

Regions for Democracy

The Global Network of Regional Governments Committed to Defend and Revitalize Democracy

Short description

Regions for Democracy is an independent, agile and action-oriented global network of democratic regional governments, driven by the priorities of its members and aimed at defending and promoting democracy.

Context and rationale

On the global democratic backsliding

As democratic norms continue to erode globally, **the need to reinforce democratic values has become increasingly urgent**. Across continents, **political systems are veering towards illiberalism and authoritarianism**. Even countries with long-standing democratic traditions are showing signs of fragility, beset by both external pressures and internal threats.

The erosion of liberties, the weakening of the rule of law and the deterioration of institutional checks and balances – once the cornerstone of democratic governance – signal a troubling shift. Minority groups remain exposed and unprotected, societal divisions are intensifying and the credibility of free and fair elections is increasingly being called into question. **In a world shaped by geopolitical competition, many governments are mistaking short-term strategic interests and realpolitik for ignoring the protection of human rights and the promotion of democratic principles**, dismissed as abstract principles with no tangible relevance to citizens' everyday challenges.

But this democratic crisis is not abstract – it carries real, tangible consequences for the daily lives of citizens. **It erodes trust in institutions, weakens cohesion and, crucially, undermines the capacity of governments to respond to economic, environmental and social challenges**. As democratic norms weaken, so does our collective capacity to confront global problems. In an increasingly volatile international environment, **reduced institutional resilience can also make governments more vulnerable to external pressures and unpredictable geopolitical dynamics**, leaving them exposed to erratic decisions of other international players.

Without democratic legitimacy, **multilateral governance also loses effectiveness and credibility**. The failure of democratic systems to cooperate across borders has further fragmented international responses to global warming, pandemics and humanitarian emergencies.

Regional governments as beacons of democracy

Yet amid this democratic backsliding, one consistent trend offers hope: **regional governments continue to enjoy significantly higher levels of public trust than their national counterparts**. Their closeness to citizens and territorial realities enables regional governments to foster inclusive participation, innovate and adapt to changing realities, and respond decisively to emerging threats. This combination of factors positions regional governments as pillars of democratic resilience.



Combining this proximity with policy competences and active engagement in global networks, regional governments are uniquely placed to reconnect democracy and global cooperation. Through practical collaboration on specific challenges, regional governments demonstrate how democratic cooperation delivers tangible results. In doing so, **regional governments help ground international cooperation in real problem-solving, showing that multilateralism is not an abstract ideal but a practical extension of democratic governance** capable of restoring trust, legitimacy and effectiveness in responses to global challenges.

Subnational diplomacy to revamp democracy and multilateralism

Over the past decade, **subnational diplomacy has undergone a notable transformation, becoming increasingly institutionalized as local and regional governments assert themselves on the global stage.** This shift reflects a growing recognition of the role that subnational actors play in addressing transnational challenges.

Despite this progress, **a significant asymmetry persists within subnational diplomacy:** While there are now more than 200 active networks representing local governments worldwide, the institutional framework for regional diplomacy remains comparatively underdeveloped. **Regional governments continue to operate in a fragmented and loosely coordinated environment.**

Crucially, there is a striking gap in the institutional landscape: **no existing network is specifically dedicated to the promotion and defense of democratic values at the regional level.** While some initiatives do engage subnational governments in democracy-related efforts, these are predominantly focused on municipalities. This lack of a dedicated platform underscores a broader challenge: the need to empower regions not only as administrative units but as active defenders of democratic principles and recipients of a democratic mandate. As regions increasingly confront issues such as authoritarian encroachment, disinformation, and democratic backsliding, **the creation of robust, values-driven regional networks could serve as a vital counterbalance – fostering resilience, solidarity, and shared democratic norms across borders.**

This institutional gap is ultimately a symptom of a broader structural limitation related to the **global multilateral system**, centered almost exclusively on nation-states. **The state-centric architecture of the United Nations is ill-equipped to incorporate the voices of citizens, regions, cities and transnational civil society**, leaving global governance disconnected from the lived realities of people. Renewing multilateralism requires expanding the actors and institutions involved in shaping global responses, and **regional governments, with their democratic legitimacy, proximity to citizens, territories and experience in policy implementation, can provide perspectives and solutions that complement those of national governments.**

Mission and vision

Regions for Democracy brings together democratic regional governments committed to defending and revitalizing democracy. Acting as a collective force and a platform for democratic renewal, the network seeks to elevate the role of regional governments in both preventing and responding to the global erosion of democratic values and practices.



This initiative **champions a stronger regional voice in national and international efforts to safeguard democracy**, highlighting the unique capacity of regions to shape inclusive, resilient and participatory governance. Rather than replacing national-level initiatives, it aims to complement and reinforce them – offering a bottom-up approach to protecting free and open societies.

Regions for Democracy is built on the recognition that **today's crisis of democracy is also a crisis of global governance**: as democratic systems weaken, our collective capacity to address global challenges erodes. Strengthening democracy, peace, and multilateralism is therefore a practical necessity for shaping fair, sustainable, and effective responses to shared global threats.

Democratic decline does not occur in isolation; it reverberates across borders, **weakening international cooperation and the very instruments designed to manage interdependence**. When democratic institutions lose legitimacy and accountability, multilateral mechanisms struggle. The renewal of democracy is therefore inseparable from the renewal of multilateralism

Objectives and theory of change

Within the framework of Regions for Democracy, member regional governments will work collaboratively to address shared challenges, including:

- **Promoting democracy** as a prerequisite for **effective, peaceful, and fair responses to global challenges**.
- **Rebuilding trust** in democratic institutions, through **transparency, responsiveness, inclusive governance, and technological innovation**.
- **Promoting multilateralism and multilevel governance as reliable frameworks for cooperation** at a time of growing fragmentation as essential conditions for addressing shared challenges effectively and legitimately.
- **Countering disinformation and misinformation**, which distort public discourse and undermine informed decision-making.
- Addressing challenges posed by the **widespread development and adoption of AI**.
- **Addressing social fragmentation and political polarization**.
- **Countering authoritarianism and recentralisation through decentralisation**, by defending regional autonomy, subsidiarity and the democratic mandate of subnational governments as safeguards against the concentration of power.
- **Revitalizing civic engagement and political participation**, especially among **underrepresented communities**.
- **Educating and engaging younger generations through civic-democratic education**
- Responding to the democratic implications of **migration and demographic shifts**.
- **Safeguarding electoral integrity**, ensuring transparency, fairness, and public trust.
- **Strengthening the rule of law**, by reinforcing judicial independence and access to justice.
- **Protecting media freedom and civil society** as pillars of democratic accountability.
- **Sustaining scientific research** as national support declines.



Regions for Democracy **seeks to protect democracy by focusing on making it functional again – capable of addressing the interconnected crises of our time.** Thus, it positions democratic renewal as an enabling condition for effective climate action, peacebuilding, equitable development, and technological governance, among others. **Democracy must evolve to meet global challenges, or risks becoming irrelevant to them – if not even a victim of them.**

The renewal of democracy requires more than defending existing institutions; **it demands rethinking how democratic systems function in a world transformed by digital disruption, social fragmentation, and global interdependence.** Traditional frameworks struggle to channel citizen participation, rebuild trust, and generate collective strategies capable of responding to today's challenges. **A new generation of democratic mechanisms is therefore needed, combining deliberation, participation, transparency, and technological innovation.**

Regional governments can serve as laboratories for democratic innovation. They possess competences and a scale that is large enough to test meaningful reforms, yet close enough to citizens to ensure participation, legitimacy, and rapid feedback. With their legislative and administrative powers, regions can experiment with new models of deliberation, digital democracy, citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, and open-government frameworks.

Moreover, **democratic innovation must move beyond traditional models and remain open to practices emerging from any part of the world that shares democratic values.** From indigenous governance traditions to digital participation tools, from youth-driven engagement movements to community-centered deliberative structures, regions can learn from this global diversity and adapt it to their own contexts. In doing so, they help create a living ecosystem of democracy that evolves through experimentation, exchange, and cross-regional learning.

Action pillars

Regions for Democracy is structured around the following five action pillars:

1. **MONITOR.** Track and analyze the state of democracy at the regional level. By identifying emerging threats, root causes, and opportunities for renewal, the network equips regions to respond proactively and strategically.
2. **SHARE & LEARN.** Strengthen ties among democratic regions to enhance institutional capacity, safeguard civil liberties, promote inclusive governance, and uphold the rule of law. Through mutual learning, the sharing of best practices, and technical cooperation, members build more resilient and effective democratic infrastructures.
3. **IMPLEMENT.** Launch and support concrete projects that reinforce democratic norms—especially in contexts where national governments fall short. These initiatives serve as bottom-up counterweights to democratic backsliding, demonstrating the power of regional leadership to act as an agent of global governance renewal.
4. **CONNECT.** Build strategic alliances with multilateral and regional organizations to integrate democratic resilience into global policy frameworks.
5. **INFLUENCE.** Represent a joint voice of regions in multilateral fora by facilitating direct engagement with multilateral organizations and channel active participation of regions to influence decisions on global agendas.

Membership

Participation in Regions for Democracy is invitation-based offered to regional governments that meet the following criteria:

- Are located in democratic countries or operate within democratic national frameworks
- Have a high degree of autonomy, preferably including legislative powers
- Demonstrate a consistent commitment to defending human rights and democratic norms
- Endorse and uphold the network's action pillars and guiding principles

Governance of the network

Regions for Democracy operates under a **flexible and simple governance model**, designed to remain agile, member-driven and action-oriented.

The network will be coordinated by a **small secretariat**, initially ensured by Catalonia, and will include **thematic working groups** aligned with the action pillars and the priorities agreed by members.

An advisory board or **knowledge partners** are also envisaged, bringing together think tanks, academic institutions and international organisations able to provide evidence, methodological support and policy expertise.

Governments and partners invited

Regional governments

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| • Azores (Portugal) | • Gyeonggi-do (South Korea) |
| • Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (France) | • Hawaii (United States) |
| • Baden-Württemberg (Germany) | • Île de France (France) |
| • Bayern (Germany) | • Jalisco (Mexico) |
| • Basque Country (Spain) | • Karnataka (India) |
| • Buenos Aires Province (Argentina) | • Kerala (India) |
| • Busan Metropolitan Government (South Korea) | • Massachusetts (United States) |
| • California (United States) | • Mexico City (Mexico) |
| • Córdoba Province (Argentina) | • Michigan (United States) |
| • Curitiba (Brasil) | • Minnesota (United States) |
| • Daejeon Metropolitan Government (South Korea) | • Montevideo (Uruguay) |
| • Emilia-Romagna (Italy) | • Nouvelle Aquitaine (France) |
| • Flanders (Belgium) | • Occitanie (France) |
| • Fukushima (Japan) | • Ontario (Canada) |
| • Gauteng (South Africa) | • Osaka Prefecture (Japan) |
| | • Paraíba (Brasil) |



Generalitat de Catalunya

- Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (France)
- Quebec (Canada)
- Sant Louis (Senegal)
- Sardinia (Italy)
- Scotland (United Kingdom)
- Seoul Metropolitan Government (South Korea)
- Tuscany (Italy)
- State of Vienna (Austria)
- Victoria (Australia)
- Wales (United Kingdom)
- West Cape (South Africa)
- Ziguinchor (Senegal)

Knowledge partners

- CIDOB – Barcelona Centre for International Affairs
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Bertelsmann Stiftung (tbc)