



WHAT IS DEMOCRACY?

1 Introduction

Core tenets

People are the best judges of their own needs and interests. If they are affected by political decisions, they should have a say in them. As citizens of a shared political community, they hold equal rights and duties.

An agreed constitution determines how their individual preferences are translated into collective action, while safeguarding fundamental rights and principles. These are core tenets of democracy, the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.



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Democracy and human rights are inseparable. We cannot have the one without the other.

Nelson Mandela—Anti-apartheid fighter and first President of democratic South Africa

Photo: John Mathew Smith, 1994

Democracy is an ongoing and never-ending pursuit of this ideal. It provides for an open space for debate, criticism and accountability. Political leaders gain and lose their mandate through the will of the people. These qualities make democracy the best framework for guaranteeing freedom and human rights for all.

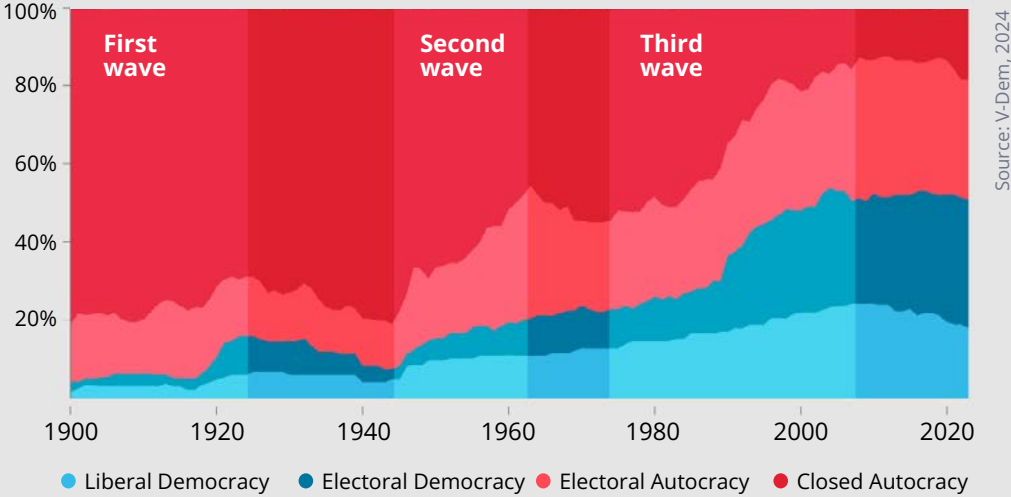
A responsive system

Democracy has the ability to adapt both policies and the democratic framework itself in response to societal needs and expectations. While its responsiveness and flexibility are among democracy's greatest strengths, they also leave it vulnerable to misuse and malign attacks. Democratic spaces and mechanisms can be exploited for undemocratic purposes, even to dismantle democracy itself in the worst case.

The waves of democratization

The emergence of democracy is one of the most important political developments in human history. In two waves following the Second World War, democracy's expansion gathered significant momentum across the world. In these periods, the share of governments considered democratic increased and the number of autocracies strongly decreased. Many countries are in a state in between these two types.

Regime types in the world—In three waves, the share of democratic countries has risen from around 4% in 1900 to around 50% in 2023. But the advance is stagnating.

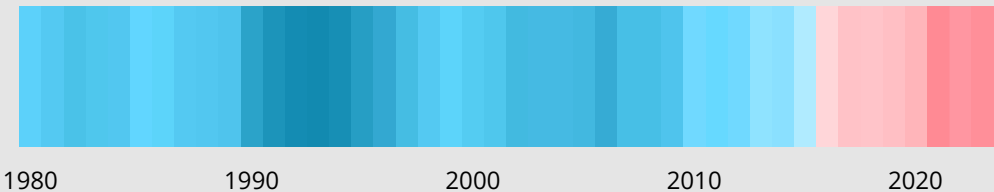


The situation today

In the first quarter of this century, the advance of democracy has slowed down, and in many countries, it has reversed. Experts describe this as a wave of autocratization. Authoritarian regimes strive to undermine democracy worldwide using various methods, including war of aggression and military threats.

Because democracy is the only widely accepted way of legitimizing political power, even the worst autocracies attempt to maintain a democratic facade and resort to democratic rhetoric. At the same time, democratic rhetoric has been misused to help justify illegal use of force, in particular the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which has impacted the credibility of democracy promotion and international law.

The temperature of democracy—Since the mid-2010s, there are more countries each year where democracy is declining (red) relative to those with advances (blue).



Source: International IDEA, Global State of Democracy 2024

2 A brief history

A modern phenomenon

Democracy as it is implemented today is a modern concept. The principle of equal suffrage, for instance, granting voting rights to all individuals regardless of gender, race or income, only gradually emerged from around 1900 onwards. In some countries, the process extended into the 1960s and 1970s. In others, modern democracy has never existed at all or only for brief periods.

Roots across the world

Democracy has roots in various cultures and civilizations around the world. Although societies historically were often marked by exclusivity,

class and caste hierarchies, and patriarchy, most also exhibited practices that a democratic tradition could build on.

Beginnings of collective governance

The beginnings of collective governance, akin to earliest forms of the democratic idea, date back almost 5,000 years. Assemblies or councils advising or limiting rulers first appeared around 3000 BCE in Mesopotamia's Tigris and Euphrates basins.

In ancient India, from around 1500 BCE, republics like Asmaka, Malla, and Vajji had assemblies of senior clan leaders. Village assemblies



Remnants of the ancient City of Ur in Iraq. Scholars speculate that forms of collective governance emerged in Mesopotamia.

Photo: Shutterstock



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While it is true that no system of government is perfect, democracy is the closest to our essential human nature.

The Dalai Lama—Tibetan spiritual leader

Photo: Christopher Michel, 2012

comprising respected elders, were common on the Indian subcontinent, often coexisting with monarchical rule. During the Zhou Dynasty in China (1046–256 BCE), local councils advised regional lords and helped manage local affairs.

Ancient Greek city-states, the Roman Republic, and Carthage, located in present-day Tunisia, developed early democratic features which are well documented, but essentially they were slave-based and patriarchal societies. Athens (500–300 BCE) allowed free male citizens direct participation through public assemblies, with legislation proposed by a council chosen by lot.

The Roman Republic (509–27 BCE) had popular assemblies for electing magistrates and passing laws, with the Senate, composed of former magistrates, holding advisory power. Carthage (5th–2nd centuries BCE) had similar institutions with elected officials and councils.

In Africa, communities usually featured councils of elders and village assemblies as well. The Igbo of Nigeria made decisions by consensus

in assemblies of adult males. Indigenous peoples in the Americas, such as the Iroquois Confederacy, also used councils and consensus-based decision-making.



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Democracy is a method of realizing the broadest measure of justice to all human beings. The principle of basing all government on the consent of the governed is undenied and undeniable.

W.E.B. Du Bois—American author and civil rights activist

Photo: James E. Purdy, 1907



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The fact that political freedom and democracy were first articulated in the West does not preclude them from universal application, nor can it be asserted that they have not been expressed in other contexts.

Anwar Ibrahim—Malaysian politician and Prime Minister

Photo: Government of Japan, 2024

From assemblies to parliaments

The history of democracy consists of a universal desire to achieve inclusion, to wrest political power from the hands of a privileged few and to place it on an ever broader basis. This development has taken place in different ways and at different speeds in different cultures, countries and regions. Democratic progress usually has had to be hard-won. In many places fierce struggles continue.

Over centuries, advisory councils evolved into early parliaments, who-

se consent monarchs needed for decisions on taxes and war. One of the earliest known parliaments of this kind was convened in 1188 by the King of León in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, bringing together nobles, bishops, and wealthy citizens. The word "parliament" originates from the old French word "parler", meaning "to speak," and was first used in the 13th century to describe gatherings for discussion or debate in medieval Europe. In 1688, the English Parliament asserted its authority over the crown, paving the way for one of the world's first constitutional monarchies.

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I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong.

Mohandas K. Gandhi—Indian anti-colonial independence fighter and pacifist



Photo: Elliott & Fry, 1931



Photo: Shutterstock

Common people protesting for citizenship rights in New Delhi in 2019, holding up a poster of B.R. Ambedkar, one of the drafters of the Indian constitution.

Modern constitutions

Another side of the coin was to democratize the early parliaments themselves. Through revolution and struggle, popular elections, universal suffrage, representative democracy and fundamental human rights have become established in modern constitutions.

The United States Constitution of 1787 and the Constitution of the First French Republic of 1793 represent the first republican constitutions in modern times that included popularly elected legislatures, though suffrage was generally limited to affluent male voters at first. In the United States, slavery persisted until 1865 and racial discrimination in voting until 1965. Women suffrage was in-

troduced in the US in 1919. Milestones in other regions include Liberia becoming the first African republic in 1847, the Japanese Meiji Constitution of 1889, which established the first constitutional monarchy in Asia, and the Mexican Constitution of 1917 which was the first to enshrine social rights in addition to civil and political rights.

Decolonization brought independence to many countries. With its 1950 Constitution, India became the world's largest democratic state, officially prohibiting discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste or sex. But other new nations struggled with establishing stable democracy, facing a legacy of colonial authoritarianism, internal division and ongoing foreign interference.



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Democracy and human rights will continue to be universal values that unite people, irrespective of their race, religion, or culture.

Tawakkol Karman—Freedom fighter from Yemen

Photo: Jindřich Nosek, 2019

South Africa's post-apartheid constitution of 1994 is considered one of the most progressive in the world. It was the first to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Federalism

Representative democracy was developed to help govern large territories and populations. To bring government closer to the people and balance power, many countries additionally adopted federal constitutions with subnational provinces, regions, or states. The United States was one of the first, followed in the 19th century by Mexico, Switzerland, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, and Brazil. Nigeria, India and South Africa today are also important federal states.

3 A universal value

Countries have established numerous organizations at the international, regional, and sub-regional levels to foster collaboration. Universal acceptance of democracy is apparent in the founding documents of many of these organizations as well as in declarations and agreements they adopted, both past and present.

The United Nations

The United Nations, founded in 1945 after the Second World War, is the world's most significant international organization. Every state is represented in its General Assembly. The

UN's Charter, which remains largely unchanged since its creation, begins with the words "We The Peoples," grounding the organization's legitimacy in the will of the people.

Any state can be a UN member regardless of its regime type. Nonetheless, through the United Nations, the international community has continuously affirmed that democracy encompasses respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that it is a universal value. Speaking at the General Assembly, country representatives from around the world frequently refer to democracy



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I'm a strong believer in democracy as the solution for the Arab world.

Jamal Khashoggi—Saudi Arabian journalist and democracy activist

Photo: April Brady, 2018

in positive terms with Global Majority countries leading the discourse.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, crafted by experts from various world regions and adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, declares in Article 21 that "everyone has the right to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives," and that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government."

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, an agreement ratified by ninety per cent of all countries, includes similar language. The Universal Declaration and the covenant are important foundations for a human right to democracy.

Regional blocs

Regional organizations also prominently support democracy. The Charter of the Organisation of American States, for instance, proclaims that member states should be based on representative democracy. The Inter-American Democratic Charter says that "the peoples of the Americas

have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it."

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance emphasizes the necessity of holding regular, transparent, and credible elections to institutionalize legitimate authority and reinforce democracy. It commits African states to "the universal values and principles of democracy".

The Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations includes the commitment to "adhere to the principles of democracy, the rule of

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The full exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights - which are universal, indivisible and interdependent - can only take place within democratic systems.

United Nations Commission on Human Rights



Photo: Studio Incendo, 2019

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We desire and thirst for freedom, democracy and the rule of law just like anyone else.

Joshua Wong—Democracy activist from Hong Kong

law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms." Strengthening democracy is one of the declared goals.

The Charter of Democracy adopted by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation states that its member states undertake to “promote democracy at all levels of the Government and the society at large” and to “uphold participatory democracy characterised by free, fair and credible elections, and elected legislatures and local bodies”.

Promoting democracy and human rights is one of the main goals of the Council of Europe founded in 1949. The European Union in turn, which strives for “ever closer integration” of its members, is based on the values

of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. The EU treaty says that the union “shall be founded on representative democracy” and member states need to be democratic.

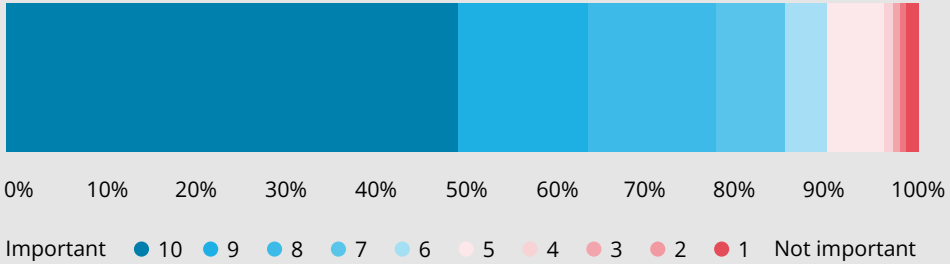
Popular support

Surveys consistently confirm popular support for democracy. Approval of democracy as a principle of government is widespread and nearly universal across the world.

The World Values Survey is one of the world’s most important global research projects that explores people’s values and beliefs in nearly 100 countries since 1981. Most recently, nearly 90 percent of respondents again confirmed they find democracy important and nearly three quarters of them strongly so. Only around three percent disagreed strongly.

Experts who analyzed the figures emphasized that people support democracy for different reasons, but cultural background, region of origin, or the political regime under which they live are not important factors. The Democracy Perception Index is another survey that measures people’s views annually in over 50 countries since 2019. In recent years, around 85 percent of respondents in this poll confirmed they find democracy important. When the survey asked about support for particular democratic rights, such as freedom of speech, fair elections or equal rights, approval exceeded ninety percent.

People find democracy important—In polls conducted in nearly 100 countries between 2005 and 2022, on average 90% agreed it is important on a scale from 10 to 1.



Source: World Values Survey, Waves 5-7, 2023

Rising for democracy

Where democracy exists, many people are not satisfied with how it functions in practice, even though they believe in it as a principle. The perception of democratic deficits and the failure of political systems is one of the most frequent triggers for popular protests around the world.

In countries under authoritarian rule, people are not free to express their views and face severe consequences if they openly demand political accountability and democratic change. But the desire for democracy and freedom endures. Despite grave risks, major protests regularly occur in places under repression like Algeria, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Iran, Myanmar, Sudan, or Venezuela in recent times. In the early 2010s, a wave of protests and uprisings swept the Arab world. While some regimes contained dissent through repression or minor reforms, the dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya were toppled. Tunisia transitioned to democracy but this progress unraveled after a

decade. In Egypt, the military ousted the first democratically elected government after one year, returning the country to authoritarianism. Libya, Syria, and Yemen plunged into violent conflict, with Syria's regime waging a brutal war against its own people, causing widespread suffering and devastation.



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We are not just fighting for our own people. We are fighting for democracy everywhere.

Masih Alinejad—
Freedom fighter from Iran

Photo: Kambiz Foroohar, 2018

4 The attributes of democracy

There are established principles and elements of democracy that have been implemented in a variety of ways. These common attributes of modern democracy are manifested not only in national constitutions across the world but also in international declarations and agreements.

The democratic nature of a state can be assessed based on how well these principles are implemented. These attributes that define democracy are popular representation and participation, individual rights and liberties, and the rule of law. Within each of these attributes, separation of powers, accountability, and transparency play a fundamental role.

Democracy is a form of government based on popular **representation and participation**, individual **rights and liberties** and the **rule of law**.

Representation

Representation is ensured by periodic popular elections of a national legislature and other public bodies and offices at all levels. Every step, from voter registration to counting votes, needs to be free from manipulation. All adult citizens need to have equal rights to vote and run for office. Political parties must be able to form and campaign freely, offering voters real choices.

A strong parliament and a political opposition are essential to keep the government in check and to provide oversight. A free and independent media plays a vital role in ensuring that citizens are informed and can hold their representatives and office bearers accountable.

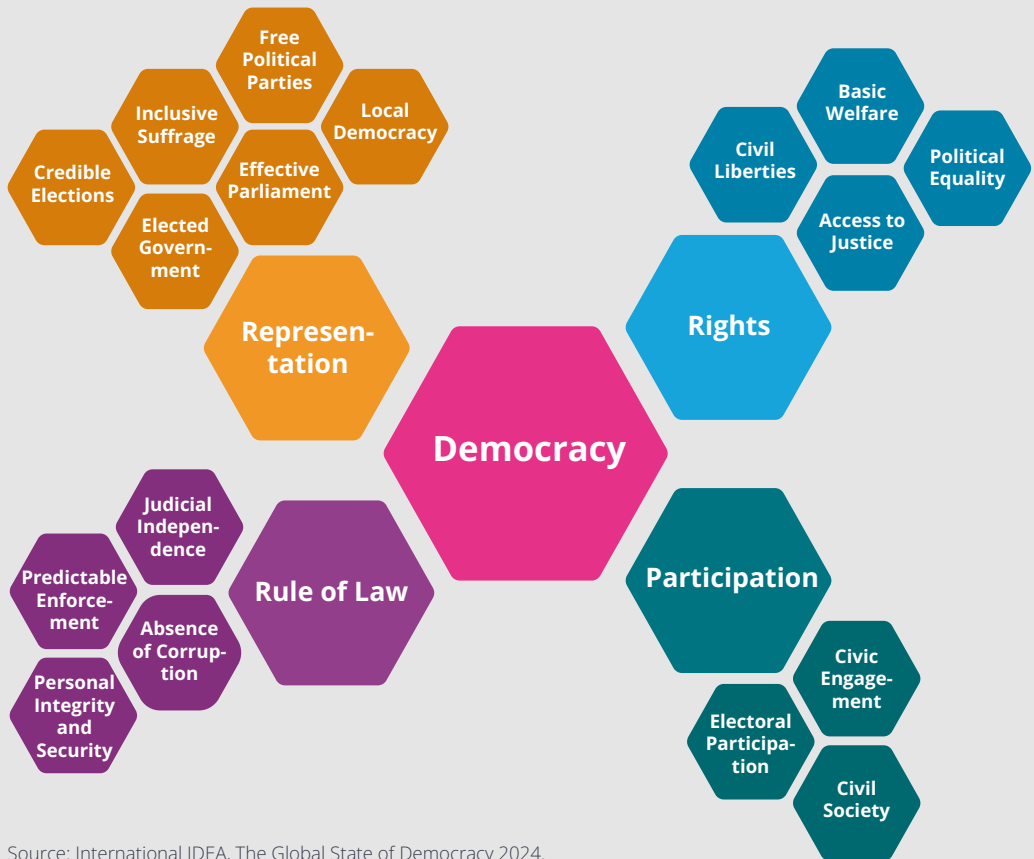
Participation

Opportunities for participation in the political and public sphere are crucial for ensuring that elected representatives and the government are under public scrutiny. There needs to be an environment that supports citizens in forming independent civil society organizations, trade unions, and other groups that pursue their interests. Good civic education is the cornerstone of active civic engagement.

Rights and liberties

Guaranteeing individual rights and liberties is at the heart of democracy. Essential to its functioning are the right to vote, and the freedoms of assembly, association, expression and the press. Other crucial rights include

Categories and factors of democracy—Each of the four core categories of democracy is based on further factors.



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy 2024. Reproduced by permission of International IDEA. © International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

due process, freedom of movement, personal integrity and security. The flip side of majority rule in democracy is the protection of minority rights, for instance related to freedom of religion, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or sexual identities, as well as equal protection or non-discrimination. This also includes supermajority requirements for changing the constitution. Ensuring economic and social rights, along with access to basic welfare, is needed in particular to facilitate citizens' participation in political life.

Rule of law

Democracy needs to ensure the rule of law. Most fundamental is an accessible, effective and independent judiciary which individuals can turn to for legal protection. Public administration must operate impartially, predictably, and transparently, under the legal oversight of the judiciary. The law must be applied and enforced equally for everyone, with no one enjoying impunity, especially in cases of public office abuse.

5 Challenges

As a theoretical concept and a political reality democracy has proven resilient and adaptive. At the same time, democracy needs constant vigilance to protect against a variety of challenges depending on the country, time period and context. Here are some of the most common ones.

Populism

A constant threat to democracy is populism in nationalist, authoritarian, religious, ethnic or other forms. Populists claim that if only the alleged “true will” of the people was implemented, which is said to be obstructed by elites, minorities and other groups, societal problems would be solved. Populism exploits a gap that exists in any democratic system between the easy promise and difficult realization of people power. Of course, a uniform “true will” of the people only exists in the populist imagination. Democracy is the task of reaching compromises that satisfy different societal and political interests as best as possible. Only rarely will a particular interest group be able to achieve complete satisfaction.

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Populist mobilization follows democracy like a shadow.

Margaret Canovan—
English political theorist

Polarization and extremism

An unwillingness or inability of political or societal forces to reach compromises fuels polarization and over time erodes the fabric of a democratic society. A determination to impose one's will on others uncompromisingly is a hallmark of radicalism and extremism. Extremism, which can be paired with populism, is one of the greatest obstacles and threats to democracy. Its worst expressions are political violence and terrorism. National security concerns in turn may be used to justify limitations and denial of democratic rights. Civic education that fosters critical thinking, empathy and media literacy is considered to be a key preventive measure to address polarization and extremism.

Corruption

Corruption and undue corporate influence are persistent threats that weaken democracy. When officials prioritize private interests over the public good through bribery, cronyism, or opaque lobbying, state institutions become compromised. Strong checks and balances, including anti-corruption measures, are essential.



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Freedom of expression - in particular, freedom of the press - guarantees popular participation in the decisions and actions of government, and popular participation is the essence of our democracy.

Corazon Aquino—Politician and President of the Philippines

Photo: Gerald B. Johnson, 1986

Propaganda and misinformation

Propaganda and misinformation have always been used to manipulate and steer public opinion.

While the internet and social media can facilitate democratic debate, opposition, and resistance, they also serve as amplifiers for populist, extremist, and authoritarian forces. The problem will worsen with the advancements in artificial intelligence, for instance by enabling “deep fakes”

of images and videos. The most repressive authoritarian regimes have seized control of the internet in their countries, censoring all accessible information.

The misuse of state resources to support political campaigns, including disproportionate and propagandistic use of government-controlled media, is a common tactic of would-be authoritarians.



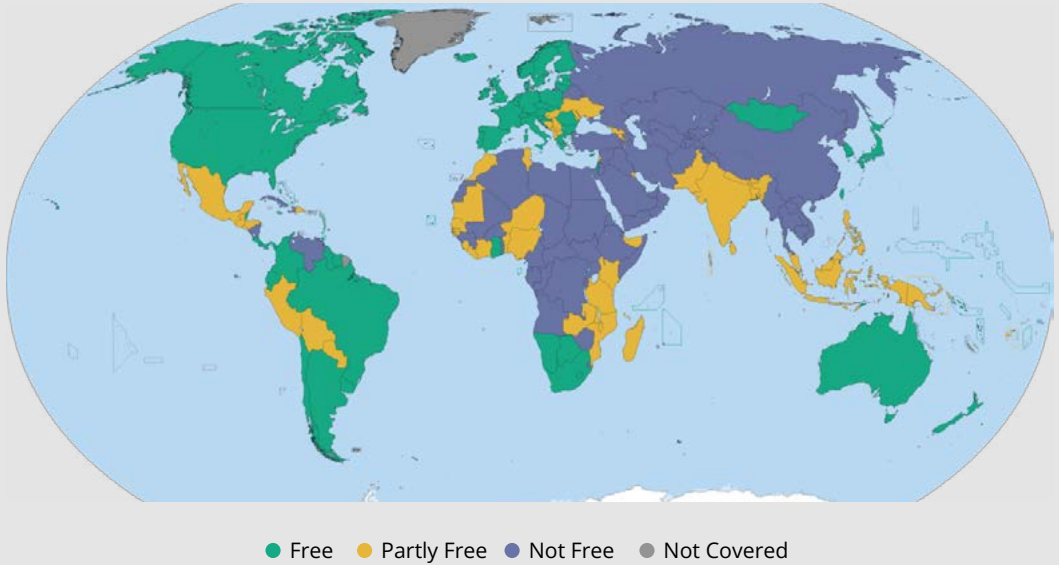
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Democracy is not a goal that can be achieved and then you move on to other objectives. It is a condition that can only be maintained if every citizen defends it continuously.

Rigoberta Menchú—Guatemalan human rights activist

Photo: Corte IDH, 2018

Freedom in the world—According to Freedom House Foundation in Washington D.C., around one third of the world's countries in 2024 were not free and nearly another third are only partly free. Forty percent were considered free at the time.



Source: Freedom in the World 2024



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On education rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.

Kofi Annan—Secretary-General of the UN from Ghana

Photo: US Mission in Geneva, 2012

Authoritarian regimes

The power of authoritarian regimes is threatened by the appeal of democracy, so they attempt to manipulate and dilute public understanding of its principles and its attractiveness. They particularly aim to sow doubts about democracy's universal substance and applicability, question its ability to meet people's needs and claim democratic societies are inherently unstable, in particular due to multi-party competition. Countless studies deal with these and other questions, showing that overall democracies deliver better in many respects. But the decisive fact is that people, if given a free choice, simply do not want to live under repression.

Thousands of people attended the Tiananmen square 25th anniversary vigil in Hong Kong on 4 June 2014. The Chinese Communist Party in 1989 with lethal violence crushed pro-democracy protests across the country. By now, it has also taken control of Hong Kong.



Photo: Shutterstock

To quash challenges to their power, authoritarian regimes not only suppress their own people, they also collude to support each other and destabilize democracy where it exists.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, its interference in other countries in its neighborhood and beyond, as well as China's ongoing military threats against Taiwan are stark examples that have forced geopolitical concerns onto the agenda of democracy defenders. It is crucial that democracies work closely together and support pro-democracy movements and freedom fighters.



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Democracy needs support and the best support for democracy comes from other democracies.

Benazir Bhutto—Pakistani politician and Prime Minister

Photo: IFaqeer/Wikimedia, 2004



Education is among the key public goods.

The limits of tolerance

Any democratic society faces the question of where to set the limits of tolerance. People and groups must have the freedom to organize and express their views. But what about fake news, hate speech, or extremist rhetoric, especially when democracy itself is questioned or under outright attack? Interventions are necessary, but they require a delicate balance. If not handled carefully, they can themselves become a threat to democracy.



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If we want a tolerant society, we must be intolerant of intolerance.

Karl Popper—Austrian–British philosopher

Photo: Lucinda Douglas-Menzies, 1990

Providing public goods

Providing public goods, such as security, education, healthcare, social services or infrastructure, ensures development, quality of life and equal opportunities. When governments deliver these services, they build trust and legitimacy which contributes to a solid foundation for democratic government. Those countries across the world which are in a fragile state and struggle to provide basic public goods face the biggest challenges in developing and maintaining democracy.

Equitable distribution of public goods reduces societal tension and helps



Countries are closely interlinked.

enhance political stability. Poor socio-economic performance and ineffective provision of public goods can be factors that contribute to democratic backsliding in certain circumstances.

Interdependence

The interdependence between nations is strong, among neighbors, regionally, and globally. Interconnectedness spans sectors including trade, finance, services, manufacturing, research, technology, communication and information as well as issues such as food, water, health, resources, security, migration, crime or development. Few matters remain unaffected by cross-border influ-



Photo: DWB, 2008

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We need to promote the democratization of globalization, before globalization destroys the foundations of national and international democracy.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali—
Egyptian politician and Secretary-General of the United Nations

ences. Climate change is a critical example. Carbon emissions impact everyone.

Interdependence limits the capacity of national governments and legislatures to address many issues independently and can affect their ability to provide public goods. This undermines their credibility. International cooperation often is essential. But achieving effective regulation and action through international cooperation is notoriously difficult. Most importantly, from the vantage point of democracy, there is no proper popular representation, participation and accountability in international deliberation and decision-making.

6 The democratic agenda

The development of democracy requires parallel progress in multiple fields. Overcoming authoritarian rule and achieving democratic government in all countries is essential. Where democracy exists, its quality must be deepened. Finally, expanding democracy on a global scale is critically important.

Developing and sustaining democracy

The political landscape is diverse: some countries have long-established democratic systems, others are consolidating or working toward democratic transitions, and many still face authoritarian rule or even

outright dictatorship. While the pace and path of democratization vary, authoritarian government needs to be overcome everywhere so that all people on the planet can enjoy fundamental freedoms and human rights. Countries on the path to democracy must receive the best possible support and authoritarian influence needs to be contained. Whether in emerging or established democracies, continuous efforts are needed to address democratic challenges, sustain resilient institutions and prevent backsliding.

Deepening democracy

Sustaining and strengthening democracy requires constant innovation of all its attributes. Complementing the attribute of representation, strengthening the participatory dimension is widely considered essential to develop democracy further.

Direct citizen participation in decision-making is a key component of this approach. Researchers have documented over 2,000 mechanisms serving this purpose in more than 100 countries at national, provincial, and local levels. Switzerland is renowned for its long-standing tradition of direct democracy. Additional innovations fostering citizen deliberation and



Photo: Alessandro Carvalho, 2013

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Democracy is not just a question of having a vote. It consists of strengthening each citizen's possibility and capacity to participate in the deliberations involved in life in society.

Fernando Cardoso—Brazilian sociologist, politician and President



participation are practiced or tested in all world regions. For instance, rural villages in India feature a Gram Sabha, a village parliament consisting of all registered voters, empowered to make important decisions. In Ireland and Australia, among others, national citizens' assemblies have been used to make recommendations on contentious issues, helping to overcome polarization. Brazil pioneered participatory budgeting, allowing citizens to directly influence public spending. In Malawi, local citizens' juries have been tested at the local level. Another method, long used in the United States and considered elsewhere, is to enable voters to participate in selecting party candidates through primaries. Participation in political parties more generally and their internal democratic process are important issues to look at. Deepening democracy in these and other ways at all levels, including through

digital technologies, is a key undertaking now and in the future. It is also a contribution to strengthening civic education.

Globalizing democracy

Global interdependence and existential threats make it essential for democracy to be implemented at the global scale. Even if all countries were democracies, cross-border influences and the need for international coordination remains. If global institutions are to be empowered to help provide public goods in an effective way, they need to be democratized so they have sufficient legitimacy. This means departing from the traditional but outdated view that managing international affairs is the prerogative of the executive branches of governments. Citizens, elected representatives, civil society and other stakeholders need to be included in



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The United Nations should transform itself from a large community of governments, diplomats and officials into a joint institution for each inhabitant of this planet.

Václav Havel—Dissident, writer and first President of the Czech Republic

Photo: John Mathew Smith

international deliberation and decision-making. There already is a large number of international parliamentary bodies that represent a broader political spectrum from their member countries. The directly elected European Parliament, which legislates binding law together with the Council of the European Union, is the most developed of them. Establishing a Parliamentary Assembly at the United Nations is a crucial step to open the world organization to a diversity of political voices beyond government diplomats. This representative assembly can help strengthen democracy not only at the UN but also in its member states. Another develop-

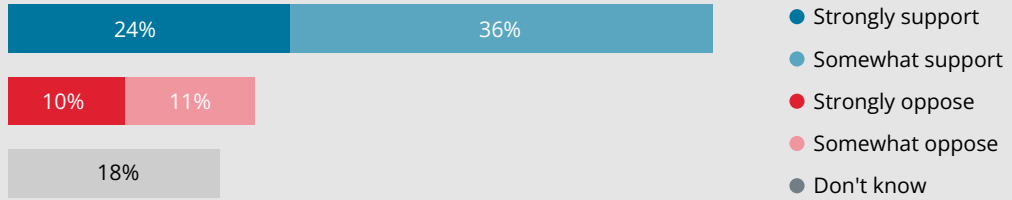
ment is the growing presence and relevance of civil society groups at the international level over the past decades. Creating a robust global space for civil society as well as avenues for ordinary citizens to participate in global governance will merge the dimensions of globalizing and deepening democracy.

A global constitution

Looking further into the future, the greatest success and climax in the development of democracy will be the establishment of global citizenship and a global parliament through a global constitution. This constitution would come about by an agreement of the world's people and nations, merging their sovereignty over global issues, to set up a new universal world organization that implements and protects democracy at the global scale and deals with global challenges. States would continue to exist. Based on the federalist principle of subsidiarity, responsibilities would be distributed across different levels of government.

According to Democracy Without Borders, the global organization should have authority over issues of global concern in the best interest of humanity and life on earth. At the same time, countries can decide to re-distribute national powers to subnational regional and local authorities. People are ahead of their governments. Surveys consistently show that they not only demand democracy, but also support the idea of global democracy.

People support a world parliament—A 15-country-poll conducted across all world regions in 2023 asked whether respondents would support or oppose a world parliament. On average, 60% were in favor compared to 21% who weren't.



Source: FES Global Census, 2023

7 Our campaigns

Democracy Without Borders together with numerous partners is running campaigns to advance global democracy, global citizenship and global governance. We campaign for the creation of a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly that represents the world's people. We advocate for a World Citizens' Initiative that allows people to put forward proposals to the United Nations and support efforts for Global Citizens' Assemblies that involve ordinary people in deliberation on global issues. We promote the appointment of a UN Special Rapporteur on Democracy to identify democratic challenges and best practices in the world's countries. Our campaigns have been endorsed by hundreds of civil society groups and over one thousand elected representatives from across the globe.





**DEMOCRACY
WITHOUT
BORDERS**

This brochure explains what democracy is, how it has developed over time, and the challenges it faces.

*Learn more about us at
democracywithoutborders.org*

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	A brief history	3
3	A universal value	7
4	Attributes of democracy	11
5	Challenges	13
6	The democratic agenda	19
7	Our campaigns	22

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Books

The Shortest History of Democracy
by John Keane—a compact overview

**Is Democracy Failing? A primer
for the 21st Century** by Niheer
Dasandi—discusses democracy
and its challenges

Autocracy, Inc. by Anne
Applebaum—describes how
autocratic regimes collaborate



**A World Parliament:
Governance and
Democracy in the 21st
Century** by Jo Leinen
and Andreas Bummel
—our reference book
on the idea of global
democracy

Leading analysis

- **V-Dem Institute**—v-dem.net
- **International Institute for
Democracy and Electoral
Assistance**—idea.int
- **Freedom House**—
freedomhouse.org
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