



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

Democracy indicates an involvement of the people in the functioning of their government. A wide range of democratic practices exist in order to further engage citizens in making political and institutional decisions. The level to which this engagement occurs is mandated either by the constitution or by individual governments through legislation and through the choice and design of the electoral system. While some countries offer more provisions for direct citizen participation within the constitutional framework, others have tighter restrictions.

This Handbook explores four mechanisms of direct democracy designed to give the electorate increased opportunities to involve themselves in the running of their governments – referendums, citizens’ initiatives, agenda initiatives and recall. The Handbook also surveys the range of uses for each of these four mechanisms and, by highlighting best practices, notes when and how each mechanism can best be used. The case studies throughout the book offer a unique comparison of the various direct democracy mechanisms and how they have been tailored to the needs of individual countries and contexts.

International IDEA aims to support democracy-building processes globally, and offers insights into the variety of ways in which democracy can be advanced. This Handbook addresses issues ranging from questions of institutional design and the initial adoption of any one or more direct democracy mechanisms, to their implementation and the potential obstacles that might be encountered during this phase. The target audience of this book is not only policy makers and practitioners but also those working in the field of democracy support and assistance, namely civil society, non-governmental organizations and academics.

This Handbook does not aim to resolve ongoing debates on direct democracy but rather aims to bring out the variety of potential participatory approaches and ways of realizing them that can be tailored to individual democracies as necessary.

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