

Democracy in the 21st Century Act

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Background: Democracy has weakened around the world for at least 15 consecutive years. In some places, authoritarian leaders have deliberately chipped away at the pillars of democracy; in others, rampant partisanship and disinformation have pitted democratic electorates against themselves. Democracies consistently prove to be the most reliable geopolitical allies and trading partners for the United States, and by any reasonable measure outperform non-democracies in delivering prosperity and good governance, and in preventing instability and violent extremism. The erosion of democracy in foreign countries threatens the United States because the threats democracy faces around the world (including disinformation, hyperpolarization, election meddling, weaponized corruption, digital repression, and attacks on independent media) respect no national boundary. More generally, competition between democracies and autocracies has become an animating feature of global politics, with authoritarian powers using their resources to undermine and interfere in democratic processes and co-opt public officials.

Objectives: The current approach of the United States Government to supporting global democracy must be updated to meet today's challenges. The United States Government must also establish new authorities and resources to address contemporary threats to democracy, including malign foreign interference, transnational corruption, and digital authoritarianism.

Summary: The Democracy in the 21st Century Act aims to modernize U.S. tools to defend democracy abroad with an emphasis on responding to emerging technology and bolstering election integrity. The bill establishes four funds with the aim of reinvigorating global democratic programming with flexible resources for confronting emerging challenges to democracy by the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Each fund may accept contributions from other international donors and the private sector, and may provide contributions to multilateral organizations. The bill also includes information-sharing provisions between the State Department, USAID, and the NED to improve coordination on democracy programming. This bill would authorize an increase in U.S. global democracy assistance to over \$3 billion. Details on the funds are as follows:

- **Fund to Defend Democracy Globally** (\$20 million each for State and USAID): to support democracy programs that bolster freedom of expression, election integrity, democratic technology use, and development assistance.
- **Fund to Combat Corruption and Kleptocracy** (\$20 million for USAID): to support civil society, foreign governments, and the private sector in efforts to combat corruption.
- **Democracy Research and Development Fund** (\$15 million for USAID): to support research, development, and innovation within democratic programming, with an emphasis on technology and inter-department coordination and information sharing.