



DRI Strategy

2024 – 2027



VISION:

**Citizens,
not subjects**

- ▶ We envision a **world where informed people can freely and authentically debate** different opinions and effect real change through the institutions of democracy; a world in which everybody can participate in their democracy equally, independent of social status, gender, religious beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, ability or political opinion.
- ▶ International law and standards provide the basis for our vision.



MISSION:

**Support democracy,
impartially**

- ▶ DRI helps **people build, protect, innovate and expand the democratic space we all share**, independent of our political opinions, religious beliefs, personal backgrounds or preferences. We focus on including those that are often excluded from debate, politics or participation: women, youth, minorities and other marginalised groups.
- ▶ Our support is grounded in **globally agreed principles of democracy** as enshrined in international law and standards. We are committed to pluralism and not bound to any party or ideology, but we are not neutral, when democracy and human rights are attacked.

This strategy was written by DRI's executive directors based on consultations with DRI team members in our offices in Berlin, Beirut, Kinshasa, Kyiv and Tunis. The shareholders and the supervisory board provided commentary and approved the strategy in May 2024.

It includes our vision, mission, context and priorities.

Context

Democracy is the **best form of government**. Its intrinsic value is the respect of the human being. Democracies tend to deliver better for their people, especially on peace and economic progress, because their institutions give citizens a role in decision-making and include numerous feedback mechanisms. It provides more equality and fairness and, in its ideal, is based on the same rules for all. Democracies are much less likely to start wars than autocratic governments. DRI has been and will be on the side of democracy.

Yet, **democracy is challenged**. Global indices show that more and more countries are governed in authoritarian ways. Almost two – thirds of the world’s population live in autocracies. In our work we have seen inspiring successes, but we directly witnessed attacks on democracy, be it in Myanmar, Tunisia, Hungary or Ukraine. The struggle between democracy and autocracy is everywhere – it takes place in established democracies, in fragile ones and in autocracies, and in the North as much as in the South.

The **context has changed**. There are more (civil) wars now than ten years ago. Some are forgotten by many players, such as those in Myanmar, DR Congo, Sudan and beyond. They cause tremendous suffering and threaten regional security.

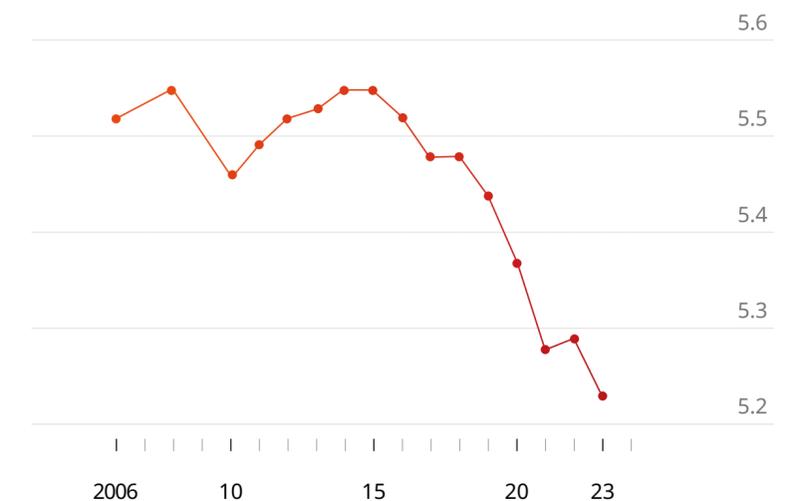
The full-fledged Russian attack against Ukraine put in broad daylight the international **security risks of autocracy**. At the time of writing, the Israel Gaza war has global ramifications, weakening the credibility of democratic states which often support international law but have not significantly done so in this case.

Ground **rules of democracy are challenged** in many democracies. Many voters choose parties which, once in power, undermine democracy. Democratic institutions that check and balance power-holders are being hollowed out. Democratic progress, such as in gender equality, is stalling or in retreat in several countries. Extremist parties and movements promote intolerant ideologies that stand against pluralism, equality and democratic progress. Severe political polarisation afflicts many societies, weakening the will to listen, to debate and to accept compromises – basics for democratic decision- making.

We observe much **confusion on what democracy means**, even though almost all states have enshrined its core principles in international law (such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) over many decades. According to international law and standards, democracy allows citizens from across the political spectrum to hold and express

Democracy index, global average

167 countries. Score from 0 to 10, 0 being less democratic and 10 most democratic.

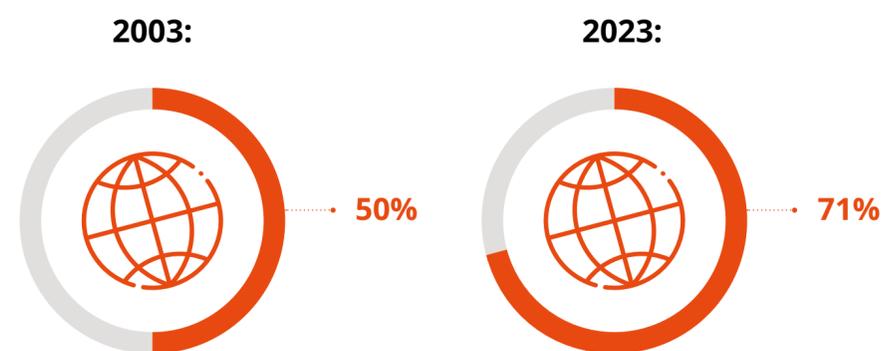


Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit.

different opinions informed by a free media and transparent government, to participate in public affairs within a defined framework for temporary political power under the rule of law and to enjoy all their rights, including social and economic rights¹.

There has been much progress in addressing inequalities and social injustices over the last decades, but the effect of the Covid pandemic, the subsequent economic downturn and the climate crisis has also worsened some negative trends. A degree of social and economic equality and success is an important enabling condition for democracy, as outlined in particular in the SDGs, Agenda 2030 and international human rights law.

Share of world population living in autocracies



Source: V-Dem.

¹ DRI publications explain in detail the international law and standards relevant for democratic governance: <https://democracy-reporting.org/en/office/global/collection?type=publications&tag=international-law>

What do we expect in the coming years?

Geopolitical tensions are increasing and with them the risk of more wars. Accelerating climate change will lead to more disruptions. This is bad news for all of us and for democracy.

Elections will remain complicated: sometimes they take the character of a referendum on democracy (you must vote for one side if you are in favour of democracy); in other cases, they provide political legitimacy, although they were held under flawed conditions that contradict international law; and, more positively, sometimes elections will help restoring democracy when authoritarian governments lose power.

Authoritarian governments will continue to learn from each other, using similar playbooks and showing resilience, even against mass protests. Democracies have supported each other for a long time, but we see a **risk that democratic governments deprioritise support for democracy** if it serves their geopolitical needs and interests. Repression is increasing; the space for people's public engagement – civic space – is shrinking.

The world of democracy is becoming flatter: some democracies, including longstanding ones, suffer from serious shortcomings and challenges, while others are resilient and strong. Many democracies struggle with authoritarian forces and tendencies. Numerous political systems can be described as “hybrid regimes”, neither fully autocratic nor entirely democratic.

The **digital transformation accelerates** with good and bad effects for democracy. It keeps empowering more people and reduces barriers to participation; but it also solidifies the dominance of a few huge, only profit-oriented companies, which dictate the direction of our digital futures. The tide of AI is rising and will cover ever more aspects of our lives. The space of information and ideas, crucial for any democratic debate, is being transformed further, with human authenticity becoming a key challenge.

More hopefully, we expect **greater resistance to autocratic change**. More and more people understand that they need to stand up to defend

the right to equal participation in decision-making. Protests for democracy are rising. The trend to autocracy is not uniform. In democracies voter turn-out is increasing. Sometimes authoritarian parties profit from increased voting. They attempt to get in power by a democratic process to then turn against it.

The **building and rebuilding of democratic institutions** – parliaments, fair elections, inclusive constitutions, free media, space for civil engagement – remain critical. People can make change, but institutions preserve and protect change. Citizens, civil society, governments and international organisations must continue to be counterweights to big tech through regulation, coalition-building, awareness-raising and public campaigning.

Our priorities 2024 – 2027

We are a **passionate team** of almost 100 people with different backgrounds, coming from many countries, speaking many languages, having diverse expertise to work intensively with a real-world understanding

of challenges and opportunities for democracy – grounded in international standards. We publish actionable analysis and use it to do practical work with people to improve democracy in many different contexts.

We will continue to give our voices and energy to support of democracy in many different contexts: countries in war or civic conflicts, fragile states, and more stable states challenged by authoritarian tendencies.

We will:



- ▶ Foster **public participation** by building capacities of partners, supporting democratic innovation, and protecting civic space. Throughout, we co-operate closely with civil society that works for the common good and is deeply rooted in their national or regional contexts. We will also support reform-minded institutions and policymakers open to maintaining and expanding the civic space. *Focus: Global.*



- ▶ Strengthen the **rule of law and justice**, by supporting independent courts, analysing and reporting seemingly technical developments, working with media to increase public attention to this subject and aiding constitutional reform processes. *Focus: Europe, North Africa.*



- ▶ Strengthen the **integrity of elections** across the electoral cycle by supporting election observers who make the process transparent, making elections more inclusive by mobilising young people to get involved, monitoring online campaigns (see below), assisting electoral processes and promoting electoral reforms. *Focus: Global.*



- ▶ Promote **digital democracy** by working for open debate and against severe political polarisation. We aim to make the tech transformation of public discourse compatible with democracy. We analyse and monitor online discourse, especially around elections and the rise of AI; train digital researchers around the world and strengthen the capacity of partner organisations; and conduct risk assessments and engage in policy and regulatory work with policy-makers and companies. *Focus: Global with a particular emphasis on Europe.*



- ▶ **Local governance** is a fundamental tier of democracy, being the most tangible and visible part of public power and in charge of delivering essential public services. We work on decentralisation reforms, helping civil society and government learn from good practices and plan effective decentralisation, increasing civic participation in existing local governance and building capacity of local governance actors. *Focus: Western Asia, North Africa, Europe.*

We give special attention to **inclusion**, to make sure that groups and people who are easily and often marginalised have a voice. We pay particular attention when discrimination and exclusion are concentrated in certain groups (intersectional approach; multiple discriminations).

We **work across political divides**: In all our work, we do our part to strengthen pluralism and address severe political polarisation. We work to facilitate robust and open debate. We do not want to contribute to unsurmountable division of opinions and identities. We accept all opinions as legitimate, but we oppose platforms that reject ground rules of democracy. We appreciate that we have different opinions in our own organisation.

Our research is action-oriented to underpin our engagement, our advocacy on policy and enforcement of regulation. We **offer well-grounded opinion and advice and thought leadership** in debates on democracy; based on our in-depth experiences of realities in many countries.

We **leverage our role through partnerships** at both national and international levels. We contribute to and convene networks of multistakeholder groups.

This is our plan. The global situation is volatile and unexpected changes can happen fast. As a medium-sized NGO we will remain **agile and ready to adapt plans** if some new development allows us to have a significant impact for democracy. We are open to experiment new approaches and ideas, even if they may turn out not to work.

These are our internal goals:

- ▶ We will focus rigorously on **impact**. It is our *raison d'être*. Our objectives are not primarily number of staff, turn-over or the size of projects. It is the positive impact for democracy.
- ▶ We will **integrate teams** in our HQ and country offices to have a common sense of mission and achievements – especially on rule of law and digital democracy and on our tried and tested tools and innovative approaches.
- ▶ We will **communicate** in easily understandable language and improve technical aspects of our communication (new website).

- ▶ For **sustainable resources**, we will reduce our dependency on a few major government donors and establish a stable funding relationship with more funding partners, especially non-government funders like foundations. We seek non-earmarked funding, including from business.
- ▶ We plan to be an **attractive employer brand** offering competitive salaries able to hire talents for all our offices, to provide an excellent “employee journey” and to manage DRI alumni. We will use effective and efficient HR processes, using state-of-the-art tools, automation and AI.
- ▶ While turnover and staff numbers are not our main objective, our **planning corridor** is to remain at a similar size as we currently have (6-8 million EUR annual turnover; 80-100 team members).

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Learn more
about us:



democracy-reporting.org