

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) briefing on democracy



Summary

- Democracy is under threat and needs strengthening everywhere – in 2023, data showed that levels of global freedom declined for the 17th year in a row.
- Strong democracies solve real-world problems and address global challenges. Evidence shows that democracy helps improve prosperity and security.
- WFD's work to help build stronger democratic systems has supported wartime **accountability in Ukraine**; helped raise the ambition of Indonesia's **climate action**; worked with MPs to ensure **teenage mothers and people with disabilities** can access education in Uganda; helped **cement peace** in Bangsamoro; and worked to **protect women from violence** in Nigeria.

What is at stake?

- **Democracy is under threat and faces strategic assault from autocrats.** In 2023, [data showed](#) that global freedom declined for the 17th year running. Just 20% of the world's population live in a country rated as free.
- **Democracy helps drive prosperity and security:** [Evidence shows](#) that democracy helps protect rights, reduces the risk of conflict, and increases the likelihood of sustainable economic growth and effective social policies.
- Major **risks to our national security** grow from or are exacerbated by autocratic states or weak democracies. **Action is needed to protect and strengthen democracy at home and abroad.**

How should we respond?

- We need to use **a full range of tools to support democracy**, including our **security alliances, economic partnerships, development programmes, and investment instruments**. They can all have an impact on accountability and transparency in our partner countries.
- To be secure and sustainable, these approaches need to be **complemented with targeted support to deepen democratic practices**, especially effective parliaments, greater inclusion and political participation, electoral integrity, and responsive political parties.
- A recent WFD-commissioned report on **how (not) to engage with authoritarian states** which provides recommendations for how to engage with authoritarian states without doing democratic harm. [Read it on wfd.org](https://www.wfd.org/reports/how-not-to-engage-with-authoritarian-states)

How do democracy support programmes help?

WFD has more than 30 years experience delivering democracy assistance and in 2022-2023, WFD delivered 58 programmes across 60 countries and territories to deepen democratic practices. Highlights of our impact include:

- WFD's work with Ukraine's Parliament, the **Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VRU)**, continues despite Putin's war: WFD delivered research for the VRU on government policies during conflict, and supported committees and individual members of the VRU to **scrutinise government policies and legislation**.
- Results of WFD's 4-year regional **Western Balkans** Democracy Initiative programme show how inclusive, democratic approaches catalyse change to address the problems people care about: from **providing better quality care to terminally ill patients** to **creating a tax-free business registration regime with potential to create thousands of high-value jobs** in technology and creative industries.
- WFD's team helped raise the ambition of **Indonesia's climate action** commitments, and delivery of its nationally determined contribution (NDC), through supporting the country's parliament, including on the new and renewable energy bill that outlines Indonesia's energy transition plan.
- Inclusion champions who WFD support tabled a motion in the Parliament of **Uganda** urging the government to address high education fees so that **teenage mothers and people with disabilities** can afford better education. The motion attracted support from the whole house and passed in December 2022.
- In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (**BARMM**), a region of the Philippines that experienced decades of conflict, WFD's expert review of the proposed **Electoral Code** highlighted pressing issues that the interim government then resolved, enabling its passage into law. The code provides the framework for the forthcoming electoral process in the BARMM that will be instrumental in establishing peace.
- In **Nigeria**, WFD supported Oyo State legislators and citizens to review and pass the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Bill into law, which provides a legal framework for the **protection of all citizens** – including vulnerable people such as women, girls, children, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).
- In **Morocco**, after years of WFD collaborating with the Equity and Parity Committee in their and others' advocacy efforts to increase women's representation, the electoral code was changed, seeing the highest number of women MPs ever elected in 2021.

About WFD

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is the UK's democracy support agency. Our programmes and policy support focus on realistic pathways to achieve democratic change.

Our partners include parliaments, political parties, electoral bodies, civil society organisations, and others that are addressing critical policy and governance challenges. We draw on Britain's democratic experience and build relationships internationally.

To find out more about our work and how you can support visit www.wfd.org/support.