

Prefiguration of the International Observatory on information and democracy

Call for contributions

March 22, 2022

This call for contributions is launched in the framework of the prefiguration of the International Observatory on Information and Democracy announced during the first Summit for Information and Democracy (September 24th, 2021, see Appendix 1).

It is aimed at researchers and experts from all disciplines (computer science, cognitive science, sociology, economics, political science, philosophy, etc.) interested in the question of the effects of the new information ecosystem on democracy. It is addressed to researchers, institutions, and to other organizations, whether State or independent, NGOs, companies, concerned by Information and Democracy. The expected contributions can take various forms and sizes: fact sheet or note, file, specific article, etc (see below).

1/ Context of the call for contributions

1.1/ About the Forum on Information and Democracy

The Forum on Information and Democracy is the implementing organization of the International Partnership for Information and Democracy endorsed by 45 countries. Founded by 11 NGOs and research centers around the world, its mission is to implement democratic safeguards in the global information and communication space.

On the occasion of the first Summit for Information and Democracy (September 24th, 2021), the Forum announced the creation of the International Observatory whose mission is to synthesize, in the form of a periodic evaluation report, the main knowledge resulting from research on the information and communication space. This report will be addressed to States, policy makers, regulatory bodies, digital platforms and civil society in order to feed the global reflection on tech regulation. It will provide a synthesis of existing research.

This call concerns the prefiguration of this Observatory. The prefiguration group is co-chaired by Angel Gurría, former Secretary-general of the OECD and Shoshana Zuboff, Emeritus Professor at Harvard Business School, and has the mandate to specify the objectives, methodology and means of the Observatory. It is composed of a steering committee of ten personalities and a team of rapporteurs who will receive and synthesize the contributions.

2.2/ The need for the Observatory

Platforms constitute a complex communication space that is used by almost three billion human beings around the world. Far from being limited to the field of traditional media, these platforms structure their daily interactions, condition the mobilization of their

attention, their access to information, and part of their consumption. In short, they have an immense impact on the life and existence of citizens.

The most negative aspects of this influence have been highlighted in recent years by a number of phenomena: fragmentation of the public space, exacerbation of messages and dynamics leading to polarization, virality, filter bubbles, new capacities for disinformation, dis-inhibition of aggressive behavior, new forms of influence...

Platforms thus raise issues that directly concern the survival of democracy. Do they compromise the constitution of a public space, a condition of possibility for a full democracy? Do digital technologies also risk providing means that can be mobilized to serve the advent of surveillance or control societies?

The phenomena mentioned above give rise to bitter controversy concerning their reality, their scope, and the interpretation and answers to address them.

In order to find appropriate responses to this situation, States must have a framework.

This implies:

- a set of clearly established and shared principles, to which all refer: this is the purpose of the Partnership for Information and Democracy;
- a common and shared understanding of the situation and the challenges, allowing for informed decision-making: this will be the role of the Observatory

The establishment of the Observatory aims in particular to:

- Provide decision-makers and the public with information based on scientific consensus
- Encourage new research and new cooperation between countries, between research institutions and between disciplines, in order to achieve a better understanding of the phenomena in question.

2/ Contributions

Every institution or researcher in the domain is welcome to bring their contribution to the prefiguration of the Observatory and the topics mentioned above.

The team of rapporteurs is particularly seeking contributions on the following topics (non-exclusive list):

- What are the main expectations of researchers in the domain of the Observatory? What are their needs (in terms of access to data, transparency) to achieve a reliable assessment of the phenomena ;
- How to evaluate the impact of digital platforms development on democracy?
- What should be the working methodology for the production of the report?
- What should be the governance for the Observatory to guarantee the fairness of the reports?
- How will institutions and researchers be asked to contribute?
- What forms should the report take and how should it be presented?
- What are the main difficulties for the realization of the Observatory?

It will be useful for the rapporteurs if contributors could precise in which domain of research they are invested in, and how they think they could benefit from and contribute to the Observatory in the coming years.

The format of the contributions is open. We welcome contributions from individuals and institutions in English, French and Spanish.

Contributors will be mentioned in the final report and are asked to disclose any links of interest with digital platforms.

Contributions can be sent to the team of rapporteurs of the prefiguration group:

Florian Forestier : fforestier@informationdemocracy.org

Chloé Fiodiere : cfiodiere@informationdemocracy.org

Contributions can be sent until the end of May 2022.

3/ Useful links

About the Initiative

The [website](#) of the Forum on Information and Democracy

The [text](#) of the International Partnership for Information and Democracy endorsed by 45 countries

The report [How to end infodemics](#) published by the Forum

The report [A New Deal for journalism](#) published by the Forum

About the Observatory

The [press release](#) of the Summit for Information and Democracy.

The [announcement](#) of the members of the steering committee

The [video](#) of the panel with Angel Gurría, Shoshana Zuboff, Maria Ressa and Christophe Deloire, chair of the Forum, at the Paris Peace Forum.