undermining our international partnerships and endangering US national security. Fifteen years of backsliding on democracy and human rights means hundreds of millions more living under oppression. As democracy's wave recedes, authoritarianism surges. Autocratic regimes have studied the tools of open societies—free speech, financial flows, technological innovation, international cooperation—and weaponized them against democracies and their own people. Russia's failure to build an open society, and China's success in building a closed one, are at the center of today's geopolitics.

Yet we know that democracy's enduring promise vastly outweighs its perceived deficits. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic has abetted repression in many places, citizens from Hong Kong to Minsk, Khartoum to Caracas, are risking their lives to challenge authoritarians.

To help address this urgent moment and shape a plan of action for the coming years, Freedom House, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the McCain Institute created the Task Force on US Strategy

to Support Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism. This bipartisan group of leaders, experts, and former policymakers spent months examining, debating, and developing recommendations for US strategy.

Recognizing these issues are not easy, we submit that, to secure our future, we must place the advance of democracy and the fight against authoritarianism at the heart of American foreign and national security policy. This report recommends the creation of a US National Democracy Strategy and puts forth a broad set of ideas to rebuild democratic alliances; strengthen institutions essential to democracy; address the challenges posed by technology; counter disinformation; address corruption and kleptocracy; and harness US economic policy to support democracy.

We welcome that the Biden administration has made revitalizing democracy a priority in its interim national security strategic guidance. Responding to democracy's crisis must be a top bipartisan national security priority. We hope you find this report's ideas useful and inspiring. We stand ready to work with our partners in the executive branch, Congress, the media, civil society, and industry to make this vision a reality.

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# Acknowledgements

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The Task Force on US Strategy to Support Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism launched in September 2020 as a joint effort of Freedom House, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and the McCain Institute. It has conducted itself as a working Task Force, with the active engagement of its members. The final recommendations of this report draw on the significant experience of the Task Force members, who contributed their deep expertise to help create recommendations that are both forward-looking and practical.

We are pleased that the Task Force's final report reflects a general consensus of our Task Force members and the three partner institutions. All Task Force members and partners generally endorse the judgments and approaches within the final report, though not necessarily every finding and every recommendation. Task Force member affiliations are provided for identification purposes and do not imply the endorsement of their institutions.

The Task Force effort was divided into five workstreams, each under the capable leadership of a Task Force member working group chair and co-chair. The Task Force is immensely grateful to the many members of the working groups and other experts who were consulted in the course of the work of the Task Force and who gave generously of their time, discussing and reviewing drafts and ideas. Their insights, experience, and substantive contributions were invaluable, and many of our recommendations emerged from these discussions. The report's final recommendations, however, do not necessarily reflect the view of working group members and experts who were consulted. Participation in a working group or a consultation implies no general or specific endorsement of any part of the final report. The

affiliations of working group members and experts are provided for identification purposes and do not imply the endorsement of their institutions.

The report also significantly benefits from a number of interviews conducted with sitting members of Congress and individuals who at the time of their interviews, or previously, served at the highest levels in the US government. We thank all of them for offering their insights and giving their time to us. We also consulted with a number of civil society leaders around the world, and are grateful for their candor and the work they do every day. Some have been listed at the end of this report, while others do not appear, in part due to the daily dangers they face in standing up for freedom.

The Task Force would not have happened without the leadership and vision of the President of Freedom House, Michael Abramowitz. The Task Force benefited significantly from the thoughtful engagement and guidance of our partners at CSIS, Dr. John Hamre and Craig Cohen, and at the McCain Institute, Ambassador Mark Green, Ambassador Josette Sheeran, and Paul Fagan. We express our gratitude to Charles Babington for his exceptional editing skills, and to the staff of Freedom House who provided their support, most especially Annie Boyajian, as well as Ben Schultz, Adrian Shahbaz, Catherine Hanley, Tyler Roylance, and Anne Haynes. We were also fortunate to have the support of three exceptional Freedom House interns, Anastasia Perez-Ternent, Emily Colcord Schrader, and Rebecca Barker, as well as that of Tracy Navichoque and Jada Fraser.

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Alex Thier and  
Anne Witkowski

Task Force Codirectors

# Executive Summary

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The rise of authoritarianism, coupled with the erosion of democracy, threatens global stability, America's economic and security alliances, and respect for human dignity. In each of the last 15 consecutive years, abuses of human rights and assaults on core democratic institutions and practices have accelerated around the globe.<sup>1</sup> *This alarming confluence requires an urgent, bold, generational response that places support for democracy and countering authoritarianism at the heart of our foreign policy and national security strategy.* US leadership in defending established democracies, supporting nascent democracies, and challenging autocrats—while putting our own house in better order—will necessitate a reordering of priorities, plans, and budgets.

The United States must adapt to the realities we now face. The United States and its democratic allies have not squarely addressed the strategic challenge posed by democratic decay and resurgent authoritarianism — most significantly an increasingly repressive and aggressive China. There are opportunities to restore freedom and advance our interests despite fierce opposition. Indeed, the members of this Task Force feel strongly that the future of US national security and the future of democracy are so fundamentally intertwined that we recommend elevating democracy to become the “fourth D” of US foreign policy, alongside diplomacy, development, and defense. It must become not only a core, cross-cutting objective of our efforts, but central to how we pursue our goals, as an integral component of a US National Security Strategy.

Building on its interim national security strategic guidance, the Biden administration should set out a new strategy and high-level policy architecture focused on democracy and involving all aspects of the US government. This includes creating a multiyear plan with bipartisan support to build US capabilities and the necessary alliances that will jointly carry the flag and share the burden. Our aim is a partnership among governments, civil society, citizens, and the private sector to confront challenges to democratic values and institutions. These alliances can then grow in number and resilience.

All over the globe, we see people struggling for liberty and equality. Now is the time to reverse the rising tide against freedom. Democracy's strengths are the very attributes that authoritarians most fear: the inherent demand for self-examination and criticism, and the capacity for self-correction without sacrificing essential ideals.

This report is both a call to action for US leadership and a roadmap for a practical, bipartisan path forward. We propose seven interrelated strategies:

## **Strategy 1: Elevate support for democracy and countering authoritarianism to the heart of US foreign policy and national security.**

This ambitious but urgent project requires a deep reordering of priorities, capabilities, and budgets. Elevating and mainstreaming democracy as a central tenet of domestic and foreign policy must encompass all elements of US power—economic, social, technological, diplomatic, developmental, military, intelligence, and law enforcement. President Biden should issue a Presidential Decision Directive (PDD), declaring support for democracy at home and abroad as a core value *and* core national interest. The PDD should direct the National Security Advisor and the Director of the Domestic Policy Council to develop a National Democracy Strategy that articulates a detailed multi-year vision of domestic and international policy to strengthen and advance democracy and counter authoritarianism. It should align with a new National Security Strategy. The president should also establish a National Democracy Council to create, coordinate, and oversee the implementation of the National Democracy Strategy. The new council would facilitate much closer coordination between foreign and domestic policy, and reform and elevate development as a key element of the democracy strategy.

**Strategy 2: Forge new leadership on democracy and human rights, creating a big tent to strengthen and build new new democratic alliances.**

The United States should embrace a “diplomacy of democracy,” making democracy and countering authoritarianism a priority for US diplomatic engagement. That prioritization should include galvanizing an international coalition to push back against authoritarian threats and reinforce democratic governance. Our fundamental approach should be one of partnership and solidarity with governments, civil society organizations, universities, the private sector, and citizens working to confront these challenges together. President Biden’s Summit for Democracy should be used to convene allies, define purpose, and drive ambition and resources. There must be a serious “price of admission” to the summit that will require participants to make concrete and serious commitments to invest in democracy domestically and globally, with a multiyear calendar of work going forward.

**Strategy 3: Scale up investment in the pillars of open, accountable, inclusive, democratic society.**

The Task Force urgently recommends that the United States and its partners dramatically increase investment in the pillars of open, accountable, inclusive, democratic society: free and fair elections; independent media; and a vibrant, active civil society. All have come under significant pressure in the last decade, and the response has been insufficient. The Biden administration and Congress should create a new Center for Integrity in Elections that works closely with elections officials and bodies in the United States and overseas to safeguard the integrity of elections. To counter the damaging trends imperiling independent media around the world, the United States should invest in a large-scale Enterprise Fund for Independent Media to promote free expression and quality journalism internationally. We also recommend that the United States focus especially on women’s equality and youth inclusion as a powerful force for change by creating a Women’s Political and Civic Leadership Initiative and launching a Young Leaders Coalition for Democracy. Finally, and crucially, the United States should develop a much more robust strategy for supporting and protecting human rights defenders around the globe.

**Strategy 4: Lead in developing a strategic digital technology policy agenda for the democratic world.**

The digital transformation of society has dramatically altered the context for democratic governance. Without more concerted values-based leadership, the internet will increasingly become a tool for state and nonstate actors to sow chaos and discord, and for authoritarians to assert greater control over their citizens. Rebuilding international support for a global, open, secure, and reliable internet will require a concentrated diplomatic focus and strong US leadership. The United States should elevate protection of an open internet and human rights as a strategically important dimension of digital technology and cyber policy. It should also dramatically step up digital technology and cyber diplomacy capabilities aimed at defending democracy and human rights. This would include appointing an ambassador-at-large for technology diplomacy, creating a new Bureau of Cyber Security and Emerging Technologies, and establishing a State Department office in Silicon Valley. We should rally democratic governments around a shared vision of the open internet, a democratic approach to regulating digital technologies, and a strategic agenda for technology policy and investment. This should include a comprehensive strategy to stem the spread of technologies that can be used for repression and authoritarian governance.

**Strategy 5: Develop a strategy to rebuild trust in the information environment and to counter the spread of disinformation, online hate and harassment.**

Rapid changes in the ways information is created, manipulated, disseminated, and consumed have shaken people’s confidence in the integrity of information—facts, science, and news—with profoundly troubling effects. The rampant spread of intentional disinformation, state-sponsored propaganda, unintended citizen-spread misinformation, and online hate and harassment are interfering with basic democratic processes. The United States should develop a strategy to counter disinformation, online hate and harassment, appoint a senior official on the National Security Council staff to lead this effort, and, as an early step, task an assessment to better understand the nature and impact of these fast-evolving trends and threats, and the effectiveness



of related US programs to address them. In addition, the United States should invest in building global societal resilience to disinformation, online hate and harassment. USAID should step up programs in digital and media literacy and cybersecurity education. The US government should increase engagement with like-minded democracies and companies to provide internet access, with a particular emphasis on marginalized communities, women, and youth. Finally, the United States should also establish a Global Task Force on Information Integrity and Resilience, bringing together like-minded democracies with civil society and the private sector.

**Strategy 6: Make combating corruption, kleptocracy, and state capture a national security priority.**

Any serious effort to promote democracy and counter authoritarianism must include measures to combat corruption and kleptocracy, which have become business models for modern-day authoritarians. Corruption and its weaponization by authoritarians harms effective governance, undermines economic growth, and weakens the rule of law. It corrodes public trust, and is interwoven with security issues like organized and transnational crime, terrorism, human rights abuses, and conflict. Unfortunately, repeated global vows to combat corruption have not been translated into effective action. The United States should make combating corruption, kleptocracy, and state capture a fundamental pillar of the National Security Strategy, and design a whole-of-government approach to implement it. We should prioritize an anti-corruption agenda across international bodies that includes calling upon the Financial Action Task Force to

establish a new set of anti-corruption standards, to be enforced by rigorous mutual assessments. We should distribute foreign aid and security assistance in ways that help reduce corruption, and leverage the private sector toward these objectives through mechanisms that promote investment in countries showing progress in countering corruption.

**Strategy 7: Harness US economic power to support democracy and counter authoritarianism.**

As the world's largest economy, the United States should exert its leverage by proactively aligning international economic and democracy policies to counter authoritarianism and promote inclusive and sustainable economic development. Transparency, the rule of law, human rights, accountable governance, and inclusion are building blocks of democracy and indispensable for long-term corporate success. The Biden administration should reframe trade and development policy to that end. The United States should focus on negotiating economic agreements that set high standards for governance and democracy and move international labor standards to the center of US trade and international economic policy. We should also use development finance, US leadership in multilateral development banks, and a series of country compacts to boost inclusive growth and a sustainable recovery; incentivize democratic governance; and avoid debt traps, while demonstrating that democracy can deliver. We should issue clear expectations that American companies will demonstrate support for human rights throughout their operations and supply chains.

# Introduction

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America's place in the world and democracy's place in America are inextricably linked.

The goal of an open and just society with free and fair elections, equal opportunity for all, protection of rights, and equal application of the law—no matter one's wealth, office, or skin color—is the heart of the ever-unfinished American experiment. It is the question at the center of every pivotal moment of American history.

While this yearning for liberty and equality may define the American dream, it is not uniquely American. From the Haitian revolution to Tahrir Square to the streets of Belarus and Hong Kong today, the spark of freedom shines brightly in every corner of the globe. Nor do the failings of American democracy define us or democracy itself. It is our response to these shortcomings, our resilience in the face of adversity, that has thus far guided our path.

Even as we struggle to safeguard America's own democracy, we also know that America's success has always been wrapped up in the success of other free nations. When we stand with those who share our values of accountability and respect for individual dignity, we elevate those things that we hold most dear—an equitable, just, peaceful, prosperous, and healthy planet.

*But America and its allies face grave peril unless we recognize and respond to a dangerous truth: the global retreat of democracy has reached a crisis point. After its rapid proliferation in the second half of the last century, democracy is in retreat in every region of the world. In each of the last 15 consecutive years, abuses of human rights and assaults on core democratic institutions and practices have accelerated around the globe. This democracy depression has been evident across the democratic spectrum, from the most established democracies, including the United States, to countries on every continent. In some countries, internal threats including extremism, populism, polarization, and corruption are undoing the tenets of free and open societies. The failure of some democratic governments to deliver inclusive economic growth and equitable services is undermining faith in the very idea of democracy. In others, external attacks from aggressive authoritarians on elections and the media are strengthening would-be*

dictators. In many countries, the combination of internal inequities and external aggression is driving democratic progress into the ditch.

Geopolitical trends are exacerbating the challenge. As democracy ebbs, aggressive authoritarians falsely promise order, security, and prosperity, while actually delivering subjugation, persecution, and corruption. China's regime is using economic, military, and diplomatic coercion to undermine democratic governance and advance its influence in Asia and beyond. Putin's Russia foments division and insecurity in established and struggling democracies, especially those close to its borders, viewing the spread of democracy as an existential threat. In both cases, they seek to advance their interests by undermining the rules-based liberal international order that the United States and its allies have superintended for three-quarters of a century, and which constrains their ambitions.

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***“The weakening of democratic institutions absolutely is a national security threat, both abroad and at home.”***

— Sen. Ben Cardin, Task Force Interview

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Democracy's opponents use the tools and values of democracies as weapons against us and their own people. They interfere in free elections and free markets. They use technological innovation to undermine free speech and trust in information. They corrupt international institutions formed to foster peace, prosperity, and human rights. To weaken confidence in the efficacy of democracy, they capitalize on its failures and the transgressions of duly elected political leaders who fail to uphold democratic values in office. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a boon for autocrats, who exploited the public health crisis in their countries to expand their authority. Flawed responses to the pandemic in leading democracies further shook public confidence in their elected governments' competence, and our adversaries

stigmatized those mistakes as proof that democracies lack the will to respond effectively to the worst crises.<sup>2</sup>

Countries with weak democratic foundations are now vulnerable to tipping into fundamentally undemocratic regimes. This includes an important array of America's partners, like India, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Brazil, and the Philippines. Other key countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia are undergoing state capture by corrupt elites, or submitting to outright authoritarianism. In a recent survey of democracy experts, most expect democracy and human rights to decline further over the next five years.<sup>3</sup>

What's more, America's ability to inspire the defense and expansion of democratic values globally has been called into question. Attacks on long-standing democratic norms, including former president Trump's effort to overturn the last election with unfounded claims of widespread electoral fraud, which fomented the mob attack on the Capitol, have damaged America's standing around the globe.

Allies and critics alike will note that the United States has its own democratic repair work to do. The original sin of legalized slavery continues to resonate powerfully, as seen in the widespread upheavals over racial justice that followed the police killing of George Floyd. Even as the United States remains an incredible bastion of opportunity and social advancement, pervasive inequality for women and minorities continues to deliver lower pay and assets, poorer health outcomes, and lower educational attainment for tens of millions, thwarting the American dream and undercutting our economy and democracy. Yet as it undertakes these self-improvements, the United States must not shy away from strong global support for competitive, fair elections, the development of checks and balances and independent institutions, and other cornerstones of enduring democracies. Our support not only expresses our founding principles and way of life, it furthers our national security interests.

The members of this Task Force, many of whom have served in Democratic and Republican administrations, are united in the conviction that the ambitious agenda we recommend will be more likely to succeed if the United States simultaneously addresses shortcomings domestically and approaches the global challenges with humility and in solidarity with other nations addressing similar challenges. The ultimate power of US influence rests on the foundation of a just, thriving, and prosperous democracy at home.

\* \* \*

This strategic challenge posed by resurgent authoritarianism and democratic decay has not been squarely addressed by the United States and its democratic allies. In recent years, the United States and our friends and allies whistled past the challenges of the democratic world with self-assurances that time will consign our non-democratic competitors to the dustbin of history. Democracy's reputation suffers from the travails of weak governments where democratic values and institutions lack deep roots, as well as from the enduring difficulties challenging established democracies—inequitable and slow economic growth, racism, unequal justice, and political paralysis. Skepticism that democracy is the most effective political model for these times is gaining ground around the world, particularly among younger generations.<sup>4</sup>

We cannot take for granted that democracy's virtues are self-evident. We must make the case that democracies deliver dignity, security, and prosperity. Economic growth is stronger over time and more inclusive in democracies. Governments and economies are more dynamic and less fragile than authoritarian regimes, where stagnation is confused with stability and corruption is often hidden. Democracy engenders constructive international cooperation and peaceful competition rather than violent confrontations. Democracies are better allies and trading partners. Democracies adhere to the rule of law and form alliances based on shared norms of international behavior. Famines and genocides do not occur in robust democracies.

China's techno-authoritarian, state-capitalist model is gaining adherents. Competitors see China's rapid ascent as an economic, military, and diplomatic power as evidence the model delivers, or at least as reason not to challenge it. The right response to those who say democracies are chaotic and ponderous isn't false bravado. It is the honest admission that democracy is messy, and often fails to produce rapid responses to pressing problems. But democracy possesses self-correcting properties that brittle authoritarian regimes do not. The answer to democracy's shortcomings is more responsive democracy.

When the failings of autocracies become more than their societies can bear, the regime cracks down or breaks apart. Citizens of democracies can effect change by regularly holding their governments accountable for their failings. Dissatisfaction, even alienation, occurs within

democracies when “throwing the rascals out” through elections doesn’t produce the change the public seeks. But accountability is still democracy’s greatest strength. For authoritarian regimes, accountability is democracy’s greatest threat.

\* \* \*

*This generational challenge to the very bedrock of America’s foreign and domestic policy requires an equally profound response. We must rise to this moment. The United States and its allies must react urgently not only as an expression of our democratic identity, but also because it imperils our vital interests. Our security and prosperity are threatened by democracy’s retreat and authoritarianism’s spread. Effective international cooperation to preserve peace and stability, to respond to global economic downturns, and to fight environmental and public health crises requires governments that are transparent and inclusive, accountable to their people, and respectful of human rights. We must also harness the powerful engines of a free society for these purposes—our capacity for innovation, our economic strength and ingenuity, our great centers of learning and research, and the tapestry of media, civil society, and artistic communities that advance thought and human connection.*

There are opportunities to restore freedom and advance our interests despite fierce opposition. The distribution of power may limit American reach, but this is not a bipolar world between democratic America and authoritarian Russia and China. Several of the most successful responses to the current pandemic have come from governments in democracies like South Korea and Taiwan. Newer democracies like Indonesia are engaged in nascent debates about the importance of democratic norms to their international identity. Surveys continue to demonstrate that democracy is considered the most effective form of government.<sup>5</sup> And as the tragedy in Xinjiang illustrates, businesses are beginning to recognize the consequences of allowing their supply chains to run unfettered through repressive economies. The popular hunger for freedom expresses itself even—or especially—in the places where it is most challenged. There are many recent examples of citizens braving danger to resist authoritarian regimes and insist on a say in how they are governed. Protesters in the streets of Yangon, Khartoum, Hong Kong, Minsk, and Moscow demand justice and accountability. They offer

powerful reminders that democratic values aren’t merely the attributes of an ideology in competition with others, they inhabit the human heart.

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*“All over the globe, we see people struggling for liberty and equality. Now is the time to reverse the rising tide against freedom.”*

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The erosion of democracy, coupled with the rise of authoritarianism, jeopardizes global stability, American economic and security alliances, and respect for human dignity. It requires an urgent, bold, generational response that places support for democracy and countering authoritarianism at the heart of our foreign policy and national security strategy. This must impact the choices we make in other policy areas. Defending established democracies, supporting nascent democracies, and challenging autocrats will necessitate a reordering of policy priorities, plans, and budgets, and an adaptation to the realities we now face. *Indeed, the members of this Task Force feel strongly that the future of the United States’ national security and the future of democracy are so fundamentally intertwined, that we recommend elevating “democracy” to become the “fourth D” of US foreign policy, alongside diplomacy, development, and defense. It must become not only a core, cross-cutting objective of our efforts, but also central to how we pursue our goals.*

To respond to this moment, the United States must strengthen our alliances. We must resume our preeminent leadership role in the cause of democracy and human rights, developing a “diplomacy of democracy” to build and manage alliances that share that cause as their central purpose. To do so credibly, we should exercise humility. Our aim is not the reclamation of a unipolar world, but a partnership with governments, civil society, business and the private sector, and citizens to confront challenges to democratic values and institutions—aliances that can grow in numbers and resilience.

We should, therefore, organize a broad coalition of democracy’s defenders at home and abroad, who recognize that the core values of democracy and a sincere commitment to its global success are not optional. The Summit for Democracy President Biden has proposed should serve as a vehicle for uniting allies in shared



purpose, setting goals, and identifying resources for a multifront campaign. The means of creating and convening the Summit should themselves be a testament to inclusion and accountability. A serious investment in strengthening democracy and resisting its adversaries at home and abroad should be the shared commitment that all participants bring to the Summit.

As we build stronger democratic alliances, we should be mindful of experiences where we lost credibility because our rhetoric prioritizing freedom and democratic change was not aligned with our actions. We must also face the certainty that holding abusive leaders to account will conflict at times with other priorities that we have with powerful rivals such as China, and with difficult partners, such as Saudi Arabia. In these instances, we need to challenge the assumption that, in the long run, democracy might be the lesser goal. We must be transparent when we favor priorities that do not support democratic governance or advance human rights. Likewise, for regressing democracies that are important allies or regional powers, such as India, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Brazil, and the Philippines, we should seek to maintain valued relationships without equivocating about holding fellow democracies to democratic standards. We should also acknowledge and address the internal strains on our own democracy, and link the progress of reforms at home to efforts abroad. The central idea of the American project—that free people govern themselves—must be upheld. And we should stand with those who claim their right to do so wherever they are opposed, despite difficulties it might entail for other policy concerns.

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*“The objective I propose is quite simple to state: to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means.”*

— Ronald Reagan, Address to Members of the British Parliament, June 8, 1982.

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We believe that the United States is fully capable of meeting these challenges. Responding to the crisis of democracy must be a top national security priority. Building on its interim national security strategic guidance, the Biden administration needs to set a new strategy and construct high-level policy architecture focused on these issues. It should be a multiyear plan with bipartisan support that builds US capabilities and the necessary alliances that will carry the flag and share the burden. We must invest in significant new tools and partnerships with a long-term agenda. We propose seven interrelated strategies for focus: elevating democracy as a core policy priority through a Presidential Directive and a National Democracy Strategy; revitalizing our diplomacy to support democracy; strengthening the pillars of democracy, including free and fair elections, independent media, and civil society; integrating the development and regulation of technology with shared democratic and human rights values; countering and curbing the poisonous flood of disinformation; combating corruption and kleptocracy; and using economic statecraft to support open societies and inclusive economies.

This report is both a call to action and a roadmap for a practical, bipartisan path forward. Nearly 40 years ago, Ronald Reagan delivered his famous Westminster speech on democracy, setting in motion the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy and other instruments that have driven US and global investment in the advance of democratic values in almost every country in the world.<sup>6</sup> The world has changed dramatically over these four decades. We face new challenges and opportunities. It is time to take a fresh look at the US and global infrastructure for supporting democracy and countering authoritarianism, fortify it with substantial new resources, and recommit ourselves to a vision of long-term transformation that seeks basic rights and freedoms, dignity and equality for all.

## STRATEGY 1

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### Elevate support for democracy and countering authoritarianism to the heart of US foreign policy and national security.

This bold, generational project requires a deep reordering of priorities, capabilities, and budgets. Elevating and mainstreaming democracy and countering authoritarianism as a central tenet of domestic and foreign policy must encompass all elements of US power - economic, social, technological, diplomatic, developmental, military, intelligence, and law enforcement. To unite these elements, the United States will need a strategy to *defend and revitalize* established democracies, including our own; *support* struggling and emerging democracies around the world; and *counter* efforts by authoritarians to undermine democracy.

Such an effort will require a nonpartisan coalition including political actors, civil society, the private sector, labor, and media for long-term success. This work should include, but go beyond, “bipartisan” to incorporate elements of the US economy and society that do not align on “partisan” grounds. This renewed leadership also requires effective use of the power of the president’s bully pulpit and refashioned tools to elevate democracy globally.

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*“Elevating and mainstreaming democracy as a central tenet of domestic and foreign policy must encompass all elements of US power.”*

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President Biden should, therefore, issue a Presidential Decision Directive (PDD), declaring that support for democracy at home and abroad as a core value and core national interest of the United States—a “fourth D” component of national security strategy alongside defense, diplomacy, and development. The PDD should direct the National Security Advisor and the Director of the Domestic Policy Council to develop a National Democracy Strategy as a complement to the National Security Strategy of the

United States. The President should also direct the National Security Advisor and the Director of the Domestic Policy Council to establish an interagency National Democracy Council chaired by the Deputy National Security Advisor and Deputy Director of the Domestic Policy Council to oversee implementation of the National Democracy Strategy. The National Democracy Council would divide its meetings and activities between promotion of democracy abroad and strengthening democracy at home.

#### RECOMMENDATION 1.1

##### Develop a US National Democracy Strategy.

In 2021, the Biden administration should develop a first-ever National Democracy Strategy that articulates a detailed multiyear vision of domestic and international policy to strengthen and advance democracy. The strategy should have global components, including how the United States will work with partners to create global public goods for democracy. Its elements should reach broadly across policy and programs, to include safeguarding the integrity of elections and independent media, enhancing tools to address disinformation and protect free speech, strengthening global anticorruption regimes, and updating trade and investment standards to incorporate rights and democracy “dividends.” It should articulate regional approaches and priorities. To be effective, the National Democracy Strategy should have an implementation plan that assigns agency roles and responsibilities and aligns necessary funding to the plan.

The National Democracy Strategy should align with a new National Security Strategy, which should articulate why democracy is central to national security. This approach would create a foundational text and roadmap for foreign and domestic policy on this priority issue. It would aid in maintaining focus, aligning strategy with programs and budgets, and sending a strong signal to the relevant agencies of the executive branch, as well as legislative, subnational, and international partners.

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*“Supporting democracy at home and abroad should be a ‘fourth D’ of national security strategy, alongside Defense, Diplomacy, and Development.”*

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President Biden should issue a Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) that articulates a vision of an integrated, interagency approach to supporting democracy and countering authoritarianism. The PDD, focused on diplomacy, development, and defense, with democracy as the new “fourth D,” would direct the National Security Advisor and the Director of the Domestic Policy Council to develop the National Democracy Strategy.

To establish a baseline of facts and expectations, the White House should request a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) to assess the global state of democracy, the drivers of decline, and related threats to US security. This NIE should be briefed to every member of Congress, and an unclassified version should be made available to the public. Congress should mandate a comprehensive review of the allocation and expenditure of democracy-related assistance through the executive branch to determine the sufficiency and efficacy of these efforts.

Congress should request an annual report on the implementation of the National Democracy Strategy, and host an annual hearing on the state of democracy and human rights in the world to ensure “consistent focus on democracy and human rights and a public record of the administration’s commitment to and plan for supporting democracy.”<sup>7</sup>

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1.2**

**Set the tone for his administration by having President Biden continue to speak to the centrality of democracy in domestic and foreign policy, and deliver a major speech on this integrated agenda in the first six months of his term.**

The president must continue to make clear that democratic values are the vital spark of America’s past and future success, and that his administration is committed to renewing these values at home and providing moral and material support for those abroad

who are struggling to secure their own rights and freedoms. There is a danger that with the burdens of governing in the world as it is, expressions of support for democratic renewal will look more like high-flown rhetoric than a deeply rooted policy shift. To avoid that, these themes will need to be woven in the fabric of US domestic and foreign policy.

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*“Some still reject the argument that the cause of liberty is a great asset of the US. I believe it is a critical asset that people around the world have a positive image of us. We have a chance to restore that now — the idea of a country with social mobility and a friend of liberty.”*

— Elliott Abrams, Task Force Interview

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A major speech—in a place of democratic significance—should lay out a positive vision that seeks human rights, equality, dignity, and justice for all people, and a roadmap to get there with international cooperation *over the next decade*. Like a moonshot, this speech could conjure a not-too-distant future in which the democracies under siege have been defended, the ascendance of authoritarianism thwarted, and the global democratic recession reversed. This address should create a tangible, achievable understanding of the pillars of this transformation—many of which are recommended in this report—and a call to action for the United States and its allies.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1.3**

**Create a National Democracy Council co-led by a Deputy National Security Advisor and a Deputy Director of the Domestic Policy Council.**

The purpose of the National Democracy Council will be to create, coordinate, and oversee implementation of a National Democracy Strategy. In order to fulfill the president’s vision of “restoring democracy at home and abroad,” it would facilitate much closer coordination between foreign and domestic policy in the White House, and ensure that policy decisions and programs align with the president’s democracy goals. These objectives





A prodemocracy protestor stands in front of a line of riot police in Bangkok, Thailand. (Image credit: Adirach Toumlamoon / Shutterstock.com)

can only be achieved by senior White House leadership. The president should stand up and direct the National Democracy Council to coordinate policy through an Executive Order. This council would be a means of harnessing the instruments of policy and programs across the national security community, as advised in this report, and between the national security and domestic policymaking processes. It is intended as a supporting and coordinating structure, not as an entity competing with the structures of the National Security Council, the Domestic Policy Council, and other White House entities that will be represented as part of the new council. It also would reinforce the necessary cooperation among these entities. Its leaders would guide preparations for the president's Summit for Democracy, and coordinate efforts through departments and agencies with congressional leaders on the needed legislative and budgetary changes.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1.4**

##### **Reform and elevate development as a key element of the democracy strategy.**

The time has come for a dramatic shift in the US approach at home and abroad to financing development and promoting democracy. There is significant evidence that, in the long run, inclusive, accountable, open, and

democratic societies are better for most everything we care about—food security, life expectancy, income, basic rights. Yet too much of global development investment seems agnostic about democracy, instead focusing on “effectiveness” and “delivery.” This approach gets the dynamic of sustainable development and democratic transformation backward. It is always the citizens struggling on the front lines who bring about change in their own societies. Just governments derive their sovereignty from the will of the people, and must strengthen and adhere to the social contract in order to remain legitimate. Inclusivity, accountability, and transparency are also essential. Citizens must be engaged in policymaking, budgeting, and oversight of government. Foreign assistance, also, too often breaks, rather than reinforces, this chain of accountability.

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*“We need a far more robust approach to supporting democracy and countering authoritarianism through development cooperation. We should be doing development democratically.”*

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Therefore, foreign and global development policy cannot be content with just “good governance” and transitory results. We need a far more robust approach to supporting democracy and countering authoritarianism through development cooperation. We should be *doing development democratically*.<sup>8</sup> Such a strategy would bring together efforts supporting citizen voice, government inclusivity, effectiveness, and accountability. Doing development democratically is also fundamental to the long-term goal of transitioning countries off aid altogether. Democratic self-governance not only supports development gains, but sustains them.

Such a transformation requires four steps. First, democracy must be seen to deliver. This requires intensive focus on equality and inclusion in economic development, service delivery, and access to opportunity. Outdated “growth is good for the poor” attitudes must be replaced by a demanding ethic of inclusive and sustainable economies, as “growth” alone does not inherently benefit either the poor or the environment.

Second, in our foreign policy, the level of investment in promoting democracy must increase substantially, with greater strategic focus and more flexibility. Some of this increase can be achieved by prioritizing data-driven, human-centered design rather than supply-side interventions. In addition, as recommended below, more investment is required to support independent media, election integrity, and inclusive growth. The Department of State and USAID should produce country and regional democracy strategies, tied to the National Democracy Strategy, that enable context-specific, multiyear planning and investment. For its part, Congress should treat democracy-related spending directives as a floor, not a ceiling. Upward adjustments should be allowed to enable more flexible investment in democracy, rights,

and governance in the environments where these efforts are needed most.

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***“We have a charity and direct-service model, and I think we need to have a partnership and capacity building model.”***

— Rep. Karen Bass, Task Force Interview

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Third, the design and delivery of democracy support must conform to the highest contemporary standards of development effectiveness and local ownership. This means investments should be both demand- and data-driven, cocreated with local voices that include diverse and marginalized communities and that use population-based, disaggregated data derived from knowledge, attitude, and practice surveys.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the United States should take the lead in ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals apply at home and abroad, and unmistakably support human rights, equity, justice, and the rule of law. Some American cities, such as Pittsburgh, Orlando, and Los Angeles, have embraced this framework and should be celebrated. In international settings, such as at the United Nations, we cannot be agnostic about the conviction that the core goals of peace, a healthy planet, and shared prosperity are best achieved through cooperation within and among accountable, democratic regimes. We must vigorously oppose the notion that “development” excludes the enjoyment of universal human rights or the achievement of dignity and equality for all.<sup>10</sup>

## STRATEGY 2

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### Forge new leadership on democracy and human rights, creating a big tent to strengthen and build new democratic alliances.

The United States and the world have changed. The United States cannot simply “return” to leading the global advance of democracy; it must forge a new path with confidence in our values and global successes,

and with humility hard-won by failed interventions abroad and steep challenges at home. We must return to the central value of the American project: a free people govern themselves. The United States will

stand with those abroad who take this view, even and especially when it is hard to do. We must also integrate the critical issues of reducing inequality and increasing social justice throughout our domestic and international policy. This will require overcoming the general lack of engagement between both government and nongovernmental entities that work on domestic and international issues. And it will require greater forbearance by policymakers who want “quick wins” when, in fact, the political and socioeconomic changes underpinning democracies are long-term and highly dependent on local contexts.

In this era, democracy needs a big tent. This means an approach that is fundamentally about partnership and solidarity with governments, civil society organizations, universities, the private sector, and citizens working to confront these challenges *together*. A mismatch of reality and rhetoric has sullied confidence in democracy-building over successive US administrations. It is not about hegemony or an effort to return to a unipolar world. This is also not an embrace of democracy and human rights that is employed only when they conveniently align with other interests. It is about engaging a diverse set of actors, creating alliances and coalitions committed to growing membership, and increasing the resilience of democracy. And it is about building and deepening partnerships committed to joint action to counter threats from authoritarian regimes. President Biden’s Summit for Democracy can provide an essential platform for planning and delivering on these commitments.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2.1**

##### **Use the Summit for Democracy to convene allies, define purpose, and drive ambition and resources.**

The Summit should include committed democracies from around the world, large and small, rich and lower-income, with a clear commitment to strengthening democracy at home and supporting it globally. We must celebrate democracy’s diversity as a strength. The Summit should serve as a platform to formulate, launch, and galvanize new democratic coalitions and initiatives designed to address specific challenges on technology, independent media, corruption, and election integrity. Commitments to follow up and review these efforts will be an essential component of the Summit.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2.2**

##### **Establish a serious “price of admission” to the Summit for Democracy.**

Participants should be required to make concrete and serious commitments to invest in democracy domestically and globally. This set of “national commitments” on countering corruption, upholding human rights, reducing inequalities, and cooperating on the regulation and use of technology to push back against authoritarian influence would be akin to the “Nationally Determined Contributions” from the Paris Climate Agreement. Civil society organizations, local government representatives, universities, private-sector actors, and opposition political parties should be encouraged to attend and also pledge. The Summit should build on lessons from how the Open Government Partnership has gathered both government and civil society at the table and established clear follow-up and review practices. The requirement for robust commitments may deter undemocratic and

illiberal nations from attending, or it could help spur needed reforms in their countries.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2.3**

##### **Build a multiyear calendar with the Summit for Democracy as a centerpiece and fundamental driver of work going forward.**

A summit is a moment. To succeed on such a significant agenda, it must be embedded in a much larger set of events, institutions, and agreements. The administration should make global democracy the key theme in a multitude of scheduled engagements in 2021, including the UN Special Session against Corruption, the G7, the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the UN General Assembly, the World Bank/International Monetary Fund meetings, the Copenhagen Democracy Summit, and forums such as the Open Government Partnership, as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Likewise, the administration could work on the margins of regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Organization of American States to create a democracy drumbeat leading up to and following the Summit for Democracy. It should use a series of events as a platform to bring in partners and craft shared commitments within their spheres of action.

## RECOMMENDATION 2.4

Undertake national consultations on work needed to strengthen democracy at home prior to the Summit, and collaborate with allies to do the same in their countries.

Efforts to strengthen US democracy will increase US success on this agenda globally. If the United States is not a credible long-term partner for democratic reinvention, allies will hedge and adversaries will press their advantage. US national consultations, in partnership with civil society groups, should convene a number of diverse forums focused on the agreed themes of the Summit. This could be done in cooperation with universities and civic organizations that are already launching similar efforts. By linking American middle-class priorities with those of citizen groups in other countries, US Summit commitments will act as a bridge between domestic and foreign policies.<sup>11</sup> We should also support activists and experts in US civil society organizations working on domestic issues like combating systemic racism, and share lessons learned with counterparts in other countries. This could help create communities of practice that endure well past the Summit. The administration also needs to engage relevant congressional members and staff early and often to advocate for these new approaches.

## RECOMMENDATION 2.5

Embrace a “diplomacy of democracy.”

Supporting democracy and countering authoritarianism should be a priority for US diplomatic engagement. To accomplish this, President Biden should charge his ambassadors in their Letter of Instruction to build and maintain relations and alliances with the purpose of strengthening democracy and countering authoritarianism. The president and secretary of state should rebuild a highly diverse US Foreign Service that is empowered to work with global movements and create opportunities to elevate democratic values, including those promoting climate justice, women’s equality, antiracism, transparency, anticorruption, and the Sustainable Development Goals (especially norms of equality and justice). Such partnerships should also be a means to hold illiberal actors to account, using the tools of diplomacy and foreign assistance as levers.

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*“The US should embrace a ‘diplomacy of democracy,’ making democracy and countering authoritarianism a priority for diplomatic engagement.”*

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Each US embassy should be required to include in Mission Strategic Plans an explicit examination of the host country’s democracy, rights, and rule of law indicators, and identify what the mission plans do to support democracy, including the extent of engagement with local civil society. Supplementing the existing human rights reports, embassies would then issue an annual report under Chief of Mission signature. Multilateral US missions, including the missions to the UN, would have responsibility for this diplomacy of democracy as well. Twenty-first-century American diplomacy in the service of democracy should also include new US participants, tapping into the energy of mayors, universities, local nongovernmental organizations and activists, and the private sector. This will provide an avenue for them to form peer relationships in partner countries and in multilateral settings such as the UN.<sup>12</sup>

Given its global presence, reach, and extensive engagements with foreign governments, the Department of Defense (DoD) should be tasked with supporting this diplomacy. In close coordination with the Department of State, DoD should issue department-wide guidance, targeted in particular at the regional Combatant Commands, to use civilian-led defense dialogues with other nations, military-to-military discussions, and exercise scenarios to reinforce democratic norms and values, including civilian control of the military, the rule of law, and safeguards against corruption.

## RECOMMENDATION 2.6

Galvanize an international coalition to push back against authoritarian threats and reinforce democratic governance as a priority.

Democratic states are letting authoritarian regimes set an agenda that is detrimental to US interests and the sustainability of democracy itself. Now is the time to shift from reactive and defensive responses to pushing back

more aggressively, preemptively, and jointly. The United States and its democratic partners should make clear that authoritarian governments in China, Russia, and elsewhere seek to divide and undermine democracies while denying their own citizens' fundamental rights.

First, the United States and its partners should act forcefully in coordinating with fellow democracies against authoritarian efforts to undermine democracy and human rights. This includes holding rights abusers to account through sanctions, such as those under the Global Magnitsky Act in the United States and other jurisdictions, and providing refuge for political dissidents under threat. The United States must be careful not to accord authoritarian leaders privileges that reinforce their legitimacy, such as meetings at the White House.

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*“The United States and its democratic allies have not squarely addressed the strategic challenge posed by resurgent authoritarianism and democratic decay.”*

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Second, enforcement of democratic values and norms should be elevated in our international relationships. As a priority, we should engage on these issues with our NATO allies, given the erosion of democracy in Turkey, Hungary, and Poland, which is straining allied cohesion and creating opportunities for adversaries to exploit our differences. The US government must reaffirm its commitment to the NATO alliance and reinforce NATO members' foundational principles of “democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law.”<sup>13</sup> This diplomatic work must be undertaken multilaterally, within the NATO framework, and augmented in bilateral diplomatic and defense engagements.

Third, we should raise public awareness among our citizens and globally about authoritarian threats and the advantages and virtues of democracy. Elevating attention to the evidence of why democracies are better allies, better trade partners, better security partners, and better providers to their citizens is vitally important at a moment when many people, even in our own country, see democracy as faltering and ineffectual. It is essential to conduct these efforts with humility, as an exercise in solidarity rather than the subject of lecturing. Such a public campaign, carried out with the Department of

State's public diplomacy resources, should stress how independent institutions and checks and balances are indispensable to avoiding accumulation of power in too few hands, punishing corruption, and respecting the role of independent media and civil society.

## RECOMMENDATION 2.7

### Evaluate security sector assistance in terms of democracy and human rights objectives.

Security sector assistance is designed for a range of purposes, generally to build relationships with partners and improve their defense and military capacity, improve interoperability with US forces, support foreign policy goals, and promote good governance and the rule of law.<sup>14</sup> With the complexity of emerging security challenges from adversaries such as Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, as well as long-standing concerns about partners like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, updated security sector assistance efforts will be integral to US foreign and defense policy. Security cooperation and foreign military sales are intended to meet important US defense and foreign policy objectives.<sup>15</sup> But our system of foreign military assistance and arms sales would benefit from a more effective evaluation of broader societal consequences, given that it is not in the US interest to reinforce poor governance or practices that violate human rights. Security sector assistance is already subject to required vetting of military units for “gross violations of human rights” (GVHR)—with potential prohibitions on assistance—under the “Leahy laws” that apply to the Departments of State and Defense.<sup>16</sup> For too long, however, such assistance has been provided to foreign governments with limited or no linkage to poor adherence to democratic governance and human rights standards or to how these issues may fuel instability, conflict, and broader governance challenges. Recent legislation requires the Department of Defense to implement a more systematic process for evaluating US interests in assessing and monitoring security sector assistance.<sup>17</sup> The US government should build on these practices, using them as a basis for elevating and integrating democracy and human rights considerations into all security sector assistance, across the Departments of State and Defense. Such integration should include a review of long-standing relationships with countries such as Egypt, which continues to receive significant US support while its government's repressive practices and human rights abuses are well-documented.<sup>18</sup>



## STRATEGY 3

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### Scale up investment in the pillars of open, accountable, inclusive, democratic society.

The common features of democratic systems of government include: free and fair elections, the rule of law applying equally to all citizens, protections for human rights, accountability of the government to its people, diverse and independent media, and a vibrant civil society and civic life.<sup>19</sup> A healthy democracy also must include all its citizens, rooting out systemic exclusion and disenfranchisement. The erosion of one or more of these features, due to internal or external factors, endangers the health and sustainability of a country's democracy.

All democracies are experiencing renewed challenges to these crucial pillars today. Many nations appear to be at a tipping point. According to an analysis of indexes like the 2021 *Freedom in the World* report, there are 80 to 100 flawed democracies and electoral autocracies whose direction will determine whether the 21st century will be more open or closed than the end of the 20th.<sup>20</sup>

Over decades, the United States has pioneered tools and approaches for supporting emerging democracies, and this report is a clarion call to renew and redouble those efforts. As a key element of our broader strategy, the Task Force urgently recommends that the United States and its partners dramatically increase investment in the pillars of open, accountable, inclusive, democratic society: free and fair elections; independent media; and a vibrant, active civil society. All have come under significant pressure in this last decade, and the US response has been insufficient. It is essential, therefore, for the United States to work with partners to invest in new ways that elevate what works, and move past what doesn't. We also recommend that the United States focus especially on women's equality and youth inclusion as a powerful force for change and necessary corrective to social ills affecting nearly every country.

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*“As democracy ebbs, aggressive authoritarians falsely promise order, security, and prosperity, while actually delivering subjugation, persecution, and corruption.”*

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A coherent strategy for addressing authoritarian threats is essential. So, too, is holding fellow democracies to democratic standards and taking steps to help backsliding countries return to the democratic path. Politicians who win free and fair elections sometimes become authoritarian leaders, as we've seen in Turkey and elsewhere. It is essential to support nascent democracies and those fighting for democracy and human rights in authoritarian regimes. There is a particular need to support those working to uphold freedoms despite profound risks to themselves, their families, and their communities. Journalists and civil society activists who come under attack for doing their job and calling out abuses of power deserve our backing. Especially troubling is a dangerous rise of transnational repression—dictators reaching around the world to murder, poison, capture, and threaten activists and opposition figures who have sought refuge abroad.<sup>21</sup>

The regimes in Russia and China pose the gravest external threats. They interfere in democratic elections; censor external criticism; demonize civil society groups and activists as foreign agents and revolutionaries; exploit and exacerbate divisions in more democratic states; and corrupt democracies' financial systems, real-estate markets, and even political campaigns with dirty money. The Chinese and Russian people, of course, are direct victims of their governments, from the continued persecution of the Uyghurs to the vicious repression of opposition political activists like Alexei Navalny and his supporters. These regimes also seek to prop up likeminded autocrats in other countries, especially those facing popular pushback. Beijing and Moscow view democracy as a threat to their authoritarian model, and they seek not only to advance their system as a preferable alternative, but to intimidate and actively undermine democracies. The rise in particular of the “China model”—a techno-authoritarian, state-capitalist system bent on refashioning national governance and international institutions in its likeness—could result in a dangerous era of global confrontation and division.



Student protesters hold an assembly supporting freedom in Hong Kong at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. (Image credit: YT HUI / Shutterstock.com)

### RECOMMENDATION 3.1

#### Create a Center for Integrity in Elections.

Interference in elections is an attack on the foundations of democracy. The full weight of America's national security and foreign policy infrastructure should be used to deter and punish perpetrators of such interference. Over the past decade, Russia, China, and other regimes have spent heavily in at least 33 countries—including the United States—to undermine democratic processes.<sup>22</sup> These governments have used cyberattacks and disinformation, and funneled money to politicians and campaigns through straw donors, nonprofits, shell companies, and in-kind contributions. Such practices are on the rise, with nearly 80 percent of documented cases taking place since 2016.<sup>23</sup> But threats to election integrity can come from within as well, as we witnessed in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2020 US elections. When confidence in election integrity is undermined, trust in government also plummets, threatening the entire enterprise of electoral democracy. Given recent challenges in the United States and many other countries, we recognize the imperative to work on protecting electoral integrity at home and with foreign partners facing similar challenges.

The Biden administration and Congress should create a new Center for Integrity in Elections (CIE) to facilitate

stepped-up engagement with international actors working for well-run, reliable elections. There is an urgent need for a hub to share threat analysis and effective approaches and technology, where the United States can learn from successful initiatives abroad and share lessons of its own. This hub could also coordinate planning and delivery of essential support, including: bringing the full force of American and international law enforcement tools and sanctions against those who illicitly interfere with elections; training on election and information transparency; partnering with governments, social media platforms, and civil society organizations to identify and counter election-related disinformation; developing resilience against tools and techniques used to interfere in elections; and reviewing election-related disinformation in order to push for transparency and accountability of media outlets and social media platforms.

The effort overseen by the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) during the 2020 elections is a good example of how national, state, and local officials, working together, can minimize outside threats. The CIE would bring together federal and state government officials, the arms of the National Endowment for Democracy and other civil society groups, and partners around the world. It would serve as a hub not only between the United States and

its partners, but also facilitate interaction among those partners. The CIE, created with a congressional mandate, could be housed independently, as part of an expanded US Election Assistance Commission, or elsewhere in the federal government. Its board would be composed of representatives from leading civil society organizations, cybersecurity and digital information experts, and national and local government representatives.

### RECOMMENDATION 3.2

#### Launch an Enterprise Fund for Independent Media.

Independent media are imperiled by the combined forces of government crackdowns, the pandemic-related economic downturn, and broader, pre-COVID challenges to their business models, largely due to digitalization, changing consumer behavior, and industry consolidation. As a result, citizens are losing independent sources of information and investigation that are critical for political engagement, the exercise of basic rights, and holding powerful actors to account.

The problem in the United States alone is profound. Since 2004, more than 2,100 local print outlets have shuttered, and at least 200 US counties have no newspaper at all.<sup>24</sup> Internationally, the same combination of forces, intensified by the pandemic, has been called an “extinction event,” especially in lower-income countries.<sup>25</sup> Independent newspapers alone may have lost an estimated \$30 billion in 2020,<sup>26</sup> and the workforce of newspaper journalists has been cut in half in the last decade.<sup>27</sup> The resulting gap is often filled by government, corporate media, or social media sources that may promote unreliable reporting, and it creates opportunities for authoritarians to suppress factual information and spread conspiracy theories and disinformation at home and abroad.

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*“Independent public interest journalism across Africa, and elsewhere in the Global South, is in grave danger of dying. With it will go an essential engine for shaping a successful democratic future.”<sup>28</sup>*

— Former Ghanaian president John A. Kufuor

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To counter these damaging trends, the United States should establish a large-scale Enterprise Fund for Independent Media. This fund would invest in promoting free expression and high-quality journalism internationally. The effort should focus on supporting the emergence and sustainability of independent media, promoting effective investigative journalism, and protecting journalists at risk.

USAID should lead in launching this fund, which could invest in both commercial and not-for-profit entities. Developing viable independent media in countries that lack the necessary investments and regulatory climate will require financial support that can lead to financial sustainability over time. The effort should seek financing partnerships with US democratic allies, especially middle- and lower-income countries. An enterprise fund model can provide the flexibility to make a combination of equity, debt, and grant investments, potentially returning money to the fund as a result of successful revenue generation. (Such funds could be reinvested or returned to the US Treasury.) To help establish this fund and elevate diplomatic work around media freedom, the United States should appoint a Special Envoy for Press Freedom.<sup>29</sup> As part of the interest in protecting journalists, this envoy position, working with the Department of State’s Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, should track and recommend action against governments and officials who persecute and intimidate journalists.

### RECOMMENDATION 3.3

#### Create a Women’s Political and Civic Leadership Initiative to strengthen representative democracy.

Women make up half the world’s population, but account for far less than half of its representative leadership. Despite significant recent advances, only 11 percent of the current heads of state and government are women, and a tiny fraction of national legislatures are at least half female.<sup>30</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women, exacerbating preexisting inequalities. Women’s unpaid care work has increased, they have lost jobs at much higher rates than men, and the level of violence against them has grown.<sup>31</sup> Millions more girls are out of school, interrupting their education and stunting a crucial pipeline for future women leaders.<sup>32</sup>



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*“Women’s inclusion and advancement in governance and public policymaking should be a fundamental priority for strengthening democracy.”*

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Seeking equality for women in political and civic leadership positions is more than a point of principle; it is necessary for creating healthy, vibrant democracies.<sup>33</sup> Studies illustrate that women’s leadership in politics, government, and civil society is positively associated with investment in social welfare.<sup>34</sup> Women’s participation has been shown to encourage the confidence of citizens in democracy, as female politicians are often perceived as more honest and responsive.<sup>35</sup> When more women are at the negotiating table, peace processes are more sustainable, and agreements last longer.<sup>36</sup> Women are proving themselves vital to political protest movements in support of democracy and human rights.<sup>37</sup>

Women’s inclusion and advancement in governance and public policymaking should be a fundamental priority for strengthening democracy. This will involve advancing their leadership, removing barriers to their equitable representation, and addressing those factors

that undermine their influence once they are elected. Therefore, the United States should create a Women’s Political and Civic Leadership Initiative to bolster investments that are already working to advance women. Embedded in the National Democracy Strategy, and co-led by the Department of State and USAID, this initiative should include: (1) ensuring that advancing women’s participation in political life is not siloed or tokenized, but instead is integral to policies and programming that support democratic movements and parties; (2) increasing resources for training, advocacy, and capacity building; (3) ensuring sustained, strategic engagement on skills training and on efforts to remove institutional and cultural barriers, including through development programming; and (4) establishing a new emergency global fund to support women civic leaders in moments of political transition. Special emphasis should be given to women from underrepresented and marginalized populations.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3.4**

##### **Launch a Young Leaders Coalition for Democracy.**

Young people often lead movements for democracy and justice, yet nationalists and extremists also heavily recruit from disaffected youth.<sup>38</sup> The United States can advance



A group of women participates in a protest in Beirut, Lebanon. (Image credit: P.jowdy / Shutterstock.com)



democracy by engaging, protecting, and training young and emerging leaders and preparing them to challenge oppressive government policies and build sustainable governing structures founded on democratic principles.

At the Summit for Democracy, President Biden should launch a Young Leaders Coalition for Democracy, a global consortium of young leaders, activists, and experts committed to human rights, democracy, and pluralism. This could build on ongoing youth empowerment efforts such as the Young African Leaders Initiative and the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative. It could also include young American leaders with diverse ideological perspectives, including from historically underrepresented domestic communities. The initiative should pay special attention to young women, LGBTQ people, communities of color, and members of other traditionally marginalized groups as potential future leaders, and use engagement such as youth exchanges, sports, music, and online games to reach these audiences.

### RECOMMENDATION 3.5

#### Bolster support for civil society groups and better protect human rights defenders around the globe, including activists, lawyers, and journalists.

As democratic backsliding worsens, reprisals against human rights defenders (HRDs) are on the rise, both within their home countries and after they have fled abroad.<sup>39</sup> The Committee to Protect Journalists has tracked a surge in violence against journalists.<sup>40</sup> Freedom House documented more than 600 direct, physical cases of transnational repression—attacks, detentions, and unlawful deportations of HRDs and their family members outside their country of origin—since 2014.<sup>41</sup> Restrictive laws, including those that criminalize criticism of repressive leaders, prohibitions on foreign funding, and jail sentences for “foreign collaboration,” have made civil society work more dangerous and limited the ability of such groups to operate. Yet as authoritarian leaders have become increasingly disconnected from and unresponsive to their citizens’ needs and interests, civil society organizations are filling the gap. They provide the major impetus for democratic reform, working against enormous odds to improve governance, ensure honest elections, and provide economic transparency while often also assuming the role of primary providers of essential services.<sup>42</sup>

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*“Standing up for civil society in places where authoritarianism has eroded that civil society is vitally important.”*

— Sen. Marsha Blackburn, Task Force Interview

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The United States should develop a more robust strategy for supporting and protecting HRDs around the globe. This strategy should be based on clear principles, including those that would guide support to civil society organizations and HRDs in contexts where such efforts may be deemed to be in tension with other geopolitical interests. Recent European strategies for supporting HRDs provide useful guidance.<sup>43</sup> The United States’ policy should include strengthening outreach to HRDs, in part through established practices for regular communication between embassies and human rights defenders, with set mechanisms for providing support and assistance when needed, and with attention to HRDs from marginalized groups and outside of capital cities.<sup>44</sup> In the past, embassies and consulates in politically sensitive countries have hesitated to meet with or assist HRDs in need, leaving those most at risk without critical support.<sup>45</sup> The strategy should include publicly designating a human rights officer at every diplomatic post, and high-level embassy officials should regularly show public support for human rights. The Department of State should mandate human rights training for every foreign service officer, including specific instruction on how officers can assist HRDs in need. The department’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices should include full and consistent reporting on attacks against HRDs, including journalists, women’s rights advocates, civic and labor activists, and those representing marginalized groups, and on acts of transnational repression.

The United States should also work multilaterally by raising the issue of attacks on HRDs at multilateral forums and pressing states to respect and uphold rights. We should collaborate with regional human rights bodies to protect defenders at risk, and coordinate swift and forceful joint responses with other democratic states when HRDs are threatened, attacked, or killed. The United States should prioritize engagement with civil society groups as a routine part of foreign policy. This

should include institutionalizing regular dialogue with civil society groups; increasing contact between senior US officials and civil society leaders, especially in places where the government has become unresponsive to its citizens; and ensuring that civil society organizations and HRDs are invited to the Summit for Democracy. The United States should provide vocal public support for grassroots prodemocracy movements and be prepared to respond to any violent crackdown by authorities with targeted sanctions, conditions on foreign assistance, and public condemnation of such attacks.

The United States should rethink how it supports civil society organizations financially. Organizations that become disconnected from their local populations are left vulnerable to accusations by the government that they somehow represent “foreign influence.”<sup>46</sup> When disbursing aid, democracies should prioritize the needs and demands of local populations, with an emphasis on long-term, locally driven, and evidence-based

solutions. In particular, democracies should provide civil society and citizen-led social movements with technical assistance and training on issues like data collection, coalition and constituency building, advocacy, organizational development, and both physical and digital security.<sup>47</sup> They should connect activists across borders so they can share strategies, tools, and approaches. Instead of funding individual projects, resources may be more effective if used to support core funding for civil society organizations.<sup>48</sup> These groups can use the money to pay operational costs while spending a portion on initiatives driven by their own priorities, which could be broadly agreed to in advance. Finally, the United States should implement policies that allow it or partner organizations to provide rapid assistance to HRDs and civil society leaders who come under threat or attack for their work. Together, these approaches would represent a modernization of how democracy assistance is delivered and bring it more into line with best practices in global development.

## STRATEGY 4

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### Lead in developing a strategic digital technology policy agenda for the democratic world.

As more of our daily lives, communications, private information, and physical infrastructure have been connected and digitized, we have not kept pace in finding ways to integrate the norms of open, democratic societies. The internet and digital technology can be a force that supports democracy and human rights, or, alternatively, can be used to undermine liberty, security, and faith in democracy itself. Without more concerted values-based leadership, the internet will increasingly become a tool for state and nonstate actors to sow chaos and discord, and for authoritarians to assert greater control over their citizens. There is an urgent need to solidify international support for a values-based vision of the internet. This requires a democratic approach to governing digitized society that is consistent with human rights law and principles.

Three big trends have undermined the original US vision of a global, open, interoperable internet: a spate of national regulations, policies, and practices that wall off or splinter the open internet; tensions among democracies about technology and fundamental rights that have eroded trust and the prospect of a

shared democratic approach to a digitizing society; and competition from a much darker digital-authoritarian model.

The digital transformation of society has dramatically altered the context for democratic governance. The internet has become critical infrastructure for our society, extending well beyond just facilitating instantaneous global communication. Digitization touches every aspect of public and private life, and “internet governance” now bears on most sectors of a connected society.

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*“Without more concerted values-based leadership, the internet will increasingly become a tool for state and non-state actors to sow chaos and discord.”*

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Digital technologies have yielded substantial benefits. Yet democratic governments are struggling to meet their basic obligations to protect the liberty and security of citizens in this radically changed context. Digitization has created challenges in protecting personal data, confidential communications, and connected infrastructure. Malign actors, foreign and domestic, have exploited digital platforms to spread propaganda and disinformation. This wreaks havoc on democratic processes and erodes trust in the digital information realm.

Alarmed by this fast-moving crisis, some democratic governments have enacted regulations or security measures inconsistent with their obligation to protect human rights, and antithetical to principles of an open internet.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, competing assessments of what human rights principles and democratic values actually require in the digital context have frayed trust among democratic allies. A serious rift has emerged in transatlantic relationships regarding a broad portfolio of digital policy challenges. These include data-sharing across borders, digital surveillance by governments, private-sector “surveillance capitalism,”<sup>50</sup> monopoly power of US platforms, and freedom of expression. Such tensions among democratic allies have undermined confidence globally in our ability to adapt existing international norms and democratic values for a digital context—and whether it is even possible to agree on their scope, application, and feasibility. Meanwhile, a digital-authoritarian model of control is gaining traction, competing with the open democratic vision of the internet and society. Authoritarian governments, most notably China, have become increasingly adept at using digital technology for repressive purposes at home and have capitalized on the growing export market for surveillance and censorship technologies abroad.

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*“Democracies must recognize that we are in a geopolitical battle over the digital governance model that will dominate in the 21st century.”*

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China’s leaders also recognized early that dominance in technology brings significant geopolitical and diplomatic influence. Their massive strategic investments in technology enable them to spread their authoritarian

values globally. China’s digital policy influence is seen within tech standard- and protocol-setting bodies like the International Telecommunication Union.<sup>51</sup> It also is seen in more traditional standards-setting arenas, such as the UN Human Rights Council (which has witnessed absurd declarations of support for China’s repressive use of technology in Xinjiang and Hong Kong).<sup>52</sup> Finally, the concept of “cyber sovereignty” has led to a splintering of the global internet into walled-off national intranets. It has served as a cyber version of a basic authoritarian stance that rejects external criticism based on internationally recognized human rights.

Democracies must recognize that we are in a geopolitical battle over the digital governance model that will dominate in the 21st century. This presents an existential threat not just to US economic and national security, but also to our values-based vision for the internet and an open democratic digital society. Rebuilding international support for a global, open, secure, and reliable internet will require robust diplomacy. The United States must exercise strong leadership aimed at forging a shared democratic framework for regulation and use of digital technology that is consistent with international human rights law, as well as a plan to combat the digital-authoritarian model.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4.1

**Elevate protection of an open internet and human rights as a strategically important dimension of evolving digital technology and cyber policy.**

Building a democratic approach to digitized society must start at home. US domestic digital technology policy must not undermine our vision of an open internet or our commitment to core human rights principles. Domestic and foreign policy related to technology must align and cohere with our normative commitments. The administration should start by strengthening mechanisms to develop and coordinate values-based technology policies throughout the federal government, with assistance from the National Security Council. This coordination effort should focus on the challenges of building norms in the digital realm, as distinct from more traditional cybersecurity concerns. Priorities should include: (1) working with democratic allies to build a shared approach to applying international human rights law and international humanitarian law in the digital context; (2) evaluating the human rights impacts of domestic regulations, executive orders,

and policies on global internet freedom; (3) ensuring that our commitments to free expression and an open internet align with our diplomatic efforts involving cyber norms; and (4) developing processes to ensure that US government regulation and use of data and technology are consistent with international human rights law.

When it comes to combating the threat posed by digital disinformation, cross-border information operations, and other forms of “harmful” online content, a values-based approach to regulating platforms must align with international free expression principles articulated in Articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>53</sup> This approach would require analysis of any proposed restrictions regarding three process principles: (1) *legality*, which requires that regulations provide enough specificity to enable compliance with the law; (2) *necessity and proportionality*, which require that any infringement on expression be necessary to address the problem and proportionate to the threat posed; and (3) *legitimacy*, meaning the restrictions’ intended aim is legitimate under international human rights law. US regulation of social media platforms should be consistent with these principles.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4.2**

##### **Dramatically step up digital technology and cyber diplomacy aimed at defending democracy and human rights.**

Congress is currently debating the “Cyber Diplomacy Act”<sup>54</sup> and the “Technology Partnership Act,”<sup>55</sup> as the Department of State is considering how best to organize a new Bureau of Cyberspace Security and Emerging Technologies. These initiatives will dramatically boost US technology-related diplomacy. The United States should be prepared to address the full spectrum of cyber and digital technology diplomacy challenges. These include: affirming the application of international law in cyberspace, influencing standards and protocols for future technologies, establishing appropriate models for regulating digital platforms, and aligning government and private-sector use of data with agreed international law and principles. The bureau should contribute to developing more robust export controls for technologies that can be used for repression. To facilitate cross-border data transfers between democracies, we will need agreement on appropriate institutional constraints on government use of data, among other issues. The United States should also push back against rising data

localization requirements around the world, which help government agencies collect users’ personal data. Disproportionate restrictions on cross-border data flows not only enable local crackdowns on human rights, but also threaten the future of an open, free, and secure internet.<sup>56</sup>

Given the breadth of future negotiations, the new bureau should be augmented by an ambassador-at-large for global digital affairs, as well as by active technology diplomacy at embassy posts. US diplomatic participation should be elevated in bilateral, multilateral, and multistakeholder digital and cyber policy development. US leadership should be reinvigorated within the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC), including by seeking to chair the coalition on rotation. More robust US diplomacy is also needed at international forums where technology standards and protocols are set (such as the International Telecommunication Union), and in arenas that develop standards of responsible state behavior in the cyber realm. These include the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on Developments in the Field of ICTs in the Context of International Security, and the process considering the draft UN Cybercrime Treaty. The Department of State should also engage the United States in the Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace.

Finally, the Department of State should create an office in Silicon Valley. The office would engage with digital platforms and other technology companies in developing values-based policies, particularly regarding private-sector responsibilities to respect human rights as outlined in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The unit should lead in multistakeholder digital policy development processes that bring civil society voices to the table. And it should work with the “tech ambassadors” posted by foreign governments in Silicon Valley,<sup>57</sup> as well as with the newly established FOC Silicon Valley working group. As an added benefit, the office could be asked to help identify emerging technologies that would benefit civil society and human rights activists.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4.3**

##### **Heal the transatlantic policy rifts over cross-border data transfers and platform regulations.**

Any prospect of building a broader, shared democratic technology agenda will require resolution of current tensions between the United States and the European



Union over technology and data. Without US-EU alignment, other democratic partners will lose confidence that a democratic model for digitized society is realistic.

Among the most urgent issues are substantial divisions over cross-border data transfer arrangements, digital surveillance by governments and the private sector, and regulation of digital platforms consistent with democratic values. These disagreements have already placed \$7.1 trillion in transatlantic digital trade at risk by interrupting data-sharing across borders.<sup>58</sup> It has also led some EU members toward a vision of digital sovereignty that could undermine any potential for a shared democratic approach to internet governance.

The first step in healing the divide must be an early dialogue with the EU to rapidly develop an alternative to the Privacy Shield data arrangement, which was negotiated between the United States and Europe during the Obama administration. The EU Court of Justice struck it down in July 2020, declaring it inconsistent with fundamental rights (over disagreements about the US government's use of private citizens' information).<sup>59</sup> Rectifying this problem will require high-level negotiations about institutional constraints on government surveillance and appropriate restraints on sharing data between government and private-sector platforms. Passage of US privacy and data-protection regulation would help move this important dialogue in the right direction.

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*“Any prospect of building a broader shared democratic technology agenda will require resolution of current tensions between the United States and the EU over technology and data.”*

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A second priority should be developing a transparency and accountability regime for digital information platforms that is applicable to US platforms operating in the EU. This framework should emphasize users' procedural rights and control of data, but also focus on algorithmic promotion and demotion of content. Recommendations from the Transatlantic High Level Working Group's Transparency and Accountability Framework can provide a starting place.<sup>60</sup> Democratic governments should require transparency and

accountability mechanisms that enhance democratic oversight of platforms and strengthen users' procedural rights and remedies, while protecting free expression. In addition, greater platform transparency can help educate users, regulators, and researchers about the effects of algorithmic information systems and play an important role in building civic resilience to disinformation. For the United States to lead by example, Congress should take care that any domestic legislation to reform Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act or impose new requirements on social media platforms starts with—and builds in appropriate mechanisms for—transparency and accountability, while also preserving the protections that allow free speech to flourish online.

Finally, policymakers should develop a diplomatic process for resolving conflicting US-EU digital policy and regulations aimed at protecting fundamental rights. This process should help resolve disparate views on how to protect a range of substantive human rights simultaneously that may conflict (privacy and free expression); how to apply international human rights law process principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality; and how to assess government regulation of digital platforms with respect to adherence to human rights law.

#### RECOMMENDATION 4.4

**Rally democratic governments around a shared vision of the open internet, a democratic approach to governance of digital technology, and a strategic technology investment agenda.**

The United States should lead a process of renewal for democratic partners that inspires optimism and confidence in the superiority of a democratic approach to governance of digital society, as well as commitment to an open internet. A central task will be further articulating how government and technology companies can adhere to international human rights law and principles in the digital context.

To start the process, the administration should use the Summit for Democracy to focus on the strategic importance of values-based digital technology policy for democracy's future. The Summit will also provide an early opportunity to help heal divisions among democratic countries over tech regulation. It could help democracies begin to align responses to tech-related security threats and expand tech-based partnership. The Summit should set a future-oriented agenda that covers the full spectrum of technology policy. This would include: joint strategic

technology R&D investment; tech standards-setting; human-rights-based analysis of government and private-sector use of data and algorithmic decision-making tools; export controls on technologies that can be used for repression; regulation of digital platforms aligned to democratic values; countering disinformation; and civic education on responsible use of social media.

More coordinated planning among trusted democratic partners could help protect supply chains for essential technologies. It could also encourage joint commitments from democratic partners for increased R&D investments in strategic and emerging technologies.

Following the Summit, policymakers should institute an ongoing process to continue developing a shared democratic approach to digital technology and governance. The process could be divided into different work streams with different “Digital Technology” partner groupings. For example, a group composed of the most technologically advanced democracies could be established to develop a strategic technology investment agenda. This cohort could include the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, South Korea, and Japan. Its primary aim would be to develop a joint investment and supply-chain plan for strategically important existing and emerging technologies, such as semiconductors, 5G) mobile networks, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum communications.

A second group could be established to resolve democratic tensions and seek alignment among democratic partners on using and regulating data and digital technology. This group could include the G7, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Brazil. Its aim would be to resolve disagreements over appropriate checks on government and private-sector use of data, as well as harmonious regulatory approaches to private-sector platforms.

A third work stream could use the existing FOC, which now includes 32 governments, for international advocacy and diplomatic coordination to defend a democratic vision of a global open internet and adherence to human

rights in the digital realm. The United States should commit to high-level diplomatic engagement with this coalition of likeminded partners.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4-5**

#### **Develop a comprehensive strategy to combat the spread of the digital-authoritarian model of governance.**

Combating the rise of the digital-authoritarian model—which includes the export, regulation, and use of technologies for repressive purposes—should be a top priority for the United States and its democratic allies. This will require building global resistance to the concept of “cyber sovereignty” and renewed global advocacy for a free and open internet, with an updated vision for how to protect it.

In particular, the United States should develop a diplomatic strategy to counter digital-authoritarian influence at norm-setting bodies, such as the UN Human Rights Council, where the global normative consensus around internet freedom must be rebuilt. The United States and its allies should also invest in coordinated international diplomacy at multilateral and multistakeholder forums where technology standards and protocols are developed. These would include the International Telecommunication Union, IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) policy development processes, and ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers).

Finally, democracies must resist repressive application and regulation of technology for censorship and surveillance, lest it be accepted as normal practice. Democratic allies should band together to create stronger export-control regimes for surveillance and censorship tools that can be used for repressive purposes, and establish more effective coordination mechanisms to curtail the global export of information infrastructure to authoritarian governments. They should place restrictions on authoritarian government access to technology and equipment for semiconductor manufacturing, to protect a democratic lead in this realm.

## STRATEGY 5

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### Develop a strategy to rebuild trust in the information environment and to counter the spread of disinformation, online hate and harassment.

Rapid changes in the ways information is created, manipulated, disseminated, and consumed have shaken our confidence in the integrity of information, with profoundly troubling effects. The rampant spread of disinformation, state-sponsored propaganda, unintended citizen-spread misinformation, and online hate and harassment are interfering with basic democratic processes. Social media and mainstream outlets readily amplify conspiracy theories, deep fakes, and other fabricated material, with new platforms emerging regularly. Furthermore, smear campaigns and hateful rhetoric against marginalized ethnic and religious groups, the LGBTQ community, independent journalists, and human rights defenders have flooded the information environment. The dramatic erosion of confidence in information presents an existential threat to democracies.

Disinformation is the intentional spread of false and misleading content by state and nonstate actors. The term regained prominence in the aftermath of Russian interference in the 2016 US elections, when employees at the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency created fake profiles, pages, and events on prominent social media platforms. But state actors like Russia and China have been using disinformation globally for years as part of a broader malign influence strategy to sow chaos, amplify internal divisions, discredit critics, and decrease trust in the democratic process.

Several governments have coupled these surreptitious campaigns with overt media activities. The Russian government uses both traditional outlets, such as the state-owned multilingual news services RT and Sputnik, and social media to exploit divisions in regions including Europe and especially the Balkans, Africa, Latin America, and the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>61</sup> China's government pushes its propaganda and disinformation on official media (such as the China Global Television Network, or CGTN), while suppressing disfavored news through economic leverage, diplomatic intimidation, and private Chinese companies' control over prominent social media and messaging platforms.<sup>62</sup>

In many countries, state-sponsored propaganda and even disinformation are aimed at domestic audiences to feign grassroots support for the government, discredit political opponents, and control the broader information narrative. Women in particular have been victims of abuse and related sexualized disinformation on social media platforms.<sup>63</sup> An underdeveloped media environment exacerbates the impact of disinformation and propaganda. Individuals are unable to fact-check information or seek out alternative views due to censorship or state capture of the media sector. Citizen journalists and activists cannot publish accurate news due to poor levels of press freedom or internet freedom.

State-sponsored disinformation is not the only concern. Political figures and other nonstate actors have used social media and partisan news outlets to push falsehoods that advance their objectives. These activities are generally more prominent around major events such as elections and protests.<sup>64</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has added new pressures to the information environment—that is, the sprawling array of print and broadcast media, social media, podcasts, and countless other sources of accurate or inaccurate information. This gives rise to an “infodemic” of misleading and false claims about the pandemic's origins, vaccine dissemination, and governments' ability to help their citizens.<sup>65</sup> Conspiracy theories and pseudoscience are increasingly prevalent on social media, often driven by algorithms that have incentivized the sharing of shocking and misleading content.

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*“Democratic governments have been unprepared to address these new and rapidly evolving challenges.”*

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In the United States, public officials, decentralized networks like QAnon, and more organized extremist groups like the Proud Boys played a significant role in spreading disinformation and violence during the 2020

election period and the 2021 presidential transition. The attack on the electoral certification process inside the US Capitol is a prime example of how disinformation and hate—propagated online and through traditional media channels—can promote violence and civil unrest that is anathema to democratic processes. It also encourages authoritarian powers to employ similar tactics to enhance repression.

Democratic governments have been unprepared to address these new and rapidly evolving challenges. There is little consensus about the nature of the problem, and even less on potential solutions. Fostering a diverse and reliable information environment requires a multipronged approach. As a first step, the US government should develop a strategy to elevate and better coordinate efforts to counter disinformation and online hate and harassment. While even democracies approach these issues from different angles under their respective laws, and may require different policy, regulatory, and technical solutions, we believe a coordinated strategy would be valuable. Second, the United States should step up its coordination with partner governments, technology companies, and global civil society to identify, expose, and dismantle disinformation campaigns as well as online hate and harassment. This effort would include foreign interference by state-backed actors in Russia, China, and Iran; domestic disinformation and propaganda campaigns led by governments against their own citizens; and online hate and harassment campaigns against marginalized populations. Third, there should be greater investment in programs to build local citizen resilience against disinformation, with an emphasis on its impact on marginalized communities, media workers, and human rights defenders. This should include partnering with host-nation governments, civil society, and the private sector to share expertise on specific country dynamics and inform product and policy decisions. It will also require more investment in digital literacy, cyber education directed at targeted populations, and emerging technologies to counter these challenges at scale.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5.1**

### **Develop a US strategy to counter disinformation, online hate and harassment.**

The US government's efforts to counter foreign and domestic disinformation and online hate and harassment are distributed across numerous agencies. These many disparate efforts need to be made far more coherent and coordinated. The federal government responded with

significant innovation to address information threats in the past—for example by establishing the US Information Agency during the Cold War. So should we develop new approaches to meet this moment. Following enactment of the Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act in 2016, the federal government has allocated more resources to address foreign disinformation campaigns, including to the Department of State's Global Engagement Center.<sup>66</sup> Yet current efforts to mitigate new challenges remain insufficient.

The National Security Advisor should appoint a senior official responsible for creating a whole-of-government strategy to counter disinformation and online hate and harassment, and coordinating its implementation throughout the federal government. This strategy should assess the impact of disinformation and online hate and harassment on weak democracies and vulnerable populations, and develop a whole-of-government response and mitigation strategy. It must address threats, vulnerabilities, and responses, including the exposure of disinformation campaigns, and offer ways to build citizen resilience to mitigate these campaigns' damaging effects. Finally, the strategy should align efforts directed at global threats with those aimed at threats of domestic origin.

Building on current efforts, the senior official should ensure that, where appropriate, US government agencies facilitate strong dialogue and cooperation with the private sector, and consult with nongovernmental organizations devoted to this mission as well. Entities such as the Global Engagement Center should continue to play an important role in messaging and building strong private-public-civic partnerships to expose foreign disinformation campaigns and state-sponsored propaganda.<sup>67</sup> Equally important, the Department of State and USAID—in cooperation with the private sector and civil society—will need to take the lead in developing programs to address online hate and harassment globally.

An initial goal should be to better understand the nature and *impact* of these fast-evolving trends and threats, and the effectiveness of related US programs. Policymakers can draw upon entities such as the congressionally mandated Foreign Malign Influence Response Center and the Social Media Data and Threat Analysis Center—both at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence—as resources for evidence-based insights and impact assessments. In addition to internally based assessments, the Department of State should task an external assessment of select countries. This would cover the impact of disinformation campaigns on citizens, the role that social media have



played in spreading disinformation in these countries, efforts underway to strengthen societal response, and the impact of online hate and harassment on marginalized populations. This assessment should pay special attention to understanding the experiences of these populations, as well as rural communities in emerging democracies and developing countries.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5.2**

### **Invest in building societal resilience to disinformation, online hate and harassment, and harness digital information technologies to serve democracy.**

Rebuilding trust in information and civic discourse cannot be achieved exclusively by countering disinformation and propaganda. Informed citizens who have access to the internet, digital security training, and credible information are essential to building societal resilience to disinformation. The United States has taken some steps to support this objective. USAID has invested in media and digital literacy programs, new media, and cyber education efforts in several regions. In its 2020–2024 Digital Strategy, USAID seeks to create “open, secure, and inclusive digital ecosystems that contribute to broad-based, measurable development and humanitarian-assistance outcomes and increase self-reliance in emerging market countries.”<sup>68</sup> To further this effort, there is need for a coordinated action plan and implementation roadmap that can be expanded quickly to critical parts of the world. To elevate coordination of US government resilience programs and adapt them at scale, the USAID Administrator should appoint a senior official to coordinate development and implementation of citizen resilience and capacity-building efforts on countering disinformation and strengthening digital society.

The United States should build on investments in digital and media literacy and cybersecurity education, with a focus on youth, women, and marginalized communities. To that end, USAID should lead the investment in programs that cultivate digital security practices, such as education about privacy protections, access to encryption technology, and digital literacy skills. These programs should have measurable impacts aligned to US national security objectives.

The United States should engage with like-minded democracies and companies to provide internet access,

especially to non-urban residents and marginalized populations such as women and migrants. The Department of State and USAID should work with partner governments, the UN, civil society, and the private sector to strengthen the delivery of internet access and usage. The US government should also advocate for the responsible innovation of emerging technologies such as AI in developing countries, which would benefit marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Finally, the United States should support global technological innovation—particularly in the development of emerging technologies such as AI and machine learning—to detect, assess, and mitigate the negative effects of disinformation and online hate and harassment. In addition, this innovation might spur the development of content by credible voices on local channels. To encourage such work, the Department of State in partnership with USAID should develop an innovation program for rising tech entrepreneurs in developing countries, including in the Global South, who can help build technologies to address these challenges.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5.3**

### **Establish a Global Task Force on Information Integrity and Resilience in order to rebuild trust in the information environment.**

Democracies around the world do not routinely come together to develop policy and technology-driven solutions pertaining to disinformation or online hate and harassment. Similarly, while social media platforms often play major roles in propagating disinformation, they are not routinely invited to sit at the table with governments to work on potential solutions. Meanwhile, civil society groups play an increasingly important role in exposing disinformation and identifying solutions, yet they too are often excluded from multilateral conversations. To address this gap, democracies need to cooperate, share information, and find ways to inform conversations on the responsibilities of social media platforms.

The United States should engage with its partners to create a new Global Task Force on Information Integrity and Resilience. It would: (1) increase and formalize information-sharing, including on current and emerging threats; (2) share best practices and lessons learned with respect to building citizen resilience; and (3) commit to addressing online hate and harassment globally, with special attention to the most targeted and vulnerable



People gather in London to show support for civilian rule in Sudan. (Image credit: Yahya Aitabi / Shutterstock.com)

populations. The Task Force should incorporate relevant insights from existing proposals, such as the European Democracy Action Plan. It should be a component of the broader diplomacy agenda recommended in Strategy 4, initiated at the Summit for Democracy.<sup>69</sup> Developing transparency, accountability, and auditability norms for social media platforms (as we recommend in Strategy 4) will help address the problems associated with disinformation. The Task Force's work must be designed to complement that of existing coordination bodies that engage on some aspects of these issues.

We envision the Task Force starting out as a small group of likeminded countries, including those from the Global South, with shared leadership responsibilities. It should be spearheaded by governments, but set up as a public-private-civic partnership. It is critical to ensure that civil society and the private sector are at the table in order to facilitate strong collaboration and information sharing. Both sectors represent diverse voices and are crucial to mitigating the threats of disinformation and online hate and harassment. Private-sector partners should include social media platforms and companies that develop emerging technologies such as AI.

## STRATEGY 6

### Make combating corruption, kleptocracy, and state capture a national security priority.

Any serious effort to promote democracy and counter authoritarianism must include measures to combat corruption and kleptocracy, which have become business models for modern-day authoritarians.<sup>70</sup> Corruption—and its weaponization by antidemocratic

forces—harms effective governance, undermines economic growth, and weakens the rule of law. It corrodes public trust, and is interwoven with security issues like organized and transnational crime, terrorism, human rights abuses, and conflict. Governments

broadly agree that it is critically important to address the corrosive effects of global corruption, as evidenced in the UN Convention against Corruption, the Global Declaration against Corruption, and other initiatives.<sup>71</sup> This June, the UN will host its first-ever General Assembly Special Session on corruption.

Unfortunately, the nearly universal political commitments to combat corruption have not resulted in effective action to root it out. By prioritizing this issue — as President Biden has publicly committed to doing — the administration can forge an international action plan to combat corruption and strengthen democratic values.

The problem has grown worse as authoritarian rule has expanded over the past two decades.<sup>72</sup> Authoritarian leaders engage in corruption not just to enrich themselves and maintain control over their subordinates, but also to penetrate and co-opt foreign states and institutions. In Russia, for example, corruption and political power have long been interlinked. Under Putin's leadership, corruption plays an increasingly large role in regime stability. Putin has been able to consolidate his power and maintain control by allowing key political elites to benefit from graft. It is also a key way in which the Kremlin seeks to undermine democracy in Europe and counter US influence in the world, presenting a major threat not only to US interests but to democracy globally.

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*“Any serious effort to promote democracy and counter authoritarianism must include measures to combat corruption and kleptocracy, which have become business models for modern-day authoritarians.”*

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While corruption is by no means limited to authoritarian regimes, it “is much more likely to flourish where democratic foundations are weak and ... where undemocratic and populist politicians can use it to their advantage,” according to Transparency International.<sup>73</sup> The theft of public funds gives authoritarian rulers, kleptocrats, and corrupt elites the incentive and means to consolidate power, suppress voices of opposition,

and manipulate institutions to limit transparency and accountability. Ordinary citizens ultimately pay the price, suffering from breakdowns in the rule of law, the deterioration of public services, and lost economic opportunities. The UN estimates that roughly \$3.6 trillion is lost each year in bribes and stolen money.<sup>74</sup> And perversely, some authoritarian regimes even deploy the tactics and language of anticorruption campaigns to purge opponents and consolidate their positions of power. Any effective anticorruption strategy will require vigilance to resist that dynamic.

Authoritarian-linked corruption notably affects, and even depends on, wealthy and long-established democracies. Corrupt officials, state-owned companies and other quasi-private actors, and criminal gangs based in countries with authoritarian regimes actively exploit the openness of democratic societies to hide ill-gotten wealth and exert surreptitious political influence.

Journalists play a vital role in revealing the extent of corrupt activities, often risking their lives in the course of their work. Between 2012 and 2018, Transparency International found, “368 journalists died while pursuing stories and 96 per cent of those deaths were in countries with corrupt public sectors”;<sup>75</sup> shockingly, one in five of the journalists killed worldwide were investigating corruption-related stories, including reporters in Malta, Slovakia, and Mexico. Many more who were working to uncover corruption are imprisoned in nations including Azerbaijan, China, and Zimbabwe.<sup>76</sup> In many cases, regimes feel pressure to enact reforms only after reporters have exposed corrupt activities, underscoring the critical importance of protecting journalists. (Recommendation 3.5 lays out ways in which the US government can better protect journalists and civil society groups working to reveal corrupt activities.)

International anticorruption efforts focus heavily on public-sector corruption, but the private sector plays a role as well. Businesses can be complicit in, fall victim to, or help combat corruption. Corporate culture and in-country anticorruption laws and enforcement are all factors in encouraging or discouraging business integrity. Effectively addressing global corruption will require a joint effort by the public sector, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Together they can strengthen governance and institutions, increase transparency and accountability, and buttress business integrity standards.



Recent US administrations have taken steps to combat corruption abroad. Congress has also promoted anticorruption measures, funding programs to strengthen anticorruption safeguards overseas, conditioning some foreign assistance on the recipient government's demonstrated commitment to anticorruption mechanisms, and proposing new measures to tackle global corruption issues.<sup>77</sup>

However, US efforts to date have not effectively jump-started real change. The Corruption Perceptions Index shows that corruption remains a persistent challenge, with nearly half of the 180 countries assessed showing no improvement, and 12 percent worsening since 2012.<sup>78</sup> Legal and regulatory reforms are needed within this country to curb corrupt actors' ability to exploit our open political and financial systems. In order to credibly lead on these issues, the United States must act with humility and get its own house in order, including by implementing and enforcing recently passed laws against money laundering; strengthening ethics and emoluments standards and conflict-of-interest laws; and requiring senior officials to disclose tax information. Making meaningful, sustained progress on global anticorruption efforts will require US leadership, working in conjunction with a multilateral coalition committed to prioritizing anticorruption efforts for years to come.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.1**

**Make combating corruption, kleptocracy, and state capture a fundamental pillar of the National Security Strategy, and design a whole-of-government approach to implement it.**

President Biden identified combating corruption as a priority during his campaign, and his administration's Interim National Security Strategic Guidance says it "will take special aim at confronting corruption."<sup>79</sup> There is strong bipartisan agreement on this. But current US efforts to combat corruption globally are scattered across multiple agencies and organizations, including the Departments of State, Treasury, Defense, Justice, Commerce, and Labor, and the Export-Import Bank. There is no whole-of-government strategy for fighting corruption through foreign policy and multilateral institutions. Making anti-corruption efforts a first-tier national security issue and deploying a whole-of-government approach would ensure that the United States undertakes global anticorruption efforts in a serious and focused way.

To address this challenge and animate his stated priorities, President Biden should make anticorruption a fundamental pillar of the US National Security Strategy, with an appropriate interagency coordination locus in the White House. The administration should work with Congress to determine what new legislation may be necessary to implement a robust anticorruption strategy, including possibly using fines and penalties under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act to enhance global anticorruption work. The US government should rank levels of corruption around the world, similar to the tiered system used by the Trafficking in Persons Report or the US Commission on International Religious Freedom's annual report.<sup>80</sup> For maximum effect, the government should integrate anticorruption tools into broader diplomatic strategies.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6.2**

**Call upon the Financial Action Task Force to establish a new set of anticorruption standards and implement rigorous mutual assessments to ensure implementation.**

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is an intergovernmental body that sets international standards and promotes implementation of legal, regulatory, and operational measures aimed at preventing global money laundering, terrorist financing, and related threats. The more than 200 participating countries rigorously and mutually evaluate their compliance with the FATF's expert-created standards.<sup>81</sup> This process has created a "race to the top" as countries continuously seek to improve their FATF evaluations and, for the lagging countries, avoid "gray list" or "black list" designations. At present, despite broad global agreement on the importance of tackling corruption, there is no FATF-style entity focusing primarily on anticorruption standards or incentivizing progress in addressing corruption. There was a refocusing of FATF to address terrorist financing following the attacks of 9/11. A similar refocusing should happen now, to bring the same level of intensity to battling corruption.

The United States should press the G20 — which oversees FATF's work — to charge FATF with adopting a new set of expert-created anticorruption standards, rigorously assessing participating states on whether they have adopted the recommended measures, and, importantly, whether they are effectively implementing them. The FATF has proven effective because financial institutions and investors pay close attention to its evaluations when



deciding about investments. Regulatory scrutiny reinforces that attention. Helpfully, the G20 already has a line of work on anti-corruption, as do other multilateral bodies including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the UN, which could be drawn upon in formulating these standards. The United States should urge partners and allies to join in this call.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6.3**

#### **Prioritize and animate an anticorruption agenda across international bodies and promote efforts to coordinate their work.**

A variety of structures for combating corruption are already in place across many multilateral institutions. These include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions, and the Egmont Group. However, lack of coordination makes their efforts less effective than they could be. There is also a need to focus on implementation and enforcement, ensuring that states actually adhere to the anticorruption commitments they voluntarily made.

The United States could provide important leadership, pushing for strategic coordination between bodies and enforcement of existing mechanisms, and thus more effectively advancing anti-corruption goals across all institutions. As the largest funder or donor at many of these institutions, the United States is positioned to make anti-corruption efforts a higher priority. Prioritization efforts should include promoting accountability in delivering assistance and loans, as well as protecting against corruption within the creditor institutions themselves. The United States should push each of these institutions to implement existing international agreements, fully use the tools at their disposal, and carry out anticorruption efforts if that is not already a focus. Efforts could include pressing for anticorruption conditionality in concessional loans made by multilateral development banks (MDBs); maximizing information-sharing about corruption and tax evasion among national financial intelligence units; and encouraging particular attention to loans for projects that are especially susceptible to graft. The United States should also press to include civil society in decision making, as they often play a key role in advancing implementation and enforcement of anticorruption measures.

It is important for each institution to steadfastly enforce agreed-upon commitments. This will strengthen anticorruption efforts while highlighting that the Chinese government's development practices do not adhere to these same standards. The United States should work with MDBs to help modernize practices that enable the banks to better meet low-income countries' development financing needs. And the United States should use these multilateral institutions to effectively highlight the corrupt activities of authoritarian regimes, including, for example, the fact that Chinese state-controlled enterprises often engage in bribery to obtain contracts outside of China.

Language on democracy, anticorruption, accountability, and transparency should be included at the Asian Development Bank and other multilateral economic groupings and international financial institutions.<sup>82</sup> Actually changing the charters of the other MDBs or advancing these norms in groupings like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, which include nondemocratic countries, may not be feasible. But anticorruption, transparency, and good governance are themes that can resonate with countries focused on sustainable development.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6.4**

#### **Employ a comprehensive, coordinated, and global approach to anticorruption enforcement and accountability mechanisms.**

The United States has many tools for fighting corruption. But it lacks a coordinated, cross-agency strategy for using them effectively. A new, whole-of-government approach could remedy this. Enforcement tools include the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and other anti-money-laundering and fraud statutes; targeted sanctions, including under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and Section 7031(c) of the Fiscal Year 2021 State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Act; anticorruption advisories from the Department of the Treasury's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN); and disclosure and compliance regulations and standards.<sup>83</sup> There should be a concerted interagency effort to choose the right enforcement tool in the right context. The United States should employ its anticorruption tools for maximum effect by integrating them into broader diplomatic strategies, and by adequately funding and coordinating them across agencies.

## RECOMMENDATION 6.5

### Design and distribute foreign aid and security assistance in ways that help reduce corruption.

The United States does not leverage its aid money as fully as it could to reduce corruption. Basing foreign assistance on commitments to anticorruption measures could increase its impact. There have been many efforts over the years to limit foreign assistance to countries with significant corruption challenges, but the approach has varied by country or funding account. Congress can play a key role in fighting corruption globally by ensuring a more systematized process for determining when and how to condition foreign aid and security assistance on anticorruption progress. Possibilities could include requiring recipient governments to meet basic anticorruption benchmarks in advance, as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) does. Congress could also mandate annual anticorruption assessments for countries that receive aid despite significant corruption problems.

Sharing information and employing new technology can also help ensure that foreign assistance is not misdirected or captured by corrupt networks. For example, a recent study by World Bank economists purports to show that “disbursements of aid coincide, in the same quarter, with significant increases in the value of bank deposits” held by elites of those countries.<sup>84</sup> The United States and other major donors should partner with the private sector to use digital asset technology to enable greater accountability in the distribution of foreign aid. New technologies such as digital public ledgers, smart contracts, and programmable money present new opportunities to improve transparency and accountability.

## RECOMMENDATION 6.6

### Create mechanisms to promote private-sector investment in key countries making progress against corruption.

One of the United States’ most powerful tools is the ability to leverage private-sector investment, and data have shown that such investment can be more powerful than aid.<sup>85</sup> The prospect of attracting such investments can be a potent incentive for countries

to meet key anticorruption benchmarks. Democratic governments also have an interest in staying engaged in jurisdictions that pose corruption risks and in not ceding influence in those jurisdictions to authoritarian powers. The Chinese government, including its state-owned enterprises and banks, is investing heavily in development projects around the world, but genuine private-sector investment is a more appealing option in the long run for recipient countries.

The United States should maximize the use of tools including trade preferences, chambers of commerce, concessional finance mechanisms such as the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), and collaboration with other democracies to tie anticorruption efforts to increases in financing and foreign direct investment. Using the authorities of the DFC and other bodies—and drawing on the standards for governance set forth by the Millennium Challenge Corporation and measurements of corruption including the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators—the United States should promote investment in these jurisdictions using a shared-risk model between US government institutions and the private sector.<sup>86</sup> It is especially important that the DFC use its full potential to spark positive, transparent development.

## RECOMMENDATION 6.7

### Fully implement federal law prohibiting the use of anonymous shell corporations to conceal stolen assets, and press foreign governments to enforce similar laws.

Authoritarians, kleptocrats, and other corrupt actors often hide stolen wealth by using anonymous shell corporations to buy high-end real estate and other luxury items. It is a global problem. Congress passed legislation in December 2020 requiring the nonpublic disclosure of the true, beneficial owners of corporations to FinCEN; the information is then accessible to law enforcement agencies and, in some cases, financial institutions.<sup>87</sup> This important law will significantly limit corrupt actors’ ability to launder their wealth through shell corporations in the United States. The Biden administration should fully and promptly implement this law by ensuring appropriate staffing for FinCEN, and encourage other nations to enforce or adopt similar measures.



Protestors gather in Myanmar against the country's military coup, holding signs that read, "We need your help America."  
(Image credit: Robert Bociaga Olk Bon / Shutterstock.com)

#### RECOMMENDATION 6.8

**Have the Securities and Exchange Commission require companies in certain industries to disclose information each year about their actions to prevent corruption.**

At present, US companies' disclosure of information related to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) risks is voluntary, and anticorruption information is often not included in the ESG disclosures that are voluntarily submitted. Corporations take seriously the information they include in ESG disclosures, because they know investors care about corporate actions and policies that affect environmental, social, and governance matters. The leaders of major corporations increasingly focus on these subjects. Because anticorruption information is not included in many companies' ESG disclosures, it is not given the same level of prioritization as some other ESG issues. To ensure that corporations give serious attention to anti-corruption measures, the US Securities and Exchange Commission should update its rules to mandate annual reporting on anticorruption efforts for companies operating in industries or jurisdictions with significant corruption risks, while avoiding overly burdensome or duplicative data-collection requirements.

#### RECOMMENDATION 6.9

**Consider establishing Unexplained Wealth Orders in the United States.**

Corrupt actors are skilled at evading anticorruption laws and hiding assets. Since 2018, the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency has used Unexplained Wealth Orders (UWOs) to compel individuals to reveal the sources of unexplained wealth. Asset seizure can result if the individuals fail to adequately substantiate the origins of their assets. If implemented in the United States, these orders could potentially be a powerful tool for combating money laundering through real-estate acquisitions and other means. They also have significant civil liberties implications, however. The executive branch should work with Congress and outside experts to determine whether UWOs are an appropriate model for the United States, and whether new legislation should be enacted to empower the Department of Justice to issue UWOs when warranted.



### Harness US economic power to support democracy and counter authoritarianism.

As the world's largest economy, the United States possesses considerable leverage it can use in a more concerted fashion to promote democracy and counter authoritarianism. The Biden administration is well-positioned to reframe the benefits of trade and development policy. It can broaden support for international economic engagement by linking trade, investment, and development policies with the goals of advancing democracy and countering authoritarianism.

First and foremost, there is the power of America's example: Its resilient prosperity has long served as evidence of the superiority of the democratic form of government. But the long-term stagnation in middle-class incomes, the inequities exposed and exacerbated by the 2008 global financial crisis, and, most recently, the faltering US coronavirus response have tarnished the image of American democracy abroad. Meanwhile, China's economic success over the past four decades has offered an alternative path of authoritarian modernization for developing economies. To restore faith in democracy in the United States and abroad, we urgently need to get our own economic house in order and demonstrate that democracies can deliver strong and inclusive economic growth at home. It is critical to show that open societies and international cooperation are a better path than authoritarianism and zero-sum international politics.

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*“Rather than retreat from leadership on international trade and development, the United States should proactively align international economic and democracy policies to counter authoritarianism and promote inclusive and sustainable economic development.”*

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Second, regulating access to the world's largest market for goods and services can advance the cause of democracy around the world. US-led international trade agreements have been used to incentivize partners to improve governance, labor rights, and inclusiveness. This tool is still viable if we choose to use it. But the widening perception that trade agreements have historically served a narrow set of business interests at the expense of US workers led to bipartisan opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2016. This marked a historic setback for the use of multilateral trade agreements to advance prosperity, security, and democratic norms. The United States must develop new ways of leveraging its market power in the service of democracy, labor rights, and human rights—ways that promote rather than sacrifice the interests of its own middle class.

Third, the US private sector has invested trillions of dollars in foreign countries, and the flow of private investment itself is a source of immense influence. With increased US-China competition, there is a growing recognition among some American business leaders—and many of their counterparts in Europe and other parts of Asia—that supporting open, inclusive, and accountable societies at home and abroad will be critical to attracting talent and boosting their companies' long-term success. Recent surveys by the Center for Strategic and International Studies demonstrate that leaders in international business are no less concerned about democracy and human rights abuses in China than leaders in other areas such as academia or national security.<sup>88</sup> However, most corporate leaders still feel compelled to focus on near-term profitability, so they remain cautious in their approach to China given its massive significance as a consumer market and sourcing location. Similarly, US allies have often been reluctant to sacrifice commercial interests in the name of democracy and human rights—with respect to China or elsewhere. The United States needs to give companies stronger incentives to promote democratic values in their choice of investment destinations and in the behavior of their foreign subsidiaries, and protect them from



foreign government backlash when they stand up for human rights and free speech. Our allies and partners should be encouraged to follow this example with their own companies.

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***“The goal is not to make economic conditions worse in countries that are already challenged, but to make governments accountable through economic consequences of human rights violations.”***

— Sen. Thom Tillis, Task Force Interview

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Fourth, US bilateral development assistance and US leadership in the multilateral development banks (MDBs) are an additional source of leverage that can be used to promote democratic norms. Among the MDBs, only the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has the mandate to promote democracy explicitly written into its founding documents.<sup>89</sup> But other MDBs support the rule of law, good governance, transparency, consultation with civil society, and other values closely related to democracy. At the same time, the US-led system of MDBs is facing unprecedented competition from China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Beijing is using its aggressive lending practices to secure natural resources and dual-use military facilities, to lock in trading linkages to China through infrastructure investments, and to enhance the international image of China’s political-economic model. There is strong evidence that Beijing is engaged in “elite capture” (aka bribery) to advance BRI projects and it is therefore imperative that MDB- and US-led alternatives highlight transparency and accountability—core principles of democratic governance. The United States and its allies need to focus on revitalizing the MDBs’ financing instruments and on elevating the importance the MDBs place on governance and the rule of law. The Millennium Challenge Corporation has demonstrated how development incentives can lead to concrete improvements in accountability and transparency.<sup>90</sup>

Fifth, the United States has a dominant role in the global financial markets and control over certain key technologies, giving it the ability to deny access to

technologies or impose crippling financial sanctions on individuals, companies, or entire regimes that are violating human rights or promoting authoritarianism. Those sanctions are generally most effective and legitimate when imposed in close consultation with allies. Conversely, the unilateral and over-use of those authorities could ultimately erode their effectiveness, as countries seek ways to insulate their financial systems from US sanctions and become self-sufficient in “choke-point” technologies.

The time is right for more assertive US leadership in these areas. It has never been clearer to more constituencies that transparency, the rule of law, human rights, accountable governance, and inclusion are building blocks of democracy and indispensable for long-term corporate success. The sustainability of major investments depends on public acceptance, best measured through transparency and accountability. Rather than retreat from leadership on international trade and development, the United States should proactively align international economic and democracy policies to counter authoritarianism and promote inclusive and sustainable economic development.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.1**

**Focus on negotiating narrower, high-impact economic agreements that set high standards for governance and democracy.**

Given the political headwinds on broad trade agreements, the United States should focus in the near term on narrower sectoral agreements on topics like digital trade (building on the US-Mexico-Canada and US-Japan Trade Agreements, for example) or green trade (building on earlier trade facilitation agreements on that sector in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation grouping) in order to continue incentivizing improvements in governance, transparency, and accountability. Emphasis on labor rights will be particularly important to sustaining support for these agreements in the United States, and will contribute to democratic institution-building in countries like Vietnam that seek closer economic ties. The United States should also continue to strengthen coalitions of democracies around technology issues and fifth-generation (5G) telecommunications, such as the Department of State’s “Clean Network.”<sup>91</sup> Particular focus should be given to rules for transparency, accountability, and reciprocity that can prevent monopolistic behavior or authoritarian exploitation of emerging technologies.<sup>92</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATION 7.2**

### **Use development finance and a series of country compacts to boost inclusive growth, incentivize democratic governance, and avoid debt traps.**

Foreign aid should address democratic decline and the need for inclusive economic growth to create a sustainable recovery. The US should develop a series of country compacts for high-priority democratic partners that brings the full potential of US development finance across USAID, the MCC, the DFC, and others. Congress should modify the way DFC equity investments are “scored” to reflect the value of the investment and the profits likely to be generated for the federal government.<sup>93</sup> Such a coordinated approach would provide positive incentives to meet benchmarks on democracy, human rights, and anticorruption efforts at a greater scale than any one program or agency can offer.

Given the growing economic clout of China and the option for autocratic regimes to choose alternative sources of investment, the United States should expand support for quality infrastructure financing and align its efforts with those of likeminded states such as Japan and Australia. The US should push for implementation of the G7 Ise-Shima Principles for Promoting Quality Infrastructure Investment, which enshrine basic tenets essential for democracy, such as sustainability and transparency.<sup>94</sup> Increasing the transparency of infrastructure financing is critical to avoiding debt traps. Strategies on infrastructure should be accompanied by parallel support for civil society groups working for transparency and accountability in recipient countries. The United States also should work with likeminded states to implement these principles in the Multilateral Development Banks.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7.3**

### **Empower women to advance good governance and democracy as part of inclusive growth.**

It has been estimated that ensuring women’s equal participation in economic activities would add \$13 trillion to the world’s gross domestic product by 2030.<sup>95</sup> Numerous studies also demonstrate that women’s participation in everything from microfinance to conflict-resolution agreements also contributes to more durable implementation of democratic norms.<sup>96</sup> Yet fewer than half of all international trade agreements

feature gender-inclusive components.<sup>97</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has put into stark relief the link between gender equality and economic performance, as women accounted for 54 percent of COVID-related job losses while making up only 39 percent of global employment.<sup>98</sup> The United States should lead a global strategy to close gender gaps in pay, access to credit, and corporate leadership in order to strengthen democratic accountability and enhance economic growth. This effort should begin with a new US directive on women’s economic participation to guide policy for undertaking this global initiative. The strategy should include a focus on trade agreements and building multilateral support for women’s economic participation initiatives through forums such as the G7 and G20.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7.4**

### **Encourage consistent corporate respect for human rights and support for the rule of law and accountable governance.**

US policy should create a clear expectation that American companies demonstrate support for human rights throughout their operations and supply chains across regions and industries—to be consistent with international standards, to reflect American values, and to protect workers and communities. US policy and diplomacy should ensure that American corporations do not face repercussions when they take actions such as divesting from places such as Xinjiang. The Biden administration should review, revise, and revitalize the December 2016 National Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct, which promotes and incentivizes responsible private-sector behavior.<sup>99</sup> A high-level Advisory Board on Business and Human Rights should be appointed to inform policy objectives, diplomatic initiatives, and foreign assistance priorities throughout the federal government. The administration should consider proposing legislation that bans US companies from complying with certain forms of foreign government coercion, along the lines of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, to diminish the risk of unintentional complicity in human rights and labor rights abuses. The administration should also consider proposing legislation to require mandatory disclosure of human rights due diligence, building on Dodd-Frank sections 1502 and 1504 (respectively requiring such disclosure related to conflict minerals and extractive revenue transparency), and contributing to more consistent global standards.<sup>100</sup> Investors should be





Barbed wire separates Belarusian security forces from protesters demonstrating against the torture of activists, and the recent flawed presidential election. (Image credit: Shavel / Shutterstock.com)

encouraged to undertake human rights due diligence focusing on companies they hold across sectors and asset classes, labor human rights, and labor rights issues. American companies should be encouraged to engage more actively with civil society, and support civic freedoms that are under pressure and human rights defenders who are under threat.<sup>101</sup> US embassies and consulates should be prepared to support and advise companies on challenging human rights issues and situations related to civic freedoms and human rights defenders. These efforts should be coordinated more consistently with leading civil society organizations and labor unions.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 7.5**

**Move international labor standards to the center of US trade and international economic policy, to protect rights and build a level playing field.**

These minimum standards—adopted by governments, employers, and unions in the common interest—protect against discrimination at work, forced labor, and child labor, and they guarantee freedom of association.<sup>102</sup>

They are essential to protect the people who grow the food we eat and make the products we buy. There are currently two major multilateral trade agreements in Asia, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), in addition to the new EU-China trade agreement, that are setting global standards for labor and democratic rights without the United States at the table. The United States will be in a stronger position to shape these rules when it returns to broad multilateral trade negotiations. But to do so it will be essential to put labor rights at the top of the agenda. By putting these rights at the center of economic policy, the United States will help guard against the temptation of governments and industries to lower labor standards to gain an advantage in trade and investment. A rights-based international economic policy will discourage the spread of low-wage, low-skill, and high-turnover industries. In turn, the development of more stable high-skilled employment and economic growth can diminish some of the causes and consequences of inequality. Moreover, consistent application of these rules will protect rights and support a more level playing field in the global economy.

## RECOMMENDATION 7.6

### Prioritize inclusive and sustainable growth to demonstrate that democracy delivers.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has raised questions about the basic competence of leading democracies worldwide, some of the most impressive pandemic responses have come from democracies like Taiwan, South Korea, and New Zealand.<sup>103</sup> Even before the pandemic, the global financial crisis that began in 2008 raised questions about whether democracy could provide economic growth. In the G8 and APEC summits that followed the global financial crisis, the United States and other governments advanced the theme of inclusive and sustainable

growth.<sup>104</sup> We need to reprioritize these themes moving forward. Economic growth built on democratic governance is far more likely to be sustainable in terms of both debt and the environment, and more inclusive of women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups. The backlash we are seeing against democratic capitalism is a backlash against failures in these regards. Yet strengthening global commitments to transparency and accountability is precisely what is needed to strengthen sustainable and inclusive economic growth, which needs to be a US priority. The United States, together with allies and partners, must make commitments to democracy, accountability, and transparency to achieve these goals.



# Appendix A

## List of Recommendations

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### STRATEGY 1

#### Elevate support for democracy and countering authoritarianism to the heart of US foreign policy and national security.

*Recommendation 1.1* — Develop a US National Democracy Strategy.

*Recommendation 1.2* — Set the tone for his administration by having President Biden continue to speak to the centrality of democracy in domestic and foreign policy, and deliver a major speech on this integrated agenda in the first six months of his term.

*Recommendation 1.3* — Create a National Democracy Council co-led by a Deputy National Security Advisor and a Deputy Director of the Domestic Policy Council.

*Recommendation 1.4* — Reform and elevate development as a key element of the democracy strategy.

### STRATEGY 2

#### Forge new leadership on democracy and human rights, creating a big tent to strengthen and build new democratic alliances.

*Recommendation 2.1* — Use the Summit for Democracy to convene allies, define purpose, and drive ambition and resources.

*Recommendation 2.2* — Establish a serious “price of admission” to the Summit for Democracy.

*Recommendation 2.3* — Build a multiyear calendar with the Summit for Democracy as a centerpiece and fundamental driver of work going forward.

*Recommendation 2.4* — Undertake national consultations on work needed to strengthen democracy at home prior to the Summit, and collaborate with allies to do the same in their countries.

*Recommendation 2.5* — Embrace a “diplomacy of democracy.”

*Recommendation 2.6* — Galvanize an international coalition to push back against authoritarian threats and reinforce democratic governance as a priority.

*Recommendation 2.7* — Evaluate security sector assistance in terms of democracy and human rights objectives.

### STRATEGY 3

#### Scale up investment in the pillars of open, accountable, inclusive, democratic society.

*Recommendation 3.1* — Create a Center for Integrity in Elections.

*Recommendation 3.2* — Launch an Enterprise Fund for Independent Media.

*Recommendation 3.3* — Create a Women’s Political and Civic Leadership Initiative to strengthen representative democracy.

*Recommendation 3.4* — Launch a Young Leaders Coalition for Democracy.

*Recommendation 3.5* — Bolster support for civil society groups and better protect human rights defenders around the globe, including activists, lawyers, and journalists.

### STRATEGY 4

#### Lead in developing a strategic digital technology policy agenda for the democratic world.

*Recommendation 4.1* — Elevate protection of an open internet and human rights as a strategically important dimension of evolving digital technology and cyber policy.

*Recommendation 4.2* — Dramatically step-up digital technology and cyber diplomacy aimed at defending democracy and human rights.

*Recommendation 4.3* — Heal the transatlantic policy rifts over cross-border data transfers and platform regulations.

*Recommendation 4.4* — Rally democratic governments around a shared vision of the open internet, a democratic approach to governance of digital technology, and a strategic technology investment agenda.

*Recommendation 4.5* — Develop a comprehensive strategy to combat the spread of the digital-authoritarian model of governance.

## **STRATEGY 5**

### **Develop a strategy to rebuild trust in the information environment and to counter the spread of disinformation, online hate and harassment.**

*Recommendation 5.1* — Develop a US strategy to counter disinformation, online hate and harassment.

*Recommendation 5.2* — Invest in building societal resilience to disinformation, online hate and harassment, and harness digital information technologies to serve democracy.

*Recommendation 5.3* — Establish a Global Task Force on Information Integrity and Resilience in order to rebuild trust in the information environment.

## **STRATEGY 6**

### **Make combating corruption, kleptocracy, and state capture a national security priority.**

*Recommendation 6.1* — Make combating corruption, kleptocracy, and state capture a fundamental pillar of the National Security Strategy, and design a whole-of-government approach to implement it.

*Recommendation 6.2* — Call upon the Financial Action Task Force to establish a new set of anticorruption standards and implement rigorous mutual assessments to ensure implementation.

*Recommendation 6.3* — Prioritize and animate an anticorruption agenda across international bodies and promote efforts to coordinate their work.

*Recommendation 6.4* — Employ a comprehensive, coordinated, and global approach to anticorruption enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

*Recommendation 6.5* — Design and distribute foreign aid and security assistance in ways that help reduce corruption.

*Recommendation 6.6* — Create mechanisms to promote private-sector investment in key countries making progress against corruption.

*Recommendation 6.7* — Fully implement federal law prohibiting the use of anonymous shell corporations to conceal stolen assets, and press foreign governments to enforce similar laws.

*Recommendation 6.8* — Have the Securities and Exchange Commission require companies in certain industries to disclose information each year about their actions to prevent corruption.

*Recommendation 6.9* — Consider establishing Unexplained Wealth Orders in the United States.

## **STRATEGY 7**

### **Harness US economic power to support democracy and counter authoritarianism.**

*Recommendation 7.1* — Focus on negotiating narrower, high-impact economic agreements that set high standards for governance and democracy.

*Recommendation 7.2* — Use development finance and a series of country compacts to boost inclusive growth, incentivize democratic governance, and avoid debt traps.

*Recommendation 7.3* — Empower women to advance good governance and democracy as part of inclusive growth.

*Recommendation 7.4* — Encourage consistent corporate respect for human rights and support for the rule of law and accountable governance.

*Recommendation 7.5* — Move international labor standards to the center of US trade and international economic policy, to protect rights and build a level playing field.

*Recommendation 7.6* — Prioritize inclusive and sustainable growth to demonstrate that democracy delivers.

# Appendix B

## Task Force Member Bios

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### J Alexander Thier (Task Force Codirector)

Alex Thier is Chief Executive Officer of the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery and nonresident Senior Democracy Fellow at Freedom House. He served as ninth Executive Director of the Overseas Development Institute in London, a leading global think tank. He was appointed by President Obama to serve as chief of USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning from 2013 to 2015, and as chief of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs from 2010 to 2013. He worked previously at the US Institute of Peace, the UN, and Oxfam and has published widely.

### Anne Witkowsky (Task Force Codirector)

Anne Witkowsky is a national security expert who has held leadership positions across the US government. She most recently served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs. She has held leadership roles in the State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism, and earlier in her career, served as a Director for Defense Policy and Arms Control on the White House National Security Council staff. In between her government service, she was a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. She received her BA in Russian and East European studies from Yale University and an MPA from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

### Sheila S. Coronel

Sheila S. Coronel is academic dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. She is concurrently also director of the Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism and Stabile professor of professional practice. She began her reporting career in the Philippines and was co-founder of the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism. She is the author and editor of more than a dozen books on Philippine politics and society, and on investigative reporting and freedom of information.

### Ambassador Eileen Donahoe (Working Group III Lead)

Eileen Donahoe is the Executive Director of the Global Digital Policy Incubator at Stanford University, Cyber Policy Center. Previously, she served as US Ambassador to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in the Obama/

Biden administration and as Director of Global Affairs at Human Rights Watch. Earlier in her career, she was a technology litigator in Silicon Valley. She serves on the National Endowment for Democracy Board of Directors; the Global Internet Forum for Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) International Advisory Council; and the Transatlantic Commission on Election Integrity.

### Michael J. Green (Working Group V Lead)

Michael Jonathan Green is senior vice president for Asia and Japan Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and director of Asian Studies at the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He served on the staff of the National Security Council (2001–05), first as director for Asian affairs, and then as special assistant to the president for national security affairs and senior director for Asia, with responsibility for East Asia and South Asia. He received his master's and doctoral degrees from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), did additional graduate and postgraduate research at Tokyo University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and received his bachelor's degree from Kenyon College.

### Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi

Dr. Gyimah-Boadi is cofounder, board chair, and interim Chief Executive Officer of the Afrobarometer (a nonpartisan, pan-African survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of quality of life, governance, and democracy). He is also cofounder and former executive director of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana, a leading independent democracy and good governance think tank), and a former professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Ghana, Legon. Gyimah-Boadi is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences (US).

### David J. Kramer (Working Group I Lead)

David J. Kramer is Senior Fellow in the Vaclav Havel Program for Human Rights & Diplomacy and Director for European and Eurasian Studies at Florida International University's Steven J. Green School of International and

Public Affairs. Previously, Kramer served as president of Freedom House and also worked at the McCain Institute and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. He served eight years in the US Department of State during the George W. Bush administration, including as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs.

#### Stuart Levey (Working Group IV Lead)

Stuart Levey is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Libra Association. From 2012 to 2020, Levey served as Chief Legal Officer of HSBC Holdings, a global bank based in London, where he managed a legal department with more than 900 lawyers in 50 countries. Prior to joining HSBC, Levey was the first Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the US Treasury from 2004 to 2011, serving as a political appointee of President George W. Bush and also of President Barack Obama. Before Treasury, Levey served as the Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General at the Department of Justice. He was also previously a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

#### Tod Lindberg

Tod Lindberg is a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute. He writes widely on US foreign policy and national security, as well as on American politics and philosophical topics. He is the author of *The Heroic Heart: Greatness Ancient and Modern and the Political Teachings of Jesus*. He is a member of the editorial committee of the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, an advisor to the Chicago Council Survey, and a member of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience. He is Adjunct Associate Professor at Georgetown University and Visiting Senior Lecturer at Indiana University.

#### Rory MacFarquhar

Rory MacFarquhar is currently Senior Vice President for International Institutions Engagement at Mastercard. He served for six years in the National Security Council and Treasury Department during the Obama administration, focusing on international economic issues such as US-China relations, the G20 and G7, and the Eurozone crisis. He has worked at Google and at Goldman Sachs in the private sector, and has been a visiting fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and a graduate fellow at Harvard's Davis Center for Russian Studies.

#### Ambassador Sarah E. Mendelson (Working Group II Lead)

Ambassador Sarah E. Mendelson is Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy and Head of Carnegie Mellon's Heinz College in Washington, DC. Her current work centers on the Sustainable Development Goals, and she cochairs Carnegie Mellon's Sustainability Initiative steering committee. Previously, she served as the US Representative to the UN's Economic and Social Council, where she led on development, human rights, and humanitarian affairs. Prior to USUN, she served as a Deputy Assistant Administrator at USAID on democracy, human rights, and governance. She spent over a decade as a senior adviser and the inaugural director of the Human Rights Initiative at CSIS. She received her BA in history from Yale and her PhD in political science from Columbia.

#### Ashley Quarcoo

Ashley Quarcoo is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Her research focuses on threats to democracy, elections, social and political polarization, transitional justice, and comparative approaches toward building social cohesion and democratic renewal. Quarcoo served for nine years as a Democracy Specialist with the US Agency for International Development where she supported strategy, policy, and program development for a nearly \$300 million democracy, human rights, and governance foreign assistance portfolio. She also previously worked for the State Department, the Carter Center, and the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. Quarcoo was a 2019–20 Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow and is a former Council Term Member.

#### The Honorable Randall G. Schriver

Mr. Randall Schriver is the Chairman of the Board of the Project 2049 Institute and a strategic advisor to Pacific Solutions LLC. He is also a lecturer for Stanford University's "Stanford-in-Washington" program, is on the Board of Advisors to the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, and Board of Directors of the US-Taiwan Business Council. Prior to that, he was a founding partner of Armitage International LLC and Chief Executive Officer and President of the Project 2049 Institute. His civilian government roles have included Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Prior to his civilian service, he served as an active-duty Navy Intelligence Officer. Schriver has a BA degree in history from Williams College and a MA degree from Harvard University.



### Nicole Bibbins Sedaca

Prof. Bibbins Sedaca serves as a Professor and Deputy Director of Georgetown University's Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) program, where she teaches on democracy, human rights, and ethics. She is also the David and Kelly Pfeil Fellow at the George W. Bush Institute and a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council. She served for 10 years at the US State Department, advising on democracy, human rights, religious freedom, and trafficking in persons. She also opened and directed the International Republican Institute's local governance program in Ecuador. She serves on the board of the International Justice Mission.

### Ambassador Thomas Shannon

Ambassador Shannon is a Senior International Policy Advisor with the law firm Arnold & Porter and cochair of its Global Law and Public Policy practice. He is also cochair of the board of the Inter-American Dialogue. He serves concurrently at Princeton University as the Codirector of the Program in the History and Practice of Diplomacy and as a Visiting Professor. An American diplomat for 35 years, he holds the personal rank of

Career Ambassador. Most recently, Shannon served as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (2016–18), Counselor of the Department (2013–15), and United States Ambassador to Brazil (2010–13).

### Vera Zakem (Disinformation Lead)

Vera Zakem is a recognized leader at the intersection of technology and democracy, with a focus on building transatlantic coalitions around these issues and strengthening integrity and trust in the information ecosystem. She is currently a Senior Technology and Policy Advisor at the Institute for Security and Technology and a founder of a mission-driven agency, Zakem Global Strategies, that examines these issues in depth. Previously, Zakem led strategy and research at Twitter. She has also worked for a number of national security policy and research organizations, including the CNA Corporation, where she spearheaded initiatives to understand and develop policies to counter disinformation and global malign influence. She is a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a member of the Tech Advisory Council for Atlas Corps. She received her MA from Johns Hopkins University.

# Appendix C

## Working Groups

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### WORKING GROUP I

Investing in institutions essential to democracy, including free and fair elections, independent media, and civil society

#### David J. Kramer (Working Group I Lead)

Senior Fellow in the Václav Havel Program for Human Rights & Diplomacy and Director for European & Eurasian Studies, Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs, Florida International University

#### Nicole Bibbins Sedaca (Working Group I Co-Lead)

Deputy Director and Professor, Master of Science in Foreign Service Program, Georgetown University; Kelly and David Pfeil Fellow, George W. Bush Institute

#### Sheila S. Coronel (Task Force Member)

Toni Stabile Professor and Director, Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University

#### Thomas Carothers

Senior Vice President for Studies and Harvey V. Fineberg Chair for Democracy Studies, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

#### Paul Fagan

Senior Director of the Human Rights and Democracy Programs, McCain Institute for International Leadership, Arizona State University

#### Larry Diamond

Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, Stanford University

#### Jamie Fly

Senior Fellow, German Marshall Fund of the United States

#### Thomas Kahn

Faculty Fellow, Center for Congressional Studies and Presidential Studies, American University

#### Monica V. Kladakis

Senior Advisor for Human Rights and Democracy, McCain Institute for International Leadership, Arizona State University

#### Sarah Margon

Director of US Foreign Policy, Open Society Foundations

#### Derek Mitchell

President, National Democratic Institute

#### Arch Puddington

Senior Scholar Emeritus, Freedom House

#### Pamela Reeves

Senior Fellow in International and Public Policy, Brown University

#### Daniel Twining

President, International Republican Institute

#### Christopher Walker

Vice President for Studies and Analysis, National Endowment for Democracy

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### WORKING GROUP II

Reforming U.S. architecture and alliances in support of democracy

#### Ambassador Sarah E. Mendelson (Working Group II Lead)

Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy, Head of Heinz College in Washington, DC, Carnegie Mellon University

#### Rob Berschinski

Senior Vice President for Policy, Human Rights First

### Sundaa Bridgett-Jones

Managing Director, Policy and Coalitions, The Rockefeller Foundation

### Camille Busette

Senior Fellow of Economic Studies, Governance Studies, Metropolitan Policy Program; Director of the Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative, Brookings Institution

### Anthony F. Pipa

Senior Fellow, Center for Sustainable Development, Brookings Institution

### Ambassador Mark P. Lagon

Chief Policy Officer, Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

### Elisa Massimino

Robert F. Drinan, S.J., Chair in Human Rights, Georgetown University Law Center

### Joe Powell

Deputy CEO, Open Government Partnership

### Ashley Quarcoo (Task Force Member)

Senior Fellow, Democracy, Conflict and Governance Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

### Kori Schake

Director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute

### Ambassador Thomas Shannon (Task Force Member)

Senior International Policy Advisor at Arnold & Porter; Former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

### William B. Taylor Jr.

Former US Ambassador to Ukraine

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## WORKING GROUP III

Harnessing and setting norms for technology to increase positive impact, and reduce the undermining of democratic norms and practices

### Ambassador Eileen Donahoe (Working Group III Lead)

Executive Director of the Global Digital Policy Incubator at Stanford University, FSI/Cyber Policy Center

### Vera Zakem

#### (Working Group III Co-lead, lead on disinformation)

Senior Technology and Policy Advisor, Institute for Security and Technology; Founder, Zakem Global Strategies

### Steve Crown

Vice President and Deputy General Counsel, Human Rights, Microsoft Corporation

### Steven Feldstein

Senior Fellow, Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

### Ross LaJeunesse

Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University

### Mark Latonero

Senior Associate, Center for Strategic and International Studies

### Rebecca MacKinnon

Founding Director, Ranking Digital Rights

### Tom McAndrew

CEO, Coalfire

### Nick Pickles

Head of Public Policy Strategy, Development and Partnerships, Twitter

### Peter Pomerantsev

Senior Fellow at the SNF Agora Institute, Johns Hopkins University

### Philip Reiner

Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Security and Technology

### Adrian Shahbaz

Director for Technology and Democracy, Freedom House

### Moirá Whelan

Director for Democracy and Technology, National Democratic Institute

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## WORKING GROUP IV

### Combatting corruption and kleptocracy

#### Stuart Levey (Working Group IV Lead)

Former Under Secretary of Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence

#### Annie Boyajian (Working Group IV Co-Lead)

Director of Advocacy, Freedom House

#### Gerardo Berthin

Director of Latin America and Caribbean Programs, Freedom House

#### Brad Brooks-Rubin

Managing Director, The Sentry

#### Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi (Task Force Member)

Co-founder, Board Chair and Interim CEO of Afrobarometer; Emeritus Professor of Political Science, University of Ghana, Legon

#### Michael Leiter

National Security Partner, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates

#### Sigal Mandelker

Former US Treasury Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence

#### Hilary Mossberg

Former Director, Illicit Finance Policy, The Sentry

#### Nate Schenckan

Director of Research Strategy, Freedom House

#### Adam Szubin

Distinguished Practitioner-in-Residence, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University

#### Juan Zarate

Former Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Combatting Terrorism (2005-2009)

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#### Jon Temin

Director of Africa Programs, Freedom House

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## WORKING GROUP V

### Aligning economic, trade, development, and investment policy with the goal of strengthening democracy

#### Michael J. Green (Working Group V Lead)

Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Professor and Director of Asian Studies, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service

#### Rory MacFarquhar (Working Group V Co-Lead)

Former Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Global Economics and Finance, National Security Council

#### Bennett Freeman

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

#### Charles Freeman

Senior Vice President for Asia, US Chamber of Commerce

#### Amy Lehr

Senior Associate, Human Rights Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies

#### Greer Meisels

Chief of Staff, Institute of International Finance

#### Scott Miller

Senior Adviser, Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy, Center for Strategic and International Studies

#### Daniel F. Runde

Senior Vice President & Schreyer Chair in Global Analysis, Center for Strategic and International Studies

#### Nargiza Salidjanova

Director for Economics and Trade, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission

#### Kelly Ann Shaw

Senior Adviser, Project on Prosperity and Development, Center for Strategic and International Studies

#### Sharon Waxman

President and CEO, Fair Labor Association



# Appendix D

## High Level Interviews, Congressional Interviews, and Expert Consultations

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### HIGH LEVEL INTERVIEWS

#### Elliott Abrams

Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations

#### Madeleine K. Albright

Former Secretary of State

#### Peter Berkowitz

Tad and Dianne Taube Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

#### Stephen Biegun

Former Deputy Secretary of State of the United States

#### Ambassador William J. Burns

President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

#### Michael Chertoff

Chairman of the Chertoff Group and Chairman of Freedom House

#### Michèle Flournoy

Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

#### Stephen J. Hadley

Former National Security Advisor to President George W. Bush

#### Anthony Lake

Former National Security Advisor of the United States

#### Michael McFaul

Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

#### Ambassador Samantha Power

Professor of Practice, Harvard Law School and Harvard Kennedy School

#### Condoleezza Rice

66th Secretary of State, Tad and Dianne Taube Director of the Hoover Institution

#### Robert Zoellick

Former President of the World Bank, US Trade Representative & US Deputy Secretary of State

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### CONGRESSIONAL INTERVIEWS

#### Sen. Ben Cardin

US Senator (D-MD)

#### Rep. Karen Bass

US Representative (D-CA-37)

#### Sen. Marsha Blackburn

US Senator (R-TN)

#### Sen. Tammy Duckworth

US Senator (D-IL)

#### Rep. Adam Kinzinger

US Representative (R-IL-16)

#### Rep. Gregory Meeks

US Representative (D-NY-5)

#### Sen. Jim Risch

US Senator (R-ID)

#### Sen. Rick Scott

US Senator (R-FL)

#### Sen. Thom Tillis

US Senator (R-NC)

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## EXPERT CONSULTATIONS

### Henri J. Barkey

Cohen Professor of International Relations,  
Lehigh University

### Jamille Bigio

Senior Fellow for Women and Foreign Policy, Council on  
Foreign Relations

### Tatyana Bolton

Policy Director for Cybersecurity and Emerging Threats,  
R St Institute

### Saskia Brechenmacher

Fellow, Democracy and Governance Program, Carnegie  
Endowment for International Peace

### Stanley S. Byers

Lead for International Cyber Strategy, USAID

### Charles G. Davidson

Editor, Offshore Initiative

### Evelyn N. Farkas, Ph.D.

Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia/  
Ukraine/Eurasia and 2020 candidate for Congress in NY

### Stephen J. Flanagan

Senior Political Scientist, The RAND Corporation

### Charles Gati

Senior Research Professor of European and Eurasian  
Studies, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns  
Hopkins University

### Katie Harbath

Former Public Policy Director, Facebook

### Jeffrey Irvine

Senior Vice President, Global Security, American  
Express Company

### Carla Koppell

Senior Advisor and Distinguished Fellow, School of  
Foreign Service, Georgetown University

### Paul Massaro

Policy Advisor, US Helsinki Commission

### Mark Montgomery

Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

### Christopher Painter

Former Coordinator for Cyber Issues, US  
State Department.

### Sandra Pepera

Senior Associate and Director, Gender, Women and  
Democracy, National Democratic Institute

# Appendix E

## Civil Society Consultations

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### Florencio “Butch” Abad

Philippine Secretary of the Department of Budget and Management (2010-2016)

### Bariş Altıntaş

Co-Director, Media and Law Studies Association (Turkey)

### Shaza Bala Elmahdi

Sudan Country Director, Center for International Private Enterprise

### Dr. Mutaal Girshab

Director of RCDCS, Human Rights and Pro-democracy Activist

### James Gomez

Regional Director, Asia Centre (Bangkok, Thailand)

### Idayat Hassan

Director, Centre for Democracy and Development, Abuja

### Mukami Marete

Co-Executive Director, UHAI - the East African Sexual Health and Rights Initiative (UHAI EASHRI)

### Franklin Oduro

Resident Program Director, Elections, NDI, Ethiopia Office

### İsrafil Özkan

Secretary General General, Freedom Research Association

### Veysel Ok

Co-Director, Media and Law Studies Association (Turkey)

### Márta Pardavi

Co-Chair, Hungarian Helsinki Committee

### Björn van Roozendaal

Programmes Director, ILGA-Europe

### Mu Sochua

Former Minister of Women's Affairs (Cambodia)

### Svitlana Valko

Head of Board, Truth Hounds

### Leon Willems

Director, Policy & Programmes, Free Press Unlimited

# Endnotes

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# About the Organizations



Freedom House was founded in 1941 under the patronage of Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie, as a bipartisan voice to champion US leadership on behalf of democracy around the world. Today, Freedom House is an independent nonpartisan organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy. Freedom House uniquely focuses on analysis, advocacy, and action. Not only does Freedom House identify the emerging threats to democracy, it also advocates for effective policies to counter those threats, and empower frontline activists to defend human rights.

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The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world's greatest challenges. Founded in 1962, CSIS's purpose is to define the future of national security.

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Inspired by the leadership of Senator John McCain and his family's legacy of public service, the McCain Institute for International Leadership at Arizona State University implements concrete programs aimed at making a difference in people's lives across a range of critical areas: leadership development, human rights, rule of law, international security and combatting human trafficking.

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**TASK FORCE ON US STRATEGY**  
**— TO SUPPORT DEMOCRACY AND COUNTER AUTHORITARIANISM —**

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