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**Federal Department of
Foreign Affairs FDFA**

GUIDELINES ON DEMOCRACY 2025–28

FOREIGN
POLICY
STRATEGY
2024–27
GUIDELINES
ON DEMOCRACY
2025–28

Foreword

"Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Churchill's bon mot points to a central truth: democracy is challenging. It requires patience, compromise and constant vigilance.

Without these underpinnings, it can slide towards demagoguery or become unbalanced. Tensions may arise between democratic self-determination and obligations under international and human rights law. Democracies develop intermittently and follow a range of trajectories, while international law tends to pursue a steady, cumulative logic. For all its challenges, democracy remains the most reliable framework for freedom and social cohesion. It demands that we stand up for it.

2024 was a global stress test for democracy. Over 4 billion people in 73 countries were eligible to vote, with over 1.5 billion actually casting their ballot. This super election year saw growing mistrust of institutions, the rise of populist forces and a crisis in the political centre. All of which goes to show that democracy cannot be taken for granted. It depends on participation, trust and balance. Where these are lacking, there is a risk of polarisation, mistrust, apathy – and a creeping loss of democratic substance. The wake-up call delivered by the bumper election year of 2024 could not be clearer: democracy is in a structural crisis.

Switzerland's Federal Constitution includes a clear mandate to promote democracy around the world (Art. 54 para. 2). In view of global democratic backsliding, the Federal Council has defined democracy promotion as one of four thematic priorities in the Foreign Policy Strategy 2024–27 (section 5.4). This strategic focus is more relevant than ever. Swiss democracy too, with its unique mix of direct participation and federal diversity, has a responsibility to build bridges, not walls.

Yes, democracy is challenging, but the effort involved pays off. Today especially, democracy provides the most stable foundation for freedom, justice and resilience.

I hope you find this document an inspiring read.

Ignazio Cassis
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Head of the Federal Department of
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1 Introduction

Democracy is currently in retreat worldwide, and autocracy is on the rise. No longer content with consolidating their own domestic power, some authoritarian regimes are operating beyond their borders to prevent the emergence of new democracies or to weaken or destabilise existing ones. A significantly larger proportion of the world's population now lives in authoritarian countries than in democratic ones (section 2.2).

The resurgence of autocracies is the result of profound geopolitical shifts. The current context is seeing the emergence not only of new alliances but also of new ideological tensions between democratic and authoritarian states.

Democracies are also under pressure from within, amid declining confidence in the ability of democratic governments to tackle the major challenges of our time, from migration to climate change. This loss of trust is linked to perceived exclusion from decision-making processes. Democracy and trust in governments thus go hand in hand, as do the loss of democracy and the loss of trust in state institutions.

Democracy is a key component of Swiss political identity. The promotion of democracy is also a constitutional and legal mandate (Art. 54 para. 2 of the Federal Constitution and Art. 2 let. c of the Federal Act on Measures pertaining to Civil Peace Support and the Promotion of Human Rights).

Promoting democracy can contribute to peace and sustainable development. Established democracies virtually never wage war against each other and are more resistant to conflict than autocracies. Democracies also provide a better basis for the economic and social development of a society: they lead to economic growth and are associated with better access to safe water, electricity and education, lower infant mortality and greater gender equality.[1]

1 V-Dem Institute, 2023, Case for Democracy.

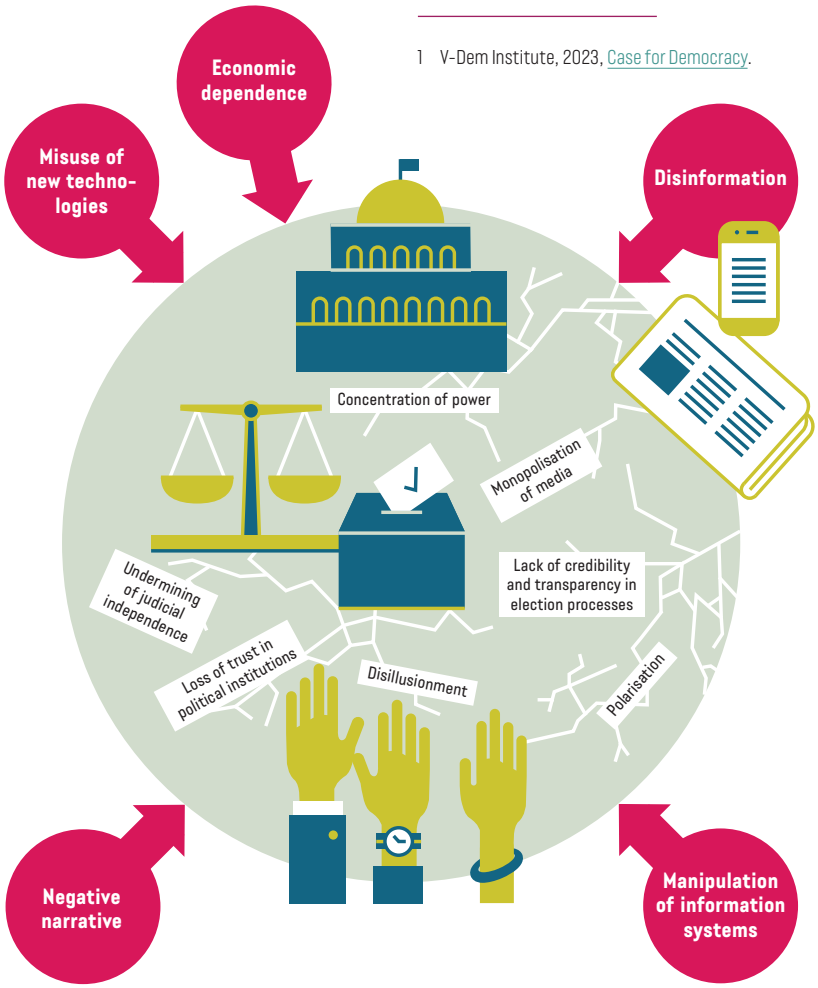


Figure 1: Democracies are under pressure from inside and outside.

Democracy and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations recognised for the first time the important role played by good governance and peace in sustainable development. This is reflected particularly in ***Goal 16*** *on peace, justice and accountable institutions. Although this goal does not refer explicitly to democracy, some of the targets are linked to democratic values:*

- *promote the rule of law and access to justice (16.3);*
- *reduce corruption and bribery (16.5);*
- *develop accountable and transparent institutions (16.6);*
- *ensure inclusive and participatory decision-making (16.7);*
- *ensure access to information and protect fundamental freedoms (16.10);*
- *and promote non-discriminatory laws (16.b).*

Preserving and strengthening democracy is in Switzerland's interests. That is why the Federal Council included democracy as one of four thematic priorities in the Foreign Policy Strategy (FPS 2024–27), thereby setting a new strategic focus.

These Guidelines on Democracy, drawn up by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), form the conceptual basis for this new Foreign Policy Strategy priority. The guidelines provide the framework for the FDFA's work on democracy promotion over the next four years. They define the objectives of this work, set priorities and describe the necessary working tools.

The Guidelines on Democracy are embedded in the foreign policy strategy cascade, the aim being to enhance coherence and facilitate coordination in democracy-focused foreign policy.

Figure 2: Thematic priorities of Swiss foreign policy in 2024–27.

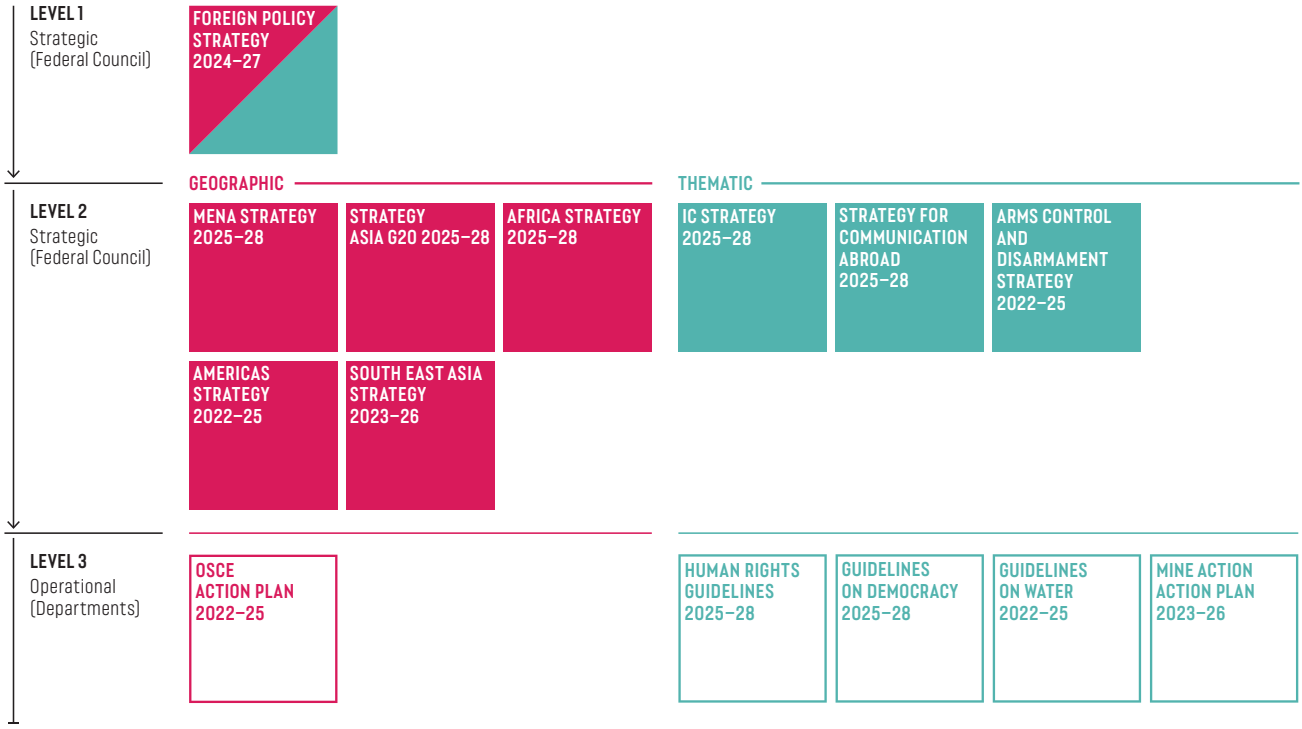


Figure 3: Foreign policy strategy cascade (selection of documents illustrating the three levels): the Guidelines on Democracy are at level 3.

2 Foundations

2.1 History and development

There is no universal definition of 'democracy' or universally accepted model of democratic government. Rather, democracy is an "unending argument about democracy itself"[2] – a series of snapshots in a constantly evolving process. This process explores the fundamental meaning of democracy, how decisions are made in a democracy, who can participate in this decision-making process, and when and how they can do so.

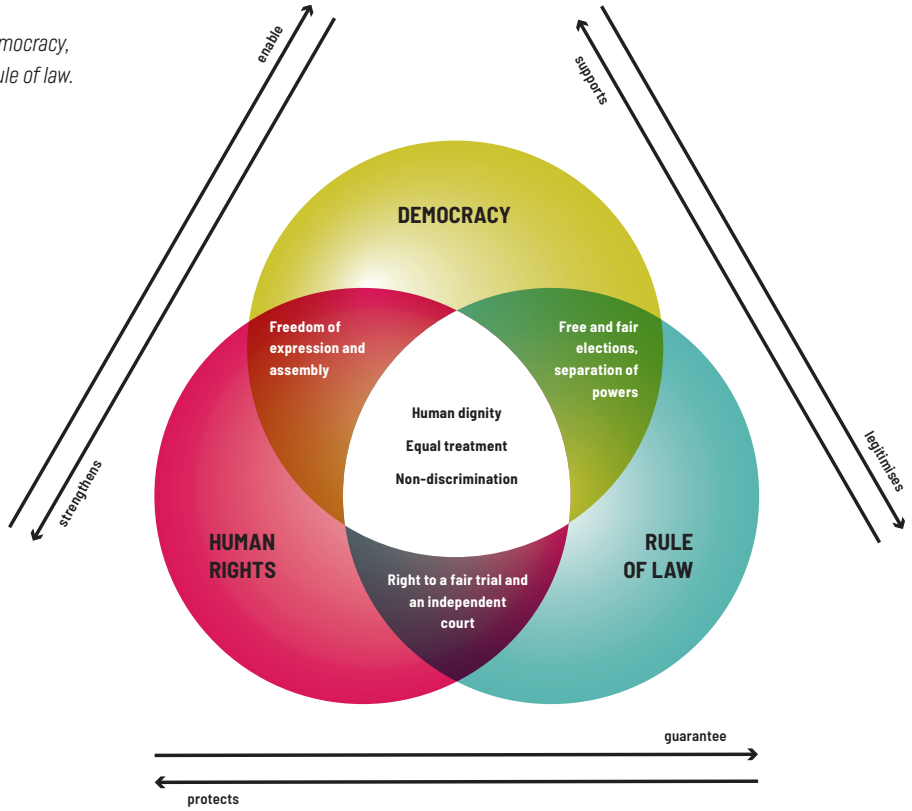
Nevertheless, there are institutions, processes and principles that are almost always mentioned in the same breath as democracy. These include transparent, credible and free elections, freedom of expression, the protection of minorities, a universally accessible justice system and independent courts, the division of state power between the executive, legislative and judicial branches (separation of powers) and the checks and balances between them. The principle of participation is also a key component of democracy, with democracies allowing citizens to effectively shape their political future.

The term 'democracy' was coined to describe the form of government in ancient Athens (and other city states of ancient Greece). It is derived from the two Greek words *demos* and *kratos* ('people' and 'power'). These form the core of what we understand by democracy, namely a form of government based on the sovereignty of the people.

Democracy has been 'invented' more than once and in more than one place. It has multiple roots and is by no means an exclusively Western phenomenon. Citizens' assemblies were already widespread over 4,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and later on the Indian subcontinent. The democracy of ancient Athens was established around 2,500 years ago.

The Enlightenment had a major influence on our understanding of democracy. Its focus on the individual and the individual's capacity for reason provided the basis on which philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Baron de

Figure 4: The triad of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.



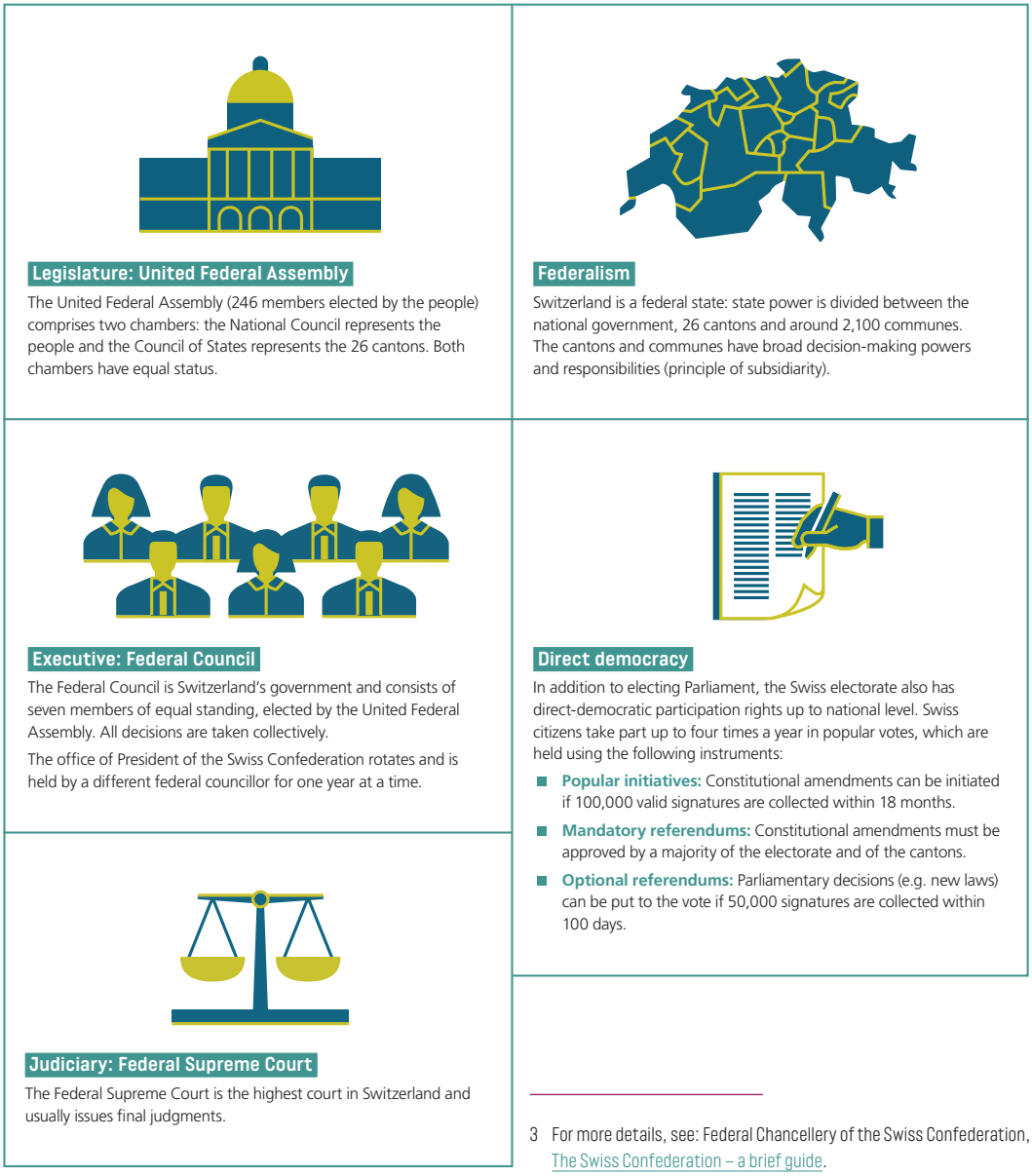
2 International IDEA, 2023, The Global State of Democracy, p. 4.

Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau developed ideas and concepts that are still closely associated with democracy today: freedom, individual rights, the separation of powers and the fundamental assumption that all people are of equal value. These ideas initiated a series of revolutions and a process of democratisation lasting several centuries. The Enlightenment thus played a formative role in shaping our view of democracy, in which democracy, human rights and the rule of law are seen as a triad of mutually reinforcing conditions.

As a result, democracy is often equated with a liberal model of democracy, particularly in Europe and the English-speaking world. This model places the will of the majority front and centre. However, that will is also limited by a constitution that grants individual freedoms and rights, which explains why our current understanding of democracy also includes the protection of minorities.

Democracy exists in a range of institutional and procedural forms. Most present-day democratic models are representative in design: the public elects representatives who legislate and govern on their behalf. In some democracies, the public is directly involved in legislation and governance, meaning that they not only elect representatives but also systematically vote on substantive issues. Such direct democracy is practised at local level in a number of countries. Switzerland is one of the few countries to also use direct-democratic instruments at national level. Moreover, federalism and the autonomy of the communes are integral to the Swiss concept of democracy, as they play a key role in ensuring that state power is not centrally concentrated.

Figure 5: The Swiss political system [3]



3 For more details, see: Federal Chancellery of the Swiss Confederation, 2025, The Swiss Confederation – a brief guide.

2.2 Current situation and trends

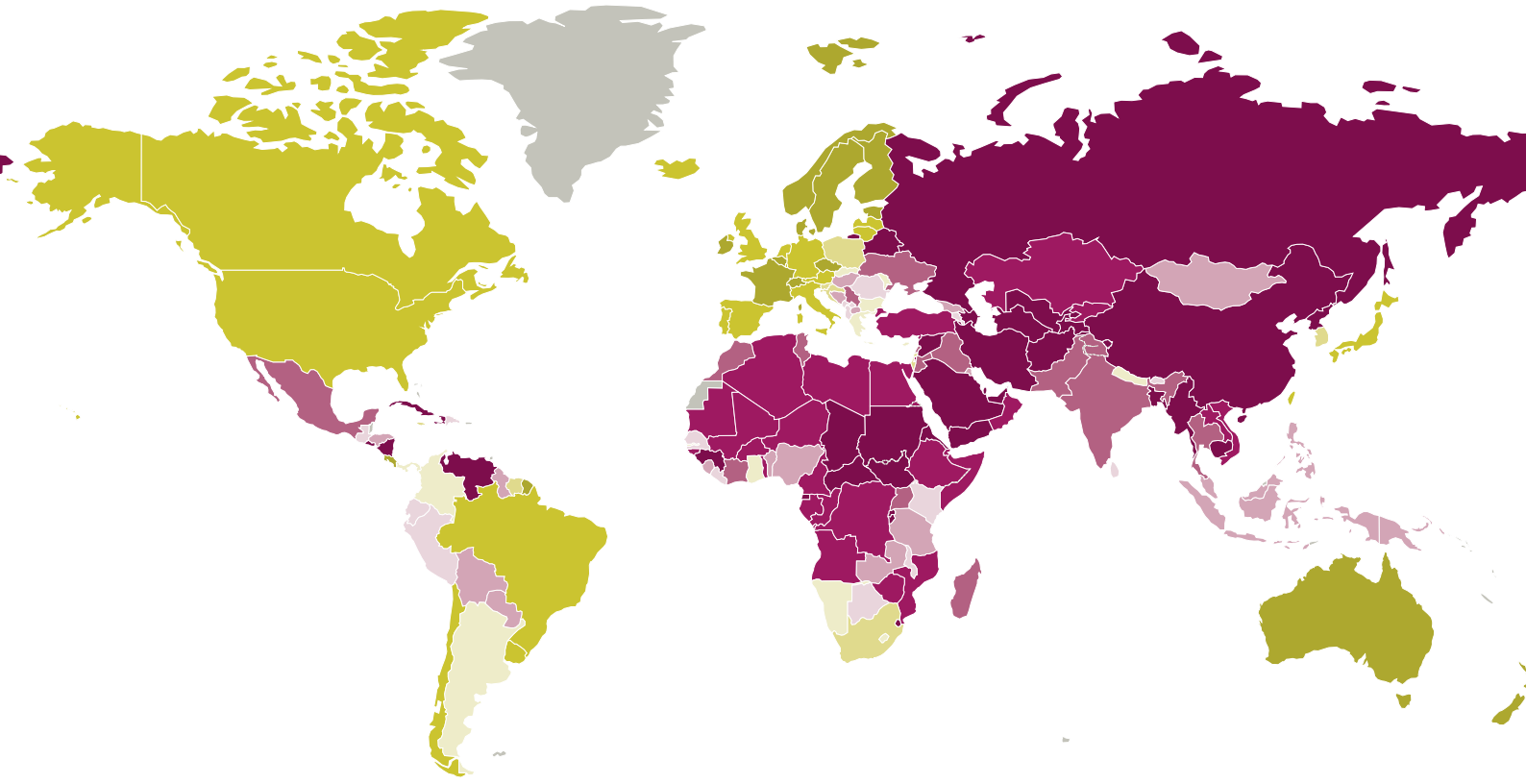
After several major waves of democratisation around the world since the Enlightenment, the global level of democracy today has fallen back to roughly the same level as in 1986. At the end of 2024, 72% of the world's population lived in authoritarian systems, and respect for fundamental human rights and the integrity of democratic processes and institutions have deteriorated in a majority of countries.[4]

This global democratic recession is characterised by two distinct but interrelated phenomena. Firstly, there has been democratic backsliding in many parts of the world. Countries that had already achieved a certain degree of democracy have experienced an erosion of their basic democratic institutions and processes, meaning that they are becoming less democratic. Secondly, an increase in authoritarianism can be observed: authoritarian states are becoming even more authoritarian and are seeking to undermine democracy beyond their borders by means of 'sharp power'[6] or outright violence. At the same time, an increasingly negative narrative about the value and advantages of democracy as a form of government is spreading in many places.

Figure 6: Level of democracy worldwide (2024).[5]

4 See V-Dem Institute, V-Dem Report 2025.
5 See V-Dem Institute, V-Dem Dataset v15.

6 'Sharp power' refers to the targeted exertion of influence by authoritarian states on other countries in order to manipulate or destabilise their political systems, societies or institutions. In contrast to 'soft power', which relies on positive appeal and cultural influence, sharp power often uses disinformation, propaganda, economic leverage or cyberattacks.



Scale representing level of democracy 2024

Lowest level of democracy — **Highest level of democracy**

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 0.6 0.7 0.8 0.9 1

No data

This figure is based on data from the V-Dem Institute (V-Dem Dataset V.15). There are other institutions that collect and publish their own indices. These include International IDEA, Freedom House and the Economist Democracy Index. The qualification of the state of democracy can vary depending on the index.

2.3 Switzerland's strengths

Switzerland has a long democratic tradition and is regularly cited as an example of successful democratic governance. This gives it credibility when it comes to democracy promotion. Its credibility is based on the following factors in particular:

- **Democratic control and power-sharing:** With its direct-democratic participation mechanisms, concordance and federal structure (figure 5), Switzerland demonstrates how concentration of power can be prevented and a broad range of democratic control instruments deployed.

- **Integration of diversity:** Switzerland is culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse. Its political institutions and processes remain able to integrate different needs and priorities. There is a particular focus on the protection of minorities, especially linguistic minorities.

- **Political stability:** Switzerland's democratic system is adaptable. It responds to social, economic, demographic and technological challenges with broad-based solutions. Well-regulated opportunities for democratic participation not only offer scope for change and further development, but also guarantee political stability and order.

Switzerland is also well positioned to support partner countries in strengthening their democracies, given its long track record of foreign policy action in a number of democracy-related areas:

- **Democratisation for sustainable development and peace:** Switzerland supports various aspects of democratic governance and democracy promotion in its international cooperation (IC) partner countries, as a contribution to sustainable development and peace. These include protection of human rights, promotion of decentralisation, participation of minorities in political processes, combating of corruption, support for parliaments and free, transparent and credible elections, and promotion of balanced public information. Switzerland also participates in election observation missions and supports, for example, constitutional revisions or security apparatus reforms with deployments of the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding (SEP). In addition, it works to ensure that women are involved on an equal footing in democratic decision-making processes.

- **Human rights diplomacy and rule of law:** Swiss human rights diplomacy and its commitment to the rule of law also help to strengthen democracy (figure 4). The realisation of human rights is a cornerstone of democratic societies, providing space for the individual and societal freedoms on which democracy is based and protecting the individual from arbitrary state power. The rule of law counteracts authoritarian tendencies, as political institutions only act within the framework of existing, constitutionally enacted laws, applying them consistently and predictably while upholding equality before the law and non-discrimination.

2.4 Principles

Based on its credibility and many years of experience (section 2.3) and on the belief that a democratic order is in its own interests (Introduction), Switzerland works to promote democracy in other countries. In so doing, it adheres to the following principles:

A

Dialogue not export

→ Switzerland promotes democracy through dialogue based on a partnership of equals. Rather than trying to export a specific concept or model of democracy, Switzerland fosters a common understanding of democracy and of democratic institutions and processes.

B

Context sensitivity

→ The democratisation process is complex and non-linear in all established democracies. In its activities, Switzerland seeks to identify and avoid potential adverse consequences of its actions at an early stage (the 'do no harm' principle). It also considers the history, culture and economic and social structures of other countries, while remaining committed to universally accepted democratic principles.

C

Prioritisation

→ There is a high level of need for democracy promotion measures worldwide. Given its limited resources, Switzerland focuses on selected topics and countries in order to maximise its impact and added value. It relies on synergies, available expertise and experience as well as existing networks.

D

Human rights and rule of law

→ Switzerland advocates the universality and indivisibility of human rights, the rule of law and the norms and fundamental freedoms that form the cornerstones of democracy. These include in particular the human rights that it promotes as part of its human rights diplomacy, such as freedom of expression and assembly, women's rights and the protection of minorities.

E

Involvement of political actors

→ The resilience of a democracy depends not only on the strength of its institutions, but also on the attitudes and convictions of political actors. In various contexts, it has been shown that political will is of particular relevance in the development of democracy. Switzerland therefore seeks to engage with political actors and focuses on dialogue and diplomacy for democracy.

F

Agility

→ Democracies are in a constant state of flux. There may setbacks, but there is always democratic progress too. Switzerland acknowledges these dynamics, adopts an agile approach and anticipates developments. It helps countries to foster positive democratic developments, where such support is wanted and possible.

3 Main objective

Against the backdrop of global democratic recession and ongoing geopolitical shifts, the main task in the coming years will be to safeguard the democratic world. Democracy promotion that takes a realistic, rather than idealistic, view of the world must therefore counteract democratic backsliding in particular. That is why Switzerland is focusing on the resilience of established, stagnating or declining democracies.

In authoritarian and fragile contexts, it continues to carry out democracy-related work, although it does not view such work primarily as democracy promotion in the sense of strengthening the resilience of democratic institutions and processes. Rather, the main emphasis of its work in such contexts is to improve governance, for example by preserving the remaining civic space, supporting good governance or ensuring respect for human rights. While democracy promotion in the narrower sense presupposes that democratic structures and institutions are already in place and to a certain extent established, democracy-related work can also begin where no democratic structures and institutions are yet in place, thereby creating the necessary basis for autonomous democratic developments.

The main objective of Switzerland's democracy promotion is to work in partnership to strengthen and protect democratic processes and institutions where these already exist (at least to some extent) but are at risk.

Switzerland raises its profile as an innovative and impact-oriented actor in this foreign policy area by working in the fields of action set out below, specifically 'diplomacy for democracy' and 'strengthening of institutional and societal framework conditions'.

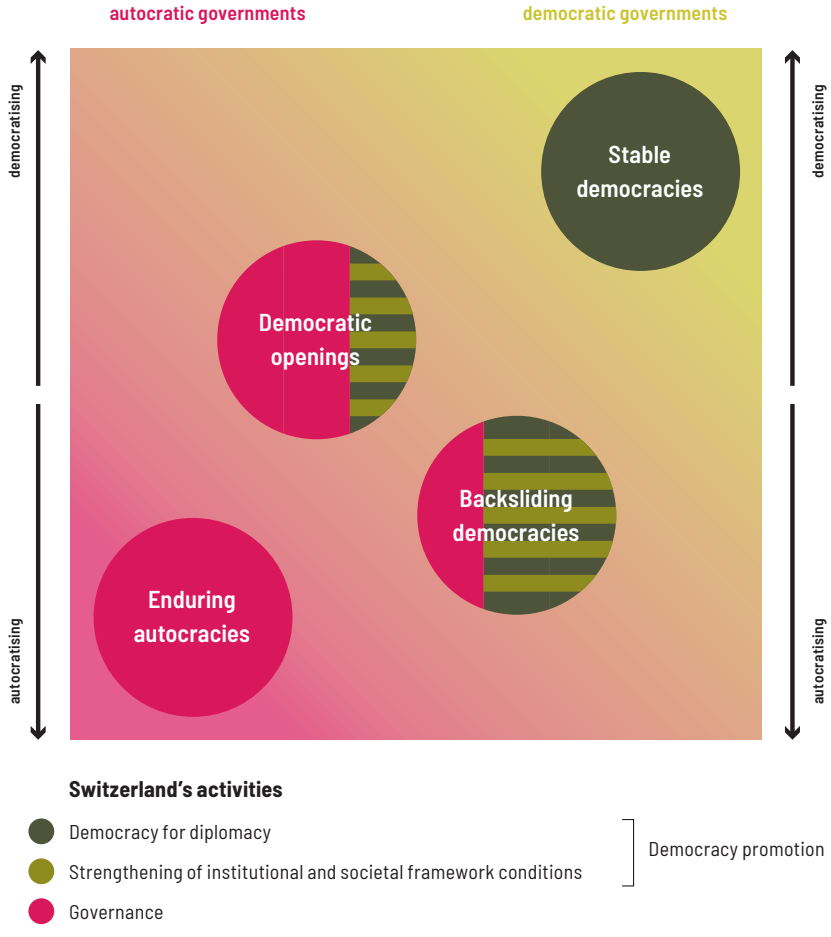


Figure 7: Overview of Switzerland's activities in the areas of 'governance', 'strengthening of institutional and societal framework conditions' and 'diplomacy for democracy'.

4 Fields of action

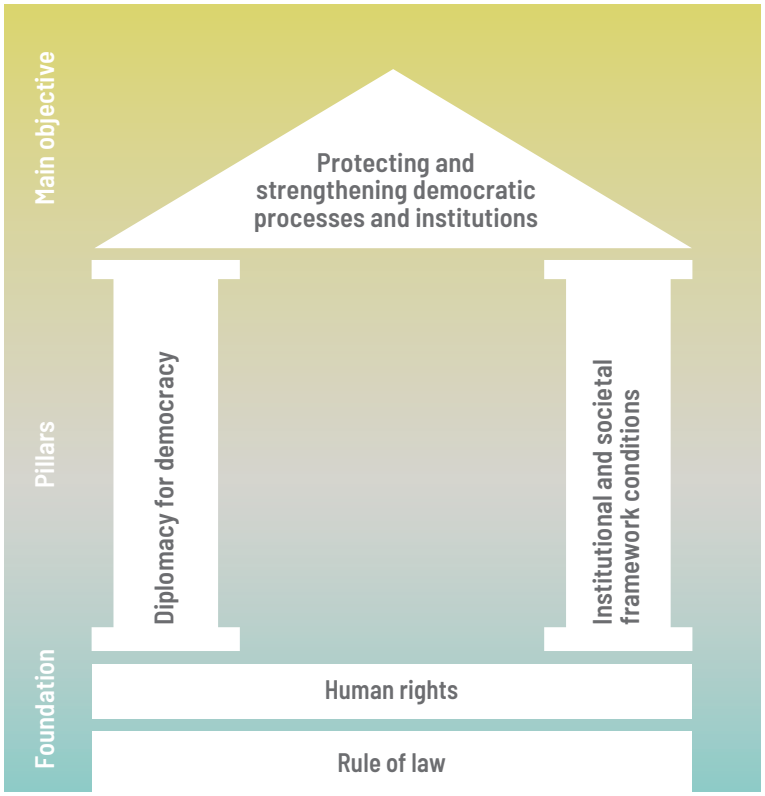


Figure 8: Democracy promotion (foundations, pillars and main objective)

Field of action 1:

Diplomacy for democracy

Switzerland strengthens the political framework for democracy. To this end, it uses bilateral and multilateral dialogues and dialogue platforms to embed democracy in the global discourse as a successful and effective model and to counteract democratic fatigue. Its many years of experience providing good offices mean that Switzerland is ideally placed to make credible and targeted use of these diplomatic tools.

In the context of diplomacy for democracy, Switzerland makes increasing use of diplomatic instruments to promote democracy.

The three main instruments have been extensively redesigned and will have to prove themselves in practice over the coming years:

4.1.1 Bilateral and multilateral dialogues

Switzerland uses political dialogues with other countries and with intergovernmental organisations to enhance mutual understanding of different democratic models, to discuss suitable ways of promoting democracy and to drive cooperation on specific issues. Where there is interest and clear added value in doing so, it launches its own democracy dialogues within the framework of existing resources.

An example of a multilateral dialogue platform: Giessbach Democracy Retreat

The Giessbach Democracy Retreat has been organised by the FDFA State Secretariat's Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) since 2022. At the retreat, high-ranking representatives from between 10 and 12 countries exchange views on issues relating to democracy in a confidential setting. Experts provide input on topical issues and support an open and self-critical dialogue. The Giessbach Democracy Retreat also supports Swiss diplomacy for democracy in building a network of states that are committed to democracy. This network can promote joint learning and action and so contribute to strengthening democracy worldwide.

In the multilateral sphere, Switzerland promotes democracy through initiatives and dialogue platforms. It raises democracy issues in organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the OECD and relevant UN bodies, for example in International Geneva.

A 'democratic deficit' in multilateralism?

The multilateral system is growing and is more closely meshed than ever before. The expansion and bureaucratisation of this system also brings challenges from the point of view of democracy. For example, individual states represent their interests primarily through the executive branch. The weaker the legislative branch and democratic participation in member states, the less influence they have. This can lead to talk of a 'democratic deficit' in multilateralism. Switzerland works with other countries to counteract these tendencies and improve the transparency of multilateral decision-making processes, with a view to also strengthening domestic procedures for participating in these processes.

4.1.2 Good offices

Switzerland promotes platforms where state and non-state actors can exchange experiences on strengthening democratic institutions and processes. The involvement of actors who have already achieved successful democratic mobilisations is especially valuable in order to facilitate joint learning. In this context, Switzerland makes particular use of International Geneva and collaborates with organisations that have networks, expertise and experience. These include multilateral organisations, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and Swiss platforms. Partner countries are also assisted in the implementation of such events or processes.

4.1.3 Support for democratic progress

Democracy can advance as well as regress. Time and again, societies succeed in deposing undemocratic or authoritarian governments through elections or protest movements or prevail on them to change their political agenda. These countries often rely on rapid external support. Switzerland aims to respond quickly in such cases, deploying its diplomatic instruments where called for.

An example of support for democratic progress: Rapid Action Team (RACT)

The PHRD's Rapid Action Team (RACT) was set up in 2020 as a means of identifying and exploiting short-term opportunities for conflict resolution, mediation and dialogue support in conflict situations, as a complement to long-term peace policy. The RACT now also enables a needs-oriented response to democratic openings, based on a start-up mindset. For example, if elections or protests open up the possibility of democratic progress, there may be a short window of opportunity to support them. Such opportunities must be spotted quickly and require an efficient response. The RACT provides the flexible structure needed for agile and innovative action in this kind of situation.

In addition to these three instruments, Switzerland will take **cross-cutting action** to counteract the widespread negative discourse surrounding democracy and bolster a more positive, meaningful approach. The aim is to show that democracy not only has demonstrable, positive impacts on peace and sustainable development (see Introduction), but is also built on a common foundation. Even mature democracies have to continually renew themselves by finding viable solutions, keeping political polarisation in check and thereby securing people's trust.

Field of action 2

Institutional and societal framework conditions

Countervailing institutions are crucial for strengthening democratic resilience. They include formal institutions such as the executive, legislature and judiciary, which provide safeguards through the separation of powers and a system of checks and balances, as well as informal institutions and organisations such as political parties, associations and the media. The latter enrich democratic debate through their diversity and demand active participation in the political process. Together, they prevent the concentration and abuse of power and curb authoritarian tendencies by building systemic resistance and ensuring that societal priorities are continuously incorporated into the political agenda. Restrictions on the scope of action and independence of formal state institutions or informal institutions and organisations are often the first warning sign that democracy is under attack.

Even the best countervailing institutions can lose their effectiveness if citizens lack trust in them or are denied access to these institutions and knowledge about their use. Without active democracy, institutions risk losing their significance or becoming alienated from citizens. For this reason, the focus must not be limited to institutional frameworks but must also take into account the social foundations. The knowledge, skills and experience of citizens play a vital role in actively shaping political processes, giving citizens a say and keeping democracy alive.

Six instruments combine and consolidate Switzerland's activities in this area:

4.2.1 Information and media systems

Freedom of expression, a diverse media system and pluralistic journalism are essential for enabling the public to develop informed opinions and hold governments to account. However, freedom of expression is coming under increasing pressure worldwide. Authoritarian regimes are strengthening their control over information systems, including in other countries, by developing or buying up infrastructure to spread their narratives. Meanwhile, restrictions on journalistic activity and the transformation of the media into mouthpieces for ideological or special interests harbours the danger of uniformity of thinking. This undermines not only diversity of opinion, but also the public's trust in democracy.

An example of support for independent and diverse media systems: IFPIM

The spread of disinformation is a growing phenomenon worldwide. Digitalisation and the proliferation of channels have also put the business model of many independent media companies under pressure. With this in mind, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supported the establishment of a new International Fund for Public Interest Media (IFPIM) in 2022. IFPIM strives to boost the resilience of information spaces and promote diverse, local media organisations. In Lebanon, for example, IFPIM funds one of the most important sources of independent journalism in the Arab region, while in Nepal IFPIM funding has helped to recruit a new group of journalists from under-represented communities for an independent media outlet.

New technologies have revolutionised the information landscape and offer opportunities for democracy, for example by promoting transparency, supporting independent media and bolstering freedom of expression. At the same time, they pose risks such as social polarisation, radicalisation and the misuse of AI for surveillance purposes. Switzerland therefore supports platforms, organisations and regulations designed to ensure a diverse information and media landscape.

Switzerland promotes freedom of expression by supporting diverse media systems and protecting independent media professionals. It combats manipulation through new technologies and harnesses their potential to strengthen democracy. It also reinforces the international legal framework to ensure a balanced information landscape and enable citizens to exercise their democratic rights in an informed way.

4.2.2 Elections and parliaments

Free, transparent and credible elections at national and local level are a key cornerstone of democracy, even if democracy cannot be reduced to the holding of elections. Switzerland promotes independent electoral authorities, balanced public information and peaceful public debates. It is committed to equal participation of women in elections, fosters the participation of minorities in political processes and supports peaceful conduct by political parties.

Switzerland also works for electoral reforms, participates in international election observation missions[7] and supports the recommendations of recognised organisations (the OSCE, EU and OAS) following election observation missions. In this context, elections are viewed from a long-term perspective rather than as isolated events, taking into account a careful

7 Election observation missions for ODIHR (OSCE), the EU and the OAS are supported by the Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding (SEP) with the deployment of Swiss election observers.

political risk assessment spanning the entire election cycle. This support is always considered as complementary to and connected with good governance programmes.

An example of support for parliaments: North Macedonia
For over 15 years, the SDC has been helping the Parliament of North Macedonia to strengthen its administrative capacities and processes. Parliamentary procedures have been optimised and data management improved, making Parliament more efficient. Switzerland's Parliamentary Services have helped to draft new laws on Parliament's internal organisation, while the SDC has worked to foster cross-party consensus, enhance the professional skills of MPs and boost Parliament's independence. Switzerland is also working to strengthen civil society on parliamentary issues.

Switzerland also strengthens parliaments. This takes place at both national and local level and mainly in cooperation with Switzerland's Parliamentary Services, which advise other countries on the drafting of laws, budget and overall supervision, and communication with the electorate, in a process of mutual exchange.[8]

Switzerland promotes free, transparent and credible elections at national and local level. It also expands its support for parliaments, to help them fulfil their core functions and build their capacities.

4.2.3 Decentralisation and federalism

Decentralisation sets the framework within which constitutional responsibilities and decision-making powers are transferred from the national to the subnational and local levels. It thus nurtures a system that splits political power between multiple levels and actors. Power-sharing counteracts authoritarian tendencies and makes democracies more resilient. Furthermore, decentralisation can strengthen democracy by contributing to more efficient political processes and bolstering citizen participation and oversight.

Support for decentralisation is geared towards the principle of subsidiarity – which means that decisions are taken as close as possible to citizens – as well as considerations of effectiveness. Federalism is one possible form of decentralisation. In a federal state structure, the constitutional responsibilities are divided between a federal government and federal units. Both levels have their own electoral constituencies, institutions and decision-making and financial powers. Switzerland has extensive experience in the development and implementation of a federal state organisation. It makes this expertise available on request, provided that the necessary framework conditions are in place.

8 For more details, see: Parliamentary technical cooperation (PTC).

Switzerland contributes to well-functioning governance at various levels of government. Building on previous activities, it supports decentralisation reforms aimed at the appropriate and transparent transfer of competencies from the national to the subnational and local levels. At the same time, it develops the ability of subnational institutions to provide services and engage in dialogue with citizens.

4.2.4 Fight against corruption

Corruption is a challenge for many countries and a barrier to their sustainable development.[9] It also harms democracy: where individuals abuse their power to influence political decisions in their own interests, corruption distorts collective decision-making. Furthermore, corrupt institutions undermine the principle of the rule of law. Powerful individuals can sidestep the rules, thereby eroding the foundations of democracy. Corruption can also lead to the unlawful diversion of public funds, resulting in dwindling resources for public services.

An example of the fight against corruption: Ukraine
In dealings with the public administration, the people of Ukraine face challenges such as corruption, restricted access to information and often inadequate public services. With the EGAP project ('E-Governance for Accountability and Participation'), the SDC is working to reduce corruption and improve access to public services. In particular, the project promotes the accountability and efficiency of public services such as business registrations, birth registrations and pension payments, thanks to newly established e-government portals. EGAP has developed a raft of democracy instruments, including e-petitions, e-consultations and online complaints procedures for services. These enable citizens to participate more effectively in political decision-making processes.

Switzerland strengthens democratic institutions and processes by taking preventive measures to combat corruption and by strategically building the capacities of the judiciary and anti-corruption authorities. It is committed to global initiatives to recover illicitly acquired assets and combat illicit financial flows. Through partnerships with international centres of expertise, it promotes the cooperation required to effectively combat corruption.[10] Switzerland is also an active participant in relevant multilateral conventions and forums.[11]

9 FDFA, 2020, The Federal Council's Anti-Corruption Strategy 2021–24.
10 The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, International Centre for Asset Recovery and the World Bank and UNODC's Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative.
11 The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), Anti-Corruption Working Group, the G20, the OECD Working Group on Bribery and the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

Switzerland consolidates its work on combating corruption. In addition to the criminal and human rights dimension, it focuses particularly on the impact of corruption on democratic processes and institutions.

4.2.5 Deliberation and participation

Deliberation, i.e. thinking and talking together about political issues, and participation in political processes are cornerstones of democracy. The practice of public political discussion has a long tradition in almost all societies. In Switzerland, it has found expression in, among other things, the formal processes of direct democracy, which promote public deliberation and participation through regular popular votes. In other contexts, different approaches are developed to involve citizens more closely in the political debate. From the citizens' assemblies common in Western Europe to the participatory budget processes developed in Latin America and the digital consultation platforms successfully implemented in Asia, these approaches enhance democratic resilience by helping to reduce social polarisation and to overcome political differences without recourse to violence. At the same time, they create spaces for constructive dialogue that strengthens trust in democracy.

Where desired and appropriate, Switzerland can provide targeted support for the development and implementation of innovative models to promote deliberation and participation, as part of innovative pilot projects. Here, it draws on its own experience and is guided by context-specific traditions and needs.

4.2.6 Civic and democracy education

Democracy education is about enabling citizens to participate actively in democratic processes, take responsibility, and understand and apply the values and principles of democracy. As well as teaching the basics of political systems, institutions, separation of powers and rights (civic education), it fosters people's ability to form their own opinions and handle information critically. It also helps to develop dialogue and conflict resolution skills that allow different points of view to be dealt with constructively. Democracy education promotes political participation and boosts long-term trust in democracy, making it vital for a vibrant democratic culture.

Switzerland's focus on democracy education builds on its existing work in the field of civic education.

5 Coordination and implementation

The Federal Constitution (Art. 54 para. 2) and the Federal Act on Measures pertaining to Civil Peace Support and the Promotion of Human Rights (Art. 2) require the Confederation to promote democracy. At the political and strategic level, the FPS 2024–27 defines the overarching goals (objective 24). The IC Strategy 2025–28 also places a new focus on democracy promotion.

These guidelines operationalise the above requirements. The PHRD is responsible for coordinating the implementation of these FDFA guidelines by means of monitoring and reporting.[12] In line with the 'structure follows strategy' principle, a Democracy Section has been in place in the PHRD since January 2024. Alongside existing bodies within the Federal Administration, this section also works on democracy promotion.[13]

Within the FDFA, democracy-related work is primarily the responsibility of the SDC[14] and the PHRD (State Secretariat), which jointly head the Interdepartmental Working Group on Democracy (IDWG Democracy). The Directorate of International Law (DIL) advises the federal authorities on matters of international law and ensures that Switzerland fulfils its international obligations. The members of the IDWG Democracy support the implementation of these guidelines and forge synergies.[15] The cantons are also involved. To ensure foreign policy coherence, these guidelines are incorporated into the Federal Council's geographical and thematic strategies.

Switzerland's external network contributes significantly to implementing the guidelines by analysing democracy-related developments in the host countries and identifying early signs of both positive and negative trends. The representations and missions are required to promote dialogue on democratic issues with state institutions, civil society actors, the private sector and academic institutions. In coordination with head office, they also carry out targeted diplomatic measures such as demarches and statements to strengthen democratic values and further Swiss foreign policy objectives.

12 The PHRD can finance individual third-party activities and projects on a selective basis and within the scope of its allocated resources in order to implement the strategic requirements in an impact- and goal-oriented manner. Cooperation with partners takes the form of specific and time-limited projects that effectively support the Confederation's objectives. The PHRD does not provide support for advocacy or lobbying activities in Switzerland.

13 The IC Strategy 2025–28 requires the PHRD to allocate 5% of its total budget to democracy promotion.

14 The SDC's priorities are democratic governance, decentralisation and the fight against corruption. To this end, it works with partners at national and local level in the priority countries.

15 The IDWG Democracy's members include units of the FDFA (Directorate of International Law, Prosperity and Sustainability Division, UN Division, Digitalisation Division and geographical divisions), the EAER (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs), the FDJP (Federal Office of Justice), the Federal Chancellery and the Parliamentary Services.

Annex

List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
DIL	Directorate of International Law
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FPS 2024–27	Foreign Policy Strategy 2024–27
IC	International cooperation
IDWG Democracy	Interdepartmental Working Group on Democracy
IFPIM	International Fund for Public Interest Media
International IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
OAS	Organization of American States
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PHRD	Peace and Human Rights Division
PTC	Parliamentary technical cooperation
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SEP	Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding
UN	United Nations
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy Institute

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