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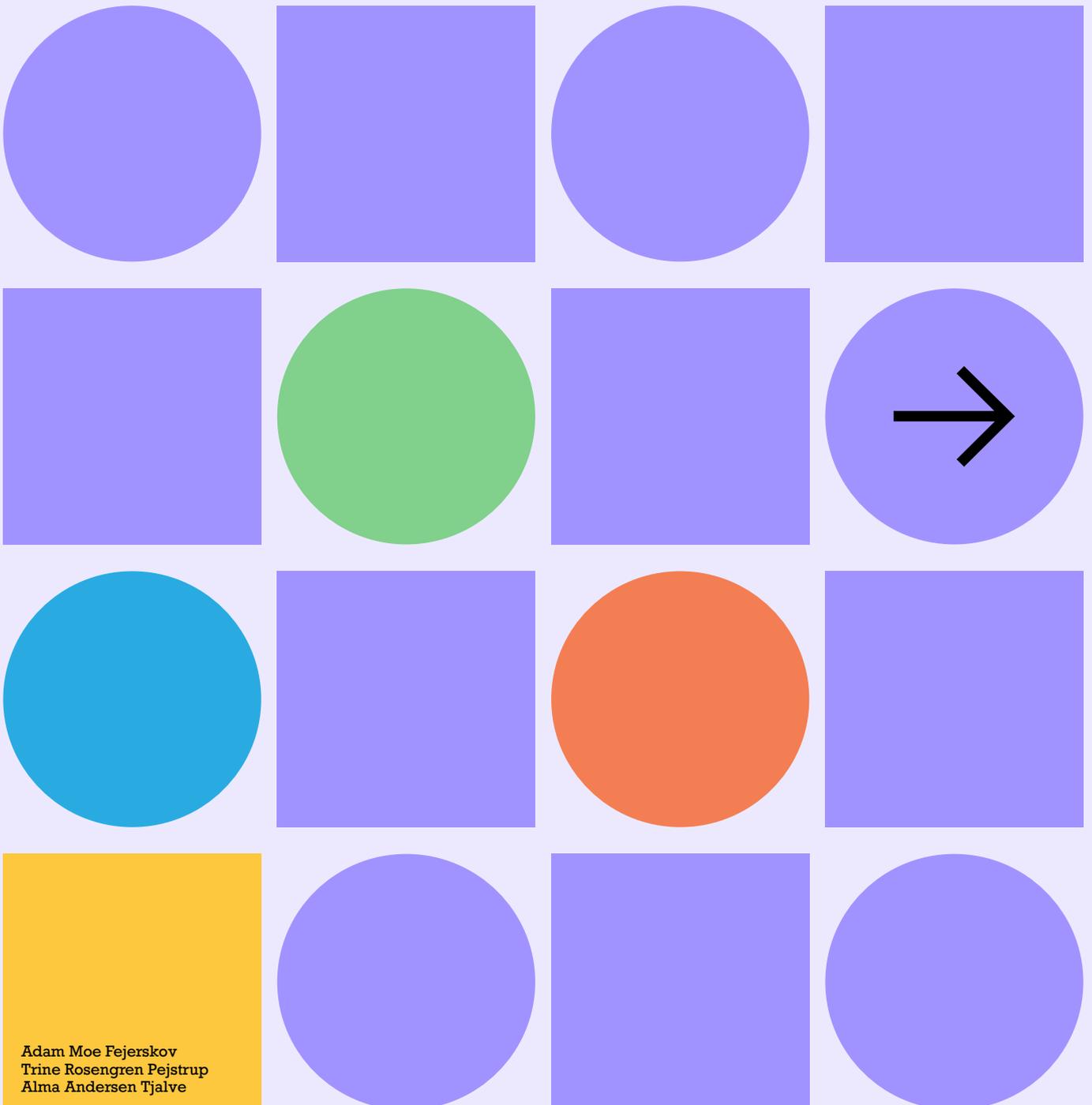


Tech for Democracy



DIIS · DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

# TECH FOR DEMOCRACY: Learnings from the Year of Action



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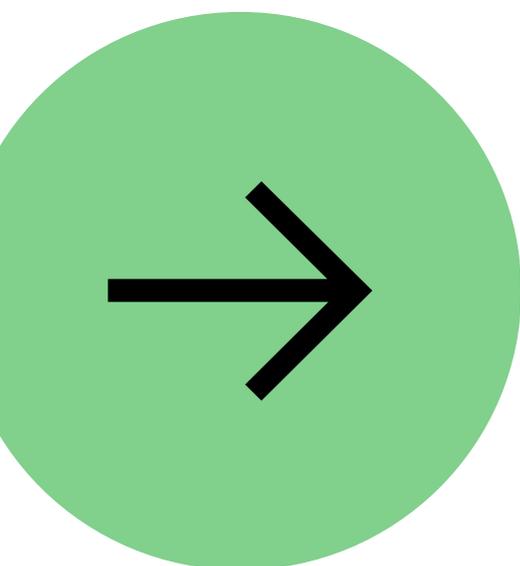
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# Executive summary

Digital technologies and tools can inspire new forms of political and social action or provide novel forms of participatory mechanisms that enable access to existing democratic processes. As such, they can establish innovative forms of social contracts or cohesion, and enhance accountability and transparency between citizens and states, permitting advancements of core institutions in democratic and inclusive societies.



Yet the distance between imagined potential and the reality of observed impact of digital technologies is widening today. The outcome, as digital technologies expand their pervasiveness for the lives of regular people all over the world, is a simultaneity of increases to everyday risks and a rules-based international order under pressure. Where normative advancements may be made, but where companies, not democratic governments, continue to set the pace and direction of societal developments. To this end, we are seeing growing calls for a shared commitment to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development.

In 2021, Denmark's Tech for Democracy initiative kickstarted a multi-stakeholder push for protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in an era of rapid technological development, bringing together representatives from governments, multilateral organizations, tech industry, and civil society. A November 2021 conference marked the launch of a Year of Action during which the initiative intended to see ideas, intentions, and visions translate into concrete actions and solutions. The high-level conference launched the Copenhagen Pledge – a political commitment to make digital technologies work for, not against, democracy and human rights – which has been signed by more than 200 governments, civil society organizations, and technology companies. Critical to Tech for Democracy has also been the forming of ten multistakeholder Action Coalitions that have worked through the year of action on establishing novel collaborations, producing knowledge and evidence, building principles of democratic technological development and use, and providing inputs to important international political, regulatory, and normative processes.

During the Year of Action, key areas of commitment made by stakeholders have centered on the creation of novel networks and channels of collaboration; knowledge production; dissemination of information and tools; monitoring and accountability; outreach and advocacy, regulatory and normative frameworks; as well as developing platforms, digital tools, and technologies.

# Findings and learnings

## Providing a platform for knowledge production, dialogue, visibility, and action

The scope and sheer expanse of work streams underline the importance of not just continuous dialogue and dissemination within the initiative, but also a systematizing of knowledge to amplify its impact.

## Forward thinking and cutting-edge on a new and difficult agenda

The initiative is applauded for seeking to foster political attention to the challenges emerging from tech, addressing what is a difficult agenda in a fast-moving and complex space.

## Pros and cons of working from a value-based foundation

Tech for Democracy forms a significant value framework of how we speak to the nexus between technology, democracy, and human rights. However, there is a continued need to act from a pragmatic and nuanced foundation.

## Importance of facilitating critical engagement with the tech sector and amplifying the right voices

The initiative has had to balance a difficult ambition to simultaneously cooperate and remain critical of the tech sector.

## Utilizing Danish positions, competencies, and networks

Denmark effectively navigated lobbying of interests and augmented its position in both transatlantic and wider international relations in the field of tech, democracy, and human rights.

## Significance of strategic planning in executing a multistakeholder initiative

The crucial challenge from timing stresses the importance of maintaining a dual vision on both the greater strategic objectives and the everyday planning to achieve those objectives.

## Maintaining momentum to sustain impact

Tech for Democracy catalysed and empowered global efforts on a key challenge for societies across the world. All stakeholders engaged agreed that they joined a promising and credible process with the Danish government in the lead that must not end as it is about to take flight.

Tech for Democracy has been a much-needed avenue of establishing novel collaborations, producing knowledge and evidence, building principles of democratic technological development and use, and providing inputs to important international and national political, regulatory, and normative processes. Ensuring that digital technologies further enhance democratic institutions, processes, and practice through principles of protection, non-discrimination or privacy is a joint responsibility of tech companies and governments – digital governance requires strong international cooperation and multilateralism to ensure accountability and social responsibility.

Analysis of Tech for Democracy's efforts and impacts during the Year of Action, underline how the initiative: provided a platform for knowledge production, dialogue, visibility, and action; was forward thinking and cutting-edge on a new and difficult agenda; showed the pros and cons of working from a value-based foundation; stressed the need to facilitate critical engagement with the tech sector and amplifying the right voices; was able to utilize Danish positions, competencies, and networks; but also underscored the significance of strategic planning in executing multistakeholder initiatives.

To inform future pathways for the Tech for Democracy multistakeholder push, the report formulates seven recommendations: continued need for knowledge production, systematizing, and dissemination; importance for the initiative in sustaining collaborations and elevating impact, not least by mobilizing and holding accountable signatories to the Pledge; ensuring coherence with other international initiatives as well as pushing for continued regulatory and normative progress on the intersections of tech, democracy, and human rights; establishing future strategic objectives and priorities, in particular reinforcing tech as a strategic objective for Denmark and the Danish MFA, while taking learnings to the Digital Democracy Initiative; ensuring critical engagement with the complex ecosystem of tech; amplifying the right voices through the platform that Tech for Democracy represents; and finally, inspiring political action and reiterating the shared commitment to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development.

The Tech for Democracy initiative has achieved much in its short lifetime, but it needs the boost that comes from political support at the highest levels in both government and ministry to sustain and elevate its impact. There is a definite need for role models in this global space, and Denmark has a unique opportunity to re-energize momentum by reiterating tech for democracy and human rights as a key political priority, employing its unique combination of being a digital front runner and having a strong voice on matters of foreign policy, security, and development cooperation. ■

# Future pathways

1

## Continued need for knowledge production, systematizing, and dissemination

Tech for Democracy has cemented the need for continued efforts in procuring, producing, systematizing, and disseminating knowledge.

2

## Sustaining collaborations to enable impact

As the initiative expands beyond the coalitions to wider work on democracy and human rights, it will be important to mobilize, publicize, and hold accountable signatories to the Copenhagen Pledge.

3

## Ensuring coherence with other international initiatives as well as continued regulatory and normative progress on tech

Working from the assumption that this is a crowded space of engagement, the initiative should continuously focus on mapping out, following, and collaborating with existing likeminded initiatives.

4

## Continued critical engagement with the tech sector

Maintaining a critical engagement requires a firm hand more than pats on the back, and Tech for Democracy should continue to be mindful of how it balances events, dialogues, and demands towards the different actors involved.

5

## Amplifying the right voices

There is a constant need to be mindful of unintended (and of course intended) biases shaping which voices are amplified through the platform provided by Tech for Democracy.

6

## Establishing tech for democracy as a future strategic priority

Denmark will need to reinforce and reiterate Tech for Democracy and human rights as a key strategic priority for the years to come. Explicit prioritization is a prerequisite for establishing strategic objectives on tech, democracy and human rights for the short, medium, and long term.

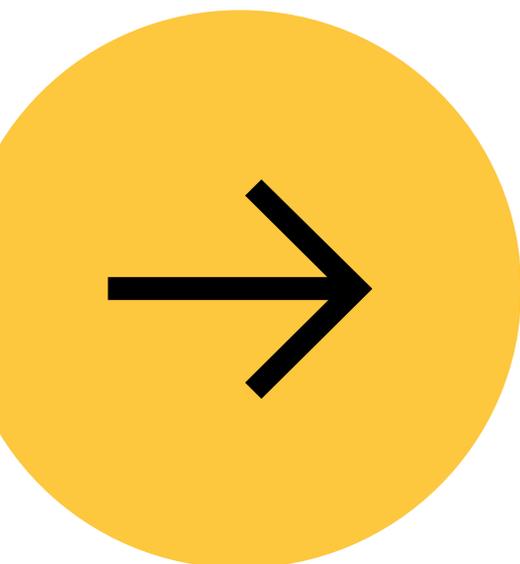
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## Inspiring political action

Denmark has a unique opportunity to re-energize momentum by reiterating a shared commitment to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development.

# Introduction

Digital technologies provide manifold opportunities and promises of progress for both people and societies. They hold potential for strengthening and promoting pluralist democracy and human rights, enhancing popular participation, and improving upon freedoms of information, expression, and association.



Digital technologies and tools can inspire new forms of political and social action or provide new forms of participatory mechanisms that enable access to existing democratic processes. As such, they can establish innovative forms of social contracts or cohesion, enhance accountability and transparency between citizens and states, permitting advancements of core institutions in democratic and inclusive societies.

Yet the distance between imagined potential and the reality of observed impact of digital technologies is widening today. We are witnessing troubling developments where the same tools lauded for their emancipatory potential are used to restrict and limit the voices and influence of some, while consolidating the power of others. Key digital infrastructure is falling into fewer hands or constructed in ways that allow for control from political or commercial elites while unseen levels of extraction and monetization of data makes capital accumulation the perhaps ultimate trait of the current digital ecosystem.

Such concentrations and skewed representations challenge the integrity of democratic conversations and dialogue – as the voices of some groups and people are amplified, particularly elites, others are silenced and marginalized. Not least owing to a series of digital divides that remain astounding in size, with almost half of the world's population without access to the internet, just as hundreds of millions of adult women in the Global South do not own mobile phones, while over 90 percent of jobs worldwide have a digital component to them. The internet does de facto not appear as an accessible global public good, serving public interests, prompting a need to reconfigure global connectivity beyond what current digital infrastructures provide or suggest.

The severity of these issues is accentuated by the growing fluidity of online-offline lives and ensuing consequences. Separations between digital and 'analogue' realms are increasingly blurred and the digital appears material too, as e.g., online disinformation quickly spirals into real-life grievances and violence. Digital surveillance, censorship, intimidation, and subjection to threats and violence are inter-related in our digitized realities when human rights defenders, oppositional parties, or protest movements are stifled or persecuted. Social control and oppression of groups may be systematized and made more efficient with digital tools at the disposal of authoritarian powers, leading to shrinking civic space.

Digital rights are human rights then, the enforcement of which are crucial to all citizens and societies. While we see political momentum for digital governance and regulation of big tech – from the EU's Digital Services Act to the UK's Online Safety Bill to the Danish Government's White Paper 'Towards a better social contract with big tech' – current transnational regulatory frameworks either have difficulty ensuring impactful reinforcement that can transform negative practices, or their geographic or legal coverage is inadequate to capture the breadth of harmful consequences. Partly because of the temporal lag between legislation and emerging effects of e.g., social media platforms, partly because of the complexity of legally governing digital technologies.

The outcome, as digital technologies expand their pervasiveness for the lives of regular people all over the world, is a simultaneity of increases to everyday risks and a rules-based international order under pressure. Where normative advancements may be made, but where companies, not democratic governments, continue to set the pace and direction of societal developments. To this end, we are seeing growing calls for a shared commitment to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development. Ensuring that digital technologies further enhance democratic institutions, processes, and practice through principles of protection, non-discrimination or privacy is a joint responsibility of tech companies and governments – digital governance requires strong international cooperation and multilateralism to ensure accountability and social responsibility.

## Multistakeholder push on Tech for Democracy →

Denmark – including the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and changing Danish governments – have been addressing this critical intersection of technology and democracy for several years. As a frontrunner in addressing the political weight of big tech, Denmark launched the position of Tech ambassador in 2017, just as tech has figured significantly in Danish development cooperation and broader diplomatic efforts over the past decade and more.

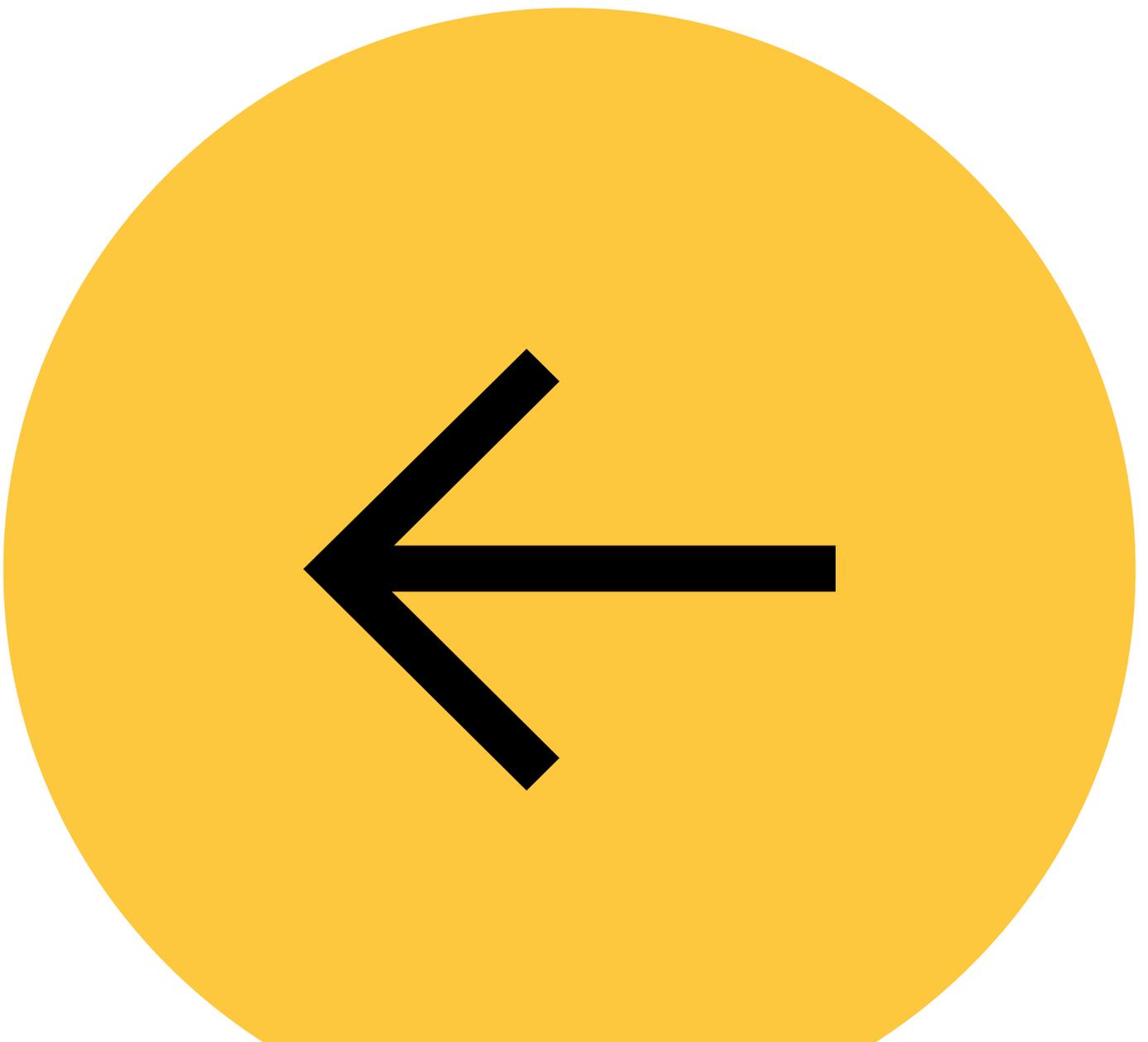
In 2021, Denmark's Tech for Democracy (TFD) initiative kickstarted a multi-stakeholder push for protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in an era of rapid technological development, bringing together representatives from governments, multilateral organisations, tech industry and civil society. A November 2021 conference marked the launch of a Year of Action during which the initiative intended to see ideas, intentions and visions translate into concrete actions and solutions. The high-level conference launched the Copenhagen Pledge – a political commitment to make digital technologies work for, not against, democracy and human rights – which has been signed by more than 200 governments, civil society organizations, and technology companies. Critical to Tech for Democracy has also been the forming of ten multistakeholder Action Coalitions that have worked through the year of action on establishing novel collaborations, producing knowledge and evidence,

building principles of democratic technological development and use, and providing inputs to important international and national political, regulatory, and normative processes. The initiative has furthermore been Denmark's flagship contribution to the US Summit for Democracy.

This report takes stock of the multistakeholder efforts made under the auspices of Tech for Democracy, including the Year of Action that followed the November 2021 Tech for Democracy conference and the Days of Action before it, as well as the Copenhagen Pledge. The report gathers experiences and learnings made over the course of the period and employ those to also look ahead – into the future of the Tech for Democracy initiative and Denmark's work on technology and democracy. It builds on data, firstly, from the Copenhagen Pledge questionnaires filled out by the 202 signatories and, secondly, upon extensive document analysis of relevant internal and external documents and publications within the auspices of Tech for Democracy, including summaries of meetings. Third, more than thirty interviews have been conducted with key stakeholders including government officials, civil society, and tech companies to explore qualitative perspectives on the multistakeholder engagement in Tech for Democracy.

From these data sources, the report identifies trends and gaps of the activities within the initiative, including commonalities and discrepancies between priorities laid out by signatories of the Copenhagen Pledge as well as opportunities and challenges for future pathways of action and multi-stakeholder cooperation. By way of analytical generalization, we have identified eight categories of action that function as main themes throughout the analysis of the Copenhagen Pledge and activities undertaken during the Year of Action, the report's two main areas of analysis: knowledge production; monitoring and accountability; disseminating information and tools; outreach and advocacy policy and normative frameworks; the regulatory and legal framework; developing platforms, digital tools and technologies; and networks and coalitions.

A few caveats apply: the information presented here is not exhaustive and it should be taken as an interpretation of selected activities, events, and initiatives under the Tech for Democracy umbrella. Related, the report is not a formal evaluation of attribution, contribution, outputs, and outcomes, but should be seen as a resource of learnings made during an ambitious international multistakeholder push. And all answers, both from the Pledge and from first-hand interviews, have been anonymized and aggregated to circumvent direct quotations linked to individual organizations, persons, and signatories. What follows is divided into three main parts, covering analysis of the Pledge signatories' focus and prioritization (alongside signing the pledge, signatories have indicated how they expect to work with these areas to meet the objectives stated), efforts made during the Year of Action, and finally a discussion of future pathways for the initiative and broader efforts on Tech for Democracy. ■



# The Copenhagen Pledge

Fortifying the overarching value framework of Tech for Democracy, the Copenhagen Pledge was launched to emphasize the collective commitment to develop, use, and promote technology in a manner that strengthens democracy and promotes human rights internationally.

More than 200 signatories – across governments, civil society, and the tech sector – have pledged to work together to promote a democratic vision for the digital age as well as enhance the digital resilience and mobilization of civil society through digital technologies. Specifically, the signatories commit to supporting democratic institutions in establishing safe and respectful online democratic processes that invites for civic participation as well as exploring ways in which digital technologies can provide opportunities for further delegation of agency to civil society by e.g., focusing on improving digital literacy through awareness raising and capacity-building.

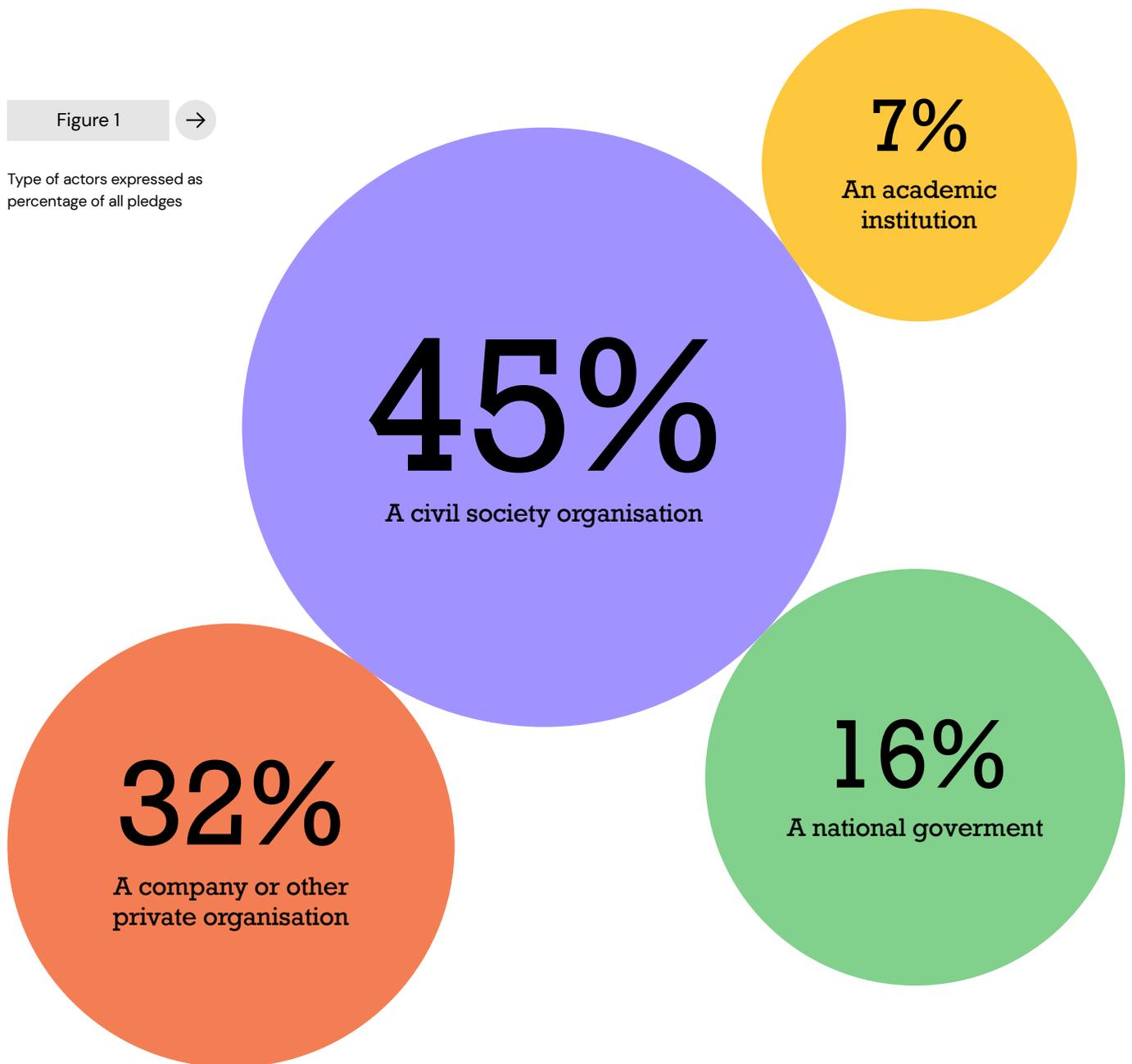
## Composition of signatories →

Tangibly, the pledge is constructed as a survey asking all signatories to identify themselves by type of actor, nationality, areas of commitment dedicated to, and how they intend to realize their pledge. From the total pool of signatories, it is possible to identify the representation of different types of actors between national governments, private organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and multilateral organizations. Overall, 202 stakeholders have signed the pledge and completed the survey. Of these, 98 pledges have been provided by civil society organizations, 65 of the signatories are private companies and organizations, 33 pledges are made on behalf of a national government, and 13 pledges come from academic institutions. As Figure 1 illustrates, civil society organizations and companies in conjunction comprise 75 percent of the pledges. Though provided as an option in the survey, no signatory has identified as a multilateral organization.

Figure 1

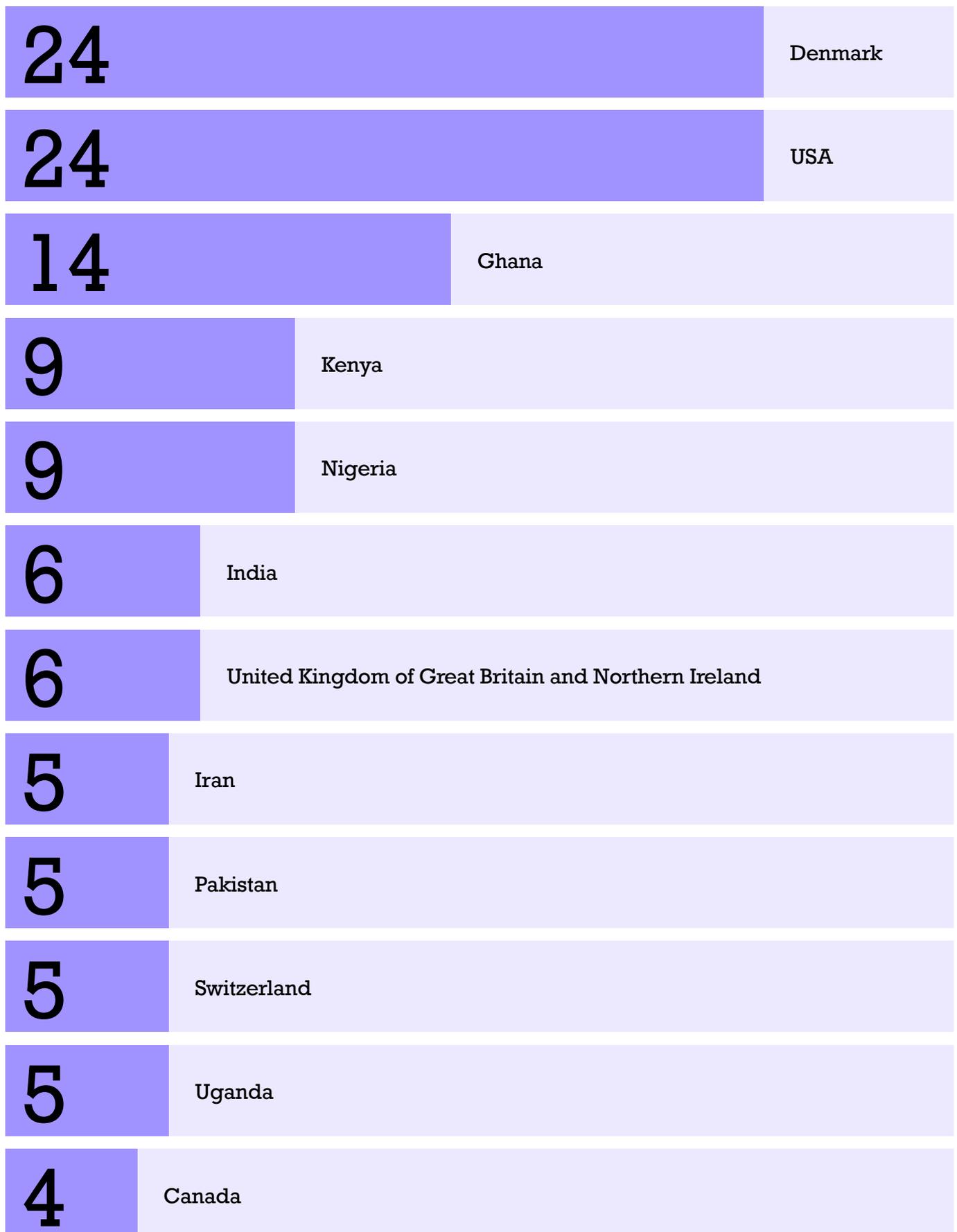


Type of actors expressed as percentage of all pledges



The signatories to the pledge encompass 59 different *nationalities* with only 19 signatories stating 'nationality not applicable'. The highest national representation is by Denmark and the United States, both with 24 pledges each, and Ghana in third with 14. In total, these three countries together comprise 29 percent of all pledges. 35 nationalities are indicated only once, covering 17.5 percent of all pledges. Figure 2 below shows the 24 countries that have been indicated more than once and with what frequency. It illustrates how the Copenhagen Pledge has received acknowledgement and commitment from countries from Oceania to North America, Global North and South, high income as well as low.

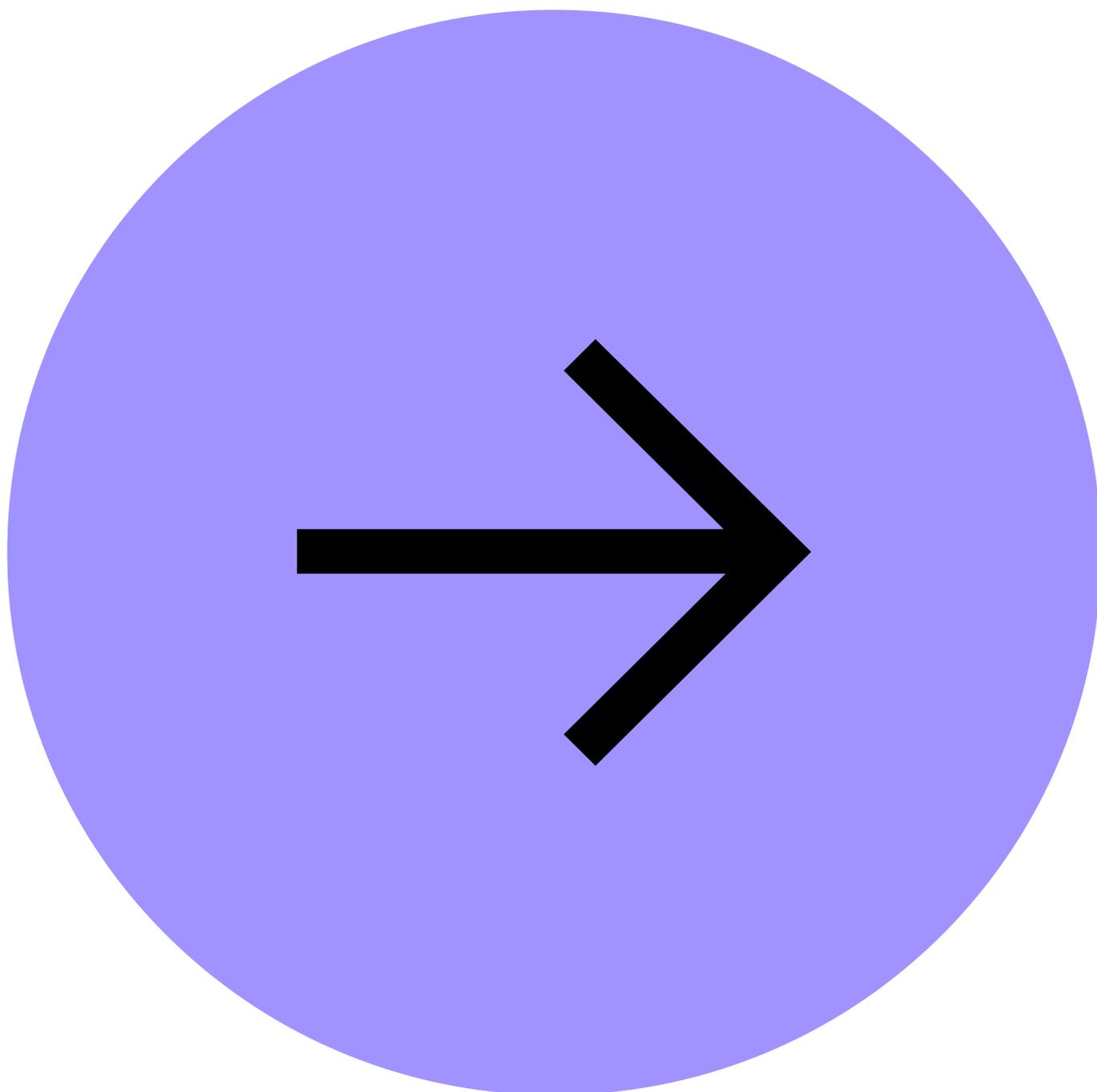
Figure 2

Number of pledges  
per nationality

4	Sweden
3	Bangladesh
3	Philippines
3	South Africa
2	Australia
2	France
2	Germany
2	Greece
2	Israel
2	Latvia
2	Myanmar
2	Vietnam

## Areas of commitment

The principal aim of the Pledge's survey is divided into six concrete areas of commitment that emphasize how digital technologies can enable democratic institutions as well as civil society in the digital realm. Three of the areas focus specifically on ensuring that the development and utilization of digital technologies facilitate a digital space for open and democratic dialogue by:





## Six concrete areas of commitment

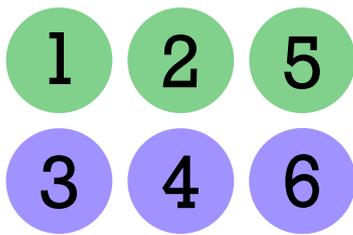
The principal aim of the Pledge's survey is divided into six concrete areas of commitment that emphasize how digital technologies can enable democratic institutions as well as civil society in the digital realm. Three of the areas focus specifically on ensuring that the development and utilization of digital technologies facilitate a digital space for open and democratic dialogue by:

- 1 Applying shared democratic values and a human rights-based approach in the design, development, deployment, and use of digital technologies;
- 2 Sharing best practices, promoting responsible people-centric approaches, and partnering on inclusive solutions for democracy online and human rights-based digital governance;
- 3 Developing digital public goods to promote a safe, active, respectful, and tolerant civic participation in democratic processes online.

Additionally, three areas of commitment pay particular attention to supporting non-governmental actors and enhancing their resilience and ability to mobilize through digital means by:

- 4 Supporting the development and use of digital technologies by and for civil society actors to help protect against human rights violations and abuses and to strengthen accountability;
- 5 Enhancing capacity-development, awareness raising, and available resources to increase the digital literacy and digital safety of civil society.
- 6 Using digital technologies proactively to narrow digital divides, with a particular focus on marginalized, vulnerable, or disenfranchised groups worldwide.

The survey that follows the Pledge is constructed for all stakeholders to indicate their contribution by checking off which of the 6 pre-determined commitments spelled out above they wish to commit to, choosing as many **areas of commitment**, as they see fit. Commitments 1 and 2 are the ones selected most frequently, respectively by 78 percent and 80 percent of all signatories. Commitment 3 and 6 have been selected by 58 percent, making them the least frequently selected commitments.



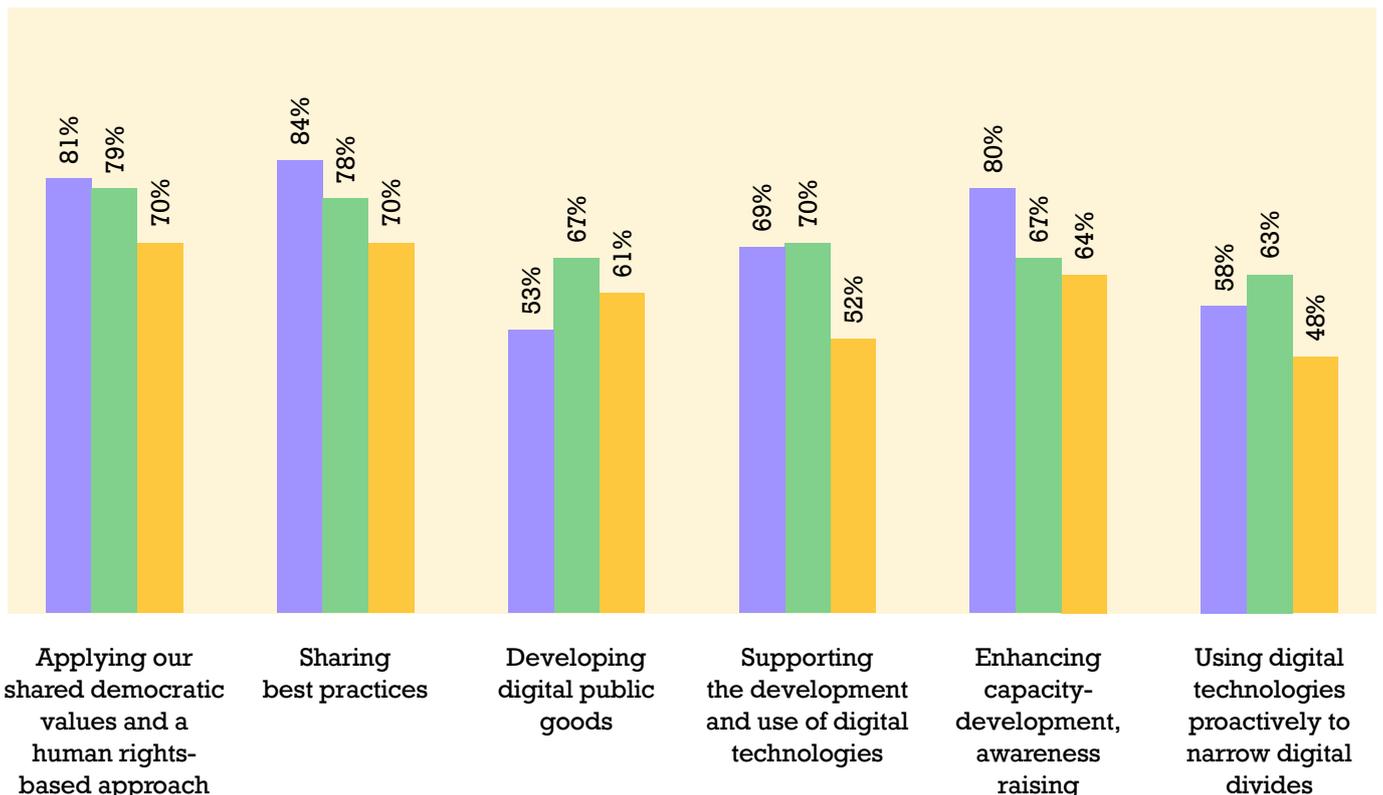
Generally, commitment 1, 2, and 5 are composed of more general initiatives such as outreach and sharing of best practices, whereas commitment 3, 4, and 6 targets a specific focus on democracy and governance (3), civil society actors (4), and marginalized groups (6). The commitments selected according to type of actor, being national governments, civil society organizations or private organizations, is outlined in Figure 3. From this data, we can conclude that over 80 percent of civil society organizations have prioritized the three commitments with a more general focus (1, 2, and 5), whereas only 53 percent prioritize commitment 3 focusing on developing digital public goods. ■

Figure 3



- Civil society organisations
- Company or other private organisations
- National governments

Type of actor and their focus on specific commitments of the Copenhagen Pledge



## Knowledge production, monitoring, dissemination, and outreach →

Private companies are the most equally dispersed group of actors oscillating with a commitment-rate of between 63 percent and 79 percent on all six commitments. Lastly, national government agencies tend to commit to fewer commitments per signatory, which is seen by the lower commitment rates on each commitment in comparison to the other types of signatories. Only regarding commitment 3, on development of digital public goods to support democratic processes, is the commitment rate of national government agencies' higher than civil society's with 61 percent of national government agencies identifying it as part of their initiative to realize the Copenhagen Pledge.

As the last, and perhaps most important step in the survey, signatories are asked to detail how they intend to fulfill their pledge – this is where they may qualitatively explain their commitments to action. By way of analytical generalization, we have identified eight categories of action that function as broader themes throughout the data regarding the Copenhagen Pledge and within the activities undertaken during the Year of Action. As such, these will serve as points of departure for the rest of the report.

Signatories to the Copenhagen Pledge, whose pledge is focused on knowledge production, express a shared belief that the development and utilization of digital tools can ensure accountability and provide insight on how and why some technologies undermine or support human rights, democratic values, and public discourse. Activities within this category vary widely but include initiatives such as analyzing the effect of international versus national regulations on minorities' digital rights. Central to the focus on knowledge is also that of sharing it, such as insights on the inequalities engendered by technologies, research, or best practice on upholding online democratic processes, as well as recommendations on implementation of responsible technologies for a multistakeholder audience.

**Monitoring and accountability** is also central to many signatories' commitment to the Copenhagen Pledge who see monitoring as crucial to understand and address the undermining of democratic practices and free dialogue. Specifically, commitments center around promoting the use of digital technologies to monitor and document human rights violations both online and offline and hold perpetrators accountable as well as advocating for increased accountability for actors who misuse digital technologies with the potential to undermine human rights.

The category of **disseminating information and tools** is addressed by a large number of signatories in a myriad of ways. Several signatories emphasize their commitment to promoting due diligence and digital human rights in their networks, whilst some plan to integrate external consultancy and internal training in human rights, digital democracy, and ethical use of technology into their business model to foster awareness and support capacity-building. The dedication to improve digital skills within and general capacity building of civil society actors and grassroots organizations is highlighted by stakeholder pledges, and include intentions to provide free education on software development and guidance on how to adapt to new digital technologies as a civil society actor with the purpose of bridging the digital divide and increase digital safety. Similarly, enabling civil society to network and collaborate on public policy development globally ensuring diversity in the democratic debate, both online and offline, occupy many signatories to the Copenhagen Pledge. This goes alongside sharing tools and knowledge in specific networks, with collaborative partners, or to a broader audience. Such tools and knowledge vary from general

and applicable by a broad range of actors and actions or specifically applicable to issues such as monitoring marginalized groups' vulnerability to hate speech and online hate speech in the digital age. Finally, some stakeholders plan to contribute with their own experience of the implications of digitalization on marginalized groups, e.g., by participating in exchange workshops.

Signatories of the pledge present several commitments that may be categorized under the umbrella of **outreach and advocacy**. On outreach, one group focus on providing knowledge about human rights using digital technologies; another on developing technical support helplines and conducting training courses for certain demographical groups, often youths, to improve digital literacy and safe use of technology. On advocacy, one group of signatories commits to advocate for open-source programs and open internet both in specific digital and national contexts as well as globally as to further equality in the digital realm. Another pledges to prioritize traditional advocacy of human rights on the grounds that awareness will push for digital technologies that work for marginalized people and minorities, rather than against them. A third group expresses concern regarding threats to the digital democratic dialogue, thereby designating their pledge to fighting online misinformation and disinformation. Overlaps do occur between all groups and these should not be seen as mutually exclusive courses of action. From the Freedom Online Coalition to the Summit for Democracy, participation in various multi-stakeholder fora constitute a central key intention within the pledges regarding outreach and advocacy. Stakeholders emphasize their dedication to engaging in direct dialogue with technology companies and platform developers to insist on concrete changes to technologies that facilitate stakeholder outreach and enhance the agency of marginalized communities.

## Policy, platforms, networks, and funding →

Several signatories intend to meet the objectives stated in their pledge by improving **policy and normative frameworks** internally within their own organizations or through partnerships. Many intend on updating their policies to ensure and value democratic practices and human rights and some explain how they turn to the application of human rights-based approaches, when designing new technology and demand the same from their business partners. However, few signatories hold the authority or capacity to directly propose any form of international policy development. Therefore, most actors who engage with policy and normative framework development on this scale focus on stimulating dialogue and push international organizations to make international standards for technology use and development. Some national representatives plan to deliver inputs to multilateral policy development, working toward making tech and democracy a priority on the international agenda. Most stakeholders who have expressed a wish to generate change in regulatory and legal framework, do not have direct legislative power. Consequently, their efforts to influence the regulatory and legal framework manifest in hosting programs and talks that actively engage in the dialogue of technology standards and regulation to ensure that democracy and human rights benefit from digital technologies. Others plan to deliver relevant policy inputs to international political bodies, such as the EU. Similarly, some national representatives plan to promote regulation of technology and digital inequality on international levels by pushing for further policy development by international political bodies.

**Developing platforms, digital tools, and technologies** to strengthen democracy and human rights is a frequent focus indicated by signatories to execute on their commitments to the Copenhagen Pledge. A wide variety of actors plan to develop apps and platforms to support the networking and dialogue of like-minded businesses working to ensuring that human rights and democratic values are upheld and furthered by technologies. Other signatories express a particular interest in exploring the potential of open-source AI and software as building blocks for further advancement of democracy-affirming technologies and increased levels of transparency in technological development. Supporting digital public infrastructure to foster increased accessibility to the internet or support electoral systems is also highlighted amongst the commitments alongside the development of general digital governance infrastructure and, more specifically, electoral infrastructure to secure transparency, accessibility, accountability, and efficiency in political systems.

A majority of signatories to the pledge view their **networks and coalitions** as a key part of their course of, and potential for, action. Some wish to integrate the Copenhagen Pledge value framework in their business-models – taking on a lead role in industry networks to build the capacity of employees and press for the concerns manifest in the Pledge. Others plan to uphold the Pledge by mainly engaging in business collaborations that adhere to the Pledge, while other signatories state the intention to create, chair, or optimize new networks and partnerships to focus on incorporating democratic values and human rights in specific industry or regional contexts. Stakeholders also point to the possibility of supporting existing networks to disperse and develop the dialogue on the implications of digital technologies, whilst maintaining corporate civic engagement efforts. The category of networks and coalitions often goes hand-in-hand with disseminating information and tools and appreciation for the central importance of changing normative and legal frameworks on a global level. Signatories, particularly from civil society organizations, emphasize the opportunity provided by the Copenhagen Pledge to cement the local and global impact of their partners in connection with further cementing sustainable international cross-sector dialogue. Noticeably, funding as a course of action is not predominant with only 3 out of 200 actors explicitly pledging funding as a key part of their course of action.

Ultimately, the multistakeholder signatories of the Copenhagen Pledge have committed to providing outputs, outcomes, and impact that correspond with the overarching value framework of Tech for Democracy augmented in the Copenhagen Pledge. To this end, they have pledged to focus their efforts – for the benefit of democracy and human rights – on knowledge production, development of platforms and digital technologies, dissemination of information and tools, construction of networks and building coalitions, strengthening of regulatory/legal frameworks and policy/normative frameworks, monitoring and accountability as well as outreach and advocacy. Furthermore, the pledges have been attentive to connecting stakeholders across sectors to realize the vision of the Copenhagen Pledge. ■

# Tech for Democracy's 'Year of Action'

Foundational to the Tech for Democracy initiative is a common understanding of a joint responsibility for digital governance, which entails global and multilateral collaboration to ensure accountability and social responsibility.

The Year of Action founded channels of collaboration and nurtured well-established as well as novel networks between the tech industry, civil society, and multilateral organisations, which built on a sense of urgency in cementing joint commitments to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development. From this, new partnerships were founded to deliver innovative and concrete solutions as to how digital technologies can further enhance democracy, human rights, and equality through institutions, processes, and practices.

During the Year of Action, ten multistakeholder Action Coalitions were constituted consisting of a range of actors from all sectors and segments of society, operating on local, national, regional, and international levels, which cemented the coalitions' global scale and scope. Each Action Coalition targeted specific issues within the Tech for Democracy field of interest such as meaningful transparency, content moderation, and gender-based online harassment. The Year of Action also brought about the establishment of a Tech for Democracy working group with members from over 20 different Danish civil society organisations engaged in topics related to technology, democracy, and human rights as well as two international advisory groups with 90 experts from 40 countries that contributed with collective input on digital resilience and digital mobilisation. Placing civil society and grassroots organizations at the heart of the initiative's focus on building new networks and channels of collaboration have ensured relevant contributions based on the limitations and opportunities of the digital age as experienced by various groups around the world.

## Action Coalitions under the Tech for Democracy initiative



Various additional channels of collaboration were formed under the auspices of the Tech for Democracy Initiative. National Human Rights Institutes (NHRI) from more than 20 countries came together, led by The Danish Institute for Human Rights, and established the Digital Rights Alliance. The alliance brought together NHRIs interested in technology to, firstly, shed light on how digitalisation constitute a significant aspect of their work and, secondly, to create a space for the organizations to support each other in the national implementation of their activities related to tech and human rights. In providing opportunity for local and national actors to work strategically with human rights impacts of digitalisation, the Alliance cemented the mandate of the NHRIs in the context of digitalisation as well as facilitated knowledge sharing on how to best navigate national human rights challenges in an age of digitalization. Tech for Democracy provided a platform for fostering new paths of collaboration amongst key stakeholders, contributed opportunity for actors to connect and coordinate their work, and created a space to engage with actors working on similar topics. As such, the initiative has supported the development of a wider ownership in making digital technologies work for democracy and human rights.

## IMPACT CASE

# Expanding collaboration – the Digital Rights Alliance



Under the auspices of the Tech for Democracy Initiative, and led by The Danish Institute for Human Rights, National Human Rights Institutes (NHRI) from more than 20 countries came together and established the Digital Rights Alliance. The alliance brought together NHRIs interested in technology to, firstly, shed light on how digitalisation constitute a significant aspect of their work and, secondly, to create a space for the organizations to support each other in the national implementation of their activities related to tech and human rights. In providing opportunity for local and national actors to work strategically with human rights impacts of digitalisation, the Alliance cemented the mandate of the NHRIs in the context of digitalisation as well as facilitated knowledge sharing on how to best navigate national human rights challenges in an age of digitalization.

## Knowledge production →

In understanding the impact of the Tech for Democracy initiative, knowledge production is a key factor, and the initiative brought about reports, principles, outcome papers, frameworks, and more. Early on, civil society engaged in the Tech for Democracy initiative launched the Tech for Democracy Action Programme, which consolidated the findings from the Days of Action and outlined recommendations for actions to be taken by a range of stakeholders and contributed a foundation for civil society advocacy. As such, providing a strong basis for civil society advocacy at the very off-set of the Year of Action. Additionally, UNPD Oslo Governance Center collaborated with Southern Voice and Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, to launch a background paper exploring the intersection of digitalization and democracy in the Global South, which illustrated the role of digitalization in everyday lives with particular attention to marginalized communities. The paper points to the challenges of rapidly changing technology and explores the possibilities to harness digital technologies in a manner that contributes to citizen engagement, online and offline.

During the Year of Action, stakeholders conducted global surveys of and identified global trends and gaps within the technology and democracy nexus. From this, they were able to formulate concrete frameworks and guiding principles. To ensure that decisions on digitalization are coherent with the needs of civil society, the coalition on Will for the Web shed light on the impacts of digitalization on grassroots civil society by identifying persistent gaps that inhibit digital equity. Its global baseline survey was completed by over 7,000 CSOs from more than 100 countries completed and more than half of the participants complied to participate in the second phase of the survey on civil society's wishes for the digital future. Complimentary, the coalition on Content Moderation for Women Human Rights Defenders, led by Dan Church Aid (DCA), launched a report on online harassment and censorship of women human rights defenders. By analysing publicly available data and surveys, as well as conduct interviews with DCA partners and staff from Palestine, Israel, Ukraine, Kenya, Nepal, and Cambodia, the report identified and outlined the scope of online abuse directed at women human rights, which was foundational to defining important guidance on improvement of regulation and content moderation.

The coalition on Civic Engagement in AI Design focused on strengthening the inclusion of civil society in the development and design of rights-based AI with its work resulting in a draft guidance framework for inclusion of relevant stakeholders from civil society and vulnerable or impact communities in human rights impact assessments for AI. By collectively mapping out the transparency policy landscape, the framework not only provides insight on meaningful engagement in relation to AI but bears the potential to be a draft for best practice models regarding inclusive innovation. As such, the Year of Action provided a platform from which knowledge was produced on issues related to tech, democracy, and human rights with a broad multistakeholder engagement.

## Dissemination of knowledge and tools →

The Year of Action mobilized a diverse range of actors who worked to disseminate knowledge and tools developed and acquired on technology, human rights, and democracy by convening multistakeholder consultations as well as stakeholder-specific sessions. Actors hosted, participated in, and contributed to side-events, panel debates, and discussions on national as well as international levels such as the opening of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly, RightsCon 2022, the 2022 Copenhagen Democracy Summit, the 50th regular session of the Human Rights Council, and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2022. Among the many activities, the Digital Rights Alliance convened a

workshop in the run up to IGF on their newly developed reflection tool, which guide NHRIs to define their role in protecting and promoting human rights digitally in compliance with the Paris Principles. Similarly, recommendations from civil society's Tech for Democracy Action Programme were shared with peers at the 2022 RightsCon to bolster civil society's tech mandate and promote concrete areas of improvement to ensure that digital technologies work for, not against, human rights and democracy.

Civil society plays a crucial role in addressing the growing call for global dialogue on disinformation and ensure that solutions for digital accountability apply to local contexts. At the core of the work of the coalition on Information Integrity in Elections was identifying local circumstances regarding key election challenges and main drivers of election assistance. The coalition managed to facilitate a link between national and global actors with specific national interests and agendas to discuss how to protect information integrity in times of elections. The meetings spoke to the notion that impact of digital technologies in elections varies depending on the national conditions it is present in. As such, the work of the coalition highlighted how the local context of digital technologies must be taken into consideration. This was echoed by the coalition on Content Moderation for WHRDs, which recommended that tech companies involve local communities and civil society actors when assessing the potential negative impact and disruption of their policies regarding digital technologies, e.g., by hiring culturally competent staff to ensure content moderation is done with a proper understanding of language and cultural context. Emphasizing local solutions was central to the Tech for Democracy pilot projects led by Action Aid Denmark. One of the projects facilitated participatory workshops on the application of technology to mobilize social change and encourage active citizenship for youth in rural Nigerian communities. The participants were taught skills in utilizing WhatsApp strategically for the improvement of democracy and human rights, which they were encouraged to share with their peers.

## Monitoring and ensuring accountability →

The criticality in placing democracy and human rights at the core of the development, use, and governance of technological development as well as identifying the level of responsibility expected from private companies in such processes and practices was emphasized by Tech for Democracy stakeholders through the convening of numerous activities with a collective focus on. The coalition on Responsible Technology worked throughout the Year of Action to ensure accountability in the private sector by supporting the improvement of human rights due diligence efforts regarding both the development and use of digital technologies. As the complexity of the digital ecosystem can hinder businesses in understanding the context in which they are operating, the coalition worked to map out the ecosystem of relevant value-chain actors in relation to a diverse range of technologies such as surveillance and social media platforms. This illustrates the interdependency of actors and outlines responsibilities of different actors in the ecosystem to proactively mitigate impact and address accountability of the negative impacts of digital technologies at earlier stages.

## IMPACT CASE

# Engaging the tech sector – International Media Support



International Media Support facilitated critical engagement with the tech sector by conducting a series of closed-door virtual roundtables between representatives from the Ukrainian government, civil society, and leading tech companies to address the issue of war and disinformation. The meetings provided an opportunity to improve coordination between Ukrainian participants and the tech industry to bolster monitoring, counter disinformation, and discuss concrete needs and solutions. Furthermore, the roundtables supported knowledge sharing on local circumstances in Ukraine to companies present in the region, as such, providing a stepping-stone towards greater engagement going forward. Concrete measures were taken regarding the monitoring of platforms and devices including identifying and amplifying voices of credibility.

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian civil society saw an increase in cyberattacks and a decline in the digital security of civil society actors. Large tech companies and platforms were urged to set in motion procedures to monitor and react to internet shutdowns, fake-news, government requests for censorship, or online hate speech. To accommodate this, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with International Media Support facilitated a series of closed-door virtual roundtables between representatives from the Ukrainian government, civil society, and leading tech companies to address the issue of war and disinformation. The meetings provided an opportunity to improve coordination between Ukrainian participants and the tech industry to bolster monitoring, counter disinformation, and discuss concrete needs and solutions. Furthermore, the roundtables supported knowledge sharing on local circumstances in Ukraine to companies present in the region, providing a stepping-stone towards greater engagement going forward. Suggestions for the private sector included working with local fact-checking initiatives to identify and flag disinformation, establish special operations centres to monitor and moderate platforms in areas of heightened risks of cyberattacks, as well as increase efforts of collaboration with civil society organisations to gain local insight and context. Concrete measures were taken regarding the monitoring of platforms and devices including identifying and amplifying voices of credibility.

## Outreach and advocacy →

During the Year of Action, stakeholders have identified opportunities for outreach and advocacy on a regular basis in ensuring visibility and active participation in international conferences and events in observance of international days or annual international campaigns such as the World Press Freedom Day and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based-Violence. Considering the variety and scale of challenges posed to human rights and democracy by digital technologies, coalitions invited stakeholders outside of the coalitions to join meetings, panel discussions, and roundtables on a variety of issues related to tech, democracy, and human rights. Several Action Coalitions received expressions of interest from organisations and individuals, who did not have the capacity to be involved directly in the coalition but were interested in following its work. This motivated the development of coalition mailing lists through which the coalitions were able to share information on the subjects covered in their work with stakeholders outside the coalitions. As such, interested and relevant stakeholders outside coalitions have been able to stay informed and engage with the coalition throughout and beyond the Year of Action.

Opportunities for outreach were also sought for on Danish soil. Global Focus' panel debates at the Danish annual People's Meeting provided opportunity for participants to gain insight into the challenges within the nexus between technology, democracy, and human rights. A panel debate shed light on how digital technologies can support civil society's access to the UN, which speaks to the work of the coalition on Tech solutions to #Unmute Civil Society. The coalition worked throughout the Year of Action on bridging the digital divide and emphasizing the opportunities provided by digital technologies in making UN meetings and processes more accessible, inclusive, and meaningful for civil society. Broadly, the outreach and advocacy efforts during the Year of Action were dedicated to engaging with the civil society, lawmakers, and the private sector to raise awareness about key challenges of digitalization within and beyond the scope and scale of the coalitions. Most importantly, the Tech for Democracy initiative provided stakeholders from civil society, governments, and the tech sector the opportunity to align outreach and advocacy efforts.

## Developing and harnessing digital technologies →

Novel ways of developing and harnessing digital technologies for more people-centred, participatory, and inclusive governance structures were explored throughout the Year of Action. Experiences and perspectives from a range of stakeholders in the Global South, including youth, indigenous peoples, and marginalised groups, were gathered amongst other things through pilot projects. Global Focus conducted pilot projects in, e.g., Central America, Uganda, and Egypt, which focused on promoting technologies as tools for broader democratic inclusion as well as strengthening the safety of human rights defenders and ensuring freedom of the press. UNDP-led country pilot projects took place in Peru, Tunisia, Pakistan, and Kenya. The projects contributed important local insight to the broader discussions concerning global digital governance and provided new ways of utilizing digital technologies to push for participatory and inclusive governance systems. Specifically, they studied how to utilize digital solutions to foster youth engagement in public institutions and policy, "listen" to marginalised groups to inform policymaking, and effectively deploy fact-checking during elections.

The pilot project in Kenya observed the impact of UNDP's iVerify platform on information integrity on pre-election and post-election periods in Kenya. This resulted in the development of a set of guiding principles as well as a

monitoring framework for the iVerify platform, which exhibit the platform's impact on information integrity broadly. Another project addressed the growing lack of trust in public institutions, particularly among youth, in Tunisia by identifying obstacles to trust in public institutions and utilizing this new data to develop a platform that encourage citizen engagement in policymaking. The pilot projects form an example of the activities undertaken during the Year of Action, which assisted in building capacity of partner institutions and ensured the sustainability of Tech for Democracy through local ownership and engagement. Moreover, they contributed concrete knowledge on how digital technologies can be developed and harnessed to further enhance democratic institutions, processes, and practice with the inclusion of broad representation from the Global South. Throughout the various consortiums constituted under the auspices of Tech for Democracy, diverse approaches were explored to the development and utilization of digital technologies as a means to foster democratic processes, broaden civic engagement, and enhance accessible, interoperable, and secure dialogue, online as well as offline.

## Regulatory and normative frameworks →

Increasing demands for governments and tech companies to strengthen regulatory (legal) frameworks and policy (normative) frameworks regarding digital technologies have, to a large extent, informed the work undertaken by Tech for Democracy stakeholders. Activities during the Year of Action broadly informed opportunities and challenges for the alignment between regulation of the tech sector and States' obligations to uphold human rights. The coalition on Gender Based Online Harassment, which worked on cementing attention to gender-based online harassment and abuse in key multilateral policy efforts, hosted several international meetings to establish and share access to reliable, comparable global and regional data to measure technology-facilitated gender-based violence and its effects. Coalition partners utilized the momentum of the Year of Action to launch a compendium of international best practices and principles regarding gender-based online harassment and abuse. Similarly, the coalition on Trustworthy Information Online provided recommendations for governments and policymakers on building a trustworthy information ecosystem online. By identifying regulatory and technical measures supportive of a digital information sphere that strengthens the democratic debate, the coalition provided guidance on constructive policy and legal frameworks, which emphasizes the steps needed from a policy and regulatory perspective to make digital technologies work for, not against, democracy and human rights.

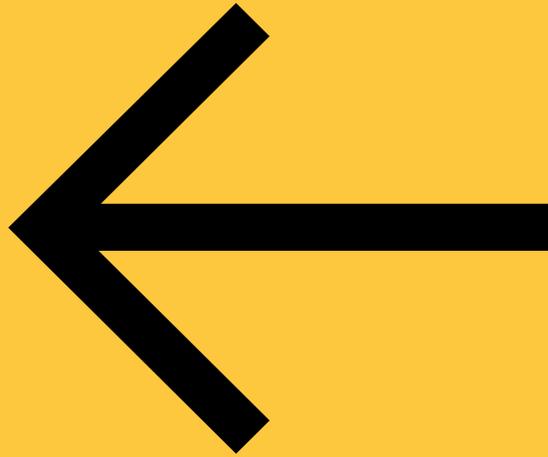
## IMPACT CASE

# Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse



The Action Coalition 'Global Partnership for Action on Gender-based Online Harassment and Abuse' was able to utilise Danish positions, competencies, and networks internationally to effectively navigate lobbying of interests, also supporting and helping to augment Denmark's position in both transatlantic and wider international relations in the field of tech, democracy, and human rights. Strengthened by bilateral partnerships, e.g., with the US, the UK, and Australia, the coalition worked on drawing attention to gender-based online harassment and abuse in key multilateral policy efforts, hosted several international meetings to establish and share access to reliable, comparable global and regional data to measure technology-facilitated gender-based violence and its effects. Stakeholders also utilized the momentum of the Year of Action to attract attention to the launch of their compendium of international best practices and principles regarding gender-based online harassment and abuse.

Overall, stakeholders worked throughout the Year of Action on founding novel channels of collaboration as well as producing and disseminating knowledge and tools on the nexus of technology, human rights, and democracy. The Tech for Democracy initiative provided a needed opportunity, not only for civil society but for all stakeholders involved, to identify existing initiatives as well as to strengthen and align advocacy and outreach efforts according to synergies and complementarities internationally. Furthermore, the Year of Action provided momentum to develop and harness digital technologies for better democracies, monitor and ensure accountability across sectors, as well as bring an increased focus on regulatory (legal) frameworks and policy (as well as normative) frameworks. The multistakeholder approach central to the initiative has proven beneficial through the numerous concrete contributions and results described, which have all cemented the initiative as a critical ally in protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in the digital age. ■



# Findings and learnings

The Tech for Democracy initiative embodies an ambitious multistakeholder push on a key challenge of our time – protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in an era of rapid technological development.

It represents a shared commitment to a future where digital technologies contribute positively to societal developments, enhancing popular participation and improving upon freedoms of information, expression, and association. Through high-level conferences and diplomatic efforts, the Copenhagen Pledge and numerous streams of work organized around ten multistakeholder Action Coalitions through a Year of Action, Tech for Democracy has established novel and fortified existing collaborations, produced knowledge and evidence, built principles of democratic technological development and use, and provided inputs to important international and national political, regulatory, and normative processes. Here, we sketch seven main findings and learnings emerging from our analysis of the multistakeholder initiative, pertaining to: providing a platform for knowledge production, dialogue, visibility, and action; being forward thinking and cutting-edge on a new and difficult agenda; the pros and cons of working from a value-based foundation; the need to facilitate critical engagement with the tech sector and amplifying the right voices; the ability to utilize Danish positions, competencies, and networks; the significance of strategic planning in executing a multistakeholder initiative; and the importance of maintaining momentum and sustaining impact.

**Providing a platform for knowledge production, dialogue, visibility, and action** →

Tech for Democracy, in all its capacity, provided a platform that would have been difficult to construct for any one type of the actors involved – a platform that enabled collaboration, expanded information sharing opportunities, and catalysed action. Exhibiting the value of multistakeholder dialogue initiatives, Tech for Democracy expanded knowledge and insight but perhaps most importantly gave way for interaction, allowing for an interfacing of sometimes distanced actors. Offering access for civil society to policymakers, but also of tech companies to the knowledge and competencies of civil society actors in the realm of democracy and human rights, Tech for Democracy pushed for

## Providing a platform for knowledge production, dialogue, visibility, and action.



The scope and sheer expanse of work streams underline the importance of not just continuous dialogue and dissemination within the initiative, but also a systematizing of knowledge to amplify its impact.

necessary cooperation. The initiative's breadth of engagement meant that in some of the areas targeted, Tech for Democracy formed the first of its kind, whether in formally bringing actors together or pushing for global collaboration.

In many instances, especially for the thematically aligned Action Coalitions, the initiative took advantage of existing or emerging connections between actors, but provided an avenue for catalysing, elevating, or expanding the collaboration in place. This includes granting actors a significant platform for visibility and dissemination, including in multilateral fora, at conferences and in the political landscape at large. The additionality provided by Tech for Democracy is palpable, and for many of the partnerships emerging, it is unlikely that the depth of collaboration obtained would have happened without the initiative in place. Likewise, it cemented technology and democracy as strategic priorities in many of the organizations involved, enabling resources to be invested beyond those provided by the initiative itself. Augmenting existing strategic priorities and partnerships, but also facilitating the creation of new ones, the platform of Tech for Democracy allowed participating actors to reach out beyond their circles of close engagement. Such additionality is crucial for any initiative positioning itself in what is essentially a crowded space of global efforts on tech, increasing cohesion and complementarity among participating actors.

At the same time, resource constraints, strategic divergences, and force majeure international events (including Russia's war in Ukraine) greatly challenged the prospective for Tech for Democracy to obtain its full potential in becoming more than a platform. Given the scope of ambition, identification of knowledge gaps and foundational analyses of key issues at stake and their wider relationality to international and national developments would have aided efforts of grounding and formulating strategic objectives. The scope and sheer expanse of work streams furthermore underline the importance of not just continuous dialogue and dissemination within the initiative on what knowledge and evidence is being produced by whom, but also a systematizing of that knowledge so that it may be brought together, and its impact amplified. And while exploiting existing avenues and areas of cooperation helps build trust and clarity quickly, it also poses a challenge to the bias of overlooking those areas that are still emerging. The same can be said for visibility – while providing a platform for elevating the visibility of initiatives and efforts done within the Action Coalitions is crucial, it is important to be mindful of whom is provided with that visibility and to what ends it is used, to ensure that it does not merely replicate existing hierarchies of who is already seen and heard.

### **Forward thinking and cutting-edge on a new and difficult agenda**



The initiative is applauded for seeking to foster political attention to the challenges emerging from tech, addressing what is a difficult agenda in a fast-moving and complex space.

## Forward thinking and cutting-edge on a new and difficult agenda →

All parts involved in Tech for Democracy agree that the initiative remains forward thinking and cutting edge in addressing what is a difficult agenda in a fast moving and complex space – and that Denmark deserves credit for taking the helm and establishing a high level of ambition. The initiative addresses very large questions that are crucial for the entire world and at the same time very much emerging and in the making, in that the consequences and implications of emerging technologies only gradually become clear to us. As an interlocutor framed it: ‘these challenges are every bit as big as those emerging from climate change, we just don’t know it yet’. As such, Denmark is lauded for positioning the challenges emerging from tech on par with those of global inequality, climate change, and protracted crises, and seeking to foster equal political attention. The breadth of the challenge, on the other hand, means that the scope of an initiative like Tech for Democracy becomes extremely difficult to determine and handle. The amount of both questions and matters to target, but also actors and groups to convene who have diverging and sometimes directly opposite preferences and ambitions, renders it borderline impossible for any one initiative to properly cover all that needs to be covered. Unsurprisingly, Tech for Democracy faced such challenges of how to cut the cake – balancing the importance of getting the right actors to the table with the important prospect of having impact. And while there are certain first-mover traits at play, it is important to be mindful of existing efforts and how to strategically take advantage of these to elevate the initiative and ensure that imagined action does not end up duplicating or reproducing work that exists or is being pursued elsewhere.

## Pros and cons of working from a value-based foundation →

Values, ideals, and interests run through any political initiative, including one such as Tech for Democracy. The initiative aims to re-center not just political and popular discussions around tech, but the very form of technological development and use, on democratic values. As such, it represents very tangible imaginaries of how technology should be developed and used, and whose voices should be heard and have an impact. Both the Copenhagen Pledge and Tech for Democracy at large forms a value framework of how we speak to the nexus between technology, democracy, and human rights. At times, these values may have been taken for granted by the initiative, without probing deeper into questions of what democracy implies (including in non-Western contexts) and to what ends it is furthered. Political strategies of value-based development cooperation can be fruitful, but they are often also taken very much as such – political – and may be seen as representing only one interpretation of societal development and render some forms of collaboration difficult. In their work in specific development contexts in the Global South, some Action Coalitions chose to focus on elements of democratic practice, more so than the idea of democracy itself, including inclusion and participation, to gain traction and enable collaboration. There is continued need to act not only from a narrow standpoint of liberal democracy, but also from a pragmatic and nuanced foundation that enables conversation with countries and actors that may not be like-minded or aligned on the question of democracy writ large.

## Pros and cons of working from a value-based foundation



Tech for Democracy forms a significant value framework of how we speak to the nexus between technology, democracy, and human rights. However, there is a continued need to act from a pragmatic and nuanced foundation.

## Importance of facilitating critical engagement with the tech sector and amplifying the right voices →

Tech for Democracy builds on the core assumption that critical engagement and interaction with the tech sector – as opposed to e.g., outside-in regulation only – is necessary to induce change. This is sensible, but it also forms a difficult ambition: to simultaneously cooperate and remain critical of the sector that has essentially brought you to the point where a political initiative like this is necessary. Balancing these concerns to foster radical change from ‘within’ is demanding when the core of your initiative starts from a high ground of human rights protection, while for parts of the tech sector, the basic business model in itself forms what can be deemed a human right violation when occurring under certain underhanded circumstances – the acquirement of people’s private data. In these situations, it is necessary to understand and work from the divergence of preferences, interests, and ambitions between the different actors of the multistakeholder initiative. This poses a resonance dilemma – the more tech companies seem to be aligned with the fundamental changes proposed by Tech for Democracy, the less radical these suggested changes are likely to be in form.

The initiative has seen mixed buy-in from the tech sector altogether – some were deeply involved, others cursorily. It was a struggle for many to access and establish dialogue with the tech sector, and a lot of lobbying was needed to get companies on board in the first place, if avenues of collaboration had not been established prior to the initiative. Some parts of the sector talked positively of the initiative and its prospects, but few set aside resources for events and collaboration, just as we currently see ethics and human rights teams among the first to be laid off in the sector. Those who did invest, however, were very engaged in the agenda and expressed appreciation for the knowledge and insights they had gained from Tech for Democracy. Some Action Coalitions adopted a cautionary approach to technology as a contrast to the more optimistic notion of deepening cooperation: ‘we went into the coalition trying to understand how tech can support our work and came out on the other side trying to understand how it can do no harm’, as an interlocutor framed the concern. While the Copenhagen Pledge adopts strong and commendable language on the responsibilities of the sector, limited efforts in upholding the pledge or holding signatories accountable through monitoring means that its impact is yet to be seen. Taken together, the experiences accentuate the importance of balancing breadth and depth of dialogue and interaction – there is much sense in attracting and including as wide an array of actors as possible to enable widespread take-up, but it remains important to ensure that the dialogue has sufficient depth to foster actual impact.

### **Importance of facilitating critical engagement with the tech sector and amplifying the right voices**



The initiative has had to balance a difficult ambition to simultaneously cooperate and remain critical of the tech sector.

In the end, for any multistakeholder initiative, this alludes to the key task of being mindful of balancing voices and of amplifying agency – asking oneself who is provided speaking time on the platform that is the initiative, and whose actions are elevated. Unless deliberate effort is done to reverse the order of influence, we are likely to see the voices of those who are already heard, being amplified. All actors in a multistakeholder effort like Tech for Democracy need to be mindful of their own positionalities and weaknesses or biases herein. While everyone will have their relative strengths – with MFAs typically oriented towards bilaterals or civil society able to better capture an array of local voices – those responsible need to make sure that strengths are both utilized but also more importantly balanced. And not balanced as in providing everyone with equal amount of attention or potential for visibility, but rather as an effort of evening out, giving more voice and agency to those who do not have too loud of a voice in the first place. While the Pledge has an impressive number of actors and organizations based in the Global South, the Action Coalitions to a lesser degree positioned southern organizations centrally and often employed ways of working where these were mainly utilized for their proximity to the 'local' level, as e.g., implementors of pilot projects.

### **Utilizing Danish positions, competencies, and networks**



Denmark effectively navigated lobbying of interests and augmented its position in both transatlantic and wider international relations in the field of tech, democracy, and human rights.

## Utilizing Danish positions, competencies, and networks →

Denmark and the Danish MFA was able to exploit of several comparative advantages and upsides in steering the multistakeholder initiative on Tech for Democracy. Differently positioned than other larger bilateral players, Denmark has been able to more directly and flexible engage with partners in the tech sphere, pushing certain agendas that other partners would have had difficulty doing. Seen as an outspoken partner in the need to align values that underpin democracy and technological development, Denmark effectively navigated lobbying of interests and augmented its position in both transatlantic and wider international relations in the field of tech, democracy, and human rights. The position and networks of the Tech Ambassador and her office gave Denmark an opportunity to bring stakeholders together over common challenges that other international agencies would not have been able to, but also made it susceptible to criticism for sometimes being too closely aligned with the tech sector. Collaboration with multilaterals and other tech initiatives to align or integrate with existing initiatives is vital to enhance synergies and avoid duplication. Compared to existing efforts, Tech for Democracy not least stands out for its focus on action and involvement of civil society as a vital stakeholder. While connections to certain parts of the multilateral system have been utilized, the potential for multilateral engagement or relationship-building with other international coalitions is much greater than that realized. Important initiatives in the UN and EU can leverage Tech for Democracy agendas in normative and regulatory spheres to push for both political and private sector action.

## Strategically planning and executing a multistakeholder initiative →

Planning and executing any multistakeholder initiative are a daunting task where strategic objectives must be pursued through varying degrees of formal planning and muddling through. The breadth of stakeholders and areas of engagement commonly means that some autonomy must be granted to different parts of the initiative to ensure both ownership and progress. Engaging in something as emerging as Tech for Democracy naturally adds a further level of uncertainty here. Actors part of Tech for Democracy continuously lauded the Danish MFA for its bottom-up efforts, flexibility, and openness in dialogue and information sharing, giving a clear sensation of Tech for Democracy as a collective effort that could only be delivered jointly. Being honest also means becoming vulnerable, something not all actors have the courage to do in international political affairs. But steering an ambitious multistakeholder push also requires a steady hand and ability to align outcome-level strategic objectives with short-term planning, particularly in situations of significant time pressure.

While getting off the ground is crucial – and all parts of Tech for Democracy did an immense effort of launching the initiative in Copenhagen in November 2021 through the high-level conference and the Days of Action – the sharp timing of the following Year of Action and the drive to deliver impact within a limited timeframe, meant there was need for continuous strategic planning. Too much stop-and-go means constant adaptation for everyone and difficulty in laying out medium-term avenues of delivery that could ensure impact, not least given the number of actors involved, size of resources needed, and extend of bureaucratic measures activated. Division of labour must be clear to not mix up mandates, ownership, and coordination and foster a sensation of decisions being untransparent or illegitimate. While muddling through must be expected,

it needs to be kept in check by clear strategic priorities and objectives – if stakeholders are in doubt about where an initiative leads or wants to go, the risk of straying off course is significant. An open-ended approach is productive for buy-in from other stakeholders – and many organizations part of Tech for Democracy certainly made choices themselves about what to pursue and how – but it needs to be accompanied by joint strategic discussion and the setting of collective landmarks, not least to aid those for whom these processes may be unfamiliar. Differing degrees of formal organization around the Action Coalitions was a benefit to some but a challenge to others that hindered the breaking down of siloes, stressing the need for cross-fertilization in the initiative.

As mentioned, a core challenge for multistakeholder initiatives is the drive to deliver impact in a complex setting within a limited timescale. Delivering within a Year of Action evidently makes timing crucial to Tech for Democracy as well. Community building, knowledge production, and ensuing action takes time – even if there are existing relations at the point of departure – and a year is scant time to build strong partnerships that mediate preferences, procure funding, and deliver impact. While some were able to pilot interventions early on, others stand ready as the Year of Action comes to a close. ‘We needed a year of preparation before a year of action’, as an interviewee noted, nodding to the challenge of building trust with partners. Timing, of course, will always be a challenge in a field such as tech, where some developments exhibit a tremendous pace, likely disrupting processes set up to address questions around them. This underlines the importance of maintaining a dual vision on both the greater strategic objectives and the everyday planning to achieve those objectives.

### **Significance of strategic planning in executing a multistakeholder initiative**



The crucial challenge from timing stresses the importance of maintaining a dual vision on both the greater strategic objectives and the everyday planning to achieve those objectives.

## Maintaining momentum to sustain impact



Tech for Democracy catalysed and empowered global efforts on a key challenge for societies across the world. All stakeholders engaged agreed that they joined a promising and credible process with the Danish government in the lead that must not end as it is about to take flight.

## Maintaining momentum and sustaining impact →

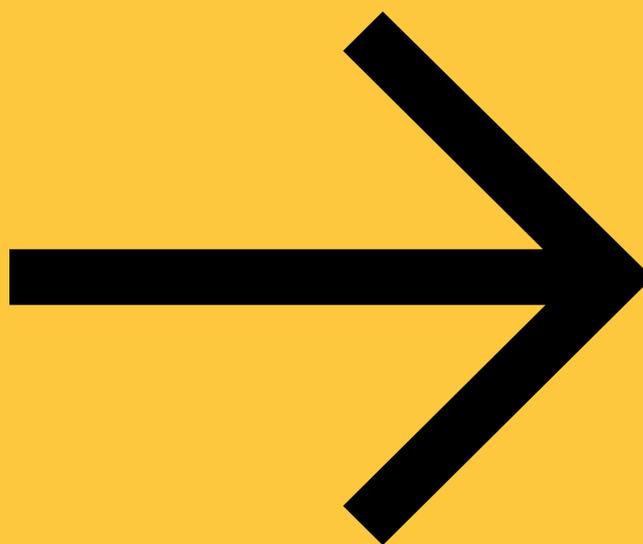
Tech for Democracy managed to catalyse and empower global efforts on a key challenge for societies across the world. Despite resource constraints, fluctuating political support, and a backdrop of abruptly emerging global crises, the multistakeholder initiative succeeded in fostering dialogue and action on the interfaces of technology, democracy, and human rights. With much attained and initiated in the first phase, it seems of crucial importance to create favourable conditions for sustaining momentum. Despite encouragements from the initiative for its participants to continue the work, and the efforts of several Action Coalitions to repackage initiatives for other funding modalities or initiatives, there is great need for reinforced political support from Danish side in continuing and ideally elevating the initiative or its main avenues of engagement and impact. All parts engaged here agreed that they joined a promising and credible process with the Danish government in the lead that must not end as it is about to take flight. Uncertainty about where to go from here, what the framework may look like, or who takes lead on what, feeds a sensation of frustration that may easily trample the efforts made. And once a multistakeholder initiative has been terminated or laid to rest, they are extremely difficult if not impossible to revitalize. ■

# Future pathways

To inform future pathways of Tech for Democracy, this final part collates a series of recommendations and deliberations as they emerge from the analysis and conclusions.

Prior work systematically reviewing multistakeholder initiatives have argued for the importance in setting out 'clear, ambitious and realistic goals to orient action and ensure that there is a match between these objectives and the resources available to achieve them'<sup>1</sup>. Besides providing structure to an initiative and a framework to assess continued added value, strategic planning can ensure broad-based stakeholder engagement and mobilisation to avoid strengthening present power structures between stakeholders. Here, we formulate seven recommendations for the initiative's future pathways: the continued need for knowledge production, systematizing, and dissemination; importance for the initiative in sustaining collaborations and elevating impact, not least by mobilizing and holding accountable signatories to the Pledge; ensuring coherence with other international initiatives as well as pushing for continued regulatory and normative progress on the intersections of tech, democracy, and human rights; establishing future strategic objectives and priorities, in particular reinforcing tech as a strategic objective for Denmark and the Danish MFA, while taking learnings to the Digital Democracy Initiative; ensuring critical engagement with the complex ecosystem of tech; amplifying the right voices through the platform that Tech for Democracy represents; and finally, inspiring political action and reiterating the shared commitment to responsible, democratic, and safe technological development.

1. Lundsgaarde, E. 2016. 'The promises and pitfalls of global multistakeholder initiatives' DIIS Report, Danish Institute for International Studies



## 1

## Continued need for knowledge production, systematizing, and dissemination

Tech for Democracy has contributed significant new knowledge on the emerging challenges posed to democracy and human rights from digital technologies but has also exposed and cemented the need for continued efforts in procuring, producing, systematizing, and disseminating knowledge. The initiative has shown the importance of identifying knowledge gaps (around particular issues, themes, processes, actors, threats etc.), but also of investing in competencies one step before that – in capacities both technical and non-technical to analyze and investigate existing gaps. While technical knowledge to comprehend the challenges is necessary, tech companies have a clear responsibility in engaging discussions on non-technical terms and facilitating the figurative translation that is needed between technical and non-technical knowledges and spheres of work. It is crucial to see knowledge production in this field as a both cumulative and collective endeavor, emphasizing the importance of sharing and systematizing knowledge between actors both within and beyond the Tech for Democracy initiative, who all have different comparative advantages in the procurement, production, and dissemination of such.

## 2

## Sustaining collaborations to enable impact

Tech for Democracy has brought together and developed a community of dialogue, knowledge production, and action. If left behind or insufficiently nurtured and developed, it would represent a significantly missed opportunity, and there is ample reason to both sustain what has been built and further leverage the work over the coming period of time. The initiative has become not only a strong brand for Denmark, whether in Washington or around the world, but a well-known platform whose use ought to be continued. And while there is much appetite from different Action Coalitions to continue the work in some form, even if outside of Tech for Democracy, there is also a strong argument to be made for Denmark to continuously assume the role of the ‘mothership’ that sustains momentum.

Looking ahead, it will be important to take stock of what has been set in motion and what has been achieved, instead of only focusing on new initiatives, but also to facilitate and further develop interfacing and synergies. Horizontal communication and cross-fertilization within the initiative can be complemented by strategic communication from the lead actor(s) to ensure both coordination and cohesion and elevate the individual coalitions to a ‘coalition of coalitions’. This can relate to both general concerns as well as thematic or otherwise specific avenues of collaboration, such as on gender-related harms. Strategic discussions on division of responsibility within a multistakeholder framework helps ensure alignment amongst stakeholders – civil society, industry, and governments alike – on their positions of power and accompanying responsibility within the initiative. In this case as in others, standardizing workstreams and outputs require vision-setting from all stakeholders involved.

As the initiative expands beyond the coalitions to wider work on democracy and human rights, it will be important mobilize, publicize, and hold accountable signatories to the Copenhagen Pledge. While normative in form, the Pledge is strong in its intent and language, and remains a very viable platform around which to structure discussions of commitments to change at e.g., a global stock-taking event. Finally, to boost momentum, solutions for sustainable finance that matches the scope and ambitions of the initiative, and the wider agenda must be sought out. Resources are a crucial enabler of action, and while many organizations have contributed their own funds towards the initiative’s efforts, this creates a bias for work to mainly progress where attention or organizational capacity is most significant. While upcoming initiatives such as Denmark’s Digital Democracy Initiative are crucial in the redistribution of funds towards civil society and other organizations and movements in the Majority world, funds also need to be secured to advance policy, normative, and regulatory initiatives at the international or regional level.

## 3

## Ensuring coherence with other international initiatives as well as continued regulatory and normative progress on tech

No initiative on the international political scene is an island. Progress and positive changes hinges on the sum of efforts done across varied initiatives, actors, and groups who have an at least theoretical obligation to not duplicate or create redundancy, and to utilize specializations and comparative advantages in productive ways. Tech for Democracy too is part of a wider ecosystem of initiatives, interventions, and coalitions that work within the space of tech, democracy, and human rights. To take advantage of synergies – and working from the assumption that this is a crowded space of engagement – the initiative should continuously focus on mapping out, following, and collaborating with existing likeminded initiatives.

Beyond formally anchoring the initiative in multilateral space, there are numerous ways of engaging more strategically with initiatives and efforts across the UN (including interagency groups, the Tech Envoy's office, special rapporteur), EU, OSCE, UNESCO and e.g., the Global digital compact. Another more focused opportunity for international engagement would be to settle on a landmark objective for the initiative in contributing to an effort like the Summit for the Future (2024), catalysing cooperation around a very tangible deliverable. Also hinging on strong multilateralism is regulation. There is need for initiatives like Tech for Democracy to continuously push for both regulatory and normative progress. While critical dialogue is an important part of behavioural change in the tech sector, regulation is as necessary as it is scant. Crucial yet still only emerging, regulation will have to take not just a single leap to become a difference maker, but continuous leaps forward, and far beyond where we see movements at the moment, such as in the EU.

## 4

## Continued critical engagement with the tech sector

Instead of pursuing an exclusionary outside-in strategy, Tech for Democracy has wisely approached and sought to include the tech sector in its initiative. Most productive changes come from within – whether emerging out of attitudinal changes, filling of knowledge gaps, or behavioural change – and close collaboration with the tech sector itself is laudable in the efforts to make digital technologies protect and promote democracy and human rights. Yet for such efforts to be fruitful, invitations extended by governments and civil society need to be met by the tech sector with open dialogue, commitments, and transparency that can result in concrete and tangible progress. Tech for Democracy needs to be very mindful of the balance between providing a platform for visibility for tech companies, and demanding necessary change through the interfacing and interaction that the platform enables. Maintaining a critical engagement requires a firm hand more so than pats on the back, and Tech for Democracy should continue to be mindful of how it balances events, dialogues, and demands towards the different actors involved. While there are obvious reasons for engaging the largest ‘tech giants’, it is also important to acknowledge the wider eco-system of tech, where both medium and smaller sector companies play a potentially transformative role, and where cooperation may initially be easier with companies showing normative resonance with the ambitions of Tech for Democracy.

## 5

## Amplifying the right voices

A platform like that provided by the Tech for Democracy initiative not only brings together actors for a collective multistakeholder push. It is also a strong amplifier of attention, voice, and influence for those taking part. In the best of worlds, the voices given force come equally from all corners of the collaboration, but in reality, this picture more often looks like a reproduction of existing hierarchies of attention and influence. This is troubling for the ways in which it reinforces inequalities, but also because the platform itself lends great legitimacy to the actors using it for visibility and voice-amplifying purposes as well as access to fora where the actor may not otherwise be seen as legitimate or well-placed. As such, there is a constant need to be mindful of unintended (and of course intended) biases towards who speak and who are heard. Tech for Democracy has an explicit global and multi-actor scope, but obviously have inherent biases in terms of what actors are listened to the most or who are asked to or proactively assume leadership in Action Coalitions. This does not represent a problem so long as the concern is top-of-mind and reflexively approached – all initiatives at this scale will have their own inherent biases and path-dependencies, what matter is how they deal with those.

## 6

## Establishing tech for democracy as a future strategic priority

While participants within Tech for Democracy have worked tirelessly, and sometimes beyond what is advisable, to realize the multistakeholder initiative, political support seems to have been fluctuating, at times significantly damaging the prospect of delivering impact. Denmark, including the Danish government and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will need to reinforce and reiterate tech for democracy and human rights as a key strategic priority for the years to come, if the initiative is not to wither. While the initiative is executed from 'below', it has to be provided the necessary resources and capacities from the 'top', to be truly realized. Participants of the initiative deserve, and are in need of, clear signals of prioritization. Explicit prioritization – including continuously resourcing and staffing the initiative – is a prerequisite for Tech for Democracy to move into a new phase of establishing strategic objectives for the short, medium, and long term.

As Tech for Democracy transitions from a delimited project to a broader political platform, important questions and visioning remain. Global conversations around tech, democracy and human rights have evolved and shifted even during the course of the short time TFD has worked, requiring continuous visionary and strategic recalibrations. This necessitates a return to core questions of how one brings actors together today for meaningful conversations in this sphere, given the changing geopolitical, economic, and governance realities we look towards.

For Denmark, tech for democracy will need to evolve from a narrower focus on technology as an add-on in societal or democratic processes to appreciating technology's transformational role in shaping social and economic development, supporting the provision of not just digital but all forms of public goods. Strategically anchoring tech in future foreign, security, and not least development strategies will be essential to both ensure high-level political support and to take advantage of Danish positions of strength.

Strategic objectives are what drives the required urgency to move things, no matter the future scope of the initiative, including within the auspices of the Digital Democracy Initiative for the Danish MFA. Just as such strategizing must be done collectively by the multistakeholder group involved in TFD, future responsibility for the initiative and the political platform also remains shared. Tech companies must move beyond lip-service of their fundamental responsibilities, while civil society organizations must be careful not to be reduced to a service delivery function and reactively wait for resources or direction, reproducing principal-agent hierarchies. As TFD transitions to a wider platform for engagement and political action, it will remain the sum of efforts made within it, and all actors will have to both assume responsibility and ensure continued progress equally, for its true multistakeholder form to remain.

## 7

## Inspiring political action

Today, distance between the imagined potential of emerging digital technologies and the reality of their observed impact is widening. Tools lauded for their emancipatory potential are used to restrict and limit the voices and influence of some, while consolidating or expanding the power of those already holding authority and influence. These complex challenges necessitate complex and multistakeholder solutions in the pursuit of transformative change. The Tech for Democracy initiative inherently responds to growing calls for a shared commitment to such transformations towards responsible, democratic, and safe technological development. Ensuring that digital technologies further enhance democratic institutions, processes, and practice through principles of protection, non-discrimination or privacy is a joint responsibility. This is pertinently laid bare by the efforts of Tech for Democracy – a multi-stakeholder push for protecting and promoting democracy and human rights in an era of rapid technological development, bringing together representatives from governments, the tech sector and civil society.

Tech for Democracy has been a much-needed avenue of establishing novel collaborations, producing knowledge and evidence, building principles of democratic technological development and use, and providing inputs to important international and national political, regulatory, and normative processes. Multistakeholder initiatives like Tech for Democracy are indispensable if we are to move towards a different reality where technology contributes towards the realization of new forms of social contracts and cohesion, enhancing accountability and transparency between citizens and states, thus enabling advancements of core institutions in society. But these initiatives, and the wider agenda they pursue, require political will and action, to be realized. The translation of ideas, intentions, and visions into concrete actions and solutions demand concerted and strategic efforts of planning and execution. But they are catalysed and ultimately realized through political will and action. The Tech for Democracy initiative has achieved much in its short lifetime, but it needs the boost that comes from political support at the highest levels in both government and ministry to evolve into something that can sustain and elevate its impact, including in the current geopolitical climate. There is a definite need for role models in this global space, and Denmark has a unique opportunity to re-energize momentum by reiterating tech for democracy and human rights as a key political priority, employing its unique combination of being a digital front runner and having strong voice on matters of foreign policy, security, and development cooperation.

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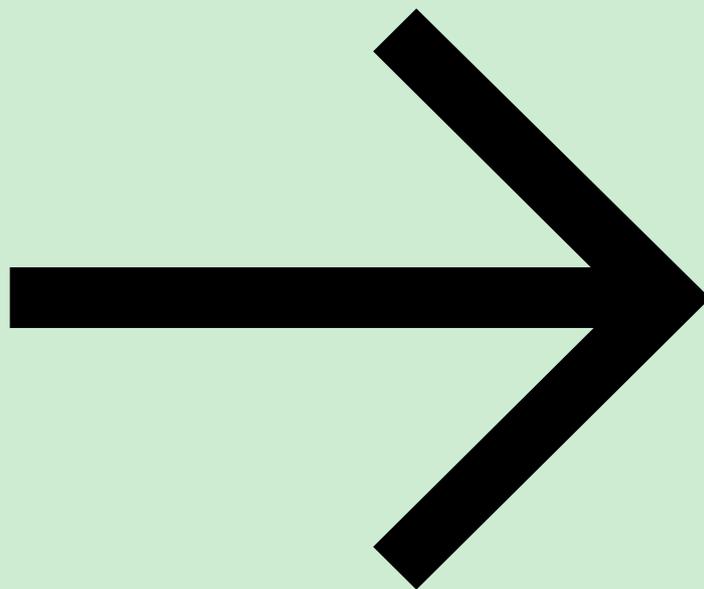
Amplifying the right voices

Establishing tech for democracy as a future strategic priority

Inspiring political action

Protect. Promote. Participate.

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**Tech for Democracy:  
Learnings from the Year of Action**

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