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UNITING FOR DEMOCRACY

New Ways of Democracy Support

The Future of Democracy Depends on Renewing its Declaration and Vitality.

Initiated by:
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June 2025



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The future of democracy lies in revitalising its narrative, coalition building, and true localisation. Let's pursue innovative ways!

NSM Focus Paper, to be issued on the International Day of Democracy, 15 September 2025

Leaders and not dealers

For African youths

**Youths have learned nothing
About democracy and politics,
But hatred and bitterness
Of opposing political parties
That lack morals of public life.**

**Youths have not learned to talk.
Their mouths are sealed
And tongues, tied
Like that of ancient slaves
In the sugarcane plantations.**

**Youths have not learned to act,
to share what they have in common.
They are in the dealership kitchens
Learning how to cook up profits
With social irresponsibility burners.**

**Today's youths are troubled enough.
They want to become leaders and not dealers
Break free from chains, pains and inertia.
To reshape their collective destiny.**

**They want to learn from adults
The best practices and morals of life.
Not in the marketplace,
But in the public space.**

Folorunsho Moshood
Educare Trust Nigeria

FROM SCIENTIFIC INSIGHTS TO STRATEGIC VISION: The Future of Democracy Support

WHY NOW

Democratic governance in global affairs arrived at an inflection point. Democratic systems have come under significant pressure, not only from the global multipolar turn (Fetcas, 2025) and the rising tide of authoritarianism. Democracies are also captured from within, exposed to new forms of fascisms, polarisation and increasingly fragmented societies. Autocratic contexts embolden populist leaders to target democratic processes including with conspiracy theories (Heinisch, 2026). As many societies undergo severe transitions under autocratic rule, maintaining, protecting and defending public space for democratic dialogue has become a real challenge.

While alarming 72 percent of the world's population lived under authoritarian rule at the end of 2024, the global level of democracy has fallen roughly back to that of 1986 (V-Dem report 2025).

This provokes a strategic debate on revitalising the democratic contract in modern societies.

THE NARRATIVE. DEMOCRACY IS UNIQUE.

What makes democracy so unique is not only surprisingly strong power of resilience (Nord, in: V-dem 2025). The reason lies in the unparalleled ability in which democracies may frame societies. As the most differentiated and adaptive form of governance, democracies can best reflect people's aims, dreams and preferences. Responsiveness makes democracy the most reasonable way of governance (Peter Wallensteen). According to the Austrian constitutional lawyer Hans Kelsen, democracies secure institutional checks-and-balances to limit power, guaranteed by legal and political safeguards.

What is more, the core of any democratic thinking is located in its belief in dialogue. **Democracy as the shared place for freedom and humanity is a value in itself (Augustine Magolowondo, Democracy Works Foundation).**

DEMOCRACY SUPPORT IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE

However, in face of the diminishing global consensus and social cohesion at national level, democracies need new avenues how to make sure no one is left behind (SDGs). Democracy support is not what it used to be, namely large nation building and political modelling (Tom Carothers, Carnegie Europe 2025). To the contrary, discovering scenario-based approaches in conjunction with a joint mechanism to identify early systemic repression can help opening windows of opportunity for societal change (Diamond 2025; Desrosiers, Cheeseman et al., 2025).

THE NEXUS.

Pathways for Democracy Support

- **Democracies all depend on transparent governmental action and civic space.** However, new forms of repressive rule, with a personalised style of electoral dictatorship or façade democracy along with anti-democratic capitalisation of formal power (Levitsky and Way, 2025), executive aggrandisement (Bermeo, 2016), information platformatisation and content control (Radsch, 2023) conquered ground. To this adds lasting inequalities.
- **Together, these factors signal a critical juncture.** It is now the moment to find new pathways for democracy support to showcase the benefits and gains of democracy for people. In parallel and to make efforts more effective, it's time to link domestic performance of democracy and multilateral multi-stakeholder support. There is a nexus between governance in the domestic sphere and rallying with other pro-democratic actors in the international arena.
- **Democracy needs new answers for better representing and protecting open societies and this can only be managed together.** It's time to look beyond aid as humanitarian and economic business, and create platforms of democratic thinking worldwide.



We need to put all efforts on reimagining democracy support and build democracy affirmative governance models, at both domestic and global levels. We call upon all partners to support democracy as a catalyst for freedom and humanity.

New Visions for Democracy Support

Based on cutting-edge research, fostering a more persuasive and actionable understanding of democratic resilience does not only require localisation. Interactive democratic societies need to define their “agora”, the marketplace of negotiating and agreeing peacefully, reconciling different layers of society and effectively countering power projection.

“Sustainable democratic development requires a functioning marketplace, not as a passive economic mechanism, but as an open political space capable of mediating democratic demands and interests” (Christopher Okidi, Kampala Analytica).

Starting from this predominantly societal perspective, the following visions aim to give some incentives of how democracy could be supported in the future, without claiming to be comprehensive.

NEW VISIONS FOR DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

1. Putting Democratic Resilience at the Centre

Damaging the democratic system, real and spin dictators can often be detected by their rejection of or weak commitment to the rules of the game, denial of opposition's legitimacy, toleration or encouragement of violence in political life as well as readiness to restrict freedoms by legal means (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). Therefore, strengthening democratic resilience lies in both supporting democratic institutions and reaching out to new partners for creative innovation:

- **Identify and accompany groups and activists working to revitalise democracy from within** – students and youth organisations, independent journalists, trade unions, women's movements, and creatives such as artists and musicians who are game changer for democratic U-turns;
- **Understand the reasons for the democratic disillusionment of youth** and engage in enabling them coming up with their own ideas how to democratise and focus on elections as critical junctures of accountability and new ways of politics;
- **Support public interest media and independent journalism** as a cornerstone of free, democratic, vibrant and resilient societies;
- **Protect the political and legal framework of democracy** from capitalisation of creeping formal power and foster “democratic infrastructure” such as courts and administration;
- **Enable narratives that can show how and why democracy works** and how it can make a positive difference for people.

2. Local Leadership and Vision: The Reinvention of Agora

While democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy and democracy does not belong to a country or region (UNGA Res. 62/7 as of 13 December 2007). We all are democracy! For a “reinvention of the Agora” we propose to:

- **Foster local democratic governance**, local leadership, and strengthen reform-minded parts of society and anticipatory capacities of local authorities;
- **Maintain and protect an independent information ecosystem**, provide factual information in understandable form, and enlist peers for inclusive policymaking;
- **Promote the realisation of useful applications of AI** to serve the nexus between information and democracy, while ensuring ethical and human-centred use of AI;
- **Do no harm**: Democracy support must not contribute to making civil society groups and social movements a target of repression.

NEW VISIONS FOR DEMOCRACY SUPPORT

3. Towards Democracy Affirmative Multilateralism

Today, international relations oscillate between principled approaches, geopolitical pragmatism and strategic interest. With this in mind, the backsliding of democracies has its roots also in the recent multifaceted crisis of an overly sclerotised multilateral system, failed commitment to genuine plurality, and the decline of the normative universalist argument against interest-led realist methods. Authoritarian regimes challenge democratic ideals and norms (Werther-Pietsch, 2024). Multilateral action can be democracy-affirmative in the following modes:

- **Building alliances and creating new international coalitions** that empower local and regional leaders to hold their governments accountable, to give them voice and coherent support;
- **Developing models of intertwined bilateral and multilateral aid** to different regime contexts;
- **Addressing autocratisation early and collectively**, which can only be done through better working together, joint assessments and enhance coordination;
- **Detecting signs of autocratic shifts** as form of conflict prevention and systematically countering deterioration when success is expected the most.

4. Staying Engaged for Democracy

Donors today react to often rapidly changing scenarios of repressive rule by ad hoc responses - from stepping up support, appeasement or resistance to replacement. In any case, democratic resilience is rooted in a set of mutually reinforcing factors that are shaped by the local, national and international context. Staying engaged means that all these levels can better be served in an informed, coordinated and ideally anticipatory way. Both strengthening and adapting political systems requires to:

- **Following eminent personalities from the Global South** playing a key role for democratic development such as Professor Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi (June 2025);
- **Learning from the past** and efforts to ensure that democracy support be more effective, tailored to and responds to contextual realities;
- **Using and optimising democracy trackers** based on empirically-monitored elements such as the one of International IDEA;
- **Apply, shape and consult international guidelines** like the upcoming Toolkits of OECD/DAC on Coordinating Action for Civic Space and of Team Europe Democracy (TED) on Free Media Support.