

VOLUME 8

D-HUB

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT



ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN

TOOLKIT

Greatest hits to defend
and renew democracies

D-HUB

VOLUME 8

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

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**D-HUB THANKS THE MEMBERS OF ITS COMMUNITY FOR THEIR FEEDBACK
AND COMMENTS, WHICH HELPED IMPROVE THIS VOLUME.**

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Twenty-first-century authoritarian leaders follow a clear playbook. It's not a formula or a recipe but a dynamic set of strategies and tactics deployed across different contexts.

In response, we've started to crack open their playbook and crafted something of our own: an Anti-Authoritarian Toolkit. Developed with insight from hundreds of frontline democracy defenders, scholars, and strategists, this 10-volume series is packed with the most effective plays to counter elected authoritarianism and safeguard our democracies.

This Toolkit is not a silver bullet. It's a catalyst designed to ignite your vision and creativity as you confront the challenges ahead. Its plays are archetypal but open to innovation and adaptation to the local context of those who use them.

We hope you use it and share it. Maybe the next big play, we'll learn from you.

Ricken Patel

CO-CHAIR, D-HUB

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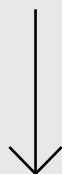
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INTRODUCTION



**HOW DO WE
FIGHT BEYOND
BORDERS?**

by Nika Kovač

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, D-HUB

Elected authoritarians do not rule on their own. Their power rests not only on domestic popularity, but also on the alliances they build beyond their borders. Governments, companies, institutions, and cultural actors continue to engage with them as legitimate partners. This support provides resources, protection, and credibility, helping them entrench their rule at home.

If authoritarian power is partly sustained from the outside, it can also be contested from the outside. As democracy defenders, we cannot limit our strategies to streets, elections, and institutions at home. We need to expand the battlefield. In that sense, actions taken abroad can weaken authoritarian regimes, disrupt their support networks, and erode the perception of legitimacy that sustains them domestically.

This volume of the **ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN TOOLKIT** focuses on how to do exactly that. In the following pages, you will find plays that highlight the value of building

transnational networks, mobilizing diaspora communities, disrupting the external support systems that sustain authoritarian regimes, activating international institutions, and engaging cultural figures who can help break through controlled information environments.

Authoritarians thrive on the illusion of inevitability. But their legitimacy is never permanent. It can be contested, reshaped, and ultimately withdrawn. By activating pressure and support beyond borders, we can shift incentives, raise costs, and create space for those on the frontlines to resist, organize, and prevail.

As always, we offer these tools not as abstract theory, but as strategies tested in real-world struggles. They are practical, adaptable, and meant to be used. Take them, adjust them to your context, and push them even further.

With love,
Nika Kovač

HOW THIS PUBLICATION WORKS

Democracy defenders are busy and practical people. That is why we designed this publication to be concise and engaging.

This volume includes **ONE GRAND STRATEGY** and **FIVE PLAYS**.

GRAND STRATEGY

A Grand Strategy is a guiding framework that aligns all actions and tactics with the long-term goals of safeguarding democracy. The foundation of the grand strategy provides coherence and effectiveness to individual plays.

PLAY

An action that can be adapted to different moments and contexts. It may be a strategy, tactic, or tool. The key criteria for its inclusion are its deployment, effectiveness, and relevance in the fight for democracy.

FOR EACH, YOU WILL FIND THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION



THE PLAY

Describes the strategy, tactic or move



WHY IT WORKS

Explains the core reasons the tactic is effective and impactful



HOW IT WORKS

A more detailed depiction of the play, with basic steps of implementation



TIPS

Recommendations and aspects to avoid



WHO'S DONE IT WELL

Examples of how the play has been deployed in real life



LEARN MORE

Links to resources

The concluding section, **"WE CAN HELP YOU,"** provides contact details for those needing help confronting elected authoritarian politics.

FEATURED GRAND STRATEGY

EXPAND THE BATTLEFIELD

**TURNING GLOBAL
CONNECTIONS
INTO DEMOCRACY
LEVERAGE**

Elected authoritarians do not govern in isolation. Even when they remain firmly in power at home, they continue to rely on international legitimacy, foreign investment, diplomatic recognition, trade, cultural prestige, security cooperation, and access to global financial and professional networks.

Today's authoritarians are not fighting only at home. They learn from one another, share tactics, build transnational alliances, and exploit international networks, money, media, and political influence to strengthen their rule.

That is why democratic struggles cannot be treated as purely domestic fights with occasional international support added on top. Modern authoritarianism operates across borders and democratic defense must do the same. As the struggle is already international, the task is now to expand the battlefield.

The international arena matters not because outsiders can “save” democracy from abroad, but because authoritarian attacks on the

rule of law, media freedom, civil liberties, elections, and human rights create openings for transnational democratic action and solidarity.

Democratic actors must learn to operate in the same international arena authoritarian regimes depend on to survive. If domestic space shrinks, widen the fight outward. Bring pressure into the diplomatic, legal, financial, cultural, media, academic, and commercial arenas authoritarian governments still depend on.

This means mapping leverage in both directions: where international actors can strengthen democratic resilience through expertise, financing, visibility, protection, networks, or amplification, and where they can increase the costs of authoritarian behavior through diplomatic pressure, reputational risk, or commercial consequences.

The goal is not to “internationalize” a local struggle artificially. It is to recognize that power, legitimacy, money, and influence

already flow across borders, and therefore be ready to act accordingly. In some contexts, that global dimension can be decisive. In others, it may play a supporting role. What's clear is that leverage points exist for those willing to look for them.

When international institutions investigate abuses and global media expose disinformation operations coordinated from abroad, investors perceive reputational or financial risks, or respected public figures refuse to legitimize the regime, so that the internal calculation begins to shift from how to survive within the regime to how to survive after it.

Expanding the battlefield forces authoritarian regimes to defend themselves on multiple fronts at once. As pressure accumulates, what once looked stable and impossible to shift, can suddenly begin to feel fragile. Alliances soften, insiders hedge, information leaks, and actors once fully aligned with power start preparing for different futures.



1

TRANSNATIONAL LEARNING NETWORKS

**Equipping national democratic frontlines
with cross-border know-how**

THE PLAY

Elected authoritarians do not act alone. They are connected. They build forums, alliances, business networks, and strategic relationships across borders. They learn from one another, share tactics, and often protect each other when challenged. In doing so, they are faster and more adaptive because they operate as a transnational learning ecosystem.

Democracy defenders need their own transnational networks, not just for solidarity, but to exchange tactics and strategic know-how. This play is about turning lessons from one struggle into tools for another by building trusted cross-border relationships between democratic actors, including movements, organizers, parties, experts, and diaspora networks.

Abstract encouragement is not enough. Usable political intelligence is required here.

In many countries, democratic actors are simply not operating at the state of the art in key areas of democratic defense. Practical exchanges between members can help them act more strategically when confronting core questions.

This also means identifying capability gaps inside the democratic ecosystem and connecting actors with the expertise, talent, resources, and operational knowledge that can help close them. The goal of transnational networks is not to copy another country's uprising or a specific electoral strategy. It is to shorten the learning curve.

Transnational democracy networks can turn scattered experience into shared political intelligence. Done well, those confronting media capture, electoral fraud, judicial attacks, or shrinking civic space do not need to start from zero, they can build their own path, adapt, learn, and respond by drawing on tested ways of fighting back in other contexts.



WHY IT WORKS

- **THE LEARNING CURVE IS SHORTENED.** Democracy defenders can act more effectively by building on tested lessons in strategy, organization, and resilience.
- **REPEATING MISTAKES CAN BE AVOIDED.** Exposure to other struggles can help democracy defenders recognize traps earlier and adapt faster under pressure.
- **UNFAMILIAR THREATS ARE TURNED INTO RECOGNIZABLE PATTERNS.** What feels unprecedented in one country is often something others have already faced and responded to.
- **HOPE IS GROUNDED IN REAL EXPERIENCE.** In moments of fear or paralysis, seeing how others resisted repression, rebuilt momentum, or achieved breakthroughs can expand the sense of what is politically possible.



HOW IT WORKS

1

FIND THE RIGHT PEERS

Trust is the foundation of this play. The most valuable exchanges often begin through personal connections among people with different but complementary profiles: veteran activists, emerging politicians, movement trainers, diaspora connectors, and informal mentors. Start by identifying which actors have become effective in confronting specific challenges within the democratic field. In that search, do not limit yourself to the usual names, or to those who held prestige in the past. Look also at those experimenting with new approaches that are proving effective. In this mapping, relevance matters more than prestige.

2

EXCHANGE OPERATING KNOWLEDGE

Once trusted spaces exist, make sure that what circulates through them is actually useful. Many international exchanges stay too general to really matter. “Stay united” or “Be resilient” is not enough. What matters is practical knowledge shared by people who have faced repression, built coalitions, made difficult decisions, and learned from real setbacks. What should travel through the network is more than just a diagnosis of democracy in times of crisis, a broader package of operating knowledge should also be present.

The most valuable lessons are specific: how a successful coalition was structured, how a GOTV strategy performed, how a slogan was tested, how local committees were built,

how legal defense was organized, or how others managed fear, burnout, and internal conflict under pressure. The point is not to exchange abstract inspiration, but to help democratic actors confront concrete strategic and operational questions: how to broaden participation, build strong communications ecosystems, resist repression, win and defend elections, and strengthen digital, legal, narrative, organizing, or security capabilities under pressure.

3 **TURN EXCHANGE INTO A COMMUNITY**

One conference here or a webinar there rarely changes much. What matters is what happens day to day. An exchange space is not the same as a living network that can keep learning, sharing, and responding over time. Lasting networks require repeated contact through WhatsApp groups, work groups, regional connections, scenario exercises, and follow-up conversations.

The goal is not just to stay in touch, but to build an infrastructure of relationships that can be activated when specific problems arise. A strong transnational network allows actors to reconnect quickly around concrete challenges, to compare responses and collaborate across contexts.

4 **TRIGGER LOCAL ADAPTATION**

What worked in one country will not necessarily work elsewhere in the exact same way. Different contexts bring different institutions, political cultures, media ecosystems, coalition dynamics, and levels of repression. The purpose of transnational learning is not replication, but adaptation.

That is why the best cross-border learning is dialogic, not one-way. If the challenge is electoral manipulation, the most useful lessons may come from groups that defended the vote elsewhere. And yet, exposure to real experience is only the starting point. Domestic actors must decide what fits their terrain, what risks are acceptable, and what path makes sense politically. The role of the network is to sharpen local strategy, not to script it from abroad.

5 BRING LESSONS BACK TO THE NETWORK

A transnational network becomes truly valuable when learning does not stop at transfer. What is tested, adapted, and refined in one context should travel back into the community so others can learn from it. This creates a continuous learning loop, where context-specific experiences become shared learning.

The point is not just sharing what worked when adapting an experience to a different context, but also discussing what needed to change, what failed, and why. This also helps democratic actors recognize recurring capability gaps across contexts and identify where new expertise, training, resources, or strategic support may be needed. When members bring those adaptations back into the community, it becomes a living system of peer learning, constantly updating, improving, and expanding the tactical repertoire available to democracy defenders elsewhere.



TIPS

A DESIGN FOR SHARED PROBLEM-SOLVING

The value of a transnational community is not measured by how many people joined a webinar or attended an event. It is measured by whether democratic actors can turn exchange into better decisions, sharper strategy, and more effective action. Make sure to design exchanges that create real interaction: small groups, follow-up conversations, peer matching, and shared problem-solving. The goal is not simply to stay connected, but to create spaces where people can test ideas, troubleshoot challenges, adapt tactics, and translate advice into practice.

B CREATE SPACES WHERE PEOPLE SPEAK HONESTLY

These networks are not for performance. They are meant for learning. This entails creating spaces where people can speak openly about what failed, what they misread, what almost collapsed, and what they would do differently.

If the network only shares what looks good from the outside, it will not help others act better when pressure comes. The most valuable exchanges are rarely the most polished ones. The ones where people speak candidly, tell the truth and go beyond visible tactics. Deeper learning is usually less glamorous: how people sequenced escalation, managed coalition tensions, handled fear, kept moderates on board, or sustained momentum after the peak.

C

PROTECT THE NETWORK

Transnational networks can be powerful, but they can also be vulnerable. Authoritarian actors may monitor activists abroad, infiltrate groups, intimidate participants, or weaponize accusations of foreign interference. That is why gaining trust should not imply lowering your guard.

Use secure communication when needed, be thoughtful about who is included in sensitive spaces, and establish clear norms around consent, visibility, and information sharing. A network that circulates tactics but fails to protect itself can quickly become a liability.



WHO'S DONE IT WELL



NOT ONE LESS

The strength of feminist networks

LATIN AMERICA

"Not One Less" (*Ni Una Menos*) were not originally born as democracy-defense campaigns. They emerged on another frontline: the fight against femicide, gender violence, and the denial of reproductive rights.

Even so, all across Latin America, they became an influential transnational feminist infrastructure that connected activists across borders, spread tactics and symbols, and built habits of collective resistance that have also strengthened the region's broader democratic ecosystem.

Ni Una Menos began in Argentina in 2015 and quickly spread across South America, reverberating through Mexico, Chile, Colombia, and beyond. What traveled was not mere outrage, but a usable repertoire that others could adapt: mass assemblies,

coordinated strikes, shared hashtags and performances, common visual symbols like the green scarf, and decentralized organizing that connected personal testimony to structural critique.

Over time, and through transnational ties, protest learning, and social media, what began as national mobilizations grew into a regional movement. In countries facing democratic erosion, this mattered much more beyond policy wins. Throughout the years, these networks have helped normalize mass civic action, strengthen coordination outside party structures, and keep rights, accountability, and public pressure alive even amid democratic backsliding.

Across pro-democracy forces in the region, feminist networks have been present, and often in leading roles. In that sense, feminism has become one of the largest sources of pro-democratic youth activism in Latin America.

**“It is the first time
that a feminist
wave spread out
from the global
South to the North.”**



AfricTivistes

AFRICTIVISTES

Building a Pan-African network for democratic resilience

AFRICA

Founded in 2015, AfricTivistes was built as a pan-African network of change agents: bloggers, journalists, civic activists, and digital organizers sharing tools, practices, and strategic lessons across borders. That standing network matters because democratic actors facing censorship, election stress, or shrinking civic space do not need abstract solidarity. They need practical knowledge they can use quickly. AfricTivistes has built that infrastructure through digital training, civic-tech support, research, toolkits, and community-building spaces that help activists learn from one another instead of starting from zero in each national crisis.

What travels through the network is not just information, but operating knowledge. AfricTivistes Academy is both a repository of learning resources and a community for sharing good practice, with open learning on democracy, elections, governance, citizen participation, human rights, and civic engagement. The network has also connected local initiatives across countries. In one electoral-mapping project, it documented citizen election initiatives across Africa to make them more visible to one another and strengthen cross-border learning. In this sense, AfricTivistes does not simply train people; it helps build a continental repertoire of tactics for protecting information flows, monitoring elections, responding to internet shutdowns, and defending civic space.

The value of that infrastructure becomes clearest during crises. In The Gambia before the 2016 election, AfricTivistes worked for more than a year with civil society groups, journalists, and

activists on information, campaigning, data collection, censorship, surveillance, and cybersecurity. When Jammeh's regime shut down telecommunications and censored mainstream media, Gambian journalists were still able to keep information circulating online. When radio stations were shut down, the network set up a pirate online radio available so journalists could continue informing the world.

In Senegal's 2024 election crisis, AfricTivistes again showed that it was not improvising from scratch. Together with Senegalese journalists and legal partners, it petitioned the ECOWAS Court of Justice over repeated internet shutdowns, arguing that these blackouts violated freedom of expression, press freedom, and the public's right to information, while also threatening election transparency by disrupting the sharing of polling-station results.

AfricTivistes' cross-border infrastructure allows activists, journalists, and civic innovators to exchange practical lessons, adapt them locally, and respond faster when repression or democratic erosion hits. By helping democratic actors protect information flows, strengthen digital resilience, and learn from struggles beyond their own borders, AfricTivistes makes them less isolated and better prepared to defend and renew democracy.

**"Responsible citizens
across Africa can
become the sentinels
of democracy."**



YOU CAN ACCESS THE
"LEARN MORE" RESOURCES
BY CLICKING ON THEM

LEARN MORE

D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2025. "Building Alliances Across Borders."
AATK Podcast Series



OTHER RESOURCES



AfricTivites. "https://africTivistes.com/en/." *Web page*



Canvas. 2026. "Publications."



FHI 360. 2016. "Regional Democracy Networks."



Televisión Pública. 2022. "Ni una Menos: siete años."



2

ORGANIZE THE DIASPORA

**Mobilizing global communities to
support democracy at home**

THE PLAY

As authoritarian regimes clamp down on domestic space, shrink civic liberties and restrict media, diaspora communities can become a powerful force in the struggle for democracy back home. This play is about turning a diverse and often fragmented population into a coordinated power base.

Diaspora communities are rarely uniform. Some members have lived abroad for decades, building influence in their host countries, while others have left more recently because of repression, political persecution, or economic collapse. These groups often bring different experiences, levels of urgency, and connections to events back home, but together they can become a powerful democratic infrastructure across borders.

If organized, diaspora networks can elevate visibility for domestic campaigns, amplify stories of repression internationally, and sustain attention beyond national borders. Distance can create strategic advantages and a clear panorama. Diasporas are often

less immersed in domestic propaganda, political polarization, or climates of fear, allowing them to identify broader patterns and frame events for international audiences more effectively.

Diasporas can also act directly within their host countries: lobbying parliaments, engaging policymakers, and pressuring international institutions. In addition, they may mobilize resources, support frontline activists, and strengthen democratic efforts in their country of origin. In many cases, when eligible, they can also vote from abroad.

From funding pipelines to symbolic protests in global capitals, diaspora organizing can mobilize economic, political, and social resources. Furthermore, diaspora efforts must be strategically organized to get it done: bridging generations and political divides, staying accountable to those on the frontlines, and avoiding fragmentation or gatekeeping.



WHY IT WORKS

- **OPERATIONS GO BEYOND REPRESSION.** Outside the reach of authoritarians, diaspora groups can speak, organize, and raise funds without the risks faced by dissidents at home.
- **DOMESTIC CAMPAIGNS ARE AMPLIFIED.** Diaspora networks can elevate local struggles to the international stage: more visibility, scrutiny, and pressure on authoritarians.
- **INFLUENCE IS BUILT EXACTLY WHERE POWER SITS.** They can develop proximity to decision-makers and shape political outcomes in their countries of residence.
- **INSTITUTIONAL CHANNELS ARE OPENED.** Access to parliaments, ministries, and international institutions can drive sanctions, shape aid decisions, and shift diplomatic agendas.
- **LIFELINES ARE PROVIDED.** Diaspora hubs can shelter activists, mobilize resources, and offer legal or emotional support when movements are under attack.



HOW IT WORKS

1

START BY MAPPING WHAT YOU CAN REACH

You can't expect to start with a full map, you build it as you engage. Start from accessible entry points: known groups, community leaders, cultural spaces, or existing networks. As you connect, identify who is active, who is trusted, and who has the capacity to mobilize or influence.

Map the diaspora as it reveals itself, understanding differences in connection to the country, legal status, and ability to act. Diasporas formed through exile, economic migration, or long-term settlement abroad often relate differently to politics back home, and those differences usually shape how they organize, vote, and engage politically. Election results abroad, community institutions, and participation patterns can offer important clues about where influence, trust, and mobilization capacity already exist. This helps you see who can mobilize, who can influence, and who can support from the margins.

2

UNDERSTAND THE DIASPORA

Informal interactions should be complemented with structured listening as you engage. Organize small group sessions, targeted interviews, or simple surveys to systematically capture motivations, concerns, and levels of engagement across different segments.

Focus on extracting usable signals: which issues resonate, what triggers participation, and where resistance or red lines exist. Structured listening turns dispersed conversations into actionable insights for messaging, mobilization or coalition-building. Do not approach the diaspora only as an advocacy network abroad. It is also a political constituency with emotional, social, and electoral ties to the homeland that must feel included in democratic action.

3

FIRST COMMUNITY, NOT POLITICS

Diaspora organizing depends on trust, relationships, and shared identity. Invest in building community through cultural, social, and informal spaces: gatherings, dinners, events, or celebrations. The aim is to strengthen bonds and create a sense of belonging.

These spaces help identify engagement, capacities, and who can take on more active roles over time. Starting with political demands too early weakens participation. Strong community ties are what make sustained mobilization possible. For many diaspora communities, identity, memory, language, family ties, and concern for what happens back home are often stronger entry points than ideology itself.

4

**BUILD A CORE TEAM AND ORGANIZE
ACROSS DIFFERENCES**

Only a small group of committed and capable actors can form a core organizing team. Structure it as a credible and professional body, with clear roles, leadership, priorities, and external communication. This signals seriousness and enables effective engagement with institutions and decision-makers.

Diaspora groups often carry internal divisions. Don't try to resolve them upfront. Build coordination through small and clear actions: supporting victims, fundraising, or joint advocacy. As trust grows, you may develop more formal structures with a leadership accountable to movements on the ground.

5

**ENGAGE POWER CENTERS
IN HOST COUNTRIES**

Diaspora organizing is not only about what happens back home—it is also about shaping how host countries respond to those events back home. Its leverage comes from access to institutions and decision-makers beyond the regime's control. Identify and engage key power centers: elected officials, ministries, international institutions, media, and civil society actors.

Tailor your approach. Some will respond to electoral incentives, others to values, interests, or reputational risks. Use this access strategically. Prepare briefings, secure testimony, and time advocacy around elections, summits, or key policy moments.

6

PROVIDE SUPPORT WHERE IT IS MOST NEEDED

When domestic actors are under pressure, diaspora networks can provide critical support. Direct funding may be constrained, but alternative channels can still remain effective. Support legal defense, amplify cases through international media and human rights organizations, and mobilize visibility through coordinated actions abroad.

Diaspora groups can also provide technical and logistical assistance, such as digital security, equipment, or operational support, that strengthens resilience on the ground. The goal is to reinforce the capacity of local actors to operate well under pressure, not to replace them.

7

SHAPE THE NARRATIVE BATTLEFIELD ABROAD

Diaspora organizing can act as large-scale amplification networks, shaping how the regime's actions are perceived internationally. Use multiple formats, op-eds, documentaries, cultural interventions, partnerships with artists, academics, and media, to keep repression visible and relevant. Memorials, vigils, and exhibitions can sustain attention over time and connect specific cases to broader democratic values.

At the same time, keep in mind that authoritarians are organized abroad as well. They fund loyalist networks, monitor critics, and spread propaganda across diaspora communities. Identify where this operates and build credible alternatives.

Sustained international visibility can raise the reputational costs of repression, sometimes pushing regimes to recalibrate or moderate their actions to avoid further scrutiny.



TIPS

A ORGANIZE THROUGH TRUST

Diaspora groups often carry old divisions, so don't begin with political ideology, begin with trust. Organize small, concrete actions that show results: support a persecuted activist, hold a vigil, or coordinate a simple advocacy effort. Trust builds credibility, and from there stronger structures can emerge. At the same time, do not ignore or pass on structures that already exist. Cultural associations, religious communities, alumni groups, migrant organizations, or informal networks can become ready-made entry points for mobilization and coordination.

B DON'T LOOK IMPROVISED

The more coherent, organized, and reliable a diaspora effort appears to be, the more seriously it will be taken by institutions, allies, journalists, donors, and potential supporters. Clear roles, defined responsibilities, and consistent communication make it easier for others to understand, trust, and engage with your work.

Where possible, bring in people with experience in legal work, advocacy, communications, fundraising, or coordination, including expertise beyond the diaspora itself. Serious organizing signals credibility and makes your efforts harder to ignore.

C

STAY CONNECTED TO THE REALITY BACK HOME

Diaspora communities often operate with more freedom, visibility, and security than those confronting repression directly. That distance can be a strength, but it can also create blind spots. Avoid turning diaspora politics into a disconnected performance detached from the realities, risks, and priorities of people on the ground.

Stay in close contact with trusted actors back home. Listen carefully before acting. The goal is not to project symbolic militancy from abroad, but to support strategies that are politically useful, sustainable, and accountable to those bearing the greatest risks.



WHO'S DONE IT WELL



MYANMAR'S DIASPORA

Sustaining the civil disobedience movement

MYANMAR

When Myanmar's military staged its coup in February 2021, doctors and medical students in Yangon sparked the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) by refusing to work under junta control. Their defiance quickly spread to teachers, railway workers, and other civil servants. The junta responded with arrests, evictions, and censorship, forcing many leaders into exile. Exile did not end the movement, though. It internationalized it. The Myanmar diaspora became a vital lifeline.

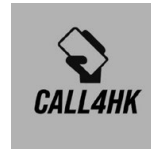
From 2021 onward, diaspora communities in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia mobilized to keep the CDM alive. Overseas professionals and students set up bank accounts, coordinated peer-to-peer donations,

and ran awareness campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram. They also turned to innovative financial tools: cryptocurrencies such as USDT and “revolution bonds” issued by the National Unity Government (NUG). On the first day of its bond launch in November 2021, the NUG raised USD \$6.3 million, mostly from overseas Myanmar nationals. By the end of 2022, the NUG reported USD \$100 million raised, with about 45% from bond sales. Independent reporting estimates diaspora contributions at tens of millions of dollars, supporting public services, humanitarian relief, and the CDM.

Crucially, diaspora organizers framed their support with credibility and discipline. They emphasized the nonviolent nature of the CDM and were transparent about fund use, directing resources to healthcare, safe houses, and the families of striking workers, while avoiding association with armed actors. Campaigns were often tied to urgent needs, such as medical care in liberated areas or relief for displaced communities, which kept supporters engaged and donations flowing.

By early 2023, some reports estimated that the NUG and its allies had raised more than USD \$130 million in total. While not all of this came directly from diaspora sources, overseas communities were central in sustaining the movement financially and politically. More than four years since its founding, the CDM endures in part because the diaspora refused to let the spark die, transforming displacement into solidarity and keeping Myanmar’s struggle for democracy visible, resourced, and alive.

“At first when we started the movements and the fundraising campaigns, we did it on social media and on the streets with protests and donation boxes. But now the fundraising is going on with the help of the diaspora... they are the ones keeping our movement alive.”



HONG KONGERS ABROAD

Turning exile into democratic infrastructure

CHINA

After Beijing imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong in 2020, the city's pro-democracy ecosystem was forced into survival mode. Independent media were shut down, civil society groups dissolved, opposition leaders were jailed or driven into exile, and even speech abroad became risky. But the crackdown did not end Hong Kong's democracy movement. It pushed part of it outward.

Across the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, Taiwan, and Europe, Hongkongers abroad began turning exile into advocacy infrastructure. Organizations and platforms such as Hong Kong Watch, the Hong Kong Democracy Council, Call4HK, and local Hong-konger associations helped connect dispersed communities with parliaments, congressional offices, journalists, think tanks, and human rights organizations. The strategy was not just protesting from abroad, but organizing diaspora power where it could matter.

In the United States, diaspora groups helped supporters contact lawmakers, backed hearings and sanctions advocacy, and kept attention on political prisoners and the dismantling of Hong Kong's freedoms. In the United Kingdom, where many Hongkongers arrived through the British National Overseas pathway, community groups began with practical needs: settlement support, legal information, cultural spaces, and spaces where new arrivals could rebuild trust. Over time, those community ties became

political infrastructure, helping new migrants stay connected to the struggle they had left behind while engaging host-country institutions.

A key moment came in 2022, during the White Paper protests in mainland China. A coalition of 52 Hong Kong diaspora organizations issued a statement in support of protesters in China, showing that Hong Kong's overseas networks were not only defending their own cause. They were becoming part of a wider anti-authoritarian infrastructure linking Hongkongers, mainland Chinese dissidents, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Taiwanese advocates, and other communities affected by Beijing's reach.

The regime understood the threat. Beginning in 2023, Hong Kong authorities issued arrest warrants and HK\$1 million bounties against prominent overseas activists; later rounds expanded the list of targets. Rights groups warned that the move extended political intimidation beyond Hong Kong's borders.

That repression made the diaspora's role even more important. Hongkongers abroad used the relative freedoms of their host countries to do what had become dangerous or impossible back home: speak openly, brief policymakers, preserve memory, support political prisoners, defend exiles, and expose transnational repression. They did not replace the movement inside Hong Kong. They helped keep its voice alive when domestic space was being crushed.

“We should not be satisfied by begging other countries to support Hong Kong; we should be the ones who can offer support to those in need, including Hong Kong.”



LEARN MORE

D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2025. "Building Alliances Across Borders." *AATK Podcast Series*

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3

TARGET THEIR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Turning global exposure
into strategic pressure

THE PLAY

Elected authoritarians maintain a façade of legitimacy abroad because they depend on trade, investment, partnerships, and private networks that help keep their regimes afloat. Oddly enough, many of these international partners come from environments where repression, corruption, or democratic backsliding can generate reputational, legal, or commercial costs.

This play is about turning that exposure into a vulnerability. By using investigations, storytelling, and public campaigns, democracy defenders can target the regime's global interests and make engagement with the regime riskier for the outside actors it depends on: companies, investors, sponsors, institutions, event organizers, and foreign partners.

The goal is not simply to denounce and condemn authoritarian abuses. It is to translate repression, corruption, and democratic backsliding into diplomatic, trade, economic or strategic costs for those who continue doing business with the regime. When international actors begin to see it as a liability, relationships weaken, partnerships stall, and that pressure travels back home.

Journalists, exiled activists, researchers, and advocacy groups often drive these campaigns, exposing the risks of engagement and pushing external partners to reconsider doing business with the regime in their own interest. Done well, reputational pressure turns into material consequences that shift elite calculations at home.



WHY IT WORKS

- **REPUTATION SHAPES ECONOMIC DECISIONS.** Investigations and campaigns can turn repression and corruption into liabilities that affect partnerships, investments, and sponsorships.
- **EXTERNAL ACTORS RESPOND TO RISK.** Economic players tend to avoid controversy and instability. When engagement becomes risky, they may choose to distance themselves.
- **DISRUPTING ECONOMIC LINKS CREATES REAL PRESSURE.** Affecting trade, investment, technology, and international partnerships can hit economic networks and power structures at home.
- **ELITE INCENTIVES BEGIN TO SHIFT.** As risks increase, domestic elites may start raising doubts about the regime's durability and create space for distancing or defection.



HOW IT WORKS

1

MAP THE REGIME'S GLOBAL INTERESTS—AND VULNERABILITIES

Start by identifying where the regime depends on the outside world. Map key economic and reputational links: major investors, trade partners, international events, strategic industries, cultural exchanges, financial networks, and foreign institutions that interact with the regime. Once the actors are clearly mapped, document abuses that create risk for those actors. Work with investigators, journalists, lawyers, and watchdog groups to verify information and build evidence that can withstand scrutiny. Cases of corruption, repression, forced labor, environmental damage, or attacks on democratic institutions can all become liabilities for companies, sponsors, investors, and partners abroad facing reputational, legal, or financial consequences from continued engagement.

2

TURN ABUSES INTO BUSINESS RISK

Once abuses become visible, translate them into real and tangible risks for the international actors doing business with the regime. Scandals, repression, corruption, or attacks on democratic institutions should not be framed only as moral violations but as liabilities for those who decide to stay engaged. Show how these connections create unnecessary exposure: reputational damage, consumer backlash, legal scrutiny, sanctions risk, or regulatory

pressure. The goal is to make continued engagement look costly and uncertain so companies, investors, sponsors, and institutions begin to reassess their involvement. What once looked like business as usual can start to resemble reputational or financial liability.

3

FOCUS PRESSURE

WHERE IT HURTS

Once risks are identified, focus pressure on the companies, institutions, investors, sponsors, and organizations connected to the regime. Many of these actors value stability, reputation, and market access, which makes them sensitive to controversy and exposure. Public campaigns, investigations, media coverage, and advocacy should highlight the risks these actors face by maintaining ties with an authoritarian government. Journalists, advocacy groups, unions, researchers, diaspora networks, and civil society actors in the home countries of those partners can increase the pressure locally and expand public visibility.

The objective is not simply to criticize them, but to raise the cost of enabling or normalizing those relationships. If they anticipate reputational damage, regulatory scrutiny, consumer backlash, or investor concerns, they may reconsider their engagement. Public-facing campaigns, including petitions, shareholder pressure, or consumer boycotts, can help turn distant abuses into public controversies. Even partial distancing, cancelled events, suspended partnerships, or delayed investments can help weaken the regime's international ecosystem.

4

**FORCE DECISIONS FROM
KEY PARTNERS**

Once specific actors are identified, the next step is to push them to make decisions. Pressure should create a clear dilemma: whether maintaining ties with the authoritarian regime is worth the growing risk. If a conference invites authoritarian officials to speak, pressure its organizers. If a company plans to invest, expose the reputational risks of that investment. If sponsors, universities, or institutions maintain partnerships, campaign for those ties to be suspended. Each cancelled exchange, withdrawn sponsorship, suspended partnership, or postponed deal sends a signal that engagement with the regime carries increasing costs. These small ruptures accumulate. Over time, that pressure can travel back home, raising doubts among domestic elites who depend on those global connections.

5

SUSTAIN PRESSURE OVER TIME

One revelation rarely changes behavior on its own. Pressure works through accumulation. Reports, investigations, testimonies, and public campaigns should keep the regime's abuses visible and repeatedly connected to the risks faced by its international partners. Follow-ups, new evidence, and recurring moments of exposure can prevent the issue from fading from view. The aim is to keep the risks present long enough for partners to reconsider their engagement, not telling the story only once. Over time, as the perception of risk spreads, existing alliances may weaken and potential partners may think twice before entering new relationships with the regime.



TIPS

A TIME YOUR REVELATIONS STRATEGICALLY

Not all moments are equal. Release reports or launch campaigns when authoritarians seek international approval: during trade negotiations, diplomatic summits, global forums, or major cultural and sporting events. These are moments when governments, investors, and international media are paying attention, and reputational costs are highest. Seize the opportunity to pose uncomfortable questions about repression, corruption, and anti-democratic abuses. Well-timed revelations turn what should be moments of authoritarian glory into moments of exposure.

B CHOOSE MESSENGERS WHO CAN'T BE DISMISSED

Decision-makers often respond most strongly to voices they cannot easily dismiss: respected and well-known professionals, industry leaders, independent experts, former insiders, or credible actors from the home countries where pressure is being applied. When these figures raise concerns, it becomes harder for companies, institutions, or investors to ignore the risks of engagement. In the case of multinational actors, pressure may also become more effective when concerns are amplified across multiple countries and audiences at once.

Survivor testimonies can humanize repression, but pairing them with authoritative voices strengthens the impact. This combination turns allegations into reputational liabilities that are taken seriously.



WHO'S DONE IT WELL



INDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Stalling discriminatory laws through global leverage

INDIA

In 2019, India's government passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), widely criticized for discriminating against Muslims, and revoked the constitutional autonomy of the region of Jammu & Kashmir, followed by a prolonged internet blackout. Indian civil society understood that challenging these moves at home would be difficult. So activists, rights groups, youth coalitions, and diaspora allies worked to make the costs international.

Their goal was to win condemnation and also turn repression into a liability inside two of India's most important external relationships: with the European Union and the United States, both central to Delhi's search for global legitimacy, trade, investment, and strategic influence. That gave democracy defenders an opening: if these abuses

could damage the political climate around those relationships, the government would face pressure not only from activists, but from the risk of harming partnerships it deeply valued.

Using personal networks, policy briefings, verified documentation, and diaspora advocacy, civil society actors helped push the CAA and the Kashmir crackdown into high-level debates in Brussels and Washington. In Europe, their efforts contributed to a draft European Parliament resolution condemning the CAA in January 2020. The resolution was deferred so as not to derail the upcoming EU-India summit, a sign that the controversy had become serious enough to disrupt the atmosphere around a key strategic and economic relationship. In the years that followed, the European Parliament continued linking closer EU-India cooperation to human rights and democratic standards.

In the United States, advocacy helped move Kashmir and the CAA into Congress, where lawmakers such as Pramila Jayapal raised the issue directly. India's foreign minister canceled a meeting with senior members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee rather than face the scrutiny, revealing how sensitive Delhi was to criticism entering one of its most important bilateral channels. U.S. government analysis later noted that human-rights concerns in India could hinder progress in the broader partnership, including in areas tied to trade and investment.

By forcing the CAA and the Kashmir crackdown into the heart of India's dealings with the EU and the U.S., democracy defenders made it harder for outside actors to engage the Modi government as if nothing had happened. Repression was no longer just a domestic abuse story; it became a reputational and strategic complication for governments and institutions invested in deepening ties with India. The results were significant. The Indian government slowed implementation of the CAA and sought to placate critics in Brussels. In early 2021, following sustained pressure from U.S. lawmakers and advocacy groups, the internet blackout in Kashmir was lifted after more than 500 days.

"Our job was to get as many voices internationally to say to Modi: we see what you are doing, and we don't approve."

CENTER *for*
REPRODUCTIVE
RIGHTS

EN Equality
Now
A just world for all women and girls



TANZANIA'S GIRLS' RIGHTS ADVOCATES

Turning donor pressure into leverage

TANZANIA

When John Magufuli's government doubled down on expelling pregnant girls from school, Tanzanian advocates did not treat it as just a domestic abuse to denounce. They turned it into a problem for the regime's international partners.

Girls' rights defenders, reproductive-rights campaigners, and allied civil society groups such as Inclusive Development for Citizens, the Center for Reproductive Rights, and Equality Now pushed donors and lenders to see Tanzania's education policy as a reputational and political risk, not business as usual. That pressure hit where the regime was vulnerable: its dependence on aid, external finance, and international legitimacy. In November 2018, the World Bank dropped a planned \$300 million education loan after Tanzania reaffirmed the ban, and Denmark withheld \$10 million in aid over rights concerns.

The campaign mattered because it translated discrimination into risk for outside actors. Advocates documented exclusion, amplified the voices of affected girls, and argued that international financing could not be separated from authoritarian abuse. In early 2020, Tanzanian civil society groups pressed the World Bank to withhold a new \$500 million education package unless the government changed course. The loan was eventually approved, so this was not a full blocking victory. Even so, the campaign forced delays, pushed the issue into the Bank's internal

deliberations, and made clear that financing Tanzania's education sector while girls were being excluded clearly carried political and reputational costs.

All this is what makes this case useful. Tanzania's girls' rights advocates did not rely only on moral outrage; they targeted institutions the regime depended on and made them choose whether continued engagement was worth the risk. They did not fully shut off the money, but they made business as usual harder, more controversial, and more conditional. Over time, that pressure kept international scrutiny alive. In 2021, the World Bank publicly welcomed Tanzania's decision to remove barriers that had prevented pregnant girls and young mothers from attending formal school.

When local advocates turn repression into a liability for lenders and donors, outside finance becomes harder for authoritarian governments to count on unquestioned.

"We need to be able to tell developed democracies, 'OK, this is not your mess, I agree. But do not help authoritarians. Do not give them foreign aid, do not give investment. Do not propagate these regimes' financial interests. If you have decided that this is not your fight, then stay away completely.'"



GEORGIAN PRO-DEMOCRACY ECOSYSTEM

Raising the cost of democratic backsliding

GEORGIA

When Georgia's ruling party pushed through its "foreign agents" law in 2024, the democracy-defense ecosystem mobilized to stop the measure, or at least raise its cost. A coalition of 121 civil society and media organizations became the clearest organized face of that resistance, showing that the fight was not only about one law, but about the future of civic space and Georgia's democratic trajectory.

They were not able to stop the law. Parliament passed it in May, overrode the president's veto, and it entered into force in June despite mass demonstrations and repeated warnings from abroad. Even then, Georgian democracy defenders made sure the fight did not remain a domestic matter. They framed the law as a test for Georgia's foreign partners, arguing that shrinking civic space was incompatible with the country's stated European path and should carry consequences for the governments and institutions still backing that relationship.

Long-standing channels between Georgian civil society and Brussels, reinforced by support from dozens of international organizations, helped keep the issue on the radar of the EU and the United States. The costs rose quickly.

In July 2024, the United States announced it was pausing more than \$95 million in assistance that directly benefited the Georgian government, citing anti-democratic actions. The European Union also moved to downgrade relations, froze part of its support, and later said Georgia would lose €121 million in funding because of democratic backsliding.

The law passed anyway. But the government's attempt to stigmatize civil society became harder to separate from its international relationships. What once looked like routine partnership began to carry political, financial, and reputational costs. The lesson is not that external pressure can always block authoritarian policy. It is that a strong democracy-defense ecosystem can make backsliding more expensive for governments that still depend on external legitimacy, money, and strategic support.

"This is a very concerning development and the final adoption of this legislation would negatively impact Georgia's progress on its EU path."



LEARN MORE

D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2025. "Building Alliances Across Borders." *AATK Podcast Series*

OTHER RESOURCES



Devex. 2022. "Tanzania education loan tests World Bank's influence."



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4

TRIGGER INTERNATIONAL MECHANISMS

Using institutional processes
to impose costs

THE PLAY

Elected authoritarians do not operate outside the international order shaped by rules, institutions, agreements, and norms. They work hard to maintain respectability because they need investment, development aid, strategic cooperation, and opportunities to showcase themselves at international summits.

And yet, that same international order also contains mechanisms that can be activated against them. This play is about using international arenas to build pressure through institutional leverage. Instead of relying on persuasion, this play focuses on turning to legal and institutional forums to activate oversight mechanisms, expose abuses, and impose costs.

More concretely, this means using international processes that force scrutiny, documentation, and formal responses. When international bodies launch investigations, deploy monitoring missions, initiate legal referrals, suspend cooperation, or issue formal condemnations,

authoritarian governments can face political or legal consequences. At the same time, criticism of their practices can gain legitimacy within their own borders.

Engaging with bodies such as the EU, OAS, AU, or UN, among others, which can pass resolutions, impose sanctions, recall ambassadors, or recognize the legitimacy of democratic actors opens new arenas. In parallel, legal arenas like the ICC or regional human rights courts can also be used to open cases, document abuses, and keep violations under scrutiny.

International mechanisms don't topple regimes on their own, but they can raise the costs and make abuses harder to ignore, justify, or conceal.



WHY IT WORKS

- **INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS HAVE RULES.** Once activated, formal mechanisms like investigations, missions, legal referrals, or resolutions cannot be easily ignored.
- **PROCESSES ENABLE SUSTAINED AND DETAILED SCRUTINY.** Unlike diplomatic statements, legal proceedings keep abuses under continuous examination and documentation.
- **FORMAL SCRUTINY CREATES POLITICAL COSTS.** When abuses enter institutional channels, they become harder for governments and international partners to overlook.
- **FORMAL RECORDS CONSTRAIN AUTHORITARIAN NARRATIVES.** Legal filings and institutional findings document evidence that can weaken the regime's official narratives.
- **INSTITUTIONAL ATTENTION EMPOWERS DEMOCRATIC ACTORS.** The political space is amplified to give visibility of democracy defenders facing repression at home.



HOW IT WORKS

1 IDENTIFY THE ARENAS THAT MATTER

Not all international bodies offer the same tools. Some forums can deploy election observation missions, open investigations, or issue formal reports. Others can pass resolutions, trigger sanctions debates, suspend cooperation, or open legal cases.

Map the institutional arenas where scrutiny can realistically be triggered: regional organizations, multilateral forums, human rights bodies, and international courts such as the EU, OAS, AU, UN, or regional judicial mechanisms. The key is not simply identifying them, but understanding which institutional channels exist, what procedures can work in your context, and how to activate them.

2 TRIGGER INSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURES

Once the relevant arenas are identified, the next step is to activate their formal mechanisms. Each institution operates through specific rules and pathways, and understanding these entry points is essential to move an issue from advocacy into the institutional agenda.

Some processes require formal submissions, others depend on member states requesting action, while others rely on rapporteurs, committees, or secretariats that can

initiate reviews. To activate these pathways, you may need to file complaints, request investigations, or submit documented evidence.

This can lead to fact-finding missions, resolutions suspending membership or funding, or formal statements from secretariats or commissions. In more severe cases, it may also involve referrals to legal bodies such as the ICC or IACHR.

3 **FEED THE PROCESS WITH PROCESS-READY EVIDENCE**

Once a procedure is activated, the issue is no longer just political criticism. It becomes part of an official process that demands documentation, discussion, and response. The strength of the process depends on the quality of the evidence behind it.

Work with journalists, investigators, lawyers, and civil society organizations to gather verifiable information that can withstand institutional scrutiny. Submit testimonies and documentation that demonstrate patterns of abuse and prevent cases from being dismissed as partisan accusations or political claims.

4 **KEEP THE PROCESS ALIVE**

Once a procedure is underway, the aim is to keep the issue moving through the institution's internal processes. These mechanisms often take time and involve multiple stages—requests for information, follow-up submissions, periodic reviews, or additional hearings.

Respond to requests as quickly as possible, submit updates when new evidence emerges, and use every procedural opportunity to keep the case active within the system. Institutional processes tend to move slowly, so patience and persistence are essential. Sustained engagement prevents the issue from fading into obscurity and helps ensure the process reaches a meaningful outcome.

5

**APPLY PUBLIC PRESSURE DURING
KEY WINDOWS**

Institutional processes have key moments: reports being released, council sessions, votes, or periodic reviews. These are moments when public attention can increase exposure and actors inside the institution are more likely to respond.

Time public interventions to coincide with these windows. When scrutiny inside institutions meets attention outside them, it becomes harder for actors to ignore the issue. Media coverage, open letters, briefings, or advocacy campaigns can reinforce the institutional process and increase pressure on decision-makers to act.

6

**BRING INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE
BACK HOME**

When international institutions produce reports, findings, or decisions, their real impact on authoritarian grip depends on how they are used domestically. These outcomes can validate claims, shift narratives, and open political space only when they are actively anchored in local reality.

Use these outputs to shape public debate, support legal actions, strengthen advocacy campaigns, or challenge official narratives. Reports, rulings, or investigations can become tools to weaken claims of legitimacy, mobilize citizens, influence media coverage, and raise the costs of repression. In short, they can pressure domestic actors and signal to democracy defenders at home that the struggle can be contested.



TIPS

A THINK IN YEARS, NOT MOMENTS

These institutional processes take time. Investigations, legal cases, and formal reviews rarely produce immediate results. However, once underway, they create sustained scrutiny that does not fade with the news cycle.

Stay engaged for the long run. These processes can keep pressure alive, protect survivors, and turn abuses into lasting liabilities that are harder to ignore, justify, or erase over time.

B WORK WITH ACTORS BASED IN INSTITUTIONAL HUBS

Diaspora groups, civil society, journalists, and lawmakers based in places where these institutions operate can play a key role in triggering reviews, raising issues inside formal arenas, or sustaining attention over time.

Work with actors who are embedded in cities that host international institutions (New York, Brussels, Washington, and others), especially those who vote, pay taxes, or operate within these systems. Their involvement can legitimize claims and make it harder for institutions to ignore or stall action.

C **SEQUENCE PRESSURE ACROSS ARENAS**

Institutional impact rarely comes from a single action. It emerges when multiple processes reinforce each other over time. Move strategically across arenas: initiate a re-view in one body, escalate findings in another, and sustain attention through parallel procedures. Sequencing actions across institutions can prevent issues from stalling and increase the cumulative pressure on authoritarians.



WHO'S DONE IT WELL



POLAND'S RULE-OF-LAW DEFENDERS

Turning EU mechanisms against backsliding

POLAND

When Poland's Law and Justice government (PiS) moved to capture the courts, Polish democracy defenders did not rely only on protests or public denunciations. Judges, lawyers, and civic campaigners worked to push the fight into the European Union's formal machinery. Groups such as Free Courts (Wolne Sądy), the judges' associations Iustitia and Themis, and allied legal advocates all documented abuses, translated legal changes into process-ready evidence, and fed that material into Brussels and Strasbourg.

Their goal was to activate institutional procedures that could impose real political and legal costs on PiS. That strategy helped turn Poland's judicial crisis into a formal EU rule-of-law confrontation rather than a purely domestic dispute. In December 2017, under pressure from Polish and European democracy defenders, the European Commission launched the EU's formal rule-of-law procedure, known as Article 7, against

Poland, warning that the government posed a serious risk to judicial independence and democratic checks and balances.

The power of the strategy lay in its persistence. Polish rule-of-law defenders did not trigger scrutiny just once and step back; they kept feeding the process. European Parliament monitoring bodies repeatedly heard directly from Polish legal and civic actors, including Free Courts, Iustitia, and Themis, on the harassment of judges, the disciplinary regime, and the government's efforts to silence independent courts.

Their testimony and documentation helped sustain attention across multiple arenas at once: the Article 7 procedure, hearings in the Council, European Parliament monitoring, Commission infringement proceedings, and litigation before the Court of Justice of the European Union. In 2021, the CJEU ruled that Poland's disciplinary regime for judges violated EU law, and the Commission followed with further action to defend judicial independence.

Polish democracy defenders did not wait for the EU to save them. They learned how its procedures worked, supplied the evidence needed to keep them alive, and used each institutional step to increase pressure back home. Article 7 did not remove PiS from power, and court rulings alone did not stop democratic backsliding. And yet, these mechanisms created an official record, imposed legal and reputational costs, constrained the government's room to maneuver, and repeatedly validated the claims of domestic democratic actors.

In 2024, after a change in government and major rule-of-law reforms, the Commission announced its intention to close the Article 7 procedure, highlighting how consequential those years of formal scrutiny had been. The lesson is clear: international mechanisms are slow, but when local actors

know how to activate and sustain them, they can turn institutional rules into long-term pressure against elected authoritarians.

"I have no obligation to stand before a body that is not a court within the meaning of Polish and European law."



GUATEMALA CIVIL SOCIETY

Sequencing international mechanisms to block a technical coup

GUATEMALA

When Bernardo Arévalo won Guatemala's presidential runoff in August 2023, anti-democratic actors tried to overturn the result through prosecutors, courts, and attacks on electoral authorities. Guatemalan watchdogs, legal experts, youth activists, and democratic actors understood that denunciation alone would not be enough. They worked to push the crisis into formal international arenas that could create scrutiny, issue official records, and raise the costs of derailing the transition. What followed was not generic international pressure, but a sequence of institutional mechanisms that made it harder to steal the election behind procedural smoke.

The inter-American system formed the backbone of that effort. The OAS Electoral Observation Mission defended the integrity of the vote and warned against attempts to subvert the result. As the crisis deepened, the OAS Permanent Council took up Guatemala repeatedly, keeping the transition on the regional agenda. In October 2023, the OAS also deployed a Mission for the 2023–2024 Government Transition Process, creating an official channel to monitor the handover of power and engage institutions and social actors.

In parallel, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights sent formal requests for information to the Guatemalan state and granted precautionary measures to Arévalo and Karin Herrera after finding they faced serious and urgent risks.

Together, these mechanisms turned the crisis into an active institutional process rather than a domestic standoff that could be quietly buried.

The European Union added a second layer of pressure. The EU Election Observation Mission helped counter fraud narratives and defend the legitimacy of the result. The EU delegation in Guatemala then used that evidence diplomatically, warning that any attempt to undermine democracy would carry consequences for Guatemala's relationship with Europe. After the attorney general's office escalated the crisis in December 2023 by claiming Arévalo's election was invalid, the European Parliament called for expedited sanctions. In January 2024, the Council of the European Union created a framework for restrictive measures in support of democracy and a peaceful transfer of power. Sanctions followed in February.

Guatemalan democratic actors sequenced pressure across arenas: election observation, OAS deliberation, IACHR protective measures, EU diplomacy, parliamentary pressure, and sanctions. None of these steps alone saved the transition. Together though, they created scrutiny, legitimacy, and costs that narrowed the room for maneuver of anti-democratic actors and helped protect the electoral result long enough for Arévalo to take office in January 2024.

"The world was watching, and that mattered. Without international pressure, we could've lost everything in silence."



LEARN MORE

D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2024. "Poland Beats Backsliding." *The Fight For Democracy Chronicles*, Volume 1.



D-Hub. 2025. "Building Alliances Across Borders." *AATK Podcast Series*

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5

BRING THE STARS TO YOUR CAMP

**Engaging international celebrities
for democracy support**

THE PLAY

Elected authoritarians often dominate the local media landscape. They also attack domestic celebrities through smear campaigns to push them into silence or compliance. But their influence drops off beyond borders. That's where this play begins: by activating international artists and influencers, who are beyond the authoritarians' reach.

When local channels are censored or compromised, international figures can break through the barrier and put the spotlight on democratic backsliding and citizen resistance. These allies can use social media to carry the message across borders and back into the authoritarian information space.

This play is about using celebrities to introduce contested issues into closed information environments. Of course, these voices won't replace democratic actors or set the agenda, but they can strengthen existing democratic efforts by expanding their reach, visibility, and credibility across audiences that don't usually engage in politics.

Pop culture figures require a careful approach. They should be engaged through credible partners, with accurate information and clear framing. Done right, this play can shift the tone of debate, reopen the narrative space inside controlled environments, energize the diaspora, and pierce the curated image of authoritarians at home.



WHY IT WORKS

- **THE INFORMATION BATTLEFIELD IS EXPANDED.** When domestic media is captured, international celebrities can break through and reintroduce contested narratives.
- **ATTENTION IS KEPT HIGH.** The engagement of cultural voices helps prevent authoritarian abuses from fading during key moments such as elections.
- **NON-POLITICAL AUDIENCES ARE ENGAGED.** Celebrities reach people outside the traditional circuits of political messaging, penetrating segments otherwise inaccessible.
- **THE REPUTATIONAL COSTS OF REPRESSION ARE RAISED.** When international celebrity voices expose abuses, they can reinforce the narratives of those resisting, amplifying them within domestic audiences.
- **BRIDGES ARE BUILT ACROSS SECTORS.** Artists and influencers can bring fresh approaches, giving political messages a resonant tone that connects across different communities.



HOW IT WORKS

1

IDENTIFY THE RIGHT CULTURAL CARRIERS

Spot international artists, influencers, and media figures who can reach audiences that are otherwise inaccessible to political messaging. Prioritize those with credibility in the specific communities or segments you want to penetrate, not just those with large followings. Develop ties early so your group becomes a trusted source. Provide reliable data, personal stories, visuals, and testimony to support their engagement.

2

ACTIVATE VOICES WITH CLEAR AND ACTIONABLE REQUESTS

Celebrities can reach millions of people at once, so therefore they should be approached carefully. Target those already active on political or humanitarian issues, ideally with ties to your country. Use trusted intermediaries such as NGOs, diaspora leaders, and fellow artists to make contact. Provide verified information and safety assurances so they feel supported and credible. Frame requests clearly: a tweet, letter, video, or campaign. Clarity and specificity increase the likelihood of action and reduce perceived risk.

3 **CREATE MOMENTS DESIGNED FOR PENETRATION**

It is not about organizing press releases. Use social media and cultural formats to spark headlines, visuals, and debate that can travel across borders and back into the domestic information space. Time these moments around key opportunities such as elections, anniversaries, summits, or media cycles.

Visibility alone is not enough, though. Design these moments to penetrate closed or skeptical audiences. Celebrities can act as entry points, especially when messages are embedded in native social media formats.

4 **BLEND GLOBAL AND LOCAL VOICES**

Celebrities are most effective when they reinforce existing democratic energy rather than attempt to substitute for it. Their voices gain impact when they are echoed, adapted, or reinforced locally. Whenever possible, connect global figures with local voices. Work with local celebrities, artists and creators who can help messages travel further inside the regime's narrative ecosystem.

These partnerships can humanize issues at key moments and ensure that messages do not remain distant external signals, but are perceived as relevant and grounded within the local context.

5 **ANTICIPATE BACKLASH —AND TURN IT INTO PRESSURE**

International media or celebrity voices can trigger authoritarian retaliation, smears, attacks, or attempts to discredit those involved. Be ready for this. When backlash comes, coordinate responses across global and local voices to amplify solidarity and reinforce the message.

If possible, use these attacks as an opportunity. Redirect attention toward the authoritarian's reaction as part of the problem. When handled well, backlash can increase visibility, validate the message, and raise the costs of attacks.



TIPS

A REACH THE RIGHT AUDIENCE, NOT THE BIGGEST ONE

Not every celebrity is helpful. Prioritize figures who already show alignment with movable audiences, those politically ambivalent or disengaged who can be driven away from authoritarian support. Credibility within a community matters more than reach alone. A smaller but trusted voice targeting the right audience can penetrate much further than a global figure who only speaks to the already convinced.

B PROTECT CREDIBILITY

Supporting high-profile voices is not only about security, it's about maintaining credibility. When briefing them, avoid pushing partisan slogans or ready-made messages. Instead, provide accurate information and context so they can shape a message they feel comfortable owning. This reduces their risk of being seen as manipulated or misinformed. The role of these figures is not to lead the struggle, but to help democratic messages travel further and resonate beyond traditional political audiences. If credibility breaks, the message can't really travel and smear campaigns will certainly find traction.

C **TURN MOMENTS INTO RELATIONSHIPS**

Keep allies engaged by sharing milestones, thanking them publicly, and offering new ways to contribute. Relationships deepen when people see results and feel part of the broader effort. Long-term partnerships ensure visibility across multiple cycles of attention and help your movement withstand authoritarian attempts to silence it.



WHO'S DONE IT WELL



ASSEMBLE THE VOTE

The Avengers join Brazil's democracy fight

BRAZIL

In the days before Brazil's decisive 2022 presidential runoff, democracy defenders faced a critical problem. Turnout in the first round had been the lowest in decades, and history showed participation usually dropped even further in runoffs. With Jair Bolsonaro seeking reelection, mobilization – and youth in particular – was essential to defeat an entrenched authoritarian threat.

That's when the Avengers assembled. It began with Brazilian fandoms and celebrities launching the hashtag *#NotAllHeroesWearCapes* on Twitter, a tribute to the countless grassroots activists mobilizing voters across the country. Soon after, one of Brazil's most famous comedians tagged Samuel L. Jackson, asking "Nick Fury" himself to call the Avengers. Jackson not only replied but tagged his Marvel co-stars—Robert Downey Jr., Mark Ruffalo, Don Cheadle,

and others—who began engaging directly with Brazilian activists online, praising their efforts and urging people to vote.

The effect was electric, particularly among young voters, as it was the intention – just a few hours before election day. Overnight, Twitter caught fire: over 600,000 tweets from 233,000 users made #NotAllHeroesWearCapes the top trending topic in Brazil. The campaign spilled over from Twitter to Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp and traditional media, all amplifying the message that even superheroes were calling on ordinary Brazilians to defend democracy at the ballot box.

On election day, the results spoke volumes. More than 118 million Brazilians voted: 500,000 more than in the first round. It was the lowest abstention rate since 2006 and the first time in Brazilian history that a runoff saw higher turnout than the first round. Lula went on to win with 50.9% of the vote to Bolsonaro's 49.1%.

#NOTALLHEROESWEARCAPES IN FIGURES

- 600,000 tweets
- 233,000 users in less than 24 hours
- 1st trending topic in Brazil, 8th in the World



KYLIAN MBAPPÉ & JULES KOUNDÉ

A call on fans to defend democracy

FRANCE

During Euro 2024, France's football stars found themselves in the middle of an unexpected political drama. Just weeks earlier, the far-right National Rally (RN) had surged in the European elections, prompting President Emmanuel Macron to call snap parliamentary elections. After the first round, the RN was leading, and pre-match press conferences suddenly carried more than sporting weight, they became a stage for democracy.

As part of an effort to reach non-political audiences with non-traditional actors, France's national team captain and global icon Kylian Mbappé urged especially young voters to mobilize, calling the election a historic moment that demanded strong participation. "The extremes are knocking on the door of power and we have the opportunity to shape our country's future," he told reporters. His teammate Jules Koundé echoed the call, posting that "the RN is not a solution" and stressing that far-right extremism had never brought more freedom, justice, or unity. He called for a bigger turnout for the second round: "It's not over yet. We can try to find those who have not voted and get them to the ballot box to make sure the extreme right does not get in."

The impact was immediate. Headlines across the world carried their words, amplifying a message that reached far beyond traditional politics: vote and block the far right. More than 200 French athletes soon published a collective open letter in *L'Équipe* urging the very same. Despite pushback from the French Football Federation, and criticism from RN leader Jordan Bardella, Mbappé's and Koundé's interventions dominated the news cycle during the tournament.

Their calls echoed an earlier moment in French football history. In 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen's far right shocked the country by reaching the presidential runoff, Zinedine Zidane urged citizens (especially the youth) to mobilize against extremism. Two decades later, with the far right surging again, Mbappé and Koundé carried the same spirit: football stars reminding fans that defending democracy means showing up at the polls.

A vibrant, decentralized campaign led by activists and civil society organizers amplified the players' message, ensuring it reached young voters. In the second round, France recorded its highest turnout since 1997, and youth participation proved decisive: 61% of 18–24-year-olds voted for pro-democracy parties, helping block the far right from power.

"I think that more than ever, we have to go and vote, it is really urgent, we cannot leave our country in the hands of these people, it is really urgent."



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D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2025. "Building Alliances Across Borders."
AATK Podcast Series



D-Hub. 2024. "Defusing the far-right bomb."
The Fight For Democracy Chronicles, Volume 9.

OTHER RESOURCES



Quid. 2023. "Assemble the Vote." *YouTube*



Shorty Impact Awards. "Assemble the Vote."



The Guardian 2024. "Mbappé urges young people to vote against 'extremes' in France elections."



Vox. 2024. "Do celebrity endorsements matter?"

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Our goal is to ensure that democracy advocates around the world are equipped with the vital relationships, deep knowledge, and essential skills they need to fulfil their mission.