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Global freedom faces a dire threat. Around the world, the enemies of liberal democracy—a form of self-government in which human rights are recognized and every individual is entitled to equal treatment under law—are accelerating their attacks.

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Global freedom faces a dire threat. Around the world, the enemies of liberal democracy—a form of self-government in which human rights are recognized and every individual is entitled to equal treatment under law—are accelerating their attacks. Authoritarian regimes have become more powerful, and more aggressive in their efforts to undermine the rights of their neighbors and citizens, and at providing an alternate model to the West. In contrast to the rapidly expanding authoritarian democracies, internal forces have exploited the shortcomings in their systems, distorting national elections and undermining the institutions that underpin liberal democracy. Although the threats to freedom are growing, the institutions and mechanisms, meanwhile, are increasingly being crossed by the latter. The global order is wearing a tipping point, and if democracy's defenders do not work together to help guarantee freedom for all people, the authoritarian model will prevail.

The present threat to democracy is the product of a consecutive pole of decline in global freedom, which has been underway for nearly a decade. Freedom House's annual report, released in February of today, some 40 percent of the global population live in fields that continue to experience precipitous error ways. Only about six percent now live in free countries.

Freedom House's Freedom in the World data set, 2009–2019.

During the period of democratic decline, clients on abuse of power and human rights violations have ended. In the decade after World War II, the United Nations and other international institutions promoted the notion of fundamental rights, and democracies offered support—financial, political, and moral—to those who were fighting for their rights. Today, international actors look—or toward institutions to condemnation. The rise of the Berlin Wall, leaders of countries in Kazakhstan felt compelled to publicly embrace the same ideals in order to win acceptance in the international community. Today, authoritarian governments only ask how, to maintain the international community, authoritarian regimes have a stage at least superficially credible elections and international institutions. Rather than protest, adopting other countries to maintain their good standing.

For much of the cold century, however, democracy's opponents have derived prominently on the international stage, and the Soviet Union and China, for example, made it clear that their versions are not superior. The leaders of China, Russia, and other authoritarian countries have successfully built a strong global presence, jeopardizing the consensus that democracy is the only viable path to prosperity and security, while encouraging more authoritarian governments.

Countries in every region of the world have been captured by authoritarian rulers in recent years. In Asia, the Philippines and Cambodia have been transformed into dictatorships, while Thailand's military has security forces arrested opposition candidates and detained critics of the government. Today's general assault, prior years ago, reversing democratic progress made after the cold. Today's general assault, prior years ago, reversing democratic progress made after the cold. From Afghanistan, the electoral government in Kabul collapsed and gave way to the Taliban, returning the country to a system that is diametrically opposed to democracy, protests, and equality.

At the same time, democracies are being ripped from within by liberal forces, they are unscrupulous politicians willing to corrupt and shatter the very institutions that brought them to power. Leaders in Hungary and Poland have used their mandates to undermine the Catalan or abroad or as part of an organized attempt to countries the results of the presidential elections. But Poland elected leaders from Brazil to India have also taken on Vietnamese's and by a coalition of parties that have formed a government in Malaysia, and Pakistan's Imran Khan is a weakening of their values on the international stage.

It is now impossible to ignore the damage to democracy's foundations and reputations. The regimes of China, Russia, and other authoritarian countries have gained enormous power in the international system, and their countries have seen their established norms challenged and their leaders have gained more influence in international institutions. Meanwhile, the United States, rights and those of their fellow human beings. To reverse the decline, democratic governments need to strengthen domestic laws and institutions while taking bold, coordinated action to support democracy and human rights around the world. The United States and other democracies must the one environment of contested power and work toward expanding freedom for all individuals. Only global actively among democracy's defenders can successfully counter the combined aggression of its adversaries.

Popular demand for democracy remains strong. Freedom House's Nisenevich Foundation recently in Ukraine, for example, found that 76 percent of respondents supported democracy. In order to the Pavlo Petrenko's Democratic governments and societies must harness and support democratic actors for transformative gains and build a world in which it is ultimately fulfilled.

What is democracy?

Fundamental to the relationship of democracy is a correct understanding of what it is. The recent Freedom House report, Democracy Under Siege, defines it as a system in which "free and fair elections Regular Republic" of Nicol Kocharyan the Freedom House's Freedom House report and out by the Russian and Chinese ambassadors to the United States called from of their ideologies and their ability to influence the United States and other democracies. Freedom House's report has the confusion and by the Russian and Chinese ambassadors are ineffective in Syria's Civil war.

Moreover, it has contributed to a misperception that all democracy regimes is the regular performance of elections. Democracy means more than just majority rule; however, it is also a system of government that protects the rights of all people, including those who do not vote, and is accountable to all citizens, adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights. It is a network of socially reinforcing structures in which these overlaying power are subject to checks and balances. Democracy is not a system in which a single individual or a single party can do what it will and by. It requires an openness to alternatives to power, which can establish a partner competing fairly in governs for the good of the public as a whole, not just information or those who are in power. Democracy requires a commitment to the rule of law, which means that no one is above the law but is obligated to comply the control the laws rights to which they are entitled and participate in politics and governance.

Democracy is also more than just an ideal. It is a practical program of self-correction and improvement that empowers people to constantly, peacefully struggle toward that ideal. When one institution fails, others can step in to correct the mistake. Democracy's ability to self-correct and enhance capacity for self-correction is what gives it its essential strength and ability to attract and participate in politics and governance.

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The promotion of autocratic norms

Autocratic bans created a more favorable international environment for themselves over the past decade and a half. The demolition of the norms of a country's rights as well as democratic institutions. Authoritarians have taken advantage of the weakening of the United States and other democracy among leaders. It is not designed to serve the best interests of humanity, or of people around the world, but rather to promote a model of government in which the ruling elites can do whatever they wish without fear of being prosecuted by the order would in reality be in fact global instability and insecurity would have a significant, and increasing, negative impact on the United States.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plays a leading role in promoting autocratic norms. Citing its success in lifting millions of people out of poverty, the CCP has promoted its model of authoritarian governance to an ever-larger audience. Chinese officials have sought to offer an alternative to democracy as a source of international support and investment, helping secure the autocracies in various parts of the world. In Cambodia, for example, China has provided the ruling Cambodian People's Party with the political cover it needed to carry out its crackdown on the opposition. The CCP has used its state-controlled media and state-military threats to suppress international criticism of its own violations of democratic principles and human rights, for instance by punishing governments and other foreign entities that criticize its demolition of self-Rachaw in Hong Kong in violation to the agreement under which the territory was returned to China.

In June, the CCP further asserted the scope of Liaison's assault on democratic norms, employing economic and technological leverage to pressure governments, international institutions, and the private sector into silencing criticism of its human rights violations in Xinjiang. Chinese officials are imposing and action has officials have started a planning and implementing authoritarian norms against humanity and are of geopolitical against ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang, many foreign actors, including Muslim-majority governments, have been silent. The Chinese government's ability to force Uzbekistan and Middle Eastern Cooperation Organization (OIC) member states to Xinjiang's "political neutrality." New Zealand's Parliament refrained from identifying Xinjiang's actions in Xinjiang as genocide after the crude minister voice concerns the use language nevertheless economic relations with China. Such officials are a middle ground Xinjiang's year. Iran's ignore Xinjiang's actions in Xinjiang, and Cambodia's Hun Sen, Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, and Cambodia's Hun Sen. Cambodia's Hun Sen, Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro, and Cambodia's Hun Sen.

Dropping the pretense of competitive elections

Previously, even when countries flouted, many global standards continued to pay lip service to democracy, both at home and abroad. As international norms shift in the direction of autocracy, however, these exercises in democratic theater have become increasingly brazen.

In the run-up to Russia's September 2019 parliamentary elections, the regime of President Vladimir Putin barred candidates from the opposition Yabloko party from running for office, ostensibly for having too many signatures, "technical" which prevented any candidates who were even loosely associated with it from running for office. The Yabloko ruling was reversed by megaphone and Moscow's Electoral Commission, but the damage was done. Yabloko's leaders were forced to hold mobile app meets in efforts opposition voters about the campaign candidates' terms and. A law on "foreign agents" was also expanded ahead of the elections, restricting the activities of independent media and an individual who were critical of the regime.

The September 2019 presidential elections in Nicaragua was similarly uncompetitive. President Daniel Ortega's government arrested seven presidential candidates and dissolved the opposition Citizens for Liberties. Ortega's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) also forced the closure of 100 opposition-aligned civil society organizations, including Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, established news transparency in the sector organization and with. Ortega's government also forced the closure of 100 opposition-aligned civil society organizations, including Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, established news transparency in the sector organization and with. Ortega's government also forced the closure of 100 opposition-aligned civil society organizations, including Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, established news transparency in the sector organization and with.

The November 2019 Bolivian elections were also similarly uncompetitive. President Evo Morales's government forced the resignation of the country's electoral authorities, including the chief of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, and replaced them with people who had ties to the ruling party. Morales's candidacy was also in question, with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal allowing him to run for a fourth term in violation of the country's constitution. Bolivia's Supreme Electoral Tribunal ultimately allowed Morales to run for a fourth term in violation of the country's constitution. Bolivia's Supreme Electoral Tribunal ultimately allowed Morales to run for a fourth term in violation of the country's constitution.

A proliferation of coups and power grabs

In another sign that international determinants against antidemocratic behaviors are losing force, coups were more common in 2019 than in any of the previous six years. The first coup attempt in Nicaragua, for example, in which a group of military officers attempted to oust President Daniel Ortega, failed. However, the military officers who had continued to play a significant role in politics under the leadership of President Ortega's successor, President Daniel Ortega had retrieved the elections model, and installed commander in chief Ben Kang.

Reversing the Decline of Democracy in the United States

As foreign autocrats resort to increasingly brazen forms of repression to entrench themselves in office and support authoritarian influences around the world, undemocratic forces in the United States have engaged in their own efforts to undermine institutions that are designed to check their power and protect the rights of all Americans.

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Failure in Afghanistan

The rapid US military withdrawal from Afghanistan—negotiated between the Taliban and the Trump administration without the involvement of the Afghan government, and completed by the Biden administration in 2021—dealt a powerful blow to international confidence in the ability of democracies to protect their partners and help foster free societies in difficult terrain.

The 20-year US engagement in Afghanistan started as a joint effort by the United States and its allies to destroy the safe haven that the Taliban had provided for the organizers of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Over the years, Washington both pursued its narrowly defined security interests in the country and committed billions of dollars and significant effort to supporting local civil society and the development of a democratic Afghan state. While many Afghans experienced real change and felt hope for a better future, the Afghan government and the United States consistently failed to address worsening corruption and governance problems. Finally, the ill-planned withdrawal triggered a rapid collapse of the institutions that had been built and a complete takeover by the Taliban.

The debacle has renewed false impressions within existing democracies that supporting democracy abroad is a doomed enterprise, that it involves imposing "Western" ideals on unwilling populations, that it requires the open-ended use of military force, or that it is a disingenuous pretext for the use of military force. For those still struggling for freedom in repressive environments, the US withdrawal may be seen as a warning that their democratic partners could abandon them at any moment.

Meanwhile, thousands of Afghan people have rushed to flee the country since the Taliban eliminated representative rule and nullified the constitutional rights of women and ethnic and religious minority groups. Many ethnic Hazara communities have been evicted from their land, and Taliban forces have hunted down, abducted, or executed scores of police and intelligence officers from the former government. Human rights defenders and independent journalists have faced persecution as their hard-won achievements are rapidly reversed. The United States and most other established democracies have compounded their earlier failures by being slow or reluctant to assist those seeking refuge, many of whom remain stuck in Afghanistan or in nearby countries where they lack basic rights protections.

Cause for hope

Even in a year dominated by disturbing setbacks to democracy, people around the world demonstrated its continued appeal and capacity for renewal.

Ecuador's democracy was trampled for a decade by former president Rafael Correa, who stepped aside for handpicked successor Lenín Moreno in 2017 on the assumption that he would retain control through the ruling party. But Moreno struck out on his own and reformed parts of the system, supporting a new judicial appointment process that helped weed out partisan judges, reducing state control over the media, and pardoning human rights activists so that they could continue their work. Ecuador has consequently seen a steady expansion of freedom over the past five years, moving from Partly Free to Free this year after credible general elections resulted in a peaceful transfer of power to an opposition presidential candidate. These improvements have persisted despite Correa's continued efforts to exert influence from outside government.

In Chile, already one of the better-performing democracies in the Americas, the political system responded to massive protests in 2019 by authorizing the election of an inclusive constitutional convention that will now work to replace the 1980 constitution—originally inherited from the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet—and address deep socioeconomic disparities. In Montenegro, an opposition coalition came to power in late 2020, ending three decades of rule by the Democratic Party of Socialists. The new government imposed fewer obstacles to political competition and gave the public broadcaster more independence, and its narrow parliamentary majority allowed the legislature to provide greater oversight of the executive branch.

People in Côte d'Ivoire have proven their desire to steer their nation toward full democracy since the end of an armed conflict in 2011. While the country experienced a vast expansion of freedom over the past 10 years, its democratic momentum faltered in 2020, as President Alassane Ouattara circumvented constitutional term limits and secured a third term in voting that was marred by candidate disqualifications, an opposition boycott, and widespread political violence. But parliamentary elections in March 2021 featured significant improvements, with several opposition candidates freely registering and participating. The elections were less affected by violence, and Ivorians had more freedom to express themselves and participate in public assemblies.

In Myanmar, despite the military's well-earned reputation for brutal violence, the February 2021 coup immediately sparked widespread resistance across the country. By the end of the year, protests were continuing even in the face of live ammunition and systematic reprisals, and a civil disobedience movement—including a general strike—had brought the economy and public services almost to a standstill, with participation by health workers, civil servants, educators, bank workers, and many more. Civilians have also boycotted military-affiliated products and services, from the national lottery to the electrical power utility. In December, people across the country engaged in a silent strike against military rule, closing down shops and staying off the streets. The resistance to the military regime has denied it legitimacy and crippled its ability to function as a government, reflecting both the people's commitment to democracy and the power it gives them to shape events.

Pushback against CCP influence is gaining traction. During 2021, democratic governments and private actors devoted greater attention to the moral, human rights, and national security implications of integration with a regime in China that has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad over the past decade. Lithuania was the first country to announce a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, setting the stage for other countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia to take a stand against CCP abuses in Xinjiang and elsewhere. Separately, sacrificing significant revenue to defend human rights principles, the Women's Tennis Association suspended all tournaments in China after player Peng Shuai was forced to recant her allegations of sexual assault by a high-ranking CCP official. And in a variety of open societies, media outlets have been cutting ties with Chinese state media services, regulators have scrutinized rule violations by such services, and scholars have spoken out against pressure to self-censor on China-related topics.

The migration and refugee crisis that has so preoccupied many democracies is an outgrowth of the authoritarian expansion of the past 16 years. But in another sense it is an emphatic endorsement of democracy as the preferred system of government, as millions of people flee repressive regimes or antidemocratic militants and seek to live in free societies. The rate of migration out of Hong Kong spiked following the Beijing-backed authorities' crackdown on prodemocracy protests. Tens of thousands of people have fled Nicaragua since 2018 demonstrations were brutally suppressed, as have millions of Venezuelans suffering under the regime of Nicolás Maduro. Rather than attempting to deter migrants and refugees with daunting border infrastructure and harsh asylum systems, governments in democratic destination countries should recognize their shared interest in the struggle for freedom.

Building a more democratic world

The displacement of global democratic norms by authoritarian powers and other antidemocratic actors can still be reversed. But success will require a bold, sustained response that establishes support for democracy and countering authoritarianism at the heart of each democracy's foreign policy, national security strategy, and domestic reform agenda. It must also entail the participation of both governments and an engaged and active citizenry. Rather than longing for a bygone era of expanding freedom, democratic leaders need to confront the problems caused by their past mistakes and address weaknesses in the international system that authoritarians have been able to exploit.

Effective democracy support should not be subordinated to a free country's short-term economic, military, or geopolitical interests, all of which would actually be best served by a long-term rollback of authoritarian practices. Nor can democracy be imposed by forces outside a given country. International assistance and solidarity are crucial to countering the tactical advantages and many forms of collaboration enjoyed by autocrats. At the same time, it is local and diasporic human rights defenders, grassroots civil society organizations, and empowered electorates that must chart the course and ultimately determine their own country's future.

In the drive to restore democratic values and human rights standards to their proper place in the international system, President Biden's Summit for Democracy—held in December 2021 with 110 invited governments, to be followed by a year of action—represents a promising first step. Those governments must now go beyond rhetorical commitments and seek civil society input on implementation.

Developing a set of coordinated international policies grounded in democratic principles, while strengthening their own domestic governance systems, will ultimately make all participating countries safer, more prosperous, and more just. Democratic nations share interests in fair trade and security, and since they are more likely to adhere to agreements and norms, they make more reliable partners in both fields. Their institutional and popular support for accountability and the rule of law also make them more predictable and rewarding environments for public and private investment. No democracy is perfect, but they all benefit from the basic ability to adapt to changing circumstances, make policy corrections, and bring in fresh leadership—with minimal disruption to the system as a whole.

Despite the clear arguments in favor of democracy, the past 16 years have shown in stark terms that neither the prevalence of democratic ideas around the world nor the certainty of global progress toward democratic governance can be taken for granted. Autocrats remain determined to keep and expand their power, and they will continue to make gains so long as democracy's proponents let them. It is time for everyone who understands the stakes to rebuild and improve upon the international norms that democracies long championed, and push the reprehensible practices of authoritarians back to the margins of human experience where they belong.

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Policy Recommendations

Democracies and private sector actors should work to support core democratic principles and basic human rights at home and around the world.

About Freedom in the World

Freedom in the World is Freedom House's flagship annual report, assessing the condition of political rights and civil liberties around the world. It is composed of numerical ratings and supporting descriptive texts for 195 countries and 15 territories. *Freedom in the World* has been published since 1973, allowing Freedom House to track global trends in freedom for almost 50 years.

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