

JULY 2020

# The Sunnylands Principles on Enhancing Democratic Partnership in the Indo- Pacific Region

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## WITH A SCOPING PAPER BY:

Michael J. Green  
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## PROJECT COORDINATOR

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A Report of the CSIS Asia Program and Human Rights Initiative

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# Foreword

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) partnered with the National Endowment for Democracy and the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands to convene leading thinkers on democracy from across the Indo-Pacific for a discussion of strategies to advance democratic governance and human rights in the region. Over three days of intense discussions at Sunnylands and subsequent exchanges over email, the participants developed the statement of principles below. In the months after the group first met at Sunnylands, the Covid-19 pandemic elevated the international debate about the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models. Authoritarian regimes, including China, have criticized democracies for ineffective responses to this crisis and championed curbs on civil and political rights in the name of public health and social order more broadly. Democracies in the Indo-Pacific region are grappling with these questions but have also proved capable of combating the virus without abandoning core pillars of democratic governance that support successful, coherent, and resilient societies. Indeed, some of the most successful responses to the pandemic in the region have come from democracies such as South Korea, Taiwan, and New Zealand. The statement of principles below presents a vision for broad regional cooperation to advance the democratic governance norms that are essential for a more stable, prosperous, just, and healthy region and world in the years to come.

**John J. Hamre**

President and CEO, and Langone Chair in American Leadership

CSIS

# The Sunnylands Principles on Enhancing Democratic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific Region

We the undersigned assembled at Sunnylands, the historic Annenberg estate in Rancho Mirage, California, from January 23-25, 2020, and achieved consensus on the following vision for regional cooperation to advance democratic governance norms in the Indo-Pacific based on the broad and diverse national experiences each of us represents:

## *Why Cooperation on Democracy Matters*

**Democracy is critical to the enjoyment of rights.** Every person has an inherent right to freedom and a responsive and accountable government. In the words of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Human Rights, all persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights. All people have a right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; a right to freedom of opinion and expression; and a right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association to promote their individual and collective interests. Democracy—or transparent, accountable, inclusive governance under rule of law—is the political system that best protects individual dignity and rights, promotes public health and education, and thus advances national stability, security, and development.

**Democracy works.** Democratic societies have proved to be more stable in the long term and responsive to their citizens. Inclusivity and respect for rights help resolve conflicts peacefully and enhance resilience. Free and fair elections enable the peaceful transfer of power and the formation of legitimate governments. Transparent and accountable governance prevents corruption, enables countries and their people to choose their own path, and leads to a stronger, more equitable, and more inclusive economy for all. There is a strong correlation between robust democracies and the better delivery of economic development, public health, and quality education.

**Democratic norms are widespread.** Despite assertions by some leaders that the authoritarian model is the future, citizens around the world—including in Asia—continue to demand political societies that are open, free, transparent, accountable, and inclusive and offer them a voice in governance. More people are living in



democracies than at any other moment in history. Since 1945, Asia has democratized in successive waves that demonstrate both the diversity and vitality of democratic societies around the world. The Indo-Pacific is the only region to show overall improvements in freedom despite global declines over the last decade. Indeed, more people in the Indo-Pacific live in democracies than under any other form of governance. Key regional agreements, such as the ASEAN Charter, emphasize adherence to the principles of democracy, rule of law, and good governance and respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**Democracy faces challenges.** Nevertheless, democratic governance is under strain in Asia, as it is in much of the world, from challenges such as: the rise of populism and political polarization; misinformation campaigns and the use of corruption for elite capture; inconsistent messages and lack of cohesion among democracies; new capacities for government surveillance; geopolitical pressures on states in the region from great power competition; declining press freedom and closing civil society space in many parts of the region; and inequality. It is therefore critical to establish a broad and inclusive partnership and vision to advance democratic governance in the Indo-Pacific.

### *A Diverse and Inclusive Plan for Action*

**1. Recognize that democracy is diverse.** This vision for democratic partnership in the region seeks to ensure that independent states—large and small—have equal rights and capacity to protect their sovereign interests as their population sees fit. It does not lay out a monolithic view of democracy, relying instead on local ownership and vision. It seeks to support the broad principles that people should have a say in how they are governed and enjoy basic liberties. It envisions that government should be accountable to its people through free and fair elections and appropriate transparency and oversight, deliver public goods impartially, be transparent in its actions, be inclusive of all citizens, and protect and advance basic values of human dignity. Responsive governance depends on the participation and ownership of a diverse set of stakeholders. Business, labor, academic institutions, civil society, women, journalists, political parties, politicians, and religious organizations all have a stake in effective, accountable, responsive, and inclusive governance. Advancing democracy in the region will require all these stakeholders to play their part.

**2. Actively support democracy at home and in the neighborhood.** Each democracy in the Indo-Pacific is already supporting democratic development and culture at home and in their region in unique and significant ways. States should coordinate to ensure a comprehensive approach that includes the diverse actors and mechanisms needed to advance responsive and accountable governance. Democracies should support cross-border learning among different peoples and groups in the region. This includes civil society and journalists engaging with each other across borders as well as governments convening regularly to learn from each other's experiences supporting democratic development. There is an opportunity to build on and coordinate existing efforts and explore new tools to support accountable government and an engaged citizenry.

- 3. Adopt a holistic approach.** Support for democratization should be integrated into all aspects of interstate relations, including diplomacy, defense, economic policy, development cooperation, and trade ties. This means ensuring that these forms of engagement and assistance are designed to foster accountability and citizen engagement in governance and diminish corruption. Such engagement should focus on building capacity, driven by local conditions and requirements and responsive to local sentiment.
- 4. Engage multilateral bodies.** Democratic states should develop a common, coordinated agenda to advance these principles as a priority in the various regional groupings in the Indo-Pacific, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN, recognizing that the region's multilateral architecture is eclectic and not monolithic. Governments in the region must fulfill existing commitments under institutional frameworks such as the United Nations and ASEAN to advance democratic governance and explore new ways to contribute to the purposeful advancement of democratic norms. Democratic states should also explore the possibility of establishing new mechanisms for cooperation among democracies in the Indo-Pacific.
- 5. Promote equitable and inclusive growth.** Democracies in the region should commit more funding to programming that supports democratic dividends to societies and economies. More equitable and inclusive growth, combined with accountable, responsive government, will demonstrate the dividends of democracy. Economic and development cooperation, including infrastructure development and trade agreements, should prioritize these goals.
- 6. Use inclusive approaches and involve women.** Studies demonstrate that inclusive and accountable conflict resolution initiatives, particularly involving women, prove far more enduring. Regional governments should ensure that interstate and subnational peacebuilding is built upon this principle. People-oriented and gender-responsive development programs aimed at poverty alleviation, combined with women's empowerment and political participation, enable long-term stability and economic growth, particularly when they are inclusive of diverse and marginalized groups and women.
- 7. Engage youth.** The Indo-Pacific has some of the oldest and youngest societies in the world, but polling shows that youth across the region remain strong supporters of democratic norms. Assistance in the region should specifically invest in and empower young people to participate in political and civic life and demonstrate that democracy values all voices, improves lives, and prepares people for the future.
- 8. Work with the private sector.** The private sector has a critical role to play in supporting a democratic culture by respecting rights as outlined in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, avoiding corruption, embodying transparency in its everyday operations, and ensuring public participation and input in public-private partnerships. The business community benefits from a level playing field, rule of law, and predictability, which require respect for rights and accountability.
- 9. Prioritize technology governance.** The future of open, free, and accountable societies will depend on effective responses to emerging technology. Governance should

enhance technology's capacity to support free expression and pluralism. Development cooperation and economic policy should focus on diminishing the digital divide. At the same time, urgent support for digital literacy across the region will be vital to develop an informed citizenry that is resilient to misinformation and disinformation, enhancing independent, democratic, pluralistic, and peaceful societies. Shared principles to limit the potentially oppressive capabilities of new surveillance technology will also help maintain and secure free peoples and free societies.

**10. Support an independent media.** An independent media is a prerequisite for transparent and accountable governance and helps uncover corruption and foreign interference.

The basis for all these diverse and inclusive efforts should always remain the promotion of human dignity. We are optimistic about the future of democracy in the Indo-Pacific region, but old challenges remain and new ones have arisen. Diverse approaches to advancing democracy must be more consciously aligned to build momentum that achieves the region's vision for open, free, transparent, accountable, inclusive, and prosperous societies.

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# Background and Scoping Paper

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## Context

The global Covid-19 pandemic has elevated an ongoing debate about the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models at the national level. Authoritarian regimes, including China, have levied harsh criticism of how some democratic governments have handled Covid-19 and claimed that strict authoritarianism performs better in combating pandemics. For example, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi has stated that “only in China and only under the leadership of President Xi can there be such effective measures to put this sudden and fast-spreading epidemic under control.”<sup>2</sup> Disinformation and propaganda campaigns by China and Russia have accompanied these triumphant statements, often with the specific aim of discrediting democratic governance.<sup>3</sup>

Democracies themselves face fundamental questions about the balance of civil and political rights and effective responses to a pandemic. A number of democracies have employed mass surveillance measures, such as cameras, location tracking via mobile phones, and credit card monitoring, to ensure public compliance with social distancing policies and trace virus transmission chains.<sup>4</sup> Others appear to have exploited the crisis to consolidate control in less-than-democratic manners, including South Africa, Hungary, Bolivia, and India, which have limited press freedoms regarding reporting on the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> While governments are still determining the optimal balance between

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1. The authors wish to acknowledge the important research conducted for this scoping paper and exercise by John Seymour of Georgetown University, who served as an intern in support of the project at CSIS.

2. “Transcript of State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s Exclusive Interview with Reuters,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, February 15, 2020, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1745264.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1745264.shtml).

3. Peter Rough, “How China is Exploiting the Coronavirus to Weaken Democracies,” *Foreign Policy*, March 25, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/25/china-coronavirus-propaganda-weakens-western-democracies/>.

4. Choe Sang-Hun and Natasha Singer, “As Coronavirus Surveillance Escalates, Personal Privacy Plumets,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/technology/coronavirus-surveillance-tracking-privacy.html>.

5. Jackson Diehl, “The pandemic is killing truth, too,” *Washington Post*, April 12, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/truth-is-the-first-casualty-in-war-including-this-one/2020/04/12/44c5ea44-7a88-11ea-b6ff-597f170df8f8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/truth-is-the-first-casualty-in-war-including-this-one/2020/04/12/44c5ea44-7a88-11ea-b6ff-597f170df8f8_story.html). See also “COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker,” International Center for Not-for-profit Law, <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/> for a complete list of the measures governments have taken to combat Covid-19

data collection and personal privacy in countering Covid-19, these policies can be used to make the argument that it is necessary to limit political and civil rights to effectively combat pandemics.

However, this pro-authoritarian narrative ignores both the historical record and current examples of how democracies have effectively responded to pandemics. Data from the International Disaster Database, maintained by the Catholic University at Louvain, show that democracies have outperformed non-democracies in preventing deaths from pandemics since 1960.<sup>6</sup> In addition, South Korea and Taiwan have demonstrated that in the Indo-Pacific region the most successful containment measures in the context of Covid-19 have been implemented by democracies.<sup>7</sup> It is true that these countries are employing technology and tracking in manners that could impinge on certain civil and political rights, but such actions are permissible in a true health emergency so long as they are genuinely aimed at combating the health emergency and are proportionate, timebound, and lawful.<sup>8</sup> This is a standard that democracies are much more likely to meet due to societal pressure and scrutiny. Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic has reminded the world how important democratic and accountable governance and transparent and accurate information are to the success and resilience of states and societies.

The current debate around Covid-19 takes place against the backdrop of growing assaults on democracy around the world. The rise of illiberal governance, attacks on civil society and journalists, and the use of technology as a means of social control are just a few of the trends that have tested the resiliency of democratic states and support for fundamental freedoms that are foundational to the liberal democratic order. These trends have been exacerbated by the increasing ideological flavor of great power competition which has incentivized Chinese and Russian support for illiberal regimes and the use of social media strategies to discredit the efficacy of democratic norms in open societies.

Yet at the same time, there is also evidence of sustained popular support for democratic governance and a broad understanding that robust democracy enhances national security and economic prosperity. Popular protests in Hong Kong and Iran and the defiant rejection of Chinese interference in Taiwan's January 2020 election all demonstrate the universal buoyancy of the human desire for liberty and accountability.

In many respects, the Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the epicenter of this new debate over how states should be organized. No other region has seen more sustained expansion of democracy over the past seven decades. In 1945, the only liberal democracies across the Pacific were Australia and New Zealand. However, successive democratic waves in the 1980s and 1990s—in most cases generated internally but often supported externally by the United States and other democracies—have meant that all the most successful and

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that may in some cases impinge on human rights.

6. "Diseases like COVID-19 are deadlier in non-democracies," *Economist*, February 18, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2020/02/18/diseases-like-covid-19-are-deadlier-in-non-democracies>.

7. Audrey Wilson, "The Countries That Are Succeeding at Flattening the Curve," *Foreign Policy*, April 2, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/02/countries-succeeding-flattening-curve-coronavirus-testing-quarantine/>.

8. Institute for Human Rights & Business, *Respecting Human Rights in the time of the Covid-19 Pandemic* (Eastbourne, UK: 2020), [https://www.ihrb.org/uploads/reports/Respecting\\_Human\\_Rights\\_in\\_the\\_Time\\_of\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_Pandemic\\_alternate\\_-\\_IHRB.pdf](https://www.ihrb.org/uploads/reports/Respecting_Human_Rights_in_the_Time_of_the_COVID-19_Pandemic_alternate_-_IHRB.pdf).



influential powers in the region other than China and Russia are now democratic. The track record in Asia shows that only rule-of-law societies that protect independent media, human rights, and non-corrupt institutions have graduated to high-income status.

There are efforts to portray the region as a bipolar system divided between the United States and China.<sup>9</sup> This overly simplistic framing of the ideational competition in the region obscures democratic evolution over the past seven decades. Perhaps Xi Jinping's China is attempting to distract its own citizens so that they do not call for greater liberties that other states such as South Korea or Taiwan provided when transitioning to high-income status (China's per capita GDP is still only \$10,000 per year). China's narrative also seeks to juxtapose what it terms "Asian values" against the "democratic values" of the United States in an effort to accelerate American acceptance of a bipolar condominium (represented by Xi's proposal for a "New Model of Great Power Relations") and eventually Sino-centrism (represented in Xi's April 2014 Shanghai speech calling for Asians to settle regional affairs on their own).

This effort to envisage and drive toward a bipolar Indo-Pacific region is mistaken, ignoring that the Indo-Pacific is increasingly *multipolar*. The success of India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, or the Philippines as democracies with their own unique character would be the best antidote to narratives about new cold wars and the ideological legitimacy of Asian values versus universal, globally accepted norms. Yet the economic and sharp-power tools employed by Beijing, the continuing appeal of non-interference in internal affairs in South and Southeast Asia, and the governance challenges faced by much of developing Asia present significant challenges. The ongoing success of the region's existing democracies may not be sufficient on its own to reinforce stability and prosperity going forward.

In this context, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) partnered with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands to convene leading thinkers on democracy from across the United States and the Indo-Pacific at the Annenberg Estate in January 2020 in order to explore whether the region's leading democracies are ready to introduce a more deliberate strategy to support democratic unity—one that adheres to universal norms while reflecting unique national experiences; that deprives China and other authoritarian regimes of the alibi of Asian exceptionalism while encouraging deeper reflection on the economic benefits of openness; that harnesses the potential for rising regional powers to contribute to civil society building while respecting their neighbors' sovereignty; that provides a common defense against interference in elections; and that sets higher expectations for the region as a whole with respect not only to democratic governance but also the protection of human rights, with the understanding that this supports stability and economic growth in the long term.

This paper assesses global and regional trend lines and offers more detailed observations on the implications of the consensus document from our dialogue: *The Sunnylands Principles on Enhancing Democratic Partnership in the Indo-Pacific Region*.<sup>10</sup> The paper

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9. Minghao Zhao, "Is a New Cold War Inevitable? Chinese Perspectives on US-China Strategic Competition," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12, no. 3, (August 2019), 371-394, doi:10.1093/cjip/poz010.

10. The dialogue was held before the World Health Organization designated Covid-19 as a global pandemic.

reflects the analysis and recommendations of CSIS scholars based on the collaborative discussion and joint set of principles produced with the NED, Sunnylands, and the other participants. As a CSIS product, the paper does not necessarily reflect the positions or opinions of those other partners and participants, although it benefited from their insights and wisdom. The paper begins with global trend lines, considers regional dynamics within the Indo-Pacific, and concludes with recommendations for policymakers to consider.

## *Global Trend Lines*

Electoral democracy is enjoyed today by more people than at any other time in history.<sup>11</sup> Yet the headlines are filled with gloom about democracy's prospects. Indeed, democracy has faced declines in recent years in numbers and quality. The measured view is that democracy faces a challenge across the globe, but a sustained effort to support it can prevent further inroads.

Definitions of democracy vary. While it is not necessary for our purposes to have a precise definition, we consider a fully functional democracy to encompass free and fair elections as well as the enjoyment of political and civil rights (such as freedom of expression and assembly) that help shore up those electoral systems and the proper functioning of government. Democracy is of course not an on-off switch, and different countries considered democracies evince these qualities to varying degrees.

The precise decline in democracy—in numbers and quality—is disputed, but it is generally agreed there has been at least some decline. While the overall losses are minimal compared to the gains of the late-twentieth century, democracy is consistently declining.<sup>12</sup> Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* report indicates that democracy has declined globally for 13 consecutive years.<sup>13</sup> According to Freedom House, the average score for every region except the Asia-Pacific was lower in 2018 than 2005.<sup>14</sup> Even the Asia-Pacific declined when countries with less than one million people—mostly small Pacific Island countries—are excluded.<sup>15</sup> These trends affect an array of democracies. For example, the United States and several European countries—considered “consolidated democracies”—have been backsliding.<sup>16</sup> Africa, the Americas, and the Middle East also have been in decline.<sup>17</sup>

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11. Scott Mainwaring and Fernando Bizzarro, “The Fates of Third-Wave Democracies,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 1 (January 2019): 110, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-fates-of-third-wave-democracies/>.

12. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2019* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2019), [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019\\_FH\\_FITW\\_2019\\_Report\\_ForWeb-compressed.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf).

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Danger of Deconsolidation: The Democratic Disconnect,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (July 2016): 15-16, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-danger-of-deconsolidation-the-democratic-disconnect/>. On backsliding, for example, leaders have weakened key institutions supporting accountability and political rights, such as independent courts, in Poland and Hungary.

17. Of 49 sub-Saharan African states, 29 have declined in freedom, with only 15 countries improving. Larry Diamond, “Facing up to the Democratic Recession,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (January 2015), [https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/ld\\_jod\\_jan2015-1.pdf](https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/ld_jod_jan2015-1.pdf). The Americas has seen a decline in its democracy score over the same time frame, especially as it pertains to Associational and Organizational Rights and electoral process. The MENA region has been experiencing an overall steady decline in its democracy rating over the last 13 years, especially as it pertains to freedom of expression and belief, functioning of government, personal autonomy and individual rights, although its

Attitudes toward democracy are in flux, with substantial differences depending on the region and age group. In the United States and Europe, confidence in and support for democracy and democratic institutions is on the decline, particularly among youth and the rich.<sup>18</sup> In 1995, 1 in 16 Americans believed that military rule would be a “good” or “very good” thing; as of 2016, one in six agreed.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, in other parts of the world such as Asia, support for democracy is strong. Indeed, it has increased in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.<sup>20</sup>

The Center for Systemic Peace’s Polity IV data set, which analyzes and codes how political authority is gained and used in every independent state with a population of 500,000 or more (167 countries), indicates that as of the end of 2017, 57 percent of countries were democracies of some kind, 13 percent were autocracies, and 28 percent exhibited elements of both democracy and autocracy.<sup>21</sup> Though a 2018 Pew Research Center poll found increased dissatisfaction with the way democracy is functioning around the world, majorities in six of the seven Indo-Pacific countries surveyed expressed satisfaction with democratic governance in their countries. (The outliers were the United States and Japan, where 58 percent and 56 percent were dissatisfied, respectively.<sup>22</sup>) Nonetheless, the trend lines favor increasingly critical views of democracy and a pattern of democratic decline that is destabilizing the international order.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) defines democratic backsliding as “a change in a combination of competitive electoral procedures, civil and political liberties, and accountability,” and the process takes various forms.<sup>23</sup> In a common pattern, populists who gain office through free and fair elections use their new powers to undermine and control government institutions until the electoral playing field is badly stacked against their rivals and the courts and press have lost their independence.<sup>24</sup> Hungary is an example of this pattern. Another pattern involves constitutional changes to term limits carried out through democratic means but which help leaders consolidate power and erode democratic institutions over time. This has been the playbook in several African and Latin American countries. Later, in both patterns, the state may control access to basic goods such as food, as seen in Venezuela, or jail and oppress opponents at scale, which helps further consolidate control.

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electoral process has improved. Freedom House, *Freedom in The World* 2019.

18. Foa and Mounk, “The Danger of Deconsolidation,” 6, 13. They note, among other statistics, that 20 percent of Americans born in the 1970s believed democracy was a “bad” political system for their country, as of 2015. *Ibid.*, 8. Younger Americans and Europeans also showed a lower level of belief that free and fair elections were necessary for a democracy.

19. *Ibid.*, 12.

20. Thomas Carothers, *Democracy Support Strategies: Leading with Women’s Political Empowerment* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2016), [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Carothers\\_Empowerment\\_Final.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Carothers_Empowerment_Final.pdf).

21. “Despite Global Concerns about Democracy, More than Half of Countries are Democratic,” Pew Research Center, May 4, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/14/more-than-half-of-countries-are-democratic/>.

22. “Twelve Countries where People are Most Dissatisfied with How Democracy is Working,” Pew Research Center, May 31, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/05/31/the-countries-where-people-are-most-dissatisfied-with-how-democracy-is-working/>.

23. Ellen Lust and David Waldner, *Unwelcome Change: Understanding, Evaluating, and Extending Theories of Democratic Backsliding* (Washington, DC: USAID, June 2015), [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PBAAD635.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAD635.pdf).

24. Diamond, “Facing up to the Democratic Recession.”

Concerted attacks on civil society also diminish democracy and are increasingly prevalent around the globe. The attacks are both overt and covert. Most obviously, civil society actors are being killed and jailed in increasing numbers, and emerging technology enables ever-increasing, cheap surveillance. More subtly, foreign development and democracy aid is drying up in some countries due to laws labeling the recipients as “foreign agents” or heavily taxing such funds. Even laws supposedly intended to address terrorism or “fake speech” are sometimes in practice used to go after critics and political opponents by cutting off their funding or jailing them. These attacks silence critics and allow further democratic backsliding as well as the co-optation and corruption of state institutions with limited internal protest. Successful responses to closing civic space in backsliding regimes empower local actors to develop counter-narratives with the support of international partners, though these efforts are often hampered by limited resources.<sup>25</sup>

The use of technology to enable and support authoritarian governance poses a new and grave threat to democracy. “Digital authoritarianism”—employing tools such as surveillance, facial recognition technology, internet shutdowns, and influence operations on social media—has supported a tilt toward illiberalism around the globe that takes direct aim at fundamental freedoms undergirding the liberal democratic order.<sup>26</sup> Massive data sets combed from social media, combined with facial and gait recognition, will lead to unparalleled opportunities to surveil populations at a diminished price tag. Absent rules and norms to govern the use of emerging technologies, the digital space could soon become an arena for social control rather than a conduit for promoting human rights and other democratic values.

Despite these and other factors that could explain this trend in democratic backsliding, there is cause for optimism about the resilience of democratic societies. Support for authoritarianism may be growing, but it is weak. What people appear to want is rule of law, accountability, and a reduction in corruption.<sup>27</sup> Larry Diamond argues that a lack of accountability enables leaders to hollow out democratic institutions.<sup>28</sup> Relatedly, over time, when supposedly democratic systems fail to respond to popular demands due to corruption and lack of accountability, this can erode confidence in democracy.<sup>29</sup> But the odds of a democratic breakdown diminish when a state economy is in better condition and when a country is in a democratic neighborhood.<sup>30</sup> U.S. and European efforts to advance democracy around the world may be weaker for the moment, but other regions of the world can lead, and such efforts may indeed have more legitimacy when countries act to support democracy in their own regions.

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25. Fabian Hetz and Annika Elena Pope, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives* (Washington, DC: CSIS, October 2018), [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181219\\_RespondingClosingCivicSpace\\_layout\\_v2.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181219_RespondingClosingCivicSpace_layout_v2.pdf).

26. Freedom House, *Freedom of the Net 2019: The Crisis of Social Media* (Washington, DC: 2019), [https://www.freedomofthenet.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019\\_Report\\_FH\\_FOTN\\_2019\\_final\\_Public\\_Download.pdf](https://www.freedomofthenet.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019_Report_FH_FOTN_2019_final_Public_Download.pdf).

27. Carothers, *Democracy Support Strategies*; Diamond, “Facing up to the Democratic Recession,” 153–154.

28. Diamond, “Facing up to the Democratic Recession,” 149.

29. Transparency International, *How Corruption Weakens Democracy* (Berlin, Germany: 2019) <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2018-global-analysis>.

30. Mainwaring and Bizzarro, “The Fates of Third-Wave Democracies,” 100, 110.

Doubling down on support for rule of law and transparency, sustained efforts to address corruption, and support for civil society can also help populations enjoy the benefits that a democratic system is supposed to provide. Furthermore, supporting strategies for sustainable economic growth undergirded by the principles of accountability and transparency can strengthen the foundation of democracy.

The combination of these efforts constitute a recipe for resilience and democratic unity critical to the future development of the world's most dynamic region: the Indo-Pacific. Countries in the region want to be empowered, but that depends fundamentally on the rule of law, good governance, a free press, economic opportunity, and strong civil society—the foundations of resilience that democratic norms provide.

## *The Indo-Pacific Region*

There are signs of a sustained commitment to democratic governance among elites in the Indo-Pacific region. In a recent survey, 53 percent of regional experts in Southeast Asian countries listed domestic political instability as the greatest national security concern facing the region, a phenomenon that is much more prevalent in autocratic states.<sup>31</sup> A similar survey of 11 Indo-Pacific economies by CSIS published in 2014 found robust support for the principles of good governance, human rights, free and fair elections, and women's empowerment in almost every country's national perspective on the future of Asian integration.<sup>32</sup> But the survey also revealed that powerful emerging actors such as India, Singapore, and Thailand, while identifying strongly with democratic norms, aligned with Chinese elites with respect to the importance of the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Thus, while the opportunity for democratic unity in the Indo-Pacific is clear, it is important to understand evolving national perspectives on governance and ascertain how best to build patterns of cooperation that could broaden regional support for continued democratic transitions in Asia and advance more open societies.

It is also important to recognize that the strategic landscape in Asia is becoming more complex with the continued juxtaposition of power competition and increased economic cooperation as well as shifts in the ideational balance of power that appear to generate some uncertainty regarding the role of democracy promotion and democratic values in regional community building. Concerning trends are especially evident in Southeast Asia, where recent developments in Thailand (the 2014 coup d'état and subsequent restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of assembly), Myanmar (the military crackdown in Rakhine state and alleged genocide of Rohingya Muslims), Cambodia (laws allowing the government to ban political parties that threaten national unity), the Philippines (the recent conviction of journalist Maria Ressa for cyber-libel despite scant evidence to support the charges and human rights violations associated with President Duterte's

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31. Regional experts were defined as stakeholders from the policy, research, business, civil society, and media communities. Tang Siew Mun et al., *The State of Southeast Asia: 2019 Survey Report* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2019), [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEASurveyReport\\_2019.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/TheStateofSEASurveyReport_2019.pdf); and Elena Slinko et al., "Regime Type and Political Destabilization in Cross-National Perspective: A Re-Analysis," *Cross-Cultural Research* 51 (2017), doi:10.1177/1069397116676485.

32. Michael J. Green and Nicholas Szechenyi, *Power and Order in Asia: A Survey of Regional Expectations* (Washington, DC: CSIS, July 2014), [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/140605\\_Green\\_PowerandOrder\\_WEB.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/140605_Green_PowerandOrder_WEB.pdf).

drug war), and Indonesia (government efforts to ban social organizations that oppose official state ideology), appear to reveal varying degrees of democratic retreat. These developments are in stark contrast to long-standing efforts by countries such as Japan and South Korea to promote governance initiatives as central pillars of development assistance in the region and the establishment of regional mechanisms such as the Bali Democracy Forum that were designed to facilitate intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation on developing democratic practices in the Indo-Pacific.

There could be several obstacles to promoting democratic unity in the region, such as adherence to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs or fear of jeopardizing economic ties with China. Another contributing factor could be inconsistent leadership from the United States. In the 2014 CSIS survey, Americans ranked at or near the bottom of surveyed countries in the priority they placed on democratic norms for regional community building. Initiatives such as the Asia-Pacific Democracy Partnership of 2008 or the more recent Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative indicate U.S. support for such norms, but recent surveys of elite opinion in the region reveal profound concerns about episodic engagement that could erode confidence in America's leadership credentials.<sup>33</sup>

Doubts about the sustainability of U.S. engagement, the relative decline in multilateral efforts at coordinating norms for good governance, and the overlay of strategic competition between China and the United States necessitate dialogue on ways to reinvigorate support for principles of democratic governance across the region. Inconsistencies in U.S. leadership notwithstanding, the trajectory for revitalizing the role of democracy promotion in U.S. strategy is encouraging. Democracy promotion strategies are focused increasingly on women's empowerment as central to the quality and integrity of democratic practice and governance.<sup>34</sup> "Playbooks" for reversing democratic backsliding have emerged with renewed emphasis on coordination between international stakeholders and local activists.<sup>35</sup> Prescriptions for revitalizing dialogue networks in the Indo-Pacific region understandably center on ASEAN but also favor outreach to new partners, including Mongolia and Taiwan.<sup>36</sup> The timing is ripe to capitalize on these dynamics and promote thoughtful exchanges with Indo-Pacific counterparts to explore new pathways toward democratic unity reflective of the region's diversity.

Indo-Pacific democracies have done much to advance democratic norms and values in the region. While definitions of "democracy support" vary from country to country, certain types of programming have found broad support among the region's democracies. For

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33. "Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative Fact Sheet," U.S. Department of State, November 3, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/indo-pacific-transparency-initiative/>. A majority of regional experts suggested U.S. engagement with the region has declined and expressed little or no confidence that the United States would "do the right thing" in contributing to global peace, prosperity, security, and governance. See Mun et al., *The State of Southeast Asia*.

34. Carothers, *Democracy Support Strategies*.

35. Amy K. Lehr, *A CSO Playbook to Reclaim Civic Space: Version 1.0, Human Rights Initiative* (Washington, DC: CSIS, December 2018), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/cso-playbook-reclaim-civic-space-version-10>. See also Norman Eisen, *The Democracy Playbook: Preventing and Reversing Democratic Backsliding* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, November 2019), [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Democracy-Playbook\\_Preventing-and-Reversing-Democratic-Backsliding.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Democracy-Playbook_Preventing-and-Reversing-Democratic-Backsliding.pdf).

36. Michael Fuchs, "How to Support Democracy and Human Rights in Asia," Center for American Progress, September 16, 2019, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/09/13122817/Democracy-and-Human-Rights-Asia-1.pdf>.



example, Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea, among other countries, conduct programs for improving governance through sharing best practices. However, regional democracies differ in their support for civil society organizations. While Australia and South Korea have built a focus on public-private partnerships with civil society in democracy support, other countries primarily work through other governments. Supporting best practices and governance is key, but wider support for civil society groups would best help build resilient and effective democracies in the Indo-Pacific.

## Examples of Democracy Support in the Indo-Pacific Region

Country	Government Support	Civil Society Support
<b>Australia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Effective governance” is one of six main priorities for Australia’s aid program run by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).</li> <li>Recent examples of government support programs include election assistance to Pacific Island Countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DFAT coordinates initiatives on good governance, justice, and conflict resolution with civil society organizations in Southeast Asia and Pacific Island Countries.</li> </ul>
<b>India</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India was the second-largest donor to the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) from 2005 to 2020.</li> <li>The India International Institute of Democracy &amp; Election Management conducts training programs on election best practices.</li> <li>India is a member of the Community of Democracies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>India’s support for civil society groups comes mostly through UNDEF, which sponsors programs on governance, human rights, and education throughout the Indo-Pacific.</li> </ul>
<b>Indonesia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indonesia hosts the Bali Democracy Forum (BDF), an annual intergovernmental forum on democracy development in Asia started in 2008.</li> <li>Indonesia implements governance assistance programs through the South-South and Triangle Cooperation (SSTC) initiative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD), an NGO established by the Indonesian government in 2008 to organize the BDF, also works with civil society groups in other Indo-Pacific countries on issues of governance.</li> <li>IPD hosts the Bali Civil Society and Media Forum and conducts visits with partner institutions in Southeast Asia.</li> </ul>
<b>Japan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provides judicial support through training programs and legal guidance and builds state administrative functions through training programs, financial support, and staff exchange.</li> <li>Recent examples include support for judicial system reform in Vietnam and providing Official Development Assistance (ODA) to strengthen legislative capacity in Pacific Island Countries.</li> <li>Japan is a member of the Community of Democracies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less than two percent of Japanese ODA went to civil society organizations, according to 2017 data.</li> </ul>
<b>South Korea</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) disburses ODA for many projects aimed at strengthening good governance and human rights in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in South and Southeast Asia.</li> <li>South Korea is a member of the Community of Democracies and hosted the 2002 Ministerial Meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South Korea established Development Alliance Korea (DAK) in 2012 to coordinate public-private partnerships.</li> <li>KOICA’s Civil Society Cooperation Program focuses on poverty relief but also has a strong emphasis on education and capacity building for disadvantaged groups.</li> </ul>

Note: This list is not meant to be exhaustive.

## Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region has been at the center of growing debate on what constitutes the best form of governance. While the region has seen an unprecedented expansion in democracy in the last 70 years, challenges such as Covid-19, attacks on civil society, foreign interference, and digital authoritarianism threaten to tip the region toward democratic backsliding. However, the Indo-Pacific is primed for a resurgence in support for democracy if regional governments can reassert their commitment to democratic principles. There is a demand for transparent, accountable governance throughout the Indo-Pacific, and regional democracies must meet this demand through expanded democratic assistance. While adherence to the principle of non-interference, lack of confidence in U.S. engagement, and concerns about losing economic ties with China complicate this vision, there is an opportunity for regional democracies to expand international partnerships and reinforce an international rules-based order oriented toward peace, prosperity, and democratic principles.

## *Implications of the Sunnylands Principles and Recommendations*

CSIS, building on the consensus document produced at the Sunnylands dialogue, believes that U.S. allies and partners should consider specific steps to follow up on these principles:

- **Invest in existing partnerships and establish new ones as a means to best support democratic governance.** While each democracy in the region already engages in democracy support, shifting to a model of bilateral and multilateral cooperation would better leverage each country's unique strengths. For example, aid agencies could coordinate on designating partner countries, selecting fields of focus, and sharing best practices to minimize overlap and project redundancy. Expanding cooperation to new partners such as Taiwan and Mongolia would also prove beneficial. Furthermore, space should be made in international institutions such as ASEAN and APEC for discussion of democracy assistance. Just as every democracy responds to local conditions, so too should democracy support avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach, instead harnessing the diversity of regional democratic governments.
- **Prioritize stronger support for civil society in democratic assistance.** A thriving civil society of academic, business, labor, and religious institutions and communities buoyed by a free press and protections for minority groups is vital to building a resilient democracy. However, leading regional democracies tend to orient their foreign aid programs toward working with government bodies. The private sector and civil society organizations have an important role to play in strengthening democratic culture and norms. Broadening the scope of private-public partnerships would support the growth of more inclusive and resilient governments, developing an Indo-Pacific built for the long-term success of democratic, rules-based governance. This investment in civil society will have to be matched by effective, rights-compliant governance and dissemination of information technologies that empower civil society, in part because of interruptions caused by Covid-19 but more broadly because of efforts by authoritarian regimes to harness technology to suppress legitimate civil society formation.

- **Integrate democracy support into all avenues of statecraft available.** While Indo-Pacific democracies have all incorporated support for democratic assistance into their foreign aid programs, more can be done to align tools such as trade, infrastructure development, and defense partnerships, with the goal of supporting regional democracies. If conducted in a demand-driven manner with a focus on local capacity building, consistent, multifaceted engagement could help grow responsive, transparent governments with citizens invested in their communities' governance. Moving these relationships from the donor-recipient binary to broader partnerships will build democratic unity and empower all regional democracies, young and old, to better confront emerging threats to democratic governance.
- **Enhance cooperation on responding to the challenges facing democratic governance.** Destabilizing conditions such as ethnonationalism and inequality and crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic all increase the risk of democratic backsliding. In addition, authoritarian regimes in China and Russia challenge democracies by challenging international norms, exporting illiberal policies such as expanded surveillance, and engaging in disinformation campaigns. Regional democracies must coordinate on confronting these threats to avoid further democratic retreat. This dialogue could be conducted within an existing institution, or democracies could construct a new framework for discussion and cooperation against these expanding threats.

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