

Democracy and Climate Roundtable

Date: Tuesday, 16 April 2024
Time: 14:30 – 16:30
Venue: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, [Maison de la Paix](#), Petal 1, 8th floor, Room P1-850.
Format: Closed hybrid event

Introduction

The Kofi Annan Foundation, in partnership with the Graduate Institute's Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, are hosting a series of quarterly expert roundtables in multilateral hubs, which will provide an opportunity for in-depth analyses of the role of democratic principles, processes, and practices in responding to emerging global challenges.

The overarching objective of these roundtables is to build a shared understanding - through evidence-based research, open dialogue, and exchanges of good practices - of the links between multilateralism and democracy and how strong accountability mechanisms and public trust at a national level can increase the effectiveness of action at the global level.

This first roundtable will focus on **democracy and climate** and explore the interplay between democracy and multilateralism in facilitating collaboration to mitigate the impacts of climate change. **An issue brief** will be produced and shared with participants before the roundtable, examining lessons learned from the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the role of social movements, the need to democratise multilateral fora such as the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP), and best practices for effective transnational collaboration.

Context and Rationale

The threats posed by climate change and the erosion of democracy are deeply intertwined. Climate change destabilises the environment and a nation's prosperity and social fabric, putting democratic institutions under strain. Conversely, effective climate action requires transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance – the hallmarks of a strong democracy. It is by gaining a greater understanding of this interplay between democracy and climate that we can find better solutions to address the issue of climate change.

Since the 1992 UN Climate Convention, international efforts to tackle climate change have faced hurdles. The first challenge has been in getting countries to work together effectively. Different national priorities and interests often create friction and hamper progress in various multilateral forums. In the past, this meant developed and developing countries disagreeing on who should cut emissions most. Despite these difficulties, the Paris Agreement stands out as a rare success. By allowing countries to set their own goals, the agreement encouraged participation, and convinced most nations to join the fight against climate change.

Despite the potential utility of international climate agreements, putting them into action has often proven challenging as nations have often failed to uphold their commitments to these agreements. This has been the case for non-democratic and democratic states (some of which have struggled to gain national support). Critics point out that democracies can be short-sighted, focusing on re-election rather than long-term goals like climate action. They are also susceptible to lobbying by powerful industries that might oppose climate policies.

An examination of past talks at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) shows that democratic countries do not always lead the way in taking action. Moreover, oil-producing nations may have divergent goals as their interests conflict with climate goals. It is important to consider and understand the complexities at play in order to develop effective global strategies that all nations would be amendable to.

Our issue brief will elaborate on some lessons that can be learned from observing negotiations at the UNFCCC, including mechanisms that feature best results or deliver most concrete action. These will be discussed and built upon with the participants in the roundtable. We propose to give special emphasis to 1) the link between

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democratic systems and the fight against climate change at the domestic level 2) implementation practices at the domestic level and 3) the role of young people and young leaders in these processes.

Participants

The roundtable will be a closed discussion, by invitation only. We expect to have 20 to 25 participants, with a mix of experts on climate change and environmental issues from international and non-governmental organizations active in multilateral negotiations, as well members of permanent missions particularly engaged in multilateral action on climate change.

Outcome

An outcome report will be compiled with a summary of the discussions at the roundtable and key recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.