

Briefing Note on Summit for Democracy

Summit for Democracy

On 9–10 December 2021, the Government of the United States, will host the first of two Summits for Democracy. These will bring together leaders from government, civil society and the private sector to set out an affirmative agenda for democratic renewal and provide a space for countries to make both individual and collective commitments to defend democracy and human rights at home and abroad.

European democracy support and Team Europe Democracy

Democracy is a core founding value of the European Union, and the EU and its Member States are the biggest donors to democracy-related projects. On 22 November 2021, the European Union launched the *Team Europe Democracy Initiative*, which aims to support evidence-based and coordinated action with Member States in support of democracy. As part of this effort, International IDEA co-implements the EU-funded project ‘Supporting Team Europe Democracy’. The project aims to strengthen democracy evidence, and foster and facilitate civil society and multi-stakeholder engagement in the Summit for Democracy and its preparations. This briefing note and the survey to which it refers are part of this project.

This briefing note has been developed by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) with the support of the European Union for participants at the Summit for Democracy 2021 and related side-events. It maps out some of the views and priorities of 77 civil society organizations and other stakeholders, provided in a [survey](#) carried out two weeks before the Summit. The briefing note also provides key data on democratic trends around the priority topics of the Summit and statistics on the invited countries.

Key recommendations

- *Expected outcomes:* The most valuable expected outcomes from the Summit are: (a) better protection and support for democracy activists, such as human rights defenders and anti-corruption whistle-blowers; (b) a strengthened multilateral world order in support and defence of democratic principles and values; and (c) more funding for democracy assistance programmes and a global democracy monitoring system, as well as better tracking of commitments led by country-level initiatives.

To Summit organizers

- *Include civil society in the Summit and support its participation:* Respondents asked for civil society to be included in the Summit, including grassroots organizations and marginalized groups from the Global South and from closed contexts, as well as financial and capacity-building support to enable their effective participation.
- *Provide more information:* Two-thirds of the respondents felt that they had not received enough information before the first Summit to be able to provide meaningful input. They requested more and better information on the structure of the meeting, on country commitments and on their own role well ahead of time for the second Summit.
- *Timely organization:* Respondents asked that the 2022 Year of Action and second Summit be planned well ahead of time, with timely information provided to all stakeholders including a vision for the collaboration and participation of civil society and other stakeholders.

Turn the Summit for Democracy into a long-term and continuous effort beyond 2022.

- *Take a long term and continuous approach:* The Summits for Democracy should become ongoing efforts beyond 2021 and the Year of Action in 2022.

To civil society

- *Build networks and coalitions:* Build on and collaborate through local, regional and global networks and coalitions to achieve common goals; collectively monitor progress on commitments and prepare joint statements on issues of common concern.
- *Nominate independent conveners:* Identify civil-society conveners to organize and plan joint activities within the Summit working groups ahead of the 2022 Summit. These could include, for example, events, webinars, commitment monitoring, and joint research and analysis.

To donors, and multilateral and bilateral organizations

- *Increase funding:* Increase funding for democracy-related activities and projects implemented by civil society organizations (CSOs) in support of the Summit commitments.
- *Facilitate participation:* Facilitate civil society participation in the 2022 Summit through dialogue events and increased participation in official side-events.
- *Support capacity-building:* Support capacity-building efforts with civil society to strengthen the effectiveness of its engagement in the next Summit.

Civil society, other stakeholders and the Summit for Democracy: priorities and initiatives

In order to gather civil society and other stakeholders' feedback as inputs for the Year of Action and the 2022 Summit, International IDEA conducted a survey with support from the European Union. The survey received 77 responses. Most of these were from pro-democracy NGOs (69 per cent), but other NGOs and think tanks (6), philanthropic organizations (5), educational institutions (3), multilateral organizations (5) and a bilateral donor agency also responded. The respondents hail from all regions of the world, although the vast majority were headquartered in Africa, Europe and North America. While the survey does not pretend to be representative of all civil society worldwide, it is a good sample of those organizations which are engaging in and around the Summit. This could, of course, bias some of the views expressed, in particular on the value of the Summit.

Key findings from the survey

- *The Summit is seen as a valuable undertaking.* The overwhelming majority of respondents (83 per cent) think the Summit for Democracy is a valuable initiative.
- *Expected effectiveness.* The majority of respondents believe that the Summit could be effective; 39 per cent of respondents think it will be effective and 15 per cent argue that it might be able to effect real change. Only 1 per cent of respondents thought it would be totally ineffective.
- *Inclusion could be improved.* On respondents' perceptions of inclusiveness of the invited participants, the largest proportion (38 per cent) considered the level of inclusion to be 3 on a scale of 1 to 5. However, 14 per cent did not consider the guest list to be at all inclusive.
- *Improve information ahead of the Summit.* The area of greatest dissatisfaction was the amount and quality of information received prior to the Summit. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of respondents considered they had not been provided with sufficient information to be able to engage in a meaningful way.
- *Information needed.* The kind of information respondents would have wished to receive includes information on civil society involvement (81 per cent), the Summit itself, the guest list and country commitments.
- *Key issues to address.* The top five topics that respondents believed should be prioritized in the Summit were civic space, fighting corruption, protecting human rights, and countering rising authoritarianism and democratic decline in democracies. This demonstrates a degree of alignment between respondents' views and the topics prioritized by the organizers of the 2021 Summit.
- *Expected outcomes.* The most valuable outcomes from the Summit expected by respondents are: (a) better protection and support for democracy activists, such as human rights defenders and anti-corruption whistle-blowers; (b) a strengthened multilateral world order in support and defence of democratic principles and values; (c) more funding for democracy-assistance programmes; and (d) a global democracy-monitoring system and the tracking of commitments fed by country-level initiatives.
- *Type of commitments.* Chief among the types of commitments governments are expected to prioritize are: protecting and ensuring civic space; and international and regional cooperation in support of democracy.
- *Ahead of the 2022 Summit.* 77 per cent of respondents are planning activities in 2022 ahead of the next Summit, mostly in the form of events/webinars, but also statements and publications.
- *Civil society and commitments.* 16 organizations will be making their own commitments and 24 are preparing model commitments for countries on different issues.
- *Proposed areas for collaboration in 2022.* The favoured cooperation modalities between civil society and other pro-democracy actors ahead of the 2021 and 2022 Summits are, in order of preference: (a) coalitions and networks of organizations, for example the Global Democracy Coalition Forum (71 per cent); (b) joint monitoring of commitments; (c) regular sharing of information; (d) a web portal with summit information, CSO events and inputs, and democracy knowledge resources; and (e) coordination of programming and activities.

The first Summit for Democracy is taking place in a context of severe challenges for democracy in all regions of the world, as highlighted by the [Global State of Democracy Report 2021](#)

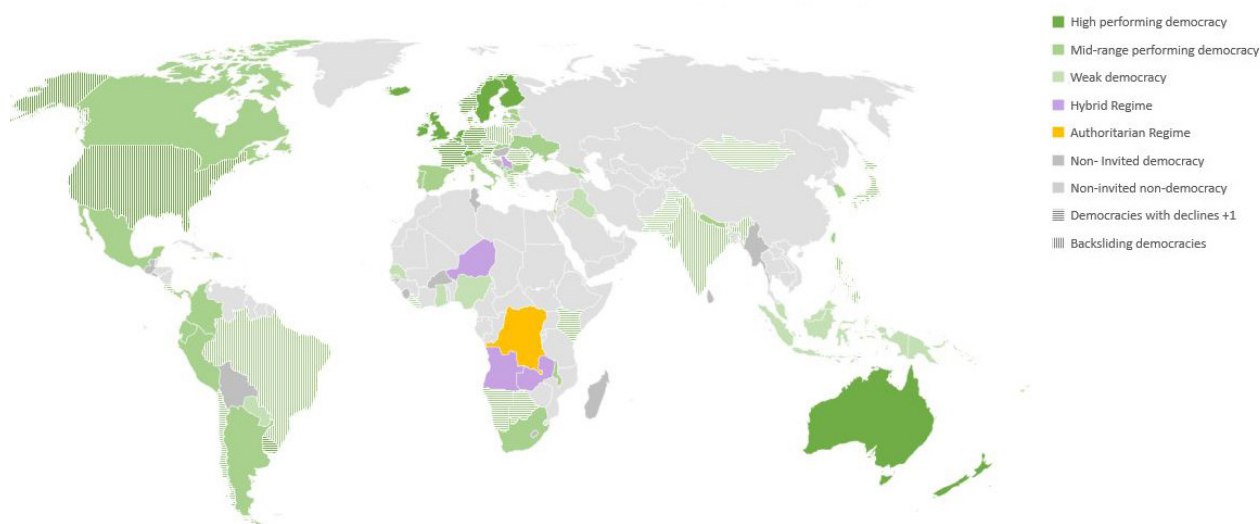
The involvement of civil society in the Summit preparations:

- The Summit organizers—the US Department of State, the White House and USAID—organized three civil society working groups around the three pillars of the Summit and smaller groups within those working groups for around 1000 CSOs around the world. Regular calls were held with those CSOs in the weeks leading up to the Summit, from around October 2021, in order to share information on Summit preparations.
- Over 40 pro-democracy organizations from around the world will also come together in a [Global Democracy Coalition Forum](#) to give voice to issues and actors not represented in the official agenda of the Summit. The one-day virtual Forum will be held for 24 hours on 7 December in the form of 40 webinars. More than 200 speakers from all parts of the world, including democracy activists, democracy-assistance providers, think tanks, media organizations and academics, will discuss more than 20 democracy-related topics such as the integrity of elections, women’s political participation and representation, disinformation, political finance, transnational repression, the global state of democracy, the role of youth and the role of a free media.
- In addition, on the margins of the Summit and outside of the Forum, a number of CSOs will organize over [50 events and webinars](#) on issues relevant to the global democracy debate.

Summit for Democracy: Context, facts and figures

The first Summit for Democracy is taking place in a context of severe challenges for democracy in all regions of the world. Every global democracy report ([International IDEA](#), [Freedom House](#), [V-Dem](#), [Economist Intelligence Unit](#)) draws similar conclusions. The most recent report by International IDEA, the [Global State of Democracy 2021](#), highlights major concerns for democracy worldwide, with rising authoritarianism and democratic decline in democracies, deepened during and by the Covid-19 pandemic. In the past decade, more countries than ever before have moved towards authoritarianism. What appeared to be promising democratization processes, have stalled or been reversed during the pandemic. Non-democratic regimes are becoming more and more brazen in their repressive methods, and a number of backsliding democracies are emulating their tactics.

Figure 1. World map of countries invited to Summit for Democracy 2021



Many countries invited to the firstst Summit face challenges to their democracies, with 40 per cent experiencing significant declines in the last five years and six experiencing more severe forms of democratic backsliding.

Governments are expected to announce both individual and collective commitments, reforms and initiatives to defend democracy and human rights at home and abroad.

- The 2021 Summit for Democracy will bring together 111 countries from across the world. Most, but not all, of the countries invited to the Summit are democracies of some kind. Of the 111 invited countries, all but five are classified as democracies (within different performance ranges) in the [GSoD Indices](#) (see figure 1).
- All 17 of the high-performing democracies in the world have been invited to the Summit; 50 of the 56 mid-range performing democracies and 16 of the 25 weak democracies are also invited. The Summit will not include all the democracies in the world. There are 15 democracies in the GSoD Indices that have not been invited to the Summit: one of the seven backsliding democracies (Hungary); two countries at high risk of backsliding (El Salvador and Sri Lanka) and eight weak and mid-range democracies, of which one regressed to an authoritarian regime in 2021 (Myanmar). The five non-democracies include one authoritarian regime (the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and four hybrid regimes (Angola, Niger, Serbia and Zambia). Zambia will be classified as a democracy in the 2021 classification as a result of the 2021 elections there.
- In addition to government participation, the Summit will feature 22 host-sponsored events, co-organized by other governments in the days leading up to the Summit, on issues such as youth participation, LGBTQI rights, women's political empowerment, inclusive democracy, anti-corruption technology, the role of parliaments, disinformation, local democracy and the role of mayors, political prisoners and democracy in closed spaces, among many others.

At a time when democracy is facing increasing challenges in both older and newer democracies, no country's democracy is perfect or immune from erosion or backsliding. Six of the democracies attending the Summit are backsliding democratically and have done so within the past decade. Governments are expected to announce both individual and collective commitments, reforms and initiatives to defend democracy and human rights at home and abroad.

Across the three themes of the Summit for Democracy, the following worrying global democratic trends are noted in the *Global State of Democracy Report 2021*:

Rising authoritarianism

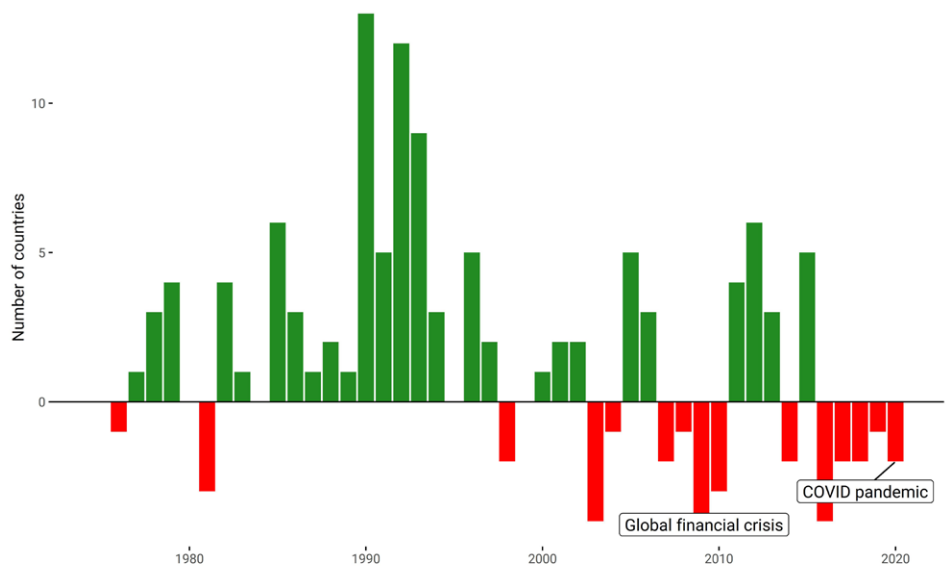
- Since 2016, three times as many countries have been *moving towards authoritarianism* than towards democracy. A similar trend was noted after the 2008–2009 financial crisis, but the current trend is more severe and longer, and as of 2020 was in its fifth consecutive year. In 2021, the only country that moved towards democracy was Zambia. In 2020–2021, the world lost at least four democracies: Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Myanmar and Serbia.
- The pandemic has accelerated and deepened the trend towards increasing authoritarianism, allowing non-democratic and democratically backsliding regimes to more easily shed their democratic facades. In the name of fighting

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the pandemic, they have justified a crackdown on dissent and shrinking the democratic and civic space.

- The past decade has seen a doubling of the number of democratically backsliding countries, which is a severe form of democratic erosion that involves the gradual and often intentional weakening of checks on government (such as judiciaries and parliaments) and attacks on the civic space, including media and civil society. There are currently seven backsliding democracies, both newer and older democracies (Brazil, Hungary, India, Poland, Slovenia and the United States).
- Non-democratic regimes are becoming more repressive and more brazen in their repressive tactics as pressure for democracy weakens and powerful authoritarian regimes gain ground. The percentage of non-democratic regimes experiencing significant democratic declines has never been as high as in the past two years.

Figure 2. Countries moving in an authoritarian or democratic direction, 1975–2020



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975-2020

Note: Red denotes the years in which the countries moving in an authoritarian direction outnumbered those moving in a democratic direction, and green vice versa.

There is a need to bolster global democratic renewal by embracing more equitable and sustainable social contracts, reforming existing political institutions, and shoring up defences against democratic backsliding and authoritarianism. For recommended policy actions, see <<https://www.idea.int/gsod>>.

Corruption

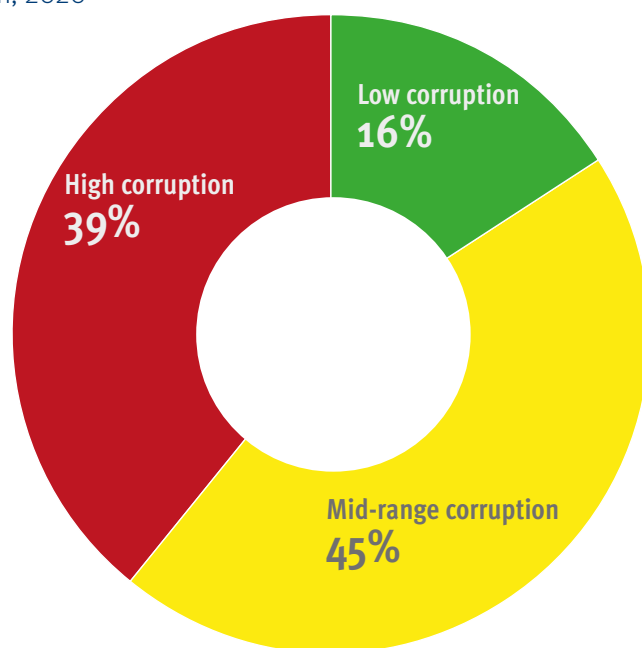
- The global fight against corruption has not yielded satisfactory results. Global levels of corruption remained as high in 2020 as they were in 1975.

Corruption undermines trust in democracy, fuels civic discontent and diverts scarce resources intended for basic welfare away from those in need.

- While overall non-democratic regimes are much more likely to be corrupt than democracies (75 per cent of authoritarian regimes), around 18 per cent of democracies suffer from high levels of corruption.
- Corruption increases democratic fragility. Democratic breakdowns are nearly three times more frequent in countries with high levels of corruption than in countries with mid-range levels of corruption.
- Around 40 per cent of the countries in the world have high levels of corruption and only 16 per cent have low levels; 70 per cent of low-income countries have high levels of corruption. The countries that are most in need of resources are those that most often see them syphoned away through corruption.

Corruption undermines trust in democracy, fuels civic discontent and diverts scarce resources intended for basic welfare away from those in need. It increases democratic fragility and provides fertile ground for extremist movements to grow.

Figure 3. Percentage of countries with high, mid-range and low levels of corruption, 2020



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2020, v. 5.1, 2021a, <<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/dataset-resources>>, accessed 1 December 2021

During the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, more than half the countries in the world violated the right to freedom of expression in ways that were disproportionate to the health threat.

Human rights

- Human rights have suffered severe setbacks in the past decade, through increasing democratic erosion, backsliding and deepening ‘autocratization’. The pandemic has placed additional strain on human rights protection around the world, leading to unprecedented restrictions on democratic freedoms on a global scale.
- Since 2012, the number of countries experiencing significant declines in their Civil and Political Liberties (freedom of expression, association, assembly,

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 34 Member States with the mission to advance sustainable democracy worldwide. International IDEA supports the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive, accountable and can deliver sustainable development to all.

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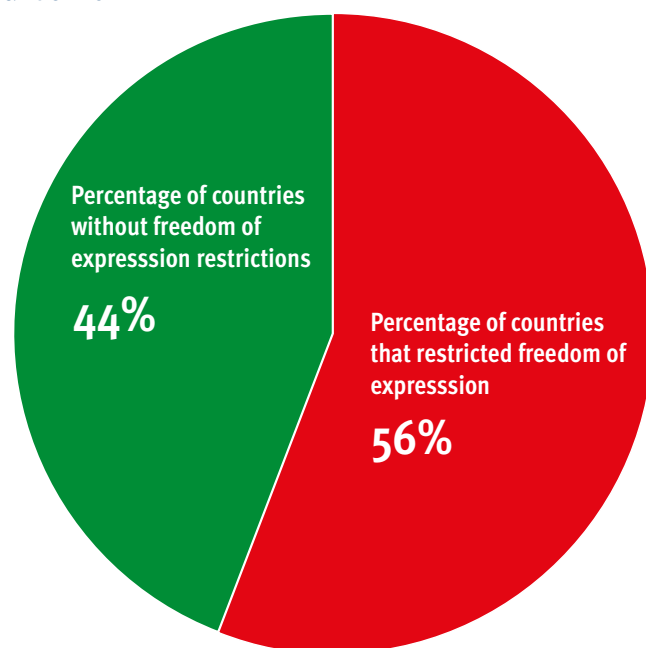
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religion, and personal integrity and security) has increased exponentially and is now three times higher than those experiencing advances.

- Gender equality, and access to education and justice have also suffered during the pandemic; 97 per cent of countries closed schools at some point during the pandemic (some are still closed in 33 per cent of countries), and gender-based violence and restrictions on court activities increased in many countries.
- Freedom of expression has been the most severely strained freedom. During the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, more than half the countries in the world violated the right to freedom of expression in ways that were disproportionate to the health threat.

Figure 4. Percentage of countries that restricted Freedom of Expression during the pandemic



Source: International IDEA, 'Global Monitor of Covid-19's Impact on Democracy and Human Rights', 13 July 2021b, <<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/covid19globalmonitor>>, accessed 1 December 2021

To defend human rights effectively, policing agencies and the government agencies responsible for internal security, with the advice of civil society, must design supportive infrastructures for peaceful public assembly and protest. Legislators must demonstrate how protestors' concerns are being integrated into policy-reform discussions. Civil society and media outlets must play their part as watchdogs that hold officials to account when necessary. See <<https://www.idea.int/gsod>>.



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