

WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY 2022 - 10TH EDITION

CONCEPT NOTE



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Thirty years ago, many people believed that the spread of democracy was as inevitable as it was desirable. Those days are now far behind us. Instead, the public and policy-makers have watched as the spread of democracy has slowed and, by some measures, gone into reverse. Those who believe that democracy is the best way to govern – and those who do not – know that democracy is in distress. Many wonder if it will survive. Others are determined that democratic decline is neither inevitable nor irreversible. The 10th World Forum for Democracy intends to get to the heart of what has gone wrong. It will look for the key contributing factors to democratic decline, consider how these might be addressed, and explore what kind of democratic future is desirable, and possible, in the interests of people across the world.

KEY ISSUES:

- **S.O.S. Democracy in distress**

One recent study suggests that people are increasingly trusting of governments and experts to manage the most pressing issues facing their societies. However, they are also losing faith in the capacity of representative democracy to deliver more broadly. The implication is that democracies may be unravelling from within. Wars, oppression, and human suffering around the globe is making clear just how dangerous the loss of democratic values can be for a society, for a country and its neighbours, and for the broader international community. To understand we need to examine the evidence, on everything from respect by for institutions and the rule of law through to civil society participation and voter turnout. We also need experts, activists and participants to tease out the different causes of the strain. Are deepening social, cultural and economic divides fraying people's trust? Are democratically elected politicians failing to address citizens' concerns? Are traditional democratic models and processes simply too slow or inefficient to keep up in our fast-paced, tech-driven modern world? This is an opportunity to take a look at the full range of challenges and their root causes.

- **Can we swing back the pendulum?**

If we are to avoid defeatism, we need to harness the energy and ideas required to address the weaknesses that have emerged in our democracies. No stone should be left unturned. We need to ask questions about the role that our cultures, identities and education might play in revitalising democratic life and citizenship. We need to think about how we can change democratic structures and institutions so that they address people's priorities – and are seen to address their priorities. We need to ask not just how government should adapt, but what role we might expect business, communities, civil society, individuals and the international community to play. The influence of each of these has changed over recent years, sometimes beyond recognition. So, whose responsibility is it really if we want to reboot democracy?

- **Democracy defended - From decline to renaissance?**

History does not end, and though democracy is down, it is not out. Most people still believe in this system – count on it – but might not feel its relevance or impact directly in their lives. Where once there was local, civic activity, now there is a globalised world where our social, professional and commercial lives exist largely online, and often seemingly beyond the realm of democratic accountability. Should we change this? Can we change it? Is it possible that the relentless rise of the Internet, Artificial Intelligence and the Metaverse can conform to democratic principles? Might they in fact hold the key to making democracy fit for purpose in the twenty-first century? The international, rules-based order has had limited effectiveness in preventing democratic backsliding and its consequences, how could the Organisations and States promoting democracy address this? This 10th World Forum will look to what our ambitions should be for democracy today, over the next ten years, and far beyond.

The World Forum for Democracy is a unique platform for political decision-makers and activists to debate solutions to key challenges for democracies worldwide. By identifying and analysing experimental initiatives and practices, the Forum highlights and encourages democracy innovations at the grassroots and their transfer on a systemic level to strengthen the foundations of democratic societies. The 10th World Forum for Democracy will revisit the results of the previous editions and assess the impact of the most promising and innovative of the initiatives presented over the last decade. It will bring together diverse voices from around the world to discuss and debate visions for the future which might successfully counteract the erosion of democratic culture and galvanise the defenders of democracy to resist dangerous polarisation and reverse the global democratic decline.