THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

THE DEMOCRATIC FUTURE OF THE INTERNET

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, June 22, 2022

PARTICIPANTS:

Keynote and Discussion:

ALEX ENGLER, Moderator
Fellow
Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

PETER HARRELL
Special Assistant to the President
Senior Director
International Economics and Competitiveness
White House National Security Council (NSC)

TIM WU
Special Assistant to the President
Technology and Competition Policy
White House National Economic Council (NEC)

Panel:

ALEX ENGLER, Moderator
Fellow
Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution

STEVEN FELDSTEIN
Senior Fellow
Democracy, Conflict and Governance Program
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

ALLIE FUNK
Research Director for Technology and Democracy
Freedom House

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. ENGLER: Hello everyone. And welcome to Alex Engler. I'm a fellow here at Governance Studies at the Brookings. I want to welcome you all to our event on the democratic future of the internet. This is hosted by the Center for Technology Innovation.

I'm just going to frame the problem briefly before inviting up our guests. The global recession of democracy is unquestionably one of the defining issues of the 21st century. In 1995, the third wave of democratization had just finished in over half of the world's countries were democracies.

Fast forward to 2006, that one most would agree that we began a global recession of democracy. The varieties of democracy index says that between 2011 and 2021, the population under autocracy, living under autocracy, increased from 49 to 71 percent. It's a dramatic increase and it's not just them. If you look at indexes from Freedom House of the economist intelligence unit or International IDA. All of them suggest a recession of democracy that is accelerating so it's getting worse faster.

The internet is only one part of this but it's a genuinely important component. Autocracies have proven more willing and more capable to curb internet freedoms through censorship and internet shutdowns as well as to use digital technologies for politic influence, surveillance and control.

We're going to hear from Allie Funk later, Research Director at the Freedom of the Net whose report says that global internet freedom has declined for the 11th consecutive year.

Steven Feldstein whose book, "The Rise of Digital Repression" expects an unriveting struggle between authoritarians and civic activists over digital spaces.

And Jessica Brandt from our Brookings will join us later, argues that Russia and China's online disinformation efforts have the goal of denting the global prestige of global democracy.

At best, the rise of the internet was contemporaneous with this fall of global democracy and at worse, it's been contributing to it. And that's what some of the broader research that we're finding today shows.

This is the backdrop for a new global initiative spearheaded by the Biden administration with partners around the world called the Declaration for the Future of the Internet signed by more than

50 countries. The declaration sets forth a code of practice for governance in the use of technology with respect to democratic norms.

It's broad vision aspiring to promote universal internet access, protect human rights, ensure fair economic competition, design secure digital infrastructure and promote pluralism as well as freedom of expression. It's important. It's intended to be a reset and a refocus on how governments should treat a free, open and prodemocratic internet at a time when it is surely needed.

To hear more about this declaration in just a second, we're honored to be joined by Tim Wu and Peter Harrell. Two of the lead White House architects of the declaration. Peter Harrell is senior director for International Economics and Competitiveness at the White House National Security Council and formerly under the Obama administration, he was the deputy assistant secretary of State for Counterthreat Finance and Sanctions.

Tim Wu is special assistant to the President for Technology and Competition Policy. He is formerly a professor at Columbia University Law School where he's known for his contributions on antitrust and big tech as well as quite famously net neutrality.

In just a second, I'll invite Tim Wu onto the stage to introduce the declaration. And then we'll have a conversation between Tim, Peter and myself before that follow up of our other panelists that mentioned. A quick full logistics. This is being recorded and livestreamed, so we welcome further audience participation. You can send questions to events@brookings.edu or via Twitter at [@BrookingsGov](https://twitter.com/BrookingsGov) or if you're in the room, there is a card that you're sitting on label to submit questions later on. And lastly through the using #FutureOfInternet also on Twitter.

With that I'm very happy to welcome Tim Wu on the stage for his opening remarks.

MR. WU: Thank you so much, Alex, for that introduction. And, you know, this event actually just came out of kind of a conversation with Alex and I. And I appreciate that we've been able to do this. I'm very happy to be here in person. I think Brookings on the inside said this is maybe one of the very first or maybe the first in person event they've done in a while so let's hope we all remember how to do this.

So, I want to again thank Brookings and offer a few remarks on the Declaration of the Future of the Internet and what we are aspiring to do with it. So, on April 28th of this year, the United States along with 60 – more than 60 partners launched the Declaration for the Future of the Internet.

And it is in its core quite simple. The idea is to announce clearly to the world our shared democratic vision for principles for conduct on the internet and for the use of digital technologies. We think this comes at any extraordinarily important time. The President has often said that we are in the midst of an epic and in fact historic struggle between authoritarianism and democracy. And we see the internet and the question of what the internet will be, will become and its future to be key to winning that struggle.

The internet while invented in America has become a global phenomenon. It has unlocked the potential of people around the world and has advanced human progress in many areas of life. All of us during the – or most of us during the pandemic saw the internet as a lifeline. How we got critical information, continued to work, communicate with families and friends, educate our children. That's the happy story, but the fact is that in recent years very basic internet freedoms have not been respected in a way that we all had hoped back in the earlier days, 1990s, early 1000s.

Some governments have come to see the internet as nothing more than another tool of state power. They use it to repress freedom of expression, to spread disinformation and to deny their citizens basic human rights. Some countries have shut down the internet when it suits them, have censored legitimate news sources, spied on dissents, prevented human rights advocates from reporting on abuses. We have also witnessed state sponsored cyber-crime harming people and businesses.

We live in an era where government sponsored disinformation campaigns have become a tool of state aggression. We in other countries have been targeted by those who so seams of division by deliberately spreading harmful disinformation online in an effort to undermine democracy. We live in a world where box feed disinformation about the war in Ukraine, about COVID. And we live in a world where children, minors and others face sexual harassment and other harms online.

To sum it up, we live in a world where online freedom is on the retreat. We have

countries plotting cyber-attacks that cripple real world infrastructure, spying on dissents, journalists and others. That is why we think it is crucial and, in fact, a strategically essentially moment for us working together with partner nations to make the internet better, to make it safer and to make it the foundation of democracy that it should be.

It is key, in our view, that democracies rise to this moment because we need to understand this battle for internet freedoms. As a key part of this larger battle for freedom and democracy more generally. I think anyone who doesn't see in the future the internet the future of civilization, the future of government has not seen where the future lies. We cannot neglect the importance of internet freedoms as we confront the rise of authoritarian governments around the world.

And these are the reasons it is time to declare fundamental principles. We're affirming and we did affirm in the declaration our commitment to an internet that is open and free. An internet that is global and interoperable. An internet that is reliable and secure.

It's important to remember that the first wave of the internet's history was full of promise and possibility. The dream was of a network that would bring the world together in sort of common language in Esperanto of network protocols.

The second wave held the promise of commerce but has in many ways become marked by too much inequality, too much use of the network to divide instead of unite. We see the launch and we see this period as part of the beginning and reflecting a third wave of the internet revolution.

This administration and our partner nations want to champion a return to the internet that promotes the best of culture, commerce. That connects humanity while remaining respectful of human rights, seeking not to undermine them and promoting a fair deal economically for everyone around the world.

That is why the declaration states and endorses a set of key principles that promote our collective vision. They include principles to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms including online safety for children and young people. Promotion of a global internet that advances the free flow of information and advances affordable access to the internet so that all people can benefit from the digital

economy. On that last point, I want to add to the Biden administration domestically has done our own part with $65 billion for broadband infrastructure build outs that are currently beginning to go underway.

Another thing we want to do is promote trust in the digital ecosystem through the protection of privacy. The President stated in the State of the Union address that we need to strengthen privacy in this country. Strengthen privacy protections and that is reflected in the DIF as well. We want to protect – I should also emphasize the multistakeholder internet governance system that keeps the internet running for the benefit of all.

Moving forward, we intend to uphold these principles and encourage citizens, businesses and civil society organizations to do the same. We are united by a belief in the potential of digital technologies to promote connectivity, democracy, peace and the rule of law. That is why I think we all need to understand that the fight for freedom on the internet is the fight for freedom, period. Thank you very much.

MR. ENGLER: Thanks for that and thanks for your comments. Thank you, Peter, for joining us today. So, I'm going to start with some questions first about the declaration before zooming out to some of the broader context and challenges and the agenda of the Biden administration.

Can you speak a little bit to the criteria and the process for inclusion and invitation for other countries to sign the declaration? And under what future circumstances can you imagine other countries joining?

MR. HARRELL: Thanks a lot. And I want to thank you, Alex, and Brookings for hosting this event.

MR. ENGLER: Thanks for coming.

MR. HARRELL: It's really a pleasure for us to be here in person to talk about this initiative, which we obviously launched a couple of months ago, but which we are thrilled to be able to carry forward because this is very much something that as your question suggests, we are taking forward.

And on your question about criteria for future membership, I should say actually since launch, we've had a country come in, South Korea, joined last month. While the President was out in

Asia and South Korea and kind of been between governments at the launch of the DFI. But I think the fact that South Korea is now in shows our commitment to carrying this forward and building out membership.

Look, I think we wanted as Tim's very eloquent opening remarks suggested. We wanted to a membership and want to have a membership that is both inclusive but also encourages a driving higher of standards. You know, we wanted something – and I think you saw this with the focus the way in which we got a number of you know, key emerging market countries like Argentina to come in.

We wanted something that was not going to be seen as just a sort of club of the G7 or the G7 plus, but a platform that we could use to build out this set of really critical values and commitments to a broader collection of countries from both the global north and the global south. And I think you saw that with the countries that were represented at launch.

Now, obviously, as we were thinking about that inclusive membership, we want members that are prepared to work with us to carry forward the agenda Tim just laid out. So, we want countries and had countries that are prepared to make commitments to respect, you know, basic freedoms online. That are prepared to make commitments and have a history of not shutting off, you know, major network access. That no, it's not shutting off major platforms. That are prepared to work with us on issues like competition policy in ways in which we can have an economically inclusive internet.

So, it was really about how do we find countries that, you know, are interested both on what they have done and what they've shown they have done as well as in kind of their conceptual framework of working with us across all the different areas that Tim laid out and that are reflected in the DFI.

MR. WU: If I can just add one thing to that. When we say we, I just want to emphasize this has been not just the United States, but there's been – you know, the European Union has been one of the foundational partners along with Japan, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom and others. And, you know, it has been a joint diplomatic effort.

And I think there is a shared interest in the many democracies in the world that we have a

very broad kind of thing. That it not just be as Peter said sort of a G7 kind of initiative. So, I just want to, you know, emphasize that this has been very much from the beginning a joint project.

MR. ENGLER: Sure. So, you just emphasized the idea of an inclusive project also trying to drive higher standards. Of course, you're going to get many countries that are engaged and want to do that. But no country has a perfect track record on these issues.

The declaration is nonbinding. How do you examine or how do you expect the next steps to come forward when countries who are signatories take actions that might break the spirit or the exact writing of the declaration?

MR. WU: So, I think that's a challenging question for I think any international regime. The reason the partners are coming together is we want to reverse the current trajectory in the rise of digital authoritarianism and reaffirm the vision of an open, free and global secure internet.

And I think that is sort of key to the shared mission. We want to get people aligned on the sense that this is the direction things should be going as opposed to say, you know, here is sort of like a code which, you know, tiny variations will be punished. So, I think that one of the keys to making this move forward, even as you said, it's nonbinding.

I think one of the keys to move forward is just to keep the momentum going, add more countries to it. Keep the conferences and make it – I mean one of the things that I think is so important about these kinds of documents are they make it clear to the world what the standards are. You know what I mean? You know, you name any law that's out there, it will be – any law or any set of principles and they will be violated by one point or another.

But the question is whether it has this sort of norm setting function where there's a reference point as to what you should and should not be doing.

MR. ENGLER: I don't know if you want to add to that, Peter.

MR. HARRELL: I think I want to add in terms of sort of an immediate or not immediate but sort of second half of this here next steps. As Tim said, we're looking both to build out additional membership and then we are also looking at building kind of practical cooperation among members.

In terms of building practical cooperation among members, we are talking with our kind of core group that pulled this together about potentially having a kind of conference in the second half of the year where we would work together to really build out workstreams and also, we're, frankly to your question, Alex, on what happens for countries that breach the standards here.

We would hope to have some civil society feedback and other stakeholder feedback to really help hold to account those members that aren't living up to the standards while making some practical recommendations to the governments about how they can better live up to the standards.

MR. ENGLER: So, on that topic, the Secretary of State and Steve Lincoln announced a few weeks ago that the United States will become chair of the Freedom Online Coalition next year.

There are also other groups like the Internet Governance Forum, the U.N. International Telecoms Union. Do you see the declaration within this broader context of a multistakeholder groups and have a plan to engage?

MR. HARRELL: Absolutely. First let me say, we are thrilled as the Biden/Harris administration to be the chair of the Freedom Online coalition next year. We really appreciate the work that Canadians have been doing this year as the chair of the FFC and look forward to carrying that forward.

Look, the DFI in addition to sort of thinking through DFI specific next steps later this year. We do see as a platform which we can then feed into and leverage in other fora, right? So, this is agreement we can use as the basis for joint statements, for example, at the G7. It's broader than the G7, but we can use as the basis for joint statements at the G7. We can use as the basis for joint statements and joint work in U.N. bodies.

And it is certainly something if you look at the values in the DFI that we look forward to working with the FOC to help carry forward large parts of this work.

MR. ENGLER: So, I think you've expressed a kind of theory of change of the declaration behind the signatories and behind maybe weaker democracies in hybrid regimes that might aspire to join? I think that you've made a case there.

But there are also more adversarial autocracies especially including Russia and China among others that are not only accused of being digitally repressive but of exporting a model of digital authoritarianism.

To what extent do you and yourself and the administration see that as a core issue here? Or do you consider a court issue? Or do you see this more as a localized and development of the use of digital repression within other countries?

MR. HARRELL: So, look, I think from our perspective it seems pretty clear that repressive governments around the world are learning from one another. Are comparing practices and are working in some way to sort of strengthen their alternative model of what the internet should look like.

I mean you spoke, you know, in your opening remarks about the way in which we are in a recession for democracy globally, and I think that is very much true online. And I do think we as a coalition of broadly likeminded states need to be rather aggressively pushing back against the model of digital authoritarianism that we're seeing coming out of China, that we're seeing coming out of Russia. Certainly, the stakes couldn't be higher when you look at what's going on between Russia and Ukraine today.

And we see kind of the DFI and getting a broad coalition of countries aligned behind the principles in the DFI across all these different areas of values, areas of work as an important part of pushing back on that model of digital authoritarianism that we do think is unfortunately being spread, you know, across a despairingly number of countries.

MR. WU: Yeah, I want to add to that. I think that's exactly right, and I'll just add, you know, sort of a historic note which is, you know, I think democracies have been at their most successful when they recognize the challenge that they're facing from a spreading movement and responding to it.

And, you know, we've done it before and we can do it again, but it requires us to realize what's going on. And I think that's part of, you know, what's happening. And I don't want to say others haven't. You know, as you already said, there's measurements of internet freedom and so forth going on. But sort of moving it to the front of consciousness and recognizing, you know, issues of internet freedom

as, you know, not so much necessarily a side show but really front and central to in some ways the future of civilization.

And, you know, how we'll live in the future is part of what we're trying to do here. And I think it's important that we be very strategic in our thinking about the challenges in this space and that's what we're doing here.

MR. ENGLER: Yeah, I mean I have to echo this point a little bit even just reading to prepare for this event, it's hard to – the gravity of the challenge really does strike you up there with any other problem that democracy is broadly facing.

Because of this, I am assuming that there is a broader set of initiatives coming from the Biden administration on prodemocratic internet technologies. You mentioned broadband. You mentioned a commitment to privacy, which we just recently saw a Senate agreement, potentially some paths forward on privacy legislation.

Are there other big --

MR. WU: Yeah, a Senate agreement. I'd like to see that.

MR. ENGLER: Reporting of a Senate agreement maybe?

MR. WU: It's sort of an inside joke, but all right. Maybe not a good one.

MR. ENGLER: Not one I'm inside of. So, are there a bunch of other initiatives and proposals that you're looking to from the Biden administration or from Congress?

MR. WU: You want us to tell you about the secret proposals that we haven't told anybody? Well, maybe, Peter, if you want?

MR. ENGLER: I actually see others that are related. I can name them, but I'm wondering if you – sort of what your perception is of what the Biden administration is doing? How much of its efforts are for a democracy preservation around the world around the internet freedom specifically?

MR. ENGLER: Do you want to reflect some domestically, Tim?

MR. WU: Yeah, maybe I'll talk about the domestic front as well. I'm, first of all, curious to see your list. To see how it compares to our list because I'm interested to see.

You know, one thing I'll notice about working in the White House is there's a gap between what you think you're saying and what people are hearing, which I don't know why that is, but you know what I mean? It's just like kind of like – and I'm always fascinated and interested to hear how we're – what we're doing is being heard.

But I want to say that, you know, on the domestic side. You know, this administration from the beginning has thought that in order to preserve a democracy at home that we also have to be serious about some of the challenges we're facing on the domestic tech front.

One of the things as I said, the President spoke in the State of Union about the need for stronger privacy. Generally, also spoke on the need for strong protection of children and young people. And, you know, just to stick on privacy for a second and talk about why that's so important.

One of the great challenges we see in our era is that a collection of intimate information from everyone so that you get served up with information which is tailored exactly to who you are, which often means that what you find the most enraging, alarming, controversial or so forth. And, you know, one of the things we think is that the current situation in online has led to domestically a fractioning, a petitioning of our democracy as sort of a loss of the center.

And it's something the President as himself has often spoken of being of a great concern. One of the reasons he ran – began the run for office was seeing what was happening in Charlotteville. So, I think that much of what we are interested in doing for the international struggle begins with the domestic side and the need to make sure we have a handle on what's going on with democracy at home.

MR. HARRELL: I'll just comment briefly on some of the international side of the agenda. I mean, we see the DFI as, you know, a signature piece of work and a signature initiative for the administration. And one that we want to carry into another – of other fora. But it's not our only international internet sort of freedom agenda as you alluded to, as you mentioned in the beginning.

We're going to be chairing the Freedom Online coalition next year. We've been working through the USU Trade and Technology Council on joint approaches to things like Russian disinformation across the world coming out the war on Ukraine. We obviously are pushing very hard for (inaudible) to

take over as head of the ITU in the current elections.

So, we're really, you know, we have a stream of work that's about kind of elevating our profile and our role in multilateral relevant, multilateral organizations. And then we're looking at ways we can use different existing fora to carry forward different aspects of the values that are reflected in the DFI as appropriate in those different fora. And then, of course, you know, we launched the DFI a little bit parallel to the President's democracy summit in December.

We obviously launched it several months later, which gave us a chance to have kind of a more freestanding launch for this and also reflected the way in which, the DFI really is as Tim said in his opening remarks, something that we have done in partnership with a couple of core allies more than just this being an American initiative.

But from a Biden administration perspective, obviously, we are now sort of halfway through the year of action, coming out of the President's democracy summit last December, going into the follow up this December. And as you know there are a number of different workstreams there focused on internet freedom.

MR. WU: I think we should, you know, mention now if not later another one of the initiatives that's out there is the State Department has launched their new – maybe this was on your list – Bureau of Cyber Space and Digital policy. Not, you know, we haven't I think pointed or announced a person, but we'll soon have a senior envoy and there's, you know, a spot for internet freedom.

So, I think, you know, I don't want to suggest as all the White House. There's some significant stuff out of both the State Department, USAID is, you know, has a number of initiatives that Sam Power has talking of lately. So, it is – I want to emphasize not just the White House, but I think an administration wide effort to tackle this serious question surrounding internet freedom and democracy.

MR. ENGLER: Sure. Speaking of the State Department. Steve Lincoln very recently said that we need to get anticensorship tech into the hands that need it, which I think is in the spirit of what we've been talking about today.

Recently, there's also been some reporting suggesting that the open technology fund,

which funds and supports the building of anticensorship and free internet access tools has received more funding from the United States. Do you see those developments as related? As part of this sort of broader strategy?

MR. WU: Yes. I think the administration, you know, across the administration sees these as serious problems. Now, like everything in the U.S. government not everything is 1,000 percent coordinated at all times. But I think there is this overlapping sense that we are facing a serious, almost extensional problem for democracy and around the world.

And, you know, I think the underlying key issue here is it's easy to talk about democracy and this and that. But the technologies of how information moves around, you know, are essential to what a country is like. And we believe very strongly that the kind of technologies that countries end up installing or using and relying upon have some role in determining their future course.

And I think, you know, that you could say that – you could have said that 500 years ago, a 1,000 years ago whether it was the printing press. Whether it was the rise of broadcast radio and others. But, you know, right now it is the internet and what the internet looks like that is going to matter. And that's why we take this issue so seriously. So, communication is destiny.

MR. ENGLER: So, I think it's really impactful that you said that. But many of the large technology companies that control so much of this infrastructure are built in the U.S. We have been somewhat reticent to regulate at least relative to the European Union's new set of interventions like the Digital Services Act for instance. Or maybe the most relevant to promoting the democratic interest of larger platforms.

Would you or broadly the Biden administration welcome that type of push? A little more systemic regulation and democratic influence on the large technology platforms? And do you see that as related to this?

MR. WU: I think everything here is interrelated. And let me just make a few points on that. I think we've said repeatedly that – and, you know, most of the regulation we've been speaking about here is the privacy and tech antitrust.

And we have said repeatedly that we have support in our – and in fact, enthusiastic about the progress of bipartisan bills in Congress on both the subject of tech antitrust and privacy. And that's something we have been watching, we've been supporting. So, the Biden administration has been clear about that.

At the same time, and I think this is something we need to recognize that's very important, and a fundamentally important part of a democracy is freedom of speech. So, you know, it won't do for us to set – you know, to support, you know, a regulatory approach that does not respect the fundamental importance of freedom of speech in a democracy. You know, it's possible to be wrong.

So, in everything that we're doing, we are trying to support, you know, protection for citizens against market power and forces that might damage democracy. While at the same time, remaining and holding onto that most respect for the principles of free speech which are important to this country.

MR. ENGLER: You know, I think there's parts of the DAS and I won't push you on this pretty specific but the independent research or access, for instance, has gotten some renewed attention that would allow researchers to examine large platforms but not necessarily influence directly the decisions which is one of the EU proposals that I'm a little partial to taking away my bias here.

So, I want to move to a few audience questions. The most common question I heard in advance, which I'll probably add a finer point to was, was the internet a mistake? But I think I'll get a little more specific for you.

Currently, the internet is subsidized by ads. Does a future internet need another funding source to create healthier democracies? This is to say is the core ad tech model of the web part of the problem here?

MR. WU: So, the question of whether the internet is a mistake. Even though we, you know, occasionally decry what's happening in social media and so forth. You know, all technologies sort of go through their ebbs and flows. And I think one of the genius of the American system is that we have this amazing ability to recover and re-understand what it takes to, you know, to have a media really

support a democracy or the kind of society we want.

I'm reminded by the fact that by the late 1950s everybody had declared that television had been a complete disaster. This was after the quiz show scandals where everyone said, you know, we just made this extraordinary mistake. Had this medium with so much potential and we let it become consumed, frankly, by advertising.

And one of the things that – and, you know, right now we live in what I think many people would acknowledge would be a golden age of television with so many choices and money spent on high quality content. And one of the things that I think is so great about this country is our capacity to learn from our mistakes. And rededicate ourselves to the original founding vision.

So, I think we live in an era where it's, you know, very obvious to a lot of people. And I think this is a strength that there have been, you know, that the internet has gone a distance away from what people hoped would be its sort of natural democracy supporting and healthy tendencies for society.

I think those of us who are active in the space in the '90s and the '1000s just thought, you know, you turn the thing in. There was something magical about the TCIP protocol that would bring out the best nature, you know, the good side of everybody and make them sort of live in harmony. That may have been a little too optimistic. And we're obviously in a course correction.

And I'm, you know, in this sense optimistic, which is to say there's a lot of people thinking very hard about whether there are ways we can rethink what the internet is. I mean the principle of connecting everyone is a very sound one. But are there ways we can, you know, as a society work together to make it healthier and better? And that involves government, that involves major companies, that involves stakeholders. All of us in trying to envision how the internet can be better and support the values that we believe in.

MR. ENGLER: More than a few people asked in what ways civil society activists, philanthropists, foundations can support? We've talked most of the time about nation states. What about everybody else? What are the efforts that you see that are particularly promising or the work that you would like to highlight?

MR. HARRELL: Look, I think that there are – you know, as Tim said. We're not going to be able to carry any agenda forward on the internet without the support and the accountability of civil society, of the companies, of the whole group of stakeholders that are involved in the internet.

Look, I think for civil society, the kind of research that civil society – look, government is not going to be well positioned, for example, to do the kind of work on tracking. Is there a recession freedom online that civil society can do, right? There's just some things that you need the kind of independence of civil society organizations to do.

I think that's true in the research front. I think that is true on holding governments to account to make sure that we have lived up to our commitments. And of course, philanthropists, I think can be very involved in funding some of those efforts and also helping connect people online. I mean the other thing and part of our DFI, you know, there are like three billion people who are still not online.

So, when we talk about connecting all of humanity, we're only at what? Maybe 60 percent or so of humanity is connected. I think that's another huge area of work over the next some years. Obviously, Tim was talking about the work we're doing domestically on that. Most people are connected. We're trying to give them a high speed. But internationally, there's so much work to be done on the connectivity front.

So, this is definitely something that we're going to need all of your work and support to carry forward.

MR. WU: You know, looking back in history just to add on that. The internet itself when it was the ARPANET back in the '70s when I was a young man, just kidding. Back in its founding era, you know, it was a government funded project, but the principal researchers were in academia and in industry.

And, you know, their efforts to build this supported by government is what made the United States the inventor of the internet, but it then had significant moments where it wouldn't have gone forward without, you know, civil society getting involved in various ways, researchers. And then ultimately industry when the internet finally became commercial in the 1990s pioneering new interests.

So, there is in history a successful model for how almost every part of society can work together. And I guess what I would say is we need to figure out what everyone does better. You know what I mean? There's certain things government does well, and certain things government does not do well. The same with private industry and same, frankly, with there's always been a significant public, nonprofit side to the internet's operations.

To this day, some of the most important website, the most trafficked website like Wikipedia continue to be nonprofits. And when you think of other media like radio and television, you've had important nonprofit roles. And I think one question that we should move forward is whether that, you know, nonprofit side of the internet is something that we need to make sure is always strong and vibrant the way it has been on other media. But we need everything to be sort in balance.

MR. ENGLER: More Wikipedias would be nice.

MR. WU: We're really here to restore balance to the force, you know.

MR. ENGLER: Sure. Totally accessible goal. I want to thank both of you. Any parting thoughts. We have just a minute before we switch over to our reaction panelists. Any last thoughts?

MR. WU: My feeling is we can do it. I'm optimistic. I think there's a lot of good will. I think there's a real desire.

You know, for this thing that originally started here. It has very good – you know, it's like a house with really good bones. The traditions of the internet are strong. They're routed in an idea of free speech, of democracy, of trying to build a society that is fundamentally for the people. And it's always been a very decentralized medium.

It was born to be that way. It was born to accept change. So, some of what we see and, you know, may be concerned about with the internet right now. It's important to understand that that is not a fixed state. You know what I mean? That this was designed from the beginning to be a network of networks, flexible medium. Something that can be the best of human aspirations. And we need to turn that corner and have the future that we want.

MR. ENGLER: Okay. Ending on a positive note. Tim Wu and Peter Harrell, thank you

so much for joining us today.

And I want to welcome our reaction panelists which are Allie Funk, Steven Feldstein and Jessica Brandt to come up. And I'll introduce them in just a second.

Okay. So, we're going to move onto the second part. We have a really excellent reaction panel to talk about what we just heard in the broader state of digital repression.

Immediately to my left is closest to me is researcher Allie Funk who is Freedom House. She leads the Technology and Democracy initiative there. They produce the freedom on the net. It's one of these global rankings that Tim just mentioned, and it is extraordinarily important.

They have an index with 70 countries on there and how they're doing in terms of digital freedom. They have an annual report, and they have 70 country level reports that dive into the individual states of how these countries are doing with digital repression and democracy on the web. I could not endorse that work more. Allie, thank you so much for being here.

In the middle of our group here is Steven Feldstein who is a Senior Fellow for Democracy, Conflict, and Governance at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He wrote this absolutely excellent book. It's not my book so I can be super explicit in pitching it to all of you. It's going to go right there. It's called the *Rise of Digital Repression*. I honestly think it is the singularly excellent resource on this topic. And if you're going to just buy one thing to learn more about this, I would absolutely recommend it.

Before his role at Carnegie, Steven was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. He has worked on these issues for a long time.

And then furthest from me is Jessica Brandt who is a Policy Director here at Brookings for Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technology Initiative. She's also a Fellow in the Foreign Policy program. Before Brookings, Jessica was a coauthor on a tremendously important report with a somewhat innocuous name. It's called *Linking Values and Strategy* which is like the most nothing of a name.

It is about a comprehensive plan for the U.S. and its democratic allies around the world to use nonmilitary approaches to outcomes autocracies. It's extraordinarily important and developed with a

lead of great experts on this. So, welcome them real quick. Thank you.

So, Allie, I want to start with you. Can you elaborate some on the global context that we're seeing? You're welcome to expand on or challenge or add to the framing that Tim and I just gave just a few minutes ago.

MS. FUNK: Yeah, happy to. Thank you everyone for being here, for having me. My name is Allie Funk.

Before I dive into some of the trends, I just want to say Freedom House. We produce this Freedom on the Net report, but we work with a network of over 80 researchers around the world who do that work on the ground who are on the frontlines of experiencing digital repression. So, I wanted to center them in our conversation today.

We've started the Freedom on the Net in 2009. A very exciting time. We all thought the internet was great. Everything was going to be good. Boy, we're we wrong. So, it's been 11 consecutive years of decline for internet freedom. I keep joking every year maybe we'll have our first positive year. 2022, I don't think will be it. Surprise.

So, there's a number of different trends we've picked up through the years that I just wanted to highlight that have really driven this. I think first has to do with just a global assault on free expression. So last year in at least 56 countries, we tracked somebody being arrested, prosecuted for their political, social, cultural speech online.

And just, you know, give into that. In 56 places, people were arrested for just a Facebook post talking about their religious expression, talking about who they want to vote for. I mean that's a wild number especially of somebody who lives in the U.S. with very strong First Amendment protections.

More governments are also just shutting off the internet all together particularly around protests, elections, just, you know, halting communication. And if you imagine, you're in a time of crisis and you can no longer text your mom that's terrifying especially if your mother is as engaged with your life as me.

So, and then, you know, another trend that I wanted to mention today has to do with

abuse of surveillance. Surveillance has just proliferated around the world. You know, under minding just

people's privacy rights, but due process under other fundamental freedoms. I think, you know, zooming

in there, spy ware is a big trend that we've been tracking. He's been tracking and I know a lot of other

organizations like Citizen Lob has been doing a lot of great work on there. So, another datapoint to throw

out because that's what Freedom House does.

   Authorities in at least 45 countries are using tools like NSO Group. You know, Cellebrite,

other extraction technology. And then the final one I want to mention is just the rise of cyber sovereignty.

And it's a little wanky term, but what I mean by that is this idea that governments want to build their own

rules and create a border over the internet. So, undermining the idea that regardless of where you're

based, you can access the same tools, the same platforms, the same information.

   And the last thing before I pass it back that I want to note and I was really excited to hear

Tim's comments about perform domestically in the U.S. as well is we talk a lot about how, you know,

authoritarian countries like Egypt, Russia, Iran, China are driving the decline of internet freedom, but I

don't think we can forget the role that democracies are playing in this.

    It's not just, you know, these spaces. The U.S. has had four consecutive years of

decline in internet freedom. We've seen rising surveillance. You know, just the way disinformation online

has led to offline harms, thinking of the January 6th attack. So, I think any sort of conversation about what

to do has to do with how democracies are playing a role and how we can hold each other accountable.

   MR. ENGLER: Sure. Thanks. You know, all of these indices also here at this point that

the U.S. is not immune to this. And sure you know by following the news here is part of this democratic

decline.

   Steven, I want to ask you to frame the decision making of autocracies and ask a little bit

more about why they use digital repression? You have a great concept in your book called Dictator's

Digital Dilemma. I'm hoping you can talk a little bit about your experience in why individual autocracies

choose to do this? And what they're thinking about when they do. Feldstein

   MR. FELDSTEIN: Sure. And again, I want to thank you for having me. This is a real

pleasure to actually see you all in person as opposed to sort of a little block online.

So, you know, first of all, I also think that, you know, I want to go off of what Allie said, which is that so much of what we're looking at is interrelated in the sense that digital repression is really linked to this democratic recession that you talked about. And it's really hard, I think to separate out the two.

And when I approached looking, you know, working on my book, I think one of the primary questions I initially was interested in was to what extent does political regime type actually effect the use of these tools for repressive or authoritarian purposes? And what I found was that after breaking down the data, looking around the world was that there's a very strong relationship between the two, which shouldn't come as a huge surprise. But actually, seeing that encapsulated in evidence and numbers I thought was really important.

So then from that point, one of the aspects I really wanted to hone in on was what is behind authoritarian strategies? And so, if you take it that one of the big vulnerabilities behind authoritarian regimes is the fact that they don't have the consent of the governed and they have to rely on sort of a few different ways in which to ensure their power.

A mixture of cohesion so using force. A mixture of cooptation so essentially bribery or providing inducements. And then, you know, trying to find other ways through, you know, peer effect and so forth to get people to follow them. It's a shaky foundation. And what's even shakier is the fact that when it comes to something like the dictator's digital dilemma is that there's a bit of a balance that regimes have to strike.

So, on the one hand, there's a need for control, right? There's a need to ensure that the information that flows within a society is one that they can regulate. So that's what you see when you look at the great firewall. That's when you see mass surveillance techniques in China, in Iran, in Russia and so forth.

But some countries particularly those that have a degree of openness also have a tradeoff when it comes to preserving an open society enough that they can actually integrate and take

advantage of economic benefits that result from being connected to the world. And so, you know, you see countries and leaders constantly making a calculous when it comes to say, to what degree can we balance one with the other?

Certain countries have decided control is the most paramount thing that's necessary. So, in Iran, for example, there is a willingness to forgo the benefits, the economic benefits, of global integration because to maintain that control is so important.

In Russia, you also see a movement towards that control. In comparative, what's interesting is that there are still some platforms like YouTube and Telegram remain open and that's part of this kind of counterbalancing effect.

And then other places like India, you see a real struggle where on the one hand there is a desire and a push to constrain and limit information. But on the other hand, so much of the dynamism behind society and the economy in India is built upon this linkage to the global – to the outside world. And so, there is sort of a built-in constraint in terms of how much mode others are willing push this. And so, that's where the dilemma comes in.

Countries face a bit of a decision when it comes to balancing control with the economic benefits and social benefits of openness.

MR. ENGLER: Jessica, so I want to bring you in. Thanks for being the third panelist who has to wait a little bit.

So, your team recently – and you're welcome to respond to either of those two points. But your team also recently published a new report on the increasing sophistication of Chinese's manipulation of online platforms especially search results which is maybe a little underdiscussed on topics like human rights abuses and Xinjiang, on COVID, Russian aggression in Ukraine, the Russian war in Ukraine.

I'm asking are authoritarians getting better at this too? Are they improving in their capacity to drive their narratives and win digital battles for technology control?

MS. BRANDT: Yeah, I think they are. I guess what I'd say, you know, built on what

Steven has just shared which is, you know, (inaudible) like Putin views information as a threat. It is a weapon to be wielded abroad and it is something to be tightly controlled at home.

And I think that is what is driving an increasingly forward leaning, you know, and I think cross platform effort to conduct information manipulation campaigns around topics that are of geopolitical salience to Beijing. And these are particularly topics that, you know, help to sort of position China as a responsible global player and to push back on criticisms of its rights record, of its early mishandling of the pandemic, for example. Criticisms that would suggest otherwise.

So, this recent work, you know, looks at how China has exploited search engine results. I think that's a really underexplored vector of information manipulation. We know from previous research that this is something that, you know, Russia has had some success at doing. And it looks like China is building on that model.

Now, you know, we tracked that phenomenon related to COVID and to Xinjiang because we know that those are two spaces where, you know, Beijing really has an interest in deflecting blame, you know, for some of its misuse. And I guess, you know, what I would say is that this is one of many tools that – I guess I would say, one thing is that we don't know whether what we're picking up is like an intentional, you know, sort of Chinese strategy or is it a byproduct of the fact that, you know, open media, you know, was able to – you know, the New York Times wrote one piece debunking the Four Teacher Conspiracy Theory.

They wrote that piece a year ago and they moved on to cover other newsworthy topics. Whereas, you know, Beijing sort of sits on top of a propaganda apparatus that turns out content every single day. It's not really beholden to budgets. It's not really beholden to audience desires. And so, I think a challenge we face is that this particular dynamic isn't necessarily search engines failing. They're prioritizing and serving up fresh relevant content for the query that users are delivering.

But, you know, nevertheless what we found is that just for searches of neutral term Xinjiang, the name of the place for every single day of our search, you know, Chinese state media was appearing in the top 10 which means that users who are sort of coming to this with an open mind might

stumble into, you know, propaganda without sort of the context for what they're looking at.

And I would say the same dynamic is driving, you know, a more assertive expansive and elaborate surveillance system within China, which I think many of you have probably seen in the New York Times' recent reporting. But we're not just talking about facial recognition. We're talking about, you know, voice prints and DNA collection and iris scans and other forms of data that are married up, you know, to exact this form of repression at home. And I think the fear is that, you know, that this repression is widening and that's not going to stay in China.

MR. ENGLER: So just a quick follow up to that. Sometimes, this battle for the internet is called sort of asymmetric. Is this an example of that where authoritarian countries are willing to do things that democratic countries really aren't?

MS. BRANDT: Yeah, I think this is a key asymmetry. I think authoritarian regimes recognize that open information environments, I think while they confer tremendous strengths on democratic societies over the long run and in the near term there are certain vulnerabilities, right?

I mean democracies depend on the idea that the truth is noble and that citizens can discern it and use it to make decisions for self-governance. And autocrats have no such need for a healthy information space to thrive.

So, I think what this means is that, you know, that democracies are somewhat constrained by norms and also, I think an appropriate desire to protect their own information environments that make it much harder for them to carry out the kinds of activities that authoritarian regimes are quite capable of on the short term. That there's virtual no normative constraints online.

The platforms don't – you know, their American companies. They're not Chinese companies. So, you know, we can talk about it in open discussion. There's lots of things that we can do to, you know, succeed in information competition in ways that are, you know, concordant with our values. I would say the administration, I think is very novel and effective approach at declassifying, downgrading intelligence and sharing it with the world ahead of and after, you know, the invasion of Ukraine on February 24th is a great example of using truthful information to go out and contest the information space.

I think it made it harder for fence sitters to fence it. I think it really bound allies together. It built support for a tougher response. Those are the kinds of sort of tools that I think are available to democracies. So, it doesn't need to exceed the space, but we have to do it in ways that are sort of reflective of our values. And the asymmetric advantages that we have which is our intelligence capabilities, our partners, et cetera.

MR. ENGLER: That's really a good example. So, I want to come from this general context back to the declaration.

Steven, I'm going to lead off with you. You've written a lot about the choices, about why states use digital repression and under what circumstances. Does this declaration – do you think it's going to be effective in changing state behavior? And I'm sort of especially curious about states that may have had a past with some dabbling with digital repression or that are wavering or weak democracies.

MR. FELDSTEIN: Yeah. Good question. Look, I think it's really important for a start. I do. And, you know, one of the things I mention a lot in my writing and book is this idea that you have to establish norms.

And I think this is an area where we've let those dissipate. We've let those break down. And I think part of the problem is the fact that within democracies themselves, you see a real erosion of the quality of governance and particularly in liberal democracies, right?

So, whether it's the United States on a host of different issues or weaker democracies where we've seen pretty troubling, you know, diminishments of free speech and so forth. We have allowed that to sort of – that trend to kind of to occur. In the meantime, we haven't put up a vision of what do we actually stand for?

And so, I think, you know, when I say, this is a first start in the sense that, you know, good. We've been able to rally core liberal democracies largely in Europe, other sort of likeminded democracies in other regions. And I think that's a really important thing.

I think the next challenge is how do you expand that out further? You know, what about India, Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa and so forth? You know, is there a way to bring them in to subscribe to

these principles while ensuring that they don't actually dilute them? And with India and with prior key

seven statements on internet shutdowns, for example, we've seen at least in the backroom where there is

a willingness on their part whether it's India or other weaker democracies to tamp down standards that I

think are important. So that will be a challenge.

        I think that another aspect to this that's also important is sort of saying, okay, we have –

you know, what do we do next to operationalize it? To make it real, right? We have, you know, high

concept standards that are important that people subscribe to. Well, what does it mean in terms of those

that flout them willingly?

        What does it mean when it comes to fencing countries that are sort of, well, maybe we're

interested, but, you know, we see things a different way? There's a whole kind of sovereignty push these

days when it comes to a country saying, look, universalism is one thing, but we really have a way that we

handle these issues. So how does this normative framework push back against that? To me that's

where the real test will be in the coming months.

        MR. ENGLER: Allie, I want to extend the same question to you. Anything to add to what

Steven just said?

        MS. FUNK: I thought he was quite right, and I totally agree. I think that I have my own

list of all the different things that the U.S. government is doing. So maybe we could all share a list and

see if we missed anything.

        And I view each of these as a step in the right direction. Individually, I don't think any of

them are going to get us where we need to go, but together they're pushing that needle and I think this is

whereas civil society had is what is our role then to hold second choice to account? And talking civil

society broadly here, global civil society. How can we play a role in holding signatories to account?

        How can we then work with other multistakeholder networks like the Global Network

initiative in which companies, tech companies, are part of that in thinking about how to protect free

expression, privacy. So, taking that multistakeholderism and putting it into action.

        MR. ENGLER: Sure. And we've did this a few times so maybe I should just say it.

There is sort of a broader scope of initiatives coming from the Biden administration that you might think are related.

I want to talk to you guys more about those. I see things like supporting privacy, enhancing technologies for which there's a US/EU and U.S./U.K. agreement to do. The US/EU being one through the Trade and Technology Council. I mentioned the Open Tech Fund which is supporting PPNs and peer-to-peer internet that are exploding in use right now in Russia.

Export controls on surveillance companies especially the NSO in Pegasus, but I don't expect that to be the only one. And other efforts like supporting open-source infrastructure like the Open Radio Access Network and broader open infrastructure that's not necessarily tied to individual countries and companies.

Does this to you all is that comprehensive? I'm missing huge things? I'm sure I am. Is there a systemic effort here? And is that collection of efforts enough? Or would you like to see a more systemic, comprehensive document or effort put forward?

MS. BRANDT: I mean I'd say one of the most important things the administration has done I think is situated this within the context of a broad asymmetric competition with authoritarian challengers that is taking place in the information space and the technology domain. And that requires a strategy to push back.

And I think having said that at the highest levels what that enables is sort of some policy entrepreneurship across the administration and across – I would say also like, you know, civil society entities and, you know, think tanks and other partners to think about how they could do their part in advancing that goal. So, I think that all the things that you have mentioned are related.

You know, I think importantly this is happening at the sort of the normative level, right? The State Department, the – you know, building out the TTC and working closely with, you know, partners and allies through the quad, for example. And that's happening at the practical level. So actually, sort of providing policy preserving tech, you know, and geo-activists and journalists who are operating, you know, in increasingly repressive environments. So, I think that balance of activities is useful. And so, I'm

glad to see it.

MR. ENGLER: Steven, anything to add?

MR. FELDSTEIN: Yeah. Look, I mean I think these are all really positive things. I don't have anything negative to say about any of these individual actions, you know, in of themselves.

What I would say is that I mean it sort of depends on what the problem is that you're trying to solve. If you're trying to solve individual aspects of digital authoritarianism, then each one of these can do some good in terms of moving the ball forward.

If you're looking kind of globally at, you know, Freedom House's 16 straight years of democratic decline. You think about all the different trends that are undermining democracies around the world when it comes to authoritarian consolidation, when it comes to weak democracies, a certain sovereignty in breaking down norms. When it comes to individual members of the liberal alliance including 20 percent of the EU, they're autocratizing at the moment.

This won't really solve the issue, but the issues brought in the tech. Tech is a part of it, but it's not the full picture. And so, I guess the question you have to ask yourself is what are the ways that we can push most beneficially on these issues that will somehow lead to greater impact around the world when it comes to the global democracy struggle, which frankly we're losing.

And to that I don't think there are any good, grand answers. I think it happens on a case by case, country by country basis. I think certainly we should be very careful about the partners the USG chooses when it comes to what kind of leaders we meet with and who we have bilateral relations with. I mean that's a separate issue, but, you know, I think – so I think in the big picture these will help but they're not going to be transformational in terms of the global democratic struggles that we're grappling with.

MR. ENGLER: Allie, I want to also ask you to weigh in. And specifically, Freedom House has called for a new cyber space office at the State Department, which we did just see the Biden administration create. I think Cyber Space and Digital Bureau. Is that another step in the right direction? Are you happy to see that? And other as broader efforts?

MS. FUNK: Yeah. I mean I'm happy to see it. I think – I was trying to think through like what do we want to see out of this? This new bureau or department?

I mean the first thing is I want to see human rights centric approach. And this is something that I thought the declaration did well as they centered human rights in the conversation. Talking about what is the national security implications? What are the business implications? Financial? Digital technology I think is part of the puzzle, but really centering those human rights concerns I think is really key. So, I'd like to see the Bureau do that.

The other, you know, I think it's been hard from a civil society perspective to figure out how do all of these different initiatives connect to each other? Do they connect? What's the overarching goal? Is there one?

I mean another one we haven't mentioned is the AI bill of rights that's sort of cotangential to a lot of the topics that we're talking about here. Administration power at USA is, you know, digital authoritarianism being a priority there. So how do all of those connect because I think if they're not, I assume folks are engaging but making sure like they're all working together. I think is really important.

And then the last thing, you know, I think that's really key, and I've mentioned it in a previous answer, and I will continue to bring up is meaningful multistakeholderism. So actually, building formalized processes in which global civil society, particularly those in the global south can engage with the center and give feedback on the things that they're doing.

And then making sure that feedback, they're actually working on it and responding to it. Because I'm not as – you know, I'm based in New York – I'm not going to be able to advise as well as a civil society group who is in India on the frontlines of experience what an internet shutdown is like. I might understand what are those levers of change that I can make in the Indian context to maybe change their own behavior. I don't have that expertise. But what I can do is try to help build those connections and then make sure that the office or the new center is strengthening those.

And the last one I'll one I'll touch on too has to do with funding and making sure that those groups – also academia – those sectors are receiving robust funding to do this work overtime. You

know, there's the anticensorship, the anti-surveillance tools that, you know, folks right now in Russia are really relying on. But also, things of like strategic legislation. That's been a really effective tool of pushing back against some problematic censorship and surveillance laws. Indonesia is an example of where that's worked. So, funding for these things that we know work, we just need to get the resources to people who need them.

MR. ENGLER: Yeah. That's a great point. There's been a lot of discussion around funding of anti-surveillance and anti-authoritarian tools, right? Which is a line of research that is not as well funded as pro-authorization tools especially because surveillance and add money go hand in hand. And so, it's nice to hear not only about the technology but also about the civil society funding as well.

I want to go towards the corporate side of this. And, Jessica, maybe I'll start with you. You've been looking into research on autocracies and how they manipulate online platforms largely or significantly held by countries in the West, though not always. Are they doing enough internally to combat authoritarian use? Do you think we need them to take a step up? Do you think there are legal or regulatory developments necessary to ask them or require them to do more?

MS. BRANDT: Yeah. Great question. I think I sort of bucket out the private sector and think about sort of platforms as one bucket and another sort of U.S. technology firms in another category.

I mean I think the most important thing we need from technology, from platform companies is to make transparency the norm. And that means, you know, with trusted researchers. I think there's, you know, some promising efforts underway to try to think through how we can square the circle and accommodate privacy concerns with getting researchers the information they need to answer some really sort of foundational questions about how social media platforms are shaping our information environment.

And then also transparency with users. So, when it comes to, you know, sort of dealing with state backed propaganda, I think labeling and, you know, sort of providing context is one of the most important measures and actually really not in favor of the outright banning of state media, even Russia state media. And even at the request of European governments. I think outright bans on certain forms of

content at the request of governments is a very slippery slope. And it's not necessary when there are other tools like deamplifying, demonetizing and labeling.

On the sort of in the other bucket, I would say, you know, I would just like to see U.S. technology firms – and actually, also like research institutions being thoughtful in doing their due diligence to make sure, you know, that they're not unwillingly participating in China's (inaudible) surveillance state. I mean it was not that long ago that MIT was, you know, revealed to have partnerships with – I think it was SenseTime and iFlyTek.

I mean these are sort of Chinese companies that are, you know, have played a role in the, you know, I think oppression with leader minorities in China in a way that I think, you know, we would all find that out. I think those partnerships have been, you know, unwound. But I think it just speaks to the importance of really upping due diligence.

MR. ENGLER: Steven, the same-ish question to you on the role of companies. Do they have a role here especially in changing the pattern of thinking around this digital dictator's digital dilemma? Can they raise the cost of digital repression from the corporate side of this?

MR. FELDSTEIN: Yeah. Actually, you know, let me just tell you a few things that worry me on the private sector side.

So, one thing that worries me is the lack of transparency from platforms like Telegram, TikTok and to some extent YouTube when it comes to their – how widely they operate and how little they actually are accountable when it comes to the type of information that is circulated. I would particularly say with TikTok that's an area. It's a platform that, you know, is fairly recent in terms of its uptake.

When it comes to the Ukraine war in particular and the fact that it does remain operative in Russia. But it censors any material linked to the Ukrainian War. I think we see it a lot of this sort of – we see them dodging around issues that other platforms are forced to be accountable for. So that's one thing.

I think the second thing is that we've seen improved behavior from platforms when it comes to a range of digital authoritarianism, political issues worldwide. One of the things that we

continue to see problems with is elections particularly in elections that are viewed as lower priority for these companies. So, you know, look at Kenya upcoming. Look at the Philippines, which just occurred. You know, other countries like that.

What we know is that Facebook and other platforms have a certain amount of resources that they will dedicate to these issues. They're willing to throw a lot of resources and a lot of political capital towards elections that really effect a user based in the global north. But when it comes to other countries, they will sort of do haphazard measures, but they really won't push forward on that. To me, that's a big gap. That's a big problem as well.

MR. ENGLER: Also, countries that are more afraid of passing regulatory laws and –

MR. FELDSTEIN: Sure. Right. And I think that's links to a third issue which is that there ought to be a way to sync up a better balance so that when platforms are faced with making hard decisions, you know, to the extent that they have or know that they have the backing in the USG. I think that can help.

And so, in Russia they were ultimately forced into a series of decisions because of political events. But there are many other places like, let's say, Vietnam where maybe there's a way for a greater round of conversation to occur quietly between platforms and USG in terms of what's a coordinated policy when it comes to these freedom of expression issues that matters and makes sense?

And what's a steer that we can give these companies in terms of how they balance, you know, massive take down requests from the, you know, the Communist Party in Vietnam? You know, what balancing effect did they do if they want to remain in that country and that does matter.

MR. ENGLER: Allie, any quick thoughts and then we're going to jump to audience questions.

MS. FUNK: Quick thought I think is underline both the comments we've heard is there's really no one size fits all. Different platforms have different risks.

You know, if the platform is owned by a Chinese company. Then that platform or that company is going to be held to really onerous data localization policies in China really on its surveillance,

censorship requirements. If it's owned VK or Russian social media platform owned by a Putin ally, it may even be more likely to censor content about the invasion of Ukraine.

So, I think understanding that we shouldn't treat every tech company the same is really, really important. And then designing regulation around those different nuances is key. And then also the context. The way we might want to advocate for Twitter or Facebook to respond to a request in one country might actually be different than to another country based on the needs of folks on the ground or who live there.

And this is something we hear from our partners all the time of like you really need to think about the context. So just I thought I would underscore that.

MR. ENGLER: Sure. So, audience question. I'm going to direct it to Jessica first, but you're welcome to either Steven or Allie jump in.

Studies earlier in the decade, in the 2010s on Chinese internet censorship used to find some degree of freedom of expression. And this was key to the CTP's authoritarian resilience. Has this changed? Has it become more repression in the less decade?

MS. BRANDT: Yeah. It's a great question. I think this is called diffusion proofing, right? It's sort of there's a lot of evidence that authoritarian regimes are becoming more resilient in part because they're adopting some of the sort of at least the patina of democratic sort of – of democratic infrastructure.

It's a creating some managed or controlled space, you know, for expression. And that this is sort of has contributed to the rising durability and longevity of personalist regimes. So, I think, you know, you're picking up on a phenomenon that's absolutely correct.

I do have a sense that the repression is increasing. And I think the vast amount of evidence that the, you know, this sort of repressive – the instruments of power that would enable the state to go farther in its repression, the state is building those tools and is desirous to go further. So, my worry is about, you know, I think we've moved in the wrong direction, and I fear that we're watching as the state is preparing itself to go even further.

MR. ENGLER: Steven or Allie any thoughts on that?

MR. FELDSTEIN: I just want to add one point which is that, you know, we've been speculating for a while what would happen when it came to the COVID pandemic and some of the different QR codes and so forth that would be used and whether those would be exploited. And we haven't seen as much evidence as that as we feared.

But in China now we're actually starting to see that take place. And I think most recently, you know, where there were planned protests, they used QR codes that suddenly turn people's phones from green to red in terms of basically saying because you now have COVID or you're infected, you can't go attend this protest.

And so, that's antidotal. That's one. I don't know if this is going to become, you know, something they have on a mass scale. But I also don't know of all the different other times something like this is already occurring in which we have no information. And so, you know, a lot of this stuff tends to me seems a bit cumulative.

You know, you start with laying a foundation of oppression. You begin by kind of employing different types of algorithms, mass surveillance and so forth. You deploy QR codes as part of your lockdown procedures. You start exploiting those QR codes and it goes on and on and on. And it doesn't reverse. It doesn't get better. At least not the trajectory that we've seen in China.

MR. ENGLER: Okay. Well, I think that actually maybe our last question. I want to ask you all in thanking our esteemed panelists for joining us today. Allie Funk, Steven Feldstein and Jessica Brandt.

I really meant every word about their content that they've been producing nice topics. My absolute first recommendation for you to go check out if you want to learn more. Otherwise, thank you all for joining us today. And we hope you enjoyed the event.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2024