



# DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AFTER TWO SUMMITS FOR DEMOCRACY

Reviewing the Impact and Providing some Reflections for the Future



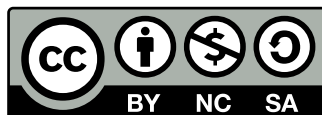
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# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>EMBs</b>	Electoral management bodies
<b>GDC</b>	Global Democracy Coalition
<b>G7</b>	Group of Seven
<b>IRI</b>	International Republican Institute
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual people
<b>SLAPP</b>	Strategic lawsuits/litigation against public participation
<b>USAID</b>	US Agency for International Development

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report seeks to contribute to the success of the Summit for Democracy process by drawing lessons from the Year of Action and Second Summit through analysis of the verbal statements and self-reports made by participating states, as well as interviews and surveys conducted with relevant stakeholders. It aims to present opportunities for shaping an inclusive and effective Third Summit for Democracy in South Korea, due to take place in 2024.

In December 2021, the US President hosted the first of two Summits for Democracy. The First Summit was followed by a Year of Action, in which involved governments were engaged to start implementing the commitments made at the summit within the fields of building more resilient democracies, combating corruption and defending human rights. On 29 and 30 March 2023, the United States co-hosted the Second Summit for Democracy with the governments of Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea and Zambia.

The Second Summit was an opportunity to seize the momentum started with the First Summit and maintained through the efforts of governments and civil society during the Year of Action. The setup of the Second Summit with five parallel summits was highly ambitious, which was both a strength and a weakness. Regions were able to take greater ownership of the summit process, giving countries the possibility to outline their own approach based on local requirements and political priorities. The summit contributed to building connections among key actors and stakeholders from many different countries and sectors, helping to bring together leaders from across the globe within a relatively short timeframe to put democracy high on the political agenda.

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**The summit sought a more inclusive and global approach, allowing for discussion between the Global North and South.**

Differently from other international forums such as the Group of Seven (G7), the summit sought a more inclusive and global approach, allowing for discussion between the Global North and South and including a diverse group of actors, such as civil society and the private sector, while also including youth voices. With the recent Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the

consequent reshaping of the global geopolitical landscape, the Second Summit came at an important time. It allowed state actors and others to come together to seek a response to some of the most pressing challenges to democratic principles and to safeguard the effective exercise of human rights.

While the Summit for Democracy organizers invited all countries to make strong commitments to uphold democracy at home and abroad, in reality the results are mixed. Countries such as Moldova and Zambia capitalized on the opportunity, making great strides in strengthening their democracies, while others delivered modest ongoing reforms or no implementation at all.

The 16 Democracy Cohorts established during the Year of Action brought together governments and civil society and managed to accomplish much in a short amount of time. A staggering amount of voluntary work by many individuals across the globe contributed to an increased momentum that did not fully transfer into the Second Summit, as the lack of structured inclusion of the Democracy Cohorts was a real missed opportunity.

Civil society organizations have been crucial to the success of the Summit for Democracy and their role was broadened over the Year of Action. While the US Government has recognized the importance of civil society and made efforts to solicit their feedback during the planning stages of the Second Summit, the engagement continues to be lacking in structure, limiting how efficiently civil society can organize around the summit process.

Finally, the Second Summit could have been an opportunity to find a consensus on the universal value of democracy while agreeing that it can take different forms depending on the context, but instead it was difficult to find a collective agreement in the government-led declaration.

In conclusion, the Summit for Democracy process remains a welcome effort for the international democracy support community, as it provides democracy actors a much-needed opportunity to raise democracy on the political agenda and come together to discuss collective solutions. It has the potential to develop into a significant and regular global movement, but certain adaptations should be implemented to ensure that the momentum of the summit is not only maintained but amplified, enabling the continuation of existing good practices and the establishment of new ones.

Some key recommendations are as follows:

- The summit agenda and accompanying expectations from participants could be clearly communicated well in advance of the event, with space reserved to present lessons learned and monitoring of commitment implementation. Proactive communication and continuous monitoring and analysis of efforts will help to encourage reflection on ongoing processes and to coordinate efforts on the local, country, regional and international levels.

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**The Summit for Democracy process remains a welcome effort for the international democracy support community, as it provides democracy actors a much-needed opportunity to raise democracy on the political agenda and come together to discuss collective solutions.**

- Collaboration and dialogues between existing summit participants, including between countries, civil society and Democracy Cohorts, should be strengthened, with the goal of creating a continuous and meaningful dialogue. This could be achieved by building new alliances with key strategic partners, especially with the private sector, as they can provide valuable input and contribute important tools and other resources to support democracy.
- A more prominent role could be considered for civil society in the formal summit process and events to help ensure that their perspectives are meaningfully represented in the outcomes. This might involve the inclusion of a more diverse set of civil society, including people from the Global South and underrepresented groups such as youth and women. Their inclusion would allow for a broader discussion on how democracy manifests itself and is understood in various geographic and cultural contexts.

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This Report seeks to contribute to the success of the Summit for Democracy process by drawing lessons from the Year of Action and Second Summit and presenting opportunities for shaping an inclusive and effective Third Summit for Democracy.

It reviews the setup of the Second Summit, the state of implementation of past democracy commitments, the new commitments made by participating countries, and the level of inclusion of civil society and Democracy Cohorts at the summit. The resulting recommendations pave the way for stronger connectivity, better structures and more inclusion and representation for future summits.

The contributions from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) to the Summit for Democracy process since 2021 can be viewed on the Summit for Democracy News and Resources Portal, funded by the European Union.<sup>1</sup> The portal delves into commitment implementation through the Commitment Dashboard, the driving efforts of the Democracy Cohorts and the plans for a Third Summit hosted by South Korea in 2024, among many other things.

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## METHODOLOGY

The analysis of commitment implementation is based on verbal official interventions by country representatives at the Second Summit as well as government self-reports that were made available. The analysis is structured in

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<sup>1</sup> <<https://summitfordemocracyresources.eu>>.

thematic categories, based on the 2022 Report released by International IDEA, *Unpacking the Summit for Democracy Commitments* (Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022), which coded commitments according to a combination of International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices. For the purpose of this Report, 'commitment implementation action' is used in reference to commitment implementation where specific measures or milestones contributed to verifiable progress. Due to the abridged, generalized and political nature of verbal statements and the limited number (16) of accessible self-reports, the analysis focuses on the themes and trends in commitment implementation. Specific country examples are based on verbal statements and self-reports, which were verified through desk-based research.

To analyse the contributions from the Democracy Cohorts and civil society, a survey was distributed to co-leads from each of the 16 Democracy Cohorts; 15 of the co-leading civil society organizations and one government sent replies. Follow-up interviews were conducted with three cohort representatives from civil society, who were selected based on their engagement during the Year of Action and the survey responses. Interviews were also held with civil society representatives from organizations in the Global South that had participated in the Second Summit for Democracy to gather some of their feedback and recommendations.

# INTRODUCTION

[T]hat's the power of these summits. Not just to speak high-minded words and shine a spotlight on those critical issues, but to galvanize action that translate to concrete progress for people around the world. That's how we make democracy deliver for everyone.

—President Joe Biden, Summit for Democracy opening speech, 29 March 2023

In December 2021, the US President hosted the First Summit for Democracy. It focused on challenges and opportunities facing democracies, with the aim to set an affirmative agenda for democratic renewal in the face of global democratic recession and the rise of authoritarianism. The summit brought together governments, representatives from international and multilateral organizations, and representatives from civil society and the private sector from across the globe. Invitations were extended to 110 countries, with representatives from 98 governments participating, announcing approximately 750 commitments aimed at strengthening and safeguarding democracy at home and abroad.

The First Summit was followed by a Year of Action, in which involved governments were engaged to start implementing the commitments made at the summit to build more resilient democracies, combat corruption and defend human rights. On 29 and 30 March 2023, the USA co-hosted the Second Summit for Democracy with the governments of Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea and Zambia.

While the Summit for Democracy organizers invited all countries to make strong commitments to uphold democracy at home and abroad at the First Summit, the results are mixed. Countries such as Moldova and Zambia capitalized on the opportunity and made great strides in strengthening their democracies, while others reported on modest or ongoing reforms, or no implementation at all. The 16 Democracy Cohorts brought together



governments and civil society, achieving some measurable impact but with mixed efficacy.

The summits have nonetheless become an important piece of the US foreign policy effort to try to build deeper alliances with a selected group of democracies. The apparent inconsistencies and lack of transparent selection criteria led some critics to denounce the selection of countries as biased and polarizing (Piccone 2021; Tharoor 2023). The geopolitical context shifted dramatically between the First and Second Summit, with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 serving to expose and deepen geopolitical rifts (Flacks 2023). Moreover, China and Russia continue to invest heavily in developing countries around the world, encouraging governance structures and political dynamics that are diametrically opposed to democracy. The 2023 summit was therefore organized against the backdrop of increasing authoritarian pressures around the world.

Despite this gloomy picture, President Joe Biden offered an optimistic perspective on the future of global democracy in his opening speech of the Second Summit for Democracy, declaring that the gathering of world leaders is ‘turning the tide’ in favour of democracy. However, many still question whether the Year of Action and Second Summit have actually galvanized action in support of democracy globally, and whether the summit has the potential to endure as a permanent global forum to support democracy (Chatham House et al. 2023).

This Report will review the impact of the Summit for Democracy process by providing evidence of its benefits and recommendations on how to address some of its shortcomings ahead of the Third Summit in 2024. It will address to what extent the Second Summit for Democracy built on the successes of the First Summit to positively influence global debates and initiate key actions to support democracy. This Report seeks to contribute to the success of the Summit for Democracy process by drawing lessons from the Year of Action and Second Summit and presenting opportunities for shaping an inclusive and effective Third Summit for Democracy.

Chapter 1 will provide a commentary on the Second Summit and its setup; Chapter 2 will review the implementation of commitments by participating countries; Chapter 3 will look back at the Democracy Cohorts and their contributions to the Second Summit; Chapter 4 will zoom in on the contributions provided independently by civil society; and Chapter 5 will outline the lessons learned and provide recommendations.

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**This Report seeks to contribute to the success of the Summit for Democracy process by drawing lessons from the Year of Action and Second Summit and presenting opportunities for shaping an inclusive and effective Third Summit for Democracy.**

## Chapter 1

# SETTING THE SCENE: THE SECOND SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

During the Second Summit for Democracy on 29–30 March 2023, many leaders showcased the progress their countries had made on the commitments from the First Summit in 2021, announced new commitments to build on the momentum from the summit, and reaffirmed the central role of democratic institutions in safeguarding liberty (The White House 2022). At the Second Summit, President Joe Biden and President Yoon Suk Yeol jointly announced that South Korea will host the Third Summit for Democracy in 2024.

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**Each co-host country organized its own setup for a regional focused summit, resulting in five very different events in terms of themes, format, presentation and access for participants.**

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### 1.1. INTRODUCING A NEW CONFIGURATION FOR THE SECOND SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

In a departure from the First Summit, the USA co-hosted the Second Summit for Democracy with the governments of Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea and Zambia, gathering representatives from government, civil society and the private sector in each co-host country. The co-hosted events were held in addition to the virtual plenary day, which assembled world leaders and civil society activists. Each co-host country organized its own setup for a regional focused summit, resulting in five very different events in terms of themes, format, presentation and access for participants (see Table 1.1).

The regional summits focused on: ‘Promoting the role of youth and political and democratic spaces’ in Costa Rica; ‘Media freedom for the wider European region’ in the Netherlands; ‘Free, fair and transparent elections in Africa’ in Zambia; ‘Anti-corruption in the Indo-Pacific region’ in South Korea; and ‘Advancing technology for democracy’ in the USA. The separate events gave participants the opportunity to focus on key topics for democracy support, tailoring approaches by region. While this approach was positive in making the summit less US-centric and helping to bring in civil society from the regions, it also was criticized as resulting in a siloed approach to discussions, in which each region and topic focused inwards instead of building bridges (see Boxes 1.2.a to e).

**Table 1.1. Agenda of the Second Summit for Democracy**

<b>Day One: 28 March 2023</b>	<b>Day Two: 29 March 2023</b>	<b>Day Three: 30 March 2023</b>
High-level virtual meeting hosted in the USA.	Co-hosted regional plenaries officially kicked off the Summit.	Co-host countries led regional gatherings on a core summit theme.
<p>Focused on thematic discussions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• paths and partnerships to strengthen democracy and human rights;</li> <li>• creating lasting peace in Ukraine;</li> <li>• linkages between democracy and equal economic growth;</li> <li>• defending the rule of law;</li> <li>• fighting corruption; and</li> <li>• raising women's civic and political participation.</li> </ul>	<p>Live-streamed plenary discussion with 40 world leaders.</p> <p>Four spotlight interventions featuring eight presentations by leading activists and civil society figures.</p> <p>Focused on topics such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• economic growth and justice for all;</li> <li>• delivering strong institutions; and</li> <li>• inclusion and equality.</li> </ul>	<p>Events gathered representatives from government, civil society and the private sector.</p> <p>Events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advancing Technology for Democracy, United States, North America.</li> <li>• Promoting the role of youth in political and democratic spaces, Costa Rica, Central and South America.</li> <li>• Media freedom as a cornerstone of democracy, the Netherlands, Europe.</li> <li>• Challenges and progress in addressing corruption, South Korea, Asia-Pacific.</li> <li>• Free, fair and transparent elections as a foundation of democratic governance, Zambia, Africa.</li> </ul>

**Box 1.1.a. USA: Advancing technology for democracy**

Hybrid one-day event on 30 March (US Department of State n.d.a).

Opening remarks by the US Secretary of State. Participation by the US Government, US Agency for International Development (USAID), foreign dignitaries, civil society and the private sector to advance a vision for freedom and democracy in the digital era that is consistent with human rights and brings together governments to stand against the misuse of technology and the spread of digital authoritarianism.

Discussions emphasized the need to shape the ecosystem of emerging technologies in line with democratic principles and human rights. Topics included Internet freedom, advancing democracy online, countering digital authoritarianism and shaping ethical use of emerging technologies.

**Box 1.1.b. South Korea: Challenges and progress in addressing corruption**

One-day event on 30 March to take stock on efforts to prevent and combat corruption (Summit for Democracy 2023b).

Opened by the President of South Korea. Participants included government delegates from Indo-Pacific countries, the trade representative of the USA, anti-corruption stakeholders from governments, the private sector and civil society.

Discussions focused on the role of international cooperation, non-governmental stakeholders for anti-corruption, technology in fighting corruption, and financial transparency and integrity.

Adopted the Seoul Declaration on Challenges and Progress in Addressing Corruption, reaffirming the importance of promoting democracy and the need to combat corruption (Republic of Korea 2023).

**Box 1.1.c. Costa Rica: Promoting the role of youth in political and democratic spaces**

Four-day programme (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.a) on 27 to 30 March with 14 events arranged by civil society organizations.

Participation by civil society organizations and youth groups from around the globe to advance the role of civil society and international organizations in promoting youth political participation and in advocating and developing democracy in their own countries.

Concluded with an event hosted by the President of Costa Rica and US Representative to the United Nations, among other key actors from Costa Rica.

Discussions were held on the role of the media, civil society, activism and education in promoting the role of youth, as well as regarding the importance of countering hate speech and including minorities and other vulnerable populations.

**Box 1.1.d. The Netherlands: Media freedom as a cornerstone of democracy**

Multistakeholder three-hour digital talk show on 30 March (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 2023).

High-level invitation-only hybrid event.

The 'talk show' was opened by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. Around 50 participants included government representatives, journalists, civil society organizations, young people, human rights defenders and academics from across the European region.

Discussion emphasized the safety of journalists, freedom of expression online and the importance of bolstering free and independent media.

**Box. 1.1.e. Zambia: Free, fair and transparent elections as the foundation of democratic governance**

Hybrid one-day programme on 30 March (Zambia 2023).

Keynote address by the President of Zambia. Participation by representatives from the US Government, several African governments, African electoral management bodies (EMBs), political parties and the judiciary, as well as from selected civil society organizations.

Discussions focused on electoral integrity in Africa, highlighting the importance of inclusive participation, political party financing, independent EMBs, and media and civil society engagement.

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## 1.2. REVIEWING THE SETUP OF THE SECOND SUMMIT

The Second Summit was an opportunity to seize the momentum that started with the First Summit and was maintained through the efforts of governments and civil society during the Year of Action. The setup of the Second Summit with five parallel summits was highly ambitious, which was both a strength and a weakness. While it created a somewhat siloed regional approach, with each event oriented towards challenges and opportunities specific to each region, it also opened the door to a more diverse and less US-centric process. Regions were able to take greater ownership of the summit process, giving countries the possibility to outline their approach based on local needs and political priorities.

Verbal statements were again the centrepiece of the summit: 82 of the participating countries submitted pre-recorded official responses that were shared online (US Department of State n.d.b). In these statements, countries shared their vision for strengthening democracy and the state of democracy in their countries and internationally. Some countries also used the statements to present progress on their implementation of commitments. The Second Summit also produced a Declaration of the Summit for Democracy, with 74 participating governments committing to 'strengthen democratic institutions and processes and build resilience, [and] to meet the rising challenges to democracy worldwide' (US Department of State 2023b). However, not all countries signed the declaration, and there were a number of sections for which complete consensus could not be achieved.

Nevertheless, there were missed opportunities, such as the lack of a clear space for the Democracy Cohorts and limited opportunities for countries to present some of the achievements in delivering on their commitments and to have debates with civil society on these issues. Finally, the Second Summit could have been an opportunity to find a consensus on the universal value

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**The summit sought a more inclusive and global ‘big tent’ approach, allowing for discussion between a diverse group of actors.**

of democracy while agreeing that it can take different forms depending on the context, but instead it was difficult to find a collective agreement in the government-led declaration.

Despite these missed opportunities, the Summit contributed to building alliances among leaders and key democracy actors from different countries and sectors to put democracy high on the political agenda. Differently from other international forums such as the G7, the summit sought a more inclusive and global ‘big tent’ approach, allowing for discussion between the Global North and South and including a diverse group of actors, such as civil society and the private sector, while also including youth voices. With the continued Russian aggression against Ukraine and the consequent reshaping of the global geopolitical landscape, the Second Summit came at an important time. It allowed state actors and others to come together across differences to seek a response to some of the most pressing challenges to democratic principles and to safeguard the effective exercise of human rights.

**Inclusiveness and accessibility of the summit events**

The decision to have five parallel regional summits gave countries from each region an opportunity to shape the discussions around country and regional priorities in a way that better suited their regional contexts, contributing to more inclusive and diverse debates. For instance, the focus on electoral integrity in Africa put heightened attention on an important issue for the region, as at least 24 countries from Africa, some which were participating in the summit, were holding elections in 2023. Similarly, Costa Rica was one of the few countries that made national Summit for Democracy commitments on youth political participation, with the regional event an opportunity to showcase progress under this theme and the important civil-society-led advocacy initiatives developed under the summit umbrella. Costa Rica is also co-leading the Youth Political and Civil Engagement cohort, also known as the Youth Democracy cohort, through the engagement of their Ministry of Culture and Youth. The Netherlands brought attention to and support for the importance of safeguarding media freedom in Europe and was one of the co-leads of the Media Freedom cohort.

There were some limitations to the inclusivity and diversity built by the regional summits: some of them remained essentially closed and difficult to access for civil society groups and other stakeholders. The regional focus of the summits and the fact that they were held simultaneously also made it more challenging for governments and civil society representatives from other parts of the world with similar concerns or thematic priorities to fully participate (see US Department of State 2023a).

The summits held in the Netherlands, the USA and Zambia were rather closed, featuring few meaningful opportunities to reach the ear of government actors and engage in productive and critical discussion. The event in the Netherlands was an invitation-only talk-show style event with few participants, and although the event hosted by the USA included civil society voices in presentations to a large audience, there was limited room for deep discussion. The

Zambian co-hosted event included the US Secretary of Education and several senior officials from the Zambian Government. However, the more detailed discussions on the content of necessary actions only involved civil society representatives as the aforementioned high-level representatives had left (Ivanov, Bollrich and Kopsieker 2023).

The summit held in Costa Rica was the most inclusive and interactive of the regional events, opening sessions for questions and answers between speakers and participants and spreading events across four days. The Costa Rican regional summit also hosted a number of representatives from civil society from the Latin American region and other continents, partly due to the efforts of the Youth Democracy cohort and the International Republican Institute (IRI), who sponsored the participation for many attendees.

However, organizational issues made it difficult for the wider public to access the summit events, and its co-hosted components online left much to be desired. Despite the fact that parts of the events were hosted on YouTube and linked on the US State Department website, complete recordings of all the events were not fully available and it was often difficult to find complete agenda details for each event (US Department of State n.d.a). Moreover, accessibility was not optimal. While American Sign Language translations were offered for people who are deaf or hard of hearing in North America, the inclusion of correct and complete closed captions would have increased accessibility, also translated into English where applicable. A transcript of proceedings, specifically in a machine-readable format, would also have helped observers from civil society, academia and the private sector to follow proceedings.

Finally, there was no allocated space for the 16 Democracy Cohorts in the official agenda. Certain cohorts nonetheless participated in some of the events, notably by organizing side events or taking part in some of the sessions. Many of the cohorts also published model commitments, action plans or other materials to contribute to knowledge sharing and raising the level of ambition or initiatives (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.b). However, an official space in which to present and discuss the work and legacy of the Democracy Cohorts could have contributed to valuable discussions on the best practices and lessons learned ahead of the Third Summit, along with providing the necessary recognition the groups deserved after so many months of voluntary hard work.

The Summit for Democracy process remains a welcome effort for the international democracy support community, as it provides a much-needed opportunity to raise democracy on the political agenda and enable key stakeholders to come together to address collective issues. However, the representatives from civil society that have participated throughout the summit process and supported the work of the Democracy Cohorts have communicated some areas for improvement through the surveys and interviews conducted by International IDEA and the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) (Kaesberg, Balleste Buxo and Silva-Leander 2023). The next

### Declaration of the Summit for Democracy

- Issued by 74 countries on 29 March 2023, negotiated between governments in the months leading up to the summit.
- Commitment 'to strengthen democratic institutions and processes and build resilience' to meet the rising challenges to democracy worldwide.
- Thirteen countries dissented from parts of the statement.

#### The declaration covered issues such as:

support to democracy;	defence against transnational threats;
the right for an elected government;	Russia's war against Ukraine;
upholding the rule of law;	safeguarding human rights for all;
equal access to justice;	protection of civic space;
respect for fundamental freedoms; free	ensuring a secure Internet;
media and expression;	the responsible use of digital
fighting corruption;	technology; and
combating authoritarianism;	multilateral dialogue on cooperation.

**The Declaration of the Summit for Democracy was an important achievement of the summit, as 74 countries came together to establish a standard of shared principles to underline and strengthen democracy.**

summit organizers could consider revising the format to make the summit more accessible and should communicate the agenda further in advance to better enable participants to contribute. It is important that civil society be included as an equal partner in following up on summit initiatives, and timely communication from summit organizers would help to facilitate this inclusion. Cohorts and country commitments would ideally be at the forefront of the summit discussions, with opportunities created for governments and a diverse set of civil society to have a real debate on democracy.

### Declaration of the Summit for Democracy

The Declaration of the Summit for Democracy was an important achievement of the summit, as 74 countries came together to establish a standard of shared principles to underline and strengthen democracy (US Department of State 2023b). However, the endorsement of the statement was not without notable reservations from certain participating governments. Of the countries that participated in both summits, 74 signed the declaration,<sup>2</sup> 13 of whom<sup>3</sup> endorsed the document with reservations or disassociation from the text regarding certain sections. While it is not ideal that a unified consensus could not be reached, it is better that the text was issued as is with dissenting sections identified, as it ensures that core democratic principles are not

<sup>2</sup> The participants of the second Summit that did not sign the declaration were Bahamas, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, European Commission, The Gambia, Guyana, Indonesia, Kenya, Maldives, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Seychelles, Tanzania and Timor-Leste.

<sup>3</sup> Armenia, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, India, Iraq, Israel, Malawi, Mauritania, Mexico, Paraguay, the Philippines, Poland and Zambia. For details, see US Department of State (2023b).



compromised while continuing to respect the different contexts in which democracy has grown around the world.

A closer look at the dissenting countries and sections reveals that there is still disagreement over what constitutes the fundamental values of democracy, especially regarding sexuality and gender identity and expression. The eighth principle in the document endorses the promotion of human rights and equality for all, including on the basis of 'sexual orientation, gender identity and expression', and it received reservations or disassociation from Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Iraq, Mauritania, Paraguay, Poland and co-host Zambia. Bulgaria and Zambia released statements on their dissent, both pointing to established legal interpretations that only recognize two genders (Lusaka Times 2023). While the other dissenting countries did not make statements, common across the countries are poor legal status and protections and low social acceptance for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, with Mauritania notably still criminalizing same-sex sexual activity (Human Dignity Trust n.d.) and the courts in Poland recently intervening against so-called 'LGBT-Free Zones' (Zygmunt 2023).

Among the other less agreed sections were those endorsing support for territorial integrity, civilian control of the military and justice where war crimes are committed, and gender equality. Dissenting countries for those principles were Armenia, India and Mexico; India, Israel and the Philippines; and the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Poland, respectively. Armenia and the Philippines released statements on their reservations, with Armenia indicating that the endorsement for territorial integrity lacks reference to 'Azerbaijan's acts of aggression' (Armenia 2023) and the Philippines stating that it does not recognize the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (Philippines 2023). Finally, Malawi's reservations or disassociation with the principle committing to collective work against climate change is reflective of broader disagreement over who should be responsible for what actions. This sentiment is reflected in the country's written commitments to 'speak out against threats to human freedom posed by strong economies bent on abusing their power and money against the weak and call on those nations to account on their obligations to humanity in addressing global crises they created, such as climate change' (Malawi 2022: 6).

The declaration therefore served to highlight and help to build alliances regarding democratic values for which there is stronger agreement, such as for elections, access to impartial justice, the right to opinion and expression, combating corruption, freedom of assembly and association, worker rights and responsible use of technology. It was praised by Freedom House, as it can help civil society in organizing more active government participation or for more governments to sign on (LaRoque 2023). However, the declaration has also helped to illustrate where there is less international consensus, both in terms of those topics for which agreement could not be reached, and in terms of those countries that dissented from parts of or the entire declaration.

## Chapter 2

# GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS TO THE SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

During the First Summit in 2021, the heads of states and governments of 98 countries made verbal commitments aimed at strengthening and safeguarding democracy at home and abroad during the Year of Action. In addition, 59 countries submitted written commitments following the First Summit. At the Second Summit in 2023, the US administration invited countries' representatives to again give verbal statements to express their vision of democracy domestically and internationally. This gave participating heads of states and governments the opportunity to showcase their country's progress on commitment implementation during the Year of Action and announce new initiatives.

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**As was the case with the First Summit, the selection of invited countries raised questions, with some commentators claiming that the selection process was inconsistent and biased.**

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### 2.1. GOVERNMENT INVITATION AND PARTICIPATION IN THE 2023 SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY

Overall, 120 countries<sup>4</sup> were invited to the Second Summit. All 112 countries invited to the First Summit were also asked to participate in 2023. In addition, eight new countries<sup>5</sup> were invited to the Second Summit (Gramer 2023). Of the 120 countries who were asked to participate, 42 were European, 28 were from the Americas, 26 from the Asia-Pacific region, 22 from Africa and 2 from the Middle East (see Figure 2.1).

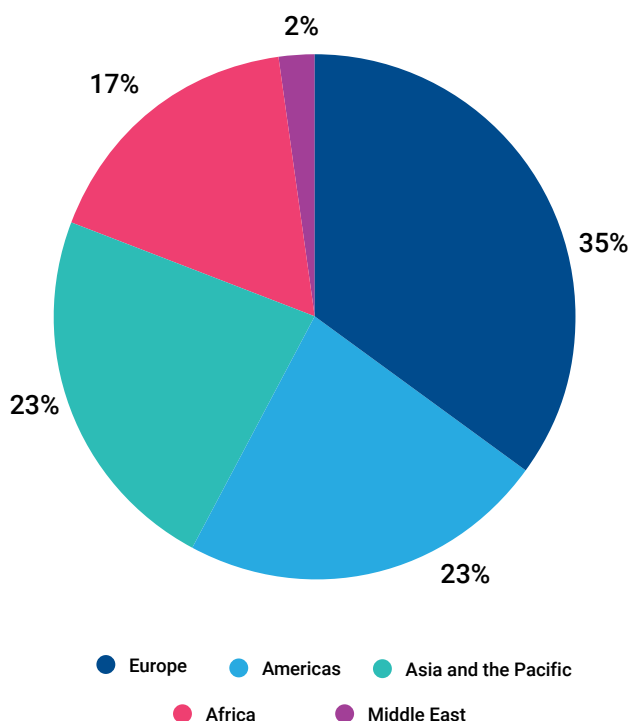
As was the case with the First Summit, the selection of invited countries raised questions, with some commentators claiming that the selection process was inconsistent and biased. For example, critics questioned Poland being invited, while European countries such as NATO member states Hungary and Turkey were again not on the invitation list. In particular, there was much discussion over the exclusion of Hungary as the only EU country not to be invited, with the

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<sup>4</sup> Numbers include the USA and the EU.

<sup>5</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Honduras, Liechtenstein, Mauritania, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Figure 2.1. Invitations to the 2023 Summit by region



Source: Data compiled by International IDEA.

country blocking a joint EU position on the summit (Zamfir and Tothova 2021). Other observed inconsistencies were the invitation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger and Nigeria, but not Rwanda (Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022).

Of the 120 countries invited to the Second Summit, 90 countries participated (see Figure 2.2). Overall, 80 countries participated in both summits, while 20 countries<sup>6</sup> declined to participate a second time. Three countries declined the first but accepted the second invitation.<sup>7</sup> Of the eight newly invited countries, all except Mozambique participated in the Second Summit. Overall, 10 invited countries never participated in the summit process.<sup>8</sup> It particularly drew attention that Mongolia, Pakistan and South Africa declined their invitations in both 2021 and 2023.

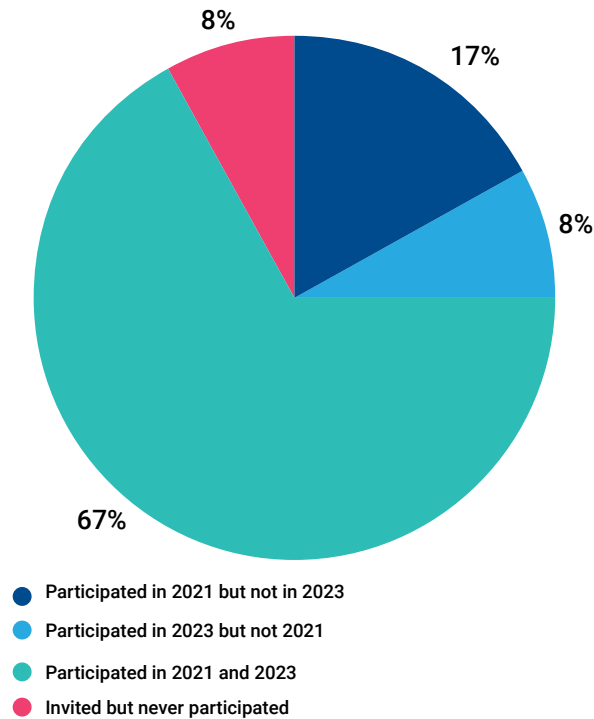
As in 2021, Europe was overrepresented among summit participants. Moreover, the number of participating European countries grew from 38 to 42 in the Second Summit. This overrepresentation was even more pronounced due to the decline in participants from the Asia-Pacific region (16 to 14

<sup>6</sup> Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Dominica, Fiji, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Kiribati, Micronesia, Namibia, Nauru, Palau, Paraguay, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tome and Principe, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

<sup>7</sup> Papua New Guinea, Seychelles and Timor-Leste.

<sup>8</sup> Malaysia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Figure 2.2. Overall participation of invited countries in the two summits



Source: Data compiled by International IDEA.

countries) and Americas (27 to 18 countries) between the First and Second Summits (see Figure 2.3). The numbers of participating African (15 countries) and Middle Eastern (2 countries) participants remained the same. Europe and the Middle East were the only regions in which no countries declined their invitation.

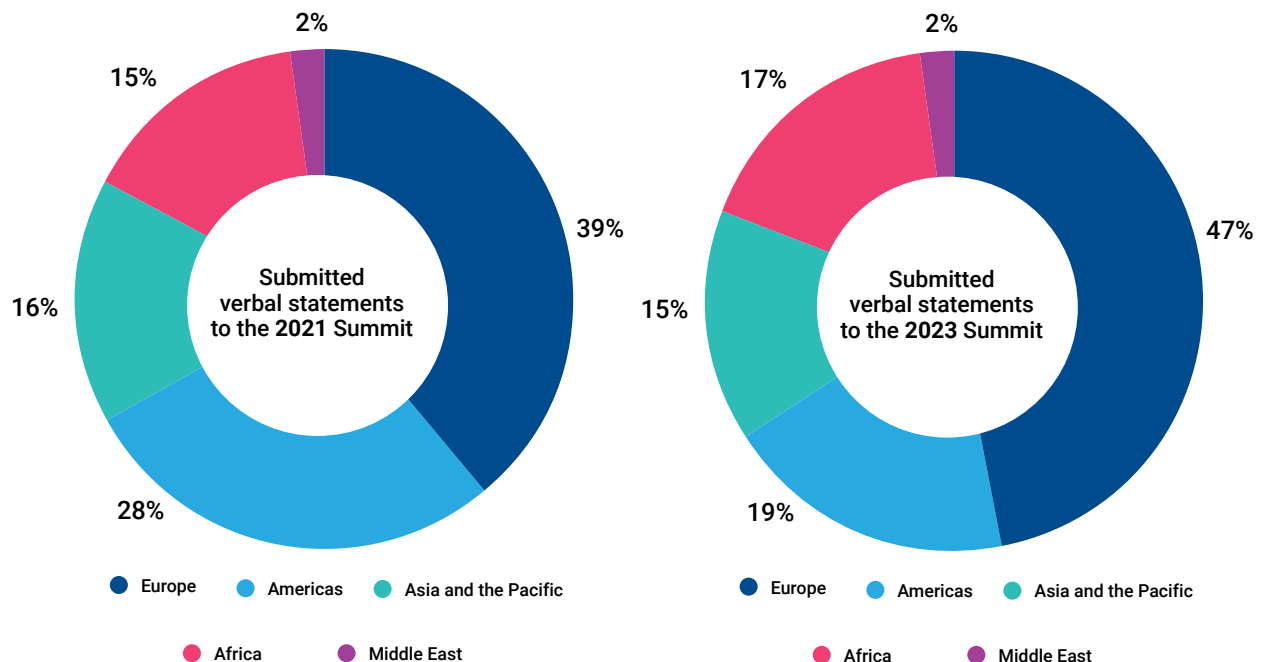
**All participating countries were invited to submit 'official interventions' in which they present progress on the implementation of their commitments.**

## 2.2. UNPACKING THE VERBAL STATEMENTS AT THE 2023 SUMMIT

Aside from the leader-level plenary session taking place on 29 March 2023, all participating countries were invited to submit so-called 'official interventions' in which they present progress on the implementation of their commitments made at the First Summit and the state of democracy in their country and internationally (US Department of State, n.d.a). Of the 90 countries that participated in the Second Summit, 82 submitted these pre-recorded 'official interventions', in which they showcased their countries' actions to implement their commitments and announced new initiatives. Eight countries<sup>9</sup> did not submit pre-recorded 'official interventions' but discussed their commitment implementation actions in their statements during the plenary session. Overall,

<sup>9</sup> Costa Rica, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Niger, USA, Uruguay and Zambia.

Figure 2.3. Comparison of summit attendees in 2021 and 2023 by region



Source: Data compiled by International IDEA.

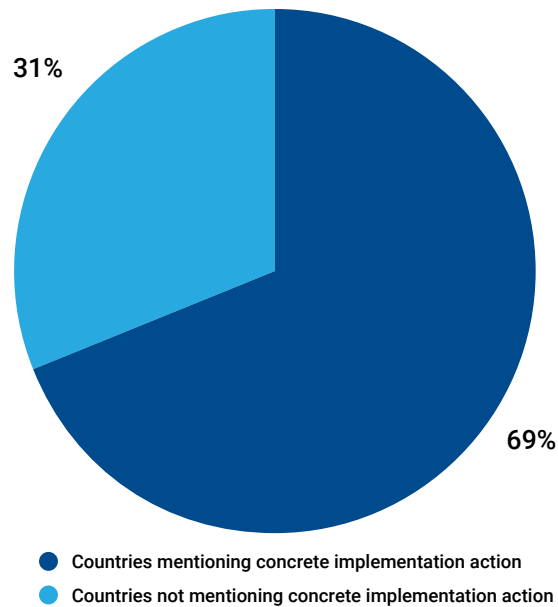
32 countries both submitted pre-recorded 'official interventions' and spoke at the plenary session.

New geopolitical considerations profoundly influenced the Second Summit, as the threat to Ukrainian statehood and democracy is considered a threat to liberal democracy globally. Of the participating countries in the Second Summit, 39 countries (not including Ukraine) mentioned the Russian war against Ukraine in their national statements, focusing on themes related to the fight against authoritarianism, such as protecting independent media and democracy defenders, combating disinformation, and security and peace building. This marked a difference to the First Summit, during which the topics related to the defence against authoritarianism and particularly security matters were less of a focus in the verbal statements.

Nonetheless, when it came to concrete progress in commitment implementation, anti-corruption efforts remained the core topic of the Second Summit just as it was in the First Summit. Yet not all of the 90 participating countries mentioned concrete commitment implementation actions during the Year of Action. In total, only 62 countries mentioned specific measures or milestones that contributed to verifiable progress in the implementation of their 2021 commitments (see Figure 2.4).

**New geopolitical considerations profoundly influenced the Second Summit, as the threat to Ukrainian statehood and democracy is considered a threat to liberal democracy globally.**

**Figure 2.4. Commitment implementation actions mentioned in verbal statements**



Source: Data compiled by International IDEA.

**When it came to commitments and their implementation, both domestically and internationally, the most frequently mentioned themes across both the First and Second Summits were the fight against corruption.**

#### Topical focus of verbal statements on commitments

When it came to commitments and their implementation, both domestically and internationally, the most frequently mentioned themes across both the First and Second Summits were the fight against corruption (mentioned by 38 per cent of participating countries in 2023), followed by efforts to enhance gender equality (for information and data on the First Summit in 2021, see Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022). Many heads of states and governments further mentioned commitment implementation actions to strengthen electoral integrity, to increase transparency and accountability of public institutions as well as to protect free media and independent journalism (see Figure 2.5). The areas that received the least attention were direct democracy (mentioned by no country), predictable enforcement (one country), and sanctions (two countries).<sup>10</sup>

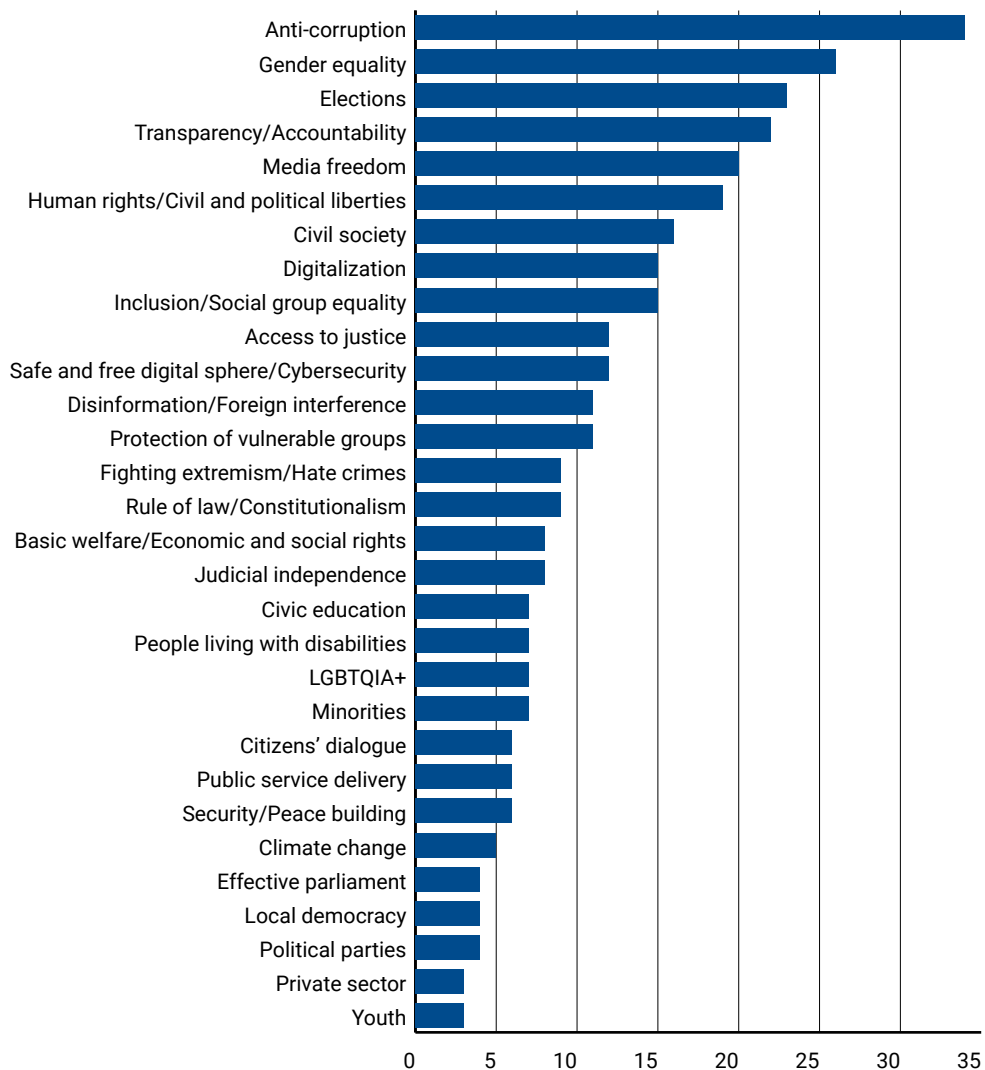
While verbal statements on strengthening democratic institutions through effective parliaments and judicial independence were less common than in 2021, a prominent exception was the protection of electoral integrity, which was mentioned in approximately 26 per cent of country statements. The continued focus on elections (mentioned by 22 per cent in 2021) is not surprising given the continued threats to electoral integrity globally, particularly through the use of online communication tools that open the door for a significant degree of voter manipulation and polarization (International IDEA n.d.a). However, it is surprising that mentions of judicial independence declined

<sup>10</sup> The themes with fewer than three mentions were excluded from Figure 2.5.

so significantly, with 26 per cent of countries in 2021 mentioning the topic and only 10 per cent in 2023.

Turning to inclusiveness, mentions of gender equality remained prominent with 28 to 29 per cent of the countries mentioning the topic in both 2021 and 2023, as the topic remains an important issue with women still significantly underrepresented in politics globally (International IDEA n.d.b). However, the inclusion of other underrepresented social groups such as national minorities, people living with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ people were mentioned by only 8 per cent of countries. Even more surprising was that youth was mentioned by only 3 per cent. The lack of attention on youth was surprising, particularly given that it was the focus of the co-hosted regional summit in Costa Rica.

Figure 2.5. Verbal commitment implementation and new commitments by topic and number of countries



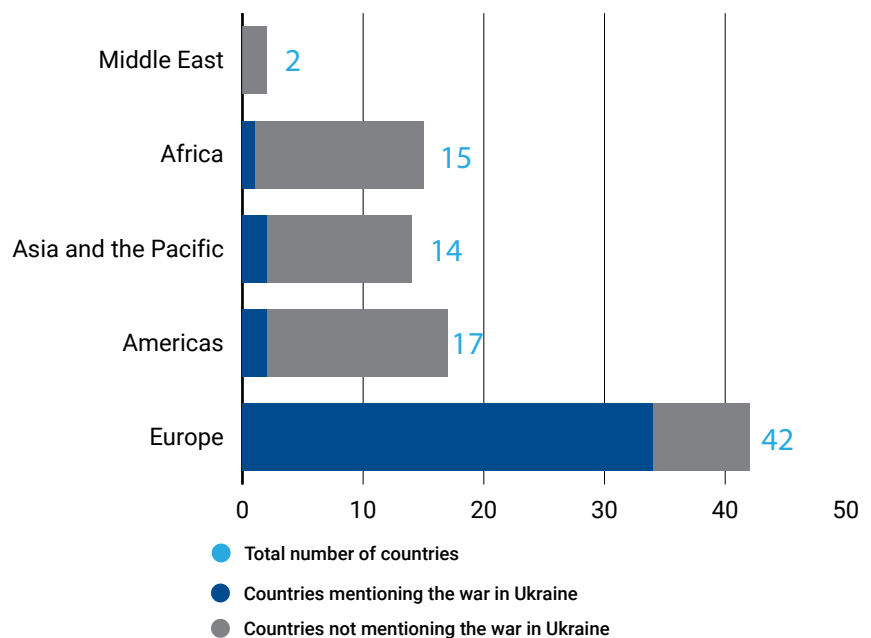
Source: Data compiled by International IDEA.

**Many participating countries underlined how Russian aggression has profoundly affected the understanding of democracy as a value system, as it represents an attack on the fundamental values of our societies.**

### Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine and countering authoritarianism

Since February 2022, the world has grappled with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has tested the objectives of the summit in new ways. Many participating countries underlined how Russian aggression has profoundly affected the understanding of democracy as a value system, as it represents an attack on the fundamental values of our societies. Others stressed how this attack by an autocratic state has profoundly impacted the global economy, increasing inflation rates and affecting food supply chains around the world.

Figure 2.6. Participating countries mentioning Russia's war in Ukraine



Source: Data compiled by International IDEA.

As a result of this new situation, the fight against authoritarianism became one of the defining topics of the Second Summit. Russia's war against Ukraine was mentioned by 39 out of 90 countries (43 per cent; see Figure 2.6), frequently linking it to the topics of media freedom, civil society, disinformation, security and cybersecurity. This was further reflected by the work of the Resisting Authoritarian Pressure cohort, which adapted its agenda and activities to the new reality, including a dedicated session focusing on the need for a Just and Lasting Peace in Ukraine during the plenary day of the Second Summit on 28 March (Summit for Democracy 2023a).

### Democracy Cohorts

The work of the Democracy Cohorts was highlighted by 15 countries, most of which were cohort co-leads. Bulgaria, for example, linked their co-leadership of the Anticorruption Policies as a Guarantee for National Security, Stability and Sovereignty cohort to the implementation of their national commitments.



Other countries praised the work and achievements of the cohorts in general, such as Czechia and New Zealand, while others such as Estonia and Lithuania stressed the importance of continuing the work of the cohorts.

Different global initiatives were also engaged over the course of the work of the Democracy Cohorts and were mentioned in some of the statements given by cohort co-leads. The most notable examples include the Open Government Partnership, the Media Freedom Coalition, and the Freedom Online Coalition, which supported the Financial Transparency and Integrity cohort, the Media Freedom cohort, and the Technology for Democracy cohort, respectively. The participation and impact of the Democracy Cohorts on the Second Summit are elaborated on in Chapter 3.

### 2.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMITMENTS AND NEW INITIATIVES

Overall, the verbal statements on countries' commitment implementation progress were of varying specificity, with some countries not providing verifiable descriptions of actions taken or implementation milestones. Of the 90 participating countries, only two-thirds mentioned some form of concrete commitment implementation action in their verbal statements that allowed for at least a partial verification (see Figure 2.4).

An explanation for this gap is that verbal statements are often short due to set time limits and tend to be more generic, as can be seen when comparing verbal and written statements from 2021 on International IDEA's Commitment Dashboard (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.d). Written statements, on the other hand, have more freedom in their length, and can therefore be more detailed in their presentation of goals and planned or concluded activities. From a monitoring standpoint, written statements are further advantageous as they provide a more accessible record that can be more easily verified.

#### Reviewing the implementation of commitments

This section will review the implementation of commitments related to the themes that were mentioned most frequently by heads of state and governments during their 2023 verbal statements: corruption, gender equality, elections, and media freedom. Specific country examples are based not only on the verbal statements made during the Second Summit, but also on the accessible self-reports produced by the respective governments,<sup>11</sup> which were then verified through desk-based research.

#### Corruption

The theme of fighting corruption has been central to the summit process and has consistently been at the top of the reform agenda in many countries. The

**Overall, the verbal statements on countries' commitment implementation progress were of varying specificity, with some countries not providing verifiable descriptions of actions taken or implementation milestones.**

<sup>11</sup> The 16 self-reports were shared with International IDEA and published on the Commitment Dashboard (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.d). Canada, Finland and the USA have shared their self-reports publicly.

topic was one of the three pillars of the 2021 Summit (along with defending against authoritarianism and promoting respect for human rights), and was the main theme of the regional summit co-hosted by South Korea. The topic's importance was also reflected in the verbal statements given at the 2021 and 2023 Summits, with it mentioned in just over half of verbal commitments in 2021 (Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022) and in 38 per cent of verbal statements given in 2023 (see Figure 2.5). Corruption also emerged as an important issue for newly participating countries in 2023, with half of them making new commitments on corruption. A sizable number of 37 countries reported on concrete actions delivered or planned on corruption in their verbal statements (34 countries) or written self-reports, which can be organized across six categories (see Table 2.1).

A total of 22 countries mention the adoption, enactment or review of national anti-corruption laws, policies, strategies or action plans, including **Croatia**. The country adopted the first Action Plan for the Implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy (2022–2024), which was the first step towards implementing its strategy. The Plan encompasses 206 concrete measures to fight corruption, such as whistleblower protection and lobbying and fiscal transparency, across areas such as local and regional self-government, the

**Table 2.1. Mapping countries mentioning concrete commitment implementation actions or new commitments on corruption at the Second Summit**

Subcategory	Country
Establishing, strengthening or assessing anti-corruption bodies	Australia, Bulgaria, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Liberia, Mauritania, Moldova, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, South Korea, Saint Lucia, USA, Zambia
Adopting, enacting or reviewing anti-corruption laws, policies, strategies and/or action plans	Armenia, Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Kosovo, <sup>1</sup> Liberia, Nepal, Netherlands, Peru, Portugal, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Serbia, Sweden, Taiwan, USA, Zambia
Establishing e-services as part of anti-corruption efforts; increasing transparency of public procurement	Albania, Canada, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Greece, Maldives, Sweden, Switzerland, USA
Adopting or strengthening whistleblower protection laws	Bulgaria, Czechia, Portugal, South Korea, Slovakia
Regulating conflict of interest; increasing transparency of lobbying	Czechia, Finland, Latvia
Fighting illicit financial flows and money laundering; regulating asset recovery; increasing transparency of beneficial ownership	Canada, Dominican Republic, Finland, Liberia, Germany, Malta, Moldova, Peru, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA

<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

private sector, justice and policing, health and sports, agriculture, and the civil sector (Croatia 2022). The **Dominican Republic**, aside from establishing new local anti-corruption offices, also made progress in the modernization of its anti-corruption law by enacting a new assets forfeiture law, increasing transparency in public procurement (Transparency International 2023).

A controversial case is **Liberia**, which mentioned the enactment of a number of new anti-corruption laws in the middle of 2022, including the New Anti-Corruption Commission Act, the Financial Intelligence Agency Act, the Witness Protection Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act and the Anti-Money Laundering Act. While the New Anti-Corruption Commission Act grants direct prosecutorial powers to the anti-corruption commission, the new law has been criticized for unfairly dissolving the old administration and reducing the powers and competencies of the anti-corruption commission, rendering it potentially less effective (Yeakula, Miemen and Bloh 2022: 22–23). The case demonstrates the importance of having measurable written commitments, as it provides a direct point of comparison that is easily accessible to all, with specific measures for supporting democracy listed. While the country made strides in granting direct prosecutorial powers and proposing legislation to counter corrupt practices and financial offences, these steps were potentially used to politically influence the structure of the new commission and reduce its effectiveness.

A total of 13 countries reported progress in establishing anti-corruption bodies in their verbal statements or written self-reports. **Australia** established an independent National Anti-Corruption Commission, which will start its work in mid-2023 to investigate and report on corruption in the public sector and educate the public on corruption risks and prevention (Australian Government n.d.). The **USA** appointed a first-ever Coordinator on Global Anti-Corruption to advance US anti-corruption priorities, coordinate with civil society, industry and international partners, and ensure that countries are meeting their international commitments and obligations (The White House 2022). Together with 37 other countries, the USA announced the Summit for Democracy Commitment on Beneficial Ownership and Misuse of Legal Persons (The White House 2023a). Participating for the first time in the summit process, **Papua New Guinea** highlighted its current efforts to set up an independent Commission against Corruption (UNODC 2022) and committed to strengthening its Ombudsman Commission (Islands Business 2023).

Certain countries made changes to improve the structure, criteria and competencies of their anti-corruption institutions. **Bulgaria** committed to establishing a national anti-corruption agency and a mechanism for independent investigations of the judicial system; it also highlighted its work as the co-lead of the Anticorruption Policies as a Guarantee for National Security, Stability and Sovereignty cohort (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.c, European Commission n.d.). **Moldova** has fully implemented its commitments made in 2021, with improvements in the disciplinary liability of the Prosecutor General and in the appointment criteria and procedures for the Anti-corruption

Prosecutor's Office and the Prosecutor's Office for Combating Organized Crime and Special Cases (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023a).

Other interesting initiatives to prevent corruption came from **Ecuador**, which created an open information platform to make public procurement data more transparent (Gobierno Abierto Ecuador 2020), and from **Latvia**, which passed a law that will establish a Lobbying Transparency Register (Baltic News Network 2022). Legislative efforts to protect whistleblowers was also a popular theme, mentioned by **South Korea** as well as four EU countries: Bulgaria, Czechia and Slovakia mentioned their whistleblower legislation in their verbal responses, while Portugal wrote about it in the self-report (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023b). These EU legislative efforts are part of the transposition of the far-reaching EU Directive on Whistleblowing.<sup>12</sup> Efforts to support anti-corruption extended to funding anti-corruption initiatives. In their self-reports, **Canada** mentioned contributing CAD 10.2 million to three projects for capacity building to fight corruption and money laundering in beneficiary countries (Canada 2023); the **USA** provided over USD 258 million in anti-corruption foreign assistance as well as announced the 2022 European Democratic Resilience Initiatives with USD 320 million funding to enhance anti-corruption defence in Europe and Eurasia (The White House 2022); and **Taiwan** (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022a) mentioned funding initiatives such as the Global Anti-Corruption Consortium (Transparency International n.d.).

#### *Gender equality*

Commitment implementation related to gender equality was mentioned by 26 countries in their verbal statements (29 countries including the written self-reports), making it the second most referenced theme. As was the case in 2021 (see Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022: 24–26), countries from the Global North mentioned implementation of gender-related commitments more frequently than those from the Global South. However, progress in implementation was also reported by countries from the Global South, such as Ecuador, the Maldives and Nepal.

Despite the fact that gender equality was not a focus theme of one of the regional summits in 2023, it was still frequently mentioned as a cross-cutting issue across the plenary day and co-hosted events. This observation is particularly noteworthy, as other commitments regarding inclusion and diversity, such as on youth, LGBTQIA+ people, people living with disabilities or Indigenous peoples, were virtually absent from country verbal statements, each mentioned by less than 10 per cent of the country representatives. The prominence of gender as a theme remains an encouraging sign, as research indicates that countries with strong respect for and participation of women are frequently also more stable democracies (Ortiz et al. 2023). Examples of the different steps implemented by each country are categorized in Table 2.2.

Countries in the Global North spotlighted their support for the Democracy Cohorts, international action coalitions and national programmes that focus on

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**The prominence of gender as a theme remains an encouraging sign, as research indicates that countries with strong respect for and participation of women are frequently also more stable democracies.**

<sup>12</sup> See <<https://www.whistleblowingmonitor.eu>>.

**Table 2.2. Mapping countries mentioning concrete commitment implementation actions or new commitments on gender equality at the Second Summit**

Subcategory	Country
Combating gender-based violence	Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Georgia, Iceland, Kosovo, Nepal, New Zealand, USA
Promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls	Austria, Ecuador, Portugal, Taiwan
Strengthening women's political participation and representation	Bahamas, Belgium, Côte d'Ivoire, Finland, Kosovo, Maldives, Mauritania, Spain
Women in the peace and security agenda	Finland, Germany, Kosovo
Providing equal economic opportunities for women	Georgia, Iceland, Nepal, Sweden, Taiwan
Gender and technology and cybersecurity	Canada, Finland, Iceland
Gender in development cooperation	Austria, Canada, Portugal, Spain, Sweden
Adopting, enacting and/or reviewing policies, plans and strategies on gender equality	Canada, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Kosovo, Maldives, Malta, Sweden

a wide spectrum of gender-related issues. In their verbal statements, **Iceland**, **Finland**, **Romania** and **Sweden** highlighted the achievements of the Gender as a Prerequisite for Democracy cohort, for which Romania and Sweden were co-leads (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.e). **Iceland**, **Sweden** and the **USA** mentioned their work as part of the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse (US Department of State 2023c). In its written self-report, **Sweden** also mentioned its co-leadership of the Generation Equality Forum, a new initiative established in 2021 to accelerate ambitious action and implementation on global gender equality (The Gender Equality Forum n.d.). Sweden further launched a new Global Strategy for Gender Equality and Women and Girls' Rights (2022–2026), through which it will fund development cooperation projects with SEK 1.3 billion (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.d). **Spain** doubled its financial support of the *Ellas + Fund*, which aims to promote women's political participation and leadership opportunities through projects in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean region (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022b). On top of current funding for research on gender approaches to cyber security, **Canada** committed to continue funding the *Women in Cyber Fellowship*. The programme supports female diplomats from developing nations to attend meetings of the UN's open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies (Canada 2023).

The adoption or implementation of gender-related national policies, strategies or action plans was mentioned primarily by European countries. The focus ranged from gender equality or gender mainstreaming across sectors (**Croatia** (EIGE 2021b), **Cyprus** (EIGE 2021a), **Germany** (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022c), **Greece** (Hellenic Republic n.d.), **Malta** (Malta

Independent 2022) and **Sweden** (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.d)), to addressing gender-based violence (**Georgia** (Tsereteli 2022), **Iceland** (Iceland n.d.), **Kosovo** (Kosovo 2022) and the **USA** (The White House 2023a)) or the women, peace and security agenda (**Finland** (Finland 2023a) and **Germany** (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022c)). **Iceland** heavily prioritized the topic of gender equality in its verbal statement, mentioning progress made to improve legislation on sexual harassment and the legal status of its victims. The country also implemented a prevention plan against sexual and gender-based violence in primary schools and increased funding for gender equality initiatives (Iceland n.d.). A pilot project was also mentioned by the country's prime minister with the objective of guaranteeing equal value for traditional women's and traditional men's jobs (Wagner 2022).

Turning to the implementation progress in the Global South, **Ecuador** started the Centros Violeta project in 2022, establishing 6 centres to assist any and all victims of gender-based violence, with the goal to have 24 centres nationwide by 2025 (Ecuador n.d.). The government also released a guide for safe travel for women and LGBTQIA+ people (Ecuador 2021) and is organizing courses and workshops to prevent discrimination, harassment and all types of violence against women in the workplace (Ecuador 2022). **Nepal** also addressed the issue of gender-based violence by adopting an Acid and other Chemical Substances Regulation Act in 2022 and by amending the criminal code to increase the scope of punishment for perpetrators of acid attacks and sexual offences (My Republica 2022). The country also made a new commitment to improve women's access, both within and beyond its borders, to foreign employment. The **Maldives** achieved gender parity in their diplomatic services abroad and appointed female justices to the supreme court; it also continues to work on increasing the number of women in democratic institutions through their National Gender Equality Action Plan 2022–2026 (Maldives 2022). Lastly, as a country new to the summit process, **Mauritania** highlighted its efforts to raise the level of proportionality in its electoral system to ensure better representation of women, youth and people with disabilities in its parliament (IFES 2023).

### *Elections*

Elections were the third most frequently referenced topic at the 2023 Summit (see Figure 2.5). This is in contrast with the 2021 Summit, where the topic was not in the top five most frequently mentioned themes. The regional summit in Zambia further specifically focused on the topic. With electoral integrity under threat worldwide and increasing amounts of attention on election administration and election campaigning, especially in the online sphere, the increased focus on elections is reasonable.

Many of the implementation steps taken were domestic-oriented, with countries taking strides to better equip their EMBs, encourage participation and protect their elections against multiplying challenges both within and beyond their borders (see Table 2.3). The theme was a particular focus in the implementation of commitments from the Global South, with four of the newly participating countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mauritania, Papua

**Table 2.3. Mapping countries mentioning concrete commitment implementation actions or new commitments on elections at the Second Summit**

Subcategory	Country
Holding free and fair elections on schedule	Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Liberia, Mauritania, Senegal
Strengthening capacity for electoral processes, including strengthening the electoral commission	Croatia, India, Japan, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, Switzerland, Tanzania, USA, Zambia
Protecting electoral integrity by regulating political advertising and by combating disinformation and electoral interference	Australia, European Commission, Ireland, Moldova, New Zealand, Sweden
Voting (voting age, voter registry, voter education and rights)	Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, USA
Electoral reform	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Guyana, Ireland, Mauritania, Mauritius, Moldova
Creation of an electoral management body	Ireland, Saint Lucia
Election observation	Canada, India, Peru

New Guinea and Tanzania, making commitments on electoral reforms. Commitments on elections were mentioned by 27 countries in their verbal statements (23 countries) or written self-reports.

As the host of the regional summit focused on the topic of elections, Zambia addressed the theme both in its verbal statement during the plenary session and in its written self-report. Following its 2021 general election, **Zambia** reviewed its electoral administration and management to conform with international best practices. Zambia's Electoral Commission commenced continuous registration of voters in all 10 provincial centres for the first time in the country's history, helping to promote universal suffrage. The country also committed to introducing electoral reforms and enhancing the operations of the Electoral Commission, including through decentralization of its operations (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023c).

**Bosnia and Herzegovina, Papua New Guinea** (PNG Facts n.d.) and **Tanzania** also pledged to reform their electoral systems. **Tanzania** based this decision on the 2022 recommendations of a presidential task force formed to improve the country's multiparty democracy based on stakeholder consultations (The Chanzo Reporter 2022). **Bosnia and Herzegovina** committed to reforming their electoral legislation to reflect the division of power and to include all national minorities in accordance with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (Council of Europe 2023).

Certain countries made progress in reforming the legal frameworks that dictate the organization and oversight of elections. **Ireland** engaged in comprehensive electoral reforms with its Electoral Reform Act 2022, overhauling its



registration system, establishing an independent statutory electoral commission, and setting new standards for the monitoring and enforcement of online political advertising. The new Election Commission will carry out core electoral functions, including explaining to the public the subject matter of referendums. It further vested out a number of new functions including the regulation of online political advertising, the safeguarding the integrity of elections from disinformation and foreign manipulation, and the research on electoral policy and procedure (Ireland 2022a). **Moldova's** 2022 Electoral Code improves the transparency of campaign financing and strengthens the Central Electoral Commission's control over political financing, with new powers to check parties' income and to set rules and limits for donations, including by third parties. The election oversight body is also responsible for the newly established Directorate for Supervision and Control of the Financing of Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns, which will monitor the financial activities of political parties and electoral candidates and verify their financial reports (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023a). **Georgia** (Maksimov 2021), **Guyana** (Guyana 2022), **Ireland** (Ireland 2022a), **Mauritania** (IFES 2023) and **Moldova** (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023a) are currently in the process of implementing other legislative electoral reforms.

To increase voter participation, other countries rolled out a variety of measures. **Switzerland** focused on voter education and developed a digital application to provide voters with nonpartisan information on candidates and political parties (Swiss Confederation n.d.). The country will create an international toolbox for voter advice applications for emerging democracies, which will roll out in multiple pilot countries in 2023 (Swiss Confederation 2022). **Belgium** aims to better include youth in elections, lowering the voting age to 16 for the European Parliament elections (Euronews 2022). **New Zealand** pledged to donate NZD 6 million to support specified countries to safeguard electoral integrity through the newly established Pacific Electoral Assistance Programme (Summit for Democracy 2023d).

To promote access to voting domestically, the **USA** adopted the 2022 Electoral Count Reform Act (Underhill 2023) and is currently working on the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act. The US administration also invested USD 10 billion in its election infrastructure and aims to invest an additional USD 5 billion to support vote-by-mail (The White House 2022). To support elections internationally during the Year of Action, the USA launched the Global Network for Securing Electoral Integrity. The network regularly convenes more than 30 election-related organizations and networks across the globe to address threats to electoral integrity by developing norms, guidelines and codes of conduct (USAID n.d.).

India and Canada also made progress on commitments to support elections internationally. **India** addressed its 2021 commitment to send election observers as well as train foreign election officials and legislators in conducting free and fair elections. The country also hosted three international conferences on electoral integrity as part of its important work as co-lead of the Election Integrity cohort (*The Hindu* 2022). **Canada** also increased its



support of election observation missions, by both deploying election observers and launching a CAD 2 million project, Democracy and Human Rights through Election Observation (Canada 2023).

### Media freedom

Media freedom was another key theme for the Summit for Democracy and was the focus of the regional summit in the Netherlands. A total of 22 countries mentioned concrete commitment implementation action to support free, independent and high-quality media and to protect journalists in their verbal statements (20 countries) or written self-reports (Table 2.4). Similar to the theme of gender equality, media freedom initiatives were mentioned more frequently by countries from the Global North. As with 2021, many countries placed high priority on the protection of journalists from physical threats and suppression. The continued Russian aggression against Ukraine intensified attention on this issue, with countries such as Czechia, Germany, Lithuania and Slovakia particularly tailoring their initiatives to support and protect independent media in Belarus, Russia and/or Ukraine. The high priority placed on media freedom in repressive contexts is important, as free media directly contributes to an informed public that may feel more motivated and better equipped to join in with the fight for democracy.

Media freedom is a key element in supporting an engaged and informed public that is capable of resisting authoritarian pressure. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, both **Czechia** and **Lithuania** (Mokkhasen 2022) have set up rapid response mechanisms that include granting emergency visas for independent media and democracy defenders in danger, predominantly those fleeing from Belarus and Russia. Among other measures, **Lithuania** has also supported the National Democratic Institute in increasing the exposure of people in Belarus to alternative viewpoints and encouraging active political participation. **Lithuania** is also working to create an ecosystem of free Internet, radio and social media content for democracy promotion to the east of its border, welcoming the establishment of the Belarusian office

**The high priority placed on media freedom in repressive contexts is important, as free media directly contributes to an informed public that may feel more motivated and better equipped to join in with the fight for democracy.**

**Table 2.4. Mapping countries mentioning concrete commitment implementation actions or new commitments on media freedom at the Second Summit**

Subcategory	Country
Support, strengthen and safeguard media vibrancy, independence and freedom and the safety of journalists	Austria, Canada, Czechia, Côte d'Ivoire, European Commission, Germany, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Panama, Slovakia, Sweden, USA, Zambia
Support media pluralism and diversify the media landscape including hearing from women, minorities and journalists in exile	Austria, Canada, Czechia, Germany, Lithuania, Slovakia
Support and strengthen accountability, transparency and sustainability of news media	Canada, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Tanzania, UK, USA, Zambia

of Radio Free Europe in Vilnius. A new global development cooperation initiative on transparency and media freedom was launched by **Germany**. The initiative aims to strengthen the resilience of local media, non-governmental organizations and media development networks in times of crisis and conflict zones, and is currently focusing on the repercussions of the continued Russian aggression against Ukraine. Domestically, Germany funds and promotes independent and quality journalism, including support for exiled journalists and gender equality in culture and media (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022c).

In light of the rising physical and online threats journalists are facing, the protection of journalists was one of the most reoccurring issues mentioned in country statements. **Austria** convened the 2022 High-level Conference on the Safety of Journalists, during which countries pledged over USD 106 million to support media freedom (Austria 2022). Austria also pledged to organize training for journalists in conflict areas as well as to support female journalists in Afghanistan, contributing EUR 150,000 for a UN Women project (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023d). **Slovakia** also highlighted its financial support of media freedom and investigative journalism projects in Ukraine and the Balkans, as well as its cooperation with the Netherlands on a support system for journalists facing threats. The **Netherlands** pledged to fund two programmes over the next five years that will enhance the safety of journalists, their sources and whistleblowers worldwide (UNESCO 2023).

The Covid-19 pandemic had a chilling effect on media institutions in many countries, motivating countries to showcase efforts to ensure the sustainability of journalism as well as to strengthen legal protections for journalists. **Ireland** established the Future of Media Commission, an independent expert body tasked with identifying a sustainable pathway for the media sector over the next decade and beyond (Ireland 2022b). **Canada** (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022d), **Sweden, Switzerland** (Swiss Confederation 2022), **Taiwan** (Summit for Democracy Resources 2022a) and the **USA** (The White House 2022) also included financial contributions to organizations like the Global Media Defence Fund, Global Forum for Media Development, and the International Fund for Public Interest Media in their self-reports. The **USA** created the Media Viability Accelerator and the Strengthening Transparency and Accountability through Investigative Reporting Program to foster the organizational and financial viability of media outlets. The country also pledged to launch the Reporters Mutual Legal Insurance to protect media organizations from being targeted by strategic lawsuits, which are increasingly used to silence journalists (often known as strategic lawsuits/litigation against public participation (SLAPP)) (The White House 2022). **Malta** established a committee of media experts to give feedback on legislative instruments proposed by government, aimed at affording the highest levels of protection to journalists (Malta 2022). The country made the commitment to introduce anti-SLAPP provisions and limitations to libel suits, and to increase the punishment for crimes against journalists. However, international media organizations have voiced criticism due to the confidential nature of the expert committee and

overall lack of public consultations, resulting in a weak draft law (De Gaetano 2023).

In the First Summit in 2021, countries from the Global South were underrepresented in commitments on media freedom, which was also the case at the Second Summit. Nonetheless, progress was made by some countries, most notably **Zambia**. To ensure its commitment to upholding free speech, the country has begun to amend archaic laws that were previously used to suppress dissenting views, including through repealing defamation laws (Short 2022). Furthermore, **Zambia** reinstated broadcasting licences for media houses that were previously revoked for political reasons, issued additional broadcasting and print media licences, and introduced periodic engagements with media houses and journalists (Summit for Democracy Resources 2023c). In a similar vein, **Tanzania** also highlighted its efforts in reopening banned media outlets (Prokscha 2021).

Overall, during the Year of Action, media freedom was high on the global agenda through a variety of initiatives and international conferences focused on the topic. Aside from hosting the regional summit focused on media freedom, the **Netherlands** brought attention to the important work of the Media Freedom cohort in its verbal statement (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.f). Another key initiative working to defend journalistic speech worldwide is the Media Freedom Coalition, which has participated closely with the Media Freedom cohort and whose work was highlighted by **Estonia** and the **UK**. The coalition has now grown to 50 member countries and the third Global Conference for Media Freedom was hosted by Estonia in 2022. In January 2023, **Panama** hosted the first International Forum for Democracy and Freedom of Expression, bringing together international civil society, the media, and governments (Panama 2023). In its verbal statement, **Slovakia** also called attention to the Journalism Trust Initiative that rewards fact-based media and helps people to identify trustworthy journalism (Summit for Democracy 2023e). **Taiwan** further mentioned international collaborative efforts to advance media literacy and education (AIT 2022), as did **Finland** (Finland 2023b) and **South Korea** (Summit for Democracy 2023c).

### Reporting, transparency and accountability

Among the countries that participated in the Second Summit, some countries submitted self-reports on the implementation of their commitments, summarizing initiatives and results achieved. Sixteen self-reports are accessible<sup>13</sup> and have been published on International IDEA's Commitment Dashboard (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.d). **Finland** (Finland 2023b), **Canada** (Canada 2023) and the **USA** (The White House 2022) went one step further and published their progress online on their government websites, making this information easily available to all its citizens. A notable positive step is that **Armenia**, who only made verbal commitments in 2021, submitted a

<sup>13</sup> Armenia, Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Kosovo, Lithuania, Moldova, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, USA and Zambia.

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**When countries agree to publish written self-reports, they increase transparency of their work on commitments, allowing national and international civil society to monitor the implementation of commitments and hold them accountable.**

written self-report, contributing to better transparency and monitoring of their work.

When countries agree to publish written self-reports, they increase transparency of their work on commitments, allowing national and international civil society to monitor the implementation of commitments and hold them accountable (see Open Government Partnership Report, forthcoming). They can also go into more detail than is feasible with verbal statements. Common across country self-reports was not only mentioning the commitments that were made in 2021 and what progress has been made towards achieving them, but also countries taking the opportunity to elaborate on new commitments, often mentioning concrete future actions and funding (discussed further in the next section). Certain countries formatted their reports for easier analysis. For example, **Canada** included filter options to search per topic, implementation status or key word on their website. **Switzerland** colour-coded the implementation process, making it easier to follow and monitor the progress. However, most of the self-assessments are in non-structured formats, and one country did not translate its reports into English, limiting the ability to compare between countries and get an idea of the broader picture internationally (see Open Government Partnership Report, forthcoming).

Despite the welcome step in sharing self-reports, the lack of formalized mechanisms of accountability and transparency for commitments remains a major issue. However, two countries demonstrated particularly good practice in facilitating domestic oversight of their commitment implementation by establishing a separate monitoring mechanism. **Kosovo** set up the Presidential Council for Democracy and Human Rights in 2022 to ensure oversight of the implementation of Summit for Democracy commitments and will continue its work beyond the Second Summit. **Spain** extended its existing accountability mechanism on the progress of government action, which includes semi-annual reports, to also monitor Summit for Democracy commitment implementation (Spain 2022).

A formal reporting and monitoring framework for summit commitment implementation would help to ensure transparency and accountability, in the best case including both progress and implementation reports. Ideally, this information would be made available to the public online in a dedicated space for Summit for Democracy communications, whether this be a standalone summit website or government website, and would also be communicated to the public through social media. Ideally, countries would proactively publish self-reports on their government websites and engage in efforts to communicate the summit and related initiatives to citizens, for example through social media campaigns. Consistent progress updates will also help determine lessons learned, further helping countries to learn from each other's experiences and for summit organizers to adjust the process as needed.

### New commitments and outlook

There was no formal request to participating countries by the summit organizers to develop new commitments to be implemented after the Second Summit, likely due to the fact that the decision for a Third Summit came late in the process. Nonetheless, 30 countries used the opportunity of the Second Summit to present new commitments, either in their verbal statements (25 countries) or in their written self-reports. However, it is unclear in what timeframe these commitments will be implemented and whether there will be some form of monitoring mechanism of the implementation progress or an opportunity at the Third Summit for countries to present their achievements.

A selection of new commitments made under the four most frequently referenced topics—corruption, gender equality, elections and media freedom—are presented in Table 2.5.

It is also worth noting the efforts of countries to advance democracy holistically through cross-administrative programmes. The **USA** pledged USD 9.5 billion across all efforts to advance democracy around the world and USD 690 million specifically in new funding for the Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal (The White House 2023b). The efforts will be coordinated by the soon-to-be-established Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance and covers a wide range of issues, including advancing gender equality globally (The White House 2023c) and democracy-affirming technologies (The White House 2023d). Another example is **Finland**, which published a Government Resolution on Democracy Policy in 2022 outlining its democracy policy and the government's measures to develop democracy and inclusion on a long-term basis at the national, regional and international levels (Finland 2019). The Resolution will serve as the basis for the work of future governments, covering issues such as functioning and safety of elections, equal participation, pluralistic media and media education (Finland 2023b).

While countries used their self-reports as an opportunity to raise their ambitions, planning new concrete actions and allocating the requisite funding, many of the new commitments contained in verbal statements remained vague and did not outline concrete actions. Given the announcement of the Third Summit, a request with clearly communicated expectations for more concrete written commitments would be useful to maintain the momentum for positive democratic change.

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Table 2.5. Examples of new commitments made at the Second Summit

Theme	Commitment
Corruption	<p><b>Armenia and Finland:</b> to develop and/or implement a new national anti-corruption strategy</p> <p><b>Bulgaria:</b> to form a new anti-corruption agency and a mechanism for independent investigations within the judicial system</p> <p><b>Dominican Republic:</b> to pass new legislation for the management of confiscated and abandoned assets and update public procurements law</p> <p><b>Nepal:</b> to amend the existing 2002 Prevention of Corruption Act and the 1991 Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority Act</p> <p><b>Papua New Guinea:</b> to set up an independent Commission against Corruption and strengthen the Ombudsman Commission</p> <p><b>Zambia:</b> to reform whistleblower protection laws</p>
Gender equality	<p><b>Canada:</b> to continue funding the Women in Cyber Fellowship</p> <p><b>Dominican Republic, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines:</b> to strengthen the legal protection of women and children, through introducing new rights (Dominican Republic), increasing penalties for crimes against vulnerable groups (Papua New Guinea), or enhancing accountability mechanisms (Philippines)</p> <p><b>Mauritania:</b> to increase the level of political representation and inclusion of women in elections</p> <p><b>Nepal:</b> to improve women's safe and dignified access to domestic and foreign employment</p>
Elections	<p><b>Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mauritania, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and Zambia:</b> to reform the electoral system, especially to raise inclusive participation and representation of national minorities (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and women, youth and people with disabilities (Mauritania)</p> <p><b>Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Liberia, Mauritania and Senegal:</b> to hold free and fair elections on schedule</p> <p><b>New Zealand and Sweden:</b> to fund programmes supporting third countries in safeguarding electoral integrity</p> <p><b>USA:</b> to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act, and to invest in vote-by-mail infrastructure</p>
Media freedom	<p><b>Austria:</b> to organize training for journalists in conflict areas and to support female journalists in Afghanistan</p> <p><b>Finland:</b> to support pluralistic media and democracy, as well as media education both at home and abroad through their Democracy Action Plan</p> <p><b>Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Slovakia:</b> to (continue to) fund programmes supporting independent media and free speech defenders in exile and facing threats abroad</p> <p><b>USA:</b> to launch a global fund supporting journalists faced with SLAPP suits</p>

## Chapter 3

# DEMOCRACY COHORTS

Democracy Cohorts were organized around 16 key topics (see Figure 3.1) to safeguard democracy at the First Summit for Democracy in 2021, with their work continuously supporting the summit process by coordinating, harnessing and sustaining global efforts around different themes. The cohorts were arranged under eight broad themes (Table 3.1).

The work of the cohorts throughout the Year of Action connected governments to civil society, the private sector, academia and other interested stakeholders, uniting forces and expertise and supporting the development of collective solutions. Their efforts also presented a valuable opportunity to bring in underrepresented voices, including from young people and the Global South (see Youngs et al. 2023).

**The work of the cohorts throughout the Year of Action connected governments to civil society, the private sector, academia and other interested stakeholders, uniting forces and expertise and supporting the development of collective solutions.**

**Table 3.1. Themes of democracy cohorts**

Economic Growth, Shared Prosperity, and the Fight Against Corruption
Press Freedom and Information Integrity
Justice for All
Strong Institutions
Labour
Protecting Civic Space and Countering Authoritarianism
Advancing Technology for Democracy
Inclusion and Equality



The cohorts were an active, continuous part of the summit effort, working to maintain the momentum of the summit during the Year of Action and bring attention to necessary topics and raise the ambition of commitments, helping to build the necessary political will for the democracy agenda. Each cohort was led by at least one government and one civil society organization, who collectively with cohort participants decided on the form, activities, focus and objectives of their respective cohorts. The majority of cohorts produced some form of best practice recommendations or model commitments, which fuelled discussions and focused attention on tangible steps to be taken towards shared goals.

This chapter will consider the participation and impact of the Democracy Cohorts in the Second Summit and beyond. For more detailed information on the work of the Democracy Cohorts after the First Summit and during the Year of Action, please see the previous publication, *Summit for Democracy Cohorts: Advancing Democracy through Collaboration* (Heinmaa and Paus 2023).

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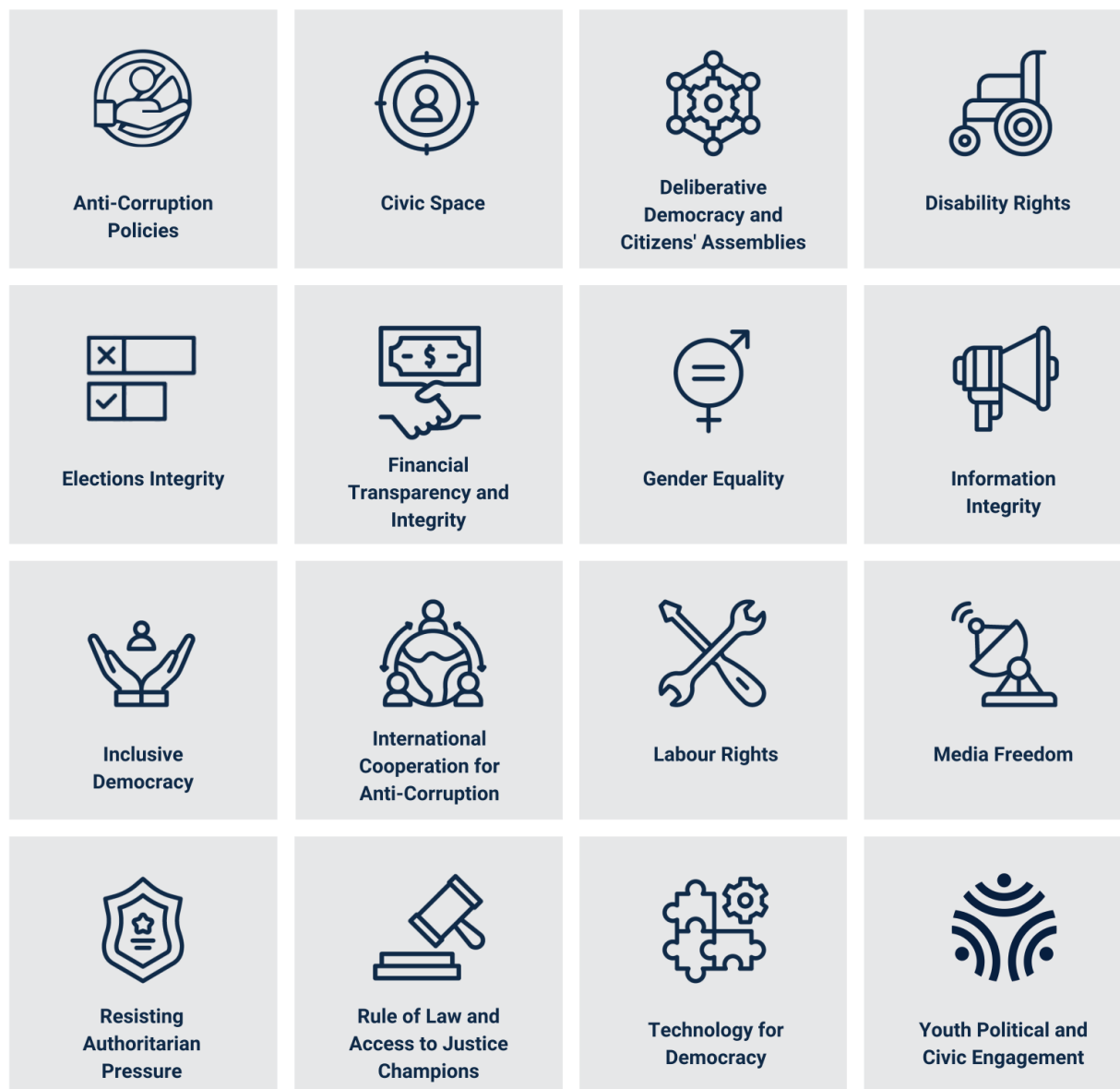
### 3.1. MAIN COHORT OUTCOMES: PARTICIPATION AND IMPACT OF COHORT DELIVERABLES AT THE SECOND SUMMIT

Throughout the Year of Action, the Democracy Cohorts engaged in a variety of different collaborative activities, such as meetings, workshops and conferences, the results of which were published and/or presented at or in the lead-up to the Second Summit to fuel discussion and inspire further action. Key outcomes that directly contributed to the ongoings and discussions at the Second Summit included reviewing the commitments made by governments at the First Summit and developing model commitments; publishing joint statements and calls to action on the basis of shared knowledge and best practices; and channelling efforts towards new or existing international initiatives (US Department of State 2023d).

The summit presented an opportunity to bring together key actors and decision makers to consider past summit commitments and their implementation, establish effective national standards and reinforce international knowledge exchange. At least 11 cohorts contributed recommendations to the Second Summit, highlighting priority areas for reform in their respective thematic areas and outlining key steps to achieving effective implementation of these reforms. For example, the Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy cohort contributed a roadmap of actions to promote gender equality that was developed in consultation with over 100 representatives from governments and civil society around the world (International IDEA 2023). The Youth Political and Civic Engagement cohort released the *Youth Participation Handbook*, which communicated lessons learned from 25 case studies across more than 30 countries to showcase best practices for raising youth participation (Youth Democracy Cohort 2023a). The cohort also made a significant contribution to any future learning and analysis efforts with the development of a Youth



Figure 3.1. Overview of the 16 Democracy Cohorts



Source: Graphics provided courtesy of Accountability Lab, <<https://summit4democracy.org/democracy-cohorts-2>>, accessed 15 June 2023.

Political Participation Index, which aims to map the inclusion and participation of youth in public affairs on a global scale (Youth Democracy Cohort 2023b).

The Democracy Cohorts that focused on different aspects of anti-corruption and justice contributed important joint statements and calls to action, developed on the basis of the collective knowledge of the key stakeholders gathered in these groups. The Financial Transparency and Integrity cohort contributed a Call to Action outlining the necessary steps for summit

participants to fight corruption and a Beneficial Ownership Outcome Document that highlighted key considerations for beneficial ownership reforms. The Rule of Law and People-Centred Justice cohort also released a Call to Action, urging strengthening the rule of law to better support democracy. The Youth Political and Civic Engagement cohort developed a Call to Action (Youth Democracy Cohort 2023d) to promote youth political participation as a bedrock of the Summit for Democracy process for the future, which was signed by over 50 organizations, many of which hailed from the Global South. Sets of recommendations were made by the International Cooperation for Anticorruption cohort and the Anticorruption Policies as a Guarantee for National Security, Stability, and Sovereign Policy cohort. These efforts demonstrated the usefulness of the summit's convening power in helping to deconstruct complex issues and zoom into what actions are needed, where, and by whom.

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**The summit helped to bring attention to important international initiatives intended to strengthen different aspects of democracy.**

The summit also helped to bring attention to important international initiatives intended to strengthen different aspects of democracy. For example, the Technology for Democracy cohort channelled the efforts of participating organizations, the Internet Society and Access Now, and engaged with the Freedom Online Coalition to draw attention to Internet shutdowns worldwide in two ways. Firstly, it built on Access Now's #KeepItOn coalition to widely communicate the stories of those most impacted by Internet shutdowns (Access Now 2023). Secondly, the cohort made contributions to the expansion and improvement of the Internet Society's Pulse Project, which works to document and publicize Internet shutdowns and their impact globally (Internet Society Pulse n.d.). On the back of the collected stories and data, the cohort will engage with the Freedom Online Coalition and GovStack to integrate their work on Internet shutdowns and e-governance (US Department of State 2023d).

Notably, the Media Freedom cohort contributed recommendations and a Call to Action, and brought attention to the Media Freedom Coalition with a detailed findings report of more than 100 pages that included commitments by all members of the cohort (Media Freedom Cohort 2023). They therefore not only contributed to the summit process with analysis of commitments and recommendations for action, but also ensured that their work would endure past the summit process by explicitly linking it to the Media Freedom Coalition.

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### **3.2. THE SECOND SUMMIT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY TO CAPITALIZE ON DEMOCRACY COHORT MOMENTUM**

Despite the extensive work done by the Democracy Cohorts throughout the Year of Action, limited efforts were made to highlight the work of the cohorts in the formal programme at the Second Summit itself. Their work was presented to a varying extent across the different days and programmes, with their contributions virtually absent from the plenary day. The cohorts were given 10 minutes of the day's proceedings to present the Civil Society Declaration

of Principles, an effort spearheaded by the Resisting Authoritarian Pressure cohort and signed onto by a total of 14 cohorts. However, presenting the 14 broad democratic principles did not sufficiently reflect the full breadth and depth of civil society efforts and their significant contributions during the Year of Action (Freedom House 2023).

On the thematic day, USAID hosted two sessions covering the work of the Rule of Law and People-Centred Justice cohort and the Financial Transparency and Integrity cohort, linking their efforts to the continuing work of USAID (USAID 2023). While the sessions drew deserved attention to the calls to action released respectively by the cohorts, many more cohorts were unable to showcase their similar calls to action, declarations, recommendations and other published resources.

Turning to the co-hosted events, cohort work was often either mentioned in passing during panel discussions, or only featured in different side events, leaving their crucial initiatives underemphasized in the proceedings. In the Netherlands, South Korea and the USA, cohort work was featured in different side events, with the Media Freedom cohort hosting a four-hour live-streamed event on 29 March in the Netherlands; the Youth Democracy cohort hosting a side event on 'Youth Resilience against Corruption—Spearheading Change' on 30 March in South Korea; and the Technology for Democracy cohort hosting a side event on 30 March on Digital Democracy in the USA (Global Forum for Media Development 2023; Republic of Korea 2023; New America 2023). The Election Integrity cohort was noticeably absent from the co-hosted event in Zambia, particularly as the event focused on elections in Africa, and the cohort had Mauritius as one of its co-leads, and there was little to no formal inclusion of the cohorts in the day's programme.

The co-hosted event in Costa Rica was the only event to feature the efforts of cohorts, with two panels featuring the Youth Political and Civic Engagement cohort. The first panel focused on 'Strengthening civic and political engagement of young people in Central America' and the second panel presented the *Youth Participation Handbook* (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.a; Youth Democracy Cohort 2023c).

While there are examples of cohort work being showcased in different ways during the Second Summit, it is unfortunate that these examples were mostly not part of the formal programme, and only highlighted the work of some of the cohorts. The work of only 6 of the 16 cohorts was featured in some way in the programme of the Second Summit, and the survey and interview results detailed in the following section reflect the disappointment felt by many cohort participants, many of whom felt their work was not sufficiently recognized.

### 3.3. COHORT PARTICIPANTS' IMPRESSIONS OF THE SUMMIT FOR DEMOCRACY PROCESS AND THE SECOND SUMMIT

International IDEA conducted two surveys soliciting feedback from the Democracy Cohorts, mostly civil society co-leads, the first in the weeks before the Second Summit and the second conducted in the weeks following the Second Summit. The sentiment among cohort participants regarding the effectiveness of the cohorts was positive: 74 per cent thought the Democracy Cohorts were effective in raising awareness on specific topics and increasing the commitment to implementation in their focus areas.

**Cohorts were perceived as a positive and active part of the summit process, which served to maintain momentum and coordinate, harness and sustain global efforts in thematic areas to safeguard democracy.**

The cohorts that expressed the strongest satisfaction with the functioning and contributions of the cohorts were the Financial Transparency and Integrity, Gender Equality, Media Freedom, Resisting Authoritarianism, Rule of Law and Youth Democracy cohorts. These respondents praised the cohorts for their multilateral and inclusive approach in which civil society played a key role, making them an ideal place for governments, civil society and other stakeholders to unite forces and expertise to strengthen democracy. Cohorts were perceived as a positive and active part of the summit process, which served to maintain momentum and coordinate, harness and sustain global efforts in thematic areas to safeguard democracy. Their activities were also useful in facilitating information and knowledge exchange across different sectors and jurisdictions.

The importance of their work was reflected in the willingness by cohort participants to continue to volunteer their time to support the summit process: none of the responses indicated that the work of their cohorts would not continue after the Second Summit. Seven cohorts indicated that they would continue in their current work and three responded that they would continue their work under a different body or instrument (see Table 3.2 for some examples). The remaining six cohorts remained uncertain of the future of their work, mainly due to a lack of clarity in general on the future of the summit itself, making it difficult to establish time commitments and funding. For instance, the Technology for Democracy cohort has fed its work into the Taskforce on Internet Shutdowns under the Freedom Online Coalition, ensuring that it will continue to support efforts to track and publicize Internet shutdowns (De Dora 2023).

While there was a mix of positive and negative opinions regarding the functioning of the cohorts during the Year of Action, there was near universal disappointment voiced in response to the lack of explicit inclusion of the work of the cohorts at the Second Summit. Their work during the Year of Action represented a real engine and a high point for tangible actions, helping to drive forward commitments and monitor their implementation, yet their important role in the process was not reflected in the summit agenda. The late communication of the agendas for each of the events also hindered cohort participation, as there was no time to organize within or between cohorts.

When asked what could be improved, in terms of both the summit process in general and the summit events themselves, respondents expressed the desire for more clarity, continuous communication and structured collaboration, and greater input in the organization and planning. The cohorts would like better clarity in terms of timelines and deliverables: while the freedom to organize as they saw fit was nice, the lack of guidance and expectations created issues in motivating participation and continuing engagement in the cohort activities. The desire for clarity was expressed in terms of the overall vision of the summit process, how cohort work will be featured in it, and what support will be provided to the co-leads. Clear expectations will also help cohorts in securing funding, or understanding what support, whether physical or otherwise, will be provided from the organizers themselves.

Communication should be continuous and proactive. It is recommended to clearly communicate focus and structure from earlier on in the summit process. For example, a tentative timeline for the summit in South Korea would be very useful for motivating further cohort efforts. Cohorts would also appreciate more responsiveness from the organizers in terms of timely and

**Table 3.2. Examples of future planning for Democracy Cohorts**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Future plans/Instrument</b>
<b>Disability Rights</b>	The cohort will engage in additional outreach to bring in new members from both civil society and governments, and plans to hold an in-person event in early 2024. These efforts will feed into the 2025 Global Disability Summit. The cohort has already launched a call for new members to join its work (IFES n.d.).
<b>Election Integrity</b>	The cohort will continue in its current form and will collect and provide success stories for summit outcomes, with a focus on voters, political parties, candidates, and logistical preparations for EMBs. Future thematic areas of focus may include good practices in countering disinformation while maintaining respect for free speech; targeted education campaigns to increase the meaningful participation of such groups as women, youth and people with disabilities; and the use of information and communication technologies in elections. The cohort also hopes to create a specialized knowledge network on election integrity.
<b>Gender Equality</b>	The cohort will conduct follow-up reviews on the outcomes of the 2023 Summit for Democracy.
<b>Media Freedom</b>	The Media Freedom Coalition will serve as a platform to sustain commitments, with its secretariat maintaining a record of commitments made in its findings report and will follow up on them.
<b>Rule of Law</b>	Through the work of the cohort and the reach of the summit process, many of its members have joined the Justice Action Coalition, which will continue to support the rule of law and access to justice globally.
<b>Youth Democracy</b>	The cohort is setting up advocacy grants which will help to implement projects aimed at supporting the commitments outlined in their menu of commitments, two of which have already begun accepting proposals. The cohort will also continue to organize events in cooperation with their partners and member organizations, with the next event being held on International Democracy Day.

clear replies to questions. Ideally, communications would be two-way, with civil society brought into the process of agenda development and planning for event themes, locations and other such decisions.

A useful solution could be to have a coordination mechanism for the cohorts, who could improve coordination and information flow efforts. This point of contact would also be useful in connecting cohort initiatives together to better share best practices and develop concrete common initiatives. There was a clear desire for organizers to facilitate cohort-to-cohort contact, which could help to develop common activities and events and build coalitions. This point of contact could also organize an online platform for regular cohort meetings.

There was agreement among the cohorts that the summit offers real value in its convening power, ability to bring about political will for change and potential to uncover new and innovative solutions to common problems. However, respondents were generally concerned that the lack of direction at the top will serve to break the current momentum that cohort participants have worked hard to achieve. It is important that the summit organizers capitalize on this eagerness to continue the Democracy Cohorts and make immediate efforts to include the co-leads in the planning process for the Third Summit.

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**The Democracy Cohorts managed to accomplish a great deal in a short amount of time, with a staggering amount of work contributed voluntarily by many individuals across the globe.**

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### **3.4. LOOKING FORWARD: WHAT IS NEXT FOR THE DEMOCRACY COHORTS AND THE SOUTH KOREA SUMMIT?**

The Democracy Cohorts managed to accomplish a great deal in a short amount of time, with a staggering amount of work contributed voluntarily by many individuals across the globe, contributing to increased momentum that did not fully transfer into the Second Summit. The lack of structured inclusion and poor communication with the Democracy Cohorts was a real missed opportunity, and it is important that the organizers of the Third Summit for Democracy do not repeat these mistakes.

There is still a significant deal of support for the Summit for Democracy effort: people still believe in its goals and purpose, but are less certain that the organizers have a realistic plan to achieve its ambitious agenda. The survey and interview respondents reflected a lot of fatigue and uncertainty, but also an underlying hunger and drive to continue the momentum that they have worked hard to initiate, especially by being more directly involved in the planning process.

Currently, cohort leads are experiencing a high degree of uncertainty and no reliable structure, which limits the possibilities for planning. It is recommended that organizers take the time to communicate now on future planning and the dedicated funding to support the work of cohorts; otherwise, there will be no motivation from civil society to mobilize resources and commit dedicated staff time. The civil society work that has fuelled the cohort outputs has created a lot of momentum that is now being broken, especially among private sector

actors, while there is no direction from the organizers. More information will allow civil society to be more proactive and make a more confident investment of their time and resources.

Central to better involving the cohorts is more structured, proactive and continuous communication from the organizers, along with tangible signs that they are as committed to the summit's goals as the cohorts are. The cohorts currently represent an untapped resource to drive forward commitments, as they represent a truly valuable and dedicated knowledge base for monitoring implementation, building awareness of commitments and the summit process, and raising ambition for and expectations of commitments. The cohorts should be formally included in the agenda(s) of future summits, with structured inclusion that involves featuring their work directly with government actors. The structured inclusion could also include directing the development of a cohort outcome report covering key activities and outputs.

Turning from the summit organizers to the participation by governments in the cohorts themselves, the efforts of the cohorts and civil society have clearly benefited from the convening power brought about by the summit, but it is important that the momentum does not end there and instead is propelled towards innovation. While government participation in cohorts and the summit has been most welcome, they may wish to consider how best to structure their cooperation within their own agencies. Cohort participants voiced the desire to participate with authorities with responsibilities for democracy (such as electoral bodies, human rights bodies and democracy taskforces). It is important that those tasked with organization and collaboration responsibilities fully understand the topics under consideration, with a clear vision of the on-the-ground impacts desired for the summit and how its efforts can be fed into enduring international initiatives. Leadership in the cohorts has been very much driven by the Global North and the process would also benefit from broadening the co-leadership to countries and civil society organizations representing the Global South (see also Youngs et al. 2023).

## Chapter 4

# TOWARDS MORE REPRESENTATIVE AND INCLUSIVE VOICES WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

The US Government engaged multiple stakeholders, nationally and internationally, throughout the planning of the Summit for Democracy. This engagement has expanded over the Year of Action to become more representative and inclusive, particularly leading to the Second Summit for Democracy.

Among these stakeholders, civil society organizations have been crucial to the success of the Summit for Democracy, as was illustrated by their active engagement in the Democracy Cohorts in the previous chapter. Their role in the summit process broadened over the Year of Action, as the US Government made strides to solicit their feedback when planning the Second Summit and to include them in the official plenary. However, engagement with civil society continues to be lacking in structure, limiting how efficiently civil society can organize around the summit.

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**Civil society reinforces and is reinforced by representative democracy, as their experience, expertise and membership are influenced by and provide useful inputs into policymaking.**

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### 4.1. MAKING THE CASE FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE SUMMIT

Civil society organizations play an imperative role in upholding democratic values and institutions by holding governments accountable and promoting equality and inclusion. These organizations can act as a bridge between citizens and the government by fostering dialogue, widening political participation and mobilizing the voices of the public. These dynamics frequently mean that members of civil society place their trust in these organizations to raise their concerns and represent their interests. Civil society therefore reinforces and is reinforced by representative democracy, as their experience, expertise and membership are influenced by and provide useful inputs into policymaking. Therefore, the meaningful engagement of civil society directly impacts the quality of democracy.



#### Box 4.1. Civil society voices about the Summit for Democracy

‘One of the main innovations of the Summit for Democracy is the ability to rally governments at the highest level to make commitments, even if many of these are verbal. The fact that these commitments are voluntary shows the true measure of the commitment made by the governments. Because every day matters when it comes to protecting democracy, the ability to make new commitments every year is important. This process of commitments is important at national level because it enables civil society actors to hold governments to account.’

—Willice Onyango, Youth Café, Kenya

‘The Summit for Democracy is an interesting experiment and a good platform. However, in an ideal world it would provide a real space for civil society to discuss with governments. Sometimes, we don’t realize that we are facing similar issues across different continents, and we are all trying to find solutions on our own. Suggesting additional opportunities to bring about changes in your country or to support these changes in other countries is what brings value to the Summit for Democracy.’

—Teodora Panus, Youth Council, Moldova

‘The Summit for Democracy offers valuable benefits, such as strategic reflection, the identification of key players and the generation of innovative ideas. They are essential to strengthening our democracies and fulfilling the commitments assumed by our countries.’

—Olgui Caballero, Alma Civica, Paraguay

Given the importance of a vibrant civil society to representative democracy, human rights and the rule of law, civil society organizations are often some of the first actors to be threatened by authoritarian forces. In its mission to support and revitalize democracy, the summit presents an invaluable opportunity for civil society organizations to connect, creating networks of like-minded organizations that share lessons learned within and across different regions. This context is especially useful, as it connects the local to the international, providing crucial perspective and invigorating discussion about the different forms that democracy can take. This form of cooperation is also helpful in establishing best practices, making specific recommendations and initiating activities that can lead to real change.

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## 4.2. THE STATE OF PLAY BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND SUMMITS

In an effort to bring in voices from civil society, a limited number of civil society consultations were held and a working group with selected organizations was set up before the First Summit for Democracy (Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022: 30). While it is commendable that the US Government recognized the importance of input from civil society, this did not translate into tangible civil society involvement at the First Summit, particularly when countries drafted their commitments. Collaboration with civil society was limited at the national level, with country commitments drafted largely by government agencies with little to no input from civil society. The majority of civil society engagement during the First Summit for Democracy was self-initiated and

driven by larger democracy organizations, with few voices heard from the Global South (Keutgen 2022).

Collaboration with civil society intensified between the First and Second Summits. For example, the US administration held a series of consultations in early and late 2022 with a broad range of civil society organizations to discuss the implementation of commitments and make plans for the Second Summit. The consultations were held on a broad range of topics, including anti-corruption, the rule of law, labour rights, civic space, election integrity, promoting Internet freedom, countering disinformation, gender equality, racial equity and justice, and the rights of persons with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ people. This cooperation was also fuelled in part by the extensive work that civil society contributed to the Democracy Cohorts.

Turning to the co-hosted events, civil society was present in each of the regional summits in Costa Rica, the Netherlands, South Korea, the USA and Zambia. Their work helped to drive the agendas of the co-hosted events on 30 March, with civil society especially engaged in the events held in Costa Rica and Zambia. In Costa Rica, democracy organizations organized 14 panels across the 4-day programme to draw the attention of governments and other stakeholders to the need to give young people a seat at the table and in decision making (Summit for Democracy Resources n.d.a). In Zambia, the GDC organized a 'Citizens Summit', which provided a platform for African civil society actors to jointly reflect on various elements of elections in Africa and their relation to the commitments made by participating governments at the First Summit, culminating in recommendations for attending governments (Ahmed 2023).

Another achievement with regard to the Second Summit was to include the voices of civil society at the virtual event hosted by President Biden on 29 March. The leader-level plenary session where government political leaders discussed democracy and the implementation of their commitments was interspersed with eight 'spotlight interventions' by leading activists and civil society figures. Each session included two presentations by leading activists and civil society figures, including from the GDC and Democracy Cohorts, on such topics as worker rights, access to justice, resisting authoritarianism, and youth.

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**One of the most meaningful contributions that the Year of Action made to the overall summit process has been expanding civil society voices to more corners of the globe.**

#### **Increasing civil society representativeness**

Arguably, one of the most meaningful contributions that the Year of Action made to the overall summit process has been expanding civil society voices to more corners of the globe, especially in terms of the Global South. While the Global North represented the majority of voices formally included in both summits, civil society from the Global South stepped up their participation during the Year of Action and in the Second Summit.

Civil society from the Global South managed to amplify their voices by collaborating with existing initiatives that are supporting the summit process and participating in Democracy Cohorts. Multiple international

initiatives collaborated with civil society organizations in the region, including International IDEA's Supporting Team Europe Democracy programme (Keutgen 2022), the IRI's Generation Democracy programme (Albanese 2023) and the Latin American and Caribbean Network for Democracy (REDLAD 2023). The Democracy Cohorts also helped to facilitate the engagement of civil society organizations from the Global South, including from those countries that were not invited to the First Summit. The co-hosted events in the Second Summit also helped to bring in more diverse voices from the different regions; for example, in Costa Rica nearly all countries in Latin America were represented by civil society organizations, including non-participating countries such as Cuba and Venezuela.

While the broadening of voices through civil society efforts is commendable, more needs to be done by the summit organizers to formally incorporate voices from the Global South into the summit agenda (Youngs et al. 2023). Participation by civil society from the Global South is important, not only to demonstrate support for democracy in these countries, but also to learn from the experiences of civil society in these regions. The experiences from voices supporting democracy in autocratic regions are especially important to hear, as they can often offer innovative solutions that result from creative thinking under constraints. Moreover, working directly with country-level efforts will help to raise awareness of the benefits of democracy to citizens in those countries. Broader participation could be achieved in a structured way through increased engagement at the national level, potentially by involving civil society actors in monitoring the implementation of commitments or while discussing new commitments.

#### **The GDC: Creating networking opportunities to influence the summit**

The GDC is a multistakeholder alliance of democracy organizations from around the world committed to advancing and protecting democracy. It was convened by International IDEA and other democracy organizations in October 2021, creating an informal group to engage collectively and constructively with the First Summit for Democracy. Since its inception, the GDC has grown to include more than 100 democracy organizations, many of which are working to increase the voices of marginalized groups in democracies.

The GDC organized a Forum two days ahead of the First Summit for Democracy to help to place issues on the summit agenda. On 7 December 2021, the first Forum brought together 52 democracy organizations from across the world, with more than 250 speakers from more than 50 countries in 41 webinars contributing to a recommendations report submitted to the Summit for Democracy organizers.

In February and March 2023, the coalition organized a second GDC Forum, which took place in a hybrid manner between Brussels and Washington, DC. The event provided a space for inclusive dialogue to collectively prepare inputs and generate collective ideas for the Second Summit and beyond. As happened with the first Forum, the second GDC Forum contributed recommendations by the coalition to the summit organizers (Kaesberg, Balleste Buxo and Silva-

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**The experiences from voices supporting democracy in autocratic regions are important, as they offer innovative solutions that result from creative thinking under constraints.**

#### Box 4.2. Increasing the voices of young people in the Summit for Democracy

Beyond the inclusion of more voices from the Global South in the summit process, participation from civil society also helped to amplify voices from more diverse groups in general, most notably youth voices. In 2021, half of the world's population was under 30 years of age (Ritchie and Roser 2019). Engaging young people in dialogue, actions and decision making related to the Summit for Democracy will contribute to better diversity and more innovative ideas.

The importance of youth participation in the Summit for Democracy was raised as a major concern after the First Summit. Thanks to the unwavering support of the Youth Democracy cohort, there is increased awareness among summit participants of the importance of youth political participation, with the topic becoming a priority for the summit process (Heinmaa and Paus 2023: 34). The issue's importance was reflected in the Costa Rican regional summit, which was dedicated to 'Youth participation in civic and political spaces', and Zambia featured the voices of young people in dedicated sessions during its co-hosted event. The Zambia regional summit featured a panel on the 'inclusive participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in electoral processes'. A side event was also held in South Korea led by the young future leaders of democracy, titled 'Youth Resilience against Corruption—Spearheading Change'.

Finally, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced the creation of the Youth Democracy Network during her keynote address as head of the US delegation to the Summit for Democracy in Costa Rica, stressing the importance of young people for the future of the Summit for Democracy (US Embassy in Costa Rica 2023). The effort of civil society organizations in the Youth Democracy cohort has also helped to support the creation of a Youth Political Participation Index, which aims to map the inclusion and participation of youth in public affairs on a global scale, creating a new tool that will support democracy potentially for years to come (Youth Democracy Cohort 2023b).

Leander 2023). These recommendations spanned from specific actions to ensure sustainability of the Democracy Cohorts to strengthening the commitment process through broader ownership and self-reporting.

**One of the most important outcomes of the GDC during the Year of Action was the 74 pledges submitted by the GDC partner organizations for the 2023 Summit for Democracy to advance, strengthen and protect democracy.**

Moreover, the GDC organized the Partners for Democracy Day 2023 (Global Democracy Coalition n.d.) a few days ahead of the Second Summit. The Partners for Democracy Day brought together a global multistakeholder coalition for democracy through a series of virtual, in-person and hybrid events. The aim of the Partners for Democracy Day was to provide a platform for civil society and other stakeholders to contribute to the summit discussions. In total, 111 organizations came together in 10 cities and online, featuring over 200 panellist voices representing 70 countries.

One of the most important outcomes of the GDC during the Year of Action was the 74 pledges submitted by the GDC partner organizations for the 2023 Summit for Democracy to advance, strengthen and protect democracy (Global Democracy Coalition 2023). Notable examples of commitments are as follows:

1. REDLAD committed to mobilizing a network of more than 700 civil society organizations through dialogue, training and exchange to facilitate their advocacy in civic space and anti-corruption in Latin America.
2. Yiaga Africa committed to providing civic education to and mobilizing 40 young Africans to promote participatory democracy and defend civic space in 2023.

3. Humanity United will work in 2023 with USAID's Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention to support efforts to elevate the perspectives and priorities of local peacebuilders.
4. Freedom House committed to publishing a global assessment of more than 210 countries and territories and the state of freedom in the world, including trends and key drivers of gains and losses in 2023.
5. International IDEA committed to continue to assess the state of democracy in 173 countries through its Global State of Democracy Indices, its Global State of Democracy Report and its Global Democracy Tracker. The work will contribute to a better understanding of key opportunities, challenges, advances, regressions and risks to democracy worldwide.

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### 4.3. MAKING CIVIL SOCIETY VOICES COUNT AND EXTENDING PARTICIPATION TO OTHER ACTORS

While the increased representativeness of civil society in the summit process is a welcome development, it will not be sufficient to create real change if it is not accompanied by meaningful participation and input from civil society. The Third Summit for Democracy should ensure effective ways to connect these voices with governments and decision makers by providing a real space for civil society to debate with governments about the delivery of their commitments or to develop new commitments. These collaborative spaces can be strengthened by highlighting and engaging with the work carried out through the Democracy Cohorts. However, the current virtual format of the plenary day will not be sufficient in this respect, and will instead require heads of state and governments to move beyond the formality of Zoom meetings to meaningful and honest in-person conversations. For a new pact to be achieved that is considered legitimate by and convinces citizens that 'democracy delivers', it is essential that civil society plays a leading role in the future of the summit and shares ownership in the creation of the new pact.

Besides civil society, the private sector has actively engaged in the Summit for Democracy since the First Summit and their engagement has increased over the Year of Action, facilitated especially through the Democracy Cohorts, and during the Second Summit. On 3 February 2023, the US Government launched a 'Call to the Private Sector to Advance Democracy' (US Department of State 2023e), organizing four round-table meetings to help incorporate voices from the private sector in the lead-up to the Second Summit. The initiative aimed to invite the private sector to make commitments that advance technology for democracy; fight corruption; protect civic space and human rights defenders; and advance labour rights. The call and subsequent commitments made by the private sector culminated in the 2023 Forum on Business and Democracy (Center for Strategic & International Studies 2023) during the Second Summit on 28 March 2023.

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**Besides civil society, the private sector has actively engaged in the Summit for Democracy since the First Summit and their engagement has increased over the Year of Action.**

Three successful examples of commitments include: (1) the endorsement, spearheaded by Microsoft, Meta, Cisco and TrendMicro and signed by more than 150 companies, of the principles to counter the rising threat posed by cyber mercenaries, a growing industry that develops and sells offensive online services (Cybersecurity Tech Accord 2023); (2) Hedera committed to convene a round-table meeting on how blockchain technologies can and are supporting human rights, transparency and sustainability, the applications of which include government systems accountability, fighting misinformation, reducing data manipulation and tracking financial flows (US Department of State 2023f); and (3) Cloudflare will work with researchers to share data about Internet shutdowns and selective Internet traffic interference, and will make the results of the analysis of this data public and accessible (Zaid and Day 2023). Unfortunately, most of the private sector participation in the Summit for Democracy was based in the USA. Wider engagement of the private sector in other parts of the world would enrich the debates on democracy and the Summit for Democracy.

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**Another key stakeholder in the Summit for Democracy is the legislative branch because members of parliament have a significant role to play in overseeing government policies.**

Another key stakeholder in the Summit for Democracy is the legislative branch because members of parliament have a significant role to play in overseeing government policies, including on the implementation of commitments made during the First Summit for Democracy. The legislative branch is moreover directly responsible for upholding democratic values, not only in their policymaking but also in the direct responsibilities they may be given for different aspects of democracy, for example in forming taskforces or committees focusing on certain challenges to democracy.

During the First and Second Summits, the US House Democracy Partnership convened a series of events that featured legislators from around the globe. The First Summit legislative track was held online and discussed the role of parliament in countering authoritarianism, fighting corruption and promoting human rights (House Democracy Partnership n.d.a). The Second Summit legislative track, held in person in Washington, reviewed the role of legislatures in supporting national commitments, promoting anti-corruption initiatives, advancing cross-party cooperation, promoting inclusion and citizen participation, and sound election policies and voter participation (House Democracy Partnership n.d.b).

## Chapter 5

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE YEAR OF ACTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

The Summit for Democracy process remains a welcome effort for the international democracy support community, as it provides democracy actors a much-needed opportunity to raise democracy on the political agenda and come together to discuss collective solutions. It has the potential to develop into a significant and regular global movement, but certain adaptations should be implemented to ensure that the momentum of the summit is not only maintained but amplified, helping to create new and continue existing good practices. International IDEA has accordingly made recommendations in the short and long term, providing a practical set of steps to ensure that the valuable momentum of the summit is not lost, and a second set of ideal changes drawn from the observed experiences of different summit participants.

These recommendations are based on the analysis conducted by International IDEA in the *Unpacking the Summit for Democracy Commitments* paper (Keutgen, Silva-Leander and Neven 2022), the *International IDEA Summit for Democracy Cohorts* paper (Heinmaa and Paus 2023), and the desk research, surveys and interviews that contributed to the conclusions of this paper. They are also informed by the recommendations contained in the GDC 'Forum 2023 Report' and 'Views on Continuation of the Summit for Democracy' (Kaesberg, Balleste Buxo and Silva-Leander 2023; Brinker 2023).

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### 5.1. SHORT-TERM PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When planning the Third Summit, it is recommended that the organizers prioritize timely and clear communication, and structure an agenda with space to present commitments and draw lessons learned, as well as a real space for governments and civil society to connect and discuss democracy.



The summit agenda should be clearly communicated well in advance of the event and reserve space to present the outputs of lessons learned and monitoring implementation. Proactive communication and continuous monitoring and analysis of efforts will help to encourage reflection on ongoing processes and to coordinate efforts on the local, country, regional and international levels. To help facilitate efficient communication and information sharing that does not duplicate efforts, it would be ideal if roles, responsibilities and expectations of the different summit participants are clearly defined. It would also be helpful to explore a more prominent role for civil society during the formal summit proceedings to ensure that citizen perspectives are meaningfully represented in summit outcomes. With international travel much more open again, summit events should be held in person and include representatives from both government and civil society to encourage network building.

The summit process should work to improve the breadth and depth of connectivity between government agencies and actors and civil society with the goal of creating a continuous and meaningful dialogue. This could be facilitated by strengthening collaboration and dialogues between existing summit participants, including between countries, civil society and Democracy Cohorts. The next summit organizers could consider revising the format to make the summit more accessible. Cohorts and country commitments would be at the forefront of the summit discussions, with opportunities created for civil society and governments to have a real debate on democracy. New relationships with key strategic partners could also be built, notably by increasing participation from the private sector, as they can provide valuable input and contribute important tools and other resources to support democracy.

### **Short-term practical considerations include the following**

#### *For summit organizers:*

- Officially request written commitments from each participating state and communicate clear expectations on their content well in advance.
- Support the establishment of a coordination mechanism to facilitate the work of Democracy Cohorts by inviting the cohorts to submit plans and report on their progress, including a formal space in the agenda of the Third Summit to present their activities and outputs.
- Consider how the summit could facilitate better dialogue between countries, private sector actors and civil society, including how existing international initiatives or coalitions, for example the GDC, can be leveraged to reinforce the summit process. Ideally, this work would also prioritize more participation from the Global South and underrepresented groups such as women and youth.



*For governments:*

- Develop new written commitments ahead of the Third Summit that are measurable, with clear outputs, timeframes and outcomes. These commitments would ideally be drafted in collaboration with civil society and other stakeholders and shared publicly, including on government websites.
- Strengthen communication of the summit process at the national level with citizens, including on the role taken by their governments regarding national commitments and implementation, as well as on their engagement with Democracy Cohorts.

*For civil society organizations:*

- Engage with governments to advocate for the development of new commitments that address genuine democracy concerns and aspirations of citizens.

*For Democracy Cohorts:*

- Engage in structured collaboration where possible with other cohorts, including by sharing relevant information on their work, building coalitions where topics can reinforce each other, and fostering lessons learned. These efforts could contribute towards coordinating the development of a cohort outcome report ahead of the next summit.
- Proactively reach out to include organizations from the Global South, especially in leadership positions and from countries that were not invited to participate in the summit process. Diversity of the cohorts could also be improved by incorporating the voices of underrepresented groups, especially young people and women.

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## 5.2. LONG-TERM LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

The feedback from summit participants shows there is a great deal of desire to continue the summit process, but effort is required especially in restructuring the overall vision of the summit process. This vision would be supported by reviewing what initiatives and alliances should be established, for what objectives, and where.

Each summit should be viewed as part of a collective progression towards democracy, rather than as an individual event. Certain enduring structures could help to maintain continuity between summits, such as a formal monitoring framework for commitment implementation, drawing lessons learned, and reliable coordination mechanisms, particularly to facilitate the work of Democracy Cohorts. Dedicated funding could also be useful in maintaining efforts, the benefits demonstrated by the dedicated paid staff that raised the ambitions of certain Democracy Cohorts, and the grants for projects that were possible as part of the Youth Democracy cohort. Existing international initiatives can be supportive in maintaining summit efforts, and it

would be useful to consider how and where these initiatives can be leveraged to enhance the process. Each country could assess their engagement in the summit process to help consider which government agencies are best placed to support the summit, reorienting responsibilities as necessary.

The summit process could also reach out regularly to countries and civil society groups from the Global South to ensure that they have an important role in the process. Some of the most innovative solutions frequently come from civil society actors operating in repressive contexts, as the situation necessarily requires that they be creative. Their inclusion would allow for a broader discussion on how democracy manifests itself and is understood in various geographic and cultural contexts. Such an approach is essential to create a truly global discussion on democratic priorities and progress.

### **Long-term summit recommendations include the following**

#### *For summit organizers:*

- Establish a formal reporting and monitoring framework for commitment implementation with progress and implementation reports, including formal space in the summit agenda to present the results and lessons learned. Ideally, the results of this framework would be published online with certain information provided in a machine-readable format.
- Critically review the Summit for Democracy model with an eye to reshaping the narrative around the summit process to better incorporate democracy as a universal value that can take different forms across different regions.
- Incorporate dedicated funding for Democracy Cohorts in the summit process, which could be facilitated by continuous collaboration with existing international initiatives.

#### *For governments:*

- Establish national monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of commitments, including publicly available regular progress reports and the final report to be posted on government websites.
- Reflect on their involvement in the summit process, in terms of both the formal summit events and their work in the Democracy Cohorts, to identify the most effective points of communication and participation among their government agencies. Civil society voices strongly indicated the desire to cooperate with government agencies other than the ministries of foreign affairs, as bodies tasked with such democratic institutions as elections or human rights may better possess the requisite knowledge to contribute to initiatives.

#### *For civil society organizations:*

- Use their unique position to build bridges between governments and citizens, both in connecting the democratic aspirations of the people with

relevant government agencies and in raising awareness among citizens of the summit process and democratic values.

- Pursue the involvement of new civil society organizations in structures engaged in summit work, in particular the GDC Forum. Ideally, special attention would be given to the inclusion of civil society groups from the Global South to ensure more inclusive global representation.

*For Democracy Cohorts:*

- Ensure open and inclusive cooperation between government co-leading agencies and civil society, as well as proactive collaboration with other Democracy Cohorts and international platforms to help sustain and amplify efforts.

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# About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 34 Member States founded in 1995, with an exclusive mandate to support and advance democracy worldwide.

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## WHAT WE DO

We produce comparative, policy-friendly knowledge and provide technical assistance on issues relating to elections, parliaments, constitutions, money in politics and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and reports. Our work is expanding to address issues related to climate change and democracy.

We use our knowledge to provide technical assistance and expert advice to governments and civil society around the world. We publish books, databases, and primers annually in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to Indigenous peoples' rights in constitution-building. Gender equality and inclusion are mainstreamed in all our work.

We engage in conversations and convene agenda-setting dialogues and partner with like-minded organizations, including the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations, to achieve greater impact.

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## WHERE WE WORK

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

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This Report seeks to contribute to the success of the Summit for Democracy process by drawing lessons from the Year of Action and Second Summit through analysis of the verbal statements and self-reports made by participating states, as well as interviews and surveys conducted with relevant stakeholders. It aims to present opportunities for shaping an inclusive and effective Third Summit for Democracy in South Korea, due to take place in 2024.

The Second Summit was an opportunity to seize the momentum started with the First Summit and maintained through the efforts of governments and civil society during the Year of Action. The setup of the Second Summit with five parallel summits was highly ambitious. It contributed to building connections among key actors and stakeholders from many different countries and sectors, helping to bring together leaders from across the globe within a relatively short timeframe to put democracy high on the political agenda.

The Summit for Democracy process has the potential to develop into a significant and regular global movement, but certain adaptations should be implemented to ensure that the momentum of the summit is not only maintained but amplified, enabling the continuation of existing good practices and the establishment of new ones.