

**Democracy Forum 2001
Democracy and the Information Revolution:
Values Opportunities and Threats**

Stockholm, 27-29 June 2001

Initial Policy Recommendations

Version 1.1 (July 6. 2001)

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Background

This document is the initial and abbreviated product of a process that was begun in the summer of 2000 when International IDEA decided to look into the issue of how democracy has been or may be affected by the information revolution. International IDEA felt that it was in a special position to look into such a cross-cutting issue due to the unique democracy promotion mandate of the organization and to provide a meeting place for those involved in different aspects of democracy promotion to gather and discuss important issues.

The first meeting toward addressing the issue of democracy and the information revolution took place in Helsinki, Finland on April 2-3, 2001. Thirty-five experts from a wide variety of regions, professions and backgrounds met to discuss what issues should be addressed as well as what questions need to be addressed. Following the Helsinki Seminar and prior to the Democracy Forum a number of consultations and small meetings occurred, which resulted in the Conference Background Paper. The purpose of this paper was to pull together concise introductions to the debates surrounding the key issues to be taken up in the course of the Democracy Forum and raise some of the questions elaborated from the Helsinki Seminar. We have circulated these questions at the Democracy Forum for possible discussion in the Workshops as well as for private/public reflection and feedback.

This document, Initial Policy Points (Version 1.1), is the first attempt to bring together some of the thoughts and issues raised at the Democracy Forum 2001. Considering short period of time since the Democracy Forum adjourned and the large amount of information provided by the participants and the continued input from the website, we are far from considering this document as anything more than an initial draft of policy point for review. From this document a larger, more comprehensive version will be produced and distributed by the end of July. That version will incorporate examples of best practice as well as points for consideration and practical guidelines for implementation.

I. Narrowing the Digital Divide on a Global and National Scale

1. Industrialized countries, the international business community, and multilateral organizations are encouraged to strengthen their commitment to digital development and to establish a higher level of coordination among their efforts.
2. Governments and businesses should undertake coordinated projects to expand connectivity and improve public access to national information infrastructures.
3. Governments should adopt the market-enabling policies needed to grow their telecommunications, Internet, and electronic commerce environments and to protect the rights of their citizens and consumers.
4. Governments should take steps to encourage the creation and dissemination of locally relevant content that preserves both cultural heritage and linguistic diversity.
5. Governments should make the rapid expansion of education and training - in general and with respect to ICTs in particular - a top national priority, and should pursue special initiatives to empower women, ethnic minorities, and other historically marginalized social groups.
6. The industrialized countries and multilateral institutions should greatly increase their technical and financial assistance to the developing and post-communist countries in pursuit of these and related goals, giving particular attention to the plight of the least developed countries.
7. Governments and the international community should support the development of independent news organizations in both the traditional and new media.
8. Governments must ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to access and use ICTs for the purposes of political speech and participation irrespective of gender, ethnicity, income, education, locality, or other considerations.

II. Building Social Capital for Local Democracy

9. Societies should explore the local efficacy of approaches to guard against excessive fragmentation of the public into narrow electronic communities of interest.
10. Societies should be aware of the risk that some groups may use ICTs to manipulate public opinion or spread misinformation, and they should meet such challenges with countervailing views and information.

11. Technologies, services and applications that have proven to be more or less effective in building strong bonds within local communities as well as between civil society and local governments should be shared and their proliferation promoted.
12. Local governments must take steps to engage particular social segments that have been marginalized from participation in community life.
13. Local governments and businesses should consider pursuing ICT partnerships with civil societal organizations engaged in buttressing democracy from the bottom up.

III. Strengthening Political Parties and Public Participation

14. ICTs should be used as a tool to strengthen political party organization, including the links between the national and local levels and with sister parties abroad.
15. Political parties should use ICTs to inform the public about their policy positions and to get out the vote.
16. Political parties should use technology to engage the public in interactive dialogues and active participation in shaping their agendas.
17. Governments should enact policies and projects supporting vibrant electronic public spheres that are open to noncommercial interaction and congenial to diverse ideas and forms of political participation.
18. ICT businesses should be encouraged to adopt practices and develop products that facilitate the dissemination of ideas and public participation in political affairs.
19. Governments, multilateral institutions, and (where advisable) businesses should use ICTs to pursue partnerships with civil societal organizations engaged in democracy-building activities.
20. Political parties should use the new ICTs not simply to gather information and publicize their policy positions, but also to actively engage citizens and social groups in interactive dialogues that can actually impact those positions.
21. In seeking to build social capital and invigorate political parties, special consideration should be given to the needs of social groups that have historically been marginalized from mainstream politics.

IV. Promoting a Vital Public Sphere in the New Media Environment

22. Public policy frameworks are needed to facilitate diverse political expression in the “old” mass media, whether commercial or noncommercial in nature.
23. Governments must protect societies against allegedly harmful political expression or misinformation on the Internet without unduly curtailing speech or imposing their laws beyond their national borders.
24. Society must preserve some measure of shared civic culture in the infosphere and guard against the excessive fragmentation of political expression into narrow communities of interest.

V. Improving the Conduct of Elections

25. Electoral management bodies must ensure that voting technologies are customer friendly and configurable to meet the needs of citizens with disabilities, limited education, or little experience in using such technologies.
26. Electoral management bodies must make sure that computerized voter identification and registration records and vote counts are handled in a politically neutral, professional manner by both public bodies and any private sector entities involved.
27. Governments should take policy and security steps to maintain their national information infrastructures and electrical power grids at levels of readiness necessary for the reliable aggregation and dissemination of election results.
28. Remote electronic voting could be promoted in order to encourage wider participation, however, governments must ensure that such opportunities are not limited to particular social groups.
29. Governments should explore the possibilities for remote electronic voting via multiple technological platforms and ensure that any opportunities to participate in this manner are not limited to particular social groups.
30. Governments should provide the resources needed to ensure that all polling stations and information processing centers are equipped with the most appropriate technologies.

VI. Fostering E-Democracy Through Governments and Parliaments

31. Governments should use ICTs to make documents and legislative deliberations progressively more accessible to the general public.
32. Governments, as they develop the necessary resources and expertise, should move beyond the one-way provision of services to creating interactive and participatory opportunities for citizen.
33. Governments should adopt strong policies on privacy protection, digital signatures, freedom of information, and related issues to avoid abuses and ensure that citizens will have full confidence in using e-government services.
34. Governments should protect citizens' right to free speech and resist the temptation to apply censorship in the increasingly diverse electronic environment.
35. Governments should implement coherent strategic plans for e-government and e-governance that give pride of place to democracy-enhancing rules and practices.
36. National and sub-national governments, as resources allow, should use ICTs to make most documents and all legislative deliberations progressively more accessible to the general public.
37. Governments equally should ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to access and use ICTs for the purposes of political speech and participation, irrespective of income, education, locality, or other potential impediments.

VII. Encouraging Change in Authoritarian Regimes

38. The international community should cooperate with civil society organizations and exile groups that are using ICTs to work for change in authoritarian countries.
39. The international community should promote the global diffusion of ICTs, particularly encryption and other technologies that increase the privacy of electronic behavior.
40. ICT companies doing business with authoritarian regimes should refrain from providing them with the technological means to track and suppress the electronic behavior of their citizens.
41. The international community should raise the profile of information and communication rights on the global human rights agenda and in its interactions with authoritarian governments.

42. Democracy assistance programs should give significant consideration to the potential benefits of ICTs for countries transitioning from authoritarian rule.
43. Governments and multilateral institutions should expand their technological cooperation with civil society organizations and exile groups that are working for change in authoritarian countries.