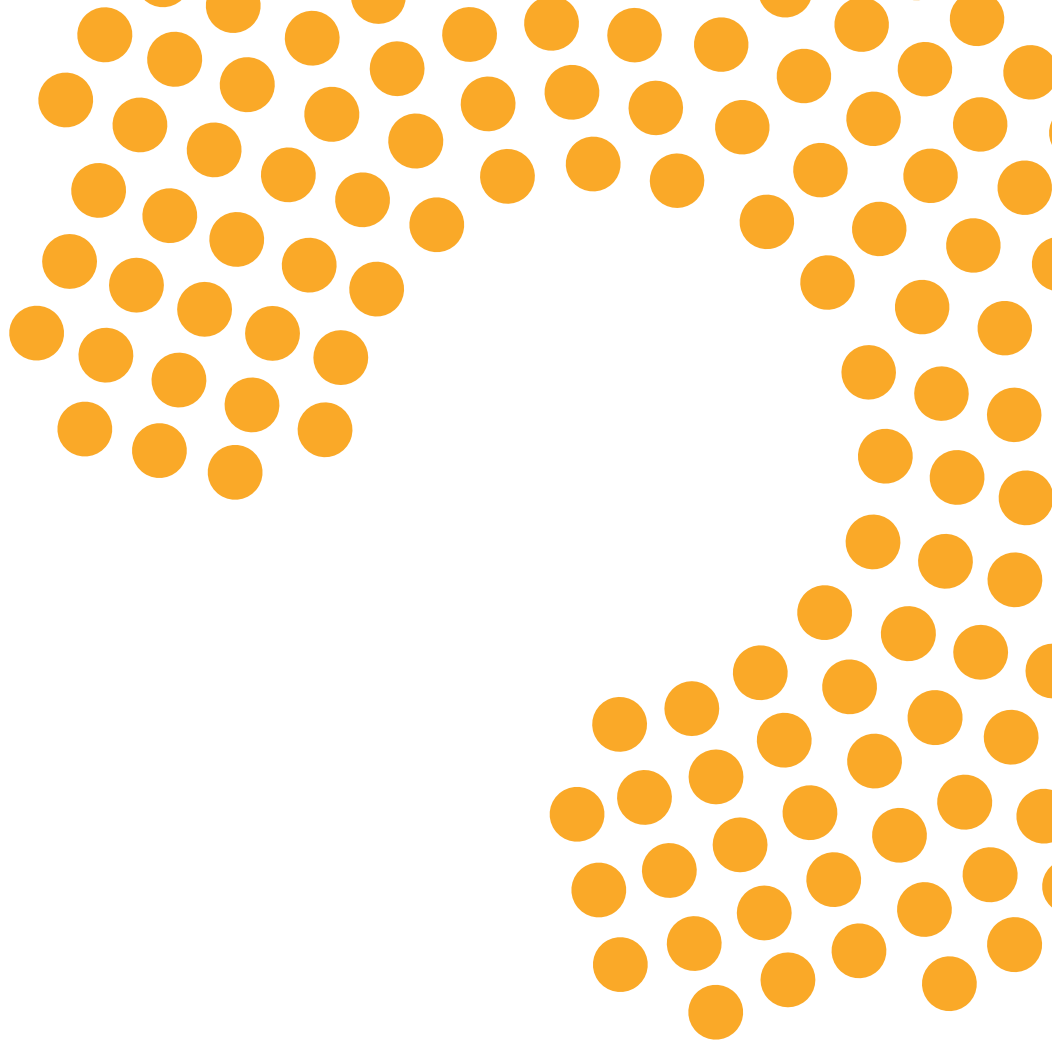


# Strategy 2021–2025



DEMO  
FINLAND





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## Democracy needs supporters

Democratic governance and multi-party system continue to spread into new countries around the world. However, anti-democratic currents grow stronger at the same time. Backsliding is occurring even in democracies that have been previously considered robust. Leading international research institutes (International IDEA<sup>1</sup>, V-Dem Institute<sup>2</sup>, Freedom House<sup>3</sup>, and the Economist Intelligence Unit<sup>4</sup>) agree that the quality of democracy throughout the world is under serious threat. Restricting civil and political rights is shrinking the space for civil society. Efforts to interfere with independent judiciaries are eroding the rule of law. These trends are concerning.

Social and political polarisation is one of the trends that is significantly impacting democracy at this time. Politically polarised societies are divided into opposite camps, with a deep mistrust that prevents healthy social debate. This type of polarisation has been found to increase the likelihood and the scope of democratic backsliding<sup>5</sup> (IDEA, V-Dem). Voters in polarised societies are better prepared to bypass democratic norms if it advances their interests. Polarisation also widens the gap between parties and further impedes dialogue and cooperation between them.

Equality in politics and in representative institutions has advanced further than ever before. Yet, the pace of change is strikingly slow. The view of the progress of women's opportunities for political participation provided by reports describing the trend is crushing. While the overall situation is progressing, it would take 97 years to achieve equality in political representation at the current speed<sup>6</sup>. As things stand, it would take 46 years to achieve gender balance in parliaments. Currently, 25% of the parliamentarians of the world are women<sup>7</sup>. The young and the persons with disabilities are also significantly underrepresented in politics. According to the latest statistics from IPU, only 2.2 percent of parliamentarians are under the age of 30<sup>8</sup>. However, the proportion of parliamentarians from underrepresented groups is only one of the indicators used to measure political participation – policies and legislation that promote equality as well as participation opportunities within political parties are also needed.

The progress of digitalisation supports democracy by facilitating, among other things, intraparty member surveys and participatory budgeting for municipalities. Social media has become an essential platform for policymaking where citizens and decision-makers meet and participate in political discourse. On the flip side, social media and artificial intelligence are used to manipulate elections, stir up polarisation, and spread disinformation.

***Positive developments in new democracies must be supported and democracy must be defended where it is under threat***

Democracy support is an essential tool in the foreign, security, and development policy toolbox of Finland and the EU, as it can be used to promote peaceful and stable social development in partner countries. However, funding for democracy support is still scarce compared to more traditional areas of international cooperation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that guides the activities of the international community and its comprehensive approach to the global challenges of our time also provide an excellent framework for democracy support and its funding. The political participation and representative decision-making of women and underrepresented groups on all levels is taken into account in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5, 10, and 16.

Demo Finland operates within a vulnerable operational environment, where the results of individual elections or undemocratic regime changes can very rapidly alter the operational capacities of political parties and politicians or the general atmosphere that facilitates cooperation. Through its work Demo Finland also aims to control its operational environment, as the *raison d'être* of the target groups of its operation – the parties and politicians in the partner countries – is to a greater extent influence the situation and the rights of the citizens as well as the prevailing social conditions between elections.

The strategy of Demo Finland is being prepared at a time when COVID-19 is rampaging around the world and government leaders are restricting the rights of citizens in order to defeat the pandemic. Elections have been postponed in multiple countries and constitutional issues with declared state of emergencies are common. It is still too early to judge the possible changes in societies resulting from the pandemic or its impact on democracy in the longer term. However, even at an early stage, COVID-19 has provided autocratic leaders or those pursuing autocracy the opportunity to reinforce their stranglehold on power and restrict critical voices and opinions. Will the threshold for declaring a state of emergency and restricting freedoms become lower in the future?

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<sup>1</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2019): The Global State of Democracy 2019 – Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise.

<sup>2</sup> V-Dem Institute (2020): Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House (2020): Freedom in the World 2020 – A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy.

<sup>4</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (2020): Democracy Index 2019 – A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest.

<sup>5</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2019): The Global State of Democracy 2019 – Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise; V-Dem Institute (2020): Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020.

<sup>6</sup> World Economic Forum (2019): Global Gender Gap Report 2020.

<sup>7</sup> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2019): The Global State of Democracy 2019 – Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise; IPU Parline – Global data on national parliaments (August 2020).

<sup>8</sup> IPU (2018): Youth Participation in National Parliaments. Figure from 2016.



## Demo Finland strengthens cooperation between political parties and the participation of underrepresented groups

Democracy is a system based on civil and political rights and that provides an opportunity for everyone to participate in the societal decision-making. It can be supported and reinforced in many ways. The support can be directed towards institutions that are essential for democracy, such as parliaments, the judicial system, electoral management bodies, or the local government. Alternatively, one can provide support for operators that maintain a healthy democracy, which include political parties and politicians, but also journalists and civil society that keep an eye on decision-makers. Yet, another option would be to focus on the different areas of democracy, such as elections, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the universal right to participate in policymaking.

Since its founding, Demo Finland's work has focused on providing support to political parties and rested on two pillars: multi-party dialogue and supporting the political participation of underrepresented groups in politics, particularly women and young people. In the light of aforementioned trends, these pillars are still justifiably relevant in the work of Demo Finland.

Multi-party democracy requires vibrant, representative, and programmatic parties who are able to and have the knowhow to carry out their multifaceted role at the core of the political system. Parties play an important role in identifying the needs and interests of people and in channelling those needs into decision-making, in reconciling conflicts of interest between groups of people, and in producing credible political programs to support decision-making. In addition, they ensure the functioning of democracy in the longer term by bringing citizens closer to the decision-making and training political leaders. When in power, parties bear responsibility for decision-making, while out of power they should hold decision-makers accountable. By succeeding in these tasks, parties ensure the wellbeing of democracy. Correspondingly, failure will lead to social mistrust, inequality, and corruption. Considering the key role parties play in democratic systems they are the primary target of Demo Finland's activities.

To ensure a functioning democracy, parties are required to make a commitment to the principles of democracy and to respect the rules of a multi-party system. This means, among other things, the ability to engage in constructive dialogue with other parties. By setting a good example, parties can increase solidarity among citizens. Thus, supporting a multi-party dialogue helps to strengthen the democratic system and reduce the risks of social polarisation.

Political parties are essential operators in terms of democracy, peace and social development, and their involvement in long-term peacebuilding is vital. The inclusion of parties has been shown to produce more sustainable results in peace negotiations. Nevertheless, they are often excluded from peace processes<sup>9</sup>.

Demo Finland's work is human rights based. Through its activities, Demo Finland particularly reinforces civil and political rights, in the realisation of which the political parties making decisions are both right holders and accountable.

Demo Finland's work supports the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. According to the commitment of Leave No One Behind, Demo Finland promotes the political participation of underrepresented groups and works to enhance their ability to influence sustainable social development that benefits everyone.



## MISSION

The mission of Demo Finland is to be a co-operative organisation of the Finnish parliamentary parties that promotes the development of pluralist democracy, by supporting the competence of parties, their operating environment, and cross-party cooperation. Demo Finland is an expert of democracy support in Finland and internationally.



## VISION

Demo Finland envisions a world where everyone has the opportunity to equally participate in democratic decision-making.



To achieve its vision, Demo Finland works to strengthen inclusive multi-party democracy.

<sup>9</sup> Demo Finland (2019): Political Parties and Peace Building – The Forgotten Stakeholder in Peace Processes.

# Demo Finland's objectives for 2021–2025

The objectives for Demo Finland's strategic period for 2021–2025 are defined below. Progress towards these objectives is monitored by using indicators in the results framework. Mid-term review will be held in 2023 to assess the implementation of the strategy and its objectives.

## 1 Outcome : Political parties are more programmatic, inclusive, and democratic

Demo Finland strengthens parties in terms of strategic thinking, political programming, ensuring inclusivity, and good command of the principles of democracy. Parties are provided with training for programmatic strategy work as well as supported to reinforce their internal democracy and their dialogue with civil society. This allows parties to better respond to the interests of their voters, draw up better policies, and to be accountable towards citizens.



Parties must promote access to decision-making for disadvantaged groups on various levels and ensure the political inclusion of women, young people, persons with disabilities, and minorities. Demo Finland encourages parties to develop strategies for the inclusion of underrepresented groups and provides support for the skills development of politicians belonging to such groups. Inclusivity improves the quality of decision-making and enhances the democratic nature of parties.

In Finland, Demo Finland promotes these objectives by strengthening parties' youth and women's organisations, providing its expertise to the parties, and creating opportunities for peer learning, both amongst the parties themselves and with parties in Demo Finland's partner countries.

## 2 Outcome: Political parties perform strengthened multi-party dialogue

Demo Finland strengthens the dialogue between parties to promote open political interaction. Successful dialogue leads to mutual respect and listening, as well as creates space for policies that take different views into account. Constructive political dialogue increases citizens' confidence in representative democracy. Demo Finland supports its partners in facilitating dialogue and creates safe spaces for an ongoing dialogue between parties.



In Finland, Demo Finland reinforces the dialogue between parties particularly in terms of international cooperation and democracy support. Demo Finland trains Finnish politicians to become leaders of multi-party dialogue to allow them to provide their experience and competence for resolving political deadlocks in the partner countries of Finland. Multi-party dialogue is a means for building sustainable peace.



### 3 Outcome: Finnish parliamentary parties' commitment to democracy support translates into policies

The spread and reinforcement of democracy around the world requires advocates and international cooperation. Finland and the European Union have made a commitment to support democracy internationally, but a value-based commitment may not be sufficiently translated into implemented policies. Demo Finland advances the democracy support policies of Finland and the European Union by offering its expertise to different authorities and decision-makers. Demo Finland brings added value to international cooperation by participating in the activities of different networks and highlighting the expertise of Finnish politicians. This added value provided by Demo Finland is particularly based on enhancing the inclusivity of the parties and their expertise on civil and political rights.



The reputation of Demo Finland as an expert on multi-party democracy will grow over the strategic period. Demo Finland's expertise on democracy will be utilised more and its communication will reach a wider target audience. Demo Finland will be increasingly profiled as a foreign and security policy actor in Finland.

## Demo Finland Strategy 2021–2025

### 1 Political parties are more inclusive, programmatic and democratic



**We assume** that policy-based and inclusive parties contribute to a politics of accountability and more democratic societies.



**We assume** that inclusive parties reflect better the diversity of societies and contribute to the realization of civil and political rights.

### 2 Political parties perform strengthened multi-party dialogue



**We assume** that when political parties practise dialogue, they can enhance the weight, trustworthiness and transparency of political system and decrease polarization and conflicts.



**We assume** that when political parties reach agreements through dialogue, the decisions are more sustainable and less likely to be reversed with a change of power.

### 3 Finnish parliamentary parties' commitment to democracy support translates into strengthened policies



**We assume** that when political parties and government officials have increased knowledge and awareness of the modalities and opportunities for democracy support, it will lead to more effective policies in support of democracy.

**Overall goal:** Strengthened and inclusive multi-party democracy





## Demo Finland's operational environment

Demo Finland's operating space consists primarily of new and developing democracies, whose democracy and multi-party systems are strengthened in collaboration with local and international organisations working in the country, along with multi-party actors. Activities are based on the needs of political parties in the partner countries, and achieving the targets often requires long-term, multiyear commitment. At the time of developing this strategy, Demo Finland has multiyear partnership agreements with partners in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Zambia.

Demo Finland operates within a vulnerable operating environment, where, for example, the results of individual elections can rapidly alter the operational capacities of political parties and politicians or the general atmosphere that facilitates cooperation. Through its work Demo Finland aims to control its operational environment, as the *raison d'être* of the target groups of its operation – the parties and politicians in the partner countries – is to influence the development of the country, the rights of the citizens as well as the prevailing social conditions. Demo Finland also operates in countries where there is either an ongoing or a newly ended conflict. In these contexts, the peace-building dimensions of multi-party dialogue are emphasised.

In addition, Demo Finland operates within Finnish and international democracy support networks. In Finland, the activities aim to strengthen the parliamentary parties' expertise on democracy related issues and to foster dialogue between these parties. Advocacy in Finland and in international democracy support networks creates added value and deepens both international and domestic partners' understanding of the importance of democracy support.

## Demo Finland's organisation

The work of Demo Finland is governed by the board, which consists of representatives from each member party and has a rotational presidency. Demo Finland's operations are implemented by an expert secretariat. In addition, Demo Finland has a high-level Senior Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the member parties. The role of the Senior Advisory Group is to guide the board in strategic development and to strengthen Demo Finland's networks and advocacy.

To achieve the objectives for the strategic period, in 2025 Demo Finland will be a wide-ranging and widely recognised expert organisation with a strong foundation. The organisation of Demo Finland has been expanded in a controlled manner to correspond to the demand and its funding base has become wider. Demo Finland has continued to operate effectively with its existing partners, and, where necessary, has also been prepared to establish activities in new countries, including in Europe, while respecting the principles of Demo Finland and producing clear added value. Demo Finland's domestic activities have been expanded into a more programmatic direction.

## Demo Finland's partners and networks

During this strategic period, Demo Finland's key partners will include local partner organisations and international democracy support organisations who carry out projects, Demo Finland's international networks, and Finnish political parties. In terms of partners, a sound knowledge of political systems and operators and a sufficiently impartial role are preconditions for high-quality and effective work. Partners are selected in accordance with the principles of democracy support, which are a multi-party basis, impartiality, transparency, inclusivity, and local ownership.

The most important international networks of Demo Finland during the strategic period are the European Partnership for Democracy and the Global Partnership for Multiparty Democracy. Demo Finland is a founding member of both. In Finland, important interest groups include, in particular the members of Demo Finland, i.e. the parliamentary parties, and the multi-stakeholder committees: The Development Policy Committee, the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, and the Human Rights Delegation.



Demo Finland's members are Finnish parliamentary parties





Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – Demo Finland is a co-operative organisation of all Finnish parliamentary parties. It enhances democracy by supporting collaborative projects between Finnish political parties and political parties in new and developing democracies.

[www.demofinland.org](http://www.demofinland.org)