







When Aid Fades: Impacts and Pathways for the Global Democracy Ecosystem

November 2025

Title Page Photo Credits:

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
Raj Bahadur Sapkota
2024 USAID Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Photo Contest Finalists
USAID Images
Alec Jacobson
Olena Hnitetska
Linda Egyir-Quainoo
International IDEA, Project Voces Ciudadanas, 2023, Photographer: Silvia Román



Strömsborgsbron 1 SE-103 34 Stockholm SWEDEN +46 8 698 37 00 www.globaldemocracycoalition.com









Abbreviations

ABA American Bar Association

Al Artificial Intelligence

CSO Civil Society Organization
CSP Civic Strength Partners

DEC Development Experience Clearinghouse

DRG Democracy, Rights, and Governance

DRGP Democracy, Rights, Governance, and Peacebuilding
DRL Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

EED European Endowment for Democracy

EU European Union

EUSEE European Union Support to Eastern Europe

FY Fiscal Year

GDC Global Democracy Coalition

GNI Gross National Income

IDEA International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

IFES International Foundation for Electoral Systems

IGO Intergovernmental Organization

INGO International Non-Governmental Organization

ISHR International Service for Human Rights

KII Key Informant Interview

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

NED National Endowment for Democracy

ODA Official Development Assistance

OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

USAID United States Agency for International Development

USG United States Government

VOA Voice of America

V-Dem Varieties of Democracy

About the Report and Acknowledgements

This study weaves together the voices, data, and analysis generously shared by partners in the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC). It stands as a collective tribute to democracy champions everywhere - in civil society, government, academia, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), the private sector and former USAID and State Department officials - whose dedication and championing of democracy worldwide continues to inspire.

The overall study was commissioned by International IDEA and the GDC with input from GDC partners. IFES joined to contribute additional data and analysis. The report was written by Annika Silva-Leander, Kourtney Pompi and Cassandra Emmons. The report draws on two surveys - one led by the GDC Secretariat covering 151 organizations, and another by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), including 125 organizations - along with key informant interviews conducted in English and Spanish, and desk research. The report has greatly benefitted from comments and feedback from Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, Jeffrey Fischer, Blair Glencorse, Erica Shein, Paulina Ibarra, Liza Prendergast, Kyra Buchko, and Matthew Baker. Nicolette Kalfas designed the report.

Table of Contents

	1. Introduction	04
	2. Objectives and Target Audience	06
	3. Methodology and Sources	07
	4. Financial Impacts of Foreign Aid Cuts: Official Data	09
	4.1 US Aid Cuts in Numbers	09
	4.1.1. US Foreign Assistance Cuts	09
	4.1.2. Cuts to DRGP sector	09
	4.2. Financial Impacts of Other Governments' Foreign Aid Cuts	12
	5. Impacts on DRGP Organizations: Survey Results	13
	5.1. Financial Impacts	13
	5.2. Other Impacts	17
	6. Impact on the Global Democracy Ecosystem and Landscape	19
	6.1. Direct Effects	19
	6.2. Indirect Effects	26
	7. Resilience Strategies	27
	8. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations	29
A	nnexes	
	Annex 1: Thematic deep-dive: Impact on election sector	33
	Annex 2: Selected testimonials	37
	Annex 3: Definitions and categories	40
	Annex 4: List of countries with DRGP cuts	41
	Annex 5: Description of survey respondents	44
	Annex 6: Additional information on methodology and data sources	47
	Anney 7: Deferences	48

Executive Summary

In January 2025, the United States (US) administration initiated a sweeping overhaul of foreign aid, closed USAID, consolidating it into the State Department, and froze all aid programmes. By March 2025, the review concluded with the termination of 86% of USAID and 41% of State Department awards, amounting to approximately \$80.5 billion in cuts. These decisions dismantled decades of US investment in humanitarian aid, health, education, agriculture, economic development and, most severely, democracy, human rights, governance, and peacebuilding (DRGP) programmes, where 97% of projects were cancelled.

The scale and speed of the cuts have destabilized thousands of organizations worldwide. undermined civil society, weakened independent media, reduced protections for human rights defenders and emboldened authoritarian regimes. United States, long the largest bilateral democracy donor, has effectively dismantled its global democracy support apparatus in a matter of months. These changes coincide with broader global aid reductions, as several Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors also announced contractions to their foreign further widening the funding gap.

The withdrawal of US democracy assistance represents а seismic shift in development assistance and governance that is having far-reaching consequences for civil society, human rights and democratic institutions the world over. While organizations are demonstrating resilience, the scale of the funding gap to support civic infrastructure is unsustainable without renewed donor commitments. Investing in democracy is not a trade-off, but essential to long-term global stability and sustainable development.

Key Findings:

This report assesses the impact of the foreign aid cuts on the global democracy ecosystem:

- Cuts in numbers. Almost 70% of all US government-funded DRGP awards more than 1,600 DRGP-related grants worth more than \$14 billion-have been terminated, affecting thousands of civil society organizations, independent media outlets, journalists and human rights defenders in more than 120 countries.
- This includes 97% of the number of USAID and 51% of all State Department DRGP awards; all electoral assistance and most funding to independent media have been wiped out.
- Just 10 USAID DRGP governance and human-rights awards appear to have been spared, as well as a number of small State Department awards on free expression, justice, counter-trafficking, anti-corruption, gender-based violence and religious freedom, many of which are set to end soon without an articulated strategy for continuity.
- These cuts are compounded by cutbacks to other tools of US "soft power," such as Voice of America, which broadcast news in multiple languages in repressive contexts, and the United States Institute of Peace, which supports conflict resolution and violence prevention globally.
- With future US funding for democracy assistance uncertain, even the National Endowment for Democracy's (NED) \$286 million in annual grants to civil society may be at risk (NED Annual Report 2024). Although NED successfully secured its FY 2025 funding through a legal challenge, the outcome of the FY 2026 budget process remains uncertain.

- Nearly half of the surveyed organizations worldwide reported US funding made up 50% or more of their budgets. Cuts have forced widespread layoffs, downsizing, programmes suspensions, and in some cases, closure.
- Broader Ecosystem Effects. The repercussions of the US foreign aid cuts affect democracy and its global ecosystem both directly and indirectly:
- In low-income, fragile, repressive or transitional contexts, the withdrawal of external funding is directly weakening civic infrastructure - both civil society organizations and independent media that relied heavily on US support to function.
- The erosion of independent media and civil society removes critical voices that verify information and hold governments to account, weakening checks and balances essential to democratic accountability and the integrity of the information ecosystem.
- The cuts have stripped away protections that once shielded vulnerable groups in repressive countries - religious and sexual minorities, and human rights defenders from persecution and harassment.
- In authoritarian contexts, the cuts have emboldened governments to intensify repression against civil society, while in democratic settings they heighten vulnerability to foreign state-backed disinformation campaigns - most notably Russian propaganda in Europe - that can polarize societies and distort electoral processes.
- As US diplomatic engagement has receded, authoritarian governments seem to have grown more confident in suppressing dissent, facing fewer checks from the international community. Governments have exploited a weakened civil society and diminished US pressure by reintroducing restrictive "foreign agent" laws, further shrinking civic space in El Salvador, Peru and Georgia, among others.

- Together with these interlocking disruptions, these dynamics are impacting the global democratic landscape and risk weakening the broader human rights, governance and peacebuilding ecosystem.
- These shifts may carry longer-term indirect effects. The pullback in foreign assistance could weaken some governments' ability to deliver basic services or sustain economic opportunities, potentially contributing to eroding public trust in democratic institutions, especially in fragile contexts.
- The weakening of civic infrastructure and independent media is unfolding amid a global democratic decline, a context that is likely to compound these negative trends.
- Resilience Strategies. Civil society organizations are adopting survival tactics such as cost-cutting, reduced programming emergency funding, experimenting with social enterprises and building mutual support networks. However, these efforts fall far short of replacing lost funding.
- Compounding Aid Contractions. Many organizations face parallel cuts from European donors. The OECD is projecting a 9–17% drop in global Official Development Assistance in 2025, intensifying the crisis for democracy-related work.

Recommendations

The report urges:

 Donors to provide flexible core support, streamline reporting requirements, adopt context-tailored strategies, coordinate funding and programming to enhance effectiveness and avoid duplication, and provide direct grants to local organizations.

- The International Community to identify new democracy champions, including from the Global South to reshape and redefine democracy support, build new multi-stakeholder and inclusive alliances in support of democracy, maintain political pressure to threats in backsliding contexts, and rethink new more horizontal, peer learning-based democracy assistance models.
- Civil Society Organizations to continue diversifying funding sources, more strictly focus on mission-aligned programmes, strengthen collaboration, participate in regional and global networks, reduce costs, leverage digital tools, clearly communicate impact and explore new funding models, such as social enterprises, community foundations, and innovative private-sector partnerships.



In January 2025, the new US administration issued a series of executive orders, which involved a review and fundamental overhaul of foreign aid, and the closure of USAID and its absorption into the State Department. This triggered a 90-day freeze on all ongoing and new US foreign aid programmes, halting disbursements, including payment of past invoices. In March 2025, the administration announced the end of the aid review, resulting in the termination of around 86% of all USAID awards and 41% of all State Department awards, or an estimated \$80.5 billion. Projects were terminated across all sectors, such as humanitarian aid. health. education. agriculture, private sector development, water and sanitation and democracy support.

This drastic reduction in foreign aid by the world's largest bilateral donor has caused widespread disruption, undermining critical services, destabilizing local partners and eroding decades of development diplomatic gains. Within weeks, the cuts effectively dismantled US democracy assistance - once the world's largest weakening US credibility in promoting democracy abroad. These cuts are occurring in a broader context of foreign aid contraction, as a number of bilateral donors have also announced significant reductions to their foreign aid in the coming years in the face of fiscal constraints and increasing

defense sector costs. Other donors, in particular philanthropic organizations, have stepped up their support, but will not on their own be able to fill the massive shortfalls created by the withdrawal of the world's largest donor, especially as global needs continue to grow.

This study looks at the impact of the drastic reduction in US foreign assistance funding and the immediate dismantling of its foreign assistance apparatus on the DRGP sector, globally. The report shows that the cuts have had far-reaching consequences, affecting a wide range of organizations and democracy support initiatives across all regions, notably assistance to: (a) independent civil society in closed and closing contexts; (b) democracy and opposition movements within and outside autocracies; (c) democratic political parties; (d) independent media; (e) political participation, representation, and human rights protection of marginalized groups, such as women and LGBTQ+ communities; (f) good governance, rule of law and anti-corruption efforts (g) support for free, fair, and credible elections and to independent judiciaries and democratic parliaments; (h) peacebuilding and conflict prevention; and (i) emergency assistance to human rights defenders.

While some studies have assessed humanitarian and health impacts, no comprehensive analysis has yet examined the

¹ This comprises \$75.9 billion in <u>terminated USAID awards</u> (Murphy 2025) and \$4.6 billion in terminated (Green 2025) <u>State Department awards</u>.

consequences for the DRGP sector as a whole, the worldwide ecosystem of democracy organizations, democracy activists, human rights defenders, and peacebuilders; or the broader implications for the global democracy landscape, civic space, and information environment. Two surveys conducted by International IDEA under the umbrella of the GDG and IFES in the spring of 2025 sought to fill that gap and constitute the basis for this study. The study has also drawn on surveys and analyses conducted by Humanity United covering the peacebuilding sector; Internews covering the independent media sector; and UN Women, covering the impact on women and gender equality initiatives. The study also examined media reports on additional cases.

The findings of this report paint a bleak picture, showing that the massive reduction in DRGP funding is already having a profound and damaging impact on the global democracy ecosystem. It documents a rapidly shrinking civic space in many countries, a further weakening of independent media and the rise of authoritarian actors exploiting the current fragility of civil society. These dynamics are playing out in a broader context of global democratic decline, documented by International IDEA and others for at least a decade - a trajectory that risks further entrenchment (International IDEA 2025). However, the study also highlights how organizations are responding with resilience by adopting creative survival strategies and forging new ways of working to navigate and adapt to today's constrained and volatile funding and geopolitical landscape. While urgent demands in other sectors persist, the study underscores the need for sustained investment in DRGP, emphasizing their foundational role in enabling broader development outcomes. At the same time, it recognizes the shortcomings of the global democracy assistance sector and calls for a fundamental rethink of democracy support overall - one that involves testing innovative

approaches built on peer exchange and more inclusive learning models, forging new alliances and restructuring the system to foster a more equitable and inclusive global democracy ecosystem.

2. Objectives and Target Audience

Photo Credit: Easy-Peasy.AI

The study has four objectives:

- To provide an overview of the impacts of US (and, when data is available, other government) foreign aid cuts on the quantity of and total funding for global, regional, and local DRGP programmes and organizations worldwide.
- To assess the consequences of these cuts for the global democracy support ecosystem of organizations, and on democratic processes and the global democracy landscape.
- To provide insights into how democracyfocused organizations are navigating funding cuts and adapting to sustain their work in a shifting financial landscape.
- To make recommendations to donors, civil society organizations and international institutions on how to sustain democracy support in a shifting geopolitical landscape.

The report aims to provide democracy, governance, peacebuilding and human rights organizations worldwide, as well as funders (philanthropic, bilateral, and multilateral) with an evidence-based picture, supported by data and testimonials, of the state of DRGP programming following the foreign aid cuts. The report aims to help organizations better advocate for continued support for DRGP assistance in the context of broader foreign aid cuts; adjust their operations and learn from each other in a changing funding landscape; and help guide philanthropic, bilateral, and multilateral donors to identify future funding gaps, needs, and democracy assistance priorities.

3. Methodology and Sources

Photo Credit: Nasjonal digital læringsarena (NDLA

The study is based on quantitative and qualitative data from various sources:

 Ouantitative data on US foreign assistance cuts. Accurately determining the extent of US foreign aid cuts for this study proved challenging, as information has not been made fully available to the public. The list of terminated USAID awards, which was sent to Congress in late 2025 without being publicly released, has been subject to multiple rounds of negotiation and revisions, resulting in the restoration of some projects and the discontinuation of others. As of November 2025, the funding picture remains in flux, as decisions continue to shift on both State Department and USAID awards. Two official government data ForeignAssistance.gov sources and <u>USASpending.gov</u> - formed the basis for two key data studies: one by the Center for Global Development (CGD) (Sandefur and Kenny 2025) and one by the New York Times (Schoenfeld Walker, Khurana, and Zhang 2025). International IDEA also reviewed award lists, some of which were dated early March 2025, just after the end of the aid review was announced, and some that were dated end of March 2025, when they were sent to Congress. These covered USAID and State Department active and terminated awards. Data on the DOGE website was also consulted, which came from USASpending.gov. Generally, data on State Department awards was notably harder to access than USAIDrelated data, suggesting greater limitations in reporting and accessibility.

Given that all the files and data sources differ on the total number of original awards, the number of awards cuts and the amounts cut, this study chose to rely on the analysis conducted bν the New York Times (Schoenfeld Walker, Khurana, and Zhang 2025) in June 2025 for USAID-related data on preserved awards and on Devex for financial estimates of the cuts, as these provided the most recent and comprehensive review (Miolene, Jerving, and Saldinger 2025). The memo sent to Congress at the end of March 2025 was used to estimate the State Department data. This report acknowledges potential data inaccuracies or inconsistencies due to lack of reliable and publicly available data.

To identify which DRG-related projects were preserved or terminated, the study adopted a broad definition of democracy, rights. and governance programming, extending beyond those formally tagged under USAID's DRG Bureau or the State Department's Democracy, Rights and Labor (DRL) Bureau. This includes projects in six broad categories: (a) democratic processes and institutions, including elections, political parties, and parliaments; (b) civil society; (c) good governance and the rule of law; (d) technology and independent media; (e) human rights; and (f) peacebuilding (for the full list of categories, see Annex 2.) Because the definitions used for this study are somewhat broader than the projects tagged to the USAID DRG Bureau or the State Department DRL Bureau, the study terms this category of projects as DRGP.

- Quantitative and qualitative data from two DRG-focused surveys. The other main data sources that informed this study were two worldwide surveys of the DRGP sector - one administered by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the other by International IDEA, which serves as the Coordinator of the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC). First, IFES sent a 29-question survey by email in six languages to civil society organizations across the global DRGP sector (IFES 2025). IFES collected survey responses from April 30 through May 14, 2025. 125 organizations from 62 countries responded, providing insights into the financial and nonfinancial impact of governments' foreign aid cuts, their short-term adaptations, and their immediate and medium-term needs in order to continue serving their communities. Second, International IDEA surveyed 151 organizations in 54 countries, many of which were members of the GDC. This 60+ question survey, which was circulated by email and on LinkedIn between May 9-23, 2025, gathered data on the financial and operational impacts of the cuts on responding organizations, the type of DRG programmes affected by the cuts, survival tactics recommendations for future action by the democracy support community. Together, the two surveys cover 276 international, and civil national local society organizations, for profit contractors and international organizations, headquartered or operating in at least 86 countries worldwide (for more details on the survey respondents, see Annex 4.) UN agencies were not included in any of the surveys and fall outside the scope of this analysis.
- Key informant interviews. The third data source comprised 11 key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with a sample International **IDEA** the survey respondents from different regions, different representing types of organizations such as international and local NGOs, associations of journalists, for contractors and international profit organizations. The KIIs focused on gaining deeper in insights four areas: organizational impact, impact, sector coping mechanisms, and recommendations.
- Desk review. The report (particularly chapter six) also draws on a desk review of news articles and publicly available reports and reviews of the impact of the funding cuts on different DRGP sub-sectors and countries.

4. Financial Impact of Foreign Aid Cuts: Official Data

Photo Credit: ChatGP

4.1. US Aid Cuts in Numbers

4.1.1. US Foreign Assistance Cuts

Until 2025, the US was the largest bilateral foreign assistance donor in the world. Its average annual disbursements since 2020 were around \$63 billion (OECD n.d.a.; OECD n.d.b.; Donor tracker n.d.). From 2015 to 2025, US foreign aid has accounted for a quarter of all official development assistance (ODA) (OECD 2025). US foreign aid was distributed through a number of agencies. USAID had the largest portfolio in fiscal year (FY) 2023 (\$43.79 billion), followed by the State Department (\$21.29 billion). Alongside at least eight other annual DRG funding agencies, (disbursements) accounted for \$USD 2.2 billion on average between 2020 and 2023 (ForeignAssistance.gov 2025).

Since President Trump's executive order on "Reevaluating and Realigning US Foreign Aid," millions of dollars in US foreign assistance awards and contracts have been terminated (The White House 2025). It is difficult to get a full picture of the financial impact of the foreign aid cuts, as overlapping decisions have led to shifting figures, and programmes have been terminated, restarted, or partially reversed since the cuts were first announced. In addition, there is still uncertainty around State Department awards, as key decisions are still in flux as of November 2025.

While acknowledging these shifts, however, all the sources reviewed coincide in their estimates that around 86% of all USAID awards have been terminated (5,341² - 5,473³ of an estimated total of 6,239-6,364 awards), worth \$75.9 billion, of which \$48.2 billion was already assigned or committed funds, but had not necessarily been paid out, leaving - at the end of March 2025 - around \$27.7 billion from these terminated programmes yet to be obligated, according to Devex (Miolene, Jerving and Saldinger 2025). Projects were terminated across all sectors, from humanitarian aid to health, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, protection, trade and private sector development, and democracy support. The State Department had terminated 2,100 awards as of the end of March 2025 - at a total value of \$4.6 billion (Green 2025). It has proved more challenging to obtain comprehensive information on the cuts to State Department awards.

4.1.2. Cuts to DRGP Sector

Based on estimates by the New York Times, the DRGP sector (see Annex 3 for definition and categories) - including awards under the themes they term justice and human rights, good governance, democratic participation, peacebuilding, and civic groups - was the most affected sector (97%, or 925 out of 950 awards) and second after economic development in terms of the number of terminated awards. (see Table 1).⁴

² According to the memo sent to Congress in late March 2025 and <u>Devex article</u> from 27 March 2025.

³ According to the New York Times (Schoenfeld Walker, Khurana and Zhang 2025).

Table 1: Number and % of USAID Awards Cut by Sector,⁵ June 2025

	No. of Total	Total no. of	No. of	% of
	projects	original	projects	awards
	cut	projects	remaining	cut
Democracy, human rights,	925	950	25	97
governance and peacebuilding				
Education	235	244	9	96
Economic development and	938	1,003	65	94
agriculture				
Social protection	45	50	5	90
Water and sanitation	81	92	11	88
Health and nutrition	473	629	156	75
Humanitarian and disaster	506	1,086	580	47
preparedness				

Source: Calculations by International IDEA based on data from the New York Times

Based on analysis of the memo sent to the US Congress at the end of March 2025, 833 USAID-funded DRG awards were cut with a value of \$13.2 billion, of which \$8 billion had been obligated.⁶

Based on the most recent New York Times estimates, from June 2025, it is estimated that only 25 (3%) of the USAID-funded DRG-related projects were preserved, of which 10 were on good governance, 10 on justice and human rights, two each on peacebuilding and civic groups, respectively, and one on democratic participation, with a total value of \$427 million. However, based on analysis of the memo sent to Congress at the end of March 2025, only 10 DRG awards were preserved, with a value of \$23.8 million. These discrepancies probably reflect the fluidity of decision making, as some awards may have been terminated and later reopened. It is not yet clear how many of these remain following the passage of the recissions <u>package</u> Congress in July 2025 by (Edmondson 2025).

Based on the memo sent to Congress at the end of March 2025, 51% of State Department DRGP-related projects were terminated with an estimated value of more than \$1 billion.⁷

However, with the rescissions package approved, and reports that the Office of Management and Budget has requested an additional round of foreign assistance terminations, there are fears that all but two <u>DRL projects</u> will be terminated (<u>Roth 2025</u>). This would effectively mean the end of US democracy assistance.

In summary, if the above data is corroborated, 1,677 DRGP-related US-funded (USAID and State Department) grants with an estimated value of \$14 billion were terminated between January and July 2025, representing 69% of DRGP-related USG-funded awards. This estimate is derived from information transmitted to Congress in March 2025 and excludes additional data that could affect the overall assessment, with no further public information currently available.

⁴ If the category 'programming evaluation and direct administrative costs; is removed. If included, this is the worst affected area in terms of number and share of awards cut.

⁵ Awards related to programming evaluation and direct administrative costs are not included in this table (Schoenfeld Walker, Khurana, and Zhang 2025) (New York Times 2025).

⁶ Using the New York Times estimates, \$12.2 billion in USAID DRG awards was cut.

⁷ Based on calculations by International IDEA.

Table 2: Number and Value of USAID and State Department Awards Reviewed, Terminated, and Remaining

	USAID (all)	USAID (DRGP programmes)	State Department (all)	State Department (DRGP programmes)
Estimated # of Awards/Contracts TERMINATED	5473 (86% of 6364)	925	2111 (41% of 5107)	752
Estimated # of Awards/Contracts REMAINING	891 (4%)	25	2997 (59%)	715 (49%)

Source: Calculations based on the New York Times (2025) for USAID awards and memo to Congress for State Department awards

It is estimated that the USAID and State Department DRGP cuts combined have affected 129 countries from all regions, from new and old democracies, to hybrid and autocratic regimes alike (Annex 4). The reprieved USAID programmes seem to protect projects in support of civil society in exile from autocratic regimes, such as Cuba and Venezuela, as well as some anti-corruption projects. The Guardian has reported that two State Department DRL programmes covering China and Yemen would also be spared (Roth 2025). Of the 715 reprieved State Department DRGP awards as of March 2025, the greater number were concentrated in Ukraine, Iran, Iraq, Syria, China, and Cuba. Most projects focused on countertrafficking, followed by justice and civil society. From the data available, the type of implementing organization does not appear to correlate with whether the award was terminated or remained operational. Overall, US funding cuts DRGP-related grants have affected thousands of for-profit and non-profit organizations, academic institutions, and human rights defenders around the world.

In January 2025, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) - which in 2024 made over 1,900 grants across 91 countries (totaling \$286

million) to hundreds of democracy and rights-focused human civil society organizations - was unable to gain access to its congressionally appropriated funds. This caused the NED to temporarily suspend its grant-making following a lawsuit in March 2025. However, its funds were again withheld in June 2025, requiring it to reanimate its lawsuit. In August 2025 the court ruled in NED's favour, prohibiting the US government from withholding or otherwise interfering with its remaining congressionally apppropriated funds (Munger, Tolles, and Olson LLP 2025). The NED is in the process of receiving its full budget for the 2025 fiscal year and is awaiting the outcome of the Congressional budgetary process for fiscal year 2026.

While the cuts represent a devastating loss, the impact of the closure of USAID and widespread staff reductions within the State Department - particularly within the DRL Bureau - extend beyond the funding (Katz 2025). They signify the dismantling of key instruments of US global leadership and soft power in advancing democratic values globally (Moynihan and Zuppke 2025). USAID was an important institutional voice and its closure removed a source of expertise that anchored US global strategy for decades.

⁸ The NED also funds its core institutes: the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the American Center for International Labor Solidarity and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE).

Archival initiatives such as DEC Document Search and USAID GoWayBack are invaluable attempts to safeguard that knowledge but they cannot preserve all the expertise lost with USAID's closure.

4.2 Financial Impacts of Other Governments' Foreign Aid Cuts

Funding for foreign aid is declining globally, even though needs are increasing. Soon after the US administration announced its cuts, major European donors, such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland, also announced cuts to rein in fiscal spending and respond to higher defense costs (European Parliament 2025). According to the OECD (2025), 11 OECD Development Assistance Committee⁹ members announced ODA cuts for 2025-2027. France, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US - which have together contributed almost two-thirds of ODA over the past decade, of which the US alone provided a quarter - are all reducing their budgets in 2025. As a result, the OECD (2025) projects a 9-17% drop in ODA in 2025, following a 9% reduction in 2024. However, Ireland, South Korea, and Spain plan ODA increases and some countries, such as Denmark (0.7% of GNI), Norway, and Luxembourg (1% of GNI), have committed to maintain their contributions (OECD 2025).

⁹ The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is a unique international forum of many of the largest providers of aid, with 33 members.

5. Impacts on DRGP Organizations: Survey Results

5.1. Financial Impacts

Box 1: Key Data Points on Impact from the Two Surveys

- The IDEA/GDC survey covered the entire DRGP sector (for-profit contractors, international, national and local civil society organizations (CSOs), international organizations, academic institutions, think tanks, and foundations). IFES' survey covered primarily national and local CSOs.
- 47% of IDEA/GDC survey respondents and 24% of IFES respondents reported that US funding represented half or more of their organizational budget.
- 85% of IDEA/GDC respondents and 78% of IFES respondents reported DRGP-related US funding cuts.
- 44% of IDEA/GDC respondents and 39% of IFES respondents reported a loss of more than half of their overall budget.
- Themes reported as impacted by most respondents: anti-corruption, support to independent civil society, youth participation, human rights protection, institutional development/capacity building (IDEA/GDC). Additionally, gender equality programmes and those focused on women were particularly hard hit (IFES).
- 42% of IFES respondents and almost 1/4 of IDEA/GDC respondents experienced cuts from other government donors. 41% have laid off staff, and 38% have reduced remaining staff pay.
- 65% of IDEA/GDC respondents have had to lay off staff, and more than half (56%) are downsizing. 69% of IFES respondents said they have reduced programmes or services.

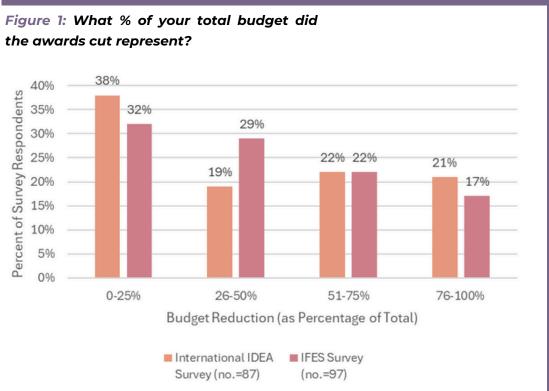
The two surveys conducted for this study provide a close snapshot of how the US foreign aid cuts have affected recipient organizations that implement DRGP programmes around the world (for more information on the surveys see Annex 4.)

Sources of US funding. In the IDEA/GDC survey: 66% of respondents reported having received USAID funds prior to the cuts, and 50% State Department funds; 72% reported receiving the funding directly and 65% as a sub-grantee. In IFES' survey: 79% of respondents reported receiving some funding from the US government prior to January 2025; 70% of respondents reported receiving these funds indirectly through a US-funded NGO and 41% reported receiving these funds directly.

Heavy reliance on US funding. respondents reported a relatively heavy reliance on US funding before the cuts. In the IDEA/GDC survey, 47% of respondents reported that US funding represented 50% or more of their organizational budget. The forprofit companies were most reliant on US government funding; eight out of nine reported more than 80% reliance prior to the cuts, while 62% of the local NGOs (10 of 16), half the international NGOs and 40% of the national NGOs reported 50% or more reliance on US funds prior to the cuts. In the IFES survey, 24% of respondents received 50% or more of their funding from government before January 2025.

In the International IDEA survey, 85% of survey respondents (86 organizations) had experienced DRGP-related US funding cuts. Of those, about 44% of organizations reported a loss of more than half their overall budget as a direct consequence of the US aid cuts (figure 1).

organizations). Survey data indicate that no subsector was spared - the cuts were broad and indiscriminate. Consistent with official records of terminated awards, respondents reported reductions across all DRGP programming areas (21 in total in the IDEA/GDC survey). The most affected areas

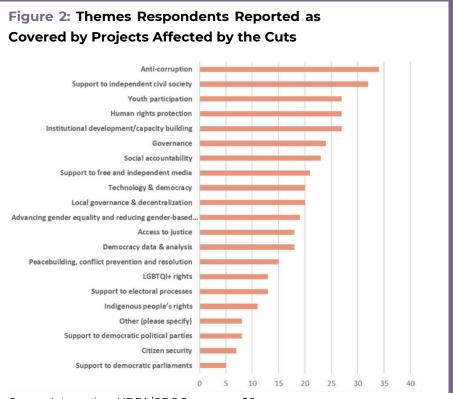


Source: International IDEA,

Scope of cuts. The IFES survey asked affected respondents to report how much their budgets were reduced by US government cuts. In total, 88% of organizations that had received US government funds before January 2025 reported reduced operating budgets in 2025 due to the cuts. 39% of those organizations have had their budgets reduced by 50% or more since the start of 2025 (figure 1). IFES also asked all respondents whether they anticipate negative impacts on their 2026 operating budgets.

DRGP sub-sectors. Both International IDEA and IFES surveyed the DRGP sector more broadly. Many respondents work across several of its subsectors (86% of the IFES sample were multi-issue-oriented

were anti-corruption projects, support to independent civil society, youth participation, human rights protection, and institutional development/capacity building (see figure 2).



Source: International IDEA/GDC Survey, no=86

Modalities of engagement. Respondents affected by U.S. government cuts in the IFES survey engaged in diverse modalities advocacy, policy research, and analysis, and group empowerment - suggesting that the reductions disrupted all major forms of engagement within the sector. For instance, 79% of the organizations engaged in advocacy (102) were affected by the cuts. Similarly high proportions were reported among organizations engaged in all the other types of activity common in the sector (ranging from 75-85% by activity type).

Impact by type of organization. The IFES survey found no major differences in experiences between elections-focused CSOs and the other organizations in the sample. The International IDEA/GDC survey did not find any correlation between the type of funding mechanism (cooperative agreement/grant versus contract), organization type (for-profit versus non-profit) or international/domestic organization when the scope of the cuts was measured in share of terminated contracts or share of budget cuts. More than half the for-profit contractors, international, and local

NGOs lost half or more of their contracts, as did 13 of the 41 (32%) national NGOs. However, contractors and international NGOs lost larger contracts than national and local NGOs, probably reflecting the larger award sizes they held initially. According to USAID data, 12% of its acquisitions and assistance and government-to-government funding in fiscal year 2024 (\$2.1 billion) went directly to local non-governmental, private sector and government partners, and the remaining 88% (approximately \$15.4 billion per year) went to US-based contractors, international NGOs and other intermediaries (USAID 2024).

Concurrent funding cuts. Many have organizations faced concurrent funding cuts from multiple donors, leaving them even more vulnerable. Almost a quarter of the respondents to the IDEA/GDC survey reported having experienced parallel cuts by other donors. More than one-third of the IFES survey respondents were affected by both the US government reductions and other foreign governments' aid reductions (see Table 3).

Table 3: % of Respondents with Operating Budgets Reduced Due to Foreign Aid Cuts

		Impacted by Other Government's Foreign Aid Cuts		
		Yes	No	
Impacted by US Government	Yes	37% both	42% US govt cuts only	
Foreign Aid Cuts	No	4% other govt only	16% neither	

Source: IFES Survey. no=123, 'NAs' excluded

In the IFES survey, 78% of respondents (97 organizations) reported receiving some funding from a government besides the US prior to January 2025. Half of the respondents had been receiving this funding directly from other government donors, while 64% had been receiving funding indirectly through subgrants; 45% of the organizations said their operating budgets for 2025 had been reduced due to decreases in other governments' foreign aid investments. Sixteen of the organizations reported that their budgets had been reduced by more than 50% due to these cuts.

How to fill the funding gap. International asked respondents IDEA survey with terminated USAID or State Department awards whether they had received replacement support from other funders. Nearly 60% have been unable to find additional from resources bilateral, multilateral, or philanthropic donors. In Mozambique and El Salvador, KII respondents noted that the EU and other bilateral donors have clearly stated that their limited resources need to be prioritized for health and nutrition, not democracy, given the devastating impact of the cuts on those sectors.

The IFES asked its survey respondents whether they had received any new funding since January 2025. A majority (88%) reported

that they have received some kind of new funding. The main sources of this funding were international NGOs (as intermediaries for local organizations) and bilateral donors. The EU was mentioned in some of the open-ended responses as a key new partner. However, only 5%

of the respondents agreed that these new funds were "mostly offsetting" the gap left by the foreign aid losses this year. The majority - 68% - said the new funds are doing little or nothing to change the operating realities (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Is New Funding Closing the Gap?

No help

Little to offset

Partially offsetting

Mostly offsetting

Did not lose funding

Figure 3 Source: IFES Survey

Reimbursements for incurred costs. As reflected in both surveys and the KIIs, the funding cuts have had a severe financial impact on DRGP organizations globally, leaving many in a vulnerable position. Not only have entire grant programmes and funding mechanisms been terminated, many organizations are struggling to be reimbursed for contractually obligated funds (see Figure 4).¹⁰ In May 2025, 67% of respondents to the IDEA/GDC survey reported that they have not

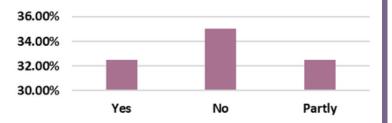
¹⁰ Most US government grants and contracts use a reimbursement form of accounting, whereby the awardee is provided with a total award amount and a smaller obligated amount. The awardee can spend up to the obligated amount, seeking reimbursement at specified programmatic milestones or on an as determined periodic basis, usually monthly or quarterly.

been or had only been partially reimbursed for costs incurred prior to termination.

however, and it is unclear how the government will handle payments for existing

Figure 4: Reimbursement of Costs Incurred Prior to January 2025

Of the obligated amounts already spent on DRG projects that were subsequently terminated, have you been reimbursed for costs incurred?



Source: International IDEA/GDC Survey

Because many organizations that received funding from USAID and/or the State Department are non-profit, most do not have a large pool of unrestricted funding or savings that they can use when there are delays in receiving reimbursements. When executive order was signed in January 2025, all and disbursements new obligations meaning payments for costs already incurred under the contractual agreement between USAID or the State Department and the recipient organization - ceased. This created significant financial hardship for most organizations, and several **US-based** organizations were forced to halt certain programmes services, furlough or terminate staff, with other merge organizations, or close their doors entirely. Some INGOs were forced to close so quickly that they did not meet their obligations to the local authorities on taxes, benefits, notice, and so on, which has led to them being sued and will pose barriers to any future activities in those countries.

Some funds from before February 13, 2025, have been released as a result of multiple court cases filed by DRG implementing partners and the NED. Litigation is ongoing,

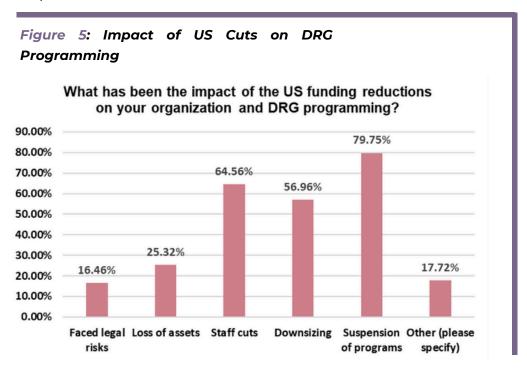
debts. Many of these reimbursement requests have been submitted by implementing partners as part of the settlement proposal termination processes conducted by USAID, but have not been paid for the period between February 13, 2025, and the time when programmes closed around the world. As these costs remain unpaid, organizations worldwide face imminent closure. This is on top of additional targeting faced by human defenders, civil rights society organizations, and media entities in and closing environments (former USAID contractor).

5.2 Other Impacts

In May 2025, 87% of respondents to the International IDEA/GDC survey said the funding cuts are forcing them to restructure their work. Nine reported being at risk of closure altogether, while 80% had suspended programming, 65% had to lay off staff, and more than half (56%) were downsizing. In October 2025, Accountability Lab reported 38% of aid organizations at risk of closure, up from 28% in July 2025.

Similarly, 69% of respondents to the IFES survey said they have already reduced programmes or services in response to the aid cuts. In addition, 36% of those respondents said they have little or no confidence that they will be able to deliver the same level of services or programming in the next 2–3 years. Furthermore, 11 respondents had already ceased operations, 51 had laid off staff, and 47 had reduced staff pay in an attempt at organizational survival.

This kind of decision-making was corroborated by several of the KII respondents, who confirmed that they are having to both downsize and reconsider the types of activities and services they can offer following the cuts. KII respondents elaborated that they have been forced to reduce the number of employed staff (many dedicated staff have remained as volunteers), downsize operations by reducing office space and closing satellite offices, and sell off assets in order to make up for cash shortfalls. Several local organization leaders reported legal actions being filed against them as they are no longer able to comply with local labour laws or pay staff (see Figure 5). These repercussions have been reported as a direct result of the grant and contract terminations by USAID and the State Department.



Source: International IDEA/GDC Survey

6. Impact on Global Democracy Ecosystem and Landscape

Photo Credit: Wikipedia

The repercussions of the US foreign aid cuts affect democracy and its global ecosystem both directly and indirectly. In low-income, fragile or transitional contexts, the withdrawal of external funding is directly weakening the democratic infrastructure of civil society and independent media, but also the parliaments, political parties, judiciaries, and electoral bodies that relied on US funding. The erosion of independent media and civil society removes critical voices that verify information and hold governments to account. These dynamics are occurring within a broader democratic context of global decline, extensively documented by International IDEA and others, such as Freedom House and V-<u>Dem</u> in a trajectory that risks further entrenchment (International **IDEA** Freedom House 2025; Nord et al. 2025). The cuts undermine civil society and independent media operating in democracies and under regimes. authoritarian In authoritarian contexts. the cuts have emboldened governments to intensify repression, while in democratic settings they heighten vulnerability to foreign state-backed disinformation campaigns - most notably Russian propaganda in Europe - that can and societies distort processes. The cuts also dismantle human rights protections that once safeguarded vulnerable groups from persecution and harassment. Indirectly, foreign aid cuts may weaken certain state agencies that have historically depended on such external support, constraining their ability to provide essential services and promote economic development - key pillars of democratic legitimacy.

Where these capacities erode, public confidence in democratic institutions may decline, especially in contexts characterized by fragility or political instability. The diplomatic reset of the US and other major prodemocracy donors also seems to have emboldened authoritarian actors to repress opponents without fear of international scrutiny.

6.1 Direct Effects

Aid cuts are eroding civic infrastructure.

Recent reductions in foreign aid have precipitated a profound weakening of civic infrastructure globally, described by some as an "existential crisis" for civil society (People in Need 2025; Romero 2025). The Financial Times (2025) has reported that nearly 10,000 organizations worldwide have been directly affected by the aid cuts. International IDEA's survey shows the scale of disruption for the DRGP sector: over 40% of organizations working on DRGP lost more than half their budgets, and most have been unable to replace the funding. The survey identified nine CSOs at risk of closure in May 2025, in countries such as Lebanon, Albania, El Salvador, Liberia, Serbia, and Nigeria, while IFES documented 11 that had already ceased operating. Civic infrastructure is being hollowed out in several ways: reductions in institutional capacity and operations hinder the ability of CSOs to sustain routine activities, such as advocacy, service delivery and protection programmes for at-risk groups and minorities, putting them at greater risk.

Widespread staff reductions deplete civil society's expertise and institutional knowledge - losses that may be hard to recover. IFES survey respondents highlighted concerns about the impact on the regenerative capacity of civil society: 70% said that the cuts would prevent the formation of new CSOs, while 72% warned that they would impede the emergence of the next generation of leaders and activists. The cuts appear to be particularly harmful for civil society in or in exile from authoritarian contexts, where some groups relied on US aid for 40-100% of their funding (People in Need 2025). Reports highlight the devastating effects of the cuts on pro-democracy movements and human rights defenders in countries such as Belarus (Liapeika 2025), Myanmar (HART 2025; Yoon Mya Lay and Shatjam 2025) and Venezuela (People in Need 2025). The cumulative effect of the cuts is a contraction of civic infrastructure, leaving pro-democracy organizations and movements underresourced and weakened in the face of authoritarian pressures. This weakening of the fabric of civil society ultimately erodes pluralism, undermines informal accountability mechanisms, and leaves countries more vulnerable to authoritarian capture.

Civic space is shrinking as legal restrictions on civil society intensify. The findings show that foreign aid cuts have eroded civil society's infrastructure, institutional capacity, morale, leaving it vulnerable; and have emboldened governments - particularly those already on a backsliding path - to further restrict civic space amid diminished international pressure. Survey respondents reported governments intensifying restrictions on civil society and media under the pretext of national security, since the aid cuts. IFES survey respondents identified shrinking space for democracy and human rights organizations as their foremost concern. More than a quarter (26%) reported increased scrutiny of the DRGP sector in their

communities by the government since January 2025.

Similar concerns were expressed by the KIIs and in media reports. Unfounded accusations against CSOs labeled as "foreign agents" were reported to have increased in Georgia and El Salvador, with journalists increasingly subjected surveillance to (Light 2025; ProtectDefenders.eu 2025; Avelar 2025; Romero 2025). There have also been news reports that the governments of Hungary and Slovakia, are using foreign agent rhetoric (and legislation), to clamp down on CSOs (Spike 2025; Higgins 2025). This heightened scrutiny has led to censorship and self-censorship. Journalists in El Salvador report having been compelled to remove stories under threat of license revocation, especially those exposing environmental damage or corruption.

New legal restrictions on civic space since the funding cuts took effect were reported in 31% of IFES' respondents' countries. Several KII informants noted that draft laws - once dormant-had been retabled for debate (e.g., Peru, Georgia, and El Salvador). Interviewees further reported that several laws and regulations previously unenforced are now being actively applied, further constraining civil society's activities.

For example, Peru reintroduced a "foreign agent law" in <u>April 2025</u>, after previously withdrawing it in December 2024, under USled international pressure (Duchiade 2025). Four months later, it passed without much international objection (Human Rights Watch 2025a). <u>El Salvador</u> reintroduced a 'foreign agent law' in May 2025, after withdrawing it months earlier under international pressure. In both cases, interviewees observed that the withdrawal of the US created space to reintroduce controversial bills undermining civil society, in the expectation of reduced international scrutiny. In El Salvador, one

informant noted that the moment was seized partly because US funding cuts had already weakened civil society, taking advantage of its vulnerability.

Because the counterfactual is hard to establish, it is unclear whether the increased restrictions on civil society in countries such as El Salvador would have occurred in the absence of these external shifts. Nonetheless, informants clearly perceive a link between escalating repression, the introduction of the bills and the reduction in US diplomatic pressure. While not necessarily attributed by informants to diminished US pressure, a number of other countries have enacted legislation in 2025, further constraining civic space in those contexts (Georgia, Ethiopia, and Zambia) (Human Rights Watch 2025c; GNI 2025).

Ending protection programmes exposes human rights defenders and minorities to escalating repression. The dismantling of USAID-funded rapid-response and human rights protection programming has left human rights defenders, religious minorities, and LGBTQ+ groups acutely vulnerable in many places. With shelters, legal aid, and dismantled, security support activists increasingly face harassment, arrest and violence (Romero 2025). Programmes that were cut included the USAID-funded Powered by the People programming and its help desk, which was launched to provide tailored support - including relocation, digital security, legal aid, and psychosocial assistance to social movements and frontline activists across sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Other programmes included <u>emergency</u> <u>assistance</u> to human rights lawyers, journalists, pastors, and religious believers, as well as justice, human rights and <u>security</u> programming protecting human rights defenders worldwide, among many others.

The withdrawal of US funding has sharply increased the vulnerability of both religious minorities and LGBTQ+ groups by dismantling the protections and services that once protected them from harassment, violence, and systemic discrimination (Outriaht International 2025). Deprived of legal assistance programming, religious minorities left more exposed to government surveillance, threats, and barriers to basic rights such as identity recognition, property ownership, and access to public services (American Bar Association 2025). Similarly, LGBTQ+ organizations have seen emergency shelters, legal aid, and health programming shut down in countries such as Uganda and South Africa, leaving already marginalized communities exposed to heightened violence and exclusion (Itai 2025; Onen 2025). For LGBTQ+ groups, the inability to mobilize local funding - due to hostile laws, discriminatory deep social stigma - has policies, or compounded these losses (Outright International 2025). Together, these dynamics demonstrate how the abrupt withdrawal of international support not only undermines immediate safety and resilience but also accelerates the marginalization of vulnerable communities by signaling diminished global backing (American Bar Association 2025).

Aid cuts erode trust between civil society and the communities they serve. Another reported impact of the drastic aid cuts is the hard-won ties fracturing of between communities and CSOs. Across countries, abrupt USAID suspensions have eroded trust by undermining the reliability of local actors pro-democracy movements. Such disengagement not only disrupts services, but also delegitimizes democratic reformers and CSOs. In Bangladesh, for example, the forced re-scoping of governance programmes left communities uncertain and with reduced confidence in civil society partners (Carter Center 2025). In Myanmar, the withdrawal of

support has crippled pro-democracy and peacebuilding initiatives, undermining community trust in pro-democracy forces (American Bar Association 2025).

Starving independent media fuels the spread of disinformation and weakens checks on government power. Prior to the cuts, Reporters without Borders (2025) estimated that USAID trained and supported 6,200 journalists, assisted 707 independent outlets and backed 279 media-sector organizations. Congress allocated \$268.4 million for independent media worldwide for fiscal year 2025 (Reporters Without Borders 2025; Kenner and Ellefson 2025). A recent Internews report on the impact of the foreign aid cuts on independent media shows how this sector has been significantly weakened worldwide by the loss of an estimated \$150 million in annual US funding (Internews 2025). It reports at least 12 media independent media outlets shutting down entirely and hundreds staff. Those slashing covering Myanmar, El Salvador, and Afghanistan have been the worst hit. In Latin America. watchdog outlets across 22 countries have closed, leaving corruption unchecked (Internews 2025). In authoritarian and conflictaffected contexts, outlets that relied almost entirely on donor funding are facing collapse, leaving journalists and outlets vulnerable to legal harassment, physical threats, and the public vulnerable to disinformation.

The report describes journalists facing increasing risks as cuts have forced them to scale-down safety protocols, leaving reporters without the necessary protections, especially in conflict zones. In El Salvador, KII informants reported being compelled to remove stories under threat of license revocation. The report shows that indigenous and minority-language media are especially endangered. This presents particular risks as they are often the targets of disinformation campaigns in countries such as Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. This vulnerability was also reflected among

the IFES survey respondents, 30% of which said the DRG community has been subjected to increased media scrutiny between January and May 2025.

The report also notes that US funding for media outlets was tied to requirements on neutrality and editorial independence. There is increasing concern that the void may be filled by actors without such guardrails, giving both foreign and domestic interests greater ability to exploit weakened information environments for their own ends. Some media outlets are reported to have been approached by China for funding to fill the funding gaps.

Without swift, flexible, and coordinated international support, the report argues that information vacuums risk being filled by propaganda, disinformation, and authoritarian actors. For more information and case studies, see <u>Internews</u> (2025).

Another <u>analysis</u> (by the Czech-based NGO People in Need 2025) also reports how funding cuts have severely weakened independent media in Eastern Europe, curtailing civil society's ability to counter Russian propaganda. In Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, independent media and human rights organizations have lost 40–90% of their budgets, curtailing basic operations. In Georgia, this coincides with intensifying political repression (<u>Marocico, Mirodan and Ings 2025</u>; EED 2025).

A European Endowment for Democracy described <u>report</u> (2025)the heavy dependence of Moldovan independent media on US funding and the shock to its fragile infrastructure caused by the cuts, reporting Russian actors flooding social media with pro-Kremlin narratives ahead of the September 2025 parliamentary elections. disinformation campaign was believed to present acute risks in the run-up to Moldova's parliamentary elections (Thornton 2025a).

Despite these pressures, pro-European parties ultimately prevailed, suggesting that the disinformation campaign failed to sway the electorate, underscoring Moldova's democratic resilience (<u>Doroftei 2025</u>).

ΚII informants also reported increased concerns about rising misinformation and disinformation as funding cuts have meant a reduction of fact checkers and citizen journalists. The contraction of media support has weakened fact-checking capacity and investigative journalism precisely as censorship and surveillance expand in a number of countries. These gaps are exacerbated by the shutdown of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty programming, which provided independent information and solidarity to activists in closed societies, with a weekly global audience of 354 million people across its 49 language services, leaving people in those countries even more isolated and vulnerable to state-controlled narratives (Martina and Naing 2025). As independent media weakens, disinformation proliferates, corruption advance can unchecked. and public confidence in information ecosystems deteriorates.

Withdrawing governance support strips away formal and informal checks on power.

The cuts have weakened anti-corruption initiatives, justice-sector reforms, and broader governance efforts worldwide. The erosion of both formal and informal oversight threatens the rule of law in fragile contexts. Moreover, a narrative of "waste, fraud, and abuse" has been adopted by governments seeking to clamp down on civil society watchdogs. In <u>Serbia</u>, authorities invoked this rationale to raid the offices of anti-corruption NGOs and subject them to investigation in February 2025 (New Union Post 2025; <u>Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2025)</u>. In <u>El Salvador</u>, President Bukele

accused journalists and news outlets that received US funding of being part of "a global money laundering operation" (López Linares 2025). The combined effects of weakened civil infrastructure, society restrictive frameworks, diminished independent media and reduced resources for governance reforms helps to erode both formal and on state informal checks power democratically backsliding or authoritarian contexts, while emboldened governments allegations deploy corruption as counternarrative justify to increased repression.

Cuts to democracy research and data production weaken the evidence base for advocacy and informed policymaking. More than \$300 million in USAID awards for democracy research and analysis worldwide is estimated to have been cut, further shrinking the evidence base that underpins democracy policy and advocacy.11 Previously, USAID supported a variety of data-collection and analytical initiatives, including regional and local longitudinal public-opinion polling (e.g., regional efforts like Afrobarometer and the Americas Barometer, as well as country polls), information-ecosystem barometers, assessments and rapid analytics, justice-sector performance data systems, local evaluation and learning, and policy/legal diagnostics.

The cuts mean previously relied upon timeseries datasets and country and regional baselines may no longer be sustained. This gap will likely weaken early-warning and crisis-response analysis and erode local research capacity, leaving governments and civil society with poorer situational awareness for their advocacy, and fewer tools to underpin, design and evaluate democracy initiatives.¹² Indeed, 75% of IFES' survey respondents ranked "less available evidence to

¹¹ Based on the data sent to Congress in March 2025. Note that these figures may be incomplete or inaccurate due to limited reliable public data.

¹² Based on KII.

advocate for accountable governance" as a top concern resulting from the foreign aid cuts. Furthermore, the weakening of the State Department's human rights reports - stripping out key sections and data (e.g., fair-trial rights, prison conditions, reprisals against defenders) - compounds the aid-cut-driven evidence gap by degrading a core reference for policymakers, advocates, and researchers (Human Rights Watch 2025b; Thornton 2025b).

Weakening of electoral infrastructure. More than \$770 million in USAID-funded electoral assistance is estimated to have been cut due to the US foreign aid reductions.¹³ These cuts have sharply reduced the international technical assistance on which many election management bodies (EMBs) have long relied. While most EMBs are funded by national budgets, international NGOs and IGOs have historically provided targeted expertise ranging from disinformation response and cybersecurity to inclusive practices for women and persons with disabilities strengthened electoral integrity. These INGOs have faced steep funding reductions, and many EMBs lost critical support in the months or even weeks before elections, while longterm reforms such as modernizing results processes or strategic planning have stalled. The absence of this expertise is already evident in suspended programmes, staff gaps, and narrowed preparation that focuses only on delivering elections "on a shoestring," often at the expense of institutional capacitybuilding.

At the same time, EMBs face mounting challenges from AI, cybersecurity, and complex information environments - threats that require sustained investment, training, and foresight that cannot be replaced by ad hoc emergency support. Cuts have also

curtailed international election observation. Major institutions and intergovernmental organizations are scaling back missions, leaving domestic observers to shoulder greater responsibility in politically sensitive environments, often with reduced credibility and higher risks. Overall, these trends highlight a deterioration in election quality, weakened reforms and greater vulnerability to violence and authoritarian backsliding in those contexts. (For more information and analysis of the impact on electoral assistance, see Annex 1, by IFES).

Additionally, in July 2025, the State Department issued a directive scaling back its use of public comment on election integrity as a diplomatic tool (Pamuk 2025). Overall, these gaps could lead to a deterioration in election quality, weakened reforms, and greater vulnerability to violence and authoritarian backsliding in those contexts.

Foreign aid cuts have disproportionately affected women and their organizations.

Recent US foreign aid cuts have had disproportionately severe effects on women, particularly by dismantling programming that protect against gender-based violence and provide essential services in humanitarian crises. According to <u>UN Women</u> (2025a), more than 60% of women's organizations in crisisaffected countries have been forced to suspend or reduce services for survivors of gender-based violence as a result of the cuts, leaving many without access to shelters, legal aid, psychosocial support, or safe spaces. It estimates that almost half of women-led or women's rights organizations in 44 countries expect to shut down within six months if current funding levels persist (UN Women 2025a).

¹³ Based on the data sent to Congress in March 2025. Note that these figures may be incomplete or inaccurate due to limited reliable public data.

In Ukraine, over 70% of women-led and women's rights organizations report major disruption, including suspension of shelters and trauma support (Le Poidevin 2025). Meanwhile, US cuts to programmes in Haiti and Venezuela have reduced UN resources for gender-based violence prevention and response (Lombardo 2025). Overall, these cuts weaken both protection and resilience and because women often rely on these targeted programmes more heavily, due to economic, social, and cultural barriers (Women's Refugee Commission 2025).

Foreign aid cuts undermine peacebuilding efforts. The ripple effects of US foreign aid reductions are being felt acutely in the peacebuilding sector, where diminished resources are already constraining conflictprevention and stabilization efforts worldwide. Humanity United's July 2025 survey of peacebuilders show 71% of respondents reported reduced funding since January 2025, and nearly half expect to run out of funds by December 2025, rising to 55% among local peacebuilding organizations (Humanity United 2025). Consequences already include suspended programmes, staff layoffs, eroded community trust, and reports of escalating violence in some contexts. Cuts also undermine multilateral tools such as UN peacekeeping, further weakening crisis management instruments (Markiewicz 2025). Collectively, these trends illustrate how foreign aid cuts contribute to eroding the foundations of peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Impacts on multilateral organizations and the UN system. The US funding cuts have severely weakened multilateral organizations and the UN system, undermining their capacity to manage crises and sustain global peacebuilding. The UN announced a \$500 million cut to its regular budget for 2026 coupled with an anticipated 20% reduction in staffing, following reductions in US contributions (Wintour 2025). The

consequences extend beyond budgets to core multilateral functions. Resource-strapped peacekeeping and stabilization missions are less able to manage armed conflict, contain humanitarian crises, or deter unconstitutional transfers of power in fragile states. Reduced funding for UNDP, UN electoral assistance programmes and regional partnerships also weakens the system's ability to provide technical support for elections. Equally significant is the diplomatic retreat. For decades, the US acted as one of the strongest champions of civil society participation in UN spaces, pushing back against member states that sought to silence non-governmental voices. The loss of this support further weakens the position of CSOs at the UN and emboldens governments that seek to curtail civic participation in multilateral forums. CSOs now face greater marginalization in agendasetting, less protection when raising sensitive and fewer allies in issues, defending democratic space at the international level. This combination of diminished resources, reduced operational reach, and loss of normative backing not only constrains the UN system's ability to respond effectively to crises, protect human rights, defend constitutional order, and provide electoral assistance, but also erodes its legitimacy as a platform for plural voices in global governance (Kenny 2025; ISHR 2025; Romero 2025).

6.2 Indirect Impacts

Reduced support erodes civil society and state capacity, and can endanger fragile political transitions. The withdrawal of US democracy assistance in countries undergoing political transitions risks markedly weakening civil society capacity and electoral preparedness by removing support at a pivotal moment in their transition trajectories. Observers contend that although USAID funding retrenchment does not in itself Bangladesh's account for protracted transition, it has materially weakened civil society precisely when robust capacity is most needed (Davison 2025). In aid-dependent countries such as Bangladesh, drastic aid reductions in sectors such as health, education, and economic development, also risk weakening state capacity to deliver for citizens, fueling frustrations that could jeopardize fragile transition trajectories.

Global ecosystem impacts. The US foreign assistance funding cuts have significantly diminished US influence abroad, particularly in regions where aid historically supported democratic development, political stabilization, and conflict mitigation. These impacts have been exacerbated by other government rollbacks and reduced presence in the same places. The sudden foreign aid cuts not only disrupt ongoing governance and development efforts, but also increase the likelihood of instability in fragile contexts. Beyond the financial impact, another serious consequence is the diplomatic retreat of the US as a defender of democracy and its core values. The withdrawal of the US as a vocal supporter of democracy abroad, through diplomacy, military engagement, and foreign assistance, has generated a vacuum in global governance.

In the absence of alternative leadership, this void risks being filled by actors advancing competing models of political order (<u>Puri 2025</u>). At the same time, however, this moment presents an opportunity for democratic states, including those in the Global South, to assume greater responsibility in sustaining and reshaping the international democratic order and the global democracy agenda.

Autocratic states opportunistically filling the vacuum. The withdrawal of US funding has created a vacuum that authoritarian actors, particularly China and Russia, are rapidly exploiting. Informants reported that Chinese officials have approached civil society and media outlets with offers of grants in countries where US support has declined 2025). Internews (Cicarelli has documented an African media outlet heavily impacted by the US aid cuts that had been approached about Chinese (Internews 2025). Some organizations have also been courted by Chinese private-sector actors, with KII respondents expressing deep skepticism about their motives. In sum, where the US retreats, authoritarian powers are stepping in with economic and soft power resources designed to expand their influence and shape civic space to their advantage.

7. Resilience Strategies Photo Credit: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

In response to funding cuts, organizations have had to adjust their operations to avoid closing their doors. Several prominent adaptation mechanisms include:

Reducing Overhead Costs, including on Staffing and Infrastructure. Many organizations have adapted by reducing staff organizations in the IFES transitioning employees into volunteer roles and using savings to remain operational. Some have opted to cut salaries (47 organizations in the IFES survey) or reduce working hours, while others are continuing their missions without pay, driven by a commitment to their communities. Respondents to the IFES survey noted that these measures come with institutional expertise and quality of work, due to a combination of staff burnout or stress and staff seekina more reliable career opportunities elsewhere. Volunteers or ad hoc personnel might also be less organizationally committed than dedicated professionals. One organization was specific in noting that they are adhering as closely to the letter of the law as possible to avoid any legal impact of the foreign assistance cuts, which could incur Many respondents considered co-working spaces as a cost-saving measure.

Reductions in Programming. Of the 125 IFES survey respondents, 11 have had to completely cease operations. 14 Nine of the IDEA/GDC

respondents reported a risk of closure due to the foreign aid cuts. Despite the financial pressures, many organizations have avoided shutdowns, instead scaling operations to ensure continuity of programming and activities as best they can. In fact, 69% of the respondents to the IFES survey have reduced programmes or services. This has reportedly had a disproportionate effect on certain subsectors of society, notably women, marginalized groups, and persons with disabilities.

Seeking Emergency Funding. Emergency fundingalthough limited - has provided some temporary relief. The IFES survey respondents ranked securing long-term funding and emergency funding operations and programmes as the top two current challenges. One survey respondent noted, "We do not expect to have large and long-term programmes in the coming years. Most likely, our work will depend on scattered small grants, which will force us to focus only on the most critical areas. This significantly limits the possibilities for strategic planning and institutional development."

Exploring Creative Funding Solutions. To build longer-term resilience, several organizations are exploring or initiating social enterprises as alternative revenue streams. For instance, one group (KII interviewee) that runs a child development center is considering launching a bakery to generate income and

¹⁴ It is worth noting that many other organizations that were invited to participate in the IFES survey had unmonitored or closed email accounts, suggesting that this number is probably much higher.

support the center's work. These efforts reflect a broader pivot toward self-sufficiency and innovation. However, securing sustainable funding remains a challenge, as short-term grants are prevalent and the complex application processes for larger opportunities such as EU funding are difficult for smaller, understaffed teams to navigate. Informants also expressed concern that growing competition among organizations could harm collaboration.

Perseverance, Solidarity, and Mutual Aid. the hardship and increased competition for scarce resources, there is a shared ethos of perseverance and mutual support and solidarity within the community. Organizations emphasize the importance of giving grace - to themselves and others - as they navigate an uncertain period. There is a collective understanding that this is part of a larger cycle and a belief that support will eventually return. In the commitment to mission, creativity in resource management, and resilience in the face of adversity are helping many groups weather the storm. Initiatives like the Global Defenders Collective have also emerged that seek to link volunteer individuals and groups willing to give their time, expertise, resources, and connections to protect human defenders and initiatives affected by the aid cuts.

Restructuring and Mergers. An October 2025 survey by Accountability Lab and Humentum found that almost 70% of aid organizations were considering a restructure to avert a risk of closing. 38% reported a risk of closure. Among the DRGP organizations surveyed by International IDEA, 87% were considering restructuring in May 2025. In the spring of 2025, Accountability Lab and Development Gateway launched a new programme, now known as Civic Strength Partners (CSP), to support social impact and CSOs to envisage their future and take action, whether through

restructuring or exploring strategic partnerships, mergers, joint ventures and acquisitions, or ceasing operations (Accountability Lab 2025). As of early September 2025, nearly 200 organizations worldwide had expressed an interest, and many are currently collaborating with the CSP team.



8. Closing Remarks and Recommendations

Photo Credit: International IDEA, Project Conversa Peru, photographer: Alonso López Salaverry

This report has drawn on a wealth of inputs from the impacted global democracy community, collected through surveys, KIIs, and other consultations. While it is possible to draw recommendations for some parts of the international development community. namely the donor and diplomatic communities, we have also chosen to elevate the efforts of civil society, so that others may learn from their resilience. These closing remarks and recommendations synthesize insights from the data shared throughout this report as well as recent reports from other voices in the community suggesting ways forward for the democracy ecosystem (Carothers, Kleinfeld and Youngs 2025; Internews 2025; EUSEE 2025).

Recommendations for Civil Society

Civil society has proven remarkably resilient in the face of unprecedented change. Those organizations and networks that have weathered the storm have adopted innovative strategies or institutional pivots, to continue their work, including:

- **Social enterprise:** Exploring social enterprise models, monetizing research, and implementing fee-for-service models.
- Creative collaboration: Co-locating offices, holding joint training events, soliciting private-sector sponsorships, and building volunteer networks.
- Microlending: Exploring small-scale loans via Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), revolving funds, and peer-to-peer lending models.

 Community foundations: Pooling local philanthropic resources to support grassroots groups.

We have also observed efforts by civil society organizations to:

- Diversify Funding Sources: Investing in improving grant-writing skills; seeking new donors (private sector, diaspora, embassies, regional/non-traditional donors); exploring non-traditional membership models, social enterprise, crowdfunding, and small-donor campaigns.
- Focus on Core Impact Areas: Prioritizing mission-aligned, high-impact programmes; reducing or pausing lowerpriority activities.
- Enhance Organizational Resilience: Cutting operational costs; building funding reserves; maximizing the value of volunteers; and investing in staff wellbeing.
- Leverage Digital Tools: Using online platforms for data-driven advocacy, citizen engagement, and cost-effective outreach.
- **Document and Communicate Impact**: Demonstrating clear results and outcomes transparently for multiple audiences, by leveraging data.
- Practice Mutual Support: Building solidarity and mutual aid efforts to strengthen community/sector ties; and supporting peer-to-peer learning.

- Foster Collaboration and Solidarity
 Networks: Strengthening cooperation
 between national and international CSOs
 to amplify advocacy and coordinate
 fundraising; facilitating cooperation and
 resource sharing between larger local
 organizations and grassroots groups (EU
 SEE 2025).
- Build cross-sector partnerships: Engage academia, media, and the private sector to expand funding opportunities and influence decision makers (EU SEE 2025).
- Increase local partnerships: Large NGOs should partner more with local organizations and grassroots groups, share resources and support direct donor access.
- Develop counter-narrative and awareness campaigns: Advance more positive democracy narratives, demonstrating the value and benefits of democracy (<u>Eisen, Rippberger, and Katz</u> 2025); launch global initiatives to combat misinformation and stigmatization of CSOs (EU SEE 2025).

Recommendations to the International Democracy Support Community

The entire international democracy support community must come together to reimagine how to continue this work considering new geopolitical and funding realities. The remaining actors should seek to better coordinate their efforts, avoiding duplication and fragmentation in favor of sharing information and coordinating both funding efforts and programming. This report is an example of such efforts. The spirit of collaboration must outpace the tendency to compete.

The community itself may also necessarily change in its composition. In this new era of democracy support, the community must embrace active Global South participation and leadership - by both governments and civil

society - in shaping the international democracy agenda. Such an effort can build upon existing platforms such as the GDC to elevate Global South voices, foster horizontal exchange, and ensure that strategies reflect diverse regional experiences and priorities. It must also think beyond typical interlocutors and instead seek to broaden the prodemocracy coalition. To do so, the community should find creative ways to bring in nontraditional allies such as the private sector. and universities into democracy coalitions (Eisen, Rippberger, and Katz 2025).

Altogether, this community should seek to redefine the global democracy agenda through stronger narratives that connect democracy to ordinary citizens' lives. This community knows too well the inherent value of democracy, but must invest the time and resources into honing that narrative for the public through storytelling and communications that resonate with citizens. Beyond the narratives, democracies must be supported to deliver shared prosperity for The concluding people. recommendations to donors and international diplomatic communities are in pursuit of these common objectives.

Recommendations to Donors/Funders (bilateral, multilateral, and philanthropic)

- Provide flexible core support: Providing funding for administrative and operational costs allows organizations to respond flexibly to evolving local needs without reshaping missions to fit donor priorities, as highlighted in (EU SEE 2025).
- Support to independent media: Provide flexible, rapidly deployable funding to assist media outlets to gradually transition to new models while maintaining operational continuity and preserving assets and networks (Internews 2025).

- Allow for greater flexibility in the use of already allocated funds: Permitting funding designated for new programming or capacity building to be redirected to core costs or towards adaptation and efficiency (Internews 2025). 80% of respondents to IFES' survey ranked this as an essential need.
- **Simplify bureaucracy**: Reduce heavy reporting and accounting burdens, lengthen timelines for demonstrating impact and offer clearer feedback on proposals, as highlighted in <u>Internews</u> (2025).
- Expand direct support: Increase direct grants to local organizations, grassroots and subnational groups; reconsider subgranting practices that currently sideline smaller organizations.
- Offer diverse funding mechanisms: Use small, non-competitive grants, pilot projects and revised consortium criteria to include local actors more equitably. Non-competitive small grants were the second highest ranked means of financial assistance requested by IFES survey respondents (59%).
- Strengthen dialogue with grantees: Build transparent partnerships that reflect local priorities, not just donor agendas.
- democracy Develop context-specific support strategies: (For authoritarian, hybrid, backsliding, recovery, and conflictaffected states) instead of one-size-fits-all including approaches, developing strategies to counter democratic backsliding and support recovery during new democratic openings (Carothers, Kleinfeld and Youngs 2025). See also the IFES Democratic Resilience Lab framework.
- Develop clear anti-backsliding strategies: (Carothers, Kleinfeld, and Youngs 2025): Develop strategies to counter democratic backsliding and support recovery during new democratic openings.

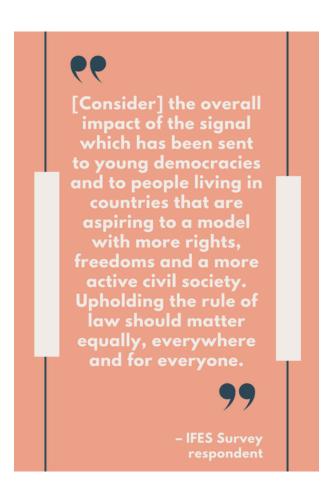
- Bridge the North-South divide: Pilot and support innovative democracy support approaches, including more horizontal models, based on mutual learning and peer exchange between organizations and countries (see for example International IDEA's member states exchanges and a number of other emerging examples in the field).
- Enhance coordination: For example, by establishing an inclusive coordination forum (Carothers, Kleinfeld, and Youngs 2025) for international democracy support to ensure funding reaches priority needs and is used efficiently, with donors leading but in partnership with media and civil society actors (Internews 2025).
- Exercise greater selectivity and prioritization: Focus on fewer countries or typologies more effectively or identify strategic partners (Internews 2025).
- Strengthen informal movements in addition to formal NGOs (Carothers, Kleinfeld, and Youngs 2025).
- Consider non-financial support: Support civic groups through knowledge-building, coalitions, capacity growth, and local resourcing, with flexible aid for emerging movements seeking tactical rather than traditional support (Carothers, Kleinfeld and Youngs 2025).
- Support grassroots partnerships: Maintain strong ties with local partners through joint advocacy, shared resources, and regular dialogue.
- Mainstream democracy alongside support for socio-economic development: Integrate democracy across sectors while still supporting core democratic institutions - both reinforce each other in advancing democratic societies.
- Legal support and risk mitigation:
 Establish regional legal assistance networks to support CSOs facing political pressure, legal restrictions, or financial scrutiny (EU SEE 2025).

• Ensuring transparency in donor aid budgets: This study was constrained by the lack of transparent, publicly available data on the aid cuts and programme allocations. As donors reduce budgets, we urge full transparency in aid spending clearly reporting where cuts and preservations occur to enable effective evaluation and monitoring.

Recommendations to the International Community

- Fill the leadership gap: Welcoming more countries, including from the Global South to advocate for democracy in multilateral spaces and advance a more inclusive global and regional democracy agenda. Broaden the pro-democracy alliance, using a big tent approach that crosses the ideological spectrum, building bridges across countries and sectors, and inviting in non-traditional actors such as the private sector (Eisen, Rappberger, and Katz 2025). Using platforms such as those provided by International IDEA, which has a diverse membership of both North and Global South democracies, and the Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity (GNSEI).
- Advocate in international forums:
 Leverage global and multilateral platforms
 to showcase pro-democracy efforts and
 advocate sustained support, underscoring
 democracy's enabling role in achieving
 multilateral goals.
- Connect local, regional, and global conversations on democracy: Support initiatives such as the GDC, which seeks to bridge local, regional, and global conversations on democracy, facilitating networks where local organizations can pool resources and amplify voices against shrinking civic space.

- Apply international pressure: Hold governments accountable for democratic values and the protection of minority rights, including climate justice and other underfunded sectors. Provide diplomatic support to defend civic space under pressure and denounce breaches of democratic norms.
- Defend civic space: Urge multilateral organizations and donor countries to integrate civil society protection measures into donor policies and funding frameworks (EU SEE 2025).





Annex 1: Impact of Foreign Aid Cuts on the Elections Sector

Cassandra Emmons, IFES

Historically, many election management bodies (EMBs) around the world have received direct technical assistance for all stages of the election cycle from INGOs funded by the US government, as well as other bilateral and multilateral donors. Following the 2024 mega-year of elections, fewer and smaller countries were going to the polls in much of 2025. Nonetheless, more than 60 countries have held or will hold national elections in 2025 and potentially as many in 2026. Some, although importantly not all, of the countries that held elections in 2025 lost their technical assistance abruptly weeks or months before election day. Others lost the long-term strategic support often needed for fundamental reform efforts, the impact of which will become more apparent as their next election nears. There is a seasonality to electionsand thus to these international actors' roles-that means we have yet to fully appreciate all the ways in which this reduction in funding and capacity will affect the election sector. Some early signs are becoming clear, however, and others will logically follow.

New Reality: Absence of International Technical Support

Most permanent EMBs are institutionally funded through their own national budgets and therefore were not directly impacted by reductions in foreign aid. However, in many countries, this work has been supplemented by critical technical support from a few large INGOs. This support typically accounts for only a small proportion of the overall costs of conducting an election and is focused on helping the EMB to identify efficiencies in their work. Those INGOs are among the organizations whose funding has been greatly reduced, as outlined in the report, and thus they will be less able to support elections globally or comprehensively advise the remaining donors on which there is now outsized pressure to prioritize among the many consequential elections, and determine which ones to support, and to what degree.

For many years, these INGOs brought deep technical expertise to election preparation in various countries. They provided comparative experience on issues that EMBs might not have dealt with before, such as addressing misinformation and disinformation, and cybersecurity threats. They offered additional considerations around routine procedures, such as modernizing election results processes and expanding out-of-country voting to previously disenfranchised segments of society. For example, an EMB seeking to be more inclusive of voters and candidates with disabilities, but without experience in this area, might consult with a partner INGO on the concrete steps they could take. Strategic communication strategies, strategic planning, and other long-term planning and reforms were also supported by these actors outside the immediate pre-election period. International election experts brought

¹⁵ ElectionGuide.org

nuance and evidence-based practice to the table for EMBs to consider; now, EMBs are being left to "sort it out for themselves."

By design, the most successful technical support or knowledge transfer is undocumented outside of quarterly and annual reports to donors. A core principle of foreign assistance around elections - for implementers, USAID, and most other donors - has always been for the institutions to maintain ownership of their own elections. International technical experts offer suggestions and tools, but it is up to the local administrators and actors to decide what to implement. Many of the former programmes were focused on providing EMB officials with the tools to advocate for their independence or autonomy, and enhance the resilience of their institutions. Because of the nature of this support, **we cannot fully know the counterfactuals** of INGO support to election officials, but we are about to feel the impact of its absence. As former Sierra Leone EMB Chairperson, Dr Christiana Thorpe, once noted poignantly about peace in her country, "[it]... is like a shady tree, you do not know the value until the tree is cut." ¹⁶

<u>Impact on Election Planning and Operations</u>

Under the best of circumstances, democratic electoral processes are constantly evolving, responding to new needs, new challenges, and changing socio-political environments. Long-term election reform efforts require foresight and dedicated planning, usually over a period of three to four years to effectively test, pilot, launch, and socialize changes.¹⁷ Now, the incentive structure for these reforms has gone in some of the countries where the "stick" of US diplomatic pressure and the "carrot" of foreign aid have disappeared. In other environments, where there is political will to pursue such reforms, there is simply not enough funding to obtain the technical assistance required.

Over time, EMBs have been asked to do more with less. Many EMBs may only have, at most, three to five months to prepare for an election. This timeframe rules out effective long-term reforms, especially in the absence of readily available international experts. Even within that short-term outlook, many EMBs are now being forced to further narrow their focus and efforts. For instance, capacity building among permanent staff or regional offices is no longer possible in many places, as EMBs are necessarily focused on delivering elections on a shoestring budget. In some countries, the emphasis has moved nearly entirely to poll worker readiness, forgoing important investments in election infrastructure. These short-term changes have long-term implications, as seasoned election officials retire or otherwise move on with their careers, leaving knowledge and functional gaps and forfeiting institutional memory. In prioritizing the public-facing aspects of their preparation, EMBs are forgoing long-term investments that guarantee stable elections in years to come.

The new operating environment for elections has also put EMBs at a disadvantage in meeting emerging threats and preparing for the "known unknowns"-particularly in the realm of Al, cybersecurity, and the complex information environment.¹⁸ Preparation for potential crises

¹⁶ 5th Global Electoral Organization Conference: Credible Elections for Democracy, March 2011, Gaborone, Botswana.

¹⁷ See Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity's Principles for Democratic Electoral Reform Processes (October 2024).

https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2024=11/GNSEI%20 Principles%20 for%20 Democratic%20 Election%20 Reform%20 Processes.pdf

¹⁸ See both https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Understanding-Cybersecurity-Throughout-the-Electoral-Process_l.pdf and https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Cybersecurity-programmesmesming-Guide-USAID.pdf

requires resilience against emerging threats requires training, technical know-how, and expertise in recognizing threats.¹⁹ These investments cannot be made overnight; they require foresight and time between when the technology is selected and procured and election day for the officials to learn and communicate its utility to poll workers, voters, and candidates. Emergency support is insufficient to prepare EMBs to meet these challenges.

These changes do not just affect the EMB and individual election officials; the broader election community - the candidates, the parties, and the voters - also suffer as the quality of existing election processes declines. For example, less investment in strategic communications by election officials can lead to mistrust of the elections downstream. As is always the case, when corners are cut due to external constraints, the stakeholders on the margins suffer the most. In countries where new technologies are being prioritized, the conversation has narrowed from using these to enable more participation by groups that may be marginalized from the electoral process to simply doing the bare minimum for the "average" person. In other countries, initiatives to increase access by or the involvement of women in elections have entirely ceased. As this report has noted, civil society is reporting a high risk that programmes that focus on gender and persons with disabilities might disappear completely.²⁰

The quality and promise of elections are likely to deteriorate without international support and early warning infrastructure in place. At a moment when the quality of free and fair elections is in decline globally,²¹ election officials and governments are already fighting an uphill battle to secure the buy-in of their citizens to the democratic process. These shifting sands could also make elections more prone to violence.²²

Impact on Election Observation

Election observation has been a central tenet of democracy promotion for the better part of the past three decades.²³ However, domestic and international election observers have become targets of rising authoritarianism in this era of democratic backsliding.²⁴ Combined with funding reductions for these actors, both international and domestic election observers will struggle to uphold this critical pillar of democracy support in the years to come.

Some experienced and well-regarded institutions that conduct international election observation have been forced to cease observations by the funding cuts. For others, such as IGOs, the pool of funds traditionally available for observation missions is dwindling as member

²² In the past, electoral support has sometimes included security commitments, especially in countries recently transitioning to democracy. See Inken von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence (Cornell University Press, 2019).*

¹⁹ Shein, E. et al., Paths to Democratic Resilience in an Era of Backsliding: A Roadmap for the Democracy Support Community (IFES, 2023), https://www.ifes.org/publications/paths-democratic-resilience-era-backsliding

²⁰ See also IFES survey data synopsis at: https://www.ifes.org/publications/assessing-impact-foreign-aid-rollbacks-civil-society

²¹ V-Dem Annual Report 2025.

²³ Learn more at the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (https://www.gndem.org/about/). On the professionalization of international observers, see the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and the Code of Conduct for International Election Observers (https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/declaration-principles-international-election-observation-and-code-conduct).

²⁴ Gerardo de Icaza, 'Why Election Observers Are Human-Rights Defenders' Journal of Democracy Online April 2025.

states reconsider their foreign aid budgets and IGOs realign their budgets with a changed security environment. Several large IGOs that have conducted extensive observation missions, including the Organizations of American States and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, receive resources from pooled funds that, until recently, included the United States. This has led and will continue to lead to a reduction in the number of international observation missions. These new realities might mean a reduction in scale (sending smaller missions), restricting the focus of the observation and reports *ex ante* or reducing the number of missions overall. The approach international missions were taking was already shifting prior to the changes in the funding environment.²⁵ For instance, EU missions had begun to incorporate social media monitoring in their reports. Overall, the impetus behind these changes was to make observer missions more effective; these changes have now been fast tracked due to the decline in resources.

The withdrawal of IGOs and other international election observation groups is likely to push more responsibility on to domestic observers. Domestic observers have always faced a different set of challenges. In some contexts, they take greater risks when being critical of election processes. In other cases, their neutrality is called into question more often than international observers. Generally, triangulating findings from the international observer mission reports bolstered these groups' reputations. As the international actors are forced to retreat from the observation space, domestic observers could see more accusations arise, potentially even leading to a credibility crisis. This might have downstream effects on the possibility of domestic observation, as donors might become more selective about who they support financially to conduct such observation.

⁻

²⁵ Discussion at Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation November 2024, Gdansk, Poland.

Annex 2: Selected Testimonials of Organizations Impacted by the Cuts

Below are several testimonials submitted to further illustrate the breadth and depth of the impact of the foreign aid cuts.

Local NGO, El Salvador:

USAID funds accounted for 70% of our revenues. After the suspension, we had to reduce operations to a minimum and lay off half of the team. Those of us who remain are on 50% of salary. Due to the cuts, we suspended several planned investigations for 2025–2026 on democracy, corruption, and human rights, as well as a fact-checking unit aimed at countering disinformation. This pause has hindered our efforts to improve information quality and mitigate the harmful impact of fake news on democracy.

NGO, Kenya:

The US foreign aid freeze has placed our programmes on democratic governance and reproductive health in serious jeopardy, along with other essential services for vulnerable communities. HIV and health interventions - including ART treatment, reproductive health education, and youth mental health counseling - are all threatened. LGBTQ+ protection programmes providing shelter, relocation, legal aid, and crisis support are also at risk. The funding gap undermines democratic engagement, health equity, and long-term community resilience.

NGO, Uganda:

The US funding pause has had severe impacts, threatening our survival and ability to serve. Programmes supporting frontline and at-risk young human rights defenders, as well as civic and voter education for marginalized youth ahead of the 2026 elections, are now in jeopardy. Our work in governance, human rights, and accountability has long depended on US support; without it, reaching underserved communities will be severely hindered. Thousands of young people have already benefited from these initiatives - losing them now risks silencing their voices. Critical activities in security training, legal support, and monitoring electoral violence in high-risk districts are at stake. Urgent action is needed.

NGO, Ukraine:

Our organization was created after Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity and exists to safeguard democratic institutions and drive reforms essential to Ukraine's European integration. With a mission rooted in strengthening governance, advancing reforms, and mobilizing civil society, the organization has delivered proven technical expertise and policy development across the social, economic, and political spheres. However, recent US foreign aid cuts have reduced our funding by 50%, stalling three core initiatives critical to Ukraine's alignment with European democratic standards. These include decentralization reform, judicial reform, and legal frameworks for local governance. Suspending these projects risks undermining Ukraine's institutional resilience, slowing EU integration, and weakening its ability to fulfil international commitments at a decisive moment.

Association of journalists, El Salvador:

The US foreign aid cuts, particularly the withdrawal of USAID funding, have had a severe impact on our organization. Two of our largest projects, which accounted for 84% of our payroll funding, were cancelled as a direct result. These funding cuts impact not only our organization, but also the independent press in the country as a whole. The reduction in resources directly undermines efforts to counter corruption, human rights violations, and restrictions on freedom of expression. Without urgent alternative funding solutions, the sustainability of our work and the protection of journalistic freedoms are in jeopardy.

Media outlet, El Salvador:

As a result of the suspensions of projects in execution, at the end of January 2025, activities were terminated and the contracts of a dozen collaborators were cut. Now we operate with a team of only two people, which affects our capacity to train new generations of journalists to provide in-depth coverage of authoritarianism, corruption, and human rights violations in El Salvador. The cut in funds has also left us in a vulnerable position, with our website attacked and the security mechanisms for our team suspended; we were also left without support to achieve safeguards in safe houses, digital communications, or even exit the country in case of emergency. The picture is complicated, given the threat to investigate organizations, journalists and independent media that received support from the international community, under false accusations by the government of "money laundering".

NGO, Cambodia:

We empower vulnerable communities - especially indigenous women and youth - through media and advocacy on natural resources, environmental, governance, and social rights. With support from USAID, we trained young media practitioners, providing biannual Advanced News Writing and Mobile Journalism training in 15 communities. These practitioners produced video stories and contributed to weekly radio/online talk shows covering community concerns. However, with US funding halted, we have been forced to stop radio broadcasts and suspend citizen journalist activities, silencing indigenous and marginalized voices. This setback jeopardizes hard-won progress in amplifying grassroots perspectives, building local media capacity and ensuring accountability on critical environmental and social issues in our province.

Afghan independent media outlet:

We are an Afghan independent newspaper that has continued operating from exile in Canada since the Taliban's return in 2021. However, recent US aid cuts have severely strained our operations. Funding once critical for staffing, investigative journalism, and press freedom infrastructure has dwindled, forcing downsizing and weakening coverage of remote regions. Investigative reporting has suffered, while training, safety, and digital security support have diminished, leaving journalists more vulnerable to Taliban repression. We now rely heavily on alternative donors and diaspora contributions, but future sustainability remains uncertain. Beyond the financial strain, the aid cut represents a symbolic setback, undermining the broader fight for free expression in Afghanistan and risking the silencing of critical independent voices.

Independent news agency, Myanmar:

As a small independent news agency, we have long relied on project-based support to sustain our operations. Partnering with Internews under USAID, we produced vital news video stories amplifying community voices. USAID's recent funding cuts have forced us to halt ongoing work, leaving us without income. Despite this, our journalists continue reporting to keep ourr organization alive. The cuts have compounded earlier hardships - since 2022, several of our reporters have been arrested by the military, nearly shutting us down. Now, with no funds to pay salaries, we risk losing our dedicated citizen journalists and reporters. This threatens not only our survival, but also independent journalism itself, at a time when free, truthful reporting is more critical than ever.

Annex 3: DRGP Programmes: Definitions and Categories

The Democracy, Rights, Governance and Peacebuilding definition in this include projects covering five main thematic categories: 1) democratic processes and institutions; 2) civil society; 3) good governance and rule of law; 4) technology and independent media; 5) human rights; and 6) peacebuilding, with the following sub-categories under each bucket.

List of DRGP Sector Categories used in report:

1. DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES and INSTITUTIONS

- a. Support to electoral processes (ELECTIONS)
- b. Support to democratic political parties (POLITICAL PARTIES)
- c. Support to democratic parliaments (PARLIAMENTS)
- d. Democracy data and analysis
- e. Democracy

2. CIVIL SOCIETY

a. Support to independent civil society (CIVIL SOCIETY)

3. GOOD GOVERNANCE and RULE OF LAW

- a.Anti-corruption (ANTI-CORRUPTION)
- b. Local governance and decentralization (LOCAL GOVERNANCE)
- c.Governance
- d. Social accountability
- e. Access to justice
- f.Institutional development

4. TECHNOLOGY and INDEPENDENT MEDIA

- a. Support to free and independent media (INDEPENDENT MEDIA)
- b. Technology and democracy
- c. Combating disinformation/information integrity

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

- a. Advancing gender equality and reducing gender-based violence (GENDER EQUALITY)
- b. Human rights protection
- c.LGBTQI+
- d. Indigenous People's rights
- e. Youth participation
- f. Refugees and internally displaced persons
- g.Labor rights
- h.Countertrafficking
- i. Religious freedom

6. PEACEBUILDING

- a. Peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution (PEACEBUILDING)
- b.Citizen security (CITIZEN SECURITY)

Annex 4: List of Countries with DRGP-Related US Cuts

Country	USAID	State Department
Afghanistan		Χ
Albania	Х	Χ
Algeria		Х
Angola		Х
Armenia	Х	Χ
Austria		Х
Azerbaijan		Χ
Bahrain		X
Bangladesh	Х	Χ
Barbados		Χ
Belarus	Х	Χ
Belgium		Χ
Belize		Χ
Benin	Х	X
Bolivia		Χ
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Х	X
Botswana		X
Brazil		X
Bulgaria		X
Burkina Faso	Χ	X
Cambodia	Χ	Χ
Cameroon	Χ	X
Cape Verde		X
Central African Republic	Χ	X
Chad		Χ
China		Χ
Colombia	Χ	Χ
Democratic Republic of Congo	X	X
Costa Rica		X
Cote d'Ivoire		Χ
Croatia		Х
Cuba	Χ	Χ
Cyprus		X
Czechia		Χ
Dem. People's Republic of Korea		Χ
Dominican Republic	Χ	Χ
Ecuador	Χ	Χ
Egypt	Χ	Χ
El Salvador	Χ	Χ
Equatorial Guinea		Χ
Estonia		Χ
Ethiopia	Χ	Χ

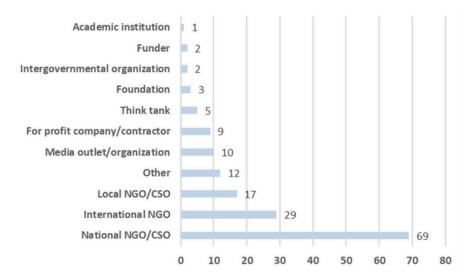
Country	USAID	State Department
France		 X
Gabon	X	X
Georgia	X	X
Ghana	X	X
Greece		X
Guatemala	X	X
Guinea	X	X
Guyana		X
Haiti	X	
Honduras	X	X
Hungary		X
India		X
Indonesia	X	X
Iran		X
Iraq	X	X
Israel		X
Jamaica	Χ	
Jordan	Χ	X
Kazakhstan	Χ	X
Kenya	X	X
Kosovo	Χ	X
Kuwait		X
Kyrgyzstan	Χ	X
Laos	Χ	X
Latvia		X
Lebanon	Χ	Χ
Liberia	X	X
Libya		X
Lithuania		X
Madagascar	X	
Malawi		X
Malaysia		X
Maldives		X
Mali	Х	X
Mauritania		
Mexico	Χ	Χ
Moldova	X	Χ
Mongolia		
Montenegro		Χ
Morocco	Χ	Х
Mozambique	X	X
Myanmar	X	X
Namibia		Х
Nepal	X	X

Country	USAID	State Department
Nicaragua	Х	Χ
Niger		X
Nigeria	Х	X
North Macedonia	Х	Χ
Pakistan	Х	X
Panama		Χ
Papua New Guinea		Χ
Paraguay	Х	Χ
Peru	Х	Χ
Philippines	Х	Χ
Poland		Χ
Romania		Χ
Rwanda	Х	
Senegal	Х	X
Serbia	Х	Χ
Sierra Leone	Х	Χ
Slovakia		X
Solomon Islands		X
Somalia		X
South Africa	Х	X
South Sudan		Χ
Sri Lanka	Х	Χ
Sudan	Х	X
Suriname	Х	
Syria	Х	X
Tajikistan	Х	Χ
Tanzania	Х	Χ
Thailand	Х	X
The Gambia		Χ
Timor Leste	Х	Χ
Togo		Χ
Tunisia	Х	Χ
Turkey		Χ
Turkmenistan		Χ
Uganda	Х	Χ
Ukraine	Х	X
Uzbekistan		Х
Venezuela	Х	Χ
Vietnam	Х	Х
West Bank/Gaza	Х	Χ
Yemen		Χ
Zambia		
Zimbabwe	Х	X
Total	Х	121

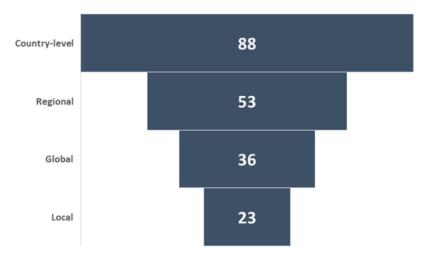
Annex 5: Description of Survey Respondents

International IDEA/Global Democracy Coalition Survey:

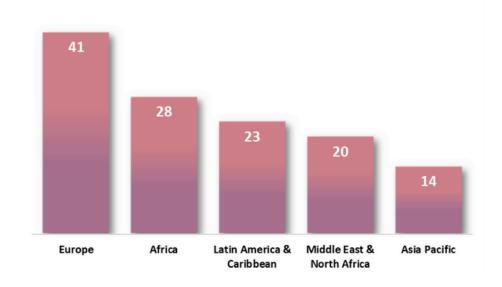
The International IDEA/GDC survey covered 151 organizations headquartered in or operating in at least 54 countries. The international organizations included in the survey did not list all the countries in which they operate, so 54 is probably an underestimate. The respondents included 10 types of organization: the largest share were national NGO/CSOs, followed by international NGOs, local NGO/CSOs, media outlets/organizations, for-profit company/contractors, think tanks, foundations, intergovernmental organizations, funders and an academic institution.



The largest number of respondents reported operating at the country level (88), then regionally (52), globally (36), and locally (23).



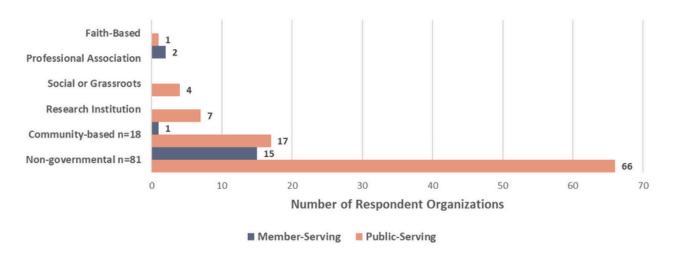
For those that reported working in a specific region, the largest share covered Europe, followed by Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia Pacific.



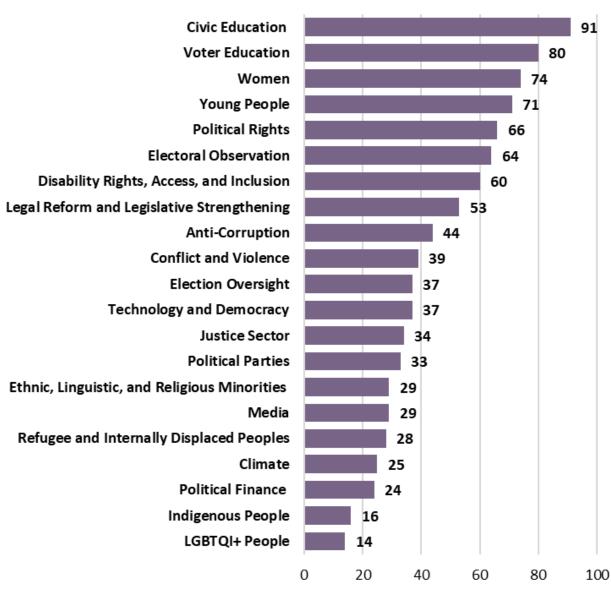
International Foundation for Electoral Systems Survey:

In total, 125 organizations headquartered in 42 countries responded to the IFES survey. These organizations reported to have worked in 62 countries. Geographically, they represent all regions of the world.

The IFES asked the respondents to describe themselves based on the definition of a CSO found in the <u>Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index</u> (USAID et al. 2020). Most organizations (58) identified as national organizations with subnational networks or chapters; second most common were individual organizations with no higher or lower hierarchy (42 organizations). Most organizations were also self-described as public-serving, while some NGOs and both professional associations that responded were primarily member-serving.



The organizations in the survey work(ed) on issues across the democracy, human rights, and governance space. On average, respondents identified seven substantive areas from a list of 21. The median respondent identified two types of activity (average=2.5), from advocacy, policy research and implementation, group empowerment, education, monitoring and evaluation activities, technical support, investigative journalism, academic research, and strategic litigation (listed in reverse order of most frequently identified).



Number of Respondent Organizations

Annex 6: Additional Information on Methodology and Data Sources

Data limitations:

There are several inconsistencies across the quantitative data files tabulating the dollar amount of terminated US government awards and contracts, which limit some of the analysis. The limiting factors include:

- The inability to see whether all the data sets originated from the same data sources. Online data sources, particularly the USAspending.gov website, would often crash making it difficult to dig down into the data to try to compare across data sets.
- In those sheets, it was not always clear whether the dollar amounts listed referred to the contracted amount, the obligated amount or the to-date-disbursed amount. Without knowing this information, it is difficult to triangulate the total amount of funding that was cut from each award.
- While awards can span multiple fiscal years and can undergo a series of funding top-ups and modifications, it was unclear whether the amounts in each list are inclusive of this potential award value or contract changes or only include the initially contracted award amount.
- None of the datasets include outstanding invoice data to better understand how much of the obligated funds spent by contractors or grantees was not subsequently reimbursed after January 20.
- Many contracts and awards could impact multiple sectors and therefore include DRGrelated components. Using just the title of a programme, which is not always indicative of the type of work being carried out or the breadth of work that may be included in the award, makes it difficult to capture details with complete confidence.

Despite these inconsistencies, we can still make confident conjectures about the overall amounts *impacted*.

The surveys and KIIs also have their own potential limitations. These include sampling bias as both surveys and the KIIS were limited to a convenience sample, or those who were willing to participate. The data is also limited by respondent bias, as individual accounts could not be verified by the researchers. However, the complementary findings from two separate surveys reinforce our confidence in the trends, and thus the analysis and recommendations.

Triangulating additional research. In addition to the CGD and New York Times studies mentioned, the study authors consulted other contemporaneous studies, such as those conducted by Accountability Lab, Code for Africa, and the Tech Global Institute. While useful in their own right, these studies examine at the DRG sector as a whole, focusing either on global impacts or impacts specific to sub-sectors of the DRG space.

Annex 7: References

Accountability Lab, "Launching a partnership matching service for nonprofits," March 27, 2025, https://accountabilitylab.org/launching-a-partnership-matching-service-for-nonprofits/, accessed September 23, 2025.

American Bar Association, Declaration of Scott Carlson in support of Plaintiffs' application for a temporary restraining order, February 10, 2025, https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336.7.9. https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336.7.9. <a href="https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336.7.9. <a href="https://storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336/gov.uscourts.dcd.277336.7.9.

Avelar, B., "Bukele blames NGOs for protest outside his residence and promotes 'foreign agents law' to suffocate them," El País, May 15, 2025, https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-05-15/bukele-blames-ngos-for-protest-outside-his-residence-and-promotes-foreign-agents-law-to-suffocate-them.html, accessed September 28, 2025.

Carothers, T., Kleinfeld, R. and Youngs, R., What Future for International Democracy Support? (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025), https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/07/what-future-for-international-democracy-support.

Carter Center, "In Bangladesh, USAID cuts force women's program to "reimagine what's possible", 2 July 2025, https://www.cartercenter.org/news/features/p/bangladesh-usaid-force-program-to-reimagine-what-is-possible.html, accessed September 28, 2025.

Cicarelli, S., "China seizes an opportunity from the United States in humanitarian aid and disaster response," Council on Strategic Risks, April 11, 2025, https://councilonstrategicrisks.org/2025/04/11/china-seizes-an-opportunity-from-the-united-states-in-humanitarian-aid-and-disaster-response/, accessed September 23, 2025.

Chatham House (2025) "Can the US retreat from global governance be exploited by other powers?," June. 18 Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/06/can-us-retreat-global-governance-be-exploited-other-powers, accessed October 25, 2025.

Davison, C., "Why a repressive regime's fall hasn't helped NGOs in Bangladesh," Devex, August 12, 2025, https://www.devex.com/news/why-a-repressive-regime-s-fall-hasn-t-helped-ngos-in-bangladesh-110638, accessed October 8, 2025.

Department of government efficiency, DOGE, [n. d.], <<u>https://www.doge.gov/</u>>, accessed September 28, 2025.

Donor Tracker, :United States donor profile," < https://donortracker.org/donor_profiles/united-states>, accessed September 21, 2025.

Doroftei, A. (2025) Lessons in Resilience: Moldova's Response to Russia's Hybrid Interference. Policy Brief, German Marshall Fund of the United States, October 2025. Available at: https://www.gmfus.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Doroftei%20Lessons%20in%20Resilience.pdf, accessed: October 24, 2025).

Duchiade, A., "Peru tightens grip on foreign-funded NGOs and media under new law." LatAm Journalism Review, April 30, 2025, https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/peruvian-law-demands-official-clearance-for-foreign-funded-ngos-and-news-outlets/, accessed September 28, 2025.

Edmondson. C., "Congress agrees to claw back foreign aid and public broadcast funds," New York Times, July 17, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/17/us/politics/senate-vote-trump-bill-pbs-npr-foreign-aid.html, accessed September 21, 2025.

Eisen, Norm; Rippberger, Renée & Katz, Jonathan. (2025) 'Global democracy is more resilient than you may think', Brookings Institution. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/articles/global-democracy-is-more-resilient-than-you-may-think/, accessed: October 27, 2025.

European Endowment for Democracy, "Moldova: A shifting landscape in pre-election times'," July 29, 2025, https://democracyendowment.eu/country-updates/moldova-a-shifting-landscape-in-pre-election-times-and-nbsp, accessed September 28, 2025.

European Parliament (2025) EPRS ATA (2025) 769540 EN [PDF], https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2025/769540/EPRS_ATA(2025)769540 _EN.pdf>, accessed September 21, 2025.

EU SEE Initiative. "The impact of the US funding freeze on civil society," March 17, 2025, https://eusee.hivos.org/document/the-impact-of-the-us-funding-freeze-on-civil-society/, accessed September 21, 2025.

Financial Times, "US to axe grants to 10,000 aid organizations," February 27, 2025, https://www.ft.com/content/f005e9cc-2364-4127-94c5-5155899cae6e, accessed September 21, 2025

Ferragamo, M. and Roy, D., "How much does the US fund the United Nations?," Council on Foreign Relations, January 21, 2025, https://www.cfr.org/article/funding-united-nations-what-impact-do-us-contributions-have-un-agencies-and-programmesmess, accessed September 23, 2025.

ForeignAssistance.gov, "United States foreign assistance data," Updated September 29, 2025, https://foreignassistance.gov/, accessed October 3, 2025.

Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 2025: The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2025) https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/FITW_World_2025_Feb.2025.pdf

Global Aid Freeze Tracker, [n.d.], < https://www.globalaidfreeze.com/>, accessed September 23, 2025.

Global Network Initiative (GNI), "GNI Statement on Zambia's new Cyber Laws: A blow to freedom of expression and privacy," July 2, 2025, https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/gni-statement-on-zambias-new-cyber-laws-a-blow-to-freedom-of-expression-and-privacy, accessed September 28, 2025.

GovWayback, USAID via GovWayback, [n. d.], < https://usaid.govwayback.com/>, accessed September 28, 2025.

Green, A., "Devex CheckUp: The Trump administration puts Gavi support on the chopping block," Devex, March 27, 2025, https://www.devex.com/news/devex-checkup-the-trump-administration-puts-gavi-support-on-the-chopping-block-109712, accessed September 28, 2025.

Higgins, A., "Former charity worker and activist faces an unlikely accusation: Coup plotter," New York Times, February 16, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/16/world/europe/slovakia-activist-fico.html, accessed September 28, 2025.

Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART), Women's Empowerment in Myanmar: Building a Brighter Future in War-torn Shan State, Visit Report (Bristol, UK: HART, August 2025), https://www.hart-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/HART_UK-Myanmar_Report-Aug2025-v05-Digital.pdf, accessed September 28, 2025.

Humanity United, "Survey Brief: Global perspectives on US funding cuts'," September 2025, https://humanityunited.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Survey-Brief-Global-Perspectives-on-US-Funding-Cuts.pdf, accessed September 23, 2025.

Human Rights Watch, "El Salvador: Foreign Agents Law targets civil society, media," Press release, May 23, 2025a, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/23/el-salvador-foreign-agents-law-targets-civil-society-media, accessed September 28, 2025.

Human Rights Watch, "US: Rights report mixes facts, deception, political spin," Press release, August 12, 2025b, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/08/12/us-rights-report-mixes-facts-deception-political-spin, accessed September 23, 2025.

Human Rights Watch, "Ethiopia: Proposed legal changes threaten civil society," Human Rights Watch, Press release, July 29, 2025c, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/07/29/ethiopia-proposed-legal-changes-threaten-civil-society, accessed September 28, 2025.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) "Assessing the impact of foreign aid rollbacks on civil society," September 5, 2025, https://www.ifes.org/publications/assessing-impact-foreign-aid-rollbacks-civil-society, accessed September 28, 2025.

International Service for Human Rights (ISHR) (2025) New ISHR report reveals how governments work behind the scenes to defund the UN's human rights work. October 21. Available at: https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/new-ishr-report-reveals-how-governments-work-behind-the-scenes-to-defund-the-uns-human-rights-work/, accessed: October 24, 2025.

International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy 2025: Democracy on the Move (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2025), https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/html/global-state-democracy-2025-democracy-move

International Rescue Committee, "Global aid crisis: 13 countries most affected by international aid cuts," June 16, 2025, https://www.rescue.org/13-countries-impacted-aid-cuts, accessed September 23, 2025.

Internews, "Crisis in journalism: The impact of the US government funding cuts on global media," [n.d.], https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FINAL-Crisis-in-Journalism.pdf, accessed September 28, 2025.

Itai, D., "US-funded South African LGBTQ groups curtail operations," Washington Blade, April 6, 2025, https://www.washingtonblade.com/2025/04/06/us-funded-south-african-lgbtq-groups-curtail-operations/, accessed September 21, 2025.

Katz, E., "State Department lays off 1,350 employees," Government Executive, July 11, 2025, https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2025/07/state-department-lays-1350-employees/406665/, accessed September 28, 2025.

Kenner, D. and Ellefson, S., "Foreign aid freeze decimates investigative news outlets internationally," International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, February 12, 2025, https://www.icij.org/news/2025/02/foreign-aid-freeze-decimates-investigative-news-outlets-internationally/, accessed September 23, 2025.

Kenny, Charles (2025) Center for Global Development "US Funding of International Organizations Has Collapsed," September 12. Available at: https://www.cgdev.org/blog/us-funding-international-organizations-has-collapsed, accessed October 24, 2025.

Liapeika, H., "With US support gone, Belarusian democratic organizations struggle to survive," New Eastern Europe, May 5, 2025, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2025/05/05/with-us-support-gone-belarusian-democratic-organizations-struggle-to-survive/, accessed October 8, 2025.

Light, F., "Georgia's parliament passes law restricting foreign grants to local groups," Reuters, April 16, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgias-parliament-passes-law-restricting-foreign-grants-local-groups-2025-04-16, accessed September 28, 2025.

Lombardo, A., "USAID cuts weaken US influence at the United Nations," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 19, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/usaid-cuts-weaken-us-influence-united-nations, accessed September 21, 2025.

López Linares, C., "Journalists explain why authoritarian leaders are wrong to say USAID-funded journalism is not independent," LatAm Journalism Review, February 20, 2025, https://latamjournalism-is-not-independent-journalists-say-thats-a-fallacy/, accessed September 28, 2025.

Markiewicz, N., "Peacebuilding cannot be a casualty of foreign aid cuts," American Security Project, June 25, 2025, https://www.americansecurityproject.org/peacebuilding-cannot-be-a-casualty-of-foreign-aid-cuts/, accessed September 23, 2025.

Marocico, O., Mirodan, S. and Ings, R., "How Russian-funded fake news network aims to disrupt election in Europe, BBC investigation," BBC News, September 21, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g5kl0n5d2o, accessed September 28, 2025.

Martina, M. and Naing, S., "Trump's cuts to US news outlets criticized for ceding ground to China, adversaries," Reuters, March 19, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trumps-cuts-us-news-outlets-criticized-ceding-ground-china-adversaries-2025-03-19, accessed September 23, 2025.

Miolene, E., Jerving, S. and Saldinger, A., "The USAID awards the Trump administration killed-and kept," Devex, March 27, 2025, https://www.devex.com/news/the-usaid-awards-the-trump-administration-killed-and-kept-109732, accessed September 28, 2025.

Moynihan, D. and Zuppke, R., "The death of USAID: How Elon Musk and Donald Trump ended America's foreign aid agency," Public Administration and Development, July 7, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.70011>, accessed September 21, 2025.

Munger, Tolles & Olson LLP. (2025) Preliminary Injunction Prohibits Federal Government from Withholding Funding from National Endowment for Democracy. August 14. Available at: https://www.mto.com/achievement/preliminary-injunction-prohibits-federal-government-from-withholding-funding-from-national-endowment-for-democracy/, accessed: October 23, 2025).

Murphy, H., "Devex Newswire: Which awards are spared, and which aren't, at USAID," Devex, March 27, 2025, https://www.devex.com/news/devex-newswire-which-awards-are-spared-and-which-aren-t-at-usaid-109729, accessed October 8, 2025.

National Endowment for Democracy, FY 2024 Programming Report, April 2025, https://www.ned.org/national-endowment-for-democracy-2024-annual-report/, accessed September 28, 2025.

New Union Post, "Serbia's NGO crackdown escalates after Trump's USAID freeze," February 26, 2025, https://newunionpost.eu/2025/02/26/serbia-ngo-crackdown-trump-usaid-freeze, accessed September 28, 2025.

Nord, M. et al., 25 Years of Autocratization: Democracy Trumped? (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2025), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/60/V-dem-dr_2025_lowres.pdf, accessed October 21, 2025.

Onen, P., "Trump aid freeze disrupts programs in Uganda, impacting LGBTQ communities', AP News, February 6, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/trump-aid-freeze-uganda-lgbtq-fe063414e720a4dd18836711ee24fbb4, accessed 21 September 2025.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Official Development Assistance (ODA)," [n.d.a.], https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html, accessed September 21, 2025.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OECD Data Explorer, "DAC1: Flows by provider (ODA+OOF+Private)," [n.d.b.], <a href="https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?lc=en&df%5bds%5d=DisseminateFinalDMZ&df%5bid%5d=DSD_DAC1%40DF_DAC1&df%5bag%5d=OECD.DCD.FSD&df%5bvs%5d=1.5&av=true&pd=%2C&dq=4EU001%2BDAC...1140%2B1160...Q.&ly%5brw%5d=MEASURE&ly%5bcl%5d=TIME_PERIOD&to%5bTIME_PERIOD%5d=false&vw=ov}, accessed September 28, 2025.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "Cuts in official development assistance: OECD projections for 2025 and the near term," June 26, 2025, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/06/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_e161f0c5/full-report.html, accessed September 21, 2025.

OutRight International (2025) Defunding Freedom: Impacts of U.S. Foreign Aid Cuts on LGBTIQ People Worldwide. New York: OutRight International, February. Available at: https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Defunding%20Freedom_Impacts_US_Foreign_Aid_Cuts_on_LGBTIQ_People_Worldwide_2.p

df (Accessed: October 24, 2025).

Pamuk, H., "Trump administration tells US diplomats abroad not to opine on foreign elections," Reuters, July 18, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-tells-us-diplomats-abroad-not-opine-foreign-elections-2025-07-17>, accessed September 23, 2025.

People in Need, "The cessation of US aid has hit independent civil society hard: Activists, anti-corruption organizations and independent media are all at risk," March 26, 2025, https://reliefweb.int/report/world/cessation-us-aid-has-hit-independent-civil-society-hard-activists-anti-corruption-organisations-and-independent-media-are-all-risk, accessed September 21, 2025.

Poidevin, O., "Funding cuts leave women's aid organisations 'stretched to brink," Reuters, May 13, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/funding-cuts-leave-womens-aid-organisations-stretched-brink-2025-05-13/, accessed September 23, 2025.

ProtectDefenders.eu, "Georgia's crackdown on civil society deepens as 'foreign agents' law comes into force," July 28, 2025, https://protectdefenders.eu/georgias-crackdown-on-civil-society-deepens-as-foreign-agents-law-comes-into-force, accessed September 28, 2025.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Balkan service, "Serbian police raids target NGOs supported by USAID," February 25, 2025, https://www.rferl.org/a/serbian-police-raids-target-ngos-supported-usaid/33327873.html, accessed September 21, 2025.

Reporters Without Borders, "USA: Trump's foreign aid freeze throws journalism around the world into chaos," February 3, 2025, https://rsf.org/en/usa-trump-s-foreign-aid-freeze-throws-journalism-around-world-chaos, accessed September 28, 2025.

Romero, Gina. (2025) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association (A/80/219). United Nations. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a80219-report-special-rapporteur-rights-freedom-peaceful-assembly-and (Accessed: October 27, 2025).

Roth, A., "US state department told to end nearly all its overseas pro-democracy programs, The Guardian, 26 June 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jun/26/us-state-department-overseas-pro-democracy-program>, accessed September 21, 2025.

Sandefur, J. and Kenny, C., "USAID cuts: new estimates at the country level," Center for Global Development Blog, March 26, 2025, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/usaid-cuts-new-estimates-country-level, accessed September 28, 2025.

Shein, E & Emmons C. "Paths to Democratic Resilience in an Era of Backsliding: A Roadmap for the Democracy Support Community" (November 21, 2023). IFES.

Schoenfeld Walker, A., Khurana, M. and Zhang, C., "What remains of USAID? The few hundred programs that survived DOGE's purge reveal the future of foreign aid," New York Times, June 22, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/06/22/us/politics/usaid-foreign-aid-trump.html, accessed September 21, 2025.

Spike, J., "Hungary's Orbán says he will do away with pro-democracy and rights groups receiving US aid," AP News, February 7, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/orban-hungary-eliminate-ngos-usaid-aff22b9f9003f4c6c3115a9798c18af6, accessed September 28, 2025.

The White House, "Reevaluating and realigning United States Foreign Aid," January 20, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid/, accessed September 28, 2025.

Thornton, L., "Russia isn't "influencing' Moldova's election", Foreign Policy, September 22, 2025a, https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/09/22/moldova-election-russian-influence-campaign/, accessed September 23, 2025.

Thornton, L., "Trump's State Department cuts human rights, redefines humans, reshapes US values," The Hill, August 18, 2025b, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/5456416-state-dept-report-omissions-analysis/, accessed October 8, 2025.

Transparency International US, "Cuts to US foreign assistance for accountability and governance carry economic and security risk'," February 24, https://us.transparency.org/news/cuts-to-u-s-foreign-assistance-for-accountability-and-governance-carry-economic-and-security-risk/, accessed September 21, 2025.

UN Women, At a Breaking Point: The Impact of Foreign Aid Cuts on Women's Organizations in Humanitarian Crises Worldwide (Geneva: UN Women, April 2025a), https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/at-a-breaking-point-the-impact-of-foreign-aid-cuts-on-womens-organizations-in-humanitarian-crises-worldwide-en.pdf, accessed September 21, 2025.

UN Women, "New survey shows half of women's organizations aiding women in crises may shut down in six months due to global aid cuts," Press release, May 13 2025b, aid-cuts, accessed September 23. 2025.

USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). DEC Document Search, [n.d.a], https://usaid.onl/>, accessed September 21, 2025.

USAID, Growing Momentum: USAID Localization Progress Report, FY 2024, USAID, [n. d.b], https://www.usaspending.gov/, accessed September 28, 2025. USAspending.gov, [n.d.], https://www.usaspending.gov/, accessed September 28, 2025.

Women's Refugee Commission, "Unfunded and unsafe: How US aid cuts are threatening gender-based violence prevention and response in humanitarian crises," New York, May 2025, https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/How-US-Aid-Cuts-Are-Threatening-GBV-Prevention-and-Response.pdf, accessed September 23, 2025.

Wintour, P., "UN faces \$500m budget cut and 20% job losses after big drop in US funding," The Guardian, September 18, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/sep/18/united-nations-un-2026-budget-job-losses-us-funding-cuts, accessed 23 September 2025.

Yoon Mya Lay and Shatjam, "How Myanmar's civic space is shrinking after USAID cuts," The Irrawaddy, March 5, 2025, https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/how-myanmars-civic-space-is-shrinking-after-usaid-cuts.html, accessed September 28, 2025.

Global Democracy Coalition * GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION



coalition was originally convened by International IDEA in 2021, to foster collaboration among democracy organizations and strengthen global collective action for democracy. The partnership comprises organizations working to advance democracy globally, regionally,

exchange, learning and advocacy, addressing pressing global democracy challenges. The influence policies, and amplify the voices of those dedicated to democratic resilience.

International IDEA



elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion and political Democracy Indices and Democracy Tracker. We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials and civil topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas. We bring states and non-state actors

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)



building local capacity. It provides technical assistance to election officials, empowers citizens

About the Authors



Annika Silva-Leander

Dr. Annika Silva-Leander is Head of North America at International IDEA where she oversees International IDEA's outreach and partnerships in the region, including relations with US and Canadian stakeholders, civil society organizations, think tanks, and academic institutions, as well as Global Affairs Canada, its engagement with the United Nations, and coordination of the Global Democracy Coalition. She is also International IDEA's Permanent Observer to the United Nations, representing International IDEA at the UN General Assembly as a leading voice and advocate on democracy. In her UN role, she leads International IDEA's democracy advocacy and research at the UN, focusing on the nexus between democracy and sustainable development through policy analysis and data production.



Kourtney Pompi

Kourtney Pompi has over 25 years of international development experience in more than 50 countries, advancing citizen engagement, accountability, and human rights. As founder of KP Global Consulting, she supports locally-driven solutions in partnership with human rights defenders, democracy activists, and civil society. A skilled facilitator and strategist, she builds bridges across communities to strengthen nonviolent collective action and civic participation. Formerly Senior Director at Counterpart International, Kourtney led the Governance Practice Area and has extensive expertise in programming design, management, training, and evaluation in advocacy, civic education, coalition-building, inclusion, and open governance. She has worked with organizations such as Camris International, Creative Associates, Democracy International, the International Migration Organization, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, Social Impact, and the U.S. Department of State, demonstrating a lifelong commitment to empowering communities, promoting democratic engagement, and advancing human rights worldwide.



Cassandra Emmons

Dr. Cassandra Emmons is the Global Democracy Data Advisor at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in the Center for Applied Research and Learning. She founded and now leads IFES' Data Analytics and Visualization Team, through which she is responsible for ensuring evidence-based approaches in all IFES programming, advancing IFES' data analytics strategy, and managing its public data products such as the Election Guide, the most comprehensive online resource for election dates and deadlines globally. She also leads the strategic thinking and development of IFES' Democratic Resilience Lab, a hub for innovation and cross-sector collaboration to deter democratic backsliding and counter rising authoritarianism around the globe.

When Aid Fades: Impacts and Pathways for the Global Democracy Ecosystem Report

November 2025

