

A high-angle, wide shot of a massive crowd gathered in a city square at night. The crowd, composed of people of various ages and ethnicities, fills the foreground and middle ground, extending towards the background. In the background, several large, ornate buildings are illuminated with warm lights. On the left, a building with a prominent dome and classical columns is visible. In the center, a large building with multiple domes and arches is brightly lit. To the right, a building with a sign that reads "ПОШТА" (Post) is visible. The sky is dark blue, and the overall atmosphere is one of a significant public gathering or protest.

A Force For Good in the World: Placing Democratic Values at the Heart of the UK's International Strategy

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Cover photograph:

Public protest about measures to contain the COVID-19 epidemic outside the seat of the Serbian Parliament in Belgrade on 9 July 2020.

Photograph by OLIVER BUNIC/AFP via Getty Images

A Force For Good in the World: Putting Democratic Values at the Centre of the UK's International Strategy

J Alexander Thier¹

Summary

Despite the liberating promise of the end of colonialism and the Cold War, rising prosperity and instantaneous global communication, the history of the new millennium, thus far, is one of declining democratic freedoms. This resurgent authoritarianism makes it much harder to tackle the major challenges of the coming decade: climate change, economic recovery, inequality and social justice, and global health security. More than any time in a generation, the strength of the UK's own democratic governance and that of its key partners will be the most consequential long-term factor for the UK's national security: the post-Covid-19 challenges will require levels of engagement and inclusion that only open, democratic societies can deliver.

International leadership is badly needed. The UK's interests, values, resources, and influence call for a leadership role in supporting democratic governance and confronting authoritarianism. In developing its approach, the UK starts with a uniquely strong set of attributes:

- **Many core British values have universal value.** Equality, accountability, rule of law, media freedom and protection of human rights are democratic values and critical to creating open economies and societies.
- **The UK has global engagement capacity and reach** through government, parliaments, networked political parties, academic and financial institutions, civil society organisations, cultural and sports links, and multilateral institutions.
- The **0.7 per cent foreign assistance commitment has made the UK a 'development superpower'** driving global agendas on governance, anti-corruption, media freedom, climate, education, gender equality, and public health.
- The **UK has driven the creation and evolution of the rules-based international system**, with strong influence and heavy expertise on issues from trade, to taxation and beneficial ownership, to defending human rights and advancing gender equality, to international criminal justice.

The UK should seize this moment for leadership by:

- **Putting democratic governance at the centre of its approach to foreign policy, development, and national security.** This approach should be values-based, recognising the need to take a clear stand at key moments, but also provide practical support to strengthen democracy through strategic and evidence-based programmes using the UK's world-class diplomatic, development and soft power tools.
- **Adopting a principled approach to multilateralism.** A rules-based international system is critical for the UK's interests but there are risks that blind support for multilateral systems will reinforce anti-democratic forces. The UK should therefore invest in alliances and partnerships that promote core objectives of peace, prosperity, planet and liberty.
- **Focusing on inclusion.** Genuine democracy requires a step change in inclusion and political participation in most societies if they are to meet the current political challenges. The UK's openness in tackling remaining gender, disability, and racial equality challenges at home will strengthen its international agenda and alliances.

1. This paper was written for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy but the views are the author's own.

To ensure that these policy goals are realised, the UK should issue a new integrated cross-Whitehall strategy to a) **defend** established democracies/institutions; b) **support** emerging/struggling democracies; c) **counter** authoritarians.

- **Defending established democracies.** Focus on three interlinked priorities. First, safeguard the integrity of elections. Most democracies are at risk and should work together to share information, tools, and responses. Second, fight disinformation and hate speech while maintaining media freedom and public trust in institutions. Leading democracies must cooperate to manage these rapidly evolving threats and set standards for technology. Third, heighten collaboration with intelligence, defence, and law enforcement agencies to expand on existing efforts to confront the actors that are attacking us.
- **Supporting emerging and struggling democracies.** Global democracy indices consider about half the countries in the world to be struggling or vulnerable democracies. Reversing the 15-year downward trend in democratic freedoms means focusing on these countries, investing in democratic governance as part of the UK's trade, poverty reduction, security, and defence relationships. The UK should explicitly update its longstanding good governance agenda to a 'democratic governance' agenda and 'doing development democratically'. Prioritise empowered citizenship as the engine to tackle underlying causes of poverty, corruption and inequality.
- **Countering authoritarians.** Aggressive actions by authoritarian states threaten the UK directly and indirectly. There should be five pillars to the response. (i) **Fight kleptocracy** - autocrats use the global finance system to steal, enrich themselves and finance anti-democratic campaigns. (ii) **Address technological repression** - regulate digital platforms and enable governments, citizens and companies to respond to malicious activity. (iii) **Support independent media** - there is an extinction-level threat to independent media that citizens need to safeguard their political and civic freedoms. (iv) **Focus on participation** - supporting demand for accountability and movements for democracy by local actors can help bring transformative change. (v) **Defend basic norms** - attacks on democratic freedoms and individual human rights are becoming so common that they threaten to shift the standard of what is acceptable.

The new Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) should create a **Department for Democratic Governance** that creates coherent policy, funding and research, using a network of relevant UK organisations. It could combine the political and diplomatic skills of the FCO with the programmatic and analytical expertise of DFID.

1. Introduction

'A state which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished.'

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

- 1.1 This paper is motivated by a belief that the next five years will be decisive for our collective future, and that the UK's leadership will be critical in meeting the challenges ahead. This view was intensified by interviews with leading thinkers and policy-makers conducted as the unfolding pandemic, the massive economic impact, and the irresistible energy of the global Black Lives Matter protests added urgency to the debates. In tackling these social, economic and health challenges on top of the climate emergency, all of the core components of democracy will be needed - full political participation, gender equality, the rule of law, accountability, media freedom, and open societies and economies. Putting democracy and human rights at the centre of the UK's national and international strategies both reflects British values and projects British interests.
- 1.2 Despite the liberating promise of the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of colonialism and Apartheid, and the rise of instantaneous global communication, the new millennium has not rid us of the gulag or genocide, of totalitarians and kleptocrats, of propaganda and dezinformatsiya. Indeed, the history of this new century, thus far, is one of declining freedoms, of rising anti-democratic forces that seek not only to oppress their own people, but to make the world more favourable for their brand of authoritarian regime. They mix the growth potential of state-controlled capitalism and the efficiency of unaccountable institutions with old and new forms of repression and theft of state resources to maintain and extend their power.
- 1.3 The UK, a moral stalwart and pioneer of the growth of modern democracy and human rights, is at a crossroads. A middle power amidst rising great power competition with still outsized influence and resources due to its historical position of empire, language, industry, and law, the UK is challenged to define its national interests during a time of deep uncertainty and a global pandemic. Will it retract its reach and global commitments to focus on security and welfare at home and in its neighbourhood, or will it seek to define a new global role meant to strengthen an international rules-based order that would benefit and define a 'Global Britain'? In either case, rising authoritarianism will likely further upend the international order, disrupting security alliances and post-World War II institutions, endangering democratic processes, and potentially leading to confrontation.
- 1.4 The greatness of Britain in the next century will derive from the reweaving of a unique set of characteristics that afford it competitive advantages. That must undoubtedly include being a society of laws, with freedom of thought and speech, technological ingenuity, financial integrity, and educational and entrepreneurial opportunity that continues to serve a beacon to the world's talent. It must also serve as an example of how diversity, democracy, and human rights are accelerators of sustainable prosperity. This ambition requires an enabling environment, at home and abroad, to flourish. To occupy this role, *the UK has the opportunity, and perhaps compulsion, to play a central role in the future of freedom and democratic good governance*. It must be both a reservoir and a global champion of universal values.²
- 1.5 To that end, this paper will explore the definition of national interests that supports this set of priorities, where and how has the UK been effective in the past, and the opportunities and imperatives for leadership now.

2. Many interlocutors emphasised that the UK should be promoting universal values, to which the British adhere, rather than 'British values' to which the universe should adhere.

2. The Twin Perils of Rising Authoritarianism and Democratic Decline

- 2.1 The aggregate global decline of democracy is unmistakable. For the first time since 2000, the majority of nations are once again autocracies, and the majority of the world's population live under authoritarian regimes.³ If it ever was so, the yearning to be free for half of humanity is now unlikely to be fulfilled. Freedom House has catalogued a net decline in democracy around the world for 14 years in a row, and in 2019 the Economist Democracy Index had the lowest global score since it started publication in 2006. Each of these indices measure some combination of the quality of human rights, gender equality, and civil liberties, political participation and space for independent media and civil society, and functioning of government and elections. It is this rich, living tapestry of institutions, norms, and practices that separates democracy in name from democracy in fact. Even as some countries have shown improvement or experienced dramatic breakthroughs, the overall trend is clear: the world has grown increasingly unsafe for democracy.
- 2.2 This state of affairs is driven by a complex series of factors. The rise of authoritarian China, an economic and increasingly technological marvel with the world's largest population and soon the world's largest economy, is a major factor in two respects. First, China uses its power around the world to undercut the foundations of democracy and to shape an agnostic world order that supports China, its economy and ambitions. Second, China's rapid economic rise and effective use of technology to suppress civil liberties are an attractive model to regimes around the world that would like to pair growth with a quiescent populace. China is joined by several powerful nations, including Russia, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, in proactively spreading an anti-democratic model that bolsters the rulers' authority while building allies to diminish both the strength of democracies, and the strength of democracy as a guiding norm in international relations. Putinism was born from nationalist fear of decline, coupled with a belief that interventionist democracies were promoting revanchism, colour revolutions (Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan) and outright invasions (Kosovo, Iraq). Kleptocrats have weaponised global finance and information systems against the nations that built them.
- 2.3 Frustrations with democracy's challenges in delivering on citizens' demands has played a part in the decline of democracy. Slow growth and rising inequality in many wealthy countries has given many the sense that globalisation and globalist elites are gaining at the expense of ordinary citizens. In poorer countries, political systems that offer all the messy drama of multi-party democracy without the benefits of accountable government risk reducing the long-term commitment needed to make democracy real. Major shocks like the 2008 financial crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, skyrocketing debt, and longer-term deterioration of infrastructure and the environment have further convinced many that their democratic governments are not capable of addressing major challenges. This overall discontent has fuelled the rise of populist, nationalist, and xenophobic sentiment and parties. As a result, the quality of democracy has ebbed from Hungary to Washington.
- 2.4 These two trends, combined, have caused, according to one former Prime Minister, 'a crisis of both confidence and efficacy' in the UK and its democratic partners, with the 'challenge of efficacy the most pressing, or demonstrating that democracy can deliver for the people'. Whether the Covid-19 pandemic will further erode or restore confidence is too soon to say, but authoritarians are taking advantage of the crisis to further restrict civil liberties through suppression of voice, information, and elections, and the use of intrusive surveillance and other emergency powers, while boasting about the effectiveness of their response. Will democratic regimes prove more adept at long-term response, and more resilient to shocks? Will the leading actors exerting pressure to constrain autocrats and supporting struggling democrats be too distracted to push back against backsliding? As one noted commentator writes, 'Western democracies are consumed with nettlesome domestic developments - including ever more contentious and divisive politics, the decay of traditional political parties, and the rise of illiberal alternatives - that are sapping their attention to the

Global Britain

'Global Britain is about us being a force for good in the world.'

Dominic Raab, June 2020

3. Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) 2020 Democracy report. Authoritarian is defined as either full autocratic or electoral authoritarian regimes.

state of democracy beyond their borders, as well as their confidence that democracy is the best choice for others'.⁴ Yet the UK defence of democratic freedoms in Hong Kong stands as an important example. Whatever the instrumental value of tackling authoritarianism, it also serves a higher purpose in framing the UK's strategy. As the Foreign Secretary recently said, 'Global Britain is about us being a force for good in the world'.⁵

3. UK National Interests and the Fight for Democracy and Against Authoritarianism

'And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned around on you - where would you hide... the laws all being flat? This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast...and if you cut them down...d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then?'

Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons*

- 3.1 The UK must chart its global role in this rapidly changing world in a way that protects its fundamental national interests. The first priority - the security and prosperity of UK citizens - starts at home. Like all countries, the UK is not immune from threats to its democratic freedoms, processes, and institutions. It must contend with concerns about interference from abroad, diminishment of privacy from surveillance and social media, xenophobia, polarisation, threats to elected officials, attacks on media, and human rights violations like human trafficking.
- 3.2 *Rapid, unpredictable change is the order of the day, and democratic and human rights principles need to be embedded into the fabric of how the UK and its partners respond to these challenges.* The Covid-19 pandemic and its fallout may prove the most profound global crisis since World War Two. Yet it has caught national and international systems flatfooted. Meanwhile climate change, likely the most profound global phenomenon of the coming century, remains at best a third or fourth tier issue for most governments and industry. Uncontrolled technological development in the form of automation, artificial intelligence, surveillance, cyber warfare, autonomous weapons, and genetic engineering also require deep democratic and ethical boundaries. The implications of growing insecurity and environmental degradation in particular will likely result in increased displacement and migration for hundreds of millions.
- 3.3 How does the UK best prepare itself for these coming challenges? First is to recognise that *being democratic and collaborating with other democracies is empirically beneficial to UK prosperity and security*. This is not a neutral or strictly values-based choice. There is a wealth of studies demonstrating the long-term security, economic, and human capital benefits to democratic governance.⁶ The goal of creating a resilient society and resilient supply chains will be enhanced by deepening democratic institutions and partnerships.⁷ For example, while the novel coronavirus has spread in democratic and authoritarian countries alike, it may be no coincidence that it originated in an authoritarian one. The free flow of information and critical perspectives are key to stopping outbreaks and to the capacity for self-correcting when mistakes are made. Even as some closed regimes demonstrate a certain effectiveness in things like infrastructure development and quarantine enforcement, by far the worst impacts of political instability and exclusionary governance derive from non-democracies. For example, the origins of refugee flows to Europe and the UK are overwhelmingly from non-democratic regimes in crisis: Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Eritrea. Democracies neither experience famines, nor wars with other democracies.

4. Carothers, Thomas. 'Rejuvenating Democracy Promotion.' *Journal of Democracy* vol. 31, no. 1 (2020): 114-23. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/745958>.

5. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (2020) *Sky News*, 5 June 2020.

6. See, for example: Acemoglu, Daron; Naidu, Suresh; Restrepo, Pascual and Robinson, James A. (2019) 'Democracy Does Cause Growth', *Journal of Political Economy* 127, no. 1: 47-100, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1086/700936> and Halperin, Morton H., Siegle, Joseph T. and Weinstein, Michael M. (2010) *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

7. 'Resilience refers to properties of a political system to cope, survive and recover from complex challenges and crises that represent stresses or pressures that can lead to a systemic failure.' Sisk, Timothy D. (2017) *Democracy and Resilience Conceptual Approaches and Considerations*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

- 3.4 There is no question that, in pursuing its interests, the UK will need to maintain a wide array of economic, security, diplomatic, cultural, and development relations including with regimes that do not meet UK democratic and human rights standards. But those relations should be routinely evaluated in light of their drawbacks. The UK will need to make some difficult decisions about its role as a friend of democratic regimes, movements, and organisations, even when those might cause tensions with prevailing powers.
- 3.5 In order to address the challenge of rising authoritarianism, the UK will need to find a way to pursue its short-term objectives without undermining its long-term goals. Will the worst potential outcomes of China's rise be shaped by engagement and accommodation, or by managed confrontation? Will autocracy's toehold in the EU galvanise or taint the whole? As leading democracy expert, Larry Diamond, expressed, 'if democracies collapse one by one and China and Russia pull countries into their orbit, this will leave the UK increasingly isolated and diminished in power, without access to a level playing field in trade and access to resources'.
- 3.6 *Therefore the UK must adopt a foreign and national security policy that seeks to protect democracy and confront authoritarian creep.* This is not just ideological or moral - it is also practical. People want effective government, they want their rights respected, they want justice and fairness. Democracy is the best system to provide what people want, and to hold leaders accountable and to restrain the excesses of power. Thus the relevance of the success of democratic freedoms as a whole may be quite high for the success of UK in the future. For those issues that will benefit the UK - rule of law and sound financial dealings; just use of force (including through autonomous weapons systems) and respect for international law; effective health security systems; protection of the environment - *democratic governance will undoubtedly be more advantageous than unaccountable caprice.* And for those issues that may prove most dangerous - violent repression and corrosive inequality leading to millions fleeing and extremism, unmanaged contributions to climate change, acceleration of technology without ethics or regulation - absence of empowered citizens and accountability will imperil UK core interests.

4. Principled Multilateralism

- 4.1 It is conventional wisdom that multilateralism will be critically important in supporting the UK's interests going forward. Multilateralism has been at the core of establishing and maintaining the rules-based international order. These rules are not imposed, they are established through iterative cooperation and adopted by governments and societies that recognise their contributions to their own national interests. Thus the UK must work to ensure that the global system - one that the UK had a critical hand in creating and strengthening - continues to serve these interests. Multilateralism itself is not inherently pro-democracy. Indeed, there is a risk that in an evolving world order, multilateralism may take the shape of reinforcing the rising strength and preferences of authoritarian actors in ways that diminish democratic norms and threaten peace and security.
- 4.2 The combination of crises and Brexit presents the UK with an opportunity to reshape its strategy for multilateral engagement. This should start with the objective of supporting multilateral organisations and multi-country alliances that promote peace, planet, prosperity, *and* liberty as the core of the global agenda: *principled multilateralism*. The UK should assess its support for existing multilateral alliances and institutions in that light, considering whether they are effective both directly in achieving appropriate mandates, and indirectly in strengthening cooperation. In addition, the UK should develop new alliances that operate both outside and within larger multilateral institutions like the UN, the Development Banks, as well as regional associations. Examples of this are the proposal for a 'D10' group of democratic nations formed to address the future of 5G broadband,⁸ and the Commonwealth, whose 2013 Charter begins with a chapter on democracy. The continued UK commitment to investing 0.7 per cent of GDP towards global development remains an important key to such initiatives.
- 4.3 Practically speaking, the UK's relationship with its closest allies and neighbours, the United States on one hand and Europe on the other, will be critical. US and UK cooperation and 'like-mindedness' has driven many international agendas reinforcing democratic norms, including the creation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), the Community of Democracies, and the removal of Russia from the G8.

8. Fisher, Lucy (2020) 'Downing Street plans new 5G club of democracies,' *The Times*, 29 May 2020.

A small number of countries such as Canada, Sweden and South Korea are increasingly vocal about the centrality of democracy, but others aren't. The US under President Trump has presented a deep conundrum for the special relationship due to his embrace of authoritarian regimes and denigration of stalwart allies and alliances like NATO. The EU has launched a 2024 Human Rights and Democracy action plan stating that the 'EU has a strategic interest in advancing its global leadership on human rights and democracy', though this could be hampered by the authoritarian trends within the Union, notably in Hungary and Poland. This reinforces the opportunity for UK leadership.

5. The Power of Inclusion

'There must be more equality established in society, or morality will never gain ground ...if one half of mankind be chained to its bottom by fate.'

Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman

- 5.1 A hallmark of democratic deficits and closed societies is the exclusion of whole elements of society through official policy, neglect, and discrimination. As global anti-racist protests are demonstrating, even mature democracies struggle with a lack of inclusion that threatens a stable political order. In a negative sense, it is impossible for a nation like the UK to espouse principles of democracy and equality for others without thoroughgoing commitment to righting the wrongs of systemic discrimination at home. In a positive light, there is tremendous power to be gained from true inclusion and equality. For example, equal treatment of women in society - from education to workforce to political participation - has profound economic and societal impacts. The World Bank estimates that the global economy is losing \$160 trillion on wealth due to women's human capital wealth deficit.⁹ As the DFID 2018 Strategic Vision for Gender Equality cited, 'with women at the negotiating table, peace accords are 35% more likely to last'.¹⁰

Gender and Politics

There is evidence that women in political power increase trust in government by making it more responsive to citizen's demands, decreasing corruption, and increasing equitable human capital investment.

As elected officials, on average, women work harder than men to represent their constituencies, which is linked to a stronger sense among voters that government is responsive to their needs. As policy-makers, women are prioritising issue areas that benefit the most vulnerable in society through healthcare, welfare and education. As such, more women leaders seem to make for more equal and caring societies.

Increased representation of women in elected office plays an important role in counteracting corruption and focusing resources on the quality and consistency of public service delivery.

Women political leaders are reshaping the nature of politics and international relations to bring in issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive health. States where women hold more political power are less likely to go to war and less likely to commit human rights abuses.

Source: WFD/Global Institute for Women's Leadership literature review, July 2020

9. Wodon, Quentin T and De La Briere, Benedicte Leroy (2018) Unrealized Potential: The High Cost of Gender Inequality in Earnings. The Cost of Gender Inequality. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

10. Stone, Laurel (2015) Study of 156 peace agreements. Quantitative Analysis of Women's participation in Peace Processes in Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes, (June 2015): 34. Annex II.

5.2 Ultimately, democracy requires not just institutions, but empowered citizens who demand justice, accountability, and voice from within. Democracy cannot be imposed from outside, nor can the risks of democratic transition and deepening be borne by external actors. But we cannot simply expect the people, especially those who are traditionally excluded, to be able to pick up the mantle of rights and democracy without the tools to wield it. They must be empowered. They must have voice. For citizens to fulfil their function, they must have accurate, independent sources of information, they must have free and fair elections, public resources must be allocated fairly and not be stolen, and they must be able to enjoy and assert their basic rights. They will ultimately be the strongest allies in the demand for democratic governance.

6. Building on a record of success, aware of challenges

6.1 In seizing on this agenda, the UK would be building on considerable past investment and success. In recent years, the UK has been a key funder and standard bearer for a broad set of issues pertaining to democracy, rights, governance, civil society and has a range of advantages and assets to build on. The UK is a multi-networked convener and agenda-setter that can bring transatlantic partners on board and has strong links to the rest of the world. It brings huge diplomatic and development reach and other soft power assets to the table, and has deep expertise across the democratic governance spectrum in law, legislatures, media, CSOs, executive delivery, internationally-connected political parties, elections, global financial sector and academia.

6.2 For example, thanks to the global reach of British media, the UK stands as a world-wide face of free, accurate, and independent speech. With nearly 500 million weekly listeners, the BBC World Service has perhaps the most extensive reach on the planet, and UK funded organisations like BBC Media Action support effective, independent media in dozens of countries. In July 2019, the UK co-hosted a Global Conference on Media Freedom in London, elevating this critical issue at a moment of severe, often deadly, pressure on journalists, media outlets, and activists.¹¹

6.3 Through the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, the British Council, BBC Media Action and other institutions, and with support from the FCO and DFID, the UK has been a leading voice for the 'governance' agenda: strengthening democratic institutions by working with 'drivers of change' in government and civil society to reform systems. This approach has, at times, been integrated into sectoral programs on health, education, and infrastructure, such that, as one prominent DFID country director has said, 'every program is a governance program'.¹² It has also meant strong focus on anti-corruption efforts, including a UK hosted summit and cross-Whitehall five-year Anti-Corruption Strategy released under Home Office leadership.¹³

6.4 UK leadership can also be measured in resource allocation. In 2018, UK official development assistance allocated to 'government and civil society' was £1,195 million or 12.9 per cent of overall spend. This represents the third largest sector of spending after health and humanitarian aid. However, the top three spending areas within this were for conflict, public policy and management, and media, divided roughly evenly between DFID and other departments, particularly the FCO. This means that a smaller percentage goes to directly supporting democratic institutions and processes, such as promoting rights, protecting civic space, safeguarding electoral integrity, strengthening political parties and parliaments, and citizen advocacy.¹⁴

11. The 'Global Pledge on Media Freedom' signed at the event declared that 'media freedom is an integral element of global security and prosperity. People need free media to provide them with accurate information and informed analysis if governments are to be held to account'. HM Government United Kingdom Policy Paper: Global Pledge on Media Freedom, 11 July 2019.

12. Chris Pycroft, DFID Head of Office - Nigeria in remarks on 29 January 2020 at the DAI Development Matters Roundtable 'Governance Reform in Nigeria - Changing Government from the Inside' in Abuja, Nigeria.

13. UK Anti-Corruption Strategy, 2017-2022 (2017) HM Government.

14. 'Governance' encapsulates activities like enhancing government-led service delivery. The biggest recipients of governance and civil society funds have been in fragile environments like Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Somalia. Support to fragile contexts reached USD 5.2 billion in 2017 (45.8 per cent of gross bilateral ODA). In 2017, USD \$2.3 billion of gross bilateral ODA was channelled to and through civil society organisations (CSOs) - but some 51 per cent went to UK based CSOs, 33 per cent to international, and only \$255m, or 11 per cent to CSOs in recipient countries. HM Government United Kingdom, Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2018.

The UK also devotes a considerable percentage of its funding to multilateral institutions, but very little of multilateral funding could be counted as contributing directly to democracy and rights.¹⁵ The UK government has announced a 20 per cent reduction in Official Development Assistance for the financial year, due to the anticipated economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Resourcing democratic governance, even at a time of belt-tightening, is critical, as investments in democratic governance generally are lower cost and offer tremendous value-for-money over time. It is failures of governance that end up costing the most.¹⁶

- 6.5 The challenges to making the democracy and rights agenda a top priority for UK national security, foreign policy, and development appear to be partly bureaucratic and partly misplaced trade-offs. First, as many interviewed for this paper noted, there are almost always 'competing' interests – defence, counter-terrorism, trade – that push strong support for democratic governance down the list of priorities in both bilateral and multilateral affairs. Amidst a global health and economic crisis occurring simultaneously with exiting the EU, the return of great-power politics, and accelerating global warming, democracy and the rule of law may seem of lesser urgency. *Yet if democratic governance is properly viewed as a long-term solution to all of these tests, it becomes considerably more important and urgent.*
- 6.6 The second challenge is the idea that democracy is not needed for development, or that more authoritarian approaches are more successful at certain stages of development. But the notion that there are economic or cultural preconditions for democracy has been debunked. Long-term comparative studies of democracies and autocracies in different regions and income levels show that while autocracies can achieve growth, over time that capacity fades as potential for growth strengthens in democratic societies.¹⁷ According to the IMF, in 2019, except for Singapore and petro-states like Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, *the top 50 countries for per capita income were all democracies*. Even for poorer countries, a landmark 2006 study showed that outside of East Asia from 1960 to 2005 poor democracies grew 50 per cent more rapidly, had nine more years of life expectancy, 40 per cent higher secondary schooling, 25 per cent lower infant mortality, and 25 per cent higher agricultural yields.¹⁸
- 6.7 Third, 'democracy promotion' has gotten a bad name. The 'freedom agenda' of the George W. Bush years is associated with attempting, and failing, to bring democracy by force to Iraq followed by the largely unsuccessful transitions to democracy in the Arab Spring. Aung San Suu Kyi's fall from Nobel Peace Laureate to complicity in anti-Rohingya atrocities, and the intractable conflicts in Libya, Yemen, and Syria that arose out of Arab Spring protests, have lowered confidence that promoting democratic reform, let alone regime change against despots, is a path to increased stability and prosperity. But this thinking obscures significant progress that has been made on establishing and deepening democracy in dozens of countries, from Botswana to Moldova to Colombia to Indonesia with the strong support of the UK, the EU, the US and other actors. There has also been multilateral progress, including the formation of the Open Government Partnership and the 2015 adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, and governance.¹⁹

15. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Global Fund Aids, Malaria and TB, and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) were prime recipients – none of which have pro-democracy programming, although do focus on 'governance' to increase effective service delivery.

16. 'UK aid to be cut by £2.9B this year' Worley, William (2020) DEVEX, 22 July 2020 <https://www.devex.com/news/uk-aid-to-be-cut-by-2-9b-this-year-97766>

17. Doucouliagos, Hristos, and Ulubaşoğlu, Mehmet Ali (2008) 'Democracy and Economic Growth: A Meta-Analysis.' *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 1 (2008): 61-83. Retrieved 23 July 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25193797>.

18. Halperin, Morton H., Siegle, Joseph T. and Weinstein, Michael M. (2010) *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace*. New York: Routledge.

19. Even the World Bank has invested effort in supporting institutions of accountable governance and the rule of law in their 2017 World Development Report. 'Modes of citizen engagement can include elections, political organisation, social movements, and direct participation and deliberation... Elections are one of the most well-established mechanisms available to citizens to strengthen accountability and responsiveness to their demands.' World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law. World Bank, 2017.

Recommendations: what are the distinctive opportunities for UK leadership on these issues in the next five years?

Recommendation 1: the UK should put democratic governance at the centre of its approach to foreign policy, development and national security. This would strengthen the UK's ability to seize this opportunity at a moment of converging mega-challenges including the pandemic, global warming, demands for social justice, an economic recession worsening already deep inequality, uncontrolled technological change, and rising autocratic powers.

Recommendation 2: set out an integrated cross-Whitehall strategy to a) defend established democracies/institutions; b) support emerging/struggling democracies; c) counter authoritarians. The UK government has an important opportunity with the Integrated Review and the impending FCO-DFID merger to truly build an entity that puts democratic governance principles at the core of its work across diplomacy, development, trade, multilateral institutions and also at the country level.

The components would be:

a. Defend established democracies and institutions

Established democracies have been facing challenges from disinformation, attacks on integrity of elections systems and media, and weakening of the rule of law. Just as authoritarians are learning from one another how to disrupt the systems that keep democracies strong and legitimate, so must democratic nations step up efforts to defend.

Defend / Support / Counter

Democratic declines are occurring across the spectrum of regimes – established democracies are under threat from internal and external forces, struggling democracies are facing new challenges and backsliding, and authoritarian governments are becoming more restrictive, expanding their arsenal of repressive tactics. While many of the issues – illicit finance, disinformation, elections manipulation, intrusive technology – are shared, to be effective the responses must be varied according to the environment.

Equally critical is that the strategy be coordinated in policy and implementation across Whitehall. Diplomatic, development, intelligence, and security elements must be stitched together thoughtfully, deployed with proper sequencing, and able to adapt on the spot to rapidly shifting political contexts for such an overarching, long-term set of goals to be accomplished. Such a strategy will require an analytical toolkit to help ensure coherence between democracy objectives and actions on other areas, for example trade and counter-terrorism. It also involves investing in long term interventions that build trust and political insight, though not necessarily at high cost. In many cases, prevention of democratic backsliding or nudging towards a more democratic path depends more on good timing and existing relationships than large, costly interventions delivered in a time of crisis.

For the UK, this should mean four things:

i. Focus on elections integrity

When confidence in the integrity of elections drops, trust in government and institution plummets and the entire enterprise of electoral democracy becomes threatened. Politicians who lose elections can begin to claim that the system is rigged against them, galvanising supporters to reject the system.

Elections

Elections are complex, and the digital age, electronic voting, larger electorates, and finance create many opportunities for interference. Cyber-attacks, disinformation that keeps people from the polls, illicit financing can all actually affect electoral outcomes and voting – but equally importantly they can shake confidence in the process of voting, the ultimate means for voters to choose their representatives and demand accountability. For example, the recent Presidential election in Poland faced charges of ballots gone missing, excess ballots, polling stations returning 100 per cent in favour of one candidate, and allegations of a tainted court. These are surprising charges considering they originate from an EU Member State.

In order to bolster the integrity of elections, a key national security priority, the UK should cooperate with a community of democracies to establish technological checks and standards on voting and combining law enforcement resources to expose and prosecute efforts to undermine electoral integrity from whatever origin. The UK should also be more proactive in sharing its own experience with elections. The UK Electoral Commission does not have in its mandate any objectives for international engagement – unlike Australia, India, and Mexico – yet has substantial expertise and legitimacy, particularly in reducing the cost of political campaigning (especially when compared to the US).

ii. Combat Disinformation and Hate Speech

A concerted effort by leading democracies to agree to standards and codes of conduct as well as regulation for technology companies is sorely needed. The UK, as a source of media, technology development, and finance, as well as prime consumer, could be an important lynchpin in such an approach.

There is also a need for cooperation on law enforcement given that sources of speech and technological development can come from anywhere.

The solutions to these challenges are complex while also protecting freedom of speech and political engagement that may be anonymous or hard to trace, and which does not authorise corporate censorship and surveillance that would undermine privacy and speech rights.²⁰

Established Democracies

These countries – the G7, most of the EU, and OECD nations – have many common features including strong economic foundations, open economies and societies, and an abiding commitment to democracy and the rule of law. In a period of potential de-globalisation, this will be the natural political and economic grouping for the UK. This also suits a UK vision of multilateralism that is about international cooperation between like-minded, sovereign states as the essential building blocks, rather than transnational entities. The 36 OECD members account for two-thirds of world GDP, three quarters of world trade, and 95 per cent of total official development assistance. The G7 has nearly a majority of voting shares on the World Bank.

iii. Heighten collaboration on intelligence sharing and law enforcement

The (re-)emergence of the future of democracies and great power competition as a key vein of national security policy means that committed, like-minded democratic allies will be elevating analysis and response throughout the bureaucratic infrastructure. Defending one's own democracy, and that of one's allies, will be a pre-occupation of law makers, intelligence agencies, defence planning, law enforcement, and other regulatory bodies. There are many bilateral and multilateral avenues for cooperation between these entities, including Five Eyes and other intelligence sharing, international parliamentary unions, and Interpol. The UK should work within these regimes to elevate and prioritise cooperation on the set of issues and actors violating legal and political norms of interference.

20. Maréchal, Nathalie and Biddle, Ellery Roberts (2020). 'It's Not Just the Content, It's the Business Model: Democracy's Online Speech Challenge'. New America, 17 March 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.newamerica.org/oti/reports/its-not-just-content-its-business-model/>.

Such steps must come with a thorough commitment that these intelligence and law enforcement agencies are fully committed to respecting fundamental democratic and human rights norms.

iv. Inject democratic governance into multilateral institutions and international standards

There are multiple avenues by which the UK can galvanise partners and the institutions they comprise to both accomplish the objectives of strengthening existing democracies and institutions, and prepare them to better support emerging democracies, discussed below. For example, the EU's accession and neighbourhood policies have been seen in the past as strong drivers of democratic reform, and the Commonwealth democracy benchmarks can be used to build norms and mutual support mechanisms to sustain democratic practices. This also means fighting back against anti-democratic efforts, like China's push for 'internet sovereignty' and limiting free speech protections at the UN. The UK should use their hosting of the 26th UN Conference of the Parties addressing climate (COP26) to encourage adoption of environmental democracy standards,²¹ and use its financial and market power in multiple forums like the G7, G20, and OECD to apply democratic principles to emerging technology.

b. Support emerging/struggling democracies

As a new world order takes shape,²² emerging and struggling democracies will become a primary battleground for influence and allies. They are the classic 'swing voters' that are likely to determine whether democracy rebounds in the coming decade, or continues the 15 year slide towards greater autocracy.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2019 Democracy Index, there are 37 hybrid regimes and 54 flawed democracies.²³ The V-DEM 2020 Democracy Report lists 50 electoral democracies (as distinct from liberal democracies) and 67 electoral autocracies, as distinct from closed autocracies. Differences at the margins aside, *there are roughly 80 to 100 countries that are potentially in play to determine whether the 21st century will be more open or closed than at the end of the 20th.* Many of these are in Africa, where the sense of competition between China (and Russia to a lesser extent) and the West is strong. Others are on the important peripheries of Europe, China, and America where proximity to these powers will be an important facet of regional relations. It is also significant that over half of the world's Muslims live in the emerging democracies of Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria and Bangladesh, and several hundred million more in democratic but backsliding India and Turkey.

The UK has a significant political, economic, and cultural stake in this grouping. The Commonwealth, which owes its heritage to the British Empire, continues to be an important grouping for UK interests and influences. The first chapter of its 2013 Charter takes a strong stance on the 'inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes' and promises to 'address promptly and effectively all instances of serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values without any fear or favour'.²⁴ A significant majority of Commonwealth member countries are in this middle category between mature liberal democracies and full authoritarian regimes.²⁵ The UK should in particular be concerned about recent backsliding in India, the world's largest democracy and an important ally.

21. Worker, Jesse. and Ratté, Stephanie. 'What Does Environmental Democracy Look Like?' World Resources Institute, 29 July 2014. <https://www.wri.org/blog/2014/07/what-does-environmental-democracy-look>.

22. Blackwill, Robert D. and Wright, Thomas (2020) The End of World Order and American Foreign Policy. Council on Foreign Relations.

23. The EIU, V-DEM, and Freedom House use complex methodologies and many variable and data sources to create a score for each country. They then group countries according to scores, with cut-offs determining difference categories. EIU defines these two categories as follows. **Flawed democracies:** these countries also have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

Hybrid regimes: elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies—in political culture, functioning of government and political participation. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.

24. The Commonwealth Charter, 2013. <https://thecommonwealth.org/about-us/charter>.

25. An important aspect of the UK's ongoing effort to address the legacy of colonialism must be to confront and ameliorate the ways in which that legacy continues to undermine full equality and promote systemic racism.

Much of UK official development assistance also goes to countries in this grouping. Seven of the top 10 recipients of UK bilateral aid are electoral autocracies (the other are closed autocracies), and of 32 DFID priority countries, only seven have improved democracy scores²⁶ since 2009 (and those seven include Myanmar and Zimbabwe). This is in part due to a heavy investment in fragile states, in most cases with explicit efforts to build the institutions and civil society to transition to stable democracy.²⁷ While important, the approach to places like Afghanistan, Somalia, and South Sudan must recognise the long difficult road to functioning democracy and not overpromise the pace of transformation. By contrast, the UK invests comparatively little on supporting democratic transitions in a range of 'swing countries' where democratisation could pay significant dividends to wider UK interests. In recent years, these countries have included Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Malaysia, and Sudan, where the chances for success are better, and where progress is likely to positively influence its less democratic neighbours.

Similarly, investments to prevent backsliding can also be critical value for money, especially when progress was built over decades of investment.²⁸ Civil society in lower incomes countries can be especially vulnerable to setbacks, due to limited sources of domestic financial support, and closing space around the world.

For the UK, two shifts are needed:

i. Democratic Governance or 'Doing Development Democratically'

'We've got to make and win the argument that in the long term, democracy and the rule of law build stronger societies and economies. We must show that democracy doesn't just make us freer, it makes us safer and richer.'

Interview with a former UK Prime Minister - May 5, 2020

'Good governance'. These two words ring out through most interviews conducted and studies referenced for this report. It has been a centrepiece of both David Cameron's and Tony Blair's post-Prime Ministerial careers, and a repeated hallmark of DFID strategy and Foreign Office funded efforts.²⁹ It is a core British brand, a no-nonsense embrace of the dictum that decent, fair rules followed by all is the core of a civil society.

But since the end of colonialism and the birth of democratic governance on every continent, this concept is underpinned by other values. It is rule 'of' law, rather than rule 'by' law. It is freedom of expression and independent media, rather than just access to information or propaganda. It is transparency even when inconvenient or unflattering, it is legal accountability for the powerful who break the law, and it is citizens exercising their rights to organise, protest, and change laws and leaders. It is protection of the universal basic rights of the most marginalised in society. It is a means of choosing and replacing leaders and representatives through free and fair elections with universal franchise. In short, the modern British conception of 'good' or 'effective' or 'inclusive' governance includes the very fundamental elements that define democracy itself.³⁰

26. Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) 2020 Democracy report.

27. HM Government United Kingdom, Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2018.

28. See, for example, Power, Greg and Carothers, Thomas (February 2018) 'Guide to Working with Parliaments and Political Parties for Sustainable Development', Department for International Development.

29. 'Strengthening global security, peace and governance is one of the four pillars of the 2015 UK Aid Strategy. The 2017 National Security Capability Review identifies governance and human rights as core to delivering stable societies.' Governance for Growth, Stability and Inclusive Development, Department for International Development (March 2019).

30. 'The United Kingdom stands for freedom, democracy, cooperation, the rule of law and human rights. We hold these values not just because they are right, but because open and free societies everywhere are critical to ending poverty and are firmly in all our interests. Open societies are the means to deliver long-term growth, stability and inclusion, and to counter corruption, violence and repression.' Penny Mordaunt, 'Foreword from the Secretary of State, Governance for Growth, Stability and Inclusive Development', Department for International Development (March 2019).

This is, therefore, the moment for the UK to take a bold step forward, and explicitly tie the 'governance' agenda to democracy. The crisis in Hong Kong puts a very fine point on this. The agreement between the UK and China to safeguard basic freedoms and self-government in Hong Kong is not a matter of 'effective' governance or Beijing's assertions that their vision of stability trumps all else.

At a practical level, the UK should increase its policy commitments and investments in promoting democratic governance around the world. But it should not only do so by increasing resources in stove-piped programmes or departments, but rather it should mainstream the approach across its strategy, integrating the fundamentals of democratic good governance into the approach, planning, and metrics of its development, defence, and diplomatic engagements, *embracing 'Doing Development Democratically' as a central theme of its development approach across Whitehall.*³¹

Empowered Citizens

It is not enough for citizens to be granted rights in constitutions, or to only defend those rights in the breach, once abuses have occurred. Many rights are observed in their activation, and there should be proactive efforts to elevate the excluded and left behind to enjoy positive rights. For example, rights to basic education or health care, to state support for the indigent or non-discrimination, to the right of legal representation and equal treatment before the law all have important positive rights components – things that must be provided for the rights to be enjoyed. Too often, parts of the populace that are marginalised due to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender or sexual orientation are denied these rights by neglect or intentional withholding of the resources or regulations needed to enjoy them. The UK should therefore promote the positive enjoyment of rights for citizens, especially in areas where they are also making substantial investments, like in public health and girls' education. Exclusion of women and girls from education is an issue of rights and politics, and interventions designed to increase quality and equality of education need to incorporate those.

ii. Empowered Citizenship, Democracy's Perpetual Motion Machine

No matter how good the institutions or how noble the principles (or principals), leaders, security forces, judges, bureaucracies will falter. The social contract is not signed and left in a vault, it is rewritten and remade each day through thousands of decisions and actions. ***Support for democracy must rest on the essential truth that the demand for democratic accountability must be driven from within.*** Democracy cannot be imposed from outside, nor can the risks of democratic transition and deepening be borne by external actors.

But we cannot simply expect people to be able to pick up the mantle of rights and democracy without the tools to wield it. They must be empowered. They must have voice. For citizens to fulfil their function, they must have accurate, independent sources of information, they must have free and fair elections, public resources must be allocated fairly and not be stolen, and they must be able to enjoy and assert their basic rights. If focusing on democratic good governance – institutions, rule of law – is the 'supply' side, then *empowered citizenship* is the 'demand' side, the users of the system that keep it fresh, renewed, accountable. As this is a necessary complement to the work on democratic good governance, the UK should make focus on empowered citizenship central to its strategy.

31. See Annex, describing an approach to 'Doing Development Democratically'.

c. Counter Authoritarians

'Digital authoritarianism is not, alas, the stuff of dystopian fantasy but of an emerging reality. [Leaders must be] more ambitious in ensuring that new advances reflect our values.'

Boris Johnson, 2019 U.N. General Assembly

The UK cannot afford to just play defence. Abuses of liberal orders and global systems of information and finance by autocrats has grown and risen in scope. Objectives have moved from enhancing their own power, wealth, and capabilities to repress their own people to also controlling or deliberately undermining elements of the international order to suit their ambitions. This has included taking leadership positions in international organisations, starting new organisations like finance banks, blocking international collective action, and interfering in elections and sowing discord within increasingly polarised democracies. These developments are not only a threat to the UK directly, but to its allies and alliances, and economic interests.

Therefore, UK national security policy on countering authoritarians should have five pillars:

*i. **Fighting kleptocracy:***

Autocrats have weaponised the global finance system to steal from their people, enrich themselves, and finance campaigns to undermine democratic rivals. They use tax-havens, banking secrecy, and money-laundering investments in the UK and around the world to hide this ill-gotten wealth. The UK should take aggressive action to reclaim stolen assets and strengthen and enforce anti-corruption and bribery laws at home and in partner countries.

*ii. **Addressing technological repression (digital authoritarianism):***

The use of digital tools for censorship, surveillance, and controlling information is a rapidly growing area of innovation and abuse by autocrats, against their own people as well as citizens of other countries. Leadership is needed to create ethical frameworks and new tools that will regulate technology companies and enable governments, companies, and citizens to respond to malicious activity.

*iii. **Supporting independent media and countering false narratives:***

Independent media is facing an 'extinction-level' event due to the combined forces of government crackdown and loss of advertising revenue exacerbated by Covid-19, and the broader challenges to the business model due to digitalisation and industry consolidation. As a result, citizens are losing their independent sources of information and investigation that are critical tools for citizens to stay informed, exercise their rights, and demand accountability. This loss affects everything from national political movements to local issues including citizen oversight of education and public health. It has aptly been referred to as an 'infodemic'. Given history and recent focus, the UK should continue to make serious investment in media freedom a centrepiece of policy.

*iv. **Supporting freedom movements/protests and enabling political participation:***

Building paths for regular political participation is a key to creating democratic feedback loops, especially with marginalised communities. Elections are of course a critical element of participation, and programmes that support diverse political representation and contestation, as well as demands for voting rights, access and proximity to ballots, and effective elections monitoring are all important. It is also important to support executive and legislative bodies, once elected, to undertake their duties effectively and inclusively. Beyond voting, the UK strategy should also support efforts like participatory planning and budgeting that can bring citizen voices directly into government decision-making that affects their lives.

v. **Aggressively defending basic norms:**

Ethnic cleansing, war crimes, gulags, torture, slavery, and extrajudicial killings all remain far too common. The murders of Jamal Khashoggi and Sergei Skripal or the deliberate bombing of Syrian hospitals cannot become a new normal in international relations. The UK must stand firmly to uphold the boundaries of human rights and basic decency in the face of ever more blatant and obscene transgressions.

Recommendation 3

The new Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) should create a **Department for Democratic Governance** that creates coherent policy and funding approaches and supports relevant, world-leading research and analysis. The new unit should build a network of relevant UK organisations that can provide policy and practical expertise in supporting political reform around the world. It could combine the political and diplomatic skills of the FCO with the programmatic and analytical expertise of DFID.

Conclusion

The post-World War II era has ended. That period was defined by the creation of a new international order to constrain the worst excesses of nations – genocide, fascism, colonialism, famine, nuclear, chemical and biological warfare – and to promote a positive agenda of democracy, human rights, gender equality, free trade, ending poverty, and peace-making. Those transformations resulted in an astonishing increase of democracies from 12 in 1945 (11 per cent of the world population) to 101 in 2011 (55 per cent of the population), the high-water mark.³² Combined with the reduction of extreme poverty from 60 per cent plus to 8 per cent in that same timeframe, billions of people coming out of privation and repression may be humanity's greatest era of progress. That same period coincides with peace in most of Europe, and a rise of adjusted GDP per capita in the UK from \$7,000 in 1945 to over \$48,000 today.

The rise of globalisation, inequality, climate change, China and other authoritarian nations, and digitalisation and automation is changing geo-politics and the trajectory of the global economy, personal freedoms, and international cooperation. While the long-term impacts are still unknown, the global Covid-19 pandemic looks likely to accelerate the pace of change.

What the UK should most fear is if 'the jungle grows back'.³³ This is a threat to the core values of the modern UK, and to the means by which it remains secure and prosperous. This is, therefore, not a moment for the UK to appease China, to allow authoritarianism to creep back into Europe, or to shrink from defending the gains for its own people and for others. Instead, it is a moment to join the fray, to use all the tools at its disposal, to build towards a new world order that secures democratic self-government for the British people, and others that would fight for it.

32. Varieties of Democracy Project, 2019. Other calculations by Max Roser based on Polity IV data retrieved from <https://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>, and data from Wimmer and Min (2006), Gapminder.org, UN Population Prospects (2015 Rev) retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/other/10/index.asp> and Our World In Data retrieved from <https://ourworldindata.org/>.

33. Kagan, Robert (2018). *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperiled World*. Routledge: New York.

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ANNEX: Doing Development Democratically

The UK should embrace 'Doing Development Democratically' as a central theme of its development approach across Whitehall. There is already a strong basis for this approach. Leading development institutions, particularly in the UK and US, have embraced a core idea: that development is inherently political, and that the effectiveness and sustainability of development requires 'doing development differently'.³⁴ They recognise that 'poverty is underpinned by poor and undemocratic governance weak and corrupt institutions and entrenched power dynamics that lead to political and economic exclusion'.³⁵ While accountability to citizens is hypothetically possible in authoritarian environments, it is the premise of democratic ones, serving as the engine of good and inclusive governance.

A cottage industry of approaches (and jargon) has arisen combining political economy assessment, thinking and working politically, adaptive management, problem-driven iterative adaptation, systems-thinking to improve outcomes and sustainability. Each speaks in some ways to the idea that development must be done differently, taking into account political realities and ensuring local partners and stakeholders are driving the process forward. Yet these efforts have not placed 'democracy' at their centre. They are meant to be fully aware of and take into account politics, yet are strangely *apolitical* as to whether or not democracy and human rights are values worth trying to support through their work.

By overtly using the term 'doing development democratically', this shift in approach would bring together efforts supporting government legitimacy, inclusivity, transparency, effectiveness, and accountability with those aimed at improving service delivery, enhancing people's socio-economic status, and ending poverty. Government derives its sovereignty from the will of the people, and must strengthen and adhere to the social contract in order to remain legitimate. The UK should invest in the foundations of political systems and culture necessary to build and sustain legitimate government, including elections systems and oversight, and political organisations.

The inclusivity of these systems is essential. Citizens must be engaged in policy-making, budgeting, and oversight of government. Rights and access to justice, services, and opportunities must be afforded to all citizens, not just those who can afford them. Women, youth, and vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, minorities, indigenous groups, the LGBTQI community, and those living in extreme poverty have traditionally been marginalised, and specific efforts must be made to support their voices in political and governance systems.

Whether government is effective is also central to the social contract. Strengthening the ability of government, in cooperation with the private sector and civil society, to meet the needs of the population is an essential element of democratic good governance. Focusing on taxation or domestic resource mobilisation (DRM) can be an important advance as well, as it demands citizen engagement, transparency, and inclusive decision-making in budgets. Ultimately, the government must also be accountable to the people, and critical roles are played by the surround of parliament, media, transparency rules and bodies, electoral institutions, and legal and justice mechanisms where needed.

Doing development democratically is also fundamental to the long-term goal of transitioning countries off aid altogether. Democratic self-governance not only supports development gains, but sustains them. For example, it is the cycle of growth, demand for services, innovation, and accountability, that moves a project to create energy access from charity into a sustainably financed service. When multiplied across sectors, it is an integrated system of governance that ultimately balances interests, maintains momentum, and prevents looting of what has been built.

34. Algozo, Dave. (2017) 'How INGOs are doing development differently.' Report for World Vision. 10 November 2017.

35. USAID Strategy on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance, June 2013.

It is essential that these efforts be integrated with each other, and with broader diplomatic and development efforts. For example, spending hundreds of millions on infrastructure without incorporating citizen engagement, budgeting, economic and social impacts, long-term financing and governance can lead to investments that are unsustainable and alienate the population. In places where there is much more limited space for civil rights and civil society, the UK government must use its diplomatic and security engagement to encourage reform and limit harm. Ultimately, if progress towards democratic self-governance is not being advanced by UK investments, these tools should be prioritised for environments where integrated impact from doing development democratically can be achieved.

Finally, the UK should also invest in the battle of ideas – funding research, evaluation, and advocacy efforts that demonstrate why democracy is the superior system to deliver stability and prosperity.

Support Independent Media

The suppression of information about Covid-19, from the original outbreak in China to dozens of countries suppressing information on infections, deaths, testing and government responses shows how such information can be a life or death issue. As economic crisis looms, reporting on corruption, food shortages, economic openings and closings all require robust, diverse media environments with the resources to report and investigate, and the protections to do so safely.

This focus should include support for the growth and development of independent media outlets especially in middle and low income struggling democracies, and in autocratic states where possible. This support should include investment-type financing to create entities that draw some of the sustenance from commerce, as well as training and resources for public interest entities focusing on local and national reporting on key democracy, rights, and rule of law issues. The defence of independent media and speech more broadly should also be a diplomatic priority, raised regularly in UK engagement on political, cultural, and economic matters.

About the author



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