Democracy 2030 NED Program Highlight Sheet – Democracy Summit 2021

Introduction

We need a bold new vision of democracy that incorporates the power and potential of digital technologies while mitigating the dangers. The potential is huge—new forms of communication, citizen input, transparency and accountability can lead to a renaissance in what democracy means, how it functions, and who is included. With support from the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, and the Center for International Private Enterprise are collaborating on a joint project to map global, inclusive, citizen-centric visions for high-tech democracy by 2030 that can out-inspire and out-govern digital authoritarianism. This project involves coordinating with global civil society actors, artists, intellectual leaders, and more to improve decision makers’ capacity to proactively envision and take steps towards a technology-empowered democratic future. Below is a selection of quotes to highlight the voices and insights gathered over the course of the project to date, and what is to come out of this project in the coming year. This represents the vision of democracy that has been expressed by people around the world.

Quotes on Democratic Futures

“To me, democracy is a type of technology. Its applied social science, applied political science and… there are a myriad of ways in participating in a day-to-day fashion and setting agenda of public discourse… and all of this basically makes sure that each and every citizen can see democracy as much more complex but also not too complicated in a sense that everyone can choose the modality they want to engage in public with” – Audrey Tang, Digital Minister of Taiwan, Taiwan, CIPE Interview
“First, recognize the problem. You need better conceptual framing of what you’re dealing with. This is not a series of discrete tech challenges [with different] repressive applications of technology. This really is the export and spread of an entire model of digital governance and you have to recognize it as such. While authoritarians have capitalized on digitization of society as a whole, democracies have not. We have been on our back foot, we have failed to adapt to this radically new environment that has completely changed the context for democracy and the exercise of human rights and the protection of human rights. And so that’s the starting place for solving these problems.”

– Eileen Donahoe, USAGM Securing Internet Freedom – Forging a New Policy Framework panel discussion

“You do need a narrative, but the problem goes deeper than having a narrative...what you actually need is some real competitive alternatives. You have to have resources, alternative providers that requires a lot of work. It really requires reorienting a lot of basic policies to pay attention to the capability to do things like build infrastructure. That’s been one of my big research concerns in the last few years...is to focus on things like how do you enlist the private sector to build critical infrastructure, including digital infrastructure that many countries need.”

– Francis Fukuyama, Senior Fellow at Stanford University, United States

“When we talk about digital civil society, we are not just talking about those groups that have tech policy at their heart, although they are part of it. Because they are only half of the equation, the other half of the expertise lives in those groups that understand the lived experience and harms of the communities that they are working with. So those two come together into what we refer to as an integrated advocacy approach and that brings the collective kind of expertise. The knowledge hurdle that I think is real is that we’ve all been subjected to three decades of being told that tech is complicated and that you cannot understand this...Sure if you have tech skills, that is valuable...but it is not a tech problem. It is a social problem and a political problem and an economic problem and that expertise exists within civil society. So pairing [solutions to these various problems] with that tech policy expertise is the path forward.”

– Lucy Bernholz, Senior Research Scholar at Stanford University’s Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society and Director of the Digital Civil Society Lab, United States

“This is a crucial juncture in our global economic and democratic future. We are now at the precipice of a more digitally oriented world where technological platforms, tools, and services have the potential to propel economic opportunity and build inclusive democracies. However, this promise risks being undermined by authoritarian actors that use these same innovations to silence dissent, surveil citizens, and consolidate power. Democracies everywhere must renew their collective focus and reimagine a path towards a positive technology-enabled future that strengthens trust in democratic institutions and respect for the rights of all people. Local private sector has an important role to play in this process by engaging with governments and other stakeholders on key
policy issues ahead and emerging global norms.” - Andrew Wilson, Executive Director, CIPE

“American technology and innovation are key drivers of economic growth and job creation here at home and around the world. From small business to global businesses, the private sector’s voice is critical to the dialogue around digital transformation of the global economy. We must work to build a coalition of private sector, civil society, and like-minded governments to design new global norms in digital security and trade that are inclusive and reflect our democratic values.” - Myron Brilliant, Executive Vice President and Head of International Affairs, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

"The two axes that characterize democratic governments are transparency and participation, and in both aspects, technology offers endless opportunities for governments to co-create together with citizens through their data, ideas and projects. When I imagine the future of democracy strengthened by technology, I think of governments that interact on a daily basis with their citizens, who understand together with them their public challenges, [and] who seek solutions together. [I imagine] governments that use technology to learn that their fellow colleagues seek to solve their same challenges and to build on their learning. And finally, I hope for governments that use technology to share their stories of impact and invite others to continue looking for solutions in a collaborative way. We live in a connected world; it is a great time to inspire with the example of democratic governments and motivate others to advance this agenda through technology.” - Delfina Irazusta, Founder and Executive Director of the Local Innovation Network, Argentina

"I have hope for how digital solutions can be used to design and scale frameworks that make decision-making more inclusive, transparent and equal for everyone, regardless of sex, race or affiliation. I see opportunities at the grassroots level, starting in schools and universities, with digital solutions leading to changes in how professional organizations, unions and political parties are functioning. Many of the flaws of the existing democratic system are the result of human error or abuse of discretion, where systems are abused and influenced by large corporations and individuals with interest in controlling political power, ultimately leading to the excessive influence of oligarchs in the process of promoting new leaders. The future of democracy we’re working towards is the democratization of decision-making through technology, making it more accessible and fair for new emerging leaders.” - Social Entrepreneur, Moldova
"Our ideal vision of a future digital democracy takes the form of an ecosystem of change agents where they are secure and able to fulfill their goals. We envision a fully fledged digital democracy ecosystem involving different layers of tools and mechanisms that would allow change agents to digitally interact with citizens while being able to work safely and effectively. This will also lead to an inclusive ecosystem of civilians where they can raise their voice and be heard from anywhere, assuming the right platform. Indeed, technology can reach a large number of individuals en-masse, but it has to be the right tool, right platform, and right targeting to convey, collect and share information. This ecosystem will only be successful if a regulatory system is put in place to make sure digital platforms are well monitored, preventing the abuse of misinformation that would fundamentally influence democratic principles at their core." - Community Organization, Burma