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GLOBAL DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE: INSIGHTS FROM AFRICA FOR A CHANGING WORLD

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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BURLEY: Good morning everyone. Good morning. Good morning on this hot Tuesday morning. Summer has finally arrived. So, I am so delighted to welcome you here this morning. I am Diana Burley. I'm the senior vice president of research here at the Brookings Institution and on behalf of Brookings and the Africa Growth Initiative and the Global program and President Ceci Rouse, welcome to Brookings.

The Brookings Global Economy and Development program was founded almost 20 years ago. And the idea behind the Global program was to recognize that our world is bound by shared priorities, goals, and challenges. No country and no region alone can survive. Today's conversation, organized by our Global's Africa Growth Initiative, recognizes the connections between these countries.

The struggle to resist democratic backsliding and to build resilient and equitable forms of government is one that we have seen in every corner of the world. Africa is on the front lines, and this struggle and the varied experiences of the African countries both influenced and are influenced by global world democratic trends.

To understand these trends, we have the honor of welcoming Damon Wilson, president and CEO of the National Endowment for Democracy. NED is the premier US organization supporting democracy and human rights. It's around the world. And before joining as its President Damon was executive vice president at the Atlantic Council and served as pre as special assistant to the president and senior director for European Affairs at the National Security Council. Welcome.

We also have the privilege of welcoming Gerardo Berthin, president of the Freedom House, whose annual Freedom in the World report has become the standard for assessing political freedom globally. Gerardo has spent three decades working on democracy issues in more than 50 countries and brings experience from his time at the UN Development Programme and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Thank you, Damon and Gerardo, for joining us this morning and thank you as well to our panelists, Belinda Archibong, Christopher Fomunyoh and Danielle Resnick for sharing their insights. We are also grateful to our very own Landry Signé, senior fellow and the Global, of the Global Economy and Development program and the Africa Growth Initiative, and, and Danielle Resnick, nonresident fellow who have together led this two year research program on the state of democracy in Africa.

This effort has brought together 14 external authors, including 10 from African institutions to produce over two dozen research products. They are also brilliant co-authors of the report that we are launching today, and we are very excited to hear all of the wonderful results that they will share with us. So thank you to Landry and Danielle.

And now I will welcome Senior Fellow of the Brookings Institution and Director of the African Growth Initiative Pierre Nguimkeu, who will introduce the event and share the amazing work that AGI and its partners have done and are here to share with you this morning. So, Pierre.

NGUIMKEU: Good morning everyone. And thank you so much, Diana, for those thoughtful opening remarks and for setting the stage so well for today's conversation.

I am Professor Pierre Nguimkeu and on behalf of the Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings let me warmly welcome you all joining this morning, both in person and online for this event, “Global Democracy Under Pressure: Insights from Africa for a Changing World.”

This is a timely conversation, but it's also a complex one. Regions across the world are witnessing growing pressures on political system and public institutions. Public institutions

are declining. We have declining trust, contested legitimacy. We have serious strain. We have polarizations insecurity and the increasing difficulty of delivery, effective governance in a rapidly changing world.

These pressures are global, but they are experienced in different, in diff, in in different ways across countries and regions. Africa is no exception in many I respect. African countries sit at the intersections of several forces, shaping governance, demographic transition, rising social expectations, state capacity constraint, economic vulnerability, geopolitical competition, and evolving form of civil participation.

That is why conversation like this one must avoid simplification Too often discussions about political development in Africa are framed in narrow terms, either through the language of crisis and backsliding or through institutional benchmark that do not always capture the full complexity of how authority, legitimacy, accountability are actually negotiated in African societies.

But the African experience must remind us of something very important. Governance is not only about formal rules written on paper, it is also about institutional credibility, social embeddedness, the ability to manage pluralism, and the capacity of resolving conflict to the extent to which the author public authority is seen as legitimate and also as effective.

This is the reason why Africa has so much to contribute on a broader, on a broader global conversation on governance, particularly on democracy. Under pressure, the continent's experience show that resilience cannot be understood only through formal constitutional design. It must also be understood through the interaction between state institutions, political leadership.

Civil actors, local histories, and in many cases the persisting social and traditional structures that continue to shape how authorities is exercised and recognized. In that sense, Africa offers not just cases to observe, but also important material for rethinking how we analyze institutional stability, fragility, and adaptation more broadly at the Africa Growth Initiative.

We see this conversation as closely connected to our broad mission. Governors matters not only in political sense, but also in governmental sense. The quality of institutions shape whether societies can mobilize resources effectively, manage economic transitions, respond to citizens', demands, deliver services, and create conditions for long-term inclusion and stability.

Questions of accountability and legitimacy are therefore inseparable to questions of economic transformation. Okay. That is why at a GI, we are proud to support this important body of work on the state of governance and democratic practice across African countries. What is especially valuable about this effort is that it brings together a diverse set of voices and perspective, including strong contributions from African scholars and institutions.

That matters because understanding governance challenges on the continent requires grounded analysis, historical sensitivity, and serious engagement with local realities. Our purpose today is not to force a single interpretation, not to assume that one institutional model fits all societies. Rather, it is, it is to deepen deflection on what makes political system more resilient, more responsive, and more capable of managing pressure in difficult environments. It is also to ask what lessons Africa's varied experiences may offer to a wider world that is itself confronting uncertainty about the future of governance and democracy.

The purpose of this conversation is therefore to achieve three, three things. First, to better understand the nature of institutional pressure in African context and beyond.

Second, to think more carefully about the conditions under which system of governance, especially democracy, can sustain legitimacy, accountability, and public trust.

And third, to encourage a more open and less formulaic global conversation, one that takes African reality seriously, not simply as deviations from external models, but as sources of insight in their own right.

We are honored to have such a distinguished group of speakers with us this morning, and we are grateful to all of them for contributing their perspective and perspective. Thank you again for being here. And now turn the program to Professor Landry Signé. Thank you.

SIGNÉ: Thank you so much, Professor Nguimkeu, and thank you Diana, for this wonderful welcoming remarks. Good morning everyone.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

SIGNÉ: I don't feel the energy, so let's do it again. Good morning everyone.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

SIGNÉ: I love this. So thank you so much for being with us today and welcome to Brookings. And before I begin, let me, by a show of hands how many of you feel optimistic about the prospect of democracy worldwide? A few hands.

WILSON: Yeah, a few hands.

SIGNÉ: And how many feel more concerned? Wow. More people are concerned. So now I will turn to you and join, of course.

WILSON: I'm gonna interrupt and say, the reason I'm optimistic is because so many of you are concerned, which we see around the world, which means you're working hard at how to address the issues that concern you. That's the core of democracy. Citizens engaged to correct the problems. You gotta be concerned. And that's why we're optimistic.

SIGNÉ: Oh, I love this. I love this. You have to be concerned to fight for democracy.

WILSON: That's the point. That's the point.

SIGNÉ: Obviously you were already introduced, but let me just add a little bit more. Damon Wilson, president and CEO of the National Endowment for Democracy, of course, a private nonprofit foundation mandated by Congress to support democracy worldwide. NED supports over 1700 grants in more than 90 countries. So that is gigantic. And including through its core institutes such as the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and the Center for International Private Enterprise, but also Solidarity Center.

So Damon, on behalf of the Africa Growth Initiative, welcome to Brookings.

WILSON: Thank you. It's a real pleasure to be here and thank you for the work you've done, the work of the whole team. I was really, really pleased to see not just this initiative, but this report coming out because it's an important contribution to a debate, particularly IMF week right now, to remind folks.

And what you're doing is reminding folks with research that was based on working with institutions and partners across Africa, that the intrinsic link between prosperity, the topic of IMF Spring Week meetings this week, the foundational basis for that prosperity is a sense of freedom, a sense of citizen accountability.

So just a real shout out for the empirical work you've done not based in Washington, but empirical work that Brookings has done with centers and partners across Africa.

SIGNÉ: Thank you so much, and we are very happy to have you. So, NED has a significant and growing portfolio of initiatives across Africa. Could you share one or a couple of examples of the most significant or successful democratic support initiatives?

WILSON: Sure. First of all, it's a real pleasure to be part of a conversation. The endowment, the endowment has a strong presence across the African continent. And I was saying just earlier before that I think it's the region of the world where there's the most unmet demand.

So I'm gonna answer your specific question, but I come to this conversation not as an Africanist, although I did start my career in Rwanda working for Save the Children, working at NSC Africa, as was my first start in the US government, and is close to my heart. At the endowment, I've got amazing team members here, and right now we've got about almost $40 million, $38 million invested across the continent and about 220 organizations in 26 of these countries.

And so, to, to answer your question, you know, one, I'll start with a specific project, but Waey organization. There's an organization in Sudan that has played a pretty fundamental role in a, atrocious situation, a violent situation of conflict and giving voice to citizens that really are demanding a peaceful different future, a democratic future.

And this organization, it's tough. You, when you're, when violence comes out, when guns are in play, the people without the guns, they're the ones that are gonna suffer. But what we've seen is by supporting these groups like Waey during a crisis, who are able to actually be responsive to the concerns of their of members of their community, it's helping to position people who believe in democratic, peaceful, different, a different future to give them credibility in their communities.

I think just last month, one of one of the the team members for Waey was caught speaking out against both Islam, the Islamist militia that was confronting a community as well as RSF, and it went viral across Sudan as an expression of really what people are thinking and afraid to say. Obviously, he's been endangered and we've had to help him get out of the country.

But this work, even in a, a desperate situation, positions those who should be our friends and allies, people who believe in peaceful democratic futures, gives them strength and credibility and respect in wartime so that in a post-conflict environment, the communities will remember them as being responsive to their concerns and problems and positioning these people to be part of the future governance.

Now that's a pretty tough one. More attuned to this, this conference about Africa growth. I'd come back to DRC. Valerie's here. The way we think about it, the endowment isn't one project. You don't have democracy and freedom flourish through one great grant. Now we bring a lot of scrutiny to every project. We want every project to deliver results, but it's not about an event or a project, it's about an ecosystem. And in the DRC for years, we've been supporting Congolese groups that have demanded accountability over the vast resources and wealth that Congo has squandered and has in its country.

And with our debate in this, in Washington today about the importance of critical minerals, to have access to critical minerals in a reliable fashion, the only way that's going to work is to have an even playing field where firms can actually compete, where workers can actually work with some dignity, to actually help deliver these products to the market in a way that that helps the Congolese people.

So we've supported an ecosystem. AfreWatch The Sentinel, Congo Is Not For Sale. Who am I leaving out? Valerie? And we -- Resource Matters, yeah. Whole collection of partners that create an ecosystem of citizen accountability and responsibility. And we saw some of the investigation work that The Sentinel did force the current administration in Kinshasa to actually order a review of contracts because they were, frankly, really embarrassed by showing how IMF and, and international financial institution resources had been wasted. Of forcing a degree of accountability by having citizen engagement and the resources that are in their community, this is one of the only ways to actually have reliable supply chains that ultimately will matter for prosperity in the continent and security for a country like our own.

SIGNÉ: Very important work. And I really like the notion of citizen accountability, including related to better managing resource wealth and in the broader context of critical minerals, we know that we need more of that. From your vantage point, what is the state of global democracy today and where does Africa fit within the picture?

WILSON: Sure, sure. There are a reason a lot of hands went up. It's a tough time. This is a consequential moment for freedom around the world and, and democracy's being challenged. We know that because of our next speaker, the president of Freedom House, we know that through two decades of research that Freedom House and many others have documented that we're in the midst of a democratic recession. But this is not a dialectic. This is not as if some forces of the universe are operating a historical cycle. This is a result of decisions. This is a result of actions and trends.

And so we're in a tough moment tracing back over two decades, sort of traces back actually to an advent of an entirely new way of citizens to communicate with each other and their governments. The advent of social media, which has incentivized great voice for citizens, but also polarization in our societies that has played out. It was against the backdrop of the, the consequences of a financial crisis, of other economic challenges, inflation, what happened during COVID that really challenged the question of can democracy deliver prosperity? What does it mean for me?

But I think one of the most important things we've seen, and one of the things that has meth metastasized into Africa is, during this period, the confidence of autocrats to not be on defense, but for them to be on offense. Perfecting repression at home, beginning to expert, export the tools, technologies and tactics of repression, and being then confident enough to go on offense, to undermine a sense of the international norms, the international institutions, the expectations to create an environment where impunity is accepted.

And we've seen this seeping, you know, led with countries like Beijing and Moscow. We know about how North Korean troops and Ukraine, we know, and we know how Venezuela, Cuba, how that's connected. But we've seen a version of this in Africa that has been really problematic, and which you have a leading opposition figure in Uganda, kidnapped in Nairobi, taken back to be imprisoned In Uganda, we are seeing autocrats understanding their interest in supporting each other.

So the autocrats working together globally has metastasized in Africa in a way that has reinforced, captured elite kleptocratic states to state governance and incentivized individual power control rather than a diverse spread of accountable governance. And it's been a crisis for Africa.

But the reason I would raise my hands with the fewer set of you that were optimistic, you look across the structural impediments right now, and you look at a continent. Is it 40%? 40% are, it's 40% of the population in, in the youth bracket. This incredible, incredible youth, youth bulge. You see this insatiable demand for more. People are frustrated. They're not satisfied with the results they're, they're experiencing. This is the kernel of citizen engagement and demanding more and accountability and the, the soft promises that we've seen.

Look what's happened in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, these siren songs of juntas that will provide easy answers for the security and economic situation that have led to skyrocketing violence and economic setbacks. Islamists almost cutting off and surrounding Bamako in, in Mali. These easy answers, I think young people are seeing through that and realizing that they have to demand more. We're seeing that in protests. Kenya, Nigeria, Madagascar. Look who is driving this debate. This is a generation that's not satisfied and is going to demand more. And that's the kernel of accountability.

SIGNÉ: How insightful. And I would like you to elaborate a little bit more on how to conserve the relationship between democratic support and national interest, especially in the context where we have geopolitical competition, critical minerals among order has support to democracy evolved.

WILSON: Sure, sure. Look, I lead America's foundation for freedom. This is the heart of an institution, a team that believes in freedom, human rights, accountability, democracy. I came to this through a national security background. I spent most of my time in the US government at the National Security Council working on issues of security, and I came to a very personal conclusion.

After working in the humanitarian field and the Balkans in Rwanda where you had to be neutral, really important work. But I was also uncomfortable being neutral when it was pretty clear to me that decisions by unelected officials with personal self-interest had downstream consequences that were really bad for their people and really bad for my country, creating issues that we had to spend money on, we had to worry about security issues.

So if you think about everything that we spend our money on today on national security, the things that we are worried about, conflict conflict neighbors challenging themselves, repression at home doesn't stay there. It leads to this type of conflict which leads to instability. Illegal immigration, which leads to so many of the challenges that we're worried about for our national security interest.

When you have governments that are responsible to their citizens. When you have individuals that have a sense of dignity because they can earn some money and keep it in their pocket and their families happy, and they can go to the church they want to go to without being harassed. When there's some degree of human dignity, responsiveness, you can solve problems in your society without resorting to conflict.

We're gonna spend a lot less money. We're gonna waste a lot less money on issues like development and corrupt environments. We're going to have to worry less about some of the security challenges that are associated with that. And I think there is such a strong case to be made that a modest degree of support for democracy around the world is like an insurance policy for greater prosperity and greater security.

I think it is among the most cost effective national security strategies for democracies around the world and certainly for the United States. You could be transactional and critical, critical minerals. And yet, if you do not think about an environment in which there are sanctity of contracts, rule of law, an environment in which there are labor rights that are not

undercutting American workers, that are not shoving out American companies because of the business practices that are playing out.

If you want to think just transactionally even, you've gotta have these other enabling factors in that ecosystem that are from the investments that we make in supporting locally grounded accountability mechanisms. That small amount of investment, really good for us.

SIGNÉ: What a powerful argument. So let me turn perhaps to the audience for a question or a couple of questions anyone has.

Okay. We'll go for you first and you second, but be brief, go directly to your question and introduce yourself.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yes sir. My name is Bronson Shepherd. I'm an economics and international relations student. And what I would love to get your input on is how do you think that pro-democratic organizations can adapt to the modern media environment, because it feels like we're we're being out flanked by authoritarian powers in that, in that regard. Thank you.

SIGNÉ: Thank you. And the last question.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi. Thank you so much. My name is Kareem. I'm from Uganda. I'm an activist in Washington, DC. I'm interested in how we can hold the institutions like East African Union or African Union accountable when it comes to transnational repression. I think Daimon talked about how Dr. Kizza Besigye was abducted from Kenya to Uganda and the last presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu is on the run in the diaspora. So how should the East African community and the African Union be held accountable and letting this happen at their watch?

SIGNÉ: And perhaps let me add to this question as a way for you also to conclude, what will be your top three recommendations to to safeguard or strengthen democracy around the world in the next decade and in particular in Africa?

WILSON: Sure, sure. Let me try to, to link that all together. And thank you for, for mentioning Kizza Besigye, you think of what Bobi Wine and his wife have been through, Tundu Lissu in Tanzania, Succès Masra in Chad, right, in Chad right now. There are a handful of really principled strong leaders who, if their citizens actually had the option, the choice, should be leaders of their countries right now. And that's not the situation. So we do have a, a real, a crisis in that sense. Information environments, the institutional side and what we need to do better to support democracy.

If I sort of put that together in, in one response first in this moment this has been a disruptive moment for an ecosystem of international engagement and support in Africa. Some of that can concern many of you, but some of it creates an opportunity. And part of what I would argue is that unlocking the key to this is the basis of some of what you've argued in your report is that a top-down approach that is done from Washington or other capitals where we think of what is best for Uganda or what the country might be, and we put out for calls on how people can respond to our ideas to serve our interests. At the endowment, we don't have implementers. You're not implementing our idea for your country. In fact, that's kind of the exact opposite of thinking about what democracy and sustainable freedom means.

So I begin with all of these challenges and saying a little bit of humility and recognizing that the solutions are gonna be those that are coming from those who know their countries best, and a little humility with the courage then to still back it up. We face a choice. Do we sit on

the sidelines while these people are imprisoned and and others and democracy fails? Or do we see it in our own interest to provide a little bit of support for those who take the initiative.

So the first one is a mindset of this, this really locally driven rather than top down approach that combines with sort of the second one. I think that if we take any one of these issues, the information environment or political prisoners, or we can have a great project and great work, it doesn't address the systemic issues we're faced in.

So I think part of what we have to do is think of ecosystems and not events. Yes, elections are important, but for us it is the ecosystem of accountability. So at the endowment we have a view, you've gotta go out and find the best people. We're talent scouts. Pick them, help give them support. But that doesn't matter unless you embed them in a a pluralistic ecosystem, where you've got investigative journalists, you've got technologists, you've got civic leaders, political leaders, you've got people on the left, right, business, labor. That is the fundamental nature of democracy. You've got these checks and balances and ecosystem of support.

And that speaks to some of your point about the entry points that pushing ourselves to be more open and wider aperture, see what's coming out of the youth movements. We have partners in Nigeria that are partnering with Big Brother to actually be able to, to get messages of democratic values and norms into villages across not just Nigeria, the entire continent. So the new entry points, who are the influencers? How do we tap this youth interest? Where are the technologists? How do we back it up with data scientists? A greater sense of understanding what is the ecosystem to address this.

And the final point I would connect, it comes back to the heart of this conference. Connecting democracy and freedom to prosperity, I think is really important. The downside is playing out royally. If you're a democracy activist and you don't understand kleptocratic financial flows, you, you might miss the game. And that hasn't been a strength sometimes in the human rights community. So our community is broader. Forensics accountants, those who understand the klepto kleptocratic flows, how to attract that, expose them, and counter and stop that. And coming back to the offense of what you're doing with this report, what we're seeing across the continent, the freedom and prosperity rise together. We have so much data to back this up and your work and what was released with the Freedom and Prosperity Index last week. Freedom actually comes first, and there is this incredible compounding interest of democratic freedoms and accountability over time, and the prosperity it delivers to citizens over time.

Freedom is not a short term stimulus. It's a long term prosperity plan. And I think we need not just the data to bank that up. You've started to get more institutions in Africa involved with this. We need the folks on the ground who are making this part of their narrative, what they publish and what they say in their local media environments, the platforms that they take forward to their populations to be unabashedly putting forward the idea that linking the idea of greater prosperity for youth bulge in Africa is fundamentally linked to democratic accountability and freedom.

So I think I'd cluster those three big ideas as a way to, to tackle some of these, which puts back how do you actually create accountability mechanisms that do not rely on states alone? States have a role to play, but citizens, and that's where the endowments focus is, understanding democracy flow actually flows through citizen activity and engagement, not through just state institutions.

So how can citizens also help activate the regional institutions for their accountability? Take responsibility for figuring out what works in these information environments and how do we actually then give oxygen to where we see that success?

SIGNÉ: What a powerful way to conclude. Thank you so much. Thank you for joining us today.

WILSON: Thank you for having me.

SIGNÉ: of course. We also emphasize our report, the entry points for strengthening democratic development in Africa. So some copies will be available at the end of this session.

WILSON: Thank you, sir. Thank you.

SIGNÉ: Again, thank you so much for our, to our distinguished audience for the fabulous questions. And I see the room is full and online we have over 400 people reserved to be present. This is really exceptional during the spring meetings. So thank you for making the time to be with us today.

So now I am joined by another distinguished keynote speaker Gerardo Berthin, president of Freedom House. I recall when I started studying democracy a few, a couple of decades ago. The Freedom House was, has been my go-to place for data on freedom around the world. And as many of you also will know, Freedom House was founded in 1941 to better inform the US public about international threats to democracy, and has published its flagship report Freedom in the World since 1973. So that is amazing.

Welcome, Gerardo.

BERTHIN: Thank you.

SIGNÉ: So perhaps before I do a deep dive, let me engage with the audience by a show of hand, how many of you believe global freedom has improved over the last decade? Three hands. Okay. Okay.

And how many of you believe it has declined? Oh, most of the room. So let contrast now with data. Thank you again for joining us. Your 2026 Freedom in the World report highlights the growing shadow of autocracy. What does this year's data tell us about the trajectory of global freedom? Will you mind elaborating a little bit about it for the audience?

BERTHIN: Sure. Well, first of all, thank you very much for inviting us to this very important and timely discussion. Two weeks ago we released our 2026 Freedom in the World report. And just to be sure, this covers the 2025 calendar year as opposed to events that have recently happened.

Unfortunately the headline is that our data shows that there are, there's 20 years of consecutive decline in freedoms around the world. As you know, Freedom House analyzes 208 countries and territories, and in this year's report, 54 actually have declined. And only 34 have actually improved. The other countries have remained the same.

Certainly to put into some sort of human terminology, 40% of the world lives now in places that are declining in freedom, where only 7% of the world lives in countries where freedom is improving. This has been driven particularly this year by, I think Damon mentioned, military coups for example, the restriction of protests around the world. And one of the most important probably trends is the elimination of constitutional safeguards, rule of law, in particular related to the independence of media, the independence of the judiciary branches of government, and also due process are other factors that are driving this decline.

Among the biggest declines this year, unfortunately four are in the African continent. So, Guinea-Bissau actually had the biggest decline this year along with Tanzania, El Salvador in our hemispheres, another country actually that has declined, and Burkina Faso and Madagascar, the other countries that actually shown the decline.

One of the benchmarks of our report this year is that it is a, we can look back 20 years because we have data going back basically to 2005. And we can actually not only compare the evolutions or in this case the trends, but also understand what's happening.

And in addition to the trends that I mentioned, I think certainly there's a lot of attacks on democratic institutions all over the world right now. And in some cases, particularly by elected individuals, I think Damon mentioned that elections are no longer anymore an indicator, basically, of democracy. And certainly this is one data point that we are seeing.

And the other particular trend that we're seeing is the intensification of authoritarian collaboration and certainly using that coordination to continue to actually repress and restrict basically the civic space, rights and liberties in particular, yeah.

SIGNÉ: Fascinating. That is really fascinating. And Freedom House's methodology has shaped how we understand democracy today. Will you mind elaborating of how, about how the, this mis capture what truly matter and how it's evolving beyond the understanding of political rights and civil liberties?

BERTHIN: Right. So, our methodology is solid. I think you mentioned we started doing this in 1973, and it's one of the few indicators that actually takes a people-center view of democracy by looking at civil liberties and political rights as they are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

And so, when we'll analyze, we're not really per se analyzing government performance, but we're analyzing is really conditions for people to have actually the freedom to decide, the freedom to make decisions, and the freedom to actively engage if they want to in, in, in political or policy life. I think certainly we have 25 indicators that basically reflect both rights and, and, and, and, and civil liberties.

And definitely we assess this methodology or we use this methodology to make sure that you have a comparison. It is different from what you will see in other important assessments. For example, the variety of democracies or the recently released democracy index of The Economist Intelligence Unit. However, despite the fact that all of these have different methodologies, the trends and tendencies in all of these studies remain the same in a sense.

SIGNÉ: So that is powerful. Thank you for sharing. Looking at Africa for the, or about the past two decades which countries stand out on the continent in terms of outperforming and what makes your trajectory so distinctive?

BERTHIN: Right. Well, this year I want to actually highlight Malawi this year. Malawi is one of the four countries in our current report that actually change its category from partially free to free. I failed to explain earlier that Freedom House actually uses an index of zero to 100, and we actually categorize our countries into three now very famous colors, right? Purple is not free. Yellow is partially free, and green is free. This map has become actually very very famous around the world.

Certainly in the case of Africa, Malawi has become a free country for the first time actually. And one finding that we have, and I'll answer your question about Africa in particular, is that of all the countries classify as partially free over the last 20 years, this is the category that actually has diminished the most. And unfortunately, countries that are diminishing are going

to the purple category as opposed to the to the green category. In this case, Malawi actually has a very important, let's say, trajectory and given particularly peaceful transfer of power, policies in favor of conditions for freedoms and liberties is another element.

But looking at around the, the decade, I, I will also mention a couple of other countries in Africa that actually stand out. Liberia is a country actually that even though it's partially free, it has shown actually tremendous resilience and moving towards basically particularly a free category if the trends continue. Twice, they have transferred actually peacefully government, which is, very important.

Another country that I would mention actually is Ghana. Ghana is another important country that is showing not only as Damon was saying, the issue of economic prosperity, but balancing actually that with conditions for freedom in, in other areas related to civil liberties and political rights.

Last but not least, I do want to basically highlight the experience of Senegal, particularly last year, we brought the issue of youth. Actually it was youth that actually made a tremendous change in in, in, in, in Senegal. Not only pressuring the supreme court of holding elections as it was meant to be, but also by electing an oddity right now in Africa, which is a young leader of 45 years old.

This is very important regarding basically the desperations of the young people. And we have seen the power of the youth in Africa. Of average age 19 years of age, by the way, as Damon was mentioning, and how in Kenya, Senegal and other places, they actually are driving this change. And so, that is really the the headline that I will bring actually from Africa regarding the freedom in the world.

SIGNÉ: Amazing. When you compare the countries which have strengthened democratic institutions, which the one which have regressed, what are the most minimal fact-- meaningful factors explaining the divergence?

BERTHIN: Right. That's a good question because as opposed to maybe 10, 15 years ago, structural factors do not necessarily guarantee democratic prosperity anymore. In fact, actually in this year's report three free countries actually in our index, including the United States, Italy, and Bulgaria declined in their freedoms. They had the greatest declines as free countries.

But certainly there's several elements. I don't think there's a blueprint actually that diverses let's say either democratic regression or democratic prosperity. But it has to do particularly, and we talked a little bit about before about institutions. I think one of the partic democratic institutions, one of the particular advantages of democratic institutions is that it forces individual leaders to adapt to that structure and not vice versa, not basically individual leaders changing that structure to actually fulfill their own individual fulfillments. Definitely understanding that yes, elections are important, however the great game actually comes after the election. How do you actually respond to what you have actually said you were going to do, change, adopt, and so forth and so on. Having this variety of checks and balances or controls, it's very important. We have seen this in many countries in which the independence of the judiciary and the due process and staying to the rule of law is very important in a sense.

But I will say also people, I mean, democratic governance at the end is not only about government, I think it's also about the other side of that coin, which is people, civil society. And if the, any of those two elements are not articulating or contributing, you're gonna have basically some sort of deficit of backsliding, I would say.

SIGNÉ: I really love this and perhaps just give us the opportunity to come to the audience to ask some questions. So yes, let's go this way and then we'll come to you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hello, my name is Geneva Cese. I'm a global affairs major at Trinity Washington University. And I was just wondering, does democracy matter more than the development of African countries, like specifically like Burkina Faso, when we see that they've taken back their gold revenue, building infrastructure, hospitals, railroads and like other expressways, like how can we incentivize people to think that democracy is the way when in countries like Burkina Faso, they're like unifying African countries like Niger, Mali Guinea, and like trying to come together.

SIGNÉ: Thank you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Good morning. My name is Shazara Clark Smith. I am with the Internal Revenue Service, but I also conduct research with the Center for AI and Digital Policy. And I'd like to ask, how do you feel like the trend of the technological developments of recent time have played into the backsliding or regression of freedoms?

SIGNÉ: And perhaps, let me add as a way also for you to conclude after this, what are the top three recommendations that you will provide, especially to prevent democratic backsliding and to strengthen democracy where they are thriving?

BERTHIN: Of course. Yeah. Great questions actually. And appreciate always students who are now actually studying international affairs or international development. You are the future really, and we need you.

Certainly data's important to make correlations, right? You have countries that are in the index of corruption, for example, or prosperity index, as Damon was mentioning. There is a correlation between being free and not being free. You will find that correlation.

Certainly you need to do more analysis to understand basically what are the drivers of that. So, the truth of the matter is, and the facts speak here by themselves the freer country you are, the more prosperous you are, and certainly sustaining that is very important. One indicator that we have in our in our report this year is that of the free countries over the last 20 years, 85% have been able to sustain that category over the last 20 years, which indicates that once you go into the free category with rights and freedoms, you're able actually to sustain it. And it's really that, that, that should be the game. Right.

Regarding technology and democracy, I think we have another flagship report, which we launch in November, which is called Freedom of the Net. Instead of covering 208 countries, it covers 72 countries and it includes probably nearly 15 countries in Africa. So I encourage you to actually look at that. This is one of the most important up and coming issues, I think, for democracy. The intersection between democracy and technology. On the one hand, there are a lot of benefits about it, but certainly particularly authoritarian regimes have learned how to use this in a very malign way. Particularly issues regarding digital repression, for example. And now somebody mentioned transnational repression. By the way, we are going to release our new data this Thursday, so standby by actually for our global transnational repression. Being outside the country as a democratic activist no longer is a guarantee that you're going to be harassed or even killed, actually. That's the, the bottom line of, of, of what's happening. And digital repression is part of that particular element.

Now to finalize three things that I would recommend that are important: First of all, we need to reimagine how to support democratic governance, I think. This moment, this particular inflection point that we are find ourselves allows us to reflect things that we were doing good,

but certainly lessons to bring back actually in a new ecosystem that has different elements. How do we actually support globally, regionally, and locally democratic governance?

The other element that I will actually bring is the issue of coordination. If autocrats can actually coordinate themselves and exchange notes and copy and paste laws and so forth, why not democracies? And certainly that has been a, a, a piece that has been missing actually in our opinion.

And the last, but not least, I will re-bring the issue of reengaging youth with democratic values. Youth are not voting anymore. Youth feel themselves not represented by their representatives. Youth have a number of interesting issues that they want to actually be engaged in. And so they're detaching themselves from something that they are not feeling at. That doesn't mean that they don't want to participate. We have seen basically different places around the world that when you bring the youth dimension into democratic governance, it immediately lights it up because it is a new energy that we needed.

So always say those three things. Reimagining how to support globally democracy, collaborating among democratic governments, and certainly making that important connection with youth and democracy. It matters.

SIGNÉ: What a wonderful way to conclude. So thank you so much

BERTHIN: Thank you

SIGNÉ: for joining us today. So we'll take another round of pictures.

Thank you so much again for your insight. Now I will come our wonderful panel to join, panelists to join the stage.

I am really honored and pleased to introduce our esteemed panelist. So we have Chris Fomunyoh, senior associate for Africa and senior and special advisor to the president at the National Democratic Institute.

FOMUNYOH: Thank you.

SIGNÉ: So of course all of you know, NDI, but obviously at NDI, Chris has organized election observation missions and civil society strengthening programs across Africa. We are so grateful to have you. Thank you, Chris, for joining us today.

FOMUNYOH: My pleasure.

SIGNÉ: Next, I would like to introduce Danielle Resnick, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute and nonresident fellow here at Brookings Global Economy and Development program. Danielle is also the co-principal investigator, co-author, and co-editor of the Brookings State of Democracy in Africa project. So, always a pleasure to have you, Danielle.

RESNICK: Thank you, Landry.

SIGNÉ: And last but not least so we have Professor Belinda Archibong, who is senior fellow in the Africa Growth Initiative here at the Brookings Global Economy and Development program. An associate professor at John Hopkins School, University, School of Advanced International Studies.

Welcome, Belinda, bienvenue.

ARCHIBONG: Merci.

SIGNÉ: So you may already guess that I will come to you, the audience, before coming to the panel. So what do you think is the biggest threat to democracy? And feel free to raise your hand more than once. Do you think that it's economic inequality? Who thinks it's economic inequality, the biggest threat to democracy? We have a few hands. Governance failures? A few, many hands. External influence? Fewer hands, but some. Youth disengagement? Interesting.

So now let's see what the panelists think about this. And let me begin with you, Danielle, as coauthor of the report that you are launching today, which takes a comparative case based approach across five African countries. And perhaps, what gaps was the report aiming to fill? Will you mind elaborating on this? And why was the design so essential to understanding the state and the strengthening of democratic development in Africa? And perhaps before elaborating on this, would you mind sharing a little bit more context on the various scholars and institutions which have been involved in the project?

RESNICK: Yeah, my pleasure. Well, thanks very much, Landry. Thanks to all of you for joining us today. This is very exciting. This has been the, the culmination of about two and a half years of, of work with a fantastic group of scholars. You heard earlier about 14 individuals, we had about five different think tanks in universities in Africa, including two of the key pillars of the Afrobarometer Movement, the Center for Democratic Development in Ghana and the University of Nairobi in Kenya. So great teams there. We had two great Zimbabwean scholars now based at Wellesley and at University of Oxford. We had fantastic scholars from the DRC, including from various different civil society organizations based there, as well as a colleague at the University of Bamako in Mali as well. So it, it was kind of a great collaborative endeavor. This is actually our third engagement. We did have a Kenyan and, and Ghana engagement on the reports as well.

So, just by way of background, we had kind of three main puzzles that motivated the project. First and foremost is what we've already been discussing. When we, we started this project, it was the period of where we're seeing a number of, of coups. We had about 13 coups, some failed, some successful. We, we know this trend across particularly the Sahel region. At the same time, we had a number of constitutional coups where there had been manipulation by executives to either stay in office longer or to disadvantage the opposition. So this, this feeling of democratic backsliding in the region was a concern and we wanted to understand it better.

Secondly though, there's obviously a tremendous amount of variability across the region and that's what motivated the case study analysis. Why do we see such divergence? And so we focus our five cases are Ghana, Mali, Kenya, DRC, and Zimbabwe. Those cases really kind of span the spectrum from our, you know, electoral democracy like Ghana, to what's now considered a closed autocracy, Mali. But interestingly, you know, these countries not just kind of sit along this diverse spectrum now, but they've experienced a lot of movement, you know, since this kind of third wave of democratization in the early 1990s.

Ghana and Zimbabwe at the same level in the early 1990s can sit based on kind of varieties of democracy indices and Freedom House. And they have, you know, diverged very dramatically since then. Both, both stable, but stable on kind of different ends of that kind of democratic spectrum. So that was the, the kind of second motivation for the case study approach.

And then thirdly, a lot of kind of puzzles within countries. You may see kind of strong judiciaries, but the legislature serves as a rubber stamp, or you have strong civil societies,

but rampant corruption. And so that was kind of another reason why we tried to break down democracy into three constitutive elements. In this project, we look at vertical accountability, so the relationship between voters and and elites. We look at horizontal accountability, so the degree to which you know institutions that are supposed to be providing checks and balances, how empowered are they? And we look at diagonal accountability, particularly the way in which non-state actors, civil society and journalists are able to push for accountability, reduce information asymmetries and engage in, in policy change.

Lastly, just to note, we kind of see these five countries as being arch types. There's a lot of parallels with, with other countries in the region. You can see parallels between Zambia and Kenya, for instance, or between the DRC and, and the Madagascar experience.

SIGNÉ: Wonderful, Danielle. Turning to Chris now, NDI has been at the forefront of supporting democratic development in Africa. And how do you describe NDI's core mission in Africa and how has it evolved throughout the time?

FOMUNYOH: Well, first of all, thank you so much for having me. It's such a delight to be here and to be with a lot of friends of Africa and a lot of Africans colleagues and former colleagues in this conversation.

The National Democratic Institute has been working with Africans for the past three decades or more, working to strengthen and support democratic governance across the continent. And I would say that right now, the mission could be defined in two ways. First of all, building partnerships across the continent to strengthen and support freedom and democracy, because that's what Africans want. And our role, we see ourselves as standing behind our partners, not in front of them, to give them lectures or to recommend models for them, but standing behind them to support them in priorities that they've defined for themselves.

And then our second approach also is to provide open spaces, platforms, open spaces where practitioners of democratic governances can meet and exchange ideas, share best practices, lessons learned. And we see that across the continent with people going from South Africa to Senegal or going from Benin to Ghana, or from Ghana and Nigeria to Kenya or to Malawi to share their experiences on what's working in their countries and how other Africans can benefit from their own experiences.

And so far, it's been working pretty well despite the challenges, but that's what keeps us going.

SIGNÉ: That is fantastic, Chris. Turning to you, Professor Belinda. So as the resident economist on this panel, so how will you connect democratic development and economic growth of performance?

ARCHIBONG: Oh, when, when Professor Signé says the resident economist, now I'm nervous. Not an economist, speaking, speaking for myself and my research. So it's a good question and I will speak based on the kind of research evidence that we have and the kind of work that I've done and collaboration on the project, but also on my own personal work.

So the, the key thing that comes out from the, from the kind of economics work and the political economy work linking democratic governance and economic growth is the importance of public service delivery. Right? So somebody mentioned earlier, I think the earlier speaker, that you have all these papers that do these correlations that will say, you know, if you have, you know, the civil liberties, the free and fair elections the rule of law, the kind of constituents of democracy, well, you will see it's correlated with maybe higher GDP growth or better public good provision in areas of education and health.

Correlations, of course, as we know, are not causal. And so one of the things that at least, you know, maybe my political science colleagues can please, you know, jump in but at least from the economic side that we have somewhat good causal evidence on, is that you do have seemingly a very strong link between good democratic governance – and we can talk about what good means, and we've been talking about what good means in this session, in this, in this in this last series of talks – but good demographic governments and, and things like education spending, health spending better education, better health outcomes, and also very importantly, more participation of in, in kind of, you know, these institutions, local institutions from people from marginalized groups and, and especially women, right?

And so, so there's this very nice link that you see where you see more women participating politically, you know, voting, community meetings. You see smaller gender gaps in political participation in areas with very good democratic governance. And then this also then translates into, not to, not to like, you know, put a gendered lens on it, but we need, really need to put a gendered lens on it, but more of women's policy preferences then being passed, like the education, like the health spending that I mentioned earlier, right?

And so, so things like education, spending, health, spending road, you know, secure roads nights, like lights at night, street lights at night, right, that, that ensure security. When women are then participating more, you then see more of these public goods that then benefit everybody, right? Who doesn't want like good roads, health, education and, and you know, security. But you see more of, more of these preferences being passed. And that's something that we do see that is very, very strongly linked. And the kind of economic links between democratization and democratic institutions and economic outcomes.

SIGNÉ: Wonderful. And staying with you, Professor Belinda, for countries already experiencing fast growth, how is democracy affecting the, the performance or the redistribution of growth?

ARCHIBONG: So one of the things that comes out, and I like that we mentioned Ghana. I always say Ghana – I'm a Nigerian, of course, we love Nigeria – well, Ghana is also one of my favorite countries in the world. I love Accra, Ghana. Highly recommend. I was just there in November. And one of the things that you see a country like Ghana, that you do see these improvements, like practical improvements, you know, in in kinda economic outcomes. And also they score very highly on almost every single democracy, democracy index that I, I've seen at least recently. Is that you are seeing and you are hearing from people on the ground that the government is doing a lot of redistribution around the things that I just mentioned, around things like health and education, and importantly electricity infrastructure, right? You go to Ghana, at least when I was there in November, you will see not a, a single kind of blackout that is happening, right? So very steady electricity, very, very important as we know for firm productivity, for individual investment, for all of these things, right?

And so really like seeing the countries that are taking those growth, that growth, and sharing it with the population through redistribution, either directly fiscal redistribution, right? You see a lot of, I know Ghana did this, especially during the pandemic and then a few African countries that did this, where they did, you know, direct cash transfers to poor households, direct cash transfers to, to women-led households, who tend to be more economically insecure. So these direct pushes for redistribution that you see where these successful countries that have democratic and also are having high growth, have been able to then translate those returns to the populace. And then they are also getting the returns back, right, in terms of, of, of, of support from the citizens, right? From everybody.

I talk to people, I don't know if there, are there Ghanaians in the room? Maybe one or two. Oh wow, okay. Usually there's at least one Ghanaian. But anyway, so I'm gonna speak for Ghana now. So, so, so from the Ghanaians that I heard from the taxi drivers to everybody, people love the new president. They're saying exactly like I just said, he's delivering public

goods, he's making it more safe. Electricity is functional. All of these things are happening. And so they are, they are much more willing to reelect the next incumbent government, government under that president because he's delivering these public goods, because he's engaging in the true distribution. And this is what, you know, this is the, for me, this is like the gold star high highlight. Or, or, or hallmark of a successful democratic country that is able to translate that high growth into these economic and political returns.

SIGNÉ: Amazing, Belinda. Turning to you, Danielle. So for when we look at the reports, what is the most important factor explaining why some countries are strengthening democratic gains while the order are stagnating or reversing?

RESNICK: Okay, so I'm going to talk about one, but then divide that into, to multiple factors. So I mean, the overarching emphasis we make in, in our, in our project is on resilience capacity. So just like, you know, any of us in our individual, as individuals or households, we have different kind of sources of capacity in the face of a crisis. It might be our family, our community, our economic resources. And it's similar for thinking about kind of democratic resilience capacity. And so we tried to kind of break down into kind of constitutive parts, what we saw across these five countries as being explanations for why we saw kind of backsliding or strengthening over time.

And so we have four key factors we emphasize in the report. One of them is what Belinda is alluding to, is this political economy dynamic. The degree to which you have inequality and particularly a kind of an economy built on resource rents, we see this kind of, you know, trend in those situations where you have high corruption, large gaps, particularly between kind of rural and urban elite. This has been one of the, the major challenges in Mali. And this leads to kind of high levels of citizen disillusionment with the government, particularly when you do have a democratic government, but it's seen as being corrupt and not delivering, to your point. So the political economy foundations were one of the dimensions of resilience capacity.

The second is military civilian relations. So certainly where the military has historically played a much larger role in politics, it's, that's likely to be reactivated again when there is a crisis. And so thinking about, you know, the degree to which the military is professionalized the degree to which it, we have kind of a siphoning off or sandboxing between its ability to use off budget resources to fund, fund weapons or machinery. When the military does have access to those off budget resources, it creates its own kind of parallel source of power.

The third element we talk about is the, the breadth or the narrowness of the political settlement. So where you've traditionally had a very kind of narrow kind of elite coalition built around kind of religious or ethnic or economic basis they're, they're afraid of losing power. They don't want to broaden the political settlement. And so over time they use different machinations to make sure that they, they retain their stay in office.

And then lastly related to that is the degree of party institutionalization. So where you have parties that actually, you know, have roots, societal roots and they're not just around one or two person leaders based on the person's charisma or resources you're much more likely for, you know, elections for instance, not to be seen as a zero sum game, but to there be a kind of buy-in to, you know, elections are kind of the rules of the game, right? That there can be alternation and you know, we don't need to resort to different types of machinations or massive violence if we, if we don't win office.

So we see those kind of four factors. They're not exhaustive, but they certainly feature in all these cases and those being really the major sources of, of resilience capacity.

SIGNÉ: Excellent summary, Danielle, but I hope you will still read the report. So, turning to you now, Chris. Looking across your work, what will you highlight as some of India's most

successful achievements in strengthening democratic governance in Africa, and what has made these interventions successful?

FOMUNYOH: Well, thank you. And I'll pick up on what be both Belinda and Danielle have said, my co-panelists, to say that, you know, that's, I think there is an underestimation of the impact of democracy and good governance in the functionality of states that when people see a country that's doing well and they give it praise, they don't take the time to look beneath the surface to see the amount of investments intentionality that went into creating institutions that work or the space, the efforts that we put into creating the space for citizens to have voice around those, the, the functionality of the state.

And so people can praise the Ghanaian government for delivering services, but the reason is delivering services is because it recognizes that its mandate came from citizens expressed through credible elections. And so you have to kind of dig below the surface to look at the work that was done by Ghanaian civil society organizations to make sure that the elections were transparent and credible, to be able to have a government that was seen as legitimate by the citizens that now fears that he has an obligation to deliver services to those citizens.

So I look at South Africa today and I can spend the next hour talking about the amount of work that NDI and its partner organizations in South Africa, Project Vote with the Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu of blessed memory now. The work that we did with the University of Western Cape in the years between 1991 and 1994 when a new South Africa was being born, and that it was that amount of investment in civic education and voter education for a population, 80% of South Africans, who had never participated in any kind of political process because of the apartheid regime that brought them to the comfort level that allowed them to be able to participate in the elections that gave Nelson Mandela the presidency of South Africa and the legitimacy to govern.

And it was in the way in which Nelson Mandela governed that set the pace for how South Africa is being governed today, for why the Constitution is being respected by every other president, because Mandela set the pace. So there's, there's a linkage there that I think we need to help people make.

We celebrate in Senegal. Gerardo just talked about Senegal as a success story. But the Senegal of today is riding the wave of electoral reforms that were done in the 90s, and the work that NDI and Senegalese partners put in, creating a national consensus around the electoral framework in Senegal when there was a deadlock, political deadlock. And then President Abdou Diouf of the Socialist party that had been in power for 40 years invited NDI to come help develop this national consensus. And Abdoulaye Wade who, who was the opposition leader, was in prison because of violence, constant violence around elections in Senegal. And NDI went in, we talked to all of the stakeholders and we came up with a report that put out recommendations on how the Senegalese could create a legal framework that would allow for credible elections. And you've seen since then that Senegal has consistently had good elections and the framework is holding.

And so that's, that's examples. Like, and you can go country after country because fortunately for NDI, we've been involved in I would say 50 of the 54 countries on the continent. And so we can lay out these success stories in a way that can help people make the linkages between the investments that are being made in democratic governance and the functionality and ability of states to be able to deliver. And you know, the question that was raised by the panelist earlier by the participant earlier I think people in the democracy support community need to do a better job at telling their story.

SIGNÉ: Yeah, that is a very beautiful way to conclude. Although it's not the end of the panel. So we'll come back. I have so many things I want to ask you, but I want to pose a little bit to give the, to bring some of your questions from the audience.

So I know that in the back you have been very patient, so you have been waiting a couple of times. So I will start with you.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi, thank you very much. My name is Jamal Ahmed. I'm a graduate of Tufts University. Currently I work in the fintech space for Flood Wave. I wanna thank the panelists and everyone that's spoken today. You've given like very insightful information and into how you think about how Africa can grow and thrive. But there's one thing I haven't really heard much of in the panel today is how can democracies disagree with each other and what does that look like? Because in the, just to give some context to the question is how I'm thinking about it.

SIGNÉ: A brief question. So be very brief. Just go to the question please.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Yeah, of course. So how can democracies disagree with each other, especially when their interests diverge? For, giving the example of the DRC, what happens when the resource of coltan that goes into our phones, the inputs needed to create that resource, the labor, if that gets more expensive, how do developed economies respond to the increase in price for the products that they're so used to, today? So when interests diverge for democracies, how can we, how can they basically come come across those differences is my question. Thank you.

SIGNÉ: Important nuance, thank you so much for your question. So, take a couple of additional question. I'll come to you. Yeah.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi, my name is Catherine Self. I'm with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Middle East program, a junior fellow. I was curious if we're considering that the youth are like the point for optimism moving forward, how does engaging the youth actually work when we're building these democracies? Like what, if you could provide some insights into how that's actually done successfully.

SIGNÉ: Can you just pass the mic behind you? Thank you for the question.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Thank you. My name is Tamara Carboniera and I'm a recent graduate in international affairs. I would love to hear your perspective on how Chinese investment in Africa is impacting the democratic landscape on the continent.

SIGNÉ: So each panelist can take a question. Danielle, is that?

RESNICK: Okay, all, all really fascinating. I, I think on this, this first one, I mean, I think democracies disagree with each other all the time on different things. I mean, you know, various trade disputes between, I mean it's, it's a bit different now with the US, but in the past, you know, you know, the US and the EU or all the negotiations around NAFTA with trade and now the, the, the USMCA. I mean, democracies disagree with each other all the time. I think what what is needed is you know, mutual respect, guardrails, and of course, you know, different institutions that help facilitate those discussions and, and, you know, what are kind of red lines and, and what are kind of acceptable, you know, for for negotiations.

And so I think that goes back to, I think the point Gerardo was making about, you know, this, this investment in institutions. I think at the end of the day, whether we're talking about kind of democratic political institutions or we're talking about some of our multilateral institutions you know, that support trade and issues around global governance. I, I think that's really pivotal, 'cause, yeah, I think there, there will this, you've given a great example, but I, you know, the, these emerge all the time. All the disagreements for the African continental free trade agreement. I mean, there's been a ton of negotiations amongst countries for that. And they've, they've set up mechanisms to try to deal with each of these one by one.

SIGNÉ: And, and, and Danielle, although I'm not panelist, but meaning democracy also evolve as a way to peacefully manage conflicts. So it is normal to have disagreement, but the question is, you have mechanisms which allow to address those disagreement in a way that people will not be harming one another or are not supposed to be harming one another. Yes, Chris?

FOMUNYOH: Yeah, I'll just piggyback on that because you, you paraphrased the now late former chair of NDI, Madeleine Albright, who always used to say, democracies don't go to war with each other. And gives me a sense that if, if those principles were embedded in more countries, then some of the conflicts that we see across the continent would be managed differently. That when Ghana, for example, has border issues with Côte d'Ivoire. As is been the case for a few years, they found an amicable way to resolve those issues in a way that both countries are actually benefiting tremendously from their maritime resources. They didn't go to war.

Now what happens if it's escalation between Egypt and Ethiopia? You know, given their credentials on some of these issues, is there a strong likelihood that they will be resolved amicably or peacefully, or will each side of, take other options? Look at what's happening Eastern Congo and Rwanda. My sense is that if the democratic credentials of both countries were spectacular, that they'll be finding ways to resolve those issues amicably. And maybe coming up with options that would allow countries on both sides of the border to benefit from those investments.

Let me just take a quick crack at the Chinese question because I think it's, it's a, it's a huge dilemma for the continent. Because, and it's also tied to the question that was raised earlier by this by the graduate student from Trinity about development and democracy. And, and the plea that we have to make constantly to ourselves as Africans and, and friends of the continent should engage in those conversations. That's a false dichotomy. Africa shouldn't be the only continent where we tell people that you have to choose between food at the table and your right to vote. We should have both. They're not incompatible.

But what we are facing on the continent now is that we have some of our international partners who are trying to propel this narrative that you can't have democracy when you are aspiring to have development. And that's not that's not helpful because Africa has been through this before. If you look at where we were at independence and look at what transpired when we had the military regimes and we had the one party states, was because people were basically saying, oh, you, you, you need development first. And look at what they did to the continent.

And then when you look at the success stories, the Malawis, the Botswana, the Ghanas, the Mauritius, these countries are actually doing well. Botswana is such a jewel on the African continent. They're producing diamond and they're managing it properly with a lot of transparency and accountability. And they're not facing, they're not imposing on themselves this dichotomy, this false choice of choosing between development and democracy.

And I think those narratives that come from regimes like the Chinese. While we appreciate the development, we appreciate the roads, the hospitals, it's great. But we can do both. And I think Africans will be well placed to pursue both aims because they're not incompatible. Thank you.

SIGNÉ: Amazing.

ARCHIBONG: Okay. Since in, oh, sorry. I completely agree. A hundred percent agree.. So in, I'll, I'll be, I'll be brief 'cause I see Landry looking over in the interest of time. So just two points.

Let me add to the, to the points that have already been made. One of the things that, there's a, since we talked about me as the economist, very famous result in economics called the Voting Paradox. I don't know if the economists in the room know this Arrow's Impossibility theorem that says that, you know, essentially, like if you're trying to go with majority voting, you'll never get a rational way to go from many, many people's preferences to a single choice decision. You need a dictator for that, right? And that's economics. Yeah. Theory. Theory. This is the theory.

I mention that to say, I think based on the questions we've heard, I think there was, there were a couple residents who mentioned it. I understand the attractiveness of authoritarianism, right. I understand being able to, and, and I'm gonna speak from the point of view of Nigeria, which I know very well, being able to say, look, look, authoritarians, they, the dictators can pass policy choices easily, right? They don't have to go through any, you know, agreement among constituents. They don't have to, to, to, to create consensus. They can just do policy. The, the, the problem with that is that the costs of disagreement under authoritarianism is very, very high, right? When you protest, and this is, I have work on protests, when you protest a military regime – as somebody who also, this is both like research and, and, and personal, you know, experience growing up in Nigeria in the 90s, they will shoot you more and kill you more. Not to say the democrats won't do it, the democratic people won't do it, but the military will do it more. They will incarcerate you more.

And so what I think a key role for democratic governance and institutions is, is to reduce the cost of disagreement for citizens. So I, I think just, just to like highlight that and put a, a fine point on that.

On the youth, I, since I wrote a piece on the youth, so, so please read my piece on the youth and, and how to engage youth more in democracies in Brookings. One of the things that we know is that youth, more than, and when I say youth, I'm talking about the 18 to 24 demographic, more than any other demographic they consume, like 60% of youth are in Africa are consuming news from social media, right? And this is as of 2022. This is true, right? You know, internet, social media, we know this, you know, this is a, a dominant form of news consumption for young people.

We also know the statistics that we mentioned earlier, like only 40% of young people are voting compared to 77% of, you know, people from older cohorts. And so when you combine those two, those two facts, plus the fact that you have this much lower trust in things like the, you know, electoral council, the president, these formal legal institutions, political institutions, amongst youth than any other demographic. What you really need to do is one address, the, the, the kind of go to youth where they are, the information asymmetry where people will say, and this is, you know, I visited, I was at University of Lagos a couple years ago and we surveyed the students there and they would say, look, I, one, one thing I'm really concerned, I don't know how to become more politically active in a way that is not protest. 'cause protest is the only category where you see youth, you know, participate more than other, you know, age cohorts. So they say, I don't know how to do this. We can use the social media that they use. You know, you can use the, the, the youth civil service organizations that people trust to communicate that information through social media going where youth are using the, the kind of use consumption. So that's one.

The second thing that these, these young people were, were, were mentioning is that they're also worried about security and safety concerns when it comes to politically engaging in, again, everything from, you know, part voting to participating in community meetings, to, you know, attending protests and demonstrations. And so that needs to be something that is a structural thing that the government needs to address, where you say, look, we are not shooting people when they're protesting. We are making sure that if you are at the ballot box, you, you, you have security that is there to protect the citizens, the young people that are trying to vote, not to try and intimidate them, right? And so that's another thing that they mentioned.

And I'll, I'll mention one more thing because I know Landry has this very nice piece on cultural, cultural capital and, and thinking about, again, the, the, the youth are using social media. TV is also one of the, still the, you know, more dominant forms of news consumptions amongst young people. Use the, the, the, the kind of, you know, TV music artists, Nollywood is huge, right? I love Ira Star. She's, she's, people, go listen to her. Anyway, there is, there is so much, and this is like the youth are involved in that, they are using to, to consume, they're consuming media on the internet. Use those people, use those icons, use, you know, or not use as a straw, it sounded like a, a strange word, but, you know, involve them, involve these, these figures that the young people are paying attention to and that they might be more likely to trust, to share information about how you can become more engaged politically, again, in ways that are less costly than protest. Protest is fine, but it is, we know it can be very costly in terms of government response, right? And also in terms of the energy that you need to do to have to go out and then the kind of courage that you need to have to go out and protest.

So, so these are the ways, you know, social media, news, you know, youth society organizations and also this kind of taking advantage of the kind of media cultural landscape that is very, very robust and thriving in Africa to communicate information about how to become more politically engaged.

SIGNÉ: That is a wonderful way to conclude. I will also come to you, Danielle, and Chris for your conclusion. Danielle, perhaps will you mind elaborating a little bit on this targeted context-specific engagement in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, or Mali, or something that Professor Nguimkeu emphasize also on the endogeneous dimension for, for development.

And, and Chris, would you mind elaborating also on the critical importance of the national versus traditional dimension to democratic development?

FOMUNYOH: Okay.

SIGNÉ: You have a minute each.

RESNICK: A minute, okay.

FOMUNYOH: Alright.

RESNICK: Okay. Well, fortunately we have, you know, written in detail in the reports that were shared, some of these entry points. So that saves a bit of time.

But I mean, following up on the, the question about the youth, and nicely from what Belinda was saying we do have some examples from the cases, you know, about what's actually important more to structural level. So the Kenyan case really emphasizes the imperative of campaign finance reform. This really excludes young people from competing in the political system, right? Because you do need to have a tremendous amount of money to compete. And there have been at least two attempts at campaign finance legislation in Kenya, and it keeps being held up at the implementation stage. So this is kind of a priority as we're going into the 2027 electoral cycle there.

Also in the, the Malian context. This emphasis that, that Damon gave earlier about, you know, local engagement, drawing on local traditions. You know, Mali has this tradition of youth youth clubs, rural tea drinking clubs. It has a huge tradition of consensual national dialogues when there are crises. The founding, you know, dialogue in, in 1991 kind of led to the democratic trajectory. And so our colleagues for the Malian case really emphasized kind of building on those local traditions, elevating them, and thinking about things like citizen dialogues in which kind of citizens including the youth, are kind of bringing their issues to, to parliamentarians.

So this is kind of a optimistic view, you know, if we got to a space where the kind of winter regime would allow that type of engagement. So engaging with those local, elevating those local traditions.

And then, you know, lastly, this idea about new entry points. Ghana is a great example. It's just been a strong democracy. But a lot of people say it's, it's actually stagnant. It's struggled to get to be a, a liberal democracy. And it still has a lot of challenges with electoral violence, with vote buying. And so, you know, one of the, the, the recommendations in the report that were given was targeting the middle tier.

So there's been a lot of democracy interventions with voters with civic education. There's been a lot of party strengthening activities with elites, but there's this middle tier of party brokers, considered kind of the foot soldiers for political parties, who go out, they do the canvassing, they're monitoring the electoral booths that, you know, they're out there handing out t-shirts and money. And they're kind of the element that would, they're, they're quite ignored at at the moment, but they would kind of benefit as well from some of these civic education techniques, learning about a tolerance, being brought, having more opportunities to be brought more formally into political structures and being able to compete themselves as candidates so that they don't just see, you know, their role as being you know, exchanged between money and votes.

So those are kind of, some of the specific examples, you know, leveraging new entry points strong into, to local traditions and really seeing, you know, what, what might be some you know, priorities to address binding constraints, like, like campaign finance.

SIGNÉ: Amazing, Danielle. Chris, last but not least, you are the one keeping us between now and the lunch.

FOMUNYOH: Okay. So I'll go quickly, but thank you. Thank you, thank you. Yeah, the, the question of how do you deal with tradition and cultures is really important because we all know Africa is a continent of traditions, strong cultures. And you know, those things come up when you go below the national level. You know, so you take a country like Nigeria, it's huge and you have to deal with traditions that differ if you're Yoruba or you are Igbo or you are Hausa, Fulani Hausa from the north.

At the same time, we recognize that we're dealing with nation states that are also themselves trying and working very hard to put, you know, this agglomerate of diversity, diverse cultures and traditions that you find in almost every African country together within the confines of a nation state. And so you look at Nigeria, for example. And we've, we've struggled with that in the course of our work. And you look at women's involvement in politics. Nigeria is 241 million inhabitants divided almost 50-50. In all of Nigeria, from the president down there are 1,460 elected positions in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Only 64 of those positions are occupied by women.

And now if you go into various societies and you're having these conversations about culture and tradition, and you hear a lot of people repeating stereotypes about how women can lead, they can govern, they shouldn't be elected. And you have, you have to face that dilemma. Do you stick with that or do you try to build a political will for them to make the right decisions, to recognize that they can't develop the country when 50% of the population doesn't have a seat at the table?

And so you contrast that with Senegal, and we celebrate Senegal today because it's got 42% of its parliament is female, is women. Okay. But it, it, it, it's not a happenstance. Going back to my point, prior to 2000, Senegal was around 10% at the maximum. But there was a lot of political will that developed at the time. There was a lot of intentionality and an investment in that sector to make it happen. So in 2000, we, based on the partnership

model, talked to political parties in Senegal across the board, irrespective of ideology. And because of the relationships that we had established through our electoral reform process, we got them to commit that if they partnered with NDI and nominated women to run for local elections in 2000, we would provide the training that they said women didn't have to be able to run for office and govern. And, and they, they, they all agreed. And we had a big ceremony, you know, politicians like ceremonies, so we had a big ceremony. We had a memorandum of understanding. All the party leaders were given opportunities to make speeches, to make their commitment, to have women candidates. They signed a memorandum. It became a big issue. It became a national campaign. 8,000 Senegalese women were nominated to run for local councils in 2000. NDI trained all 8,000 women. 6,000 of them got elected. And it's that class of women that were elected in 2000 that have gone through the process and that are now sitting in parliament.

So these things don't happen overnight. And so you have one country where people are stuck in traditional beliefs and they're shutting out 50% of their population. And then you have another one in contrast, where the political will has developed and they've imbibed or embraced what is the democratic value that is universally accepted.

SIGNÉ: That is a beautiful way to conclude. Please join me in celebrating. So I'll ask the panel to come and Professor Nguimkeu to join us for the picture. But as Professor Nguimkeu is joining us, Izzy, can you stand up, and also Dafe? So they have been behind the incredible output that we have had, over 24 output. So thank you so much and many other who were acknowledged before by Professor Nguimkeu.