

March 19–20 | Navarro Viola Foundation – Buenos Aires

CHANGE NETWORKS FOR DEMOCRACY

Regional Forum of the Americas
GDC 2025



1. Context and Motivation

Across Latin America, democracy is being questioned—not just in the institutions that uphold it, but in the daily experiences of citizens who feel disconnected from decision-making processes. In this context, **local territories are emerging as fertile ground for democratic innovation**, where new leaderships, civic technologies, and participatory practices are reshaping the meaning of governance.

In line with the **Global Democracy Coalition's** mission to foster democratic resilience worldwide, the **Regional Forum of the Americas** was conceived as a space to **amplify grassroots knowledge, facilitate cross-border learning, and co-design concrete democratic solutions** that reflect the needs and aspirations of Latin American communities.

2. Forum Objectives

The Forum aimed to:

- Foster **regional dialogue** around democratic challenges and opportunities with a territorial focus.
- Provide a **platform for local changemakers** to share tools and experiences.
- Introduce **co-creation methodologies**, such as RIL's Change Networks Facilitation and Empathy tools.
- Build **regional contributions** to inform global democratic debates in the lead-up to the **Global Forum**.

3. Participation and Representation

The Forum gathered **on site participants** from:

- **7 Latin American countries:** Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay

- Sectors represented:

- **Civil society organizations**
- **Local governments and city councils**
- **International development institutions**
- **Grassroot social movements**
- **Academia, media, and youth organizations**



The diversity of participants enabled **horizontal exchanges** that combined practical experience with strategic reflection, and ensured the inclusion of often underrepresented voices, such as young people, people with disabilities, and community leaders from non-capital cities.

Attendance and Reach

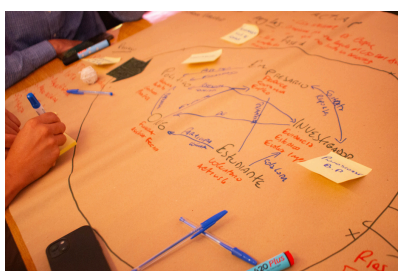
The event gathered a total of **111 in-person attendees**, including **64 participants who attended both days** of the Forum and an additional 47 who participated in one of the two days. The attendance reflected the strong interest and commitment of a wide range of actors involved in democratic innovation throughout Latin America.

In addition, the Forum achieved a significant virtual reach, with over 300 people connecting through various online platforms to follow discussions, panels, and shared resources. This hybrid format allowed the event to broaden its impact and ensure accessibility beyond geographical constraints, reinforcing the inclusive and participatory spirit of the initiative.

Outreach strategy

In mid-January, we began drafting the outreach strategy, meeting with partners and donors to secure invitations to relevant stakeholders. In late January, after IDEA International's introduction and invitation, we met with regional partners and potential speakers to begin drafting the event's agenda of panels and workshops. By the end of February, we had secured most of the speakers and facilitators.

Alongside this, we launched communications campaigns via email, social media and one-to-one messaging. As a highlight we also produced [a video](#) and [media article](#) that helped engage with potential audience, using a strong and unique visual identity.



4. Methodology and Structure

The Forum was designed as an open lab for democratic reflection and co-creation. The agenda was built around:

a. Thematic Panels

- **Territorial innovation and civic participation**
- **Trust, legitimacy, and representation**
- **Digital rights and access to information**
- **Intergenerational and intersectional leadership**

b. Collaborative Workshops

Using **Change Networks methodology**, participants mapped current challenges and ideated collective responses. Tools included:

- **Empathy mapping:** To understand community needs from the inside out.
- **Systems mapping:** To dissect root causes and generate alternative pathways.
- **Filtering of ideas dynamics:** To prioritize solutions based on feasibility and impact.

c. Immersive Dynamics

The event featured symbolic interventions to stimulate reflection:

- An **“empty chair” installation** invited participants to join the conversation, and express the diverse voices that are missing in today’s democracy.
- A **“weaving the network” exercise** that visually demonstrated the power of interconnection and collective action.



The empty chair in action: one of the Forum’s participants making her voice heard by using the proposed dynamic of “taking the empty chair”.

The “empty chair” had ropes of colour to make it different and was left empty in the development of the panels. Participants were invited to step up to the stage when they felt they had something to add to the discussion. This was a symbol for what needs to be done in society: in order to make different voices heard, we need to make room in a deliberate manner.



d. Visual Facilitation

An illustrator worked throughout the event to capture and synthesize emerging ideas in real time, fostering a sense of a creative, deconstructed, shared narrative.



Graphic Facilitation by Lucila Sarquis – March 19–20, Buenos Aires This visual summary captures key highlights from the Forum, including participatory dynamics such as "empty chair", "ideation", and "systems mapping". It also reflects powerful quotes from participants, such as "Crisis is not destiny", "Solutions shouldn't come from outside", and "Collaborative governance is not a linear process." Click on the image to download a high resolution version of the image.

5. Key Themes and Learnings

a. Territory as a Democratic Engine

The Forum reaffirmed the **strategic value of local governance** in addressing democratic fatigue. Participants emphasized that solutions are often born in small-scale, community-based initiatives, and urged that these be scaled and recognized.

"We must democratize not only power, but also imagination – and that starts in the neighborhoods."

– Josaphat Jarpa at the "Change Networks for Democracy" workshop - Fundación Crescendo, Chile

b. The Crisis of Trust

A recurring theme was the **erosion of trust in democratic institutions**, which participants linked to:

- The **distance between decision-makers and citizens**

- **Fragmented or exclusionary communication**
- Lack of **transparency and accountability**

Trust was seen not just as a precondition but as a **consequence of democratic practice**, requiring sustained engagement and reciprocity.

"Democracy cannot just be a structure—it has to be a relationship."

— Nicolás Escobar at the "Challenges and Solutions for youth participation" panel - Puentes para el Desarrollo - Costa Rica



c. Youth as Catalysts

Young leaders brought urgency to the table, questioning outdated leadership models and pushing for **horizontal, agile, and collaborative governance formats**.

"We don't just want a seat at the table. We want to redesign the table itself."

— Gabriela Vega Franco, Recambio (Peru)

¿Cuáles consideras que son las principales barreras para la participación de las juventudes en la democracia?

49 responses



Live Word Cloud from Audience Responses – March 2025. During one of the interactive sessions, participants were asked: "What do you consider to be the main barriers to youth participation in democracy?". The live-generated word cloud highlights key recurring issues such as disinterest, distrust, bureaucracy, lack of confidence, and discouragement. These insights underscore the complexity of fostering meaningful engagement among young people in democratic processes.

d. Democracy and Technology

Access to open data, civic tech tools, and digital literacy were identified as **crucial enablers of participation**. However, the Forum warned against **techno-solutionism** and highlighted the digital divide.

“Data is a right, not a bonus. Without it, democracy becomes opaque.”

— Natalia Carfi at the “Empowering citizenship in decision making” panel, Open Data Charter

e. Inclusion and Accessibility

Beyond rhetoric, the Forum emphasized the need to make democracy **physically and culturally accessible** to all communities. Participants with disabilities, older adults, and migrants shared their lived experiences navigating exclusionary systems.

“We talk about participation, but don’t build ramps to the polling station. That’s a contradiction.”

— Karina Sánchez at the “Democracy for all” workshop - former LIP(1) participant and member of the LIC(2) - Director of the Disability Area of the Municipality of Junín

6. Outputs and Proposals

The Forum yielded a series of **concrete deliverables** including

Top 5 Democratic Challenges Identified:

1. Low institutional trust and legitimacy
2. Youth disengagement from formal politics
3. Digital exclusion and lack of infrastructure
4. Over-centralization of decisions at national level
5. Communication gaps between citizens and governments

Top 5 Proposed Solutions:

1. **Create local democratic labs** to prototype citizen participation models
2. **Launch digital literacy campaigns** targeting vulnerable populations
3. **Develop open-source civic tech tools** to monitor and co-design public policies

¹ Local Innovators Program

² Local Innovators Community



4. **Form intergenerational leadership circles** for political training
5. **Establish regional Change Networks** for policy exchange and peer learning



7. Outcomes and Impact

- Creation of **cross-national alliances** among civil society organizations in Latin America.
- Documentation of **a replicable methodology** for participatory democracy building at regional level.
- Contribution of a **Latin American perspective** to the Global Democracy Coalition's global conversation.
- Generation of a **graphic and audiovisual summary** to support advocacy and public dissemination.
- Integration of proposals into **RIL's ongoing democracy initiatives** across municipalities.

Reflections That Resonate: Participant Voices from Across Latin America

At the heart of the event's impact were the voices of those who took part. Participants shared how deeply moved and inspired they felt by the gathering, highlighting its unique power to foster genuine connection, regional collaboration, and renewed hope.

"It was an incredible space to come together and connect!" – Agostina Sánchez, Technology with Purpose, Argentina

"I felt there are no borders when it comes to imagining solutions to social problems."
–Verónica Capurro, Inmigrantes Digitales, Argentina

"Thank you for letting us be part of such a beautiful, inspiring event." – Karina Sánchez, Junín Government Director for Inclusion

"It's important for us to find spaces where people are working for the same goals. It brings us hope." – Nicolás Arbelaez, Puentes para el Desarrollo, Costa Rica

"We used this opportunity, which brought together organizations and institutions committed to strengthening democracy in Latin America, to connect and expand our purpose." – Roberval Tavares, Conturia, Brazil

"We didn't know how much we needed a space like this, especially in a moment like this one."
– Young Participant

These reflections summarize the event's emotional resonance and its capacity to spark a shared sense of purpose across borders and generations.

8. Continuity and Next Steps

As part of the **Global Democracy Coalition's Road to the 3rd Summit for Democracy**, this Forum marked a pivotal moment in the regional democratic dialogue. Moving forward:

RIL and partners will **disseminate the report's findings** across networks and institutions.

- The Change Networks methodology will be **shared as an open-source tool**.
- Several cities expressed interest in **replicating the format** in their local contexts.
- Participants will be **invited to contribute to global recommendations** at the upcoming Summit.

The Forum closed with a symbolic **handover to Nairobi**, which hosted the following regional GDC gathering. The spirit of co-creation and local protagonism will carry forward through each stage.

Small Details, Big Impact: Sustainability and Social Responsibility

At the Forum, attention to detail extended beyond the agenda and into the logistics—reflecting a commitment to environmental responsibility and community care.

- All cutlery, plates, and serving materials used throughout the event were **biodegradable and compostable**, minimizing waste and promoting sustainable practices.
- Surplus food from the catering service was **donated to a community kitchen**, supporting families in vulnerable situations in the city of Buenos Aires.



Photo of the donations in the community kitchen, and the thank you note provided by the institution.

Navigating Challenges: protests in the City

The Forum took place amid a tense political and social climate in Argentina. On the **opening day**, massive **public demonstrations** were held around the National Congress, including a large march led by retirees and social organizations protesting against recent economic reforms and agreements with the IMF.

These events, which were widely covered by national media ([see reference](#)), **affected the mobility of several attendees**, especially those relying on public transportation.

Roadblocks and disruptions near central government buildings caused delays and required last-minute logistical adaptations from the organizing team.

Despite these challenges, the Forum unfolded as planned, with a **high level of participation and engagement**. The adverse context served to underscore the relevance of the discussions taking place: while democracy was being debated inside, the streets outside were alive with citizens exercising their right to protest.

9. Telling the Story: Voices that Inspire, Journeys that Transform

Throughout the two-day gathering, powerful stories emerged, stories of resilience, imagination, and the collective will to reimagine democracy. In our photo gallery of [day 1](#) and [day 2](#) and our video recaps, you'll see and hear directly from the changemakers, participants, and organizers who made this event possible. Their voices give insight into the dreams, questions, and actions that are shaping democratic innovation across the region.

We also published [different articles](#), to continue spreading the main messages and conclusions of the event. The [first one, summarizing the GDC Coordinator, Elisenda Ballesté Buxó's powerful opening remarks](#), and a [second article that provided a general overview and analysis of the event](#).

By capturing and sharing these moments, we aim to keep the conversation alive, because telling the story is also a way of continuing the change.

RIL **GLOBAL DEMOCRACY COALITION**

19 y 20 de Marzo 2025 | Buenos Aires

REDES DE CAMBIO PARA LA DEMOCRACIA

FORO AMÉRICAS DE LA GDC

2 DÍAS DE CONEXIÓN E INNOVACIÓN PARA FORTALECER LA DEMOCRACIA

LINE UP

HERNÁN CHAROSKY • GABRIELA VEGA FRANCO **RECAMBIO (PERÚ)** • MATÍAS BIANCHI • NICOLÁS FERRERO JEREMÍAS PORMA FAVRE • **ASUNTOS DEL SUR** • PABLO ROLANDO • **CAF** • NICOLÁS ESCOBAR • **PUNTES PARA EL DESARROLLO (COSTA RICA)** • NATALIA CARFI • **OGP** REBECA ROBLES • MARIANO BERNACCHIA • FERNANDO DESTEFFANIZ • FERMÍN ALCÁCER • **OPEN DATA CHARTER** GUSTAVO ORREGO • JOSAPHAT JARPA • **FUNDACIÓN CRESCENDO (CHILE)** • FLOR CAFFARONE • **DEMOCRACIA EN RED** • OLGUI CABALLERO • **ALMA CÍVICA (PARAGUAY)** KARINA SÁNCHEZ • **ASHOKA** • ROBERVAL ALMEIDA **CONTURIA (BRASIL)** • PAULA MARIANO • **POTENCIA ARGENTINA**





THANK YOU!

