



Sujit Choudhry Supports Constitutional Change in Emerging Democracies



Sujit Choudhry
Founding Director

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Interview conducted by:
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“Always listen and be responsive to people on the ground. They know what’s going on – and know what they need.” - Sujit Choudhry

CEOCFO: What is the idea behind the Center of Constitution Transitions?

Sujit Choudhry: [The Center for Constitutional Transitions](http://www.constitutionaltransitions.org) generates and mobilizes knowledge in support of constitution building by assembling and leading international networks of experts to produce evidence-based policy options for decision-makers and agenda-setting research, in partnership with a global network of multilateral organizations, think tanks, and NGOs. We have worked with over 50 experts from more than 25 countries.

CEOCFO: What led to you founding the organization?

Sujit Choudhry: For many years, I’ve worked as a constitutional advisor to emerging democracies across the world, writing new constitutions and amending existing ones. There is a significant body of knowledge on the questions that arise during constitutional transitions, but issues still arise for which knowledge is incomplete, outdated, or non-existent. The lack of adequate, up-to-date research impedes the effectiveness of constitutional advice. The Center for Constitutional Transitions is designed to fill that gap.

CEOCFO: Would you tell us about your immigrant background and steps towards your success and expertise today?

Sujit Choudhry: As an immigrant who has law degrees from three countries, I’ve navigated new legal and political environments for my entire life. That skill has been a key ingredient in my professional success, as every country has its own particular issues, histories and stakeholders. My parents – both professors – put a premium on higher education. My law degrees from Oxford, Toronto and Harvard have given me the tools to succeed. I also have wide-ranging public policy experience, and have learned a great deal about political decision-making from that work.

CEOCFO: There seems to be a growing interest in the interpretation of the Constitution in current political environment. Tell us about your academic contributions to our understanding.

Sujit Choudhry: I am a [scholar of comparative constitutional law](#). We may be facing the greatest global challenge to liberal democratic constitutionalism since the Second World War. For those of us who live and work in the United States but study the world, the myth of American exceptionalism has been punctured, and comparative experience has never been more important to mainstream legal and political analysis. What is happening in America is similar to what is happening in constitutional democracies under stress around the world. It’s never been more important to America to learn from the successes, and failures, of other countries.

CEOCFO: Would you share the challenges and rewards working globally with people of different cultures?

Sujit Choudhry: Always listen and be responsive to people on the ground. They know what’s going on – and know what they need. You have to be able to quickly immerse yourself in a new environment and look at things from their point of view – which may be very different to how Americans may look at an issue. Never assume you know the truth.

CEOCFO: *How has your vision and approach changed over time?*

Sujit Choudhry: Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. I used to have very fixed ideas about how I wanted a project to unfold, and if they didn't pan out it first, I got discouraged. I learned to use every setback as an opportunity to go back to the drawing board – and often came up something even better. I have learned that constant reinvention of the way in which you achieve your goals is the [key to success](#).

CEOCFO: *What might you like to do given unlimited time and funds?*

Sujit Choudhry: We need a new organization that organizes and hosts the most important constitutional case-law from around the world, in multiple languages. It would change the history of constitutionalism.

CEOCFO: *Looking back, what do you see as an accomplishment that you did not recognize at the time?*

Sujit Choudhry: Bringing together experts – leading practitioners and scholars – from around the world to create global knowledge networks. Those networks outlive our projects.

CEOCFO: *What's ahead for you and the Center for Constitutional Transitions?*

Sujit Choudhry: This Fall, we are completing three large thematic, collaborative research projects in partnership with the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: “Territorial Cleavages in Constitutional Transitions”, “Security Sector Reform and Constitutional Transitions in Emerging Democracies”, and “Security Sector Oversight: Protecting Democratic Consolidation from Authoritarian Backsliding and Partisan Abuse”. We'll be launching our knowledge products this Fall.



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