

RETHINKING DEMOCRACY

#RethinkingDemocracy

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High Level Segment

CLUB DE MADRID ANNUAL POLICY DIALOGUE



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Policy Dialogue 2021 Rethinking Democracy

Concluding Document

Our commitment to democracy

1. Club de Madrid's founding conference was organized in October 2001 with the sole purpose of contributing to the protection and promotion of democracy worldwide. Twenty years later, our mandate remains more relevant than ever.
2. We commemorate our anniversary by reaffirming our firm commitment to the most basic principles and values of democracy, including the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; separation of powers; checks and balances; independence of the judiciary; respect for the rule of law; a pluralistic system of political parties and organisations; free, fair and periodic elections; accountability and transparency; and free, independent and pluralistic media.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/59/201 remains an international reference on the *essential elements of democracy*. It represents and consolidates international consensus on what democracy means and how it should function.

3. Democracy must be protected, nurtured and promoted by all means. As democratic former Heads of State and Government, we understand the magnitude of the challenges it faces. This is a lifetime and shared endeavour. No single nation, government, or society, can take democracy for granted. We must all remain vigilant and stand ready to act at warning signs of democratic backsliding.
4. The state of democracy in 2021 compels us to profoundly reflect on the nature of the challenges and threats being faced in mature and younger democracies alike. Democracy was already being tested in significant ways well before COVID-19. The pandemic has only aggravated and underlined trends present before and should be considered only one element, amongst many others that are shaking democracy worldwide.
5. Lack of trust in institutions, increasing inequality, persistent patterns of social exclusion, self-serving elites, waning social mobility, political polarization and rising authoritarian tendencies, are only a few examples of the numerous challenges confronting democracy across the globe. Restoring trust will be critical for the future of our democracies. Responsible leadership,

accountability, resilient institutions and inclusive representation are key elements in which democratic societies should invest all efforts.

6. We remain firm in our conviction that despite the failings and demands for improvement, Liberal Democracy remains the best system of government. Based on strong institutions and strong societies, it provides a balance between stability and freedom that must be preserved and protected.

7. With the support of a unique network of political leaders, expert practitioners and civil society organizations from all over the world, who contributed to the preparation and deliberations during our Policy Dialogue on “Rethinking Democracy”, we, Members of Club de Madrid, present the following reflections and proposals for the protection and renewal of democracy:

The future of democracy, a question of shared responsibility and global solidarity

Protecting and defending democracy is a shared responsibility. All democratic governments should be held accountable for their actions, as must civil society, political parties, the private sector and the media. We need a shared and clear strategy to advance democratic development in a context of uncertainty and fast-paced demands from a changing world.

Protection of democracy must be rooted in a profound democratic culture in which all generations and all members of society, including women, minorities, and marginalized groups have the space to enjoy their rights and assume their responsibilities as liberal democrats.

We welcome the US leadership in organising the 2021/2022 Global Summit for Democracy. This will be an opportunity for partners across the globe to reaffirm the importance of democratic governance after years of democratic decline. It is also an opportunity to craft a common agenda for democratic renewal. We call on participating states and civil society actors to use this opportunity to identify new time-bound commitments towards democracy and remain accountable in their implementation.

We encourage the organizers to broaden the agenda, despite geopolitical interests, and include all pro-democratic voices in the

process, including those coming from non-democratic countries fighting to promote democratic values and principles often at great personal risk.

We should strengthen international democratic unity and set the basis for a renewed coalition for democracy, able to collaborate in solidarity. There is no perfect democracy, and all democratic societies are, by definition, subject to self-assessment and self-improvement. Cooperation in identifying and implementing solutions to common challenges will only strengthen the resilience of our democracies.

Despite domestic challenges and failures abroad, democracy assistance should be maintained, diversified, strengthened and depoliticised. Established democracies should be able to learn from past experiences, relating their support for democracy abroad to national efforts for domestic democratic renewal. We should be able to address misconceptions around the concept of democracy support and project a more balanced perspective that takes into account positive and successful contributions to democratization.

Democracy could benefit from the creation of an international peer-review mechanism on democratic practice. Lessons learned and experiences coming from the United Nations Human Rights Council, the European Union, the African Union, and the OECD DAC can be of useful reference. The appointment of a United Nations Special Rapporteur for Democracy under the mandate of the UN Human Rights Council could be a positive contribution to the quality of democracy worldwide.

Removing the seeds of authoritarianism from our democracies

Contemporary authoritarianism is becoming an existential test for our democratic societies. We are being confronted by both consolidated authoritarian regimes and by authoritarian and populist movements within our societies. We must be aware of the threat that the rise of political nationalist ideologies and the increasing use of divisive rhetoric pose to democratic societies and their capacity to respond to global challenges. We should prevent populist nationalism from leading into any form of authoritarianism.

We encourage democratic societies to actively respond to any sign of concentration of power, corruption, erosion of the rule of law and checks and balances, attacks and control mechanisms on the media and civil society organizations, attempts to undermine the judiciary, and restrictions to civil liberties among other authoritarian practices.

We should be able to respond and put a brake on these before it is too late.

All democracies should work together in opposing and countering interferences and attacks from authoritarian regimes – transnational repression, cyberattacks, disinformation, digital authoritarianism, demographic and economic coercion. Those who Foster authoritarianism might say democracy is not an effective way to address global challenges. They are wrong. Challenges to democracy must be addressed with more democracy.

We call on democratic governments and their leaders to reaffirm their determination to protect democratic values and support other democracies in countering authoritarianism. Democracies should work together to defend those struggling to conquer or preserve their rights and freedom and counter repressive tactics of authoritarian regimes targeting and silencing opponents beyond their national borders.

Early-warning systems are a critical tool for countering authoritarianism, but they need to be accompanied by decisive and timely actions by intergovernmental organizations, democratic governments and civil society. Democracies should tread carefully when engaging with authoritarian regimes, as they can often seek legitimacy and continuance through small concessions.

COVID-19 restrictions on civil liberties should be introduced only when necessary and have to be defined by law. They should be lifted as soon as public health conditions allow. The pandemic cannot become a pretext for a more controlled form of democracy.

Leadership, an ethics of personal conviction and an ethics of responsibility

As populist leaders and movements increasingly threaten our democracy, responsible political leadership remains a crucial element in countering democratic backsliding. So is corporate and civil society leadership. As democratic former Heads of State and Government, we highlight the importance of ethics, deep-seated values and commitment to the public good.

We recall that good leadership in the 21st century means not just providing for the citizens of our countries but helping to craft a fair and inclusive rules-based global order able to guarantee international peace and global stability.

Our democracies need a radical change in the culture and practice of leadership recruitment. There should be more emphasis on ethical convictions, integrity, commitment to the common good and team building and spirit instead of undue focus on economic or financial performance or individual careers and capacity alone.

Inclusivity is key. Leadership promotion must seek out minorities, women, and youth for key roles. Too many unrepresented voices can foster distrust, breed resentment, and contribute to lingering inequalities.

Countries could benefit from involving the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) (2021b) in planning efforts to strengthen institutional resilience and leadership capacity in the context of the SDGs, especially SDG16.

Combating Corruption and lack of transparency

Corruption remains a perilous threat to democracy. It undermines our institutions and values, erodes trust, and reduces the capacity of our democracies to deliver and respond effectively to people's needs. COVID-19 recovery funds are already generating corruption issues. We call on governments to spare no effort to prevent and combat corruption, strengthen international cooperation and reaffirm their commitment to ending impunity for corruption offences.

We reaffirm our strong support to the United Nations Convention against Corruption as the most comprehensive legally binding universal instrument on corruption, as well as to the political declaration adopted by the United National General Assembly on 4 June 2021, "Our common commitment to effectively addressing challenges and implementing measures to prevent and combat corruption and strengthen international cooperation". Moreover, the existing proposal for the establishment of an International Anti-Corruption Court should be given serious consideration.

We also encourage governments to address campaign finance reforms to reduce the dominance of moneyed interests in democratic elections. There is also a need to establish clear accountability and transparency requirements for lobbying.

Democracy should not surrender to the politics of polarization

We are deeply concerned about the level of political and social polarization affecting our societies. While the liberal order thrives on political differences and the debate of policy issues, excessive polarization can ultimately cripple democracy.

Social divisions are being exploited rather than addressed by opportunistic political actors and the ensuing rise of identity politics – facilitated by social problems long left unattended– threatens political stability and creates openings for demagogic leadership. Populist movements and deeply divided societies are disquietingly endangering political institutions and norms that have long been seen as neutral.

We recognize income disparity and inequality as drivers for discontent and polarisation.

Democracies will need to deal with illiberal movements triggered by frustrations with Covid-19 restrictions and economic consequences and build bridges between liberal and illiberal actors to head off negative clashes after Covid-19 hopefully subsides.

We call on political leaders and parties to leave the “us vs them” rhetoric aside and build a political environment where societies can heal their divisions based on common interests.

A new information ecosystem that serves the public interest

Democracies worldwide are struggling to ensure that the media serve the public interest. Digital transformation shapes the way we access and consume information. Technology has facilitated the rapid growth of digital content, offering new ways for the public to inform and educate itself, but it has also increased the exposure to malicious artificial intelligence that favours sensationalist, bizarre, and hateful material over evidence-based and factual content. This system continues to provide fertile ground for fake news, disinformation, and propaganda. For democracy to thrive, we need a modicum of shared truth.

To succeed in the global fight against authoritarianism, democracies are required to ensure that information ecosystems support safe,

healthy, and fully functioning societies. Citizens and public interest should be at the core of all decision-making.

In the spirit of shared responsibility, we encourage all media outlets, social media platforms, and technology companies to embrace the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to prevent and mitigate adverse human rights impacts arising from the use of their content, platforms and services.

Democracies should support high-quality journalism to counter the current business models and establish mechanisms to support segments of the information ecosystem that provide quality information but cannot sustain themselves within the free market. We encourage countries to pledge support for public interest media and set budgetary targets and mechanisms to accomplish this. Established democracies should also support developing public interest media in countries that face economic hardship and cannot finance this type of initiative.

We encourage governments to implement principles of open government and open data to increase access to information. All stakeholders in the information ecosystem, including governments, civil society and private companies should embrace the concept of radical transparency. By leading in the definition of guiding principles for radical transparency multilateral institutions could improve access to corporate and institutional information by all actors in informational ecosystems.

We encourage leaders within democratic governments, civil society, and industry to pursue public-private partnerships to improve and design digital infrastructure capable of providing services and systems to foster social cohesion, contribute to the creation of shared societies and enable democratic societies to thrive in the digital era. Public-private investment in information awareness and digital literacy training could help foster more responsible information behaviour on the part of citizens. We recall our support for the development of a Social Contract for the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Age as well as a human rights-centred AI International Accord.

We call on democratic governments, civil society, and private companies to implement existing regulation, agreements and codes of conduct to address hate speech both on and offline while respecting freedom of opinion and expression and the right to equality and non-discrimination. Civil society and other democratic stakeholders should assertively engage with social media companies and mobilize their

users to demand resolute action against hate speech. We also call on regional and international institutions, and their member states to introduce normative and regulatory changes to prevent digital violence and harassment against children, women and minorities.

The legislative bodies of democratic states should consider adopting appropriate rules to limit monopolistic practices on social media companies.

Democracy that Delivers

Much of the trust and support of citizens to democracy is related to its capacity to respond to people's needs in a meaningful manner. Democracies need to renew their commitment to a fair, inclusive and sustainable social development, in the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals including social protection and healthcare for all. We support the United Nations Secretary-General's demands for a renewed social contract able to tackle growing inequalities between and within countries and protect the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. We call on democratic nations to use the proposed 2025 World Social Summit as an opportunity to advance in the social development agenda.

The Pandemic has highlighted the need for stronger state capacities to reduce inequality. This should not be detrimental to the quality of democracy. We encourage all governments to ensure that the development of better state services goes hand in hand with wider civic involvement in decision-making. The balance between state effectiveness and fairness should prevail.

Democracy is also about realising results and deliverables. Citizens are demanding a 'Democracy of Results'. The reliability of democracies is based on concrete results that can be meaningful to people.

Responding to emergencies and global challenges

The world is facing complex global challenges that require agile responses from their governments, from pandemics to economic crises, natural disasters, demographic and security challenges. The capacity of democratic leaders and institutions to offer an effective and democratic response to critical risks will determine the resilience of democracy. Fundamental elements of democratic systems, such as the

separation of powers, checks and balances, and citizens' trust in democracy, are all directly impacted by the state's capacity to tackle these challenges.

We call on democratic governments and institutions to devote political attention and resources to strengthen their national emergency preparedness plans before the next crisis hits. These plans should be developed or revised with wide societal involvement, and include provisions for strong oversight and accountability mechanisms in emergency response. Strengthening the role, the independence and the ability of Constitutional Courts to function in an emergency is particularly fundamental to ensure that emergency response does not incur short-term or long-term damage to the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights.

Club de Madrid's Global Commission on Democracies and Emergencies can be an initiative of reference for all democratic states willing to improve their resilience in case of emergencies.

Interacting and working with non-democracies is essential to address global challenges, be they health crises, natural disasters or climatic devastations. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs remain the best framework for dialogue and collaboration to find solutions in the face of emergencies.

Democracy and the rules-based multilateral system

We are witnessing how illiberally inclined states are increasing their influence in regional and international organizations. We call on democratic governments to strictly respect the principles and norms of the Charter of the United Nations and international law in general and to continue working to make sure multilateral institutions reflect the values and principles of democracy, especially human rights.

Protecting Civic Space

It is with great concern that we see how restrictions on civil society organizations are growing in many democracies. Healthy and resilient democracies rely on strong and organized civic participation. Civil society organizations should be able to operate in a safe and free environment. We call on governments to secure administrative and financial support to allow civil society organizations to continue

supporting human rights protection, strengthening independent media, the rule of law, and the accountability of governments and local authorities.

The capacities of civil society organizations operating in hostile, non-democratic environments should be supported. We call on democracies to continue defending and protecting pro-democracy civil society movements abroad.

Ensuring Human Rights protection

The promotion and protection of Human Rights is a basic prerequisite for a democratic society. They should be at the centre of all domestic and foreign policies and remain central to the global conversation on the future of democracy. Civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are not only universal but also indivisible and interrelated in their application, individually and globally.

In our commitment to human rights, we support measures to promote global accountability for human rights violations and to protect human rights defenders, media and journalists, women and marginalized minorities.

Fostering a democratic culture

Democracy requires a culture based on profound democratic principles and values. These values should be fostered through civic education and political empowerment.

We call on governments to invest in civic education in early childhood, primary, and secondary education to achieve greater civic literacy. Civic education can serve to better understand the existing democratic system and to better enable youth to take ownership, innovate and press for democratic reforms.

We encourage governments, civil society and the private sector to support digital literacy programmes, especially for children and youth, so they can learn in a formal setting what it means to be a citizen in the cyber world.

Participatory democracy and inclusive representation

Democracy is not only a matter of voting in every election. Citizens are demanding greater opportunities for participation, including digital. We encourage governments to commit to more participatory democracy, to find ways to institutionalise direct citizen participation and deliberation in formal decision-making processes and help build the capacity of citizens to engage in policymaking by providing services, guidance and tools for participatory and deliberative practices across different levels of governance.

While several countries around the world have taken important steps to improve political participation and leadership of underrepresented communities, women, youth and minorities remain poorly represented in all democracies. We urge democratic governments to improve their position within political decision-making and ensure political empowerment.

The future of democracy will be anchored in the capacity of our societies to promote youth's engagement in politics. We urge governments to open the political space for youth, including young women and girls; to lower the barriers, including financial, for youth participation in democratic processes and institutions; and to promote intergenerational dialogue and equity to make sure the future we create reflects the interests and beliefs of future generations.

Private Sector, promoting good business models for democracy

The private sector plays a fundamental role in protecting and promoting democracy. Their operations and business models have a direct impact on the quality of our democracies. The private sector can help societies to combat authoritarianism, corruption, disinformation and protect human rights, but they also have the capacity to do the opposite.

We encourage the Private Sector to include a “democracy” approach in their corporate social responsibility policies. An approach that would allow companies to reflect on the consequences of their operations and practices in the quality of democracy. We also encourage all stakeholders to include the Private Sector in the global discussions on the future of democracy.

In the spirit of shared responsibility, we, Club de Madrid Members commit to:

→ Counter radical political nationalism and authoritarian advances within our democracies and support other Club de Madrid Members engaged in these efforts.

→ Participate in peer-to-peer initiatives to support current political leaders in meeting the challenges of inclusive democratic governance.

→ Support the promotion of democratic values through civic education.

→ Defend political and civil society leaders against authoritarianism.

→ Advocate for inclusive leadership.

→ Strengthen engagement with non-democratic countries, identifying common ground and ways to collaboratively face and tackle global challenges.

→ Support democracy, shared societies, and a multilateralism conducive to a more democratic world.

→ Strengthen gender equality and participation of women in democratic processes and decision making.

→ Engage with the private sector and the media to promote an information ecosystem that serves the public interest.

→ Explore the establishment of permanent channels of dialogue with democratic activists and between them.