COLUMBIA | SIPA
School of International and Public Affairs

Innovative Pathways to Strengthen Representative Democracy in Colombia

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Part I: Identifying Barriers to Sustaining Democracy

1. Executive Summary

This report, produced in collaboration with Fundación Corona, outlines strategic pathways to strengthen representative democracy in Colombia amid widespread distrust, disinformation, and political disengagement. Drawing on behavioral science, technological innovation, and international comparative analysis, the report identifies systemic challenges and proposes targeted solutions to rebuild institutional trust and inclusive political participation. The recommendations center around four key pillar:

1. **Fostering an Inclusive National Identity via The Imagined Community**
   Rooted in Benedict Anderson's theory, this pillar emphasizes the need for Colombia to reimagine its national identity through inclusive symbols, narratives, and participatory cultural practices. It recommends the promotion of shared national experiences, like sports and arts, and the institutionalization of initiatives such as a *National Constitution Bee* to bridge regional, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides. Strengthening the "imagined community" in Colombia, a concept developed by Benedict Anderson to describe a shared sense of national identity among people who will never meet, is crucial for fostering the spontaneous sociability that Francis Fukuyama identifies as essential for building trust within a society. When individuals feel part of a larger collective with shared values, histories, and goals, they are more likely to engage voluntarily with others beyond their immediate circles—across regions, ethnicities, and social classes. This spontaneous sociability creates networks of trust and mutual responsibility, which not only support economic collaboration but also enhance civic engagement. As trust deepens and people see themselves as part of a common democratic project, they become more invested in political participation, institutional accountability, and the long-term health of democracy in Colombia.
2. **Constructing a Democratic Learning Ecosystem**
   This pillar addresses Colombia's fragmented political education and declining youth engagement. It calls for institutionalizing civic education at all educational levels, developing leadership and ethics training for public officials, and establishing localized

youth leadership platforms. The objective is to foster political literacy, civic agency, and sustained participation across generations and regions.

3. **Reimagining Technological Solutions for Democracy**
   Recognizing both the promise and pitfalls of digital tools, this pillar critiques the overreliance on tech fixes in democracy building and calls for a more strategic approach. It recommends establishing a centralized data and evaluation platform for civic tech tools, regulating digital platforms to combat disinformation, and shifting resources toward media literacy and open-data initiatives. The aim is to build a resilient digital civic space grounded in behavioral insights.
4. **Expanding Youth Participation and Representation**
   With a focus on engaging Colombia's diverse youth population, this pillar proposes innovative methods to empower young leaders and normalize political engagement. Strategies include social media campaigns to amplify youth role models, inclusive program design involving youth at all stages, and the creation of citizen participation toolkits tailored to youth.

By integrating these pillars, the report envisions a resilient, participatory, and inclusive Colombian democracy. Fundación Corona is positioned as a key catalyst in this transformation, leveraging its credibility to coordinate cross-sector partnerships and scale impactful civic innovations.

2. Introduction

Colombia stands at a critical juncture in its democratic development. After decades of armed conflict and political fragmentation, the country has made meaningful progress toward peace and institutional reform. Yet, democracy in Colombia remains fragile. Trust in public institutions is low, disinformation proliferates online, youth political participation is inconsistent, and many citizens, particularly in marginalized communities, continue to feel disconnected from the national political project.

These challenges are not unique to Colombia. Around the world, representative democracies are grappling with similar patterns of institutional distrust, polarization, and declining civic engagement. However, Colombia's unique historical, cultural, and regional context requires solutions that are not only innovative but also deeply localized.

This report seeks to identify and address the structural and behavioral barriers undermining democratic resilience in Colombia. Through a combination of field research, stakeholder interviews, and international case studies, it offers actionable, evidence-based recommendations grounded in four strategic pillars: fostering inclusive national identity, constructing a democratic learning ecosystem, reimagining technology for civic empowerment, and expanding youth engagement.

The aim of this report is to provide a roadmap for building a more participatory, equitable, and trusted democracy, one that reflects the voices of all Colombians, equips future generations to shape their nation with confidence and purpose, and is well-positioned to endure the political volatility characteristic of this era.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methodology

This study primarily adopts a mixed-method approach that combines literature review and semi-structured interviews, supplemented by case study analysis, to ensure the integration of theoretical insights with practical relevance, thereby enhancing the feasibility and specificity of our policy recommendations.

3.1.1 Literature Review

In the literature review component, we employed two main methods: Comparative Literature Review and Case Study Analysis.

For the Comparative Literature Review, we conducted keyword-based searches using terms such as behavioral science, technology, participation, combating disinformation, and social trust across several major academic databases, including but not limited to JSTOR, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the Columbia University Library Database System. We selected highly relevant and insightful literature—both in English and Chinese—for comparative analysis and synthesis. The results are presented in Chapter 3: Literature Review of this report.

For the Case Study Analysis, we focused on highly practice-oriented themes, such as the use of technology in democratic governance and strategies to counter disinformation. We identified and analyzed several internationally recognized cases that reflect mature and innovative practices with potential applicability to the Colombian context. The findings from these case studies are incorporated into both the Literature Review and Policy Recommendations sections to support our proposed strategies and tools.

3.1.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Based on the findings from the literature review and several rounds of coordination with Fundación Corona, our research team conducted a field study in Colombia in March 2025. The field team included five core members of the project, who traveled to Bogotá, Cali, Buenaventura, and Barranquilla for on-site interviews.

We interviewed three main groups of stakeholders: scholars from local universities and research institutions, staff and leaders from civic organizations, and youth leaders engaged in social and political activities. The interviews followed a semi-structured format—we developed tailored questionnaires for each stakeholder group in advance, while allowing for flexible follow-up questions based on interviewees' responses. This approach ensured that we gathered both the necessary contextual background and valuable, in-depth insights.

All interviews were conducted with the consent of participants, and were recorded, transcribed, and systematically summarized. The interview guides and list of interviewees are provided in the Annex. The interview findings and analysis are integrated throughout various sections of the report, particularly in the problem identification, challenge analysis, and policy recommendation chapters.

3.2 Identified Limitations and Research Gaps

While this report is grounded in extensive literature review, international case studies, and fieldwork conducted across four Colombian cities, several limitations emerged throughout the research process. First, the time and logistical constraints of fieldwork limited our ability to include a broader sample of geographic regions, particularly rural and post-conflict areas where democratic disengagement may present distinct characteristics. Second, although the team conducted interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders, including civil society leaders, youth leaders, and academic experts, there was limited direct engagement with public officials or political party representatives, which could have offered additional insights into institutional incentives and barriers. Third, while we emphasized behavioral and technological factors, structural economic dimensions, such as poverty, inequality, and labor precarity, were not addressed in depth, though they are important to understanding patterns of political participation. Finally, some of the policy recommendations rely on international models that, while informative, may not fully translate to Colombia's unique cultural and institutional context without careful adaptation.

These limitations do not invalidate our findings but rather point to future directions for research and program development. Fundación Corona and its partners are encouraged to continue expanding participatory diagnostics, particularly in underrepresented communities, and to integrate multi-sectoral perspectives that encompass governance, economics, and lived experiences.

4. Background and Literature Review

4.1. Background

In a study conducted by Cifras y Conceptos published in November 2024 entitled "Decimo Estudio de Percepcion de Jovenes," the range of those that felt represented by the government was between 30 percent and 37 percent. Of the youths surveyed, 20 percent said they trusted political parties, while 31 percent said they trusted the National Congress. Among the factors noted by the youths for there to be an increment in trust are the need for greater transparency, harsher punishments for those convicted of corruption, and for politicians to fulfill the promises made during campaigns.

The rise of illiberal governments around the world is an alarming wakeup call. In light of the success of many illiberal regimes, democracy is no longer seen by many as the most viable mechanism of government. Emerging from the shadow of its decades-long armed conflict, COVID, the *Estallido Social*, and the election of the first leftist president in Colombian history, a deep disconnect persists between citizens and democratic institutions with a growing perception that democracy has failed to deliver. On the ground, this is manifested in the perception that political institutions are there to serve powerful interests and the privileged classes. The state, some youth perceive, is a corporation to be captured by special interest groups to perpetuate inequalities, hostile social structures, and cover up the crimes of the ruling elite. Professor Monica Pachon of the Universidad de Los Andes, has concluded that the nation suffers from a representation crisis, in which citizens—especially youth from disadvantaged backgrounds—feel alienated from formal democratic institutions.

While there is no shortage of political discourse on social media or in protest movements, especially the *Estallido Social* during the Duque administration, this energy

failed to translate into formal democratic participation, such as voting, civic organizing, or even keeping up with the workings of the national Congress.

Despite the pessimism, the mass protests known as the *Estallido Social* of 2021 against the Duque administration offers a unique opportunity for change. In his seminal work *The Origins of Political Order*, Francis Fukuyama argued that major crises that shake the core of the political, social, economic or military establishment are the ones most capable of leading to the implementation of effective reforms. Such was the case, Fukuyama argues, with the military reforms of the Prussian Army, considered the best in Europe, following defeats against the armies of Napoleon. While shakedowns prompt elites to rapidly reform any system, the worst systems to reform are those that despite their structural flaws continue to operate.

Thus, the *Estallido Social* and its implications ought to be seen as a wakeup call to the plethora of stakeholders capable of instituting transformative and enduring projects that seek to tacke the aforementioned challenges. While institutional transformations require a political will that is perhaps lacking at the moment from political actors, societal stakeholders such as the private sector and civil society have the capital and the institutional capacity to carry out polices that target political apathy. If political agents wont respond to the challenges at hand, civil society and the private sector can unite to implement a series of projects that will result in higher levels of human capital and societal trust.

In 2021, responding to the Estallido Social, the business sector in Cali demonstrated a significant shift towards community engagement and social responsibility. Faced with widespread protests from a disillusioned youth sector, local entrepreneur and corporations recognized the need to actively address the underlying social issues. One of the most notable responses was the launch of the Compromise Valle, a collaborative effort initiated by local business leaders. This initiative sough to create forums in which the private sector and disillusioned youths communicated to advance common goals. According to El Pais, by the end of 2022, Compromise Valle had mobilized 722 companies, creating over 11,000 opportunities in areas like employment, entrepreneurship, and development of human capital. Beyond Compromiso Valle, several businesses and foundations undertook direct interventions to respond to the crisis with projects that sough foster a sense of community pride.

Initiatives like *Compromiso Valle* have laid a strong foundation for community regeneration by addressing urgent needs in employment and education. However, to build long-term societal resilience, these efforts must evolve to include programs that directly cultivate civic responsibility, especially amongst the youth, and continue fostering spontaneous sociability and trust amongst individuals in society despite socio-economic background. Fostering spontaneous sociability—the ability of individuals from different walks of life and regions to interact informally and cooperatively— is key to transforming Colombia's low-trust environment and generate a sense of ownership in public institutions. Thus, while we recognize that the existing challenges to political apathy are immense, these are not insurmountable.

4.2 Literature Review

Existing literature, including both global research and Colombia-focused studies, consistently emphasizes the critical importance of applying behavioral science and technology to strengthen representative democracy in Colombia. These approaches are vital for increasing voter participation, combating disinformation, and enhancing institutional trust. As an interdisciplinary strategy, they directly address the core challenges facing the country's democratic development and offer possible pathways for reforming political participation mechanisms and rebuilding public trust.

4.2.1 Behavioral Science and Trust Formation

Behavioral science provides a powerful lens to understand how individuals develop political preferences, particularly trust or distrust toward public institutions. Moving beyond first-wave behavioral economics, which emphasized cognitive limitations and nudging, the second wave—pioneered by scholars such as Karla Hoff—focuses on the cultural and historical foundations of belief systems (Hoff 2023, 2–6). According to this approach, individuals operate with "cultural mental models," or socially constructed frameworks through which they interpret the political world (Hoff 2023, 4). These models influence what people perceive, how they respond to government actions, and ultimately, whether they choose to engage politically.

In Colombia, such models are deeply shaped by a legacy of violence, institutional weakness, and historical exclusion. The 2024 SIPA Capstone project identifies four main

sources of the dominant “distrust-oriented” mental model: (1) a normalized cultural attitude of skepticism toward government; (2) entrenched perceptions of corruption, reinforced by media and everyday experiences; (3) historical trauma from paramilitary conflict and state collusion; and (4) socio-economic exclusion, especially among marginalized groups (Kassymbekov et al. 2024: 18–21).

This context creates a mental feedback loop: people expect the state to fail or deceive them, and so they disengage, which in turn weakens the state's ability to serve and gain legitimacy. This is supported by studies showing that past experiences—such as conflict, inequality, or discrimination—shape long-term political beliefs (Alesina and La Ferrara 2002; Guiso et al. 2011). As Hoff (2023) argues, the only way to shift these entrenched mental models is through repeated, meaningful, and positive experiences with public institutions. These experiences must challenge existing expectations and offer alternative narratives of government efficacy and fairness.

Thus, interventions that aim to rebuild trust should not be limited to messaging or transparency reforms. Instead, they must enable citizens to re-experience the state—through inclusive participation processes, visible responsiveness, and spaces where citizens co-produce solutions with local authorities (OECD 2022). Trust, in this framework, becomes not just a cognitive belief but a lived reality.

4.2.2 Technology and the Battle Against Disinformation

Technology plays a dual role in contemporary democracies: it enables both democratic engagement and authoritarian manipulation. Disinformation, as defined by the OECD, refers to deliberately false or misleading content created to manipulate public perception or behavior (OECD 2022). In the electoral context, it undermines trust, distorts voter choice, and contributes to democratic backsliding.

The Colombian case illustrates the severity of this problem. According to Vallejo (2024), disinformation in Colombia thrives in a context of high distrust, low media literacy, and algorithmic amplification. Misinformation is often emotionally charged, morally framed, and widely shared on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. The 2022 presidential election witnessed waves of digital manipulation, including AI-generated content, fear-based messaging, and false narratives about candidates (Freedom House 2022; Csernatoni 2024).

To combat this, several countries have developed AI-driven solutions. Brazil's Telegram Monitor aggregates and tracks trending political misinformation across hundreds of public channels, helping journalists and researchers identify false narratives in real time (Vallejo 2024: 4). The EU's "Fake News Tracker" uses facial recognition and biometric patterns to detect deepfakes (Csernatoni 2024). India and Brazil have also collaborated with platforms to limit viral message forwarding, a key vector for disinformation (Freedom House 2022).

However, these technological solutions come with serious caveats. As Unger (2021) argues, without proper data governance, such tools may violate privacy, reinforce bias, or be used for surveillance (Unger 2021: 310–312). Moreover, AI systems often struggle to detect culturally specific content or sarcasm. Hence, a hybrid approach is recommended—one that integrates technical tools with human oversight, community fact-checking, and media education campaigns (Van Bavel et al. 2021; OECD 2022).

Fundamentally, technology alone cannot restore trust. Disinformation feeds on emotional and social vulnerabilities; therefore, addressing why people believe falsehoods—due to fear, alienation, or low trust—is just as important as detecting the content itself (Vallejo 2024: 2–3). Behavioral science is used to identify solutions to complex social problems. Unfortunately, behavioral science is extremely time and resource intensive, and thus unsustainable (Vallejo 2024). Therefore, it is important to consider ways to go beyond the root to address where the seed was planted. In this case, of course, the seed is misinformation and the soil is large online platforms.

Regulatory movements are taking place across the world with nations pushing back against big tech in order to safeguard democracy. Countries like Australia, South Africa, Germany and the broader European Union have legislated policies to regulate big tech corporations. Germany's Network Enforcement Act, or NetzDG law requires social media platforms to meet a higher standard of content moderation, transparency with algorithms, and risk mitigation to protect users. Online platforms in Germany face fines of up to €50 million for failing to delete illegal content (Echikson, W., & Knodt, O.: 30) The European Union similarly passed the Digital Services act with the main goal being: "to prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation. It

ensures user safety, protects fundamental rights, and creates a fair and open online platform environment." (European Commission: 31)

In addition to these two examples, Australia stands out as a place leading the path to securing media sustainability. In 2020, the Australian government asked the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to draft a law to address the power imbalance between tech giants and local media companies. The News Media Bargaining Code is the result. The idea was met with support within the Australian media landscape and around the world, but garnered severe pushback from its main targets– Google and Meta. Australia ended up signing a bill into law requiring Google and Facebook to negotiate with publishers for the price of news. Annually, Australian journalists are receiving hundreds of millions of dollars to fund critical reporting and investigative journalism. As funds for journalism are absorbed by social media platforms it is imperative to address the brittling information ecosystem. Journalism is a pillar of civic education and prosperous democracies.

4.2.3 Voter Participation: Trends, Drivers, and Behavioral Interventions

Voter participation remains a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy. In Colombia, although voting is voluntary, turnout is not low by international standards. Over the past two decades, it has fluctuated between 40% and 55%, and in the 2022 presidential runoff, it reached a historic peak of 58.1%, driven by heightened political polarization, anti-elite sentiment, and a surge in youth mobilization (Carter Center, 2022). This upward shift reflects a latent demand for political change and a growing willingness to engage, particularly in moments of perceived democratic urgency. However, as in many democracies, participation remains uneven across regions and population groups.

Research indicates that both structural and psychological factors shape voter turnout. Structurally, barriers such as complex voter registration procedures, lack of transportation infrastructure, and localized voter intimidation continue to depress participation in certain areas (DANE, 2023). Psychologically, variables including political efficacy, social norms, and early exposure to civic education strongly influence whether individuals perceive voting as meaningful and worthwhile (Prior, 2010; Muxel, Gaxie, & Yon, 2022).

Importantly, when compared to other countries with voluntary voting systems, Colombia performs relatively well. The United States, for example, reached a 62.8% turnout in its 2020 presidential election (Pew Research Center, 2022), only marginally higher than Colombia's 2022 figure. Mexico recorded 63.4% in 2018 (INE, 2018), and Paraguay reported 63.1% in 2023 (TSJE Paraguay, 2023). In contrast, the Dominican Republic registered 55.3% in 2020 (JCE, 2020), while Chile, during its voluntary voting phase, saw just 49.0% in the 2017 presidential election's first round (Servel, 2017). These comparisons confirm that Colombia's participation rate is not low but rather in the mid-to-upper range among countries with non-compulsory voting.

Nevertheless, the presence of structural inequalities and limited civic infrastructure underscores the need for long-term investment in democratic engagement strategies. The Colombian case illustrates that voter mobilization can be substantial under conditions of political contention, but sustained participation will require addressing both material and cognitive barriers to inclusion.

Table 1

Country	Voting System	Election	Voter Turnout
Colombia	Voluntary	2022 Presidential Election (2nd Round)	58.1%
United States	Voluntary	2020 Presidential Election	62.8%
Mexico	Voluntary	2018 Presidential Election	63.4%
Paraguay	Voluntary	2023 Presidential Election	63.1%
Dominican Republic	Voluntary	2020 Presidential Election	55.3%

Chile	Voluntary (2012–2022)	2017 Presidential Election (1st Round)	49.0%

Behavioral interventions have shown considerable promise:
(1) Social pressure messaging, such as informing voters that neighbors are voting, increased turnout by up to 8 percentage points in U.S. experiments (Gerber et al. 2008).

(2)Simplified registration processes, reminders, and early voting have consistently improved participation in Latin American contexts (Möller et al. 2014).

(3)Civic education during adolescence strongly predicts lifelong engagement (Hangartner et al. 2017; Muxel et al. 2022).

(4)Messages framed around reciprocity and trust (e.g., "your vote helps your community") are especially effective for disengaged populations (BIT 2021).

In Colombia, youth remain underrepresented in electoral processes. While they turned out in higher numbers for Gustavo Petro's reformist platform in 2022, many prefer issue-based activism or direct action over formal politics (Coe and Vandegrift 2018). This gap underscores the need for youth-targeted strategies that integrate voting with other forms of participation—such as participatory budgeting or youth leadership councils.

4.2.4 Disinformation, Mental Models, and Democratic Vulnerability

Disinformation is not only a technological issue—it is a behavioral phenomenon. The spread of disinformation depends less on the content itself and more on how individuals process information, make decisions, and seek social belonging. Individuals make choices to believe or share disinformation often driven by psychological needs–such as desire for certainty, status within a group, or affirmation of preexisting beliefs–rather than a rational evaluation of truth. Studies in political psychology have shown that people are more likely to believe and share falsehoods that align with their identity, emotions, or

group affiliation (Van Bavel et al. 2021). Factors such as partisan bias, cognitive shortcuts (like the illusory truth effect), and low tolerance for ambiguity contribute to misinformation's virality.

In Colombia, the Detox Information Project identified four primary behavioral risk factors: (1) low interpersonal trust; (2) dehumanization of political "others"; (3) perceived discrimination; and (4) inability to cope with complexity (Vallejo 2024: 2–3). These characteristics mirror the cultural mental models identified by Hoff (2023) and suggest that disinformation thrives in environments of institutional and social mistrust.

Even when fact-checking tools exist, people may disregard accurate information if it clashes with their worldview (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). Thus, strategies must go beyond content moderation. Effective behavioral responses include:

(1) Media literacy training, especially among youth and rural populations;

(2) Prebunking (inoculation) techniques, which expose people to weak versions of misinformation in advance;

(3) Storytelling-based campaigns that provide emotionally resonant counter-narratives;

(4) Community-based information networks, where trusted local actors can verify content.

Fundación Corona and its partners are well-placed to lead such efforts, especially in communities where traditional media and government are distrusted. Disinformation is best combatted not with censorship, but with empowerment and engagement.

4.2.5 The Imagined Community: Building Inclusive National Identity

The concept of the "imagined community," introduced by Benedict Anderson (1983), significantly complements behavioral and technological strategies for democratic strengthening in Colombia. According to Anderson, nations are socially constructed entities imagined by their members through shared symbols, narratives, and experiences.

This theoretical perspective is critical for understanding the fragmentation in Colombia's democratic and civic life, influenced by its historical context of colonial legacy, regional disparities, and decades of internal conflict.

Colombia's current democratic vulnerabilities, including low trust and susceptibility to disinformation, are deeply intertwined with how citizens conceive of their national community. As Anderson highlights, effective nation-building relies on the style and inclusivity with which the community is imagined. Colombia's historical patterns reveal a significant mismatch between individual citizens' imagined communities and the collective national vision. These discrepancies can be traced back to structural divisions originating from colonial administrative practices, regional inequalities, and social exclusions dating back to independence struggles (Anderson, 1983).

Francis Fukuyama's analysis of low-trust societies complements Anderson's argument by illustrating how the lack of impersonal, broad-based trust compels individuals to rely excessively on close-knit in-groups, further reinforcing fragmentation and exclusion (Fukuyama, 1995). This socio-cultural dynamic severely restricts cooperation beyond immediate social circles, limiting effective civic participation and engagement with broader democratic institutions.

4.2.6 Integrating Approaches: Fundación Corona's Strategic Role

Fundación Corona has long been committed to strengthening civic participation and social equity in Colombia. Through its Modelo de Incidencia Ciudadana (MIC), the foundation has developed tools to assess and improve the quality of citizen engagement at the local level. Findings from this program indicate that lack of trust is the third most cited reason for non-participation—after lack of information and rights awareness (Kassymbekov et al. 2024: 9).

Fundacion Corona's dual identity—as a policy advocate ("agitator") and implementation coordinator ("orchestrator")—makes it uniquely capable of advancing behaviorally informed reforms. Its strategies should include:

(1)Piloting youth leadership labs that offer experiential civic learning;

(1)Promoting community-level participatory budgeting, especially in post-conflict zones;

(3)Collaborating with tech platforms to scale up digital literacy and disinformation monitoring;

(1)Fostering “positive government touchpoints,” where citizens can directly co-create policies.

Rather than isolated projects, these interventions should be framed within a long-term Theory of Change that aims to shift Colombia’s cultural mental model from distrust to co-responsibility (Hoff 2023; Kassymbekov et al. 2024: 26). Fundación Corona is not just a service provider—it is a systems convener and catalyst for democratic renewal.

5. Objective(s)

This report aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on democratic governance in Colombia by achieving two interrelated objectives:

5.1 To identify and analyze the evolving dynamics and emerging challenges related to representative democracy in Colombia.

This includes exploring factors that shape citizen participation, information environments, civic engagement, and institutional trust. Through fieldwork, stakeholder consultations, and a comprehensive literature review, the study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the opportunities and constraints facing democratic representation in the Colombian context.

5.2 To develop actionable and context-sensitive strategic recommendations to strengthen representative democracy in Colombia.

These recommendations are informed by international best practices and grounded in local realities. Particular emphasis is placed on the use of innovative tools and approaches, especially behavioral science and technology, to support inclusive participation, promote information integrity, and foster sustained public confidence in democratic institutions.

By pursuing these objectives, the report seeks not only to offer practical guidance to local actors and policymakers but also to contribute to the broader regional and global dialogue on the renewal and resilience of representative democratic systems.

Part II: Pillars and Findings

Pillar I: (The Imagined Community) Fostering An Inclusive Colombian National Identity

Colombia's rich cultural diversity and complex history present both a challenge and an opportunity for building an inclusive national identity. In his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson noted that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined." Anderson stressed that communities are to be distinguished, "not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." Thus, Anderson defined the nation as an imagined community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign, since "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their imagined communion." Today, as a result of history, mechanisms of state formation, state capacity, inter alia, individuals in some nations are better capable of imagining the community in a manner that adheres to what the collective is imagining in terms of political and social aspirations. No doubt, some states, as a result of the various factors are more successful than others in ensuring that the individual members that comprise the state imagine the community in a manner that adheres to what the collective is imagining. Thus, the mechanisms that enable individuals to form a particular image of the community that adheres to what the collective is imagining is a process that can be altered, if so desired at will, by members within that community.

Decades of armed conflict, regional inequalities, and a colonial legacy have fragmented Colombia's social fabric. Most significantly, this has signified that the individual citizen's particular vision of the imagined community fails to closely resemble the vision of the collective. Structural and institutional mechanisms, antedating the independence of Latin America, partly explain the reasons for this mismatch in imaginings. Anderson, citing Lynch and Mazur, both biographers of Bolivar, notes that "far from seeking to induct the lower classes into political life, one key factor initially

spurring the drive for independence from Madrid…was fear of the lower classes' political mobilizations." In 1789, when Spain issued a new slave law "specifying in detail the rights and duties of masters and slaves, "the creoles rejected state intervention on grounds that slaves were prone to vice and independence." The divisions within society, Anderson notes, help explain the long duration of the struggle. According to Anderson, the inability of the creole elite to win a rapid war against a debilitated Spain "suggests a certain social thinness to these Latin American independence movements."

Unlike European cases of national identity formation, Anderson points to economic and social factors as the immediate trigger to the independence struggle in Latin America. Towards the last decades of the eighteenth century, "Madrid imposed new taxes, made their collections more efficient, enforced metropolitan commercial monopolies, restricted intra-hemispheric trade to its own advantage, centralized administrative hierarchies, and promoted heavy immigration of peninsulares." The otherness-factor that prompted the Latin Americans to rebel is thus deeply rooted in the direct economic policies emanating from the Spanish Crown rather than from a genuine development of a national identity rooted in ethnicity. Thus, at the time of independence, the aspiring states in the region lacked a vision of an imagined community as the one Anderson cites emerged in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Following independence, the new South American republics adhered to the administrative boundaries established by Spain between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. Anderson notes that "in this respect they foreshadowed the new states of Africa and parts of Asia in the mid twentieth century," forming a "sharp contrast to the new European states of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." Anderson underscores that "the original shaping of the American administrative units was to some extent arbitrary and fortuitous."

For the Latin American states, including Colombia, the ultimate result of the independence wars was the consolidation of a weak state resting on low-trust societies. According to Francis Fukuyama, low-trust societies abound in in-groups which individuals form as a coping mechanism in the absence of broad, impersonal trust that would otherwise enable cooperation beyond immediate circles. Thus, the nation is

imagined by the individual from the perspective of the in-group rather than from the perspective of a grand national or regional vision. Fukuyama argues that when trust is limited to families or tight-knit communities, individuals are compelled to rely on these localized networks for economic survival, social support, and mutual security. Unlike high-trust societies, where shared cultural norms and institutions foster spontaneous sociability and cooperation among strangers, low-trust environments inhibit the development of large-scale organizations and civil society. As a result, individuals gravitate toward in-groups defined by ethnicity, class, religion, kinship, or patronage, where trust is inherited rather than earned. These in-groups, concludes Fukuyama, become essential mechanisms for navigating a fragmented and uncertain public sphere, but they also cultivate exclusivity and suspicion.

Presently, there is great need for creative strategies to foster an imagined community that not only fosters diversity and erodes the significance and over reliance on the in-group, but also enhances the capacity of the state. Modern technologies like social media, television, and the internet, are capable of bridging the gaps in Colombia's and Latin American nations' means of imagining the imagined community. Anderson argued that "the figuring of imagined reality was overwhelmingly visual and aural." These two mechanisms made it possible to think of the nation.

Benedict Anderson famously defined the nation as "an imagined political community – imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign". In other words, nations are socially constructed through shared narratives, symbols, and experiences; members will never all meet, yet they envision a communion. Colombia's challenge has been that its "imagined community" has often failed to reflect its on-the-ground pluralism. A 200-year history of centralist nation-building projects often disregarded the regional diversity of Colombia's peoples "in favour of an imaginary nation, removed from everyday reality". This legacy, combined with decades of civil conflict, left a patchwork of localized loyalties and identities rather than a cohesive national story.

According to official estimates, Afro-Colombians comprise about **10.6%** of the population and Indigenous peoples about **3.4%**, alongside a majority who identify as mestizo or with no specific ethnic affiliation (DANE, 2005). Colombia's population is also

regionally varied – for instance, Afro-descendant communities are largely concentrated on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts (as the above map illustrates). At the same time, Indigenous groups are present in Amazonian, Andean, and other territories. These realities mean that any national identity narrative must intentionally weave post-conflict cleavages, ethnic/racial diversity, and regional particularities into an overarching tapestry of belonging.

The youths from underprivileged backgrounds interviewed noted the prevalence of in-groups in Colombian society that impede the formation of an imagined community. The imagined community is essential, for according to Fukuyama it "has to adopt common norms as a whole before trust can become generalized among its members." Social capital, affirms Fukuyama, "cannot be acquired simply by individuals acting on their own," since "it is based on the prevalence of social, rather than individual virtues." Thus, a weak imagined community is one that impedes spontaneous sociability, defined by Fukuyama as "the capacity to form new associations and to cooperate within the terms of reference they established." Based on our interviews, we found that the "terms of reference" are in many cases at odds with each other. The divergent "terms of reference," fostered within the in-groups, make it impossible for a teenager attending the Colegio Aleman in Medellin and one attending a public school in Bogota to conceptualize the same imagined community. The youths interviewed in Bogota noted the significance of partaking in collaborative academic activities in high school that enabled them to community with students from other parts of the country and from different socio-economic strata. One university student, currently at the Universidad Nacional noted that her path to university and her motivation to attend university was partly shaped by experiences like Model United Nations.

The information age presents a unique opportunity not only to reimagine the nation but to end many of the cultural hierarchies that impede the manner in which the individual vision of the nation resembles that of the collective. While Fukuyama notes that "a low trust society may never be able to take advantage of the efficiencies that information technology offers," information technology is capable of fostering mechanisms that enable the creation of social capital amongst the younger generations.

Fukuyama notes that "social capital… is usually created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like religion, tradition, or historical habit." By mobilizing information technology to foster social capital, the state and civil society organizations have an opportunity to create a historical habit that despite being a novelty, would seem to the younger generations as emanating from time immemorial. If employed to these ends, the information age offers a unique opportunity to shatter many of the cultural hierarchies that impede the re-imagining of the nation.

Fundación Corona can draw on Anderson's concept to help **re-imagine Colombia's national community** more inclusively. Rather than an abstract "imaginary nation" imposed from Bogotá, the goal is a shared identity built from the ground up, celebrating the country's many faces – mestizo and Afro-Colombian, urban and rural, indigenous and immigrant, costeño and llanero – as equally "Colombian." By leveraging cultural and civic strategies, this project seeks to transform Colombia's **"imagined community"** from a source of fragmentation into a foundation for reconciliation – a nation where all citizens can see themselves reflected, and thus commit to a shared future.

1. International Models and Lessons for Colombia

Colombia is not alone in grappling with how to build an inclusive national identity amid deep divisions. Several other nations – each with distinct histories – offer comparative models and cautionary tales. This section examines four cases (South Africa, Germany, Turkey, and Brazil) to extract concrete lessons relevant to Colombia's context:

1.1 South Africa: The "Rainbow Nation" & Post-Apartheid Inclusion

In the aftermath of apartheid's brutal racial hierarchy, South Africa embraced the metaphor of the "Rainbow Nation" to signal unity in diversity under democratic rule. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's vision was concretized by Nelson Mandela's government through a new multicolored flag, recognition of eleven official languages, and highly symbolic reconciliation gestures—most famously Mandela donning the Springboks rugby jersey at the 1995 Rugby World Cup to bridge historic racial divides. These symbolic acts

helped many Black South Africans feel, for the first time, that they truly belonged to their country rather than to an imposed hierarchy. Yet the failure to couple rhetoric with socioeconomic inclusion left glaring inequalities intact, prompting some to ask "whose freedom?" when poverty and unemployment remained skewed along racial lines. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission further illustrates the power of collective memory: by publicly airing testimonies of victims and perpetrators, the nation began to weave a shared narrative of suffering and forgiveness. For

Colombia, the key takeaway is two-fold: first, invest in highly visible symbols and rituals that broadcast inclusivity (language rights, national flag, cultural festivals); second, ensure that these gestures are accompanied by targeted policies—education, land reform, job creation—that tangibly close disparities among regions and groups. Only then can the "rainbow" narrative move beyond a hopeful slogan to a lived reality.

1.2 Germany: Constitutional Patriotism, Memory, and Reunification

Germany's post-World War II transformation offers another model: in rejecting the ethnic nationalism that fueled Nazism, West Germany pivoted to "constitutional patriotism," anchoring national belonging in shared democratic values rather than blood or heritage. This concept, championed by thinkers such as Dolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas, empowered Germans to rebuild pride in their republic's commitment to human rights, the rule of law, and pluralism. Reunification in 1990 tested these ideals, as East and West Germans confronted divergent lived experiences. Germany's approach combined large-scale investments in the former East—modernizing infrastructure, harmonizing institutions, and fostering municipal partnerships—with frank engagement in "Erinnerungskultur," or culture of remembrance. By memorializing the Holocaust and commemorating other injustices, Germans cultivated a humble patriotism centered on "never again," forging moral unity through shared historical accountability. The revision of citizenship laws in 1999 from jus sanguinis toward jus soli further opened the national community to immigrants, signaling that civic participation, not ancestry, defines Germanness.

For Colombia, this suggests that emphasizing the 1991 Constitution's pluralistic, democratic principles can serve as the ideological core of "Colombianness." Embedding transitional justice findings and memorial projects into school curricula, public monuments, and media campaigns will help Colombians of all backgrounds coalesce around a shared moral narrative. Concurrently, directing infrastructure, social services, and investment toward historically marginalized regions will demonstrate that the nation's principles apply equitably from Bogotá to the Pacific coast.

1.3 Turkey: Nation-Building, Homogenization, and Minority Exclusion

Turkey's early republic trajectory provides a cautionary lesson in how aggressively enforced homogeneity can backfire. In the 1920s, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk modernized and secularized the former Ottoman Empire by imposing one Turkish language, a unified education system, and a singular national identity. While these reforms succeeded in forging rapid cohesion, they did so at the cost of marginalizing Kurds, Armenians, and other non-Turkish groups, provoking enduring insurgencies and social cleavages. Kurdish language and culture were proscribed for decades, and minority voices were silenced in the name of national unity. Only under later pressure did Turkey begin to loosen restrictions on language broadcasting and cultural expression, but the legacy of exclusion persists. Turkey's experience teaches Colombia that nation-building efforts must avoid assimilationist impulses.

Colombia's constitution already recognizes dozens of Indigenous nations, Afro-descendant communities, and immigrant populations; practical implementation must ensure these groups retain autonomy over their languages, traditions, and governance structures. Incorporating minority histories into the national school curriculum, celebrating new holidays that honor Indigenous and Afro-Colombian cultures, and creating government advisory bodies with genuine decision-making power can embed diversity into the state's DNA. Moreover, Colombia should foster civic rituals, such as regional-exchange volunteer programs, that bring youth from disparate regions together, thus reinforcing unity without erasure. By contrast, any attempt to impose a

monolithic “Colombianidad” risks reproducing Turkey’s pattern of resentment and conflict.

1.4 Brazil: Unity in Diversity through Culture and Sports

Brazil’s storied tradition of celebrating mestiçagem, or racial mixing, demonstrates how popular culture and sports can integrate a vast, heterogeneous society. Over the twentieth century, football became a crucible of national pride as Pelé’s triumphs and the Seleção’s five World Cups united citizens across class and race. Carnival and musical genres such as samba and bossa nova likewise offered joyous, participatory rituals in which Black, Indigenous, and white Brazilians danced under a shared banner of “Brasilidade.” These cultural phenomena projected an image of “racial democracy” even as structural inequalities endured. In recent decades, Brazil has begun confronting the myth of harmonious mixing through affirmative action and public debate on racism, acknowledging that cultural unity must be backed by social reforms.

Colombia can mirror this blend of soft power and hard policy by amplifying its own icons—Afro-Colombian athletes, Indigenous artists, and regional cultural ambassadors—in national media campaigns and public ceremonies. A rotating “Festival of Colombian Cultures” could spotlight the Pacific coast one year, the Andean highlands the next, weaving a narrative that each region’s music, dance, and cuisine belong to every Colombian. Televised football clinics in underserved municipalities, streamed live across the country, can replicate Brazil’s shared moment of enthusiasm. Crucially, these celebratory events must run alongside targeted initiatives—anti-discrimination laws, equitable school funding, and land-title programs—to ensure that cultural visibility translates into genuine opportunity. In doing so, Colombia can cultivate a pride that is as inclusive as Brazil’s ideal of unity in diversity, yet anchored in the reality of reducing regional and racial disparities.

Strengthening the imagined community in Colombia can lay the foundation for deeper social cohesion by fostering a shared national identity that transcends regional, ethnic, and class divisions. As Benedict Anderson argues, nations are built not on face-to-face interactions but on a collective sense of belonging among strangers. When

individuals begin to see themselves as part of a common narrative, it creates the conditions for what Francis Fukuyama calls spontaneous sociability—the natural inclination to cooperate, organize, and engage with others outside one's immediate circle. This sociability is essential for building trust, which in turn enables more inclusive political participation, reduces polarization, and strengthens the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Crucially, when people feel connected to a broader national project and believe their voice matters within it, they are more likely to take part in democratic processes—most fundamentally, by going out to vote.

2. Sports and Arts as Vehicles for Democratic Cohesion

Why should sports and the arts occupy center stage in Colombia's quest for an inclusive national identity? Abstract political debates often fail to penetrate the daily lives and emotions of citizens, whereas shared cultural activities—playing on a team, performing together, or collectively experiencing a work of art—engage people at a deeper, affective level. In societies emerging from conflict and long-standing divisions, these domains provide neutral, low-stakes arenas where individuals from disparate backgrounds can meet as peers rather than adversaries, forging bonds of empathy, trust, and cooperation. Insights from behavioral science and political psychology confirm that such positive intergroup contact, structured around common goals and collaborative rituals, reduces prejudice and lays the groundwork for durable social cohesion.

2.1 Sports as a Unifier and Peacebuilding Tool

Sports possess a near-universal appeal and a unique power to transcend linguistic, class, and historical barriers through the shared joy of play and competition. At their core, sports programs instantiate the four conditions identified by social psychologists as critical for reducing intergroup bias: (1) cooperative pursuit of shared goals, (2) equal status among participants, (3) sustained interpersonal interaction, and (4) endorsement by authorities and norms. Imagine a teenager from a former FARC-controlled village and a youth from an affluent Bogotá neighborhood wearing the same jersey, striving together to win a football match. In that moment, team allegiance eclipses prior prejudices; their collaborative effort rewires social categories from "us versus them" to "we."

On the community level, carefully designed sporting initiatives create environments in which participants must coordinate strategies, respect each other's skills, and share resources. Physical gestures—high-fives after a goal, supportive huddles—foster non-verbal trust anchored in neurobiological mechanisms such as endorphin release and oxytocin-mediated bonding. These embodied interactions often penetrate deeper than dialogue alone, humanizing "the other" in ways that words cannot. PeacePlayers International's mixed-race basketball leagues in South Africa, for instance, demonstrated measurable reductions in racial stereotypes and increased cross-group friendships among youth.

Beyond grassroots programs, national and international sporting successes offer highly visible, emotionally charged moments of unity. Historical examples abound: during Côte d'Ivoire's civil war, qualification for the 2006 World Cup helped broker a brief ceasefire, as players appealed for peace and citizens rallied behind a shared aspiration. In Colombia, the golden era of Valderrama and Asprilla in the 1990s similarly provided collective relief from violence, forging positive memories that transcended political fault lines. To harness this potential, Colombia should invest in sports diplomacy—supporting national teams, celebrating regional talents, and staging high-profile matches in former conflict zones. Such events not only reinforce collective pride but also signal the state's commitment to unity in practice, not just in rhetoric.

Crucially, integrating educational components into sports programs amplifies their peacebuilding impact. After-action dialogues led by trained coaches can guide teams to reflect on how on-field cooperation parallels democratic participation off the field—negotiating differences, resolving conflicts, and honoring shared rules of fair play. Empirical studies from conflict transformation contexts confirm that coupling physical activity with structured reflection deepens attitude change and enhances empathy. By blending play with pedagogy, Colombia can cultivate a generation of citizens who internalize democratic norms through lived experience.

2.2 Arts, Culture and Narrative for Social Cohesion

Arts and culture engage hearts and minds in ways that reshape group identities by surfacing marginalized voices, fostering empathy, and reweaving Colombia's national

tapestry with threads from every region and ethnicity. Whether through community murals in former conflict zones, theater productions that dramatize the experiences of displaced families, or participatory music workshops, the arts facilitate perspective-taking and build social tolerance. UNESCO research links arts education to greater openness and civic engagement, while memory art—murals, music therapy, exhibitions—provides communal spaces for trauma healing and moral reflection. Neutral cultural gatherings, such as traveling festivals that bring together ex-combatants, victims, and rural artisans, lower psychological defenses by positioning participants as co-creators rather than adversaries, catalyzing genuine human connection where formal negotiations might falter.

At the national level, deliberately amplifying Colombia's cultural diversity—showcasing Indigenous oral traditions, Afro-Colombian music and dance, and regional crafts in mainstream media, museums, and prime-time programming—signals that belonging does not require assimilation but celebrates mosaic identities. Storytelling through film, literature, and digital platforms can counter "us vs. them" tropes by projecting new narratives of inter-ethnic solidarity, much like *Invictus* did for South Africa. Behavioral science further suggests that synchronized creative activities—group singing, percussion circles, nationwide concerts—release bonding neurochemicals, making mass cultural events powerful accelerators of shared identity. Together, these arts-based strategies cultivate the empathy, trust, and moral imagination essential for a cohesive, democratic Colombia.

Pillar II: Constructing a Democratic Learning Ecosystem

Although increasing voter turnout is one of the project's objectives, our field research indicates that the sustainability and deepening of democracy in Colombia requires far more than simply encouraging electoral participation. As Alejandra Barrios from Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE) observes, a more pressing challenge lies in how to meaningfully enhance political engagement, especially among marginalized groups and youth. In response, building a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable ecosystem for political learning and engagement emerges as a critical priority. Interviews with civic organization staff, community leaders, and youth in Bogotá, Cali, Buenaventura, and

Barranquilla consistently highlighted the widespread perception of voting as a "ritual without consequence." One young community leader in Buenaventura shared: "I voted once, nothing changed, so I don't see the point anymore." Another interviewee in Bogotá noted that civic engagement should not be "reduced to a one-day event every four years," calling for continuous democratic learning.

Based on interviews conducted in four Colombian cities, we found that many citizens view the political system as "unreadable," experience persistent psychological alienation, and lack the digital and civic literacy necessary for informed participation. This sentiment was echoed by an interviewee Buenaventura who described politics as "a language we were never taught to speak." These findings point to the urgent need for a strategic and systemic response. In this context, constructing a Democratic Learning Ecosystem is not merely about voter education, it is about cultivating political agency, rebuilding institutional trust, and enhancing democratic resilience across all levels of society. This pillar aims to diagnose the structural roots of disengagement and to articulate why such an ecosystem is necessary for reversing Colombia's democratic decline.

Despite having a formal institutional framework, Colombia's democratic practice suffers from deep fragmentation and entrenched localism, which significantly erode citizens' sense of political belonging at the national level. One key cause is the hyper-fragmentation of the party system, which makes it difficult for the media to clearly communicate political platforms or policy debates. As one civic organization leader in Cali put it, "We tell youth to participate, but even adults can't make sense of the choices." Voters often confront ballots featuring more than ten parties, creating confusion and a perception of incoherence. This complexity makes it harder to distinguish candidates or agendas, weakening motivation to engage. The impact is particularly pronounced among youth. Several interviewees in Buenaventura who had some connection with the Youth Councils (Consejos de Juventud) admitted that they "didn't know who to go to" or "what the Council is supposed to do." Even those in formal participatory structures often lack clarity on their roles, responsibilities, or institutional leverage, highlighting the broader institutional failure to provide guidance, feedback, and capacity-building. Meanwhile, the global contraction of civic space, most notably reflected in reduced funding for civic

initiatives, has also affected Colombia, shrinking opportunities for state-society interaction and reinforcing public detachment from democratic processes.

Colombia's political system further induces psychological alienation. Among youth, the group most central to this project, two dynamics are especially notable. First, young people are frequently infantilized in public discourse and treated as politically immature. This delegitimizes their civic contributions and impedes the formation of political identity. One youth leader from Buenaventura remarked: "They ask us to participate, but when we do, they say we are too young to understand." Another interviewee described, "We are like disconnected islands within society." Even youth who occupy representative positions often feel unsure of how to act within institutional frameworks, what another participant referred to as being "included but not truly empowered." Second, there exists a generalized atmosphere of mistrust. As one young interviewee in Buenaventura stated, "It doesn't matter who wins, corruption wins anyway." This pervasive cynicism, rooted in systemic dysfunction and information asymmetry, contributes to widespread apathy.

Compounding this sense of alienation is a widespread cognitive deficit in political understanding. Several interviewees pointed out that Colombia lacks a coherent political education system. One academic in Bogotá noted that students graduate from school "without ever reading the Constitution or knowing what a mayor actually does." As a result, many citizens have little knowledge of how political institutions function or how to participate meaningfully. They are also frequently overwhelmed by a chaotic information environment, which blurs the lines between facts and misinformation. This confusion leads to a loss of orientation and trust. Polarized media further exacerbate the problem by reducing complex political issues into ideologically charged soundbites, which stifles public comprehension. Alejandro Sanchez Lopez De Mesa, a political science professor at Universidad Javeriana Cali, emphasized that civic understanding could be enhanced through open data platforms, digital tools for engagement, and community-based media ecosystems that support informed public discourse.

In sum, Colombia's democratic challenges stem not just from low voter turnout but from the intersection of institutional, psychological, and epistemic barriers to participation. To address these challenges, a long-term structural approach is needed, one that builds a Democratic Learning Ecosystem capable of embedding political learning into

the fabric of daily life. This ecosystem must extend beyond electoral cycles to integrate educational institutions, public administration, civil society, and national policymaking. Only through such an approach can Colombia nurture a democratic culture that is inclusive, resilient, and capable of evolving with the needs of its people. Concretely, this ecosystem should incorporate tiered systems of democratic participation tailored to the needs of students, public officials, and the broader citizenry, ensuring that all segments of society have the knowledge, tools, and opportunities to participate meaningfully in public life.

Pillar III: Reimagining Tech Solutions

Through direct discussions with actors from both the public sector, the private sector and civil society organizations such Buenaventura Cómo Vamos, Foro Occidente, and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)—it has become increasingly clear that technological solutions alone are insufficient when implemented without a nuanced understanding of human behavior. As behavioral science has long emphasized, sustainable policy solutions require deep insight into the root causes of behavioral patterns. For example, to improve voter turnout or civic engagement, it is not enough to create digital tools; it is critical to first understand why citizens choose not to register to vote, attend polls, or participate in civic initiatives, even when incentives are in place.

In recent years, civil society leaders have responded to the challenge of democratic disengagement by developing a variety of digital tools: data hubs for tracking policy gaps, civic education platforms, and app-based fact-checkers. While well-intentioned and often innovative, many of these tools fall short in terms of long-term impact. For instance, fact-checking platforms can be expensive to maintain and may fail to reach audiences most vulnerable to disinformation.

Angela Rodriguez, Director of NIMD, remarked that within her organization, they often refer to their efforts in technological innovation as "failing ahead"—a phrase that reflects both the inevitability of setbacks and the limited lasting effects of these tools. Her candid assessment underscores a broader truth: while technology is undeniably

transforming the democratic landscape, it cannot substitute for foundational reform. Advancements in technology have profoundly reshaped the democratic process, offering both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges. Digital platforms have democratized access to information, enabling citizens to engage in political discourse and mobilize for causes with greater ease. Social media platforms, for instance, have become pivotal in organizing protests and facilitating real-time political discussions, as seen in movements like #BlackLivesMatter and the tax reform protests in Colombia in 2021. Additionally, online government initiatives have improved transparency and citizen participation by providing online access to government services and information. (Asimakopoulos, 2025)

However, these technological advancements also present significant challenges. The proliferation of misinformation, often amplified by algorithms prioritizing engagement over accuracy, has eroded public trust in democratic institutions. Deepfake technologies and AI-generated content further complicate the landscape by enabling the creation of realistic but misleading information. (Financial Times, 2025) Moreover, the concentration of power among a few tech giants raises concerns about surveillance, data privacy, and the manipulation of public opinion. (Kirschschläger, 2024)

In light of these dynamics, it's imperative to recognize that while technology can enhance democratic engagement, it also necessitates thoughtful regulation and ethical considerations to ensure it serves the public good. As we move forward, fostering a digital environment that upholds democratic values requires a balanced approach that embraces innovation while safeguarding against its potential misuse.

Leaders like Dr. Juan Carlos Galindo of Fundación Colombia 2050 are optimistic about the role technology can play in expanding democratic participation. As Dr. Galindo noted in our interview, technology enables new forms of civic engagement, widening access to political discourse beyond traditional mechanisms like in-person voting. However, this expanded access is a double-edged sword. The same tools that amplify citizen voices can also be exploited by foreign interference campaigns, bots, and malicious actors intent on spreading disinformation. As such, strengthening Colombia’s digital

democracy requires building online spaces that are both inclusive and resilient to manipulation.

This is where regulation becomes critical. As Dr. Galindo and others have suggested, Colombians must be empowered not only to participate in the digital era but to shape it. That includes demanding greater accountability from powerful private tech firms such as Meta and Google. These entities should not be perceived as operating beyond the reach of national law. Thoughtful, democratic regulation, modeled on global best practices, can help ensure that tech platforms serve public interests rather than undermine them.

Locally, the challenges are just as urgent. Professor Alejandro Sanchez Lopez de Mesa of Javeriana University in Cali praised initiatives like Cali Cómo Vamos and the broader Cómo Vamos network, as well as the work of the Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE). These organizations have improved democratic transparency by equipping citizens with data and accessible political analysis. According to Professor Sanchez Lopez de Mesa, digital tools must play a role in rebuilding public trust, combating misinformation, and reinforcing the connection between citizens and their government. But this work requires more than tools, it requires sustained support.

Similarly, Joaquín Gregorio Tovar, Director of Fundación Foro Nacional por Colombia - Regional del Valle del Cauca, stressed the need to foster dialogue and counteract polarizing narratives. As with many civil society actors, he emphasized that the task of building trust and promoting democratic accountability is too large to be managed by isolated efforts. Moreover, while digital tools can be valuable, their utility is often constrained by limited reach and resource scarcity. Buenaventura Cómo Vamos Director, Amin Sinisterra, noted that while their data is accessed globally, it often fails to reach the very communities most affected by local governance decisions. This disconnect highlights a critical resource gap. Direct investment in civic education programs, particularly those designed to help citizens understand and act on public data, would ensure that information collected at great cost is translated into meaningful engagement at the local level.

However, merely injecting resources into existing platforms will not address the root problems. For example, despite increased interest in fact-checking tools, their scalability is limited, and their long-term sustainability remains in question. Without complementary reforms to political institutions and the broader media ecosystem, these tools risk becoming yet another set of well-intentioned but short-lived experiments. Angela Rodriguez aptly observed that while everyone acknowledges the need for reform, there is "never a good time" to initiate it, especially in a country with frequent electoral cycles. Yet, these conversations reflect a consensus: reform is overdue. For Colombia's democracy to thrive in the digital age, structural change is necessary. Change that extends beyond the creation of apps and data dashboards, is necessary.

Pillar IV: Youth Engagement

As alluded to above, every effort to improve Colombian society needs to include a consideration of the youth involved both due to the significance of their current role and due to the significance they will play as time passes and they take even more decisive roles in Colombia. All of these efforts should meet every subset of Colombia's population where they are now, but this is especially true for the youth subset, who have their own unique concerns and challenges. The imagined society should include components directed at including youth into this imagined society and ensuring their perspectives influence its development and growth. Civic education efforts should take into consideration what sources of information the youth are accessing and how they can be encouraged to consume and internalize civic education. Tech solutions should be tied to the technology young people are currently using and be suited to their individual contexts as they vary around the country.

Colombia is at a unique moment in its political history, simultaneously grappling with decades of disillusionment and low trust in politics and with many groups that have historically felt left out and disenfranchised or even persecuted now seeing new opportunities. One observation that came up in meetings with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and with youth leaders in Buenaventura was that youth are not a monolithic group, and that they are not necessarily disinterested in politics, but rather many are increasingly engaged and are voting in greater numbers each election.

Countering these stereotypes both encourages youth to engage and increases the consideration they receive from decision makers. While many youth may be moving out of their parents' homes relatively later, limiting some of their traditional engagement with politics, this does not mean they are unreachable. Too many approaches see youth as an obstacle or unemployment 'time bomb' rather than as a complex group of people with agency who present Colombia with an opportunity to evolve in new unimagined ways.

In line with Fundacion Corona's current guiding principles 2 and 3 (catalyzers and missionary), innovative solutions to youth related problems will revolve around involving youth themselves in process design and ensuring sustainable structures to ensure youth power and role models are maintained in the long run. The concept of youth role models was suggested in meetings with Fundacion Bolivar Davivienda, with youth leaders in Buenaventura, and in general behavioral science literature. Supporting youth as role models allows them to serve as an alternative to the common role models youth are purported to have (drug dealers and people with large social media followings) and ensures that as much of their complexity and diversity is represented in decision making and politics as possible. Youth have to be given role models so they can view themselves in alternative contexts and then actually be provided access to those alternative opportunities in order to encourage them to pursue engagement in politics and integration into Colombian society.

In terms of including youth in program design and decision making, Colombia is clearly making progress especially since the 2018 reform to the Statute of Youth Citizenship and the creation of Youth councils and representatives. This is one prominent example of engaging youth and building bottom up and horizontal mechanisms rather than simply top-down ones, but not the only one. At smaller scales, government and non-governmental organizations need to employ more youth and on an even more simple scale, need to include data on youth in their programs. As a part of their 'Don't Throw Away Your Vote' campaign, Fundacion Foro Suroccidente designs their social media efforts based on the comments on their previous posts and the knowledge gaps and misconceptions they reveal. They first tested this approach out with a few small youth organizations before scaling it up. Fundacion Foro Suroccidente also promotes non-traditional forms of engagement such as peaceful protest that youth have more direct influence over and contributes to the integration of partial participation into their

lifestyles. The research team witnessed the power of protest first hand in Buenaventura, where thousands of young people participated in a protest tied to President Petro's call for mobilization for national service regulations.

Amidst this, there is still a significant knowledge vacuum, especially in places like Buenaventura, where some young people have 'political blindness' and are unaware of who is representing them, what to expect from them, and how to hold them accountable or get more engaged. Bad actors can take advantage of these knowledge vacuums and manipulate youth either through vote buying, disinformation, or other mechanisms to re-direct youth political engagement in ways that doesn't benefit youth or Colombia. Social media presents both a challenge and an enormous opportunity, as it is a platform for misinformation and distraction and also provides so much data for how youth are engaging and can serve as a mechanism to reach out to them via a medium they're already choosing to use. Positive social media engagement and the amplification of youth role models offer encouraging mechanisms to combat the misinformation and negative stereotypes that are currently being amplified. They Identifying and messaging the perspectives of young people outwards and upwards to their peers and in-group members around Colombia and to politicians and other decision makers serves two main purposes. First, it spreads awareness of how young people can engage constructively and encourages them to do so. Second, it provides opportunities for more direct communication between citizens and governments as espoused in Fundacion Corona's Participa+ Model of Citizen Involvement. Making progress in this area would allow Fundacion Corona to shift the mental models that persist in Colombia about youth, the government, and political information in a more positive direction.

Part III: Recommendations and Implementations

Recommendation I: The Establishment of National Constitution Bee

In light of the limited awareness of the political process, the structure of the government and the functioning of the constitution, we recommend the establishment of a National Constitution Bee, modeled after the National Constitution Bee in the United States. The nationwide competition is designed to educate and engage young citizen sin the foundational principles of Colombian democracy, and a unique forum for youths from around the country to engage on a common project. This initiative, with the goal of enhancing human capital, promoting spontaneous sociability, and building common images to enhanced the Imagined Community, has the potential to foster civic awareness, promote critical thinking, and nurture a new generation of informed and active citizens. By deepening understanding of the rights and responsibilities enshrined in the Colombian Constitution of 1991, the competition will empower young citizens to become active participants in shaping their communities and nation.

The competition will be structured in three main stages based on locality. First, competition will be held at the municipal level, ensuring broad access and representation and ensuring that all communities in the country have an opportunity to participate. The winners of the municipal competition will then advance to the state competition. Finally, the winners of the state competition will advance to the final round which will be held in Bogota.

To ensure fairness, all participants will be provided with the same preparatory resources via an online platform. These resources will include reading materials, videos by political scientists on the constitutions, videos by politicians on how the principles of the constitution manifest in the political process and videos from civil society members on how the Constitution plays a role in advancing the rights of individuals and groups. Because of core principle of the competition is inclusivity, special emphasis will be placed on recruiting participants from disadvantaged communities and steps ought to be taken

to eliminate barriers to entry. The advantage of the online platform to prepare is that it would give students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds an equal opportunity.

To fund the competition at all levels, it is recommended that Fundacion Corona establishes partnerships with the private sector. The private sector can collaborate in the form of funding the venues, giving the judges and the participants a stipend for participating, and establishing scholarships for those that win. By investing in this initiative, the private sector would be investing in the future of Colombian democracy and in the development of human capital.

Implementation I

Fundacion Corona can leverage its credibility, history, and institutional capacity by being the lead implementing organization of the project. This would require that Fundacion Corona coordinate with academia, the private sector, stakeholders at the local, regional, and national level.

Phase 1: Planning

Establish a National Coordinating Committee comprised of members of Fundacion Corona, academia, and private sector partners. Academia, as a stakeholder, will contribute by preparing reading materials, videos, and other resources to be made available in the Colombia National Constitution Bee website.

Phase 2: Regional Partners Coordination

Coordinate with regional and local partners to implement organizational logistics and outreach. Corona, will identify the partners at the local and regional level that are capable of carrying out the competition with the standards and the materials supplied by the National Coordinating Committee.

Phase 3: Implement

Recommendation II: The Establishment of a Scout Program Centered on Civic Education

Modeled on the American and European Scouts programs for young children and young adults, this initiative is designed to bring together youths from diverse regions and socio-economic backgrounds Colombia, providing them with shared experiences and educational tools that promote democracy, problem solving, dialogue, common images about what it means to be a Colombian, and a sense of common national destiny. The program will be funded by the private sector, which will see investing in such initiatives as a way to give back to the community, a mechanism to foster spontaneous sociability and build social capital, and a means to invest in the country's human capital development. The private sector ought to be cognizant that fostering social cohesion is a driver for long-term economic stability and growth.

This Scouts program seeks to respond to the rigid socio-economic divisions that manifest in deeply exclusionary social structures. Children from different economic backgrounds typically attend disparate school systems and rarely interact in meaningful, sustained ways. These conditions foster in-group biases and limit the development of spontaneous sociability, social capital, and a national identity rooted in a shared sense of common destiny and purpose. This scouts program will respond to these challenges by offering an inclusive, extracurricular space where teenage youth can step outside their in-group bubbles and build relationships grounded in common goals, civic values, and collective learning.

The program will be divided into two components, a in-person component and an online platform component. Applicants that demonstrate interest in the program will first register in an online platform and complete a series of modules to demonstrate true interest in the program. Following these modules, the applicants will be formally asked to join in-person scouting activities hosted in secure spaces in regions throughout the country. Implementation of the in-person activities component will be left to regional partners on the ground to best implement. Some regions will present greater challenges than others, especially concerning security.

The in-person activities will blend traditional scouting activities, such as team-based challenges and community service, with a civic education curriculum that will be

formulated by educators. Recommended topics will include collaborative activities that foster trust, democratic participation, rights and responsibilities, the significant of the local government, and conflict resolution. These face-to face experiences seek to build spontaneous sociability, empathy, and collaboration among participants from varied regions and socio-economic backgrounds.

To complement the in-person activities, the website first used to complete preparatory modules will serve as a platform where scouts can continue their learning journey. This website will feature interactive civic education modules, group forums, mentorship opportunities, and mechanisms by which to inform scouts of the significant events happening inside Colombia and around the world. The website will also serve as a meeting point for scouts, promoting sustained engagement beyond physical meetings and allowing for broader inter-regional connections.

To ensure equal access, the program, including the acquisition of scouting supplies and uniforms, ought to be financed through partnerships with the private sector. Colombian and multinational corporations operating within Colombia should support the initiative as part of their social investment strategies, recognizing that a more cohesive, civically educated youth population contributes directly to the development of a stable, skilled workforce and a healthier society.

Implementation II

Phase 1: Planning

The initial phase ought to focus on foundational planning and curriculum design. A National Coordinating Committee should be established composed of educators, civic leaders, and representatives of existing scouting communities from within Colombia and outside Colombia. This group will be responsible for developing the civic education curriculum, the online modules, ensuring it is contextually relevant, inclusive, and engaging for teenagers.

Concurrently, a private sector engagement strategy ought to be launched to secure funding and long-term sponsorship. This will involve targeted outreach to major Colombian businesses and multinational companies with local operations, presenting the program as an investment in social cohesion and development of human capital.

Phase 2: Ground Base Development

This phase should focus on building the physical and organizational infrastructure of the program. Fundacion Corona can work with local partners to identify local actors willing to implement the program at the local level and to establish chapters. Each chapter ought to be led by trained coordinators operating under the framework established by the National Coordinating Committee. A tiered leadership model ought to be created, including local scout leaders and regional supervisors to enable efficient coordination. While it would be necessary to hire full time personnel, the number of full time personnel should be kept low, while at the same time relying on working professionals or college students that engage part-time or volunteer their time.

Phase 3: Pilot Programs Implementation

Begin by launching pilot programs in a small number of cities. The program can be advertised in local supermarkets, malls, or partner companies that are visited by parents of the targeted populations (youths).

Recommendation III: Unidos Por El Futbol— A National Youth Soccer Initiative for Social Cohesion in Colombia

Unidos por el Fútbol is a strategic initiative designed to directly support the strengthening of democracy in Colombia by fostering social cohesion and trust among youth through the unifying power of soccer. In a country where deep regional, ethnic, and socio-economic divisions often undermine national solidarity and political participation, soccer offers a rare and powerful common ground. It is a deeply rooted cultural symbol that transcends identity boundaries and evokes a shared sense of pride and belonging. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's concept of the "imagined community," the program uses soccer as a space where young Colombians—from urban centers, rural villages, and marginalized communities—can see themselves as part of a larger national collective. These shared experiences help cultivate a common identity, reducing the social fragmentation that weakens democratic life.

At the core of the program is the promotion of what Francis Fukuyama calls "spontaneous sociability"—the informal, voluntary interactions between individuals that generate trust outside of rigid institutional structures. Through mixed football teams, tournaments, and training programs, *Unidos por el Fútbol* creates opportunities for youth to cooperate, compete, and build relationships across traditional divides. These experiences foster mutual understanding and empathy, helping to bridge social gaps and generate interpersonal and community-level trust. Trust, in turn, is a critical precondition for democracy: it makes citizens more likely to engage constructively with one another, more willing to participate in political processes, and more confident in the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

The logic is simple but powerful—when people trust one another and feel part of a shared national project, they are more likely to vote, more open to pluralism, and more committed to the democratic process. *Unidos por el Fútbol* leverages this dynamic by using soccer to build the social foundations necessary for a stable, participatory democracy. By privately funding this initiative, Colombian businesses also play a vital role in reinforcing democratic resilience, supporting community well-being, and investing in long-term national stability. This is not merely a sports program—it is a civic infrastructure project, one that uses the most beloved national pastime to generate the social capital and trust that democracy fundamentally depends on.

Program Components:

Organized leagues will be launched in major cities and towns, where teams are intentionally mixed to include players from various socio-economic contexts. These teams will train weekly and compete in local tournaments. Coaches ought to foster team-building and facilitate activities that build trust. To achieve this, coaches themselves ought to be trained and supplied with a package of activities to implement.

In addition to playing football, teams will engage in community service activities and leadership workshops. This component seeks to foster the idea that beyond the football field is a world that these teenagers can engage once they reach adulthood and to prepare them for such tasks.

A digital platform ought to be integrated in which teenagers can stay connected, access life-skills content, mentorship, and educational resources. To ensure inclusivity and equal access, the private sector ought to fund this program, guaranteeing that uniforms and other necessities are accessible regardless of socio-economic background.

Implementation III

Phase 1: Program Design and Partnerships

Fundacion Corona has a plethora of national partners that can take ownership of this project and implement it. To begin, a main Coordinating Committee should be established to agree on the program framework and build foundational partnerships.

The design of the framework should include coaches, teachers, and sports groups representatives, and experts on the field of social cohesion. These professionals ought to develop league formats, training guides, and inclusion protocols to ensure balanced team composition across socio-economic lines. Simultaneously, the members of the Coordinating Committee shall work to establish partnerships with national, regional, and local private businesses, local governments, schools, community centers to identify what each can contribute to the project.

Phase 2: Pilot Program Implementation

The program should first be implemented in two major cities, ideally in the Pacific and Caribbean regions.

Phase 3: Regional Rollout

Following successful implementation in the Pacific and Caribbean regions, the program should be expanded nationwide.

Recommendation IV: Institutionalizing Civic Education-certification

This project recommends institutionalizing civic education by systematically integrating it into Colombia's national education system, spanning lower secondary, upper secondary, and tertiary levels. At the lower secondary level (grades 6–8), civic

education should be incorporated into subjects such as social studies and ethics to cultivate foundational civic knowledge and values. At the upper secondary level (grades 9–11), dedicated courses should focus on democratic institutions, civil rights, and public responsibilities. At the tertiary level, civic education should be reinforced through general education and elective courses in disciplines such as political science, constitutional law, and public administration. The curriculum should cover essential topics, including democratic values, electoral systems, media literacy, and civic duties, and be adapted to reflect Colombia's diverse regional social and cultural contexts, ensuring both relevance and inclusivity. Upon completion of the respective courses, students should be awarded certificates or digital badges to formally recognize their achievements and incentivize sustained civic engagement.

Field interviews indicate that several Colombian cities and regions have already implemented various forms of civic education, with some programs accumulating over a decade of experience. However, significant disparities persist in content, quality, and availability across regions and between public and private schools. A cohesive national framework is currently lacking. To address this gap, the project proposes that the national government develop a relatively standardized set of curricular benchmarks and implementation guidelines to ensure educational quality, equity, and sustainability nationwide. While establishing a consistent foundation, the framework should also allow for local adaptation, enabling Colombia to scale up and deepen civic education in a balanced and context-sensitive manner.

Implementation IV: Institutionalizing Civic Education

Fundación Corona can leverage its Model of Citizen Involvement Participa+ to support the nationwide institutionalization of civic education in Colombia. The following four components are recommended:

1. Curriculum Development

Submit policy recommendations to the Ministry of Education advocating for the creation of a national civic education curriculum framework. Fundación Corona can

collaborate with its partner civic organizations to conduct regional diagnostics, ensuring the curriculum is adaptable to local social and cultural contexts.

2. Teacher Training

Partner with educational institutions at Lower Secondary (grades 6-9), Upper Secondary (grades 10-11), and Higher Education (including university) to design and deliver workshops that equip educators with the necessary tools and pedagogical methods. Pilot programs should be launched in selected regions to refine content and delivery models prior to nationwide implementation.

3. Resource Development

Develop and distribute standardized teaching materials, including textbooks and digital content, to support civic education at both secondary and tertiary levels. Core topics should include democratic values, electoral systems, media literacy, and civic responsibilities.

4. Engagement Activities

Fundación Corona can also organize democratic knowledge-based competitions. Winners may receive certificates or badges, and exceptional participants could be selected as candidates for the youth role model network described in Pillar IV.

Recommendation V: Establishing a Public Sector Leadership and Ethics Development System

To enhance the governance capacity and public responsibility of civil servants at all levels, we recommend establishing an institutionalized, non-partisan, and sustainable Public Leadership and Ethics Development System, dedicated specifically to serving public officials currently in office. This system should consist of two core components:

First, the creation of experience-sharing platforms, enabling public officials across different institutions and administrative levels to exchange practical knowledge, share case studies, and learn from each other across regions and sectors. These platforms would

promote collective learning and policy co-creation, ultimately improving inter-agency coordination and the quality of public service delivery.

Second, the implementation of systematic ethics and values-based training, covering key topics such as integrity, inclusive governance, policy transparency, public communication, and accountability mechanisms. These trainings should guide public officials to uphold honesty, fairness, and service orientation in their daily responsibilities, helping to cultivate a public administration that citizens can trust.

This development system could be implemented in partnership with institutions such as the Escuela Superior de Administración Pública (ESAP), and should be embedded in Colombia's governance structure as a long-term initiative, independent of electoral cycles. In doing so, it would support the professionalization of the civil service and contribute to restoring public trust in state institutions.

Implementation V

Drawing on its experience in public governance and leadership development, Fundación Corona can support the establishment of a national Public Leadership and Ethics Development System through the following actions:

First, policy advocacy. Prepare a policy report advocating for the creation of a nationwide Public Leadership and Ethics Development System, aimed at enhancing the ethical standards and institutional capacities of civil servants currently in office.

Second, strategic partnerships. Collaborate with organizations such as the Escuela Superior de Administración Pública (ESAP) and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) to jointly design platforms for experience-sharing and co-develop ethics training modules. These programs should be piloted in selected public institutions and scaled up based on evaluation outcomes and institutional feedback.

Recommendation VI: Promoting Media Literacy Education

In the digital era, misinformation significantly undermines democratic participation by distorting civic reasoning and decision-making. This project recommends the establishment of a nationwide media literacy education initiative targeting all citizens, especially digital platform users. In a landscape defined by information overload, algorithmic bias, and politicized narratives, individuals are increasingly vulnerable to misleading content and emotional manipulation.

Building citizens' capacity to critically assess the credibility of information, detect manipulative framing, and make informed political judgments is essential to safeguarding democratic discourse. Media literacy must therefore go beyond fact-checking; it must foster long-term cognitive resilience, emotional awareness, and a shared civic ethic for truth and pluralism.

In this regard, collaboration with existing initiatives such as the Detox Information Project (DIP) can be instrumental. DIP uses behavioral science, digital tools, and communication strategies to identify psychological risk factors, such as distrust, perceived discrimination, and low tolerance for ambiguity, that make citizens more susceptible to misinformation. DIP's application of inoculation theory and psychological testing has demonstrated measurable success in reducing vulnerability to misinformation by up to 30%. Integrating these tested approaches into Colombia's civic education strategy would strengthen media resilience across diverse demographic groups.

Implementation VI

To support this recommendation, Fundación Corona can take the following actions:

First, knowledge integration. Collaborate with the Detox Information Project to incorporate behavioral insights and tested digital tools (e.g., short videos, diagnostic personality tests) into a scalable national media literacy program. These tools should be adapted for schools, universities, and public communication campaigns.

Second, community outreach. Coordinate with local civic organizations to organize public workshops, discussion forums, and social experiments that promote critical thinking and reflexive media consumption habits. These efforts should especially target vulnerable populations identified in DIP's research.

Third, curriculum development. In coordination with the aforementioned civic education efforts, support the design of a structured media literacy curriculum that addresses psychological vulnerabilities, emotional triggers in media, algorithmic biases, and disinformation strategies. This curriculum should be adaptable to different age groups and educational settings, ensuring relevance across diverse learning environments.

Recommendation VII: Establish an Information Base for Technological Solutions (Recommendation For: Fundacion Corona and Partners)

Implementation VII

Embed technology in a broader framework of political reform, institutional accountability, and civic empowerment. Overly technical solutions risk treating symptoms rather than causes. Coordinate a national strategy—one that combines regulatory reform, investment in civic infrastructure, and behaviorally-informed policy to create a democratic system that is inclusive, resilient, and fit for the digital era. This recommendation is formulated in light of comments from partners during research interviews conducted in March. Due to comments about the ineffectiveness of technological solutions, request data from partners on the implementation and application of technical solutions to document successes, failures, and unexpected outcomes. Within this database, create clear guidelines regarding how and when to use tech solutions. This information should include both quantitative outcomes and qualitative feedback, capturing successes, failures, and any unexpected results.

Establish a centralized database that not only documents past experiences but also serves as a strategic resource to guide the implementation of innovative tools. The database should include standardized guidelines that clarify best practices for deploying technological tools, including criteria for when and how to use them effectively. These guidelines should be developed collaboratively to ensure they reflect the diverse contexts and needs of partner organizations.

Prioritize funding according to standards outlined in the database. Funding decisions should be closely tied to the insights derived from this information base. Projects with demonstrated potential for impact, scalability, and alignment with pre-established success factors should be prioritized. This approach ensures that technological interventions are not only innovative but also grounded in evidence and practical experience.

Recommendation VIII: Support a National Digital Trust Infrastructure (Recommendation For: Fundacion Corona and Partners)

Implementation VIII

Over the long term, plan to move away from developing new apps or extensions that provide temporary solutions to social issues like misinformation. Various stakeholders claim that trying to offer new technological solutions is asinine. With fact checking applications, like GatoChequeador, substantial resources are required to combat misinformation. Given the unsustainable nature of these tools, we recommend a pivot towards regulation and reform.

1. Make the Platforms Do the Work

Address the root causes of disinformation, disillusionment with democratic process and other factors leading to decreased trust in the political system. Large platforms have an underrepresented role to play in fracturing trust in democratic systems. Rather than developing and replicating tools to address symptoms of poor regulation on social media platforms, support regulation.

Create a coalition of organizations, thought leaders, and influential stakeholders advocating for big tech regulation. Advocate by sharing the benefits across industries and political ideologies of creating a safe, fact-based, online experience. Advocate for transparent algorithms, increased content moderation, and funding for journalists.

Put political pressure on Big Tech to make changes: Colombia is a reputable democracy with great influence in the region. Colombia has the political power and regional reputation to implement policy that would force tech companies to pay or else lose business in Colombia as well as other Latin American countries that choose to follow suit.

In the short term: coordinate across academia, public and private sectors to determine the types of regulation that are the highest priority for Colombia and consider policies that would go into legislation.

2. Support Quality Information

Over the short term, highlight the benefits of open data policies in local governments, enable local officials to share as much information as possible to increase voter trust and reduce information vacuums which give root to the spread of disinformation. In addition, consider providing microgrants to local journalists/organizations focused on providing vital information on the Colombian political system. In this way, support the bolstering of democratic decision making by empowering individuals with accurate information.

Recommendation IX: Involve Young People in Program Design, Targeting, Execution, and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL)

Many young people feel left out by the political system and many of its related structures and organizations. They see people from outside their in-groups arriving with

resources and ideas that they safeguard closely without enabling locals or young people to influence them. Many young people view governmental, civil society, and NGO projects as temporary and not interested in their interests. Install young people as permanent fixtures of organizational programs in as many dimensions as possible, not just as the target of short-lived interventions. Rather than supporting projects run by external teams that meet their desired results then leave, sometimes resulting in worse conditions for the community than before the project, plan and support programs that involve young people and locals and provide permanent institutions that serve the community sustainably, and on the community's terms.

Implementation IX

1. Recruit Youth Consultants

At the beginning of every program, recruit youth consultants and/or full-time employees from an area the program is intending to target. These could be based on recommendations from local schools, politicians, civil society organizations, or social media, or based on an open application process, but efforts should be made to maximize diversity, equity, and inclusion so that youth consultants are as representative as possible of the relevant youth populations.

2. Invite Youth Consultant Input

Invite youth consultants to provide input into the program's design and how it can be suited for youth. Consider creating a questionnaire or grading rubric for them to use about how the program will be received by the young people in their communities and identifying opportunities to market the program at youth events and on social media.

3. Involve Youth in Execution

During the program's installation, have youth consultants contribute to the program's execution by sharing about it on their social media while giving youth full-time employees as much power as possible to guide execution.

4. Involve Youth in MEAL

Give youth consultants or employees roles in MEAL or other evaluation processes and ensure that they receive any products so that they can take the lessons learned forward with them.

Recommendation X: Identify and Magnify Youth Role Models / Social Media Takeovers

Field research reveals that youth role models play a critical role in motivating civic participation and fostering a sense of public responsibility. Positive role models can encourage young people to engage in public life, while negative ones risk reinforcing political apathy and distrust in institutions. Therefore, we recommend that organizations such as Fundación Corona take the lead in identifying and supporting young individuals who demonstrate credibility and social impact in public affairs, helping build a more constructive and inspiring environment for youth engagement. Celebrate and normalize the image of young people engaging positively with politics and Colombian society. Give them platforms to inspire each other and communicate their experiences and interests to civil society and government decision makers.

Implementation X

1. Determine FC/Partner Youth Role Model Criteria

Determine criteria for role models that fit the organization's vision and the locality's needs. These could be young people involved in programs following the above recommendation, or a young person who started a political club at their school, attended a protest, or participated in a townhall, Model United Nations type program or national political effort. They could also be musicians or athletes with significant followings.

2. Produce/Co-Produce Content

Each month or quarter, find a young person who meets these criteria, interview them, produce a short TikTok video or instagram post, share it on the organization's social media (ideally co-posting with local municipal government, school, and other popular

accounts), and provide it to the young person to share it on theirs. Also give them the opportunity to take over the organization's social media account to produce their own content about a day in their life as young people in their communities or about the challenges they face or the ways they participate in local and national government.

Recommendation XI: Generate Youth-Focused Citizen Participation Toolkits (Baseline and for each Election)

If we want people to do something, we need to make it as easy as possible for them to do that thing, and put the right amount of useful information into their hands without them having to search it out. Young people are both very distracted by social media and the internet and very reachable by social media and the internet. There has been significant progress made in the last few elections in terms of producing useful, shareable content to inform voters and young people, but that progress needs to be expanded and delivered in a manner that meets young people where they are.

Produce social media posts, infographics, and videos that are attention grabbing, easily shareable, and easy to understand for younger audiences. Whenever possible, these tools should be produced using the voice of young people either literally (by having a young person explain how to identify misinformation or how to find a polling place) or more generally by avoiding using vernacular more common amongst younger Colombians.

Implementation XI

1. Generate Baseline Toolkits

Generate a base package of infographics, links, and short blurbs to be published on social media and FC and partner websites. These base toolkits should provide information about routine political participation processes like the Youth Council and how young people can contact and engage with local officials and politicians. FC can collaborate with its partners to create a toolkit at the national level, and each partner can create one for their local communities.

2. Generate Election-Specific Toolkits

In the lead up to each election, especially the coming Youth Council elections, generate a toolkit specific to the election about key issues and the various stances, how to find polling places, and candidate and party information.

3. Post toolkits on websites, and post and co-post them on social media partnering with youth role models and influencers.
4. Invite young people to share their experience/feedback using the toolkits to both increase their engagement and get user-level input in modifying future toolkits.

Recommendation XII: Meet Youth Where They Are and Support and Provide Refinement to Existing Positive Youth Political Engagement

Building on Recommendation XI, Fundacion Corona and its partners should meet young people face to face whenever possible to deliver their messages and inspire young people directly. Young people should be given opportunities to see civil society and political activity in a positive light, supporting them and their needs and interested in their lives and perspectives. Rather than leaving young people to feel left out by the system, actively seek them out and integrate their worlds into the society Colombia is developing into. For young people already involved in political processes, give them broader access to other programming and give them training or other resources that will make their engagement better informed or supported. Wherever there is a large population of young people (concerts, sporting events, positive youth engagement (peaceful protests, Model UN programs, the Youth Council, scouting organizations), identify ways to support young participants and provide them resources and opportunities to broaden and deepen their engagement.

Implementation XII

1. Develop Youth-Focused Materials

Develop materials to attract and draw in young people at the lowest level on the ladder of engagement (pamphlets, QR codes to display that link to organization landing pages, etc.).

2. Identify Events

Each month (or as opportunities present themselves) identify upcoming events or programs likely to involve high youth engagement.

3. Engage With Youth at Events

Send representatives or partner with organizers to set up a table/booth, make a short speech/presentation, or walk up to young people to offer them materials from step 1 and resources for how to make their votes more effective, get more involved in local politics, or make their message or protest more effective.

Part IV: Conclusion

The policy recommendations presented are varied and seek to tackle a variety of barriers that cause voter apathy. While some of these policy solutions are relatively easy to implement, others demand more will from the stakeholders. Thus, the policy proposals are preceded by pillars containing rationale, resting on a solid foundation of case studies and academic analysis, that Fundacion Corona will be able to utilize when seeking to convince stakeholders.

To heal existing divisions in Colombian society, it is necessary to implement policies that address long-lasting structural problems that result in inequality, corruption, and barriers in social mobility. This report provides recommendations based in technology and behavioral science that Fundacion Corona and its partners can implement starting today to combat disinformation, improve voter participation, and increase trust in the democratic system. Simultaneously, for more ambitious, societal change,simply

motivating people to vote by using behavioral science during an election year is not enough.

Youths from underprivileged backgrounds spoke of a political system that is simply not delivering, but rather perpetuating existing economic and political power structures. The response from the part of Fundacion Corona, civil society, and the private sector ought to be holistic in nature and penetrate the surface. To achieve this, policies that seek to build forums of exchange, of dialogue, ought to be prioritized. There should be increased trust and a national consensus around the need for a paradigm shift before institutional reforms are implemented by the political actors. To achieve this, the elites must be persuaded that it is in their best interest and in the interests of the nation to support these forums of exchange and dialogues.

The *Estallido Social* has presented unique opportunities to persuade the elites and the private sector to make an investment in the nation and in the most vulnerable sectors. This investment ought not to respond merely to urgent needs, but serve to build the nation's stock of human capital, spontaneous sociably, and trust. Thus, it would require the establishment of long-lasting programs across regions, socio-economic classes, and generations.

Francis Fukuyama best noted the ultimate consequence of a fractured society: higher transaction costs. Today, Colombia has an opportunity to unleash untapped economic potential by investing in mechanisms to increase trust and spontaneous sociability and thus reduce transaction costs, a form of tax that society self-imposed.

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Annex

1. Interview Questions (16-22 March)

Questions for Civil Society Staff

Part 1: Organizational Role & Challenges

1. What are the biggest challenges your organization faces in promoting political engagement and trust?

2. What partnerships (e.g., with government, NGOs, tech companies) have been most effective in achieving your goals?

Part 2: Technology & Behavioral Science in Voter Participation

3. What digital tools or strategies has your organization implemented to encourage voter participation?

4. Can social media influencers drive voter registration elections? What Colombian creators or formats (e.g., memes, telenovelastyle storytelling) could make voting culturally resonant?

5. What accessibility challenges have you encountered in using technology to promote voter participation, and how have you addressed them?

Part 3: Technology & Behavioral Science in Combating Disinformation

6. What tools or strategies have been most successful in countering misinformation among different demographics?

7. How do you balance combating disinformation with concerns about free speech?

8. What gaps still exist in current disinformation prevention strategies, and how could they be addressed? Have you collaborated with tech platforms (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok) to mitigate the spread of disinformation?

9. What news sources are most prevalent in the communities that you work in?

Part 4: Technology & Behavioral Science in Trust (149)

10. What initiatives has your organization undertaken to strengthen trust in democratic institutions?

11. What role do you think NGOs, government agencies, and private companies should play in restoring trust in democracy? (I suggest we divide this question)

12. Do you feel misinformation impacted the result of the last election?

Questions for Youth Leaders

Part 1: Understanding of Democracy

1. What does democracy mean to you in your daily life?

2. How do you think democracy functions in Colombia? Do you think it is fair and inclusive? Why or why not?

Part 2: Youth Participation in Politics and Civic Activities

3. Have you ever participated in political activities or community governance? If so, what kind of activities? If not, why?

4. What would encourage you or other young people to be more actively involved in politics and civic engagement and advocacy outside politics? Could youth advisory councils or digital platforms formalize their influence in policymaking?

Part 3: Major Obstacles and Challenges

5. What do you think are the main barriers preventing young people in Colombia from participating in politics? (e.g., lack of information, distrust in the government, limited resources, etc.)

6. Beyond elections, what other ways do you think young people can participate in democracy?

Part 4: Views on Democracy Education and Leadership Development

7. Have you received any education about democracy, government operations, or civic rights in school or other institutions? If so, what was it like?

8. How could schools help young people better understand democracy and political participation?

Part 5: Hopes for the Future of Democracy

9. What role do you think young people should play in the democratic system?

Questions for Experts

Part 1: General Context

1. What do you see as the main barriers preventing higher voter turnout and trust in democratic institutions?

2. What role has technology played in shaping democracy in Colombia over the past decade?

Part 2: Technology & Behavioral Science in Voter Participation

3. How can digital platforms (e.g., social media, mobile apps, online forums) be leveraged to increase voter participation?

4. Have you seen successful applications of behavioral science (e.g., social norms, nudges, commitment pledges, default settings) to encourage voting in Colombia or other countries?

Part 3: Technology & Behavioral Science in Combating Disinformation

5. What are the most prevalent forms of political disinformation in Colombia? How do AI and social media algorithms contribute to the spread of disinformation, and how can they be used to combat it?

6. What strategies can help citizens develop resilience to disinformation and make more informed political choices?

7. What policies should be implemented to balance the fight against disinformation with free speech protections?

8. Have you seen any successful international models that Colombia could adapt in its fight against political disinformation?

Part 4: Technology & Behavioral Science in Trust

9. How would you assess the level of trust in Colombia's electoral institutions and political processes?

10. How can governments, NGOs, and tech companies collaborate to enhance trust in electoral systems?

Part 5: Structural & Institutional Reforms

11. What community led initiatives (e.g., participatory budgeting in Medellín, citizen oversight committees) could shift these narratives through tangible, positive government interactions?

12. How could social norm campaigns (e.g., publicizing neighborhood turnout rates) be tailored to Colombia's collectivist culture without exacerbating peer distrust?

13. Pilot projects often fail to scale. What systemic partnerships (e.g., integrating civic education into school curricula, media alliances) could sustain engagement between elections?

14. How do you strengthen Colombian democratic institutions, and how does it affect voter participation?

2. Interview Lists

Interview list in Colombia		
City	**Name**	**Organization**
Bogota	Andrés Hernández	Transparencia por Colombia
	Alejandra Barrios	Misión de observación Electoral
	Ángela Rodríguez	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
	Marcela Restrepo	Foro Nacional por Colombia
	Juan Carlos Galindo	Fundación Colombia 2050
	Andrés Caro	Fundación Estado de Derecho
	Sandra Acero	CIVIX Colombia
	Yann Bassett	Universidad del Rosario
	Juan David Gutiérrez	Universidad de Los Andes
	Beatriz Gil	Observatorio Congreso Visible
	Beatriz Vallejo	
	Camilo Franco	GOYN Bogota
Cali	Alejandro López	Cali Cómo Vamos
	Maira García	Coordinadora Regional del Programa Juntos por la Transparencia
	Valentina Cardona	Fundación Smurfit Westrock
	Alejandro Sanchez Lopez De Mesa	Universidad Javeriana Cali

	Joaquín Gregorio Tovar	Fundación Foro Suroccidente
	María Isabel Alvarado	Unidad de Acción Vallecaucana
	Lina María Orozco	Unidad de Acción Vallecaucana
Buenaventura	Bairon Castro	Líder Jóvenes Activa Buenaventura
	Amín Sinisterra	Buenaventura Cómo Vamos
	Melkin	Presidente Junta de Acción Comunal Buenavenutura
	Luz Mery	Presidenta Junta de Acción Comunal Buenavenutura
	Edilberto Viveros	Edil Buenaventura
	Henry Montaño	Concejal Buenaventura
	Robinson Rentería	Concejal Buenaventura
Barranquilla	Brandón Hernández	Nuestra Barranquilla
	Lilian Urueta Cruz	GOYN Barranquilla
	Lucía Avendaño Gelve	Barranquilla Cómo Vamos
	Paola Ruiz Aycardi	Universidad del Norte