It's Not All Doom and Gloom: The Future of Democracy & Markets *Can* Be Positive
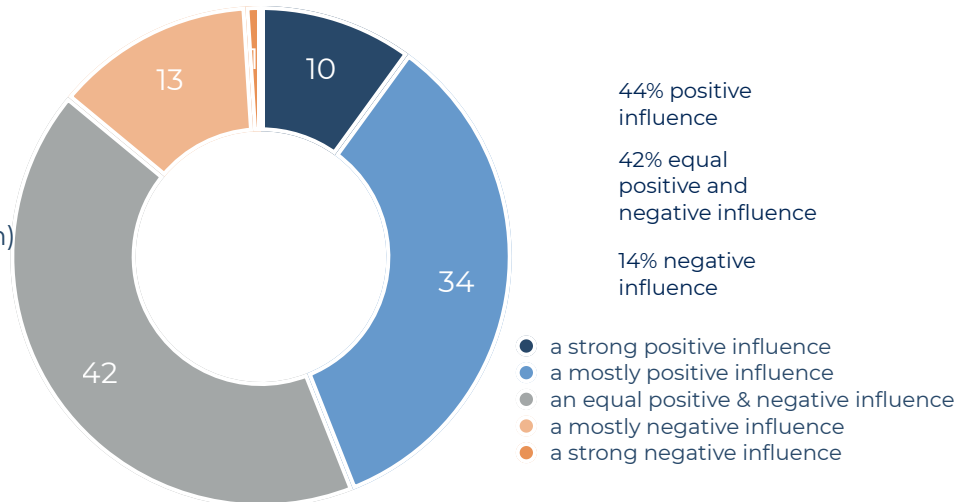
Although many narratives about the future of democracy and technology fall into the categories of either digital authoritarianism or the surveillance economy, we believe **an alternative, positive vision for democracy exists**. The Future of Democracy Survey seeks to counter these two narratives and identify and articulate the possibilities for a technology-empowered democratic future.

The Survey's results demonstrated the **importance of education** in bridging the gap between technological innovation and society's understanding of technology and the regulations that govern it. However, the results also indicated that there is little consensus on **how to build trust in a digital future** and how to effectively shape global norms and standards that strengthen trust in future applications of technology.

The insights from this Survey can **inform and inspire** global democratic reformers to take tangible action locally and provide ideas for stakeholders and communities to collectively strengthen democracy.

Survey Background and Methodology

- Administered by Ipsos
- Online surveys in 6 languages (English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Russian, Mandarin)
- 518 respondents from 97 countries
- Respondents include NGO/Civil Society, Think Tank, Business Associations, and Public Sector partners from CIPE, IRI, NDI, and NED
- Average age: 38.3 years old
- Gender breakdown: 55% male; 41% female; 4% other/prefer not to say

44% positive influence

42% equal positive and negative influence

14% negative influence

- a strong positive influence
- a mostly positive influence
- an equal positive & negative influence
- a mostly negative influence
- a strong negative influence

Global Observers Remain Optimistic about the Influence of the Internet on Democracy and Rights

When asked about the influence of the Internet on democracy and rights, the results were **more positive than negative.** Respondents from Africa and the Asia Pacific are most enthusiastic about the potential of the Internet to counter democratic backsliding. In response to a question about whether democratic governments or authoritarian governments have benefited more from the Internet and digital technologies, most respondents said **both democratic and authoritarian governments have benefited equally**, followed by respondents who thought democratic governments have benefited more than authoritarian governments because technology allows access to information, freedom of expression, and political participation. Only 18% of respondents thought that authoritarian governments have benefited more than democratic governments.

A Force for Good: Technology as a Positive Agent for Democratic Reform

According to respondents, the top three ways technology can be used as a force for good are providing increased **access to information**, holding governments, individuals and/or companies **accountable**, and improving **transparency** in government and/or business processes. These results were unsurprising, but reassuringly compatible with most current areas of democracy programming.
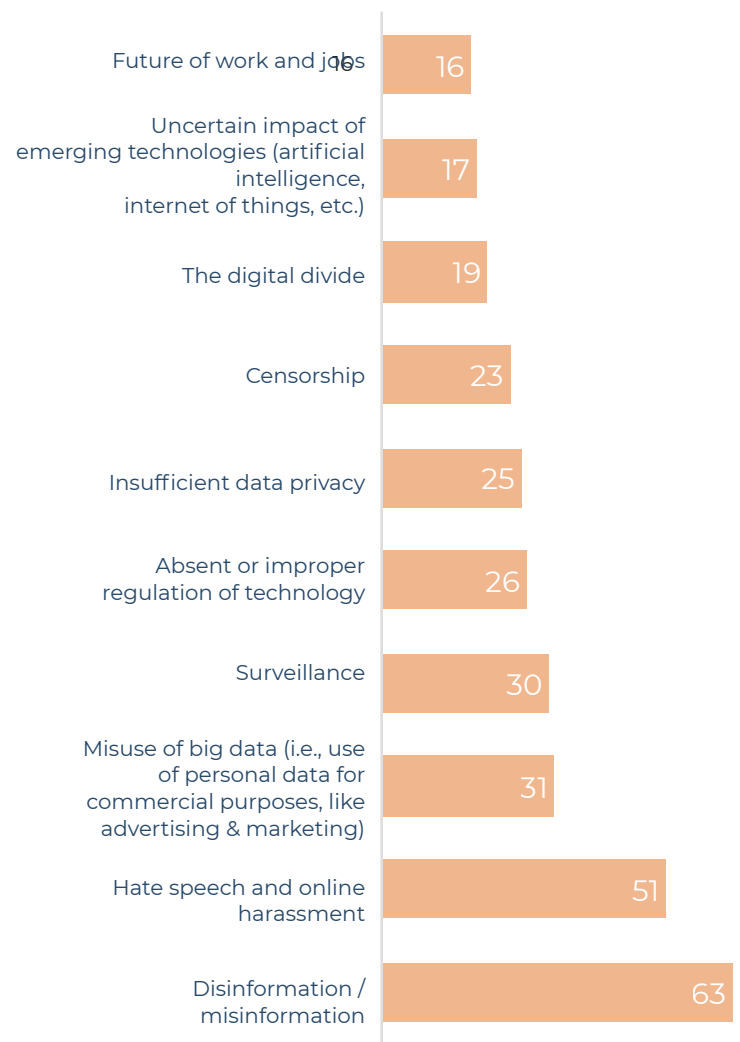
There was also wide consensus on the key principles or values that should underpin a democratic future in the digital age. **Freedom of expression, privacy and data protection, and transparency in institutions and technologies** were the top three responses. However, respondents in Europe and North America tended to value freedom of expression less than elsewhere; only 42% of respondents in Europe and 44% in North America thought freedom of expression should underpin a democratic future, while the score reached 65% in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 62% in Africa and 57% in Asia Pacific. Those same respondents in Europe and North America also highly valued privacy and data protection – by several percentage points more than respondents from other countries.

Applications of Technology that Could be Beneficial for Democracy in the Future

When presented with a list of seven options, 94% of respondents agreed that providing an **enabling digital environment for protected political mobilization and participation** would be most beneficial for democracy. The same number also pointed to leveraging technology to **crowdsource** ideas, decisions, and solutions to public policy challenges. Respondents also favored facilitating **encrypted communications** to exercise democratic participation (e.g., developing secure platforms for online voting or using messaging and social media platforms for collecting policy input and preferences).

Information Integrity is the Top Worry

Respondents' top three worries at the intersection of democracy and technology were **disinformation and misinformation**, **hate speech and online harassment**, and the **misuse of big data**. Concerns about disinformation and misinformation were most prevalent among respondents in Europe (73%) and least prevalent among respondents in Asia (51%). Respondents in MENA worried the most about hate speech and online harassment (59%), while respondents from Europe worried about it least (47%). Concerns about misuse of big data were highest in South America (40%) and lowest in North America (25%). Surprisingly, the future of work and jobs ranked last as a concern in all regions despite many global analysts linking globalization and automation to the erosion of democracy and the rise of populism.

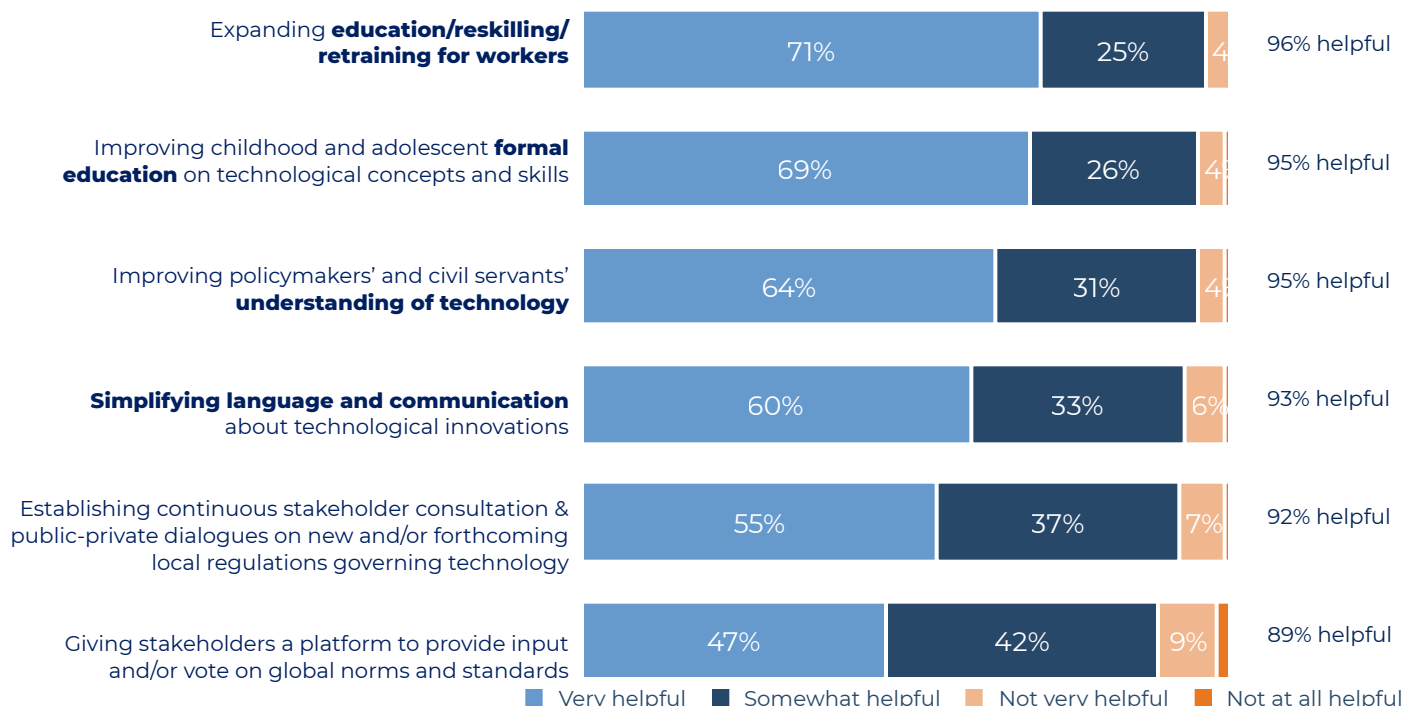| Category	Value
Future of work and jobs	16
Uncertain impact of emerging technologies (artificial intelligence, internet of things, etc.)	17
The digital divide	19
Censorship	23
Insufficient data privacy	25
Absent or improper regulation of technology	26
Surveillance	30
Misuse of big data (i.e., use of personal data for commercial purposes, like advertising & marketing)	31
Hate speech and online harassment	51
Disinformation / misinformation	63

Education is Key to Bridging the Gap

Given that technological innovation often outpaces understanding and regulations, we asked respondents what mechanisms or channels would be helpful to bridge the gap in the future. Survey results reflected wide consensus on the importance of education. Over 90% of respondents favored expanding **education/reskilling for workers**, improving childhood and adolescent **formal education** on technological concepts and skills, and improving policymakers' and civil servants' **understanding of technology**.

Interestingly, respondents in North America and Europe did not find it useful to establish continuous stakeholder consultation and public-private dialogues on new and/or forthcoming local regulations governing technology. They were similarly pessimistic about the usefulness of giving stakeholders a platform to provide input and/or vote on global norms and standards. This finding is somewhat troubling because there are well-established mechanisms and channels to comment on technology regulations in these regions.

No Consensus on How to Strengthen Trust in Future Applications of Technology

Another question that yielded similar responses was "What are effective ways to shape global norms and standards that strengthen trust in future applications of technology?" Respondents' first choice was improving access to **digital education training and curricula**, including for decision-makers, again demonstrating the importance of education. Only 39% of respondents believed it would be effective to institute clear processes for meaningful and continuous engagement (e.g., giving citizens a digital voice at the international level through crowdsourced input). That reveals, again, that engagement at the international level is not necessarily the most effective way to strengthen trust. Overall, responses to this question clearly demonstrated that there is **no consensus** on how to strengthen trust in technology. This finding can help inform how democratic reformers approach future programming and organizational priorities.

Category	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	
Expanding **education/reskilling/retraining for workers**	71%	25%	4		96% helpful
Improving childhood and adolescent **formal education** on technological concepts and skills	69%	26%	4		95% helpful
Improving policymakers' and civil servants' **understanding of technology**	64%	31%	4		95% helpful
Simplifying language and communication about technological innovations	60%	33%	6%		93% helpful
Establishing continuous stakeholder consultation & public-private dialogues on new and/or forthcoming local regulations governing technology	55%	37%	7%		92% helpful
Giving stakeholders a platform to provide input and/or vote on global norms and standards	47%	42%	9%		89% helpful

■ Very helpful ■ Somewhat helpful ■ Not very helpful ■ Not at all helpful

Anthology for a Future of Tech-Enabled Democracy Website

Please visit https://futureofdemocracy.cipe.org/ to learn more about the Survey results and to discover positive visions for a technology-enabled democracy.

"We asked democracy experts, reformers, and visionaries from around the world to help envision a positive democratic future enabled by technology. They not only shared the challenges of the present and their hopes for the future, but also the work that they are already undertaking to make that future possible. We hope that, like us, you will find their words both useful and inspiring."

– Andrew Wilson, Executive Director of CIPE

"With illiberals on the offensive, democratic forces must demonstrate greater vision and energy than ever to harness technology's potential to defend and advance democratic principles worldwide. Our hope is that the diverse perspectives of a positive digital future included in this Anthology will inspire the creativity and innovation, commitment, and action necessary to address this critical challenge of our time. "

– Derek Mitchell, President of NDI

"Technology can enable the best of democracy, with digital tools empowering civic entrepreneurs and facilitating open and inclusive governance. We see a great deal of appetite from activists, political parties, and governments to channel the ingenuity of the digital revolution to advance democracy and outcompete autocracy worldwide. This Anthology captures their hope, drive, and belief in a future where democracy is strengthened by technology – a future we will work towards together to make a reality."

– Dr. Daniel Twining, President of IRI

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