

Briefing on Democracy in the World

May 2025

Why international democracy support matters for the UK

Democratic political systems are facing significant challenges globally. Authoritarianism is on the rise. In 2024, global freedom levels declined for the 19th consecutive year. These trends directly impact UK interests – from national security to economic prosperity and global influence.

UK national security and prosperity depend on democratic resilience worldwide. Instability, corruption, and weak governance drive irregular migration and threaten UK trade, alliances, and security interests.

By strengthening democracy abroad, the UK can expand its influence and achieve key foreign policy objectives while contributing to long-term global stability and prosperity.

Security and stability

- When institutions are accountable and inclusive, authoritarian influence weakens, and the risks of instability, corruption, and violent conflict decrease.
- Democratic resilience strengthens UK and global security.

Crisis prevention

- Preventing crises is more cost-effective than responding to them.
- Investing in democracy support reduces long-term economic and security costs associated with instability, forced migration, and conflict resolution efforts.

Trade, investment and economic growth

- Accountable, inclusive political systems deliver more sustained economic growth domestically and create better environments for UK trade and investment through transparent governance and rule of law.
- Good governance attracts investment and fosters economic stability.
- Democracies provide transparent regulatory environments, fair legal systems, and political stability - conditions that attract business and uphold market integrity.

Shared challenges

- Democratic systems are better equipped to address shared challenges like climate change, migration, mis/disinformation, and corruption.
- Transparent governance is essential for effective international cooperation.
- Strong democracies are more likely to uphold international commitments.

UK influence and soft power

- The UK's democratic political culture and expertise are soft power assets.
- UK democracy support through WFD programmes builds genuine partnerships with local leaders and actors that strengthen relationships in-country and with UK counterparts – WFD engaged with 4463 parliamentarians globally in 2024-2025.

The UK's role in supporting democracy

Filling the democracy gap

Embed democracy support in UK foreign policy: Military, economic and development partnerships must work together to reinforce democratic governance

Invest in democracy support as a strategic priority: UK spending on democracy assistance is modest but delivers high-impact results by strengthening institutions and preventing crises.

Strategic opportunity: With traditional democracy supporters scaling back, there is unmatched demand for UK expertise on how to build democratic resilience.

The UK's democracy support organisation

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) has 30+ years of experience strengthening democratic institutions across the world, reinforcing UK soft power and developing trusted international partnerships that are critical to foreign policy and trade objectives.

Locally led, genuine international partnerships. WFD hires local staff and works with local partners. Programmes reflect partners' real priorities and support change that lasts.

Trusted relationships. WFD builds relationships with leaders, parliaments, political parties, electoral bodies, and civil society.

Cost effective. WFD's annual grant from FCDO costs less than one day of refugee resettlement, yet we work in over 50 countries to strengthen the systems that underpin lasting change.

International standards and coalitions: WFD provides a strong UK voice in forums that establish or strengthen international standards and contributes to coalitions supporting democratic governance and responsible international relations.

Independently reviewed. A 2023 Public Body Review reported that WFD has high levels of expertise and operates effectively across a global network and in challenging locations.

Our impact



Ukraine: strengthening democratic resilience amidst war

WFD is ensuring Ukraine's democracy remains strong despite the war by supporting political parties, parliamentary oversight, and civil society. This work helps prepare for Ukraine's reconstruction after the war, and ensures Ukraine remains aligned with democratic and Western partnerships – increasingly critical as US funding has been cut.

Indonesia: Fostering more ambitious and inclusive climate action

In Indonesia, WFD's support for the parliament's efforts on climate policy has delivered steady progress towards the landmark Climate Change Act. Following the 2024 election, WFD's support secured the Bill's place among the new administration's legislative priorities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): countering hate speech in elections

Hate speech and political polarisation threaten democratic integrity in BiH. WFD's work on electoral integrity and inclusive governance is helping stabilise the political landscape, reducing the risks of external authoritarian influence in the Balkans – an area of increasing strategic importance for the UK.

For more information about WFD's work across Europe, the Western Balkans, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and Africa and the Middle East, or a briefing on a specific country, region, or theme, please contact

Luke Chapman
External Affairs
E. comms@wfd.org
T. 07718 201 272