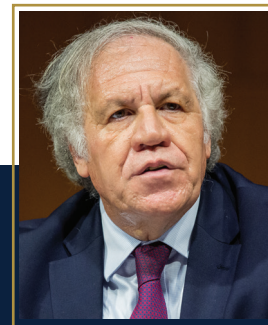# Policy Takeaway

In May 2024, the University of Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute for International Studies held its first Global Democracy Conference (GDC), themed "Understanding Today, Shaping Tomorrow." The annual event is a forum where diverse voices — scholars, practitioners, journalists, and advocates — come together to examine democratic erosion amid contemporary challenges and devise ways to strengthen democratic practices worldwide. This short policy note highlights areas where innovative academic research intersects with salient democratic challenges, setting the tone for further discussion at the next GDC, on **"Protecting Democracy from Executive Overreach," May 12-13, 2025, in Washington, DC.**

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ENHANCING DEMOCRACY

Young people are growing in an era where democratic norms and overall appreciation for democracy is questioned. For example, there is an overall decline in civic education in primary schools in the U.S.

The proliferation of state level legislation to ban books and impose other restrictions on teachers "have produced a chilling effect" on their ability to teach and cultivate democratic values, according to Anne Thompson, an NBC news journalist. The growing ideological polarization further erodes the relevance of citizen participation and engagement in the public sphere. The lack of reliable and informed spaces for debate, and the proliferation of online disinformation campaigns actively undermined citizens' trust in democratic dialogues.

"Weak political ideologies have led parties and candidates to embrace emotional immoderation. To enhance democracy, I feel we need to bring back more rationality in politics, more political collaboration and give citizens better knowledge. This is why we are so happy to sign this agreement with the Keough School today, because our effort must be based in knowledge."

Luis Almagro

Secretary General
Organization of American States

KEY ACTIONS TO ENHANCE DEMOCRACY

▸ **Promote and improve civic education especially in primary schools.**
Research suggests that young children -particularly girls- hold the key to revitalizing democratic processes. According to panelists David Campbell (University of Notre Dame) and Christina Wolbrecht (University of Notre Dame), primary schools in the US have played a key role in cultivating respectful political discussions and confronting real-world issues of democracy.

▸ **Build pro-democracy coalitions across different social sectors.**
A genuine democracy requires support from across business groups, civil society groups, journalists, labor unions, philanthropic organizations, universities, indigenous and other minority groups to protect electoral processes, civil liberties, and the rule of law. Jennifer McCoy (Georgia State University) provided cross-national evidence that political coalitions of groups like these can protect against backsliding, especially if they act quickly against rising authoritarians. International organizations can help reinforce the formation of pro-democratic coalitions.

▸ **Facilitate public participation and engagement around "deliberative AI".**
According to Lisa Schirch (University of Notre Dame), there are multiple platforms that can develop community forums to foster deliberative conversations and minimize affective polarization. Some innovative examples include Stanford's Deliberative Polling apps, Taiwan's AI-driven citizen deliberation processes, or Pol.is.

GET INVOLVED

▸ USAID, Ford Foundation and other organizations have organized to fundraise for democracy promotion activities, including the 2022 Democracy Delivers Initiative.

▸ The US federal government is recruiting AI-experts on platforms like AI.gov to harness the benefits and mitigate the risks of artificial intelligence in regular government operations.

▸ The Artificial Intelligence Safety Institute Consortium (AISIC), supports academic and public collaboration efforts to pool expertise from various disciplines to improving government use of AI.

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