



## Defining Global Challenges to Democracy

In recent years, a seismic shift has occurred in global politics. Alongside the acceleration of globalization, new systemic challenges to democracy have emerged. Authoritarian powers have become more repressive at home and emboldened abroad, while the safeguards in many democratic systems that ensure routine transfers of power and the protection of civil and political rights have been challenged.

A number of complex, pervasive global trends are influencing these alarming trajectories. Rapid digital advances together with growing economic interdependence are fueling cross-border exchange, expanding access to information, and putting new tools in the hands of civil society. Yet these developments are also destabilizing democratic political systems and, increasingly, presenting new opportunities for authoritarian regimes—which have proven adept at exploiting transnational flows of money, information, and technological know-how to their advantage.

Over the past decade especially, major changes in the information and technology landscape have fundamentally altered how public opinion takes shape and how power is exercised. Authoritarian powers are deeply engaged in a global struggle over ideas. Digital media platforms have facilitated the spread of false and polarizing content, including authoritarian influence campaigns, at an unprecedented speed and scale. Advanced surveillance tools have enabled autocrats to cultivate new forms of repression at home and export them globally. Internationalized strategic corruption has grown as a vector for corrosive authoritarian influence in every corner of the globe. Finally, authoritarians are exploiting their growing leverage across these domains to corrode democratic institutions from within and shift global norms in autocracy's favor.

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As these trends accelerate, societies of all types must adapt. They face the need to develop local responses to powerful, globally driven challenges. For democracies, safeguarding core principles in this demanding context requires new forms of collaboration and innovation. To meet emerging challenges, responses must work across sectors and span multiple fronts, including efforts to leverage critical technologies in favor of democracy. This includes ensuring that democratic activists have access to the latest tools to work more safely and effectively, as well as to learning that will help keep them ahead of constantly evolving threats.

At the same time, sustained protests in repressive countries around the world remind us of the potential for positive change. Political ferment in a diverse range of closed countries suggest the inherent brittleness and fragility of systems that operate on the basis of unchecked power. Autocracies view criticism and competition as existential threats. Any crack in their dominance would expose incumbent elites to accountability for decades of accumulated abuses. It is therefore essential to support local actors who have a positive vision for their societies.

The accompanying four papers highlight emerging global challenges to democracy—relating to the integrity of the information space, transnational kleptocracy, emerging technology, and global authoritarian influence. They do not aim to provide sweeping or comprehensive recommendations, but instead offer succinct overviews of these complex and interrelated challenges, highlight the current state of play on each of them, and put forward key principles for effective response.

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