



Democracy and Diversity - Can we transcend the divides?

Strasbourg, 6-8 November 2024

The strength of democracy lies in its ability to embrace and balance differences to serve society as a whole. Diversity is a source of resilience, adaptability and creativity. But it can also be exploited for political gain by polarising opinion and deepening divides. Socio-economic, gender, ethnic, generational and other inequalities fuel divisive rhetoric and trigger electoral choices which make democracies increasingly fragile.

In a year during which around one half of the world's population has been called to the polls¹, the 2024 edition of the World Forum for Democracy will address the critical threats posed by disinformation and divisive political narratives around diversity, including in the context of election campaigns. The Forum will focus on how electoral processes may inadvertently crystallise societal divides and provide fertile ground for populism to flourish. In light of the urgency of this challenge, the Forum will explore ways of raising understanding among citizens of the risks posed by populism for their fundamental rights and freedoms.

To achieve this, the Forum will feature inspirational talks by thought leaders. Analytical labs will challenge proposed new solutions and identify ideas worth spreading. Moreover, the Forum will actively foster the creation of networks and communities of practice, serving as incubators for turning ideas into action.

The main axes for the 2024 edition will be:

Elections and value divides: Elections are pivotal moments in democratic life, yet they have become flashpoints where deep-seated value divides are exacerbated. The Forum will offer a deep dive into the potential of inclusive electoral practices and new ideas to overcome binary thinking and foster unity within diverse societies.

Unraveling the web of disinformation: Disinformation, particularly online, is a powerful tool to manipulate public opinion, sow discord, and erode trust in democratic institutions. The Forum will analyse the mechanics of disinformation campaigns, their impact on democratic processes, and explore innovative strategies to counteract this threat.

Citizen engagement for democratic renewal: Many democracies are facing a crisis of citizen engagement. Democratic organisations which can freely associate are a prerequisite for civil society being able to foster citizen engagement. They help creating social capital, trust and confidence which are instrumental in shaping democratic outcomes. The Forum will assess the extent to which democratic institutions reflect a changing *demos* and whether population diversity is adequately represented in public life, business, culture, sports and other areas of democratic life. It will look into new forms of citizens' engagement and decision-making which can help create spaces for constructive dialogue, foster understanding and young people's engagement, and build consensus on policy solutions that transcend narrow interest and deliver the common good.

The World Forum for Democracy is not just a platform for discussion but a call to action. As an annual gathering of policy-makers, academics, activists, youth representatives and democracy innovators, in the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg, it contributes to the implementation of the Reykjavik Principles of Democracy adopted by the Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe member states at their Fourth Summit in Reykjavik in May 2023².

¹ www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/01/06/2024-annee-electorale-record_6209359_3210.html

² Appendix III to the Reykjavik Declaration <https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1>