

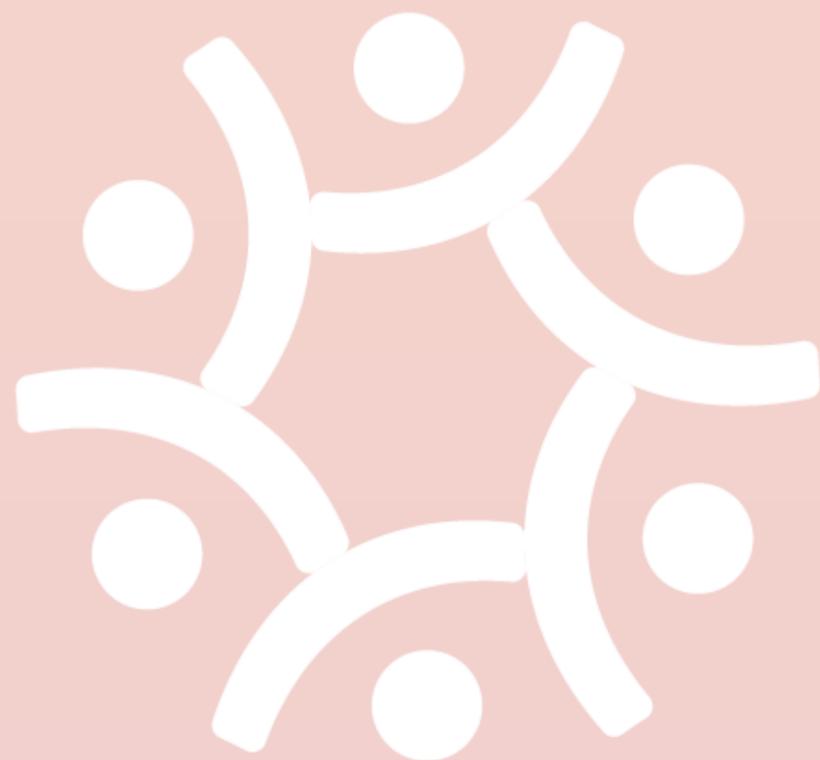


**GLOBAL
DEMOCRACY
COALITION**

**GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION
FORUM 2023
REPORT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organized by the steering group of the [Global Democracy Coalition](#), coordinated by International IDEA and Counterpart International, and supported by the European Commission, the Bosch Foundation and the Youth Cohort, the [second Global Democracy Coalition \(GDC\) Forum](#) was held as a hybrid event in Brussels, Belgium and Washington, DC, USA from 28 February to 1 March 2023. During the two-day Forum, a group of 100 democracy organizations convened ahead of the second Summit for Democracy (S4D) to develop analysis and resources and take stock of the Year of Action since the first Summit in 2021. Partners in the GDC convened five panel sessions, two workshops, and four networking events. The GDC also made its own pledges to advance democracy in 2023, while the Youth Cohort launched its menu of thirty-three possible commitments that governments can adopt to enhance youth participation and leadership in policymaking.

This report provides a summary of the key highlights and recommendations that emerged from each of the five panel sessions, which aimed to: (1) take collective stock of commitment implementation; (2) assess the state of democracy globally since the first Summit; (3) provide reflections on lessons learned and achievements of the cohort process; (4) present pledges that GDC partner organizations have made to strengthen and advance democracy; and (5) propose recommendations to give continuity to the Summit process beyond the second Summit.

Across sessions, GDC members expressed the value of cohorts in helping to deliver S4D ambitions, though improvements can be made for greater effectiveness. Recommendations for the post-Summit process and reflections on the commitment process both stressed the importance of civil society being involved early on as equal partners in the S4D process, enabling broader ownership and more effective monitoring of countries' commitments. This strong, equal partnership is critical, as the panel on Assessing the Global Democracy Landscape revealed that democracy is in decline globally, despite high levels of public support for it. At a time of rising authoritarianism, there is broad consensus that the Summit for Democracy provides a valuable galvanizing space in support of democracy and should be given continuity, while strengthening its process with added inclusion, transparency, and effective communications. Support for increased inclusion and consultation with marginalized communities was also reflected in GDC partners' pledges to advance democracy, corresponding to similar calls in the cohorts and other fora of the Summit.

The 2023 GDC Forum builds on the Coalition's efforts to harness the collective power of 100 civil society organizations around the world to provide recommendations for the Summit for Democracy. Through these panels and pledges, the Coalition demonstrates its commitment to fighting the fear, distrust, and apathy that allows authoritarianism to flourish, while building responsible, inclusive, and sustainable democracies. The GDC will continue to support peer-to-peer learning, amplify human rights defenders and peacebuilders, and shift power from those that thrive from violence and greed to those that thrive on justice, equity, and peace.

BACKGROUND

The Global Democracy Coalition was formed in October 2021, convened by International IDEA and other democracy and democracy assistance organizations from around the world. The goal was to create an informal group of organizations committed to the advancement of democracy, working together to engage constructively with the Summit for Democracy, hosted by the United States government in December 2021.

Together, partner organizations decided to hold the Global Democracy Coalition Forum two days ahead of the Summit. The purpose of the Forum was to facilitate a global conversation on democracy to broaden the Summit discussions, providing a multi-stakeholder platform for voices, actors and issues that were not part of the official Summit. On 7 December 2021, the first Forum brought together 52 democracy organizations across the world, with more than 250 speakers from over 50 countries in 41 webinars, including democracy assistance organizations from the North, Global South, and authoritarian contexts. A report summarizing the recommendations to the Summit for Democracy was put together following the Forum, and handed over to Summit organizers to inform the discussions in the Summit and the Year of Action (YoA).

In January 2022, the Coalition convened to discuss the lessons learned from the [first GDC Forum](#) and Summit for Democracy process and decided that the Coalition would take the Year of Action as an opportunity to continue collaborative efforts in support of democracy and the Summit process.

Building on lessons learned from the first Forum, partner organizations in the Coalition decided to hold the second Forum one month ahead of the second Summit for Democracy, scheduled for 29-30 March 2023. Partners in the GDC all saw the value of broadening the conversations of the Summit to more actors, voices, and issues, enabling stakeholders not invited to the official Summit to join in parallel conversations and gain greater visibility for their efforts. To allow for greater civil society inputs to the Summit process, a multi-faceted engagement strategy was devised to: 1) provide inputs to the Summit agenda and discussions months in advance; 2) broaden the conversations of the Summit to more voices and issues; 3) create visibility for civil society and other stakeholder efforts in support of democracy.

What started as an informal group working together to produce one Forum has evolved into a strategic multi-stakeholder alliance of 100 democracy organizations from around the world committed to advance and protect democracy worldwide and to influence the Summits for Democracy and the Year of Action. The Global Democracy Coalition provides a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange and experience-sharing, and advocacy around the Summits for Democracy and beyond. Working collectively on strategic issues relevant to the democracy agenda contributes to making individual voices stronger and more likely to be heard.



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PANEL SESSIONS



PANEL 1: COHORTS AS A MEANS TO DELIVER ON THE AMBITIONS OF THE SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM | 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Panelists: Meera Selva, CEO, Internews Europe; Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, Senior Advisor, International IDEA; Nicole Bibbins Sedaca, Executive Vice-President, Freedom House
Moderator: Julie Keutgan, Programme Manager, International IDEA

Following the first Summit for Democracy, governments and civil society organizations within the Global Democracy Coalition formed sixteen cohorts centered on the different thematic areas of country commitments (see box). Each cohort is co-led by a government and a civil society organization, allowing greater collaboration to work on shared priorities in the Year of Action. Many cohorts have produced significant accomplishments in the past year, including the three featured on this panel: the Cohorts for Media Freedom, Gender Equality as a Pre-requisite for Democracy, and Resisting Authoritarian Pressure.

To complement countries' commitments, the Media Freedom Cohort encouraged partners to make their own commitments of measurable, systemic actions to protect journalists, advance freedom of expression, and bolster independent and diverse media. Meanwhile, the Gender Cohort produced a statement of recommendations for actors to adopt at the Summit and beyond. This statement identifies critical needs to promote gender equality as an effective safeguard for democracy. For example, recommendations include changing stereotypes and negative social norms, engaging men in supporting gender equality because it benefits them AND women, and emphasizing intersectionality in all gender programming. Finally, the Resisting Authoritarian Pressure Cohort produced a Declaration to Combat Transnational Repression that establishes a working definition on transnational repression and pledges a basic commitment to actively fight this threat and hold perpetrators accountable.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Draw from other existing entities and mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of cohorts.
- Use the cohorts to harness different voices from across the globe and to advocate for new and additional resources.
- Leverage the cohorts' ability to provide great breadth and depth in key issue areas.
- To improve the cohort system and process, clarify the cohorts' structure and mandate, increase their funding, and form stronger linkages to the Summit itself.



DEMOCRACY COHORTS

- Anti-corruption Policies as a Guarantee for National Security, Stability and Sovereignty
- Civic Space
- Deliberative Democracy and Citizens' Assemblies
- Disability Rights
- Elections Integrity
- Financial Transparency and Integrity
- Gender Equality as a Pre-requisite for Democracy
- Information Integrity
- Inclusive Democracy
- International Cooperation for Anti-corruption
- Labour Rights
- Media Freedom
- Resisting Authoritarian Pressure
- Rule of Law and Access to Justice Champions
- Technology for Democracy
- Youth Political and Civic Engagement

Photo by Alex Radelich via unsplash.com



PANEL 2: REFLECTIONS ON SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY COMMITMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

WASHINGTON, DC, USA | 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Panelists: Annika Silva-Leander, Head of North America, International IDEA; Joseph Foli, Chief Research Officer, Open Government Partnership (OGP); Amb. Norm Eisen, Senior Fellow in Governance Studies, Brookings Institution; Gina Romero, Executive Director, REDLAD; Jimmy Kande, President, Pan African Anti-Corruption Network; Yengwe Kakusa, Director of Governance and Planning, Ministry of Justice of Zambia

Moderator: Sanjeeta Pant, Global Programs and Learning Manager, Accountability Lab

This panel discussed lessons learned from the first Summit for Democracy's (S4D) commitment process, presenting tracking and monitoring efforts, taking lessons learned from other multilateral processes, and presenting two countries' Year of Action (YoA) progress. While International IDEA, OGP, and the Brookings Institution tracked and presented data on all S4D commitments, Gina Romero of REDLAD shared lessons learned from monitoring commitments from the OAS's Summit of the Americas. The session then turned to examples of governments and civil society organizations' monitoring efforts through the Government of Zambia's presentation on its progress and the Pan African Anti-Corruption Network's analysis of the Democratic Republic of Congo's commitment progress.

Through their [commitment dashboard](#) and tracking tool, International IDEA found that more than 60% of the 98 countries that attended the first S4D followed up with written commitments, numbering 62 countries with more than 800 commitments. Ten out of 62 countries uploaded progress reports on the dashboard. International IDEA analyzed roughly half of these 800 commitments (the domestic electoral commitments and all the international commitments), finding evidence of progress or completion in approximately 200 of the 400 commitments. Applying their independent reporting mechanism, the S4D commitments followed similar trends as OGP commitments did when OGP was in its early days, with 80% of commitments being verifiable, though many were light on primary evidence. In the Brookings Institution's study of 250 anti-corruption pledges, gaps were identified in measurability, verifiability, and implementation.

Sharing lessons learned from another multilateral process, REDLAD presented their methodology to assess the Summit of the Americas' commitments, which produces follow-up reports involving hundreds of civil society organizations. In every country, there is a focal point that creates a CSO joint agenda that then monitors the government's commitments.

The Government of Zambia's Progress on their S4D Commitments

A co-host of the second Summit for Democracy, the Government of Zambia (GoZ) presented progress made on three commitments during the Year of Action. For example, to support their commitment to improve the independence and transparency of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, they conducted a review of the 2021 general election and increased voter registration to be outside of election years.

One challenge in their Year of Action was that citizens were unaware of their rights and thus unable to claim them. As a result, the GoZ is now implementing sensitization and awareness raising campaigns and recommends a multi-pronged communications strategy so that citizens can understand the relevance of the government's commitments.

The Pan African Anti-Corruption Network's Analysis of the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) S4D Commitments

The Pan-African Anti-Corruption Network assessed the DRC's progress in their S4D commitments, as well as challenges with implementation. While the government did adopt a law to protect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples, other commitments did not receive as much progress. For example, their electoral commitments faced challenges due to the electoral commission's delay in releasing the election schedule, making it difficult for the government to hold elections on time.

Based on this experience, they recommend providing mechanisms to sanction states who do not meet their commitments or instead behave regressively and to support civil society in states with fragile democratic environments.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strengthen the commitment process to hold governments accountable and increase the credibility of the Summit by tying countries' monitoring efforts and progress to Summit participation.
- Devise broad ownership in individual and joint commitments between governments and civil society because commitments' quality increases when civil society is involved throughout the process, including from the early stages.
- Require governments to self-report on their commitments.
- Grant civil society greater access to information to effectively fulfill their role in monitoring commitments.
- Install a longer time horizon for the Summit process.
- Follow-ups are important to increase accountability, strengthen implementation, and build CSO capacity.
- Develop a multi-pronged communications strategy so that citizens can understand the relevance of their government's commitments, how it affects their lives, and their own role in advancing democracy.



PANEL 3: ASSESSING THE GLOBAL DEMOCRACY LANDSCAPE ONE YEAR AFTER THE FIRST S4D

WASHINGTON, DC, USA | 01 MARCH 2023

Panelists: Seema Shah, Head of Democracy Assessment, International IDEA; Olaf Böhnke, Senior Advisor, Alliance of Democracies; Richard Wike, Director of Global Attitudes Research, Pew Research Center; Joseph Asunka, CEO, Afrobarometer; Pippa Norris, Professor, Harvard Kennedy School of Government

Moderator: Annika Leander-Silva, Head of North America, International IDEA

Drawing on various sources of data and analysis produced by partners in the Global Democracy Coalition, this session served as a joint reflection on the state of democracy globally and how it has evolved since the first Summit for Democracy. Presentations included International IDEA's Global State of Democracy, as well as a range of public opinion surveys and expert research on citizens' attitudes toward democracy. Critically, this panel showed a divergence between expert research and public opinion on the state of democracy; where expert research suggests a global decline in democracy and surge of authoritarianism, according to public opinion data, public confidence in democracy remains consistently high, and slightly increasing.

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Report for 2022 found that democracy is in decline worldwide, with more countries moving toward authoritarianism than democracy, and existing democracies declining in quality with an increasing number of them backsliding. Dr. Pippa Norris discussed the hypothesis that democratic backsliding is at least partially due to cultural backlash and the emergence of populist rhetoric and leaders that promote authoritarianism. She demonstrated a link between democratic backsliding in states that elect populist, authoritarian leaders, showing that freedom of expression and electoral integrity declined after such leaders came into power.

The Alliance of Democracies' Democracy Perception Index indicated that despite a high confidence in democracy globally, only half of the people surveyed believe that their country is actually democratic, implying that governments are not living up to the expectations of their citizens. Looking specifically at how social media is impacting democracy, Pew Research Center's survey found that most respondents have a nuanced view of social media. They see it as a tool for awareness-raising and connecting to officials, as well as a risk factor exacerbating polarization and enabling the spread of dis/misinformation. Specifically assessing public opinion in Africa, Afrobarometer found that Africans' commitment to democracy has largely remained stable across almost all countries surveyed.

For additional analysis on the main reflections and findings of this panel, see [here](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is important to use both expert and public opinion data to holistically assess the state of democracy.
- Make a distinction between demand and supply sides when talking about democracy.
- Governments are not responding to their citizens' democratic aspirations. As a result, governments need to deliver. The S4D commitments can help with that.
- Democratic backsliding is not caused by one universal factor, and is highly context-specific, therefore there is no "one size fits all" solution to address backsliding.
- Keep the information environment in mind when conducting surveys in countries that are less free or have repressive governments. Local partners have a good sense of what can be asked.



PANEL 4: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A POST-SUMMIT PROCESS

Washington, DC, USA | 01 March 2023

Panelists: Thomas Carothers, Co-Director of the Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Joseph Brinker, Executive Director, Cincinnatus Development Consulting; Vukasin Petrovic, Vice President for Media, Tech, and Human Rights, DT Institute; Willice Onyango, Executive Director, Youth Café; Jean Scrimgeour, Global Director, Growth and Operations, Accountability Lab

Moderator: Kourtney Pompei, Director for Civic Engagement, Counterpart International

This session presented the Global Democracy Coalition's recommendations that were based on a member survey, five focus group discussions, and two tabletop workshops held in DC and Brussels during the 2023 Forum. Additionally, key lessons learned from historical observations of the Community of Democracies and Open Government Partnership were presented. Although there were several avenues of co-creating recommendations, seven recommendations consistently emerged (see right). These recommendations are not in order of prioritization or importance.

Based on experiences from Open Government Partnership and the Community of Democracies, the Summit for Democracy should consider the following critical questions:

- What are the pros and cons of strong US leadership in the Summit process?
- How permissive is the membership? Are there consequences when states no longer meet democratic standards for membership?
- What is the focus, in terms of both theme and process, and how do different issues tie together?
- Who is in a potential secretariat and how does it link to existing mechanisms without duplicating while ensuring synergies and coordination? Who is going to pay for it, how will it operate, and how will it engage with governments and civil society?
- There needs to be a significant role for civil society in any future Summit governance structure.



RECOMMENDATION #1: FORMALLY INTEGRATE CIVIL SOCIETY INTO THE SUMMIT PROCESS.

Three potential options include: (1) the GDC sharing a role for cross-cutting coordination, (2) solidifying civil society's commitment tracking and monitoring role, and (3) installing a parallel yet overlapping civil society track into the Summit.

RECOMMENDATION #2: REVISE THE GOVERNANCE AND/OR THE FORMAT OF THE SUMMIT.

GDC members expressed a broad desire for follow-on action with broader ownership and leadership structures that view governments and civil society as equal partners. A dedicated secretariat is also an option, and there was discussion of the “moment” that governments and organizations coalesce around, which does not necessarily have to be a summit.

RECOMMENDATION #3: THE COHORTS ARE VALUABLE AND CAN BE IMPROVED...

with better funding, greater alignment with existing initiatives, more inclusive representation and leadership from countries and organizations from the Global South, and a clearer mandate in relation to the Summit.

RECOMMENDATION #4: ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS BOTH INTERNALLY WITHIN THE SUMMIT AND EXTERNALLY TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

Timely communication from Summit organizers to civil society would strengthen the commitment process while an enhanced communications strategy would better convey the importance of democracy and reach the general public at a grassroots level.

RECOMMENDATION #5: COORDINATE WITH AND INVEST IN EXISTING INSTITUTIONS.

Both the survey and workshops highlighted consistent interest among GDC members for closer ties with existing institutions with expertise on democracy. They also called for more meaningful investments (in organizational support, messaging, high-level action and potentially funding) in established mechanisms such as UN agencies, Open Government Partnership, UN Commission on the Status of Women, Freedom Online Coalition, World Movement for Democracy, International IDEA, and Community of Democracies, among many others.

RECOMMENDATION #6: SUPPORT GREATER INCLUSION IN THE SUMMIT PROCESS AND COHORTS OF ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS,

including youth, women, sexual and ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities, as well as organizations from non-participating countries facing authoritarian repression.

RECOMMENDATION #7: FOSTER GREATER TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

One such way is introducing a knowledge sharing platform to strengthen information on the Summit for Democracy and increase collaboration between governments and civil society.



PANEL 5: PRESENTATION OF GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION PLEDGES

WASHINGTON, DC, USA | 01 MARCH 2023

Panelists: David Tran, Coordinator, Alliance for Vietnam’s Democracy; Kelli Kaesberg, Independent Consultant; Kyra Buchko, Co-Executive Director, PartnersGlobal; Bryan Sims, Senior Manager, Humanity United

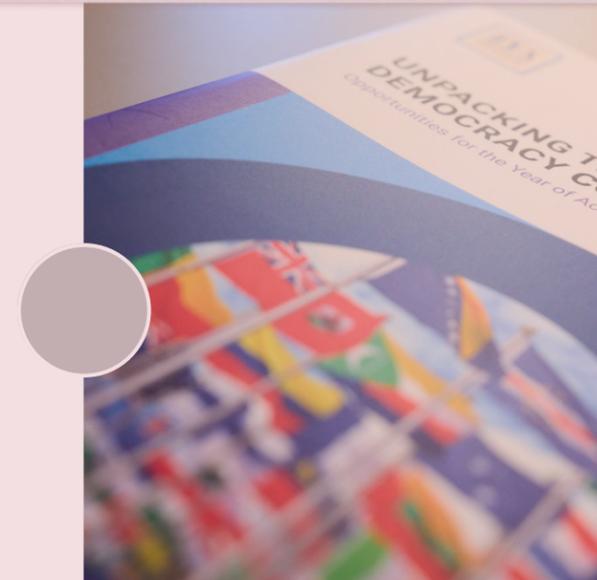
Alongside governments’ commitments, members of the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) submitted their own pledges to strengthen and advance democracy. The pledges’ publication on the GDC website will create a space for organizations to coordinate while reinforcing solidarity and collaboration among member organizations.

Collected over two weeks in the lead up to the 2023 Forum, a total of 74 pledges from 38 organizations were received, covering an array of themes, scopes, and outputs. Nearly a quarter of the 74 pledges require a collective effort as partners seek to address entrenched and systemic challenges. Of the 18 listed themes, the top 3 selected were pledges relating to Human Rights, Civil and Political Rights, and Good Governance. Pledges also prioritized the inclusion and rights of women, persons with disabilities, and youth’s civic and political participation. Outputs to do with knowledge creation in the form of publications, indices, and reports were the most common, as were those based on learning and relationship building through convening trainings, conferences, and learning events.

Key impact trends emerged from the pledges, such as:

- GDC members providing data and analysis on the quality of democracy, civic space, and democratic processes to support evidence-based policies and programming to strengthen democracy
- Supporting human rights defenders and peacebuilders under threat from authoritarian oppression
- Continuous anti-corruption efforts, especially regarding financial and information integrity and highlighting the intentional use of technology to advance democracy

Pledges also coalesced around process and a holistic approach to strengthening democracy through a variety of methods. These include: (1) bottom-up approaches like citizen awareness, engagement, and mobilization efforts; (2) top-down approaches to meet people where they are by increasing accessibility of services and reforming responsible institutions to increase the supply side of democracy; and (3) engaging policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of democracy assistance.





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www.globaldemocracycoalition.org

This report was authored by Kelli Kaesberg under the supervision of Elisenda Balleste Buxo and Annika Silva-Leander at International IDEA.

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