

ACFVA Public Meeting

Daniel Runde:

Okay. We're going to get started. I'm Dan Runde. I chair the ACFVA board, and I want to welcome you to an ACFVA public meeting. We have some really wonderful members of the ACFVA committee here, and I thank all of them for being here. It's a public meeting, so it's your meeting, and thank you all for coming.

And I want to welcome Administrator Mark Green, who's here, as well as Deputy Administrator Bonnie Glick. I'm really pleased that both of them are here, and both of them are in really important roles, and so I sleep better at night knowing that both of you are in those jobs. I want to thank Tori Whitney [spelled phonetically] who's worked tirelessly to help pull this meeting together. Thank you, Tori. Thank you very much.

So, we've got some really interesting issues we need to cover. I think -- I think you'll hear about them from Administrator Green, but we're going to have a panel discussion about programming in closed and closing spaces. AID has worked in some of the toughest places in the world and continues to do so and will continue to do so. And I think that you'll hear a lot more about that. And we're going to be publishing ACFVA's -- we have a subcommittee that's working specifically -- worked specifically on this issue of closed and closing spaces and will be publishing something, and you'll hear more from the two subcommittee cochairs, Kimber Shearer and Ken Wollack, about that shortly.

So, I don't have much else to say other than welcome. But, also, I wanted to -- I think everyone -- I don't think I need to give a long introduction to Administrator Mark Green, who is, I think, known and loved by all of us. And I think everyone at AID is thrilled that he is the administrator at AID at this time and is -- was meant for this role. He was ambassador to Tanzania. He was an Africanist before Africa was cool, if I can put it that way, and loves development. You know, really brings so much expertise and leadership roles to this -- to AID at a very challenging time.

So, without further ado, I'm going to ask Administrator Mark Green to come up. Mark, please come on up.

[applause]

Mark Green:

Thank you, Dan, for that kind introduction, and thanks for hosting us here today, and thanks to all the members of ACFVA that are here. Dan, it was kind of you to say that you're sleeping better at night. Bonnie and I are not.

[laughter]

So, welcome, everyone, to the first ACFVA meeting of 2019. ACFVA has long been a source of innovative ideas and constructive feedback for USAID. It has helped to strengthen our agency operations and hopefully helped to ensure that we stay true to our noble mission. It serves as an invaluable forum for the public to provide counsel and ideas for USAID's activities. Last year,

ACFVA provided ideas, suggestions, and, yes, critiques, on what was, at the time, our brand-new Journey to Self-Reliance framework. That feedback helped shape the direction of USAID's transformation, and your fingerprints are all over the changes that we continue to implement. I am excited to see what this year's working groups will provide. ACFVA's chair, of course, is Dan Runde. Chairman is his most important position, of course, other than -- whoops, you took it down --

[laughter]

-- Senior Vice President and Director of the Project on Prosperity and Development here at CSIS. Dan, we are honored to have you on ACFVA, and thanks so much for all that you do. We're also honored to have great minds, or at least pretty good minds, here today --

[laughter]

-- to lead us through the discussion. My friend Ken Wollack, former president of the National Democratic Institute; Kimber Shearer, Vice President for Strategy and Development at the International Republican Institute; Doug Rutzen, president and CEO at the International Center for non -- non-for-profit law; and USAID's own Kate Somvongsiri. It is great to have all of you here.

We are fortunate to have these leading thinkers here because this is an important time; a crossroads moment, I think that we all agree with. This is -- these are rapidly changing times in so many ways. These are times in which we agree citizen response of governance, citizen-centered political systems are under tremendous pressure.

As we look around us, we see that China is cracking down on freedom and democracy in often-ghastly, inhumane ways, as millions of Uighurs and Christians have been discovering. Even worse, we're seeing that China is doing everything it can to export its own brand of absolute state control across the world. It's working to prop up dictators like Nicolas Maduro by providing technologies it began developing in the wake of Tiananmen Square. Technologies that are the antithesis of human dignity and human liberty. In other places, it captures regimes for its own purposes by shackling them with unsustainable debt. Those purposes include trying to suffocate Taiwan, a true democracy, next door, and opposing any international efforts to investigate China's human rights abuses.

The Kremlin? The Kremlin circles countries that are pursuing Western values and freedoms like a predator in the wild, looking for openings that it can exploit with its brand of cyberattack, weaponization of media, and economic bullying.

Both brands of aggression are playing out in places like Venezuela. Once among the most prosperous nation in the Americas, authoritarian pawn Nicolas Maduro has led that country to quite literally implode. Something like 4 million Venezuelans have already fled, the largest cross-border exodus in the history of the hemisphere. Most Venezuelan children are showing signs of malnutrition, and diseases long thought to be gone are rapidly re-emerging.

Some regimes don't need Beijing or Moscow to be brutal and oh-so-dangerous. In the DRC, the toll of years of kleptocracy and brutality have created extraordinary impediments to bringing the Ebola outbreak under control. Medically, we know what to do. We know what to do to contain and conquer Ebola. But convincing victims and potential victims of that requires them to believe that their leaders have their best interests at heart.

A legacy of former president Kabila is that Congolese not only don't trust the government in Kinshasa; they despise it. And the fact that hundreds of thousands of them in pandemic-affected areas were denied the opportunity to vote in the most recent elections, well, that's only reinforced their sense of despair. And that's playing out in horrific ways. Since the beginning of the year, there have been over 90 attacks on outsiders and authorities -- mostly aimed at healthcare facilities. More than 1,200 Congolese have now died from this outbreak.

Three and a half decades ago, Ronald Reagan called for a campaign to assist democracy, which led to the work that has brought us all here today. Since then, many things have changed, while the most important things have not. In Reagan's day, authoritarians openly opposed elections and did everything they possibly could to prevent them. These days, they embrace elections. They welcome elections and then mobilize every tool, every technology, every strategy to steal them and bend them to their will. By the time that voters go to the polls, the outcome is pre-ordained. The authoritarian may even have gained of a near-legitimacy.

What hasn't changed is the extraordinary courage of democracy activists; the willingness of democracy and civil society voices to put their freedom, if not their very lives, on the line. It really is inspiring to all of us. And so, the question that we need to answer is how we can most effectively stand with them. How can we support their courageous efforts? When I met Juan Guaidó of Venezuela face to face, the first thing he did was to thank me for our humanitarian assistance and support of his countrymen and countrywomen. The second thing was to thank us for the democracy assistance that we have providing to democracy activists and the national assembly. It has made all the difference, he told me. I'm proud of that. And you should be.

In recent months, we have seen democracy break loose in places like Ethiopia and Ecuador. When I met with Prime Minister Abiy back in March, he told me how important it was that civil society be vibrant and free in his country. And he asked for our help in making it so. A statement like that would have been unthinkable in Attis not so long ago. Just last week, I signed a new MOU with Ecuador's foreign minister to pave the way for USAID to openly return to that truly beautiful country five years after we were forced to leave. That same day, I met with civil society representatives who were bursting with pride and optimism and gratitude for the support that they have received over the years from groups back here.

As I said earlier, I believe we're at a crossroads moment in the campaign for democracy, of which Ronald Reagan spoke. Authoritarians have new tools and tactics they're deploying to bend elections and snuff out the voices of the people. For years, the democracy community represented here has been a quiet lifeline that has kept the flame of democracy alive despite the shadows that have too often crossed our paths. The shadows are darker in some parts of the world these days, and so we have to figure out our own new tools and tactics for shining a hopeful light. The next Guaidó, the next Abiy; those priests in Nicaragua. So, many brave souls.

They're counting on us. They're counting on us to stand with them. They're counting on us to work with them. And they're counting on us to remain a lifeline, a beacon of hope. I look forward to the ideas brought forward today from this working group. I look forward to your input to help guide us. We are at a crossroads moment. Crossroads moments imply choices, and I think we have key choices to make. Thank you.

Male Speaker:

Okay, we've got a panel discussion about closed and closing spaces, so I'd invite the panelists to join me up here.

Kimber Shearer:

Welcome, everyone. First, I want to thank Administrator Green for the opportunity for ACFVA to provide ideas and recommendations on these important topics and for joining us today. USAID support of closed and closing spaces can advance America's national security by supporting more open, responsive, and accountable governance, and in the case of closed societies, by helping courageous activists struggling peacefully to secure fundamental, political, and human rights. However, designing and implementing effective projects in these situations is complex and often challenging.

The ACFVA subcommittee on DRG programming closed and closing spaces was tasked with developing guidance that would offer recommendations and best practices for the most effective ways for USAID to consider when designing and supporting projects. The guidance will reference tools -- new ones -- and old ones that can be done and used more effectively. And, most importantly, it will include operational guidance for how to most effectively operate in these environments. The purpose of this panel is to, first, hear from these experts who have worked on DRG programming for many years and who were introduced earlier. But also, importantly, to hear from you, the audience. Your ideas and feedback on what is discussed to help us on the subcommittee most effectively inform and advice the administrator and USAID. So, thank you all for participating today.

So, first, I'd like to turn to Ken. As my distinguished subcommittee co-chair, I'd like to ask you to start off by providing some background on how is the subcommittee defining closed and closing spaces for the purpose of this project?

Kenneth Wollack:

Yeah, definitions are hard because this is a moving target at all times. I guess if I was a Supreme Court justice, I'd say you know it when you see it.

[laughter]

But for the purpose of the ACFVA study on operating in closed and closing spaces, we have -- at the risk of oversimplification -- examined two broad regime typologies. The first are those that are considered closed for authoritarian regimes, where the dominant political agency -- whether it be a monarchy or a political party or a dictator or a junta -- is highly repressive and controls all aspects of political and economic life, and where institutions and organizations separate from the

state are virtually nonexistent or anemic. They may find it necessary to operate, more or less, underground. Independent voices are routinely [unintelligible] or imprisoned.

The closing spaces refers to so-called semi-authoritarian regimes, which combine the features of authoritarian government with certain democratic forms. In these environments, civic groups can operate multi-party elections are held, and some form of independent press is allowed to operate. In reality, however, the executive, along with the judiciary and security forces, serve to maintain the power of the regime. Parliaments are usually rubberstamp bodies, and polling results, as the administrator said, are often pre-determined long before election day. While these regimes have become more resilient over the past decade, significant cracks have emerged. And recent examples in Armenia, Malaysia, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Algeria, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are only a handful of examples.

Closing spaces represent a broad spectrum of countries, which, on one end of the spectrum resembles many aspects of closed societies -- Egypt and Cambodia are but two examples of that. The other end of the spectrum includes places like Ethiopia, which are moving toward what Freedom House might label as partly free, but both of these regime types can easily move one way or another along this spectrum, and require, I think, a study of the typology before one engages in activities and programs to determine how best to carry out democracy assistance efforts.

Kimber Shearer:

Thank you. So, I wanted to ask what your thoughts are on what should be -- give us an example: What should be the objectives or some intended results for genuine DRG programming in these environments?

Kenneth Wollack:

Well, the objectives in all of these places will be more modest but no less important, I think, than in what we would call new, emerging, nascent, fledgulent democracies because of the political environment. They should not be seen as attempting regime change or even creating a democratic breakthrough. Rather, they are more long-term in nature, designed to demonstrate solidarity, provide protection, transfer resources and organizational skills necessary to take advantage of whatever political space exists.

Above all, it will be necessary to prevent atrophy of these local groups and help build what we in the past have called democratic subcultures in these countries. And, eventually, when there is a democratic breakthrough -- and there usually will be a democratic breakthrough in these countries -- these groups and individuals will be able to fill the political vacuum. And I think studying places as diverse as Ukraine, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Burma are instructive in this regard. And I think we will find it instructive in Venezuela, hopefully in the not-to-distant future.

Kimber Shearer:

Thank you. Kate, I'm going to turn to you. Can you offer some points on why USAID should be working and supporting projects in these environments?

Kate Somvongsiri:

Yeah. Thank you, Kimber. The bottom line is human development and democratic development are inextricably linked, and that's the main reason we should be working this area. Improving a country's democratic governance bolsters its long-term stability, its economic prosperity. From a development agency's perspective, all of our gains across every development sector, whether it's health, education, et cetera, can be completely undermined by backsliding in democratic gains. So, it is not only -- I know that some people in this room are strong, passionate, DRG supporters, but it is not only a DRG issue. It is a development issue broadly.

And then from a national security perspective, because we are an agency of the national security apparatus as well, the threat of resurgent authoritarianism is real, and that a democratic world is a more peaceful world. We firmly believe that. I had the privilege of serving in Ukraine for four years during the Maidan revolution and the Russian annexation. That was my last tour before here. And we would often sit in country team with the ambassador and other colleagues and talk about, you know, what are the most effective ways to fight back against the Russians? And we were always -- as the democracy officer and aid there, we were always part of that conversation -- he and all of us would always firmly believe that the best way we can fight back in this big geopolitical space is to build a functioning democracy in Ukraine that lifts all the voices and actually delivers on democracy. So, I think that is key to why we work in this area.

That having been said, we are clear-eyed about the risks and challenges. We know that there are folks in the development community who say -- who feel there's a tension in this and feel that if we push too far on the democratic side, we can undermine and cause tension with governments -- those country governments where we work and we can undermine net gains. We also know there are challenges from other areas, in terms of what the administrator talked about, of competing development models like China's that are more transactional, more extractive, et cetera. But all that to say, with all these risks and challenges, they are not reasons not to work in this area. For us right now, the question is not whether we work in this area or not. It's how we work in this area. And that's why we're here today because we want the great input from you all on how to do that.

Kimber Shearer:

That's great. That's a nice transition. I think, Doug, we were talking earlier about how USAID partners are affected by working in these closed and closing spaces if you wanted to offer some thoughts on that.

Doug Rutzen:

Absolutely. We're also encouraged to make this a conversation -- I want to reflect on a comment that Ken made when he referenced closing space, and he aggregated a number of different country environments. And I think it's really important to look at the direction of travel. As the administrator mentioned, if you take a country like Ethiopia or Ecuador, there's a different set of programming options that are available, including engaging on the commitment side of the journey to self-reliance or working with government, opportunities that won't be available where there's a downward trajectory, where the government itself is the fundamental problem; there's no political will. So, I think as we turn to responses later on, that's an important issue that we'll need to address.

Responding to your specific question, what we have found around the world is that civil society empowers people to affect their daily lives. And that's enormously threatening to certain kinds of governments that want to control people and the issues around which they organize. So, the way we look at it is that often the DRG groups are at the epicenter of these constraints, but the restrictions reverberate through the sector data.

Ethiopia. Under the 2009 NGO proclamation, 90 percent of all the human rights groups went out of business by 2011 -- within a two-year period. A 90 percent mortality rate for human rights groups. But the impact then reverberated through the sector. If you look at consortiums that worked on HIV/AIDS, 60 percent of all the members went out of business. Forty-six percent -- nearly half of all Ethiopian organizations -- went out of business in two years. And if you look around the world, the pattern repeats itself -- whether it's Egypt or Libya or a number of other countries around the world, we see groups that work on public health, food security, even, in the case of Venezuela, humanitarian assistance, restricted by this compressed space. So, in sum, we're all in it together.

Kimber Shearer:

Yeah. Thank you. Dan, we mentioned some global threats to democracy. I mean, growing democratic recession, resurgent authoritarianism, authoritarian leaders capitalizing on governance failures, the need to deliver on democracy, terrorism, massive flows of refugees, et cetera. How can foreign assistance overall be used most effectively in these particular environments to foster democracy?

Daniel Runde:

Thanks. I also want to thank you, Kimber, and Ken for being the co-chairs of the subcommittee. I know you're in it for the money.

[laughter]

But you guys are -- you've worked -- both of you've worked really, really hard on this issue of closed and closing spaces and have convened a really smart and thoughtful group of people, both within the ACFVA committee but also drawing some outside folks like Doug in. Thanks, Doug, for agreeing to do this.

I think we're -- you know, if you think -- if you care about development, you're going to have to care about these issues. If you -- most of the challenges in fragile and conflict-affected states are -- have issues of politics or corruption. My wife's fourth-favorite economist after her father and two brothers, is Douglass North. He talks about limited access order. So, if you know about Douglass North and limited access orders, these are -- these are really hard, complicated problems. So, the issue of democracy and human rights and governance is deeply entwined, as Kate was saying, to what we should care about. And if we care about development, and we should care about both, in basically the same side of the same coin -- two sides of the same coin.

I also think what I'm really gratified to know is that AID has been working in these issues for a long time and that AID is going to continue to work in these places and on these issues for a long time. And I was really pleased to hear Administrator Green's remarks reflecting that.

I was taken by some of Administrator Green's remarks -- a place like -- think of, like, Ethiopia, which has come up. If we think about, this guy is the guy we've been waiting for. This guy, I mean, I don't know, I mean, we waited 40 years for a prime minister in Ethiopia. Like, this guy's -- this is like -- it's kind of like a dream leader of Ethiopia, and, like, I don't think I could come up with -- you know, I mean, it's not going to be Switzerland any time soon, but this guy is really good. So, I mean, I think we should -- you know, but I think that's a, you know, and we need to be a partner to -- I think we have to -- I would just say a couple of things.

I would say that -- and, Ken, I don't want to steal your thunder, but I also was at that -- the swearing-in for Jeff -- was it Dan --

[talking simultaneously]

Daniel Runde:

-- yeah, at -- for the ambassador to Uzbekistan -- our ambassador to Uzbekistan -- and he was talking about one of his goals is about democracy and human rights in Uzbekistan.

Now, do I think we'd have had that conversation five years ago in Uzbekistan? Probably not. Do I think ambassadors 30 years ago would have talked about that's their job? Probably not. So, we've made a lot of progress. I mean, if you -- you know, this is the work of -- this is the -- we've got to play a long game on these issues and there's going to be a lot of setbacks. There are setbacks. But the arc can -- if we help the right kind of folks, it can go the right way. I think they're looking to us. I think what's changed in the landscape is we've got some folks -- the bad guys have gotten better at being bad, right? I think there's, like, a whole -- there's -- just as there's a DRG community, there's sort of a "bad guy" community of, like, the community of "badness of practice," right, in terms of, like, deep fakes and all the social media stuff and doing fake elections, and, you know, there's a community of practice of "badness," and so they've gotten a lot better at it.

And, so, that's -- that doesn't mean we shouldn't stop. It means we've got to up our game. And it also means there's also some folks who are like, you know, maybe I could kind of go with the authoritarian state-owned enterprise thing, like the Chinese have on offer. But I think over time I think many societies will say this doesn't really answer the mail in terms of my full hopes or aspirations, or it doesn't allow me to reflect, you know, that we're holding our society back.

So, I think I'm really gratified that AID has worked in these issues for a long time and it's going to continue to work on these issues. We've got to take a long view. There's going to be lots of -- you know, I mean, Ken, you've got to be, you know, have to have had -- you've probably had good days and bad days in the business, and I think you -- I just -- I just think that it seems to me that one has to take a long view of these things. And I suspect, you know, folks like you, Kimber as well, both of you have probably had to take the long view. Sometimes there's good days and bad days, but we've got to keep pushing, and they're looking to us.

Kate Somvongsiri:

Kimber, may I jump in -- since I know we're -- we want to make this a little bit more of an exchange. On Dan's community of bad guys comment, which I think we all wholeheartedly

support. Ever the optimist, as you have to be working in this industry, I think one thing we have over the bad guys is the community of bad guys is not a democratic community. The bad guys are not consulting with the public for getting the best ideas out. And there's a more limited -- in an authoritarian community, they're sharing best practices, for sure. You have Russians coming [inaudible] --

Daniel Runde:
-- or worst practices.

[laughter]

Kate Somvongsiri:
-- et cetera. And that -- and that is something we really need to have to watch. But the thing that I think will help us win in the long run is exactly this. So, pressure on you guys in the Q&A discussion to really get input and thoughts from the public, because that's really what's going to kind of tip the scale [inaudible] --

Daniel Runde:
Hey, Kate, let me just wholeheartedly agree with you and let me just say something else that -- there are -- for AID to do this work means taking risks, taking hard risks. And people in this community have taken personal risks and have, you know, ended up in jail. And so, it means that we all have to collectively, you know, stay strong. We have to support people who, you know, take these risks. It also means I think we have to not waver if because sometimes, you know, things aren't going to necessarily go right, I think it means that folks in this room, probably, have to remind elected political leaders and support AID in terms of saying, look, this is a risky, tough business, and so we all have to, you know, support the agency and support the cause of democracy and rising governance, even when people take risks, and back them up and support them.

Kimber Shearer:
That's great. I'm actually going to jump in to a quick question here -- for -- I think for several of you who are interested in this question is: Offer some examples of challenges and risks that USAID and partners face. And how can USAID and partners mitigate risks or otherwise? So, Ken, if you have any thoughts on that, and Doug, if you have something to add.

Kenneth Wollack:
Well, Dan talked about some of those risks. First and foremost, there are the risks of local partners. And it's important in this regard to, in the name of local ownership, have those local partners determine the risks for themselves. It's not for outsiders to say, we want to save you in spite of yourself by not providing assistance to you, because that'll place you in further jeopardy. Because what usually happens is these groups will be blamed for receiving money, and they'll have the worst of both worlds. They'll have the blame and not the money, or the technical assistance and support they need. So, first and foremost is to understand the risks of local partners. But it's worth taking those risks. And I think, to some degree, one can look at the Foreign Assistance Act and the way that Congress has defined democracy assistance has defined the type of partners that the United States should have in these circumstances.

The second risk is to the implementers, the USAID partners who operate in these countries. And oftentimes they are the canary in the coal mine. Usually governments will go after these groups. And shortly after, local groups will be attacked. And in those situations, one has to consider the benefits of offshore programming, which can serve an important purpose. And I -- and I know sometimes you can accomplish more from offshore than you can from being in a country because you're free and you're able to connect people on the ground with peer organizations internationally; provide another venue for training and skills-building.

And the third risk is to USAID itself. And Kate talked about this a little bit. Missions in places like Ecuador and Venezuela and Bolivia and Russia were impacted by USAID's democracy programs in those countries. And they paid a price. It can affect other development priorities of the agency that the missions may have. It may lead to a non-presence country. But, again, things can be done to minimize those risks. But, ultimately, as Dan said, a decision has to be made whether it is worth taking those risks at the outset. And I think the answer -- and I think the administrator's view is that, yes, indeed, it's worth taking those risks.

Kimber Shearer:
Douglas?

Doug Rutzen:

It's interesting. I think, in fact, we need to be careful about the concept you introduced of "risk mitigation." To mitigate means to reduce. And, in fact, if our goal is to reduce risk, we will then try to avoid risky situations. And I would argue that it is not -- and you'll correct me if I'm wrong -- AID's current approach, nor should it be to avoid risk, to reduce risk. I think instead of risk mitigation; it should be risk management. So, then the question, as Ken was talking about, is look at the different players within the development value chain. What's the appropriate allocation of risk across that continuum? Is there an appropriate and knowing assumption of risk? And how do we manage the risk environment? But we have to be very careful not to use this as an excuse to avoid risk.

Kimber Shearer:
Thank you. Kate?

Kate Somvongsiri:

That's right. And I think, to Doug's point, many people in this room may not be aware, you see it actually has a USAID risk appetite statement. And this isn't directly related -- it wasn't built out on the context of this -- in the closing space environment. It was built out in the context of our procurement reform, acquisitions and assistance. But I will read -- I was hoping we'd have this conversation --

Daniel Runde:
Don't make it a Netflix [inaudible] --

[talking simultaneously]

Daniel Runde:

Who needs “Game of Thrones”?

Kate Somvongsiri:

When I’m reading a USAID risk appetite statement, right?

[laughter]

Quote -- USAID risk appetite statement, quote, “We have a HIGH risk appetite with regard to embracing” -- “high” is all caps -- embracing flexible, interactive design and implementation.

Now, I make this distinction. We don’t take risk. We mitigate risk when it comes to the safety and security of our people and partners. Absolutely. We don’t go beyond what our partners -- local implementing partners feel. We are 100 percent wedded to that. But in terms of programming risk, we are willing to take risks for failures of programming, because that’s how we adapt and learn. So, that’s what that risk appetite statement is about.

Daniel Runde:

It’s a programming risk.

Kate Somvongsiri:

It is. It’s a programming risk that we’re willing to take. And I think we’re not always known, either as an agency or as a government, for being, maybe, high-risk, but I did want to put that out there because that’s part of this whole discussion; that we need to be able to adapt and learn is the willingness to take risks.

Kenneth Wollack:

And I think the challenge, I think, for any AID mission operating in these environments, is how do you avoid a trap where you portray a DRG program by supporting a parliament that is controlled by the executive? It doesn’t have any opposition members, but you’re doing institution-building for the parliament as a DRG program. How do you deal with civil society organizations that may be captured by the state versus organizations that are separate from the state?

See, these are all judgment calls, I think. And I think the notion of reaching out to elements within the executive in these places is a valid one. And it can also help reduce some of the risks, but not at the expense of those that are struggling who would be considered to be genuine democrats. And here, again, if you look at the Foreign Assistance Act, if you look at section 70-32, it talks about governments in these environments are prohibited from having any approval rights in terms of the democracy programs that we carry out in these countries.

In terms of the implementer, in terms of participants in programs, in terms of the nature of the programs. And so, how to balance this so you don’t end up having faux democracy programs but at the same time being cautious enough that you don’t get thrown out of the country the next day. How are you being forward-leaning and finding the sweet spot in these environments, I think, is a huge -- is a huge challenge for, you know, nongovernmental organizations and for AID.

And working with other international NGOs and working with other governments and aid agencies and intergovernmental organizations are important in this regard because most of these countries are members of regional organizations that have democracy and human rights as part of their guiding principles. It's true now with the African Union; it's certainly true with the OAS, the OSCE. The African Union developed their democratic charter primarily from the OAS. So, how to work on a multilateral basis to make the risks higher for the regime to come down on local activists and international democracy providers.

Daniel Runde:

So, and just thinking about -- I really liked this distinction of protect people and take programmatic risk. Is it -- maybe it's a formulation for what you're doing. Katie, I'm also -- I was just counting up in my mind, and I don't know the exact number, but I'm assuming you must be -- without listing countries -- there must be 10 to 20 countries that would kind of fall in the category of closed and closing spaces where you're operating right now. I wouldn't want to ask you to list them out, but it just -- everyone can kind of use their imagination and can think of it. But you all are doing this in a very significant way already, and I think it's -- and I think it's really great and it's really important.

One thing that we haven't talked about, Kimber, is that working with allies -- working with neighbors and allies, I think that oftentimes if I think about, you know, some of these really complicated places, it seems to me that the neighbors have better networks sometimes or they, you know, you can pick your friends but you can't pick your neighbors. And so, you've got to, you know, I think sometimes they've got -- they've got abilities and ways to help that we need to think about.

I do think -- the other thing I wanted to reference was we haven't talked about women and young people in this conversation, and how we should think about supporting women and young people. And how a lot of the changes in these -- if I think about what's happening in Sudan, for example, or Algeria, there've been these movements. And a lot of that sort of positive change is coming from those parts of the society. And how we make investments or bets in supporting them are really important.

Kimber Shearer:

So, Ken, I want to turn to a critical element of DRG programming, which is elections, and something that the subcommittee is looking closely at. In closed and closing spaces, when an election is scheduled but it appears that the election itself, the results might be predetermined or unlikely to be free and fair, what areas of programming should USAID consider supporting instead of traditional pre-election support? Particularly so as not to appear as if the community is legitimizing what will likely be -- or seems to be an illegitimate election.

Kenneth Wollack:

And the administrator talked about this in his remarks, but I know how concerned he is about this subject. Again, every situation is different. In most of these places, however, these are elections in name only. And I think the authoritarian or semi-authoritarian leader has become much more adroit at rigging the process long before election day. He or she or the regime does this through a variety of means -- changing the legal framework, placing regime loyalists in election

commissions, and in judicial posts, controlling online and offline information through bots and trolls.

I think in Cambodia, about 30 percent of all the news about Prime Minister Hun Sen generated by bots from outside the country -- and through many, many other means. Employing what's called "zombie observers" both at home and abroad that can rationalize regime behavior, can sanction the results of a fatally flawed election. And these techniques that are being used today are cross-borders and cross-regions today. Everybody -- as Dan said, people learn from each other in this interconnected world. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be programming around these elections. I remember one very prominent Russian dissident once said, we participate in elections not to win; we participate to learn. And I think we have to approach these environments in that way. There are groups on the ground that organize in these processes in order to expose misconduct, in order to monitor the process, to learn communication skills with the electorate.

This is true with political parties and it's true with civic organizations. And we can support these groups through what I would consider to be nonpartisan activities: citizen election monitoring; detecting, exposing, and countering disinformation campaigns; poll-watching by political parties. All these nonpartisan activities all can contribute not necessarily to a better process, not to encourage participation and confidence in a fatally flawed election, but help these groups use elections as a vehicle to develop organizing skills. It's not going to create a breakthrough. But, again, when the breakthrough takes place in these countries, sometimes they do it around elections.

You know, it was the monitoring effort in Georgia by ISFED that led to the Rose Revolution. So, there -- it was the work of NAMFREL in the Philippines in 1986 that exposed the fraud in the snap elections that Aquino eventually won that led to the People Power revolution. So, this is not -- you know, Russia keeps talking about this as being an American export. This has really been a Philippine export in terms of citizens rising up to protect the integrity of the vote.

So, there are many things that we can do. But, first and foremost, we have to listen to people on the ground to determine what they want out of this process. There are some times they want to boycott, there are some times they want to stay away. But there are people who want to engage in this process to legitimize themselves, not to legitime the process itself.

Kimber Shearer:
Dan?

Daniel Runde:
Yeah, so I'm -- in addition to being the ACFVA chair, I'm on the IFES board, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems. And IFES does work in -- has done work in over 100 countries on free and fair elections and the -- sort of setting the rules of the game. But one of the things that I think that they've done -- that we've done recently is invest significant money in civic education.

And so, some of the things you can do in addition to actually running an election is -- I think one of the -- just like you have a credit card, like, you need to have rules about -- there's rules and responsibilities to having a credit card, or you've got to learn about how to drive a car, I think there's, like, rules and responsibilities of being a citizen. And so, I think whether it's in the United States or elsewhere, I think there's something about being educated and having -- taking some responsibilities as a -- and I think that may be a piece of sort of helping set the table for down the road. You know, I think if people understand what their -- there's not just rights but there's also responsibilities to being a citizen in a country.

Kenneth Wollack:

Yeah, Dan raised an important point. The hardest, I think, decision that's made is when and how to work with election management bodies in these environments. And I know IFES is very much engaged in this. And there are times, however, where there are reformers within commissions.

Daniel Runde:

In closed places, even?

Kenneth Wollack:

Even, yes, in closed places. And sometimes they perform an important role within commissions. And connecting them to counterparts in other countries is important. And in the end, they can play an important role in exposing irregularities and mismanagement and malicious behavior. Sometimes they do stand up.

I go back to the Chilean plebiscite in 1988. You know, we always thought the election commission was the -- was an adversary in this process. But, in fact, the chairman of the election commission, to the surprise of everybody, stood up and carried out a very worthwhile process. So, finding -- again, finding -- you may not want to support the commission itself, but support certain elements within the commission that are trying to do the right thing.

Kate Somvongsiri:

I wanted to add onto that. I think one of the toughest decisions that we grapple with in this environment is, in what cases are there that our support to -- an election is so deeply flawed because of the enabling environment, the legal framework, the repression to civil society, there's -- in what way would our engagement actually legitimize a flawed process versus looking at the other side of the equation: What can we do to actually prevent things from being a little less bad? And at what point do you draw that line and say there's nothing that we can do that would -- that would be helpful in any way, and all we'd be doing is just painting that veneer of legitimacy on that.

So, that's one of the things we're grappling with, with ACFVA's help. And I should also acknowledge Tim Meisburger, the head of the DRG center, and his team here at AID who are really doing a lot of work on this issue. And would welcome more discussion on that, because that's a really tough one.

Kimber Shearer:

Kate, in the instance of more of what we called “closing spaces,” as sort of defined earlier, but in a situation where the space starts to get more restrictive, there’s backsliding, there’s this sort of a feeling of change, how would you recommend that partners most effectively collaborate and communicate with USAID in those environments to start to figure out what to do? To provide some advice to USAID, whether it’s at the mission level in country or whether it’s back at headquarters.

Kate Somvongsiri:

I think, Kimber, the word you used that’s key to this is “partnership,” right? This is in that case where we can’t just rely on the formalities of a grantee, contractor, donor, et cetera, relationship, right? We need to be partnering very closely, we need to be -- I know we always say this -- collaborative, communicate, but I think it’s really key in these environments. We have to be able to be very open about the concerns and share that.

I know in many cases, implementing partners don’t necessarily want to share what’s not worrying or what are the challenges. And, likewise, on the AID side where we like to put a positive gloss on things. But we need to be able to openly exchange concerns. We need to collaborate and actually co-design and adjust together as we go and have that constant feedback loop. We have to have regular check-ins. Tell us, your AOR, COR, mission directors, “Here are the things we are -- that are happening in terms of our processes that are hampering our ability to respond quickly.” Sometimes we’ll be able to decrease those bureaucratic hurdles. Sometimes there won’t be. But we don’t even know how to -- what they are until there’s frank communication on that. And we need to have more initiatives and discussions like these to get the feedback on that.

A couple things I think we, as AID, need to do better and we’re working on in these sorts of environments, is building this community. I think Dan alluded to it a little bit earlier -- a community of -- a supporting community of defenders out there who are not only our civil society or implementing partners, right? There are many people who are part of social movements or individual activists, et cetera, who have a role. And how do we find ways to engage and partner with them is something I think we need to work on and do better as an institution.

And the second part, I think, is civil society groups and implementing partners are adapting and finding ways to work in this environment. We need to work on -- and we’re starting to do this with some of the procurement reform I alluded to earlier -- but we need to find ways to be a bit more adaptable and flexible in these environments as well.

Kimber Shearer:

Dan, did you have a comment?

Daniel Runde:

Yeah, just a couple things. I wanted to make a comment about partners. I’m very pro-AID and the American people getting the credit on branding. And so, I know that when Andrew Natsios was administrator, there was a big push to make sure that there was branding. And I know there’s often tension with partners.

It seems to me in a lot of these really tough cases this is probably not the place to put a big -- sometimes it's probably not the moment to put a big, old AID thing on it. At the same time, I don't want -- my personal view is I wouldn't want partners to say every single -- all 85 countries where they're working is a closed and closing space and they don't want to put the brand on it. So, I do think there's something about how do we talk about what we're doing? And is there some -- is situations where, "getting money from AID" is going to be -- is going to be complicated? I think there's probably a -- there's probably a challenge.

I just wanted to make a larger point. I was just thinking about, you know, we're coming up on the 30th anniversary of Tiananmen Square. We almost had a democratic breakout moment in China. Now, I think it's sort of not talked about in polite circles these days. Like, can we imagine a democracy in China? We ought to think about -- we ought to make that a goal. I mean, Taiwan is a multiparty democracy. They have religious freedom. It's four times wealthier than mainland China. It's a -- I mean, if you haven't been to Taiwan, I want to encourage everybody to go. It's a great place.

But, I mean, we ought to -- we ought to be thinking about, like, that's, you know, a lot of specialists who follow China will kind of poo-poo the idea that there could ever be democracy in China. Imagine if we had multiparty democracy in China where, you know, individual liberty was respected and all sorts -- I could list a whole bunch of human rights and other things. What would that -- what kind of a world would we be in? That's a -- that's a good goal to have. That's a 30-year project we ought to work for.

Same with Russia. It's not -- is it impossible that Russia could be a democracy some day? Now, a lot of people sort of shrug their shoulders and say, "Ah, I don't know about that." Well, I'm young enough; I can live 20 or 30 years more. So, if someone says 30 years, I'm good with that. Let's take a -- let's take the long view.

Iran? What if we had a -- I mean, there've been, like, several breakout moments in Iran. What if we had a democratic Iran? Democratic Cuba, anybody? I'm up for that. Sign me up for that.

We've been -- you know, so, these are, you know, I don't think anyone would have said, you know, look at central Asia right now. There's been 10 years -- from 10 years ago, it's a much, you know it's -- like, it's not Switzerland, but, you know, Kyrgyzstan is a full-on democracy. Uzbekistan may, you know, there's something going on there.

And when I talk to the Kazaks, they spend a lot of time asking questions here whenever they come to town. They say, what do you think about what's happening in Uzbekistan? Why do you think they're asking that?

So, anyways, I just think we've got to take the -- this is -- this is worthy work. This is -- we've got to take the long view, and we ought to think big about some of the big -- I mean, the -- imagine if we had democracies in these countries. And some other people, oh, that's not possible. That's not true. It is possible. It's totally possible. And I think we'll -- look at how much progress we've made in 30 years. That's what we -- that's what we ought to be thinking about over the next 30 years. And I think AID's going to have -- AID's going to have a big role

in that. It's going to be AID and the partners in this room are going to have a big role in making that happen. So, I'm interested in that project. I'm interested in spending the next 20 years on that project, so, anyways.

[laughter]

Kenneth Wollack:

Just to bring this down just a little bit --

[talking simultaneously]

Kenneth Wollack:

I wanted to add to a point you were making, Kate, about partnerships and about branding. There are a lot of operational issues that relate to working in these types of spaces. Branding is one. Monitoring and evaluation is another. What results and objectives you want to -- want to achieve? Communications. How do you weigh transparency with the security of local groups? And how do you balance that and how it affects everything that you do. How you communicate with the government, how you communicate back in Washington. How do you deal with other organizations that are offering in the country? So, the operational side to this is very important, and the partnership, and how you define that partnership. And I think it ultimately comes down to relationships.

There should be more studies about relationships. And they're usually more important than frameworks because you can have the best framework in the world, but if you don't have the relationships, your objectives are not going to be met. And how do you establish it? And who are the interlocutors? What should be government-run and what should be government-supported? All of these things affect those relationships. And these are key issues that you can't apply uniformly to this entire class of countries, but they're issues that have to be studied and dealt with in each country you work with, within this broad category.

Kimber Shearer:

Doug?

Doug Rutzen:

And I like the idea of the vision. You know, we're in a generational struggle. And you've heard me say this before. Martin Luther King didn't inspire people by saying, "I have a problem."

[laughter]

We need to figure out a way to inspire people around the vision. And one part of our work, I think, has to look at what changed over the last 30 years. And I would identify one fundamental issue: digital technology. Economic cost of repression has significantly declined over the last 30 years.

Thirty years ago, you needed legions of secret policemen and people who are listening on phone calls and spying on people to repress your citizens. Now, for pennies on the dollar, you can buy

technology. So, we have a fundamental shift. And I think we really have to look at the role of digital technology and its impact on the DRG space in a more intentional and coherent fashion.

Kimber Shearer:
Kate?

Kate Somvongsiri:

Fully agree. And I have two more short comments to add to that in terms of the vision. I was writing this as you were speaking, Dan, in terms of offense versus defense. I feel like when we talk about closing space and closing environments, we, as a community, are often on the defense, right? How do we -- how do we safeguard and prevent backsliding? And what you laid out in terms of vision is we need to go more on the offense on some of this and go big.

But then the second point related to that, as I say that: The big challenge, to me -- I'm not sure I mean this, but I'm going to say it anyway -- is that the hard part isn't necessarily -- the hardest part isn't necessarily getting at China or Cuba to sort of open towards democracy. It's, subsequent to that, delivering on the promise of democracy. And I think that's where we've seen some of these gains fizzle out; that that's where the backsliding, et cetera, comes in.

So, I think, yes, push for the bigger vision. But that tough slog, right, I mean, everyone gets energized with revolutions out in the town square and, you know, a big election, et cetera. But nobody's watching -- not nobody -- the dedicated men and women who work on international development are the ones who are watching this space and slogging through the governance piece and making sure democracy delivers. That's key to being able to keep pushing forward.

Kenneth Wollack:

And, Kate, you said at the very beginning about the -- about development in democracy. And I think there has been sea change over the last 35 years. I remember going into Mexico in 1987. And I won't name names, but the U.S. ambassador said, what are you doing in my country?

Daniel Runde:

I'm not going to Wikipedia this now.

[laughter]

Kenneth Wollack:

You're not going to bring the Philippine People Power revolution to Mexico. He didn't know that we had been invited by Donaldo Colosio who was a reformer within the PRI party and who tragically was assassinated. And he would have been a great leader, I think, of Mexico.

But I -- there's been a sea change, I think, in the development community seeing these linkages. And it's a sea change in the diplomatic community. You don't have an ambassador saying that anymore. Every single ambassador --

Daniel Runde:

Every one of them.

Kenneth Wollack:

-- has democracy and human rights as part of his or her portfolio. Back then, it was a Harry Barnes in Chile, it was a Mark Palmer in Hungary, it was a Steve Bosworth in the Philippines. They were a rarity. And today it is part and parcel. Now, sometimes you want the democracy and human rights part of the portfolio higher up on the bilateral agenda, and you fight and struggle over these issues. But there is a fundamental change in terms of the United States and how they view these bilateral issues. And it was 35 years ago, and I think that's a positive. And that's true in terms of other governments as well, and aid agencies.

This is no longer an American enterprise. There is an international democracy architecture that didn't exist 35 years ago. And the question is how do you marshal that and how do you utilize that to the benefit of democratic reform and change in these countries?

Daniel Runde:

So, just a couple of things. So, it wasn't anything we said, but Administrator Green had to leave. But I'm really glad that Deputy Administrator Glick is here to be with us, and I thank you for being here.

And so, I just wanted to just reference that. And just a -- two other things. One is I do think we need to often look at the progress. I mean, I think there's a -- often in the development business and, I think, in the democracy business, we often focus on the challenges because we're in the problem-solving business, so we focus on the problems. But if we take a little bit of a step back and look at either -- if you look at economic or political or social progress in the last 40 years, if you lose that as sort of the starting point, I mean, it's impressive. And many of you have heard of Steve Pinker's work and, you know, "Enlightenment Now." I mean, that gets at some of this.

But I think -- I think if you look at, say, the Freedom House indicators and if you use 1980 as a metric or, I mean, I'm just thinking of Mexico. Ken, I mean, I -- 2000, I guess, was the first time there was a change from the pre- to the pan? I mean, it's amazing. So, it's not that -- you know, this is all pretty, you know, kind of yesterday in a lot of these places. So, we've made a lot of progress over a relatively short period of time. And so, we need to keep that in mind, but we have a lot of progress. So, that's on the plus side.

I want to come back to something, Doug, you were saying about technology. I'm worried because -- and maybe it's related to Ken's point about relationships. I'm worried about this deep, fake stuff and these bots and this trickery that's gotten a lot more sophisticated. You're going to see a lot more fake, you know, emergence -- maybe not the emergence, actually. Fake news has actually been a phenomenon for centuries, actually. There's been some -- we did a roundtable here on fake news -- is that there've been other periods of time of fake news in the -- but I think all this sort of fakeness and trickery is going to be a much bigger part of the landscape. In addition to sort of the bad guys getting bad and, you know, sharing the best of work worst practices or whatever, you know, that there's also this technology trickery stuff that's going to be -- might get much harder to do the work that we've done in the past.

I think 10 or 15 years ago, I think, there was a hope that technology was going to be the great

emancipator, the great, you know -- it's not. It's a little bit of both. And I think we're going to have to think about how do we create trust? How do we create belief? And I just think it probably has to be people-to-people or we're going to have to, you know, find different, you know -- who do you trust? And how do we find ways for folks to have trust in a world where there's going to be a lot of lies and a lot of tricks and a lot of fakery.

Kimber Shearer:

That's great. So, Doug, I wanted to turn back to the issue of how civil society, in particular, is impacted in close -- enclosing spaces. I wanted to see if you could offer some recommendations for how USAID can best support civil society or to foster the enabling environment that we talk a lot about in such environments, and also how some of these recommendations might be able to work in practice.

Doug Rutzen:

Thanks. I think there's been a lot of good work done by the DRG Center. And we can start with that as the base. And I would say there's really two tracks. One, we have to look at the laws as written. And there, the formula's pretty simple. You help build capacity of local experts. You monitor and you engage quickly when opportunities arise or threats emerge.

Case study: Ethiopia. I mentioned that really bad law; 90 percent of the human rights groups are out of business. AID didn't give up. The DRG Center actually brought over somebody to Washington to study international law. He returns to Addis. The moment that there's a change, he gets appointed to chair the working group that passed the much more progressive law on February 5th. It was that patient, development approach which resulted in significant impact upon the change.

The second is to recognize it's not a transactional issue. It's not just about a moment in time when a law's in play. But think about our daily lives. When you confront complexities in the law, what do you do? You find a lawyer. And we've got to figure out ways that we can actually provide legal assistance to groups to be able to navigate that web of laws that's put up there to catch groups so that governments can say, "It's nothing against democracy. It's nothing against [unintelligible], but we're a country that's the rule of law and these groups violated the law."

Case study: Azerbaijan. A few groups were able to register. The government didn't like that. They put in place really complex reporting requirements. And they said, "If you don't comply, we're going to fine you. And the fines are so high we'll bankrupt you." Again, AID stepped forward and what they did is set up a system to provide assistance to the groups to navigate that web. And not a single group that they provided assistance to in the first wave were shut down. For a hundred [inaudible] groups --

Kenneth Wollack:

Who ruled by law, not rule of law.

Doug Rutzen:

Correct.

Kimber Shearer:
[affirmative]

Doug Rutzen:

Correct. So, then the recommendation is simple. We know that a number of missions are going through a revision to their country development cooperation strategies. They're trying to align them with the journey to self-reliance. There are metrics around the commitment of governments to respect the freedom of association. There are metrics around civil society capacity. And I think the next step is to go from this sort of abstract level of principle to a set, sort of a menu of options for missions of what they can do in different country contexts to help move forward and expand the space for civil society. And I think this community can help inform those sorts of options.

Kimber Shearer:

That's excellent. Thank you. Dan, would you like to -- you've mentioned some points earlier, but I wanted to give you the floor to think about some recommendations for how the U.S. government as a whole -- not just through USAID and through foreign assistance. What can the U.S. government on the whole try to do to prevent further backsliding in the country when spaces start to look like there is a closing occurring?

Daniel Runde:

Well, I do think we can't step back. I think the first thing is, I think we need to use our diplomats to -- I think our -- that is a role for diplomacy. I also think to the extent we have an AID mission, that's a role for AID. If I think about AID having deep relationships with leaders in a country, that's a moment that -- to step in and leverage our trust relationships, whether it's diplomatic or AID.

I also frankly think what struck me in a number of instances is -- I'm not saying that American generals ought to be doing development or doing diplomacy. But I will say that in a number of instances -- whether it's Southern Command or AFRICOM -- it seems to me that there's perhaps a limited role, but a role for American defense leaders to also sort of have a -- how should I put this -- sort of also deliver the same message, as long as we're on the same page, of saying that this is -- this isn't good for your national security and making the argument that development and human rights -- and General Kelly, who's been here on several occasions when he was in active duty, would talk about how he worked with military leaders to talk about respecting human rights. It's a really important part of being a military officer. And so, I think these sorts of things. So, I think we need a -- we do need to take a whole government approach. I do think it's a role -- it's an appropriate role for our diplomats.

I do also think there is a role for members of Congress. And I've -- I think about Myanmar, I mean, Mitch O'Connell made Myanmar and, you know, met with -- he's -- he made a major commitment to the shout -- the cause of Myanmar. Myanmar's not perfect. I think we could -- I think everyone who follows it will list all the terrible things and challenges with that country. But, you know, there's been some significant progress at the same time in Myanmar.

So, I think we should be thinking about how do we use members of Congress. There's any

number of different wonderful champions in the U.S. -- in the Congress on democracy, human rights, and government and governance in both Republicans and Democrats and how do we -- how can we deploy them? I actually think that's an important -- I actually think that's an important tool that -- sometimes I think those of us in the biz who are technical people don't -- you know, either are reluctant to think about or otherwise. So, I think we need to think about how do we use -- how do we use some nontraditional government actors? And I'm thinking of, you know, appropriately, you know, appropriately -- you don't, you know, please come away with this. But I think appropriately on [unintelligible], you know, these combatant commanders, diplomats, AID mission directors, I think have important roles to play.

So, I would also just say one other thing. I think we in the West in sort of a post-religious societies, I think we undervalue -- I think, you know, we're in technocratic jobs in a very technocratic town. I think we undervalue the role of religious leaders in these societies. I think they have a lot -- they've got a lot of moral authority oftentimes in the West and in the United States. Religious leaders are having, you know, or, you know, it's kind of a bare market for moral authority right now for religious leaders. So, -- but I think in a lot of societies that's not the case. And I think we need to think about how are we -- how are we working with the religious leaders. I think we need to be comfortable working with the religious leaders.

There is a really important book called "Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft" which was published -- CSIS edited it 25 years ago. We -- I hosted a 25th anniversary with one of the editors I guess about three or four months ago. So, I think we need to be comfortable with how we -- and I -- it goes back a little bit to what I said about who do you trust. I think in a world of deep fakes and trickery, I think we're going to have to think about what are the -- what are the -- what are the people or what are the -- who are the people are going to trust, and we're going to have to kind of double down on that and stop there.

Kimber Shearer:

Great. Okay, I want to close off with a quick lightning round question for each of you. As we think about global trends and sort of emerging challenges to democracy and stability, what are some specific concerns the international community as a whole should be thinking about and analyzing that will specifically affect the future of civic space? Doug, I'll start with you. You talked about, for example, the role of digital technology. But I wanted to open it up to you and then to others who can chime in.

Doug Rutzen:

So, one that's less obvious -- electric vehicles. Why do I say that? If you look at the history of use of natural resources to fend off human rights, you find -- look at the example of Saudi Arabia. Its access to fossil fuels enables it to mute human rights criticism. If you look at the movement, the transition -- now I don't know if this is going to happen in 20 years or 30 years -- from fossil fuels to battery power, it's quite interesting to map which countries will now be resource rich.

Do you know which country has 60 percent of the world's natural resources for cobalt, which is one of the most precious minerals to make batteries? DRC. We talked -- the administrator talked about DRC earlier. Imagine you have a country with 60 percent of the natural

[unintelligible] of cobalt. Who's in the top three? The top three are DRC, Russia, and Cuba.

Daniel Runde:

Wow.

Doug Rutzen:

So, I think it actually is an issue that we need to consider -- which countries will be resource rich as we move to this new source of power? Which will be poor? And what are the implications for DRG? May be an underexamined issue.

Kimber Shearer:

Thank you. Kate.

Kate Somvongsiri:

Not an under-examined issue, but we've talked about already resurgent authoritarianism. We've talked about the manipulation of social media in terms of distorting democratic discourse and discrediting actors. One thing we have not talked about as much in terms of emerging technologies is the use of data and how you can abuse data collection. And then also in terms of how new technologies can be used to surveil and monitor and repress citizens.

So, those are all things I think we're looking at and analyzing. And not for analysis, but in terms of just for ourselves as a -- right now, I think because of the amount of backsliding and the talk about authoritarianism, there isn't this threat of this. But I think, you know, several years back when democracy was doing pretty well and end of history and all that -- you can also into this, in this sector, get into a sense of complacency. And so, I think that's something we always have to kind of ward off against as a sector and always stay sharp and looking forward.

Kimber Shearer:

Dan?

Daniel Runde:

So, Doug, I'm sorry. When I heard you say that, I thought plastics, you know, like "The Graduate," you know?

[laughter]

But I actually agree with you. But I would say my word isn't plastics. It's corruption. And so, I think we've got a -- if you look at the progress that's happened in the last 40 years on global corruption, it's because the U.S. has led -- when it's chosen to lead -- on global corruption.

Now, there -- it's a lot better. The landscape on global corruption is a lot better now. We are a flawed vessel. But guess what? We've always been a flawed vessel on corruption. So, there's lots of things -- if we point the mirror at ourselves, I think there's lots of things we could all, as a group, kind of group list of challenges and faults and shortcomings we have in this country on that. But if someone's going to have to lead it, and if we're a flawed vessel -- I recognize that. But to the extent we get at the front of the parade on global corruption, that's a good thing.

There's something -- I've seen this world economic forum polling. It's something like 80 countries. The top one, top two, or top three issue in something like 80 countries or more is corruption. So, wouldn't we want to be on the front of that parade?

But I also think if you think about either sort of democratic progress and we going -- we've talked about backsliding or closing spaces -- I think oftentimes the failure to deliver on democracy -- and oftentimes it's mixed up with grand corruption -- is a real -- it just -- I also think it poisons the well on future democratic progress. So, I think how we think about corruption, how do we think about sort of the intersection of democracy and governments and grand corruption is a big problem. A big, thorny, hard problem. And like I said, we're not -- we're not running for sainthood on this issue. But someone's got to lead, and it might as well be us. So.

Kimber Shearer:
Ken, final word?

Kenneth Wollack:
Yeah, I think it's -- I would say both on the democracy delivering front is I think the next huge challenge, of which corruption is part of this. Because people are in a demanding mood and they want to put food on the table and they want to have a political voice. And if the institutions don't deliver, usually bad things happen. And then the issue of technology -- there was a Mexican civic activist who once said that citizens are using 21st century technology to communicate and government is using 20th century technology to listen and 19th century technology to respond.

Daniel Runde:
I love that.

Kenneth Wollack:
And --

Daniel Runde:
It's good.

Kenneth Wollack:
And the question is how do these institutions -- we tend to look for the democratic hero. And usually, we find out that people are more democratic in opposition than they are in government. And ultimately, it will be the institutions and democratic processes that will -- that will prevail. We talked about Africa earlier. Just think of this statistic. Between 1960 and 1990, there were four African heads of state that stepped down voluntarily -- four in that 30-year period. And since 1990, that figure is over 50.

Daniel Runde:
Wow.

Kenneth Wollack:
Which represents a change in face on the continent and the demands that citizens -- youth,

women, previously marginalized communities -- and ultimately recommending that demand and the need to respond not only because it's the right thing to do, but I think it serves -- it serves our interest and it serves the interest, I think, of these countries.

Kimber Shearer:

Great. Thank you. I just want to give a quick hand -- round of applause to the panelists for [inaudible].

[applause]

Daniel Runde:

And the moderator.

[applause]

Kimber Shearer:

Okay. And now I'll turn it over to Dan Runde --

Daniel Runde:

Okay.

Kimber Shearer:

-- for the public comment.

Daniel Runde:

So, can I just first make an editorial comment? I'm just -- Katie, I'm so impressed. Well, you represent AID so well and I know there are hundreds of folks that you're representing. Can we give Katie a round of applause just recognize all the public servants and all the AID folks here?

[applause]

Kate Somvongsiri:

To all the USAID [unintelligible] out there.

Daniel Runde:

So, thanks for representing all the -- so many capable and smart foreign service and civil servants that, you know, are doing the work that you do -- guys do every day. So, thank you very much.

Okay. So, this is your meeting. So, we're checking for -- we want to get rounds of questions. I know we've got -- okay, so who's got -- how are we doing? We have microphones? Okay.

So, I want to hear from this gentleman here in the front row, my friend here in the third row, and my friend John Sullivan. We're going to do these in rounds. I'm going to get at least six, I promise, and maybe more. And there -- I know there are some I'm not going to be able to escape from. So, I know I'll get to -- you know. All right.

Sir, name, rank, and serial number.

Male Speaker:

Yes.

Daniel Runde:

Keep it short. Let's keep it as a -- respectful. Not that you wouldn't, but just to set the rules here. And keep it short so that we can make -- get it to as many questions as possible. And let's do it in the form of a question, if possible. Okay?

John Coonrod:

Okay. My question is, what are the best ways that USAID could strengthen decentralization, devolution of financial resources? Because it seems to me -- I'm John Coonrod. I coordinate the Movement for Community-led Development. And we do that because we're pretty sure the only way the promise of democracy can be delivered on is at the local level. So, how can both the development activities and the democracy in governance activities of USAID better move resources down to the local level?

Daniel Runde:

Great. Okay. So, we're going to bunch three of these together. And so, this is for the ACFVA committee. So, I'm looking for ACFVA committee members to also take the first stab at this and not put all this on Katie who's been a good sport to be on the panel. So, please.

Nora O'Connell:

Hi, I'm --

Daniel Runde:

And thanks for modeling a question and following the rules here. A good example for others to follow. Yes.

Nora O'Connell:

So, hi. I'm Nora O'Connell from Save the Children. And I just want to say what great timing this panel is, as many of us are getting ready to head to Ottawa for the Open Government Partnership meeting. I'll be there. We're hosting an event on Feminist Open Government Day on gender data. Hope you'll come.

But the reason I want to talk about this is I was really excited to hear you talk about democracy as both an end and a means to an end in the development context. And when you look at development outcomes, we're seeing rising inequality within countries and we're seeing closing civic space. And the remedies to rising inequalities are actually our civil and political tools, right. It's freedom of the press. It's mobilization. It's all these kinds of things to address the development outcomes -- the health sector, nutrition sector, food security, education.

And so, how does USAID need to work differently in its democracy and governance programs to address rising inequality and the things government is supposed to deliver on for its citizens in an era of closing civic space? And if you can also share any examples on USAID's recent work on

tax and DRM which is actually co-led by E3 and DRG, would -- that would be a great example to hear more about.

Daniel Runde:

Okay, clear your calendar. We've got infomercial. We're doing a big report on the next generation on taxes. Like I said, don't make it a Netflix night. Taxes and development -- it's really important, though.

Nora O'Connell:

I'll be there.

Daniel Runde:

And we're having event -- I think a roll-out I guess next week on this or the week after. So, May 31st. So, I think this is an important -- John Sullivan. No, no, right here.

John Sullivan:

Right there.

Daniel Runde:

Then I'll get to Frank after this.

John Sullivan:

Hi. John Sullivan. I'm doing consulting now. Used to do --

Daniel Runde:

And affiliated here.

John Sullivan:

Sorry?

Daniel Runde:

And also, you're affiliated here.

John Sullivan:

Yeah, well I, at one time, had a role here --

Daniel Runde:

Yes.

John Sullivan:

-- in chairing the ACFVA committee.

Daniel Runde:

Yeah, yeah.

John Sullivan:

But I used to be with Center for International Private Enterprise. And in that respect, I can't avoid asking the question, which is -- we've seen the rise of China, and Dan alluded to the work of Doug North [spelled phonetically] and the idea of looking at open and closed spaces and institutional structures as part of an overall development pattern. So, to my -- and Doug North is a big believer -- or was a big believer in the -- as he answered a question once -- why do you need democracy? Because you don't get rule of law on a long-term basis and a sustainable basis without it -- was Doug's answer.

But the question is -- we've seen the rise of China. And we see this increasingly assertive Belt and Road Initiative, 2035 program, et cetera. And they're putting forth the idea of an alternative development model. You know, 30 years ago, it was Tiananmen. But 30 years ago, it was also the fall of the wall. And after the fall of the wall, we all had this theory that to get development, to get economic growth, to get private enterprise, you needed a democratic system.

The Chinese have put forth a very stark alternative viewpoint which they are -- as Doug and others have mentioned -- systematically trying to fund around the world. Has ACFVA looked at this question of alternative development models or the importance of democracy as a key to economic growth and development?

Daniel Runde:

Okay. So, I'm going to ask each of you to take on -- you don't have to answer all three of the questions. But maybe I'll start with you, Kimber and each of you could just kind of take on each [unintelligible] you can cherry-pick the ones you want to take on. Let's just make sure we cover -- at least one of you responds to each of the questions. Then we'll get another batch of questions.

Kimber Shearer:

Sure. I'll start with the last one. So, ACFVA hasn't looked at that issue specifically in terms of a task of a subcommittee, but we actually have an annual -- or biannual, I guess, ACFVA meeting tomorrow and I think this is something we could bring up on the agenda.

Daniel Runde:

It's a good question.

Kimber Shearer:

In terms of the development model, I mean, one of the things that we look at -- I know Administrator Green has spoken quite a bit about it -- is this idea of China having a development model versus sort of the western democrat model -- is really looking at making sure that stakeholders in these countries understand what that really means -- the use of soft power, sharp power, economic incentives that are essentially co-opting those nations, giving up, you know, their own sovereignty. Whereas the western government support for democracy, economic development, et cetera, is more supportive in ways. And it's more people-driven by domestic partners in those countries.

One thing I think that the U.S. government needs to do -- and again, Administrator Green has spoken about this a lot -- is it can't just be through the arm of foreign aid. China, of course, as

you know all too well, does have these multiple forms of essentially influencing these foreign governments. And so, the U.S. government, like I think a lot of western nations, need to be thinking about these whole of government approaches -- which is one of the things I asked Dan about. It can't just be foreign assistance. It needs to be other bilateral things that the U.S. government is trying to do, particularly with partners around the world.

Daniel Runde:
Okay. Ken?

Kenneth Wollack:

Well, just a couple quick points. I would agree with you in terms of development of China today. But if you look at The Great Leap Forward of the Cultural Revolution and saw what the impact was -- and I think in many of these places these regimes look stable. They seem to deliver. But we tend to look at a snapshot and what ultimately happens in these environments -- and I believe it will happen in China -- that hubris develops, corruption develops, and ultimately these regimes are stable until they are unstable. And I think eventually once China gets through the low-hanging fruit economically, they're going to face many, many challenges.

The question is, how will they perform when they don't do well economically. It's not how they perform when they're doing better economically.

In terms of decentralization, I'm going to be a little bit contrarian here just on one example. We have a romantic notion of decentralization -- that that's the answer to all these development programs. But in many places that we work, particularly the Middle East, for example, there's no history of decentralization. I remember when NDI did a poll in Mosul, the citizens of Mosul and the refugees outside of Mosul were very much against decentralization. They saw this as a vehicle through which more warlords would come back, and it meant that they were going to become marginalized. And what they wanted is to have a stronger role in the central government. They want to have a seat at the table, and they want to get the economic benefits from the center. And they feared that they were going to be left out in a decentralization process.

In Jordan, for example, the king has pushed decentralization and --

Female Speaker:
[inaudible]

Kenneth Wollack:

-- I think he's very well intentioned. But the view of the bureaucracy and the government is that means building a ministry of the interior all over the place. And they will -- the central government would deliver resources at the local level. So, I think we have to be a little more cautious that this is going to be the answer to everything.

In Tunisia, for example, they voted on decentralization before there was even a law that talked about what the -- what the powers, the devolution of powers would be. They voted for local elections. So, I think we have to take a very much of a long-term view of this and recognize that in many cases, people are fearful of this process. And sometimes the answer is not always

decentralization unless you bring people along. And that takes quite awhile. So, [inaudible].

Daniel Runde:
Him.

Doug Rutzen:
I'll pass to provide more time for Kate and questions.

Kate Somvongsiri:
Thank you, I think [laughs].

Daniel Runde:
Thanks, Doug.

Kate Somvongsiri:
I think actually, it flows together well because my rejoinder to Ken's comment -- which I agree with. But the other part to that equation is I think there are times when decentralization is absolutely key to democratic development. I may be a little bit personally biased because the last two places I served for four years at that time have been Ukraine and Indonesia, two cases where decentralization were critical to the democratic development of the country in terms of getting government closer to the people, having those accountability measures, having services delivered that targets the population in a thoughtful way, et cetera.

So, the bottom line, I think there are some cases -- and it -- as with all of these things, as you all know this, it will be dependent on the specific country context. I think we don't prescribe decentralization everywhere, but where are the cases like the Indonesias of the world -- that's absolutely a focus of the USAID democracy portfolio [inaudible] --

Kenneth Wollack:
And I would just say [unintelligible] that the megacities are doing things that the central governments are not doing in Jakarta and in other cities around the world. Even here in the United States, because of political paralysis in Washington, oftentimes, the innovation comes from the local level.

Kate Somvongsiri:
Yes. And in a lot of cases --

Daniel Runde:
And in this country --

Kate Somvongsiri:
-- innovation comes from the local level. One area we have to be better at, I think -- the push for this often -- is often from the democracy sector, to some extent from the economic sector. But I think we need to do a better part of kind of integrating the decentralization work across the range of services and sectors -- health, education, et cetera.

And then I think the interesting part -- you didn't ask this question, but I'd love some time for somebody to answer this question. I hadn't thought about the intersection of decentralization work with the backsliding issues in closing space. Because there are many places where we work where it's the national government that's the most repressive that has these laws in the books, et cetera. And then you have pockets at the local level where there's the push against that.

I think there are some -- in many countries -- where it's the reverse, right, the most repressive policies et cetera that we see come out happen at the local level. And so, I don't know how much analysis there's been. I'm sure the big brains on this stage have thought about it more. But I think that's something worth exploring.

And then to the question that I think nobody else has addressed yet in terms of getting democracy programs to deliver in the closing environment in other areas, I would say on two levels. On a basic level, when we talk about the end of the spectrum for the very closed environments, like the North Korea's of the world and where Venezuela is getting. I think fundamentally you have to deal with the democratic governance issues to be able to even move the needle on the other issues from -- as an external actor, I think.

But I think in cases where many places where we were talking about in terms of closing environments more broadly, I think there is a lot of room for engagement across a variety of sectors and for those areas to work together in order to get outcomes that are beneficial both in terms of the normative as well as the practical outcome.

And one question you asked about that I won't take the time to answer now in terms of taxes and domestic resource mobilization, we're doing a lot of work in this area --

Daniel Runde:
Yes.

Kate Somvongsiri:
-- right now on financing self reliance, on -- I think Tim [spelled phonetically] is one of the biggest proponents for this. Right? Nothing brings you closer and more citizen participation when you start paying for those services and real [unintelligible] --

Kimber Shearer:
[inaudible]

Kate Somvongsiri:
-- that so we're really engaged a lot in that area. So, I would encourage you to talk with the team here afterwards to get more details on it.

Daniel Runde:
Yeah, let me just add on the tax issue, I think a lot of the work in international development has been sort of a technocratic solution from an economic growth. How do we do call centers and -- but there's these -- it's a whole subfield. But there's the issues of tax solidarity. And so, to the extent that people won't actually pay taxes -- a function of whether they feel services are actually

being delivered or how much money is going to people's Swiss bank accounts and this sort of a thing.

And so, I do think there's a -- it's very intertwined with governance issues. And so, I do think the more that the DRM agenda is interlinked with the DRG agenda -- I can't believe I just said two different acronyms. Sorry. But everyone understood what I was talking about. So, you know, to the extent that we're having taxes and good governance and delivering on democracy linked, I think that's a much more -- that's an important -- the more that migrates, the better.

Just on John's point, I think he's -- John, you're right. I'm of the John Sullivan school of good governance and economic growth and a lot of what I've learned, I learned from you and from SIPE [spelled phonetically] on these issues and all the work you guys did when you were there. And so, I think we have to -- I think we all have to collectively look at ourselves and recognize that they have a seductive model at first.

And I think Ken's point about that these, you know, they -- there are these bad guys have fragile regimes and they do have -- and there's -- and there's off -- they oftentimes, at first glance, look good. But I also think if you look at any number of -- I'm thinking, say, Malaysia, for example, seeing -- you know, just seen a change there.

I want to give Kazakhstan the benefit of the doubt. And I think many people in this room are not going to give Kazakhstan the benefit of the doubt. But I would just say if you look at sort of the, you know, or Uzbekistan, if you look at these places, there's a -- I think we ought to -- I think we ought to believe that there's, you know, there are serious people trying to do serious things in some of these places.

So, it is true that China is offering an alternative model that's seductive, but I think we can -- we ought to do a better job of making sure we're aware of that and thinking about how we -- how we answer the mail on that. Okay, let's hear from some others.

Okay, so -- okay, my friend from West Virginia, in the blue shirt. All right. And then I want to hear -- I need some other hands. Yeah, okay. So, Frank, you -- go ahead.

Franklin Moore:

Okay. Thank you, Dan. Franklin Moore. And this is a bit of a follow-up to some of the things that Kate said. There were two interesting comments for me that were made earlier; one about citizen response to governance and the other one was the creation of democratic subculture. And I would maintain that if you look at many of AID's programs, particularly in health, but not only in health, where at local levels -- because the local level was the service delivery level -- that our projects actually engaged in something Dan called, "the responsibility of being a citizen," where we have worked quite actively on governance and demand at the local level.

And my question is whether you all have looked into some of the cases of these to see whether they reflect something that takes place at a higher level at the national level or at the center from a democratic point of view.

Daniel Runde:

Okay, sorry. Okay, my friend here, third row. I'm sorry, I lean right, so I'm missing you guys over here. I'm [unintelligible] my biases, so I'll get someone over here, too. Please.

Jenny Russell:

Hi. [inaudible] Is this working?

Daniel Runde:

I guess so, yeah.

Jenny Russell:

So, we're nearing the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference.

Daniel Runde:

McKenzie [spelled phonetically]. Technology is great when it works.

Jenny Russell:

Hi. Okay, now this works. Hi, this is Jenny Russell at Save the Children. We're nearing the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Conference, where Hillary Clinton famously said, "Women's rights are human rights." I'm curious about the intersection of gender and democracy and governance. And if you could speak a little bit to innovative programming that helps to ensure that girls, in particular, are learning about civic participation, its importance, and how to support their own participation. And girls are amongst the worst as violated by human rights, FGM, early child marriage. And so, how are you focusing on this population?

Daniel Runde:

Okay, thank you. Okay. And this gentleman in the blue shirt and the blue jacket. I know that's like a lot of people in this audience, but --

[laughter]

-- but with the fashionable glasses. How's that?

Hisham Jabi:

Thank you very much for the [unintelligible] and Hisham Jabi at MSI. I think everybody talk about trust and relationship with local partners and alliances. It's very critical. I work with many local partners, especially in the Middle East. And the message that -- and consistent message from U.S. government [unintelligible] is make it very, very difficult for local democratic partners to really have that trust and allow some room for actually set in forces such as Iran or Russia or China to have an entry point to certain community. Of course, like Yemen and Syria -- it is like an elephant in the room, like kisses in the face. So, I know there has been some attempts to do this year [unintelligible] like the --

Daniel Runde:

The stabilization review.

Hisham Jabi:

The stabilization [unintelligible].

Daniel Runde:

Yeah.

Hisham Jabi:

Yeah and that's very positive. But where do we stand and what could be done better to create that notion of trust with local partners with a consistent message?

Daniel Runde:

In the context of fragile states --

Hisham Jabi:

Correct.

Daniel Runde:

-- and stabilization.

Hisham Jabi:

Correct.

Daniel Runde:

Okay. Okay, good questions. Okay, let me get one more. My friend Anne Simmons-Benton over here, please.

Anne Simmons-Benton:

You've talked a lot about a lot of actors. What about universities? Where do they play a role in this?

Daniel Runde:

Okay. I'm going to take that one because, well, you know, I like the topic. Okay. So, Anne, sometimes with Arizona State and AID alum, too, so thanks. Okay.

So, I've been thinking about this as late -- I was at my -- I actually think there's been -- there's been a sea change about how we're thinking about China in the last two years -- in the last three years. And I think that's -- I think that's permanent in Washington.

And one of the things that's been said is, well all these -- "all these Chinese folks come and study in the U.S. and it hasn't made a difference." I would argue that -- I don't know if it's been not enough time yet has elapsed to when sort of big cohorts of Chinese students came here to like taking real jobs in the Chinese system. They're just kind of now -- I would argue -- I haven't looked at this closely enough -- but I think they're just kind of now taking the real jobs in the system.

They're not in the -- I don't know how many members of the politburo or whatever the --

whatever the Chinese ruling thing is. I think it's the politburo -- studied in the U.S. All their kids have studied in the U.S. But I don't know how many -- have they studied in the U.S. And so, I think the jury's -- my argument would be is the jury still out? We need another 15 years to know if all -- a million or two million Chinese people study in the U.S. for a year, two, three years getting Ph.D.'s or undergrads, if that's fully kicked in. I would argue it hasn't fully kicked in.

I do think, you know, anybody who was at AID for a long time would tell you the best thing we ever did was -- and make long-term investments to have people study in the United States. I don't know -- I mean, and, you know -- you know this is, again, this is one of my favorite hobby horses -- that we don't -- we haven't fully done a study on this -- and I'm available to do a study on this.

[laughter]

But I think there's a -- how many -- how many central bank presidents, how many foreign ministers, how many governors, how many big city mayors, how many finance ministers, how many NGO leaders of civil society groups? How many have studied in the United States -- preferably in the U.S.? I'm also good with the West -- that's capital W, the West. But who drank the Kool-Aid, the good-guy Kool-Aid, and then bring it back.

Now I said this. I was at Harvard this weekend for a thing and I said this and there was like this - - they didn't like me saying this. This was, like, "How can you say that?" Because, I said, I'd rather they study here than in China. And they still got all offended with me. I'm, like, "What are you talking about? Of course, I want them studying here." We should want them to study here. We want -- I want a lot of them to study here and then go back and in -- you know, I know it's a two-way street. I get all that. But they're bringing back a whole bunch of implicit stuff. They're bringing -- they're drinking the western Kool-Aid. That's the truth.

So, yeah, I'm all for it. And I think it's a force of democratization in the world. Now, you -- for the million people we can pick, there's that guy who came here in the '40s who wrote, you know, that crazy guy from Egypt and -- you know what I'm talking about. Everyone knows what I'm talking about. If you follow the Middle East. He became, like, that radicalized leader who's kind of like the ideologue for al-Qaeda and, you know, and he went to Colorado College in Greeley, Colorado, or whatever it was. And, you know, anyways, Q-U-T-B -- I don't know how to pronounce his name. But if you -- if you follow the Middle East, you -- there's one of those folks out of every million. But I'll go with the 999,000 that did -- aren't those people.

So, I think it's a really important secret weapon that we have in the United States and we should have a lot of those people studying here and going back. Sorry. Okay. Let me start with you, Katie.

Kate Somvongsiri:

Okay. Thank you for the question about the intersection of gender and democracy rights and governance work. I think in many ways I was remiss in not mentioning that, even when Dan actually asked a question about women and youth. And in many ways, it's so fully integrated that I didn't really distill and tease that out. But I should have been more explicit in saying that

it's absolutely integral to all of the democracy rights and governance work. There are major portfolio work focused on women's political participation. For example, civic education obviously targets women and girls. The human rights portfolio -- obviously, women's rights are human rights and the protection of women's rights in that sphere. So, everything we've talked about, obviously, women is one component of that. And I would highlight in particular -- since we're talking about enclosed spaces and fragile environments -- not to conflate the two for the purists out there. But since we're talking about those types of environment as well, I would also note the Women Peace and Security Act which was signed into law in 2017.

And I don't think I'm revealing any spoilers here, but we are so close to signing a National Women Peace and Security Strategy coming out of that law. So, it outlines -- and it's not just USAID. It's State Department, DoD, DHS. And it lays out all these areas where we can strengthen women's participation in conflict environments, for example in peace processes. But as well, is address how women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence and conflict including gender-based violence in complex emergencies, et cetera. And so, a lot of work has gone into that. And I think you'll be hearing and seeing more about it soon. I thank you for raising that question.

Daniel Runde:
Doug.

Doug Rutzen:
And thank you for raising the question about other actors. It's interesting that we've been approached by universities in Hungary, Turkey, Egypt, Russia -- the list goes on. Because they're saying space is closing for them as well. And we just published a report on closing academic space.

But I think it addresses a broader issue which is other players in the democratic space. We haven't talked about labor, media, social movements. And I think as we begin to look at closing space, it's important that we have all these actors in mind and to consider how we might be able to help protect the space for a diversity of actors as they move forward to try to protect -- not just civic space -- but democratic space around the world.

Daniel Runde:
Ken.

Kenneth Wollack:
Well, let me come back to women's participation. I happen to believe that the only way you're going to get changes in policy is if political parties change their behavior. Because ultimately, political parties are the vehicle through which women are going to enter politics and leadership position. And unless women are on parliamentary lists that allow them to be elected, there is not going to be a critical mass in legislatures that are going to pass laws on economics, on inheriting rights, and all the issues that affect women politically, economically, financially. And how parties behave becomes, I think -- I think central to this.

A huge challenge in this is cyber bullying if -- and violence against women in politics on -- you

know, in the social media sphere. If you ask any woman -- and I don't care if it's Finland or whether it's Burkina Faso -- any woman that enters politics is going to face a torrent of violence, psychological violence online.

And it not only affects the women engaged in politics, but it affects others who say, "Why should I put myself through this or put my family through this?" And I think it's a huge challenge. So, (a), I believe party reform is key to getting women into political power, and (b), dealing with the technology, the social media side of this is going to be critical --

Daniel Runde:
That's good.

Kenneth Wollack:
-- in order to create an environment that allows women to enter the space.

Daniel Runde:
Could -- Ken and Kimber, could either of you just address my friend --

Kimber Shearer:
[inaudible]

Daniel Runde:
-- from MSI's question and make sure -- make sure -- I don't want Frank to leave without making sure we answer -- we covered his -- could either of you take it?

Kimber Shearer:
Well, I can do it. Yeah, the local partners piece about sort of, you know, trusting local partners. If we're looking particularly in closed and restrictive authoritarian environments, I think it's critically important to make sure that the tactics that are being used to reach those individuals, to reach those organizations -- particularly outside capitals, which is really important -- needs to be, like, carefully thought through. Is it government-to-civic actor engagement? Is it going through international organizations or regional organizations who have longstanding networks in those longstanding relationships to reach those people, even if it's just to get their input, not necessarily to be in delivery of assistance? And then operationally, it's so important -- we see this all the time -- to be able to let those partners lead in what they are comfortable, in terms of assuming risks. So, the ability to work in those environments.

I mean, over the years -- for me at IRI working in those environments -- we've heard a lot of donors -- not just the USG, but other donors -- say it's too risky for them. It's too risky for them. I rather, you know, not do that, not put them in danger. But the reality is we're working with these people who are saying, "Give me assistance. I want to take the risk." It comes back to some informed risk so that we're not directly or inadvertently putting them in danger. But if they know -- and these are brave souls and people that want to be helped -- then the international community should be responding. But it really gets back to the operational elements in reaching them to hear their voice and also to be able to support them.

Kenneth Wollack:
Two quick examples on this --

Daniel Runde:
Please.

Kenneth Wollack:
-- at least at the local level. In northern Syria, even under the most horrendous conditions, you have citizen groups and local administrative councils that are dealing with each other in the delivery of services on issues that are prioritized by the citizens themselves -- an extraordinarily important USAID program -- also supported by others, but an important USAID program. And now, that's not going to create a breakthrough in Syria. But some day when there is a breakthrough in Syria, I think a lot of those people in literally dozens and dozens and dozens of community in northern Syria will have an impact nationally.

The second example I'll just give is Moldova and -- where this isn't an issue of closed space -- a closed space, but the drivers of reform are the mayors, not the national leaders. And the challenge there is how do you corral all of these local mayors who are leading the reform effort to change the way parties behave, political leaders behave, and the national government changes?

Daniel Runde:
Okay. Time for two more. Okay, this hand in the back there, and my friend here -- my new friend here. Yeah. Yes, please. Stand up. Name.

Gotenga Bayor:
My name is Gotenga Bayor [spelled phonetically]. I'm a student at Catholic University, an activist and a writer. So, I would like to say thank you for the three points you said here about civil education. Excuse my English. I went to school here to learn English. So, I'm speaking more in French.

So, you say how to help people in education and in civil right. And I think even a baby one day know how to cry when he's hungry. But in Africa, we have a big problem. Because when I was young, we have civil education in our curriculum. But they took it off. They don't have it anymore. So, I was so sad when I came back from Togo [spelled phonetically] and I realized that we don't have it anymore in Chad. So, please put that in the USAID program to introduce back the civilian education.

And for the youth, how to add them? I realize that now in -- they are using Diaspora International Network online. So, when there are issue in Chad, they will send it out to us and we share it. So, we are sharing a very good -- we create a kind of new way to raise awareness about an issue using Diaspora. Then we have a very good example in Canada. They just create a radio and they're using that radio from Canada to inform, to educate, and to raise up information. Thank you.

Daniel Runde:

Thank you. Okay. This woman here.

Gotenga Bayor:

Excuse me. I wrote a book and published it on FGM, the first woman in Chad, so please.

Daniel Runde:

Okay. Thank you.

Jaleen Moroney:

Thank you. My name is Jaleen Moroney. I'm with Cardno, USA. And I was very pleased to hear about the comment about taxes and good governance and democracy linked and, you know, the road to self-reliance. And then we also talked about China and how they had another option for a lot of countries.

And I was wondering if USAID has thought about funding programs that would actually teach countries that fell into the China trap, like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, other countries in Africa who don't know how to evaluate an infrastructure project. They can't predict demand. They can't do the cost. They can't, you know, estimate the economic benefits well. And so, China tells them, "Do this. This is going to be great for you." But really, it's just great for China.

Daniel Runde:

I could -- I wish -- I'm so happy you asked that question. It's like a planted question. This is great. So, -- it's not. So, I -- we just did a task force on global infrastructure. We had Dr. Steve Hadley, who was the National Security Advisor for President Bush, 43. And we had Ambassador Charlene Barshefsky who was the U.S. Trade Representative for President Clinton co-lead this issue.

And I think -- one of the things I took away from it is that we're going to need something akin to some sort of open source intelligence about sort of the global infrastructure that's happening. We don't have to necessarily meet China dollar-for-dollar. But I'd like it when the Chinese show up to say, "Hey, I got money for a port for you." In certain instances, we ought to make a decision as the good guys in the West and say are we going to enable an alternative? It could be the Asian Development Bank, could be the [unintelligible] bank, could be, you know, the alphabet soup of DFI's, but I do think there's absolutely a role for AID in this.

I also think we need to help countries plan and negotiate better. And I think one of the problems with -- everyone -- many -- everyone on the Hill knows about the Sri Lanka port. They know it was bad. One of the issues was, I think, that they -- they were sort of sold a, you know, something that was kind of on a flim-flam -- now, I think there was probably a lot of bribes going around, too. And I think they don't follow the Marquess of Queensberry Rules of international business, frankly.

But I think that we need to help countries plan, negotiate, and evaluate projects in a better way. It's not sexy stuff. There's not someone going up to the Hill and asking for an earmark for, you know, this really wonky, kind of sleepy stuff. But I think in this -- in this environment that we're in, we're going to have to kind of revisit that as something -- AID does do a lot of work on

infrastructure. But I think this is -- that it's worthy of us paying a little bit more attention to it given sort of the stakes. Yeah.

Kate Somvongsiri:

Yeah, the answer to your question is, yes, we are already doing this. And we absolutely need to scale up because it's a matter -- so part of it is technical capacity, right, understanding what these loan terms actually mean. What are the -- what are the actual infrastructures, sites, et cetera -- all that. So, it's very technical in many ways, so much so, I can't explain it coherently here. But we are doing it in some places already and we are looking at -- Burma is one example, for example.

And I think it also happens in places -- to combine it with this conversation -- in environments that are closing democratically. And we start -- if we start turning away or we start "conditioning" our assistance with some of these, you need to put in some transparency or practices accountability. And China offers this alternative model that comes with a lot of money and no strings. That makes it very, very difficult for countries to make that decision. So, at a minimum --

Daniel Runde:

And bribe -- maybe some bribes, too.

Kate Somvongsiri:

And maybe some bribes [inaudible] --

Daniel Runde:

Just saying.

Kate Somvongsiri:

So, absolutely, I think we're doing that on a case-by-case basis in different countries. And what we're trying to get our handle on more is how do we pull that together, elevate it, and do it in a more systemic way across the board and provide that as an option.

But the other thing I would say that's really powerful -- and we're looking at it -- is it's not the U.S. going to -- in Burma and saying, "Don't do this. This is terrible for you." But talking -- bringing the Sri Lankan government over to the Burmese government saying, "Hey, this is what happened to us when we signed this deal on this port." So, really, I think it's bringing in other actors into this conversation as well. So, countries that are going down that road understand the long-term consequences of choosing that model.

Daniel Runde:

Does anyone want to respond to anything else that was said? Kimber?

Kimber Shearer:

I just want to add real quick to what Kate was saying. I think that this latter point -- part is it's important, obviously, to help the countries that have clearly realized what's happened, falling into that debt trap, understanding what is actually happening for them to figure how to get out of it.

But another equally important element is educating countries that don't have that awareness. So, to Kate's point, bringing the stakeholders to other countries to sort of shine a light on what's happened. IRI has actually embarked on a global project to really develop a lot of resources about these sort of -- the worst practices, so to speak, guide of what China's doing, what -- using economic incentive, sharp power tactics, especially.

And that thing that we are seeing, particularly in developed democracies with very little knowledge of what sort of the reasons why the tactic is being used, is really important at the outset so that they can go into some of those potential bilateral negotiations -- whether it's for economic or other means -- more informed to help, again, protect sort of their sovereignty and protect those economic interest, more on the prevention side, as well as dealing with the countries that are already in that sort of trap trying to figure out what to do.

Daniel Runde:

Okay. I think we should end it here. I want to adjourn this ACFVA Public Meeting. Thank you all for being here. Thank you very much.

[end of transcript]