



## In Search of Democratic Revival

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### Summary

There is a consensus that a democracy recession has deepened. Even in established democracies, identity-based, nationalist populism divided societies, often targeting the rights of minorities. Social media channeled disinformation and distrust of government, and even of science. Eventually, the overwhelming preoccupation with Covid-19 diminished attention to the global situation of rights and democracy.

However, cycles come and go. Democracies are now declaring renewed resolve. The quest for human rights, dignity, and political accountability through democracy, however apparently embattled, continues wherever humans live. Citizens everywhere have the same expectations: for safety and security, but also for fairness and transparency, opportunity, and the impartial rule of equitable law.

Revived democracies have much to offer in the way of support. We are at an inflection point when the existential nature of global challenges of health and climate underline universal interdependence and the necessity of effective international cooperation, at a time when the digital revolution poses problems to be resolved and opportunities for advancing common welfare.

While the global community mobilizes for this global agenda of necessity, democratic societies should apply their leverage creatively on behalf of the rights of human rights defenders and those who seek establishing accountable government and a dignified life. Democracies need to hold all countries – beginning with themselves – to their commitments to international covenants.

The evidence is irrefutable that the contribution of civil society and the rewards of popular agency are critical to inclusive governance and sustainable development. They also form the building blocks of democratic self-realization. Democratic countries should now collectively recommit to offer support to aspirants for more open societies everywhere.

Many lessons have been learned, in a spirit of mutual learning, about best practices in transitions to democracy. Each trajectory is different. There is no single systemic model or organizational template for success. But universal human rights remain an essential crucible of human satisfaction.

## Part one

### The world today

V-Dem's 2021 Democracy Report data confirm that world democracy levels have reverted to those of 1990. True liberal democracies have declined to 32 from 41. Backsliding "electoral" autocracies, whose sham elections are neither free nor fair, now number 87. Autocracies govern 68% of the world's population.

Abrupt reversal by *coups d'etat*, such as in Myanmar and very recently in Mali (once President-in-office of the Community of Democracies), are now quite rare.

Democratic recession mostly occurs by stealth. Once majoritarian populists win power by exploiting polarization and anxiety, they deepen control by backsliding incrementally on civil liberties, inclusivity, and openness, consistently subtracting from tenuously established democratic space.

This paper asks why the regression occurred. Has there been a lesion of belief? If so, why? What will restore confidence in democracy? What can democracies do to best support democratic journeys of others?

We need new tools for democracy support beyond those connected to development assistance. How do we think about diplomacy and political engagement in new ways? How can democratic countries partner together to support democratic development via civil society and via bilateral and multilateral techniques?

### A bilateral project of the like-minded

The pursuit of answers to "what is to be done" to reaffirm support for democracy development and human rights has been at the heart of this Canada-Germany consultative project. As liberal parliamentary democracies and federal states committed to inclusivity and civil rights Canada and Germany both have multi-party political cultures that require political compromise to govern. They share aversions to competitive nationalism, and rely on multilateral cooperation.

The political cultures of both countries are driven by the imperative to show that democracy works for citizens. Our shared emphasis on citizens rather than on nations in contrast to nativist/nationalistic trends in the world aiming to expand national advantage at any cost, informs foreign policy as well.

We both favour multilateralism because it can provide pragmatic and necessary solutions to the real problems citizens face that can't be obtained by domestic policy alone.

Can Canada and Germany build a common strategy for supporting citizens elsewhere who need and seek our help? What institutions do they need to protect their rights?

Understanding the past: *What went wrong?*

## a) The human factor

Right from the evacuation of communism from Europe, it became apparent that the export of western democratic institutions to newly independent regimes would not suffice as a national belief system to replace the discarded ideology. Jacques Rupnik of the Sciences-Po points out that imitation inadequately fills identity and nation-building needs of newly independent nations.

Even before EU and NATO membership for Central and Eastern Europe, populist leaders, plumbing national pasts for ways to ground identity in more authentic traditional values, obtained popular traction through emotive majoritarian ethnic and tribal bonding. Adopting the pose of "illiberal democracies," they challenged assumptions that membership in the EU and NATO would cement democratic values, norms, behaviour, and institutions.

Such assumptions under-estimated the human behavioral factor, on which democracy development ultimately relies, as much as it does on institutions. The rule of law depends on more than establishing courts and statutes, as Carnegie legal scholar Thomas Carrothers has argued; "it's what's in citizens' heads that matters."

Václav Havel was acutely conscious of the transformational challenges for citizens. He took to referencing Ralf Dahrendorf who in 1990 predicted that a democratic transition could set out the design of a new political order in six months, but that it would take six years to change the legal system, economy, and institutions – and 60 years for the people's mindsets to change.

## b) Events

Havel's relative skepticism was obscured by early post-Cold War optimism, which ended with the attacks of September 11, 2001.

The March 2003 invasion of Iraq on contrived grounds of securing "democracy" (when other justifications of Iraqi WMD and complicity in the 9/11 attack came up empty), conflated democratic solidarity with an agenda of forceful regime change, undermining democracy support and creating *en passant* a transatlantic rift that has not fully healed.

The financial crisis of 2008 deepened depletion of confidence in Western leadership. Though industrialized governments stabilized the world economy, little was done to address the insecurity and loss experienced by many ordinary people. Economic disparities widened in almost every country. Populist illiberal nationalists were swift to exploit liberal democracy's malaise, encouraging identification of "democracy" with discredited neo-liberal economic theory and practice.

Nonetheless, the ignition in 2010 in Tunisia of the "Arab Spring" spurred hope in Middle Eastern societies long resistant to democracy that reform, indeed revolution, were possible. The reasons why the peaceful upheavals failed are multiple and still merit analysis and reflection. Clearly, nonviolent democratic insurgents lacked coherence and cooperation and were either easily outmaneuvered by organized opponents, as in Egypt, or were crushed by ruthless autocratic clans in

power, as in Syria, where the catastrophic costs of civil war claimed more than 400,000 lives, and displaced more than 11 million, including several million refugees.

The autocratic use of massive violence to retain power quashed dissent in Daraa, Moscow, Hong Kong, Caracas, Yangon, Minsk, and elsewhere.

c) The indifference of anxious Western publics

As distinct underdogs in the struggle for power, nonviolent aspirants to democracy felt increasingly abandoned by

Western democracies which were stressed and preoccupied by their own polarizing political and identity issues, including:

- backlash against mass migration characterized by nativist alienation, islamophobia, and populist nationalism (though Germany and Canada managed integration of refugees reasonably well).
- widening doubt over the competence of their established institutions after the 2008 near-financial collapse (reflecting what Obama called “an economic philosophy that has completely failed,” though little was done to reform it).
- resentment over widening disparities and working-class income stagnation, accompanied by hostility to globalization that working people blamed for the export of jobs.
- Ubiquitous, unmediated, polarizing, and destabilizing social media that empowered and amplified extreme voices, including those projected into the democratic arena by outside adversaries, disrupting the influence of factual truth.

Donald Trump's election in 2016 further eroded democratic unity and leadership, confidence in multilateral institutions, universal human rights, and even humanitarian mobilization.

d) Authoritarians took their cues

The self-absorbed detachment of western democracies encouraged authoritarian leaders to subtract even more democratic space, which would be made easier by the emergency conditions of the pandemic.

Globally, the exemplary impact of the Trump Administration was toxic. Authoritarians everywhere matched divisive playbooks, stoking and exploiting polarization rooted in economic and cultural resentments. Even in democratic Europe, "conspiracy theories, driven by the global health crisis, are taking root ... drawing inspiration from the QAnon movement in the US." (Pierre Donadieu, AFP, May 16).

Applause from the Trump White House for such trends and clear indifference to human rights, plus the popularization of "America First," provided autocrats with permissive license, cheered on by Chinese and Russian leaders who had become open adversaries of liberal democracies, philosophically, and geo-politically.

Authoritarian leadership successfully exploited this sense of insecurity, especially where prior efforts to transit to democratic governance had disruptive and divisive outcomes. But as Pippa

Norris argues (*Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2021), "Sometimes, people really do want leaders who prioritize order and security from outside threats, adhere to traditional norms, and promise to defend the tribe."

President Havel may have been unduly pessimistic about the timeline for transition, but he correctly anticipated what he described to President Obama as "the curse of people's high expectations. Because it means they are also easily disappointed."

Such disappointment has been a major factor in making personalist false democracies such a prevalent form of governance. These regimes diligently appropriate the facade of democracy – all but 5 non-democracies since 2000 have held elections to acquire the veneer of legitimacy and popular mandate – while incrementally undermining the checks and balances, judicial independence, and media freedom on which democracy relies. They increasingly throttle civil society which acts as democracy's incubator, thereby stifling the experience of agency and the practice of compromise. Authoritarian leaders of EU member Hungary and NATO member Turkey now respectively control 90% and 85% of national media.

Factually interfering in western democratic processes, while rebutting as illegitimate any criticism of their own internal repression, Russia and China have become self-appointed champions for the revived doctrine of non-intervention in internal affairs, dear to lapsing democracies as Brazil and India. Increasingly, they outlaw foreign support for local democracy advocates and human rights defenders, hobbling the ability of the world democracy community to provide support other than moral solidarity.

*The central question for liberal democracies is **what is to be done?***

a) foreign policies for democracy

Grounding foreign policies in democratic values as well as sustainability is mandatory. The existential differentiation of the status of the free from that of the unfree needs always to be taken into account. Those who seek in other countries the propagation of civic freedoms and democratic standards expect support from democrats everywhere.

Human rights support is primary, crucial to prospects for democratic development and to democracies' credibility. Democracies experience ups and downs in national social, economic and political cycles, but their demonstrable belief in and commitment to human dignity and inclusivity must remain irreducible.

Democracies should make clear that evidence of human rights abuse that contravenes international covenants inevitably affects the quality and intensity of bilateral relationships. This principle must be consistently applied, irrespective of country-specific transactional commercial and geo-political interests.

Foreign relations form concentric circles. Inner circles of close relationships with corresponding benefits will necessarily be reserved for trusted partners.

There is little merit in re-creating a schematically divided world. Dialogue and openness is important with backsliding and offending countries both with regard to shared goals and to divisive issues. Vital strategic and transnational issues like global warming, global health, conflict prevention, and strategic arms negotiation need universal participation. Their de-linking from human rights should in no way accommodate abuse.

As to the "info-war" of disinformation and defamation, democracies' best defense is confident and transparent performance and validation of factual truth and evidence-based science which people almost everywhere claim to want for themselves. But democratic countries have to impose costs for outside disruptive cyber or other interference in their own democratic processes.

#### b) What can democracies do together? Understand democratic transition

Without proposing that there is a single theory of transitional success, Western democracies would benefit from a comprehensive normative analysis to identify essential components and conditions needed for democratization, such as:

- democracy cannot be exported
- it needs to emerge authentically from the country in question,
- there is no single theory or preferred template but respect for civil liberties and human rights judged to be universal are foundational, as is gender equity
- inclusivity is essential - unless citizens enjoy equal rights, the country's status is not democratic
- fairness and respect for human dignity are paramount; corruption corrodes conclusively
- democracy's building blocks are bottom-up, lodged in civil society, where participants experience agency and the essential facility of compromise
- it takes time for behavioural and institutional components to become second nature to citizens, though some societies (e.g., Taiwan, and the Republic of Korea) show a faster track to democracy becoming organic to sense of identity.
- each trajectory is different and outcomes vary, including truth and reconciliation efforts linked to respectful pacting between old and new orders (to use Dr. Kathryn Stoner's phrase).

#### c) Practical democratic solidarity in development assistance

Old donor country-recipient country development models don't apply. A spirit of mutual learning is essential.

It should be acknowledged "the best vehicles for outside support are rarely governments and their own programmes, however well-intentioned. They are not good at it. Outside support for democratic capacity-building potential comes best from international civil society partnerships,

with the lead partner being the one inside the country.....The lesson that democracy support is best done when it's not called "democracy promotion" has become a truism of policy and outreach." (*A Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development*)

Development assistance needs to be re-gearred and de-bureaucratized. Budgets should show as much support for civil society as possible, and there are calls to apportion 25-30% of funds to civil society to administer directly. Juxtaposing beneficial connective tissue via direct civil society-to-civil society links, often for functional non-political and local projects, by and for civil society needs to be enhanced.

#### d) Multilateralism and democracy

Democracies are generally, by disposition, multilateralists. They must help build democratic capacity and norms into multilateral functional organizations which radiate them outward.

Democracies have to challenge reckless actions to break multilateral rules created to help all countries and people, such as the state hijacking of a civil airliner by Belarus, and also the attitude that tolerates the export of crimes such as hacking and ransomware extortion as long as it takes place abroad.

Democratic countries, working together with civil society partners should among themselves:

- share needs analyses, best practices, and normative comparisons of benefit
- divide labour, and leverage national contributions to maximize comparative advantage
- ensure the democratic value standards of multilateral "clubs" - the EU, NATO, OECD, Council of Europe/ECtHR, the Commonwealth, La Francophonie, OAS, etc. - are actually applied
- use sanctions judiciously for correct behaviour: when possible, consider the alternatives of positive incentives for positive behavioural alignment (as in the JCPOA with Iran, or as the EU offer of substantial material assistance to Belarus to encourage a democratic course)

#### e) Cooperation in diplomatic representations

Ambassador Pierre Vimont, former head of the European Union's External Action Service posed as the first obligation of democracies the protection of human rights defenders, but also the question, "How far can you go?" (*A Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support.*)"

There is a crucial role here for diplomatic missions, who should maintain encouragement for civil society and outreach to the independent political community, if possible, and demarche collectively injustice and persecution.

#### f) other actors, policy imperatives, and positive messaging

Specifically about the Canadian capacity, as argued by Roland Paris and Jennifer Welsh in their essay in *The Globe and Mail* June 5, "the Trudeau government should promptly implement its

Throne Speech commitment to establish a Canadian centre dedicated to democracy and governance that could serve as a hub of both expertise and democracy-support activities."

International business investments play an important role in channeling inclusive and equitable governance when local corporate practice consciously aligns with governance norms increasingly obligatory in industrialized democracies, embedding in the local workplace ethics such as transparency, accountability, meritocracy, and gender equity that can transfer to civil society.

Arms sales to dictatorships and repressive regimes are a toxic insult to the professed beliefs and credibility of democratic countries. Clientelist deference to Saudi Arabian arms sales has disabled any mediatory diplomatic role in respect of the Yemen war and other conflicts.

Democratic countries (indeed all countries) should prosecute vigorously evidence of corrupt practices abroad and end the competition to offer profitable havens to oligarchic wealth.

Finally, overall, democratic publics need to pay more attention to the lives of others. Democracies need to radiate their concern for repressed democratic aspirations everywhere.

Democracy's reputation has suffered from the perceived dilution of the ethic and practice of fairness. But younger generations, for whom the spirit of 1989 may be remote, are increasingly insistent on redress in the present, as we see from the BLM and Green revolutions.

In Tahrir Square, demonstrators were impatient, not primarily for other peoples' "democracy" but for an end to autocracy and for fairness, and dignity.

*Can aspirants to greater inclusion and fairness in such countries be able still to look to our examples for solidarity and encouragement, and evidence that democracy works for citizens, or will they see detached self-absorption in our enduring quarrels?*

## ***Part Two: Questions***

*1) What are our constituencies – abroad and domestically? And how do they relate?*

At the most basic level, the policies of liberal democracies such as Canada and Germany should be consistent with – and reflect – our commitments to the dignity and agency of every person, as pursued domestically and in our subscription to international rights covenants and instruments. Human rights and civic freedoms are central to our sense of selves.

While there have always been illiberal, reactionary elements in our own societies, these are increasingly vocal and networked with each other, often in surprising coalitions (“Querdenker” anti-pandemic protests in Germany, for example). And these networks are global, as the metatasis of the QAnon conspiracy cosmology demonstrates.

While the velocity of fundamentally anti-liberal mobilization has been facilitated and accelerated by social media and effective support from positions of authority (as with former President



Trump), such trends are far from new. Still, the contestation of fundamental democratic principles we see today would have been unthinkable in the heady air of 1989-1991, when the sense of history's arrow was effectively adopted by a self-congratulating "triumphant" West. Events have shown that democracies can deplete (as witnessed in the horrific assault on the US Capitol January 6), and that malign exogenous influences contribute to depletion.

A focus on democratic "protection" therefore stands to reason that defense inherently necessitates shoring-up our own systems to make them more fair, equal, and accountable – and therefore resilient. But it also requires recognizing the value of working in a solidarity group with those who share these goals for their own societies.

To maximize the potential effect, demonstration of shared principles to defend human dignity at home and abroad should not be sequestered in foreign ministries or the offices of prime ministers/presidents/chancellors, but made visible and encouraged throughout the public sector and engaged civil society. For example, a minister of labor meeting with beleaguered trade unionists from a non- or partial democracy who have been visibly repressed, would send a message in both societies (and beyond) that this is a norm to be embraced.

We can learn from those abroad who look to us for help, as well as those who have undergone societal regression. Those democratic aspirants comprise our *external constituency* that can show how to broaden and deepen the popular appeal of liberal democratic values when they are challenged – laterally or vertically.

Solidarity with them, in myriad manifestations is demonstrated from within our civil societies. This broad swathe of domestic civil society, beyond NGOs and extending into all forms of bottom-up self-organization, represents our *domestic constituency*, our citizen focus.

While differentiated, these external and domestic bottom-up exponents of civic agency and dignity are deeply intertwined. Their interaction, when most fruitful, can serve a vital function in identifying effective potential applications for policy support (including public affirmations of solidarity from on high) and programmatic/material assistance, and even delivery.

Ultimately repressive governments fear the contagion of ideas that solidarity confers, lest they metastasize through a society to weaken control – as seen still in Belarus, despite the blunt force of repression.

Our expressions of solidarity should of course be demand-driven, informed by the needs, situational awareness, and cost-benefit analysis provided by beneficiaries themselves. Benefits should include a degree of protection against the most egregious repression and abuse, but also the validation conferred to fellow citizens on the fence, as well as the morale boost from recognition of values-driven efforts. Material benefits can include smaller-gauge individual acts of solidarity from both societies and beyond.

There are potential downsides to democracy aspirants being celebrated by democracy supporters abroad, of course. Regimes and their supporters (foreign and domestic) tar recipients as "foreign

hirelings” or “puppets,” aiming to delegitimize them. But the voices of democracy activists calling for demonstrations of solidarity (and often measures against the regimes repressing them) should be decisive.

*2) Do we have weaknesses in our credibility with our constituencies that we can remediate?*

All countries carry baggage from policy decisions and history – including the quality and nature of their international relationships. Germany and Canada have been rightly seen as vocal exponents of democratic liberalism and rule of law, in particularly sharp relief in the Trump era. But no country’s policy choices and legacy render it impervious to skepticism or criticism.

Germany’s reckoning with its history is foundational to its democracy. The recent apology regarding the genocide against the Herero and Nama peoples in Namibia over a century ago also bolsters its moral capital. Canada’s most glaring historical liabilities – paralleling much of the rest of the Americas and Oceania – concern historic treatment of its First Nations. Illiberal states rarely reflect on historical events from a posture of contrition – victimhood of the nation is usually the default setting. The ability of democracies to revisit their histories honestly and bravely and apply these lessons to residual inequity today is a core strength. The struggle to press for such reckoning most frequently originates from civil society.

Domestic and foreign constituencies and interests often collide. Germany’s commercial and financial imperatives as a lead manufacturing exporter not only have generated frictions within the EU, but cause internal reluctance to be particularly forward-leaning on human rights issues, lest it inflicts damage on trade. Such tensions are present in other democracies, but are particularly pronounced and visible in the case of Germany, given its relative weight in the EU, the size of its economy, and resultant expectations of political and moral leadership.

Without a doubt, a perception that a country will pull its punches in its policies and positions due to fear of risk to priorities judged as higher damages its credibility with those who hope to see professed values reflected. The example of the German government’s assertion that it “took courage” to risk friction with Beijing by meeting with the Dalai Lama over a decade ago is a case in point. Of course, these vulnerabilities are common in international commerce – such as Volkswagen’s location of production in Xinjiang as Beijing institutes mass “re-education” of Uighur and Kazakh Muslims. Contradictory decisions and public pronouncements that risk affecting a country’s credibility as a sincere exponent of human dignity worldwide are regrettably commonplace. And they are contested, in every democratic society – as the above examples demonstrate.

*3) What can we do to try to insulate civic and human rights advocacy and support from being bent by the gravitational pull of geopolitics?*

With a return to a perception of geopolitical contestation (vis-à-vis both Russia and China), the alignment of governments has returned as an issue to public discourse and perceptions. Such geopolitical considerations again threaten dominance in decision making, particularly regarding an ever-more assertive China. Conflation of geopolitical considerations and advocacy and support for bedrock liberal democratic principles is already evident in the upcoming meeting of the G-7

with Australia, South Korea... and India (which is billing it as the “D-10”). Despite its being the world’s biggest electoral democracy, India’s addition to a convening of liberal democracies raises challenges when it comes to commitment to human and civil rights, due to the Hindu-chauvinist policies pursued by illiberal Prime Minister Narendra Modi. While the security rationale to work with India may be compelling – as represented in the “Quad” of the US, Australia, Japan and India – commingling the geopolitical with groupings billed as representing common values carries with it serious moral hazard. The lessons of the Cold War, in which strategic partnerships with authoritarian, repressive regimes for the sake of geo-political alignment continue to cast a shadow over Western governments, demonstrating real time and lasting reputational damage and other costs.

Those advocating for human dignity that liberal democracy is designed to promote and protect are depicted by their opponents, governments and within their own societies, as aligned with external powers. But the Belarusian democracy movement, for example, deliberately positioned itself against being labelled as “pro-Western” and care should be taken not to communicate otherwise.

*4) Are our democracy support institutions, instruments, procedures – even philosophical “givens” with which we approach democracy support efforts – **fit for purpose**? Do they need recalibration for the current environment? If the latter, what is required?*

Democracy development and support efforts were hardly unprecedented prior to 1989; they grew during the “third wave” of democratization beginning in the mid-1970s with Portugal’s Carnation Revolution. But their ambition grew exponentially after 1989. While some initial efforts in this realm built on prior experience, urgency drove an ethos of experimentation in the first decade or so, through the 1990s. Some efforts - such as the UK “know-how fund” - attempted to fast-track and simplify projects. But much of the effort was consigned to constellations of for-profit contractors – developed to conduct democratization projects, through government-to-government partnerships, support to external and internal NGOs, independent media, and so on. In some recipient countries, these even created economic profit-centres of their own, affecting social and political incentive structures.

An underlying set of presumptions attended much of this effort. First of these was the belief that democratic governance and free markets were an inherent package deal – and equal priorities. So was a teleology of political and economic development, in which the established democracies would transfer skills and institutions, particularly in the electoral realm. This implied a hierarchy, as did the sense of “arrival” into democratic clubs such as the OECD, NATO, and the EU. Implicit in all this was a presumption that democracy was a destination – a static one at which societies *arrive* (and relax). Subsequent events, both for the “class of 2004” of new EU members and in the established democracies, demonstrate the complacency encoded in this mindset at the high-water mark of democratic predominance. In the recession which followed, a gap between liberal democratic declaratory form and substantive performance became impossible to camouflage. Its legacy is an increasingly reactive posture.

It stands to reason that an audit of democracy support mechanisms is called for, navigating from the aforementioned first principles. Institutions, instruments, and procedures designed for more

permissive environments a generation ago require reassessment for ground realities that are more challenging. These will require greater creativity and flexibility.

There is a tendency to default to declarative condemnation and/or (increasingly personalized/targeted) sanctions in response to rights abuses. While making clear what side we are on and seeking to exact a cost for violations of fundamental rights, the direct impact – in terms of either assisting those undertaking democracy-building efforts (defined broadly) or affecting the actions and dispositions of the key decisionmakers behind repression – remains mixed at best.

### *New Modalities of Engagement?*

Listening to those on the sharp-end of rights struggles – in Belarus, Myanmar, Uganda, and elsewhere – who know the terrain and can foresee the likely effects, is essential.

While the impediments to helping advocates of human rights, rule of law, and public accountability being erected by authoritarian governments worldwide are obstructive, there may be other avenues to assist civic agency.

A dedicated effort to opening such avenues needs to be developed in consultation with intended beneficiaries. The ideal would be to quietly convene representatives of self-driven civil society from a variety of contexts *in personam*, though the closure of civic space and potential reprisal by governments (let alone the pandemic) make this a challenge. To the maximum extent practical, an opportunity should be provided for a range of civic actors – particularly from the “hard cases” (e.g. Myanmar, Belarus, etc.) but also those less challenging – to share experiences, strategies, and tactics. Specifically, developing not just vital country-specific understanding, but also to plot commonalities and tendencies, would allow for a “sensitivity vs. solidarity matrix” to be developed to guide democracies which wish to help. This effort could generate bottom-up guidance on the sort of assistance which would provide the best value in specific contexts, for specific sorts of activities. Diplomatic posts in the field would serve as vital nodes in both informing and assembling such an effort.

Greater attention to developing effective proactive measures to assist development of societal solidarity around basic democratic values – including across social divisions (ethnicity, race, class, sect, gender, region) is required. A collaborative review process involving civic actors – our external constituency – could help identify modalities of engagement which are better matched with current and foreseeable challenges faced by those seeking to establish the accountable, liberal democratic governance that can best protect and nurture human dignity.

Assistance to local communities to address climate, health, and other global priorities, could perhaps still slide through the increasingly tightly woven net, if designed to promote productive agency that supports collective action by citizens. This sort of climate and global health action, *inter alia*, demands support, not just for impact on livelihoods and a collective responsibility, but also for its potential to develop civic self-confidence, driving organic, bottom-up pressure and change.

Many developing countries closing civic space also call for North-South financial assistance to address climate change and the pandemic. This necessity of resource transfer confers both access and some latitude to established democracies – including promoting South-South "contagion" of agency. Such agency cannot be exported or induced, but it can be supported and embraced as it emerges of its own accord.

Given China's pivotal role in addressing the climate crisis, sensitivity to not "provide ammunition" to arguments that climate and public health assistance mask a hegemonic governance agenda necessarily figures into the mix of policy design and delivery. But this is surely feasible. In the global context, Beijing's marketing of its engagement and its alleged "win-win" nature is increasingly incongruent with an elite-centric, infrastructure export approach that views citizens as subjects to be sold *post hoc* to deals cut at the top, rather than encouraging civic engagement. The export of coal-fired power stations, as opposed to wind turbines and solar farms, in which China also "makes the market," illustrates this gap. Democracies seen to walk their climate (and health) talk will be more likely to be seen by citizenries as partners. The extent to which their corporations adhere to that line in their own activity also affects national credibility.

### *Values-Based Solidarity*

What we propose here is a constellation of policies which is philosophically consistent – at home and abroad. Honesty and self-confidence can co-exist, as Canada and Germany have demonstrated, though not as consistently as they should. Democracies' values-based solidarity needs to be visible and audible across the full range of policies, reflecting citizen-based propulsion from within. This would create a positive feedback loop, maximizing popular engagement and understanding of the policy choices required to demonstrate solidarity – especially when these entail costs.

The choice facing liberal democracies now is nothing less than whether to forego a solidarity-driven sort of engagement in the world in deference to a focus on protecting our own democracy and competitiveness, or alternatively, recognizing that a values-forward engagement including from our citizens is from whence our credibility – as a partner, a destination, and aspirational guidepost – derives.