

Re-Imagining the Building Blocks of Democracy Project

1. Introduction

This is a 4-year Democracy & Culture Foundation (DCF) project carried out with a large group of partners and encompassing the Global North and the Global South. It aims to come up with specific and practical policy recommendations regarding the functioning-operational parts (blocks) of democracy, that will make it better able to meet the challenges of the 21st century as well as its own internal and external enemies. The project is now in its third year following a methodology initially delineated by a group of mainly academic advisers to DCF. Each year all partners gather in London to present and discuss the year's activities, and the results are then presented at that year's Athens Democracy Forum (ADF), which also serves as the launching pad for the following year's activities.

2. The Building Blocks

After extensive discussion it was decided to concentrate on policy proposals that concern the following functions of liberal democracy: (a) people and their interaction with democratic institutions, (b) voting, obstacles and absenteeism, (c) the executive vs. the legislature and the desired balance thereof, (d) money & parties and their influence on policies, (e) information and its impact on democracy, (f) the business world and its role in democracy and combating inequality, (g) AI & the need for universal ethical standards. The formal titles are:

- The Power of the People
- The Power of Voting
- The Power of the Executive
- The Power of Parties
- The Power of Information
- The Power of Business
- The Power of AI & Ethics

3. The methodology.

Following Phase Zero, which involved the inception of the project, setting up the advisory committee and the creation of content, there are four phases for each building block:

Phase one—the experts: This phase sees the convening of roundtables of experts to examine the issues pertaining to each block, discuss and suggest policy recommendations. The proposals are stress-tested by convening citizens' panels.

Phase two—the people: This phase involves a process called "Consultation", involving the convening of citizens, and asking them to suggest policies that deal with the issues raised, without informing of the recommendations made by the experts

Phase three—the deep dives: The third phase has two "branches": (a) the experts' and the peoples' recommendations are compared and from the comparison emerge changes, adjustments, and even rejections – on the basis of pre-agreed criteria by the partners; (b) chosen recommendations are subjected to a deep dive to test for academic, legal, and institutional integrity.

Phase four—the launching: In this phase all chosen final proposals are presented at ADF and partners agree on the ways and means for dissemination and for exerting institutional and public pressure on decision makers for implementation.

4. The places, the partners, the associates, the numbers.

- a. Partners and associates include Atlas, Ban Ki Moon Foundation, Berggruen Institute, Bertelsmann Foundation, Eidos Foundation, ELIAMEP, EnAfrica, Innovation & Development Foundation (Colombia), Idea/Sapenieship, Kofi Annan Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Libra Philanthropies, McKinsey, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, newDemocracy Foundation, Sekyra Foundation, Taejae Future Consensus Institute.
- b. Meetings took place in: Athens, Berlin, Brindisi, Brussels, Bogota, Bucharest, London, Nairobi, Prague, Seoul, Sydney, Tel Aviv, and Washington.
- c. Seven roundtables of experts have been convened (with subsequent citizens panels) and four citizens consultations have taken place.
- d. There were 140 experts involved in the roundtables, and 350 people in the citizens consultations.
- e. There were more than 50 policy recommendations. Of these, four are now in phase three and one is ready to enter phase four. At present, in total, there are five recommendations approaching final resolution and two in the pipeline.

5. The current state of affairs

- a. *The power of the people*: there is one final policy recommendation, for citizens' panels to advise parliamentary committees that discuss draft legislation. If the PC does not accept the advice of the panel it should explain in public the reasons. The newDemocracy Foundation is setting up a pilot on this for ADF 2024, and in the next year the proposal will enter the phase of dissemination in the institutional and public spheres.
- b. *The power of the executive*: the policy recommendation has now entered phase 3 and concerns the creation of a "Fourth Branch of Government" composed of citizens chosen by sortition, that will be called to resolve differences and conflicts between the executive and the elected representatives. Taejae Future Consensus Institute with Prof. Ahn Byong Jin are engaged in the process.
- c. *The power of voting* (regarding in particular obligatory voting), *the power of information* (concerning the involvement of citizens in labelling information) and *the power of parties* (concerning mainly the effect of technology on party membership and operations) are now entering phase 3 (deep dive) and are handled by KAF, FIDEP and KAS respectively.
- d. *The power of business*: there are four specific policy recommendations that aim to sever the link between business and short-termism. The recommendations are at the stage of dissemination.
- e. *The power of AI & Ethics*: This building block now stands at the entry level of phase two, but due to its complexity and rapid rate of change (Pacing Problem, Collingridge Dilemma) there is also the need to convene a second enlarged and diversified roundtable of experts.

6. Generic Recommendations

Two common recommendations emerged from all roundtables and consultations: the need (a) to educate children at a young age on the principles and functions of democracy as well as on the dangers it faces and, (b) to engage citizens in the democratic process, in greater number and higher frequency through the tools of deliberative democracy.

As a result, DCF is in the process of creating partnerships for the implementation of two projects:

- Education
 - Introducing edutainment on democracy as a pilot in 250 Greek elementary schools as part of the civic education curriculum and as early as September 2024.
 - Using existing work, develop a 2-month degree curriculum on “Ancient Greek Philosophy, Leadership & Wellbeing” to be taught to postgraduate Greek and non-Greek students, in Athens, by one Greek and one non-Greek universities cooperating.
- Citizen engagement—the Digital Tool Kit

Based on the Greek experience, create a prototype for the introduction of Digital Governance in countries that have not yet done this, complement it with a series of tools for deliberative democracy and accompany it with instructions and suggestions for training.

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