

Case for Democracy Conference

CONFERENCE REPORT



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Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) produces the largest global dataset on democracy with almost 30 million data points for 202 countries from 1789 to 2020. Involving over 3,500 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures hundreds of different attributes of democracy. V-Dem enables new ways to study the nature, causes, and consequences of democracy embracing its multiple meanings.

Produced by the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg

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Case for Democracy

THE WORLD IS CURRENTLY EXPERIENCING A WAVE of autocratization characterized by increasing executive power, erosion of democratic norms, and a general tendency toward less freedom. One-third of the world's population – 2.6 billion people – now lives in countries undergoing autocratization.

With support from the European Union, the V-Dem Institute initiated the “Case for Democracy” – a program to translate and distribute scientific evidence from the academic sphere to policymakers and practitioners on the dividends of democracy. Providing evidence-based information is of utmost importance in the present era of “fake news” which is often generated by and in support of autocratization.

Policy Briefing Papers

The evidence is collated in 8 Policy Briefing Papers. Read and Download:

- [Do Democracies Perform Better Combatting Climate Change?](#)
- [Does Democracy Bring International and Domestic Peace and Security?](#)
- [Does Democracy Increase Global Health?](#)
- [Are Democracies Better for Social Protection of the Poor, Gender Equality, and Social Cohesion?](#)
- [Does Democracy Cause Economic Growth, Stability, and Work for the Poor?](#)
- [Does Democracy Improve Public Goods Provision?](#)
- [Democracies Produce More Transparent and Higher-Quality Data](#)
- [Does Democracy Have Dividends for Education?](#)

Webinar Week 2021

From March 22–25, 2021 this week featured five 1.5-hour webinars bringing together academics and policymakers in a dialogue based on state-of-the art scientific findings on the dividends of democracy for a series of development outcomes: 1) economic development, 2) human development and infra-structures, 3) human development and health, 4) security, and (5) combating climate change.

The webinars are found on YouTube using the links below:

- Webinar 1: [Economic Development](#) (SDG 1, 8, and 10)
- Webinar 2A: [Human Development - Enabling Hard and Social Infrastructures](#) (SDG 3, 5, and 16)
- Webinar 2B: [Human Development – Health](#) (SDG 3)
- Webinar 3: [Human, Domestic, and International Security](#) (SDG 5 and 16)
- Webinar 4: [Combating Climate Change](#) (SDG 13)

Onsite/Hybrid Conference, Brussels

From November 30th to December 1st, 2021, 26 scholars and over 400 policymakers and practitioners participated in a hybrid onsite/virtual conference held in Brussels on the Case for Democracy. Scholars presented scientific evidence on the dividends of democracy across six broad areas. This report summarizes these findings and discussions.

The “Case for Democracy” Conference

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM NOVEMBER 30TH – DECEMBER 1ST, 2021

Participation in Numbers:

- Brought together 26 world-leading scholars from four continents
- Attended by over 400 policy-makers, practitioners, and officials
- Participants came from over 120 international organizations, ministries, state authorities, international and national NGOs, civil society organizations, universities, and independent consultants

Evidence on the Case for Democracy in 6 areas:

- Economic Development and Reducing Poverty
- Education and Empowering Women
- Peace and Human Security
- Sustainable Environment and Climate Change Mitigation
- Human Development and Global Health
- Public Goods and Corruption

A Draft Concept note for an **International Scientific Panel on Democracy (ISPD)** was launched by an international coalition of scholars and the UNDP Governance Center’s Director:

Professor Amaney A. Jamal, Dean, Princeton School for Public and International Affairs, Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Politics

Arvinn Gadgil, Director, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre

Dr. Joseph Asunka, CEO, Afrobarometer

Professor Larry Diamond, Hoover Institute, Stanford University

Dr. Julia Leininger, Head of Program, German Development Institute

Assistant Professor Vanessa A. Boese, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg

Professor Staffan I. Lindberg, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg

The Concept Note for the ISPD now has broad support from a large number of scholars. It is found at the end of this conference report.

Why a “Case for Democracy” Conference?

Confronted with increasingly overt attacks on democracy, world leaders are growingly aware of the need for a united effort in democracy promotion and protection. For instance, new US

President Joe Biden convened a [Democracy Summit](#) on December 9–10, 2022. Boris Johnson earlier proposed a [D\(emocracy\)10](#), bringing together the G7 states with Australia, India and South Korea, while the former German foreign minister Heiko Maas suggested a [Marshall Plan for Democracy](#), and Sweden launched the ‘[Drive for Democracy](#)’ as a new foreign policy priority in 2019.

The EU’s actions in democracy support at home and abroad requires sound and robust evidence on the dividends of democracy. Beyond its intrinsic value, what is democracy good for? What is the evidence for democracy’s advantages for people in terms of economic development, human development, women and children’s rights, health outcomes, and protection of the environment to fight global climate change?

To answer these questions and to contribute to building a scientific evidence base for democracy, the European Union signed a contract with the University of Gothenburg and the V-Dem Institute to develop “The Case for Democracy” and make it available to the European Union as well as its collaborating partners. The principal activities of the project are to:

- Develop a common understanding on the scientific evidence on the dividends of democracy in key areas of development among democracy support stakeholders from around the world.
- Bring together academia, policy-makers, and practitioners to share the scientific evidence on dividends of democracy; discuss the dividends of democracy in key areas of development at global level; and build a coherent narrative on why democracy support and protection is important.
- Document the evidence on the dividends of democracy and distribute that documentation widely among democracy support stakeholders around the world.

From 22nd to 26th March 2021, the V-Dem Institute organized five webinars during “The Case for Democracy Week”. The seminars are found [online here](#) and the Policy Briefs on the main findings are [here](#).

The enthusiastic response on the webinar week and accompanying policy briefing papers was followed up with an onsite/hybrid conference in Brussels on November 30th to December 1st, 2022.

In the meantime, the collaboration also gave birth to a more ambitious, long-term goal: The creation of an *International Scientific Panel on Democracy (ISPD)*. The conference in Brussels thus also had as one objective to build a core coalition of scholars standing behind a final draft concept paper on the ISPD.

Opening Session

Assistant Professor Vanessa A. Boese and Professor Staffan I. Lindberg (Director, V-Dem Institute) welcomed the conference participants, both virtual as well as on site in Brussels. They remarked that this conference on the dividends of democracy could not have been timelier. Prof. Lindberg talked about how a growing set of enemies of democracy are actively working to dismantle democratic institutions and establish autocratic rule. These actors include states, non-state actors, and various others. Supporters of democracy face enormous global challenges. V-Dem's 2021 report on the state of democracy showed that one-third of countries, home to 2.6 billion people, were autocratizing. The report also showed that the level of global democracy had regressed to the level of 1999. On a global scale, V-Dem's findings indicated that the improvements and dignity that people came to enjoy after the Cold War had been eradicated.

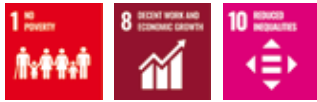
Tom Millar, Head of Section at the EC/INTPA, spoke of the urgency and importance of the conference spreading cutting-edge research to a global audience. We are increasingly facing a death of facts, as Millar argued. Without facts, there is no truth, and without truth there can be no trust. This conference is about the facts of democracy, and, as Millar emphasized, the fact is that democracy works.

In light of these developments, Prof. Lindberg and Ass. Prof. Boese argued that making the case for democracy was as important as ever. The intrinsic value of democracy is well established, thus the conference focused on the material dividends of democracy. Over the course of the conference, scholars presented state-of-the-art research on the benefits of democracy to economic growth, education, gender equality, health, peace, climate protection, and public goods and good governance. We provide a summary of these panels below.



Yuko Sato, V-Dem Institute

Session I: Dividends for Economic Development and Reducing Poverty



Scientific Evidence Shows:

- **Economic growth is higher in democracies than in autocracies**
- **Democratization leads to a 20% increase in GDP/c**
- **Democracies provide more, and more transparent, high-quality data on development**

In the first session Professor James A. Robinson (University of Chicago) presented scientific evidence on the relationship between democracy and prosperity.¹ Rigorous studies demonstrate that democratization is good for economic growth. Countries that democratize increase their GDP/c by about 20% in the 25 years following democratization, compared to countries that remain autocracies. The “theory of change” behind the findings is that, because more people have access to political power in democracies, governments are forced to provide public goods that benefit a greater number of people and economic policies that provide prosperity for the country as a whole. Further strengthening the evidence base, Professor Mario A. Maggioni (DISEIS & CSCC Catholic University of Milan) presented the results of a comprehensive meta-analysis on democracy and economic growth synthesizing the results of 188 studies over 30 years.² The clear results show that democracy has a substantial positive effect on growth.

Professor Markus Eberhardt (University of Nottingham) went on to demonstrate the evidence base on exactly which democratic institutions lead to economic growth.³ Is it clean elections, freedom of



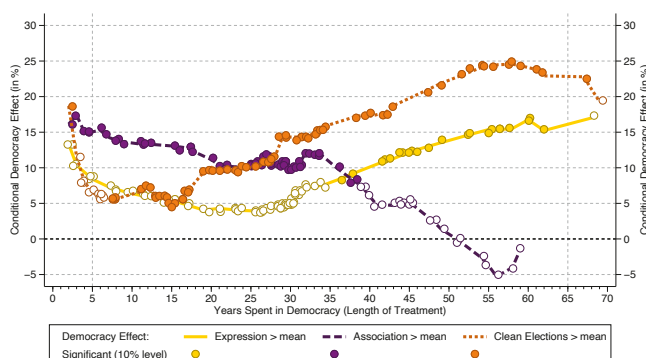
Associate Professor Markus Eberhardt, University of Nottingham; Assistant Professor Vanessa A. Boese, University of Gothenburg; Professor Mario A. Maggioni, DISEIS & CSCC Catholic University of Milan; Professor James A. Robinson, University of Chicago; Associate Professor John Does, Bucknell University

expression, freedom of association, legislative constraints, judicial constraints, or the rule of law that drive democracy’s dividends for economic development? The answer provided by scientific studies is that it is primarily well-functioning vertical accountability (clean elections and freedom of expression) that drive the long-run effect of democracy on growth. Figure 1 illustrates this evidence. In addition, the liberal aspect of effective legislative constraints on the executive is also positive for increasing economic growth over time.

Finally, Professor John Does (Bucknell University) pointed out that data quality is essential to reliable evaluations of the relationship between democracy and development. Cutting-edge research demonstrates that democracies are more not only more transparent than autocracies, but also report *more* and *higher quality* data about debt, inflation, and economic and development outcomes. Democracies also report better data about economic outcomes.⁴

The presentations generated exciting discussion about regional variations in this relationship. In response to one attendee’s question, scholars emphasized that, for example, the “Asian Tigers” are clear outliers that do not undermine the general relationship. Although in rare historical instances there is growth under dictatorship, there is much more consistent growth in democracies. Other attendees raised the critical issue of facilitating economic growth in Africa. The scholars pointed to evidence on many institutional weaknesses in African countries and the need to strengthen democratic institutions in the region to help facilitate economic growth. Attendees also raised the issue of different definitions of democracy, but scholars confidently pointed to the evidence that, regardless of the measurement of democracy used in these rigorous studies, democracy lead to growth.

FIGURE 1: EFFECT OF POLYARCHY COMPONENTS ON LONG-TERM GROWTH



Source: Prof. Eberhardt presentation at Case for Democracy conference.

1 Acemoglu, D., S. Naidu, P. Restrepo, and J.A. Robinson. 2019. “Democracy Does Cause Growth.” *Journal of Political Economy* 127(1): 47–100.

2 Colagrossi, M., D. Rossignoli, and M.A. Maggioni. 2020. “Does Democracy Cause Growth? A Meta-Analysis (of 2000 Regressions).” *European Journal of Political Economy* 61:101824.

3 Boese, V.A. and M. Eberhardt. 2021. “Democracy Doesn’t Always Happen Over Night: Regime Change in Stages and Economic Growth.” V-Dem Working Paper no. 114.

4 Magee, C.S.P. and J.A. Does. 2015. “Reconsidering Regime Type and Growth: Lies, Dictatorships, and Statistics.” *International Studies Quarterly* 59(2): 223–237.

Session II: Dividends for Education and Empowering Women



Scientific evidence shows:

- **Democracy leads to *more* education – increases secondary education enrollment by almost 70%**
- **Democratization leads to countries spending up to 30% more on education – these dividends primarily benefit low- and middle-income households and rural residents.**
- **Effect of democracy on education *quality* is less consistent.**

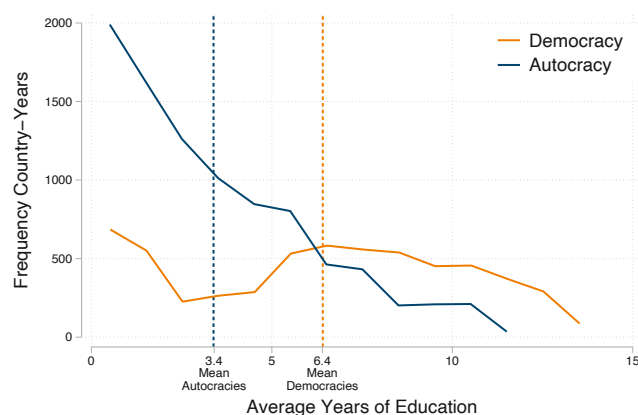
Associate Professor Robin Harding (University of Oxford) presented unambiguous evidence showing that, on average, democracies spend more on education, have higher enrollment rates, and higher levels of literacy.⁵ Further research shows that democracies redistribute education spending more, with the dividends of democracy being larger for poorer and rural segments of society.⁶ Associate Professor Sirianne Dahlum (Peace Research Institute, Oslo) showed evidence that, while democracies provide greater access to education, there is no clear relationship to students' performance on test scores.⁷ She indicated this can have to do with a trade-off between quality and quantity during rapid expansion in access to schooling.

Professor Pamela Paxton's (University of Texas-Austin) presentation demonstrated with evidence that women's equal representation is simultaneously a dividend of, and a fundamental aspect to democracy.⁸ Democracy guarantees civil liberties, leading to substantial improvements in women's representation, not least

due to positive effects on women's rights organizations and movements. But women's representation also contributes to democracy with higher legitimacy of political decisions and more focus on issues such as women and children, domestic violence, child health care, and poverty.

In the discussion attendees wanted guidance for people working in the field and scholars suggested activities that strengthen vertical accountability (elections and freedom of expression) to help align the incentives of politicians and other stakeholders in education with that of voters. For instance, more competitive and more party-centered (as opposed to individual candidate-centered) elections generate a higher degree of accountability and, in turn, better education outcomes. On the subject of women's representation, one attendee wondered whether the fact that women prioritize some aspects of politics deepen stereotypes. Panelists responded that the evidence rather suggests that the perspectives women bring to politics are beneficial to society as a whole and broaden the focus of policies.

FIGURE 2: AVERAGE YEARS OF EDUCATION IN AUTOCRACIES AND DEMOCRACIES



Source: See *V-Dem Policy Brief #35, 2022*. Education estimated as average years of education among citizens older than 15 from *Clio Infra*. Democracy and autocracy from V-Dem's *Regimes of the World* measure.



Professor Pamela Paxton, University of Texas-Austin; Professor Staffan I. Lindberg, University of Gothenburg; Professor Robin Harding, University of Oxford; Associate Professor Sirianne Dahlum, University of Oslo

5 Harding, R. and D. Stasavage. 2014. "What Democracy Does (and Doesn't Do) for Basic Services: School Fees, School Inputs, and African Elections." *Journal of Politics* 76(1) 229–245.

6 Harding, R. 2020. "Who is Democracy Good for? Elections, Rural Bias, and Health and Education Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Journal of Politics* 82(1): 241–254.

7 Dahlum, S. and C.H. Knutsen. 2017. "Do Democracies Provide Better Education? Revisiting the Democracy–Human Capital Link." *World Development* 94:186–199.

8 Paxton, P.M., M.M. Hughes, and T. Barnes. 2020. *Women, Politics, and Power: A Global Perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Session III: Dividends for Peace and Human Security



Scientific Evidence Shows:

- **Democracy causes peace, between individuals, within families, and across countries. Fewer democracies in the world will lead to more wars. After India turned into an electoral autocracy, the statistical odds of a militarized dispute with Pakistan are now 3 times higher than 10 years ago.**
- **Democracies are also much less prone to civil war and domestic volatility compared to autocracies.**
- **Transitions are risky: The odds of civil war in a regime transitioning from autocracy to semi-democracy is 9 times higher compared to before the change.**

Professor Håvard Hegre (Uppsala University) provided evidence that civil war is now the most common form of war and is extremely destructive. The typical civil war lasts for up to a decade, takes 15% from a country's GDP, leads to 25,000 battle-related deaths, and an additional 50,000 civilian deaths. Civil wars are much less likely in democratic countries and, when they do occur, they are less deadly.⁹ Critically, for democracy to effectively prevent civil war both vertical (high quality elections) and horizontal accountability (effective executive constraints) are necessary.

Professor Scott Gates (Peace Research Institute, Oslo) detailed robust findings that the most civil war-prone countries are those with medium levels of democracy indices: nascent, weak democracies and electoral autocracies.¹⁰ Partial disenfranchisement of groups, irregular leadership changes, executive attempts to grab

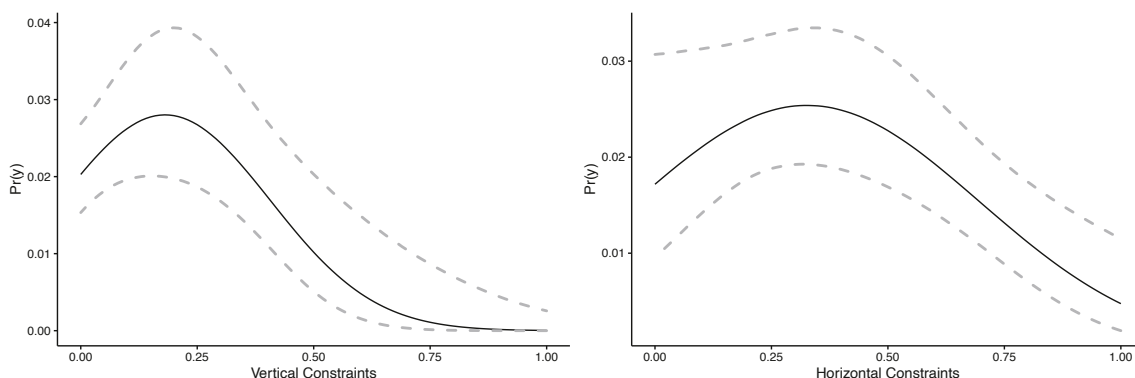


Professor Håvard Hegre, Uppsala University

or keep political power, and weak state institutions could be why middle countries are most prone to conflict. But if countries "make it" to become liberal, high-quality democracies, they are clearly the most likely to have peace.

Professor Anke Hoeffler (University of Konstanz) provided scientific results demonstrating that democracy has substantial dividends across a wide range of other forms of violence as well. She highlighted that, while armed conflict kills about 100,000 people per year, homicides kill more than 500,000 per year. Physical and sexual assaults, as well as intimate partner violence and severe child punishment, also have higher rates of violence than armed conflict. All of these forms of violence are much more common in autocracies than democracies.¹¹ Democratic institutions give people nonviolent mechanisms to express discontent and provide accountability for the use of violence.

FIGURE 3: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL CONSTRAINTS (X-AXES) AND THE PROBABILITY OF CIVIL WAR ONSET (Y-AXES)



Adjusted Predictions with 95% CIs. Source: H. Fjelde, C.H. Knutsen, H.M. Nygård. 2021. "Which Institutions Matter? Re-Considering the Democratic Civil Peace." *International Studies Quarterly* 65(1): 223–237.

9 See, for instance, H. Håvard. 2014. "Democracy and Armed Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 51(2): 59–172.

10 Gates, S., H. Hegre, H.P. Jones, and H. Strand. 2006. "Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability: Polity Duration, 1800–2000." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(4): 893–908.

11 See A. Hoeffler. 2018. *Security and Development: Shifting the Focus to Interpersonal Violence*. *The Economics of Peace and Security Journal* 13:12–22. and A. Hoeffler. 2017. *Violence against Children: A Critical Issue for Development*. *European Journal of Development Research* 29:945–963.

In the discussion attendees were interested to know about what policy mechanisms could best reduce political violence. Regarding civil war, the panelists agreed that it is important to promote vertical accountability (free and fair elections) while also improving horizontal accountability (constraints on the executive). It is also important to make changes incrementally, recognizing that countries with middle levels of democracy are more prone to

conflict. Domestic buy-in and trust are essential in such processes for creating democratic institutions that reduce violence. Finally, the discussion also evaluated the importance of state capacity. The panelists agreed that state capacity is an important factor that promotes peace. However, even when taking varying levels of state capacity into account, the dividends of democratic institutions for peace are clear.

Session IV: Dividends for Sustainable Environment and Climate Change Mitigation

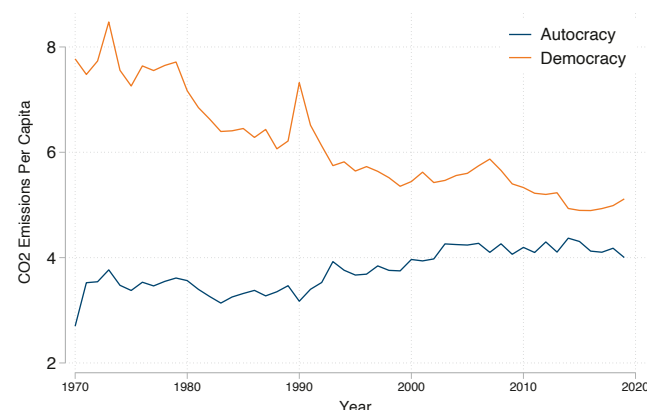


Scientific Evidence Shows:

- **Democracies produce more ambitious climate policies – the difference between closed autocracies and democratic equals a difference in the Paris Agreement reduction policy targets of 1.6°C.**
- **Each new climate policy reduces CO₂ emissions by 1.79% within three years.**
- **Civil liberties empower environmental NGOs. A 1% increase in civil liberties generates a 0.05% reduction in national CO₂ emissions.**

Professor Thomas Bernauer (ETH Zürich) presented rigorous results on how democracies adopt stricter national environmental policies, participate more in international environmental protection efforts, and exhibit a higher level of environmental system quality compared to autocracies.¹² This patterns indicate that more democracy in the world is critical to mitigate climate

FIGURE 4: CO₂ EMISSIONS PER CAPITA FOR DEMOCRACIES AND AUTOCRACIES, 1970–2019



Source: CO₂ emissions data from [Our World in Data](#), democracy and autocracy from V-Dem's *Regimes of the World* measure.

change and advance on the Paris accord. Professor Amanda Murdie (University of Georgia) demonstrated what hard data says on mechanisms. Democracies provide the freedom of expression and association necessary for environmental non-government organizations (NGO) to effectively influence policy design, lobby, campaign and educate on sustainable environment and climate action.¹³ Professor Bernauer also emphasized that high income democracies outsource substantial amounts of their climate impact.¹⁴ Making democracies better and more incentivized to contribute to international climate changes and environmental protection is crucial for the future.

Professor Sverker Jagers (University of Gothenburg) showed evidence on how difficult the required policy changes can be, especially in democracies where legitimacy is critical. There are a wealth of factors that influence people's likelihood of accepting a policy, such as their values, trust, and perceptions of fairness, along with contexts such as quality of institutions, and economic development. His team's research has demonstrated how critical conditions of legitimacy are for climate change policy action.¹⁵



Professor Staffan I. Lindberg, V-Dem Institute; Professor Thomas Bernauer, ETH Zürich; Professor Amanda Murdie, University of Georgia

12 Bernauer, T. and V. Koubi. 2009. "Effects of Political Institutions on Air Quality." *Ecological Economics* 68(5): 1355-1365; Bättig, M. and T. Bernauer. 2009. "National Institutions and Global Public Goods: Are Democracies More Cooperative in Climate Change Policy?" *International Organization* 63(2): 281-308.

13 Pacheco-Vega, R. and A. Murdie. 2020. "When do Environmental NGOs Work? A Test of the Conditional Effectiveness of Environmental Advocacy." *Environmental Politics* 30(1-2):180-201.

14 Kolcava, D., Q. Nguyen, and T. Bernauer. 2019. "Does Trade Liberalization Lead to Environmental Burden Shifting in the Global Economy?" *Ecological Economics* 163: 98-112.

15 Povitkina, M. and S.C. Jagers. 2021. "Environmental Commitments in Different Types of Democracies: the Role of Liberal, Social-Liberal, and Deliberative Politics." V-Dem Working Paper no. 117.

In climate science, “future scenarios” are widely applied to assess what is required to reach different targets in the future. Dr. Julia Leininger (German Development Institute) showcased evidence of how these future scenarios analyses assume increasing global levels of democracy, while the world is in a wave of autocratization that will alter trajectories toward different targets substantially.¹⁶ We should thus expect upcoming assessments by climate scientists she is involved with to lead to even worse projections that again testify to the importance of democracy for mitigating climate change.

The discussion covered the importance of freedom of expression, highlighting that key mechanisms through which democracy matters for climate change are by engaging with civil society, mobilizing citizens, and drawing attention to environmental and climate issues. Discussions also covered the issue of how democracy’s importance for a sustainable future goes together with the need for rapid development in areas such as Africa. Panelists pointed out that we primarily need policy innovation in richer countries, as these cause the largest emissions. But for developing countries, the most straightforward process to motivate better policies is “low-hanging fruit” that create incentives to choose climate friendly options, for instance via trade agreements.

Session V: Dividends for Human Development and Global Health



Scientific Evidence Shows:

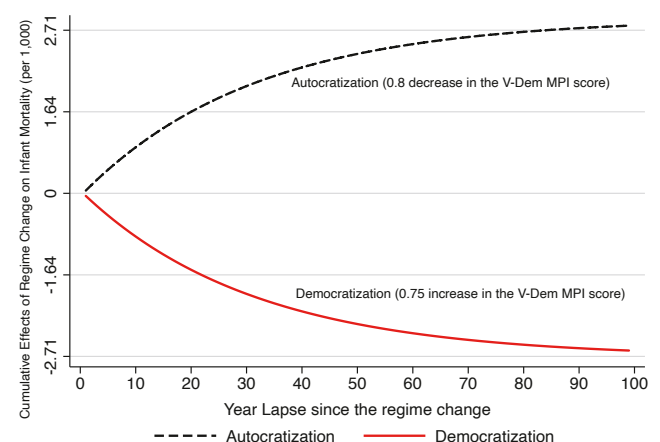
- **Transition to democracy increases life expectancy by 3% within 10 years of regime change.**
- **Increased global levels of democracy averted 16 million cardiovascular deaths between 1995 and 2015.**
- **A high level of democracy leads to 94% lower infant mortality compared to dictatorships.**
- **Autocratization directly leads to a decline in life expectancy by 1.3 percentage points and a decrease in health care protection by 9 percentage points.**



Associate Professor Masaaki Higashijima, Tohoku University; Professor Staffan I. Lindberg, V-Dem Institute; Professor Thomas J. Bollyky, Council on Foreign Relations

Professor Thomas J. Bollyky (Council on Foreign Relations) presented scientific evidence showing that, although some autocracies have been famous for providing health care, democracy plays a critical role in global health. Transitions to democracy substantially increase life expectancy, reduce child mortality, and democratic experience significantly lowers deaths from non-communicable diseases.¹⁷ Critically, rigorous analyses demonstrate that improvements in democracy are an even stronger factor driving down mortality from diseases than any other factor, including GDP/c development. Better vertical accountability (free and fair elections) and longer democratic experience are the aspects of democracy that are the most important mechanisms. Further, democracies provide more universal health coverage, which is particularly important in low-income nations.¹⁸

FIGURE 5: LONG-TERM EFFECT OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND AUTOCRATIZATION ON INFANT MORTALITY



Source: Prof. Higashijima's presentation at the Case for Democracy conference based on Annaka and Higashijima (2021).

¹⁶ Sörgel, B., E. Kriegler, I. Weindl, S. Rauner, A. Dirmaichner, C. Ruhe, M. Hofmann et al. 2021. "A Sustainable Development Pathway for Climate Action within the UN 2030 Agenda." *Nature Climate Change* 11(8): 656–664; O'Neill, B.C., T.R. Carter, K. Ebi, P.A. Harrison, E. Kemp-Benedict, K. Kok, E. Kriegler et al. 2020. "Achievements and Needs for the Climate Change Scenario Framework." *Nature Climate Change* 10(12): 1074–1084.

¹⁷ For example, Bollyky, T. J., Templin, T., Cohen, M., Schoder, D., Dieleman, J. L., & Wigley, S. (2019). *The relationships between democratic experience, adult health, and cause-specific mortality in 170 countries between 1980 and 2016: an observational analysis*. *The Lancet*, 393(10181), 1628–1640.

¹⁸ Templin, T., Dieleman, J. L., Wigley, S., Mumford, J. E., Miller-Petrie, M., Kiernan, S., & Bollyky, T. J. (2021). *Democracies linked to greater universal health coverage compared with autocracies, even in an economic recession*. *Health Affairs*, 40(8), 1234–1242.

Associate Professor Masaaki Higashijima (Tohoku University) further evidenced the critical dividends of democracy on infant mortality, showing that these effects are particularly strong with time. With rigorous scientific analyses, he demonstrated that political liberalization tends to immediately increase pro-poor public policies but policy outcomes take time.¹⁹ Policy-makers and the international community need to be patient and help communicate that the dividends of democracy on advancing human development come in the long run.

In the discussion, attendees raised questions on a series of issues, including what the present global wave of autocratization will mean for global health, if democracies are better or worse at handling pandemics, and how autocracies like China also reduce

infant mortality. The panelists detailed how the evidence at hand means that current shifts to autocracy will have adverse effects on adult health, as well as on infant and maternal mortality. Panelists also pointed out the importance of democratic governance to maintain a functional health system, especially during a pandemic such as at present. In particular, they pointed to the evidence on the importance for health outcomes of effective vertical accountability to hold politicians accountable. Lastly, panelists emphasized that sustainable, good health outcomes are systematically delivered almost exclusively in democracies with robust vertical accountability mechanisms, despite some exceptions in autocracies.

Session VI: Dividends for Public Goods and Corruption



Scientific Evidence Shows:

- **Full democracies spend 100% more than closed dictatorships on social protection policies benefitting the poor and vulnerable.**
- **Democracy provides an average citizens with an internet connection rate more than 300% higher than autocracies.**
- **Democracy with strong vertical accountability mechanisms diminishes corruption.**

Professor Mansoor Mushed (Erasmus University) presented hard scientific evidence that democratization leads to more formidable efforts ensuring that the poor and marginalized have access to public goods. Rigorous analyses demonstrate that going from closed dictatorship to full democracy leads to an increase in social protection expenditure by 100% on average.²⁰ Democracy provides public goods to more people by reducing inequality.

Professor Nils Weidmann (University of Konstanz) gave evidence from another set of scientific studies demonstrating that democracies provide more public goods in terms of greater internet access for their citizens and a freer environment for digital communication – increasingly critical drivers of innovation, political participation, and ensuring accountability. Internet connectivity has risen to be 300% higher in democratic countries compared to autocracies.²¹ Autocratic governments have reasons to limit access



Professor Morten Jerven, Norwegian University of Life Sciences

to this public good, censoring content²² and use cyberattacks and temporary shutdowns to deter opposition.²³

Scientific evidence now demonstrates that one way democratization improves public goods provision is by mitigating political corruption. Associate Professor Brigitte Seim (University of North Carolina) presented rigorous analyses showing a curvilinear effect where liberalization and the mere introduction of multi-party elections increases corruption, yet corruption decreases substantially with stronger vertical accountability (really free and fair elections).²⁴

19 Annaka, S., & Higashijima, M. (2021). *Political liberalization and human development*. *World Development* 147, 105614.

20 Murshed, S. M., B. Bergougui, M. Badiuzzaman, and M.H. Pulok. 2020. "Fiscal Capacity, Democratic Institutions and Social Welfare Outcomes in Developing Countries." *Defense and Peace Economics* 1–26.

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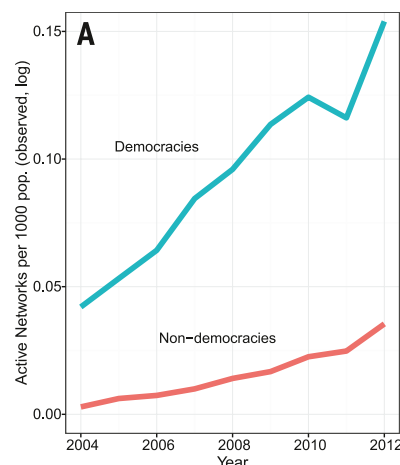
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Professor Morten Jerven (Norwegian University of Life Sciences) then issued a cautionary note with analyses of data and statistics as public goods. Rigorous evidence suggested that rulers often influence which data is collected and made available and use statistics as it benefits them. Thus, both the production of data and aggregation of statistics involve politics.²⁵

In the discussion several key questions were raised by participants. For example, how we should think of increasing freedoms to express opinions on social media and the future of democracy, how corruption can be further reduced, and what practitioners need to think about when seeking to support better data administration. Panelists acknowledged the tension between promoting freedom of expression and access to information that also opens generates fake news, hate speech, conspiracy theories, and the like. A general agreement was that “democracy dies with the lies” and, therefore, a critical challenge for democracy is how to regulate freedom of expression. Panelists also pointed out the evidence that more democracy mitigates inequality in public goods provision by increasing the cost of corruption. Corruption typically siphons off resources from the poor and most marginalized communities. Finally, panelists emphasized the need to support data collection for effective public administration and carefully anticipate how rulers’ politics of numbers may interfere with these efforts.

FIGURE 6: INTERNET PENETRATION RATES IN DEMOCRACIES AND NON-DEMOCRACIES



Source: Weidmann et al. 2016.



Professor Nils Weidmann, University of Konstanz

25 Jerven, M. 2018. “Beyond Precision: Embracing the Politics of Global Health Numbers.” *The Lancet* 392(10146): 468-469; and Jerven, M. 2015. *Africa: Why Economists Get it Wrong*. Zed Books Ltd.

Plenary:

Draft Concept Note on International Scientific Panel on Democracy (ISPD)

Assistant Professor Vanessa A. Boese (V-Dem Institute) opened by summarizing the main findings of the conference: democracies deliver on a range of socio-economic outcomes. In light of the recent wave of autocratization, she stressed the importance of gathering scientific evidence of democracy's dividends. Professor Staffan I. Lindberg (V-Dem Institute) pointed out evidence that today, two-thirds of the world's population live under autocracy. The world's liberal democracy score has declined to levels from 1989 or before. Hard evidence presented at this conference shows that the current wave of autocratization will have serious and substantial negative effects on a range of socio-economic outcomes. There is now a need for an International Scientific Panel on Democracy (ISPD) that can provide policy-makers and practitioners with a scientific account of the status of democracy, the dividends of democracy, and guidance for democratic support and protection on a regular basis. Naturally, the ISPD must be free of political influences and therefore hosted outside of multilateral institutions.

Professor Amaney A. Jamal (Princeton University) recognized the importance of this bold ISPD initiative and praised the conference for highlighting the dividends of democracy. She called attention to challenges on the demand side. Recent Arab-Barometer surveys show that citizens in autocratic countries are increasingly satisfied with the economy, healthcare, and educational systems while citizens in Tunisia are increasingly dissatisfied. We must recognize the importance of economic inequality for popular demands for democracy. This also helps understand the increasing support for Russia and China as models among citizens in the Middle East.

Dr. Joseph Asunka (Afrobarometer) pointed to surveys showing that Africans support democracy for its protection of civil liberties, rule of law, accountability, and provision of collective goods, not for economic goods or outcomes. Over 70% of Africans support democracy and reject autocracy. Even the share of Africans stating that they prefer accountable government over effective



Dr. Joseph Asunka, Afrobarometer; Professor Amaney A. Jamal, Princeton School for Public and International Affairs; Arvinn Gadgil, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre; Professor Larry Diamond, Stanford University; Dr. Julia Leininger, German Development Institute; Assistant Professor Vanessa A. Boese, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg

government (if they had to choose) is increasing and is now at 62%. All of these findings show a deepening of democratic values on the continent. Dr. Asunka is excited about the ISPD and stressed how important it will be that the ISPD can provide evidence on the gap between the supply and demand sides of democratization. The current wave of autocratization is happening mainly on the supply side in Africa, not the demand side.

Professor Larry Diamond (Stanford University) emphasized that, given the alarming situation for democracy in the world, including the rise of Russia and China and the potential for democratic breakdown in the United States, the need for the ISPD could not be greater. He agreed that the scientific case for democracy is very compelling. However, the initiative cannot rest only on performance. In addition, the results may not be uplifting all the time. Therefore, the ISPD must also make the normative case for democracy and highlight political outcomes, such as protection of human rights and civil liberties, as ends in their own right. Professor Diamond also cautioned on the difficulty in establishing consensus about the state of democracy in borderline cases, such as India. All of these trends point to the importance of the work of V-Dem and the regional barometers to continue to measure and assess democracy around the world, as well as the work to establish the ISPD.

Dr. Julia Leininger (German Development Institute) expressed that the idea of the ISPD to provide scientific evidence to protect democracy and mitigate autocratization is excellent. Echoing Professor Diamond, she also highlighted the importance of recognizing the intrinsic value of democracy. She then pointed to the critical need also to establish a clear link between the scientific evidence and practitioners. Translation of scientific evidence to policy-makers and practitioners is often very complex and challenging and the ISPD must have institutional preparedness to facilitate these connections. To further such translations, Dr. Leininger also stressed the importance that the ISPD members have knowledge of actual democracy support and protection programs/tooboxes that are used in the international community. Finally, she stressed the importance of global inclusion on the ISPD, in particular of researchers from countries in the Global South.

Providing a perspective from a multilateral organization, Director Arvin Gadgil (UNDP Oslo Governance Center) enthusiastically endorsed the importance of the ISPD for establishing the dividends of democracy and highlighting the intrinsic value of democracy. It is clear that even established norms of inclusive governance are under threat in the international community. It is unlikely that the ISPD could mirror the Intergovernmental Panel



Professor Staffan I. Lindberg, V-Dem Institute, University of Gothenburg



Professor Anke Hoeffler, University of Konstanz

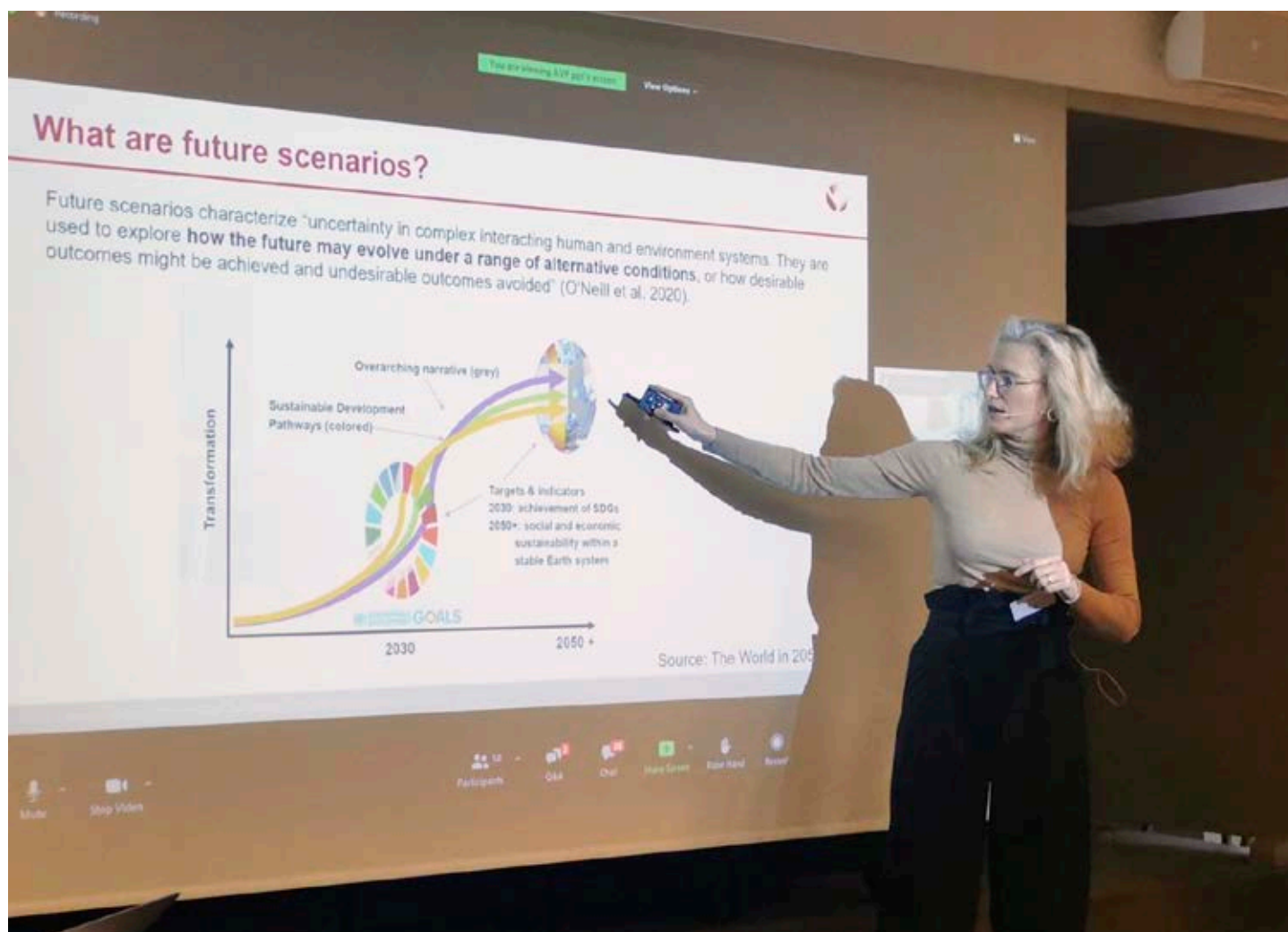
on Climate Change (IPCC) in terms of organization. As a result, he suggested to seek an alliance for the ISPD among committed democracies. Director Gadgil also raised some questions that would be to be answered in order to build such an alliance and a strong foundation for the ISPD. First, is it really the lack of scientific consensus itself inducing the lack of action in defense of democracy? In addition, how will an initiative like this be understood in the current political context and how will the ISPD build a coalition of support in that context? Finally, how useful is it to further a binary conceptualization around democracy and autocracy?

A lively discussion followed among panelists and participants from the floor. One important point was that much of the public dissatisfaction with democracy today occurs in countries that are not fully democratic. Thus, perhaps public dissatisfaction is because of too little democracy, not too much of it.

Concerns were voiced that the international policy community may judge other issues to be more important than commitment to defend democracy. It was pointed out that this made it even more important that an institution like the ISPD could show evidence that strong democratic institutions are essential to accomplish development objectives. Several spoke to the importance of establishing a broad coalition of actors to support the

establishment of the ISPD, as both an opportunity and obligation to facilitate democracy promotion and protection. The discussion further highlighted the importance of separating the ISPD from governments and intergovernmental organizations. The ISPD should be multinational, multilateral, inclusive with substantial participation of scholars from the Global South, but protected from influence and instrumentalization by governments.

Participants recognized the existing diversity in measurements of democracy but expressed confidence that it would be possible to reach a consensus. The discussion also emphasized that, to preserve its integrity and legitimacy, the role of the ISPD must be strictly to provide scientific evidence (which could include normative dividends on human rights, gender equality, etc.). Democracy promotion and protection should not be among its objectives. Those issues belong in the political sphere. In this context, the discussion also highlighted the importance of establishing an institutional interface in the ISPD for scientists to offer evidence-based guidance to policy-makers and practitioners.



Dr. Julia Leining, German Development Institute

Concept Note

International Scientific Panel on Democracy (ISPD)

Confronted with increasingly overt attacks on democracy, world leaders are aware of the need for a united effort in democracy promotion and protection. For instance, US President Joseph Biden convened a leader's [Democracy Summit in December 2021 to be followed up in Summer 2022](#), and Boris Johnson has proposed a [D10](#) group bringing together the G7 with Australia, India and South Korea. German foreign minister Heiko Maas recently suggested a [Marshall Plan for Democracy](#), and Sweden launched the '[Drive for Democracy](#)' as a foreign policy priority. While these efforts are relevant political reactions to current global autocratization trends, they also need to build on scientific evidence to make a substantial and credible case for democracy.

Therefore, this is the time to build an equivalent of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for democracy: the **International Scientific Panel on Democracy (ISPD)**.

The ISPD will provide policy makers with *regular scientific assessments on democratic developments, their implications for fact-based dividends (and limitations) of democracy, as well as to put forward scientific guidance on democratic resilience and protection*.

Rationale

The world is facing a wave of autocratization. Powerful autocratic states, former democracies, and political movements within democracies increasingly present ideological challenges to the principles of democratic governance. There is an urgent need for a global coalition to demonstrate and protect the dividends of democracy. At this historical moment, the European Union has a unique position to take the lead, to gather its partners around the globe, and based on hard scientific evidence shape the future of democracy in the world.

A range of academic and think-tank organizations provide assessments of democracy including various aspects such as media and academic freedom, and human rights on a regular basis. There is much consensus between these assessments. Yet, the world lacks a single, coherent, and scientific account of both supply (democratic institutions) and demand (popular support) that the major academic data sources stand behind. This is a source of disunion standing in the way of decisive action on the protection of democracy in the international community. The independent, science-based ISPD Expert Report on Democracy will provide key input for international negotiations as well as work on democracy protection and promotion.

In addition, there is an urgent need to gather the best available science on democracy's dividends across a range of fields related to the Sustainable Development Goals and human development

including human rights, and to conduct additional studies where there are gaps. Finally, the evidence must be brought to bear on policy and programs through guidance from academic on how to interpret and use/not interpret or use, the scientific findings.

Goals

Similar to the IPCC and IPBES, in order to serve the needs of the international community of policy makers, practitioners, and the public, the ISPD will provide the best possible scientific evidence. Therefore, the goals of the ISPD are:

1) Provide a scientific consensus on the state of democratic institutions:

The ISPD will build a scientific consensus to provide an authoritative account of the status and trends in the world for democracy, autocracy, and human rights. For example, details on which countries are worsening or improving on democracy and human rights, and how popular support for democracy and human rights are developing or diminishing. Not all sources will agree on every country's status as a democracy or autocracy but with world-leading academics on the ISPD, the various sources can be used to authoritatively classify the vast majority of countries where sources are close to in the agreement, and then also to identify the countries in the "grey-zone/mixed-status" while taking sources of uncertainty into account. This scientific assessment will come in the form of an annual ISPD Expert Report on Democracy communicating the global expert consensus.

2) Build an evidence base on the dividends (and limitations) of democracy:

The ISPD will build an evidence base to provide the most reliable science on democracy's dividends for outcomes across the sciences, medicine, technology, as well as the social sciences. This will incorporate issues such as human health, economic development, education, empowerment of women and children, climate change, peace and human security, public goods and corruption, information technology and digital communication, and crisis management, including handling of pandemics. An additional, and critical component of the evidence base will be focusing on what one could refer to as the "intrinsic" case for democracy's dividends in terms of ensuring citizens' freedoms and rights, especially human rights. The output will be a series of subcommittee thematic reports and studies that distill and communicate the scientific evidence of the benefits, as well as the limitations of, democratic governance and associated human rights on a range of human and developmental outcomes. Assessing limitations is important also critical for understanding how democracy may need to be strengthened and supported in order for any dividends to be maximized. Following a review of existing evidence, gaps will be filled by original research conducted or commissioned by ISPD subcommittees.

3) Provide global, regional, and country-specific guidance:

The ISPD will organize a science-policy interface through consultative meetings policy- and practitioner stakeholders can meet the scientific expertise the ISPD gathers on a thematic or geographic basis to get guidance on how the findings can but also should not be interpreted and used.

Value Added

The ISPD will bring together the leading actors who make assessments of democratic institutions across the world and build one evidence-based consensus based on these multiple sources.

The first value added is that the ISPD will bring about the sort of consensus on the state and trends for democracy and autocracy in the world, that the IPCC did for climate change. The full range of evidence that members offer will be brought to bear on establishing which countries are democracies and autocracies or an uncertain status in between; which countries are in decline or in an episode of democratization; as well as on the state of various democratic rights and institutions in each country of the world.

Second, the ISPD will couple this evidence-base with the demand-side of how people across the world assess democracy, what they want, how support for democracy is changing, and what the relationship is between the developments of institutions, rights, and preferences.

Third, the ISPD will put these findings on trends for supply and demand in light of what the evidence shows on the dividends and limitations of democracy in terms of Agenda 2030 and issues such as human health, economic development, education, empowerment of women and children, climate change, peace and human security, public goods and corruption, crisis management including handling of pandemics, as well as human rights and freedoms. While identifying direct causality is not always possible with 100 percent certainty, the leading expertise from among the best scientists in the world that the ISPD will cast, can identify the most plausible positions and conclusions on both consequences and limitations of democratic governance. Thus, the ISPD can provide evidence on what the trends for democracy and autocracy will mean in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting related global challenges.

Set-up

Given the potential implications of assessing the political institutions of states, it is critical that the ISPD can claim independence from governments and other political actors. Different from the IPCC and the IPBES, therefore, the ISPD should not be organized within the confines of the UN or any other type of

intergovernmental body. While it is anticipated that the funding must come from a global coalition of democratic states, the consortium constituting and organizing the ISPD should accordingly consist of highly reputable academic and policy institutions that can provide and safeguard the legitimacy of the ISPD and its reports. The institutional arrangement can be organized through a trust fund, or similar.

To accomplish its goals, the ISPD will gather the leading expert academic communities, think-tanks, and institutes that take stock of democracy. While, for example, the V-Dem Institute's *Democracy Report* and Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* are by some considered leading sources of factual assessment on democracy there are many specialized sources. These include Susan Hyde and Nikolay Marinov's National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA); Article 19's data and report on freedom of expression/media; Bertelsmann Foundation's Transformation Index; the Democracy Barometer by the Center for Democracy Aarau (ZDA) and the Department of Political Science at the University of Zurich; the Polity project at Center for Systemic Peace; Reporters without Borders' World Press Freedom Index; CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project; and the Human Rights Measurement Initiative founded by economists Ann-Marie Brook and Susan Randolph. On the demand-side measuring popular opinions the ISPD will involve the World Values Survey as well as the Global Barometers (Arab-, Afro-, Asia-, Latino-, and Euro-barometers). In addition, the ISPD will draw on prominent scholars of democracy at universities across the world, not the least in the Global South for regional and country-specific expertise.

As members in its subcommittees, the ISPD will also include leading research institutions, centers, and groups across different fields such as political science, sociology, economics, law and human rights, conflict and security, development, global health, medicine, biology/biodiversity, and climate change/climatology to collate, assess, and when necessary, conduct additional studies of democracy's dividends across outcomes critical for the international community.

Supported by the EU (EC/INTPA) as well as by, for example, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with its extensive global network and international standing, the V-Dem Institute is able to bring the leading academic and other authorities on democracy together for this joint mission.

The V-Dem Institute has also (with support from the EC/INTPA) taken the first steps towards gathering the leading scholars providing evidence on democracy's dividends across a range of outcomes. This is done under a program of work titled "The Case for Democracy", which could serve as a model for the second leg of the ISPD and its subcommittees.

Concept Note

Organization

The ISPD will have a slim and decentralized organization to ensure unconstrained output of the highest scientific quality with the minimum bureaucracy. Figure 1 provides a suggested organizational structure.

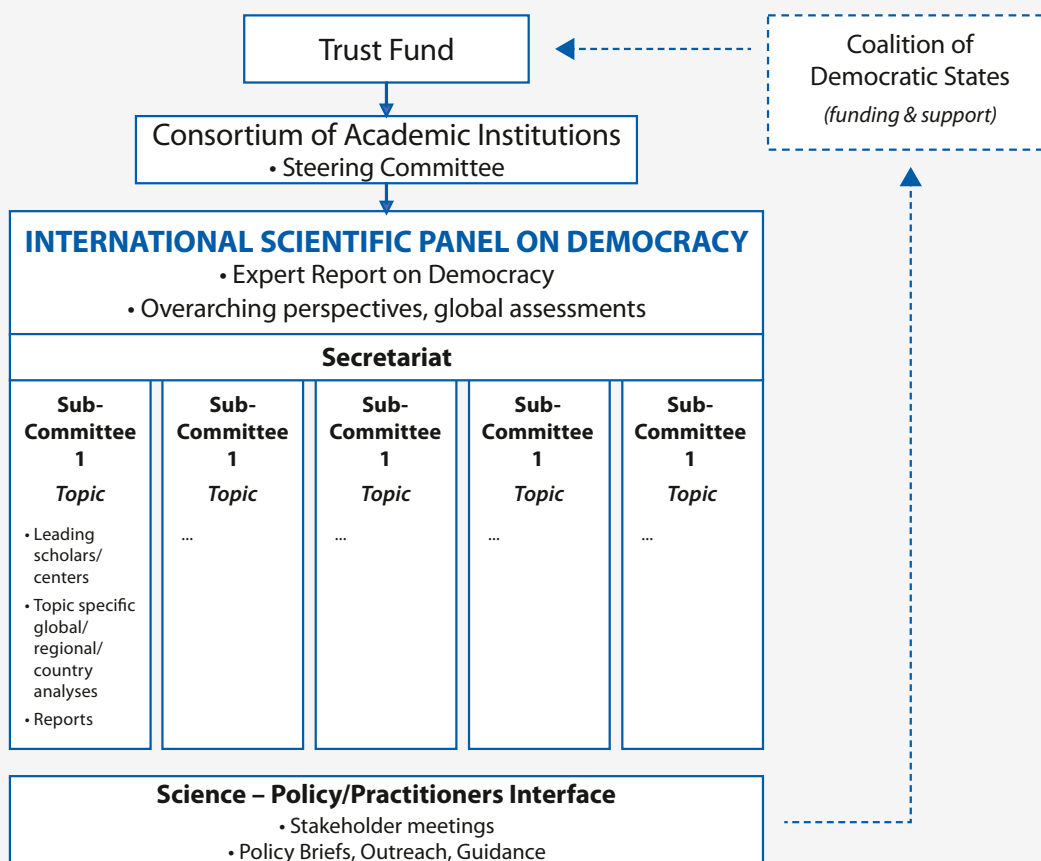
The *coalition of democratic states* provides the core funding to a trust fund (or similar) that is owned by a consortium of academic and other reputable institutions. These institutions are represented in the Steering Committee which appoints members of the ISPD but beyond that has oversight functions only.

The *ISPD* meets twice a year and is tasked with 1) providing a scientific consensus on the state of democratic institutions worldwide in the *Expert Report on Democracy*, and 2) bringing the findings from topic-specific sub-committees together to provide the overall evidence base on the dividends of democracy at a global scale. The members of the ISPD are expected to conduct the equivalent of about three months of fulltime work per year.

The *secretariat* supports the work of both the ISPD and its sub-committees and organizes the interface for science-policy/practitioners. The secretariat is estimated to need at least three to five fulltime officers.

The *sub-committees* meet quarterly and are tasked with identifying and collating the best available, robust scientific evidence on the relationship between democracy/autocracy as well as democratization/autocratization, and the area of its concern (e.g. economic development, human and global health, climate change mitigation, ICT, human rights and freedoms, etc). The recruitment of scholars is critical to the success of the ISPD and its sub-committees. The primary criterion for invitations will be based on publishing robust findings in the most highly regarded international, peer-reviewed scientific journals and publishing houses in respective field. In addition, the ISPD and its sub-committees must reflect a wide variety of expertise from both the North and the Global South, and be well-balanced with regard to gender, race, and ethnicity.

FIGURE 1. ISPD ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



Based on the collation of evidence, the sub-committees will identify gaps in the existing evidence-base, and conduct its own, cross-disciplinary studies to fill those gaps with essential knowledge. The work for each individual who are members of a sub-committee is estimated to between one and two months of fulltime work per year, and each sub-committee needs at least one full-time officer coordinating and supporting the work.

Examples of possible topics for such interdisciplinary sub-committees:

1. Supply side: Global/regional institutional trends (democratization / autocratization);
2. Demand side: regional surveys including cross-cutting and selected country analysis, which represent trends on popular supports for democracy;
3. Outcome: Human development (health, life expectancy, infant mortality, disease control, etc);
4. Outcome: Social development (education, cooperation, social protection schemes, empowerment of women and children);
5. Outcome: Economic development (income, employment, public goods, corruption);
6. Outcome: Climate change mitigation and environment;
7. Outcome: Peace and human security;
8. Outcome: Innovation, technology, and digital communication.

In the *interface for science-policy/practitioners*, stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on findings and, in particular, to discuss of provide guidance on how the findings can be translated and communicated to policy-makers and practitioners. The interface's core activities consist of policy briefs summarizing findings from the sub-committees, and direct workshops/conferences with policy-makers and practitioners.

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Global Standards, Local Knowledge



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