

Foreword

Not too long ago the world was euphoric about the advancement of democracy. The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 are some of the defining moments that gave reason to be optimistic about the future of democracy. Only three decades after the fall of the Berlin wall, the euphoria about democracy's forward march has been replaced by doom and gloom narratives that allude to the death of democracy. We certainly cannot and should not ignore the contemporary threats to democracy such as the blatant disrespect for the norms of multilateralism, extreme inequality resulting in the capture of politics by elites, persistent corruption that continues to rob ordinary citizens of opportunities of service provision and better quality of life; conflictual identity politics, intolerance and societal polarisation aggravated by social media and spurred by populist politics that promise quick and simple solutions to complex socio-economic problems and more. Added to these pressures, are global development threats, such as climate change and its perils; fears of a looming global economic slow-down exacerbated by a trade war between US and China, and global insecurity—not least exacerbated by terrorism from external and internal forces.

The onslaught on multilateralism, that plays out in the form of nationalistic sentiments and nativist politics, led by the traditional yesteryear champions of multilateralism—has left a global leadership vacuum at a time when the world desperately needs a committed and predictable leadership that can effectively galvanise it around contemporary global challenges—including threats to democracy. Unfortunately, this leadership vacuum, has empowered and emboldened authoritarian regimes that have political and economic muscle to export their models of governance to different parts of the world, and are keen to write democracy's obituary!

It is important to note however that the doom and gloom narratives about the state of democracy do carry some truth. However, it is not the whole truth! In particular, such narratives tend to overshadow stories about positive democratic developments around the world which equally deserve to be highlighted. Nonetheless, rather than cause us to despair, we should see these narratives as warning bells that should jolt us into action in defence of democracy. While acknowledging the challenges and the threats to democracy, we must be equally bold in telling the stories of democratic

gains being made around the world, such as the fact that despite the challenges and threats to the quality of democracy, the number of democracies continues to grow. Countries such as Armenia, The Gambia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Tunisia, which were not counted as democracies only a few years ago, now are. More people today choose their leaders through the ballot box rather than through the bullet, and more people today live in democracies than 40 years ago. While progress is painstakingly slow, there is more gender equality in politics and representative institutions than there has ever been in history.

Even more compelling is for us to boldly tell the story of citizens' activism and demand for democracy in authoritarian contexts such as Algeria, Hong Kong and Sudan; while in democratic countries, citizens are demanding better quality representation, accountability, a stop to corruption and better quality of life. The citizen activism that we are witnessing around the world in democracies and non-democracies alike is a story of hope for the future of democracy that needs to be told! The point is—we need to hear balanced narratives of the state of democracy. Indeed, warnings about threats to democracy help us to be vigilant and not be complacent in our efforts to defend and advance democracy. However, narratives that highlight gains and opportunities as well as propose solutions, encourage those in the frontlines of protecting, defending and advancing democracy that their efforts are not in vain.

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Report is a breath of fresh air in this regard. First, its analysis is based on a robust and transparent methodology, based on a broad multi-dimensional conception of democracy. It is my opinion that the citizens' demand for better quality democracy the world over, is a demonstration that democracy cannot be viewed as only limited to elections and the exercise of civil and political rights. Equally important is the quality of representation, better quality of life for citizens including respect for and protection of the totality of their human rights. Secondly, the report offers a balanced narrative of the Global State of Democracy. It highlights challenges and positive democratic developments, while also recommending possible solutions. In this regard, this report stands to readily inform policy decisions and programmatic choices in the democracy-assistance field, while providing data needed by democracy defenders to inform and shape evidence-based advocacy for the broadening and deepening

of democracy in their countries and regions. Thirdly, the analysis is based on data that spans from 1975 until today, providing a good balance of the long and short-term view of the state of democracy. This allows for a balanced and less events driven analysis that has framed some of the alarmist narratives. Balanced narratives such as carried in this report, will surely encourage and embolden democracy defenders to keep on fighting for more and better-quality democracy. Finally, by taking both a global and regional view, this report highlights a thread that run across the state of democracy in different regions, while bringing to bare the unique

challenges they each face, and therefore providing a great opportunity for targeted policy choices at various levels.

In today's multi-polar world, where, in the absence of global leadership, authoritarianism is rising in all regions, practical solutions and action in defence of democracy is even more urgent. This report couldn't have come at a better time. I am truly delighted to be associated with it!

Winnie Byanyima
Executive Director
Oxfam International, Kenya