

# Special Committee

## Strengthening Democratic Governance and Democratic Institutions



# Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Definition of Key Terms
  - A. Governance
  - B. Democracy
  - C. Voter Awareness
  - D. Democratic Resilience
  - E. Civic Space
  - F. Democratic Deficit
  - G. Political Efficacy
  - H. Self-Determination
- III. General Overview
- IV. Major Parties Involved
  - A. The European Union
  - B. Inter-Governmental Organizations
  - C. National and Local Governments
  - D. Hungary
- V. Timeline of Key Events
- VI. Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue
  - A. The Abolition of Apartheid
  - B. The Conference on the Future of Europe
  - C. The Strengthening Democracy Task Force
- VII. Possible Solutions
  - A. Platform Explaining Government Processes
  - B. Recurring or Punctual Events
  - C. Simulations of Democratic Processes
  - D. Taskforce or Government Body
- VIII. Appendices
- IX. Bibliography



## Introduction

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, both the theory and the practice of democracy have undergone profound changes. However, strengthening democratic governance and democratic institutions remains an important issue. The goal of this committee is to improve current democratic processes and encourage citizens' participation in these processes. Among other things, this requires access to accurate information, inclusive and transparent electoral and parliamentary processes, democratic representation, and opportunities for non-state actors to influence decision-making and law proposals.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Governance

Governance refers to the exercise of political and administrative authority at all levels to manage a country's affairs. It encompasses the mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations, and mediate their differences.

### Democracy

Government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives. The United Nations does not advocate for a specific model of government but promotes democratic governance as a set of values and principles that should be followed for greater participation, equality, security and human development.

### Voter Awareness

Voter awareness refers to voters' will and preparedness to participate in elections and trust the electoral process.

### Democratic Resilience

In its strictest sense, democratic resilience means preventing democracies from becoming undemocratic. However, it also refers to maintaining high-quality institutions ensuring representative

government and participatory engagement, respect for fundamental human rights, checks on government, and the support of an impartial administration. Trust in public institutions is particularly important for democratic resilience.

## Civic Space

Civic space is the political, legislative, social and economic environment which enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns and act to influence and shape their societies. Civic space enables people to pursue multiple, at times competing, points of view both individually and collectively.

## Democratic Deficit

'Democratic deficit' is a term used to denote a situation where institutions and their decision-making procedures suffer from a lack of democracy and accountability. It refers to a perceived lack of accessibility or lack of representation of the ordinary citizen with respect to government institutions – a sense of there being a gap between the powers of those institutions and a perceived inability of citizens to influence those institutions' decisions.

## Political Efficacy

The feeling that personal political action may effect political and social change. Political efficacy is what makes citizens believe in voting and other forms of political engagement as worthwhile and effective tools for change, making it crucial for countries to increase their citizens' political efficacy if they wish for more participation in politics.

## Self-Determination

Self-determination is the right of people to decide their own destiny in the international order. Self-determination is protected in the United Nations Charter as a right of "all peoples." Contemporary notions of self-determination usually distinguish between "internal" and "external" self-determination, suggesting that "self-determination" exists on a spectrum. Internal self-determination may refer to various political and social rights; by contrast, external self-determination refers to full legal independence/secession for the given 'people' from the larger politico-legal state.

## General Overview

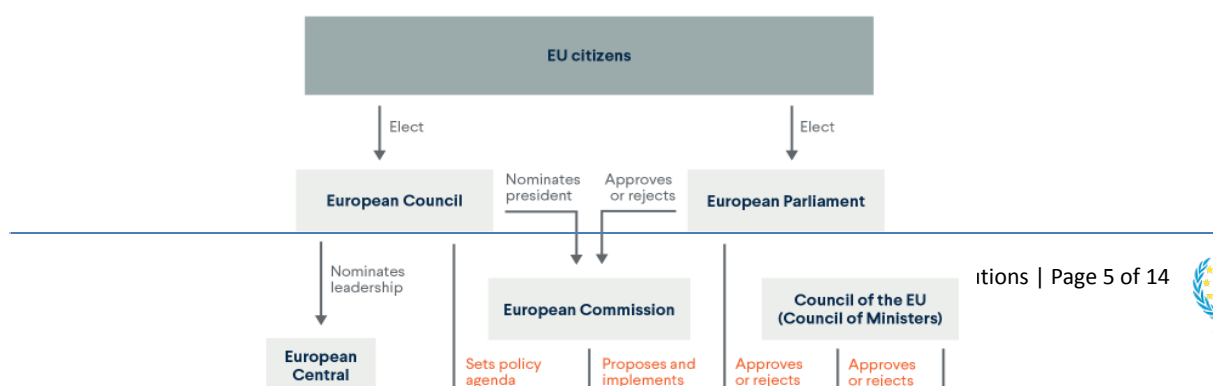
Strengthening democracy primarily requires participation from the people. It is essential that as many citizens as possible have the ability to take a part in politics. This not only includes encouraging higher turnouts at elections, improving ease of access to elections, and improving voter awareness, but also increasing citizens' participation in politics outside of election times in ways including but not limited to petitioning, contacting elected representatives, protesting, or working with others so as to solve common issues. Increasing involvement in politics also means giving citizens the ability to more directly participate, which means improving communication and exchanges between government and citizens. Aside from vote and participation, a strong democracy also requires independent, free and pluralistic media, free from government influence and able to expose multiple points of view, allowing citizens to deliberate and form their own opinions. Such dialogue and deliberation requires secure civic spaces, without discrimination against political opinions. Lastly, strong governmental institutions require trust. Transparent institutions are essential to strengthening democracy. This committee must ensure that democratic principles are respected and protected, and search to improve democratic resilience in member countries and the efficiency of democratic institutions at a national and international scale.

## Major Parties Involved

### The European Union

The EU has three main decision-making bodies: the European Parliament (representing EU citizens), the Council of the European Union (representing EU governments) and the European Commission (representing the EU's overall interests). These institutions all play different roles in law-making and directing EU policies. These institutions are constantly altered in various ways to address issues of democracy deficit, efficiency and coherence within the EU. Concerns of democratic backsliding and a gradual erosion of EU values in some Member States have been brought up in the EU parliament, which has supported the use of sanctions against any such breaches.

How Do the EU Institutions Work Together?



## Intergovernmental Organizations

Many intergovernmental organizations like the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance have expertise in democracy promotion and advocate for better practices in governance, elections, transparency, civic participation, and democracy assessment.

## National and Local Governments

Countries may have differing views on how democracy should be implemented, especially when it comes to the respective roles of different organizations. For instance, the roles and duties attributed to national governments in one country may be dealt with on a regional level in another country. Similarly, there may be differences in countries' stances when it comes to the power of European institutions as compared to national ones.

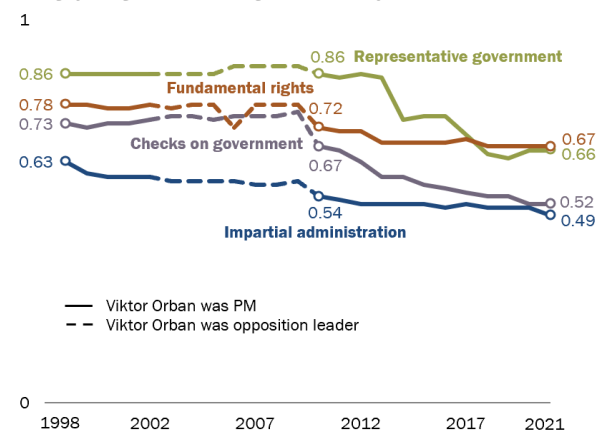
## Hungary

In 2022, the European Parliament declared that Hungary could no longer be considered a democracy, and that it had deteriorated into an “electoral autocracy”. This refers to a constitutional system in which elections occur, but respect for democratic norms and standards is absent. Parliament condemned the “deliberate and systematic efforts of the Hungarian government” to undermine

European values. Since Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's election in 2010, the Hungarian government has passed laws that hamper the operations of opposition groups, journalists, universities, and nongovernmental organizations that are critical of the ruling party or whose perspectives it otherwise finds unfavorable. The April 2022 parliamentary elections were deemed severely flawed by observer missions, which noted that the rules were administered to advantage the ruling coalition. The EU has had difficulties countering this democratic backsliding.

### Indicators show decline in Hungarian democracy

Rating of Hungarian democracy on measures of ...



Note: Viktor Orbán served as prime minister from 1998 to 2002 and again from 2010 to present.

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



## Timeline of Key Events

- 17 June 1991**      **Abolition of Apartheid** in South Africa removed a system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination that denied political and economic rights to the non-white majority population.
- 25 December 1991**      **The Fall of the USSR** was the death of a totalitarian regime, leading to policies that greatly improved transparency and led to a more democratic world overall.
- 1979**      **CSPAN** is a non-profit by a then-new industry called cable television, providing gavel-to-gavel coverage of the workings of the U.S. Congress, both the House and Senate, all without editing, commentary or analysis.
- 1 December 2009**      **Treaty of Lisbon** entered into force. It served to address concerns of a democratic deficit in the EU. With a few exceptions, the Treaty put the European Parliament on an equal footing as law maker with the Council of the European Union in areas where this was not previously the case, notably in setting the EU budget, agriculture policy, justice and home affairs.
- April 2021 to May 2022**      **Conference on the Future of Europe:** A major pan-European democratic exercise, with citizen-led debates enabling people from across Europe to share their ideas.
- January 2023**      **The Strengthening Democracy Task Force** was established in 2023 to protect Australia's democracy from threats like foreign interference, online disinformation, populism and declining public trust.



## Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

### The Abolition of Apartheid

The Abolition of Apartheid is one the biggest advances in the civil rights movement and improvements of democratic representation. The Anti-Apartheid Act enacted in 1986 by the United States Congress is a prime example of how using economic sanctions and civil unrest in areas that lack democratic representation and equal rights is an effective strategy to strengthen democratic governance peacefully. Though the end of Apartheid in South Africa gave equal voting rights to citizens, it did little to further transparency. It was an important step towards a more democratic regime, but only a first step in a long journey.

### The Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe from April 2021 to May 2022 had the goal of encouraging a citizen based debate to share ideas and discuss a course of action. It led to the submission of 49 proposals to the European Commission. These proposals covered nine topics: climate change and the environment; health; a stronger economy, social justice and jobs; EU in the world; values and rights, rule of law, security; digital transformation; European democracy; migration; education, culture, youth and sport. They included general objectives and more than 300 concrete measures, and the three institutions are now examining how to follow up effectively on them, each within their own sphere of influence and in accordance with the Treaties. While this is progress, the turnout was 5 million citizens out of the 448.4 million in the EU and the platform could not sustain many more people. The European Union has implemented many projects which EU citizens can greatly benefit from, however it is important to make discussion and proposals a regular occurrence rather than an occasional conference, requiring many resources that could be inaccessible to other citizens.

### The Strengthening Democracy Task Force

The Strengthening Democracy Task Force was established in 2023 to protect Australia's democracy from threats like foreign interference, online disinformation, populism and declining public trust. Bringing together expertise from various fields, the conducted analyses were able to identify flaws and offer useful recommendations. The creation of a specialized taskforce increases the likelihood of meaningful reforms being implemented. Since it is run transparently, the taskforce itself is a practical



solution at a local scale. However, the taskforce faces challenges as it lacks any legislative power. It simply proposes potential laws, and seeks a difficult consensus from differing point of views.

## Possible Solutions

### Platform Explaining Government Processes

A platform, digital or not, to inform citizens about their rights, eligible elections and other ways they could influence decision-making in their country could promote citizens' political efficacy. Though lack of reliable and readily available information is not the only ailment threatening democracy, providing clear and accurate information would certainly be a step forward in strengthening democratic governance and democratic institutions. Such a platform could be broad in scope, covering many different subjects and issues. However, cyberattacks on such a platform must be identified quickly so as to limit the spread of potential misinformation.

### Recurring or Punctual Events

As seen with the European Conference on the Future, an event would allow those most invested in political life to participate in a meaningful way and contribute towards the strengthening of democracy. It is also important to consider the scale and target audience for the conference, whether it is to motivate the youth to be more involved in political life or to attract citizens from a specific area. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that although events on a national scale may be most influential in the political changes they effect, they are necessarily limited in their number of participants, and often only implicate those who are already politically active and empowered. In order to encourage all citizens to participate in political life, it may be useful to consider creating events on a regional or local scale, where more citizens might feel empowered and legitimate enough to engage in decision-making.

### Simulations of Democratic Processes

In many instances, simulating democratic processes can increase citizens' political efficacy as they gain knowledge and understanding of the democratic systems that govern their countries, and how best to navigate them. Moreover, the role-playing aspect of simulations leads citizens to feel more

emotionally engaged in the democratic process, and to identify with the role they are playing. They may therefore feel more empowered to hold and express political opinions, as the perceived social and educational gap between the governed and the governing is reduced. Citizens who participate in simulations of democratic processes like Model United Nations conferences are therefore more likely to feel empowered to engage in politics.

## Taskforce or Government Body

The creation of a taskforce or government body responsible for ensuring democratic governance and democratic institutions could be part of a solution to the issue. However, it is important to be clear in the aims and methods of such a body, as well as the scale on which it is to operate. Government inertia could stall implementation, especially on politically sensitive reforms. Taskforce members may harbor biases or be disconnected from public sentiment. Another limitation of such a body is that it could not alone resolve structural issues weakening democracy.

## Appendices

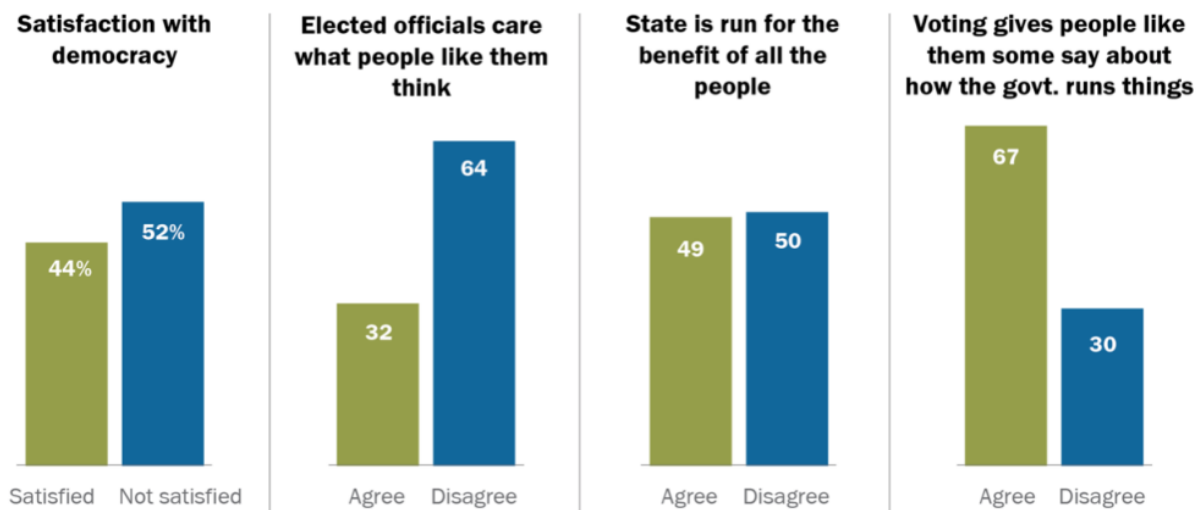
### Appendix A

In 2002, the UN Commission on Human rights declared the following principles as essential for democracy:

- Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms
- Freedom of association
- Freedom of expression and opinion
- Access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law
- The holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people
- A pluralistic system of political parties and organizations
- The separation of powers
- The independence of the judiciary
- Transparency and accountability in public administration
- Free, independent and pluralistic media

## Appendix B

### Globally, many are dissatisfied with the way democracy works and frustrated with elected officials but still value voting



Note: Percentages are medians based on 34 countries.  
Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey. Q5, Q50a-b, e.  
"Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Appendix C

Some interactive maps:

- International IDEA, State of democracy by country (annual data until 2022)  
<https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/interactive-map>
- Freedom House, Global freedom status/trend (2023)  
<https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map?type=fiw&year=2023>

## Appendix D

### Fair judiciary and gender equality highest-rated democratic principles

% who say it is very important to have \_\_\_ in their country

	● Most common response	● Second most common response	● Least common response						
	Fair judiciary	Gender equality	Free religion	Regular elections	Free speech	Free media	Free internet	Free civil society	Free opposition parties
U.S.	93%	91%	86%	84%	77%	80%	71%	68%	67%
Canada	91	93	65	83	66	73	69	65	67
<b>Europe</b>									
Greece	95	85	83	85	87	89	71	55	75
Hungary	95	85	70	87	87	76	77	63	68
Sweden	93	96	53	85	83	82	80	66	73
UK	92	92	75	78	68	77	66	68	72
France	91	90	52	78	83	65	70	72	60
Netherlands	89	92	58	70	69	64	70	60	69
Spain	87	84	54	80	79	79	77	72	67
Germany	86	90	72	70	86	67	74	66	60
Bulgaria	86	73	58	70	74	67	61	57	58
Czech Rep.	82	70	47	67	73	67	67	46	58
Italy	72	74	61	59	63	56	52	35	42
Poland	72	69	56	63	61	64	60	57	49
Slovakia	69	67	52	61	60	56	59	49	51
Lithuania	69	62	48	57	64	59	53	55	47
<b>MEDIAN</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>60</b>
Ukraine	81	57	59	62	59	63	54	48	36
Russia	63	54	42	40	45	38	40	31	23
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>									
Australia	90	91	60	75	63	69	59	54	63
Japan	72	63	18	55	61	48	50	47	40
Philippines	64	80	74	66	56	64	53	56	54
South Korea	64	56	45	60	60	49	57	46	51
Indonesia	60	61	79	54	37	45	36	38*	24*
India	58	72	78	57	32*	37*	25*	35	37
<b>MEDIAN</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Middle East/North Africa</b>									
Lebanon	92	72	82	60	41	28	24	40	35
Israel	86	64	77	70	51	46	40	37	50
Turkey	82	74	82	72	65	64	55	56	59
Tunisia	80	44	75	59	32	33	27	49	39
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>									
South Africa	69	67	80	54	55	61	50	55	49
Nigeria	69	43	88	57	53	55	50	60	54
Kenya	64	52	75	56	43	54	31	50	56
<b>Latin America</b>									
Argentina	90	91	74	86	87	80	81	60	65
Brazil	81	88	82	64	70	60	61	52	36
Mexico	71	80	52	62	73	64	59	48	43
<b>34-COUNTRY MEDIAN</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>54</b>

\* 20% or more of respondents in these countries did not answer the question.

Source: Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, Q55a-f & Q57a-c.

"Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



## Bibliography

- European Commission “Conference on the Future of Europe.”  
[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en)
- European Union. “Facts and Figures on Life in the European Union.” 2023  
[https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/key-facts-and-figures/life-eu\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/key-facts-and-figures/life-eu_en)
- United Nations Development Program “UNDP Digital Guides - Strengthening Democratic Institutions and Processes.”  
<https://digitalguides.undp.org/guide/strengthening-democratic-institutions-and-processes>
- Australian Department of Home Affairs “Strengthening Democracy Taskforce”  
<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/taskforces/strengthening-democracy-taskforce>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development “OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative” <https://www.oecd.org/governance/reinforcing-democracy/>
- Merkel, Wolfgang. “What Is Democratic Resilience and How Can We Strengthen It?”  
[https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-169\\_what-is-democratic-resilience\\_merkel.pdf](https://toda.org/assets/files/resources/policy-briefs/t-pb-169_what-is-democratic-resilience_merkel.pdf)
- C-SPAN “Our History | C-SPAN.org.” <https://www.c-span.org/about/history/>
- The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. “International IDEA.”  
<https://www.idea.int/>
- Connaughton Aidan , Kent Nicholas, and Schumacher Shannon. Pew Research Center. “How People around the World See Democracy in 8 Charts.”  
[www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/27/how-people-around-the-world-see-democracy-in-8-charts/](http://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/02/27/how-people-around-the-world-see-democracy-in-8-charts/)
- European Union - Access to European Law. “EUR-Lex - Democratic deficit ”  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/democratic-deficit.html>
- European Parliament. “Hungary: MEPs denounce deliberate and systematic efforts to undermine EU values”

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230524IPR91910/hungary-meps-denounce-deliberate-and-systematic-efforts-to-undermine-eu-values>.

Campbell, Gurin, and Miller. "The Voter Decides" 1954 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1951650>

Science Direct. "Political Participation".

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/political-participation>

Cornell Law School. "Self-Determination"

[https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/self\\_determination\\_\(international\\_law\)](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/self_determination_(international_law))

Hazleton and Jacob. "Simulating International Diplomacy: The National Model United Nations Experience". 2010 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00922013.1983.9942346>

