From local conflicts to global and diaspora information wars. From cheapfakes to deepfakes. From one international process to govern AI to another. Such were just some of the themes that dominated 2023 and continue to shape our digital future.

However, the direction of digital technology is not inevitable. And certainly not inevitable in the direction tech billionaires and executives would like us to believe. We can regain power from big tech and bend the trajectory of technology to ensure it serves us first and foremost as citizens, and only then as consumers.

At the Forum, we started the year launching policy recommendations on Pluralism of News and Information in Curation and Indexing Algorithms at a time when global trust indicators reached record lows for many of our institutions of democratic governance.

We ended the year signaling the need to not repeat the mistakes of global agenda-setting moments where tech executives and private interests from the anglo world dominated discussions around what AI harms matter, and which don’t.

Our work this year empowered stakeholders from the global majority and advanced global collaboration on critical policy efforts so that together we can reshape the policy narratives carved out by big tech and re-center them on citizens, society and our democracies.

We launched the Observatory on Information and Democracy, highlighted by the OECD in Facts not Fakes as global best practice in driving meta-analysis aimed at establishing a common understanding of the impact of tech on our information and communication space.

In partnership with the French Government, the Third Summit on Information and Democracy brought high level representation from Partnership States to reaffirm the critical work ahead.

I am tremendously grateful to our international NGO Coalition Partners, our global network of academics and researchers, and officials from Partnership countries whose collaboration, experience and commitment advance our goals for information integrity in the information ecosystem.

I thank the members of our Board of Directors, themselves representing civil society organizations seeking positive policy change around the world. And to the staff of the Forum on Information and Democracy: your work matters – every, single, day.
Since its inception, the Forum on Information and Democracy has fostered dialogue between civil society and State representatives of the members of the Partnership for Information and Democracy.

Here, Maria Ressa, journalist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, discusses with Catherine Colonna, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the sidelines of the 3rd Summit for Information and Democracy.

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The Forum collaborates with dozens of civil society organizations around the world to produce recommendations, promote them, and encourage public or private authorities to comply with them.

States and governments

The Forum works with the 52 States of the Partnership for Information and Democracy to guide the regulation processes in relation to the intergovernmental agreement.

International organizations

The Forum collaborates with numerous international organizations to promote its recommendations worldwide (including the OECD, the UN, the UNESCO, the OIF, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe).

Tech companies

The Forum works with platforms to implement its recommendations for a democratic information ecosystem.

Civil society

Research community

The Forum engages with the research community worldwide for its assessment of the state of research and to develop policy recommendations.
A SHARED APPROACH ABOUT THE FORUM ON INFORMATION & DEMOCRACY

Providing democratic safeguards for the global communication and information space

**Commission on Information and Democracy**

**Composition:** Nobel Prize laureates (peace, economics, literature), tech experts, journalists.

**Mission:**
- Published the International Declaration which defines the universal principles for Information and Democracy and inspires the Partnership
- **Annual Summits for Information and Democracy**
  - **Objectives:**
    - Strengthening international cooperation
    - Working towards the implementation of the Forum’s recommendations
    - Promoting dialogue between governments and the civil society

**INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY**

**Composition:** States committing to implement democratic principles in the space of information and communication

**Objectives:**
- Strengthening international cooperation
- Working towards the implementation of the Forum’s recommendations
- Promoting dialogue between governments and the civil society

**Missions:**
- Evaluating the information and communication space
- Providing recommendations
- Support projects

**IMPLEMENTING ENTITY**

- **Publishes** an assessment report ahead of the Summits of the Partnership
- **Evaluates** the norms, structures and architectures of the information and communication space
- **Gathers** contributions and recommendations from experts
- **Develops** regulation frameworks addressed to signatory States

**INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY**

- **Founded by 11 organizations from civil society and academia**
- **Missions:**
  - Evaluating the information and communication space
  - Providing recommendations
  - Support projects

**Forum on Information & Democracy**

- **Hosts**
- **Gathers** contributions and recommendations from experts
- **Evaluates** the norms, structures and architectures of the information and communication space
- **Develops** regulation frameworks addressed to signatory States
- **Publishes** an assessment report ahead of the Summits of the Partnership

**International Observatory on Information and Democracy**

**Missions:**
- Providing states and society as a whole with periodic evaluations of the information and communication space
- **Gathers** contributions and recommendations from experts
- **Evaluates** the norms, structures and architectures of the information and communication space
- **Publishes** an assessment report ahead of the Summits of the Partnership

**Civil society organizations and academia**

**Missions:**
- Contributing to develop recommendations and to the evaluation of the information space
- Promoting the implementation of democratic safeguards in this space
- **Mobilizes**
- **Hosts**

**International working group**

**Assignments:**
- Gathering international contributions and expertises
- Suggesting recommendations to the states and stakeholders
Launch of the Forum’s report on Pluralism of Information

The Forum presents the recommendations of its new report on *Pluralism of Information in Curation and Indexation Algorithms* during the UNESCO “Internet for Trust” conference on February 21st. This report has been sent to the signatory States of the International Partnership for Information and Democracy.

The Forum’s representatives on a mission to West Africa to promote its recommendations

The Forum organizes a mission to Benin and Ivory Coast to promote the report on *Pluralism of Information in Curation and Indexation Algorithms* to local authorities and regulatory bodies.

100 researchers call for the creation of the Observatory

On the occasion of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, 100 researchers from around the world launch a call to support the International Observatory on Information and Democracy, the IPCC of the information space.

Launch of the working meetings of the Partnership for Information and Democracy

On June 21st, the Forum brings together around fifty representatives of government agencies and regulatory bodies of the signatory States to establish mechanisms to promote reliable information, notably through the *Journalism Trust Initiative* (JTI) standard.
**SEPTEMBER**

**Global declaration on Information integrity**

Around thirty States publish the Declaration on Information Integrity on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly. The Forum is mentioned as a key actor for the implementation of these principles.

**OCTOBER**

**Launch of the first working cycle of the Observatory**

The International Observatory on Information and Democracy launches its first working cycle during the Internet Governance Forum 2023 in Kyoto, Japan. The first assessment report of the observatory will provide a shared and comprehensive understanding of the state of research on AI, media in the digital age, and data governance.

**NOVEMBER**

**3rd Summit on Information and Democracy, Brazil and Moldova in the spotlight**

The 3rd Summit for Information and Democracy was held at the Paris Peace Forum. It brought together 6 ministers from signatory States as well as civil society figures such as Maria Ressa, 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, to discuss the Forum’s work.

**SEPTEMBER**

**Launch of the Working Group on Artificial Intelligence**

On September 28th, on the occasion of the International Day for Universal Access to Information 2023, the Forum launches its working group on *Artificial Intelligence and its Implications for the Information and Communication Space*. 
IMPLEMENTING THE PARTNERSHIP

Five years after the initial commitment of 12 heads of State and government, the Partnership for Information and Democracy surpassed the symbolic threshold of 50 signatory States in 2023.
On August 31 2023, the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced Brazil’s commitment to the Partnership for Information and Democracy:

“By joining the Partnership, Brazil seeks to encourage principles of transparency, accountability and neutrality in communication activities, including in virtual media”.

On November 10th, during the Third Summit for Information and Democracy, Moldova’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nicu Popescu, announced his country’s signing of the Partnership for Information and Democracy. The Partnership “represents an opportunity to defend our fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and opinion, as well as our values,” declared Minister Popescu.

WORKING MEETINGS TO BUILD A SHARED APPROACH

As the secretariat of the Partnership for Information and Democracy, the Forum organized three working meetings with the signatory States:

- June 21, 2023: Coordinating the implementation of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI) within the framework of the Partnership for Information and Democracy
- September 7, 2023: Discussion among Partnership States on the United Nations Code of Conduct for Information Integrity
- November 28, 2023: Consultation on artificial intelligence and its implications for the information and communication space

1. Press release from the Presidency of the Federative Republic of Brazil
THE THIRD SUMMIT
FOR INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY

After two previous Summits held on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the 3rd Summit for Information and Democracy took place in Paris on the margins of the Paris Peace Forum. In a context marked by the resurgence of armed conflicts and a “militarization” of the information space, the Summit brought together several ministers and figures from civil society and the research community.

In the run-up to a decisive year for democracy worldwide, the Partnership has made significant commitments to build a democratic information space:

• Taking into account the work of the Observatory on Information and Democracy in the development of our public policies.

• Promoting research and sharing best practices to ensure transparency, monitoring, and accountability regarding the use of artificial intelligence systems to prevent the spread of misinformation and hate speech.

• Developing new concrete partnerships to support the quality of information by supporting ecosystems involved in democratic governance: civil society organizations, public interest media.

• Monitoring closely the discussions on information integrity within the United Nations and other international and regional multilateral forums.

• Supporting the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General to develop a Code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms and a Global Digital Compact, taking into account the principles of the Partnership for Information and Democracy.

An intense discussion between Maria Ressa and the two representatives of Brazil, Carlos Márcio Cozendey, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, and João Brant, Secretary for digital policies at the Brazilian Presidency.
THE OBSERVATORY ON INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY: LAUNCH OF THE FIRST WORKING CYCLE

We want to provide policymakers with comprehensive assessments based on research evidence so that they can develop more effective and proportionate interventions.”

Courtney C. Radsch

The year 2023 marks the official launch of the first activities of the Observatory on Information and Democracy. Based on the feasibility study conducted with Shoshana Zuboff and Angel Gurria, the Forum on Information and Democracy has:

• Established a high-level Steering Committee, chaired by Dr. Courtney C. Radsch, a globally recognized expert on new technologies and their impact on the information space.

• Recruited a team of experts to work on the first assessment report, led by Dr. Robin Mansell, Emeritus Professor at the London School of Economics.

• Defined the four chapters of the first assessment report, announced in October 2023 at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Kyoto, Japan.

For this initial working cycle, the three working groups of the Observatory are tasked with assessing the state of research and its gaps on the following themes: artificial intelligence, media in the digital age and data governance, as well as cross-cutting issues related to misinformation.

2023 IN ACTION

100 researchers support the launch of the Observatory

Announcement of the composition of the Steering Committee

Launch of the first Global Call for Contributions of the Observatory

March

May

June

September

October

November

Iris Boyer joins the Forum on Information and Democracy to lead the creation of the Observatory

Launch of a call for nominations for the Steering Committee (over 200 applications received)

Launch of the first working cycle of the Observatory at the Internet Governance Forum in Kyoto, Japan
THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATORY ON INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY

FORUM ON INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY BOARD

19 members of the Steering Committee of the Observatory

Chaired by Courtney C. Radsch
Validates priority themes and oversees report production

100 members of the Stakeholders Advisory Group
Representative of the research community, civil society, government, regulators and private companies
Advisory role on priority themes

Permanent Staff of the Observatory
Supports, manages and coordinates

Scientific Director
Dr. Robin Mansell
Ensures the academic and scientific rigor of the report and compliance with the Steering Committee’s guidelines

Lead Rapporteur
Dr. Rob Procter
Coordinates the work of the rapporteurs, particularly on cross-cutting themes

3 Research Assessment Panels (RAP)
Team of 6 rapporteurs and 40 members in total working on the themes below. Disinformation and misinformation has been validated as a cross-cutting theme.

Artificial Intelligence, Information and Democracy Ecosystem
Media, Politics and Trust in Journalism
Data Governance and Democracy

+100 external contributors
(through the Global Calls for Contributions and interviews of experts)
PLURALISM AND AI: HOW TO GOVERN ALGORITHMS?

WORKING GROUP ON PLURALISM OF INFORMATION

On the occasion of the UNESCO conference “Internet for Trust”, the Forum on Information and Democracy published the report of its working group on Pluralism of Information in Curation and Indexation Algorithms.

The result of several months of work chaired by Dr. Pier Luigi Parcu, Director of the Center for Media Pluralism and Freedom at the European University Institute, this report was addressed to all the States of the Partnership for Information and Democracy and digital platforms.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATES AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

- Separate the hosting and curation of content functions to open up the algorithm market to competition
- Ensure that platforms offer their users several options for curating and indexing content, including non-algorithmic options
- Support, through public funding, the development of technical standards that promote content diversity on online platforms
- Require platforms to disclose content selection criteria so that users can choose the algorithms they will use

WORKING GROUP ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE INFORMATION SPACE

On September 28th, on the International Day for Universal Access to Information, the Forum launched its new working group on artificial intelligence and its implications for the information and communication space.

CO-CHAIRS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Dr. Laura Schertel Mendes
Professor of Law at the Brazilian Institute for Development, Education, and Research (IDP), and rapporteur of the Commission of jurists advising the Brazilian Senate on AI.

Dr. Jonathan Stray
Senior Scientist at the Center for Human-Compatible AI at the University of California Berkeley.

OBJECTIVE:

To develop actionable recommendations that will result in the prevention and mitigation of the harmful effects of AI systems on the information ecosystem and encourage positive contributions of AI.

NEXT STEP

The report will provide recommendations around the development and deployment of AI systems, their accountability regimes, mechanisms for incentivizing ethical AI, and AI governance.
INFORMATION INTEGRITY IN TIMES OF CONFLICTS

By Katharina Zuegel
Policy Manager of the Forum on Information and Democracy

Recent examples of armed conflicts show how much the information space has become a battlefield. Disinformation, propaganda and counter-narratives have swamped the information space.

The optimization objectives of the platforms have had a disastrous impact on peacebuilding.

Ahead of the third Summit for Information and Democracy held on the margins of the Paris Peace Forum, it became evident that the Forum had to take a stance on this crucial issue.

Through this policy brief, we issue a call to platforms and States to take action to create an information ecosystem that can support peacebuilding. The global information and communication space is certainly not the root cause of conflicts and wars. However, by enabling access to reliable information and fostering the creation of a joint narrative, it can contribute to peace consolidation.

Building on our previous recommendations and in collaboration with selected experts, we thus developed a policy brief addressed to platforms and states. This document calls for urgent action to enable peacebuilding through safeguarding the integrity of the information space in times of conflict.

This policy brief was published and presented at the Paris Peace Forum and the third Summit for Information and Democracy.
AN INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT FOR INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY

The transnational nature of the information space calls for an international civil society movement to meet the challenges of information chaos. In 2023, the Forum further extended its network of partners and multiplied its activities and modes of engagement in order to strengthen peer-to-peer exchanges and promote the Forum's recommendations on all continents.

In Senegal, a two-day seminar brought together over 50 experts, researchers, journalists, and civil society actors to explore ways to “Strengthen Senegalese democracy through the implementation of democratic safeguards in the information space.”

In India, a public meeting on artificial intelligence brought together over a hundred participants from across India to initiate a national discussion on how AI impacts the information space and the production, dissemination, and consumption of media in India.

In South Africa, the Forum presented its recommendations on the sustainability of journalism at the seminar “Big Tech and Journalism - Building a Sustainable Future in the Global South”.

In Brazil, the “Big Techs, Information, and Democracy” seminar brought together civil society organizations from Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay to discuss specific challenges related to platform regulation in the region.
THE CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION ON INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY

Launched in September 2021, the Coalition aims to bring together civil society organizations that share the same goals to form a collective force advocating effectively for the protection of human rights and the development of democratic safeguards in the global information and communication space. To date, it gathers 48 civil society organizations around the world.

COALITION ON INFORMATION AND DEMOCRACY

SHARE
The Forum offers regular exchanges between peers from different regions. A quarterly Newsletter allows partners to share information about their work.

LEARN
The Forum organizes sessions with experts from civil society, regulators, and researchers to discuss specific topics such as ongoing or upcoming regulations.

ACT
The Forum consults the coalition on its programmatic priorities such as the themes of its working groups and the development of its public policy recommendations.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Too often dominated by the perspectives of Western democracies, the debate on regulating the information space must be more inclusive of the world’s diverse experiences.

The Forum is committed to working with civil society across the globe to achieve these goals. In 2023, around ten strategic partnerships were signed to support these actors:

1. Observacom, Uruguay
2. ALCRER, Benin
3. JONCTION, Senegal
4. REPPRELCI, Ivory Coast
5. DataLeads, India
6. Africtivistes, Senegal
7. Intervozes, Brazil
8. CFF Ghana, Ghana
9. Media Monitoring Africa, South Africa
10. Maharat Foundation, Lebanon

grant agreements
signed in 2023 for a total amount of 170,000 euros

experts consulted
within the framework of the AI working group through 8 workshops

seminars
(South Africa, Brazil, India, and Senegal) gathering more than 200 professionals around the world

"In our attempt to discuss trends in technology, we took a weekend off and dived deep into the evolving landscape of Artificial Intelligence, and its direct impact on democratic processes. We are grateful for the support of the Forum on Information and Democracy and to our dear speakers who inspire us everyday".

Data Leads, India
A STRENGTHENED BUDGET

In 2023, the Forum substantially increased its annual budget, enabling it to strengthen its team and activities worldwide. Thanks to the Forum’s long-standing supporters such as the NED, the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ford Foundation and Luminate, the Forum is consolidating its sustainability while continuing its growth phase. In July 2023, Sweden’s Postcode Foundation joined the list of the organization’s financial partners.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR PARTNERS

Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
Within a larger project including RSF’s activities and the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI), this subvention has contributed to the overall funding of the Forum on Information and Democracy.

National Endowment for Democracy (NED)
The NED subvention has contributed to the promotion and development of the Partnership for Information and Democracy, of the two working groups, respectively on Pluralism and on Artificial Intelligence, and to the strengthening of the Coalition.

Ford Foundation
This subvention has contributed to the overall funding of the Forum on Information and Democracy.

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (DGM/CIV and DGP)
This subvention has contributed to the development of the Partnership for Information and Democracy, to the launch of the International Observatory on Information and Democracy, to strengthen the support of the members of the Coalition in the Global South.

Luminate
This subvention contributed to the overall funding of the Forum on Information and Democracy.

Postcode Foundation
This subvention has contributed to the launch of the Observatory and to the production of its first report assessing the information and communication space.

“Global tech- and social media platforms are affecting both the international and the Swedish public debate and how we relate to the information and facts presented. It is important to create a shared understanding of their impact, to be able to formulate international regulations that can protect human rights and our democratic processes and institutions. We are therefore happy to support the Forum on Information and Democracy in their work on international digital regulation.”

Marie Dahllöf
Secretary General for the Swedish Postcode Foundation
NEXT STEPS

FEEDING THE 2024 MAJOR INTERNATIONAL PROCESSES

The Brazilian presidency of the G20, the UN’s Global Code of Conduct for Information Integrity, the work of the OECD, the OIF Summit... in 2024, many international initiatives will focus on topics linked to the Forum’s mandate. The Forum is committed to contributing to these various processes in order to promote the principles of the Partnership for Information and Democracy.

NEXT STEP
Follow and contribute to the various processes by representing the Forum’s partners.

STRENGTHENING THE COALITION OF DEMOCRACIES

In front of tensions and moments of crisis, democracies must unite to promote an ambitious vision for a democratic information space. The Forum will continue to develop working meetings of member States to establish a space for the free exchange of ideas between countries sharing democratic values, and to provide the information space with external protection mechanisms.

NEXT STEP
Defining annual action plans for the signatory States of the Partnership.

INCLUDING THE VOICES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Faced with the under-representation of voices from the South in the governance of the information space, the Forum has been committed for several years to supporting its partners to enable them to participate fully in its work and in the global governance of the information space.

NEXT STEP
Strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ones, particularly in Asia.

PUBLISH THE FIRST META-ANALYSIS OF THE INFORMATION SPACE

Thanks to the collaboration of hundreds of independent researchers and scientists from around the world, the Observatory’s first working cycle will produce the first meta-analysis of the information space and its impact on public debate and democracy.

NEXT STEP
Publish the meta-analysis and launch a major awareness campaign.