



# National Endowment for Democracy

*Supporting freedom around the world*

## A Strategy for Democratic Renewal: Meeting the Challenges Ahead

JANUARY 2020

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the National Endowment for Democracy produced its first strategy document in 1992, democracy's continued expansion appeared inexorable. Nearly three decades later, after years of negative global trends that have been called the democratic recession, such optimism about democracy's prospects seems profoundly unrealistic.

But the recession is being countered today by surprising democratic resilience. Since the spring of 2018, when authoritarian regimes unexpectedly fell in Ethiopia, Armenia, and Malaysia, grassroots movements of protest against corruption and unaccountable autocratic governments have swept through many countries and regions. In this new period, **NED plans to focus on six urgent priorities:**

**Liberalizing Authoritarian Systems:** In China, Russia, North Korea and other dictatorships in Latin America, the Middle East, Eurasia, Africa, and Asia, NED will continue to aid civil-society groups, independent journalists, and human-rights defenders, and to mobilize international support for activists exposed to repression and violence. NED will also support investigative journalists and civil-society networks battling transnational kleptocracy, which is a pillar of modern authoritarianism.

**Supporting Democratic Transitions:** NED will provide urgently needed support to democrats in countries like Tunisia, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Armenia, Malaysia, and Sudan where popular uprisings against corrupt and abusive autocratic regimes have created the opportunity for democratic transitions. At the same time, NED will continue its efforts to help fragile emerging democracies struggling to deliver the improvements in governance and economic opportunity that citizens expect from democratic institutions.

**Countering Malign Authoritarian Influence in the World:** NED will counter the malign influence of states like China and Russia that are engaged in a global effort to undermine democratic norms and to manipulate educational and cultural institutions, media outlets, think tanks, and civic associations. Many of the targeted countries are especially vulnerable because they lack the resources – media, think tanks, academic and governmental bodies – that can help them understand how the Chinese and Russian systems work internally and how they are seeking to project influence internationally. NED will seek to close the knowledge and capacity gap by raising awareness about the multi-dimensional nature of authoritarian influence.

**Competing with Authoritarians in the Arena of Technology and Information:** The newest and most complex challenge is to win the battle over technology and information, which has become a critical arena of contestation between democracy and authoritarianism. While authoritarian regimes are trying to use the Internet to subvert and defeat democracy, emerging forms of independent online media provide potent resources for democrats, enabling them to investigate abuses, counter illiberal narratives, and inform and organize citizens. NED's support for underdog civil-society groups that use new technologies to challenge repressive state institutions will be critical in the period ahead.

**Strengthening Unity among Democracies:** The current democracy recession has made strengthening international democratic cooperation more important than ever before. Authoritarian powers are cooperating to undermine democracy where it already exists, to prevent democratic breakthroughs, and to obstruct fragile democratic transitions. NED and its institutes are building international coalitions for democracy in collaboration with partners around the world – in governments and parliaments; in civil society and political parties; in business associations and trade unions; and in democracy foundations, development agencies, and multilateral institutions.

**Defending Democratic Values against Illiberalism and Intolerance:** The norms and values of liberal democracy are being challenged today by an array of illiberal forces across the globe opposed to the values of civility, tolerance, pluralism, and mutual respect. NED will support these values by mobilizing and strengthening the voices of leading activists and public intellectuals, as well as others who wield social influence, including bloggers, vloggers, artists and musicians, religious leaders, entrepreneurs, and online journalists. Broad-based civic education and leadership development is also needed to nurture a new generation of civic leaders and engaged citizens.

NED will meet these challenges by marshaling and integrating in a coherent way the assets at its disposal to empower indigenous grassroots democratic groups around the world. These assets include:

1. NED's four core institutes, representing the two major political parties, business and labor;
2. Thousands of nongovernmental organizations across the globe that are supported by NED's targeted and demand-driven small-grants program; and
3. NED's own activities aimed at building networks of activists and institutions; organizing solidarity events and other initiatives to strengthen political support for frontline activists; and conducting cutting-edge scholarly research on the critical challenges facing democracy.

NED will also enhance the work of its strategic fund, established in 2016, to promote collaborative efforts across different regions and sectors by linking the most innovative and effective groups at the forefront of democratic struggle. Towards this end, **a new Strategic Cooperation Fund will build on initiatives already in progress**, such as countering kleptocracy and disinformation, to incorporate new priorities and initiatives for collaborative engagement.

While democracy faces greater dangers than at any time since NED was established more than three decades ago, its continuing resilience shows that these dangers can be addressed and overcome. With increased resources provided by the Congress, NED will expand its efforts to empower frontline democrats and amplify their voice and impact.

**This is NED's mission – to support the universal aspiration for freedom in a way that both advances America's national interest and fulfills its highest political ideals. Never has this mission been more important than it is today.**

## FULL TEXT – A STRATEGY FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

It is now nearly four decades since President Reagan delivered the Westminster Address that launched the process leading to the establishment of the NED. Never during that time has democracy been as severely challenged as it is today.

The crisis of democracy is global and has many dimensions. The world is now in the midst of what is commonly called a democratic recession, with political rights and civil liberties having declined for 13 consecutive years, according to the latest Freedom House global survey. Many people feel that democracy may actually be [in decline](#), as many countries that were once emerging or electoral democracies have in recent years become increasingly authoritarian – among them important regional states like Turkey, Venezuela, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Hungary. Support for democracy has declined even in long-established democracies where illiberal populist and nationalist movements have arisen in reaction to anxieties caused by the erosion of traditional cultural norms and disruptive demographic and technological changes. Sharp political polarization and declining trust in the efficacy of democratic government have even caused some analysts to speak about the possible [“deconsolidation”](#) of Western democracies whose stability was once taken for granted.

The troubles affecting existing democracies have been accompanied by a much bolder projection of power and influence by authoritarian countries like China and Russia. These and other despotic regimes are not just becoming more repressive internally but are expanding their power internationally, filling vacuums left by the declining influence, unity, and self-confidence of the democratic West. Authoritarian governments are using a combination of military and economic pressures, as well as “sharp-power” information and surveillance tools, to increase their international influence, monitor and control their own populations, divide and weaken democracy where it exists, and create a post-democratic world order in which the norms of human rights and the rule of law are replaced by the principle of absolute state sovereignty. They are also cooperating with each other to block democratic progress and bolster autocratic regimes throughout the world.

The resurgence of authoritarian political forces, the rise of illiberalism, and the loss of self-confidence in the democratic West have led to a sharp reversal of democratic progress and a new pessimism about the prospects for democracy. Alarmed by illiberal trends in world politics and the widespread cynicism about democracy that has fueled the rise of anti-system political movements and parties, some 300 leading democracy activists and intellectuals adopted a statement in 2017 called [The Prague Appeal for Democratic Renewal](#) that opened by declaring that “Liberal democracy is under threat, and all who cherish it must come to its defense.”

Significantly, the people who have been the first to rally to the cause of democracy are the activists on the frontlines of democratic struggle in many authoritarian countries. Foremost among them have been the millions of people who took to the streets in Hong Kong last June to protest a change in the extradition law that would subject Hong Kong residents and visitors to the jurisdiction of state-run courts in mainland China. Those protests, led by young people, quickly mushroomed into a sustained challenge to Beijing that has been compounded by an accumulation of other crises, including the slowdown of the Chinese economy and the trade war with the United States, criticism of Beijing’s massive repression of the Uyghur

population in Xinjiang, resistance in Taiwan to its heavy-handed coercion, and growing controversies in many countries in connection with Beijing's invasive Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese President Xi Jinping acknowledged the threat to the regime's stability when he told party officials at the beginning of 2019 that the regime "faces major risks on all fronts and must batten down the hatches."

Mass protests also took place during the summer in Moscow after the authorities disqualified dozens of candidates in elections for the local Duma, or city council. As in Hong Kong, the protesters showed no fear and were "maturing and getting stronger" by the day, [as one Russian journalist put it](#). Putin, by contrast, was put on the defensive, and the candidates of his United Russia party were forced to run as independents for fear of being associated with the party's toxic reputation. Putin no longer seems invincible after twenty years in power, and his strongman posturing has lost its appeal during a period of economic and demographic decline in Russia and widespread pessimism about the country's future.

The authoritarian regimes in Beijing and Moscow do not appear to be in danger of imminent collapse, and the protest movements could be repressed or lose momentum if there is a protracted political stalemate. Nonetheless, they confirm the continuing validity of President Reagan's observation in his Westminister Address that people's "instinctive desire for freedom and self-determination surfaces again and again" in repressive systems.

We are seeing examples of this today in many other authoritarian countries. One of them is Venezuela, where the economy has imploded, more than ten percent of the population has fled to neighboring countries, and a united opposition has been recognized as the legitimate government by the United States and more than fifty other countries. It has also surfaced in Nicaragua, where the Ortega regime remains unstable following the protests that erupted in April 2018 and would probably not survive a collapse in Venezuela – or even a negotiated settlement there leading to free elections. The resignation of longtime autocrat Evo Morales in Bolivia, following accusations that his party stole the October presidential elections, is a further blow to leftist populism in Latin America.

The Islamist regime in Iran is yet another example of a dictatorship whose survival is threatened, in this case by mass protests against corruption and economic misery in cities like Qom and Mashad that traditionally have been strongholds of the Revolutionary Guards. The protests that erupted in more than 100 cities triggered by the rise in the state-controlled price of fuel in late 2019 were the largest since the Green Revolution a decade earlier. Elsewhere, the Erdogan regime in Turkey suffered a significant setback as a result of its losses in local elections earlier this year, especially in the rerun of the Istanbul mayoral vote. The ouster of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in Algeria, Omar al-Bashir in Sudan, and Saad Hariri in Lebanon following popular uprisings shows that, despite the failure of the Arab Spring, the resistance to authoritarianism in the Middle East has not been extinguished.

In some countries, popular resistance to autocratic rule has created openings for democratic transition. In 2018, for example, surprising breakthroughs occurred in Ethiopia, Armenia, and Malaysia, all countries with considerable influence in their respective regions. In each case, deeply entrenched autocratic regimes succumbed to popular revulsion against corruption and unresponsive and abusive governance. The recent agreement in Sudan between the military and the Forces for Freedom and Change on a constitutional declaration and the formation of a joint ruling body offers yet another opportunity for a transition to civilian government. In all of these countries, the obstacles to a successful democratic

transition are formidable, but the fact that this possibility now exists in so many places is itself a remarkable step forward.

Popular protests in several post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe have even challenged the politics of illiberalism supported by the governments in Hungary and Poland. In Slovakia, for example, the murder in 2018 of the investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée led to mass demonstrations that brought down the corrupt and clientelistic Prime Minister Robert Fico, and to the victory in the presidential election last March of Zuzana Caputova, a political outsider and liberal reformer. In Romania, the murder of a 15-year-old girl led to an outburst of public revulsion against corrupt strongman rule and to the adoption of measures to strengthen the independence of the country's judiciary. And in the Czech Republic, the largest anti-government demonstrations since the Velvet Revolution led to the crushing defeat in Prague of billionaire Prime Minister Andrej Babis' party in the elections for the European Parliament. According to a report on these developments in *The Financial Times*, illiberal populism in the region has been put on the defensive "because hundreds of thousands of the region's citizens, impatient with politicians who feed corruption and bend justice to their own purposes, have risen against it."

The mass protests against corruption and autocratic rule in so many countries across the world show that "democracy is proving itself to be a not-at-all-fragile flower," as Reagan famously said at Westminster. The uprisings have not reversed the democracy recession of recent years, but they have mitigated some of its worst effects and given reason to believe that important democratic gains are possible in the period ahead.

*This period will be defined by the tension between democracy's recession and its surprising resilience. It is in this context that we need to identify the principal challenges to democracy and how we can meet them.*

NED can help to meet these challenges by marshaling and integrating in a coherent way the resources and assets at our disposal to empower indigenous grassroots democratic groups around the world. The critical task will be to bring the entire NED family of institutions and grantees together to work cooperatively on the challenges facing democracy. NED also has the capacity, based on its more than thirty-five years of experience aiding activists fighting for democracy, to leverage its resources and institutional assets to broaden the community of countries and institutions supporting democracy.

NED's greatest strength is that it is an independent and comprehensive democracy support system with the single mission of advancing freedom and self-government around the world. This support system has three key components. The first is NED's four core institutes representing the two major political parties, business and labor. They conduct programs in their respective sectors and are able to use NED funds to leverage other resources, thereby broadening the overall scope and impact of NED's work. They are also able to draw upon the expertise and experience in their respective sectors from all over the world, further strengthening the global impact of NED programs.

The second component is the thousands of nongovernmental organizations across the globe that are supported by NED's targeted, demand-driven small grants program. These grants respond to the needs of local NGOs that defend human rights, strengthen independent media and civic education, and empower women and youth in a manner that enables them to establish credibility as democratizing forces in their own societies. NED has developed a reputation for acting swiftly, flexibly and effectively in providing vital assistance to activists working in the most challenging environments.

The third component is the activities that NED itself conducts. These activities build upon the grants program in developing regional and global activist networks, organizing solidarity events and other initiatives that strengthen political support for frontline activists, and conducting and publishing cutting-edge scholarly research on the critical and often complex challenges to democracy. Such research gives activists and policy-makers alike access to the latest insights on strengthening liberal values and developing strategies for advancing democracy.

With its global grants program and democracy-promotion activities, NED serves as a vital hub of activity, resources, and intellectual exchange for democracy activists, practitioners, and analysts around the world. NED board members, in addition to carrying out their oversight responsibilities, are part of this hub through their participation in NED events and their public advocacy. They also can - and often do - address larger policy issues related to strengthening democracy, something that NED as a bipartisan organization cannot do directly. In the period ahead, their different voices can help inform the debate on U.S. foreign policy and restore a bipartisan consensus on how support for democracy advances U.S. values and interests.

As we look to the future, there are six fundamental challenges facing democracy that NED will need to address:

#### 1) LIBERALIZING AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEMS

Since its founding more than 35 years ago, NED has been committed to assisting the struggle for freedom against authoritarianism, even in the most repressive and inaccessible countries. NED's *Statement of Principles and Objectives*, written in 1984 when the third wave of democratization had not yet gathered momentum and few people expected that democracy might spread to dictatorial countries, nonetheless stated that the Endowment "will not neglect those who keep alive the flame of freedom in closed societies."

Because of this commitment, NED was involved in the historic and often unexpected spread of democracy to many third-wave countries ruled by authoritarian governments, among them Chile, South Korea, and Taiwan, as well as Czechoslovakia and Poland and former Soviet republics like Ukraine, Georgia, and the three Baltic states. Democratic progress in these and other countries, and the subsequent breakthroughs in formerly authoritarian countries like Nigeria, Indonesia, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Malaysia, and Sudan, underline how support for democrats in highly repressive societies opens the way to democratic transitions. This needs to remain a central part of NED's mission and work – for practical as well as moral reasons.

The current wave of protests against corrupt and repressive regimes shows that still further progress is possible. There are significant differences among such systems, and it's important to adapt assistance to the specific circumstances and opportunities in each country. The protests in Russia and Hong Kong, for example, have taken place in relatively open environments where, despite massive arrests, activists have used the most up-to-date digital tools to track the movements of riot police, keep the public and media informed, deploy lawyers for legal defense, and organize sophisticated social-media campaigns. While the situation in mainland China's "surveillance state" is more closed, groups are nonetheless working across multiple sectors, including labor and the environment, to hold local officials accountable; to develop strong digital security practices; to safeguard access to independent information and train new

citizen journalists; and to mobilize international human-rights pressure on the regime. Even in a country as isolated as North Korea, there is growing evidence of discontent as a result of increased citizens' awareness of the outside world, including among elites, participants in private markets, and young people who are captivated by South Korean popular music and drama. Increasing the flow of information into and out of North Korea is important, as is reaching the country's elite inhabitants who have access to the Internet and can visit other countries in Asia.

In these and other dictatorships in Latin America, the Middle East, Eurasia, Africa, and Asia, NED will continue to aid civil-society groups, independent journalists, and human-rights defenders, and also mobilize international support for activists exposed to repression and violence. NED will support democrats-at-risk and also help connect activists to technology companies that need to better understand the dangers on the ground. While frontline activists need support, they also have a lot to teach the West about how to deal with regimes like those in Moscow and Beijing that are increasingly adept at using information and state financial resources to manipulate international politics.

They can also advise on how to deal with transnational kleptocracy, which is a pillar of modern authoritarianism. Since kleptocrats rely on cross-border networks, they are vulnerable to networked civil society and journalism that can track kleptocrats across borders, share information, expose illicit transactions, and raise the issue on the agenda of publics around the world. Building such networks and allying with investigative journalists from kleptocratic states must be part of a strategy to liberalize modern authoritarian systems, to make their international operations more transparent, and to subject them to the rule of law.

## 2) SUPPORTING DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

As already noted, one of the most surprising and encouraging developments during the recent period of democratic recession has been a series of popular uprisings against corrupt and abusive autocratic regimes, creating the opportunity for democratic transitions in many countries, including Tunisia, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Armenia, Malaysia, Sudan, and Bolivia. While the progress in these countries has led to immediate gains in human rights and press freedom, these breakthroughs will have no lasting political significance – and will do little to reverse the democratic recession – if they do not lead to real social and economic reforms that respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. For that to happen, new democratic institutions will have to be developed that will enable citizens to hold political leaders and economic elites accountable, foster economic growth and opportunity, protect the rights of ordinary people, and resolve ethnic and other divisions in a peaceful way. NED needs to help these countries build such institutions so that they can become inclusive and stable democracies.

The challenge is immensely difficult because the legacy of authoritarianism often leaves countries with degraded official institutions and a civil society that is inexperienced and not prepared to take advantage of the new opportunities. What's needed in such situations is a multi-sectoral approach that simultaneously supports the development of political parties, business associations, unions, and other institutions. Establishing transition hubs to provide fast and accessible assistance on issues of economic reform, political-party development, reducing corruption, and security-sector reform is especially important. Providing civil-society activists with the skills needed to “cross over” to political leadership and governmental service is also necessary, even as other activists remain in civil society to hold new governments accountable for their reform promises and performance.

Democratic transition is inevitably a long-term process, and NED needs to stay engaged with democratic reformers even when they suffer setbacks, which is inevitable. Ukrainian activists fighting for reform and against corruption did not stop their work following the failure of the Orange Revolution, when many international groups withdrew. Since NED had remained in Ukraine, it was well positioned to help the invigorated reform process that followed the Revolution of Dignity in 2014.

The long-term nature of the transition process underscores the need for NED to remain engaged in young democracies where the transition from authoritarianism started well before the recent proliferation of democratic openings. Even relatively successful transitions in countries like Ghana and South Africa are vulnerable to problems of corruption, inequality, and weak rule of law. The difficult problems in other fledgling democracies like Honduras, Kosovo, and Burkina Faso are even more challenging.

Thus, even as NED focuses special attention on post-authoritarian countries embarking on democratic transitions, it will not diminish its ongoing efforts to help fragile emerging democracies that are struggling to deliver on the promise of democratic government. If democratic governments fail to improve the living standards of the people and deliver vitally needed social services, they could easily fall victim to demagogues and illiberal populists who prey upon people's grievances to subvert democratic institutions.

If the Endowment can both help these transitions succeed and foster the improvements in governance that citizens expect from democratic institutions, it will strengthen the prospects for democracy internationally. The stakes are very high, and the NED family must rise to the occasion.

### 3) COUNTERING MALIGN AUTHORITARIAN INFLUENCE IN THE WORLD

The third challenge is to counter the malign influence of modern authoritarian states like China and Russia. Such states – technologically sophisticated, economically integrated, and globally connected – are attempting to undermine democratic norms and manipulate educational and cultural institutions, media outlets, think tanks, and civic associations in countries around the world. Not only are these authoritarian states preying upon the openness of established democracies. They are also using their multi-dimensional influence to overwhelm developing countries in regions with limited resources that are unable to analyze, much less to counter, such activity. China has used [“sharp power”](#) information tools and economic programs like the [Belt and Road Initiative](#) to penetrate other societies and advance its geopolitical objectives, while Russia is manipulating elections in dozens of countries across [Africa](#) and [Latin America](#) to bolster the achievement of its commercial and political priorities.

There is a great need to close the knowledge and capacity gap on China and Russia, since information concerning their international strategies is limited in many of the societies where Beijing and Moscow are now deeply engaged. This asymmetry places many vulnerable countries at a strategic disadvantage. The challenge of responding to growing authoritarian influence is compounded by the fact that, except in a handful of countries, there is a dearth of resources – media, think tanks, academic and governmental bodies – dedicated to the subject.

A priority at this stage should be to study and analyze the various forms of authoritarian influence and their effects on democratic institutions, norms and values. Efforts should also be made to raise awareness, particularly in countries and regions not familiar with the multi-dimensional nature of authoritarian influence. This can be done by supporting and developing local experts in vulnerable countries who can



understand how the Chinese and Russian systems work internally as well as how they are seeking to project influence internationally.

#### 4) STRENGTHENING UNITY AMONG DEMOCRACIES

NED has been committed to strengthening unity among democracies since 1984, when it stipulated in its founding Statement of Principles and Objectives that international cooperation in advancing democracy would be one of the five program areas of its future work. The Statement said that programs in this area should “foster a sense of common identity and purpose among democratic groups and democratic societies generally.”

Over the past three decades, the NED has supported initiatives that have linked groups across borders and between regions, established democracy hubs of grantees in key cities, nurtured regional democracy networks, encouraged other countries to establish their own democracy-promotion institutions, and launched the World Movement for Democracy (WMD), a global solidarity network of political and civil-society activists and democracy scholars and practitioners.

The current democracy recession and the fraying of traditional alliances and of the rules-based international order have made strengthening international democratic cooperation more important than ever before. Authoritarian powers, working directly and often through ad hoc coalitions and multi-lateral bodies like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, are trying to undermine democracy where it already exists, prevent democratic breakthroughs, and obstruct fragile democratic transitions. They constitute what amounts to a de facto authoritarian international.

NED and its institutes need to work with their partners and friends around the world – in governments and parliaments; in civil society and political parties; in business associations and trade unions; in democracy foundations, development agencies, and multilateral institutions - to build international coalitions for democracy. It will be necessary to help rebuild the democratic consensus that anchored the transatlantic alliance; to work closely with successful democracies in Asia, Latin America and other regions; to strengthen the commitment of regional bodies and mechanisms like the OAS and the OSCE to democratic ideas and values; and to amplify the voices of today’s democratic activists and movements.

Building upon its existing networks around the world, the NED has already begun to lay the foundation for this initiative. For instance, in a number of Asian democracies the Endowment is nurturing the development of a community of partners from various sectors, ranging from think tanks and the media to parliamentarians and business and civil-society leaders. The goal is to encourage a stronger commitment to democracy through diplomacy and development assistance in Japan, India, and other Asian democracies, and to anchor regional multilateral mechanisms in shared norms and democratic values.

The World Movement for Democracy can strengthen the link between civil-society activists and politicians by recruiting more parliamentarians to its Steering Committee and by convening a global network of parliamentarians at its biennial world assemblies. The NED should also strengthen the Prague-based International Coalition for Democratic Renewal, which has spawned working groups in such areas as transatlantic cooperation and youth engagement.

The democracy struggles now taking place in the streets of Hong Kong and Moscow and in Venezuela, Sudan, and other countries can help awaken a revived commitment to democratic renewal around the world. The bravery and commitment of a new generation of activists are as compelling today as they were during the earlier struggles of Solidarity in Poland and Soviet dissidents. NED is well-positioned to amplify the inspirational narratives of these new struggles, and the digital revolution provides us with useful tools and platforms with which to reach new audiences. Doing this effectively will be difficult, but the impact could be significant.

## 5) DEFENDING DEMOCRATIC VALUES AGAINST ILLIBERALISM AND INTOLERANCE

The norms and values of liberal democracy are being challenged by an array of forces across the globe, from religious and political extremist movements to populist leaders and parties. Although the ideologies, tactics and motivations of these movements vary greatly, they rely upon a similar narrative framework that decries democracy for its emphasis on individual liberty, ethnic and religious pluralism, and political tolerance. In their bid for power, violent extremists use force and terror, while illiberal populists incite fear and hatred of “the other” and foment political polarization. Their methods differ, but both deny the importance of individual freedom and scorn civility, pluralism, and tolerance.

In recent years, NED has made many grants for programs countering violent extremism, mostly in majority-Muslim countries in the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia. Such programs seek to amplify moderate religious voices, engage and train religious leaders in democracy, prioritize youth in civic-education efforts, and use online platforms to combat narratives of hate and extremism.

NED will continue to fund such programs, but it must now also address the problem of illiberalism, intolerance, and sharp polarization in other countries and regions as well. Although liberal democracy has proven to be resilient in the past to anti-pluralist movements, their current manifestations present unprecedented challenges in terms of scope and complexity. Traditional appeals to liberal democratic ideals, values and principles have faltered in the face of political movements and parties that exploit deep-seated emotions, fears, and resentments.

While NED will continue to support programs that promote good governance, fight corruption, and strive to help democracy deliver, the nature of the new challenge demands a response that seeks to strengthen the understanding of democratic ideas and support for the values of civility, tolerance, pluralism, and mutual respect.

NED can also support these values by mobilizing and strengthening the voices of leading activists and public intellectuals. The Prague Appeal for Democratic Renewal is an example of such an initiative. Rather than concede national loyalty to the illiberal forces, it endorsed the idea of a healthy civic nationalism, stating, “National identity is too important to be left to the manipulation of despots and demagogic populists.”

The battle of ideas must also be fought in new and innovative ways. Since technology has diminished the influence of some of the traditional gatekeepers of public discourse, such as intellectuals and media editors, NED will need to engage diverse other actors who wield social influence, including bloggers, vloggers, artists and musicians, religious leaders, entrepreneurs, and online journalists.

At its last meeting, the WMD Steering Committee recommended the creation of an online platform that would share the stories of brave and imaginative democracy activists whose bold actions often go viral on the Internet. If a platform carrying such stories and images could gain a global following, it would give new vitality to the democratic idea.

In addition, broad-based civic education and leadership development will be the key to nurturing a new generation of civic leaders and engaged citizens. John Dewey once said, "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife." A new civic-education guide called "On Education & Democracy: 25 Lessons from the Teaching Profession," has just been published by Education International (EI), an international association of education unions in 170 countries representing 32.5 million educators, which was created 25 years ago by Albert Shanker, a founding board member of the NED. The guide is a clarion call to educators to defend democracy and its institutions. NED should explore how it can help advance this and other initiatives to promote civic education at a time when support for democracy among young people has been declining.

## 6) COMPETING WITH AUTHORITARIANS IN THE ARENA OF TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION

The newest and most complex challenge is to win the battle over technology and information, which has become a critical arena of contestation between democracy and authoritarianism. From disinformation and fake news to surveillance and the "end of privacy," the technology era is unleashing new threats to democracy. The challenge cuts across all fields, but its effect is perhaps most pronounced and best understood in the information and media space and in the political process, where tools such as big data, artificial intelligence, and algorithms that determine what you read or watch - and that influence whom you vote for - are increasingly dominant.

Authoritarian regimes and rising illiberal powers understand the power of modern technology, and they have already used it to great effect to manipulate the information space, to sow popular distrust in democracy, to divide publics, and to challenge shared notions of truth. They are building a more repressive architecture for the Internet and improving methods of surveillance and censorship. A comprehensive response to this threat should include initiatives to expose the dangers of authoritarian manipulation of political processes and information; to strengthen open-source research and data journalism that reveal corruption and abuses; to protect Internet freedom at the country and global levels; to adopt the most advanced anti-censorship and anti-surveillance technologies; to strengthen digital-security support networks; and to increase work at the global level to influence the policies of Internet governance bodies and corporations. It will be critical to ensure that the constantly evolving digital public sphere is governed by democratic norms.

While authoritarian regimes are trying to use the Internet to subvert and defeat democracy, the same information and technology arena also provides potent resources for democrats, enabling them to investigate abuses, counter illiberal narratives, and inform and organize citizens through emerging forms of independent online media. Independent media outlets and watchdog groups may have limited resources compared to the state-directed mass media and surveillance tools of the autocrats, but the technology revolution is strengthening their voice and impact. For example, videos and other interactive materials on the social media pages of some news portals already compete with state television in Russia and other countries. Activist accountability platforms that monitor public spending and analyze accessible

government data have exposed significant abuses and led to international sanctions against culpable regimes and hundreds of legal cases against corrupt officials. NED-supported analytical centers are at the forefront of using tech tools to track, expose, and counter the purveyors of fake news. Human-rights organizations employ social media to track arrests and provide legal assistance rapidly during mass detentions, as well as to maintain databases of abuses that are used to hold perpetrators accountable. In brief, technology offers a means for underdog civil-society groups to effectively challenge imperious regimes and repressive state institutions. NED's support for such groups will be critical in the period ahead.

#### MEETING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

While each of these six challenges is significant in its own right, they are also inter-related and reinforce one another. The liberalization of authoritarian countries opens the way to democratic transitions, and NED will be in a much better position to respond rapidly when a breakthrough occurs if it is already engaged in supporting human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, and others fighting for an end to autocratic rule. In addition, if such transitions succeed, this will refute Beijing's message that authoritarianism is the best path to development and stability, strengthen the positive image of democracy, and counter the international influence of authoritarian sharp-power and disinformation activities. Efforts to reverse authoritarian momentum will be aided by greater cooperation among democracies in defending democratic norms and values, which in turn will also bolster the politics of pluralism in the world and weaken the influence of illiberal movements and parties. Not least, all of these goals will be advanced by recognizing that technology has become a critical sphere of contestation between democracy and authoritarianism, and by empowering NED grantees and partners to harness technology to restore trust in democratic values, processes, and ideas.

We have entered a period in which we will have to find new ways to address complex threats and opportunities in an increasingly inter-connected and transnational world. Over the past four years, NED has brought together in a focused way, under the heading "Strategic Threats Facing Democracy Abroad," its four core institutes and grantees from around the world to address critical strategic problems. This work has laid a foundation for NED to use new resources to scale up and deepen the collaboration that has already taken place.

To meet the new challenges, NED will need to work deliberately and proactively to connect across different regions and sectors the best and most innovative groups, those that are at the cutting edge of democratic struggle today. It should draw them into a common discussion about how to respond to the new threats they face from authoritarian regimes that are themselves collaborating to increase their power and subvert democracy. NED partners will also need to discuss how to take advantage of the new possibilities that now exist to promote the process of democratic transition in many countries. The goal will be to accelerate learning on how to tackle the most difficult problems and to amplify the impact of all NED programs, thereby helping democrats counter repressive and unaccountable regimes and build democratic institutions after their downfall.

Collaborative efforts to address strategic challenges must be linked to NED's overall grants program to ensure that these efforts are rooted in the struggles taking place on the ground in frontline countries.

**Towards this end, NED will established a new Strategic Cooperation Fund to build on strategic initiatives already undertaken, such as countering kleptocracy and disinformation, and to incorporate new priorities and initiatives for collaborative engagement.** This will be an on-going process, subject to regular evaluation and modification, that will strengthen NED’s ability to meet the evolving challenges to democracy in a rapidly changing political and social environment.

One of the most memorable passages in Reagan’s Westminster Address emphasized the centrality of defending democratic values in promoting democracy. “Our military strength is a prerequisite to peace,” Reagan said, “but let it be clear we maintain this strength in the hope it will never be used, for the ultimate determinant in the struggle that’s now going on in the world will not be bombs and rockets, but a test of wills and ideas, a trial of spiritual resolve, the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish, the ideals to which we are dedicated.”

Many people believe that this competition did not survive the collapse of the Soviet Union, which brought an end to the Cold War. But the ideological struggle between liberal democracy and authoritarianism did not begin with the Cold War, nor did it end with the collapse of communism. The United States was seen as a champion of liberal values and an opponent of authoritarianism from the moment it rebelled against Great Britain in 1776. It was a beacon of hope for 19th Century European liberals, and it has continued to represent liberal values even after the fall of communism, as people fighting against the world’s many remaining authoritarian regimes have looked to this country for political support and moral solidarity.

The recent global backlash against liberal democracy underlines the continuing importance of NED’s work to the future of freedom in the world and to the security of our country. While democracy faces greater dangers than at any time since NED was established more than three decades ago, its continuing resilience shows that these dangers can be addressed and overcome.

The world has reached a fateful juncture. The retreat of democracy and advance of authoritarianism could lead to a new era of turmoil and tyranny. But democratic renewal is also possible, though it is hard to see how that can happen without the recovery of political will, purpose, and self-confidence in the world’s leading democracies. NED cannot single-handedly determine the outcome of the historic contest that is underway between democracy and authoritarianism, but it can influence the course of events by empowering frontline democrats and amplifying their voice and impact. This is NED’s mission – supporting the universal aspiration for freedom that both advances America’s national interest and fulfills its highest political ideals. Never has this mission been more important than it is today.