



Extracted from *Direct Democracy: The International IDEA Handbook*
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Foreword

Democracy has different faces. This Handbook considers whether, when and how the use of electoral direct democracy mechanisms is conducive to enhancing democratic systems. It gives an overview of the usage of direct democracy in all regions of the world, and examines six countries – Hungary, Switzerland, Uganda, the United States (Oregon), Uruguay and Venezuela.

Direct Democracy: The International IDEA Handbook provides recommendations and best practices, offering a critical analysis for those who may be considering the adoption of one or more instruments of direct democracy, or for those who may be seeking to make existing institutions and processes perform more effectively.

Switzerland opted for the system of direct democracy. The right of optional referendums, incorporated into the Swiss constitution in 1874, allows citizens to have the ultimate say on laws enacted by the parliament. In 1891, a modification to the constitution further introduced the popular initiative which allows citizens to request that a partial revision be made to the constitution. These two instruments of direct democracy exist at the federal and local levels.

Direct democracy can sometimes be perceived as slowing down social progress, and has shown its limits when used by political parties to introduce, for instance, xenophobic measures under cover of the protection of national sovereignty and cultural identity. It is, however, a unique mechanism which, by encouraging citizen participation and popular freedom of speech, contributes to avoiding social conflict and permits the launch of political debate on given themes.

With this new Handbook, International IDEA offers policy makers and actors engaged in the democratic reform process some thoughts and reflections on the enhanced participation of citizens in building democracy in an evolving society.



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