



Democracy Needs to be Strengthened and Defended

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Democracy is under pressure worldwide from the outside and from within. Democracy's decline is destabilizing societies and the global order. It is high time we stepped up our efforts to make it stronger and to defend it against its enemies.

According to Freedom House, the global balance in 2020 has been shifting further "in favour of tyranny". For the 15th consecutive year, they have noted an overall decline in global freedom. In the 2020 edition of its democracy index, The Economist Intelligence Unit recorded the worst state since the index was first published in 2006. V-Dem, another leading research project, reported that in the previous year, autocratisation accelerated and "turned viral". They say that the level of democracy enjoyed by the average global citizen is down to that of around 1990.

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Democracy is a human right and there are no human rights without democracy. It is the best system known so far that can make sure that government is responsive, inclusive, accountable and responsible in the best interest of all. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights points out, everyone has the right to take part in the government, directly or through freely chosen representatives and the authority of governments needs to be based on the will of the people that is expressed in periodic and genuine elections.

Democracy is a universal human aspiration. Surveys indicate that large majorities of people in all world regions continue to believe in democracy. However, there is strong dissatisfaction with how it operates in practice. Governments are perceived to be failing to address major issues such as corruption, inequality, the needs of ordinary people or the threat of global warming.

A club of democracies could help identify common challenges and solutions. As many issues have a cross-border dimension, a transnational perspective is vital. An honest assessment of how to reinvigorate and defend democracy cannot be made by diplomats and political leaders alone. Such a club should include a network of civil society organizations and host a network of parliamentarians from pro-democratic parties.

The club should also consider convening a transnational citizens' assembly to produce recommendations on how to strengthen democracy. At the national level, there are good examples to draw upon.

Turning outwards, the club should be a platform not only for coordinating democracy promotion but also for common value-based policies, including joint smart sanctions against gross human rights abusers. The group should coordinate a UN democracy caucus to push back against authoritarian influence in the world organization.

Finally, as globalisation increases the need for global coordination and decision-making, democracy needs to be expanded to global institutions too. Leading proposals include a UN Parliamentary Assembly, the instrument of a UN World Citizens' Initiative and the creation of a UN Civil Society Envoy. Ultimately, a club of democracies will only be credible if it helps promote democracy at this level as well.

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