



THE ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN PLAYBOOK

Recommendations from
Women Leaders for Women
Leaders in the Global Fight
for Rights and Democracy

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On the cover: Dr. Obiageli “Oby” Ezekwesili, Vital Voices Global Leadership Award Honoree 2020 and former Minister of Education, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Women are instrumental in holding the line between democracy and authoritarianism, between peace and conflict, and in determining if the movement for rights and democracy will backslide or advance. They lead and crucially support democratic movements, assemble and support electoral coalitions and lead all manners of democratic resistance and advancement.

They do this because they understand the evidence. Democracy has proved the most powerful system of governance to sustain and expand their rights, as equal citizens in every aspect of civic life. They gain most, and for the long term, when democracies succeed.

With authoritarianism on the rise, the role of women leaders in democracies and democratic movements has never been more crucial, or more at risk. Strongmen target women because they understand the power they wield, from countries with electoral democracies to entrenched authoritarian rule. They threaten their hold on power as a formidable force for democratic advancement and rights.

With so much at stake, Vital Voices Global Partnership, in partnership with the Empiria i Wiedza Foundation, hosted “Leading the Rise: Women for Rights and Democracy”, a Global Action Summit September 9-12, 2024. The Global Action Summit in Warsaw, Poland, convened over 100 women leaders with direct experience protecting rights and democracy around the world, “Leading the Rise” against authoritarian practices. Together these women connected causes, shared best practices, and identified a series of key recommendations in the fight against authoritarianism.

These recommendations make up the “Anti-Authoritarian Playbook,” a tactical guidebook written by women leaders for women leaders on how to best counter the rise of authoritarians with actionable tactics and principles. Our intent for the Playbook is that it is one starting point for countering the authoritarian trend. On its own, it won’t turn the tide. But by sharing practices across geographies and experiences we will collectively be stronger, and with full confidence that we will, through our collective efforts, continue to lead the rise.

Alyse Nelson
President and CEO
Vital Voices Global Partnership



Alyse Nelson, Global Summit. Warsaw, Poland. September 2024.

NAVIGATING THE PLAYBOOK

The Playbook is divided into six topic areas. These were developed by a 12-member Vital Voices Global Advisory Group of women leaders and further refined during the Global Summit, which included participants from more than 50 countries. Each section includes a quick summary and context followed by a series of recommended tactics and actions.

In addition, the Playbook includes summary sections immediately below on the tactics of authoritarians, as well as an overview of the Playbook and its recommendations. The final section includes links to additional resources and areas for deeper exploration.

Utilize the Playbook to apply recommendations and practices that fit the circumstances. Not every observation or recommendation will be suited to every situation, culture or experience. The success of a tactic in one context will not guarantee a positive outcome in another.

The Playbook is published as an open-source document. It is not meant to be a static document and is open to revision, improvement and expansion based on the sharing of best practices.



Global Summit, Warsaw, Poland, September 2024.

LEADING THE RISE

Understanding the Strongman

The authoritarian leader thrives by dividing his opposition through fear and division, overwhelming communication channels with disinformation, intimidating through violence, undermining democracy through attacks on institutions and norms. These are among the tried-and-true strongman tactics, principle among them misogyny and relentless attacks on women.

The strongman argues that he is the guardian of stability and future prosperity. In contrast, it is women who threaten the traditional order. As Harvard's Zoe Marks and Erica Chenoweth have authoritatively noted: "Women's political activism has clearly expanded and fortified democracy—a fact that autocrats and illiberal democrats intuitively understand and that explains their fear of women's empowerment."

By most accounts, the practices of the authoritarian leaders are increasingly similar. They learn across borders, implement identical tactics and form strategic, business and geographic alliances, often based on increasing wealth and using government for self-enrichment. Their playbook is effective. Seventy one percent of the world's population is currently living in autocracies, a 48 percent increase in just the last ten years. Global democracy is at 1985 levels.

The effort to turn the tide will not be easy. It will require extraordinary courage and, in many cases, extraordinary sacrifice. It will also require that donors think differently and resource civil society and activists with a firm eye on long-term partnership and support. After strongmen come to power, whether through legitimate elections or other means, they hold power with relentless force, employing their playbook to further their control and silence the opposition. They use virulent tactics that range from the seemingly banal to the explicitly grotesque, dividing, harassing and intimidating to exiling, detaining and killing.

Women leaders are accustomed to long odds and overcoming the seemingly impossible. They also have the most at stake in "Leading the Rise" against the authoritarian trend, furtherance of their rights and full participation in civic life. There is a reason, as Marks and Chenoweth noted, that autocrats fear the power of women. They represent one of the greatest threats to their future and perhaps the greatest force for democracy.

The strongman argues that he is the guardian of stability and future prosperity. In contrast, it is women who threaten the traditional order.

THE ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN PLAYBOOK

We created the Anti-Authoritarian Playbook to capitalize on shared learning and best practices, across geographies and diverse contexts. The goal of the Playbook is to build from what is working, learn from what has not, and support learning and each other across diverse experiences and geographies.

Developed by and for women leaders in the Vital Voices Global Network, the Playbook is based on four core principles:

- **Be Innovative:** The tactics and practices of authoritarian leaders are constantly evolving. The counter movement requires sustained innovation and new thinking, and new ways of funding to keep pace.
- **Build Networks:** Strongmen learn and build alliances across geographies. They work together. Build broad geographic alliances and networks that share experiences and practices, that learn from one another about what is working.
- **Fight Isolation:** Authoritarian leaders thrive by isolating their opponents, demoralizing them into submission. Don't let them. Always remember you are not alone and connect with others who are waging similar battles.
- **Be Safe:** Never underestimate the power of the strongman, who will deploy every means at his disposal to sustain his power, most of all violence, harassment and intimidation.

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No matter the skill, commitment or courage, the counter movement won't be successful without funding. Frontline activists require support in ways that sustain their long-term work, skills building and mental health. The work of civil society actors need not just support, but fewer obstacles to accessing funds and higher levels of trust and risk acceptance on the part of donors.

They will also need funding that allows them to better prepare and respond to authoritarian threats, like security audits, digital safety, and updating of registration documents. Donors will need to enhance their own referral and other networks so they can better support their partners by connecting them to experts and technical support. Financing for highly-skilled lawyers and legal teams will need to be a standard part of individual support and grant agreements.

BY THE NUMBERS

71%

Percentage of the world's population living in autocracies, or 5.7 billion people, as of 2023.

(Source: Democracy Report 2024, V-Dem Institute)

52

The number of countries in 2023 that experienced declines in political rights and civil liberties, with 21 countries showing improvements.

(Source: Freedom in the World 2024, Freedom House)

48%

Percentage increase, in the previous ten years, of the world's population living in autocracies.

(Source: Democracy Report 2024, V-Dem Institute)

44%

Percentage of the world's population, or 3.5 billion people, living in so called electoral autocracies, where elections are used as a means to legitimize autocratic leaders.

(Source: Democracy Report 2024, V-Dem Institute)

29%

Percentage of the world's population, or 2.3 billion people, living in liberal and electoral democracies.

(Source: Democracy Report 2024, V-Dem Institute)

35%

Percentage of the world's population living in countries that are becoming more autocratic.

(Source: Democracy Report 2024, V-Dem Institute)

STEPS FOR FIGHTING AUTHORITARIANISM

Step 1: Own Democracy

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Authoritarians detest democracy, because democracy and democratic movements are a threat to their power. They seek to undermine it as a failed system that has not delivered. They will attack institutions and norms to cast doubt on the system, to argue often convincingly that only a strong arm can cure the ills of society. Their attacks exploit insecurities. They will invoke threats from abroad, use security and enemies of the state as a cudgel to solidify their power. These appeals are visceral, difficult to counter, and play on insecurities.



Alida Vicente, Indigenous Authority, Guatemala, Protest Movement, 2023. Read her story below.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1. Define Democracy:** Don't let strongmen define democracy. Be relentless in claiming its benefits. Authoritarians attack democracy and its institutions to bolster their power, to divide and bully their way to power.
- 2. Focus on Elections First:** Focus on winning elections first, put off divisive fights till after. Once a strongman leader is elected, he will use his powers to erode rights and attack women. Defeating the strongman should always be the priority.
- 3. Win on Issues:** Embrace issues that unite to build broad and powerful coalitions and that speak directly to citizen concerns. Downplay or avoid divisive issues when necessary to build inclusive issue-based coalitions.

4. **Use the Media:** Independent media is often the first target of authoritarian leaders. But always build alliances with independent media where it exists as natural allies in supporting democracy.
5. **Own Democracy:** Governments don't define democracy, the people do. Claim and reclaim democracy on your own terms and be relentless in stating why it's advantageous for sustaining and expanding rights for women.
6. **Take Small Wins:** Make progress at the local level. It is the building block for long-term gains. Celebrate the seemingly small wins and take the long view. Today's local leader is tomorrow's national champion.
7. **Join the Resistance:** Always learn across borders. Women leaders across different geographies have successful experiences and tactics to share in how they resisted and won against autocratic leaders.

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

Alida Vicente is an activist and an indigenous authority of the Poqomam Maya Nation, as well as a Vital Voices Global Network leader in Guatemala. In 2023, when the ruling political elite attempted to undermine election results, Alida led nationwide protests for over 90 days to resist this democratic backslide. As one of the few female leaders in the movement, she advocated for the inclusion of women, youth, and indigenous communities in the protests. She helped build and demonstrate how broad, inclusive coalition building serves as a successful tactic in countering authoritarians. Ultimately, Alida and her coalition succeeded in ensuring the peaceful transfer of power to Guatemala's reformist democratically elected president.



Step 2: Build Movements

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

While authoritarians detest democracy, they fear democratic movements even more. This helps explain why authoritarian leaders use tactics to discredit popular movements, from vilifying them through vicious disinformation to jailing, exiling and killing opponents. Popular democratic movements are a powerful counterforce to the authoritarian trend. The evidence also shows that women play a critical role in movement building. Women's participation is strongly correlated to success and more durable outcomes. The stakes are particularly high for women. When movements fall short, women are targeted in the backlash. Women have the most to gain in supporting movements, but they also have a lot to lose if the movement is not successful.



Ruchira Gupta, Activist and Journalist, India, 2023. Read her story below.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1. Be Prepared:** Autocrats use all means to undermine opposition, legal actions, audits and other threats against organizations and individuals. Preparedness planning is key. Use experts to address vulnerabilities such as legal and financial compliance.
- 2. Have a Plan:** Strongmen will often use arrest and detention as a tactic to silence movements and their leaders. Learn from the experts on how to develop and put a plan in action on how and when to react, resist or respond.
- 3. Build Inclusivity:** Build solidarity among diverse groups, ages, and backgrounds. Authoritarian actors will seek to divide and weaponize animosity between different coalitions. Unity is critically important as a strength.
- 4. Use Existing Systems:** Autocrats will seek to attack the legal system and bend it to their interests. But they are not always entirely successful. The law and the courts may still include allies and create pathways for protecting rights.

5. **Have a Broad, Clear Vision:** Set clear and consistent goals, and then model democratic principles in their implementation. Shared values and transparency go hand in hand in building trust within a movement.
6. **Model Democracy:** Practice democratic values of inclusiveness in movement building and insist on gender parity. Movements are more effective and durable when women lead and are part of the leadership structure.
7. **Ensure Peace:** Nonviolent movements are shown to be more successful and further the movement's narrative. Instigating violence only gives an opening to violent state actors and plays into the hands of authoritarians.
8. **Take Time to Plan:** Plan, then act. Taking time to reflect, assess and reassess is an essential part of building movements. Authoritarians thrive on overwhelming the opposition. Reflecting, assessing, and then acting is more essential than ever.
9. **Meet Basic Needs of Movement Members:** Wellness is a strategy for movement building. Movements can't thrive if people burn out, or their individual needs are not accounted for and addressed.

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

In India's 2024 Parliamentary elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi aimed to strengthen his grip on power. Modi is often associated with accelerating democratic decline by suppressing dissent, curtailing fundamental rights, and silencing critics through harassment and imprisonment. However, Indian journalist, activist and Vital Voices Network member **Ruchira Gupta** reports that women at local and regional levels remained undeterred. In the election's lead-up, they organized grassroots protests, staging sit-ins against discriminatory laws, holding anti-rape rallies, and leading strikes by healthcare and mid-day meal workers for fair wages. Hundreds of thousands of women supported these actions through village councils, savings groups, and cooperatives.

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Modi's political rivals seized upon the strength of these women-led movements, positioning them as a formidable counterbalance. They provided resources and supplies through their party networks. They invited them to lead and join campaigns, including a 2,200-mile march across India considered a turning point in energizing the opposition. This election saw India closing the gender gap in voting, with more women casting ballots than men. The opposition gained 2 percent more of women's votes, while Modi's party lost 1 percent, underscoring women's rising influence in shaping Indian democracy. Modi ultimately won the election, though by a narrower margin than anticipated. Women were widely acknowledged as significant in curtailing Modi's power.



Step 3: Power Up Networks

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Authoritarians seek to isolate their opponents. In electoral democracies, they do this by vilifying groups using tried and true tactics of othering. In entrenched autocracies, they use more vicious tactics, like jailing, violence and physical intimidation. Networks are powerful means to decrease isolation as well as to improve, share skills, strategies and tactics. Networks are a means to connect and reinforce the positive emotion that you are not alone, and that authoritarian attacks are being experienced by others. The collective can serve as a powerful tool in strengthening personal resolve. Networks are also an important component of movement building and create opportunity for new thinking that arises from shared experience.



Nyaguthii Kioi, Activist and Network Leader, Kenya, 2024. Read her story below.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1. Share Resources:** Share best practices, funding opportunities and other forms of support in the collective fight for change. Acknowledge and practice the importance of joint action against strongmen who thrive on division.
- 2. Start Small:** Use personal networks for protests and organizing. Even the most micro-networks can lead to broader societal change. Build from your immediate community, and always value it.
- 3. Also Think Big:** Networks are more powerful when they cross borders and geographies. Authoritarians isolate their opponents. When possible, include allies across borders to share experiences, support and connections.
- 4. Support Each Other:** Offering emotional and psychological support is vital in a challenging environment. Women leaders help each

other navigate setbacks and celebrate successes, reinforcing their commitment to the movement.

- 5. Avoid Divisive Fights:** Practice norms and narratives that promote unity. Always remember the greatest tool in the authoritarian toolbox is division. Identify and reinforce narratives that seek common ground.

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

Nyaguthii Kioi is the coordinator of the WILD Feminists Network, a grassroots feminist community fostering safety and freedom for women and gender minorities in Kenya. The Network works to dismantle patriarchal, colonial and anti-democratic systems through a feminist intersectional, intergenerational and community-based approach to social justice.

The Network played an active role in 2024 street protests that led to the Government of Kenya rescinding a law that would have imposed onerous taxation on average citizens. During the protests, members faced multiple attacks during protests, online and offline.

They sustained their activism by rallying around each other, providing mental health and wellness support. The Network used tactics such as community debriefs, art therapy and financial mutual aid to meet members' urgent needs. In addition, the Network engaged in feminist political education with mothers and maternal figures of the members ensuring a decentralized intergenerational feminist movement even in rural areas.



Step 4: Lead Across Generations

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Authoritarian tactics of division often exploit generational divides. Strengthening inter-generational coalitions is essential for creating sustainable opposition. Cross-generational work is vital in the fight for democracy as it fosters knowledge sharing and mentorship, allowing experienced activists to pass down invaluable lessons and strategies to younger generations. Engaging with youth is paramount to preserving democracy as their engagement not only revitalizes democratic processes but also ensures that the values and priorities of future generations are represented.



Wiktorja Nowak, Youth Activist, Poland, 2024.
Read her story below.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1. Focus on Intergenerational Training and Capacity Building:** Identify issues that cross generations and unite young and old. Build coalitions first on issues that unite, before introducing topics that may require change.
- 2. Build Bridges, Not Divides:** Avoid generational labels and prejudices that erode trust. Start with accessible communication using age sensitive vocabulary before introducing new language or terminology.
- 3. Learn Across Generations:** Learn from the past, as history often repeats itself. Activists from older generations frequently have experience from tackling similar issues and countering strongmen tactics.
- 4. Learn Lessons:** Be open and create opportunities to learn from one another. Diverse viewpoints always produce better results. Movements are more powerful when they learn from previous experiences as well as new thinking.

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

In the 2023 Polish election, women turned out in record numbers. More women than men voted for the first time in Polish history. They were joined at the polls by a groundswell of support from younger voters, motivated by the ruling party's attack on issues that mattered most to their lives. The Polish election is often cited as a case study of how to turn back the authoritarian trend, focusing on issues that unite and pressing the case for democracy being on the line. There is certainly never a guarantee that this strategy will work. This is particularly true for incumbent parties with divided coalitions and that are swimming against an electorate pushing for change. But the Polish opposition demonstrated how women and a broad inter-generational coalition can defeat a government with eight years in power and a record of democratic backsliding.



Step 5: Counter Online Attacks

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The rising tide of online threats, disinformation, deep fake imagery, and coordinated intimidation campaigns, particularly on social media, is undermining women leaders' credibility and safety. The online ecosystem is being relentlessly exploited by authoritarian leaders and is one of the most successful tools in attacking women leading the opposition. Women leaders are left navigating a landscape where their safety, credibility, and well-being are constantly at risk. The counter strategy requires both a defense, in preventing tactics such as hacking, and offense in change of legal norms and organizing online to counter attacks.



Nika Kovač, Activist and Movement Leader, Slovenia 2022. Read her story below.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1. Update Training and Tools:** Always implement robust, best practice security measures at the personal and organizational levels, such as counter-hacking software, use of secure online communication tools
- 2. Don't Go it Alone Online:** Form online communities and alliances that can help counter digital attacks, or so-called counter trolls. Authoritarians assault and intimidate online, isolating opponents. Counter with your online allies.
- 3. Pause, Think, Act:** Don't respond immediately when attacked online. The attackers are counting on making you feel unsafe, or much worse. Take a moment to disconnect, get some emotional distance before reacting.
- 4. Counter Disinformation:** Speak out against disinformation online and report threats when you see them, often referred to as flooding the zone. But also, be judicious when responding, abide by the rule of pause, think act.

5. Advocate for System Change: Laws need to be changed. Advocate for online safety laws and regulations that include explicit provisions that address harms faced by women online. System change is an important part of the solution.

6. Change the System: Consider identifying and even developing alternative online platforms where women are safe online. The current platforms frequently work against women’s rights, consider if revision is the solution.

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

Nika Kovač is the founding director of The Research Institute of 8th March, a movement-building organization that uses storytelling and advocacy to confront gender and economic inequalities across Slovenia.

Her team was regularly targeted by the country’s former Prime Minister as well as multiple far-right groups. As typically happens, violence online led to violence offline.

Despite having powerful adversaries, Kovac came up with an innovative way to counter trolling: she mobilized what she calls a “love army” who, whenever trolling begins, respond by overwhelming digital feeds with positive messages instead. The women also tour the country, recruiting more people to join their campaign, with the ultimate goal of changing national laws relating to online abuse.



Step 6: Build Wellness

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Resisting autocracy takes its toll. Women leaders and activists have long neglected the importance of well-being and mental health in movement building and activism. Maintaining well-being is essential to long-term resistance. Leaders who have found success in maintaining their mental well-being prioritize emotional regulation strategies, such as mindfulness and positive self-talk. This along with a variety of protective factors has shown to improve leaders' wellbeing and ultimately allow for them to sustain their activism.



Yasmina Benslimane, Activist and Organization Leader, Morocco. Read her story below.

KEY ACTIONS

- 1. Expand Your Window of Tolerance:** Prioritize regular self-care and rely on your support network. These practices will help manage stress more effectively and remain engaged over the long term.
- 2. Harness Collectivism in Wellness:** Wellness must be a shared priority for a movement to be sustainable and effective. Implement community check-ins, resource sharing, and training sessions, to build a wellness culture.
- 3. Create Boundaries:** Learn when to say no, prioritize self-care and make time to reflect. Communicate boundaries to your team and others so they can support your personal well-being as well.
- 4. Don't Go It Alone:** Involve others in the decision-making process to alleviate the burden on any one individual. This collective effort cultivates belonging and support, reducing feelings of isolation and promoting mental well-being.

ADVICE FROM AN ACTIVIST:

“As a young feminist activist, I find hope and strength in the incredible community of young women I work with. They are my chosen family, and every investment I make in them is an investment in a brighter future. But to keep supporting them, I’ve learned that self-care is not a luxury, it’s a duty. It’s essential to create space for rest, reflection, and personal wellness. For me, success comes from recognizing that caring for myself allows me to continue uplifting others. Boundaries, mindfulness, and nurturing joy are key practices that sustain me in the face of stress. We can’t pour from an empty cup, and I owe it to my chosen family to stay grounded, balanced, and well.”

—**Yasmina Benslimane**, Vital Voices Fellow, Morocco



RESOURCES

STORY FROM THE FIELD:

The founders of **STROIKA** set out to create a new kind of international organization, dedicated to working with community-based and progressive organizations on tactics for countering authoritarianism. They link groups and activists from seemingly unrelated geographies, who are often surprised to discover they are confronting identical tactics despite different contexts. One lesson-learned from STROIKA is to never underestimate the value of preparedness planning. They work with individuals and organizations to imagine expected and unexpected futures; map response strategies; identify current barriers to preparedness; and create realistic plans for overcoming these barriers. They believe that the distinction between “high risk” and “safe” environments is often an artificial one, as political and operating conditions can shift rapidly. Building a culture of security is key for organizations to safeguard their work, staff, partners, and their communities – and to avoid the operational burdens of ad hoc responses to unexpected emergencies.



STROIKA Co-Founders
Yelena V Litvinov and
Tatyana Margolin

Authoritarianism Trends

Democracy Report 2024

The Democracy Report 2024 from V-Dem Institute documents the global decline in democracy, with 71% of people now living under autocratic governments. Key democratic pillars like free speech, fair elections, and civil society are worsening in many countries. Despite this, there are positive trends in regions like Latin America, where democracy is improving in some nations. The report also offers new insights into how democracies rise and fall.

The Authoritarian Playbook

The “Authoritarian Playbook” by Protect Democracy outlines the strategies used by authoritarian leaders to undermine democratic institutions, including attacking the press, weakening checks and balances, corrupting elections, and using violence or the threat of violence. The report also offers insights into how democracies can resist these tactics to protect their systems of governance.

Freedom in the World

This report by Freedom House evaluates political rights and civil liberties in 195 countries and 15 territories, highlighting the global decline in freedom. This report, published annually since 1972, reveals that democracy has continued to erode for the 17th consecutive year, with increasing restrictions on political rights and civil liberties.

Books

Autocracy, Inc - The Dictators Who Want to Run the World

“Autocracy, Inc: The Dictators Who Want to Run the World” by Anne Applebaum explores the rise of authoritarian leaders and their ambitions to influence global affairs. It examines how these leaders use economic, political, and technological tools to extend their power beyond their own borders, impacting international relations and democratic institutions worldwide.

How Democracies Die

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt are widely recognized in the United States and abroad for their insightful analysis of the breakdown of democracy. The Harvard scholars based their analysis on extensive evidence of how democracies perish through the gradual erosion of norms and institutions. They also point to the tactics of how to save democracies and how to successfully oppose the rise of authoritarianism.

The Authoritarian International: Tracing How Authoritarian Regimes Learn in the Post-Soviet Space

Stephen Hall explores how authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet region interact and learn from each other. The book examines the ways these regimes share

strategies, tactics, and technologies to maintain control and suppress dissent, providing insight into the international dynamics of authoritarian governance.

Democracy - Eleven Writers on What It Is and Why It Matters

The book includes powerful, urgent reflections on the value of democracy from eleven women writers and thought leaders including Margaret Atwood, Mary Beard, Erica Benner, Kaja Kallas, Aditi Mittal, Vjosa Osmani, Adela Raz, Elif Shafak, Lola Shoneyin, Yuan Yang, and Lea Ypi.

Authoritarianism & Gender

Revenge of the Patriarchs; Why Autocrats Fear Women

“Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women”, by Erica Chenoweth and Dr. Zoe Marks, explores how authoritarian regimes deliberately target women’s rights to reinforce patriarchal control and prevent the empowerment of women, which they perceive as a threat to their power. The article highlights that women’s autonomy and participation in public life challenge the traditional structures that autocrats rely on to maintain their authority.

Cambodia’s Friday Women are fighting for justice, with their husbands and sons in jail ahead of a ‘democratic charade’ election

This article covers the role of women in Cambodia’s 2023 election, focusing on their efforts to advocate for the release of imprisoned activists. It highlights how women are mobilizing to push for democratic reforms and human rights amid a politically repressive environment.

PODCAST: Why Empowered Women Are Authoritarianism’s Targets and How They Can Be Protected

This podcast explores why authoritarian regimes view empowered women as threats and the strategies they use to target and suppress them. It also discusses ways to support and protect women in these environments, emphasizing the importance of resilience and advocacy.

Digital Authoritarianism and Censorship

REPORTS

It's Everyone's Problem: Mainstreaming Responses to Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

The report, by Nina Jankowicz, Isabella Gomez-O'Keefe, Lauren Hoffman, and Andrea Vidal Becker, assesses the state of research on Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence as well as recent global legislative, regulatory, and policy progress made on this issue.

World Elections 2024

The World Elections 2024 report monitors key elections worldwide, focusing on election integrity and the impact of digital platforms and disinformation.

Global Expression Report 2024

The Global Expression Report assesses global trends and threats to freedom of expression, highlighting challenges faced by journalists and activists in advocating for free speech.

BOOKS

The Death of Truth: How Social Media and the Internet Gave Snake Oil Salesmen and Demagogues the Weapons they Needed to Destroy Trust and Polarize the World – And What We Can Do

“The Death of Truth” by Steven Brill explores how the internet and social media have fueled misinformation and polarization, undermining trust in institutions. The book investigates the role of tech companies and political manipulation, offering solutions to restore truth and combat the spread of misinformation.

ARTICLES

Exclusive: Leaked Files Show China And Russia Sharing Tactics On Internet Control, Censorship

The article discusses the collaboration between Russia and China in expanding internet censorship and control, emphasizing the growing alignment between the two countries in curbing online freedoms.

Dictators' Dark Secret: They're learning from each other; The Washington Post Opinion

The article highlights how dictatorships globally are increasingly learning from each other. This collaboration allows them to enhance censorship, restrict free speech, and undermine opposition.

RESOURCES

Access Now: Digital Security Emergency Helpline

Access Now provides urgent support and guidance for security online communications and protecting digital identities of human rights defenders during crises.

Vital Voices: Digital Security Toolkit

Vital Voices Digital Security Toolkit offers a practical guide for women leaders and activists to protect against digital threats and online surveillance.

Pen America: Online Harassment Field Manual

Pen America's manual provides strategies for responding to online harassment and protecting personal data.

Internews: Media Workers' Toolkit for Safer Online & Mobile Practices

Internews offers a guide designed for journalists and media workers to safeguard their online communications and mobile devices from security breaches while reporting in hostile environments.

Digital Defenders Partnership Incident Emergency Fund

Digital Defenders supports organizations and individuals facing digital threats, offering immediate financial assistance to respond to incidents of online harassment, hacking, and surveillance.

Cross-Generational & Youth Movements

ARTICLES

New Feminist Activism, Waves and Generations

This UN Women paper explores the rise of a fourth wave of feminism, led by young women, focusing on democracy, gender-based violence, and sexual rights. It highlights how this new wave is global, technology-driven, and intersectional.

Young, Feminist and Fearless: Holding the Line

The State of Youth Civil Society 2023 report by Restless Development focuses on young feminist movements, highlighting their pivotal role in challenging autocracy and advancing gender equality. Despite facing significant barriers like lack of recognition, online harassment, and mental health struggles, these movements continue to lead change through digital platforms and direct action, demanding more inclusive leadership and financial resources

RESOURCES

Youth Activist Toolkit

The Youth Activist Toolkit by Advocates for Youth offers young people practical tools for organizing, building coalitions, and creating lasting social change.

Mental Well-Being

RESOURCES

Vital Voices Mental Well-Being Toolkit

This toolkit supports women leaders in high-risk environments by offering strategies to safeguard their emotional well-being. It provides practical guidance and resources to help manage stress, build resilience, and maintain their mental well-being.

Positive Psychology: Window of Tolerance

The Window of Tolerance helps individuals understand and expand their capacity to cope with stress, trauma, and challenges, enhancing emotional resilience and well-being.

Amnesty International: Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World (Volume 2): A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists:

The well-being workbook is designed for youth activists, offering practical tools and exercises to maintain mental health.

Open Briefing: Wellbeing and Resilience Handbook

The handbook provides guidance on maintaining mental and emotional well-being in high-stress environments, with strategies for building resilience in activism and humanitarian work.

Protection International Psychosocial Approach, Applied to the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

The guide outlines a psychosocial approach to protecting human rights defenders, focusing on emotional support, well-being, and mental health in high-risk situations.

Additional Tools

Civic Freedom Monitor

The Civic Freedom Monitor by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law tracks developments related to the legal environment for civil society around the world. It provides updates and analyses on laws, policies, and government actions that affect freedoms of association, expression, and peaceful assembly. This resource is vital for understanding how civic space is protected or restricted in different countries.

Fragile and conflict-affected situations

The World Bank's List of Fragile Situations identifies countries and regions experiencing significant challenges related to fragility, conflict, and violence. This list is used to guide support and resources to areas most in need of development assistance to help stabilize and rebuild institutions, economies, and societies.