

HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON REIMAGINING DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Comparative Experiences from the Global South



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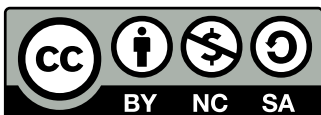
Comparative Experiences from the Global South



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Contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1	
Context: Framing the dialogue	7
Chapter 2	
Democracy retrenchment and new forms of democracy in the Global South ..	9
Chapter 3	
Democracy and development: Lessons from the Global South	12
Chapter 4	
Quality of institutional representation.....	15
Chapter 5	
Reclaiming the social contract: civic participation, development justice and democratic renewal	17
Chapter 6	
Strengthening electoral democracy: Comparative experiences	19
Chapter 7	
Chapter 8	
Democracy in the future: Shaping influences	24
Chapter 9	
Reflections: Reclaiming democracy as a pathway to justice, dignity and development	27
Chapter 10	
Conclusion: Towards a living democracy rooted in justice, solidarity and transformation	29
Chapter 11	
Recommendations	31
Annex A. The Pretoria Consensus.....	35
Annex B. Conference agenda.....	40
About International IDEA	44

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The High-Level Dialogue on 'Reimagining Democracy in Africa: Comparative Experiences from the Global South', held in Pretoria on 19–20 June 2025, convened diverse actors across Africa, Latin America and Asia to critically examine the state and future of democratic governance. Set against the backdrop of rising authoritarianism, civic disillusionment and deepening inequality, the dialogue served as a strategic platform for reflection, exchange and renewal. Key insights from the two-day conference underscored that while democracy remains the preferred form of governance across the Global South, it must evolve to remain relevant. There was broad consensus that inherited liberal democratic frameworks—often narrowly focused on formal electoral processes—have proven inadequate in addressing socio-economic exclusion, environmental collapse, youth marginalization and institutional decay.

The dialogue reaffirmed the urgent need for a new democratic praxis rooted in justice, inclusion and responsiveness to development needs and opportunities. Comparative experiences from countries such as Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Sudan revealed that where democracy has delivered tangible results—particularly in strengthening civic engagement, electoral transparency, or gender and generational inclusion—it has done so through bold innovation, grassroots mobilization and sustained reforms. A strong call emerged for reclaiming democracy as a living practice that integrates civic and political, socio-economic, and collective and cultural rights. The conference highlighted several thematic imperatives for a reimagined democracy:

- *Socio-economic justice.* Governance must deliver decent livelihoods and redistribute opportunity, especially to historically marginalized populations.
- *Youth and gender inclusion.* Young people and women must move from symbolic presence to meaningful power across democratic spaces.

- *Environmental stewardship.* Governance of the climate and natural resources must reflect democratic values of transparency, accountability and equitable benefit sharing.
- *Digital equity.* Emerging technologies must be regulated through rights-based frameworks to protect democratic processes and civic integrity.
- *Regional and South–South solidarity.* Democracy’s defence and renewal require cross-border coalitions that counter authoritarian coordination with democratic cooperation.

This High-Level Dialogue also commemorated International IDEA’s 30th anniversary and South Africa’s democratic journey, while recognizing ongoing gaps in accountability, equity and public trust. Rather than celebrating it as a discrete achievement, the meeting understood democracy as an ongoing project—one that must be defended, redefined and rebuilt in response to contemporary challenges. Participants concluded with a collective commitment to deepen democratic values and practices through people-centred partnerships, policy innovation and strategic civic action. The Pretoria Consensus affirmed that democracy must be reimagined not as a procedural luxury but as a political and moral necessity for human dignity, justice and sustainable development across the Global South. Among the key recommendations that emerged were:

1. Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks for democratic governance, including electoral laws, constitutional safeguards and independent judicial mechanisms.
2. Enhance civic education and political literacy, particularly targeting youth and first-time voters through digital and community-based platforms.
3. Institutionalize inclusive participation by ensuring gender parity and the meaningful involvement of youth, persons with disabilities and Indigenous communities.
4. Promote electoral justice through independent courts, trained electoral judges and accessible electoral dispute mechanisms.
5. Establish regional mechanisms such as an African Independent Electoral Commission to ensure electoral transparency and harmonization of democratic standards.
6. Bridge the civic–state divide via participatory budgeting, citizen monitoring frameworks and devolved governance structures.
7. Develop regulatory frameworks for artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies to prevent disenfranchisement and abuse in electoral and governance systems.

8. Anchor democratic practice in economic and climate justice, ensuring democratic and redistributive governance over minerals, land and public goods.
9. Launch multi-stakeholder, regional coalitions to protect civic space and counter authoritarianism.
10. Institutionalize the High-Level Dialogue on Reimagining Democracy in Africa as an annual platform.
11. Scale peer-learning platforms across the Global South to share innovations in youth engagement, electoral transparency and inclusive policymaking.
12. Leverage South Africa's upcoming G20 presidency to advance a democracy and development agenda driven by the Global South.
13. Mobilize support for the United Nations Convention on the Right to Development, reinforcing the indivisibility of civil, political, economic and social rights.
14. Institutionalize follow-up mechanisms to track progress on recommendations and ensure sustained accountability.
15. Reimagine democracy as a lived, inclusive practice that delivers equity, dignity and development.

INTRODUCTION

At a time of shifting global dynamics and rising authoritarianism, the urgency to critically examine the state of democracy in Africa has never been greater.

At a time of shifting global dynamics and rising authoritarianism, the urgency to critically examine the state of democracy in Africa has never been greater. Across the continent, there are growing concerns about the inclusiveness, effectiveness and sustainability of democratic systems. Declining public trust in institutions, coupled with democratic backsliding, calls for renewed dialogue, cross-regional learning and collective action within the Global South. It is against this backdrop that the High-level Dialogue on 'Reimagining Democracy in Africa: Comparative Experiences from the Global South' was convened to explore innovative, locally rooted approaches to democratic renewal.

Africa's democratic project stands at a crossroads. While many countries have made notable strides in governance reforms and electoral integrity, deep structural challenges persist. These include entrenched poverty, high youth unemployment, systemic gender inequality, elite-driven politics and climate vulnerability. Such challenges often lead to disillusionment and weaken the legitimacy of democratic institutions. In contexts where elections are manipulated, opposition stifled and institutions politicized, the gap between democratic ideals and practice continues to widen. But despite these challenges, democracy remains central to Africa's developmental aspirations. African citizens continue to express a clear preference for democracy. Public opinion surveys consistently show that the majority favour democratic governance over authoritarian alternatives.

Core values such as participation, transparency and accountability are essential for inclusive governance. These cannot thrive without the material conditions that support political agency. Persistent poverty, hunger and exclusion undermine citizens' ability to fully engage in democratic processes. As such, democracy and development must be pursued together—without tangible socio-economic outcomes, trust in democratic institutions quickly erodes. Valuable lessons emerge from the experiences of other regions of the Global South. Countries like Chile, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia and South Korea have shown that strong institutions, civic participation and inclusive economic

policies can sustain democratic governance. Chile's social protection systems and Indonesia's transition from authoritarian rule demonstrate the importance of institutional legitimacy and citizen empowerment. These cases underscore that democratic resilience is built on both procedural integrity and development justice.

Since 2020, six countries in Africa have experienced military coups, and others have altered constitutions to entrench incumbents. Tactics such as suppressing opposition, weakening oversight institutions and manipulating electoral outcomes further erode democratic norms. In regions like the Sahel, conflict and violent extremism divert resources from development to security, weakening state capacity and undermining democratic governance. Peace, security and governance remain deeply interconnected; strong, independent institutions are necessary to manage political contestation and enforce the rule of law. But their development is often hindered by conflict and political interference. The influence of international actors is also double-edged: while donor support can strengthen governance, it can also compromise national ownership. Infrastructure partnerships such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, though developmental, raise concerns around transparency, debt burdens and democratic accountability.

Nevertheless, countries such as Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius and South Africa demonstrate that where legal safeguards are respected and institutions are trusted, democratic practice can flourish. In these contexts, independent judiciaries and credible electoral commissions have played a crucial role in sustaining democratic legitimacy. South Africa illustrates both the promise and fragility of democratic transition. Its historic 1994 breakthrough brought transformative constitutionalism and a commitment to social justice. Over three decades, South Africa has advanced multilateralism, regional cooperation and human rights. Yet its democratic achievements remain vulnerable to socio-economic pressures and political complacency. The country's upcoming G20 presidency offers a critical platform to champion a democracy-led development agenda for the Global South.

As a founding member of International IDEA—which celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2025—South Africa's democratic trajectory is linked to global efforts to build resilient democracies. The dialogue, hosted in partnership with International IDEA, aimed to foster comparative insight, deepen Global South solidarity, and generate actionable strategies for democratic renewal rooted in justice and development.

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OBJECTIVES

The 'High-Level Dialogue on Reimagining Democracy in Africa: Comparative Experiences from the Global South' was conceived as a strategic platform to reflect on democratic achievements, interrogate current challenges and foster solidarity across regions. Drawing on experiences from Latin America,

the Asia-Pacific and Africa itself, the event aimed to generate comparative insights to inform democratic renewal. As host, South Africa reflected on its post-apartheid journey and reaffirmed its commitment to multilateralism and democratic leadership on the continent.

The dialogue pursued the following key objectives:

1. To establish a multi-stakeholder platform for critical exchange on comparative experiences, emerging trends and evolving democratic trajectories across the Global South.
2. To celebrate International IDEA's 30th anniversary by recognizing its global impact in supporting democracy through research, policy influence and technical assistance.
3. To facilitate peer learning on electoral democracy, with case studies and innovations from Africa, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific—to identify context-specific best practices.
4. To explore strategies for inclusive political participation, with a focus on enhancing the engagement and representation of women and youth.
5. To spotlight development challenges—such as inequality, instability and democratic backsliding—facing Africa and the Global South, while leveraging South Africa's multilateral leadership.
6. To promote mechanisms of solidarity and resilience for defending democratic norms and countering authoritarian resurgence, especially in fragile or contested contexts.
7. To produce actionable recommendations for strengthening legal and institutional frameworks essential to consolidating democratic governance in Africa and the wider Global South.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The dialogue was expected to yield the following outcomes:

1. Actionable policy recommendations, as mentioned in point 7 above.
2. Strengthened partnerships and networks among key stakeholders—including governments, civil society, multilateral agencies, research institutions and the private sector—committed to deepening South–South cooperation and peer learning in democratic governance.
3. Renewed solidarity and coordinated advocacy efforts to defend democracy, uphold civic space and counter authoritarian encroachment, particularly in contexts marked by political fragility and institutional erosion; and through the above.

Chapter 1

CONTEXT: FRAMING THE DIALOGUE

Reimagining Democracy in Africa: Comparative Experiences from the Global South opened with a profound sense of urgency and reflection. Against a backdrop of rising authoritarianism, civic disillusionment and deepening socio-economic inequalities, the deliberations marked a critical moment to interrogate the assumptions, structures and trajectories of democratic governance in Africa and across the Global South. What unfolded was a compelling call to reimagine democracy—not as a procedural artefact or a fixed institutional form, but as a living, evolving practice rooted in the realities, struggles and aspirations of people.

Democracy was understood not merely as a system of elections and governance, but as a developmental and transformative force. The challenge posed was how to construct democratic systems that are not only formally representative, but also substantively redistributive, inclusive and accountable. The discussions traced the disjuncture between the promise of democracy and the lived experiences of many African citizens—particularly youth, women and historically marginalized communities—who continue to face exclusion, poverty and insecurity, despite decades of democratic reforms.

Critical attention was drawn to the performative nature of many electoral processes, which, while procedurally compliant, often fail to deliver tangible improvements in people's lives. Erosion of trust in elected governments was not interpreted as a rejection of democracy itself, but rather as a growing frustration with failures to transform power relations, dismantle elite capture, or redistribute opportunity and dignity. The underlying consensus was that democracy must mean more than periodic voting; it must translate into equitable access to public goods, protection of human rights and political agency for all.

The dialogue moved beyond critique to embrace a vision of 'substantive democracy'—a transformatory one that prioritizes economic justice, participatory governance and social inclusion. This reimagining demands

a paradigm shift away from inherited liberal democratic templates towards African-centred models that draw on histories of resistance, Indigenous governance systems and contemporary forms of grassroots mobilization. Rather than mimicking external models, the path forward must be rooted in pluralistic, locally informed approaches that engage with the continent's political diversity and cultural depth.

At the heart of this vision was the insistence that democracy must be felt in the everyday lives of citizens. It must materialize in accessible healthcare, quality education, secure livelihoods and social protection—especially for the vulnerable and excluded. Where democracy becomes a distant or symbolic construct, abstracted from daily realities, it risks being hollowed out and delegitimized. Conversely, when institutions are transparent, accessible and responsive, democracy becomes a source of dignity and hope. The conversation also reflected on the broader global context, acknowledging that democratic backsliding is not confined to Africa. Across the world, civic spaces are shrinking, public institutions are being captured and democratic norms are under threat. However, amid this crisis lies an opportunity for the Global South to assert new forms of democratic leadership rooted in solidarity, humility and mutual learning. The Global South was conceived of not as a zone of perpetual crisis, but as a space of innovation, resilience and democratic imagination.

The growing wave of civic activism, feminist organizing and digital mobilization signals an emerging renaissance of democratic renewal 'from below', that is, people-led and people-centred.

Africa's young people were recognized as central agents in the continent's democratic future. The growing wave of civic activism, feminist organizing and digital mobilization signals an emerging renaissance of democratic renewal 'from below', that is, people-led and people-centred. The challenge is how to harness this energy and translate it into institutional transformation. This requires rethinking not only electoral systems and constitutions, but also the very ethics of power, leadership and accountability. Reimagining democracy in the 21st century requires courage—the courage to question old models, confront uncomfortable truths, and pursue democratic futures that are just. It requires humility—the humility to learn from failures and from one another. And it requires solidarity—across movements, regions and generations—to defend democratic norms in the face of authoritarian resurgence and to co-create a more equitable and humane political order.

This reflection set the foundation and tone for the broader dialogue, grounding subsequent conversations in the imperative of building democratic systems that are not simply inherited or imported, but genuinely owned, contested and lived. It framed democracy not as an endpoint, but as an evolving practice of freedom and justice—one that must be continually redefined in response to changing conditions and rising demands for equity, dignity and voice.

Chapter 2

DEMOCRACY RETRENCHMENT AND NEW FORMS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In exploring the retrenchment of democracy and the rise of alternative democratic imaginaries in the Global South, the dialogue engaged in a bold and layered interrogation of the state of democracy across Africa, Latin America and Asia. Against the backdrop of declining global democratic indicators, the discussions emphasized that the concept of democracy—though widely upheld—has become increasingly contested in its meaning, legitimacy and institutional manifestation. What emerged was a compelling narrative: that democracy, as currently practised in many Southern contexts, is failing not because its ideals are flawed, but because its forms have been misaligned with the lived experiences, historical trajectories and socio-political realities of those it is meant to serve.

The dominant liberal democratic model, largely inherited through postcolonial transitions or imposed through donor-driven reforms, has proven inadequate in addressing the structural inequities and governance failures that persist across the Global South. Rather than empowering citizens, electoral democracies have too often become vehicles for elite consolidation, bureaucratic exclusion and symbolic rather than substantive participation. In many African contexts, the imposition of liberal democratic blueprints has clashed with traditional and communal modes of governance, generating friction and, at times, instability. In the Global South, legitimacy is derived not from adherence to civil liberties or procedural benchmarks alone, but also from economic delivery, public order and cultural resonance.

Democratic backsliding is symptomatic of multiple crises: institutional decay, elite capture, pervasive corruption and the erosion of public trust. Citizens increasingly find themselves alienated from the formal democratic apparatus, choosing instead to express agency through informal and non-institutionalized modes of mobilization, protest and everyday organizing. What appears on the surface as voter apathy (low voter turnout) is, in fact, a reconfiguration of political life from below—driven by youth movements, feminist collectives, Indigenous resurgence and digitally enabled activism. Across these

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discussions, a strong call emerged for the creation of a new democratic social contract—one that is grounded in legitimacy, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of ordinary people. This social contract must recognize the centrality of social justice, economic equity and historical repair. The Global South's experience makes clear that democracy must be more than an event every few years; it must be a daily lived reality that delivers safety, dignity, voice and belonging.

Feminist and grassroots perspectives pushed the dialogue further, insisting that democracy must be grounded not only in formal institutions but in care, solidarity and relational organizing. In this vision, democracy takes place not only in parliaments and polling stations, but in kitchens, community centres and other everyday spaces where people negotiate power, survival and collective futures. These movements challenge traditional hierarchies of power, offering instead models of decentralized, leaderless and horizontally accountable forms of governance. Such reimagining questions the legitimacy of dominant paradigms that measure democracy solely by elections, rather than by outcomes that reflect justice and redistribution.

The conversation also opened critical space to examine the interplay between identity politics, religion and governance, especially in regions where colonial legacies of ethnic stratification continue to shape institutional design. Questions of legitimacy are understood through cultural and historical narratives, which often diverge from liberal proceduralism. In Southeast Asia, dominant-party systems and technocratic governance continue to enjoy popular legitimacy not primarily through political pluralism, but by invoking a deeply embedded historical narrative that links national progress to economic stability, technocratic competence and social order. This legitimacy is rooted in developmental state models that emerged during postcolonial nation-building, where rapid economic growth was framed as both a moral and political imperative. In this context, democracy is not necessarily equated with electoral competition, but with the state's ability to deliver material well-being, stability and developmental outcomes—challenging liberal assumptions that democratic legitimacy must derive from political contestation and pluralism alone.

Digital technologies were explored as both enablers and threats to democracy. While they offer unprecedented tools for mobilization, access remains unequal and platforms can be weaponized by authoritarian actors. This duality underscores the need for democratic innovation that is both technologically adaptive and socially inclusive. Importantly, the conversations called for deeper attention to the normative foundations of democratic governance. Where power is conflated with authority and where legitimacy is rooted in coercion rather than consent, the state loses its moral anchor. Citizens across the Global South are increasingly withdrawing their consent—not from democracy as an ideal, but from states and systems that fail to meet their expectations. This withdrawal, manifesting through street protests, civic disengagement, or the construction of parallel political spaces, signals the need for radical institutional reform.

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Ultimately, the dialogue did not mourn the decline of liberal democracy but treated it as an inflection point—a moment to craft new democratic futures that are people-centred, historically grounded and boldly experimental. These futures must be built from the ground up, anchored in the everyday realities of marginalized communities and informed by solidarity across postcolonial geographies. Reimagining democracy in the Global South requires confronting structural inequalities, disrupting elite monopolies on power and constructing governance systems that are participatory, locally legitimate and radically inclusive.

This reimagining must also be diplomatic and geopolitical. The weakening of multilateralism and the global crisis of democratic legitimacy demand a coordinated response from Southern actors. A renewed solidarity among Global South countries can offer not only a counterweight to hegemonic powers but also a space for mutual learning, co-creation and the development of democratic models that are relevant, resilient and resolutely people-driven.

The weakening of multilateralism and the global crisis of democratic legitimacy demand a coordinated response from Southern actors.

Chapter 3

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The relationship between democracy and development emerged as one of the most urgent and complex questions confronting societies across the Global South. While the normative link between democratic governance and inclusive development remains widely accepted, the realities on the ground often tell a different story. Across regions—from Latin America to Africa and Southeast Asia—democracy continues to be celebrated as an ideal but falls short in practice when measured against its ability to transform lives, dismantle inequality and deliver socio-economic justice.

The discussion surfaced a growing consensus: procedural democracy, in the absence of material redistribution and meaningful participation, is no longer sufficient to sustain public legitimacy. Citizens are no longer judging democratic systems based solely on electoral regularity or constitutional form, but increasingly on the outcomes they produce. Democracy, to remain relevant, must address persistent structural inequities—racialized exclusion, patriarchal systems, elite capture and the historical marginalization of entire communities. It must not only enable voice but guarantee public access to education, health, decent work—and genuine influence over policy.

Drawing on comparative experiences from the Americas, Africa and wider South–South cooperation platforms, the dialogue highlighted the importance of embedding social rights and social inclusion in binding legal and institutional frameworks. When designed collaboratively and monitored rigorously, social policy becomes not a matter of discretion but a democratic entitlement, backed by social power. Formal commitments to inclusion must be matched with accountability systems that give citizens leverage—from peer review mechanisms to participatory budget planning. The notion of ‘nothing about us without us’ must guide how policies are formulated, resourced and evaluated.

At the heart of the conversation was a deeper critique of the gap between democratic promises and lived realities. Even where inclusive policies exist

on paper, their implementation often falters due to bureaucratic inertia, fragmented institutions and chronic underfunding. Participatory governance mechanisms risk becoming symbolic rituals rather than transformative spaces. When public engagement is reduced to compliance checkboxes, the result is alienation rather than empowerment. People lose faith not in democracy as an idea, but in its ability to respond to their everyday struggles. The dialogue thus insisted on reframing the very notion of citizenship. Citizens must be seen not merely as voters or beneficiaries but as co-creators of policy and governance. Truly inclusive democracy means a relational and participatory approach—one that enables communities to define their priorities, monitor delivery and hold institutions to account.

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The dialogue revealed numerous efforts in this direction are ongoing. From municipal dialogues tackling water crises in South Africa to community-designed social protection policies in Latin America, the Global South is home to innovation in people-led governance. These experiences reaffirmed that inclusion must be practised ‘on site’—in real time, with real budgets and through iterative, grounded processes. Development cannot be achieved by technical solutions alone; it demands political courage, cross-sectoral collaboration and cultural shifts in how institutions relate to citizens.

The conversation was especially critical of governance failures rooted in corruption, state capture and unaccountable leadership. Across the African continent, repeated unconstitutional changes in government—coups, elite pacts and other manipulated transitions—reflect deeper institutional fragilities. Yet such reversals must also be contextualized within a broader political economy shaped by colonial legacies and ongoing neo-colonial influence. Sovereignty, many argued, is increasingly undermined not only from within but also through conditional aid, exploitative trade regimes and external interference. A strong call was made for reclaiming democratic ownership, with the African Union and other regional bodies urged to move beyond declarations and towards substantive support for constitutionalism, human rights and inclusive development.

South–South cooperation emerged as a vital strategy in this effort. Peer learning platforms that prioritize mutual respect, local knowledge and horizontal exchange offer powerful alternatives to hierarchical, donor-driven development models. These initiatives not only amplify successful practices but also nurture political solidarity among countries facing similar challenges. The future of democracy in the Global South, it was argued, will depend not just on internal reform, but on strategic alliances that reshape global governance norms.

The importance of gender justice was brought into sharp focus, especially in contexts where women remain politically active yet structurally marginalized. While women often represent the majority of voters and civic actors, this power has yet to be reflected in decision making or fiscal allocations. Gender-based violence and underinvestment in care infrastructure were cited as stark indicators of the gap between symbolic recognition and substantive

Democracy, to deliver development, must itself be developed—from the ground up, with communities at the centre and justice as its guiding principle.

transformation. There is a clear need to move beyond short-term ‘pilot’ projects on gender towards fully sustainable, institutionalized reforms.

In closing reflections, the discussion returned to the issue of accountability—both horizontal (between institutions) and vertical (between states and citizens). Without consistent follow-up, political will and embedded mechanisms for learning, high-level engagements risk becoming ceremonial rather than catalytic. The call was not only for implementation but for a cultural and institutional reset. The session delivered a clear message: the future of democracy in the Global South must be participatory, redistributive and grounded in the realities of everyday life. It must break with transactional models of governance and move towards relationships of trust, care and shared responsibility. Democracy, to deliver development, must itself be developed—from the ground up, with communities at the centre and justice as its guiding principle.

Chapter 4

QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL REPRESENTATION

The conversation on institutional representation—at supranational, national and local levels—unfolded as a critical reflection on the architecture of democracy in the Global South. The session offered a layered analysis of how democratic institutions—whether parliaments, electoral bodies or regional organizations—can either reinforce or erode public trust. Representation was not discussed as a static notion of formal presence, but as a dynamic process of responsiveness, inclusion and shared power. What emerged was a call to reimagine representation as a tool for equity, participatory governance and justice—especially for those historically marginalized by majoritarian systems.

Experiences from across the Global South illuminated both the challenges and opportunities of institutional reform. One important focus is harmonizing electoral systems across African states to ensure predictability, transparency and legitimacy. Regional standards for electoral governance can strengthen democratic norms and reduce post-electoral instability. At the supranational level, the role of bodies such as the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament was critically explored. These institutions were conceived to serve as continental platforms for collective accountability and democratic oversight. Yet their ability to enforce norms and confront democratic backsliding remains constrained. Strengthening these bodies to become credible guardians of democracy was framed as a necessary step towards continental solidarity and resilience.

The conversation also brought local and national dynamics into sharp focus. Effective representation, it was argued, cannot be achieved without decentralization and the active inclusion of diverse social groups—especially women, youth, Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities. Formal constitutional guarantees are important but insufficient if not accompanied by political will, financial resources and institutional accountability. Decentralized governance models, particularly federal systems, were seen as offering pathways to deepen democratic engagement and to better accommodate ethnic, cultural and regional diversities.

Formal constitutional guarantees are important but insufficient if not accompanied by political will, financial resources and institutional accountability.

Representation must also be understood through the lens of trust. Across many contexts, public trust in parliaments and elected bodies has declined due to corruption, inefficiency and the perceived complicity of representatives in executive overreach. Restoring trust in the legislative branch requires a recalibration of institutional ethics, integrity and purpose—parliaments must move from being symbolic to substantive actors in governance. This entails enhancing their independence, professionalizing their operations and ensuring that members are accountable to citizens rather than beholden to political party interests. Reforms that empower oversight mechanisms, protect whistle-blowers and embed ethical standards within legislative bodies were highlighted as vital to restoring institutional credibility.

When institutions listen, adapt and act with integrity, they become engines of transformation.

Beyond formal structures, representation was also discussed as a process that must include voice and agency. It is not enough for institutions to be diverse in appearance; they must be actively inclusive in function. Representation must enable people to see their lived realities reflected in policy debates and national priorities. This requires institutional spaces to open up to citizens organizing at grassroots level: civil society actors and informal leaders beyond the elite who are often excluded from governance processes. When institutions listen, adapt and act with integrity, they become engines of transformation.

As such, the conversation pointed to a future in which representation must evolve from passive inclusion to active partnership. This means redefining institutions not as distant power centres but as accessible, responsive and co-owned by the people. Whether at the supranational, national or local level, democratic institutions must be designed and reformed with the understanding that legitimacy flows not from title or tenure, but from the ability to deliver justice, dignity and meaningful participation.

Chapter 5

RECLAIMING THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: CIVIC PARTICIPATION, DEVELOPMENT JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

The dialogue on reclaiming the social contract unfolded as a profound reckoning with the broken promises of post-independence democracies in the Global South. At its centre was the realization that the legitimacy of democratic governance hinges not merely on the holding of elections or the drafting of constitutions, but on civic trust, social justice and the inclusion of marginalized voices in decision making. Across Africa, Asia and Latin America, there is a growing recognition that the social contract—envisioned as a reciprocal relationship between state and citizen—is fraying under the weight of inequality and elite dominance. In some cases, it has been destroyed altogether.

From Kenya to Sri Lanka, Sudan to Zimbabwe, social movements have demonstrated that when states fail to deliver on the basic needs and democratic aspirations of their people, it is often women and young people who step into the breach. In moments of political rupture and economic collapse, it is these groups that have mobilized, resisted and reimagined new democratic futures. However, while their presence in mass mobilizations is often highly visible, their participation tends to be systematically excluded in post-crisis negotiations and ensuing governance arrangements. This disjuncture between protest and power reflects a persistent failure to translate civic energy into institutional transformation. The discussion returned repeatedly to the central question: what does democracy mean in the absence of dignity, equity or material well-being? If democratic systems reproduce the same exclusions and inequalities as authoritarian regimes, then the social contract loses both its moral and its political authority. Reclaiming that contract demands not only political reform but a radical restructuring of how power is organized and shared.

In many countries, the erosion of the social contract has been catalysed by economic injustice. The notion of 'economic democracy' was highlighted as a foundational pillar of any genuine democratic system. Where citizens are denied access to food, electricity, housing and healthcare—often in the context of globalized austerity policies, corruption and elite impunity—governments

lose their legitimacy regardless of how often elections are held. Particularly where public outrage has erupted into mass uprisings, the urgency of linking political rights to economic redistribution has been laid bare.

Yet democratic renewal cannot emerge solely from crisis. It requires vision, intergenerational dialogue and solidarity across movements. While past liberation struggles dismantled colonial rule, many of their successors have failed to build inclusive and accountable systems. Today's youth movements are not only resisting authoritarian drift. They are calling for a different kind of leadership and governance rooted in transparency, humility and proximity to people's lived realities. The generational transition in politics must be more than symbolic; it must equip young people with the tools, platforms and institutional access to reshape public policy and the governance space underpinning it. This includes redefining what political participation looks like, expanding it beyond the corridors of power into neighbourhoods, unions, cultural spaces and digital platforms where everyday struggles are being waged. The call was clear: democracy must be felt where people live, not only where laws are made.

This shift also demands new forms of regional and global solidarity. As authoritarian regimes increasingly support one another through shared tactics of repression, surveillance and control of the narrative, pro-democracy movements must do the same—linking across borders, learning from one another and building collective power. These networks of solidarity are critical not only for resisting state violence but for generating and sustaining alternative models of participatory democracy.

Attention was also drawn to the enduring power of the military in shaping political transitions across Africa. In several contexts, democratic openings have been abruptly closed by military interventions, often justified in the name of stability. Reclaiming the social contract, therefore, also entails engaging with the role of the military—not as a monolithic threat to democracy, but as an actor that must be held accountable within a constitutional and civilian-led framework. Democratic renewal cannot succeed where armed institutions remain unchecked or above the law.

Democracy is not an ideal from the past nor a destination to be reached, but a journey to be continuously negotiated.

The message from the session was resounding: democracy is not an ideal from the past nor a destination to be reached, but a journey to be continuously negotiated. It must be defended not only in the face of authoritarianism, but also from complacency, co-option and institutional inertia. The social contract can only be reclaimed when citizens are not merely governed, but governing—shaping their futures through shared struggle, courageous leadership and enduring solidarity across geographies and generations.

Chapter 6

STRENGTHENING ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY: COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES

What does it mean to deliver credible, participatory and just elections in contexts marked by inequality, mistrust, institutional fragility and rising disinformation? While elections remain the most visible feature of democratic life, the dialogue reaffirmed that electoral democracy, to become substantive democracy, must deliver the interlocking needs of representation, equity and accountability. This requires going beyond periodic voting to ensure transparency, integrity and meaningful inclusion in both procedures and outcomes, thereby anchoring democratic legitimacy in everyday governance as well as electoral form.

Across the conversation, there was a consistent recognition that electoral democracy is not a finite achievement but a continuous process—one that must be defended, adapted and deepened in response to changing social, technological and political realities. The Global South offers both cautionary tales and bold innovations. While elections have become the dominant mechanism for acquiring or renewing state power—including in regimes with authoritarian features—their legitimacy increasingly hinges on the integrity of institutions, the transparency of processes and the inclusiveness of outcomes. In contexts of democratic backsliding, where formal procedures persist but substantive commitments erode, these dimensions become even more critical to safeguarding public trust.

The strengthening of electoral management bodies (EMBs) emerged as a fundamental pillar. In many African countries, these institutions are underfunded, overburdened and politically constrained. Yet where they are independent, professional and well-resourced, they form the backbone of credible democratic practice. Comparisons with Latin American and Asian counterparts highlighted the value of robust legal frameworks, citizen engagement in electoral administration, and affirmative action policies that proactively expand access to underrepresented groups—particularly women, young people, Indigenous communities and persons with disabilities.

Without trusted mechanisms to resolve electoral disputes, democratic systems risk descending into contestation, violence, or public apathy.

Without trusted mechanisms to resolve electoral disputes, democratic systems risk descending into contestation, violence or public apathy. Specialized electoral courts, judicial training and transparent procedures were cited as key ingredients in electoral dispute procedures capable of safeguarding the democratic contract. If not managed efficiently, the rising volume of electoral litigation can strain the operational capacity of EMBs—and crucially for legitimacy, delay the democratic process.

A critical concern raised throughout the dialogue was political finance. Current systems overwhelmingly benefit dominant parties and elite candidates, reinforcing inequality and marginalization. There was strong advocacy for rethinking how public funding is allocated and for creating mechanisms that level the playing field for independent candidates, grassroots movements and marginalized communities. Political finance reform was positioned not merely as a technical issue, but as central to revitalizing democratic competition and trust. Equally pressing was the call to reconceptualize civic and political education. Education must be more than a pre-election campaign; it must become a permanent, generational infrastructure for democratic life. Informed voters are not only less susceptible to populist manipulation and misinformation, they are also better positioned to hold institutions accountable and demand responsive leadership. Civic literacy, therefore, must be embedded in formal curricula, public media and digital platforms to reach both urban and rural constituencies.

Technology featured prominently in the discussions, as both a solution and a source of risk. Digital innovation has enabled new forms of voter outreach, candidate transparency and timely transformation of results. Yet the proliferation of disinformation, the digital divide and the high cost of tech-driven elections present formidable challenges. Electoral technology must be accessible, equitable and anchored in public trust. Where used responsibly, it can deepen engagement; where mismanaged, it can disenfranchise and delegitimize. Another recurring theme was the deepening disillusionment among young people—a trend that signals not the absence of political interest, but a deliberate form of protest. Disengagement, in this context, is a response to systems perceived as exclusionary, unresponsive and disconnected from the realities of youth. This form of withdrawal contests traditional assumptions about participation, especially those rooted in narrow electoral metrics, and forces a re-evaluation of what democratic engagement truly means. It also draws attention to a broader legitimacy crisis: institutions that fail to reflect the voices, aspirations and lived experiences of their youngest constituents risk losing relevance altogether. The future of electoral democracy, therefore, depends not only on expanding access but on reconfiguring power—by building institutions that are not simply open to young people but fundamentally shaped by them.

The role of international actors in electoral processes was also critically examined. While external observation missions remain important for upholding standards, they must be grounded in understanding of local context. The popular legitimacy of an election is ultimately to be judged by those who live

under its outcomes, not by external observers alone. Throughout the session, one message was clear: electoral democracy cannot be left to periodic moments of mobilization every four or five years. It must be lived, protected and transformed through everyday practices of accountability, fairness and participation. The credibility of electoral systems rests not only on the counting of ballots, but also on the meaningful inclusion of all voices—especially those historically excluded from power.

In conclusion, strengthening electoral democracy across the Global South requires a holistic approach anchored in legal reform, civic education, equitable political finance and inclusive technology. More fundamentally, it requires a bold reimagining of democracy as ongoing lived experience, not a periodic event. Institutions must evolve to reflect the aspirations of the people they serve and display resilience in the face of countervailing pressures; electoral processes must become catalysts for justice, not merely mechanisms of political competition. Only then can democracy deliver its transformative promise of dignity, participation and inclusion.

Strengthening electoral democracy across the Global South requires a holistic approach anchored in legal reform, civic education, equitable political finance and inclusive technology.

Chapter 7

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES

Far from being linear or singular events, democratic transitions were framed as extended processes rooted in political negotiation, social struggle and institutional experimentation.

The dialogue on democratic transitions in the Global South offered a sobering yet hopeful reflection on the uneven, contested and ongoing nature of democratization. Far from being linear or singular events, democratic transitions were framed as extended processes rooted in political negotiation, social struggle and institutional experimentation. Across Africa, Latin America and South Asia, transitions have been shaped not only by elite pacts and formal agreements, but by the persistent demands of citizens for dignity, justice and representation.

South Africa's journey stood as a poignant reminder that democratic breakthroughs are often born of painstaking negotiation. The shift from apartheid to democracy, while symbolized by iconic moments such as the presidential inauguration of Nelson Mandela, was undergirded by years of behind-the-scenes dialogue, social mobilization and international pressure. The country's use of transitional justice mechanisms—particularly the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—were an effort to reconcile historical violence with nation-building. While imperfect, such mechanisms reflected a critical insight: sustainable transitions require more than legal or political reform; they demand societal reckoning and the cultivation of moral legitimacy.

In Latin America, the democratization process exposed how entrenched inequalities—particularly gendered and racial exclusions—continue to challenge the depth of democratic transformation. The expansion of women's representation through mechanisms such as electoral quotas marks an important step, but remains insufficient in addressing the systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities. Democratization, in this context, is not simply about regime change but the redistribution of power within society. The democratic project must engage the structural roots of exclusion, not merely diversify its institutional surface.

This complexity is mirrored to some extent in South Asia, where formal democratic institutions overlay highly contested political environments. The

experience of countries like Bangladesh illustrates the tension, with nominal adherence to electoral cycles often masking deficits in media freedom, civic space and institutional independence. The role of journalism emerged as a critical battleground. Where media institutions function as extensions of political or corporate interests, democratic scrutiny and public accountability suffer. And while digital tools offer new spaces for civic expression, they are also vulnerable to manipulation and surveillance, further complicating the landscape of democratic contestation.

Across the African continent, failure to deliver material improvements has rendered many democratic transitions fragile and led to a resurgence of authoritarian alternatives. Military interventions, often justified through promises of stability and development, have capitalized on disillusionment and a vacuum of trust in mainstream institutions. Where democracy is equated with political freedom but not economic justice, it struggles to take root. A recurring theme was that sustainable political transitions are inseparable from socio-economic transformation. Only when democratic systems respond to people's daily struggles—jobs, services, safety—can they secure long-term legitimacy.

Broad and inclusive negotiation emerged as another central element in successful transitions. Whether in South Africa's multiparty dialogues, or efforts to rebuild post-authoritarian states in Latin America, a willingness to engage across ideological, historical and institutional divides has been critical. Transitions that fail to institutionalize inclusion, redistribute power and guarantee rights often remain vulnerable to backsliding—a pattern that may be set early, with the shape of negotiations themselves.

The future of democracy in the Global South lies in its ability to embrace complexity and contestation. Rather than aiming for a static end-point, transitions should be understood as dynamic processes. Reimagining democracy thus requires a deliberate departure from minimalist definitions and a bold commitment to pluralism, justice and structural change. Ultimately, the path to transformative democratic transitions lies in centring those historically excluded: women, young people, ethnic minorities, the poor and the working class. If power is to be rebalanced on a stabler, less crisis-prone footing, these groups' participation must not be symbolic or temporary, but sustained and institutionalized.

The future of democracy in the Global South lies in its ability to embrace complexity and contestation.

Chapter 8

DEMOCRACY IN THE FUTURE: SHAPING INFLUENCES

The future of democracy in Africa and the broader Global South is increasingly shaped by forces beyond traditional electoral politics.

The future of democracy in Africa and the broader Global South is increasingly shaped by forces beyond traditional electoral politics. Climate change, digital innovation and natural resource governance have emerged as defining arenas where democratic principles are being tested, renegotiated and potentially redefined. These overlapping domains demand a rethinking of democracy—not only as a system of voting and representation but as a dynamic process of inclusion, justice and responsive governance. One of the strongest themes that emerged was the intrinsic connection between democracy and climate justice. Across the continent, communities most affected by climate impacts are often the least represented in decision-making processes. Democracy in this context must go beyond the procedural and electoral; it must become a vehicle for ensuring that those most vulnerable to environmental degradation—youth, women, Indigenous populations and rural communities—have a voice in determining climate policies and resource distribution.

This intersectionality calls for a broader definition of democratic participation, one that embeds climate justice into governance frameworks. Efforts such as grassroots climate justice schools and youth-led organizing platforms offer promising pathways to amplify marginalized voices and democratize climate advocacy. Yet challenges persist, especially around financing for climate action. The inequity of global climate finance was highlighted as a structural injustice that undermines the sovereignty and long-term development of African nations. A future-oriented democracy must therefore include the power to negotiate fair climate deals, shape global narratives and build pan-African and South–South solidarity in the fight for environmental equity.

Alongside climate justice, the governance of digital technologies—particularly artificial intelligence (AI)—emerged as a critical frontier for democratic resilience. Technology offers new tools for civic engagement, political transparency and electoral participation. However, it also poses serious risks. The rise of opaque, algorithmic decision making, or ‘black box’ systems, threatens to undermine the accountability that democracy relies on. In contexts where biometric data is misinterpreted or AI-driven systems fail to recognize cultural and physical diversity, entire communities face new forms of risk, exclusion and disenfranchisement.

There was a clear warning against the unchecked adoption of digital technologies without robust safeguards. AI is not neutral but reflects the values, biases and limitations of those who design and deploy it. Without regulatory frameworks grounded in human rights and democratic oversight, digital systems can exacerbate inequality and erode trust in electoral processes. The conversation called for Africa to develop its own regulatory and technological capacity to ensure that digital infrastructure is locally governed, data sovereignty is protected and technologies are designed with transparency, fairness and inclusion at their core.

The governance of Africa’s vast mineral wealth was the third major strand of the discussion, framed as both a challenge and a powerful opportunity. As the world shifts towards green energy, African countries find themselves central to the global supply chain of critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt and rare earths. Yet the paradox remains: while the continent is rich in resources, the benefits rarely reach the communities where extraction occurs. Too often, resource governance is dominated by opaque deals, elite capture and weak regulatory oversight. A democratic approach to mineral governance would demand meaningful participation of affected communities, public transparency in contracts and revenues, and policies designed to ensure intergenerational equity. The promise of the energy transition cannot become another extractive cycle that reproduces old patterns of exploitation. Instead, democratic futures must be rooted in fair benefit-sharing, strong local institutions and the prioritization of citizen welfare over short-term profit or geopolitical competition.

The old boundaries between political rights and socio-economic rights are dissolving; in their place must emerge a new democratic ethic—one that reflects the complex realities of today and anticipates the needs of future generations. Whether through shared technological standards, climate diplomacy or collaborative policy design, the path forward lies in South–South cooperative action and mutual learning. This solidarity must challenge extractive global systems while strengthening internal democratic capacity at all levels.

Finally, shaping the future of democracy requires vigilance, innovation and bold leadership. It requires resisting the temptation to digitize exclusion, greenwash inequality or abnegate decision making to unregulated AI and other extractive industries. It instead requires investing in people, movements and institutions

Without regulatory frameworks grounded in human rights and democratic oversight, digital systems can exacerbate inequality and erode trust in electoral processes.

that can hold new and established power to account. Self-determination and justice extend beyond elections and courts to ecosystems, technologies and economies. The message was clear: democracy's future must be actively constructed, not passively inherited. And in that construction, the Global South has both the agency and the responsibility to lead.

Chapter 9

REFLECTIONS: RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY AS A PATHWAY TO JUSTICE, DIGNITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The reflection moments of the High-Level Dialogue echoed with clarity, urgency and moral conviction. They were a reaffirmation that democracy, while under siege globally, remains one of the most vital instruments for human dignity, equity and transformative justice. Against the backdrop of intensifying authoritarianism, civic resistance across the Global South continues to generate hope and momentum for a new democratic horizon—one rooted in the lived experiences and material struggles of ordinary people.

A sharp critique of neoliberal orthodoxy also emerged—specifically, the notion that markets alone can deliver human flourishing. The dominant economic model, by privileging profit over people, has undermined social cohesion and eroded public trust in democratic institutions. A bold counterargument was made: that the state must reclaim its rightful role in advancing public goods, regulating capital and redistributing resources to enable inclusion and justice. In this context, democracy must be defended not just at the ballot box, but in budgeting processes, public service delivery and socio-economic planning.

This reimagining requires a new democratic ethos—one that integrates political rights with economic and social rights. It calls for a shift from tokenistic participation to meaningful inclusion, particularly of youth, women and structurally marginalized communities. In Africa, where the majority population is young, the exclusion of youth from formal political processes is a democratic failure that cannot be ignored. The future of democracy depends on intergenerational renewal, and on building political systems that reflect the aspirations, insights and agency of the continent's young people.

Another critical thread explored was the deep and organic relationship between democracy and human rights—two principles that are not separate, but mutually reinforcing. The ability to vote means little without food on the table, education for one's children or access to healthcare. At the same time, the provision of these socio-economic goods remains vulnerable in the absence of democratic accountability, rule of law and citizen voice. In this framing,

The future of democracy depends on intergenerational renewal, and on building political systems that reflect the aspirations, insights, and agency of the continent's young people.

democracy cannot be measured solely by the occurrence of elections or the presence of civil liberties, but by whether people are able to live in dignity. This insight also challenged narrow interpretations of human rights that prioritize civil and political freedoms while sidelining socio-economic rights as secondary or aspirational. The enduring struggle for a global recognition of the right to development was invoked as a cornerstone in this broader fight for justice—particularly for countries in the Global South, where the barriers to democratic agency are often materially entrenched. For those living in poverty or precarity, the capacity to participate meaningfully in political life is constrained not by apathy, but by structural exclusion. Development, in this context, is not presented as a sequential precondition for democracy, but as a necessary enabler of full democratic participation.

Today's democratic battles cannot be waged in isolation.

The geopolitical dynamics of democracy were also brought to the fore. The uneven global terrain—where some actors in the Global North preach democratic norms while obstructing structural reforms in multilateral arenas—was met with sober critique. Yet rather than retreat into cynicism, the discussion called for renewed solidarity across the Global South. There was a powerful recognition that today's democratic battles cannot be waged in isolation. Movements resisting authoritarianism in Latin America, Africa and Asia share common struggles. Their strength lies in deepening transnational solidarity and learning from each other's innovations and resilience.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A LIVING DEMOCRACY ROOTED IN JUSTICE, SOLIDARITY AND TRANSFORMATION

In a global moment characterized by democratic backsliding, intensifying climate emergencies, protracted armed conflicts and mounting humanitarian crises—from the Sahel to Gaza, Sudan to Myanmar—this High-Level Dialogue unfolded as a defiant and hopeful act of collective imagination.

From across Africa and the broader Global South, voices converged to ask not whether democracy is still viable, but how it must be redefined to remain meaningful in the lives of ordinary people. What emerged was neither nostalgia for past models nor blind optimism for inherited systems. Instead, there was a clear-eyed recognition that many postcolonial democracies, though hard-won, have remained incomplete—captured by elite interests, constrained by inherited liberal frameworks and often detached from the material needs of their people. The conference illuminated the structural and ideological limits of procedural democracy: elections alone cannot address chronic poverty, youth marginalization, gender inequality or environmental collapse. Nor are they sufficient to resist the resurgence of authoritarianism, which increasingly exploits democratic institutions to consolidate illiberal power. In many contexts, authoritarian movements manipulate electoral processes—abiding by formal rules while hollowing out their substance—to legitimize their hold on power. This strategy, cloaked in legalism, allows them to restrict opposition, capture institutions and rewrite constitutions under the guise of democratic renewal. Selective populism further compounds the threat by appealing to majoritarian sentiment while excluding or vilifying minorities and dissenting voices. Without safeguards for a level electoral playing field—such as media freedom, independent oversight and equal access to political participation—elections risk becoming instruments of authoritarian entrenchment rather than democratic expression.

Throughout the sessions, a new vision of democracy took shape—one that is fundamentally anchored in socio-economic and environmental justice. There was a strong call to integrate democratic values into the governance of natural resources, to regulate emerging digital technologies through equity-

centred frameworks, and to build civic power that is capable of shaping—not just surviving—political systems. The centrality of women, youth, Indigenous peoples and other historically marginalized groups was seen as the condition of possibility for any just and sustainable democracy. Moreover, the emphasis on regional and South–South solidarity reflected a growing awareness that democracy cannot be secured in isolation. Authoritarianism is increasingly transnational—reinforced through shared repression tactics, financial flows and digital surveillance. The response, therefore, must be equally interconnected. The convergence of movements, institutions and ideas across the Global South is not only strategic, it is necessary. From Dakar to Dhaka, Lusaka to La Paz, new democratic imaginaries are being forged through collective struggle and mutual learning.

**Democracy,
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What ultimately crystallized in Pretoria was a call to action: to reclaim democracy from cynicism and co-option, and to root it in the everyday struggles for food, work, dignity and voice. The democracy that must now be built is not one of rituals without results, but one that delivers decent livelihoods, protects the Earth and restores public trust. It is a democracy that listens and learns from below, evolves in response to complexity, and does not confuse institutional form with political substance. The close of the dialogue was marked by a sense of forward momentum—a renewed commitment to deepen democratic practice, expand civic agency and forge multilateral, people-centred partnerships. The dream of democracy, it was affirmed, lives in the will of communities to fight for systems that reflect their realities, honour their histories and secure their futures. Democracy, reimagined and reclaimed, remains the most powerful architecture for building just, inclusive and resilient societies across the Global South.

Chapter 11

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerged from the deliberations and are proposed as pathways to deepen democratic governance and resilience in Africa and the Global South:

1. *Strengthen legal and institutional frameworks for democratic governance, including electoral laws, constitutional safeguards and independent judicial mechanisms.* A robust democratic system requires the foundation of credible, enforceable and contextually relevant laws. Participants stressed the urgent need for reforming outdated electoral laws, enhancing constitutional guarantees and safeguarding the independence of judiciaries to protect against executive overreach. This includes ensuring judicial appointments are transparent and merit-based, and that constitutional provisions are not easily amendable for political gain.
2. *Enhance civic education and political literacy, particularly targeting youth and first-time voters through digital and community-based platforms.* A politically informed citizenry is critical for a healthy democracy. The dialogue highlighted the information gap among youth and first-time voters, often exploited by disinformation campaigns. Civic education initiatives—leveraging schools, radio, social media and local non-governmental organizations—must equip citizens with knowledge of their rights, voting processes and the importance of democratic participation.
3. *Institutionalize inclusive participation by ensuring gender parity and the meaningful involvement of youth, persons with disabilities and Indigenous communities.* True democracy must reflect the voices of all citizens. Participants called for concrete measures such as quotas, accessibility reforms and cultural recognition to ensure the active inclusion of historically marginalized groups. Gender parity in leadership positions, youth parliaments and disability-inclusive electoral processes were cited as examples of actionable reforms.

4. *Promote electoral justice through independent courts, trained electoral judges and accessible electoral dispute mechanisms.* Without trusted mechanisms for dispute resolution, fairness of elections is undermined. The dialogue emphasized the need for impartial electoral courts, the professionalization of election judges and simplified grievance procedures that are accessible to all citizens regardless of location or socio-economic status. This would increase public trust in electoral outcomes and reduce the risk of post-election violence.
5. *Establish regional mechanisms such as an African Independent Electoral Commission to ensure electoral transparency and harmonization of democratic standards.* Cross-border learning and shared accountability mechanisms were recommended to raise electoral standards across the continent. An African Independent Electoral Commission could serve as a technical body to offer peer review, observer missions and capacity development, while also serving as a buffer against manipulation of electoral processes.
6. *Bridge the civic–state divide via participatory budgeting, citizen monitoring frameworks and devolved governance structures.* To counter growing disillusionment with state institutions, citizens must be given real power in decision-making processes. Participatory budgeting and citizen oversight of service delivery were proposed to enhance accountability, while devolution of power to local governments can enable more responsive governance tailored to community needs.
7. *Develop regulatory frameworks for AI and digital technologies to prevent disenfranchisement and abuse in electoral and governance systems.* The rise of AI and digital tools has transformed political engagement but also presents risks of surveillance, disinformation and algorithmic bias. The dialogue called for Africa-led digital governance frameworks that protect human rights, prevent manipulation of electoral outcomes and ensure equitable access to digital tools for civic participation.
8. *Anchor democratic practice in economic and climate justice, ensuring democratic and redistributive governance over minerals, land and public goods.* Participants emphasized that democracy must deliver material benefits to citizens, especially in resource-rich contexts. Equitable access to land, water, minerals and clean energy were seen as foundational to democratic legitimacy. Integrating environmental sustainability and socio-economic equity into governance systems is vital for long-term democratic resilience.
9. *Launch multi-stakeholder regional coalitions to protect civic space and counter authoritarianism.* With civic space shrinking in many parts of Africa and the Global South, there is a need for regional alliances involving civil society, independent media, academic institutions and international actors. These coalitions would collectively advocate for rights protections, monitor civic freedoms and provide solidarity to actors under threat.

10. *Institutionalize the High-Level Dialogue on Reimagining Democracy in Africa as an annual platform.* To sustain momentum, deepen comparative learning and reinforce collaborative democratic action, it is recommended that the High-Level Dialogue be convened annually. This platform should serve as a forum for tracking progress, generating actionable insights and strengthening solidarity across regions. A call is made to funders—among them the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and other international partners—to provide consistent support for such initiatives that promote democratic resilience and regional cooperation.
11. *Scale peer-learning platforms across the Global South to share innovations in youth engagement, electoral transparency and inclusive policymaking.* Countries across the Global South are experimenting with democratic innovations. The dialogue proposed regional hubs and digital platforms for sharing tools, methodologies and lessons—from youth-led political mobilization to tech-enabled election monitoring and community-driven policymaking—fostering a culture of mutual learning and support.
12. *Leverage South Africa's upcoming G20 presidency to advance a Global South-driven agenda on democracy and development.* South Africa's G20 leadership presents a strategic opportunity to push for a development-focused democratic agenda that reflects Southern priorities. Delegates proposed using the G20 platform to elevate issues such as inclusive governance, fair trade, global digital equity and reparative economic frameworks.
13. *Mobilize support for the United Nations Convention on the Right to Development, reinforcing the indivisibility of civil, political, economic and social rights.* Recognizing that political rights alone cannot guarantee human dignity, the dialogue advocated for stronger endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development. This would cement the principle that development—both individual and collective—is a human right, and that social justice must underpin all governance and policy frameworks.
14. *Institutionalize follow-up mechanisms to track progress on recommendations and ensure sustained accountability.* To avoid the pattern of conferences without impact, participants recommended that concrete follow-up systems be established. These could include annual review forums, civil society tracking dashboards, or parliamentary scorecards to monitor the implementation of reforms agreed upon in this and similar meetings.
15. *Reimagine democracy as a lived, inclusive practice that delivers equity, dignity and development.* The final and overarching recommendation was to shift the framing of democracy from a static model to a dynamic, evolving practice rooted in people's lived experiences. Delegates affirmed that the

problem is not with democratic ideals, but with forms of democracy that fail to adapt to social realities and imperatives of justice. A democracy rooted in care, justice and collective well-being must be co-created with the people it seeks to serve.

Annex A. The Pretoria Consensus

COMMUNIQUÉ ARISING FROM THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON REIMAGINING DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA: COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Preamble

We, the participants of the high-level dialogue held from 19 to 20 June 2025, under the theme ‘Reimagining Democracy in Africa: Comparative Experiences from the Global South’, co-convened by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the African Union (AU), the Open Society Foundations, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the European Union and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) of the Republic of South Africa, hereby issue this communiqué.

The high-level dialogue brought together over 200 stakeholders from across Africa and the Global South, including state actors, parliamentarians, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth organizations, academics, media outlets and representatives of regional bodies such as the African Union (AU), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), SADC Secretariat, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations-Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA) and various electoral management bodies (EMBs). These diverse stakeholders participated in discussions that underscored the need for a fundamental reimagination of democracy, recognizing that the democratic frameworks inherited or adopted by many nations must evolve to meet the dynamic realities of contemporary governance challenges.

Acknowledging the context and background

It was noted by participants that the trajectory of democracy, especially in Africa, has been deeply influenced by historical legacies, colonialism and the complexities of state-building. In this context, the high-level dialogue recognized that democracy must transcend the procedural aspects of elections and political representation, emphasizing the deeper, substantive dimensions of governance that directly impact the lives of ordinary citizens.

In many African countries, the process of democratization has been accompanied by challenges such as poverty, inequality, exclusion and the persistence of state fragility. Noting that these issues persist despite the adoption of democratic frameworks, the high-level dialogue affirmed that the crisis faced by many democracies in the Global South is a crisis of substance rather than form. Speakers collectively emphasized that democracy, in its current form, often fails to deliver on its promise of development, equality and social justice, particularly for the most marginalized groups.

Reimagining democracy: A decolonial, people-centred vision

The high-level dialogue placed particular emphasis on the need to reimagine democracy through a decolonial and people-centred lens. Conscious of the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism, participants affirmed that Africa’s democratic project must be grounded in the continent’s own histories, cultures and struggles for justice. It was recognized that Africa’s

democratic vision should not be dictated by externally imposed models but must reflect the aspirations, values, and social realities of African societies. In this regard, the high-level dialogue commended the efforts of social movements and organizations across the continent that have worked to reclaim democracy as a tool for social justice and empowerment.

The high-level dialogue recollects that democracy must be anchored in the lived experiences of ordinary citizens, particularly marginalized groups such as young people, women, people living with disabilities, and rural communities. It was appreciated that the voices and leadership of these groups must be central to any reimagining of democratic practice in Africa. We urge that their active participation and leadership be prioritized, not merely as tokens of inclusion but as vital contributors to the transformation of governance systems. This requires a paradigm shift from elite bargains and top-down governance models to participatory, transparent and accountable systems that reflect the aspirations of the broader population.

The crisis of democratic substance: A call for transformation

The high-level dialogue highlighted the persistence of poverty, exclusion and inequality in many democratic systems, emphasizing that while formal democratic institutions like elections and political parties are essential, they are insufficient to ensure citizens' well-being or societal development. Noting the failure of many governments in the Global South to fulfil promises of equitable growth and social justice, participants affirmed that the crisis in democratic governance stems not from procedural failures, but from a lack of democratic substance. The dialogue warned against complacency in focusing solely on formal democratic processes, stressing the need to address deeper issues of economic justice, social equity and human dignity. Participants emphasized that true democracy must fulfil both procedural and substantive rights, including access to quality public services, dignity, and participation in decision-making. The participants recommended redefining democratic governance in the Global South to prioritize not just electoral mechanics, but the tangible outcomes democracy should deliver, particularly for historically excluded groups.

The role of participatory and inclusive governance

Acknowledging current global political developments, the high-level dialogue participants expressed concern over the rising tide of authoritarianism and the growing erosion of democratic norms across the Global South, highlighting increasing threats to political freedoms, civil liberties and institutional integrity. Raising concern about the growing trend of populism, elite capture and abuse of power under the guise of democracy, participants emphasized the need for an inclusive, participatory governance model. It was noted that democracy must be about more than just elections—it must be about ensuring that the voices of all citizens, particularly the most marginalized, are central to the decision-making processes.

The high-level dialogue encouraged the promotion of participatory governance systems that enable citizens, particularly those from historically excluded groups, to have a voice in shaping the policies that affect them. In this regard, the high-level dialogue highlighted the importance of fostering inclusive democratic practices that are rooted in local realities. This includes ensuring that democratic processes are not only about formal participation in elections but also about active, continuous engagement in governance at all levels. The high-level dialogue emphasized that participatory governance must be institutionalized as a right, not as a favour, and that it must reflect the needs and aspirations of ordinary people.

The need for stronger regional mechanisms and multilateralism

Drawing on comparative experiences from Sudan, South Africa and other Global South contexts, the high-level dialogue emphasized the importance of strengthening regional and continental mechanisms to safeguard democracy and constitutional order. Noting the growing challenges to democratic governance within the region, including military coups, authoritarian regimes and the suppression of civil society, participants urged greater political will from regional organizations, particularly the African Union (AU), to uphold democratic principles and safeguard civic space.

The high-level dialogue participants commended the AU for its efforts in promoting democratic governance across the continent but raised concern about the gaps in the implementation of its norms and standards, particularly in relation to unconstitutional changes of government and the protection of human rights. In this context, the high-level dialogue recommended that the AU and other regional bodies strengthen their roles in fostering democratic consolidation and in providing support to member states facing democratic backsliding. This includes ensuring that regional organizations are adequately resourced and politically empowered to respond to emerging democratic challenges.

Reclaiming the social contract for democratic renewal

The high-level dialogue noted the critical need to reclaim and strengthen the social contract, emphasizing that democracy must be understood as a continuous, participatory practice. Acknowledging the central role of youth, women and people with disabilities in driving democratic renewal, the participants expressed concern over their marginalization in post-conflict political structures, which undermines efforts towards genuine democratic transformation. The high-level dialogue recognized that the collapse of the social contract in many African nations is a result of the betrayal of the promise. The participants stressed the need for a fundamental shift in political power dynamics to prioritize economic democracy and social justice.

Appreciating the importance of global solidarity, the participants emphasized that solidarity must go beyond rhetoric, with practical exchanges of strategies and resources to support movements fighting for justice, accountability and civic space. Encouraging the expansion of civic participation at all levels, the participants reminded governments to ensure the inclusion of marginalized voices in decision-making processes, ensuring that the social contract reflects the needs and aspirations of all citizens. The participants recommended the reclaiming of democracy as a daily practice, urging all actors to remain committed to justice, equity and accountable governance to benefit all citizens.

Strengthening electoral democracy

The high-level dialogue highlighted the essential role of elections in maintaining democratic integrity, while acknowledging the challenges faced by electoral systems in an evolving world. Emphasizing that elections alone do not guarantee democracy, participants raised concern about the need for continuous adaptation to political, technological and environmental changes to safeguard electoral integrity and public trust. The high-level dialogue emphasized that electoral systems must be continually revised to remain resilient and responsive. The importance of citizen engagement was stressed, with a focus on ensuring that marginalized groups have an active role in electoral processes.

Furthermore, the high-level dialogue also highlighted the need for responsible use of technology to maintain transparency and the critical role of the judiciary in ensuring electoral justice. Addressing concerns over political finance, the high-level dialogue urged a rethink of systems to enable broader participation, particularly for women and young people. The need for continuous reform, post-election evaluations and enhanced civic education was acknowledged to ensure informed citizen participation. The participants called for ongoing electoral reform, robust citizen engagement, responsible use of technology and strong electoral justice systems. Participants urged all stakeholders to work together to create inclusive electoral systems that strengthen democracy and foster public trust across the Global South.

Democratic transitions in the Global South

The high-level dialogue on democratic transitions in the Global South emphasized that these transitions are complex and ongoing, requiring continuous negotiation, societal inclusion and the pursuit of both political and socio-economic freedoms. Participants recognized that South Africa's transition resulted from prolonged negotiations, highlighting the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in fostering dialogue. Reflecting on South America, the dialogue stressed that democratization is a continuous struggle, particularly for marginalized groups like women and Indigenous communities, and raised concerns about the escalation of far-right movements. In Bangladesh, the importance of independent journalism was acknowledged, with warnings about the risks of social media spreading disinformation. In Africa, while political freedoms have progressed, concerns about economic inequality and social injustice were raised, emphasizing the need for inclusive transitions. The dialogue reaffirmed that successful transitions require ongoing collaboration, institutional reforms and a comprehensive approach to measuring democracy focusing on economic, social, and cultural rights. The dialogue concluded by urging future transitions to focus on marginalized groups, ensuring transformative change, and encouraging the exchange of best practices.

Addressing the impact of emerging global challenges

The dialogue highlighted the critical intersection of democracy, governance, climate justice and technological impacts on democratic systems, particularly in Africa and the Global South. Participants emphasized the need for inclusive and equitable democratic frameworks that address evolving challenges, including the integration of marginalized voices in decision-making, particularly regarding climate justice. Raising concern over disproportionate climate financing burdens on African nations, despite their minimal contribution to global emissions, the dialogue applauded initiatives empowering young people to advocate for climate justice. Noting the growing role of digital technologies in electoral processes, especially AI, participants raised concern about biases that may disenfranchise voters, urging the development of robust regulatory frameworks and local capacity building. The dialogue also acknowledged Africa's critical role in the global energy transition and urged stronger democratic governance in the management of mineral resources. Emphasizing the importance of South-South solidarity and regional cooperation, participants recommended an integrated approach to governance that balances technological innovation with social and environmental justice. We called for sustained efforts to ensure future generations are empowered to shape their political and socio-economic futures inclusively and sustainably.

In conclusion, the high-level dialogue emphasized that reimagining democracy in Africa and the Global South must be rooted in inclusivity, social justice and participatory governance. The participants commended the efforts of various regional bodies, civil society organizations and grassroots movements in advancing democratic principles but warned that the fragility of

democracy remains a pressing challenge. To ensure that democracy delivers on its promises, the high-level dialogue urged all stakeholders—governments, international organizations and civil society—to collaborate in creating more resilient, inclusive and accountable democratic systems.

The high-level dialogue reaffirmed that democracy is not a borrowed project but a universal aspiration that must be shaped by the agency of the people. We called for a renewed commitment to democratic practices that prioritize the needs and aspirations of all citizens, particularly those who have been historically excluded. This vision of democracy, grounded in the realities of the Global South, will require bold political leadership, a commitment to deep reforms, and the active participation of all citizens in shaping the future of their societies.

Issued on 20 June 2025 in Pretoria.

Annex B. Conference agenda

Directors of ceremony:

- Nthabiseng Malefane, Acting Chief Director, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, DIRCO
- Winluck Wahiu, Senior Advisor for Constitution-Building Processes, Africa and West Asia Region, International IDEA

Day 1: 19 June 2025

08:30–09:30—Registration and welcome

09:30–10:15—**Session 1: Opening session**

- Marino Cuenat, Deputy Head of Mission at the Swiss Embassy in South Africa
- Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General, International IDEA
- Chukuemeka Eze, Director, Democratic Futures in Africa, Open Society Foundations
- Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioners for Political Affairs, Peace and Security
- Thandi Moraka, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Republic of South Africa

10:15–10:30—Keynote address: H. E. Dr Abdalla Hamdok, former Prime Minister of Sudan; and former Deputy Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Moderator: Peter Ndoro, Broadcast Journalist

10:30–10:45—Group photo

10:45–11:00—Tea break

11:00–12:30—**Session 2: Democracy retrenchment and new forms of democracy in the Global South**

Lead Speaker: Retselisitsoe Phooko, Faculty of Law, University of Fort Hare

Discussants:

- Bruno P. W. Reis, Professor at Federal University of Minas Gerais and President of the Brazilian Political Science Association

- Norshahril Saat, Senior Fellow, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (Singapore)
- Ikram Ben Said, Tunisian feminist, Co-Founder and Co-President of New Visions
- Nkata Murungi, Professor and Director, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria

Moderator: Roba D. Sharamo, Regional Director, Africa and West Asia, International IDEA

12:30–14:00—**Session 3: Democracy and development: Lessons from the Global South**

Speakers:

- Batlokoa Makong, Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer, African Peer Review Mechanism
- Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, Director, Department of Social Inclusion, Organization of American States (OAS)
- Ambassador Diar Nurbintoro, Director, Non-Aligned Movement Centre for South-South Technical Cooperation (SSTC)
- Sithembile Mbete, Executive Director, Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), Senior Lecturer at the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria
- Fadel Barro, Civic Activist, Afrikki Mwindi, Senegal

Moderator: Kula Ishmael Theletsane, Director of the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Affairs, SADC

15:20–16:50—**Session 4: Comparative experiences on the quality of institutional representation (supranational, national and local)**

Speakers:

- Supra Obakeng Ramoeletsi Mahumapelo, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation, National Assembly, South Africa
- Indira Rana, Deputy Speaker, House of Representatives, Federal Parliament of Nepal
- Chief Fortune Charumbira, President, Pan-African Parliament (PAP)
- Rasheed Draman, Executive Director, African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs (ACEPA)

Moderator: Dithapelo Lefoko Keorapetse, Speaker of the National Assembly, Botswana

End of day one

Day 2: 20 June 2025

09:00–10:30—Session 5: Reclaiming the social contract: Civic participation, development justice and democratic renewal

Speakers:

- Kholood Khair, Women's Rights Activist, Sudan, Founder of Confluence Advisory
- Marisol García Apagüño, President, Federation of Kichwa Indigenous Peoples of Chazuta Amazonas (Fepikecha), Member of the Board of Directors of the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSEP), Peru
- Gift Ostallos Siziba, alumnus and co-facilitator for the Obama Foundations for Africa 2024–2025 cohort; alumnus of the Mandela Washington Fellowship; and former Member of Parliament in Zimbabwe
- Sandun Thudugala, Head of Programmes, Law and Society Trust, Sri Lanka

Moderator: Hespina Rukato, Africa Director, Crisis Action; former Deputy CEO for New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); former Deputy Chief of Staff of the African Union Commission (AUC); Author of 'Future Africa: Prospects for Democracy and Development'

10:45–12:15—Session 6: Comparative experiences on strengthening electoral democracy

Speakers:

- Mosotho Moepya, Chairperson, Independent Electoral Commission of South Africa
- Hon. Justice Robert Limo, Judiciary Elections Committee (Kenya)
- Norma Irene De La Cruz Magaña, Councillor, El Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE), Mexico
- Mbali Ntuli, Executive Director, Ground Work Collective, South Africa
- Robert Gerenge, Regional Advisor, Elections, UNDP Bureau for Africa

Moderator: Olufunto Akinduro, Senior Adviser, Electoral Processes, Africa and West Asia, International IDEA

12:15–13:20—Session 7: Comparative experiences on democratic transitions in the Global South

Speakers:

- Flávia Biroli, Professor at the Institute of Political Science, University of Brasília
- Ursula van Beek, Professor and Director of the Centre for Research on Democracy at Stellenbosch University

- Ikhtisad Ahmed, Managing Director, Netra News, Bangladesh
- Thomas Ouedraogo, Executive Director, Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique, Burkina Faso

Moderator: Cynthia Chigwenya, former Africa Youth Ambassador for Peace (AYAP)

14:20–15:30—**Session 8: Democracy in the future: Shaping influences** Speakers:

- Marit Kitaw, former Interim Director of the African Minerals Development Centre (AMDC), currently in charge of the minerals portfolio at UN-ECA
- Ann Makena Kobia, Climate Change Expert, Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)
- Ousmane Maiga, Spécialiste Renforcement Capacités et Innovations, Association des jeunes pour la citoyenneté active et la démocratie (AJCAD), Mali
- Samson Itodo, Executive Director, Yiaga Africa, Member of International IDEA Board of Advisers and Member of the AU Advisory Group on AI
- Moderator: Gram Matenga, Regional Head of Programmes, Africa and West Asia, International IDEA

15:30–15:45—Session 9: **Pretoria Consensus**: Reading of the communique: Ms Mpule Kgets, African Union Youth Ambassador for Peace (AYAP), Southern Africa Region

15:45–16:30—**Session 10: Closing ceremony**

Speakers:

- Kevin-Casas Zamora, Secretary-General, International IDEA
- Pedro Abramovay, Vice President, Programmes, Open Society Foundations
- Nthabiseng Malefane, Acting Chief Director, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, DIRCO

Moderator: Winluck Wahiu, Senior Advisor for Constitution-Building Processes, Africa and West Asia Region, International IDEA

18:00–21:00—Dinner event for International IDEA's 30th anniversary commemoration

End of event

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 35 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

WHAT WE DO

We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion 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 Democracy Tracker.

We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials and civil society. We develop tools and publish databases, books and primers in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas.

We bring states and non-state actors together for dialogues and lesson sharing. We stand up and speak out to promote and protect democracy worldwide.

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.

OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

We have a catalogue with more than 1,000 publications and over 25 databases on our website. Most of our publications can be downloaded free of charge.

<<https://www.idea.int>>

The future of democracy in Africa and the broader Global South is increasingly shaped by forces beyond traditional electoral politics. Climate change, digital innovation and natural resource governance have emerged as defining arenas where democratic principles are being tested, renegotiated and potentially redefined. These overlapping domains demand a rethinking of democracy—not only as a system of voting and representation but as a dynamic process of inclusion, justice and responsive governance.

International IDEA together with the South Africa Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), the Open Society Foundations (OSF), the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Switzerland), the African Union (AU) and the European Union convened a High-Level Dialogue under the theme ‘Reimagining Democracy in Africa: Comparative Experiences from the Global South’, at the DIRCO Headquarters in Pretoria, South Africa, on 19–20 June 2025. This event report is a summary of deliberations from the two-day event that culminated in the [Pretoria Consensus](#). The event brought together esteemed democracy and governance experts from the AU, senior government officials, think tanks, International IDEA Member States, representatives from regional economic commissions, electoral management body networks, parliaments, judiciary, civil society and social movements across the Global South.