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WEBINAR

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY: GLOBAL INSIGHTS FROM AFRICA

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FIRESIDE CHAT:

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HONORABLE SAARA KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA
Speaker of the National Assembly, Parliament of the Republic of Namibia

PANEL DISCUSSION:

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NGUIMKEU: Colleagues and friends, my name is Professor Pierre Nguimkeu. I am the Director of the Africa Growth Initiative and a Senior Fellow in the Global Economy and Development Program at Brookings. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to our today's event on Democracy Day. The Democracy Day offers us a moment of reflection, not simply to mark a date on the calendar. But to pause and consider the evolving realities of African governance and the continent's political experience, which are very diverse. We have witnessed moments of citizen mobilization, institutional innovation, and peaceful transfers of power, but we have also seen reversal, fragility, and growing questions about how political system can deliver on people's aspiration for dignity, security. And prosperity. The Brookings report guiding our conversation today, prospect of democratic resilience in Africa during uncertain times, invite us to grapple with those tensions. It reminds us that resilience depends on many forms of accountability, citizen engagements, leaders, institutions checking one another. And civil society ensuring transparency and responsiveness. It highlights that why some countries are consolidating democratic practices, others are facing stagnation or experimenting with different approaches. We believe that there is no size fit or answer. I believe that the value of our gathering today rely on that. We are not here to promote a single model of governance, but we are here to ask hard questions. What systems are most legitimate and efficient in the eyes of citizens? What institutional arrangement deliver real results? And how can Africa chart pathways that are grounded in its own historical context while also adapting to the pressures of today's or certain times? To help us guide these reflections, we are honored to host a fireside chat with two distinguished voices, followed by a discussion with a panel of eminent scholars. The fireside chart will feature right Honorable Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, who's a speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Namibia, and whose leadership and experience provide invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities of governance on the continent. She will be in conversation with Professor Landry Signé, senior fellow at Brookings and a leading scholar on Africa's governance and development. And Landry will also moderate the panel discussion. I can think of no other better way to mark democracy day than a conversation that is both grounded in scholarship and enriched by practical leadership. And experience. Thank you all for joining us today. Please join me in welcoming Honorable Saara Kuugongelwa and Professor Landry Signé. Over to you, Landry.

SIGNÉ: Thank you so much, Professor Pierre Nguimkeu, for the fantastic introduction and your wonderful leadership. We are very grateful. Greeting and happy day, everyone, and happy International Day of Democracy. It is my distinguished honor to introduce a fearless leader and trailblazing woman of first, Honorable Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila, Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia, the first woman who hold this role, and she previously served as the first woman Director General of Namidia's National Planning Commission, Finance Minister and Prime Minister, and has represented. Namibia in international bodies including the IMF, the World Bank, the AFGB, SADC and SACU among others. And often described as a wonder woman, her leadership is truly remarkable and she received numerous honors including the most brilliant order of the sun and an honorary doctorate in public finance. From the University of Namibia amounts many accolades. Thank you so much for joining us today, honorable speaker.

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Thank you very much, Mr. Landry Sr. For having me. It's my pleasure.

SIGNÉ: Fabulous. Honorable Speaker, as I mentioned, you are a woman of many firsts, whether in your current capacity as Speaker, but also Director General of the National Planning Commission, Prime Minister, Finance Minister, among others. In your view, is there a connection between women's political power and the resiliency of a democracy.

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Thank you very much. First and foremost, in order for a democracy to be resilient, it must also address the other needs of society, besides that political freedoms and regularity of elections. It must ensure that there is inclusion as well, and women being the majority of the global population. It becomes important that they are participants in the governance of their countries, the economies of their countries in order for us to ensure that we have a true democracy that truly responds to the needs of the people and is resilient. So to that

extent I would say indeed that is so. And we have seen that in Namibia where at independence women were classified as minors, they needed the permission of their male family members, their parents and their spouses to be able to engage in businesses and we have had to. Undertake legal reforms in order to recognize women as equal partners in society and give them the rights that are granted to other citizens, but also to assist them to participate in the economy to protect them from violence. And that has seen not only the empowerment of women, but it has enabled them to make their due contribution to the growth of the economy international development. And as the saying goes, of course, if you want to empower a nation, you have to empower women because when you empower a man, you empower an individual.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, honorable speaker. In our research, we examine the crucial role played by national assemblies in overseeing executive power. How will you describe the importance of your role as Speaker of Namibia's National Assembly?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, Namibia's National Assembly is one of the two chambers of the Namibian Parliament and the Assembly is the primary house of legislation. The laws originate from the National Assembly. In addition to that, it has a representative mandate for the people of Namibya, and it has the responsibility to oversee the other organs of the state, including the executive and the judiciary. But these powers of the National Assembly... Are vested in the collective membership of the assembly, operating under the laws of the state, the constitution, and the rules. And the speaker only is the presiding officer. But of course, that does enable the presiding officer to participate in determining the agenda for national development through the laws that we must pass and also through the oversight mandate of the institution.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic. And what are the biggest differences in your current position, Honorable Speaker, compared to working within the government as Prime Minister or Finance Minister?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, the parliament, as I have indicated, being the primary or the lawmaking body of the state and the oversight organ of the State would determine the development agenda and the governance of the country. But the executive is the administrative arm of the state. So they are in daily contact with the communities, in a position to identify the challenges that are facing the nations. But most importantly, They develop the programs that respond to the challenges that they face in the nation, and they are involved in the implementation. But they are both very important functions, but complementary and different. And coming in from the executive has given me an experience that assists me with my new role as presiding officer of World Health.

SIGNÉ: Fabulous, honorable speaker. And this is a question that we often ask and that many students of democracy also wonder in the specific context of Namibia, who has more power? Is it the executive leader or the parliamentary one?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Well, I think in a functioning democracy, the primary representative of the people of any country are the elected leaders that are responsible for the governance, which is the passing of laws. And the fact that the legislature exercises oversight over the executive, that also indicates a seniority. But in terms of our constitution, members of the executive are drawn from parliament. So it is not like in other countries where the members of executive come from outside of the parliament. And in addition to that, the president who is the head of the Executive is also head of state with powers to dissolve parliament and also has powers to appoint a limited number of members to the assembly. So that creates a checks and balance so that you don't have one organ that is super powerful, but you have a situation where there will be no abuse of power and there would also be augmentation of views in order to optimize the public interest.

SIGNÉ: Amazing honorable speaker. And how does parliament and the government ensure accountability to the general public both during and in between elections?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, what we do as an assembly is that the first and foremost, our governance system emphasized rule-based or law-based governance. Every action of every public institution must be in compliance with the laws. And these laws are passed by representatives of the electorate that are usually elected on the basis of what we call political manifestos. And they will become and pass laws and develop policies and implement them. They account to the public whom they will rely on for the renewal of their mandate in terms of how they have given effect to the commitments that they have made. But in addition to that, Parliament also has committees, Parliamentary Standing Committees. We also have select committees that investigate matters of concern as brought to our attention by members of the public. And that also go out to assess the implementation of policies in order to verify what is reported to Parliament by executives who are required to provide periodic reports, including audit reports by Auditor General, who is autonomous and accountable only to the National Assembly. Of Parliament. And then we have watchdog institutions like the Ombuds Office that would make sure that the executive bodies actually carry out their work and are accountable to Parliament to enable Parliament to hold the executive to account.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic. And how will you assess the strength of Namibia's civil society and the role played in national politics?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, Namibia civil society sector is quite vibrant. We have numerous players there that are very diverse, both in their nature and in the work that they do, and that address very important issues that affect our nation. The church, for example, in Namibian does not only confine itself to preaching and religious education. Before independence, they were the primary service providers of critical services to the oppressed African populations. The schools and the health facilities were owned by the church. In this way, they only sent us that were available to provide services to African communities. Even when we started with our struggle for national independence, the church has amplified the voices of oppressed people of Africa. And they joined the petitions to the United Nations. So for us, the church is not only a religious organization, but it's a community-based organization that is an invaluable partner in the development of the country. And we have seen that they have gone beyond that education and health to issues like gender-based violence and economic empowerment of women. So, and they have a very wide outreach to areas that sometimes government struggle to reach. But you also have others like Women Group Savings and Credits Association. And there are instances where they are able to mobilize savings and assist low-income groups to have access to low-cost housing, for example. And then you have organizations that assist communities to have to legal services, and therefore ensuring access to justice for all, supporting the implementation of state laws and policies.

SIGNÉ: I really like the comprehensive approach from religious group, but women groups, among other honorable speaker that you presented so beautifully. And as you know, honorable speaker, Namibia has remained consistently high ratings and maintain consistently high ratings in global measures of democracy. Whether by Freedom House, Varieties of Democracy, and International Idea, which are organization ranking democracies around the world. And for example, International Idea places Namibia in the top 25% of countries in the world when it comes to the quality of democracy. What do you think, honorable speaker, accounts for the resiliency of Namibia's democracy at a time of a regional and international pressure to democracy around the world?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: I think the primary reason really for Namibia is that for us, democracy is not a matter of compliance with international law or good practices. For us, democracy is something that is homegrown, that is based on the aspirations born out of a long bitter struggle for independence. It's the people that have had to experience two genocides in. In successive colonial oppressions in having to fight a long armed struggle in order to get our independence. And so we value democracy. We say, many Namibians would say we died for democracy. So we cherish it and we nurture it. That is first and foremost. And secondly, upon attainment of independence, we ensured that we have established a solid foundation of governance in the country with laws, institutions and systems, including separation of powers with the judiciary being autonomous from the legislative and the executive, being unafraid to take on

government or parliament when we are challenged. And I always say there were instances when we lost these cases and our adversaries were very happy. But as leaders, political leaders, we are also happy to know that our people have an alternative when they are not happy with the decisions that we have taken. That way we are assured that the freedom that we have paid so much for would not be threatened by unrest as a result of displeasure of members of the communities with the decisions of the executive or parliament. I think these are some of the issues. But for us also, we know that democracy is not only about political rights and the regularity of elections. They must also ensure that there is development, inclusive growth and the dignity of people. Freedom from poverty, and that I think has also enabled our people to appreciate democracy and work hand in hand to ensure that we maintain it because it's a prerequisite for prosperity.

SIGNÉ: I really like how you emphasize various key dimension that we also speak in various papers in our series, whether horizontal accountability, vertical accountability, and diagonal accountability, the value of the people that people have for democracy, but also the checks and balance, which we often call horizontal accountability. An honorable speaker. So you were speaking about that struggle for freedom and so on, and you were involved also in that. I don't know if it's something you want to speak a little bit about. You started very early, which is one of the things which made you such a fearless leader. Is it something you wanna speak a little about as to when you started, your journey eventually?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, indeed. I think I became involved in political activism, not as a result of some campaign that were directed at me, but because of the experience that I observed. It's a young African girl living in a country that was ruled by external colonial powers that were subjecting the population to oppression and racial segregation. And based on what I experienced, I decided to align myself with those that we're pursuing efforts to bring about freedom and independence. And I think going into exile at the age of 12, I think build a degree of resilience in me. And I was also lucky in that the potential that I had was supported by our leaders who mentored me together with many others and enabled me to participate in the governance, taking the position of Director General. Of National Planning Commission, which actually coordinates the formulation of national development policies in the overseeing implementation and reviewing of that. From there, then I went to finance, as you have indicated, and there I had an opportunity to actually make a meaningful impact by being able to ensure that the fiscal strategy of government in... And the budget responds to what are considered to be the most pressing priorities for our country. So that was one of the most fulfilling times that I have had in politics. Then I come to the office of the prime minister, where you coordinate different government ministries, and that brought its own experience and also satisfaction in terms of being able to contribute to ensuring that our efforts is a collective government, executive, judiciary, and legislature are focused on what is the most pressing priorities and optimize the outcome from that. So that's a rich experience that would help me in my new capacity as a presiding officer of one of the chambers of our parliament.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, honorable speaker. And what have been the biggest challenges to Namibia's democratic consolidation in recent years, and what have political actors worked to address and overcome them?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, our biggest challenge has actually been that Namibia has been one of the most unequal societies. We had managed to propel our economy to higher rates of growth and to demonstrate resilience, even in the face of natural emergencies like droughts and floods, which are very common in Namibian and also through COVID. But we have sections of our population that are not small that still live in poverty. And although the country managed to be elevated from a low middle income to an upper middle income, for example, we experienced high levels of poverty and unemployment. And that has been one of the most challenging thing. And what makes it worse is that poverty actually follows racial lines. So the majority of the poor are the black indigenous communities. And the majority of the rich are Namibians of foreign extraction. And that does not work well for peace and stability. And that is why we made deliberate efforts to bring about equity and inclusivity by supporting those that are on the margins of socioeconomic activities through an Affirmative Action Act, Public Service Act that promotes affirmative action, and also funding schemes to assist entrepreneurs from marginalized communities to get access to

funding. Using the state procurement program to set aside some tenders for small companies and also for indigenous companies and the list goes on to make sure that we do not only have political freedom and peace and stability that may be short-lived but we actually have shared prosperity because that's the only one that can guarantee us the resilience of our democracy going forward.

SIGNÉ: Amazing. So inclusive development is really key to consolidating democracy. And honorable speaker, how will you summarize the most important lessons Namibia has learned about reinforcing and advancing democratic gains?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, one of the most important lessons really is inclusivity, inclusivity when we came from exile, when we come to participate in the UN supervised elections that led to our independence, we decided to adopt a policy of national reconciliation. We decided to not persecute those that persecuted the majority of our people, including our own nationals, that felt praying. To the manipulation of the colonial government in working with them. And that enabled us to ensure peace and stability in the country. Then we went on to ensure that we foster a spirit of patriotism in one Namibia, one nation. And that was a challenge because we had diverse cultural groups that were deliberately incited by the colonial powers against each other in order to detract the Africans from the main goal of freeing themselves from colonial oppression. So to get them from that and give them a sense of oneness, one nation and still be able to celebrate their cultures is something that was a challenge, but I think that's something that was worth investing in. So we made sure that inasmuch as power is in the hand of the electorate exercised through their elected representatives. We have. A council of traditional leaders that advise government on traditional matters so that we can balance those issues. And I cannot overemphasize that part to say diversity may be a challenge to manage, but diversity cannot be disregarded and sidelined in preference of the dominant forces, because that would only spell conflict, as our former president would say, inclusion spells harmony. And exclusion spells conflict. And what we are seeing around the world today was all sort of insecure environments on account of some members of the global community not wanting to embrace inclusivity, both in terms of shared prosperity and diversity of views and use of peaceful means to resolve conflict. And I think it is important that we revert back to that. Otherwise, so long as there are a few people in the world that feel insecure and unfairly treated, none of us will ever be saved, and we will not be.

SIGNÉ: I really love this, honorable speaker, inclusion, inclusivity, but also homegrown solution. You mentioned the role of traditional factors as well. So those are extremely important factors. And do you think, honorable speakers, that this lesson can offer advice for other countries? In other words, what can other countries, whether in Africa or around the world, learn from the Namibian experience.

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, I think that there are some lessons that can be drawn by others from my experience. We know that we have also learned from others. Our constitution is hailed as one of the best because we are one of youngest countries around the world. We were able to build on the positive aspects of governance systems elsewhere, but we were also able to observe the mistakes that were made by others and try to avoid them. And we are hoping that others can also look at. Some of the challenges that we face in how we have managed to navigate them, the same way that we can learn from others in terms of shared prosperity. So that point of national reconciliation is especially important, I think, from my point of view for others to learn from. I always say that anyone who comes to Namibia 10 years after independence would never believe that Namibian was what it was in 1980, for example. It was a bloodbath here. But when you come here 10 years after independence, it's a completely different country. And that we are able to achieve what we have achieved. It's not because we are smarter. It's because we work together. We accommodate each other so that even in our parliament, where the ruling party has had two-thirds majority, more than two-tenths, and we still have an absolute majority, we take decisions on the basis of consensus most of the time. It is only in a few isolated cases that we can do that. So for us, inclusivity, consensus building is very, very important.

SIGNÉ: Amazing honorable speaker and with many of the other key leaders from Namibia that I have engaged with so the message of really working together strong stronger together partnership

those are words which came often so I really like how this that convergence and given your expertise as a former Minister of Finance and former director. General of the National Planning Commission, do you think that there is a connection between democracy and economic performance, Honorable Speaker?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Most definitely. There is a connection. Without democracy, we cannot achieve economic development and economic growth, because there can be no prosperity where there is conflict. And we have many examples very close to us. We don't have to mention those countries. And some of those countries were supporting us when we were waging our struggle. And even the young generation of freeze. Who may not have experienced what our generation experienced before independence. When they look at what is happening around the world, they are able to appreciate that. And when you also have conflicts and you don't hold hands, it means that everyone cannot bring their talent and their experience to the table to advance the course of national development. So that is besides the fact that without peace in tranquility, no development can take place.

SIGNÉ: So amazing, and in addition of the points that you have highlighted, honorable speaker, what various mechanism of democratic governance really causes that connection?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, for Namibia we have a system where we have national governance institutions like the National Assembly or the Parliament as we talk about, but we also allow communities at the regional level, for example, to have their representatives that are elected directly. People who come from their midst, people who are familiar with their conditions and can bring issues that affect them to the table of decision-making. And one of the things that we are looking at is how to ensure adequate funding for what we call constituencies to enable them to implement programs in the respective regions where they are elected. But we also talked about civil society. Civil society is also an important partner. And what we do is we also subsidize as a government. We actually do have a policy of cooperating with them and we subsidize them. We subsidize church schools, church hospitals, and other community initiatives that support the aspirations expressed by the Namibian people in their including the Constitution.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, Honorable Speaker. As a leader of many firsts, what advice will you give to young women in Africa or around the world, inspired or willing to follow your footsteps?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: Yes, I would say to them, they should believe in themselves, in that, in fact, many of them are already providing leadership from where they are. Often, people think that leadership is about holding a political office. But leadership is just being someone that provides guidance and nourishment wherever you are. In Namibia, for example, we even have women-headed households. In a large size, we have children headed households that government do support through social safety net programs. So I want to encourage them to believe in themselves because definitely they have significant value to add to the governance of the country. Secondly, to tell them that they will most definitely make mistakes if they are elected to political office or they are appointed to positions of leadership. But making a mistake is not a failure, It is an opportunity to learn. You learn from that mistake, you pick yourself up, and you'll be stronger when you try next time. And then I will also say, not only to the women, but also to the men, that the women add value to our society. They are our mothers that raised us, the nature us, to the level of the households. So when they are brought to the table, we are not pushed away. We should not feel threatened, but we should feel empowered because it means that women being the majority. Women being the naturists are going to bring that perspective and would strengthen the national effort that would make sure that the cake is made bigger and all of us can get the bigger chunk when everybody comes to the table. Because leadership is not about opportunity for advancement for that person, it's about an opportunity to contribute to the welfare.

SIGNÉ: What an incredibly beautiful way to conclude this distinguished fireside chat, honorable speaker. We are deeply grateful for the powerful insights that you have shared, and we are also grateful to Her Excellency, Margaret Mansa Williams, Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia to the United States for her leadership. So thank you so much to your team and to everyone who

have made this possible. And I will invite the other panelists to join us soon, but perhaps before that, honorable speaker, do you have any last word you want to share?

KUUGONGELWA-AMADHILA: No, I just want to appreciate this platform. I think that these are important issues that we need to discuss so that we can draw lessons, positive lessons from wherever we can get them around the world, and so that you can prosper together. Leaving no one is a global community. Thank you. Leaving no.

SIGNÉ: Leaving no one behind. Thank you so much, Honorable Speaker. We are incredibly grateful for your time and for your words of wisdom. Thank you. I will now call the panelists to join me, Chipo Dendere, George Ofosuo-Skow, Tehle, Daniel Risnik, and Jason Stearns. One of the key dimension that I want to emphasize here is that the conversation we'll have for this panel, for the conversation will have for these panel would like to gratefully acknowledge the Open Society Foundations for its support of Brookings research on democracy in Africa. Brookings is committed to quality, independence and impact in all of its work. Activities supported by its donor reflect this commitment and the analyzes and recommendations are solely determined by the scholars. So the panel joining me, of course, we have Professor Chippo Dendere, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Willis Lake College. We have Professor George Ofosu. Assistant Professor, Department of Government, London School of Economics and Political Science, and also a fellow at the Center for Democracy and Development of Ghana, CDD Ghana. We have also Professor Oscar Otele, Chairman of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration of the University of Nairobi. We have Dr. Daniel Riznik. Non-resident fellow at the Brookings Global Economy and Development Program, and a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. And we also have Professor Jason Stearns, associate professor at the Simon Fraser University and founder of the Congo Research Group and senior fellow at New York University Center on International Cooperation. Welcome to our distinguished panelists. I'm so excited to have you today, especially after the incredible works that you have done on the papers, which are available on our Brookings website. So perhaps to get started, I will call Dr. Danielle Resnick, who is my co-principal investigator for this project. On democracy and resiliency in Africa. And before we dive into the research, Danielle, how will you evaluate the current state of democracy in the world and in Africa? Are we witnessing progress, regression, or something in between?

RESNICK: Well, thank you so much, Landry, for the opportunity for us to share our insights from our project on democratic resilience in Africa, especially today. It's timely, not only because it is International Democracy Day, but we're also on the eve of much watched elections in Malawi happening tomorrow and just weeks away from elections in Cote d'Ivoire in Tanzania. So I think it's very timely to have these conversations. And to your question, I think globally, we're obviously in quite a difficult period. The launch of today's report from the International Democracy and Electoral Assistance Institute showed that globally in 2024, 94 countries suffered a decline in at least one metric of democratic performance compared to their performance just five years prior. So that could have been, you know, a reduction in credible elections, access to justice, civil liberties, etc. So I think democracy everywhere are facing different types of internal and external threats, whether that's loss of public trust, growing polarization, de-alignment of political parties that creates opportunities for populists, or also, you know, basic threats to inclusivity and public participation. In the Africa region, what we've found is that collectively, we've actually seen a lot stability over the last two decades with notable caveats. So more specifically of the 46 Sub-Saharan African countries where we have varieties of democracy data or VDEM data, there are the same number of electoral democracies in 2024, 15 that we had in 2004, so two decades prior. And so during this 20-year period, only seven countries though consistently retained their democratic status. And 27 countries consistently remained autocracies. So we have at one end of the spectrum, countries like Namibia that we've just heard about, also Ghana, countries like South Africa and Senegal that have really stayed the same over the last two decades on these V-Dem metrics. But as we've heard from the honorable speaker, these stronger democracies themselves have faced new challenges over time that have allowed them to mature. And then at the other end of the spectrum, we've had countries like Eritrea or Iswatini that have stayed closed autocracies or others like Uganda, Rwanda and Zimbabwe that have been more or less stayed as electoral autocracies.

Now, I said that there's caveats, of course, to this picture, and there have been remarkable shift as well. Mali, of courses, one of those countries that are quite notable in this regard, it really slipped dramatically from being a noted electoral democracy to now being under a military junta regime. And there have been major improvements in some countries. The Gambia and Liberia, for instance, really stand out as making important strides. I think within each of these large-scale trends around both electoral democracy and even on the autocracy side, we see different steps forward and backwards. There may be progress with enhancing the judiciary, for example, but then perhaps backsliding with respect to civil liberties or civil society associations. And I think that's really the essence of our project, is really better understanding these different trajectories and what drives them, what causes some countries to bounce back from democratic backsliding, and what causes others to avoid that backslide in the first place. So really looking forward to the rest of the panel today.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, Danielle, and I will keep you on the line. Our co-authored Brookings report, Prospects for Democratic Resiliency in Africa During Uncertain Times, was just released on Friday ahead of the International Day of Democracy. What listens from Africa's most resilient democracies? Illustrated with concrete examples from across the continent can inform other countries both regionally but also globally.

RESNICK: OK, well, thanks for that question, Landry. I think in terms of Africa's most resilient democracies, I think there's definitely some cases where they've really performed quite well. And we're going to hear from Ghana later, which is, I think, one of those cases. I will say democratic performance is always a relative assessment. And I know that citizens from countries that look very strong on global metrics. Often have grievances, of course, with how their country is doing. And I think that's natural. Democracy is a process and we can always do better. But I think from just the global metric side, besides countries like Ghana and Namibia, there's, of course, others like Botswana, like Senegal, like Mauritius and South Africa that have stayed relatively strong performers for the last 20 years, despite some setbacks. And these countries, they are quite different from colonial linguistic traditions. But collectively from our project, we found four major factors across our five cases and in these other settings as well that were really important for either strengthening accountability or weakening accountability. The first factor is military-civilian relations. Generally, across Africa, we see that trust in the military is quite high when you look at afrobarometer data, for instance. And that's also something you find in a lot of advanced democracies as well. There seems to be continued trust in military. But there are notable variations in the region in terms of the degree of civilian oversight over military activities and professionalized military training, and also a variation in terms of when the military is allowed to get involved in economic activities, which tends to create a disincentive for the military to give up power over time. So that's one of the first factors. The second is the breadth or narrowness of elite coalitions or what some others call the political settlement. So sometimes when you have a very narrow political settlement that's limited to just a small group of insider groups that may control a disproportionate amount of power, they have more at stake from losing power and therefore more likely to manipulate mechanisms of accountability when different types of marginalized groups try to assert. Themselves in the political sphere. The third important factor we find is the degree to which party systems are institutionalized or personalized. So a lack of institutionalized political parties or the de-institutionalization of parties often results in much more personalistic parties that revolve around a leader's charisma and a lack internal democracy and election procedures. And in those circumstances, leaders are less respectful of mechanisms of horizontal accountability that could constrain their autonomy. And finally, the fourth factor we see being quite key is the underlying political economy. I think the honorable speaker also talked about this in Namibia. This refers to the way in which key sectors of the economy can be exploited for either narrow interests or for broader public goods. So in cases where you have high dependence on natural resource rents, that can often lead to corruption, natural rent extraction. While those with high regional inequalities can lead to grievances among the poor that have been shown to dampen public participation in elections and therefore dampen vertical accountability. So overall, not all four of these factors are apparent in all the stronger cases I mentioned. For instance, Senegal has much more personalized parties than institutionalized ones. But elite coalitions there have become much broader over time, military civilian relations. Are strong, and the political economy until now has been much more

diversified away from natural resource extraction. So I would say those are kind of four non-exclusive factors that have been quite key across our research.

SIGNÉ: Fabulous. Danielle, I really like the comprehensive systematic approach to understanding democratic resiliency in Africa. And turning now to Chipo Dendere, so you have co-written a paper on the importance of international actor in supporting democracy, specifically using the case of Can you explain what role bilateral and multilateral relationships play in enabling or hindering democratic transition.

DENDERE: Hi, Landry. Thank you for including me in the panel. It's good to be in good company. I have to say it's also exciting to bring my Wellesley students. So they're here with me. You can't see them in the video, but I figured there's no better way to learn about African politics than to learn from all of you. Malstini and I put together a project on figuring out what has been happening in the Zimbabwean political scheme. And we believe very strongly that the international community played an important role both in their absence, right? So in the lack of support we felt for the democratic initiatives after the coup. But you know, this is a double-edged sword because on one hand, it's really important to respect sovereignty and the autonomy of countries. But we do think that stronger communication against coups is critical. As Danielle pointed out, we've had a lot of success on the continent, but we've also seen an increase in coups or military takeovers or some of these undemocratic behaviors. And democracy we think is a public good, and democracy is better when it has more support and good democracy begets more democracy. And so that's where we come from. But of course we must recognize that the way other actors local actors. I think Zambia has been a good ally for the Zimbabwe democracy movement, as has been Botswana in the past, some actions from South Africa. So there is a lot to be said, but our main point was that the international community failed Zimbaba by sort of looking away from the coup back then in 2017, and that allowed for what we've seen with the in the Nangawa regime, which is at. Deepening of authoritarian tendencies within the government restrictions of journalists, limiting the work that the civil society can do, the jailing of civil society actors and fair trials. Jobsikala, for example, was imprisoned for 500 days with no bail, with no trial. So we've seen an increase of that behavior. But also I think in the follow-up, we think a lot about the deepening corruption in Zimbabwe is something that came out of the coup. And that has taken root and that puts democracy at risk.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic. And like many African countries, Zimbabwe has a large diaspora that retains family and community ties with the country. How might the engagement of the diaspora with Zimbabwe and its politics support its transition.

DENDERE: The diaspora has a big role to play. I don't know if I should plug in my book because it is coming out. It's the leading book on the role of the diaspora, death, diversion and departure. It's available online. But I think one of the things that the diasporas can do, so the diaspara already sends a lot of money in remittances. We know that billions of dollars are spent every year from the diaspra in the global north to the global south. That money sustains families on their basic needs, school fees, health, etc, etc. But that money also supports governments. And I think it is right time for the diaspora to make a strong case that our funding, right, if we are subsidizing the government, then we should have the right to vote. If we're subsidizing, the government then we shouldn't have a say in government, because essentially the diaspora has become an extra arm of the government. And because of that, their money should do more than, right? Just pay for school fees. Their money should go towards how do we push for more democracy? Something else that the diaspora can do is to strengthen their own civil society organization. So at least in the case of Zimbabwe, in the early 2000s, you saw a large of active civil society, but that has declined over time. I think people get busy. Life in the diasporas is complicated. Immigrants are facing. Many, many challenges, but there is still a need for strong diaspora civil society. There's also a need for the civil society in the home countries to connect with the diaspora. There's a strong need for the diasporas to return home and vote. So one of the things that I write about in my book, and we also allude to in this conversation with Mao standing is that when people are not there to vote, right? So if you're not present to vote then the conversations that happen in. The broad broadly they matter but what matters more is people being able to go back in and vote so whether that vote is done

from abroad or that vote has done back home but the diaspora has a lot of role to play in shaping the future for democracy for their home countries and especially you know the democracy i mean the diasporas many people live in countries that are pro-democracy so we think a lot about how do you remit good democratic tendencies. And so that's something that I think is critical and the diaspora has that voice and they have the critical numbers.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, Professor Chipo. Now I want to turn to Jason Stearns and in your paper you describe DRC as a complex political regime that is hard to classify as fully democratic or fully authoritarian. Can you describe the state of democracy in the country and what makes it so complex?

STEARNS: Yeah, first, thank you very much for allowing me to participate in this event and also in this study. So we think that describing the Congolese democracy is actually quite complicated and difficult because on the one hand, it's alive and well. So Congo returned to multiparty elections and competition in 2006. They've had four rounds of national elections since then. And executive powers changed hands at the national level and numerous times at the provincial level. You've also seen massive popular mobilization that in 2016 prevented the president from changing the constitution to stay in power, something that almost none of its neighboring countries have achieved. And you can see a vibrant, albeit very fragmented and boisterous. Civil society, and media landscape with very loud debates about key issues. On the one hand, Colling's democracy shows signs of resilience that defy its usually extremely low scores in all of the various democracy scales that we see around the world. Nonetheless, and I think this is the reason for the very low scores, the DRC, we define it as an electoral oligarchy where power changes hands uh, within a very narrow political elite. And so democracy, the elections, uh, only serve to exchange hands between a very, narrow elite. Um, and while these transfers of power produce some checks and balances, there's extremely little accountability, whether it's vertical, horizontal, or diagonal accountability. Those are different kinds of accountability that, uh that Brookings and we use as well. Um, and you can see that in parliament, which is dominated almost entirely by one coalition, you can it in the court system, which has increasingly politicized. You can see in the electoral and other agencies, uh, democratic agencies, the 2011 and 2018 elections in particular were extremely flawed. Uh, and, you see it in internal democracy within political parties of which there's very little, uh political parties are extremely personalized. And so. And all of that's the reason that you can't really describe the Congo as a full a full democracy, despite all of its its democratic assets. And I think finally, one thing to highlight is, is that it's produced at the end of the day, democracy needs to provide for people. And the fact that on paper, at least the Congo is a multiparty democracy has actually produced extremely little for the Congolese people, the countries at war. The country is afflicted with extreme poverty and social marginalization. And so democracy really has extremely healthy in some parts of society, but it's usually in the parts of the society that are outside of the official institutions in grassroots organizations and civil society.

SIGNÉ: Amazing. Our research examined the important role of civil society in enforcing diagonal accountability. In DRC, civil society groups are currently pushing for a national dialog including government and opposition actors. Based on the country's experience with past dialogs, what are some of the benefits and risks of this approach?

STEARNS: So this is something that you see in Congolese history going back to the 1990s. The country is in crisis and so therefore the government calls for a national dialog. The country currently is certainly in crisis. There are two main challenges. There's a conflict in the Eastern DRC that's displaced seven million or more people. And then there's a political crisis in Kinshasa with the political scene almost completely dominated by one coalition, two of the main political opposition leaders. Are in de facto exile and there's serious worries about the upcoming 20-28 presidential and national elections. And so because of these dual crises, the churches, the Protestant and Catholic churches together have invited political stakeholders for a national dialog. Most parties have bought into this, but I think there's reason to be skeptical about this, or at least to try to ensure that it's done in an accountable fashion. In the past, one of the main pitfalls of these kinds of dialogs has been that they've been used by the government for co-opting political opponents. So both in 2013 and 2016, the dialogs, instead of actually dealing with the crises of the

country, of which there are numerous, they just took advantage of the dialog to buy off political opposition and critics and include them into the government. And so those kinds of, if you use dialog to actually circumvent the constitutional forms of accountability, elections, parliamentary control, and other things, if it's just an extra institutional means of co-opting your opposition, that's a huge problem. And so this current dialog is very necessary, but you need to have a reality check and you need be able to make sure that it's inclusive, transparent, and have a very strong mediation.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic. And perhaps very briefly, Jason, DRC has been in the news recently due to the Trump administration's diplomatic attempts to resolve the insurgency in eastern Congo in exchange for access to the country's natural resources. So do you think that these agreements have implications for democratic consolidation in Congo? And will you mind providing some context, Please.

STEARNS: Yeah, so at the moment, as I mentioned, the conflict, there's been a conflict ongoing in the Eastern DRC since November of 2021. So almost four years now, well, there has been a conflict ongoing for longer than that. But this main, the largest conflict, the M-23 conflict has been going on for around four years. There are two competing or not two parallel peace processes that are supposed to deal with this conflict. One hosted in Qatar, the other hosted in the United States and Washington. Um, and they are making some progress, although the one in Qatar is currently at a standstill, or at least currently struggling, I think, to find a compromise. I think in general, it's going to be extremely difficult to persuade this rebellion, the M23 to give up its weapons and territory, given the fact that they stand extremely little chance at surviving in the Congolese political system. You've seen that with the predecessors to the M 23. So in order to get this to work, in other words, you need to have a very strong mediation. The involvement of both the U.S. Government and the Qatari government, as well as African countries is extremely important, especially given the fact that the M23 is backed by the Rwandan government, provides both opportunities and challenges in that regard. So that's where the conflict stands at the moment. What does this mean for democracy was your question. I think that there are two main challenges here. The first challenge is the fact that... There's a temptation for the Congolese government and for facilitators to solve this conflict simply by giving the M23 positions. This is what's been done in the past, but that would reinforce what many in the Congo called the rebel to politician pipeline. In other words, the fact that you solved armed conflict just by giving rebels, rewarding rebels with positions. That would dismay I think many Congolese who want accountability and could encourage future rebellions. So that's one challenge for democracy. I think the second challenge is perhaps a deeper challenge, which is the fact that the more that the Congolese people, in particular the army, see that their own government is struggling to defeat a rebellion that's occupied a large part of territory, the 23 at the moment. Controls an area of around 10 million people, and it controls the two very large towns of Goma and Bukavu in the east. The more that the government fails to deal with this crisis, the more you'll see certain parts of the society and the elites inclined to take radical, perhaps anti-democratic, solutions. This, after all, is what happened in the Sahel, in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, where people and armies saw that their own government was unable to deal with the security crisis and they took action and carried out a coup. I don't think a coup is on the horizon in the DRC, but these are the dangers of a democracy that can't provide. At the end of the day, a democracy will fizzle out, will fray if it cannot provide for its people.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, thank you so much Jason for those insights. Shifting to Oscar Otele, Kenya's democracy has gone through many changes and reforms, but as you wrote in your paper, it has been very resilient. With good and civil society groups acting strongly and decisively against serious challenges, to the Constitution. What explains the strength of these actors in ensuring horizontal and diagonal accountability? Professor Oscar?

OTELE: Thank you, Landry, for inviting me to this important occasion and happy International Day to everyone. Kenya's case is quite interesting, as you have alluded to, and there are several factors which may account for you know, the strength of diagonal accountability and horizontal accountability. If we place this in the context since the third wave of democratization, in our paper, we have highlighted a number of factors. If you may allow me to just highlight some of the key

factors. I'll start. With the factor number one on horizontal accountability. And this is rightly situated in the Kenya's constitutional review process that culminated to the realization of the 2010 constitution. Now, the 2010 Constitution reconfigured the calculus of power. Especially the relationship between the executive and the legislature, when it allowed provision for the establishment of key institutions, particularly the creation of the Supreme Court, number one, the creation the Judiciary Fund, number two, and also provision for the parliament to it. Some of the key appointments, especially from the executive. Now, in a sense, those key institutions allowed the oversight of the legislature to question, look at them, look at the appointees, the executive appointees and particularly also to constrain the executive power for. A propensity to retaliate. For example, the judiciary fund allowing judiciary to operate without much restraint from control of its budget. The other issue also we have seen judiciary able to make some certain key decisions, for example, nullification of 20. 17 presidential election, which was actually a first in African continent, which remains a landmark case in judiciary. Then that also is tied to the appointment of the judicial officers in the sense that the executive has not much control we have we have seen the courts have ruled out, have ruled against the executive in terms of telling the president that it has, the president has no role to, you know, influence the decision of judicial service commission. So that has been a plus. And obviously, in terms even retaliations on what the executive has to say about about judiciary. So attacks have been there, yes, but still we have seen, you know, judicial independence. So in short, that institutional design has actually assisted courts to be able to function without much limitation from the executive. The other factor that I would like to talk about is the to bring to the attention is the civic architecture that we have witnessed in this country since the late 1980s and the early 1990s, which has, over the years, created a habit of civil society organization to continuously scrutinize the executive. We have seen the church networks, human rights groups, lawyers associations, and of course, increasingly, we are also seeing autonomous media spaces to come boldly in terms of questioning executive excesses. So, increasingly this infrastructure has expanded the species of engagement of these actors within diagonal accountability framework. And progressively, their works have also oomphed the participation of other actors, and especially the actors from the stream a political alignment. This particularly, as it was in the run-up to 1997, where we saw the CSOs initiative and the actors from the political side coming together to form the Inter-Party Parliamentary Group, IPPG, as we abbreviated. This initiative actually was are very fundamental in terms of creating an administrative. Legal and constitutional reforms that open space for, you know, for opposition mobilization. So much so that in the run-up to 2002 election, again, in the history of Kenya's electoral democracy, we saw opposition actors coming together and, you know, aligning their... You know, their parties, their partners to come up with a united front that triumphed that election, marking the end of authoritarian regime that had been, you know enjoying power for the last couple of years. And therefore, this civic space has made fundamental contribution to digital accountability. The other factor that I would also like to mention, sorry, one second. Well, all right, is the connection of actors from the diagonal accountability and horizontal accountability coming together. One framework reactivating another. Whenever there is a scandal, you see civil society media getting excited. Then that culminates into the mobilization of opposition calling for accountability and then it leads to a formal establishment of inquiry, horizontal accountability. That has also contributed. Lastly, is the digital activism. Which have actually given diagonal accountability a new dimension. So.

SIGNÉ: Thank you, Landry. Thank you so much, Oscar, and we'll come back to you during the Q&A session. So now I turn to Professor George Ofosu. George, when thinking of democratic success in Africa, Ghana is a country often mentioned not only for having free and fair elections, but for having four peaceful transfers of power. Between governing bodies? What factors contribute to Ghana's success?

OFOSU: Thank you very much, Landry, for having me and happy International Democracy Day to everyone. I think so from our study, I think I would like to highlight about, let's say, four key factors in very brief succession that has contributed a lot to the resilience and democratic success of the country. I think the first has to do with institutions. I think this cannot be overemphasized. Ghana benefit a lot from a fairly liberal, democratic constitution, which was adopted in 1992. That guarantees various freedoms, rights. That guarantees electoral competition. And so that gives sort of the framework, the architecture within which various political actors can play what I would say

the democratic game and of course it has its imperfections, it has various obviously has all the organs of governments guaranteed in the constitution, the parliament, the executive branch, the judiciary giving them respective rules. It's. It's what one of our colleagues called an imperial constitution in the sense that it gives too much power to the president when it comes to policy and decision-making processes. So that imperfection exists in the Ghanaian constitution, but over time, 30 years, it has withstood military coups that the country experienced prior to the 1992 transition. So I would say the constitution has been very key in terms of providing the normative framework within which political architects have been operating. Of course, the fun thing of that constitution has been enabled by these two strong political parties that the country enjoys. The National Democratic Congress, which is currently the incumbent party, and the opposition, the MPP. These parties have traditions that goes way back to the country's founding independence in in you know in 1957 and they have played the one one role or the other since then up to now uh providing a strong institutions that have ground uh network of supporters that has given life to democratic context and guidance to the democratic constitution that we have In that light, we can talk about the political culture that the country has enjoyed. So among citizens and political elites, there is now some sort of consensus that democracy is the way that we should go. And so there's enormous support as expressed in the Afrobarometer surveys that has been conducted for the country. But also among political elites, we have seen... Of course, the exchange of power between the two major parties, they work hard every eight years, there's a, you know, there's the change of power. So there is that sort of gentleman's agreement between these two political parties that, you, know, this is the way we want to play and that sort of culture is taking root and guiding the democratic resilience of the country. Of course, one thing that I think has slipped in. Among political elites is that idea of being a torchbearer. So Ghana, obviously, first country to make the independence movement, also to make a democratic transition. Political elites believe that they are the torchbearers of the continent, and therefore they have to safeguard this democracy. So currently, the recent opposition leader that accepted, the incumbent party that subtest. Electoral defeat set to the whole country democracy is our greatest asset and therefore we need to safeguard it and I think that is very important for us and last thing to mention and to end there is the immense role that civil society have played they have played a role in safeguarding election integrity by organizing election observation promoting civic engagement providing civic education. And promoting policy-based elections. So these, I think, four factors, in my view, have sort of worked hand-in-hand to ensure the resilience that Ghana's democracy have enjoyed over the past 30 years.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, really. I really like how you provided a holistic perspective, George. And perhaps briefly in a minute or two, what is the most important consideration for political leadership to keep in mind to ensure continued democratic consultation?

OFOSU: In a minute, I think I would emphasize two things. I think first has to do with making sure democracy deliver. And I think that is one of the points that various panelists have emphasized that, you know, not only that citizens of the continent wants to live in a democracy, but they also want a democracy in which delivers in the sense that it helps them to hold. Those who are duty bearers, those who holding office accountable. And so to keep in mind that democracy has to deliver. Provide better governance. We have to make sure that the various institutions that makes democracy work, i.e. Elections, works better. Elections that are of higher quality are conducted, and which implies that we have to have a level playing field for all political actors to compete. We have to be able to have a fair information environment for which people can learn about their government's performance and to hold them to account. And of course, a political party that is very inclusive, inclusive of minority groups, but also inclusive of women, as our distinguished speaker from Namibia mentioned, women are and we have to make sure that political parties open their doors to include include women as well. Last, if you would allow me, is the idea that even though there is a lot of support for democracy, which is important for democratic consolidation, there is also a minority, significant one, that still hold anti-democratic views on the continent and we need to make sure that there is enough civic education to emphasize not only instrumental benefit that we stand to gain from democracy, but also the intrinsic value of self-governance that is important for which reason we all support, you know, the idea of democracy.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic, George. And let me come back to Danielle. We are in the Q&A session. So please feel free to submit your questions to our distinguished panelists. So you can put them in the chat or in the q&a section of Zoom. So. Danielle, one of the questions we receive from the audience, what can democratic societies do to better counter-political polarization, digital authoritarianism, and other anti-democratic forces around the globe?

RESNICK: Okay, thanks, Landry. Well, that's a huge and important question. I mean, I think what we've seen is in country after country, global north or global south, a lot of the polarization comes from creating an other and, you know, identifying certain groups as being in and part of the nation state and others being, you know, excluded or invaders of some sense. Or not part of, you know, the critical kind of political settlement that I alluded to earlier. So I think we need to be really careful, you know, in encouraging our leaders to to facilitate dialogs, ensuring, you know, drawing on some of the examples we have, excuse me, seen throughout Africa, where there are consultative processes, you know, bringing in community groups. And we heard the the honorable speaker talking about that in Namibia. Earlier, we know places like Botswana with the HOTLA system, others, the National Assis initiatives that you see in a lot of Francophone Africa. So I think these dialogs are really important to continue. And I think we need to also be continuing to push on oversight mechanisms on the digital front, continuing to monitor and call out you know, where there are falsehoods about elections. And where there is an attempt to exacerbate polarization. So it's obviously one of the pressing issues of our time. And I don't have the best solutions to that. But I do think some of those are definitely the first steps.

SIGNÉ: Extremely important. Thank you so much, Danielle. And Chipo, first congratulations on your book and also welcome again to your students. So the CEO in action and they also learn from our colleagues here. So I have an international related questions here also from the audience for nations like Japan who are partnering with African entrepreneurs and governments. What are some key ways to show up also as partner in the preservation of a healthy democracy in nations across Africa? And are there any actions or decision that seems supportive, but might be counter-intuitively destructive?

DENDERE: Yes, you know, Landry, this excites me because that's our next project for Brookings. I think that a lot of countries are looking at trade and trade is important because we want to get people out of poverty. But I think countries like Japan that are pro-democracy can push their counterparts in Africa and say, listen, we want it to invest, but we care about rights because when people Feel safe when journalists are protected. When people are not afraid that a protest can just erupt on their way to work, it is good for business. So I think it is really important for peaceful, democracy-loving countries like Japan to lay it out for their African counterparts why it is important that their countries keep moving towards democracy, why it important that in South Africa, taxi drivers are not a afraid that they're going to get burned up because somebody suspects they're a foreigner, right? That is not. Good for investment. If you're Japan, you don't want to put your investments in countries where at any minute that money could be lost because of political violence. So peace-loving pro-democracy countries really have to tie their investment in industry with the outcomes of democracy. And as the honorable speaker said, poverty is bad for democracy, right? And we haven't talked enough about this. Poverty is bad for democracy. Development is good for democracy. So let's make democracy work in a way that sustains democratic engagement, in a that sustain civil society, in a allow citizens to vote, right? Where elections are free and fair, where people are not scared to wake up on election day. All of that is good development. And what is good for development is for politicians, right. If politicians want countries to make money, then create a conducive environment to make man.

SIGNÉ: Fantastic. Thank you so much, Chipo. And to Oscar, Kenyan youth have mobilized many times in the past year in protest criticizing the government. So what do these protests and the government's responses to them tell us about the state of democracy in Kenya?

OTELE: Thanks once again. The recent protest in Kenya, you know, informed, tells us a lot of, you know, lessons to take away. Fundamentally, we are seeing a renewed axis, reconfiguration of Center of center of gravity of democracy this way. Traditionally, the public has been seen as

people who are told by the state, this is what we are offering, take it or leave it. But the protest against the finance bill is a strong indication that actually people have the power. They are the owners of the policy. And therefore, we can drive the policy direction. The fact that the masses caused the state to pull away what it had initially drafted. Says a lot about the power, the bottom-up agenda. So there is need to strengthen the agenda-setting process that entails involvement of the people. But at the same time, there is also the danger here that, Yes! We are, it has shown the resilience of Kenya democracy, but at the same time, the state coming out to respond harshly, okay, to critics, all right, is also an indication of, you know, the sort of risks that, you know accompanies these renewed changes in the country. Bottom line, from where I see laundry and to all, there is need to exert a concerted effort around the question of rebooting the civic space in this country. I strongly believe an empowered citizenry will actually keep on questioning what the government is doing. And by that extension, the government will be watchful in terms of the policies it is putting across and the source.

SIGNÉ: Thank you, Oscar. I think your screen is freezing for a second. So let me move to Jason. What is the expected impact on democracy and the uproar of the rule of law in Africa following the policy changes and shift in the global aid space, especially by the United States? And you have a minute there, Jason.

STEARNS: Well, I think that it's unclear. I think there's several things going on at the moment. One is obviously the funding decreasing. There's other huge shifts in geopolitics happening throughout Africa. So I think these things are gonna be difficult to isolate one from the other. You have in particular a rise of the implication of middle powers, as well as China in Africa. All of these things will have an impact, I think, on democratic evolution in Africa, certainly the DRC is a case study of that. Uh, and so I think it remains to be seen. Certainly civil society relies enormous amount on aid flows, both, and it's not just the U S that's pulling out European countries are looking inwards. They're investing in Ukraine. A lot of the money that came from humanitarian aid is now being directed towards Ukraine. You have a rise in right-wing governments around the world. They're looking in words. And so I that is going to have a serious impact. It could be, I think, initially cripple and hamstring some of these civil society organizations. Um, but it also could, uh, drive greater independence in Africa. And a realization of these, these changes have to come from within. So I think it's too soon to sit to tell, but we're really entering a new phase, I think in African political dynamics.

SIGNÉ: That is a beautiful way to conclude to conclude and George. I don't know if you have a word about this. So No, okay, perfect. So, happy International Democracy Day again. So we are so grateful for the engaged, the lively engagement, the many questions received from the public, the distinguished insight shared by the audience. We are also very grateful for our team at AGI. With our director, Professor Pierre Gimke, Nicole, Nicole, Daphne, but also global comms, including Izzy, Esther, Jeanine, Junjie, Taylor, among others. And of course, you are deeply grateful to Brookings Central Comms, also for the phenomenal work. And please, consult the website of the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution. Where you can see the wonderful papers drafted by our distinguished scholars who have engaged with you today. Again, we are deeply grateful for you joining us today and let's stay connected. Thank you so much for your special time and attention.

OTELE: Thank you.

OFOSU: Alright, we are clear.