



Meeting the Challenge: World Justice Project Convening on Democracy and the Rule of Law

Thursday, August 1, 2024

Hyatt Regency Hotel
151 East Wacker Drive
Chicago, Illinois

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Overview

On August 1, 2024, the [World Justice Project \(WJP\)](#) will host “Meeting the Challenge,” an event to support collective problem-solving, learning, and exchange of best practices on rule of law and democracy challenges. This one-day, in-person event will bring together more than 100 representatives from global and US-based democracy advocacy organizations, bar and legal associations, donors, and researchers to encourage partnerships and action for strengthening rule of law and building democratic resilience. The centerpiece will be project showcases from the finalists of the 2024 [World Justice Challenge](#), WJP’s global prize competition to recognize impactful, replicable initiatives that advance the rule of law.

The event will take place during the [American Bar Association \(ABA\) Annual Meeting](#) and will be convened adjacent to programming by the ABA Task Force for American Democracy, an initiative created by current ABA President Mary Smith to leverage the contributions of legal professionals to support and defend American democracy and the rule of law.

Agenda

All rooms are located in the Hyatt's Ballroom Level (East Tower)

8:30-9:00am: Arrival and check-in, continental breakfast (*Grand Ballroom B*)

9:00-9:30am: Opening Remarks (*Grand Ballroom B*)

- *Welcome:* Bill Neukom, Co-founder and CEO, World Justice Project

9:45-11:15am: World Justice Challenge Project Showcases, Part 1

- *Media and Information Showcase* (*Grand Ballroom B*)
- *Youth Engagement Showcase* (*Grand D South*)

11:30am-1:10pm: World Justice Challenge Project Showcases, Part 2

- *Electoral Processes Showcase* (*Grand Ballroom B*)
- *Justice Institutions Showcase* (*Grand D South*)

1:10-2:00pm: Lunch (*Grand Ballroom B*)

2:00-3:15pm: Workshop Sessions: Democracy and the Rule of Law

- **Threats to the Judiciary:** addressing rising pressures on justice sector actors, including security concerns, harassment, censorship, and politicization (*Grand Ballroom B*)
 - Lauren Rikleen, Executive Director, Lawyers Defending Democracy (*Moderator*)
 - Kathy Bonnifield, Judicial Integrity Program Officer, Piper Fund
 - Jiyong Jang, High Court Judge, Suwon, Republic of Korea
 - Judge M. Margaret McKeown, United States Circuit Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit
- **Disinformation and a Weakened Information Ecosystem:** responding to the threat to democratic processes posed by disinformation and polarization (*Grand D South*)
 - Elizabeth Andersen, Executive Director, World Justice Project (*Moderator*)
 - Jeanne Bourgault, President and CEO, Internews
 - Amy Colando, General Manager, Responsible Business Practices, Microsoft
 - Michael Spikes, Lecturer and Director, Teach for Chicago Journalism Program, Northwestern University

3:30-4:15pm: World Justice Challenge Awards Ceremony (*Grand Ballroom B*)

- *Presenter:* James Silkenat, Board of Directors, World Justice Project
- *Presenter:* Karen Burgess, President, International Academy of Trial Lawyers
- *Closing Remarks:* William Hubbard, Co-founder and Board Chair, World Justice Project

The Rule of Law: Foundation of Democracy

The “Meeting the Challenge” convening and the 2024 World Justice Challenge competition focus on the theme “The Rule of Law: Foundation of Democracy.” The rule of law provides a critical underpinning for democracy. While democracy establishes *who* exercises power and decision making, rule of law guides critical concerns about *how* that power is exercised, reinforcing democratic societies’ ability to realize key principles of representation, participation, equality, and accountability. Strong rule of law thereby helps sustain democracies beyond elections and establishes the rules that allow democratic institutions and processes to flourish.

In recent years, rule of law and democracy have each experienced worrying global recessions. According to the WJP Rule of Law Index, [2023 was the sixth year in a row](#) in which more countries declined than improved in their rule of law performance. Since the global rule of law recession began in 2016, the rule of law has weakened in 78% of countries covered by the Index. Those declines have been driven by growing authoritarian trends, including fewer checks and balances, shrinking civic space, diminished governmental accountability, and eroded protection of fundamental rights. Meanwhile, democracy has observed similar downturns. [Democratic freedom has declined globally every consecutive year since 2005](#), and [closed autocracies now outnumber liberal democracies for the first time in more than two decades](#).

While these trends are sobering, there are also some positive developments. Some countries benefiting from committed, effective leadership in and out of government have seen progress during this period. It is critically important to learn from these examples and identify strategic, effective approaches that can bolster the rule of law foundation for democratic resilience. The World Justice Challenge prize competition and the “Meeting the Challenge” convening are aimed at exploring and promoting such promising practices and initiatives.

About the Event

“Meeting the Challenge” will bring together an engaged group of democracy and rule of law advocates to support discussion and collaboration on key governance and justice topics. This event comes during 2024’s historic election year, during which at least 60 countries, including the United States, will hold elections and nearly half of the world’s adult population will have the opportunity to cast their vote. Against this backdrop, it is more critical than ever to share effective, strategic approaches and form new alliances to counter autocracy and build trust in democratic governance. The one-day event will feature keynote remarks from prominent democracy and justice leaders, showcases of impactful approaches from World Justice Challenge finalists, thematic workshops on priority topics, networking opportunities, and the Challenge awards ceremony.

About the World Justice Challenge

The World Justice Challenge is a global prize competition and program of supporting activities to identify, recognize, and promote good practices and impactful initiatives that protect and advance the rule of law. The objective of the Challenge is to build an evidence base of promising approaches to key rule of law concerns, raise the visibility of these approaches, and encourage learning, partnership development, and utilization of these good practices. Each cycle of the competition invites submissions for impactful, scalable, and sustainable initiatives that address critical rule of law concerns around the world. The competition is open to applicants across sectors, including civil society organizations, government agencies, media, and the private sector.

For the 2024 competition, WJP received 424 submissions from 108 countries. From that pool, a group of 30 finalists was chosen in five thematic categories:

- Ensuring that **electoral processes and transitions of government power** are subject to the law
- Building citizen trust in **justice institutions** and guaranteeing that justice systems are independent, impartial, accountable, transparent, and ethical
- Protecting **free media and a robust, trustworthy information ecosystem** in the face of new challenges posed by 21st century technological change
- Strengthening **young people's** engagement with and commitment to rule of law and democracy processes and institutions
- **The U.S. Building Trust Prize** for the project from the United States that demonstrates exceptional impact in one or more of the above categories

WJP raises the visibility of these projects on its website and social media and provides finalists opportunities to connect with other rule of law practitioners, donors, and the media. The competition will culminate at the "Meeting the Challenge" convening with finalist showcases and an awards ceremony with the top projects winning a \$20,000 cash prize, selected by a judging panel of international rule of law experts.

Questions? Contact WJP Director of Engagement Lauren Kitz at lkitz@worldjusticeproject.org.