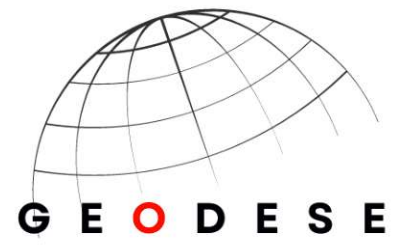


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# The democratic moment that is fading in the world

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## Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, global trade and the exchange of people and ideas have been enhanced by an institutional framework that is rooted in an enforceable concept of the rule of law and complemented by a general acceptance of democracy and the protection of certain universal rights, as ideals to which we aspire. The generation that has passed, in which that order has prevailed, has made those who live in it forget its fragility.

This article examines the current confluence of geopolitical dynamics, to highlight a serious emerging risk: the international order based on rules and democracy and the defense of universal law as an aspirational norm is collapsing. The dynamics are complex but focus on four significant and interdependent phenomena: (1) global interconnectivity and its consequences; (2) the perceived insufficiency of Western democracy in that context to address the central challenges; (3) the rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its impact on other actors, and (4) serious deficiencies in the United States' response to the new strategic threat landscape.

Globalization, ironically, is the facilitator of the current system, but also the driver of the dynamics that are transforming it. The exchange of people, trade, money, data and ideas enabled by globalization and its supporting

institutional framework was fundamental to the transformation of the People's Republic of China of its access to global inputs, markets, capital and technology.



The accelerated global flow of information and the "democratization" of its dissemination through new technologies such as social networks has exerted unprecedented pressures on democracies, widening the already significant gap between citizens' expectations and the performance of their organizations. governments, increasing demands, dissatisfaction, perceptions of "difference", in a plural world, and polarization.

Globalization also allowed the expansion of transnational criminal flows, vulnerability to global economic crises, epidemics derived from new and broader contacts between people, animals and plants; attacks and crimes related to cyberspace; in addition to terrorism, enabled by the spread of radical ideas and the knowledge of ways to kill and disrupt the interdependent world.

In much of the world, interconnectivity has fueled expectations, crime and insecurity, discontent, polarization and radicalization, faster than it has brought perceived benefits and solutions, particularly in parts of the world affected by weak governments and/or corrupt.

In Latin America, interconnectivity played a facilitating role in transnational crime, the spread of Covid-19, the inflationary effects of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, and the public discourse that has transformed that discontent into disillusionment and actions. destabilizing in democratic political systems.

Despite the conventional wisdom that speech fuels democracy, beleaguered democracies have proven remarkably vulnerable to the contemporary combination of citizen disillusionment, real challenges, and an overload of imperfect and often polarizing information. At the same time, authoritarian actors have become adept at taking advantage of the new information environment to magnify and weaponize discontent, destabilize and boast democracies, and consolidate power, while also limiting their own vulnerabilities to information sharing.

Once in power, illiberal regimes representing a wide range of cultures and agendas, from Russia to Iran, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, have used control over the means of coercion to repress or intimidate opponents, while they use control over legislative and judicial institutions to prohibit or bankrupt non-aligned political parties, NGOs, the Press and other possible opposition bases. New generations of authoritarians from Honduras on the left, to El Salvador on the right are learning from and applying the playbook.

The People's Republic of China has played a key yet indirect role in the survival and advancement of authoritarianism, trading with, investing in, financing, and otherwise supporting illiberal regimes for its own benefit. It financially finances Russia's war against Ukraine, simultaneously empowers the oil economy of Iran and rival Saudi Arabia, North Korea's missile buildup, and Venezuela's criminal government and its illicit rent-seeking, while simultaneously distancing itself from of each person's bad behavior. Its economic commitment has contributed resources to regimes such as Venezuela, the previous government of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and the MAS governments in Bolivia, to compensate the regime's supporters, while those regimes consolidate power,

The PRC has become increasingly sophisticated and unapologetic in promoting that multilateralism is the only path forward for the world. English authoritarians. China's Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), for example, promotes a non-concrete or unitary concept of democracy and human rights, which prevents coordination in the international community against those who violate such norms and rights. The PRC has taken advantage of illiberal regimes' desire to protect themselves against Western sanctions, to gain their cooperation in transitioning to GNI-denominated transactions, which ultimately serve the PRC's long-term goals in positioning its currency as a key pillar of a transformed global financial system.

In the new global dynamic, the availability of the People's Republic of China as an economic and strategic partner undermines the United States' ability to pressure other governments to adhere to democratic norms and human rights. As political and economic crises push a growing number of regimes into the illiberal camp, the drive of those governments to collaborate to protect each other, despite their divergent agendas, undermines the West's ability to use international mechanisms to resolve disputes. legal and political.

On the other hand, the private sector's domination of the US system limits its ability to channel private capital into an attractive counteroffer to counter China's courtship.

Finally, the United States itself has fallen victim to the forces of polarization and political paralysis of the modern information age, undermining its ability to present itself as an attractive and effective example of democracy to others, and crippling its ability to formulate effective public policies against the double challenge from the People's Republic of China and the illiberal regime.

The collapse of the rules-based democratic order is not inescapable, but avoiding it requires a dramatic change in the internal cohesion of the United States and the effectiveness of public policies. In the absence of such change, those who recognize and prepare for the mutually reinforcing rise of the PRC and liberalism will be better prepared to navigate and survive.

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[1] R. Evan Ellis is Research Professor for Latin America at the US War College. The opinions expressed by the author are his own and do not necessarily represent his institution or the US government.



**Evan Ellis**

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Managing Director

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José Luis Esparza Guerrero

[director@geodese.com](mailto:director@geodese.com)

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