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Working Title: Protecting Vulnerable Knowledge Globally

- Pertinent Topics:
 - Collection Development in a Changing World: Navigating the challenges of access, ownership, and preservation in the face of evolving information landscapes and disappearing data.
 - Law Libraries & the Preservation of Democracy: Exploring the vital role of law libraries and their collections in upholding the rule of law and democratic principles.

Abstract:

Knowledge production and dissemination are essential parts of a functioning society. In the United States, the production and dissemination of knowledge are necessary to sustain an informed democratic society and ensure meaningful participation in decision-making. But, since January 2025, the Trump Administration has diminished the public's abilities to produce knowledge and access information through deliberate anti-democratic actions, such as removing government information from public access, targeting free speech rights, and shuttering government agencies. The administration's actions have broad, negative impacts on both the U.S. and global information ecosystems. The international legal order supported by the U.S. government is declining; revealing a fragmented and vulnerable global information ecosystem. For example, cuts to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) resulted in termination of the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). DEC was a repository for USAID materials that supported the work of national and international researchers, policymakers, and organizations. The loss of access to DEC would be felt deeply if not for an unintentional information save. The Institute for Development Impact (I4DI) was working on a project to make DEC documents easier to find and had saved many documents when DEC was taken offline. Overnight, I4DI became the unintentional steward for over 150,000 DEC documents, which they are making accessible through DECfinder. I4DI is an example of one institution filling a knowledge void created by the administration, but they are also a warning that we can not depend on accidental information guardians to save and restore information. Academic law librarians must collaborate to develop and implement sustainable information access goals (loosely modeled on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals) to promote

collections strategies that counter current attacks and prepare for future attacks on information access.

This paper examines the Trump Administration's attacks on knowledge production and dissemination. Specifically, this paper examines how cuts to federal agencies and withdrawals of support for international organizations have affected information creation and access globally. This examination reveals a complex, fragmented information system over-dependent on a crumbling international legal order supported by the United States. The goals of this paper are to (1) identify weaknesses in the global information ecosystem accentuated by the current administration's attacks on information access and (2) begin the work of developing sustainable information access goals that become a call to action for U.S. law librarians and global partners to work together to counter future attacks on access to information through collaborative collections strategies.