



CHOOSE freedom

*Revitalizing American Support for Democracy
and Human Rights in the 21st Century*

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January 2020

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“The success of freedom rests upon the choices and the courage of free peoples.”

- President George W. Bush

*20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy
November 6, 2003*

INTRODUCTION

As the world experiences its thirteenth consecutive year of democratic regression and human rights abuses continue on every continent, skeptics have raised questions about the future of democracy and human rights around the world. The rise of authoritarian governments, which challenge stable and newer democracies and violate their citizens' rights, has also prompted debates about the United States' role in advancing democracy and human rights globally.

Amid these questions, democracy remains the only system of government that strives to protect civil liberties and minority rights, encourages the entrepreneurial spirit, fosters political institutions that promote good governance and the rule of law, and enshrines nonviolent mechanisms for improving the system itself. It is not the end in and of itself. It is a system — a vehicle for achieving the best possible outcomes for human freedom and liberty. Certainly, frustrations and challenges that require democracies to evolve will always exist. Yet, despite its flaws, democracy remains the most effective system of protecting human rights and promoting human advancement.

It is essential that the world's democracies — including the United States — support democracy throughout the world. The support of democracy and human rights has been a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy for many decades and enjoyed bipartisan support. The United States government and nongovernmental community have actively supported the strengthening of democratic institutions on a global scale, the administration of fair elections, and the courageous work of supporting democracy and human rights activists who seek the same freedoms that Americans enjoy. Today's increasing global challenges reinforce the need for continued — and even expanded — American leadership and action in this area, not a retreat. Encouraging democratization and respect for human rights globally are essential to advancing American values, as well as security and economic interests around the world. The values that underpin democracy and human rights are not just American values — they are universal ones.

A recent [poll](#) by the George W. Bush Institute, Freedom House, and the Penn Biden Center commissioned shows that Americans continue to support these policies. The poll showed that 71 percent of Americans favor the United States government taking steps to support democracy and human rights in other countries, and 84 percent of Americans affirm that it is important to live in a democratically governed country. The poll results prove that Americans recognize the benefits and the importance of American leadership in the pursuit of democracy in the world. When the United States fails to lead on these issues, the ensuing gap is not filled by democratic actors, but by nondemocratic actors who seek to reverse the gains that democracies have made over the last several decades.

In light of these factors — global challenges, America's historical position, and broad citizen support, it is essential to identify how the United States can increase, reimagine, and revitalize its efforts to support democracy and human rights, as a central component of American engagement in the world. This engagement is not without serious domestic and international challenges, but the need for American leadership is as great today as it has ever been. This paper presents an overarching vision of democracy support, provides the case for engagement, and outlines action items for American government agencies — at local, state, and federal levels — as well as for civil society and private sector actors.

A LOOK BACK: AMERICAN HISTORICAL SUPPORT

Since the 1970s, democracy and human rights have played a key role in the formulation of American foreign policy. At the height of the Cold War, as the Vietnam War drew to a close and the United States saw significant human rights progress at home through the Civil Rights Movement, American civil society actors began to look more intensively at how American foreign policy aligned with the values enshrined in foundational American and international documents. These activists pushed the American government to ensure these values were reflected in our foreign policy.

In his 1977 inaugural address, President Jimmy Carter captured this sentiment stating,

“Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere. Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights.”

Even so, American support for democracy and human rights has been a dichotomous story. The United States has been a bold supporter of democracy and human rights activists, leading global efforts and standing against the Soviet Union and despots in many countries. To name just a few examples, the United States supported free radio broadcasting in the former Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc, election administration in countries holding elections for the first time, and the training of women parliamentarians, judges, and civil society actors around the globe. Simultaneously, the United States has at times supported dictators or nondemocratic movements, periodically compromising these values for economic or security interests. Those compromises have been counterproductive and strategically unwise, as well as morally wrong. Throughout American foreign policy, what has been consistent, however, is the inclusion of democracy and human rights as part of American foreign policy; a bold, relentless, and active civil society community; and a mobilized American citizenry that has demanded American action. And when the United States has led on these issues, other democracies have followed this lead.

POLAND

Throughout much of the 1980s, the United States government and civil society, particularly the AFL-CIO's early support for the Polish labor movement, Solidarity, provided invaluable support to the courageous activists who fought Soviet occupation. Radio Free Europe broadcast crucial information to activists about developments in the West, democracy globally, and support for human rights. This external support played a key role in Poland's democratization.

Indeed, President John F. Kennedy reminded all Americans of their country's duty to lead the cause of freedom around the world in his 1961 inaugural address saying,

"...the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans — born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage —and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Over the past century, American presidents have illustrated this bipartisan thread in American foreign policy, a foreign policy fueled by the input of American civil society. In their unique ways, U.S. presidents have supported American values and interests and global aspirations through a consistent American commitment to supporting democracy and human rights worldwide.

This ideal was concretely articulated by President Ronald Reagan in his 1982 Westminster speech when he said:

"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."

He then challenged the United States to act, noting, "(i)t is time that we committed ourselves as a nation — in both the public and private sectors — to assisting democratic development."

Doing so has been the work of not only the executive branch but also of an active Congress and a vocal and active civil society that have advanced American support for democracy and human rights.

Congressman Dante Fascell (D-FL) was the driving force of Congressional activism on democracy and human rights for many years. His visionary advocacy was the initial seed for the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and partner nongovernmental organizations in the 1980s. Many members of Congress have followed in his footsteps, including the late Sen. John McCain (R-AZ), who was one of the most vocal members on the importance of democracy and human rights to America's moral and security interests.

At the heart of the American movement for fostering democracy and protecting human rights abroad have been American civil society organizations and citizens. Americans know and understand the value of democracy and human rights and have been active in helping those who pursue freedom. From the 1941 founding of Freedom House to the founding of the NED in 1983 and its four core institutes to the hundreds of other active civil society organizations which have valiantly raised awareness, lobbied for policy change, supported activists, and refused to be silenced in the face of at times overwhelming nondemocratic forces, American civil society has been the engine behind America's presence and policies on these issues.

Today, we face challenges to this tradition. Nonetheless, American civil society and its engine for good remain unchanged. Likewise, the case for democracy remains equally compelling, and the need for all sectors of American society to join the fight is equally needed.

A LOOK AHEAD: THE EXPANDED CASE FOR SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The historic case for the support of democracy endures. America's security and economic interests are best advanced in a global order predicated on democratic values — the rule of law, transparency, civilian-controlled institutions, and human dignity — with stable democracies as partners. These democratic allies provide more security across the globe, are better economic partners for the United States, and seek to protect human rights and the democratic values upon which the United States was founded.

The greatest security threats in the world — and specifically to the United States and its interests — continue to originate from nondemocratic governments, including China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, and regional destabilizers such as Venezuela and Saudi Arabia. While terrorism knows no boundaries, the vast majority of terrorists emanate from nondemocratic countries where violence is their chosen weapon of expression.

Democratic nations continue to provide the most stable and noncorrupt environments for American economic engagement. Where American businesses are able to operate under the rule of law and democratic governance, they are best positioned to advance American economic interests through access to open markets for American goods.

Similarly and simply, our core foundational values are protected only through the promotion and defense of democracy and the preservation of human rights. Freedom of speech, freedom to worship, and freedom to choose one's leaders are just a few of the many American and universal values best protected by a strong democracy at home and through the support of more democratic nations and human rights around the world. The protection of our founding values is directly tied to the flourishing of democracies and human rights globally.

As President George W. Bush expressed in his 2005 inaugural address:

“For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny — prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder — violence will gather and multiply in destructive power and cross the most defended borders and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment and expose the pretensions of tyrants and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant and that is the force of human freedom.”

While these age-old truths endure, current events or perceptions that appear to challenge the importance of democracy and human rights often obscure or undermine these truths. The following developments have contributed to this skepticism. Ironically, each issue highlights the increased — not decreased — relevancy of democracy and human rights in our current context.

Challenges from Global Authoritarians:

In order to challenge American leadership, moral and security interests, and economic priorities, China and Russia are actively seeking to challenge the United States and shift the global order away from democratic values, rules of transparency and openness, and respect for human rights. Establishing and

maintaining themselves as global leaders require them to consistently challenge democratic values and institutions, American leadership, and a democratic global world order in which human rights flourish. Russia's active engagement in undermining democratic elections and institutions in new and established democracies, as well as their military engagement in Ukraine and Syria are part of these efforts. China is also seeking to use its economic power to align developing countries to its agenda and use existing global institutions — or create new ones — to roll back the democratic order, plus extend its reach and philosophy into American universities and businesses within mature democracies. A failure to counter these threats is detrimental to American interests and values. These great power challenges do not call for less American engagement on democracy support, but rather for a radical increase in supporting democratic development to counter the threats posed by these nations.

Faltering Economic Development:

The economic struggles of some newer democracies have strained democratization efforts and public backing. In countries where economic development has been slow or difficult, citizens have at times lost patience with democratic processes, which can be slow in delivering changes on needed but challenging reforms. A 2018 Pew Research Center [poll](#) indicated a strong link between citizens' concerns about economic growth and assessment of democratic performance. For instance, the report showed that in Hungary (where democracy is in significant decline), eight of every 10 people surveyed who said the country's economic situation was poor were also unhappy with the country's democratic performance. Meanwhile, China's aggressive economic expansion, combined with its illiberal and often corrupt engagement in developing nations, is seen as an alternative means of economic growth free of the perceived pitfalls of democratic development. While these short-term economic challenges are unquestionably difficult, studies prove that democracy remains the best political system to foster medium- and long-term economic growth based on citizens' interests and inclusivity.

Rise of Populism:

Where Western democracies experience the rise of populist leaders and undemocratic sentiments and movements, skeptics have questioned democratic systems that produce illiberal outcomes. While concerns about these populist trends are valid, the most effective counter to the damaging effects of unbridled populism is strengthened democratic institutions. Such institutions provide a systemic check on illiberal impulses of leaders or undemocratic groups, serve as a vehicle for citizen engagement, and protect minority rights under majority rule. These essential characteristics are lacking in authoritarian and nondemocratic governments, which cannot restrain the rise of illiberal or populist leaders.

Continued Human Rights Abuses:

In 2018, the world marked the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the tremendous progress made in institutionalizing human rights norms and state responsibility, as well as in combating violations globally. The next year saw continued conflict and displacement in Syria, violent ethnic attacks in Burma (also known as Myanmar), crackdowns in Venezuela, Uighur concentration camps in China, and ongoing ethnic strife in South Sudan, to name only a few sites of massive human rights violations. It is not coincidental that these abuses occur in nondemocratic countries where basic human rights are not protected and there is a lack of democratic institutions to restrain the use of violence.

Democracy and War:

American military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan is falsely perceived to have been waged in order to promote or impose democracy. This has given the United States' support of democracy an undeserved negative reputation. Also, American military engagement has overshadowed America's pragmatic efforts to support democracy through organizations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy that bolster democratic governance, representative political organizations, women and minority rights, infrastructure, economic growth, and humanitarian aid. This misperception has also led to calls for the United States to stop supporting democracy overseas, because American democracy assistance is incorrectly interpreted as military intervention. Younger generations, which are more familiar with these wars than with the longer arc of historical democratic developments, are more skeptical about democracy support as a concept. The United States government and democracy support community have a challenge to gain — with humility and understanding — the trust and understanding of foreign partners and the next generation to ensure that the perceived linkage between military commitment and democracy support is erased. For those who have long opposed the United States' role in state building, it is important to differentiate between that comprehensive effort and supporting democratic institutions at the behest of the local populations.

These important and challenging developments have unquestionably raised questions about the role of supporting democracy and human rights around the world. They have, however, pointed to the importance — not the irrelevance — of democratic norms and institutions to address these significant problems and why democracy remains the best system to address them.

For this reason, the United States has moral and pragmatic interests in safeguarding the expansion of democracy and the protection of human rights around the world. Our ability to build on the gains of the past while addressing the challenges of today will be contingent upon our ability to ensure that support for democracy and human rights remains central to American foreign policy and engagement abroad, as well as to the liberal world order.

CALL TO ACTION

Building on the George W. Bush Institute's Spirit of Liberty [report](#), this call to action urges a wide array of actors in American society to redouble their efforts to support democracy and human rights globally for the prosperity, stability, and well-being of our own country; for democracies around the world; and for people living under authoritarian rule. It recognizes that significant work is ongoing, but that more work — particularly in light of new challenges — is needed to strengthen democratization around the world.

How To Talk About Democracy

The changing global environment requires a refreshed message and expanded body of messengers.

The aforementioned case for democracy remains and should be complemented with the following points:

- Democratic values have underpinned a global trade system, security collaboration, and economic development, all of which have benefited the United States for decades. Significant

threats from Russia and China demand a response that protects American interests by advancing these values. Both countries seek to challenge not only our economic and security interests but also the values of our country and other democracies.

- Democracy is a system of governance that provides a structure for the creation of effective policies that advance majority interests and protect minority rights. Democracy is not a guarantor of perfect democratic performance and policies; rather, it offers a system of governance that allows undemocratic performance or policies to be addressed and remedied. Democracy also requires the presence of an informed citizenry whose engagement and oversight are critical for its performance and endurance.
- Respect for human rights is foundational to the United States, and our commitment at home must extend to the policies we implement abroad. American history is one of great dichotomy — tremendous foundational concepts that remain the country's guiding star have coexisted alongside massive diversion from these values through slavery and lack of political and civil rights for many groups and an imperturbable resilience and forward momentum that address historical shortfalls. The United States' story is not one of perfection — it is one of constant work to advance democratic values and commitment to protecting human rights.
- The importance of American global leadership on supporting democracy does not mean the United States has a perfect track record in upholding democratic values — it does not. Our leadership does mean we constantly strive to honor the democratic values upon which our country was founded and use democratic institutions to evolve our policies and practices when we fall short of these values. The United States and indeed all democratic countries must speak out about the importance of democratic values at home and globally.
- American leadership must be concurrently humble and confident. American leadership needs to be humble about the fact that the United States has a mixed history in upholding democratic values and protecting human rights yet confident that these values are universal, that the United States is a strong democracy that has supported the growth of democracy around the world, and that the United States remains an indispensable leader in this important global work.
- The United States government is and must be a leader in supporting democracy and human rights but shouldn't be the only leader. From regional government leaders to local activists to members of regional and international organizations and global nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), many actors have led and should continue to lead in this effort and the United States can and should support their endeavors.
- The United States has contributed to building a global democracy architecture that has helped countless people seeking freedom around the world, created a global community of individuals and nations committed to democratic values, and reinforced the values shared by the United States and countries throughout the world.
- Global support for democracy and human rights is not a partisan issue. Implementation may appear to be different under different administrations and parties, but the history of democracy and human rights policies reveal a story of cooperative bipartisanship.
- The United States' efforts include political support for democratic governments and activists, public advocacy for democracy and human rights, training of democratic activists, building and strengthening of democratic institutions, creating and advancing regional and international organizations based on democratic values, and much more. These efforts do not include the support of democratization efforts by military force or otherwise imposing it on others.

The expansion of this message will allow the United States to draw on the solid foundation of American democracy and human rights support while addressing any new problematic developments and trends in the world.

As the message expands, so must the cadre of messengers. The United States government has a role in advocating for strengthened democratic development at home and abroad, as do American local institutions, the private sector, civic organizations, and academic institutions. American institutions and organizations must lead and do so in concert with the multitude of partners in other countries, both those inside and outside of governments.

The Executive Branch

As the primary shaper of American foreign policy, the Executive Branch must ensure — in word and in deed — that democracy support is a cornerstone of American foreign policy. In 2020, the American people will choose a president who will shape and execute American foreign policy for the next four years and will have the opportunity to show a commitment to democratic values as the foundation of American policy. Given the significant threats to democracy at home and abroad, it is of utmost importance that the newly elected president make democracy central to foreign policy. To do this, the President elected in 2020 must:

Articulate American Commitment:

Just as many American presidents have done in the past, the American president must articulate continuing U.S. support for democracy and human rights at home and abroad. That articulation would reassure Americans and our allies that the United States will support democracy and human rights overseas, strengthen democratic institutions and processes at home, and demonstrate that support for democracy and human rights is a cornerstone of American foreign policy. This would serve also as a framework for domestic and international action on these issues, as we saw with President Ronald Reagan's Westminster Speech and President George W. Bush's second inaugural speech.

Hire and Empower Officials:

The president must hire and empower individuals who have an unwavering commitment to democratic values and the support of democracy, not only in key positions such as that of the USAID Administrator or the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, but also throughout the administration, including those of American ambassadors. These individuals should be empowered and given the sufficient resources and authority to boldly advance U.S. policies that support democracy. Likewise, our crucial diplomatic and military corps should be well trained in how to implement democratic values and support for democracy abroad and how to integrate democracy in U.S. national and foreign security policies.

KENYA

The United States has supported Kenya's democratization, including through political pressure from Congress and the executive branch when Kenyan officials committed human rights abuses and through support for Kenya's first democratic elections in 2002. The United States has provided assistance for Kenya's continued democratization and opening of space for civil society through election support, civil society programs, and other aid.

Use American Strength for American Values:

The United States has long worked to balance its support of democracy and human rights goals with immediate security and economic goals; this balance is equally important today, including in our ongoing dealings with long-standing allies like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the Philippines. The United States should continue to advance its security and economic objectives while using its strength and leadership role to simultaneously call for an end to violations of human rights and advocate for democratization globally. The United States should also prioritize partnerships and exchanges with activists promoting democracy around the world.

Strengthen Partnerships for Democracy Support:

The United States should utilize international fora and institutions to advance democracy and human rights. American leadership is crucial to initiating and shaping such efforts, and so the United States must have sustained presence and influence in doing so. Embedding these values and the effective promotion of democratic institutions in the United Nations, regional organizations, trade- and economic-focused organizations, and ad hoc coalitions will ensure that democracy and human rights underpin the global architecture and that the United States will share the load of supporting these values.

Strengthen Domestic Voice for Global Example:

Many countries look to the United States as a democratic example. American leaders should seek to affirm and strengthen our democratic institutions — regardless of outcome — to demonstrate the strength of American democracy. This includes affirming the role of independent media, strong legislative checks and balances, independent judiciaries, defending fair electoral processes, and the consistent rule of law.

Congress

Strengthen Cadre of Democracy/Human Rights Advocates:

With the arrival of new Members of Congress and the departure of long-time democracy/human rights advocates, it is important to strengthen and expand the number of members who recognize the importance of democracy and human rights to their districts and our country. All members of the Senate and House Committees on Foreign Relations, Foreign Affairs, Armed Services, and Intelligence, as well as other interested members should prioritize and expand their regular briefings from democracy and human rights advocates or regional specialists. These briefings serve to deepen congressional members' knowledge and expertise, as well as their abilities to integrate democracy and human rights into their legislative agendas.

Make Democracy and Human Rights Central:

Hosting an annual hearing on the state of democracy and human rights in the world and how the administration is supporting democratic developments will ensure that a consistent focus on democracy and human rights and a public record of the administration's commitment to and plan for supporting democracy. The House Foreign Affairs Committee and Senate Foreign Relations Committee should convene such a hearing before the 2020 election and commit to making this an annual event.

Support Bicameral, Bipartisan Democracy Caucuses:

The bipartisan Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission has been a successful coalition of concerned members of the U.S. House of Representatives that works to protect human rights globally. Advocates are working to establish a similar caucus in the name of John McCain on the Senate side. Given the bipartisan nature of democracy support in the past, a bipartisan caucus should be formed to advocate for and address issues impacting democracy around the world. Such a caucus should work closely with the Lantos Commission and other like-minded bodies. Early areas of collaboration could include evaluating Russian election interference in elections in the United States and those of other countries, Chinese coercion of American citizens and institutions, expanding women's political participation, religious freedom, and democracy in Venezuela. The two caucuses should also become strong advocates for filling key administration democracy-related positions with strong, qualified candidates and expeditiously confirming these candidates.

Guide Democracy and Human Rights Policies:

In exercising its oversight, legislative, and funding powers, Congress should elevate the U.S. role of supporting democracy and human rights in foreign policies. This could be done by maintaining significant funding levels for democracy/human rights support, calling on the administration to take significant action in cases of threats to or deterioration of democracies overseas, and providing support for the administration's democracy successes. Additionally, Congress should continue efforts to enshrine U.S. bipartisan support for democracy and human rights abroad through legislation that elevates these issues publicly, holds human rights violators accountable, and encourages democratic values; examples include the Magnitsky Act and the North Korean Human Rights Act. Sustaining congressional support over the long term — far beyond an election or an individual act — is essential to the viability of democratic growth and the protection of human rights.

HONG KONG

As courageous students and activists took to the street to protest China's proposed extradition legislation in 2019, the United States government and civil society stood in support of their efforts. Congress passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act that imposes sanctions on those violating human rights in Hong Kong. American NGOs and activists have been vocal in providing support and continued focus on the efforts to roll back China's undemocratic influence in Hong Kong.



Hong Kong protesters demand democracy in this demonstration on July 14, 2019. (Jimmy Siu / Shutterstock)

Nongovernmental Organizations and Philanthropic Organizations

Reach New Supporters:

American NGOs should continue their efforts to build support for democracy and human rights, focusing on targeting younger generations, addressing skepticism about how democracy support works and the linkage between democracy and human rights, and addressing misunderstandings about the United States' historical policies in this area.

Broaden Alliances:

Democracy and human rights NGOs should build and/or broaden alliances with military, academic, and corporate leaders to encourage actors in the security and economic sectors to raise awareness about and advocate for the importance of supporting democracy and human rights. Having key leaders from other sectors carry this message will broaden the understanding of how democracy underscores American security and economic goals.

Build Domestic Partnerships:

Given the importance of American organizations and entities that are active daily in American democracy (local legislators, mayors, governors, local media, civic organizations) and the important linkage between America's democratic health and its global example, democracy-promoting NGOs should continue to build partnerships with domestic organizations. These can include increasing participation of local leaders in exchanges and outreach, joint advocacy with American communities interested in countries where democracy and human rights NGOs are active, and joint advocacy to Americans outside of Washington on the importance of supporting democracy and human rights. Additionally, engagement between domestically focused democracy advocates and internationally focused democracy advocates should increase to reinforce the importance of democracy to the United States at home and abroad and so they share best practices about strengthening democratic institutions.

Create Dedicated Advocacy Body:

Democracy and human rights NGOs have ongoing contact with members of Congress and their staffs, but are limited in their efforts to lobby and support members due to their 501(c)(3) status. At the same time, authoritarian governments are actively lobbying for their interests. A separate and distinct 501(c)(4) organization should be created to advocate for democracy and human rights policies and to support candidates and members of Congress who support these policies.

Sustain Foundational and Philanthropic Support for Democracy/Human Rights:

Because of the long-term nature of democracy and human rights work, sustained funding for these efforts are important. Foundations that are dedicated to peace, security, and human advancement should make global support for democracy and human rights a cornerstone for long-term support. Likewise, independent philanthropists and investors should support the work of American and overseas organizations that support the development of democratic institutions globally.

Corporations

Engage Executive and Legislative Branches:

Corporate leaders who recognize the importance of democratic institutions and processes in countries where their corporations operate should jointly advocate for democracy support to play a significant role in American foreign policy. This advocacy could include engaging the executive branch and Congress to increase support for those issues that most affect corporations, including rule of law, transparency, and anticorruption, and to provide regulation that ensures companies reinforce these values, as was done with the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. This could include country-specific efforts to jointly lobby the administration and Congress to support democratization in specific countries where democracy is under attack. Likewise, these corporations could support states working to build their democratic institutions and avoid nondemocratic influence from China and Russia, while growing their economies.

Include Democracy and Human Rights as Key Components of Business-Oriented Organizations:

Organizations such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Corporate Council on Africa, or US-ASEAN Business Council should include “operating in accordance to democratic values and principles” as a core component of their engagement in their respective regions, and — when possible — as a component of their scorecards and matrices for support.

Align and Promote Democratic Internal Policies:

Corporations set examples at home and abroad by how they operate internally and by how they engage with external forces. The groundbreaking work of the Sullivan Principles applied in South Africa shows the tremendous impact corporations can exert when they pursue ethical business practices in areas where there are significant concerns about human rights. Corporations should seek to align internal operational policies with the values of democracy and human rights and resist external actors — political leaders and authoritarian governments such as China — that would seek to steer countries away from the practices of rule of law, transparency, and anti-corruption.

Expand Corporate Social Responsibility Efforts:

Many corporations make robust corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. Where these do not already include a democracy and human rights focus, corporations can expand efforts to promote democracy and human rights, including support for international and local organizations working to strengthen democracy and human rights globally.

SOUTH AFRICA

After decades of a brutal apartheid system, South Africa made courageous strides to correct its abusive and segregated history, ultimately ending the system in 1994. International pressure — including strong and vocal engagement from American universities, Congress, businesses, and eventually the executive branch — was a significant factor in South Africa’s decision. Prompted by strong civil society pressure, Congress passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 and numerous American businesses divested from South Africa, sending the strong signal that the United States stood with those in South Africa seeking democracy and a full protection of their human rights.

Local American Political and Civic Leaders

Advocate for Democracy That Impacts Local Communities:

State and local leaders, including governors, legislators, and mayors, whose communities benefit significantly from democratic partners overseas, should communicate the importance of strong democratic partnerships through vehicles like joint letters to the administration and key legislators. These leaders could include those with significant engagement with Latin America (Florida, Texas, Arizona), Asia (California, Oregon, Washington), or Africa (Illinois and Arkansas).

Engage Faith Communities and Religious Freedom Activists:

Religious leaders, particularly those whose coreligionists are facing persecution in nondemocratic societies, are or can be strong advocates for democracy and the religious freedom protections that exist most often in democratic societies. Likewise, organizations that support religious freedom, including the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, National Association of Evangelicals, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and U.S. Council of Muslim Organizations, can also be strong voices for the importance of democratic institutions to religious leaders' issues and concerns. These organizations and communities should build a multifaith coalition for democracy and human rights to advocate for the U.S. government to push for the release and fair treatment of their coreligionists, as well as to advocate transformative political change through democratization.

Engage Local Democracy Leaders:

Organizations supporting American democratic institutions and civic engagement (e.g., the National Conference on State Legislatures, National League of Cities, National Governors Association, the Council of State Governments, or National Center of State Courts, and the League of Women Voters) should urge political leaders to ensure that our foreign policy includes the promotion of the democratic values and institutions that these groups work on domestically.

Engage Diaspora Community Americans:

Americans who emigrated from countries that remain under authoritarian rule are also strong voices for highlighting the difference between democratic and authoritarian rule and the importance of the United States' voice in supporting democracy and human rights. Organizations or individuals from various diaspora communities should write to both the executive branch, as well as their respective members of Congress and members on key foreign policy committees to urge American leadership on democracy and human rights globally.

Significant Influencers

Numerous groups and individuals enjoy significant respect and citizen support and could be pivotal spokespeople about the importance of American leadership in supporting democracy and human rights overseas.

Former Presidents:

All former presidents should use their voices individually and collectively to speak about the importance of democracy and human rights support to their respective foreign policies. This nonpartisan message, spanning decades of U.S. engagement in the world, will be a powerful reminder that democracy and

human rights support is central to American foreign policy, regardless of administration, party, or policy. While former presidents have a unique advocacy platform, it does not preclude other former senior political officials such as secretaries of state or congressional leaders championing U.S. democracy and human rights support.

Business Leaders:

Corporate leaders should emphasize that commercial interests and democracy support can and should coexist, including through signing a statement outlining the importance of democracy support to American business interests. These leaders have had a particular engagement with democratization issues through their media outlets, political campaigns, and other philanthropic engagement. They should encourage other business leaders to sign this statement, which would serve as a standing, nonpartisan statement to the current and future administrations. This could be released in the context of the 2020 election, so that it is not seen as a critique of the current administration or as an endorsement of any specific candidate.

Veterans and Military Leaders:

Similar to the statements from businesspeople and presidents, respected military leaders and veterans should also sign a similar statement of alignment with democracy support as a key element of our foreign and national security policies. Highlighting the crucial linkage to American security, this statement would show the importance of this issue directly to securing the homeland and American values.

Media

Focus on Democracy and Human Rights in Campaign 2020:

Media organizations covering the presidential debates should include a focus on what values underpin the candidates' respective policy development, not just on the specific policies at hand. Similarly, local and national coverage of the 2020 presidential campaign and debates should include questions about these values and what role candidates foresee support for democracy and human rights would play in a future foreign policy. This includes local and national newspapers' written interviews of candidates, video interviews with individual candidates, debate questions, and candidate analysis coverage.

Shift from Threats to Solutions and Progress:

There is significant media coverage of the threats and challenges to democracy in the United States and abroad. Given the significant and impactful work to strengthen democracy at home and abroad, analytical news programs should increase coverage devoted to increasing awareness about the role of democratic institutions and highlighting positive efforts to strengthen these institutions at home and abroad.

Academia

Underscore Democracy and Human Rights as Part of Foreign Policy:

International affairs programs at American universities should include in their courses of study the following topics: democracy and democratic values as part of the global world order, democracy and

human rights as a part of foreign policy, and democracy as a governing system as a part of their core curriculum to expose college-aged students to the concepts and debates around each. Universities should prioritize democracy and human rights as a core curricular focus and consider the establishment of stand-alone democracy and human rights programs. Organizations that support education in international affairs, such as the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs or Council on Foreign Relations should equip educators with the educational material necessary to lead discussions and educate on these topics.

Advance Democratic Values on Campus:

Colleges and universities shape how young adults engage with a diversity of political and other views, as well as how they engage diversity in their community. This is important not only to create an open and democratic environment on campus and cultivate a new generation of democratic citizens but also to counter the active engagement of authoritarian governments on university campuses to limit free speech. Equipping students with a deep understanding of freedom of speech, navigating diverse views with civility and respect, and the importance of these values to a democratic society will be important influences on their democratic engagement domestically and internationally.

2020 Presidential Election

Debate Foreign Policy:

In the primary and general election debates, the moderators should ask whether democratic values underpin the formulation of the candidates' policies and what role supporting democracy and human rights will play in a future foreign policy. The Commission on Presidential Debates should make democracy and human rights key focuses of the 2020 presidential debates — either as stand-alone topics or integrated into the domestic and foreign policy debates. Similarly, candidates should seek to differentiate themselves from candidates in their party and in the general election debates by articulating a clear vision for the role of democratic values in foreign-policy formulation.

Articulate Democracy and Human Rights Policy Positions:

Both parties' candidates will articulate in written and verbal public statements their foreign policy positions. These statements should outline their views on supporting democracy and human rights as part of their foreign and national security policies.

Include Democracy and Human Rights Support in Party Platforms:

As both parties prepare for the national conventions, each will be drafting their party platforms. These platforms should include a clear articulation of the role of democracy and human rights support. While candidates and political leaders will not always adhere to every element of the platform, it is important that these articulations of the parties' views include this point.

Educate Voters on Foreign Policy Issues:

Civic organizations dedicated to educating voters about candidates and platforms should include coverage of the candidates' democracy/human rights policies as part of foreign policies. Voter-education organizations could collaborate with democracy/human rights support groups to shape voters' understanding of the issues.



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