

How democracy became an early casualty of USAID's demise. By Anna Gawel, Devex Newswire, 28 May 2025

NED reckoning

“I believe the renewed strength of the democratic movement, complemented by a global campaign for freedom, will strengthen the prospects for arms control and a world at peace.”

Those were the words of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan in 1982 as the Cold War raged. A year later, the [National Endowment for Democracy](#), or NED, was founded.

Today, [NED is on life support, as are U.S. democracy efforts](#) on the whole — victims of the Trump administration’s [purge of USAID](#).

From the outset of that purge, every program in the country’s global election monitoring system was canceled. **NED funding was blocked.** The [U.S. Agency for Global Media](#), which promotes **independent journalism**, was deemed “unnecessary.”

Even the [International Republican Institute](#), a GOP-backed group once championed by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, has been left hanging by a thread, my colleague Elissa Miolene writes.

As with many things, Rubio apparently changed his mind about programs like IRI. “When you’ve been promoting democracy in some society for 20 years and have made no advances, you have to ask yourself, at least at a minimum, are we spending money on the right thing, with the right people, and in the right way?” he said at a recent congressional hearing.

Rubio is far from alone in articulating that frustration. Tim Meisburger, USAID’s former director of democracy and governance under Trump’s first term, is another critic, **accusing NED of discriminating against Republicans** and conservatives in its hiring practices and arguing that the organization is duplicative and should be defunded.

While some Republicans welcomed the elimination of U.S. democracy programs, the news was also greeted with glee by leaders whose democratic credentials are questionable, at best — bolstering the argument that **the demise of democracy promotion efforts is a boon to autocrats.**

For example, in the early days of USAID’s dismantling, Nayib Bukele, El Salvador’s strongman president, posted on the social media platform X: “Cutting this so-called aid isn’t just beneficial for the United States; it’s also a big win for the rest of the world.”

Read: [How the US government let support for democracy unravel](#)