The Global State of Democracy 2019

Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise

INTERNATIONAL IDEA
INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL ASSISTANCE

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Text editing: David Prater
Cover illustration: Phoenix Design Aid
Design and layout: Phoenix Design Aid
Printer: Bulls Graphics, Sweden
ISBN: 978-91-7671-270-2 (Print)
ISBN: 978-91-7671-271-9 (PDF)
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2019.31>

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Foreword

Not too long ago the world was euphoric about the advancement of democracy. The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the end of the Cold War in 1991 and the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 are some of the defining moments that gave reason to be optimistic about the future of democracy. Only three decades after the fall of the Berlin wall, the euphoria about democracy´s forward march has been replaced by doom and gloom narratives that allude to the death of democracy. We certainly cannot and should not ignore the contemporary threats to democracy such as the blatant disrespect for the norms of multilateralism, extreme inequality resulting in the capture of politics by elites, persistent corruption that continues to rob ordinary citizens of opportunities of service provision and better quality of life; conflictual identity politics, intolerance and societal polarisation aggravated by social media and spurred by populistic politics that promise quick and simple solutions to complex socio-economic problems and more. Added to these pressures, are global development threats, such as climate change and its perils; fears of a looming global economic slow-down exacerbated by a trade war between US and China, and global insecurity—not least exacerbated by terrorism from external and internal forces.

The onslaught on multilateralism, that plays out in the form of nationalistic sentiments and nativist politics, led by the traditional yesteryear champions of multilateralism—has left a global leadership vacuum at a time when the world desperately needs a committed and predictable leadership that can effectively galvanise it around contemporary global challenges—including threats to democracy. Unfortunately, this leadership vacuum, has empowered and emboldened authoritarian regimes that have political and economic muscle to export their models of governance to different parts of the world, and are keen to write democracy's obituary!

It is important to note however that the doom and gloom narratives about the state of democracy do carry some truth. However, it is not the whole truth! In particular, such narratives tend to overshadow stories about positive democratic developments around the world which equally deserve to be highlighted. Nonetheless, rather than cause us to despair, we should see these narratives as warning bells that should jolt us into action in defence of democracy. While acknowledging the challenges and the threats to democracy, we must be equally bold in telling the stories of democratic gains being made around the world, such as the fact that despite the challenges and threats to the quality of democracy, the number of democracies continues to grow. Countries such as Armenia, The Gambia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Tunisia, which were not counted as democracies only a few years ago, now are. More people today choose their leaders through the ballot box rather than through the bullet, and more people today live in democracies than 40 years ago. While progress is painstakingly slow, there is more gender equality in politics and representative institutions than there has ever been in history.

Even more compelling is for us to boldly tell the story of citizens' activism and demand for democracy in authoritarian contexts such as Algeria, Hong Kong and Sudan; while in democratic countries, citizens are demanding better quality representation, accountability, a stop to corruption and better quality of life. The citizen activism that we are witnessing around the world in democracies and non-democracies alike is a story of hope for the future of democracy that needs to be told! The point is—we need to hear balanced narratives of the state of democracy. Indeed, warnings about threats to democracy help us to be vigilant and not be complacent in our efforts to defend and advance democracy. However, narratives that highlight gains and opportunities as well as propose solutions, encourage those in the frontlines of protecting, defending and advancing democracy that their efforts are not in vain.

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Report is a breath of fresh air in this regard. First, its analysis is based on a robust and transparent methodology, based on a broad multi-dimensional conception of democracy. It is my opinion that the citizens' demand for better quality democracy the world over, is a demonstration that democracy cannot be viewed as only limited to elections and the exercise of civil and political rights. Equally important is the quality of representation, better quality of life for citizens including respect for and protection of the totality of their human rights. Secondly, the report offers a balanced narrative of the Global State of Democracy. It highlights challenges and positive democratic developments, while also recommending possible solutions. In this regard, this report stands to readily inform policy decisions and programmatic choices in the democracy-assistance field, while providing data needed by democracy defenders to inform and shape evidence-based advocacy for the broadening and deepening

of democracy in their countries and regions. Thirdly, the analysis is based on data that spans from 1975 until today, providing a good balance of the long and short-term view of the state of democracy. This allows for a balanced and less events driven analysis that has framed some of the alarmist narratives. Balanced narratives such as carried in this report, will surely encourage and embolden democracy defenders to keep on fighting for more and better-quality democracy. Finally, by taking both a global and regional view, this report highlights a thread that run across the state of democracy in different regions, while bringing to bare the unique challenges they each face, and therefore providing a great opportunity for targeted policy choices at various levels.

In today's multi-polar world, where, in the absence of global leadership, authoritarianism is rising in all regions, practical solutions and action in defence of democracy is even more urgent. This report couldn't have come at a better time. I am truly delighted to be associated with it!

Winnie Byanyima
Executive Director
Oxfam International, Kenya

Preface

Democracy is experiencing severe challenges all over the world. The sense of hope and inevitability that infused democracy's remarkable expansion during the second half of the 20th century is all but gone. Pessimism and hand wringing about the health of democracy have become the norm.

Is democracy ill? If so, what are the remedies?

In this report, International IDEA, the only intergovernmental organization exclusively working on democracy worldwide, provides a global health check of democracy. Based on data covering 158 countries since 1975, we explore democratic trends, challenges and opportunities, and provide a uniquely comprehensive analysis of democracy at national, regional and global levels. In addition to vital democratic elements such as free and fair elections, independent judiciaries and representative institutions, our analysis also includes diagnostics of civil society participation, social rights and equality, media integrity and corruption, to name a few. A total of 28 aspects of democracy—based on 97 indicators—are used to measure and compare democratic performance over time. This provides a nuanced, holistic assessment of democracy's health.

The overall diagnosis is both worrying and hopeful

When looking at democratic developments in the past decade, there are legitimate reasons to be concerned. The data demonstrates that democracy continues to expand its global reach, while experiencing a significant decline in quality across the board. This multi-faceted deterioration affects old and new democracies alike, across all regions. The erosion of popular trust in democratic institutions and processes reflects—and nurtures—an alarming rise in authoritarian rhetoric and practices. Democratic backsliding is a growing malaise, often initiated through electoral and constitutional channels and fuelled by civic disenchantment about corruption and democracy's ability to deliver results. Democratic erosion is further exacerbated by polarization, disinformation and hate speech. Seriously weakened Checks on Government and a shrinking civic space are seen despite the widespread adoption of elections.

These worrying signs notwithstanding, there are also reasons to be optimistic. The number of democracies around the world continues to grow, and a wide range of countries has transitioned to democracy in recent years. Our data shows that, despite its shortcomings, democracy is still by far the preferred form of government in all continents. Democracy continues to be an aspiration for those who have never experienced it. When democracy is threatened, citizens all over the world have united to protect it. In nearly every democracy, most people want democracy to work, even when they feel that it may not be working perfectly for them.

This report—and, indeed, all of the work that International IDEA carries out globally—is driven by the recognition that, despite its current ills, democracy's vitality should be acknowledged and celebrated. It aims to shed light on democracy's present predicament, as well as the possible solutions to this predicament. As such, these pages are infused with a sense of urgency, but also of possibility and hope. Through this report, we provide actionable knowledge, tools and advice to actors working on democratic reform processes at the subnational, national and regional levels. We seek to empower and enlighten, sustain and support, reinvigorate and relaunch the efforts to protect and advance democracy worldwide. It is only through a vast collective effort, fired by conviction but also grounded in facts, that we can address democracy's ills and revive its promise.

Kevin Casas-Zamora
Secretary-General
International IDEA

Acknowledgements

International IDEA would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the 2019 edition of *The Global State of Democracy*. This publication has benefited from contributions made by many individuals at International IDEA, and from the input of members of the Institute's partner organizations.

The Global State of Democracy 2019 was led by the report editor Annika Silva-Leander, Head of International IDEA's Democracy Assessment and Political Analysis (DAPA) unit, and written and compiled by the members of the project team, including Annika Silva-Leander, Armend Bekaj, Martin Brusis, Elisenda Ballesté Buxó, Rosinah Ismail-Clarke, Naomi Malaki, Joseph Noonan and Adina Trunk (from the Secretary-General's Office). The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices data analysis for each chapter was carried out by Martin Brusis and Joseph Noonan. The DAPA unit is part of International IDEA's Global Programme, whose Director Keboitse Machangana has provided strategic guidance throughout the drafting of the report. International IDEA's Secretary-General since August 2019, Kevin Casas-Zamora, has provided final clearance to the report.

International IDEA would like to thank Professor Svend-Erik Skaaning of the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University, Denmark, who has led the conceptualization of the GSoD Indices, supervised the annual data updates and peer-reviewed the GSoD Indices analysis of the report. Thanks also goes to Associate Professor Claudiu Tufis of the Political Science Department at the University of Bucharest, Romania, who acted as the GSoD Indices Data Manager. Thanks also to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute at the University of Gothenburg, which has made available its data that a significant share of the GSoD Indices draw on. Special thanks to Gerardo Munck of the School of International Relations at the University of Southern California who peer-reviewed the overall report.

This report was produced with the assistance of members of International IDEA's Communications and Knowledge Management Unit, including Ingrid Bicu, Lisa Hagman, Katarina Jörgensen, Tomas Spragg Nilsson, Lynn Simmonds, Lucy Smith and Tahseen Zayouna. We would also like to thank the copyeditor, David Prater, for his meticulous attention to detail.

Acknowledgements for individual chapters and sections appear below.

Chapter 1

Section 1.1 on global democratic trends was written by Annika Silva-Leander, who also edited **Section 1.2 on the global democratic landscape** and wrote the sections on shrinking civic space, ICTs and democracy and on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Martin Brusis wrote the section on democratic backsliding together with Annika Silva-Leander and also, the section on populism with Elliot Bulmer. Sead Alihodžić, Erik Asplund, Oliver Joseph and Therese Pearce Laanela wrote the section on electoral processes. Yukihiko Hamada wrote the section on corruption. The peer reviewers for this chapter were Gerardo Munck and Svend-Erik Skaaning. Other reviewers and contributors included Petra Auer-Himberg, Armend Bekaj, Martin Brusis, Elisenda Ballesté Buxó, Alberto Fernández Gibaja, Meghna Kulshrestha, Keboitse Machangana, Joseph Noonan, Anna Marie Obermeier, David Rosén, Massimo Tommasoli, Adina Trunk and Peter Wolf.

Chapter 2

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Section 2.2 on the state of democracy in the Middle East was led by Armend Bekaj and written by Elisenda Ballesté Buxó, who also wrote the background country case study on Yemen. Mohamed El Dahshan wrote the background

regional case study. Other reviewers and contributors included Sherif Alaa, Armend Bekaj, Rosinah Ismail-Clarke, Keboitse Machangana, Joseph Noonan, Anna Marie Obermeier and Annika Silva-Leander.

Chapter 3

Section 3.1 on the state of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean was led and edited by Annika Silva-Leander, who also edited **Section 3.2 on the state of democracy in North America.** The regional co-editors for the Latin American and Caribbean section were Khushbu Agrawal and Daniel Zovatto. Miguel Carter wrote the Latin America and the Caribbean background regional case study on which the chapter draws. Country case background studies were written by Sandra Botero (Colombia), Guilherme Simões Reis (Brazil), Irma Méndez de Hoyos (Mexico), Elvira Cuadra Lira (Nicaragua), Daniel Chasquetti Perez (Uruguay) and Michael Penfold (Venezuela). Frank McLoughlin and Seema Shah co-wrote the case study on the state of democracy in the United States. The peer reviewers for Latin America and the Caribbean were Sergio Bitar (member of the International IDEA Board of Advisers) and Gerardo Munck. The peer reviewers for North America were Nicole Goodman (member of the International IDEA Board of Advisers) and Abraham Lowenthal. Other reviewers and contributors included Armend Bekaj, Martin Brusis, Elisenda Ballesté Buxó, Kevin Casas-Zamora, Alfonso Ferufino, Carolina Floru, Rosinah Ismail-Clarke, Celso Lafer, Keboitse Machangana, Percy Medina, Joseph Noonan, Anna Marie Obermeier, Adolfo Ocana, Miguel Angel Lara Otaola, Lourdes Gonzales Prieto and Massimo Tommasoli. Several ideas advanced in Section 3.1, especially in the Policy Recommendations section, owe much to insights shared during a conference organized by International IDEA and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 'El estado de la democracia en América Latina: 40 años del inicio de la Tercera Ola Democrática' [The state of democracy in Latin America: 40 years since the beginning of the Third Democratic Wave], in Santiago de Chile, 26–28 November 2018.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 on the state of democracy in Asia and the Pacific was led and edited by Annika Silva-Leander. The regional co-editors for this chapter were Amanda Cats-Baril and Leena Rikkilä Tamang. The sections on social media and conflict were written by Mark Salter, who also contributed to edit the chapter. Authors of the background subregional case studies included Saniia Toktogazieva (Central Asia), Julio Cabral Teehankee (East Asia, and the Pacific Islands) and Amanda Cats-Baril (South Asia). Imelda Deinla and Kent Marjun Primor co-wrote the background case studies on South East Asia and the Philippines. Authors of the background country case studies included Tom Daly (Australia), Sumona DasGupta (India), Abdul Gaffar Karim (Indonesia), Chin Huat Wong (Malaysia), Seira Tamang (Nepal), Kim Hyejin and Erik Mobrand (South Korea) and Eugenie Merieau (Thailand). The peer reviewers for this chapter were Ketut Putra Erawan and Peter R. deSouza. Other reviewers and contributors included Adhy Aman, Battuul Baterdene, Elisenda Ballesté Buxó, Rosinah Ismail-Clarke, Avinash Kumar, Keboitse Machangana, Joseph Noonan, Anna Marie Obermeier, Nyla Grace Prieto and Antonio Spinelli.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 on the state of democracy in Europe was led and edited by Armend Bekaj. The regional co-editors for this chapter were Sam van der Staak and Nana Kalandadze. Florian Bieber wrote the background subregional case study on Central and Eastern Europe. Richard Youngs wrote the background case studies on Europe and Spain and acted as the peer reviewer for this chapter. Marko Prelec wrote the background case studies on the Western Balkans and North Macedonia. Background country case studies were written by Magdalena Solska (Poland), Dimitris Tsarouhas (Turkey) and Valeriya Mechkova (Ukraine). Other reviewers and contributors included Elisenda Ballesté Buxó, Alberto Fernández Gibaja, Rosinah Ismail-Clarke, Keboitse Machangana, Joseph Noonan, Anna Marie Obermeier and Annika Silva-Leander.

Abbreviations

AU	African Union
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CSO	Civil society organization
ECLAC	UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EMB	Electoral management body
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GNC	General National Congress (Libya)
GSoD	Global State of Democracy
HoR	House of Representatives
ICT	Information and communications technology
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commission on Human Rights
SAO	State Audit Office (Georgia)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

Introduction

Democracy is ill and its promise needs revival. Indeed, the value, viability and future of democracy are more contested now than ever before in modern history, or at least since the 1930s. While the past four decades have seen a remarkable expansion of democracy throughout all regions of the world, recent years have been marked by declines in the fabric of both older and younger democracies. While the idea of democracy continues to mobilize people around the world, the practice of existing democracies has disappointed and disillusioned many citizens and democracy advocates.

Democratic erosion is occurring in different settings and contexts. New democracies are often weak and fragile. Their governments and political representatives face the challenge of building and strengthening democratic institutions in resource-constrained environments. Older democracies are struggling to guarantee equitable and sustainable economic and social development. The share of high-quality democracies is decreasing and many of them are confronted with populist challengers, which combine exclusionary claims with a disregard for democratic principles.

Both old and young democracies are suffering from a shrinking civic space, with declines in civil liberties, clampdowns on civil society, and restrictions on freedom of expression. The present report contains a number of examples of countries where governments intentionally limited the civic space and weakened constitutional checks on executive authority, resulting in democratic backsliding and a deteriorating rule of law. In some countries, this illness has been so severe that it has resulted in partial (with examples such as Nicaragua and Pakistan) or full democratic breakdown (Venezuela).

Modern democratic backsliding occurs from within the democratic system: through legislative and constitutional reforms and policy decisions by democratically elected majorities. The gradual hollowing-out of the non-electoral pillars in backsliding democracies ultimately damages democracy's core principles of popular control and political equality.

Democratic backsliding coincides with the rise of populist politicians and movements that appeal to growing numbers of voters, most notably in Europe but also in the Americas, and Asia and the Pacific, although forms vary according to cultural and regional contexts.

The rise of populist politics is linked to a variety of context-specific factors, but some common drivers include a disenchantment with traditional political actors; the perceived inability of current political systems to address core societal and economic problems; and a clash between expectations of what democracy should provide and what it actually delivers. Populists tap into citizen discontent about rising inequalities (perceived or actual), corruption, increasing mass migration (again, perceived or actual), unemployment and precarity of employment, and increased digitalization and its impact on labour market structures.

A feature of populist rhetoric and practice is disrespect for the accountability institutions that check government, protect political pluralism and constitute democracy. This inherent predisposition for unconstrained power turns populism into a threat for democracy. However, some also argue that populist politicians have helped put on the agenda important issues—such as corruption in democracies—that democracies need to tackle in order to regain their legitimacy.

At the same time, a number of large countries with political and economic clout seem immune to democracy. These political regimes not only persist as non-democracies (e.g. China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia) or hybrids regimes (e.g. Singapore), but have also begun to export their model of governance to other countries.

Despite this gloomy picture, there are also reasons for optimism. Democratic transitions continue to occur in political regimes that seemed staunchly undemocratic or stuck in the hybrid grey zone between democracy and non-democracy. Examples include The Gambia in 2017, promising democratic openings in Ethiopia in 2018, and the transitions to democracy in 2018 of two of the world's most enduring hybrid regimes: Armenia and Malaysia.

Popular demands for democratic reforms backed by intense social mobilization have been witnessed across the world in places such as Algeria, Armenia, Egypt, Hong Kong, Russia and Sudan. New democracies such as Timor-Leste and Tunisia and more recently The Gambia have also consolidated some of their democratic gains.

One of the main findings of this report is that democracy has not always produced the sustainable and prosperous

outcomes that many expected. A number of democratically elected governments have failed to substantially reduce corruption, advance gender equality, reduce social, political and economic inequalities or produce employment and economic growth.

However, the GSoD Indices data shows that most hybrid forms of democracy that flirt with authoritarianism, and non-democracies, have generally not delivered and sustained better policy outcomes, with some exceptions. The data shows that democracies are more likely to create the conditions necessary for sustainable development compared to non-democracies or hybrid regimes. Levels of gender equality are overall higher in democracies, access to political power is more equal, there is generally less corruption, there is generally more basic welfare, and it is often easier to do business in democracies. The choice is therefore not between non-democracy or illiberal or hybrid forms of it and democracy. The world needs more and better democracy, to revive the democratic promise.

What is the aim of this report?

International IDEA is trying to address the current ills of democracy with data; evidence-based, global and region-specific analysis; and solutions based on sound comparative global knowledge and tested good practices. This report therefore provides a health check of the state of the world's democracy, analysing trends, opportunities and challenges that are seen across various regions and within regions.

The report mainly targets policymakers and civil society organizations working at the national, regional or international levels, either implementing, supporting or advocating for democratic reforms. The report also targets those policymakers who may not be working directly on democratic reform but are involved in reform processes more broadly, be they economic, social or digital.

This report is important for other readers as well, as it argues that **democracy matters**. Democracy matters as a goal in itself, but it also matters for sustainable development. If democracy faces challenges producing sustainable societies for the survival of the planet, non-democratic and hybrid forms of democracy will certainly be even less able to steer future generations towards a better and more sustainable world.

That is why this report closely connects with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each chapter contains a section on progress on SDG 16 and SDG 5, as measured by the GSoD Indices.

In addition to providing a health check of the world's democracies, this report aims to infuse the democracy debate with evidence and data and describe how democracy's challenges and opportunities play out in different ways around the world, shaped by regional and country contexts. Beyond the diagnostic, the report also seeks to provide some solutions, building on the good practices and cases which have shown resilience in the face of challenges. These have been collected through International IDEA's more than 20 years of regional and country-level technical assistance in democratic reform throughout the world.

This, we believe, is the main contribution of the report—to move the debate beyond the diagnostic, to also point the way forward, inspire change and push for reform based on what has worked and what has worked less well in different parts of the world.

The democracy landscape is changing so fast that some of the events described in this report may already be outdated by the time it is printed. Nevertheless, the hope is that the data, concepts and good practices proposed to advance democracy will withstand the circumstantial events.

The report builds on the global and regional knowledge of International IDEA and is a collaborative institution-wide effort. Because the report covers all the attributes of the GSoD framework, in-depth analysis of each of the topics has not been possible this time. The report therefore seeks to provide highlights from International IDEA's global and regional knowledge, so that those interested in more in-depth analysis on specific topics can go into those publications, referenced at the end of each chapter.

The report has also benefited from the inputs of a number of recognized regional and country experts who have contributed their views and analysis to each of the regional chapters. All case study authors, and other contributors, are listed in the Acknowledgements section of this report.

The structure of the report

The Methodology section explains the conceptual framework of the GSoD Indices and provides an explanation of the new regime classification that this second edition of the report has introduced, as well as definitions of some of the key concepts used in the analysis.

The main body of the report is divided into five main chapters. They are written in a modular fashion, so that they can be read as stand-alone chapters, depending on the specific regional interests of the reader.

Chapter 1 looks at the global democracy landscape and is divided into two main parts: a section on global democratic trends, based on the GSoD Indices data, and a second part that zooms in on a selected number of issues in the current global democracy landscape for more in-depth analysis. The chapter includes a series of policy considerations that draw from International IDEA's regional and country-level technical assistance.

The four remaining chapters focus on the state of democracy in the different regions of the world.

Chapter 2 focuses on the state of democracy in two intertwined regions: **Africa and the Middle East**. It should be noted that the GSoD Indices classify the Middle East and Iran as a single region, referred to in this report as the Middle East. Furthermore, while the GSoD Indices classify the subregion of North Africa as part of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa are closely interconnected from a historical, religious, cultural, political, linguistic and ethnic perspective.

Chapter 3 focuses on **the Americas**, a region which is not defined in the GSoD Indices, but which is used in this report as an umbrella term for two regions covered in separate sections—Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America, including a case study on the state of democracy in the United States.

Chapter 4 offers an overview of the long-term democratic trends in **Asia and the Pacific**, the most populous region covered by the GSoD Indices, with 30 countries across five subregions. As the GSoD Indices only cover countries with more than one million inhabitants, data on most Pacific Islands is not included. However, in order to ensure coverage for the Pacific Islands, qualitative analysis and other data sources are used to assess these smaller countries.

Chapter 5 focuses on **Europe**, the region in the world with the largest number of democracies. The GSoD Indices divide Europe into a number of subregions including East-Central Europe, East Europe/post-Soviet Europe, North and West Europe, and South Europe. Europe as defined in the GSoD Indices also includes Israel and Turkey. For more information on these and other regional classifications see the Methodology section in this report.

Each regional chapter follows the same structure. For those who do not have time to read the full chapter, the key findings provide a quick overview of the key opportunities and challenges in each region. The reader can then choose which sections in the longer analysis they are interested in looking at in more detail. Each chapter contains a summary table on progress on SDG 16 and SDG 5 in the relevant region, a brief discussion of long-term democratic trends since 1975, and an analysis of current opportunities and challenges to democracy in each region.

Each chapter concludes with a table summarizing the GSoD Indices data for each attribute as well as a set of policy considerations that are linked to the data. A table of the countries covered by the GSoD Indices is provided for each region, including regime classifications and country-level democratic performance on each of the five GSoD attributes.

The conceptual framework of the GSoD Indices is used as the broad organizing structure of the bulk of the analysis in each chapter, with a focus on each of the five attributes: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Finally, the GSoD Indices depict democratic trends at the country, regional and global levels across a broad range of attributes of democracy from 1975 to 2018. The Indices currently produce data for 158 countries and are updated annually. Anyone can freely access the country-level data for all Indices. The data can be downloaded via the Global State of Democracy Indices website <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>

Chapter 1
The global democracy landscape

This chapter analyses key trends and issues in the current global democracy landscape. The first section of the chapter provides a global overview of democratic trends based on the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices data, which now covers world events up to the end of 2018. Where there is a lag between the GSoD data and recent political events, this is indicated in the text. The analysis first briefly examines democratic trends from a long-term perspective, looking at developments in the last four decades, and then continues with a focus on key developments in the last five years.

The second section provides a more in-depth analysis of five issues currently affecting the global democracy landscape: the crisis of representation of political parties and the rise of populism; patterns and conditions of democratic backsliding; the empowerment of civil society in a shrinking civic space; managing electoral processes as fair competition in challenging environments; and corruption and money in politics. A brief overview of information and communications technologies and their impact on democracy is also included.

GLOBAL PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The GSoD Indices provide complementary data to official indicators to track progress on eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDG 16 and SDG 5.5 (see Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1).[1]

According to the GSoD Indices, global progress on SDG 16 is facing significant challenges, although some advances are noted. Of the 18 GSoD indicators used to measure progress on SDG 16, a total of 12 have seen significant declines, with just 5 indicators showing advances, and 1 seeing stagnation.

The SDG 16 targets that are facing most challenges, with more declines than advances, are SDG 16.1 on reducing violence and SDG 16.10 on freedom of expression and fundamental freedoms.

One of the targets where advances outnumber declines is SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. However, more sustained progress is needed on this target as 43 per cent of countries in the world still have high levels of corruption, which is a key impediment to human development.

Targets that have seen mixed progress include SDG 16.3 on rule of law, with observed advances on Access to Justice and Predictable Enforcement, but declines in Judicial Independence; SDG 16.6 on effective institutions, which has seen declines on Judicial Independence, Free Political Parties and Civil Society Participation, but advances in Effective Parliament; and SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making, with declines in Clean Elections and Elected Government, stagnation in Electoral Participation and Local Democracy and advances in Effective Parliament.

Gender Equality

SDG 5.5 on political representation of women has seen regression, with two countries declining since 2015 and no country advancing.

1 The methodology for tracking progress on SDG 16 with the GSoD Indices is described in International IDEA, 'Tracking progress on Sustainable Development Goal 16 with the Global State of Democracy Indices', GSoD In Focus No. 8, September 2019c.

KEY FINDINGS

Positive developments

- More than half of the countries in the world (62 per cent, or 97 countries) covered by the GSoD Indices are now democratic (compared to only 26 per cent in 1975), and more than half (57 per cent) of the world's population now lives in some form of democracy, compared to 36 per cent in 1975.
- The number of democracies continues to rise, from 90 in 2008 to 97 in 2018. This increase has occurred despite a slowdown in global democratic expansion since the mid-1990s.
- Popular demands for democracy are strong even in countries that have never experienced democracy. In 2018, protests and demands for democratic change in Armenia and Malaysia—both seemingly enduring hybrid regimes—led to democratic transitions in those countries. Protests in Algeria, Egypt and Sudan in 2019 demonstrate that democratic aspirations are strong and find expression even in hybrid or non-democratic contexts.
- Other countries (e.g. Ethiopia) have not yet undergone democratic transitions but are experiencing democratic reforms that provide promising prospects for a democratic opening.
- The large majority (81 per cent) of the world's 97 democracies have proven democratically resilient, having maintained their democratic status uninterruptedly since 1975 or when they transitioned to democracy.
- On average, democracies have higher levels of Gender Equality and Human Development and lower levels of corruption than non-democracies and hybrid regimes. Democracies are also generally better countries in which to do business than non-democracies and hybrid regimes.
- The aspect of democracy that matters most for Human Development is Absence of Corruption. The less corrupt a country is, the more likely it is to have high levels of Human Development and vice versa.

Challenges to democracy

- Despite the continued quantitative increase in the world's democracies, the quality of the world's democracies is eroding.
- The number of democratic re-transitions is on the increase, pointing to the democratic fragility of many newer democracies. The number of weak democracies with low democratic quality is also increasing. The largest share of weak democracies is in Africa, but they can be found in almost all regions of the world.
- Democratic erosion is on the rise. The share of countries experiencing democratic erosion has more than doubled in the past decade compared to the decade before. North America, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific are the regions most affected by democratic erosion, with more than half of countries in these regions falling into this category. This is also the case for under half of democracies in Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- There are signs that the quality of the world's high-performing democracies is eroding. The share of democracies with high performance on all five democratic attributes has decreased in the last decade.
- Despite some advances in political gender equality in the past decades, serious efforts are still required to achieve political equality for men and women. At the current rate of progress, it will take another 46 years to reach gender parity in parliaments (see Figure 1.23).
- In all regions of the world, and across all regime types, civic space is shrinking.
- Democratic backsliding is a particular form of democratic erosion involving the gradual and intentional weakening of checks and balances and curtailment of civil liberties. This phenomenon has become more frequent in the last decade. A total of 10 countries in the world are currently experiencing democratic backsliding.
- Venezuela represents the most severe democratic backsliding case in the past four decades. Venezuela is the only country that has gone from being a democracy with high levels of Representative Government in 1975 to a non-democracy (since 2017).
- The share of hybrid regimes has increased in the last decades. In the majority of cases, hybridity is not a transitional stage towards democracy but a defining feature of the regime. Of the world's hybrid regimes, 71 per cent have never been democracies. This is also the case for 67 per cent of the world's non-democracies.
- Non-democracies and hybrid regimes, taken together, still represent a significant share of countries (38 per cent) and of the world's population (43 per cent).
- While a number of hybrid regimes and non-democracies have seen some advances in their democratic indicators in the past 10 years, a significant number have also experienced deepening autocratization and become more repressive.

1.1. Global democratic trends

1.1.1. Introduction

In the past four decades, democracy has undergone a remarkable global expansion across all regions of the world. This has included an expansion of suffrage, and a strengthening of electoral processes, institutions and actors central to a healthy democracy, including political parties, parliaments, electoral institutions, judiciaries, the media and civil society organizations (CSOs).

Democracy continues to expand its reach to this day, albeit at a slower pace. Democratic aspirations have proven strong, even in countries that have never experienced democracy. Popular demands in these countries have often been a key driving force of recent democratic transitions.

However, the quantitative expansion of democracy has not been matched by a qualitative increase. On the contrary, democracy is facing a deterioration in quality. New democracies are often weak and democratically fragile. They face the challenge of building and strengthening democratic institutions in resource-constrained environments.

FIGURE 1.1

The GSoD conceptual framework and its link to the Sustainable Development Goals

TABLE 1.1

Democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG Target	Description	Progress
Target 16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Declines ↓
Target 16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Mixed progress
Target 16.5	Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	Advances ↑
Target 16.6	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	Mixed progress
Target 16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	Mixed progress
Target 16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Declines ↓
Target 5.5	Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life	Declines ↓

Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>; United Nations General Assembly, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', UN Document A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015, <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E>.

Older democracies face challenges in maintaining high democratic performance while also guaranteeing equitable and sustainable economic and social development. Both older and newer democracies are facing increasing citizen expectations of what democracy can deliver for them, both in terms of democratic and socio-economic quality.

This section provides an overview of key global democratic trends, commencing with the advances and opportunities for democracy, followed by the key challenges facing democracies today. The analysis begins by briefly examining democratic trends from a long-term perspective, looking at developments in the last four decades, and then continues with a focus on key developments in the last five years (i.e. the period 2013–2018). A selection of issues in the current global democracy landscape are analysed in more depth in Section 1.2.

The analysis is based on the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices) which translate International IDEA's definition of democracy—popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control—into five main democracy attributes. The attributes cover aspects related to Representative Government; Fundamental Rights; Checks on Government; Impartial Administration; and Participatory Engagement.

The GSoD Indices build on 97 indicators that measure trends in democratic development for 158 countries and six regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Iran (referred to in this report as the Middle East), and North America (see the Methodology section for further information). The Indices now cover world events up to the end of 2018. Where there is a lag between the GSoD data and recent political events (e.g. Thailand's 2019 elections), this is indicated in the text.

1.1.2. Encouraging democratic trends: advances and opportunities

The analysis in *The Global State of Democracy 2019* reflects the data in the GSoD Indices for the period 1975–2018, which shows that democracy continues to expand its reach around the world, with the number of democracies continuing to grow. Democracy has also proven resilient over time. Furthermore, democracies are associated with more sustainable outcomes than hybrid regimes or non-democracies.

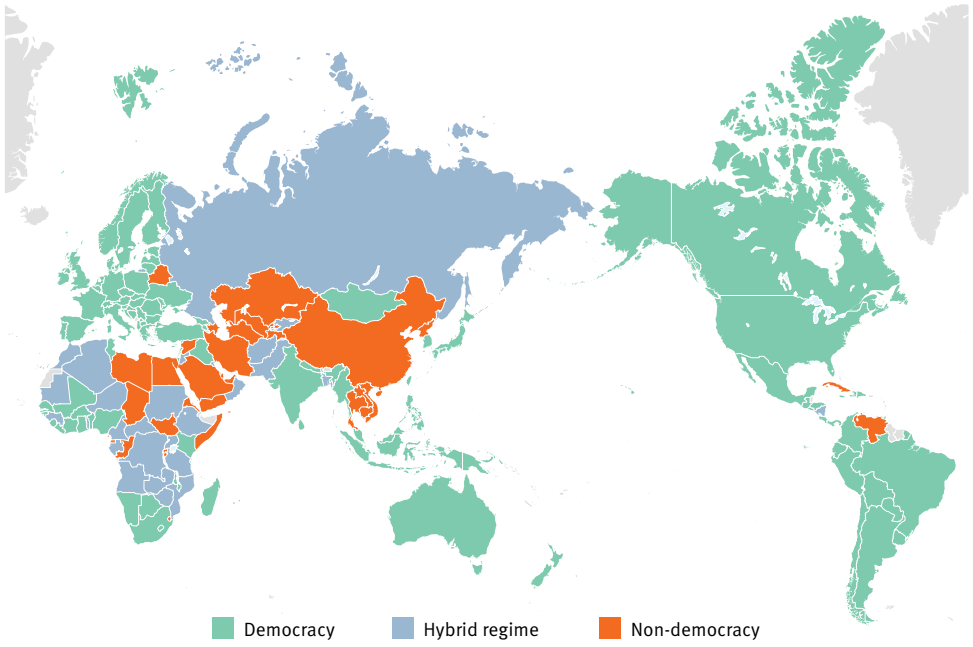
The number of democracies continues to grow

The world is more democratic than it was in 1975, following a global democratic expansion in the last four decades. As illustrated in Figure 1.2, more than half of the countries in the world (62 per cent, or 97 countries) are now democratic (compared to only 26 per cent in 1975), and more than half (57 per cent) of the world's population now lives in a democracy, compared to 36 per cent in 1975. The share of non-democracies has more than halved since 1975 (68 per cent of countries in 1975 versus 20 per cent in 2018). See Figures 1.3 and 1.4 for more detail.

The number of democracies continues to rise, despite a slowdown of the global democratic expansion since

FIGURE 1.2

Map of the world by regime type, 2018

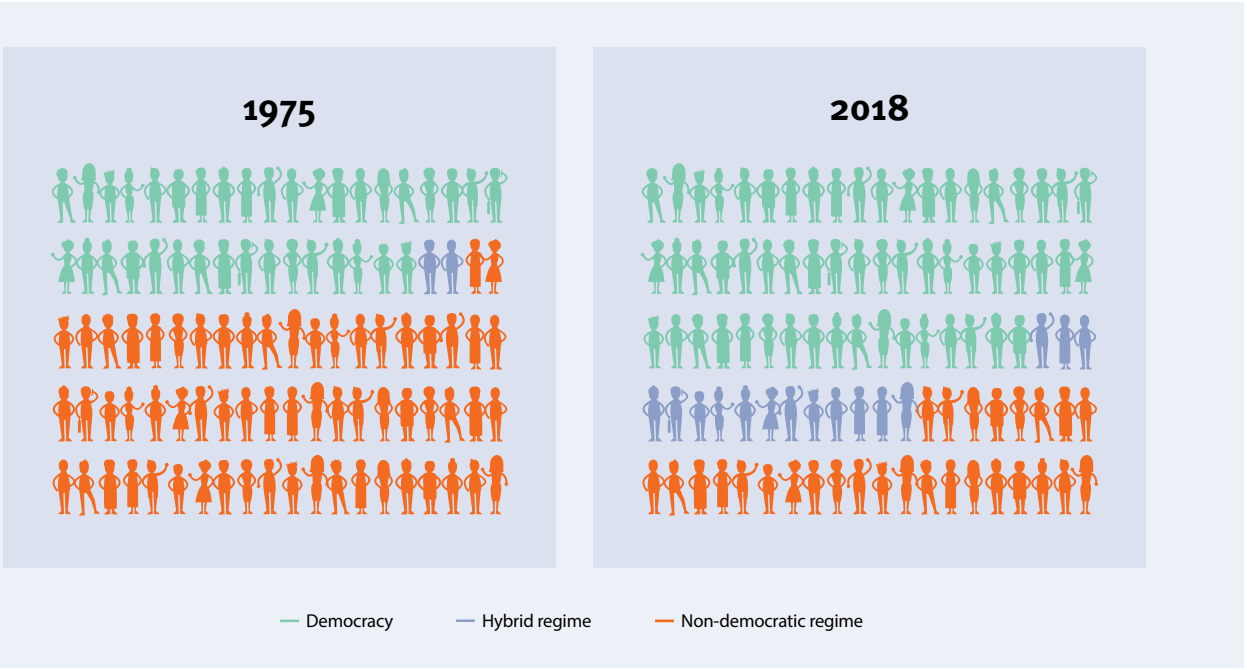


Notes: Land areas marked in grey are not included in the analysis as they either are territories or have a population of less than one million.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.3

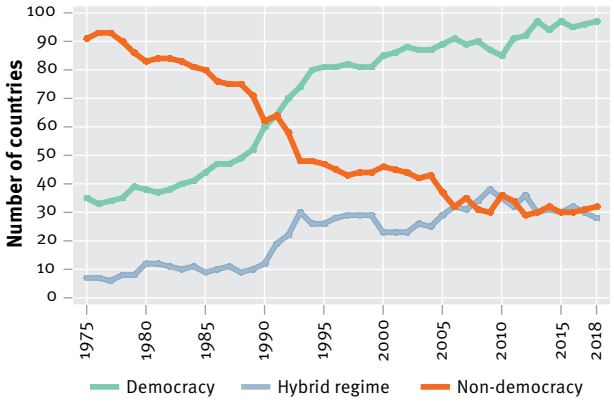
Population living in each regime type, 1975–2018



Sources: World Bank: World Development Indicators, 2019; International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.4

Regime types, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

the mid-1990s. In fact, between 2008 and 2018 the number of democracies continued to rise, from 90 to 97. This data therefore does not support the hypothesis of a 'reverse' third wave of democratization (i.e. a significant and sustained decline in the number of democracies) (Huntington 1991).[2] The majority (72 per cent) of today's democracies were established after 1975 as part of the third wave of democratization. Of these, more than three-quarters transitioned before 2000 (and are referred to as 'early third-wave' democracies), while less than one-quarter transitioned after 2000 (and are referred to as 'new third-wave democracies'). The remaining 28 per cent of the world's current democracies, all of which were established prior to 1975 (and therefore referred to as 'older democracies'), have experienced uninterrupted democracy between 1975 and 2018, except Sri Lanka.

The largest democratic expansion occurred between 1985 and 1995, when 39 countries became democracies. Of these, more than one-quarter (28 per cent) were new countries that gained independence, typically following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet/Communist bloc. Subsequently, the pace of democratic expansion slowed but continued uninterruptedly until 2006. Since then, the number of democracies has continued to increase (from 90 in 2008 to 97 in 2018), although several year-to-year fluctuations have also occurred. For example, a dip in 2009–2010 was caused by several countries sliding into hybridity, including Honduras and Madagascar (in 2009), and Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti and Sri Lanka (in 2010). There was also a noticeable increase between 2010 and 2013, and some smaller variations have been observed since then.

Democracy continues to spread to countries that have never experienced democracy. In the past 10 years (i.e. since 2008), 11 countries transitioned to democracy for the first time in their history. Four of these transitions have occurred in the past four years: Burkina Faso and Myanmar in 2015, and Armenia and Malaysia in 2018. This is more than the previous decade and equals the number of new transitions in the first decade of the third wave (1975–1985).

Democratic progress continues worldwide

Democracies can now be found across all regions of the world. In 1975, the majority of the world's democracies were concentrated in North and West Europe and North America, and to a lesser extent in Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa.

In North America and Europe in 2018, 100 and 93 per cent of countries are democracies, closely followed by Latin America (86 per cent of countries). Europe contains the largest share of the world's democracies (39 countries, or 40 per cent of the global total), followed by Africa (21 per cent and 20 democracies), and Latin America and the Caribbean (20 per cent and 19 democracies). In Asia, the total number of democracies is equal to the combined total of hybrid regimes and non-democracies, while in Africa and the Middle East democracies constitute less than half of countries (41 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively). See Figure 1.5 for more detail.

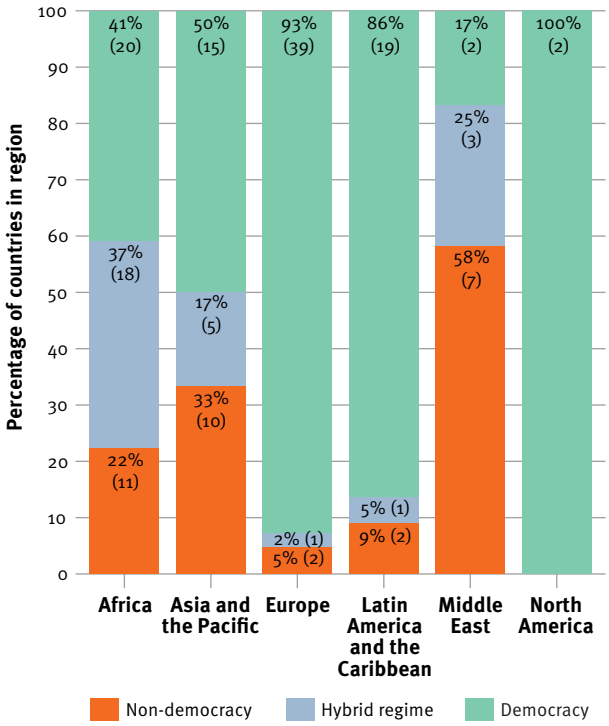
There is democratic variation among subregions. The most democratic subregions in the world are Oceania, North and West Europe, South Europe, and East-Central Europe, which only contain democracies. Other subregions with a large share of democracies are South America (90 per cent), Central America (86 per cent), the Caribbean (80 per cent) and West Africa (73 per cent).

A number of aspects of democracy have been particularly strengthened during the democratic expansion of the last four decades. Significant global progress has been made in the quality of elections, the effectiveness of parliaments,

2 In 1991 Samuel Huntington used the concept of waves to describe periods in time with a significant and sustained increase or decrease (reverse wave) in the number of democracies. According to Huntington, the first wave of democracy began in the 1820s and ended in 1926, while the second wave began in 1945 and lasted until 1962, and the third wave started in 1974 (Huntington 1991: 12).

FIGURE 1.5

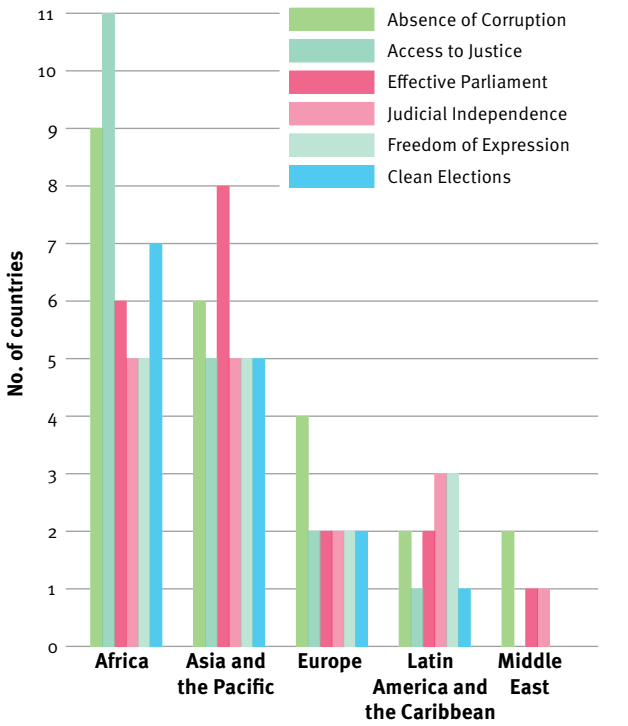
Number and percentage of regime types per region, 2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

FIGURE 1.6

Advances in democratic aspects by region, 2013–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Local Democracy and levels of Electoral Participation. Furthermore, there has been an increase in freedom for political parties, enhanced Media Integrity and increased levels of Civil Society Participation. Globally, Checks on Government have been strengthened, suffrage has become more inclusive and there has been an expansion of Civil Liberties, enhanced Gender Equality and higher levels of Basic Welfare. Progress on these aspects has been made to varying degrees, across all regions over the world, even in weak democratic contexts such as the Middle East.

A number of countries have seen significant advances in reducing corruption, strengthening the rule of law and ensuring respect for Civil Liberties since 2013. Most countries advancing are recorded in Africa, although Asia and the Pacific has seen a larger share of its countries advancing (see Figure 1.6).

Despite the long-term gains observed in these aspects of democracy, in the past five years, the number of countries with significant declines outnumber those with advances in each of those dimensions, except for Effective Parliament and Access to Justice, which have seen an equal amount of countries declining and advancing (see section on Concerning democratic trends: challenges).

Democracy comes in many shapes and democratic performance patterns

Democracy comes in many shapes and forms. The democratic performance of the world's democracies varies widely. The GSoD Indices measure low, mid-range and high performance (according to GSoD score) on the 0 to 1 scale on its five attributes of democracy: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

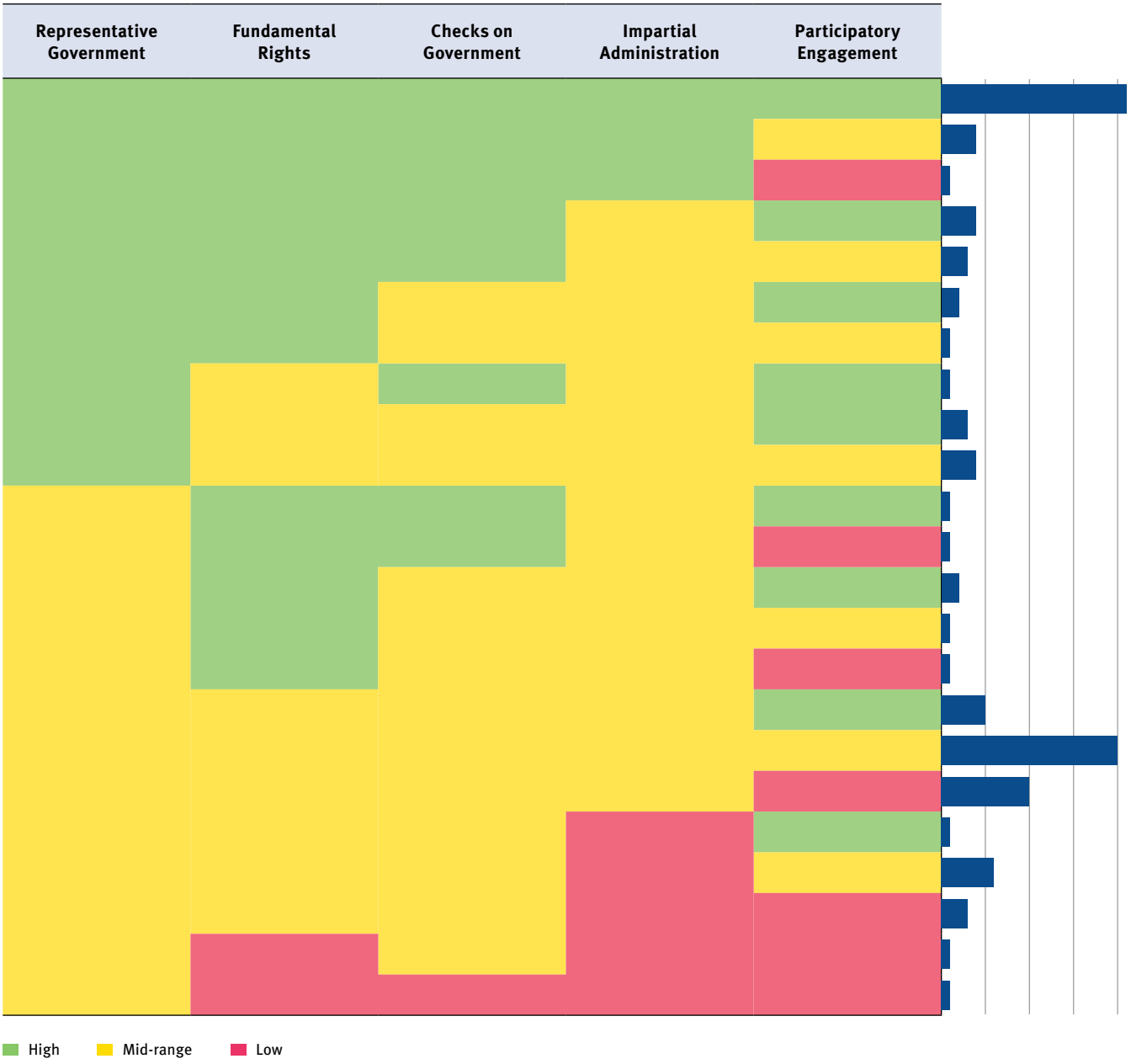
A total of 23 different democratic performance patterns can be identified among the world's 97 democracies. However, only a small percentage of democracies (22 per cent) are high performing on all democratic attributes. The largest share of

these (14 of 21) are older democracies located in Northern and Western Europe, although they can be found across other world regions, including Asia and the Pacific (Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan), Latin America and the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay) and North America (Canada).

Well over half (71 per cent) of the high-performing democracies are older democracies (i.e. those that were democracies before 1975), while the rest are early third-wave democracies (i.e. those that transitioned to democracy between 1975 and 2000). Mid-range performance across all attributes is also a common performance pattern, with 20 countries in

FIGURE 1.7

Democratic performance patterns in 2018, global level



Notes: Distribution and performance patterns of the world's 97 democracies. The blue bars on the right indicate the number of countries in each performance pattern.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

the world in this category. The remaining 56 democracies perform better on some aspects of democracy than others, in 21 different performance constellations. This suggests that the world's democracies vary in term of both democratic performance and performance patterns (see Figure 1.7).

Democracy has proven resilient over time

The world's democracies have proven remarkably resilient. The large majority (81 per cent) of the world's 97 democracies have proven democratically resilient, having maintained their democratic status uninterruptedly since 1975 (or since they transitioned to democracy). See Figure 1.8 for more detail.

Older democracies have shown more democratic resilience than third-wave democracies. A total of 28 countries in the world were democracies before 1975, when the third wave of democratization began. Democracy has been interrupted in just two of these countries: Sri Lanka, which re-transitioned back to democracy in 2015, and Venezuela, which is the only old democracy to have experienced a gradual democratic backsliding over the past two decades, and which ultimately became a non-democracy in 2017.

Third-wave democracies have proven relatively resilient, although less so than the older democracies. Of the 83 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1975, well over half (64 per cent) have remained democracies uninterruptedly. Of the 70 current third-wave democracies, 76 per cent have remained democracies uninterruptedly since their transition. More than half (56 per cent) of the countries that experienced partial or full democratic breakdown after 1975 have since returned to democracy.

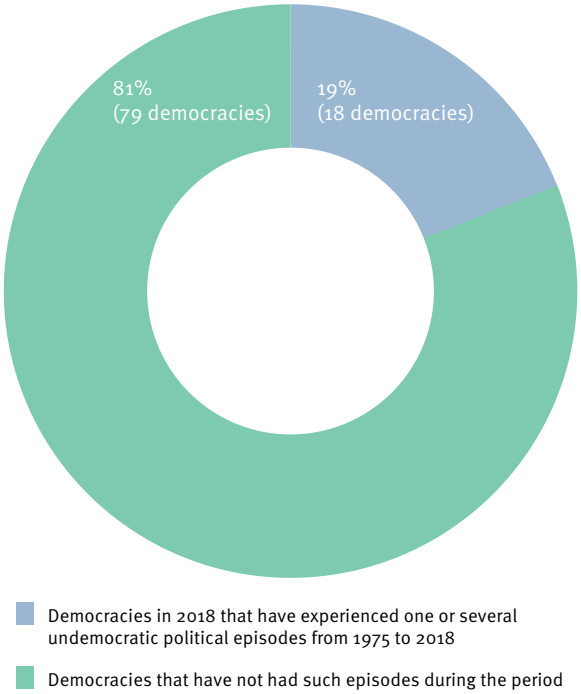
Some hybrid and non-democratic regimes have made incremental gains

Hybrid and non-democratic regimes are not static in their democratic development and can also experience advances in aspects of democracy. While this progress may represent genuine attempts at democratic reform, this will not always be the case. These improvements can also represent attempts to strengthen the legitimacy of the regimes by creating or maintaining their democratic façade.

Around half of all hybrid regimes (10 in total) and non-democracies (11 in total) have seen advances in at least one of their democratic aspects in the past five years. Four countries stand out for their advances over this time: Angola, Central African Republic (CAR), Ethiopia and Uzbekistan (see Table 1.2). Each of these countries has seen advances on four or more aspects of democracy, reflecting the progress of emerging democratic reforms.

FIGURE 1.8

Interruptions to democracy, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

In the case of Ethiopia, the four advances recorded in 2018 were significant enough to lead to a change in its regime classification, from a non-democracy to a hybrid regime. Uzbekistan is a non-democracy that has experienced advances on five of its democratic subattributes, reflecting the unprecedented administrative and constitutional reform processes undertaken since 2016, although these have not yet been sufficient to alter the regime type (see Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion).

Democracy as an enabler of sustainable development

International IDEA views democracy as a universal human aspiration and as a goal worth pursuing because of its intrinsic value to societies. However, it also believes that democracy has an instrumental value, as an enabler of sustainable development (International IDEA 2018a: 5–9).

The GSoD Indices data provides some backing for this view, while recognizing that more research is needed beyond descriptive statistics to explore with greater depth when, how and under what circumstances democracy can lead to more sustainable societal, economic and environmental outcomes.

International IDEA also acknowledges that regime type is only one of the factors that comes into play when determining sustainable development outcomes and is therefore not a sufficient condition for this determination. Indeed, a number of democracies have low levels of sustainable development. This has been identified as one of the drivers for the rise of populism, an issue explored in more detail in Section 1.2.

For this reason, *The Global State of Democracy 2019* does not claim a direct causal link between democracy and sustainable development. However, the GSoD Indices provide some backing for a number of claims on the association between democracy and certain aspects of sustainable development.

Democracies generally outperform hybrid regimes and non-democracies on aspects not generally considered core to democracy. The GSoD framework includes a broad range of democratic characteristics—such as Basic Welfare, Access to Justice, Gender Equality, Social Group Equality and Absence of Corruption—which link to sustainable social, human and economic development. In other definitions of democracy, these dimensions are often viewed as outcomes of democracy, rather than defining characteristics (Munck 2016).

While several hybrid regimes and non-democracies perform well on these aspects, they are the exception rather than the rule. Democracy is not a sufficient condition for high performance and not all democracies perform well on these aspects. However, democracies are more likely to have high performance than non-democracies.

On average, democracies have higher levels of **Fundamental Rights** (including Access to Justice, enjoyment of Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality) than hybrid regimes and non-democracies (see Table 1.3). All the countries with high levels of Fundamental Rights are democracies (see Figure 1.9). Inversely, 59 per cent of non-democracies have low levels of Fundamental Rights. There are only two democracies in the world with low levels of Fundamental Rights: Haiti and Turkey.

Democracies are associated with higher levels of Gender Equality. On average, democracies have higher levels of

TABLE 1.2

Hybrid regimes and non-democracies with significant advances, 2013–2018

Country	Regime type (2018)	No. of significant advances	Democratic aspects with significant advances
Angola	Hybrid regime	4	Predictable Enforcement Absence of Corruption Media Integrity Effective Parliament
Central African Republic	Hybrid regime	6	Civil Liberties Civil Society Participation Access to Justice Clean Elections Absence of Corruption Predictable Enforcement
Ethiopia	Hybrid regime*	4	Absence of Corruption Civil Liberties Access to Justice Media Integrity
Uzbekistan	Non-democracy	5	Civil Liberties Absence of Corruption Effective Parliament Access to Justice Civil Society Participation

Notes: *Ethiopia was classified as a non-democracy in 2017 but transitioned to a hybrid regime in 2018.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Gender Equality than non-democracies and hybrid regimes. All but one of the countries with high levels of Gender Equality are democracies, while this is the case for only one non-democracy (Rwanda). Half of non-democracies have low levels of Gender Equality, while only three democracies (Iraq, Papua New Guinea and Turkey) have low levels of Gender Equality.

Democracies have on average higher levels of Basic Welfare and Human Development than non-democracies or hybrid regimes. On average, democracies have higher levels of Basic Welfare (which in the GSoD Indices aggregates indicators on nutrition, literacy, life expectancy and health equality) and Human Development (UNDP 2018) than non-democracies or hybrid regimes (see Table 1.3). Close to half of the world's democracies (48 per cent) have high levels of Basic Welfare, while this is the case for only 28 per cent of non-democracies and 11 per cent of hybrid regimes.

Democracies have on average significantly lower levels of corruption than non-democracies and hybrid regimes. The aspect of democracy that has the highest correlation with Basic Welfare and Human Development is Absence of Corruption. In other words, the more corrupt a country is, the more likely it is to have low levels of Human Development and vice versa.

On average, democracies have significantly lower levels of corruption than non-democracies and hybrid regimes (see Table 1.3). More than two-thirds (78 per cent) of non-democracies have high levels of corruption, as do 64 per cent of hybrid regimes, while no non-democracy has low levels of corruption. The fact that only one hybrid regime (Singapore) has low levels of corruption confirms that Singapore constitutes the exception rather than the rule. In comparison, only 25 per cent of democracies have high levels of corruption.

A recent meta-analysis of quantitative studies confirms the GSoD Indices finding that democracies tend to be less corrupt than non-democracies (Doorenspleet 2019: 189; see also Casas-Zamora and Carter 2017 and Mills,

TABLE 1.3

Average score by regime type and aspect of democracy, 2018

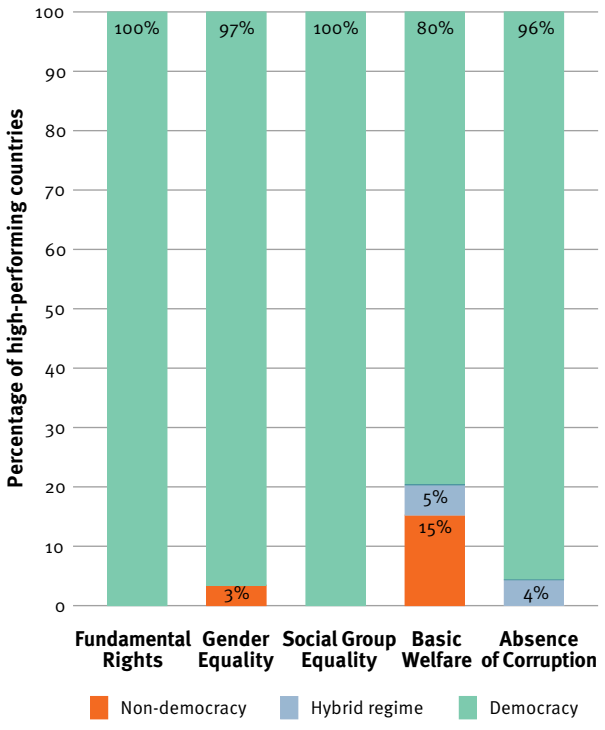
Attribute	Average GSoD Indices score		
	Democracies (n=97)	Hybrid regimes (n=28)	Non-democratic regimes (n=32)
Fundamental Rights	0.69	0.50	0.37
Gender Equality	0.64	0.51	0.44
Basic Welfare	0.68	0.50	0.57
Absence of Corruption	0.54	0.37	0.30
Human Development Index	0.74	0.62	0.66

Notes: The Human Development Index figures are from 2017 and are not included in the GSoD Indices data set. The green-coloured cells denote the highest average score.

Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Index, 2018, ‹http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi›

FIGURE 1.9

High performance levels by regime type



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Obasanjo, Herbst and Biti 2019). However, the GSoD Indices data, similar to the meta-analysis, does not support a direct causal link between democracy and low corruption, given the prevalence of high levels of corruption in a quarter of the world's democracies. The meta-analysis identifies level of democratic consolidation as an explanation for the prevalence of corruption: the more consolidated a democracy is, the less corruption there is likely to be. Weaker democracies, with weaker institutions, are more prone to corruption.

Another factor that interacts with corruption is the level of economic development. Particular institutions within democracies, such as free and independent media organizations, are seen to effectively limit corruption (Doorenspleet 2019: 189). The GSoD Indices data confirms these findings, with moderate levels of correlation between Media Integrity and Absence of Corruption. The highest correlations in the GSoD data set are, however, found between Absence of Corruption and Access to Justice and Clean Elections.

Overall, these findings confirm that democracy, while not perfect, is a better institutional choice than non-democracy or hybridity for combating corruption and that efforts are needed to further strengthen democracies' capacity to reduce corruption.

According to the GSoD Indices and some academic studies, economic and environmental performance also seems to differ according to regime type, although a direct causal link is not claimed in this report.

TABLE 1.4

Mean GDP per capita by level of Representative Government, 1975 and 2017

Level of Representative Government	Mean GDP per capita in current US dollars		Increase
	1975	2018	
Low	1,490	7,000	5 times
Mid-range	1,031	13,105	13 times
High	5,812	49,789	9 times

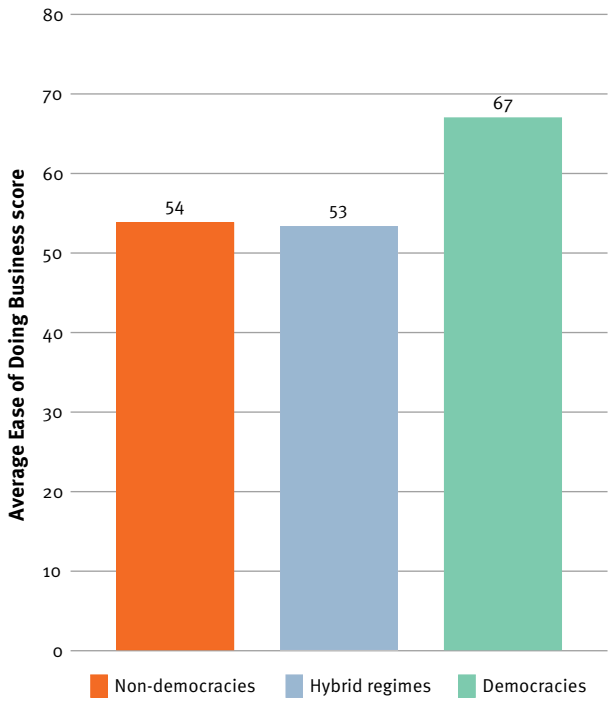
Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›; World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2018a, ‹https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators›.

The GSoD Indices find that democracies with high and mid-range levels of Representative Government have achieved higher rates of long-term gross domestic product (GDP) growth than non-democracies with low levels of Representative Government (see Table 1.4). Moreover, transitions from non-democracy to democracy have been found to increase GDP per capita by about 20 per cent for 25 years, compared to income levels in countries that remained non-democratic (Acemoglu et al. 2019: 48).

Democracies are better for doing business. Democracies provide better regulations for business and protect property rights more effectively than other regime types. The average score on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Score is 67 for democracies, compared to 53 for hybrid regimes and 54 for non-democracies (see Figure 1.10). Regime type is also significant when controlling for other factors in the regression analysis (World Bank 2018b).

FIGURE 1.10

Average Ease of Doing Business score by regime type, 2018



Notes: The Ease of Doing Business score compares economies with respect to regulatory best practice. The 2018 scores for GSoD Indices countries range between 20 and 87, with higher scores denoting better performance.

Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›. World Bank, Ease of Doing Business Score, 2018, ‹https://www.doingbusiness.org/en/data/doing-business-score›, accessed 6 August 2019.

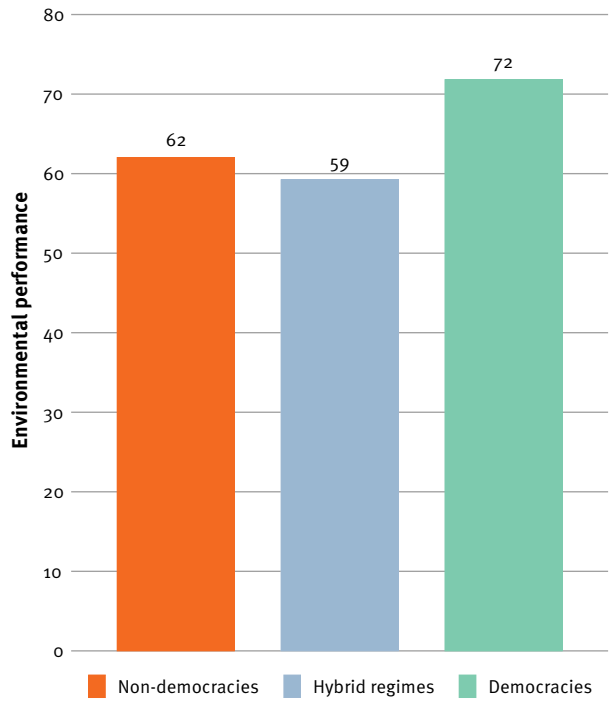
Democracies are associated with higher average levels of environmental performance than non-democracie.s. The Environmental Performance Index measures how well countries protect human health from environmental harm and preserve vital ecosystems (Wendling et al. 2018). Democracies score an average of 72 out of 100 on the Environmental Performance Index, compared to an average of 62 for non-democracies and 59 for hybrid regimes (see Figure 1.11).

1.1.3. Concerning democratic trends: challenges

Despite the significant democratic achievements observed in most regions of the world over the past decades, and the continued increase in the number of democracies, there are other concerning signs that may point to a global democratic malaise. This condition is defined by a number of challenges, including a loss in democratic quality in both older and third-wave democracies and challenges related to the difficulties in meeting citizens' expectations of high and equitable democratic, social and economic performance.

FIGURE 1.11

Environmental performance by regime type, 2018



Notes: The difference between regime types loses significance when controlling for income levels.

Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›. Wendling, Z. A. et al., 2018 Environmental Performance Index (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, 2018), ‹https://epi.envirocenter.yale.edu/›.

Weak democratic performance of third-wave democracies is on the increase

The democratic performance and quality of many of the third-wave democracies remain weak and the share of weak democracies is on the rise. Democracies that score low on at least one attribute of democracy have been labelled weak democracies.[3] They are characterized by having weak formal and informal democratic institutions, processes and practices. The share of democracies with weak democratic performance has increased in the last decade, from 20 per cent in 2008 to 25 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 1.12). Of these weak democracies, just over one-half (13 countries) transitioned to democracy between 1975 and 2000 but remained in a state of democratic fragility and vulnerable to breakdown, while the remainder, a little less than one-half, transitioned to democracy after 2000.

Africa is the region with the largest share of weak democracies. However, weak democracies are present across other regions of the world, with four each in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe; three in Asia and the Pacific; and the two democracies in the Middle East (see Table 1.5).

TABLE 1.5

Democracies with weak and very weak performance, 2018

Region	Weak-performing democracies	Very weak-performing democracies
Africa	Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia	Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar
Asia and the Pacific	Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea	
Europe	Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine	Turkey
Latin America and the Caribbean	Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras	Haiti
The Middle East	Lebanon	Iraq

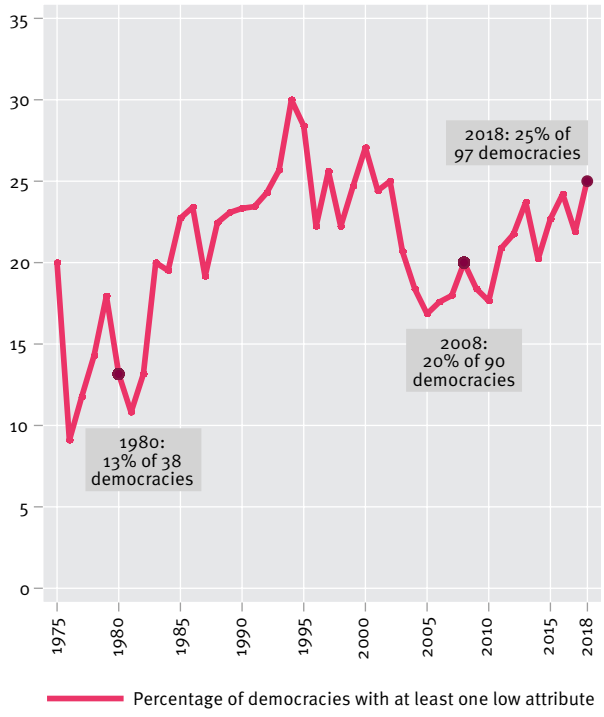
Notes: Weak performance is defined as a low score on at least one attribute of democracy (unless a country scores high on the other four attributes), while very weak performance is defined as a low score on at least two attributes.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

3 The coding rule for weak democracies is low score on at least one attribute, unless they have high on the four other attributes, which is the case for Ireland.

FIGURE 1.12

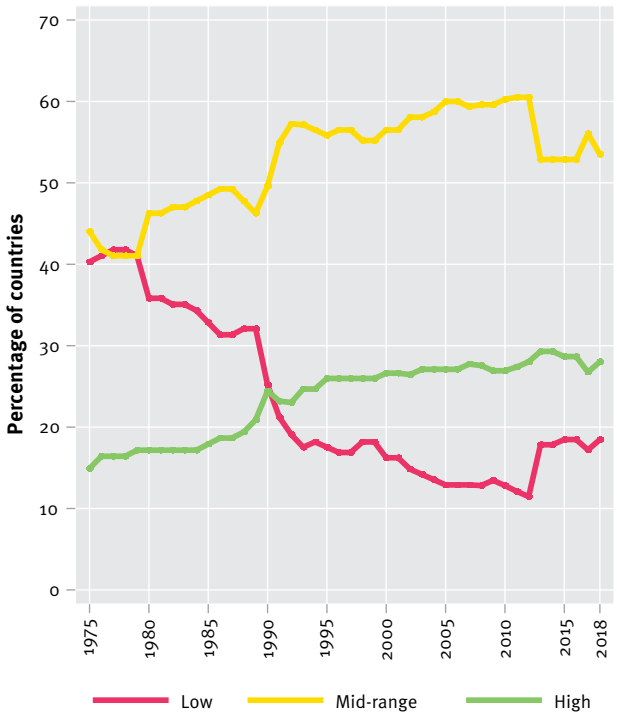
Countries with low performance on at least one attribute of democracy, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.13

Share of countries by performance level in Access to Justice, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Increases in the share of countries with low democratic performance have been seen in relation to democratic aspects such as Fundamental Rights, Social Group Equality, Civil Society Participation and Electoral Participation. The decrease in Fundamental Rights is particularly visible in aspects related to Access to Justice (see Figure 1.13) and Civil Liberties (see Figure 1.14)—mostly in relation to Freedom of Association and Assembly and Personal Integrity and Security, but also Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion. Since 2016, the share of countries with low levels of Clean Elections has also seen a slight increase (from 20 per cent to 23 per cent of countries).

Democracy remains fragile in some transitional contexts

The majority of countries that underwent a democratic transition after 1975 have kept their democratic status uninterruptedly. Nevertheless, around 36 per cent have experienced democratic fragility. This is described in the GSoD as partial (to hybrid) or full (to non-democracy) democratic breakdowns at some point in the past four decades. More than half of these countries (18 in total) have since returned to democracy, while the remaining 40 per cent have remained in either a hybrid or non-democratic state.

The increasing number of re-transitions to democracy points to the democratic fragility of a number of third-wave democracies. In the period 2007–2018, there were 19 such transitions—more than twice as many as in the previous decade (see Figure 1.15). All of these countries had transitioned to democracy at some point after 1975, experienced a partial (to hybrid) or full (to non-democracy) democratic breakdown and then returned to democracy. The most recent examples include Sri Lanka (2015), Haiti (2016), The Gambia (2017) and Lebanon (2018). Therefore, while the world continues to experience a quantitative increase in the number of democracies, the quality of many of these democracies remains low and subject to democratic fragility.

The majority of countries with partial or full democratic breakdowns experienced only one such episode. However, 9 of the 30 experienced several breakdowns since 1975, and 4 of those (Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Nepal and Sri Lanka)

have currently returned to democracy (note that Guinea-Bissau and Haiti are also weak democracies). Six countries (Bangladesh, Nicaragua, Niger, Zambia and most recently Pakistan) with previous democratic breakdowns have remained in a hybrid state while Thailand remained in a non-democratic state until 2019.

Africa contains the largest share of fragile democracies. A total of seven fragile democracies are in Africa but Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific also contain fragile democracies. Two-thirds of fragile democracies are early third-wave democracies (i.e. those that transitioned before 2000), while the remainder are third-wave democracies that transitioned after 2000.

Democratic weakness and fragility are closely interlinked. Two-thirds (12 of 18) of fragile democracies (i.e. those that have experienced undemocratic interruptions) are also low-performing weak democracies. The largest share of those weak, low-quality and fragile democracies is found in Africa, but they can also be found in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Europe and the Middle East (see Table 1.6). Democratic weakness and low democratic quality make democracies more vulnerable to partial (into hybridity) or full (into non-democracy) democratic backsliding or breakdown, therefore reinforcing their democratic fragility.

Democratic erosion is on the rise

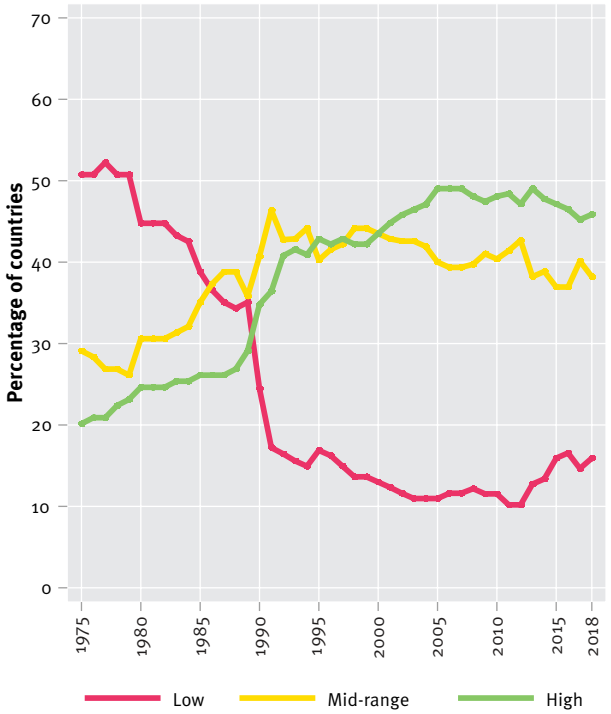
The share of democracies experiencing democratic erosion has seen a consistent increase in the past decades and has more than doubled in the past decade compared to the decade before. The GSoD Indices define democratic erosion as a statistically significant decline on at least one democratic subattribute over a five-year period in democracies. Democratic erosion can occur at different levels of democratic development.

In 2018, one-half (50 per cent) of the world's democracies experienced democratic erosion, with declines on at least one subattribute of democracy, and 15 per cent experienced declines on three subattributes or more. Nearly half of the world's population (43 per cent) live in countries that have experienced some form of democratic erosion in the last five years (see Figure 1.16).

The regions with the largest share of democracies experiencing democratic erosion are North America, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe (see Figure 1.17). Democratic erosion affects more than half of the democracies in these regions, and a little under half of all democracies in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (43 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively).

FIGURE 1.14

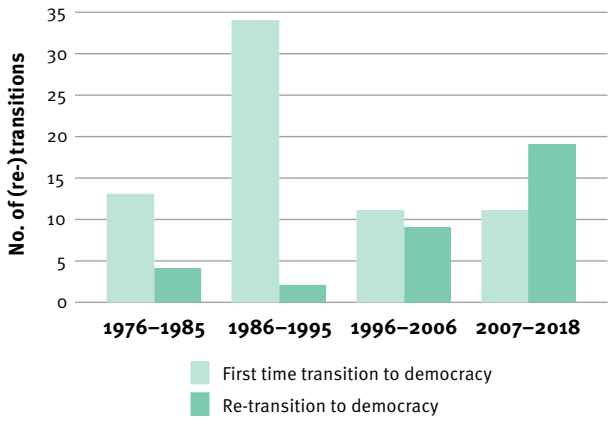
Share of countries by performance level in Civil Liberties, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.15

First-time democratic transitions versus re-transitions by decade, 1976–2018



Notes: Some countries may have experienced several re-transitions in a decade and may therefore be counted more than once. First-time transitions to democracy refer to countries that experienced a democratic transition after 1975 for the first time in their history, while re-transitions are those countries that transitioned to democracy after 1975, experienced partial or full democratic breakdown, and then returned to democracy.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 1.6

Fragile and weak democracies, 2018

Combination of fragility and weakness	Africa	Europe	Latin America and the Caribbean	The Middle East
Fragile and weak	The Gambia, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria	Georgia	Dominican Republic, Honduras	Lebanon
Very fragile and weak	Guinea-Bissau			
Fragile and very weak	Madagascar	Turkey		
Very fragile and very weak		Haiti		

Notes: Democracies that are both weak and fragile according to definitions provided in text.
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Roughly half of both older (48 per cent) and third-wave democracies (53 per cent) have experienced democratic erosion in the last five years. The democracies that have seen the most widespread democratic erosion in the past five years, judging by the number of democratic subattributes declines, are six third-wave democracies (Brazil, Hungary, Kenya, Poland, Romania and Turkey) and two older democracies: India and the United States.

In 2014, in another sign of global democratic erosion, countries with significant democratic declines in Fundamental Rights started to outnumber those with significant advances. Furthermore, in 2016, for the first time since 1975, the number of countries with significant declines in Representative Government and Checks on Government also began to outnumber those with significant advances.

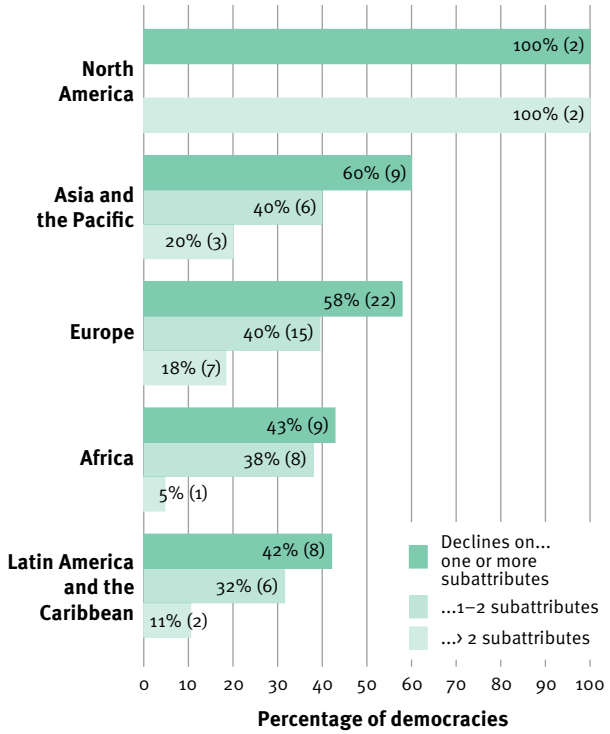
FIGURE 1.16

Share of world population living in countries with and without democratic erosion, 2018

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.17

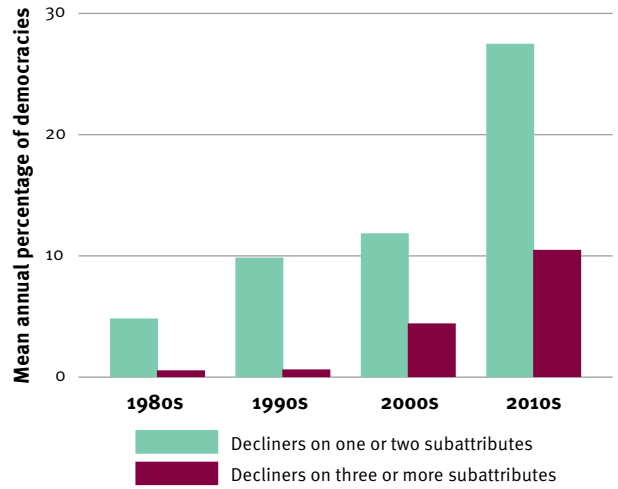
Democratic erosion by region, 2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.18

Significant declines on one or more subattributes of democracy, 1980s to 2010s



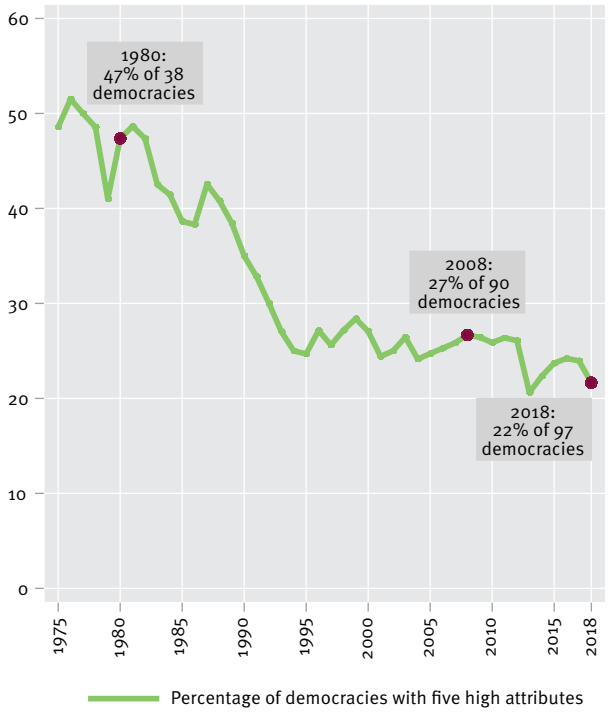
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

While democratic weakness and fragility affects a number of third-wave democracies, there are also signs that the quality of the world's high-performing democracies is eroding. This erosion has been particularly marked in the last decade. High performance in this context refers to a high score on all five attributes of democracy. Despite the number of democracies more than doubling in the past four decades, the share of democracies with high performance on all five democratic attributes has been cut by more than half during the same period (from 47 per cent in 1980 to 22 per cent in 2018). In the past decade alone (i.e. since 2008), the share of high-performing democracies has been reduced from 27 per cent to 22 per cent (see Figure 1.19).

The aspects of democracy that have eroded most in high-performing democracies are those related to civic space. The GSoD Indices measure this erosion via indicators on Civil Society Participation, Media Integrity and Civil Liberties (in particular Freedom of Religion, Personal Integrity and Security, and Freedom of Expression) as well

FIGURE 1.19

High performance on five GSoD Indices attributes, 1975–2018



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of countries with high performance on all five GSoD Indices attributes over time. It illustrates how the quality of democracy has declined in former high-performing democracies.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

as Electoral Participation and Free Political Parties. Declines are also seen in Judicial Independence.

The share of countries with high performance on Judicial Independence, Free Political Parties, and Personal Integrity and Security was lower in 2018 than in 1990, while Media Integrity and Freedom of Expression had regressed to 1990s levels.

There are increasing signs of democratic backsliding

Democratic backsliding, a particular form of democratic erosion involving the gradual and intentional weakening of checks and balances and of civil liberties, has become more frequent in the last decade. The GSoD Indices define democratic backsliding as a gradual and intentional weakening of checks on government and accountability institutions, accompanied by declines in civil liberties. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 1.2.

A total of 10 countries in the world are currently experiencing democratic backsliding. The most severe cases are Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. However, countries such as India, the Philippines and Ukraine are also affected. In Nicaragua (2016) and Pakistan (2018), the backsliding was so severe that it led to a regression into hybridity (partial democratic breakdown).

Venezuela represents the most severe democratic backsliding case in the past four decades. Venezuela is the only country that has gone from being a democracy with high levels of Representative Government in 1975 to a non-democracy (since 2017) (see Section 3.1 for more information).

Civic space is shrinking

In all regions of the world and across all regime types, civic space is shrinking. The GSoD Indices show most countries declining on aspects of democracy related to civic space. This decline is observed in various contexts, including of democratic erosion, democratic backsliding and deepening autocratization. This has serious implications for democratic health and sustainability—a vibrant civic space is key to building and sustaining healthy democracies and safeguarding them against threats. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 1.2.

The aspects of civic space that have seen the largest number of countries declining are Civil Liberties (particularly Freedom of Expression, but also Freedom of Association and Assembly, Personal Integrity and Security, Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Movement) and Media Integrity. Levels of Civil Society Participation have also seen significant declines in a number of countries (see Figures 1.20, 1.21 and 1.22).

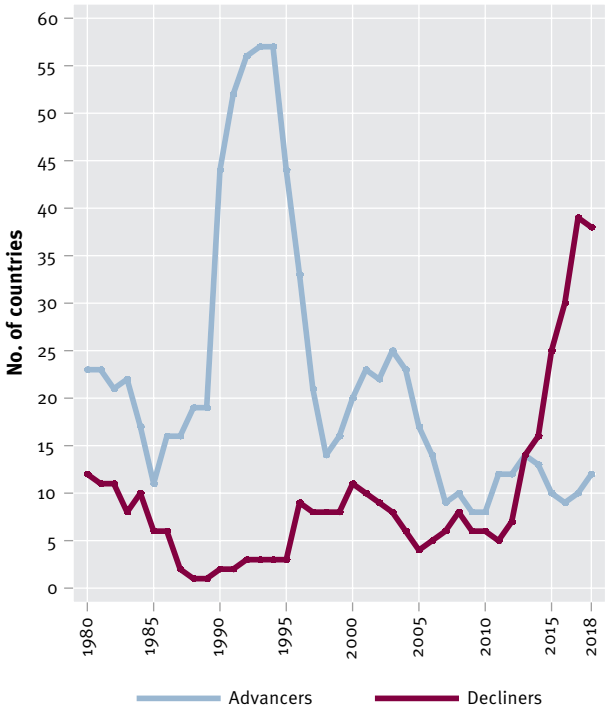
Although Europe still has higher levels of civic space than other regions of the world, it is the region that has seen the largest share of countries with declines in the Civil Liberties and Media Integrity aspects of civic space. Meanwhile Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean have seen an equal number of countries declining on Media Integrity.

Progress on other crucial aspects of democracy has been slow (e.g. corruption, gender equality and judicial independence)

The democratic aspects that have seen the slowest advances in the past four decades relate to reducing corruption, advancing Gender Equality, increasing Social Group Equality, and strengthening Judicial Independence. Absence of Corruption is the only aspect of democracy that has deteriorated globally in the past four decades, with a three per cent decrease since 1975,

FIGURE 1.20

Significant declines and advances in Civil Liberties, 1980–2018



Notes: Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

except in Latin America and the Caribbean. The share of democracies with high levels of corruption has more than doubled in 40 years: in 1975, 9 per cent of the democracies had high levels of corruption (3 of 35), while this was the case for 25 per cent of democracies in 2018 (24 of 97).

Despite some advances in political gender equality in the past decades, serious efforts are still required to achieve political Gender Equality. Only 24 per cent of parliamentary seats in the world are occupied by women. No regional average has reached the 'critical minority' point of 30 per cent of women legislators (International IDEA 2019), although some subregions—including North and West Europe (36 per cent), East Africa (34.5 per cent), and Central America and Mexico (32 per cent)—have done so (V-Dem 2019). Despite these advances, serious efforts are still required to achieve political equality for women.

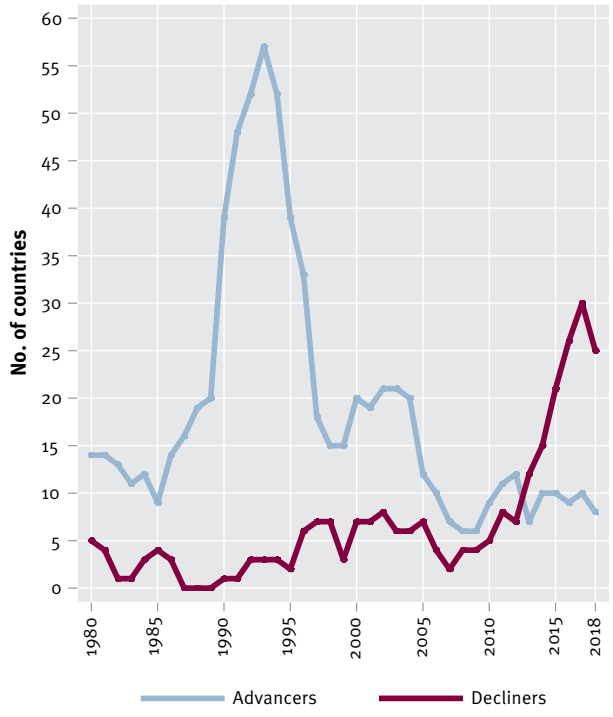
Political inclusion and judicial independence have not seen sufficient global improvements in the past four decades. Despite the significant economic and democratic progress that the world has made in the past 43 years, efforts to secure more equal access to political power, and to strengthen the independence of judiciaries, have significantly lagged behind other democratic advances.

Social Group Equality, which measures equality in access to political power and enjoyment of Civil Liberties by social group, has only increased by 10 per cent, making it the second-slowest advancing aspect in the GSoD framework. Similarly, global levels of Judicial Independence have only advanced by 15 per cent since 1975. Since 2013, the number of countries with significant declines (19) in Judicial Independence outnumber those with advances (16).

While all countries with high levels of Social Group Equality are democracies, 14 per cent of democracies have low levels of equality in access to political power. Of the democracies with high levels of social group inequality in 2018, more than half also had high levels of income inequality.

FIGURE 1.21

Significant declines and advances in Media Integrity, 1980–2018

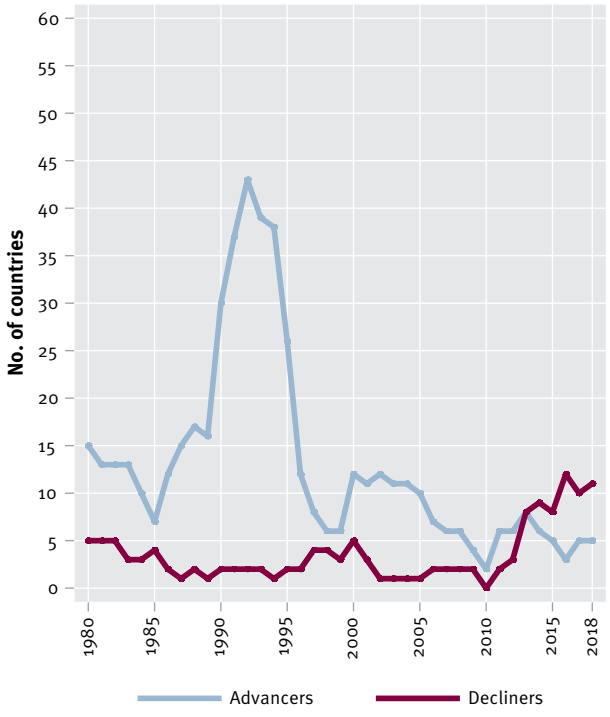


Notes: Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.22

Significant declines and advances in Civil Society Participation, 1980–2018

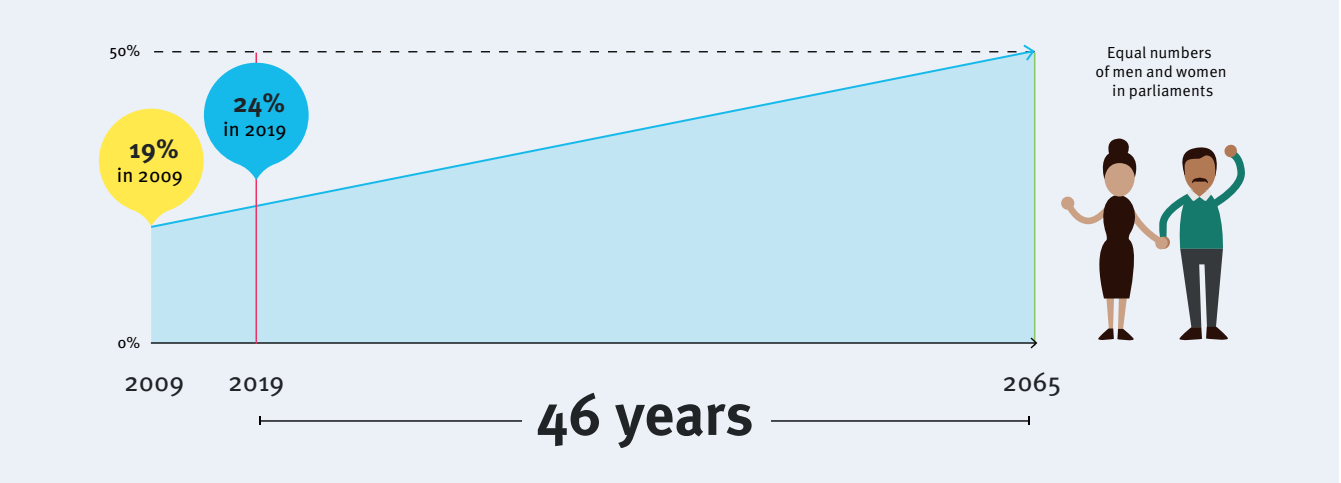


Notes: Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.23

How long will it take to reach gender parity in parliaments?



Note: International IDEA's own calculations based on the Varieties of Democracy data set (V-Dem 2019) and on data collected by the Inter-Parliamentary Union ‹https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality›, accessed 1 August 2019.

Of the 11 most income-unequal countries in the world (with a Gini coefficient[4] over 50), almost two-thirds are democracies. Furthermore, of the 58 countries with relatively high levels of income inequality (with a Gini coefficient over 40), more than half (62 per cent) are democracies. The largest share of the most income-unequal democracies in the world is found in Latin America and the Caribbean (17 countries), followed by Africa (14 countries), although they are also found across all other regions of the world (World Bank 2019).

As will be seen in the following chapters, the perceived inability of democracies to reduce corruption and socio-economic and political inequalities, among other challenges, reduces trust in democracy. This perceived inability is at the core of the current crisis of democracy in regions such as Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, where voters are turning to populist responses in the hope that they will be better able to address these challenges.

Hybridity has increased in past decades

The share of hybrid regimes has increased in the past decades. Hybrid regimes occur in countries that adopt democratic façades (often in the form of periodic, albeit non-competitive, elections), generally coupled with severe restrictions on Civil Liberties and other democratic rights. The number of hybrid regimes has more than quadrupled since 1975, from 7 (or 5 per cent) of countries to 28 (or 18 per cent) in 2018.

More than half of the world's hybrid regimes are located in Africa. The Middle East also contains a significant number of such regimes. Hybrid regimes are found in all regions except North America. In 2018 Pakistan and Tanzania became the most recent democracies to regress into hybridity.

In the majority of cases, hybridity is not a transitional stage towards democracy but a defining feature of the regime. Of the world's hybrid regimes, almost three-quarters (71 per cent) have never been democracies. Less than one-third (30 per cent) of third-wave democracies underwent a hybrid phase before transitioning to democracy. A very small share (20 per cent) of the world's hybrid regimes and non-democracies experienced democratic interruptions at some point in the last four decades.

However, in 2018, two of the world's most enduring hybrid regimes transitioned to democracy: Armenia and Malaysia. Malaysia became a democracy after more than four decades of hybridity following the 2018 general elections in which the monopoly of the National Front Coalition (Barisan Nasional) came to an end on the back of a united opposition and a strong civil society. Armenia, a hybrid regime since

4 The Gini coefficient measures inequality in income distribution in a country. A Gini coefficient of 0 represents perfect equality, while a coefficient of 100 implies the highest levels of inequality.

its independence in 1991, was beset by a wave of popular protests in 2018 that led to the resignation of its prime minister and long-standing president, and a subsequent electoral victory for the opposition. These cases demonstrate the strong popular democratic aspirations that exist even in regimes that have never experienced democracy.

Performance patterns vary widely across hybrid regimes, ranging from countries that score mid-range on all attributes, to countries that score low on all attributes. Several hybrid regimes have exceptionally high performance on some aspects of democracy. Singapore, for example, is the only hybrid regime with high levels of Impartial Administration. However, hybrid regimes and non-democracies with high performance on a democratic attribute are the exception rather than the rule.

Non-democratic regimes have persisted and deepened their autocratization

Non-democracies and hybrid regimes together still represent 38 per cent of countries. More than 3 billion people or 43 per cent of the world's population live in such regimes. The share of non-democracies has been significantly reduced in the past decades (from 68 per cent of countries in 1975 to only 20 per cent in 2018). Non-democratic regimes include autocracies, authoritarian regimes, one-party rule, military regimes, authoritarian monarchies and failed states or war-torn, conflict-ravaged countries without a centralized monopoly on the use of force.

In most non-democratic regimes, civil liberties tend to be systematically curtailed. There is often no clear separation of power, the judiciary is usually controlled by the executive, oppositional political parties are often barred from operating freely, and the media tends to be systematically restricted as are critical voices within civil society, although in non-democracies that are failing states and countries ravaged by civil war, the executive usually lacks autocratic repressive powers over the judiciary and opposition parties.

The share of people living in non-democracies (28 per cent) remains significant as a number of non-democracies (i.e. China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) have large populations. Non-democracies are found across all regions of the world. The Middle East is the least democratic region in the world, with more than half (58 per cent) of its countries being non-democracies. Of the 32 non-democracies in the world, the largest share (34 per cent) are in Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific (31 per cent), and the Middle East (22 per cent). The least democratic subregions in the world are Central Asia, which has never had a democracy, and Central Africa, which contained no democracies in 2018. North Africa and East Africa have just one democracy each.

Even within non-democracies, performance patterns vary. Some non-democracies score low on all democratic attributes—almost half of all non-democracies (16) can be found in this category across all regions with such regimes—while others score mid-range on some of their attributes. The United Arab Emirates is the only non-democracy that scores high on a democratic attribute, namely Impartial Administration (due to its low levels of corruption). If performance at the subattribute or subcomponent level is analysed, some non-democracies also score exceptionally high on some aspects. Cuba, for example, scores in the top 25 per cent in the world on both Basic Welfare and Gender Equality. Rwanda is a non-democracy with high levels of Gender Equality.

A significant share of the world's non-democracies has proven remarkably persistent, and citizens in these countries have never experienced democracy. More than half of the world's non-democracies (18 of 32) and the large majority (73 per cent) of hybrid and non-democracies combined have never been a democracy at any point since 1975. The influence of these persistent non-democracies on the global democracy landscape should not be underestimated.

The actions of China (and Russia) in Venezuela, providing the regime of President Nicolás Maduro with favourable loans in exchange for subsidized oil, are seen as key factors in his maintenance of power. In the case of Cambodia, no-strings financial loans to the government, in addition to large economic investments, have also been key elements in the country's deepening autocratization, helping to shield the regime from international pressure. China invests in all regions of the world and also reportedly exerts its political and economic influence by exporting surveillance technology to non-democratic regimes.

While a number of hybrid regimes and non-democracies have seen some advances in their democratic indicators in the past 10 years, a significant number have also become increasingly autocratic. This process (referred to as deepening autocratization) is defined in the GSoD Indices as significant declines in at least three democratic subattributes during a five-year period (see Table 1.7). In some cases, this has pushed some hybrid regimes into non-democracies, as was the case in Venezuela in 2017 and in Cambodia in 2018. The number of countries experiencing deepening autocratization has increased in the last decade and has now reached its highest peak since 1975 (see Figure 1.24).

TABLE 1.7

Countries experiencing deepening autocratization, 2013–2018

	Number of subattribute declines, 2013–2018	Within hybrid category	Shift from hybrid to non-democratic category	Within non-democratic category
Venezuela	8		2017	
Yemen	8			X
Burundi	7			X
South Sudan	5			X
Egypt	3			X
Mauritania	3			X
Togo	3	X		
Bahrain	3			X
Cambodia	3		2018	

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

1.1.4. Conclusion

There is some hope for democracy worldwide. The number of democracies continues to rise, and people's democratic aspirations remain high, even in countries that have never experienced democracy. Those popular demands have often been a key driving force of recent democratic transitions. However, democracy is under stress and faces a global malaise.

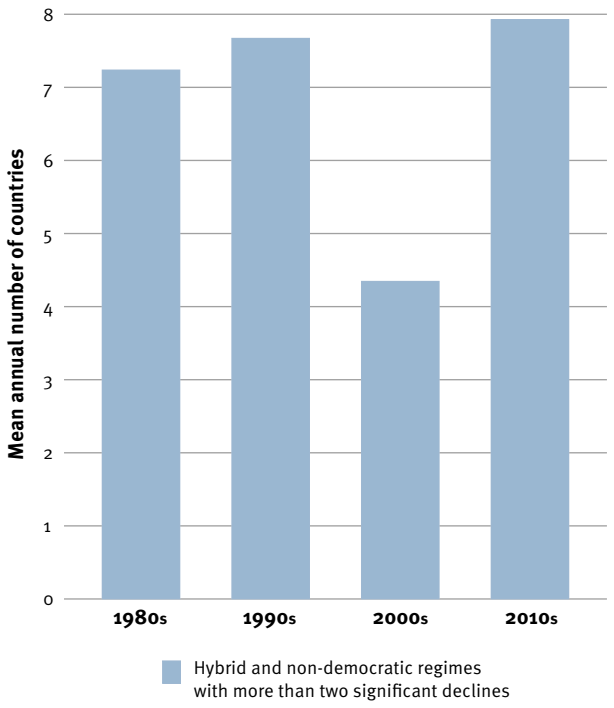
While the quantitative expansion of democracy continues today, the quality of the world's democracies is deteriorating. This deterioration takes different forms depending on the context. New democracies exhibit weak democratic performance and, even while building their democratic institutions and capacities, remain susceptible to backsliding into hybridity or a non-democratic state.

The share of countries with high democratic performance is decreasing and these countries face the challenges of democratic erosion and backsliding, often spurred by the rise of populist alternatives. Populists attract voters with promises of more effective solutions to socio-economic challenges at the expense of democratic quality. In all these contexts, civic space is shrinking.

At the same time, governments in a number of large or economically powerful countries across all regions of the world seem immune to democracy and endure as non-democracies (e.g. China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) or hybrid regimes (e.g. Singapore), while luring others with an exportable model of governance. Some of these opportunities and challenges for democracy are analysed in greater depth in Table 1.8.

FIGURE 1.24

Deepening autocratization per decade 1980s–2010s



Notes: This figure shows the annual number of non-democratic and hybrid regimes with at least three significant declines, averaged per decade. Note that the decade of the 2010s is only made up of eight years' worth of data (2010–2018).

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 1.8

The Global State of Democracy Indices: A global snapshot

This section offers a snapshot of the Global State of Democracy, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis covers the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement—as well as their subattributes.

Representative Government

Of the world's 97 democracies in 2018, 55 per cent have mid-range levels and 45 per cent have high levels of Representative Government.

Elected Government:

When counting countries with more than one million inhabitants, the world has 97 democracies with democratically elected governments, 32 non-democracies and 28 hybrid regimes.

In 2018, Pakistan and Tanzania regressed from democracy to become hybrid regimes, while Armenia and Malaysia transitioned from hybridity to democracy.

Clean Elections:

Overall, 59 per cent of democracies (57 countries) have high levels of Clean Elections, while 41 per cent (40 countries) have mid-range levels. Of the countries with high levels of Clean Elections, 49 per cent are found in Europe, while 19 per cent are found in Latin America and the Caribbean, 8 per cent in both Africa and Asia and the Pacific and 2 per cent in North America.

Inclusive Suffrage:

In 2018, 94 per cent of countries in the world had high levels of Inclusive Suffrage.

Free Political Parties:

Overall, 29 per cent of democracies have high levels of Free Political Parties, while 71 per cent have mid-range levels. Of the countries with high levels, 47 per cent are found in Europe, while 21 per cent are found in Latin America and the Caribbean, 18 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and 7 per cent in both Africa and North America.

Fundamental Rights

In 2018 more than half of all democracies (55 per cent) had mid-range performance on Fundamental Rights, while 43 per cent had high performance. Only two democracies—Haiti and Turkey—had low performance on this attribute.

Access to Justice:

Of all the democracies in the world, only four—El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Turkey—have low levels of Access to Justice. Three of these countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, 56 per cent of non-democracies (18 of 32 countries) have low levels of Access to Justice.

Civil Liberties:

In the past five years, 38 countries have seen significant declines in their Civil Liberties scores: 32 per cent are in Europe, 24 per cent in Africa, and 18 per cent in Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Gender Equality:

In 2018, 18 per cent of countries had high levels of political Gender Equality, while 68 per cent had mid-range levels and 14 per cent had low levels. A total of three democracies had low levels of Gender Equality: Iraq, Papua New Guinea and Turkey.

Social Group Equality:

Overall, 23 per cent of democracies (22 countries) have high levels of Social Group Equality, while 14 per cent have low scores on this measure (14 countries). No hybrid regime or non-democracy has high levels of Social Group Equality.

The regions with the largest number of countries with low levels of Social Group Equality are Africa (16 countries) and Asia and the Pacific (14 countries).

Basic Welfare:

Of all the democracies in the world, 48 per cent have high levels of Basic Welfare, while 42 per cent have mid-range scores and 10 per cent have low performance.

Checks on Government

In 2018, 62 per cent of the 97 democracies in the world had mid-range performance on Checks on Government, and 37 per cent had high performance. Only one country, Turkey, had low performance on this attribute.

Effective Parliament:

Overall, 21 per cent of countries have high levels of Effective Parliament, while 24 per cent have low levels.

Judicial Independence:

Since 2013, 19 countries have seen significant declines in Judicial Independence. While most of the declines are seen in Europe and Africa (32 per cent or six countries each), most of the 16 countries presenting significant advances in the last five years are in Africa and Asia and the Pacific.

Media Integrity:

In 2018, 47 per cent of democracies had high performance in Media Integrity, while 52 per cent had mid-range performance and 1 per cent had low levels.

Impartial Administration

27 per cent of democracies in the world have high levels of Impartial Adminsitration, 61 per cent have mid-range levels and 12 per cent have low levels.

Absence of Corruption:

While 23 per cent of democracies have low levels of corruption (› 0.7 on Absence of Corruption), this is true for only one hybrid regime (Singapore) and for no non-democracies.

In 2018, high levels of corruption could be found in 25 per cent of democracies. Of these countries, 37 per cent are in Africa, 25 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 17 per cent in Europe, 13 per cent (three countries) in Asia and the Pacific and 8 per cent (two countries) in the Middle East.

Of the 22 democracies with low levels of corruption, 68 per cent are in Europe, four (18 per cent) are in Asia and the Pacific, while three are in the Americas.

A total of 23 countries have seen significant advances in their Absence of Corruption score in the last five years, while 14 have seen significant declines.

Predictable Enforcement:

In the last five years, 17 countries have seen significant declines on Predictable Enforcement.

Participatory Engagement

In 2018, 41 per cent of democracies performed highly on Participatory Engagement, while 40 per cent performed mid-range and 19 per cent had low performance.

Civil Society Participation:

In 2018, 44 per cent of democracies had high performance on Civil Society Participation, while 55 per cent performed mid-range. Only one democracy, Turkey, had low performance.

Electoral Participation:

Electoral Participation levels are low in 8 per cent of democracies and 25 per cent of non-democracies. Just one hybrid regime (Ethiopia) has high levels of Electoral Participation. Of the 57 democracies that perform mid-range, 49 per cent are in Europe, 10 (18 per cent) are in Latin America and the Caribbean, 9 (16 per cent) are in Africa, and 6 (11 per cent) are in Asia and the Pacific. The Middle East and North America have two countries each, or a 3 per cent share.

Direct Democracy:

Only two countries—Taiwan and Switzerland—have high levels of Direct Democracy; both are democracies. Bulgaria, Ecuador, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, New Zealand, Peru, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Uruguay account for the 12 per cent of democracies that have a mid-range performance, while the rest (86 per cent, or 83 countries) have low levels. Overall, 91 per cent of countries have low performance on this subattribute.

Local Democracy:

Among the world's democracies, 46 per cent have high performance in Local Democracy, 36 per cent perform mid-range and 15 per cent have low performance.

1.2. Spotlight on key global issues in democracy landscape

This section provides more in-depth analysis of a selected number of issues identified in the previous section on global democratic trends that are currently affecting the global democracy landscape: the crisis of representation of political parties and the rise of populism; democratic backsliding; the empowerment of civil society in a shrinking civic space; managing elections as fair competition in challenging environments; and corruption and money in politics.

The five sections can be read in isolation depending on the specific interests of the reader, although the linkages between issues are also explored. Each provides a brief overview of key global trends and their impact on the global democracy landscape; points to main drivers, explanatory factors and consequences; and offers a set of policy considerations for harnessing the opportunities and addressing the challenges. A text box on information and communications technologies and their impact on democracy is also included (see Box 1.1).

1.2.1. The crisis of representation of political parties and the rise of populism

Democracy relies on effective representation, in the form of responsive political parties and leaders who can craft policy solutions for their societies. Yet many citizens question whether traditional political parties can handle current challenges and crises, and this has increased apathy and distrust among voters. It has also encouraged many to support alternative paths of political action, triggering the rise of ideologically extremist parties and movements with populist bents on both the right and left of the political spectrum and across all regions of the world.

Party systems in democracies are under threat, and traditional political leadership is caught between the centralization of policy decisions on the one hand, and disaffected voters on the other hand, who turn to populist responses. However, what is a populist political party or leader, what gives rise to populism and what impact does it have on democracy and on other societal aspects such as welfare and the economy? This section seeks to provide some answers to these questions.

KEY FINDINGS

The crisis of representation of political parties and the rise of populism

- Citizens are disenchanted with traditional political parties' perceived lack of capacity to address societal and economic problems. This has encouraged many voters to support alternative paths of political action, thereby contributing to the rise of extremist parties and movements on both the right and left of the political spectrum.
- Populist actors often show disrespect for the accountability institutions that check government, protect political pluralism and constitute liberal democracy. This inherent predisposition for unconstrained power turns populism into a threat for democracy.
- The GSoD Indices data shows that populist governments diminish the quality of democracy compared to non-populist governments. The only aspect of democracy that has improved more under populist governments is Electoral Participation.
- However, some also argue that populists have helped to put on the agenda important issues (e.g. corruption in democratic systems) that democracies need to tackle in order to regain their legitimacy.

Patterns and conditions of democratic backsliding

- Democratic backsliding is a particular form of democratic erosion that involves the gradual weakening of checks on government and civil liberties by democratically elected governments. This intentional dismantling of checks and balances has more than doubled in the past decade and has, in the case of Venezuela, led to a full democratic breakdown.
- Low levels of popular support for democracy as well as societal and political polarization appear to be linked to an increased probability and extent of backsliding.
- Populist presidents and governments tend to make backsliding more likely and to increase the scope of democratic decline.
- Higher levels of Effective Parliament and Civil Society Participation appear to effectively prevent the start of a backsliding process, make continued backsliding less probable and reduce the scope of backsliding.

The empowerment of civil society in a shrinking civic space

- The global democratic expansion in the past four decades has enabled an expansion of civil society and civic space at the global, regional, national and subnational levels across all regions of the world.
- A transformation of civic space has been observed in recent years, brought about by the use of information and communications technologies and the transformation of political parties, with a shift towards an individualization of civic engagement beyond formal organizational structures, to citizen mobilization and networking into looser and more fluid forms of interactions, often facilitated by social media.
- There are two key challenges related to civic space, in the current global democracy landscape. The first relates to the emergence of uncivil elements in civil society. While such currents have always existed, new forms have acquired a more potent voice and become more visible. Some of these voices (e.g. movements on the extreme right in Germany, Sweden and the United States) are the product of democratic societies and constitutionally acquired rights such as freedom of expression.
- The second key challenge for civil society is a rapidly shrinking civic space in many countries.
- Declines in civic space are seen in countries across all regions of the world and across all levels of democratic performance. These declines in civic space are occurring in contexts of democratic erosion, democratic backsliding and deepening autocratization.

Managing elections as fair competition in challenging environments

- Elections have now become the norm rather than the exception. A total of 62 per cent of countries in the world regularly hold free, fair and competitive elections. Of the world's democracies in 2018, more than half (59 per cent) have high levels of Clean Elections.
- Most electoral processes taking place around the world manage to successfully overcome the inevitable technical hiccups and facilitate orderly transitions of power. However, when confronted with serious technical challenges and significant efforts of delegitimization, electoral processes may fail to deliver credible or trusted results. Failed elections can trigger political crises with profound negative effects on societies.
- For countries undergoing significant democratic reforms as part of transition processes, revising electoral rules and strengthening electoral systems is key to ensuring the sustainability of such processes.
- Many undemocratic regimes strive to uphold elections as means of internal and external legitimization. In country contexts ruled by hybrid or non-democratic regimes, elections can reinforce a democratic façade, both domestically and internationally. The distortion of electoral principles for non-democratic purposes can further undermine public trust in the value of the electoral process in democracies.
- Social media provides a communication channel whereby rumours and disinformation spread at an unprecedented rate and this can also undermine trust in electoral processes. A need for a more rigorous regulation of social media platforms has become increasingly apparent.

Corruption and money in politics

- Absence of Corruption is closely connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies and, in particular, SDG 16.5 which aims to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms.
- Absence of Corruption also indirectly contributes to achieving the other SDGs, as corruption can hinder the effective implementation of policies at improving health or education, eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality or fostering economic growth.
- Corruption not only affects people's trust in politicians but can also undermine trust in government and democracy more broadly.
- Democracy matters for corruption. In and of itself, democracy is not sufficient to guarantee low levels of corruption: indeed, 25 per cent of democracies suffer from high levels of corruption. However, democracies are by and large less corrupt than non-democracies and hybrid regimes.
- The lack of progress in reducing corruption has serious implications for the sustainability, stability and health of both older and newer democracies. The perceived inability of some countries to effectively curb corruption is seen as one of the causes for the rise of populism.

What is populism?

Populism has become a loaded term, frequently used to discredit political opponents and their views. A popular interpretation of the word encapsulates the idea of populists as the true representatives of the neglected people, in contrast to the ruling elites.

Scholars studying the phenomenon have defined populism as an ideology, a political mobilization strategy or a discursive-stylistic repertoire. Most agree that the opposition between 'the people' and an elite that fails to represent the people's true interest constitutes the core idea of populist rhetoric and framing of politics. According to one prominent definition, populists consider 'society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite" and argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 6).

However, some view this definition as too broad as it may potentially include all those who criticize ruling elites. Other definitions therefore complement the anti-elitist element of populism with the idea that populists do not only oppose elites, but also claim to exclusively represent the people (Müller 2016). This claim questions the legitimacy of competing political actors. Some also view the people–elite opposition as overly narrow because it overlooks populists' separation between 'the people' and outside groups such as foreign nationals—immigrants in particular—as well as foreign political or economic powers (Brubaker 2017).

Electoral successes of populist politicians and parties have posed challenges to both older and newer democracies, as populist politicians claim that democratically elected political elites do not represent the 'true' interests of 'the people'. As a 'thin-centred' ideology (Freeden 1998; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017), populism can be attached to different political positions. A left-wing variant, motivated by issues of economic justice and distribution, sees elites primarily in financial terms, as a plutocratic ruling class who must be restrained and overcome in the name of the people.

A right-wing variant sees elites in cultural terms, as a liberal cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that betrays the 'true values' of the nation and looks down on the homespun folkways of the people. This variant can be seen as amalgamating populism and ethnonationalism. One example of this variant is the ethnonational populism with religious roots that has, according to observers, gained salience as a political discourse in India (Mishra 2017).

Critics of populist politics have also used the term 'authoritarian populism' to highlight linkages between populism and authoritarian values (Norris and Inglehart 2019: 69–71). The compatibility of populist ideas has supported their transnational diffusion and their adoption by mainstream political actors trying to compete with populist challengers.

Populist politicians often seek to convince their followers by using simplistic rhetoric associated with the language used by ordinary people (Brubaker 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 68). Various rhetorical tropes are used to criticize incumbent elites and democratic institutions, for example: 'the mainstream media ("fake news"), elections ("fraudulent"), politicians ("drain the swamp"), political parties ("dysfunctional")' (Norris and Inglehart 2019: 4). Populists also tend to provide seemingly simple solutions to complex challenges, such as inequalities, migration or the economy.

Because populists present themselves as the only true representatives of the people, they often interpret their electoral support as a mandate authorizing them to ignore or disrespect institutions enshrined in democratic constitutions. In the populist framing, constitutional checks and balances against the abuse of executive authority have not only failed to make elites responsive but also enabled elite conspiracy. This is why these checks and balances also lack any legitimacy to constrain the will of the people. The direct personalistic link between populist leaders and the people renders these institutions obsolete and can override or substitute them. This inherent predisposition for unconstrained power turns populism into a potential threat for democracy.

However, there is also a more 'benign' view of populism, whereby it is seen as contributing to the reinvigoration of democracy by identifying flaws and failures in current democratic systems and pushing forward necessary reform. In these circumstances, where the political system fails to respond to major unmet public needs through established democratic channels such as elections, parties and legislatures, voters turn to populist alternatives in the hope that they will better meet their expectations.

On one reading, populism is a rational response to the failure of established political parties to represent an important section of voters; if the established parties will not speak for them, then new parties (or new insurgent movements) will. According to this understanding, the rise of new parties occupying this policy space is not, in itself, a problem for democracy. Such parties give voice not only to neglected classes and ideologies, but to overlooked rural and regional

areas away from metropolitan economic and cultural centres. They also place important issues on the public agenda, such as responses to unemployment, and the need to address socio-economic inequalities and reduce corruption. Some therefore argue that the rise of these populist parties is not, as many worry, a symptom of democracy in crisis, but rather a healthy sign of democracy's capacity for self-correction and peaceful change.

However, if populism is viewed as rejecting pluralism and opposing outsiders, populists violate the liberal norms underpinning democracy, even if they may succeed in making democracy more representative by mobilizing previously less-represented voters.

The causes of populism

The origins of the recent populist wave can be traced back to several interacting factors and developments. Economic and cultural globalization has transformed the social structure and political culture of Western, post-socialist and developing countries alike (Appadurai 2006). International economic integration has supported the growth of middle classes in developing countries (Chen and Chunlong 2011; Ravallion 2010). These social groups have nurtured higher expectations regarding the performance of political regimes and democracies in particular. They also have more resources, enabling them to participate in politics. Sociocultural modernization has weakened traditional authority mechanisms and shifted the burden of regime legitimacy towards performance, democratic responsiveness, legal rationality or personal charisma. Socio-economic, sociocultural and generational changes have resulted in more political mobilization, protests and civil society activism (Bermeo and Yashar 2017; Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

Western and post-socialist societies have undergone equally profound changes resulting in the decline of traditional industrial sectors and the growth of services or high-technology manufacturing. These processes have increased domestic disparities between the beneficiaries of economic globalization and groups falling behind because of structural disadvantages related to age, location or a lack of skills. The World Bank describes these groups as disenchanted by a broken 'social contract', where their preferences for equity and perceptions about inequalities clash with how markets and public policies distribute these resources (Bussolo et al. 2018).

Hence, rising inequalities (real or perceived) combined with increasing vulnerability, the loss of social status and related fears have made these groups particularly susceptible to the appeals of populist political movements in Western and post-communist Eastern Europe. Sociocultural modernization has also led to the emergence of an individualistic and disintegrated political culture, with a decline in mass-membership organizations such as political parties, trade unions and churches that once gave form and substance to collective political action (Putnam 2000; van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012). *The Global State of Democracy 2017* identified a crisis of representation of political parties, with growing public frustration with political institutions and processes that seem unresponsive to their needs and loss of trust in political leaders, parties and institutions (International IDEA 2017: 98–122).

Globalization has raised awareness of the need for action by national governments to manage complex new transnational interdependencies. Global economic competition and financial market integration has caused many governments to adopt policies broadly in line with the dominant paradigm of neoliberal economics. Private businesses and non-governmental actors on the one hand, and non-elected agencies and institutions such as international regulatory bodies or central banks on the other, have become more important partners in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Such partnerships and the delegation of public tasks to non-elected bodies have only partly reinstated the policy autonomy of elected governments constrained by global economic interdependencies (Mair 2013; Rodrik 2011). Populists have criticized the influence of these non-elected bodies and supranational organizations such as the European Union. They claim that these organizations constrain popular sovereignty and serve the interests of technocratic elites or foreign economic or political powers. Such claims have been made, for example, during the refugee and Eurozone crisis or during the referendum on 'Brexit' held in the United Kingdom.

The use of the Internet and the spread of social media have fundamentally transformed the public sphere and political communication across the world. These new technologies greatly facilitate transnational communication, contributing to the transfer of social and cultural practices across nation states, and increasing citizens' awareness of realities in other countries. While new technologies ease access to information for many citizens, they also multiply the flows of information and dilute the filter functions performed by traditional mass media, as well as some of the mediating functions of political parties. These technologies reduce the transaction costs of collective action and therefore support political mobilization through protests and other public campaigns (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Diamond and Plattner 2012).

However, unlimited information flows enabled by digital technologies and the underlying business models of the commercial platform providers also lead to a more fragmented and segmented public sphere, harming the inclusiveness and quality of democratic deliberation (Keane 2013; Tucker et al. 2017). A fragmenting public sphere has catalysed the polarization of society into adversarial 'tribes', lacking a sense that they share a polity in common; and the collapse of the civic virtues that were once held to be essential to a democratic polity, such as tolerance, integrity, truthfulness and responsibility (Fukuyama 2018). Social media platforms lend themselves to populist mobilization because they facilitate interactive communication, but their potential is also misused to simulate a direct exchange between populist political leaders and citizens.

Increasing inflows of immigrants and refugees to Europe and the United States—partly fleeing from violent conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria and other countries, partly induced by poverty and economic crises in developing countries—**have compounded fears and resentment particularly among socially vulnerable citizens, that question whether nation states are still able to protect their citizens and their distinct national culture against the perceived threats of globalization.**

The long-term challenges of globalization, immigration and digitalization have concurred with the medium-term disruptions triggered by the global financial and economic crisis after 2008. This crisis and the ensuing sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone undermined the credibility of the EU and the nexus between economic integration and prosperity—a belief that had guided political elites in Eastern and Southern Europe for several decades (Kriesi 2018). Disappointed citizens voted for populist and anti-establishment parties to protest against mainstream elites and what many perceived as externally inflicted economic and migration crises (Krastev 2014).

In summary, political regimes and political elites are under pressure to meet the expectations of citizens and respond to their demands. However, global economic competition and interdependence constrain governments' power to tax capital owners and raise public revenues. Governments increasingly depend on private, international or non-profit actors to implement policies. Transnational migration and transnational security risks challenge the protective functions of nation states. Immigration and emigration are perceived as threats by vulnerable social groups.

These factors and the rising demand of citizens for better governance confront incumbent political elites with a dilemma: they increasingly depend on policy performance (economic growth, rising incomes, and social and human security) as a resource of regime legitimacy, but are less able to generate this resource due to eroded state capacities and increased interdependencies.

The underperformance of democracies causes dissatisfaction among citizens and reduces trust in established democratic institutions and political parties (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014). The tendency of politicians to over-promise during political campaigns and to under-deliver while in power leads elected representatives to be viewed as failing to fulfil popular expectations. This casts doubt on the institutions designed to hold these representatives accountable. Declining trust in institutions and declining turnout are particularly salient in third-wave democracies because the transition to democracy has raised performance expectations, and democratic institutions are less consolidated in political culture.

Drivers of populism

Political factors driving populism include the crisis of representation of traditional political parties; the decline in party membership; and more politically aware and mobilized middle-class populations with high expectations of democracy's delivery capacity. Other factors include the transformation and disintegration of political culture caused by increasing individualism; and the fragmentation and polarization of the public sphere, deepened by the emergence of new technologies and social media.

Economic factors driving populism include expectations of democracy from rising middle classes disenchanted by democracy's perceived weak delivery (e.g. in promoting growth and employment and in reducing corruption); labour-market transformation caused by technological advances, which in turn has led to an increase in domestic socio-economic disparities; globalization and loss of national control over key policy decisions; vulnerability ensuing from the economic and financial crises of 2008; and increased immigration flows to Europe and North America.

The consequences of populism

To what extent are populists in government able to erode or dismantle democratic accountability? Or is there evidence confirming that populist governments are more responsive to the needs and concerns of the people?

The present report explores these questions using the GSoD Indices. However, since the GSoD Indices do not measure populism, this report relies on two extant data sets to assess how populism affects democracy: the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change's 'Populists in Power: 1990–2018' database (see Kyle and Gultchin 2018) and the Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index (Timbro 2019).[5] In the absence of a single robust data set on populist governments, the findings of this analysis therefore need be interpreted with caution.

To examine how populist governments influence democracy, the following analysis compares years under populist government with years of non-populist government in the same sample of countries. Since the duration of populist governments in office differs across countries, the analysis looks at the mean changes of GSoD Indices aspects per year, comparing 'populist' and 'non-populist' episodes for a sample of 43 countries from 1980 to 2018.

The data shows that populism weakens and undermines democracy. As Table 1.9 illustrates, periods with populist governments in office show a decline on the four attributes of democracy in the GSoD Indices data set that have an aggregate score (International IDEA 2019). These declines are significant for Elected Government, and for Civil Liberties and three of its subcomponents (Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, and Freedom of Movement).[6]

In contrast, episodes with non-populist governments are marked by improvements on the vast majority of GSoD Indices dimensions, while only six aspects of democracy improved under populist governments. Of these, only Electoral Participation increased under populist governments, while it declined under non-populist governments. The other aspects (Direct Democracy, Inclusive Suffrage, Basic Welfare, Gender Equality and Local Democracy) saw an increase during both types of period but improved more during periods of non-populist government.

The preliminary GSoD findings also suggest that populist governments not only are more harmful for democracy, but also do not perform better than non-populist governments in promoting basic welfare and a sound business environment or in protecting the environment.

When comparing populist and non-populist periods of government using the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Score (World Bank 2018), the mean annual change in policy outcomes under non-populist governments (+0.7 per cent) is slightly higher than under populist governments (+0.5 per cent), although the difference is not statistically significant.

When performing similar comparisons using the Ecological Footprint metric (Global Footprint Network n.d.), the mean annual change in policy outcomes under non-populist governments (–0.01 per cent) is lower than under populist governments (+0.01 per cent), although the difference is not statistically significant. Further research on the consequences of populism is recommended to further develop this analysis.

Policy considerations

In 2018, International IDEA, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, the Organization for Security and Co-operation's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Research Centre for the Study of Parties and Democracy, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy formulated a Global Agenda for the Renewal of Representation. The agenda reflects these organizations' collective view on the best response to address the underlying drivers of populism and focuses on a number of action points to improve the quality, transparency and functioning of democratic institutions as well as their economic and social outcomes.

- *Dare to defend democracy.* Governments, civil society groups, political institutions (including parliaments and political parties) and democracy assistance providers (and their donors) need to make the case for democracy in clear and compelling terms. In defending democracy, these actors should be both honest and specific about the flaws in existing systems and show greater precision in describing the problems that democratic institutions currently confront, rather than subsuming everything under the label of populism. Democracy assistance providers and the academic community need to collaborate more effectively in disseminating and showcasing the 'evidence for the defence' on how democracy benefits people.

- *Get creative and get serious about political participation.* Governments, political parties and parliaments should make use of a wider range of participatory mechanisms—

5 The Populists in Power: 1990–2018 database identifies 46 populist leaders or political parties in office, covering 33 countries since 1990. The Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index maps populist parties in 33 European countries since 1980, based on an in-house coding of parties relying on various data sources. More information on these data sets and the methodology employed in this section can be found in the 'Background Paper to Global State of Democracy Report 2019: Analysis of Conditions and Consequences of Populism and Democratic Backsliding' (2019) on the International IDEA website.

6 To determine significant differences, a series of regression analyses were run. This made it possible to measure the effect of populist government on the GSoD Indices aspects by controlling for the influence of individual country features, years, and levels of income and democracy.

TABLE 1.9

GSoD Indices scores in populist and non-populist periods of government, 1980–2018

GSoD attribute	GSoD subattribute/subcomponent	Non-populist period (% change)	Populist period (% change)
1. Representative Government		1.4	−0.3
	1.1 Clean Elections	1.4	−0.3
	1.2 Inclusive Suffrage	0.5	0.2
	1.3 Free Political Parties	1.0	−0.4
	1.4 Elected Government*	0.9	−0.4
2. Fundamental Rights		0.9	−0.4
	2.1 Access to Justice	0.7	−0.4
	2.2 Civil Liberties*	1.1	−0.8
	2.2.A: Freedom of Expression*	1.2	−0.9
	2.2.B: Freedom of Association and Assembly*	1.3	−0.9
	2.2.C: Freedom of Religion	0.6	−0.4
	2.2.D: Freedom of Movement*	0.6	−0.2
	2.2.E: Personal Integrity and Security	0.9	−0.4
	2.3.A: Social Group Equality	0.4	−0.2
	2.3.B: Basic Welfare	1.0	0.8
	2.3.C: Gender Equality	1.1	0.5
3. Checks on Government		1.1	−0.8
	3.1 Effective Parliament	1.1	−0.6
	3.2 Judicial Independence	0.8	−0.7
	3.3 Media Integrity	1.2	−0.8
4. Impartial Administration		0.6	−0.5
	4.1 Absence of Corruption	0.3	−0.1
	4.2 Predictable Enforcement	0.8	−0.8
5. Participatory Engagement			
	5.1 Civil Society Participation	1.3	−0.8
	5.2 Electoral Participation	−0.1	0.6
	5.3 Direct Democracy	2.6	2.1
	5.4 Local Democracy	1.1	0.1

Notes: This table shows mean percentage changes in GSoD Indices aspects per year, comparing 'populist' and 'non-populist' episodes in a sample of 43 countries which experienced populist episodes of government between 1980 and 2018. There is no aggregate score for Participatory Engagement. Red shading denotes declines, while green denotes advances. Asterisks denote statistically significant differences.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›; Kyle, J. and Gultchin, L., 'Populists in power around the world', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 13 November 2018, ‹https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3283962›; Timbro, Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index (Stockholm: Timbro, 2019), ‹https://populismindex.com/report/›.

such as consultation processes, sortition, citizen assemblies and other forms of direct democracy—to ensure that political participation goes beyond elections and democracy unfolds daily. Such practices need to link the institutions more closely to citizens, particularly to those groups of society that have felt excluded from decision-making. Political parties should develop mechanisms for participation that reach beyond their membership base, recognizing that an increasing number of citizens want to engage with political parties and decision-making processes in a less permanent manner. The scope for democratic policy alternatives should be expanded in order to address the gap between citizens' expectations and the capabilities of governments that have triggered populist protests. Civil society should generate new ideas about how participation can take place and build partnerships that bridge the gap between formal and informal institutions. Democracy assistance providers, civil society and academic researchers need to generate and disseminate new knowledge about how different forms of participation work and the impacts they have in different contexts.

- *Invest in civic education and digital media literacy.* Governments and democracy assistance providers should invest in civic education to promote democratic values, equipping citizens of all ages with the skills required to engage with information in a critical manner while remaining respectful of differences. Civil society or civic educators should provide the public with opportunities for direct exposure to real-life participation, emphasize the value of community service and increase digital media literacy. Governments and democracy assistance providers should collaborate with the media to ensure that civic education is effective and reaches a broad audience. Political parties and parliaments should invest in the skills of their own staff and members to ensure that political institutions use new communication channels, such as social media, in a way that strengthens and enriches democratic practice. Academic researchers should expand our understanding of how new channels of communication affect democratic practice.

- *Ensure inclusive representative mechanisms.* Governments and political institutions, with the support of democracy assistance providers, should work to make representative mechanisms more inclusive. They should continue to invest in the inclusion of women and youth while expanding efforts to include other marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities and people with disabilities. Concrete steps in this direction should include reducing the financial and administrative barriers to political participation, such as the costs of running for political office. Political parties have a critical role to play in nominating, and supporting the campaigns of, a broader range of candidates across all levels of politics. Governments should expand options such as subsidizing the costs of election campaigns to increase diversity and competitiveness and creating formal mechanisms through which marginalized groups can contribute to the development of policies that affect them.

- *Improve the integrity and transparency of political institutions.* Governments, civil society and democracy assistance providers should improve the integrity of political institutions by tackling corruption, increasing transparency and implementing effective policies to tackle social and economic inequalities. To increase transparency, governments should design and implement enforceable frameworks to regulate the role of money in politics, making use of digital technology to ensure disclosure systems are visible to, and accessible by, the public. Where necessary, this should be paired with reforms that increase the probity of public procurement, reduce the influence of organized crime on politics, improve transparency in the banking system and empower oversight agencies to conduct their work in an effective manner. Political institutions, including parliaments and political parties, should establish and adhere to clear codes of ethics and be more proactive in disclosing information about how political decisions are made.

In addition, International IDEA recommends conducting more research on the linkage between populism, democracy and economic, social and sustainable development, to better understand the drivers and impact of populism and connect academia with policymakers working on the topic.

1.2.2. Patterns and conditions of democratic backsliding

The share of democracies experiencing democratic erosion is on the rise, having more than doubled in the past decade compared to the decade before. The GSoD Indices define democratic erosion as a statistically significant decline on at least one democratic subattribute over a five-year period within democracies. In 2018, half (50 per cent) of the world's democracies experienced some form of democratic erosion, recording declines on at least one subattribute of democracy. Of these, 15 per cent experienced declines on three or more subattributes. This section discusses the definition, identification and effects of one specific form of democratic erosion: democratic backsliding. It builds on the analysis of *The Global State of Democracy 2017* (International IDEA

2017a: 70–94) to further explore the facilitating conditions and to distinguish patterns of democratic backsliding, based on the GSoD Indices data.

What is democratic backsliding?

The GSoD Indices refer to democratic backsliding as the gradual weakening of checks on government and civil liberties by democratically elected governments. Democratic backsliding is an incremental, partly concealed institutional change that is legitimized by references to popular electoral mandates, majority decisions and laws. It is often driven by the intentional dismantling of accountability institutions. Other forms of democratic erosion are generally not driven by such explicit intentions. Not all countries experiencing democratic erosion necessarily experience democratic backsliding, but the countries that experience backsliding do so as part of a process of democratic erosion.

International IDEA distinguishes between modern and traditional democratic backsliding. The new type of democratic weakening contrasts with the democratic expansion of the 1990s and differs from traditional authoritarian reversals, which featured drastic interventions by powerful non-democratic actors who suspended democratic institutions through coups, outrightly disregarding election results. While these still occur, they are not as common as they used to be (International IDEA 2017a: 73–74). Therefore, in this report, the term 'democratic backsliding' refers to modern democratic backsliding.

Democratic backsliding is initiated and driven by executive incumbents, legislative majorities and governing political parties. The process is relatively straightforward. First, they win competitive elections. Second, they form governments and use their power to weaken institutional checks on governmental power. Third, they modify the constitutional balance in their favour, restrict electoral competition and reduce the civic space underpinning political participation (International IDEA 2017a: 73–74).

These actions do not question democratic elections or voting rights as such. Institutional reforms carried out as part of democratic backsliding do not completely abolish the freedoms of expression, assembly and association underpinning meaningful political participation. On the contrary, incumbents often justify their attacks on the checks and balances of liberal democracy by claiming that their measures will make politics more democratic, curtail the influence of corrupt elites and re-establish popular sovereignty (Bermeo 2016).

Various methods and techniques are used to subvert democratic institutions. These include the capturing of courts and state agencies; the sidelining of (potential) rivals in the political opposition, business or the media; and changes to the constitutional and electoral rules governing the political process (Waldner and Lust 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). In addition, incumbents often constrain the public sphere and politicize executive power by replacing a merit-based professional bureaucracy with clientelist dependency relations (Ginsburg and Huq 2018). They also use biased referenda and manipulative public campaigns against alleged enemies to demonstrate popular approval for their policies and legitimize the outmanoeuvring of democratic institutions (Pech and Scheppele 2017).

These methods share the common strategic aim of rendering incumbent political elites less accountable to constitutional and political institutions with scrutiny and sanctioning powers. In order to increase and consolidate their power, incumbents seek to weaken legislatures, opposition deputies, courts, prosecutors, public agencies, independent watchdogs, mass media, CSOs and, ultimately, the electorate.

The concept of democratic backsliding also implies that a political regime moves 'back' to a lower level of democracy in its own history or in the course of democratization more generally. The notion of backsliding partly overlaps with scholarly concepts such as 'democratic recession' (Diamond 2015), 'democratic decay' (International IDEA 2017b), 'de-democratization' (Bogaards 2018), 'deconsolidation' (Foa and Mounk 2017; Mounk 2018) or 'autocratization' (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Cassani and Tomini 2019).

Most scholars apply the concept of democratic backsliding to declines within democracies, but some authors have suggested also including declines in the democratic qualities of governance observable within autocracies (see e.g. Waldner and Lust 2018: 95). The present report aligns with the view that democratic backsliding starts within democratic political regimes and may or may not result in democratic breakdown. Further democratic declines that occur within hybrid regimes or non-democracies are referred to in this report as cases of deepening autocratization (see Section 1.1 for a discussion of this phenomenon).

While democratic backsliding may result in a breakdown of democracy and the (re-)installation of an authoritarian regime, it may also leave the fundamentals of a democracy intact, albeit with a permanent loss of democratic quality. Determining the endpoint of a backsliding process

is difficult because episodes of backsliding occur gradually, and many have begun only recently. Incumbent elites need, and claim to sustain, the public façade of democracy and seek to frame the unchecking of executive authority as a deepening of democracy. Democratic legitimacy continues to be a requirement and constraint of these elite actions, preventing incumbents from openly promoting autocratic rule. The term democratic backsliding focuses on the process itself and is therefore more open to different possible final states of backsliding.

This report identifies democratic backsliding as a form of democratic erosion. When country-level declines in one or more aspects of democracy are observed, but do not fit the conceptual and quantitative description of democratic backsliding, they are referred to as other forms of democratic erosion or democratic deterioration (these terms are used interchangeably in the report).

Measuring backsliding using the GSoD Indices

The Global State of Democracy 2019 builds on the analysis of democratic backsliding initiated in the 2017 edition (International IDEA 2017a: 70–94) and further explores the scope and patterns of democratic backsliding, applying updated GSoD Indices data to identify country cases. Empirical studies of backsliding have used declines over time on composite indicators of democracy (Coppedge 2017; Mainwaring and Bizzarro 2019; Kaufman and Haggard 2019), but scholars differ regarding the size and time span required to qualify as backsliding. While the gradual character of the process suggests setting low threshold values as the most appropriate method, setting these thresholds too low would risk including minor declines that do not reflect institutional change and may result from imprecise measurement.

The present analysis uses the GSoD Indices attribute Checks on Government and the subattribute Civil Liberties to identify cases of backsliding. Checks on Government captures the extent to which the legislature supervises the executive (Effective Parliament), the media landscape offers diverse and critical coverage of political issues (Media Integrity) and the courts are not subject to undue influence from other branches of government (Judicial Independence). Civil Liberties denotes the extent to which civil rights and liberties are respected, that is, to what extent citizens enjoy the Freedoms of Expression, Association and Assembly, Religion, Movement, and Personal Integrity and Security.

The analysis focuses on the period after the global expansion of democracy in the early 1990s. Democratic backsliding cases are defined as those democracies that have suffered a net decline of at least 0.1 points on their average Checks on Government and Civil Liberties scores over a period of five years.[7] This enables the analysis to focus on net declines over a five-year period and identify accumulated declines and changes by summing up year-to-year changes (Coppedge 2017: 7).[8]

A total of 158 country–years show a decline of at least 0.1 in Checks on Government and Civil Liberties during the period 1975–2018. Of these cases, 106 occurring after 1998 have been selected. Countries with non-contiguous years of backsliding are then either classified as one episode if the scores for intermediate years do not improve (e.g. Nicaragua, North Macedonia, Ukraine and Venezuela) or the prior episode is omitted (e.g. Nepal 2002–2005, Pakistan 1999). These selection criteria generated a sample of 20 countries in which democratic backsliding has occurred since 1994. As shown in Figure 1.25, the number of democratic backsliding cases has more than doubled in the past decade.

According to the GSoD Indices, 10 democracies (10 per cent of the world's democracies) experienced democratic backsliding in 2018. In Nicaragua and Pakistan, democratic backsliding has resulted in partial democratic breakdown (into hybridity), while Venezuela's backsliding resulted in a full democratic breakdown in 2017. All 10 democracies have backslid over several years. The average length of a backsliding episode is nine years. The countries with the largest number of backsliding years are Venezuela (20 years) and Hungary and Nicaragua (13 years). Within the sample of countries, European countries, democracies and upper-middle-income countries are overrepresented.

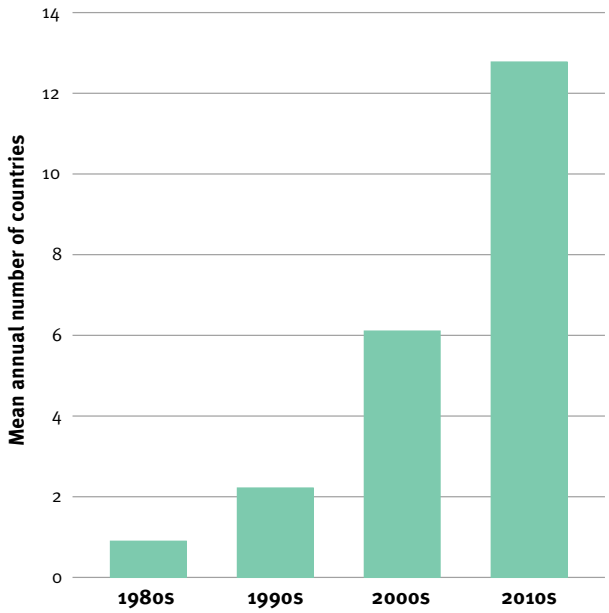
Table 1.10 lists all backsliding countries identified by the GSoD Indices. The table distinguishes between countries affected by moderate democratic backsliding and those suffering severe democratic backsliding (see Figure 1.26 for a visual representation). Both types occur in regimes that remain democratic but experience a significant loss in democratic quality. Countries with mid-range levels of

7 This value is approximately seven times the size of the confidence interval for the mean of Checks on Government and Civil Liberties. It has been selected to include all cases that have been frequently discussed as examples of backsliding (see also Lührmann and Lindberg 2019 for a similarly sized indicator).

8 For the countries and years (referred to as country–years) identified by this threshold, 'episodes' of democratic backsliding are constructed by adding preceding and subsequent years in which the backsliding indicator does not improve. In a third step, high-performing democracies are excluded if their mean scores on Checks on Government and Civil Liberties decline by less than 0.15 points during an episode. This restriction seeks to filter out cases of minor declines at high levels of Representative Government, assuming that the comparatively resilient institutions of such democracies can better contain incumbents' attempts to weaken accountability. For more information on the methodological steps carried out to perform this calculation see International IDEA (2019).

FIGURE 1.25

Average annual number of countries experiencing democratic backsliding, by decade



Notes: The data for the most recent decade only covers the years 2010–18.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Representative Government and declines of less than –0.15 on their average Checks on Government and Civil Liberties scores during their episode of backsliding (e.g. India) are listed as cases of moderate backsliding. Countries with larger declines at high or mid-range levels of Representative Government are classified as suffering from severe democratic backsliding (e.g. Hungary, Poland and Turkey). Among the cases of democratic breakdown, Table 1.10 also makes a distinction between cases of full breakdown (i.e. Venezuela) resulting in non-democracy and cases of partial breakdown leading to a hybrid political regime (i.e. Nicaragua).

Declines in Checks on Government and Civil Liberties are positively and strongly correlated with declines in Civil Society Participation, Access to Justice and Predictable Enforcement, indicating that backsliding often affects those dimensions of democracy (Coppedge 2017). Democratic backsliding is only weakly correlated with the electoral-representative dimension of democracy which comprises Clean Elections, Electoral Participation and Inclusive Suffrage—except for cases that become so severe that they result in partial or full democratic breakdown.

The causes of and facilitating conditions for democratic backsliding

According to the GSoD Indices data, and other complementary data sources, a number of factors, including

TABLE 1.10

Episodes of democratic backsliding in the GSoD data set

Moderate democratic backsliding	Severe democratic backsliding	Severe democratic backsliding resulting in democratic breakdown	
		Partial democratic breakdown (from democracy to hybrid regime)	Full democratic breakdown (from democracy to non-democracy)
India (2006–2018) Philippines (2015–2018) Ukraine (2010–2018) Ecuador (2008–2016) North Macedonia (2008–2016)	Hungary (2006–2018) Poland (2013–2018) Romania (2017–2018) Serbia (2010–2018) Turkey (2008–2018)	Nicaragua (2006–2018) Pakistan (2014–2018) CAR (1999–2007) Russia (1999–2010) Venezuela (1999–2010, regressed to a hybrid regime in 2008) Nepal (2012–2016) Mali (2012–2016)	Madagascar (2009–2012) Niger (2005–2010) Bangladesh (2001–2010) Venezuela[9] (regressed from a hybrid regime to a non-democracy in 2017)

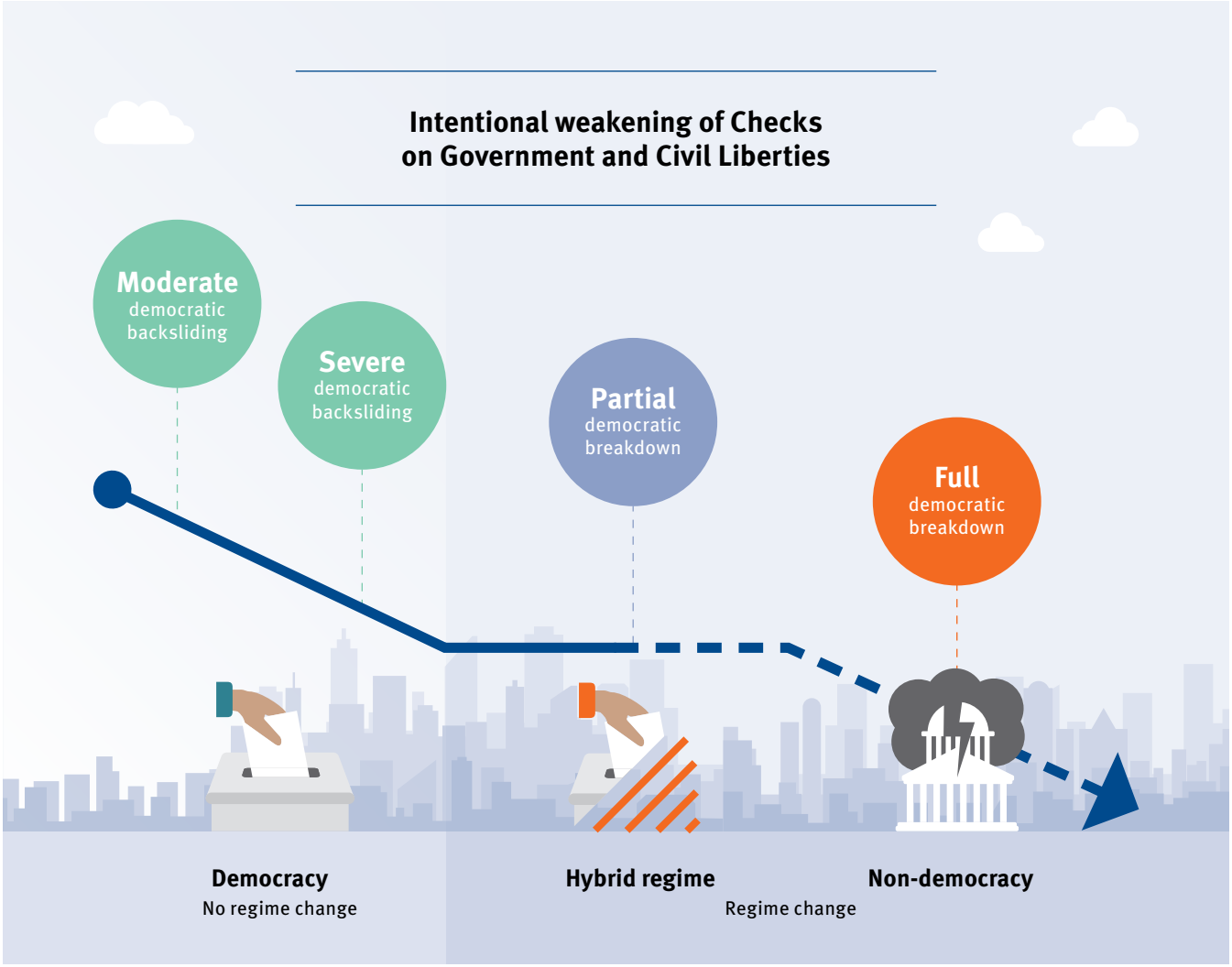
Notes: The data in the GSoD Indices reflects events up to the end of 2018. Cases of democratic backsliding listed as occurring up to and including 2018 may therefore have since evolved or changed. For more information on the definitions of moderate and severe democratic backsliding see the Methodology section of this report.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

9 According to the GSoD data, Venezuela experienced two years (2011/12) interrupting the backsliding process it had started in 1999, ending the episode identified by the coding rule. By then Venezuela had already backslid into a hybrid regime. Technically, therefore, when it backslid into a non-democracy in 2017, it was a case of deepening autocratization. It is included in the table to indicate that the country has passed through all phases of a backsliding process, ultimately culminating in a non-democracy.

FIGURE 1.26

The process of democratic backsliding



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

economic factors, features of the digital public sphere and political polarization, contribute to the triggering and sustaining of episodes of democratic backsliding. The statistical analyses compare the conditions prior to and during these episodes both over time and across countries.

A first set of potentially influential factors relates to democratic institutions. Independent courts, free and pluralist media outlets, a vibrant civil society, opposition parties harnessing their powers in the legislature, and impartial bureaucrats can be assumed to prevent governing majorities from dismantling checks and balances. The GSoD Indices measure the strength of these factors in detail.

Moreover, the fact that the Indices cover a 43-year period (from 1975 to 2018) means that they enable an assessment of how long, and to what extent, a particular democracy has endured over that period. More stable institutions in older democracies might render them less prone to decline, but the passing of time may also be associated with citizens' disenchantment with democracy and the expansion of rent-seeking and vested interests.

Second, democratic stability may also depend on the extent to which citizens support democracy as a political regime (see e.g. Foa and Mounk 2016; Easton 1965; Claassen 2019a, 2019b). To assess this so-called diffuse support,

the analysis of democratic backsliding carried out for the purposes of this report includes results from public opinion surveys for which data exists for about 91 per cent of the years identified as backsliding in the data set. These representative surveys include the Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Eurobarometer and Latinobarómetro, as well as the World Values Survey.

Third, the analysis considers the extent to which economic recessions, levels of economic wealth or international economic dependencies, captured by high shares of foreign trade, might have facilitated changes of government that led to backsliding.

A fourth group of possible causal factors pertain to political polarization, populism and the public sphere in general. Extreme polarization, populist confrontation and radicalizing online discourses and communities have been viewed as conducive to the erosion of democratic norms, whereby extreme partisan polarization is identified as a factor contributing to the electoral success of political leaders and parties committed to eroding accountability institutions, paving the way for democratic backsliding.

Polarization is seen as linked to partisan degradation of party competition and is often exacerbated by the emergence of populism (Ginsburg and Huq 2018: 78–90). It is seen as weakening informal norms of democracy such as the acceptance of political rivals as legitimate actors and the use of restraint in employing institutional prerogatives (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018: 11). These norms often appear to have been eroded prior to the start of a democratic backsliding episode.

The present report studies these potential causes by including variables that measure whether a country has a populist government and how the Internet and social media affect political behaviour. These variables come from the above-mentioned populism studies (Kyle and Gultchin 2018; Timbro 2019) and the Digital Society Survey conducted in connection with the V-Dem project (Digital Society Project n.d.). This survey asks country experts to what extent people consume online media; major domestic online media disagree in their presentation of major political news; and political parties disseminate false information and use hate speech. The surveyed experts also assess the polarization of society, that is, the extent of 'serious differences in opinions in society on almost all key political issues, which result in major clashes of views' (Mechkova et al. 2019; Coppedge et al. 2019: 298).

The main finding of the GSoD Indices analysis confirms the view that a polarized society is associated with a higher probability and extent of backsliding. Variables indicating aspects of political polarization—including the polarization of society, the fractionalization of online media and the use of hate speech and false information by political parties—show significant effects in most statistical models that have been constructed. Therefore, it is possible to infer that countries with deep political divides and embittered political controversies are prone to experiencing democratic backsliding as measured by the GSoD Indices.

However, the analysis also shows that there is no dominant strategy of polarizing political disputes and escalating political conflicts. Polarization may be facilitated by political parties that use hate speech or disseminate false information in their campaigning but it may also be catalysed by a public sphere disintegrating into fragmented, tribe-like communities or by declines in journalistic quality driven by the shift from traditional quality media to online media outlets with less stable funding.

Higher levels of Effective Parliament and Civil Society Participation appear to effectively reduce the probability of backsliding, prevent the start of a backsliding process, make continued backsliding less probable and reduce the scope of backsliding. These effects may be explained by the fact that strong parliaments and civil society participation often help provide voice to critics of an incumbent government. They can enable opposition parties, CSOs and engaged citizens to limit the attempts of incumbents to maximize their power. However, higher levels of Free Political Parties and Media Integrity seem to have the opposite effect. Indeed, democracy provides not only the institutions to check executive authority, but also the arena for political polarization, which has been identified as an explanatory factor for democratic backsliding.

Longer preceding democratic periods significantly increase the probability of backsliding or the extent of democratic decline in the models analysed. This could suggest that backsliding is more likely to occur if the immediate post-transition phase has receded into history, if the transitional constellation of political actors has changed and, perhaps, if initial popular hopes linked to a democratic transition have been dashed.

Low levels of public support for democracy are associated with higher declines and an increased probability of backsliding. Declines in support may be due to weak governmental performance, economic crisis or more adversarial political conflicts undermining the credibility of democratic institutions. The relevance of democratic legitimacy as an explanatory factor corresponds

to the importance of the public sphere, communication and the public perception of political elites.

Populist presidents and governments tend to make backsliding more likely and to increase the scope of decline, as one would expect. However, these effects are only partially significant and should be interpreted with caution, since the available survey and populism data does not cover all countries identified as backsliding. Backsliding episodes usually begin prior to the inauguration of populist-led governments, but this does not mean that populist challengers did not exist when the backsliding began. On the contrary, qualitative evidence from the cases analysed suggests that such challengers contributed to the polarization of society before they took power.

Democratic backsliding also appears to be a political reaction to economic vulnerabilities exposed in the wake of international economic integration and the global financial crisis. Exposure to economic globalization, measured as a share of foreign trade in gross domestic product, contributes to the increased probability of continued backsliding. This effect reflects, to some extent, the overrepresentation of upper-middle-income countries from Europe among the countries experiencing declines.

However, the trade share also relates to economic openness, interdependency and exposure to international economic developments. High levels of Social Rights and Equality reduce the probability of backsliding and the scope of democratic decline, although this effect is only partially significant. The analyses show that lower or negative economic growth rates contribute to the triggering and continuation of backsliding. Hence, backsliding may occur as a response to a growing sense of economic vulnerability in countries depending on international trade integration.

Policy considerations

- **Policies aimed at the prevention and termination of democratic backsliding should seek to address the polarization and disintegration of the public sphere that has preceded and accompanied many episodes of backsliding**. Moderate political elites should demonstrate their readiness to listen to the concerns of citizens and to bridge political divides by integrating different parts of society. Taking these concerns seriously would reduce the scope for populist challengers who exploit grievances against established political elites:
  - **Institutional reforms should seek to contribute to the reduction of polarization, for example by ensuring adequate representation and protection of minorities**. Constitutional designs that facilitate efficient public administration and enable responsive and responsible government—rather than those that fragment responsibility and create deadlocks in policy delivery—may help prevent a crisis of representation from arising in the first place. Such constitutional design choices keep dissatisfaction within tolerable limits and may help strengthen democracy's self-correcting tendencies. If there is scope to pursue policies within the framework of a constitution, while respecting democratic procedure, the rights of the opposition, judicial independence and so on, then there will be less incentive to violate these norms in order to deliver on promises made to voters. While rules enabling effective and responsible government may reduce dissatisfaction, it is also important to ensure political moderation—a government must be capable of being contested, challenged, held to account, and sometimes forced to compromise.
  - **Polarizing tendencies in the public sphere should be limited.** This entails acting against extremist demagogues, preventing the spread of disinformation and hate speech through social media, strengthening quality media outlets, and educating citizens to acquire critical media literacy.
- **Strengthen institutions that check the executive, such as the legislature, but also courts and an independent, pluralist media system.** These institutions enable citizens, who are faced with restrictions to their rights, to use and protect their political freedoms. Stronger checks on government may constrain the scope for quick and far-reaching policy change that is sometimes needed. At the same time, they ensure that incumbent governments reach out to other political actors and build inclusive coalitions that are likely to make policy change more sustainable.
- **Design constitutional rules to enforce deliberation.** This deliberation could be between a government and opposition in a parliamentary system; between the executive and legislature in a presidential system; between members of a governing coalition; or between different levels of government. Even if the government's view ultimately prevails, as in most Westminster-style democracies, it should be forced to justify its actions, to give an account of its reasoning, to hear the other side, and perhaps to make concessions to other views. Details of constitutional design (e.g. how and when parliament can be dissolved, who presides over the

public accounts committee, how the auditor-general is chosen, or the powers of a leader of the opposition) can be important in striking this balance between effective responsible government and a proper scrutiny and accountability.

- **Protect new democratic institutions against the popular disappointment that is likely to ensue if the high expectations attached to their creation are not met**. To better manage popular expectations, policymakers should engage in a rational, open dialogue with citizens that fosters an understanding of the constraints and trade-offs of democratic politics. Improved popular knowledge of policies would also enable citizens to make more informed assessments of electoral promises and their viability. Memories of the authoritarian past should be preserved and conveyed in order to remind younger generations of the achievements of democracy, therefore guarding against misleading nostalgic sentiment.

- **Governments should protect their citizens against the disruptive effects of economic crisis and globalization.** This requires policies that enable vulnerable groups of society, including immigrants, to adapt to job losses and provide them with equitable access to services, employment, opportunities and resources.

- **Strengthen and enable a vibrant civic space and counteract efforts to undermine it.**

- **Support civic and other forms of education on democracy**, to educate children, youth and adults on the value of democracy, and its benefits for society.

1.2.3. The empowerment of civil society in a shrinking civic space

The democratic expansion in the past four decades has also enabled an expansion of civil society and civic space at the global, regional, national and subnational levels across all regions of the world, with CSOs playing key roles as service providers and advocates. In contexts of democracy advocacy, CSOs often work in collaboration with or in parallel to the media. In recent years, civic space has been transformed, with a shift to an individualization of civic engagement beyond formal organizational structures, and a move towards looser and more fluid forms of interactions. At the same time, civil society organizations are facing increasing obstacles to operate and advocate for societal change in a context of shrinking civic space. This section explores the challenges and opportunities faced by an empowered civil society in an increasingly shrinking civic space.

What is civic space and why is it important for democracy?

Civic space is the space in which formal and informal CSOs engage, together with other actors (e.g. the media and the public), to make their voices heard and advocate for change.

The GSoD Indices measure civic space through three subattributes of its framework: Civil Liberties, which measures aspects such as Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly and Freedom of Religion; Media Integrity, which measures the diversity of media perspectives in society; and Civil Society Participation, which measures both the vibrancy of civil society and the extent to which it is consulted on key policy issues.

Views of civil society are divided into two broad camps: those that celebrate civil society as a democratizing force and as a key pillar of democracy, and those that see civil society as reproducing existing social and economic inequalities.

The GSoD framework is grounded in the former view. Civil society is seen as an important dimension of a healthy and vibrant democracy as it provides a pluralistic set of societal voices and enhances informal checks on government. A vocal civil society also provides a bulwark against democratic backsliding.

CSOs have over the past decades increasingly played a key role as service providers, often replacing or filling the gaps of faulty or non-existent public services in developing and developed countries, and generally with a focus on reaching poor and marginalized groups that may otherwise not be reached. They have also played a role as advocates, holding governments to account in a variety of fields, including governance, human rights protection, anti-corruption efforts, environmental protection and many others. In developing countries, both of these roles have been strongly supported by international and bilateral donors, the first in a context of shrinking states and public–private collaboration in service delivery, as well as to support the demand side of governance.

In recent years, however, a transformation of civic space has been observed. This transformation has been brought about by the use of information and communications technologies and by the transformation of political parties, with a shift towards an individualization of civic engagement beyond formal organizational structures, to citizen mobilization and networking into looser and more fluid forms of interactions, often facilitated by social media. The *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement in France is one case

in point (Kramer 2019). Often, but not always, CSOs play a role behind the scenes in mobilizing these forces, although the movements go well beyond these formal organizational structures.

Civil society has advocated for reforms in contexts of democratic transition and taken various positions either for or against reforms on other issues of concern. For example, civil society groups advocated for democratic reforms in Tunisia in 2011; in The Gambia in 2016; in Armenia in 2018; and in Algeria, Sudan and Venezuela in 2019. CSOs campaigned against corruption in Romania in 2018; against gun violence and for gender equality in the United States (the 'Women's March') in 2018; against labour law reforms in Hungary in 2019; against privatization of public services and denouncing illicit campaign finance in Honduras in 2019; and against legal reforms in Hong Kong in 2019 (BBC News 2019).

CSOs use a variety of tactics to make their voices heard, including offline and online protest, advocacy and collaboration. This expansion of civic activity has led at least one observer to claim that 'political participation is on the rise' (Economist Intelligence Unit 2018: 2). However, while civil society represents an opportunity for democratic advancement and protection, there are two key challenges related to civic space in the current global democracy landscape.

The first challenge relates to the emergence of uncivil elements in civil society. While such currents have always existed, new forms have taken shape, gained ground, acquired a more potent voice and become more visible in recent years. Some, including movements on the extreme right in older democracies such as Germany, Sweden or the USA, are the product of democratic societies and constitutionally acquired rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly.

In many democracies the emergence of these movements has led to public debates about the extent to which fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and the right to protest should be respected, even when such groups proclaim anti-democratic values, by denying rights to other groups and promoting hate speech. The tension between freedom of speech and the propagation of hate speech has also played out in the online sphere, where social media and Internet platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Google and WhatsApp) and the technology firms behind them have been criticized for enabling hate speech to be propagated and amplified, further polarizing public debate, deepening divisions in societies and, in the most extreme cases, promoting violence.

The second challenge for civil society is the shrinking of civic space in many countries. Any reduction in civic space has severe consequences for democracy, as it erodes and weakens the societal fabric in which civil society and democracy are embedded, reduces the diversity of voices in society (including critical voices) and ultimately undermines checks on government, as civil society and the media also play key roles in scrutinizing state power and holding the state to account.

Beginning in 2012, and for the first time since 1975, the GSoD Indices data records a steep rise in the number of countries with significant declines on the three aspects of civic space measured by the data. These declines have been seen since 2012 on Media Integrity, since 2014 on Civil Liberties, and since 2015 on Civil Society Participation (see Figure 1.28). In all three cases, the steep rise in declining countries coincides with a significant decline in the number of countries with gains in these aspects. In fact, for the first time since the GSoD Indices measurement began in 1975, these declines now outnumber the number of countries with gains.

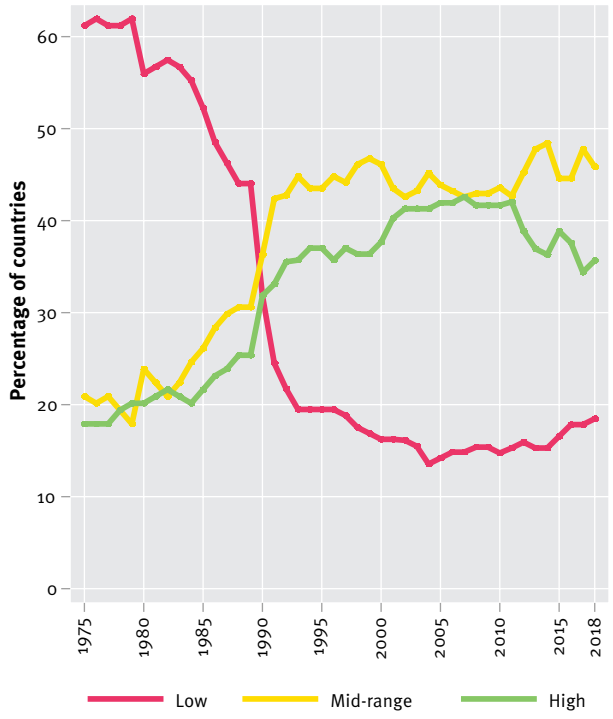
The aspect of Civil Liberties with most countries declining (a total of 38 countries since 2013) is Freedom of Expression (see Figure 1.27). In recent years, an increasing number of countries that previously performed highly on this dimension have slipped into the mid-range, reflecting worsening conditions in these contexts. The share of high-performing countries on Freedom of Expression peaked in 2011, at 42 per cent, before dropping to 36 per cent by 2018.

Likewise, the share of high-performing countries on Media Integrity has dropped from 39 per cent in 2006 to 29 per cent in 2018. A total of 24 countries have also seen significant declines in Freedom of Association and Assembly, while 11 countries in the world have seen a decrease in levels of Civil Society Participation in the last five years.

Declines in civic space have been observed in all regions of the world and across all levels of democratic performance. Europe is the region with the largest share of countries with declines in their Civil Liberties scores, followed by Africa. On Media Integrity, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean have seen an equal number of countries in decline (see Figure 1.28). These declines in civic space are occurring in contexts of democratic erosion (including milder forms of democratic deterioration), democratic backsliding and deepening autocratization (see Table 1.11).

FIGURE 1.27

Performance levels in Freedom of Expression, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

One explanatory factor for the shrinking of civic space is the rise of nationalist political parties (e.g. in India), **which seek to restrict foreign funding of, and foreign interference in, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to preserve national sovereignty and limit foreign-imposed agendas that are viewed as undermining national values.** In other cases (e.g. Hungary and Poland), drivers include governmental measures to combat terrorism, promote law and order and national security. In some countries (e.g. Egypt, Nicaragua and Venezuela), attacks have aimed at limiting the space for opposition and critical voices. The spread of disinformation on social media has also led some countries (e.g. most recently Sri Lanka) to restrict social media use.

In what ways is civic space shrinking?

The shrinking of civic space has taken several forms, including changes to legislative and regulatory frameworks, funding cuts, and laws that regulate public protest and online engagement.

A number of countries (e.g. India) have recently passed and enforced laws or revived existing laws that seek to regulate foreign funding to NGOs, under a nationalist discourse, to stave off attempts of foreign interference (see the case study in Chapter 4 of this report). Similarly, laws have been passed in some countries (e.g. Bangladesh and Hungary) using the justification of tighter controls over organizations that finance activities linked to terrorism. When such laws are passed in bilateral donor countries, this has ripple effects on funding to CSOs in the developing world, which are aid recipients. Many of these organizations play a key role in public service delivery to poor and marginalized groups and are therefore key to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A number of CSOs have also been affected by funding cuts linked to the ban introduced under the administration of US President Donald Trump, on funding to organizations providing family-planning assistance. This has had serious consequences for CSOs working on women's and children's issues more broadly.

A number of countries (e.g. Australia, France and the USA) have also passed or revised laws that regulate public protest, again as part of measures to combat terrorism and promote law and order. Others (including France, Germany and several Pacific Island countries) have passed laws aimed at regulating online engagement. Such laws have been passed in democracies and non-democracies alike, but their implementation takes more repressive forms in non-democratic contexts (e.g. China).

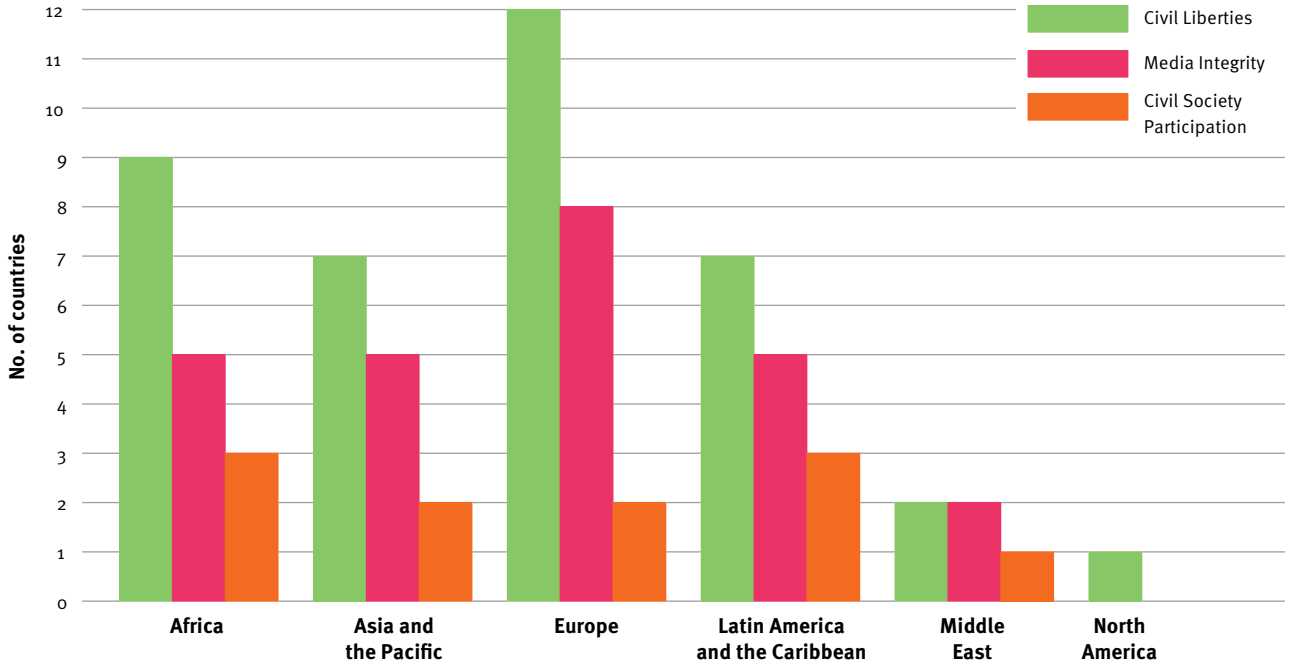
In the most severe cases, restrictions on civic space take the form of harassment (and in some cases killings) of human rights activists. Front Line Defenders, an international human rights organization that collects data on threats against human rights activists, estimates that 321 civil society activists were killed in 2018, although this figure is most likely severely under-reported and highly contested as there is no global agreement on who should be classified as such (Front Line 2019).

Of the 321 confirmed murders in 2018, 74 per cent occurred in Latin America. The highest numbers were recorded in Colombia (126) and Mexico (48)—which together accounted for more than half of the murders of civil society activists in 2018—followed by the Philippines (39 civil society activists killed), Guatemala (26), Brazil (23) and India (19) (Front Line 2019).

The majority of those killed (77 per cent) were working on issues related to land, indigenous peoples' and environmental rights. Front Line Defenders estimate that activists working

FIGURE 1.28

Declines in civic space by region, 2013–2018



Notes: This figure shows the absolute number of countries with significant declines between 2013 and 2018 in each region, per subattribute in the three aspects of civic space (Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation). While the comparison made is between regions, each region has a different number of countries.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 1.11

Declines in civic space, 2013–2018

Extent of decline	No. of countries	Details
Declines on all three aspects of civic space	7	*Democracies:* Brazil, India, Turkey (democratic backsliding) *Non-democracies:* Burundi, Venezuela, Yemen (deepening autocratization) Thailand (democratic breakdown from 2014 to 2018)
Declines on two aspects of civic space	14	*Democracies:* Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia (severe democratic backsliding) Chile, Colombia, France, Kenya (democratic erosion) *Hybrid regimes:* Nicaragua, Pakistan, Togo *Non-democracies:* Bahrain, South Sudan (deepening autocratization)
Decline on one aspect of civic space	46	Civil Liberties (17) Media Integrity (7) Civil Society Participation (1)

Notes: The three aspects of civic space covered by the GSoD Indices are Media Integrity, Civil Liberties and Civil Society Participation.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

in those sectors are three times more likely to be killed than activists working in other sectors (Front Line 2019). Activists and journalists exposing corruption cases are also a likely target, as are civil society activists advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights (Front Line 2019).

Reporters Without Borders reports that 80 journalists were killed in 2018, up from 55 in 2017. While 26 journalists (or 33 per cent) were killed in war or conflict zones (i.e. Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen), the remainder were killed in non-war torn countries, with the largest share (47 per cent) in democracies, including Mexico (the deadliest country for journalists outside a conflict zone, with eight journalists murdered), followed by India and the USA (six each). One journalist was also killed in Central Eastern Europe (Slovakia) in relation to investigative reporting on criminal networks and corruption. The remaining five journalists were killed in CAR, Palestine and Saudi Arabia.

More than half of the journalists killed were deliberately targeted because their reporting threatened the interests of certain people in positions of political, economic, or religious power or organized crime (Reporters Without Borders 2018). More than half of the world's imprisoned journalists are held in five countries, of which two (Egypt and Turkey, which together hold 38 per cent of imprisoned journalists) have undergone a recent process of democratic backsliding, while another 33 per cent are held in non-democracies such as China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Journalists have also been detained in new democracies such as Myanmar.

In an increasingly globalized world, closing civic space in one country may have spill-over effects on other countries, as seems to be the case across the globe, through both norm diffusion and the replication-domino effect that such phenomena in large countries may have on others in a region (Hossain et al. 2018). Added to this is the role of countries, such as China, that provide a model in which limited civic space is an intrinsic feature, and which also export this model. Freedom House (2018), for example, notes China's export of surveillance training to like-minded regimes.

Policy considerations

- Support the strengthening of CSOs working on democracy and human rights issues in contexts where these rights are threatened.
- Support a free media and training to journalists on democracy reporting.
- Facilitate access to regional and international civil society networks for CSOs that face restrictions, especially those working on corruption and human rights and the weaker and less well-resourced organizations, which often tend to be those working on women's rights and LGBT issues.

1.2.4. Managing elections as fair competition in challenging environments

Clean elections are instruments for ensuring representative governments and popular control over decision-making. In the GSoD Indices the subattribute of Clean Elections measures the extent to which elections are free, fair and competitive, and held with integrity. A number of indicators are also used to assess the cleanliness (i.e. integrity) of elections, including the scope of electoral competition, the level of voting irregularities, government intimidation, and the autonomy and capacity of electoral management bodies (EMBs). While not a sufficient condition for democracy to thrive, elections are a necessary component of any democratic system. This section explores some of the key current challenges and opportunities relating to electoral processes worldwide.

Elections have now become the norm rather than the exception

While only 36 countries held competitive elections in 1975, a total of 97 countries in the world (or 62 per cent) now do so regularly. Moreover, global average levels of Clean Elections have increased by 73 per cent since 1975. Democracies with high levels of Clean Elections are now found throughout all regions of the world, although the regions with the largest shares (50 per cent of countries and over) are Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. However, despite the expansion of countries with clean elections, the share of democracies with high levels of Clean Elections was higher in 1975, at 74 per cent, compared to 59 per cent of democracies today.

Most electoral processes that take place around the world manage to successfully overcome the inevitable technical hiccups and facilitate orderly transitions of power. At the same time, when confronted with serious technical challenges and significant efforts of delegitimization, electoral processes sometimes fail to deliver credible or trusted results. Failed elections may trigger political crises with profound negative effects on societies.

Because of the implications and the dynamics of failed elections, EMBs—the agencies tasked with administering elections—have an increasingly important social role to play. The way in which they interpret and perform this role is crucial. EMBs are well aware that their legal status and technical mandates are not sufficient to protect them

from errors or spoilers. With no guarantee that electoral stakeholders will comply with the rules of a level playing field, or that technical aspects will play out as planned, EMBs are increasingly taking proactive steps to ensure that they are protected against known and unknown risks.

Electoral processes and the role of EMBs: opportunities

EMBs that demonstrate the resilience to adjust to new circumstances, embark on meaningful reforms, and engage potential spoilers are in a better position to secure legitimate—and accepted—electoral outcomes. Strategies for building a bulwark against malicious attempts to hijack electoral processes may take the form of investments in the integrity of electoral processes and the competencies of electoral staff, or thoughtful engagement with like-minded agencies and civil society groups.

In countries undergoing democratic reforms, rules that govern elections are being continuously revised to strengthen democratic process. For countries undergoing significant democratic reforms as part of transition processes, revising electoral rules and strengthening electoral systems are key to ensuring the sustainability of such processes.

For example, in 2018 Ethiopia initiated an ambitious democratic reform programme that seems to have set the country on the path towards democracy. An advisory council has been established to support its law reform initiatives and a specific working group designated to review the design of democratic institutions, including electoral ones, which currently perform among the bottom 25 per cent in the world on Clean Elections (Ethiopian News Agency 2018).

Following a dramatic election result in 2018 in Malaysia, which had been governed by a hybrid regime for the previous 42 years, electoral reform was designed to provide all stakeholders, particularly members of parliament, with a comprehensive understanding of the complex and multifaceted issues related to reforming the current electoral framework (The Star Online 2018).

In Fiji, a dialogue framework between the EMB and CSOs is being considered to provide a platform for assessing the electoral institutions and processes during the post-electoral period (International IDEA 2018a).

While one-off measures are important, so is a practice of consistent reflection and refinement. In Indonesia, electoral reform involving many stakeholders has been continually underway since the transition to democracy two decades ago, demonstrating that a shift in institutional culture and a change in political habits requires long-term commitment and the involvement of multiple sectors of society beyond formal government institutions (International IDEA 2005; Hamid 2014).

However, there is also increased understanding of the need for periodic and systematic review of rules that govern the organization of elections—even in older democracies with well-established electoral systems. While the GSoD Indices data shows that 22 of the world's 27 older democracies have high levels of Clean Elections and electoral systems that are decades or centuries old and possess unquestioned integrity, these systems are increasingly recognized as requiring review and adjustment to modern contexts.

Global engagements in peer exchange, responding timely and constructively to election observation mission recommendations, examining and learning from international comparative examples, and the purposeful inclusion of opposition, women, youth and minority voices in the reform process are now all elements of standard electoral management practice.

Sweden provides a good example, having responded to criticism by the OSCE/ODIHR on the secrecy of the vote in its national elections in 2018, and undertaken a review of its practices on polling station layout (OSCE/ODIHR 2018). A process for ballot paper redesign has been launched which involves examining sample ballot papers from across the globe.

In the United Kingdom, a number of pressure groups (see e.g. Electoral Reform Society n.d.) are lobbying for major changes in the electoral process including adopting a proportional representation electoral system instead of the first-past-the-post majoritarian system.

Addressing some of the new (and ongoing) obstacles to clean elections requires inter-agency regulatory collaboration. While many EMBs traditionally have a mandate to regulate, oversee and/or enforce matters pertaining to electoral processes, these mandates are not always sufficient to deal with the ever-creative behaviours that threaten the fairness of the electoral process in areas such as political financing or use of social media for campaigning.

This regulatory gap becomes problematic when the quick tempo of technological change outpaces any rulebooks. While EMBs do not have the mandate to regulate all aspects of an election process, they do initiate and provide advice on regulatory guidelines for relevant legislative and regulatory

bodies. One example is the British Electoral Commission's advice on digital campaigning (Electoral Commission n.d.).

EMBs find inventive ways to collaborate with a range of state and non-state actors on a range of issues pertaining to the conduct of clean elections. In India, the national EMB has the formal authority to deploy security agencies; in Mexico the coordination group involves multiple security and civilian agencies who coordinate on issues of electoral operations and security; in Kenya and many other African countries, electoral coordination forums bring together state agencies and the civil society sector; in Ghana, traditional leaders are an EMB partner (International IDEA 2018b).

Even without formal powers to regulate or direct behaviours and actions of political parties and media, EMBs can and do work with these stakeholders to codify and enforce codes of conduct for political parties and media during elections (International IDEA and Swiss Federal Department of Political Affairs 2017; UNDP 2014). In many countries, CSOs are important partners for EMBs in voter education, as well as in the monitoring of negative party campaigning and interferences in processes. Further, in the case of Indonesia, voting results confirmed by CSOs in the 2014 presidential election boosted the credibility of the EMB in disputes with the parliament (Thornley 2014: Hasanuddin 2014).

One critical area in which inter-agency collaboration is being fast-tracked is in response to cybersecurity concerns in elections. While EMBs lack sufficient mandates, expertise or resources to deal with complex cyberattack vectors, or to holistically protect elections from a broad range of emerging electronic threats, cyber-experts lack the essential electoral experience to provide effective protection. Recognizing the urgency as well as the transnational nature of the problem, international electoral assistance providers are facilitating international, multi-stakeholder discussions on this topic. The aim is to obtain comparative experiences about contemporary challenges and good practices in order to distil policy considerations in this area.

Concerns about cybersecurity in elections have led to more thoughtful discussions of the benefits and risks of technology-based electoral reform. Some electoral stakeholders have seen voting technology as a panacea to strengthening democracy, a shortcut to credible election outcomes even in an environment where overall electoral integrity is low. When technology such as electronic voting is used as a tool in electoral processes, this can enhance political equality as it reduces barriers to electoral participation and helps make elections more inclusive. More inclusive electoral processes in turn strengthen representative government.

However, beyond the benefits of technology for electoral processes, there is also a shift towards a more widespread agreement that technology alone is not able to deliver meaningful improvements in contexts with severe democratic deficits, where democratic institutions have been considerably weakened, and trust in democratic and electoral processes is low. Events in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Venezuela in 2018 are recent cases in point where even the application of some of the most advanced election technology did not lead to election results being widely accepted and perceived as legitimate and credible. In Venezuela, on the contrary, such technology has been seen as manipulated to favour the regime (Berwick 2018; Reuters 2017).

However, where introduction of technologies in elections is based on well-informed decisions and managed properly, technology has contributed to the resolution of long-standing electoral problems and, ultimately, to the acceptance of results.

Biometric voter registration technology, for example, is now used in many countries, especially in Africa and Latin America, and has increased the integrity of voter registers and reduced electoral malpractice (International IDEA 2017a). One such case is Nigeria where a long history of unreliable voter lists and voter impersonation has been addressed through technical solutions, thereby contributing to the strengthening of electoral processes in Africa's largest new third-wave democracy.

Another example is the introduction of SMS-based voter registration in Libya in 2013 that enabled citizens in remote areas to register electronically without travelling long distances, especially considering the security situation in the country (Chao 2014).

While security and privacy concerns, risks, high costs and community traditions hinder a wider adoption of electronic voting; Brazil, Estonia, India, Mongolia and the Philippines are examples of countries where wide acceptance of electronic voting has had positive impacts on electoral integrity. In the context of the GSoD Indices, Brazil, Estonia and India have high levels of Clean Elections, while Mongolia and the Philippines have mid-range levels.

Finally, the application of open-data principles in elections allows for unprecedented advances in electoral transparency and citizen participation, for example through digital solutions for political finance reporting disclosure or more efficient and accessible results aggregation and publication systems (International IDEA 2017b).

Global challenges to electoral processes

Delivering legitimate elections results accepted by all stakeholders, or at least the critical majority of actors (e.g major political parties, CSOs, domestic observers and the international community), is becoming increasingly complicated for EMBs.

What makes an election result more likely to be accepted as legitimate? This question serves as a common theme that overshadows recent political crises, in which irregularities and flaws in electoral processes, genuine or perceived, have led to delayed, cancelled, disputed or re-run elections. Recent examples include Bolivia, Nigeria and Turkey in 2019; the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and Venezuela in 2018; Kenya in 2017; Austria in 2016; and Afghanistan and Libya in 2014.

While circumstances leading to the rejection of results may differ between countries and elections, two critical dynamics intersect: process flaws and polarizing context settings. At this intersection, digital disruptions deserve special attention because of their contemporary relevance.

In many contested elections, the ostensible reasons for non-acceptance of the results relate to process flaws, such as technical irregularities or manipulations occurring in critical phases of the electoral process. In Nigeria in 2019, for example, the opposition claimed that the ruling party had manipulated the vote. Another example is the 2018 parliamentary elections in Iraq, where electronic counting of votes was widely disputed, leading the parliament to order a manual recount of votes under the supervision of a panel of nine judges replacing the nine members of the Iraqi EMB (Aboulenein 2018).

The complexity and magnitude of delivering elections provides ample space for making claims that are difficult to cross-check and verify in a timely manner, if at all. While technical mishaps are rarely of proportions that impact electoral outcomes, there is no room for complacency in the administration of elections. Sometimes the theoretical possibility of irregularities in the vote count changing the outcome of an election is deemed enough for the result to be overturned, as in the Austrian presidential election in 2016 (Atkins 2016).

In democratic contexts where political stakes are high, EMBs remain exposed to the risk that results will be rejected or annulled, even when they deliver a technically well-executed process. This is because elections reflect the society and the historical context in which they are held—for better or worse. Older and third-wave democracies alike confront efforts to delegitimize their electoral processes, from both domestic forces and foreign election interference.

The consequences of failed electoral processes may be particularly grave in transition contexts, acting as a tipping point that damages the societal confidence necessary to ensure a peaceful, stable and democratic transition to democracy. The challenges for EMBs are about being able not only to run an election technically well—which in many countries is difficult enough—but also to navigate multiple minefields of stakeholder pressures, voter apathy and mobility, heightened unrest, vendor influence, international expectations, and a range of historical and contextual factors, including, inter alia, security, corruption and weak institutions.

When democratic processes and institutions are questioned and contested or susceptible to political pressure, the credibility of EMBs is at stake. A glaring example of this is Malaysia during the general elections in 2018. Due to pressure from the incumbent administration, the EMB delayed the announcement of the results to—allegedly—give the incumbent time to convince some minor party winners to change sides, which would have given them a majority. In the end, the incumbent party lost the elections, but the resulting scandal led to all electoral commissioners resigning under pressure from the new administration and the people.

Many undemocratic regimes strive to uphold elections as means of internal and external legitimization. In country contexts ruled by hybrid or non-democratic regimes, elections can serve the purpose of reinforcing a democratic façade, both domestically and internationally. Almost all (87 per cent) non-democracies hold some form of elections, as do most hybrid regimes, even though these elections cannot be classified as clean. In these contexts, electoral results are likely to be perceived as illegitimate by a large mass of the population and by the opposition (as was the case in Venezuela in 2005 and 2018).

The distortion of electoral principles for non-democratic purposes can undermine public trust in the value of the electoral process in democracies. This distortion can occur subtly, especially in contexts of democratic backsliding or deepening autocratization (these concepts are described in more detail in Section 1.1).

Systemic manipulations can manifest in the form of a redesign of legal frameworks, reforms to extend term mandates (as in the cases of Nicaragua, Venezuela and most recently Egypt), exclusion of political opponents and supporters, abuse of state resources for campaigning, use of physical and psychological violence, weakening checks and

balances and—critically—the exercise of control over the electoral administration. This is referred to by some scholars as 'electoralism' (see e.g. Karl 1986: 9–36).

In these circumstances, EMBs have limited powers and space to deliver credible elections and legitimate results. This type of democratic backsliding contributes to the hollowing out of democracy and can lead to partial (e.g. Nicaragua) or full democratic breakdowns (Venezuela).

The challenges faced by EMBs working in environments shaped by a culture of political mistrust or of deeply embedded societal and political divides can be daunting. In such instances, even genuine election results may be rejected by gameplaying political actors who exploit a small-scale irregularity for short-term political gain.

Social media may be used by spoilers (the effect of vote splitting between candidates who often have similar ideologies) as a platform for undermining elections in such contexts, contributing to further polarization. Negative perceptions can be augmented by residual grievances from past elections, or through mistrust in the state's capacity for impartiality.

If an EMB loses the confidence of the critical mass, the legitimacy and acceptance of the election results will suffer, even if the outcome is lawful. In such contexts, a rejection of results may be a well-calculated act of gameplaying that aims to compensate for unfavourable election results. By rejecting genuine election results, actors aim to generate political crises where power-sharing deals can be sought. If the losing party is an incumbent or armed stakeholder, a rejection of a result can be a gambit for the violent usurpation of power.

An example is the 2014 legislative election in Libya, when the General National Congress (GNC)—the interim legislative body expected to act as a parliament until a permanent House of Representatives (HoR) could be elected—refused to acknowledge the results of the internationally recognized parliament after a presumably 'baseless' ruling from the Supreme Court dissolving the HoR. This led to the creation of two parallel legislative bodies and two parallel governments, and the eruption of nationwide instability and violence. In 2015, all parties to the conflict signed the United Nations-brokered Libyan Political Agreement, a power-sharing arrangement between the major Libyan political players (including the GNC whose legal mandate had expired) (UNSMIL 2016).

Digital disruption has negative effects on electoral processes. Digital resources are increasingly applied to electoral processes to store electoral data, to register, identify, inform and mobilize voters, to cast and count votes, and to transmit, compute and tabulate results. With opportunities come challenges and trade-offs. Voting technology can be complex, difficult to understand for many electoral stakeholders, and potentially perceived as a manipulation tool or a game changer with uncertain impacts.

This inevitably raises suspicion among political contestants. Reservations concerning fraud or vulnerabilities, substantiated or not, can quickly gain traction and affect election credibility, as seen previously in the Netherlands in 2017, Kenya in 2017 and Iraq in 2018. Therefore, the incorporation of major technology upgrades in elections is not simply a technical or administrative process, but also demands a concurrent political and societal trust-building exercise that EMBs are often not well equipped to provide.

Social media provides a communication channel via which rumours and disinformation spread at an unprecedented rate, and this can also undermine trust in electoral processes. While sometimes information on candidates or on the electoral process is spread organically, there is an increase of systemic disinformation campaigns, sometimes funded by unknown sources, and sometimes also as part of an official political campaign.

Such disinformation campaigns have been used in attempts to undermine the trust in credible EMBs and the electoral events they organize, and in political parties and candidates, and to manipulate voters' participation and choices. The two most recent examples, both in 2016, are the US presidential elections and the European Union Membership Referendum in the UK (known as the 'Brexit' referendum), in which social media is believed to have possibly been used to manipulate voters' choices. Furthermore, in the Brazilian elections in 2018, WhatsApp became a conduit for disinformation during the presidential election campaign (see Section 3.1 in this report).

The need for a more rigorous regulation of social media platforms has become increasingly apparent. In response to increasing public scrutiny, social media providers have proposed and implemented measures to mitigate excesses and have increased self-regulation in the political space. Examples include the political advertising transparency tools and fact-checking mechanisms increasingly implemented since 2017 by platforms such as Facebook, Google, Twitter and WhatsApp for elections in Australia, Brazil, the European Union, India and the USA.

However, while EMBs argue that more needs to be done, regulation requires mandates, resources and expertise that

they may not have at their disposal. Regulation that is hastily implemented and flawed can hinder innovation and lead to lost opportunities; conversely, a hesitancy to implement regulation increases the risk of harm to those who require protection.

As challenges to electoral processes become more sophisticated, fast-paced, and nuanced, EMBs need to be forward-looking and increasingly creative. Innovative regulatory instruments, skill sets and management processes, the effective use of technologies, and collaboration with other agencies will help EMBs effectively respond to new challenges.

Policy considerations

- **Carry out reform thoughtfully.** EMBs should make a periodic and systematic review of rules that govern the organization of elections and ensure their adjustment to modern contexts. Parameters for the design of a review process should include internal audits and consultations, peer-exchange events and examination of international comparative examples, constructive responses to election observer recommendations, and the purposeful inclusion of opposition voices in the reform process. These reviews should become standard electoral management practice.

- **Encourage new regulatory alliances.** When EMBs do not have formal powers to directly regulate all issues of concern, they should initiate such processes with relevant regulatory bodies and play a constructive role in supporting informed decisions. Critical areas may relate to the illicit financing of political parties, cybersecurity, social media regulations and prevention of electoral violence, among others. Concrete actions by EMBs could include methodological documentation and analysis of a problem with a view to distilling pieces of advice for respective legislative and regulatory agencies.

- **Invest in people.** To plan and implement election activities in difficult environments—often marked by social and political tensions, security challenges and risks of natural hazards—EMBs need knowledgeable and capable staff. To ensure that permanent and temporary staff can respond to changing circumstances, EMBs should provide continuous capacity building opportunities, for example through dedicated training departments, peer exchanges or attendance at specialized courses. The establishment of electoral training centres may provide additional opportunities for training of key electoral stakeholders.

- **Introduce technology carefully.** The introduction of technologies in electoral processes should be anchored in thoughtful and context-aware discussions and analysis of the benefits and risks of the options at hand. When there is already a lack of trust in democratic and electoral institutions, the introduction of technology can be a controversial issue. Where the introduction of technologies in elections is based on well-informed decisions and managed properly, technology can potentially contribute to the resolution of long-standing electoral problems.

- **Protect democratic gains against risks.** Trust in electoral processes and institutions can be easily lost. When this happens, trust is difficult to restore. Therefore, EMBs should institutionalize risk management and resilience-building processes. Risk management will help EMBs to anticipate and address various risks before they negatively impact the process and results. Resilience-building will strengthen the capacity of the system to deal with inevitable shocks and stresses.

1.2.5. Corruption and money in politics

When government officials abuse their office for personal gain, through embezzlement, bribery or theft, this further undermines the impartial administration of state power, and the fairness and predictability of its exercise. Corruption not only affects people's trust in politicians but can also undermine trust in government and democracy more broadly. Efforts to reduce corruption have not kept up with the pace of other forms of democratic progress. Furthermore, the lack of progress in reducing corruption has serious implications for the sustainability, stability and health of both older and newer democracies. This section examines corruption in democratic processes, with a particular emphasis on the role of money in politics.

Why does corruption matter?

Democracy is not only about access to power and control of power, but also the exercise of that power (International IDEA 2018d). If policy implementation is unfair and unpredictable, and there are large discrepancies between official policies and how they are practised, the fulfilment of democratic principles is threatened (Munck 2009; Alexander and Welzel 2011).

Corruption (when government officials abuse their office for personal gain, through embezzlement, bribery or theft) further undermines the impartial administration of state power, and the fairness and predictability of its exercise. The OECD has identified corruption as the 'heart of the governance trap' that includes a declining trust in institutions and weakening of the social contract in OECD countries and regions such as Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America (OECD 2018: 16).

Corruption not only affects people's trust in politicians but can also contribute to the undermining of trust in government and democracy more broadly (Arkhede Olsson 2014; Fisman and Golden 2017; OECD 2018). Moreover, recent events show that corruption is a salient electoral issue that can make or break governments (Carothers and Carothers 2018; Bågenholm 2010).

The GSoD Indices' Absence of Corruption subattribute is closely connected to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 16, to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies, and SDG 16.5, in particular, which aims to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms (United Nations General Assembly 2015).

Absence of Corruption also indirectly contributes to achieving the other SDGs, as corruption can hinder the effective implementation of policies aimed at improving health or education, eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality or fostering economic growth (OECD 2018). This claim is supported by the GSoD Indices data, where Absence of Corruption is the aspect of democracy most highly correlated with Basic Welfare (correlation coefficient of 0.709), which measures levels of Human Development.

Democracy matters for corruption. Democracy in and of itself is not sufficient to guarantee low levels of corruption: 25 per cent of democracies actually suffer from high levels of corruption, therefore making it impossible to draw a direct causal link. However, non-democracies and hybrid regimes are, by and large, much more corrupt than democracies. More than two-thirds (78 per cent) of non-democracies have high levels of corruption, as do 68 per cent of hybrid regimes. No single non-democracy and only one hybrid regime (Singapore) has low levels of corruption, demonstrating that Singapore constitutes the exception rather than the rule.

Trends in corruption

Efforts to reduce corruption have not kept up with the pace of other forms of democratic progress over the past four decades. Global levels of corruption are slightly higher today than they were in 1975, with a three per cent global decrease in the Absence of Corruption score (noting that a lower score on this measure denotes an increase in corruption).

This lack of progress is also seen at the regional level. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region to show some progress in reducing its regional corruption levels since 1975, while all other regions have seen slight statistically insignificant declines. Despite this, a significant share of democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean (31 per cent) still suffer from high levels of corruption, only surpassed by the Middle East (the case for the only two democracies) and Africa (45 per cent) which both have lower levels of democratic development.

Since 2016, North America has witnessed a worsening situation, with declining scores that are primarily driven by developments in the United States, as well as a slight decline in Canada. Nonetheless, only North America and Europe outperform the global average with regard to Absence of Corruption.

The lack of progress in reducing corruption has serious implications for the sustainability, stability and health of both older and newer democracies. All democracies with high levels of corruption are third-wave democracies that transitioned to democracy after 1975. While democratic fragility is caused by a number of different context-specific factors, and caution should be used in arguing for a causal link, more than half (57 per cent) of the democracies that have high levels of corruption have experienced democratic breakdown at some point after their first transition to democracy.

Between 1975 and 2018, democratic breakdowns were nearly three times more frequent in countries with high levels of corruption than in countries with mid-range levels of corruption. No breakdown occurred at low levels of corruption, although this calculation does not control for other factors that may also have been in play.

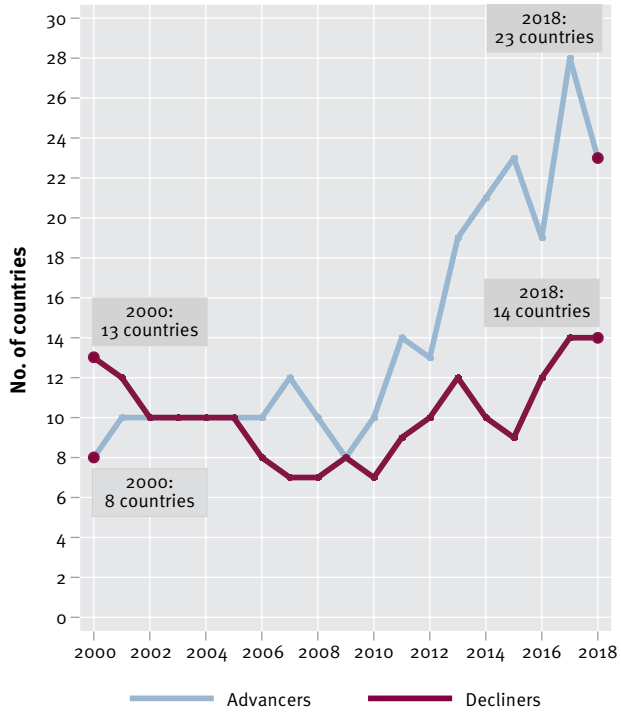
More recent advances have nevertheless been made in fighting corruption. Despite a stagnation in the reduction of global and regional levels of corruption, individual countries have seen advances in reducing corruption, while others have seen setbacks and increases in corruption levels.

Since 2006, however, the number of countries reducing their corruption levels has consistently been higher than those with increasing levels. From 2013 to 2018, 23 countries increased their Absence of Corruption scores (and therefore reduced their levels of corruption), while 14 countries saw a decline in their Absence of Corruption scores (see Figure 1.29). The share of countries with high levels of corruption was reduced from 48 per cent of countries in 2000 to 42 per cent of countries in 2018 (see Figure 1.30).

This reflects the development and effective implementation of policies and institutions to fight corruption in a number of countries and is at odds with other democratic aspects covered by the GSoD Indices, where more countries have been declining than advancing since 2014 (see International IDEA 2018e).

FIGURE 1.29

Declines and advances in Absence of Corruption, 2000–2018

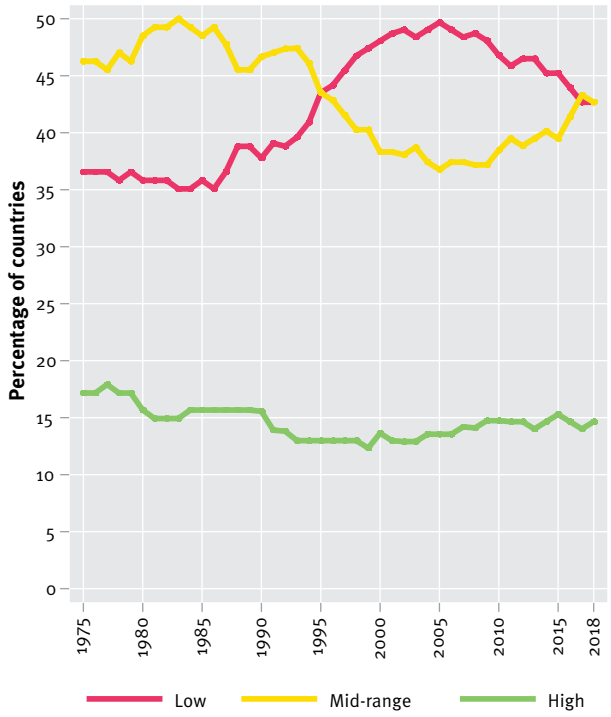


Notes: This graph shows the number of countries worldwide between 2000 and 2018 that have experienced statistically significant advances and declines in their Absence of Corruption scores.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 1.30

Global trends in Absence of Corruption, 1975–2018



Notes: A high score on the indicator Absence of Corruption is positive. To enable accurate comparisons over time and avoid distortions due to increases in the absolute numbers of countries, this graph shows percentages rather than counts.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Political corruption and money in politics

While corruption could take place anywhere, corruption involving public administration, government and political parties is referred to as political corruption. For example, procurement for public administration is often identified as an area that is vulnerable to political corruption, since elected officials might exploit the system and award public contracts to those who supported them in their campaigns as a return of favours (OECD 2018).

Throughout the world, politics and in particular elections have become increasingly expensive. Money is needed for political parties and politicians to communicate to constituents, run successful election campaigns, strengthen political organizations, support policy research or train party members (International IDEA 2017a: 126–56). Financing political activities is an important element of any democracy and is not a corrupt act per se, but the amount of resources involved in such processes in combination with lax regulatory frameworks, weak enforcement or weak judicial institutions has led political corruption to become a significant share of overall corruption.

While corruption takes a number of different forms (e.g. bribery, abuse of public resources, tax evasion, money laundering and accounting fraud), inadequately controlled funding of political parties and election campaigns is one of the most widely exploited entry points for private interests to exert undue influence (so-called policy capture) over politics and political decisions.

Corruption in general undermines trust in democracy but political corruption further weakens the democratic principles of popular control and political equality. It distorts representative government by diverting politicians' responsiveness to donors rather than voters. It creates an unequal playing field for candidates' political participation

and representation, favouring those with access to financial resources and networks, thereby reinforcing existing socio-economic inequalities. When it goes as far as breaking laws, it undermines the integrity of political processes and of public administration (International IDEA 2016; OECD 2018).

Towards a holistic and comprehensive approach to money in politics

Adequate design and effective enforcement of political finance regulations is critical to weaken incentives for political corruption and penalize corrupt behaviour and transactions. Existing political finance regulations alone cannot limit the access of undue interests to political processes. This realization has led to a major shift in anti-corruption strategies in both international organizations and national governments in order to connect political finance with other related issues such as asset declaration systems and lobbying registers (International IDEA 2017a: 126–56).

Significant advances have been achieved in this regard. Several countries have been undergoing major political finance reforms and several others are underway. For example, in South Africa, the Political Party Funding Act, which seeks to improve accountability and transparency in political finance, came into effect in 2019 and introduced stricter regulation of private donations.

Similarly, Malaysia's political finance is so far largely unregulated and foreign donations, for example, are permitted. It was in this context that former Prime Minister Najib Razak became embroiled in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal in 2015. Approximately USD 700 million from foreign individuals and corporations was allegedly transferred to Najib via 1MDB, a government-run strategic development company, claiming that these funds were a legal campaign donation from foreign sources.

Since the change of government in 2018, and after 61 years of single-party rule, Malaysia's Election Commission has begun developing more comprehensive political finance regulations, including donation limits and donor registration (Loheswar 2019).

Digital technologies for greater transparency and accountability

Information on how much money circulates in and around elections, where resources are coming from and how they are spent could expose the undue influence of politicians and help protect against the infiltration of illicit sources of money, therefore contributing to the broader fight against corruption (International IDEA 2017b).

According to International IDEA's Political Finance Database, more than 60 per cent of surveyed countries currently disclose political finance information publicly (International IDEA n.d.). Among those countries, there has been considerable progress in the use of ICTs to enhance transparency and accountability in political finance in recent years.

A growing number of countries now require political parties and candidates to submit their financial reports online to the EMB or other oversight agency, with the data subsequently disclosed in a searchable public database. While the development of online reporting and disclosure systems is not a silver bullet to fight against corruption and money in politics, it can exert pressure on political parties and candidates to submit accurate and detailed data, as an online platform facilitates the public scrutiny of political finance information (International IDEA 2017b).

For example, Georgia's State Audit Office (SAO) developed an online political finance reporting and disclosure system in 2014. The SAO publishes regular reports detailing party incomes and expenditure, and the names and identity numbers of individual donors, in searchable and downloadable formats. Based on the disclosed data, Transparency International Georgia also launched its own portal to provide information on all donations made to Georgian political parties since 2012 (International IDEA and OGP 2019).

Moldova has also adopted new technologies for reporting and disclosing political finance information, and other countries such as Bolivia, Mongolia, Peru and South Africa are discussing their implementation (International IDEA 2019). It would be ideal if such a system is linked to other databases such as tax records, in order to interconnect multiple data sets and detect corruption risks. For example, in Mexico political finance data is cross-checked with data from several financial institutions including the Financial Intelligence Unit, the National Bank and the Monetary Commission (International IDEA 2017b).

Closing loopholes in political finance regulations

While most countries have some kind of laws regulating the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns, shortcomings still exist in many contexts. This, in combination with weak judicial institutions and poor

access to justice, helps explain the slow advances in reducing corruption in a number of countries.

For example, setting spending limits for political parties and candidates could prevent a spending race and reduce the incentives for corruption stemming from high expenditures. According to International IDEA's Political Finance Database, overall spending limits for political parties exist in 32 per cent of the surveyed countries. However, only 3 per cent of countries have a specific spending limit on online media advertisement for political parties, while 5 per cent have a spending limit for candidates (International IDEA n.d.).

In Romania, candidates are allowed to spend up to 30 per cent of their total spending limit on online electoral campaign material. As social media has become an important platform for political communications around the world, countries may consider developing specific regulations in relation to online media advertisement spending by political parties and candidates.

In addition, levelling the political playing field and ensuring the inclusion of women, youth and other marginalized groups helps make political processes more resilient in the face of corruption risks. By linking the amount of public funding to the level of gender equality among the candidates that a political party puts up for election, or earmarking a certain portion of public funding for gender-related activities, political finance regulations could make money play a positive role in promoting diversity and anti-corruption in politics (International IDEA 2018a).

However, this type of gender-targeted public funding only exists in approximately 30 countries, including France, Haiti, Kenya, Portugal and South Korea. Other countries should follow suit and could consider updating their political finance regulations accordingly.

Ensuring effective implementation

One of the major lessons from recurring corruption scandals is that many countries continue to struggle with the effective implementation of political finance regulations. While there is no one-size-fits-all model to regulate the negative impact of money in politics, efficient oversight, timely reporting and auditing, public scrutiny and dissuasive sanctions play a crucial role in promoting anti-corruption.

Institutions responsible for political finance oversight must be independent. They require a clear mandate, legal powers and the capacity to enforce regulations (OECD 2016). In reality, many agencies have rather limited human and financial resources to effectively deal with large volumes of oversight work.

For example, Greece recently updated its political finance regulations in line with good practices in other European countries. Under the new system, political finance oversight is carried out by an audit committee. However, the committee's chairperson is appointed by the parliament and uncertainty remains as to the committee's ability to conduct independent and effective auditing of political parties and members of parliament (Svarrer 2017). Furthermore, while the audit committee maintains a website to disclose political finance information, most of the data regarding private donations and bank loans is not uploaded in a timely manner.

No matter how comprehensive a law looks on paper, the level of implementation is what matters the most. Countries need to ensure that oversight agencies are equipped with adequate resources to fulfil their roles.

Corruption risks posed by new technologies

Blockchain, big-data analytics, artificial intelligence and other new technologies are changing political participation and representation across the world. While technologies such as digital reporting and disclosure platforms can be a major driver to increase transparency and accountability in political finance, new technologies can also pose a new regulatory challenge for anti-corruption efforts.

For example, the emerging popularity of cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin raises concerns about their use to finance politics (International IDEA 2018c, 2019b). Depending on the design, some cryptocurrencies could make it very difficult to trace donors' identities and the destinations of their donations. Cryptocurrencies could be exploited to circumvent existing political finance regulations such as donation limits and bans from foreign and anonymous sources.

Although the use of cryptocurrencies in political finance is not common practice, some political parties and candidates have started to accept donations in cryptocurrencies. For example, in 2014 Mathias Sundin, a cryptocurrency advocate, was elected to the Swedish parliament after funding his election campaign solely using bitcoin. While his political views won him the seat, his radical approach to fundraising garnered international attention and sparked a debate on the implication of cryptocurrencies in political finance (Coindesk 2014).

Similarly, Georgia is now ranked second in the world for cryptocurrency mining behind only China (Hileman and Rauchs 2017). One Georgian political party has started accepting cryptocurrencies to fund its political campaign. In Canada, the popularity of cryptocurrencies has prompted an ongoing debate as to whether the digital currency should be officially regulated as part of political finance processes (O'Malley 2019).

It may be too soon to draw any conclusions about the impact of cryptocurrencies on corruption. However, it becomes increasingly important for governments to have a better grasp on such emerging technologies. It is important to first dissect what diverse implications they have for political finance and anti-corruption efforts. Only then will it be possible to assess how they can be best utilized. In the case of cryptocurrencies, regulations need to be considered regarding how to exchange cryptocurrencies to regular currency.

The fight against corruption more broadly requires strengthening of the rule of law, particularly access to justice, and judicial capacity and independence—two issues with a high degree of correlation with corruption in the GSoD Indices data (with correlation coefficients in 2018 of 0.836 and 0.737, respectively). The uneven and slow progress in reducing corruption levels around the world underscores the need to intensify efforts to fight against corruption as well as thinking about more innovative ways to make money play a positive role in politics.

Policy considerations

- Improve political finance transparency and, wherever possible, develop a holistic and comprehensive anti-corruption approach that links political finance with other related matters such as asset disclosure and lobbying registers. International instruments such as the OECD recommendations and the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiatives could support countries' anti-corruption reform efforts in that direction.

- Political parties should pledge full transparency of party finances by incorporating anti-corruption mechanisms in codes of conduct (e.g. declarations of assets from party representatives and conflict-of-interest norms), strictly regulating conflicts of interest, banning anonymous donations, and implementing sound anti-corruption policies and internal party democracy mechanisms (International IDEA 2017a).

- Consider the adoption of digital reporting and disclosure platforms for greater transparency and accountability in money in politics. Online databases also facilitate scrutiny of money in politics. Such platforms should ideally be connected to other systems such as a tax database in order to discern patterns and detect signs of corruption.

- Close loopholes in existing political finance regulations to address remaining and emerging corruption risk areas. For example, countries may consider introducing specific regulations on online media spending by political parties and candidates or adopting gender-targeted public funding to level the political playing field among all stakeholders.

- Focus on the effective implementation of existing political finance regulations. In order to do so, countries must ensure independent oversight mechanisms by providing clear mandates, legal powers and sufficient capacities to the regulatory agencies to fulfil their tasks.

- Carefully consider the pros and cons of new technologies such as cryptocurrencies and adopt necessary measures accordingly. Governments and regulatory agencies are often too slow to react to emerging corruption risks brought by new technologies.

- Promote civic education and awareness of the importance of integrity in politics and other societal and economic spheres.

- Monitor state performance, use of public resources and corruption through investigative activities and reporting, and report to judicial institutions for processing. Use media to increase pressure for integrity.

- Consider the role of the private sector. It can act as either a catalyst for, or an obstacle to, organized criminal engagement in political corruption. Working together with private companies is therefore crucial in fighting this phenomenon. One example is the role of the banking sector in monitoring transfers that may involve money laundering. Leveraging the potential for corporate social responsibility principles to encourage companies to conduct due diligence in detecting potential criminal interests in their market chain is another important avenue.

BOX 1.1

New technologies and democracy

New technologies, including information and communications technologies (ICTs) and social media, are contributing to a profound transformation of the global democracy landscape. They provide unprecedented opportunities to deepen democracy, while also creating new challenges and risks. This box summarizes these.

Opportunities for democracy provided by new technologies

- **ICTs provide new and enhanced opportunities for increasing political equality and enhancing popular control.** The use of new technologies has the potentials to democratize participatory engagement, political engagement and activism and thereby strengthen political equality and help increase pressure for political and democratic change.
- **In particular, ICTs have provided citizens with new tools to voice their opinions and mobilize pressure for change.** People can now voice their opinion, mobilize for protest, organize the signature of petitions or vote from the comfort of their home, breaking down geographical, physical and gender barriers that may have hindered or prevented their meaningful political participation.
- **New technologies can help increase pressure for political and democratic change.** This was seen during the Arab Uprisings, the democratic transition processes in Armenia and The Gambia and also more recently in Algeria and Sudan, where social media helped amplify societal voices and mobilize protests. Together with other offline processes, this helped create pressure for change and accelerated democratic openings that could lead to broader democratic transitions. However, online mobilization needs to be combined with offline actions (e.g. protests, political reforms, political will, international action and electoral processes) to effect change.
- **New technologies can help strengthen representative government.** When a technology such as electronic voting is used in electoral processes, this enhances political equality as it reduces barriers to electoral participation and increases inclusivity. More inclusive electoral processes in turn strengthen representative government. Biometric technology can also improve the accuracy of voter registration and reduce the potential for vote tampering, strengthening the integrity and transparency of electoral processes (International IDEA 2017).
- **Technology can provide additional avenues for citizen participation.** Governments and parliaments can use online tools to engage citizens in public debate, consultations and referenda on particular issues. New technologies can also be used to hold political decision-makers to account, increasing societal checks on government and the means of popular control. CSOs can use new technologies to monitor government spending, and to pressure politicians to clarify their position on issues. This can help provide incentives for reducing corruption and enhancing the impartiality of administration.
- **New technologies, particularly social media platforms, can help bridge the gap between citizens/voters and decision-makers.** Whereas such interactions were once mediated by gatekeepers such as the media and political parties, social media allows direct interaction, eliminating the need for this mediating filter (Tufekci 2018). While this can help increase proximity, it also fundamentally alters the traditional dynamics of interactions between decision-makers and citizens.
- **Anonymous speech and anonymous information access have become a critical component of the online political debate.** The ability to use Internet technologies to communicate anonymously has enabled journalists, CSOs and members of ethnic, religious or minority groups (who may be persecuted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity) to exercise their right to freedom of expression, while protecting their privacy. This has led to a diversification of the public arena, bringing more voices into the public debate and broadening the range of issues discussed, as anonymity often allows people to talk about issues previously off the agenda.

Challenges to democracy posed by new technologies

- **New technologies can also contribute to the weakening or even undermining of democratic processes, with disinformation playing a key role.**
- **When used as a tool to manipulate public opinion, social media can harm core democratic processes.** Coordinated manipulation campaigns on social media and digital networks can harm democratic politics in a number of ways:
  - The manipulation of public opinion online has the potential to skew the political debate towards topics favoured by those with more resources and access to these manipulative techniques.
  - The spread of disinformation on political candidates and their positions can contribute to the distortion of factual electoral debate. While the use of disinformation to discredit political opponents is not a new phenomenon, the speed at which information travels online is a key factor that adds to the challenges, as is the scale of disinformation when amplified on social media to reach millions of viewers.
  - Manipulation and disinformation via social media can potentially change electoral outcomes as voters may turn against (or for) a candidate based on the disinformation received.

- Coordinated manipulation of social media can generate confusion about the trustworthiness of the information ecosystem, affecting the credibility and confidence of the political process. This reduces trust in electoral processes and, as a consequence, trust in democracy more broadly (Chertoff and Donahoe 2018).
- A reduction of trust in democratic processes can lead citizens to opt out of these processes, increase voter apathy or push voters towards political parties and leaders of a populistic bent who may not always support democratic ideals.
- The ease of manipulation of online content (via anonymous human interaction, trolls and bots) enables and facilitates foreign interference in electoral processes and domestic public debate, which undermines national sovereignty, popular control and political equality.
- The use of online manipulation techniques, such as microtargeting or astroturfing, means that individuals may be excluded from political information flows and lose the ability to form opinions freely and independently without fear of reprisals (United Nations 1966: Article 18). This is also applicable online (United Nations 1966: Comment 25 to Article 19).
- Social media contributes to the polarization of the political debate, and undermines its civility, which is central to the democratic conversation. Social media platforms, by design, seek to capture the attention of users. This generates filter bubbles and echo chambers, and reinforces already-held views, reducing access to alternative viewpoints. The effect is deepened polarization rather than balanced opinion shaping.

- The GSoD data shows that increase polarization is a key contributing factor for democratic backsliding.
- Social media and other Internet platforms can contribute to a weakened media environment through fragmentation and monopolization, and a reduction in quality, with online content published without editorial oversight and quality control. This weakens the role of the media as an independent check on government performance (Tufekci 2018).
- The shaping of public opinion and agenda setting shifts from the public arena and its traditional actors (media and politicians) to the private arena. The latter includes a number of global technology giants that control key communication platforms, which manage large information flows, vast amounts of personal data as well as research into artificial intelligence and algorithms.
- **Technologies are tools that, in the hands of non-democratic regimes, can be used to reinforce authoritarianism, increase citizen surveillance and disseminate propaganda.** V-Dem data shows that 70 per cent of non-democratic regimes use the Internet to manipulate the information environment in their countries (V-Dem 2019).
- **Governments are grappling with how to curb the harmful spread of disinformation, while balancing other democratic rights such as free speech.** This is a difficult balancing act in democracies, but can easily go overboard in non-democracies, where the curbing of disinformation can provide a legitimizing façade to crack down on free speech.

FIGURE 1.31

New technologies and social media impact on democracy

- Strengthen participatory engagement
- Democratization of information and media landscape
- Increase societal checks on government and means of popular control, which can reduce corruption and enhance impartial administration
- Bridge gap between citizens/voters and decision-makers
- Strengthen representative government
- Increase political equality
- Increase pressure for political and democratic change

- Disinformation can distort and harm democratic processes, in particular the electoral process
- Increase polarization, which can provide breeding ground for democratic backsliding
- Decrease in quality of information for citizens to make informed choices
- Weakened media environment undermines checks on government, facilitating unaccountable and corrupt practices
- Tools to reinforce authoritarianism

Conclusion

This analysis has sought to provide an overview of a selection of issues, including both opportunities and challenges, that affect the global democracy landscape. It is not exhaustive but rather a selection of current issues in the democracy debate that the GSoD Indices have sought to unpack and analyse, with the aim of helping policymakers better understand and tackle the key global issues of our time.

The policy considerations build on International IDEA's global, regional and country expertise, based on nearly 25 years of accumulated institutional experience in providing advice and analysing democratic reforms worldwide.

The following chapters provide more in-depth analysis of how these issues take shape in different regional contexts and what can be done to tackle regional- and country-level democratic challenges, while building on advances and harnessing current opportunities.

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Chapter 2
The state of democracy in Africa and the Middle East

This chapter focuses on the state of democracy in two intertwined regions. The first section offers an overview of democratic trends in Africa, while the second aims to provide an understanding of the current democratic landscape in the least democratic region of the world, the Middle East. The chapter offers a long-term perspective on democracy in each region, followed by overviews of their respective current democratic landscapes, using the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis highlights current gains and opportunities for democracy as well as democratic challenges. Finally, the chapter includes a number of policy considerations for Africa and the Middle East.

It should be noted that the GSoD Indices classify the Middle East and Iran as a single region, referred to in this report as the Middle East. However, for the purposes of the analysis in this chapter, the Middle East is regarded as part of a wider region—that of Africa and the Middle East. Furthermore, while the GSoD Indices classify the subregion of North Africa as part of Africa, the Middle East and North Africa are closely interconnected from a historical, religious, cultural, political, linguistic and ethnic perspective. Examples from North African countries are therefore mentioned in both the Africa and the Middle East sections.

AFRICA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Africa is the region that has made most progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) since 2015, if measured by the number of indicators that have seen more countries advancing than declining. However, significant challenges remain if Africa is to achieve SDG 16; levels of democratic development measured by this goal remain low compared to the world average.

Of the 18 GSoD indicators used to measure progress on SDG 16, 8 have seen more countries in Africa with gains than declines since 2015. This is the case for SDG 16.1 on reducing violence and SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. SDG 16.10 on access to information and fundamental freedoms records more declines than advances on all its aspects. However, SDG 16.3 on rule of law has seen more countries declining in Judicial Independence, but advancing in Access to Justice and Predictable Enforcement.. SDG 16.6 on accountable institutions has also seen declines outnumbering advances for independent judiciaries and civil society participation, but not for parliaments. SDG 16.7 has had mixed results, with gains in Elected Government, Effective Parliament, Local Democracy and Social Group Equality, but declines in Clean Elections and on Electoral Participation.

Gender Equality

Significant challenges remain in terms of achieving gender equality and SDG 5.5 on political representation of women. The GSoD measure of (political) Gender Equality for Africa has seen stagnation since 2015, with no countries declining or advancing. Africa has the second-lowest levels of political Gender Equality in the world, after the Middle East.

KEY FINDINGS

Positive developments

- **The expansion of democracy in Africa since 1975 is second only to Latin America and the Caribbean.** Africa has experienced a remarkable democratic expansion in the last few decades, particularly since the early 1990s when many countries in the region introduced multiparty elections.
- In 1975, 41 countries were non-democracies while only 3 countries were classified as democracies. By 2018, the share of democracies had increased fivefold to 20 countries, making democracy the most common regime type in the region (41 per cent).
- **Representative Government has been strengthened in Africa.** Of the 20 countries categorized as democracies, the large majority have mid-range levels of Representative Government. However, only one country (Mauritius) has a high level of Representative Government.
- Between 1975 and 2018, the gains recorded on Representative Government were followed by advances on **Checks on Government** and **Fundamental Rights**.
- **Democratic aspirations in Africa remain strong.** Popular mobilizations demanding democratic change in countries with long-standing autocratic leaders have been seen recently in Ethiopia (2014–2018) and The Gambia (2016), resulting in incipient democratic reforms in the former and a democratic transition in the latter after 22 years of non-democratic rule. The large pro-democracy protests that rocked Algeria and Sudan in 2019 also testify to the growing demands for democracy in enduring hybrid and non-democratic regimes in the region.
- **Civil Liberties are one of the best-performing aspects of democracy in Africa.** In 2018, 33 per cent of countries had high levels of Civil Liberties. The high performance is concentrated in the subregion of West Africa, followed by Southern Africa. Of the countries that score highly on this measure, 87 per cent (14) are democracies, while only 12 per cent (2) are hybrid regimes. No single non-democratic regime has high levels of Civil Liberties.
- **Elections have become the norm rather than the exception throughout Africa.** Only four countries in the region (Eritrea, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan) hold no form of elections, scoring zero on Clean Elections and Inclusive Suffrage and, as a result, on Representative Government. Although Libya and South Sudan held elections in 2014 and 2010 respectively, regular elections are not held in these two countries because of protracted civil war. In countries in West Africa such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, democratic elections and stronger governments have replaced long-standing civil wars.
- **Of the new third-wave democracies, Tunisia has seen most democratic advances and now scores among the top 25 per cent in the world on seven of its democratic subattributes.** The Gambia is another new third-wave democracy that has seen significant democratic advances since its transition in 2017.

Challenges to democracy

- While democracies hold the largest share of regime type in the region, a total of 11 African countries are still categorized as non-democracies, representing 22 per cent of countries in the region.
- Africa also has the largest share of hybrid regimes in the world, with more than one-third of countries (18) in this category. The latest country to regress into hybridity is Tanzania, in 2018.
- **Despite gains in the past decades, the conduct of elections in a number of African countries remains flawed**. While the region has witnessed a rise in the number of transitions from ruling to opposition parties, many countries have failed to enact key reforms that would enhance the integrity of electoral processes. Disputed elections are a common feature of electoral processes in the region, sometimes leading to the outbreak of election-related violence.
- **Another set of challenges to democratic consolidation seen in many parts of Africa today relates to conflict and civil war.** In several countries, earlier gains have been reversed due to violence, a return to military rule, or failure to transform the political process.
- **An array of challenges inhibits the implementation of regional and country-level initiatives in Africa on gender equality**. To varying degrees, women in Africa lack equal access to political power and socio-economic status, and their inclusion remains a major hurdle for most countries.
- **Despite the expansion of democracy in the region, several countries have experienced significant declines in recent years.** Such declines are discernible in countries such as Egypt which, following the Arab Uprisings, experienced further democratic declines and deepening autocratization.
- **Judicial Independence is one of the weakest aspects of democracy in Africa**. Levels of Judicial Independence are low in almost half of the countries in the region.
- **Africa is the region with the highest levels of corruption as well as the highest share of democracies with high levels of corruption.** High levels of corruption are highly correlated with low levels of human development. This, therefore, has detrimental effects for sustainable development in the region.

2.1. The state of democracy in Africa

2.1.1. Introduction

Between 1975 and 2018, Africa made significant democratic advances which, while encompassing most aspects of democracy, were spread somewhat unevenly across the continent. These advances gathered momentum in the early 1990s following the end of the Cold War, which triggered a wave of multiparty elections in the region. As in Asia and the Pacific, Africa's democratic advances continue today, while other regions are now seeing stagnation or even decline. However, the African democratic landscape presents a speckled picture, with 11 non-democracies, the largest share of hybrid regimes in the world (18), and 20 democracies, of which several are experiencing states of democratic fragility. Africa's most democratic subregion is West Africa, followed by Southern Africa, North Africa and East Africa. Central Africa is the only African subregion with no democracies.

In addition to the uneven spread of regime types across its subregions, Africa's current democratic landscape offers a diverse set of opportunities and challenges. According to the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices, which now contain data up to and including 2018, improvements and opportunities for further potential gains can be seen in the conduct of elections (7 countries recorded gains on Clean Elections), administration and civil service (9 recorded gains on Absence of Corruption, and 8 on Predictable Enforcement), judicial access and accountability (11 recorded gains on Access to Justice), and parliamentary oversight (6 recorded gains on Effective Parliament).

However, such gains are countered and, to a degree, neutralized by declines, most of which are recorded on a wide range of civil liberties (nine recorded declines on Civil Liberties), Media Integrity (five recorded declines on Media Integrity), the conduct of elections (nine recorded declines on Clean Elections), and judicial access and accountability (eight recorded declines on Access to Justice). The fact that some of the main gains and declines impact on the same GSoD aspects indicates that while these aspects may be doing well in some countries of Africa, other countries are grappling with challenges in the same areas.

The GSoD findings also indicate that the democratization landscape in Africa is currently characterized by the prospects of a broadening civic space and strengthened fundamental human rights in some countries. At the same time, serious challenges remain in some contexts, related to shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding (including weakening of checks on government), infringements on constitutional norms and practices, and reversals in fundamental freedoms or civil liberties.

This section offers an overview of the long-term democratic trends in Africa, and an overview of the current democratic landscape, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the democratic challenges it faces. The analysis is based on the GSoD Indices as the principal data source, complemented by other sources. The section concludes with an overview of policy considerations relevant to democratic trends and challenges in Africa.

2.1.2. Taking the long-term perspective: democratic developments in Africa since 1975

The democratic expansion that has occurred in Africa since 1975 is second only to the Latin American and the Caribbean region in terms of its range and scope. Between 1975 and 2018, the overall landscape in Africa points to a remarkable democratic expansion, with a gradual upward trend that has seen the region move away from autocracy and towards democracy. This expansion saw a particularly sharp take-off from the early 1990s onwards, following the broad introduction of multiparty elections across the region.

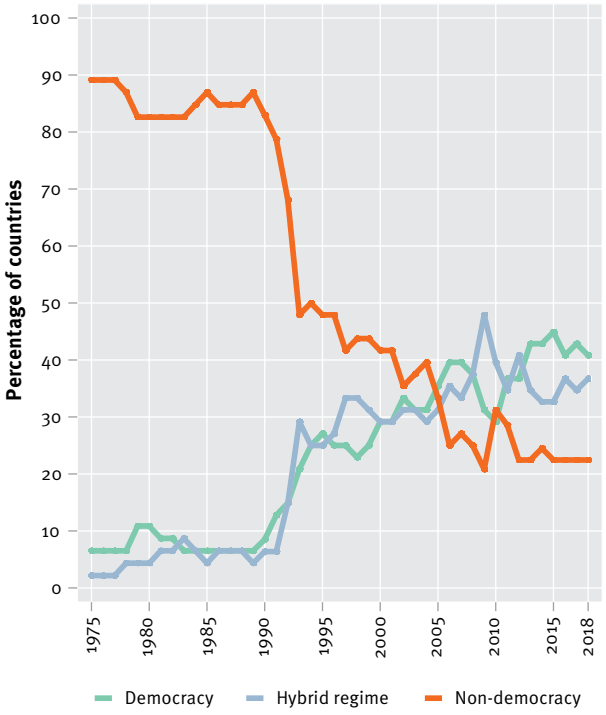
To put the scope of Africa's democratic expansion into perspective, in 1975 a total of 41 African countries were non-democracies, while only three countries were classified as democracies. By 1990, the share of non-democracies was still high, at 85 per cent (39 countries), and the number of democracies had only increased by one (Namibia, which became independent from South Africa in the same year), while a new type of hybrid regime had emerged, with three countries in that category.

In contrast, in 2018 a total of just 11 African countries (23 per cent of countries in the region) were still in the category of non-democracies (see Figure 2.1). The share of democracies has increased fivefold, to 20 countries, meaning that democracies now constitute the largest share of regime type in the region (41 per cent). At the same time, the number of hybrid regimes has increased to 18 countries (37 per cent of countries in the region).

Africa's most democratic subregion is West Africa, followed by Southern Africa, North Africa and East Africa. Central Africa is the only African subregion with no democracies (see Figure 2.2).

FIGURE 2.1

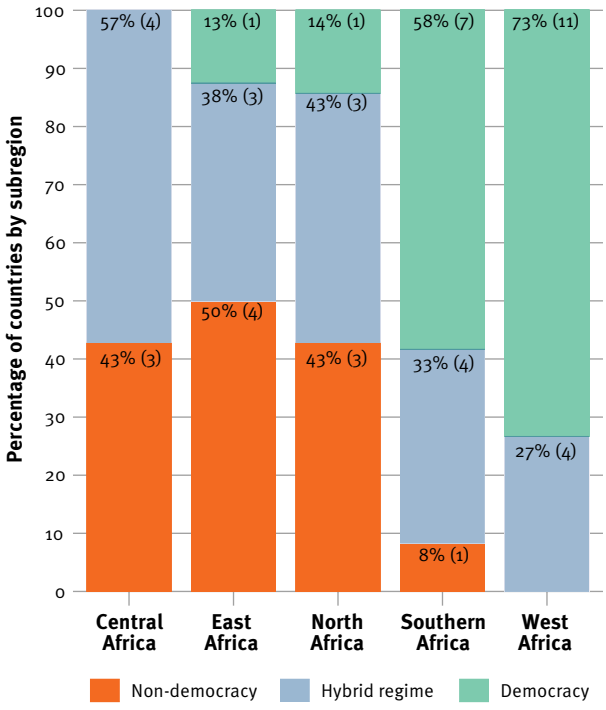
Regime types in Africa over time



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

FIGURE 2.2

Regime types in Africa by subregion, 2018



Notes: Using percentages to compare between subregions is important, as subregions may have a varying number of countries. The absolute number, however, is also included in brackets in each column.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Of the new third-wave democracies in Africa, **Tunisia** is the country that has seen most democratic advances; it now scores among the top 25 per cent in the world on seven of its democratic subattributes. **The Gambia** has also made great strides towards democratic advancement since its transition in 2017.

Between 1975 and 2018, several gains can be discerned across democratic attributes, particularly between the late 1990s and early 2000s. During these four decades, and particularly during the 1990s, Representative Government improved the most, followed by Checks on Government and Fundamental Rights (see Figure 2.3).

Since 2013, two countries—Burundi and Libya—have experienced statistically significant declines in **Representative Government**, while only Burundi has experienced similar declines in **Checks on Government**. Meanwhile, **Fundamental Rights** saw no declines and most countries have seen positive developments. Since 1975, there have been slow advances in **Impartial Administration**. Only 31 per cent of countries have seen a positive change on this measure, whereas 12 per cent of countries have seen a negative change.

2.1.3. The current democracy landscape in Africa

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the democratic challenges it faces.

Representative Government

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

Summary: Representative Government in Africa, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.45)	
High (›0.7)	Mauritius
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Low (‹0.4)	Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Libya, Mauritania, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda

Progress across the region on Representative Government has been uneven

The GSoD Indices data for 2018 shows that Representative Government has been strengthened in the African region as a whole. According to data, 20 countries are now categorized as democracies, of which all but one (Mauritius) has mid-range levels of Representative Government. However, the depth and scope of democracy varies considerably, depending on an individual country's performance. For example, three countries—The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria—which score mid-range on this attribute—have all experienced statistically significant gains in the last five years (see Table 2.1).

The data at the subregional level is complex:

- In **Southern Africa**, apart from Madagascar, only Botswana and Namibia have seen some improvement, although this is not statistically significant. At the same time, when compared to the rest of Africa, Southern Africa has experienced some of the highest levels of electoral participation since 2005 (Schulz-Herzenberg 2014).

- In **North Africa**, Tunisia leads the subregion in terms of democratic reforms. Developments in the country since the 2011 revolution provided a key opportunity for democratic gains. The 2014 Constitution, negotiated among key players, provides for freedom of

TABLE 2.1

Data on Representative Government, 2013 and 2018

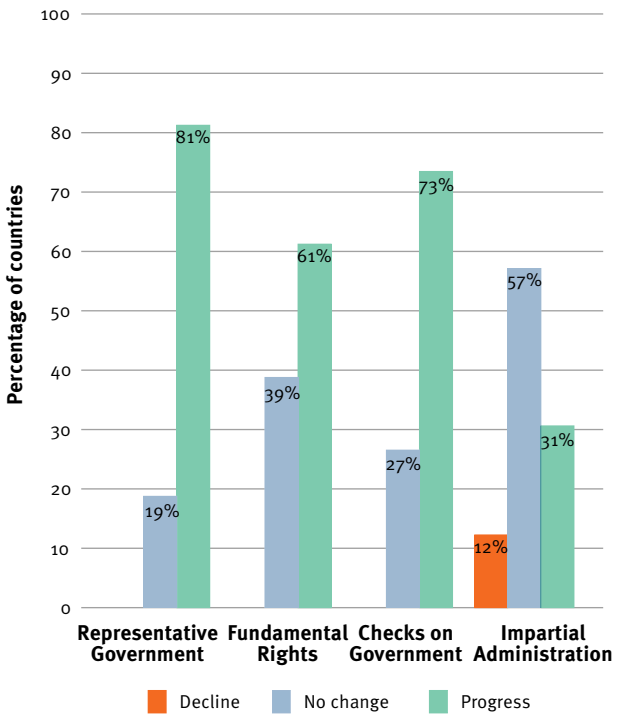
Country	Representative Government score	
	2013	2018
Mauritius	0.79	0.81
The Gambia	0.38	0.56
Guinea-Bissau	0	0.58
Madagascar	0.40	0.47
Nigeria	0.49	0.63

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 2.3

Democratic development in Africa between 1975 and 2018



Notes: This bar graph shows the percentage of countries which have experienced positive, negative or no change between 1975 and 2018 according to each of the four democratic attributes that are aggregated. In order to measure change on each attribute, it was necessary to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the country's score on an attribute in 1975 in comparison to 2018.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 2.2

Heat map of democratic performance patterns in Africa, 2018

Country	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Mauritius	High	High	High	Mid-range	High
Ghana	Mid-range	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
Tunisia	Mid-range	High	High	Mid-range	Low
Benin	Mid-range	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Sierra Leone	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Senegal	Mid-range	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Liberia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range
Malawi	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
South Africa	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Namibia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Lesotho	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Botswana	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
The Gambia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Mali	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Côte d'Ivoire	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Burkina Faso	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Nigeria	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Kenya	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Guinea-Bissau	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Low
Madagascar	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: This heat map shows the performance of the 20 democracies in Africa by attribute in 2018. Green indicates a high-performance level, while yellow denotes mid-range performance, and red shows low-range performance.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

expression, popular participation in decision-making and civic engagement in politics (see Box 2.1).

- In **West Africa**, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria have made significant advances on Representative Government, as well as Clean Elections and Free Political Parties. Most constitutions in this subregion were written by military or authoritarian regimes which held sway for an extended period. With the return to civil rule, countries such as Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire have embarked on constitutional amendment reviews, which are helping to entrench democracy by checking executive excesses (International IDEA and Hanns Seidel Stiftung 2016).

- In **Central Africa**, only two countries—Central African Republic (CAR) and Gabon—score mid-range on Representative Government, while the rest score low. Gabon has made attempts to organize a political dialogue although it was not attended by the main opposition party (Akum 2019). The CAR government signed a peace accord with armed groups in February 2019. However, it is still early to say whether such a deal will hold (International Crisis Group 2019).

- In **East Africa**, Kenya and Tanzania are the only two countries that score in the mid-range on Representative Government, while all other countries score low. Kenya and Tanzania are examples of countries where presidents have adhered to constitutional requirements on terms of office. Kenya continues at present to maintain quite solid participatory institutions and adherence to the rule of law (Mbaku 2018). However, Tanzania regressed into a hybrid regime in 2018, due to a deteriorating political environment and significant democratic declines.

Africa's democracies vary quite widely in terms of their democratic performance patterns and the quality of their democracy. For example, the only democracy to score highly on Representative Government is Mauritius. There are nine additional variations on democracy in the region. At one extreme, two countries (Ghana and Tunisia) perform highly on two attributes. At the other, two fragile democracies (Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar) have no high scores and record low performance on two attributes, respectively (see Table 2.2).

Democratic progress has been incremental across the region

Elections have become the norm rather than the exception throughout Africa. Only four countries in the region (Eritrea, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan) currently hold no form of elections. Each of these countries therefore scores 0 on both Clean Elections and Inclusive Suffrage and, as a result, on Representative Government. Although Libya and South Sudan held elections in 2014 and 2010, respectively, regular elections are not held in these two countries because of protracted civil wars. Eight countries in the region (Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia) score highly

BOX 2.1

Tunisia: the story of a fledgling democracy

Following the overthrow of the regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 (Chrisafis and Black 2011), Tunisia experienced major advances across most aspects of the GSoD Indices. In the last 10 years it has recorded significant advances in 11 GSoD subattributes: Clean Elections, Free Political Parties, Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, Social Rights and Equality, Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, Media Integrity, Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement and Civil Society Participation (see Figure 2.4 and Figure 2.5).

Due to the gains achieved during this period, Tunisia is currently the only country in North Africa to have made a successful transition from non-democracy to democracy and is presently among the best performing democracies in Africa, with seven GSoD subattributes in the top 25 per cent in the world (see Table 2.3 for a summary of Tunisia's GSoD scores in 2018). The new Tunisian Constitution (2014) introduced sweeping reforms. To date, successful presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections have been organized, building on the trend set when the country's first democratic elections took place in 2011.

However, a number of important challenges remain. The first relates to the large number of institutional and structural reforms that have not yet been carried out. For example, the constitutional court provided for by the 2014 Constitution has

TABLE 2.3

The state of democracy in Tunisia, 2018

GSoD attribute score				
Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
0.62 =	0.76 =	0.80 =	0.61 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last 5-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

not yet been established (Democracy Reporting International 2017). The legislative framework for the court, which is intended to play the role of ultimate arbiter in the country's democratic system, has been adopted but parliament is yet to reach an agreement on its composition.

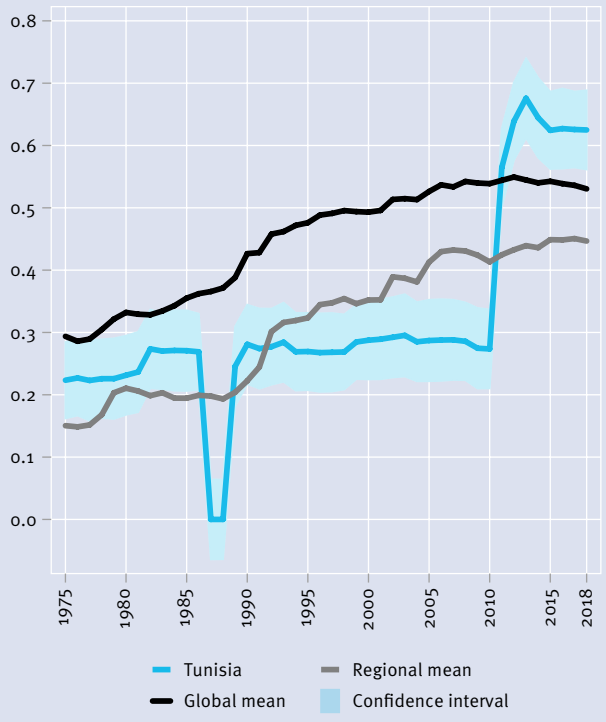
The second is the framework for decentralization. In April 2018, the Tunisian Parliament adopted a decentralization law that reformed the general framework within which municipalities are supposed to function. The new law sets out a list of powers that municipalities are supposed to exercise directly (most of which relate to environmental issues such as garbage disposal), and a list of powers that municipalities are supposed to share with the central government (Kherigi 2018). However, municipalities cannot exercise any of the shared powers until a second law, which has not yet made any legislative progress, is adopted. Therefore, Tunisia's score on the Local Democracy subattribute remains low (0.17).

The third challenge relates to economic reform. Since 2011, Tunisia's economy has stagnated. Unemployment remains stubbornly high, there has been a sharp increase in fiscal deficit and government debt, and opportunities for growth remain limited (OECD 2018). Tunisia's national authorities are under significant pressure to liberalize various segments of the economy, but little action has been taken to date (AfDB Group 2019). This will remain a major source of concern in the coming period, and it will certainly prove to be a testing ground for the resilience of the country's fledgling democracy.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly given the context, Tunisia's national debate on policy reform remains unsatisfactory, partly because political parties remain highly fractured and embryonic. Parties continue to break apart and lose members at an alarming rate, often preventing serious discussion about major issues, including those raised above. Arguably the most important example of this phenomenon is the end of the alliance between the country's secular party, Nidaa Tounes, and the Islamist Ennahda party (Grewal and Hamid 2018). While Tunisia scored 0.70 on Free Political Parties in 2013, there has since been a decline, albeit an insignificant one, to 0.65 in 2018.

FIGURE 2.4

Representative Government in Tunisia, 1975–2018

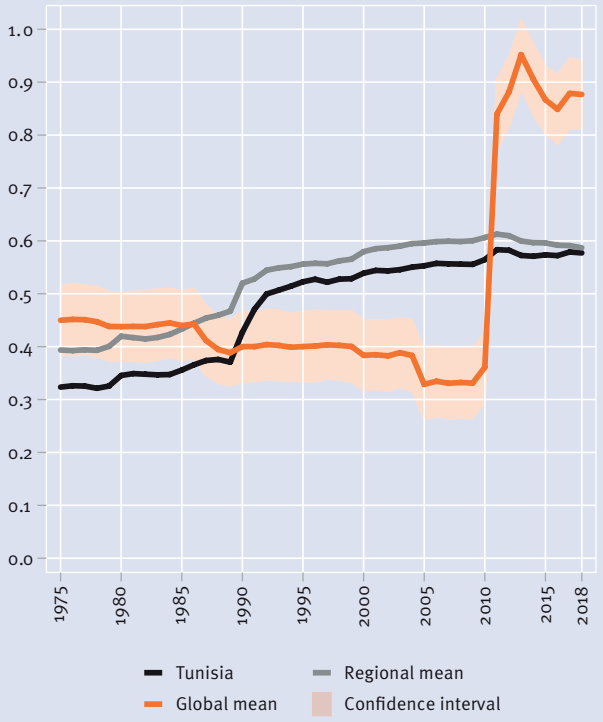


Notes: The y-axis indicates the score (0–1), while the x-axis indicates the years. The shaded areas around the line display the 68 per cent confidence bound of the estimate.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 2.5

Civil Society Participation in Tunisia, 1975–2018



Notes: This graph allows for both temporal (over time) and spatial (between country and region) comparison. The y-axis indicates the subattribute's score, measured from 0 to 1 while the x-axis indicates the years.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

on Clean Elections, while 25 score in the mid-range and 16 countries have a low performance (see Figure 2.6).

In several countries in West Africa, democratic elections and stronger governments have replaced long-standing civil wars (Annan 2014). Although the legacy of authoritarian rule and armed conflicts has continued to derail democratization, a number of countries have tried to surmount these legacies.

For example, the 2017 elections in Liberia—in which the candidate of the opposition Congress for Democratic Change, George Weah, defeated the candidate of the ruling Unity Party, Joseph Boakai, in a run-off—marked the third general-election cycle since the end of the civil war in 2003 (MacDougall and Cooper 2017). Similarly, in Sierra Leone the candidate from the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party, Julius Maada Bio, defeated Samura Kamara of the ruling All People's Congress candidate in the March 2018 elections (The Carter Center 2018). Côte d'Ivoire exhibits remarkable progress in managing its post-conflict institutional challenges, but still struggles with undisciplined security services that have attempted violent mutinies (Tsolakis 2018).

Between 2013 and 2018, virtually all countries in the West African subregion, including those previously under long-term authoritarian or military rule, conducted polls. Another positive characteristic of this subregion is the increase in the rate at which opposition candidates were able to emerge victorious at the polls to take over power from the incumbent through a peaceful transition (see Figure 2.7).

Despite gains, the conduct of elections remains flawed in several countries across the African region. Some countries have failed to enact sufficiently robust legal and institutional reforms to level the playing field between ruling parties and opposition parties. Electoral bodies are often constrained by a lack of adequate human and financial resources, while others lack independence from the executive branch. This has led to a context of mistrust between electoral stakeholders, which is exacerbated by low levels of judicial independence and the perception that disputes will not be resolved impartially (Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen 2018).

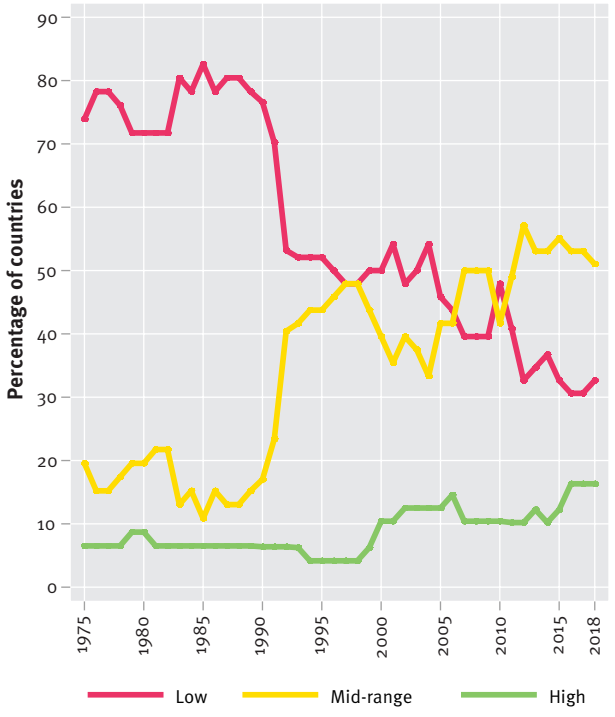
Nine countries in Africa (Burundi, Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Niger, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have seen their Clean Elections score drop significantly in the last five years.

The persistence of election-related violence in many contexts is a symptom of these challenges. Elections are used to legitimize undemocratic regimes in a number of countries, including Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, The Gambia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe (although The Gambia experienced democratization reforms following the 2017 elections). Each of these countries has a record of conducting regular elections which are largely flawed and uncompetitive. In other contexts, if an opposition exists it has little chance of dislodging the incumbent party from power (for more see: Temin 2017; Wodrig and Grauvogel 2016; Galvin 2018; Moore 2017).

In some East African countries, including Burundi, electoral institutions are not independent of the executive. This undermines their ability to conduct free, open and democratic elections (Makulilo et al. 2015). Challenges range from the registration of voters, compilation of the voter registry, procurement of voting materials, the actual conduct of elections, and eventual counting and final announcements of results. In each of these stages there is a level of opaqueness that should be addressed if the region is to enhance the credibility of its elections.

FIGURE 2.6

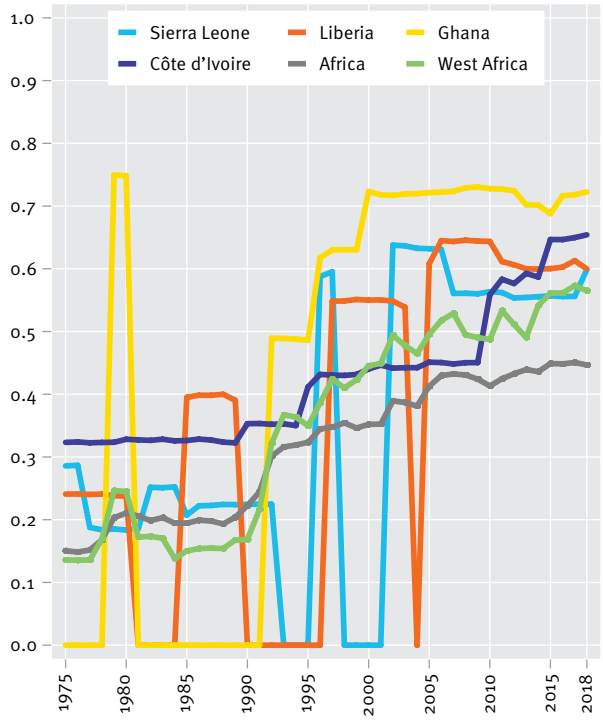
Clean Elections in Africa, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

FIGURE 2.7

Representative Government in West Africa, 1975–2018



Notes: The y-axis measures the score (0–1), while the x-axis indicates the year. Scores of 0 indicate that no regular elections were held due to coups, conflicts or other interruptions.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

For example, Kenya's 2013 and 2017 presidential elections were both contested at the Supreme Court. The 2017 presidential election was annulled based on a number of flaws in the electoral process, and the repeat election, while affirmed by the Supreme Court, was also replete with flaws inconsistent with an open, credible and democratic election. There were claims that insufficient time was allocated for the preparation of the election, and provocations of violence in several election centres (Mbaku 2018).

Similarly, in Uganda's 2016 elections the main opposition candidate, Kizza Besigye, was detained for weeks and eventually charged with treason. In that case, social media was shut down ahead of the general elections (Mattes and Bratton 2016). There were also questions with regards to the credibility of the re-run elections in Zanzibar in March 2016, which were boycotted by the opposition following the annulment of the 2015 poll prior to the announcement of final results. In South Sudan, meanwhile, no election has been held since the assumption of office by President Salva Kiir after the 2011 independence referendum. An election initially scheduled for July 2014, and subsequently postponed until October 2018, could not be held due to conflict and instability.

Central Africa offers several examples whereby electoral outcomes, especially for the presidency, have translated into little real change in terms of power alternation. According to the GSoD Indices, most countries where there has been a re-election of heads of state score low on Representative Government. With two exceptions, all heads of state in this subregion have recently been re-elected.

In Cameroon, President Paul Biya has ruled for 37 years and was re-elected in 2018. Idriss Deéby Itno of Chad came to power in 1990 through a coup d'état and won the presidential elections of 2016. In the same year, Sassou Nguessou, President of the Republic of Congo since 1979 (with an intermission between 1992 and 1997), was re-elected. In Equatorial Guinea, President Teodoro Obiang had ruled the country for nearly 40 years when he won the 2016 elections (Al Jazeera 2016). Finally, in Gabon, Ali Bongo Odimba, the 60-year-old son of the late President Omar Bongo, who came to power after his father's death in 2009, was re-elected after the disputed elections in 2016.

The two exceptions occurred in CAR and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The December 2018 presidential elections in DRC saw the election of an opposition candidate, Felix Tsisekedi, although the transition did not occur without controversies (see Berwouts 2019). A change of power also occurred in CAR, which as a result of peace processes has had two presidents in the last five years, one of them being a woman: Catherine Samba-Panza (Murray and Mangan 2017).

One of the most common challenges to democratic consolidation is the manipulation that takes place around elections and the electoral system. Many African leaders have consolidated their power base by preaching the language of democratic reforms, whereas in fact such language only serves to hide their authoritarian tendencies to keep their hold on power. In some instances, leaders themselves have chosen the voters by deciding who should vote (Mkandawire 2008).

Additionally, in order to stay in power some regimes continue to manipulate the constitution in favour of the incumbents. For example, constitutional changes to adjust term limitations (e.g. in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda) have weakened the process of democratic reforms or reinforced ongoing autocratization processes (e.g. in Egypt). In Uganda, where term limits were scrapped in 2005, the

Constitution was altered in 2017 to remove the age limit for presidential candidates (Biryabarema 2017).

In Rwanda, the 2015 constitutional referendum enabled the incumbent President Paul Kagame to run for a third seven-year term in 2017 before introducing a limit of two five-year terms. Since the amendments were not retroactive, this effectively makes Kagame eligible to serve until 2034 (McVeigh 2015). In Burundi, the 2018 constitutional referendum focused on extending the presidential term from five to seven years. The current President, Pierre Nkurunziza, has stated that he will not be contesting the next election, although he would be eligible to serve a further two terms. The last country to remove presidential term limits was Egypt, in 2019.

In some countries, there is a lack of political will to democratize and elite rule remains entrenched. Central Africa is illustrative of this trend, being home to the longest-serving leaders in Africa, including Biya in Cameroon, Déby in Chad and Sassou Nguessou in Republic of the Congo. These countries have continued to hold regular elections, but there has not been any change in leadership, and their parliaments have very weak checks on the executive (Akum and Donnefeld 2017).

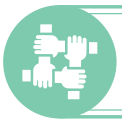
Burundi and Uganda illustrate similar patterns. In Uganda, democratic advances have essentially ground to a halt because of President Yoweri Museveni's determination to remain in power after more than three decades. Recently, Uganda even passed legislation that removed presidential age limits (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2018). Burundi has been in crisis since 2015 when President Nkurunziza announced his intention to run for a third term. In May 2018, the country faced more inter-ethnic tensions during the campaign for a referendum to allow Nkurunziza to rule for another 14 years when his term expires in 2020. While the referendum was approved despite strong opposition, Nkurunziza declared afterwards that he would step down in 2020 (Mikhael 2019). As a culture of impunity has re-emerged in Burundi, there are mounting concerns about the resumption of a large-scale civil war (Temin 2017; Wodrig and Grauvogel 2016). This explains why, according to the GSoD Indices, Burundi scores low on all five attributes and falls firmly under the category of a non-democracy.

Similarly, Cameroon has struggled to overcome the legacy of a highly centralized state under President Biya. Political parties exist under repressive conditions and the resurgence of a secessionist movement in anglophone regions since 2016 has underscored serious gaps in representative governance (Galvin 2018).

Togo remains a hybrid regime which is partly attributable to the slow pace of governance reforms aimed at opening up the political space and loosening the one-sided grip of the ruling party on the key levers of power, including the security forces. Term limits and the electoral system have been at the heart of the street protests that have engulfed Togo since 2017 but so far this has not resulted in greater political openings (Ahlijah 2018).

While the country held legislative elections in December 2018, they were boycotted by the opposition (Kohnert 2019). The increased majority for the ruling party in the legislature will facilitate the passage of a constitutional amendment that will permit the incumbent to run for a further two terms in 2020. This is likely to exacerbate tensions ahead of the 2020 presidential election (Al Jazeera 2019b).

Table 2.4 offers a snapshot of scores on the Representative Government attribute and its subattributes in Central African countries.



Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Summary: Fundamental Rights in Africa, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.52)	
High (>0.7)	Benin, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal and Tunisia
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Low (<0.4)	Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan

TABLE 2.4

Representative Government in Central African countries, 2018

Country	Representative Government subattributes			
	Clean Elections	Inclusive Suffrage	Free Political Parties	Elected Government
Cameroon	0.29	0.81	0.47	0.65
CAR	0.48	0.87	0.49	0.65
Chad	0.22	0.82	0.47	0.51
DRC	0.38	0.82	0.45	0.65
Equatorial Guinea	0.16	0.80	0.32	0.37
Gabon	0.38	0.84	0.49	0.65
Republic of Congo	0.31	0.83	0.43	0.51

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Conflicts and liberation struggles have led to the militarization of social and political life

Another set of challenges to democratic consolidation, seen in many parts of Africa today, relate to conflicts and civil wars. There are several states where earlier gains have been reversed because of violence, a return to military rule, or a failure to transform the political process. Most North African countries caught up in the Arab Uprisings in 2011 fall under this category (Abderrahim and Aggad 2018). Egypt relapsed into militarism while Libya has been engulfed in a civil war since the fall of Gaddafi in 2011. Algeria, Morocco and Sudan (all hybrid regimes) successfully weathered the uprisings and, through some measured reforms, have managed to reorganize their authoritarian systems.

In Algeria, leading opposition parties boycotted the May 2018 legislative elections, resulting in a low voter turnout. After 20 years in power, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned in April 2019 following pressure from the army and massive street protests demanding democratic reforms in the country (Nossiter 2019). In April 2019, Sudan's leader Omar Al-Bashir was ousted by the military following weeks of mass protest and is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of crimes against humanity and genocide (Reinl 2019; Reuters 2019). The protests were initially met with brutal repression and a strengthening of the military's hold on power, although negotiations on a power-sharing deal between the military and the civilian opposition—under pressure from the African Union (AU)—have led to the installation of a transition government that will govern the country for a 39-month period until elections are organized. As of July 2019, the political landscape in Egypt is dominated President Abdel Fattah Al Sisi, in power since July 2013 and sworn into office in June 2014 (Goldberg 2018). In an April 2019 referendum a majority of voters approved constitutional amendments that could see the President stay in power until 2030 (Al Jazeera 2019a).

Central Africa and West Africa both continue to grapple with the consequences of conflict, which has in turn perpetuated a so-called militarization of social and political life. The frequency of coups d'état and coup attempts, civil unrests accompanied with political assassinations, and the emergence of religious fundamentalism and insurgency feed a practice of militarization that keeps democratic progress at bay. DRC, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Niger are among the countries facing such challenges (Barka and Ncube 2012). It must be noted, however, that according to the Cline Center for Advanced Social Research's Coup D'etat Project (2013), the number of coups and attempted coups has decreased significantly compared to previous decades. This claim is corroborated by more recent studies too (Besaw and Frank 2018).

In a number of countries in Africa, the AU has been instrumental in preventing or resolving conflicts. The AU has overseen the Abuja Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks, deployed peacekeeping missions including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), mediated in crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Libya (Oguonu and Ezeibe 2014) and pressed for a peaceful transition in The Gambia in 2016. By mid-2019 the AU was preoccupied with pre-empting further upheavals in Sudan and pressured for a power-sharing deal and a transition to democracy, as well as in launching the African Continental Free Trade Area (Abebe 2019). Furthermore, the AU has been vocal against unconstitutional changes of government, as initially pronounced in the Lomé Declaration, formalized in the AU Constitutive Act, and then further elaborated in the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG), which seeks to promote systems of government that are representative based on the holding of regular, transparent, free and fair elections (see International IDEA 2016: 18–26).

Five countries in Southern Africa—Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe—have made some democratic progress, to different degrees, through protracted liberation struggles. The liberating parties have remained dominant political parties since the attainment of independence. Decades later, the shift to democratic consolidation is still a challenge as a result of the enduring legacies of those liberation struggles.

The influence of war veterans in politics varies significantly between countries. In the extreme case of Zimbabwe, key bureaucratic posts charged with managing democratic processes remain largely staffed or controlled by veterans and ruling-party officials (Latek 2018). The cadre deployment policy of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), and the appointment by the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) of former freedom fighters to high-ranking positions, are relevant examples of stalling democracy through the institution of liberation-war fighters.

As Table 2.5 shows, despite instances where countries with conflict legacy have transitioned to hybrid regimes or democracies, this has not necessarily led to improvements in the relevant democracy attributes. As some of the cases discussed in this section also demonstrate, liberation movements have generally failed to evolve into vibrant political parties that foster inclusion and a good governance culture. This trend has been observed in Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe, and to a lesser degree in Angola and South Africa.

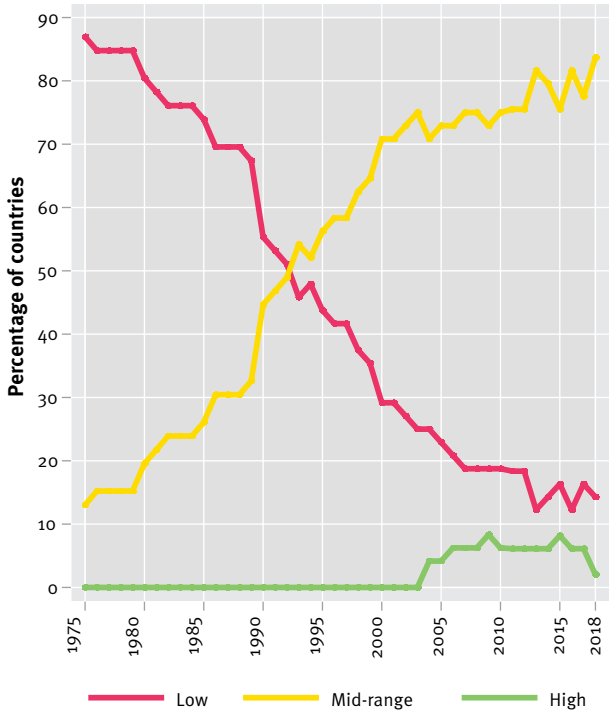
Advances have been made in gender equality in Africa but challenges remain

Africa's average levels of political Gender Equality are in the mid-range (0.53), slightly below the world average (0.58). While the overwhelming majority of countries in the region (41 countries or 84 per cent) score mid-range, 15 countries score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world on Gender Equality (see Figure 2.8). The largest share of those are non-democracies (eight), and five are hybrid regimes, but two (Kenya and Nigeria) are democracies. Two countries score in the top 25 per cent in the world on Gender Equality: of these, one is a democracy (Senegal) and one is a non-democracy: Rwanda. With a score of 0.73, Rwanda has one of the highest levels of Gender Equality in the world.

Important advances have been made recently in terms of gender equality in Africa. The year 2016 in particular was an important milestone for gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa, as it marked the 30th anniversary of the coming into force of the African Charter on Human

FIGURE 2.8

Share of countries by performance level in Gender Equality in Africa, 1975–2018



Notes: The year 2004 was the first in which a country scored 'high' on Gender Equality in Africa.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 2.5

Countries with conflict legacy, 1991 versus 2018

			Attribute				
Country	**Year**	**Regime type**	**Representative Government**	**Fundamental Rights**	**Checks on Government**	**Impartial Administration**	**Participatory Engagement**
Angola	**1991**	Non-democracy	0	0.31	0.24	0.35	
	2018	Hybrid	0.42	0.51	0.44	0.42	
Mozambique	**1991**	Non-democracy	N/A	0.52	0.40	0.44	
	2018	Hybrid	0.47	0.59	0.56	0.43	
Namibia	**1991**	Democracy	0.55	0.66	0.66	0.60	
	2018	Democracy	0.59	0.69	0.63	0.63	
South Africa	**1991**	Non-democracy	0.15	0.38	0.50	0.47	
	2018	Democracy	0.68	0.66	0.699	0.50	
Zimbabwe	**1991**	Hybrid	0.41	0.51	0.42	0.53	
	2018	Hybrid	0.42	0.46	0.50	0.25	

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

and People's Rights in 1986, which was further built on by the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2003).

The year 2016 also marked the beginning of the second phase of the AU's African Women's Decade 2010–2020 (AU n.d.), an implementation framework which aims to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women. Additionally, in 2015 the African Development Bank (AfDB Group) launched a Gender Equality Index (AfDB Group 2015), which is the most comprehensive assessment of the state of gender equality on the continent. It examines the role of women as producers, as economic agents, in human development and as leaders in public life.

Nevertheless, an array of challenges continues to inhibit the implementation of regional and country-level initiatives on gender equality. To varying degrees, women in the African region lack equal access to power and socio-economic status, while their inclusion in decision-making remains a major hurdle for most countries. Women and youth in general, as well as the less wealthy, tend to be systematically disadvantaged from access to political power. Even in cases where democracy is advancing, social competition has often produced inequalities that advantage some groups over others, leaving women to fare poorly (Lührmann et al. 2018).

Civil Liberties shows promising potential

The subattribute of Civil Liberties is one of the best-performing aspects of democracy in Africa, with one-third of countries (16) scoring at high levels. The high performance is concentrated in the subregions of West Africa and Southern Africa (see Figure 2.9). One notable example is The Gambia, which scored 0.37 in 2013 but increased to 0.73 in 2018 (see Box 2.2). Of the countries

BOX 2.2

The Gambia: breaking with the past?

The Gambia presents an interesting case, having experienced declines across all democratic attributes following the 1994 military coup which toppled Sir Dawda Jawara, the country's first prime minister (and later president). The 22-year-long rule of President Yahyah Jammeh was synonymous with human rights violations, corruption, press censorship and civil society curtailment.

However, The Gambia has now returned to the path of democratic progress (see Figure 2.10 and Table 2.6). The December 2016 election of President Adama Barrow marked the first alternation in power in the country, which has begun dotting its democratic landscape with numerous democratic gains and opportunities. Many political prisoners have been released, exiled Gambians are returning en masse, the press is operating more freely, and civil society is beginning to thrive. There also is an expressed commitment to the development and independence of indigenous judiciary.

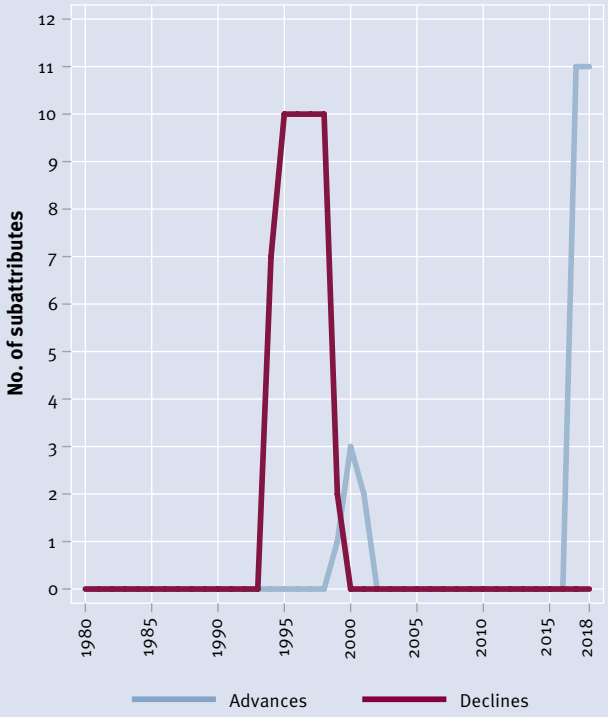
Since December 2017 The Gambia has made great strides, setting up a Constitutional Review Commission; a Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission; and a National Human Right Commission. This is the first step in facilitating the process of reconciliation and compensation for the victims of human rights violations (Law Hub Gambia 2017; Jeffang 2018). Furthermore, the once dreaded and anti-people National Intelligence Agency is undergoing reform. Opposition parties are operating freely.

However, despite these gains and opportunities, some of the threats lurking in the country's democracy landscape include the persistence of draconian laws, repression of peaceful protests by the current administration, weak capacity of parliamentarians, failure to address constitutional term limits, and ethnic politics (Hartmann 2017).

The Gambia is the country with the most gains in democratic performance since 2013. It has seen increases in 11 of its GSoD Indices subattributes: Clean Elections, Free Political Parties, Elected Government, Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, Media Integrity, Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement and Civil Society Participation.

FIGURE 2.10

Advances and declines: The Gambia, 1980–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 2.6

The state of democracy in The Gambia, 2018

GSoD attribute score				
Representative Government	**Fundamental Rights**	**Checks on Government**	**Impartial Administration**	**Participatory Engagement**
0.56 +	0.63 +	0.66 +	0.56 +	Low

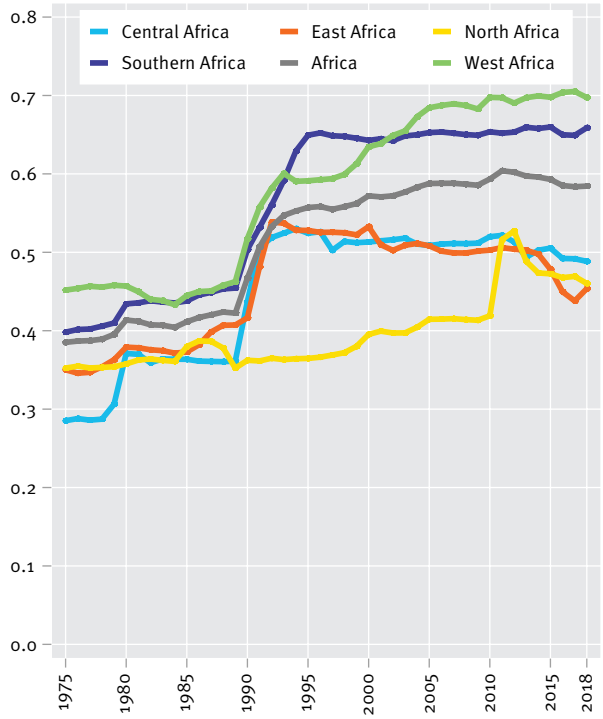
High Mid-range Low

Notes: + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 2.9

Civil Liberties in Africa, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

that score highly on Civil Liberties, 14 (or 87.5 per cent) are democracies, while only two are hybrid regimes; no non-democratic regime has high levels on this measure.

CAR, Ethiopia and The Gambia have all experienced a statistically significant advance on Civil Liberties. However, nine countries have seen significant declines in Civil Liberties in the past five years. One is a democracy (Kenya), five are hybrid regimes (Cameroon, Guinea, Mauritania, Tanzania and Togo), and three are non-democratic regimes (Burundi, Libya and South Sudan).

The regional performance is particularly high for Freedom of Movement, and for Freedom of Religion. On each of these measures, 26 countries (or more than half of the countries in Africa) score highly. Six countries (Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Namibia, Sierra Leone and South Africa) also score in the top 25 per cent in the world on Freedom of Association and Assembly. However, Africa performs particularly poorly on some aspects of Civil Liberties. Close to half (22) of the countries in the region have low levels of Personal Integrity and Security. Of these countries, 9 are non-democracies, 11 are hybrid regimes and only 2 are democracies.

Nine countries in Africa have seen a significant drop in Civil Liberties since 2013. Of these, Burundi and Cameroon are among the four countries in the world with the most severe declines in civic space. They are followed by Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Mauritania, South Sudan, Tanzania and Togo.

Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

Summary: Checks on Government in Africa, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.51)	
High (›0.7)	Mauritius and Tunisia
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Low (‹0.4)	Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan and Sudan

Democratic backsliding and democratic fragility are on the rise

The expansion of democracy in Africa has brought about qualitative challenges. A number of African countries remain democratically fragile and prone to regressing into hybridity or breaking down into non-democracy. Africa is home to more than three-quarters of the world's fragile democracies, which are countries that transitioned to democracy after 1975, but then experienced a partial (to hybrid) or full democratic breakdown (to non-democracy) but have since

returned to democracy. Six democracies in the region can be considered fragile, of which one (Guinea-Bissau) is very fragile, in that it has experienced more than one democratic breakdown since its first transition to democracy. Moreover, more than half of Africa's democracies can be considered weak democracies, with a low performance on at least one of their democratic attributes. Of these, two countries (Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar) stand out as very weak, with low performance on both Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement. Seven countries (The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali and Nigeria) combine weak democratic performance with democratic fragility.

When African countries experience partial (to hybrid regime) or full democratic breakdown, this occurs through both so-called modern democratic backsliding and more traditional coups. The GSoD Indices refer to modern democratic backsliding as the gradual weakening of checks on government accompanied by concomitant declines in civil liberties. This occurred in Madagascar (2009–2012), Mali (2012–2016), CAR (1999–2007) as well as Niger (2005–2010). While Madagascar and Mali backslid into hybridity and have since returned to democracy, CAR and Niger have remained in a state of hybridity. Backsliding also occurs in contexts which do not fit either of those two definitions, but which nevertheless exhibit overall democratic deterioration. This was the case for Tanzania and Zambia, both of which regressed to hybrid regimes in 2018 due to a deteriorating political environment and significant democratic declines.

A number of countries in Africa have recently suffered from deepening autocratization, which refers to hybrid regimes and non-democracies that become more repressive. This has been defined in the GSoD Indices as significant declines in at least three of the democratic subattributes of hybrid regimes or non-democracies during a five-year period. Since 2013, more than half of the countries in the world that have suffered from deepening autocratization are in Africa. Mauritania and Togo are hybrid regimes and the remainder are non-democracies: Burundi, Egypt, Libya and South Sudan (see Table 2.7).

Gains in judicial independence have been coupled with severe weaknesses

Judicial Independence is one of the weakest aspects of African democracy. Levels of Judicial Independence for 2018 were low in 24 countries across Africa. Of these, 3 are democracies, 11 are hybrid regimes, and 10 are non-democratic regimes. Additionally, progress has been slow, with average levels of performance similar to those observed in 1975 (see Figure 2.11).

TABLE 2.7

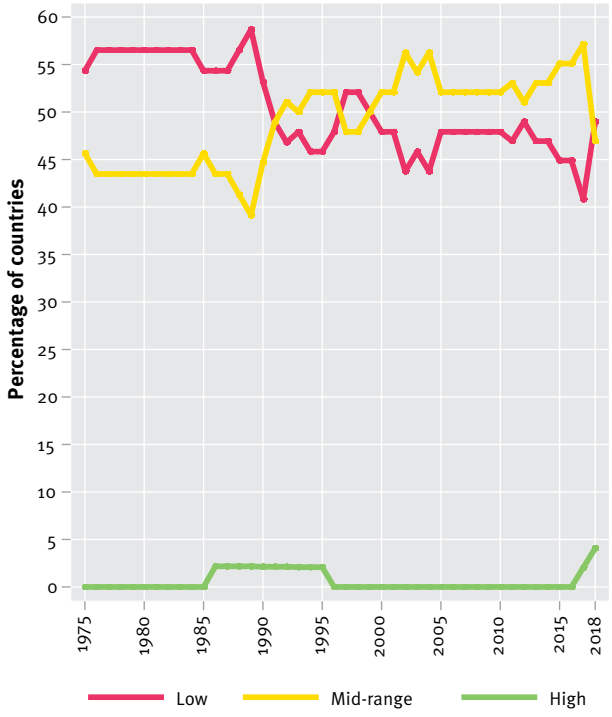
Countries experiencing deepening autocratization, 2013–2018

Country	No. of subattribute declines, 2013–2018	Within hybrid	Within non-democratic
Burundi	7		YES
South Sudan	5		YES
Egypt	3		YES
Mauritania	3		YES
Libya	3		YES
Togo	3	YES	

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 2.11

Judicial Independence in Africa, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

However, in some countries the judiciary is gaining more independence and holding leaders to account. While The Gambia is still grappling with its transition to democracy, and Tunisia is in the process of consolidating its democratic institutions, on Judicial Independence they are the only countries in Africa to score highly in 2018. When comparing relative scores for 2018, Benin, The Gambia, Namibia and Tunisia perform among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on Judicial Independence.

Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

Summary: Impartial Administration in Africa, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.41)	
High (>0.7)	N/A
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia
Low (<0.4)	Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo and Zimbabwe

A total of 19 of the 49 countries in Africa (39 per cent) are below the global average on Impartial Administration, and 17 of these are in the bottom 25 per cent globally. On Absence of Corruption, 18 of 49 African countries are in the bottom 25 per cent globally, and 32 were below the world average in 2018. Only three countries in Africa (Botswana, Rwanda and Tanzania) are among the countries in the world with the lowest levels of corruption, while 37 per cent of the countries in the region are in the 25th percentile, with the highest levels of corruption in the world. Among the countries with the highest levels of corruption, almost half are in Africa (International IDEA 2018b).

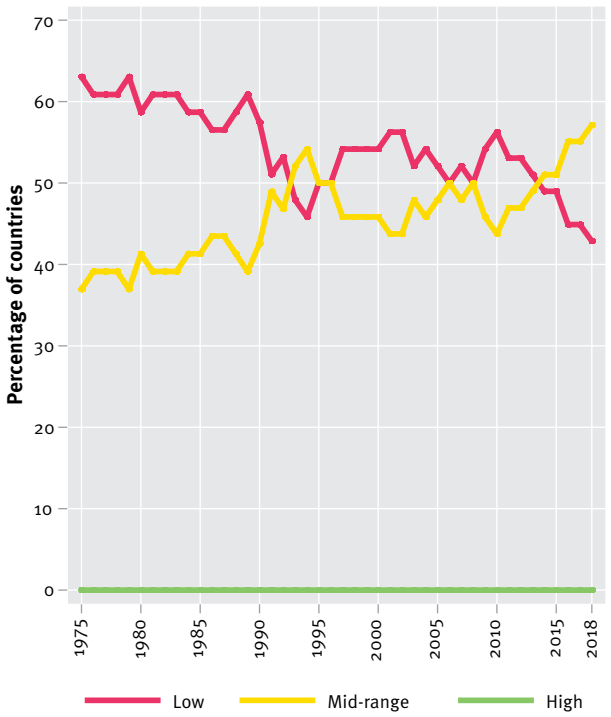
Corruption: a corroding and enduring phenomenon

All of Africa's subregions have continued to show low levels of performance on Impartial Administration and its subattributes, irrespective of advances on Representative Government, Checks on Government and Participatory Engagement. Weak impartiality of public administration and high levels of corruption are among the weakest aspects of African democracy (International IDEA 2018a). This undermines the democratic gains in other aspects and presents serious impediments to the advancement of human development in the region. The average level of Impartial Administration in Africa stands at 0.41.

On the subattribute of Absence of Corruption, the region records the lowest average performance in the world. Moreover, after the Middle East, Africa has the largest share of democracies with high levels of corruption, with 45 per cent of the region's democracies falling into this category. According to GSoD Indices data for 2018, 32 countries

FIGURE 2.12

Impartial Administration in Africa, 1975–2018



Notes: No countries in Africa score highly on this subattribute at any point between 1975 and 2018.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

in Africa have low scores on Absence of Corruption (of which 10 are non-democracies, 13 are hybrid and 9 are democracies). In contrast, no country in the region scores highly on Absence of Corruption—not even the only country that has high levels of Representative Government (Mauritius).

However, despite the low performance, there are some signs of hope. In the last five years, nine countries in Africa (18 per cent) have experienced statistically significant advances in tackling corruption. West Africa saw the greatest number of countries improving, with statistically significant advances in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia and Nigeria. Advances were also recorded in Angola, CAR, Ethiopia and Tanzania. At the same time, in all these cases, levels of corruption were either high and moved to mid-range, or decreased within the mid-range, and none reduced to low levels of corruption.

For the most part, the persistence of corruption across Africa signifies that progress on building democracy has not been matched by similar efforts in improving governance and impartial administration and in reducing corruption (International IDEA 2018b). Zimbabwe offers an example of a country where, despite of changes in government, Impartial Administration levels remain low (see Box 2.3).

BOX 2.3

Zimbabwe: low Impartial Administration despite changes in government

Zimbabwe has traditionally performed poorly on Impartial Administration, and there are no signs of immediate improvement despite the change of government leadership in 2018. Currently, Zimbabwe scores low (0.25) on this dimension, as well as on Absence of Corruption (0.24) and Predictable Enforcement (0.24). There have been no significant changes on these scores in the last five years.

The country's poor performance across all the attributes is connected to the fact that the country's governance and administrative systems remain heavily skewed in favour of ZANU-PF members. No substantial progress has been made in tackling rampant corruption despite the creation of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission under Chapter 12 of the 2013 Constitution. Public service posts that are awarded as a reward for party loyalty appear to haunt the country, even after the change of government leadership. Extensive systemic socio-political reforms and inclusive accountability systems and processes are essential to turn this around.

In November 2017 the Zimbabwean military removed President Robert Mugabe from power in a bloodless coup. Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, another veteran of the liberation struggle, was sworn in as caretaker president until the July 2018 elections. According to Zimbabwe's electoral authorities, Mnangagwa and ZANU-PF won the elections by a very narrow margin, resulting in his installation as president of the so-called Second Republic of Zimbabwe, while the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance, cried foul over the results (Burke 2018).

Zimbabwe is now classified as a hybrid regime, with mid-range levels on the attributes of Representative Government, Fundamental Rights and Checks on Government, and low scores on Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement (see Figure 2.13 and Table 2.8).

The low ratings on Representative Government relate to the lack of Clean Elections and Free Political Parties. In fact, the

TABLE 2.8

The state of democracy in Zimbabwe, 2018

GSoD attribute score				
Representative Government	**Fundamental Rights**	**Checks on Government**	**Impartial Administration**	**Participatory Engagement**
0.42 =	0.46 =	0.50 =	0.25 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

2018 elections reinforced claims that electoral processes are plagued by mistrust originating from a history of partisan electoral management bodies (EMBs). Further, there are accusations of the abuse of state resources for party campaigns by ZANU-PF and allegations of voter rigging, and intimidation of voters is so institutionalized that its subtlety can easily go unnoticed. After every general election, questions remain around the legitimacy and credibility of election processes and the electoral law.

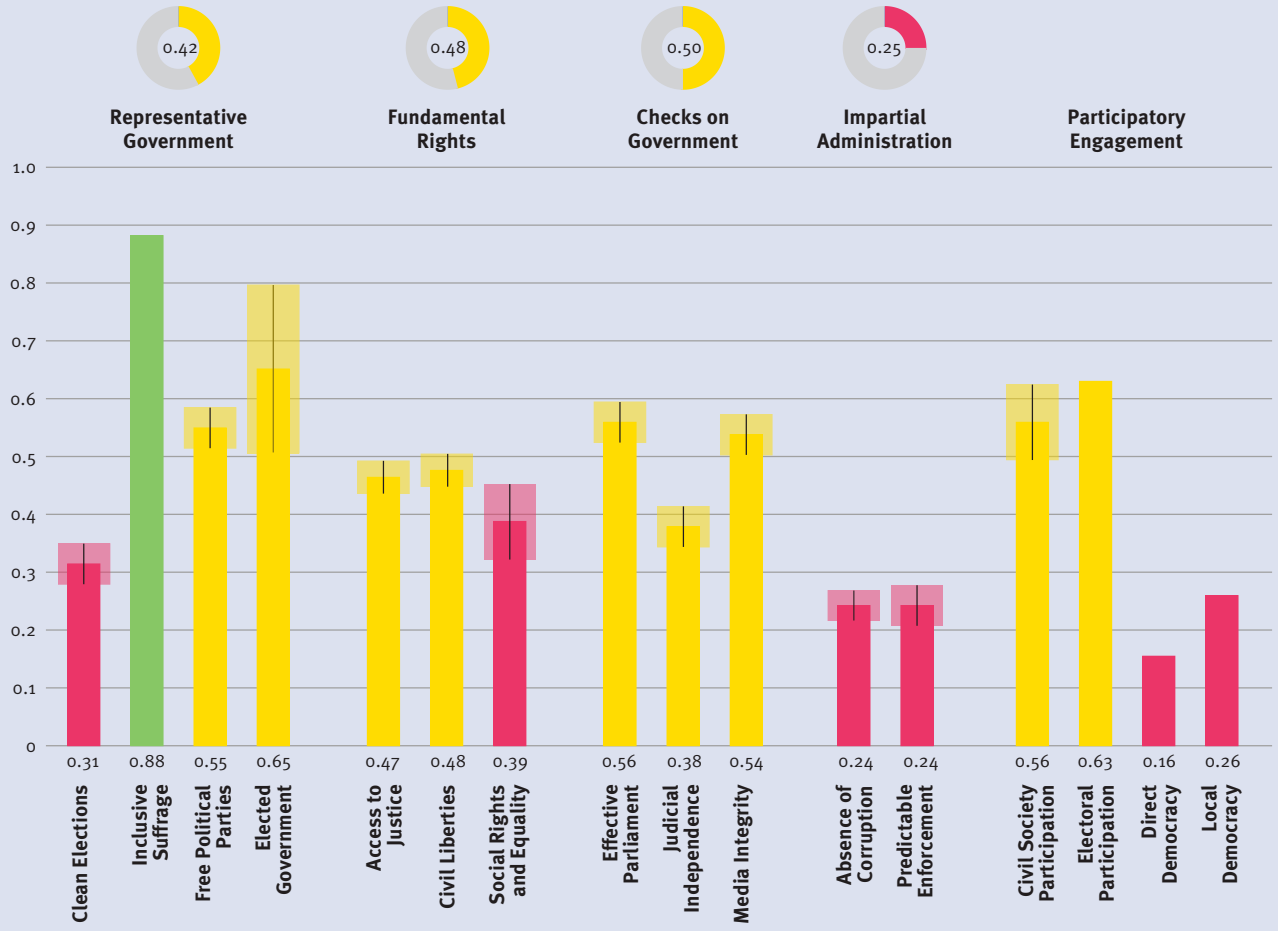
On Fundamental Rights, the country has been experiencing a decline in the economy and the absence of basic public services, which affects Social Rights and Equality. The Bill of Rights in the Constitution has reduced the excesses of the state in violating citizens' human rights. However, current challenges relate to aligning administrative statutes with constitutional provisions to address historical injustices and correct the previous Republic's imbalances and exclusion.

Judicial independence has always been problematic in Zimbabwe. A highly politicized justice system has resulted in citizens losing confidence in the criminal justice system. This confidence is yet to be regained despite new constitutional provisions that create room for the design of more accountable institutions. Scores across all the subattributes are lower than the regional and world averages. A somewhat robust but polarized media has struggled to draw attention to weak governance processes, especially around corruption.

The engagement of the public and civil society in decision-making processes is weak and intermittent. ZANU-PF's sophisticated party-controlled instruments for political involvement are in place all over the country. In this context, the inclination to conform to the ruling party's decisions undermines their functionality and effectiveness, and the work of civil society is considerably curtailed by the repressive actions of the system and the laws that are in place.

FIGURE 2.13

Democratic performance: Zimbabwe, 2018



Notes: Vertical black lines in columns indicate the extent of measurement uncertainty (68 per cent confidence intervals).

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in civil society organizations (CSOs) and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

Summary: Participatory Engagement in Africa, 2018

Regional average: Low	
High	Ghana, Liberia, Mauritius and Sierra Leone
Mid-range	Benin, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia
Low	Algeria, Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Tunisia and Zimbabwe

A promising civil society coupled with a shrinking civic space

Despite advances in civil society in some countries, the empirical evidence shows that there have been many setbacks. In East Africa, countries such as Burundi, Kenya and Tanzania have seen a worsening of fundamental human rights and civil liberties. Tanzania, a democracy from 2010 until 2018, has regressed into hybridity in 2018 because of President John Magufuli's continuing assault on political opponents, journalists and ordinary citizens expressing their views on social media. Similarly, in Uganda, in the face of a growing youth resistance to President Museveni, the government has reverted to repression, intimidation, and detention of opposition politicians, civil society and the media. Uganda's failed democratic transition is illustrated in GSoD Indices scores that show no improvements in the promotion and protection of Fundamental Rights and the country continues to be classified as a hybrid regime.

In West Africa, democratic advances are frustrated by a restrictive civic space and a clampdown on the opposition, civil society and media. Some governments in the region are promulgating laws to ban online speech, shutting down the Internet during elections and protests. For instance, on the eve of its presidential run-off elections in August 2018, the Malian government blocked Internet access in the country (Tobor 2018). Such shutdowns point to a wider trend in Africa, with regimes in many other countries (including Ethiopia, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe) subjecting their citizens to similar measures (Ogola 2019).

In Nigeria, the Not-Too-Young-To-Run movement was conceived in 2016 and driven by young people demanding a reduction in the minimum age for contesting elective positions in the country. By 2018, following several ultimatums directed to the president, the movement succeeded in having the law amended to effect the reduction in the age limit. In Senegal, between 2011 and 2012 youth movements such as Y'en A Marre ('Fed Up!' or 'Enough is Enough!') organized demonstrations to resist an attempt by incumbent President Abdoulaye Wade to actualize his third-term presidential ambitions, which contributed to his defeat in the polls in 2012 (Diome 2014). Modelled on Y'en A Marre, the Balai Citoyen Movement was instrumental in the overthrow of President Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso in 2014 (Wienkoop and Bertrand 2018).

In Central Africa, Chad has permitted the growth of democratic institutions despite the persistence of a strong executive under President Déby. A weak parliament and the absence of an independent judiciary have reinforced Déby's dominance. Chad has fairly active CSOs, particularly labour and student movements, as well as a free media, which have used the limited space to make demands on the government through popular protests and boycotts.

Ethiopia faced considerable democratic challenges following mass anti-government protests between 2014 and 2018 which centred on demands for enhanced political and economic reforms (Kelecha 2016). In 2016, the Ethiopian government imposed a state of emergency and released several opposition supporters from jail, but these efforts did not stem the protests (Human Rights Watch 2017). Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned in February 2018, paving way for the appointment of a new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, who has embarked on a set of ambitious and promising democratic reforms, although a full transition to democracy is yet to come.

As a result, in 2018 Ethiopia's GSoD Indices classification was upgraded from a non-democracy to a hybrid regime. According to the latest reports, Ethiopia's stability is being rocked by political infighting and resistance against Ahmed. In June 2019, the army chief, the country's Amhara governor and some of their close friends and colleagues were killed following alleged attempts to organize a coup. In the past year alone, more than 1,000 people have been arrested on terror-related charges for inciting ethnic-based attacks (Associated Press 2019). These events have precipitated calls for caution, amid fears that Ethiopia will suffer further splits and divisions ahead of the elections scheduled for 2020 (Blomfield 2019).

As is the case in several other regions of the world, a number of African countries have also experienced a shrinking civic space in recent years. The GSoD Indices measure civic space through three subattributes: **Civil Liberties**, which measures aspects such as Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, and Freedom of Religion; **Media Integrity**, which looks at the diversity of media perspectives in society; and **Civil Society Participation,** which measures both the vibrancy of civil society and the extent to which it is consulted on key policy issues. As shown in Table 2.9, the declines in civic space in the region are occurring in contexts of deepening autocratization (e.g. Burundi, Egypt and Togo), as well as overall democratic erosion (e.g. Tanzania).

TABLE 2.9

Declines in civic space and deepening autocratization in Africa

Extent of decline	Examples
Declines on all three aspects of civic space	Burundi (deepening autocratization of a non-democracy)
Declines on two aspects of civic space	Kenya (democracy), South Sudan (deepening autocratization of a non-democracy) and Togo (hybrid regime)
Decline on one aspect of civic space	**Civil Liberties:** Cameroon, Guinea, Mauritania, Tanzania (hybrid regimes) and Libya (non-democracy) **Media Integrity:** Benin (democracy) and Egypt (non-democracy) **Civil Society Participation:** Niger (hybrid regime)

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Civil Society Participation in Africa demonstrates mixed results since 1975. In general, there have certainly been improvements, with some movement towards a higher engagement of civil society. By 2018, 5 countries (10 per cent) in Africa had low Civil Society Participation scores, while 12 countries (25 per cent) scored highly, and 32 countries (65 per cent) scored in the mid-range.

2.1.4. Conclusion

Between the beginning of the third wave of democratization in 1975 and 2018, Africa made great progress towards democratic consolidation across a number of areas, encompassing the majority of the aspects covered by the GSoD Indices but somewhat unevenly spread across the region.

As is the case in other regions, including Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the democratic advances in Africa gathered pace in the early 1990s following the end of the Cold War, which triggered a wave of multiparty elections in the region. Importantly, Africa—together with Asia and the Pacific—continues to witness democratic advances, while other regions are seeing stagnation or even decline.

According to GSoD Indices, the democratization landscape in Africa is currently characterized by the prospects of a strengthened civil society and fundamental human rights. However, many outstanding challenges remain in relation to the curtailment of civic space, with declines in Civil Liberties and Civil Society Participation and weakening of Checks on Government.

A number of countries face democratic weakness and fragility. In most cases, this is due to the weakness of democratic institutions, but such weakness can also be caused or exacerbated by the risk of recurring conflict, or the potential for relapse into either hybridity or authoritarianism. Furthermore, infringements of constitutional norms and practices, as well as reversals in fundamental freedoms and civil liberties, pose potential threats to the democratic gains and advances in the region.

TABLE 2.10

The Global State of Democracy Indices snapshot: Policy considerations for Africa

This table offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in Africa, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. It presents policy considerations across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.45)

Elected Government:

During the past four-and-a-half decades, Africa has made major improvements in terms of Elected Government. In 1975, 41 countries in Africa were classified as non-democracies, while only 3 were classified as democracies and 1 as a hybrid regime. By 2018, 20 countries in Africa were classified as democracies, with 18 hybrid regimes and 11 non-democracies.

Priority countries for reform:

Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Morocco, Somalia and South Sudan (countries with low performance in Elected Government)

Priority areas for reform:

Conducting periodic elections that are free, credible and fair is paramount to consolidating democracy. To achieve this, governments that have not yet done so should sign and ratify continental and subregional instruments such as the ACDEG. African states that have already ratified these instruments should enact reforms to align national laws, regulations and processes with their aspirations.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Benin, Ghana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia (countries with high performance in Elected Government and in top 25%)

Clean Elections:

A total of 8 countries in Africa (16 per cent) have high performance on Clean Elections, while 51 per cent (25) have mid-range and 33 per cent (16) have low levels. From 2013 to 2018, seven countries improved their Clean Elections scores, while nine saw declines. There is wide regional variation in performance, with West Africa and Southern Africa having the highest average scores (which are in line with the world average), while North Africa, Central Africa and East Africa all fall below the global average.

Priority countries for reform:

Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, DRC, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Libya, Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe (countries with low performance in Clean Elections)

Priority areas for reform:

States should build stakeholder trust in the impartiality and neutrality of EMBs to strengthen public confidence in electoral processes. Reforms should aim to make the nomination and appointment process for electoral commissioners more consultative and merit-based to ensure electoral policymakers are known for their independence and integrity. Legal revisions aimed at strengthening operational and financial independence of EMBs should be enacted to reduce opportunities for government interference in electoral processes. States should also support EMBs in investing in institution building and strengthening the capacity of electoral officials at all levels, particularly in countries that use technology in their electoral processes. Reforms should be enacted to ensure electoral dispute-resolution mechanisms are effective and timely to reduce the possibility of election-related violence. Electoral stakeholders should also be held accountable via binding codes of conduct to ensure all actors contribute to transparent and peaceful electoral processes.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia (countries with high performance in Clean Elections)

Inclusive Suffrage:

While the vast majority of countries in Africa (45 countries, or 92 per cent) have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage, 4 countries (Eritrea, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan) have low levels of Inclusive Suffrage.

Priority countries for reform:

Eritrea, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan

Priority areas for reform:

Countries should strive to ensure that all eligible voters have an opportunity to register to participate in electoral processes. Measures to be adopted include reducing barriers to voter registration and broadening the reach of voter registrations efforts, particularly to include marginalized persons. Countries that use technology for the registration of voters should ensure electoral officials are well trained to avoid the risk of poor data capture. Lawmakers should also examine the feasibility of conducting out-of-country voting to broaden electoral participation.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Mauritius and South Africa (countries with high performance in Inclusive Suffrage and in top 25%)

Free Political Parties:

The majority of countries in Africa (40 countries, or 82 per cent) score in the mid-range on Free Political Parties, while 7 countries have low levels. Only two countries (Botswana and Mauritius) score highly.

Priority countries for reform:

Burundi, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Rwanda and South Sudan (countries with low performance in Free Political Parties)

Priority areas for reform:

Lawmakers should reform legal frameworks to remove barriers to registration for political parties and independent candidates. They should also examine the feasibility of supporting political parties that meet minimum requirements (including gender requirements) through public financing, while also putting in place measures to regulate campaign funding and expenditure to ensure competitive electoral playing fields. Ruling parties should desist from using their incumbency advantage and state resources to campaign. States should also ensure that opposition parties are able to campaign freely and have equal access to state media. Political parties must ensure that candidate selection processes (e.g. party primaries) are credible and transparent, as this is critical to the overall conduct of elections.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Botswana and Mauritius

Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.52)

Access to Justice:

Access to Justice improved in 11 African countries (Algeria, CAR, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone and Tunisia) in the period 2013–2018. However, just seven countries (Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal and Tunisia) have high levels of Access to Justice, while 61 per cent of countries are in the mid-range and 24 per cent have low levels.

Priority countries for reform:

Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Libya, Mauritania, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan (countries with low levels in Access to Justice)

Priority areas for reform:

Priority countries should institute reforms that will enhance increased access to justice for all citizens, including strengthening the legal infrastructure and making legal provisions for the use of paralegals. Deliberate measures should also be taken to foster access to justice for marginalized groups such as women. Civic spaces for civil society engagement on access to justice should be broadened for lobbying, with duty bearers and providing awareness raising to rights holders. Mechanisms should be instituted to strengthen the role of parliaments as guardians of citizens' rights and liberties.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal and Tunisia (countries with high levels in Access to Justice)

Civil Liberties:

One-third of African countries have high levels of Civil Liberties, while only 14 per cent have low levels. Most countries (53 per cent) score in the mid-range. A majority of countries in West Africa and Southern Africa score above the global average. From 2013 to 2018, three countries advanced while nine declined.

Priority countries for reform:

Burundi, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Sudan (countries with low performance in Civil Liberties)

Priority areas for reform:

Measures should be taken to reform legislative frameworks to provide for civil liberties. Legislation that constrains fundamental civil liberties should be repealed. Security-sector institutions should be reformed to enhance their civilian relations and uphold civil liberties.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Benin, Ghana and Mauritius (countries with high performance in Civil Liberties and in top 25%)

Gender Equality:

The vast majority of countries in Africa have mid-range levels of political Gender Equality. Only one country (Rwanda) has high levels, while seven (Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan) have low levels. Between 2013 and 2018, no countries in Africa saw statistically significant improvements or declines in Gender Equality.

Priority countries for reform:

Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan

Priority areas for reform:

Align legislative frameworks and policy documents to the aspirations of subregional, regional and international normative frameworks and standards on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Rwanda

Social Group Equality:

A majority of African countries (32, or 65 per cent) score in the mid-range on Social Group Equality, while almost one-third of countries (16, or 33 per cent) have low levels. Only Tunisia has high levels of Social Group Equality.

Priority countries for reform:

Angola, Chad, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Mauritania, Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan (countries with low performance in Social Group Equality and in the bottom 25%)

Priority areas for reform:

Institute legislative and policy measures to enhance representation of disadvantaged groups (e.g. minorities and people living with disabilities) to ensure that they are represented in national legislative and local government assemblies. Measures should also be instituted to advance equitable enjoyment of civil liberties, inclusive and equitable political participation, and representation.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Tunisia

Basic Welfare:

Africa has seen a remarkable improvement in terms of its Basic Welfare performance: since 2013, more countries score in the mid-range (30) than in the low range (19 countries).

Priority countries for reform:

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia and South Sudan (countries with low performance in Basic Welfare and in the bottom 25%)

Priority areas for reform:

Reform legislative frameworks to ensure inclusive and equitable delivery of basic services such as education, health and social security. Priority countries for reform should further ratify and domesticate the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Government and Local Development.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Tunisia

Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.51)

Effective Parliament:

The majority of African countries (67 per cent) score in the mid-range on Effective Parliament, while only three countries (6 per cent) score highly. From 2013 to 2018, six countries improved on this measure, while only four declined.

Priority countries for reform:

Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Mauritania, Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Sudan (countries with low performance in Effective Parliament)

Priority areas for reform:

Countries should support parliamentary reform processes geared towards the strengthening of parliament's role as independent policymakers; guardians of citizens' rights, liberties and needs; and overseers of government. The reform process should also aim to enhance pluralism and the representativeness of views in parliaments.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Malawi, Mauritius and Tunisia (countries with high performance in Effective Parliament)

Judicial Independence:

Only two countries in Africa (The Gambia and Tunisia) have high scores on Judicial Independence, while the remainder are split between low and mid-range performance. From 2013 to 2018, five countries advanced while six declined on this dimension.

Priority countries for reform:

Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan and Togo (countries with low performance in Judicial Independence and in the bottom 25%)

Priority areas for reform:

There is a need to sustain reform efforts to build more robust, accountable and results-oriented judiciaries. Political interference should be pre-empted by consolidated legal frameworks and financial support for judicial authorities.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

The Gambia and Tunisia

Media Integrity:

Only eight African countries (16 per cent) have high levels of Media Integrity, while seven (14 per cent) have low levels. The remaining 34 countries (69 per cent) are in the mid-range. From 2013 to 2018, three countries advanced while five declined on this dimension.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries with lower levels of Media Integrity (e.g. Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho and Tanzania)

Priority areas for reform:

Reform and align media-related legislation, regulatory frameworks and institutions to international standards on media freedom, independence and pluralism.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Burkina Faso, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia

Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.41)

Absence of Corruption:

A majority of African countries (65 per cent) have high levels of corruption, with the remaining 35 per cent having mid-range levels. No country in Africa has low levels of corruption. On the positive side, between 2013 and 2018 a total of nine countries improved their Absence of Corruption scores, while three declined.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries struggling with corruption (e.g. CAR, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria and Sierra Leone)

Priority areas for reform:

Countries that have not yet done so should sign and ratify the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption. Countries that have signed the convention should align their national legislation to ensure effective implementation. Countries should develop measures such as asset declarations to ensure public officials remain accountable to the public and discharge their duties transparently. National governments should invest resources in maintaining and building the capacity of effective independent institutions to combat corruption. National governments and anti-corruption agencies should apply resources for investigations into corrupt practices in an impartial manner based on strict criteria to avoid the politicization of their work. Judicial authorities should enforce the laws and apply sanctions in a non-partisan and impartial manner. Efforts to strengthen media and civil society capacities in investigative journalism should also be undertaken to strengthen their watchdog role.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Botswana, Rwanda and Tanzania, (countries with mid-range performance in Absence of Corruption and in top 25%)

Predictable Enforcement:

No country in Africa has high levels of Predictable Enforcement, while 39 per cent have low Predictable Enforcement and 61 per cent score in the mid-range. From 2013 to 2018 there were eight advances and four declines on this measure.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries with low levels of Predictable Enforcement (e.g. CAR, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya and Madagascar)

Priority areas for reform:

National governments should strengthen the capacity and independence of law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary to improve the rule of law and the predictability of law enforcement. National legislation should be updated to avoid the use of public administration and other state resources for political purposes. A particular focus should be placed on studying the possibility of putting in place restrictions on the commissioning of new policies or projects close to electoral events. National governments should also invest in strengthening the capacity of civil-service officials to enhance bureaucratic efficiency and quality.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Benin, Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal and Tunisia (countries with mid-range performance in Predictable Enforcement and in top 25%)

Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices score: Low

Civil Society Participation:

By 2018, 10 per cent of countries in Africa had low Civil Society Participation scores, while 24 per cent scored highly and 65 per cent scored in the mid-range.

Priority countries for reform:

Burundi, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea and South Sudan (countries with low performance in Civil Society Participation)

Priority areas for reform:

Governments at all levels must ensure that CSOs are allowed to operate without intimidation or restrictions (including on funding). Governments should seek to promote partnerships with civil society at the expense of adversarial relations by including them in policy consultations and public outreach. Efforts must be made to encourage and promote inclusive participation by creating an atmosphere and incentives that encourage active participation of youth, women and people living with disabilities in political processes. Governments should aim to support civil society initiatives through the provision of funding to strengthen civil society's capacity to foster accountability.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Mauritius, Niger, Sierra Leone and Tunisia (countries with high performance in Civil Society Participation and in top 25%)

Electoral Participation:

Of the 49 countries in Africa, 9 score among the top 25 per cent in the world on Electoral Participation, while 16 (33 per cent) have low levels and 23 (47 per cent) have mid-range performance.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries with low levels of Electoral Participation (e.g. Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Madagascar and Nigeria)

Priority areas for reform:

Electoral stakeholders should undertake research to study voter turnout patterns in greater detail, including generating data on the demographics of voters. EMBs, political parties and CSOs should engage in broad campaigns targeting potential voters and encouraging them to participate in electoral processes by making voter information easily accessible to all eligible citizens. EMBs should consider increasing the number of polling stations to ensure voters can participate in elections more easily. They should also study the feasibility of early voting and out-of-country voting without compromising the integrity of electoral processes.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone (countries with high performance in Electoral Participation and in top 25%)

Direct Democracy:

West Africa has the highest levels of Direct Democracy in the region, followed very closely by North Africa and East Africa.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries with low levels of Direct Democracy (e.g. Benin, CAR, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and South Africa)

Priority areas for reform:

National legislation should be developed or strengthened to ensure public input into key decisions such as constitutional amendments, especially regarding the issue of term and age limits for elected officials. Stakeholders should also study the feasibility of introducing citizen-led initiatives and the possibility of enabling citizens to recall elected officials.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Mauritius and Tanzania

Local Democracy:

Only 2 African countries (4 per cent) have high levels of Local Democracy, while 33 (69 per cent) have low levels. The remaining countries have mid-range levels.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries with low levels of Local Democracy (e.g. CAR, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar and Tunisia); and hybrid regimes with mid-range levels of Local Democracy (e.g. Algeria, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Rwanda and Zambia)

Priority areas for reform:

National governments that have not yet done so should sign and ratify the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development. Countries that have ratified the Charter should align national legislation to ensure it is fully implemented. National governments and other stakeholders should invest in local government capacity-building programmes to ensure responsive systems are established that can deliver essential services to residents. EMBs and other stakeholders should also conduct outreach campaigns to educate citizens about the roles and responsibilities of local governments to encourage participation in local government elections and other platforms for citizens to engage with local authorities.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Mauritius and Sierra Leone (countries with high levels in Local Democracy).

TABLE 2.11

Regime classification for Africa, 2018

Table 2.11 shows the regime classification for all of the countries in Africa covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

	GSoD Attribute				
Country	**Representative Government**	**Fundamental Rights**	**Checks on Government**	**Impartial Administration**	**Participatory Engagement**
Democracies					
Benin	0.66 =	0.75 =	0.60 =	0.61 +	Mid-range
Botswana	0.69 =	0.68 =	0.63 =	0.66 =	Mid-range
Burkina Faso	0.62 =	0.60 =	0.58 =	0.57 =	Low
Côte d'Ivoire	0.56 =	0.53 =	0.54 =	0.58 =	Low
The Gambia	0.56 +	0.63 +	0.66 +	0.56 +	Low
Ghana	0.67 =	0.72 =	0.65 =	0.43 =	High
Guinea-Bissau	0.58 +	0.47 =	0.53 =	0.28 =	Low
Kenya	0.50 =	0.46 =	0.58 =	0.42 =	Low
Lesotho	0.63 =	0.60 =	0.58 =	0.48 =	Mid-range
Liberia	0.61 =	0.64 =	0.60 =	0.396 =	High
Madagascar	0.47 =	0.51 =	0.54 =	0.35 =	Low
Malawi	0.55 =	0.64 =	0.698 =	0.49 =	Mid-range
Mali	0.51 =	0.52 =	0.55 +	0.42 =	Low
Mauritius	0.81 =	0.74 =	0.701 =	0.60 =	High
Namibia	0.59 =	0.69 =	0.63 =	0.63 =	Mid-range
Nigeria	0.63 +	0.62 =	0.65 =	0.43 =	Low
Senegal	0.63 =	0.73 =	0.65 =	0.61 =	Low

Sierra Leone	0.62 =	0.64 =	0.51 =	0.47 =	High
South Africa	0.68 =	0.66 =	0.69 =	0.49 =	Mid-range
Tunisia	0.62 =	0.76 =	0.80 =	0.61 =	Low
Hybrid regimes					
Algeria	0.35 =	0.54 =	0.395 =	0.38 =	Low
Angola	0.42 =	0.51 =	0.44 =	0.42 +	Low
Cameroon	0.36 =	0.38 =	0.39 =	0.21 =	Low
CAR	0.45 =	0.44 +	0.57 =	0.34 +	Low
DRC	0.38 =	0.36 =	0.46 =	0.17 =	Low
Ethiopia	0.36 =	0.52 =	0.42 =	0.50 +	Low
Gabon	0.406 =	0.65 =	0.48 =	0.49 =	Low
Guinea	0.49 =	0.44 =	0.41 =	0.33 =	Low
Mauritania	0.37 =	0.402 =	0.42 =	0.398 +	Low
Morocco	0.45 =	0.63 =	0.56 =	0.49 =	Low
Mozambique	0.47 =	0.59 =	0.56 =	0.43 =	Mid-range
Niger	0.55 =	0.67 =	0.59 =	0.50 =	Low
Sudan	0.38 =	0.31 =	0.37 =	0.25 =	Low
Tanzania	0.52 =	0.57 =	0.58 =	0.58 +	Mid-range
Togo	0.42 =	0.49 =	0.47 =	0.32 =	Low
Uganda	0.38 =	0.53 =	0.59 =	0.43 =	Mid-range
Zambia	0.52 =	0.52 =	0.51 =	0.44 =	Mid-range
Zimbabwe	0.42 =	0.46 =	0.50 =	0.25 =	Low
Non-democracies					
Burundi	0.25 -	0.30 =	0.25 -	0.12 -	Low
Chad	0.32 =	0.39 =	0.35 =	0.17 =	Low
Egypt	0.28 =	0.43 =	0.397 =	0.27 =	Low
Equatorial Guinea	0.21 =	0.30 =	0.19 =	0.19 =	Low
Eritrea	0 =	0.22 =	0.07 =	0.26 =	Low
Eswatini	0.26 =	0.53 =	0.38 =	0.402 =	Mid-range
Libya	0 -	0.39 =	0.58 =	0.18 -	Low
Republic of Congo	0.33 =	0.42 =	0.38 =	0.36 =	Low
Rwanda	0.35 =	0.57 =	0.35 =	0.63 =	Low
Somalia	0 =	0.34 =	0.49 =	0.20 =	Low
South Sudan	0 =	0.24 =	0.25 =	0.15 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five year period; + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

2.2. The state of democracy in the Middle East

This section offers an overview of the long-term democratic trends in the Middle East, and an analysis of the current democratic landscape, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current gains and opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the democratic challenges it faces. The analysis is based on the GSoD Indices as the principal data source, complemented by other sources. The section concludes with an overview of policy considerations relevant to democratic trends and challenges in the Middle East.

2.2.1. Introduction

The Arab Uprisings of 2010–2011 raised hopes for democratic progress and seemed to be a turning point in the history of the Middle East and North Africa. However, the majority of the movements that demanded greater democracy in the region have since fizzled out, and the expected transitions have been either aborted or diverted. The sole exception has been Tunisia, the country where the uprisings began, and which has since undergone a transition to democracy.

Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor in the central Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire in December 2010, and his subsequent death led to a series of street protests throughout the country. Tunisia's President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled the country for 22 years, threatened to use military action against the protesters but was ousted in January 2011. The protests in Tunisia, sometimes referred to as the Jasmine Revolution, spread to other authoritarian regimes in the region (Chakchouk et al. 2013: 575).

In February 2011, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was also removed from power (Taylor 2017). In February and March 2011, in Bahrain, pro-democracy protests were attacked by security forces. The global condemnation that followed prompted King Hamad to create the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) in July that year, which recommended the prosecution of security forces personnel (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry 2011). Until 2015, of the 26 recommendations made by the commission, only 2 were fully implemented and 8 saw no progress at all (Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain 2015). Because of protests in Jordan, two successive cabinets resigned (*The Telegraph* 2011a, 2011b). In Kuwait the Prime Minister was replaced in November 2011 and the parliament was dissolved until elections were held in February 2012. In March 2011, Oman's legislative powers were given to advisory councils (Khaleej Times 2011). That same month in Saudi Arabia, the government banned protests and tried to stifle dissent by providing an additional USD 127 billion in social benefits to citizens (BBC News 2013).

THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The Middle East has made some progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) since 2015, although significant challenges remain, and eight of the 18 indicators used to measure progress have shown stagnation. The Middle East remains the lowest-scoring region in the world on all indicators linked to SDG 16. A total of six indicators have seen some advances, while four have seen declines.

SDG 16.3 on rule of law and SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption have seen more countries advancing than declining. SDG 16.1 has seen stagnation, and one-half of the indicators linked to SDG 16.6 on effective institutions have also shown stagnation, while the other half have shown small increases. This is also the case for SDG 16.10 on fundamental freedoms. SDG 16.7 shows a mixed picture, with stagnation on three indicators, a small increase in Effective Parliament and a small decline in Clean Elections.

Gender Equality

Significant challenges need to be overcome if gender equality, and SDG 5.5 on political representation of women, are to be achieved in the region. The Middle East remains the lowest-performing region on this target. The GSoD Indices measure of political Gender Equality for the region has been stagnant since 2015, with no countries declining or advancing.

KEY FINDINGS

Positive developments

- **According to the GSoD Indices, the Middle East contained just two democracies in 2018: Iraq, which is considered a very weak democracy; and Lebanon, which is a weak and fragile democracy.**
- **Iraq is the only country in the Middle East where democracy is proving to be resilient.** Although its democratic institutions remain fragile, it has not backslid into hybridity since its transition to democracy in 2010. The country is a very weak democracy, with low levels of Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, and has levels of Fundamental Rights among the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world.
- **Some efforts have been made on Gender Equality in the Middle East.** Much work is still needed, but small steps are observed. Iraq has introduced quotas for women in the legislative branch. Saudi Arabia has established quotas for the appointment of women in the Shura Council (Consultative Council). However, this is perceived as more of an effort to appease Western partners than a reflection of fundamental reform in favour of gender equality.

Challenges to democracy

- **The Arab Uprisings in 2010–2011 raised hopes for democratic progress in the Middle East and seemed to be a turning point in the democratic history of the region.** However, many of the movements that demanded greater democracy for the Middle East and North Africa have since fizzled out. With the exception of Tunisia in North Africa, the expected transitions have been aborted.
- **The Middle East remains the least democratic region in the world.** This is readily apparent from its low number of democracies (2 out of 12 countries in the region). It is also the region with the largest share of non-democracies. More than half of the countries in the Middle East (58 per cent) are non-democracies, while one-quarter are hybrid regimes.
- **Non-democracies in the region have, unfortunately, also proven resilient.** Of the 12 countries in the region, 10 have never experienced democracy. The regime status of six of these countries has never changed, while the remaining four have had periods of hybridity.

Peaceful protests also erupted in Syria in March 2011, where the Syrian Government responded by killing hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoning many others. By July 2011, the Free Syrian Army was formed with the aim of overthrowing the regime of President Bashar Al Assad, thus marking the beginning of the civil war that has now plagued the country for eight years (Al Jazeera 2018).

Because of these developments, in a period of three years the Middle East experienced more changes within its governmental institutions than in the previous few decades. This did not, however, translate into significant democratic progress for the Middle East. The hope for democracy inspired by the wave of protests across the region was quickly dashed, as more repressive regimes and authoritarian governments replaced those that crumbled under the pressure of the Arab Uprisings.

According to the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices data, in 2011 there were two democracies in the Middle East (Iraq and Lebanon), as well as three hybrid regimes (Jordan, Kuwait and Oman) and seven non-democracies: Bahrain, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen. By 2018, six years after the Arab Uprisings, the share remained unchanged. Similarly, in North Africa, the only country that has seen changes since the Uprisings, and which should be taken as an example for the region, is Tunisia.

2.2.2. Taking the long-term perspective: democratic developments in the Middle East since 1975

Since 1975, the Middle East region has seen the slowest democratic progress in the world. In 1975, 11 of the 12 countries in the region were non-democracies. Lebanon, a weak democracy in 1975 and on the verge of a civil war, backslid into a hybrid regime in 1976 and slipped in and out of hybridity up until 2018, when it returned to democratic status. The region has only gained one democracy since 1975: Iraq, which transitioned to democracy for the first time in its history in 2010. This makes the Middle East the region with the smallest share of democracies.

The Middle East also contains six of the most enduring non-democracies in the world, which are countries that have never experienced democracy or even hybridity at any point in their history: Bahrain, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE. Since 1975, incremental improvements have been noted in Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Yemen, which went from non-democracies to hybrid regimes for the first time in 1991, 2005, 2012 and 1993, respectively. Of these four countries, however, only Kuwait did not slide back into non-democracy.

In summary, currently seven countries (almost 58 per cent) in the region are non-democracies, three countries (25 per cent) are hybrid regimes, and two countries (17 per cent) are classified as democracies (see Figure 2.14).

Between 1975 and 2018, the Middle East showed the slowest progress and consistently poorest performance of all the world regions on the GSoD attributes of Representative Government, Fundamental Rights and Checks on Government. On each of these attributes, the region's performance has consistently been well below the world average.

In 1975, every country in the region had low levels of Representative Government. In 2018, only two countries in the region (Iraq and Lebanon, both democracies) performed mid-range on the same attribute.

One-half of the countries in the region (Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE and Yemen) had low performance on Fundamental Rights in 1975, while five (Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman and Qatar) performed mid-range.10 In 2018, Saudi Arabia's, Syria's and Yemen's performance remained low, although the latter two countries have been fighting wars in their territories for more than five years, and this affects their performance on all dimensions of the GSoD framework (see Box 2.6 for a discussion of how the conflict in Yemen affects its GSoD scores). Kuwait and Lebanon were the only two countries performing mid-range on Checks on Government in 1975, while the rest performed low on this attribute. By 2018, Iran, Iraq and Jordan had also moved to the mid-range, while seven countries maintained their low performance.

In 1975, Kuwait was the country in the Middle East with most subattributes (five) in the top 25 per cent in the world. By 2018, the UAE was the country with most subattributes (two) in the top 25 per cent.

Saudi Arabia, one of the 18 countries in the world that has never experienced democracy, has the poorest performance in the region on the GSoD attributes. In 1975, the country scored low on four of the five GSoD attributes, and among the bottom 25 per cent in the world on 7 out of 16 subattributes. By 2018, Saudi Arabia's performance worsened even further: it scored in the bottom 25 per cent in the world on almost all its democratic subattributes (15 of 16).

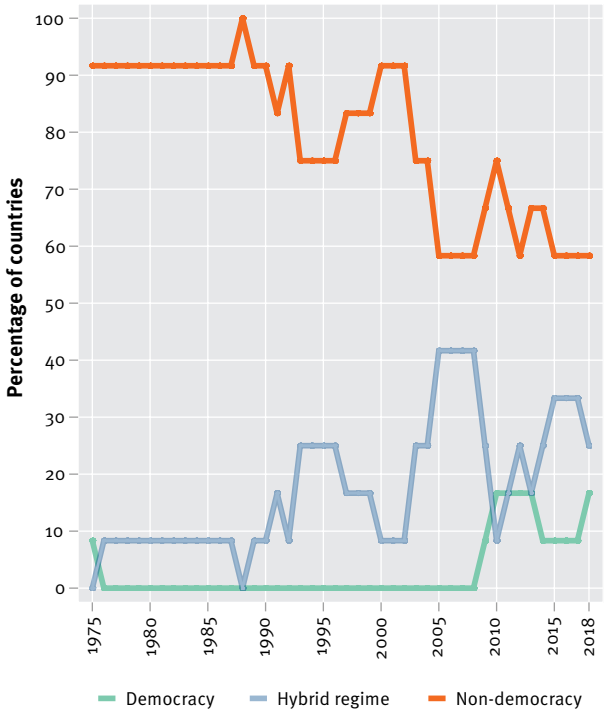
Of the two countries that qualified as democracies in 2018, Iraq has very weak performance, scoring low on two attributes (Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement), while Lebanon is considered a weak democracy as it scores low on one attribute (Impartial Administration).

Iraq, a non-democracy in 1975, transitioned to a hybrid regime in 2005, when the first multiparty elections were held. This hybrid stage lasted until 2010, when the country transitioned to democracy with the first fully competitive elections. Although it is considered a very weak democracy, Iraq has so far proved resilient: it has not experienced an undemocratic interruption since its transition in 2010 (see Box 2.4). Lebanon is a very fragile democracy, having experienced two democratic breakdowns—one between 1976 and 2008, and the other between 2014 and 2017—before bouncing back to democratic status in 2018.

In the Middle East, four countries have advanced from a non-democracy to a hybrid regime but have never transitioned out of hybridity. Of these countries, Jordan, Oman and Yemen have had intermittent periods of hybridity and non-democracy, while Kuwait became a hybrid regime in 2005 and has been so ever since (see Table 2.12).

FIGURE 2.14

Regime types in Middle East, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

10 There is no GSoD data between 1975 and 2004 on Fundamental Rights for Bahrain.

BOX 2.4

Iraq: a resilient but weak democracy

Iraq has been classified a democracy by the GSoD Indices since 2010. Having made its democratic transition, the country has remained a resilient—albeit weak—democracy ever since. After the invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies in 2003, the country faced and overcame enormous challenges. Iraq's democratic achievements, given the context, are unique in history. There have been five peaceful and successful national parliamentary elections since 2005, with three democratic and non-violent changes of power. Iraqi citizens also participated in a constitutional referendum and several local elections during this time (Ollivant and Bull 2018).

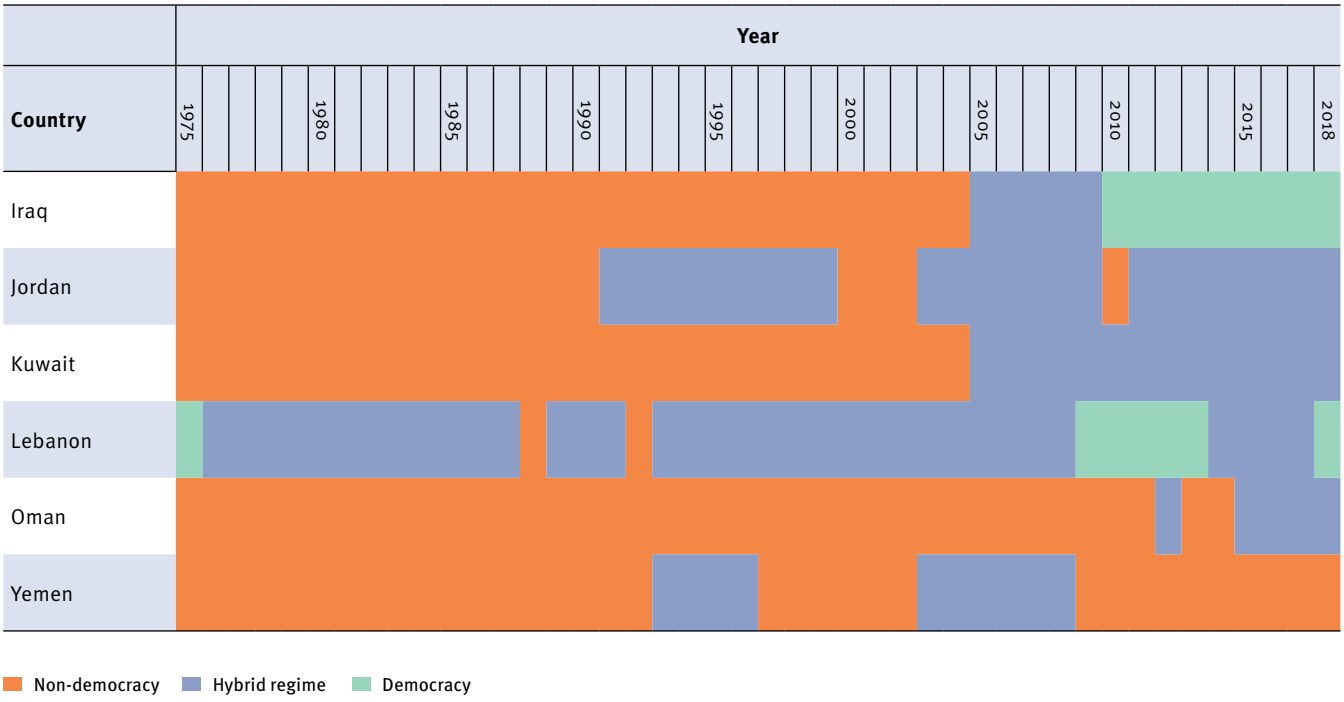
However, Iraq's institutions are weak and far from stable. Since the first elections in 2005 the Iraqi Government has been led by Shiites, who have gradually isolated the Sunni majority. This created a sense of anger and distrust which enabled the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to be considered a viable choice, becoming one of the major obstacles to democratic development in Iraq. By 2014, ISIS had taken over large portions of the country; it took three years for the government, along with the US-led coalition, to drive out the self-proclaimed Islamic State.

Two years after ISIS decimation in Iraq, the organization is still operating, especially in Iraq's remote regions, where the government is largely absent, and citizens continue to lack adequate access to services or resources (Magid 2019). This situation needs monitoring by the Iraqi Government as it could lead to the re-emergence of the so-called Caliphate, as the conditions that provided fertile ground for ISIS to expand its reach have not fully been addressed.

In addition, Iraq's internal and sectarian divisions could also threaten stability and democracy. The country should work towards strengthening its democratic institutions and accountability tools; decrease corruption and increase transparency; and improve access to services for its citizens. Nonetheless, 'Iraq remains a hopeful wild card precisely because its democratic politics, though ugly, have been resilient' (Gerecht 2019).

TABLE 2.12

Changes in regime type in the Middle East, 1975–2018



Notes: This timeline displays the changing regime types in the Middle East between 1975 and 2018 in countries that experienced hybridity or democracy at some point during that period.
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

2.2.3. The current democracy landscape in the Middle East

Representative Government

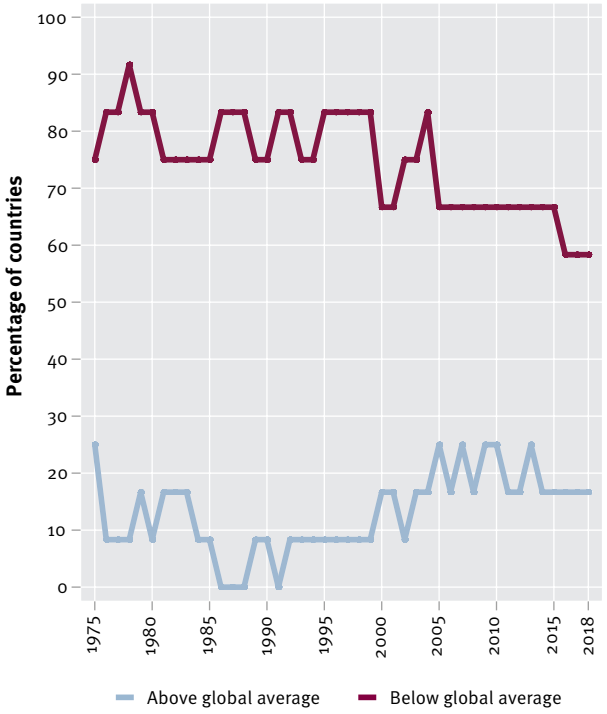
The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

Summary: Representative Government in the Middle East, 2018

Regional average: Low (0.23)	
High (›0.7)	N/A
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon
Low (‹0.4)	Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE and Yemen

FIGURE 2.15

Clean Elections in the Middle East, 1975–2018



Notes: Country percentages may not always add up to 100 per cent, as some countries' scores are at the global average, a category which is not represented in this graph.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

In 2018, the Middle East had the lowest score in the world on Representative Government, lower than all other regions, and below the world average.

Elections are a mirage when political parties are either limited or banned

The majority of the countries in the Middle East do not hold clean elections and, even when they do occur, they are likely to be sham elections. The few electoral exercises in place have limited sway over the executive power. In 2018 almost 60 per cent of countries scored below the global average on Clean Elections (see Figure 2.15).

To take one example, the UAE—a non-democracy in the form of a federation of absolute monarchies—held parliamentary elections in 2015 for the third time since its independence in the early 1970s. The 2015 elections were the first to include a single-vote system and universal suffrage. The Emirati Government had been working for several years to create awareness on the importance of voting, and to educate people on their role in the election of the Federal National Council. Voter turnout was 35 per cent, an increase in comparison to the 27 per cent turnout in the 2011 elections (United Arab Emirates Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs 2015). The most important advance in the 2015 election was the single-vote system—in the 2011 elections, voters had been allowed to vote for up to half of the number of seats in their respective Emirates, which had resulted in the election of candidates of the same tribe, skewing the results of the electoral process (Salama 2015). However, despite the introduction of the single-vote system, elections in the UAE are still not regarded as competitive, which contributes to the country being classified as a non-democracy.

Free political parties are rare in the region. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—all ban political parties, although what they refer to as 'societies' or 'blocs' function as such. The countries that do allow political parties place severe restrictions on their operation or even existence, making access to political power in the region hardly free or equal. The space

within which political parties can express themselves is also significantly limited by institutional factors, because in most countries in the region monarchs hold broad executive authority.

Islam and politics have historically been interconnected and have never been separate entities in the Middle East and North Africa. Islamist parties are the outcome of reform and modernization, what is known as political Islam (Schwedler 2011; Hirschkind 1997). Islamist political parties have been a constant in the Arab world and Iran, although they have been subjected to fierce repression, especially since 2011, and have drawn criticism from those who argue that politics and Islam should not be mixed (see Tran 2013; Warraq 2018).

An example of an Islamist party is the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt, which was created in 2011. Although formally independent, it was considered the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, one of the biggest political movements in Egypt. The parliamentary elections in November 2011 and January 2012 saw the Freedom and Justice Party gain 47 per cent of seats in the Egypt's People's Assembly (see Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2015). The party's presidential candidate, Mohamed Morsi, went on to win the May–June 2012 presidential elections. In July 2013 the Egyptian military, headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, overthrew Morsi and suspended the 2012 constitution, while protesters on both sides—pro-Morsi and pro-military—demanded change (Fontevecchia 2013). Morsi was sent to jail (where he died in June 2019) and the Freedom and Justice Party was dissolved by al-Sisi's administration in 2014.

Despite constraints, Islamist movements are likely to continue. The role of Islamist parties—like all other political parties—is crucial and, as some argue, the legitimate involvement of Islamist parties could contribute to broaden prospects for democratization in the region (Cesari 2017). The existence of free political parties, including both Islamist and non-religious parties, are important for democracy to potentially take root in the region.

Non-democracies in the region are persistent

The Middle East is home to six of the most persistent non-democracies in the world: Bahrain, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the UAE. Four countries have advanced from a non-democratic state to become hybrid regimes but have never transitioned out of hybridity. Of these countries, Jordan, Oman and Yemen have had intermittent periods of hybridity and non-democracy, while Kuwait became a hybrid regime in 2005 and has been so ever since.

During the last five decades, non-democratic regimes have been taking advantage of their resources and geographical positions. They have created networks that have helped them stay in power. The oil-rich GCC monarchies of the Arabic Gulf—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—have never experienced democracy and rely on their important oil assets and their geopolitical location to sustain their power. They have maintained historical business and foreign policy ties with the USA, but also with Europe.

The USA and Europe have provided the region with security and weapons and have in turn received multi-billion-dollar contracts, and access to oil and key geopolitical points, including the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-al-Mandab. The Middle East countries have also been reliable and dependable political partners. However, with the Arab Uprisings this scenario shifted slightly. The US Government supported the protesters, and a sense of wariness was instilled in the regimes that had been supportive of the USA for decades. New foreign policy options began to be explored. For example, in 2011 US President Barack Obama introduced the so-called Rebalance Strategy, which focused on giving Asia and the Pacific priority over the Gulf monarchies, and created unease in Saudi Arabia (Simon 2015; Mesa Delmonte 2017a). In 2015 the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany (the P5+1) signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which relieved Iran of sanctions limiting its nuclear ambitions (Storey 2019). This pushed Saudi Arabia to tighten its existing ties with Russia and China, signing economic deals worth billions of dollars and sending a clear message to the USA and Europe that Saudi Arabia should not be taken for granted (Borshchevskaya 2017).

In 2017, the inauguration of Donald Trump as US President brought a new phase of dialogue between the USA and the GCC monarchies. All parties were of the view that Iran and its 'expansionist policies' were a problem for the region and that the JCPOA was detrimental for the region (Mesa Delmonte 2017b). In November 2018, the US Government reinstated its sanctions on Iran. Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia continues to strengthen its ties with Russia (Foy 2018; Mammadov 2019). This illustrates the fact that the political scenario is liable to change, and that even when Saudi Arabia (and the region in general) is moving towards a post-oil economy, the Middle East countries remain important geopolitical players—even when democracy, human rights and civil liberties in the region are severely curtailed.

Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries offer their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Summary: Fundamental Rights in the Middle East, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.42)	
High (>0.7)	N/A
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar and UAE
Low (<0.4)	Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen

Between 1975 and 2018, one-quarter of the countries in the Middle East saw improvements in their Fundamental Rights scores. However, eight countries scored below the world average in 2018. Between 1980 and 2009, the regional score rose from 0.36 to 0.44 (a 30 per cent increase) but it has plateaued since, and the region stills shows the slowest growth compared to other regions.

Compared to other Fundamental Rights aspects, Social Rights and Equality shows a stronger positive trend over time. Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon and Oman score higher than the region's average score.

Jordan, Kuwait and Oman fall under the category of hybrid regimes, where basic liberties such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of religion are limited. Despite this, together with Iraq and Lebanon (the only democracies in the region), five countries—Iran, Jordan, Oman, Qatar and the UAE—score mid-range on Fundamental Rights. Three countries (Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen) recorded scores low for this attribute in 2018. These three countries score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world on Fundamental Rights. Yemen was the only country to regress (from 0.41 to 0.27) over the past five years.

Regimes in the region continue to curtail civil liberties and control people

For years the adherence to civil liberties has been one of the weakest points for regimes in the Middle East. Freedoms of expression, religion, movement, association and assembly have been on the decline. Citizens have started to prioritize greater civil freedoms and have asserted their rights, pressuring their governments for more accountability and participatory politics. Although slow transformations with respect to rule of law and gender equality are occurring, there is still much to be achieved in these and other areas—for example, in media freedom.

A number of governments in the region have taken advantage of anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws to criminalize free speech. In Jordan, the 2014 amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Law broadened the definition of terrorism to include provisions which threaten freedom of expression in the country. The amendments removed the requirement that an act of violence should be connected to the action, meaning that any act that 'shows discord' or 'disturbs public order' would be punishable by law (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Since 2015, governments in Bahrain (see Box 2.5), Jordan, Kuwait and Palestine have introduced anti-cybercrime laws that have been criticized by human rights organizations as restricting freedom of expression online (Social Media Exchange 2018).

Freedom of religion has been significantly curtailed in **Iran** since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. According to Human Rights Watch, religious minorities such as the Bahá'í, Sunni Muslims and Christians face discrimination in both public and private life. For example, as of November 2018, 79 Bahá'ís were held in detention in Iran, and younger members of the minority are forbidden to register at public universities (Human Rights Watch 2019). Furthermore, during the first week of December 2018, 114 Christians were arrested as part of an Iranian Government strategy to 'warn' other Christians against evangelization during Christmas (World Watch Monitor 2018; Open Doors 2019).

Saudi Arabia dominated world news during 2018 because of the country's record on human rights violations, its media censorship and silencing of activists, and the globally publicized killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. On 24 June 2018 Saudi Arabia ended its ban on women driving cars; just weeks previously, Saudi authorities had arrested and allegedly tortured at least 13 women (and seven men) who

BOX 2.5

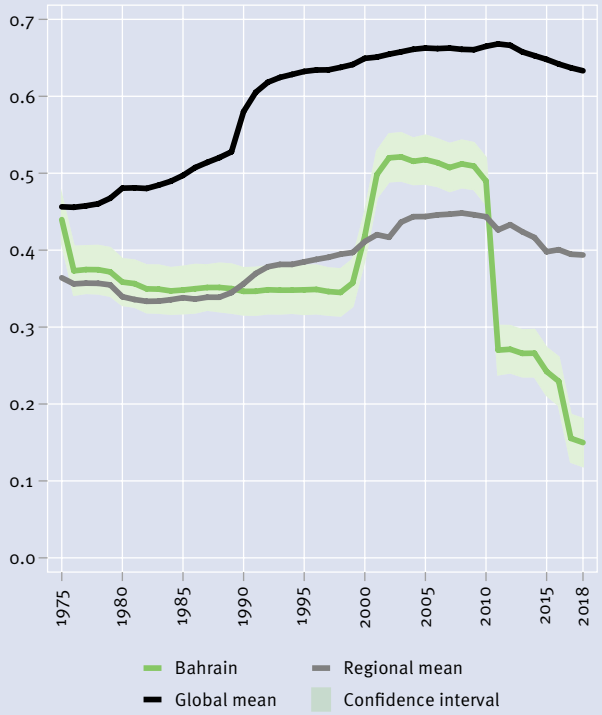
Bahrain: the deepening autocratization of a non-democracy

Bahrain is a non-democracy that has experienced a recent deepening autocratization, with significant declines observed on three of its democratic subattributes: Clean Elections, Civil Liberties (particularly in Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly) and Media Integrity (see Figure 2.16). The Bahraini Government has curtailed the right to free expression and has responded with violence to protest movements. After security forces in Diraz used live ammunition to shoot protesters on 26 January 2017, Freedom House issued a statement condemning Bahrain's security forces, accusing them of regularly using deadly force against protesters and inviting the government to 'hold its security forces accountable for its repeated excessive use of force' (Freedom House 2017).

In July 2018 the Office of the UN High Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR), through its Human Rights Committee, called on Bahrain to end its restrictions on freedom of expression and the repression of activists. In its report, the committee highlighted the fact that Bahrain's anti-terrorism act was being used extensively 'outside the scope of terrorist, including against human rights defenders and political activists' (UN OHCHR 2018: 5). The committee encouraged Bahrain to allow peaceful protest and freedom of expression, citing the case of Nabeel Rajab, one of the leaders of the pro-democracy protests, who was sentenced to five years in prison for criticizing Saudi Arabia's involvement in the Yemen war, and for accusing Bahraini prison authorities of torture (Frontline Defenders 2019).

FIGURE 2.16

Decline of Civil Liberties in Bahrain, 1975–2018



Notes: The y-axis is the index score, from 0 to 1, where 1 indicates high levels of Civil Liberties. The light-shaded band around the green line demarcates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimate.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

had campaigned for the lifting of the ban (Associated Press 2018). At least nine women remain detained without charges and subjected to violence, with some experts anticipating their sentence could be up to 20 years (Human Rights Watch 2018). Their trial began in March 2019, although no foreign media, diplomats or independent observers were allowed to attend the hearings. Three of the women were later released on bail (Michaelson 2019).

Quotas are a step towards political gender equality

The Middle East is the slowest-performing region in the world on Gender Equality, with an average score of 0.35 in the GSoD Indices, and all countries in the bottom 25 per cent of the world score.

In the last 43 years, only five countries in the region (Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE) have seen significant advances on Gender Equality—all still show low performance on this subcomponent. In 2018, only Lebanon and Jordan performed in the mid-range, and the rest performed at the low level. Iraq (0.40), together with Papua New Guinea (0.26) and Turkey (0.35), is one of the three democracies in the world with a low score on Gender Equality.

No single country in the Middle East has reached the critical minority point of 30 per cent women's representation in the legislature. In fact, the average for the region is 11 per cent, the lowest in the world. As of February 2019, the countries with the highest percentages of women in councils (i.e. legislatures)

are Iraq (25 per cent), the UAE (23 per cent), Saudi Arabia (20 per cent) and Jordan (15 per cent). Of these, only Iraq's is democratically elected (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019).

Since 2013 Iraq has imposed a quota for women in the country's legislative branch, reserving 25 per cent of the seats in the Shura Council. So far, however, women have not received enough votes to be elected beyond the quota and gender discrimination continues as there are no structures that can assert women's power in parliament (Al Rahim 2019). While Saudi Arabia has reserved 25 per cent of the appointed seats in the Shura Council (Consultative Council) for women, this can be viewed as an effort to appeal to or appease Western partners rather than a representation of the progression of women's rights in the country.

All countries in the region allow women to run for office, even those which do not impose gender quotas. Nonetheless, it is very difficult for women to win seats in councils. For example, the National Assembly in Kuwait is composed of 65 seats, of which 15 are filled *ex officio* (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2017). In the country's 2016 elections, 15 women ran for the 50 open seats but only 1 was successful: Safa Al Hashem, who was re-elected, and has been the only woman in the parliament since 2012 (Cohn 2016). In Jordan, the establishment of a 25 per cent quota at the local level (Dalacoura 2019: 18) translated into an increase in the number of women represented in the regional councils, from 30 seats in 1995 to 241 seats in 2007.

The Arab Uprisings brought minor progress in Yemeni political participation, especially for women. In 2011, the GCC Initiative supported stronger participation of women in parliament. In 2014, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) stated that 30 per cent of the high offices, elected bodies and the civil service had to be represented by women (Council on Foreign Relations 2019). Efforts by women to achieve this goal were met with disdain by clerics and tribal chiefs, who sought to keep women away from public political life. As of 2017 there were no women in parliament and only 5 per cent of ministerial positions were held by women. However, many female activists in Yemen continue to fight for their voice to be heard, and for a more inclusive interpretation of the Koran and Shari'a, which would empower women and their role in politics. Nevertheless, as of 2018, due to the ongoing conflict in the country, the quota system had not become a reality.

The laws in several countries in the region discriminate against women, including on matters of personal status, criminal law and citizenship. For example, a number of laws in Yemen, including the Citizenship Law, Personal Status Law, the penal code and the Evidence Law 'systematically discriminate against women' (Manea 2010: 3).

Countries in the region are experiencing serious humanitarian crises

Despite the fact that two of the world's worst humanitarian crises—in Syria and Yemen—are currently unfolding in the region, the Middle East performs in the mid-range on Fundamental Rights. Both Syria and Yemen score in the bottom 25 per cent on all subattributes (Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality) of Fundamental Rights. Both war-torn countries continue to face democratic challenges, but most importantly a worsening humanitarian crisis.

In Syria, where the civil war commenced in 2011, it is estimated that 12 million people are in need of assistance: 95 per cent of the population lack adequate healthcare, 70 per cent lack regular access to water and half of all children receive no education. Because of the conflict, 30 per cent of Syria's citizens have been forced out of the country to seek asylum, either in neighbouring countries or in Europe (World Vision 2019).

In Yemen, a period of unrest which began in 2012 had, by 2015, developed into an ongoing war between Houthi rebels and the internationally recognized Yemeni Government (backed by a Saudi-led coalition). Half of the population is now at risk of famine, 75 per cent of the population require some form of humanitarian assistance and 1.1 million people have contracted cholera, in the largest-ever epidemic of its kind (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2019). In 2018 the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, declared Yemen 'the world's worst humanitarian crisis' (UN Office in Geneva 2018).

Palestine is also in need of humanitarian aid. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been ongoing for years, although in the last 11 years both the Israeli blockade and internal divisions within Palestine have further aggravated the humanitarian crisis (BBC News 2019). According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between 2013 and 2018, a total of 3,026 Palestinians were killed and 80,598 were injured, while 160 Israelis were killed and 3,688 were injured (UN OCHA n.d.). The Palestinian protests taking place in Gaza near Israel's perimeter fence have escalated the number of Palestinian casualties and the Gaza Strip is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Access to essential services for its two million inhabitants is insecure, and entire sectors of the economy have been wiped out (UN News 2019a).

Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

Summary: Checks on Government in the Middle East, 2018

Regional average: Low (0.37)	
High (>0.7)	N/A
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon
Low (<0.4)	Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE and Yemen

Iraq stands out as the country with the highest scores on Checks on Government (0.61) in the region (with Jordan and Lebanon right behind), and on par with the world average (0.62). Iraq outperforms the Middle East on all Checks on Government subattributes.

Checks on Government have remained stagnant in the Middle East, with 9 out of 12 countries showing no overall or net improvements on this measure since 1975. According to the GSoD Indices, 8 (20 per cent) out of 40 countries in the world currently scoring in the bottom 25 per cent on Checks on Government are in the Middle East. Effective Parliament showed the biggest advance in the region, with a 99 per cent improvement between 1975 and 2018. On this measure, eight countries have recorded significant advances in the last 43 years, while none have declined.

Constitutional reforms have not led to increased judicial independence

The overthrow of authoritarian leaders, such as Ben Ali in Tunisia (2011) or Abdullah Saleh in Yemen (2012), meant that people's hopes for democratic change in the region were raised. Ensuing events led to a number of countries in the region opening dialogues on the importance of constitutional reforms. By 2014, constitutional changes in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia had laid the groundwork for other countries (e.g. Morocco) to follow suit and make changes in their constitutions. This, in turn, provided Middle Eastern countries with the means to develop robust judicial institutions and promote a more transparent and efficient rule of law (Szmolka 2014).

Unfortunately, this opportunity was not seized, and the constitutional reforms undertaken by some countries in the region did not translate into advances in Checks on Government scores. Instead reforms have been used by governments as a pretext to strengthen their legitimacy while holding on to power. For example, members of the constitutional courts in Jordan and Syria are mostly appointed by the executive. In this context, judges' decisions are often made in alignment with the executive's interests, rather than in accordance with the law, for fear of losing their positions or privileges. If rules and procedures are not established to allow constitutional courts to resist political pressure, they will continue to be a façade for the rule of law (International IDEA and Center for Constitutional Transitions 2014).

Struggling for free media can be life-threatening

Media freedoms are an essential building block for strong and robust democracies. In order to hold governments accountable, citizens have found new spaces for expression, including social media networks. Protesters and journalists in the Middle East have used social media tools to raise issues on the public agenda and to expose human rights and other violations. Nevertheless, for journalists, the Middle East continues to be one of the most dangerous regions in which to operate.

Media Integrity, one of the subattributes of Checks on Government, fares poorly in the region, with scores of 0.38 and 0.35 in 2013 and 2018, respectively (see Figure 2.17). Following some gains in the post-2011 period, the media landscape has witnessed a steady erosion, with the exception of countries such as Kuwait and Lebanon, which have a more consolidated tradition of relatively free media (see e.g. Fanack 2018). Compared to the regional GSoD Indices score on Media Integrity, Lebanon has a score of 0.69, and Kuwait scores 0.59, placing them above the world average.

Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index (2019a), which provides measurements for 180 countries, shows that 5 countries in the Middle East are among the 15 worst countries for journalists in the world: Bahrain (ranked 167th), Yemen (168th), Iran (170th), Saudi Arabia (172nd)

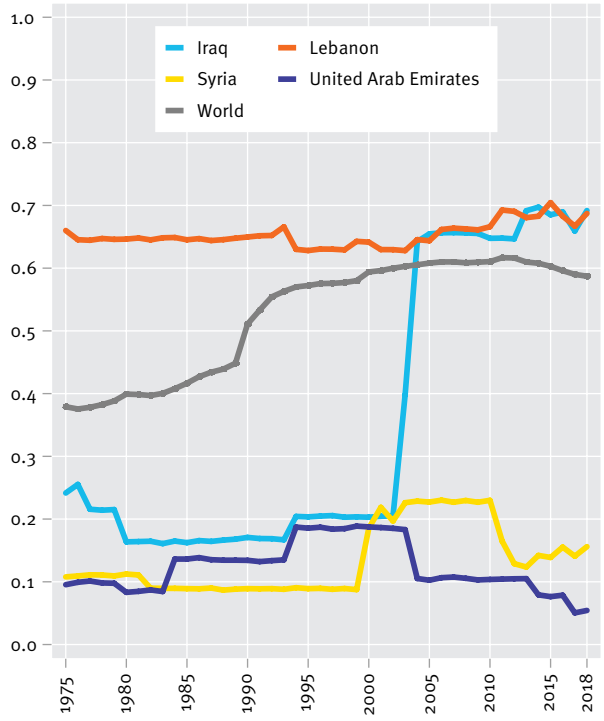
and Syria (174th). Syria actually advanced three positions in the ranking between 2018 and 2019. Although 11 journalists were killed in Syria in 2018, the number of killed has fallen each year, from 69 in 2013 to 36 in 2014, 26 in 2015, 20 in 2016 and 13 in 2017 (Reporters Without Borders 2019b).

The assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul in October 2018 received widespread international media attention and also had a regional impact. International media outlets demanded that Saudi Arabia—especially Mohammed Bin Salman, the crown prince who is believed to have been implicated in the assassination—be held accountable. However, the reaction of the US administration has been interpreted by some as legitimizing Saudi Arabia's actions (see e.g. Reuters 2018a). Europe's stance was, in principle, stronger. Germany re-imposed an arms embargo and, together with France and the United Kingdom, demanded a thorough investigation, as its ties to Saudi Arabia depended on the credibility of such an investigation (Reuters 2018b; Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2018). However, this initial firmness has evaporated and individually European countries are seeking to maintain a degree of normalcy in their relations with Saudi Arabia, driven to a large extent by business interests. Although the European Union is expected to continue calling on Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights and civil liberties record, firmer measures are not to be expected (Barnes-Dacey 2019). Russia, on the other hand, kept quiet and acknowledged Saudi statements on the issue (Hall 2018).

Nonetheless, the sustained pressure from Western media outlets and activist groups demanding justice for the slain journalist might have played a role in the decision of Saudi Arabia to push for the peace talks on the conflict in Yemen, which were held in December 2018 in Stockholm (UN Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen 2018). As a consequence of the talks, an agreement was reached on a ceasefire in the city of Hodeidah, which would enable humanitarian aid to enter the country. However, the Stockholm Agreements have still not been enacted, with parties delaying the process. The timeframe of the Hodeidah agreement was too short (21 days) to be effectively enacted and the language lacked precision. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen is still working to achieve the decisions reached in the agreement and a multiparty dialogue is taking place. Some advances have been made, not only to reach a peace agreement but to develop a strategy that will ensure a peaceful transition to democracy.

FIGURE 2.17

Media Integrity in selected Middle Eastern countries, 1975–2018



Notes: This figure compares the countries with the highest and lowest scores on Media Integrity in the region for 2018 and displays their performance over time.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

Summary: Impartial Administration in the Middle East, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range (0.42)	
	High (›0.7)	UAE
	Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar
	Low (‹0.4)	Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen

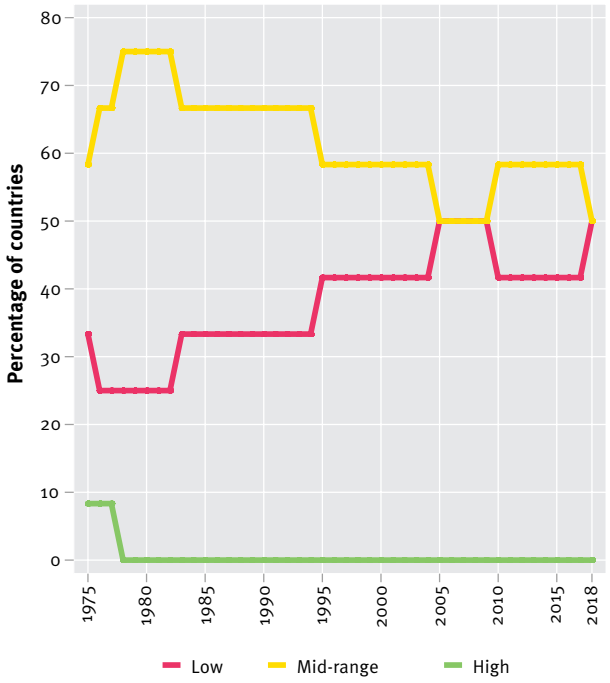
Impartial Administration is the only attribute for which the Middle East does not have the lowest scores in the world. On this measure the Middle East, with a score of 0.42, sits midway between Asia and the Pacific (0.45) and Africa (0.39). Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen score lower than the regional average for the Middle East, while the UAE is the only country in the region to score highly on this attribute. In fact, the UAE is the only country in the Middle East among the 40 countries that make up the top 25 per cent in the world on Impartial Administration. Both the UAE and Oman score also higher than the regional and world averages on Absence of Corruption and are considered the least corrupt countries in the Middle East.

The obstinacy of politicians ensures that corruption continues unchecked

The topic of corruption has been at the centre of the debate in the Middle East for decades, as it is one of the central challenges in the region. According to the GSoD Indices, eight countries' levels of corruption are above the world average. Five countries have high levels of corruption, scoring low for Absence of Corruption, while seven have mid-range levels. While no country has low levels of corruption, the UAE has relatively high mid-range levels, scoring at 0.69 despite being one of the world's few persistent non-democracies (see Figure 2.18).

FIGURE 2.18

Absence of Corruption in the Middle East, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Some countries in the region are trying to take action to address corruption. However, political corruption is so ingrained that efforts by governments to increase transparency have not yielded the expected results, and citizens regard government officials and members of parliament as being most corrupt (Transparency International 2016). Politics and corruption are therefore closely interlinked, and vested interests work to ensure that laws passed to fight corruption remain unenforced (Transparency International 2018).

In Iran, the powerful system of patronage has undermined the Rouhani administration's anti-corruption efforts. Rich and influential citizens are often spared prosecution and the intelligence services often determine the judgement of politically sensitive cases (GAN Integrity 2017). Judicial institutions designed to control corruption suffer from nepotism, cronyism and influence-peddling (Shahidsaless 2016). Moreover, in a context where civil society is severely restricted and civil liberties repressed, there is little space for citizens and CSOs to expose bribery and corruption.

The Omani Government generally implements the laws of the Omani Penal Code fairly efficiently. Its efforts to curb corruption have seen high-ranking officials prosecuted for crimes of corruption and abuse of office. Contrary to the practice in Iran, gifts or bribes to public officials in Oman are criminalized, making them a rare act when trying to obtain favourable judicial decisions (GAN Integrity 2016). However, nepotism is still widespread in both countries, especially in the higher spheres of political power.

The GSoD Indices data indicate that Lebanon still has high levels of corruption. In addition, according to the Arab Barometer, 94 per cent of Lebanese citizens believe that there is corruption within the government, while only 15 per cent believe that the government is cracking down on corruption (Arab Barometer 2017). However, the government has made recent efforts to fight corruption. In 2017, it passed the Access to Information Law (Article 19 2017) and committed to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which measures the good governance of oil and gas resources (EITI 2017).

Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are

not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in CSOs and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

Summary: Participatory Engagement in the Middle East, 2018

	Regional average: Low	
	High	N/A
	Mid-range	Lebanon
	Low	Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE and Yemen

While there is no aggregated GSoD Indices score for Participatory Engagement, the regional average on this measure in the Middle East is low. Only one country, Lebanon, performs in the mid-range in terms of its Participatory Engagement, while the remaining 11 countries in the region perform at low levels. A similar trend can be seen for the countries in North Africa.

Civic space in the Middle East has seen advances followed by setbacks

Since 2013, the Middle East has seen a shrinking of civic space, as measured by the indicators of Civil Liberties (particularly Freedom of Expression and Association and Assembly), Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation. In particular, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya and Yemen have seen significant declines on one or more of these measures during this time.

In the 1990s, the Middle East saw an increase in the number of active CSOs, mainly as service providers in health and education and other social assistance, but also as advocacy organizations (e.g. on women's and human rights). The Arab Uprisings further reinvigorated civil society in the Middle East and North Africa. However, in the past decade, this civic space has contracted.

While in other regions the shrinking of civic space often occurs in contexts of democratic backsliding, in the Middle East and North Africa, it has taken place in countries that have experienced deepening autocratization (e.g. Bahrain and Yemen in the Middle East and Egypt and Libya in North Africa). Half of the countries in the Middle East have experienced some declines on Civil Society Participation since 2013.

The most significant decline has occurred in Yemen, which had actually seen some advances between 2011 and 2012 due to attempts by the Saleh administration to regain the stability lost during the civilian protests resulting from the Arab Uprisings. However, these advances came to a halt with the advent of the conflict in Yemen. Since the war erupted in 2015, the steadily decreasing number of CSOs in the country have faced severe restrictions (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2018). Yemen's profound decline on this democratic dimension started in 2013; by 2018 it had recorded its lowest-ever score (0.20) on this measure. Together with Syria, Yemen is now among the seven countries in the world with the lowest levels of Civil Society Participation (see Figure 2.19; Box 2.6).

In the last decade, the region has increasingly become more violent, resulting in the relocation or closure of a number of CSOs. In addition, various laws have been passed that restrict CSO operations. According to Abdelaziz (2017), these laws have been especially harsh on CSOs focusing on human rights and democracy issues. Bahrain and Jordan provide telling examples. In Jordan, the Council of Ministers decided in 2017 that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would be subject to the requirements of the 2007 Anti-Money

BOX 2.6

Yemen on the brink

In 1990 North and South Yemen unified, creating the Republic of Yemen, with President Ali Abdullah Saleh as head of state. At the time of unification, and in contrast to the absolutist monarchies in the region, Yemen was the only country in the Arabian Peninsula to hold periodic elections. Despite this fact, Yemen was not considered a democracy, as the elections were a façade for Saleh's regime to maintain its legitimacy.

In 2011, the ripple effects of the Arab Uprisings also spread to Yemen, which was already on the brink of a revolution. The

ensuing unrest in Yemen echoed the purported cause of the uprisings but was also the consequence of more than 30 years of abuse of power by the governing class. By this time, Yemen's GSoD Indices score for Representative Government was not significantly higher than in 1990, indicating that for more than 20 years the representation of Yemenis by the political class had stagnated.

In 2012, after 33 years in power, President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned, precipitating an internal war. By September 2014 the Houthis had taken Sana'a, and Yemen's internationally recognized President, Abdarrabuh Mansur Hadi, had absconded to Saudi Arabia. Soon after, the so-called Saudi Alliance (a coalition led by Saudi Arabia that includes Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Sudan and the UAE) commenced attacks on the Houthis and the war escalated. These events saw Yemen's score on Representative Government decline from 0.25 in 2015 to zero in 2016—where it remained in 2018.

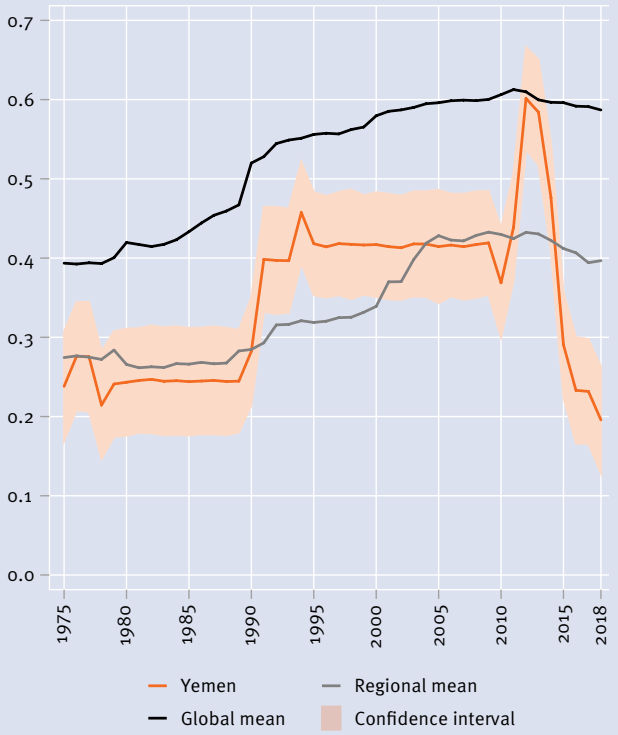
The Arab Uprisings brought minor progress in Yemeni political participation: CSOs, focusing on youth and women's empowerment, flourished in the immediate aftermath. This led to a spike in Yemen's Civil Society Participation subattribute in 2012, reaching 0.60 (Yemen's highest score for this subattribute since 1975). However, the escalation of the conflict and the beginning of the war in 2015 meant that this score plunged to 0.20 in 2018, one of the lowest scores that Yemen has seen.

It is difficult to explain the GSoD Indices scores for Yemen (see Table 2.13) without considering the almost complete breakdown of institutional mechanisms that have resulted from the armed conflict in the country. When juxtaposed against a prism of war, it becomes clear why most aspects of the GSoD Indices have declined in a statistically significant manner since 2015 in Yemen. On subattributes such as Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Electoral Participation and Local Democracy, Yemen now scores zero, because such mechanisms are simply non-existent in such conditions of war.

This has subsequently resulted in Yemen falling into the non-democracy category. The situation in the country remains critical: 14.3 million people are classified as being in acute need, of which two million are children under the age of five. More than 20 million people in Yemen suffer from food insecurity and 10 million suffer extreme levels of hunger (UN OCHA 2019). In early 2019, the UN stated that Yemen continues to be the world's greatest humanitarian crisis (UN News 2019b).

FIGURE 2.19

Civil Society Participation in Yemen, 1975–2018



Notes: The light-shaded bands around the orange line demarcate the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimates.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 2.13

The state of democracy in Yemen, 2018

GSoD attribute score				
Representative Government	**Fundamental Rights**	**Checks on Government**	**Impartial Administration**	**Participatory Engagement**
0.0 –	0.27 –	0.29 –	0.21 =	Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

Laundering Law and Counter-Terrorism Financing Law. NGOs that fail to comply with these requirements now face suspension, monetary fines, or even detention. In Bahrain, the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior vet funding for CSOs from international sources (Abdelaziz 2017).

2.2.4. Conclusion

The Middle East is the region in the world that suffers from the greatest democratic weakness. The democratic hopes brought about by the Arab Uprisings have dwindled and the region's democratic performance has since worsened. Moreover, a number of countries in the Middle East (including Bahrain and Yemen) and North Africa (including Egypt and Libya) have suffered from deepening autocratization, with significant declines on at least three of their democratic subattributes since 2013.

The Middle East is also home to the largest share of enduring non-democracies in the world and its hybrid regimes have never made the step to full democracy, seemingly stuck in an enduring state of hybridity. The conflicts in Syria and Yemen continue to have humanitarian ripple effects on the rest of the region.

The region's share of democracies is the lowest in the world, and the two democracies that do exist—Iraq and Lebanon—are weak and democratically fragile. The violent protests in Iraq in 2019 provide testimony to the many challenges the country is yet to overcome on its road to democratic consolidation. Efforts need to focus on supporting the strengthening of these two countries' democracy, and on the lessons from Tunisia's experience. Significant efforts are also required in order to enhance gender equality and speed up progress on SDG 5.5 in the region.

TABLE 2.14

The Global State of Democracy Indices snapshot: Policy considerations for the Middle East

This table offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in the Middle East, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. It presents policy considerations across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement. As Syria and Yemen are countries in conflict, the immediate priority must be ending these conflicts. For this reason, the policy considerations do not apply to these two countries.

Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: Low (0.23)

Elected Government:

Nine countries in the Middle East are in the bottom 25 per cent of the world for Elected Government. Iraq and Lebanon, the only democracies in the region, perform in the mid-range, as does Syria.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Priority areas for reform:

- Advocate for the decentralization of the government and its processes.
- Focus on the subregional and then the national level, by building capacity for local councils.

Clean Elections:

Two countries (Bahrain and Yemen) have seen significant declines on Clean Elections between 2013 and 2018. Of all the countries in the Middle East, 58 per cent are now below the global average for Clean Elections. In addition, 42 per cent are in the bottom 25 per cent of global performance on this measure.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Inclusive Suffrage:

At 0.56, the Middle East has the lowest levels of Inclusive Suffrage of any region in the world. This is well below the global average of 0.84. In addition, 58 per cent of the countries in the Middle East are in the bottom 25 per cent of global performance. Kuwait is the only country in the region in the top 25 per cent of global performance.

Priority countries for reform:

Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Kuwait (top 25% in the world)

Free Political Parties:

The Gulf monarchies (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) are among the 15 lowest-scoring countries in the world on Free Political Parties. The Middle East has the lowest levels of Free Political Parties of any region in the world, at 0.28—well below the global average of 0.54.

Priority countries for reform:

The GCC monarchies

Priority areas for reform:

- The GCC monarchies should consider allowing the establishment of free political parties.
- Allow political parties to operate without restricting their agendas.

Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.42)

Access to Justice:

On Access to Justice, 75 per cent of countries in the Middle East score in the mid-range. In addition, 42 per cent of countries in the region are in the bottom 25 per cent globally.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain

Civil Liberties:

A total of 11 countries in the Middle East (92 per cent) are in the bottom 25 per cent of global performance for Civil Liberties.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Gender Equality:

A total of 10 countries in the Middle East (83 per cent) score low on Gender Equality, while only 2 (Jordan and Lebanon) score in the mid-range. All 12 countries in the Middle East are below the global average on Gender Equality, and in the bottom 25 per cent of the world. Of the 10 worst-performing countries in the world, 4 are in the Middle East. Yemen and Saudi Arabia score the lowest, with 0.19 and 0.20, respectively. Iraq is one of the three democracies in the world that score low on Gender Equality.

Priority democracies for reform:

Iraq

Priority areas for reform:

Encourage gender quotas in parliaments, as they have proved useful in other countries to encourage women's participation in politics.

Social Group Equality:

Half of the countries in the Middle East score in the bottom 25 per cent for Social Group Equality.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE

Basic Welfare*:

Half of the countries in the Middle East have high levels of Basic Welfare, while the other half have mid-range levels. No country in the region performs low on this measure; 58 per cent of countries in the Middle East are above the global average on Basic Welfare.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Lebanon and Qatar, which score at the top 25% in the world

Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: Low (0.37)

Effective Parliament:

On Effective Parliament, 58 per cent of countries in the Middle East score in the bottom 25 per cent.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Judicial Independence:

Half of the countries in the Middle East score in the bottom 25 per cent for Judicial Independence. No countries in the region have high levels, or score over the global average, on Judicial Independence.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Media Integrity:

On Media Integrity, 75 per cent of countries in the Middle East are in the global bottom 25 per cent.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.41)

Absence of Corruption:

Half of the countries in the Middle East score below the global average on Absence of Corruption, while two (Oman and the UAE) are above the global average.

Priority democracies for reform:

Lebanon and Iraq

Priority areas for reform:

- Enforce anti-corruption laws and demand accountability and legal transparency.
- Use the digitalization of bureaucratic processes as a tool to fight corruption.

Predictable Enforcement:

On Predictable Enforcement, 41 per cent of countries in the Middle East have mid-range performance, while 50 per cent have low levels. No countries in the region has seen any advance on Predictable Enforcement since 2013.

Priority democracies for reform:

Iraq

Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices score: Low

Civil Society Participation:

On Civil Society Participation, 67 per cent of countries in the Middle East are in the bottom 25 per cent. Iraq is the only country with high levels of Civil Society Participation.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE

Priority areas for reform:

Help empower civil society and citizens by mobilizing them to rebuild political institutions and enhance their participation.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Iraq

Electoral Participation:

Three-quarters of the countries in the Middle East are in the bottom 25 per cent for Electoral Participation. No country is in the top 25 per cent. Iraq and Lebanon, both democracies, have a mid-range performance for this subattribute.

Priority countries for reform:

Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Direct Democracy:

The Middle East has the lowest average score in the world on Direct Democracy: all countries in the region have low performance for this subattribute, while 75 per cent score in the bottom 25 per cent worldwide.

Priority countries for reform:

All countries

Local Democracy:

No country in the Middle East has high levels of Local Democracy. While nine countries in the region have low levels of Local Democracy, two have mid-range levels. Kuwait does not have a score for this subattribute. There have been positive developments in the last 20 years with the percentage of countries with low levels of Local Democracy falling from 100 per cent in 1998 to 82 per cent in 2018.

Priority democracies for reform:

Iraq

Notes: *The data on Basic Welfare contains some gaps and may not be applicable in countries with quickly worsening conditions (e.g. Syria and Yemen) as not all indicator-level data is updated annually.

TABLE 2.15

Regime classification, the Middle East, 2018

This table shows the regime classification for all of the countries in the Middle East covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

	GSoD attribute				
Country	**Representative Government**	**Fundamental Rights**	**Checks on Government**	**Impartial Administration**	**Participatory Engagement**
Democracies					
Iraq	0.49 =	0.44 =	0.58 =	0.34	Low
Lebanon	0.50 =	0.54 =	0.57 =	0.398 =	Mid-range
Hybrid regimes					
Jordan	0.403 =	0.59 =	0.53 =	0.55 =	Low
Kuwait	0.41 =	0.59 =	0.59 =	0.50 =	Low
Oman	0.35 =	0.54 =	0.30 =	0.53 =	Low
Non-democracies					
Bahrain	0.23 =	0.22 =	0.21 =	0.33 =	Low
Iran	0.28 =	0.43 =	0.41 =	0.43 =	Low
Qatar	0 =	0.46 =	0.25 =	0.42=	Low
Saudi Arabia	0 =	0.34 =	0.23 =	0.36 =	Low
Syria	0 =	0.21 =	0.21 =	0.17 =	Low
United Arab Emirates	0.12 =	0.45 =	0.22 =	0.703 =	Low
Yemen	0 –	0.27 –	0.29 –	0.21 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period; + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

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Chapter 3
The state of democracy in the Americas

This chapter focuses on the Americas, a region which is not defined in the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices, but which is used in this report as an umbrella term for two regions covered in separate sections: Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. The Latin American and Caribbean section provides an overview of the current democratic landscape in the region, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis highlights current gains and opportunities for democracy as well as democratic challenges. The North America section provides an overview of the most recent GSoD Indices data on the region. The section also features a case study on the state of democracy in the United States.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen mixed progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) since 2015, and significant challenges remain.

It is the region after Europe with the largest share of SDG 16 indicators that have seen declines. Of the 18 GSoD indicators used to measure progress on SDG 16, 72 per cent (13) have seen more countries with declines than gains since 2015.

This is the case for SDG 16.1 on reducing violence and for SDG 16.10 on fundamental freedoms, where all indicators have seen declines, except for Freedom of Association and Assembly, which has seen stagnation. Stagnation is seen on SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. Mixed results are seen on SDG 16.6 on accountable institutions, with gains outnumbering declines for independent judiciaries, effective parliaments, political parties and civil society participation.

SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making has seen declines in Clean Elections, Elected Government, Electoral Participation and Social Group Equality, as well as increases in Effective Parliament, but stagnation in Local Democracy.

Gender Equality

Latin America and the Caribbean performs third, after North America and Europe, on Gender Equality and SDG 5.5 on the political representation of women. The GSoD Indices subattribute of (political) Gender Equality for Latin America and the Caribbean has seen one country (Brazil) decline since 2015; no country has advanced on this measure.

KEY FINDINGS

Positive developments

- **Latin America and the Caribbean is the third-most democratic region in the world, after North America and Europe, with all but three countries classified as democracies.** Democracies in the region have proven resilient. Of the five countries that were democracies in 1977, four (Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) have remained democracies uninterruptedly. Among the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1977, almost 75 per cent have remained democracies without interruptions.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean has a heterogenous democratic landscape.** At the same time, a small number of democracies stand out for their high performance. Of the top five countries in the world with the highest levels of Representative Government, three (Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay) are in Latin America. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay were the two countries in the region (from a total of 21 in the world) that scored highly on all democratic attributes. Costa Rica, Chile and Jamaica score highly on four of the five attributes. The democratic performance of these five countries is also high compared to the rest of the world—they all score among the top 25 per cent in the world on Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government and, with the exception of Jamaica, Impartial Administration.
- The best performing aspects of Latin American democracy compared to the rest of the world are **Electoral Participation** (on which measure the region has the highest levels in the world, together with Asia and the Pacific) and **Freedom of Religion** (on which measure the region scores higher than Europe). On all other aspects of democracy, Latin America and the Caribbean performs third-best, after North America and Europe.
- Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with most advances in political gender equality in the past decades. Together with Europe, the region has the highest representation of women in parliament, averaging 27 per cent, which is above the world average of 24 per cent.

Challenges to democracy

- **The quality of Latin American democracy varies widely: 12 different democratic performance patterns can be identified.** The most common democratic performance patterns are (a) mid-range on four of five attributes; and (b) low performance on at least one attribute of democracy.
- **Cuba is the only country in the region not to have undergone a democratic transition since 1975 and to have persisted as a non-democratic regime for the past four decades.** Cuba's role in the democratic breakdown of Venezuela should not be underestimated. Venezuela has supplied Cuba with oil in exchange for Cuban doctors, teachers and intelligence advisors.
- **Venezuela is the region's most democratically ailing country.** It has undergone a process of severe democratic backsliding over the past two decades, which resulted in a full democratic breakdown in 2017. In fact, Venezuela is the only country in the world that has gone from being a democracy with high levels of Representative Government (from 1975 to 1996) to a non-democracy.
- **A number of other countries have suffered from backsliding or democratic erosion (or both).** Nicaragua has undergone a process of severe democratic backsliding in recent years, regressing into the category of hybrid regime in 2016. Brazil has experienced democratic erosion in the past five years. It is the democracy in the region with declines on most subattributes (8 out of 16) and among the top five countries in the world with the largest number of declines since 2013. During the same period, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Haiti have experienced declines on at least one subattribute of democracy.
- **Some countries in the region are characterized by democratic fragility.** Of the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1977, 5 have had undemocratic interruptions, backsliding into hybrid regimes, but 4 (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras and Peru) have since returned to democracy. Dominican Republic, Haiti and Honduras are also the weakest democracies in the region, together with Guatemala, judging from their low performance on one or more of their democratic attributes.
- **The region suffers from the highest levels of socio-economic inequalities in the world, which has translated into highly unequal access to political power.** This has also resulted in Latin America and the Caribbean having the highest rates of crime and violence in the world. Combined with high levels of corruption, this undermines trust in democracy and fuels civic discontent.
- **Political parties in Latin America are suffering from a crisis of representation.** This crisis derives from their difficulty in adapting to societal transformation and increasing expectations of a middle-class population deceived by lack of delivery in reducing corruption and inequalities. It has pushed voters in some countries away from traditional parties towards anti-establishment leaders.
- **Similar to other parts of the world, Latin America and the Caribbean has also experienced a shrinking of civic and media space in recent years.** Limitations on civic space are often, but not always, linked to advocacy or investigation into corruption and illicit networks.
- **The region is also facing new challenges, including migration.** These are driven, in part, by democratic breakdown in Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as a less porous border between Mexico and the United States, which diverts migration flows from Central America to the rest of the region.
- **There is a marked decline in the support for democracy across the region.** Public opinion surveys show a 12-point drop in support for democracy over the last decade, from 70 per cent in 2008 to 58 per cent in 2017, with close to a 9-point decline in the last three years alone (Latinobarómetro 2018).

3.1. The state of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean

This section provides an overview of long-term democratic trends in the Latin American and Caribbean region as well as an overview of the current democratic landscape, using the Global State of Democracy conceptual framework as a basis. It highlights the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the challenges it faces. The analysis is based on the GSoD Indices as the principal data source, but also draws on a number of other complementary sources.

The GSoD Indices for Latin America and the Caribbean cover 22 of the 29 countries in the region, as only countries with more than one million inhabitants are included in the GSoD sample. Furthermore, not all non-GSoD data sources used in the chapter are available for the Caribbean. Therefore, when the chapter refers only to Latin America this means that data was not available for the Caribbean.

3.1.1. Introduction

The third wave of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean began in 1978 and the region has since undergone a profound democratic transformation. In the 1970s, the region was mostly dominated by authoritarian regimes under military rule. Now, all those countries have transitioned to democracy, with the exception of Cuba, the only country in the region not to have experienced democracy.

Latin America and the Caribbean is now the third-best democratically performing region in the world, after North America and Europe. It even outperforms these two regions on some aspects (e.g. both regions on Electoral Participation, and Europe on Freedom of Religion). However, despite its significant democratic advances, Latin America and the Caribbean faces a number of challenges to its democratic landscape.

Cuba's non-democratic persistence provides a model to regimes, including Venezuela and Nicaragua, that have recently significantly backslid from democracies to hybrid regimes or non-democracies. The democratic collapse of Venezuela has had spill-over effects on the rest of the region, generating the most severe migration and humanitarian crisis in Latin America's history (BBC News 2018b). Even the democracies in the region face significant challenges. High levels of corruption, inequality (the highest in the world), insecurity, crime and violence have undermined people's trust in democracy, with levels of support for democracy now at their lowest in a decade.

A number of democracies have also seen an erosion of their democratic performance in recent years, and some suffer from weak democratic performance. This disenchantment has pushed voters towards anti-establishment strongmen on both the left and right of the political spectrum, who have gained access to the reins of government in a number of countries in the region. The GSoD Indices data shows, with the examples of Venezuela and Nicaragua, that if leaders with populist authoritarian tendencies sustain themselves in power through the electoral channel and constitutional means, this can over the medium term contribute to democratic backsliding which may ultimately result in democratic breakdown.

In order to continue to advance democratically, build on the region's democratic momentum and re-establish citizens' trust in democracy, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean need to tackle the societal problems they face, reduce their high levels of inequality, strengthen their judicial institutions to more effectively reduce corruption, and reinvigorate their political party systems.

3.1.2. Taking the long-term perspective: democratic developments since 1975

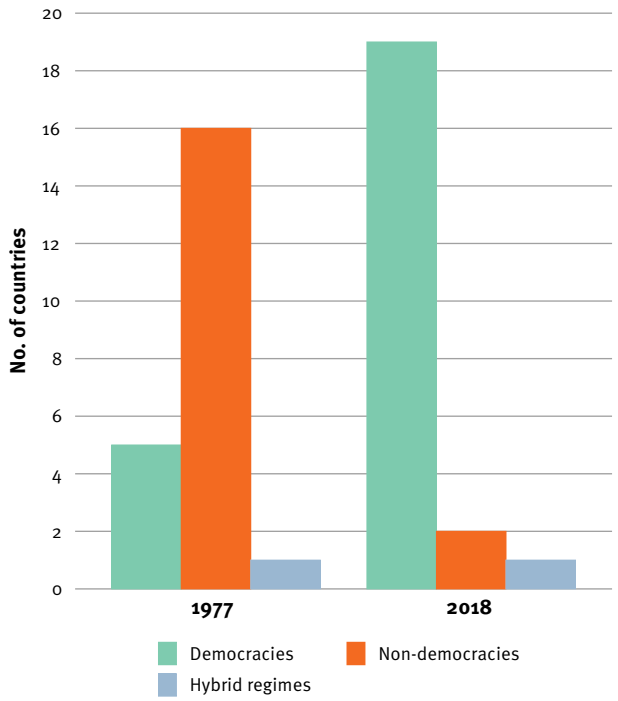
Latin America and the Caribbean has experienced an historically unprecedented democratic expansion and its longest democracy cycle, during the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991). In the region, this wave of democratization started in 1978 when the Dominican Republic transitioned from authoritarianism to democracy. This was followed by democratic transitions in Ecuador (1979); Peru (1980); Honduras (1982); Argentina (1983); El Salvador (1984); Bolivia, Brazil and Uruguay (all in 1985); Guatemala (1986); Paraguay (1989); Chile, Nicaragua and Panama (all in 1990); and Mexico (starting gradually in the period 1977–1997 and culminating in 2000).

Because the region's third wave of democratization started in 1978, 1977 is used as the baseline year to study the democratic transformation of the region. Hence, in 1977, 16 of the 22 countries in the region covered by the GSoD Indices were classified as non-democracies, mostly in the form of authoritarian military regimes, while today all but three countries in the region are democracies (see Figure 3.1).

Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions in the world that has seen most democratic advances since the 1970s. Its average regional increase across all democratic aspects during this period was 65 per cent, well above the world average increase of 41 per cent. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world that has seen some advances in reducing corruption since 1975 (19 per cent improvement), while all other regions have seen average increases in corruption.

FIGURE 3.1

Regime types in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1977–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

These advances have expanded the democratic space in the region. The democratic aspects measured by the GSoD Indices that have seen most improvements are Direct Democracy, Representative Government and specifically Clean Elections, all of which have nearly doubled since 1975. Significant improvements have also been observed in Effective Parliament, Social Rights and Equality, Local Democracy, and Gender Equality.

Through these gains, citizens in the region have gained various new rights, including enhanced protection for indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, children, LGBT groups and people with disabilities, among other underprivileged groups. Many of these new social rights have been enshrined in recent constitutions. Others have been strengthened thanks to the adoption of international covenants.

As a result of democratic transition processes, between 1984 and 2017 a total of nine Latin American countries held assemblies to write new constitutions, while other nations reformed parts of existing constitutions (International IDEA 2018). These processes have helped affirm basic democratic principles and enabled institutional changes that strengthen democracy in the region—with the exception of the constitutional amendment processes in Nicaragua and Venezuela, which have been used to weaken democracy.

Alongside advances in access to rights and political freedoms, the region has also experienced an important process of institutional development. Key institutions for electoral democracy have been put in place, with some countries creating new electoral management bodies (EMBs) or substantially reforming existing EMBs in ways that have greatly enhanced their capacity and performance.

Governments have also incorporated a variety of new instruments for accountability related to anti-corruption and transparency. These include international covenants advanced by the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) and other international initiatives to enhance the transparency and openness of governments. In addition, governments have strengthened national policy frameworks for auditing agencies, established asset disclosure requirements for public officials, adopted access to information laws, implemented public procurement systems and passed campaign-finance and money-laundering regulations and norms, while gradually setting up the instruments needed for e-government (Casas-Zamora and Carter 2017).

The pace of democratic progress in the region has varied. It was fastest between 1978 and 1990 but slowed down until mid-2000; progress has since stagnated across all dimensions except Basic Welfare and Electoral Participation. Some (statistically non-significant) regional declines have even been observed on Free Political Parties, Civil Society Participation and Media Integrity since mid-2000. From 2013 to 2018, no dimension has seen any significant advances in regional averages, although some country-level advances have occurred.

Democracies in the Latin American and the Caribbean region have proven remarkably resilient in the past four decades. Of the five countries in the region that were democracies in 1977, four (Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) have remained democracies uninterruptedly until today. Of the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1978, almost three-quarters (11 countries) have remained democracies without interruptions. Of these, Uruguay has made most democratic advances, scoring low on four out of five attributes in 1975; now, together with Trinidad and Tobago (and 19 other countries in the world) Uruguay records high performance on all democratic attributes. Uruguay, together with Costa Rica, can be seen as a democratic success for the region (see Box 3.1).

Of the four countries that have had undemocratic interruptions since 1978, two (Dominican Republic and Peru) have since returned to democracy without any further interruptions, for more than 23 and 18 years, respectively.

While the region has seen significant democratic advances since 1975, not all aspects of democracy have advanced at the same pace, with some dimensions trailing behind others. The subattributes that have seen the slowest advances, and where the region scores in the mid-range today, are Absence of Corruption, Access to Justice and Social Group Equality.

While the large majority of countries that transitioned during the third wave have remained democracies, several have been characterized by greater democratic fragility. Of the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1978, four had democratic interruptions but then returned to democracy: **Dominican Republic** (1994–1995), **Haiti, Honduras** (2009–2012) and **Peru** (1992–2000). Haiti

BOX 3.1

Two democratic success stories: Costa Rica and Uruguay

Costa Rica presents a case of high-performing democratic endurance in a democratically weak subregion (Central America). Its democratic performance, as measured by the GSoD Indices, has been consistently high for four decades. Costa Rica scored in the top 25 per cent in the world on 13 of 16 subattributes in 1975; in 2018 it recorded similarly high scores on 15 democratic subattributes. Costa Rica also has the highest levels of Representative Government in the world, with the maximum score, and just ahead of Chile and Sweden.

While not entirely blemish-free, Costa Rica's recipe for democratic success includes a combination of features that reinforce each other. Its democratic history is stable, with no democratic interruptions since 1949 and a relatively homogenous and small population (4.8 million people). It enjoys the highest level of Representative Government in the world and higher levels of Social Group Equality than other countries in the region. It has a presidential system with proportional representation in parliament and a well-developed and free multiparty system—in fact, on Free Political Parties its score is the second highest in the world, after the United States. Costa Rica's political culture is built on compromise, based on long-held public trust in political institutions and a strong regard for the rule of law.

Costa Rica also enjoys high levels of Basic Welfare and human development, and near-universal access to healthcare and primary education, enabled by a comprehensive social security system. Its social spending levels are high, enabled in part by a significant reduction in military spending following the abolition of the army in 1948. Its use of its natural resources is sustainable, and its economic structure has been transformed, enabling sustained levels of economic growth that have cushioned the country against the effects of economic crises (OECD 2017; Peeler 1986; Dabène 1988).

However, despite these strengths, Costa Rica's democracy is not immune to challenges, including political polarization, an increasingly fragmented party system and the infusion of religion into politics, as shown by the fact that an evangelical pastor came close to winning the 2018 presidential election (Murillo 2018). Additional challenges relate to the strain of immigration caused by the worsening political situation in Nicaragua, and high levels of income inequality. Costa Rica is now the sixth-most income-unequal country in the region (see e.g. World Bank 2018).

Uruguay presents a case of unequalled democratic advances. In 1975 it was one of the region's authoritarian regimes, scoring low on four out of five democratic attributes. Uruguay is now one of the two democracies in the region that scores high on all democratic attributes and the only country in the region to score among the top 25 per cent in the world on all 16 subattributes.

Uruguay, like Costa Rica, enjoys lower levels of inequality in access to political power and in enjoyment of civil liberties compared to other countries in the region. However, Uruguay has significantly lower levels of income inequality. Other common features include the establishment of a social contract, which provided the basis for the development of a welfare state, with strong social protection and based on redistributive tax policies; and sustainable management of natural resources.

Uruguay also has a long democratic tradition, with democracy only interrupted twice since 1918—first, briefly, in 1933 and then during the authoritarian period between 1973 and 1985. Its multiparty system is stable and competitive, with three main political parties alternating in power, a small and homogenous population (3.4 million people) and strong rule of law and Impartial Administration.

Unlike Costa Rica, Uruguay records high levels of Direct Democracy (the highest in the region). However, even a high-performing democracy such as Uruguay is not flawless. Challenges to democracy in the country include rising levels of crime and violence (often linked to the drug trade), corruption and declining trust in democracy, although Uruguay still performs better than other countries in the region on these aspects (Chasquetti 2017; Petit 2017; Rodríguez Cuitiño 2018; Goñi 2016).

presents a complex case, having been a hybrid regime between 1999 and 2004, a non-democratic regime in 2005, a democracy from 2006 to 2009, a hybrid regime again between 2010 and 2015, and finally a weak democracy from 2016 onwards. Honduras' democracy remains weak, with the OAS characterizing its 2017 elections as marred by irregularities (OAS 2017). Nicaragua backslid into a hybrid regime in 2016.

Cuba is the only country in the region that has endured as a non-democratic regime since the start of the third wave of democracy, and Venezuela presents a case of democratic backsliding that has resulted in full breakdown. In fact, Venezuela is the only one of the five democracies in the region in 1977 that has backslid into a non-democratic regime since that time.

3.1.3. The current democracy landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the democratic challenges the region faces.

Representative Government

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

Summary: Representative Government performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.64)	
High (>0.7)	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay
Low (<0.4)	Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

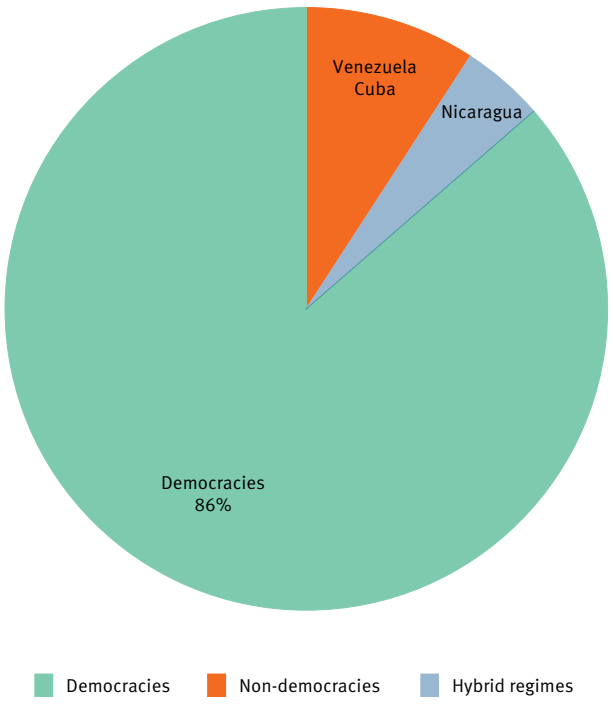
The democratic landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean is heterogenous

Latin America and the Caribbean is today a largely democratic region. Thanks to democratic advances over the past 40 years, the region currently has the third-largest share of democracies (86 per cent), after North America (100 per cent) and Europe (93 per cent). Latin America and the Caribbean is home to 19 democracies, one hybrid regime and two non-democracies (see Figure 3.2). Of the region's democracies, more than half (53 per cent) have high levels of Representative Government, while a little less than half (47 per cent) have mid-range levels.

Democratic performance patterns and the quality of democracy still vary widely between democracies in the region. A total of 12 different democratic performance patterns can be discerned among the democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean, with only two countries (Uruguay, and Trinidad and Tobago) recording high performance across all attributes (see Table 3.1). All other countries perform better on some aspects than others, pointing to uneven levels of democratic quality in the region.

FIGURE 3.2

Share of regime types in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

TABLE 3.1

Heat map of democratic performance patterns in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

Country	GSoD attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Uruguay	High	High	High	High	High
Trinidad and Tobago	High	High	High	High	High
Chile	High	High	High	High	Mid-range
Costa Rica	High	High	High	Mid-range	High
Jamaica	High	High	High	Mid-range	High
Argentina	High	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
Peru	High	Mid-range	High	Mid-range	High
Brazil	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
Panama	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
Colombia	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Bolivia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
Ecuador	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
El Salvador	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Paraguay	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Mexico	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Guatemala	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range
Dominican Republic	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range
Honduras	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range
Haiti	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range	Low	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: This heat map shows the performance of the 19 democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean by attribute in 2018. Green indicates high performance, while yellow denotes mid-range performance, and red shows low-range performance.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Of the other eight countries with high levels of Representative Government, Chile, Costa Rica and Jamaica record high performance on four attributes; Argentina and Peru on three; Brazil and Panama on two attributes; and Colombia on one. El Salvador, Mexico and Paraguay perform in the mid-range on all attributes. Weaker levels of democratic performance are found in Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Honduras, which record low performance on one attribute; and Haiti, which has seen low performance on three attributes.

Cuba is the enduring exception to democratization in the region

Cuba is the only country in Latin America and the Caribbean that has not experienced a transition to democracy in the last four decades.

Cuba's 1959 revolution turned the country into a Communist one-party state. In 2018, Cuba scored in the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world on 12 of its 16 democratic subattributes. The transition of power in 2018 to Miguel Díaz-Canel, a non-Castro family member, has given some observers hope that the regime may be opening up for a potential transition. However, Raul Castro remains the first secretary of the Communist Party and a February 2019 referendum on a new constitution reaffirmed the party's grip on power, strengthening the irrevocable character of Cuba's socialist regime (Augustin 2019).

Cuba's close ties with other non-democratic and hybrid regimes in Latin America has implications for the democratic landscape in the region, as their political, financial and human-resource barter trade give these regimes lifelines in the face of international sanctions. For example, Venezuela supplies Cuba with oil in exchange for Cuban doctors, teachers and intelligence advisors (Labrador 2019).

While Cuba classifies as a non-democracy, it does not score poorly on all its democratic aspects. In fact, on the GSoD Indices subcomponent of Basic Welfare, Cuba outperforms all other countries in the region and even scores among the top 25 per cent in the world. The same is true for Gender Equality, and for Electoral Participation, although Cuba's elections are not classified as free or fair.

Backsliding has resulted in democratic breakdown in Nicaragua and Venezuela

While the large majority of countries in the region have undergone democratic transition and consolidation in the past decades, two countries stand out from that pattern. Nicaragua and Venezuela are the two countries in the region—and among ten countries in the world—that have suffered from severe democratic backsliding.

Nicaragua underwent a democratic transition in 1990 but from 2005 onwards it gradually deteriorated in terms of its democratic performance and weakened checks on government, finally backsliding into a hybrid regime in 2016 (see Box 3.3). Venezuela was one of the six democracies in the region in 1977 but backslid to a hybrid regime in 2008–2016 before undergoing a full democratic breakdown in 2017 (see Box 3.2).

Nicaragua and Venezuela's backsliding patterns differ in terms of their depth and timeframe, and their levels of democratic performance (see Table 3.2). Venezuela's backsliding has been the most severe, dropping an average of 0.31 points across

TABLE 3.2

Comparative table of democratic backsliding: Venezuela and Nicaragua

	Venezuela		Nicaragua	
Timeframe of democratic backsliding	1998–2018 (20 years) Deepening autocratization since 2009–2010		2005–2018 (13 years)	
Level of democratic performance	**Prior to backsliding** Democracy uninterrupted, 1975–2007 High levels of Representative Government in 1998 Hybrid regime: 2008–2016	**Since backsliding** Non-democracy since 2017 In bottom 25% of the world on 12 of 16 GSoD subattributes	**Prior to backsliding** Democracy, 1990–2015	**Since backsliding** Hybrid regime since 2016 In bottom 25% of the world on 11 of 16 GSoD subattributes
Depth of backsliding	Decline of 0.42 on Checks on Government and 0.34 on Civil Liberties (1998–2018) Average GSoD Indices decline of 0.31 points (49 per cent) (1997–2018) Significant declines across 11 of 16 GSoD subattributes (1998–2018)		Decline of 0.30 on Checks on Government and 0.48 on Civil Liberties (2005–2018) Average GSoD Indices decline of 0.23 points (39 per cent) Significant declines across 12 of 16 GSoD subattributes (2005–2018)	

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

BOX 3.2

Venezuela: A case study of democratic breakdown

Venezuela has experienced the most severe democratic backsliding process in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years, resulting in full democratic breakdown in 2017. The democratic breakdown in the country is also unparalleled in the world.

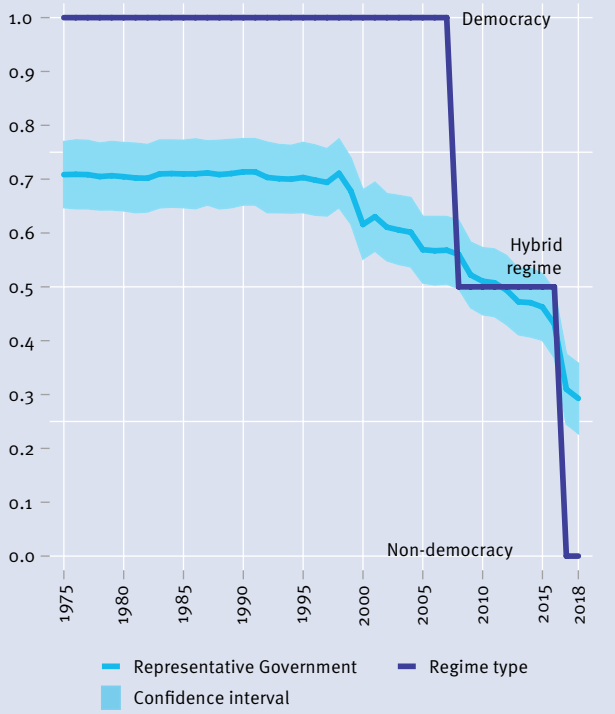
According to the GSoD Indices, in 1996 Venezuela was a democracy with high levels of Representative Government (0.70), well above the world (0.49) and Latin American and the Caribbean (0.65) averages. Venezuela's score on this dimension has more than halved in two decades (to 0.29) and is now among the bottom 25 per cent in the world (see Figure 3.3). A similar decline can be seen in Venezuela's Civil Society Participation, Judicial Independence, Media Integrity and Impartial Administration scores (see Table 3.3), while its scores on Civil Liberties have nearly halved over the same period. Venezuela is now, along with Cuba, in the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world on 12 of its 16 democratic subattributes.

The democratic backsliding process in Venezuela has occurred over a period of two decades. It began in 1998 with the 'Bolivarian Revolution' initiated by the democratically elected government of Hugo Chávez and further deepened during the presidency of Nicolás Maduro following Chávez's death in 2013. The process was enabled by the significant public support enjoyed by Chávez, who won the 1998 elections with more than half of the votes, based on promises of fundamental reform to a corrupt and centralized party system. Indeed, prior to Chávez's election, Venezuela suffered from comparatively high levels of corruption, hovering in the lower bracket of mid-range and recording a borderline low score of 0.45 in 1996.

While Chávez's sweeping reforms sought to tackle a corrupt party system, they also led to a severe weakening of Checks

FIGURE 3.3

Regime type and Representative Government in Venezuela, 1975–2018



Notes: The light-shaded band around the Representative Government line demarcates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimates.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

TABLE 3.3

The state of democracy in Venezuela, 1996 and 2018

Year	GSoD attribute score				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
1996	0.70	0.62	0.68	0.50	High
2018	0.29	0.39	0.25	0.08	Low

High Mid-range Low

Note: Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes are not aggregated.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

on Government, debilitating and ultimately dismantling institutions of representative democracy in favour of mechanisms of direct participation (Ollier 2018). Venezuela has had the largest increase in the world in the last 20 years in terms of its Direct Democracy score, with a peak score of 0.56 in 2003, second only to Switzerland and Uruguay.

Between 1999 and 2013 the country held seven referenda. The first, in April 1999, related to the establishment of a National Constituent Assembly, and succeeded with a 90 per cent approval rating. The aim of the assembly was to draft a replacement for the 1961 Constitution, which was also approved in a popular referendum with 72 per cent of votes (Reuters 2011).

The 1999 Constitution gave the executive significant powers over the legislature and the judiciary, which then enabled the expansion of control over other governmental institutions, such as the National Electoral Commission, the Comptroller's Office (Contraloría) and the Public Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalía). It also enabled Chávez to increase the presidential term limit from five to six years—making it one of the longest in Latin America—and introduce the possibility of presidential re-election. In 2007, another constitutional amendment, again approved in a referendum, removed limits on the number of times a president could be re-elected, catapulting Venezuela into a hybrid regime.

Earlier, by 2004, Chávez had re-legitimized his presidency through a revocatory referendum on his presidency, which enabled him to consolidate his grip on power. The constitutional reforms in combination with strong popular support enabled Chávez's governing coalition to effectively control the National Assembly, where they held 64 per cent of seats from 2000 to 2005, 96 per cent of seats from 2005 to 2010 (in part due to an electoral boycott by the opposition in 2005) and 59 per cent between 2010 and 2015 (IPU 2000, 2005 and 2010).

This, in turn, enabled the National Assembly to delegate powers to the executive to approve a number of laws that further undermined formal and informal democratic checks and balances, strengthened presidential control and weakened fiscal and budgetary transparency. It also enabled Chávez to nominate loyal supporters to the Supreme Court and other institutions. He was then in a position to dispose of the country's large oil income (during the oil boom) at his discretion, and to expand state media and social programmes, which often had a clientelistic character. While this fuelled corruption, it strengthened Chávez's political support among large parts of the population, boosting levels of electoral participation to facilitate his re-election in 2000, 2006 and 2012.

The process of decentralization initiated in Venezuela in the 1990s was also reversed, undermining local democracy. Regional governments were stripped of their control over public services and a significant portion of their financial resources. Moreover, new participatory mechanisms such as the Communal Councils were created as direct competition to regional and municipal governments, further undermining their decision-making authority and political legitimacy (Penfold 2009; López Maya 2011).

Finally, Chávez secured the loyalty of the military through a constitutional reform which gave the president full control over military promotions without needing approval from parliament. He also purged military ranks to ensure key positions were held by supporters, who were guaranteed access to political and economic power, and the financial resources enabled by the oil boom. Military officials were awarded ministerial posts and given control of the state oil company, banks and other financial institutions—a tradition continued by Maduro (BBC News 2019a).

While most of Venezuela's democratic indicators dropped under the Chávez and Maduro regimes, Electoral Participation levels rose to unprecedented historical highs. During Chávez's rule, the country's score on this measure rose from 49 per cent (in 1994) to 82 per cent (in 2012). Similarly, levels of Direct Democracy rose by 5,700 per cent between 1996 and 2013, as a key pillar of the Bolivarian Revolution was to introduce a more participatory form of democracy, which in practice reinforced the president's hold on power and ultimately resulted in the erosion of representative democracy in Venezuela.

Venezuela deepened its autocratization process after the death of Chávez in 2013 and the handover of power to Maduro, who was not able to sustain the popular electoral support enjoyed by his predecessor. Maduro won contested presidential elections in 2013 by a very narrow margin, and again in 2018 amid allegations of fraud by the opposition (Phillips 2018). Maduro further autocratized the country by silencing critical voices, banning the main opposition parties and disabling the direct democracy mechanisms so widely used by Chávez. He also took control of the media, closing outlets and harassing and imprisoning journalists to quell dissent (Corrales and Penfold 2015).

Maduro's mandate coincided with a drop in international oil prices, which together with mismanagement of the economy led to a severe economic crisis, hyperinflation and plummeting of basic welfare and a significant increase in poverty to nearly 82 per cent in 2016 (Freitez 2016). As popular discontent grew, the opposition parties succeeded in winning the legislative elections in 2015, obtaining a majority of seats in the National Assembly. This enabled them to partially renew the composition of judicial institutions. However, in 2017, under orders from the president, the Supreme Court annulled the functioning of the National Assembly and transferred its legislative powers to the parallel National Constituent Assembly established under Chávez. It also recognized the results of the 2018 presidential election, in which Maduro was re-elected. This was despite the fact that the elections were boycotted by the main opposition forces and were viewed as fraudulent and illegitimate by leading international bodies and most Latin American governments.

Venezuela's opposition parties have historically been fragmented. The severe repression of opposition parties throughout Venezuela's democratic backsliding process has

made the task of uniting the opposition even more difficult. However, the building of alliances between a new generation of political leaders has now enabled the rallying of the opposition behind the figure of Juan Guaidó, which has helped strengthen the voice of a more unified Venezuelan opposition in its communications with the outside world (Lozano 2018; Moleiro 2019).

Despite being endowed with one of the largest oil reserves in the world, Venezuela is now experiencing general socio-economic disintegration as a consequence of its democratic decline. The economy has collapsed, with the country's gross domestic product (GDP) falling by half in the last five years, and hyperinflation spiralling to more than 1.7 million per cent in 2018 (*The Economist* 2019b). Venezuela has also experienced a sharp deterioration in basic public services and living standards, and now records some of the highest crime and homicide rates in the world, as by-products of the regime's autocratic deepening and isolation.

Venezuela's complete breakdown has caused an exodus of more than three million people in the past two years, resulting in the most severe migration crisis in Latin American history, with humanitarian implications for the entire region. Neighbouring Colombia bears the brunt of this burden, but Brazil, Ecuador and nine other countries in the region have all been affected (BBC News 2018b). There are no signs that the Maduro regime is ready to negotiate or cede power. Despite international backing for Guaidó, the president looks likely to cling on to power as long as he has the backing of the military.

all GSoD Indices aspects since 1997, and with significant declines across 11 subattributes including severe declines in Elected Government, Clean Elections, Local Democracy, Civil Society Participation, Judicial Independence, Absence of Corruption and Media Integrity. Nicaragua's democratic backsliding, when measured in terms of its average point drop since 2005 (–0.23), is not yet as severe as Venezuela's.

The two countries also differ in their democratic departure and endpoints. Venezuela's democratic performance before its backsliding process started in 1996 was in the high range on Representative Government (0.70) but dropped to the bottom 25 per cent in the world in 2018. Nicaragua, in contrast, had lower levels of democratic performance before its backsliding process started. However, as in Venezuela, its performance on Representative Government is now among the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Venezuela and Nicaragua now score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world on 12 and 11 of their 16 democratic subattributes, respectively. The economic and humanitarian collapse of Venezuela is also more severe than Nicaragua's.

In both countries the backsliding process has been gradual. In Venezuela, it has occurred during the presidencies

BOX 3.3

Nicaragua: A case study of democratic backsliding

Nicaragua is the second country in Latin America and the Caribbean, after Venezuela, to have experienced severe democratic backsliding in recent years, with an average decline of 39 per cent across all democratic dimensions since 2005.

According to the GSoD Indices, Judicial Independence has seen most declines, with a 79 per cent drop since 2005. Nicaragua's levels of Judicial Independence are now lower than they were in 1975 under the dictatorship of President Anastasio Somoza. Similarly, its Representative Government score has dropped by 44 per cent since 2005, and its Civil Liberties score by 63 per cent with Freedom of Association and Assembly suffering the greatest declines with a nearly 71 per cent drop (see Figure 3.4). Nicaragua now scores in the bottom 25 per cent in the world on 11 of 16 subattributes.

Somoza was overthrown in 1979 by the left-wing Sandinista movement whose leader, Daniel Ortega, served as President for the first time between 1985 and 1990. Nicaragua transitioned to democracy in 1990 when the Sandinistas were defeated in general elections, with the opposition presidential candidate, Violeta Chamorro, defeating Ortega. In 1996 Chamorro was, in turn, defeated, leading to the election of Arnoldo Alemán as President.

In 2000, Nicaragua's National Assembly approved constitutional reforms that reduced the minimum share of votes needed to win the presidential election from 45 to 35 per cent as part of a deal between Alemán and Ortega, then opposition leader. The reforms also allowed both leaders' parties to divide politically appointed seats on the Supreme Court and Electoral Council, and other democratic institutions, thereby allowing Ortega and the Sandinistas to secure political influence over these bodies.

Ortega was elected president for the second time in 2007 and has since ruled the country through alliances with the Catholic Church, the private sector, the judiciary and the army. Nicaragua backslid from a democracy to a hybrid regime in 2016 but, as in Venezuela, the process of democratic backsliding has been gradual.

In 2010, the Sandinista-controlled Supreme Court lifted a ban on consecutive presidential re-election, allowing Ortega to run again in 2011. In elections marred by accusations of fraud, the Sandinistas won 62 per cent of the votes, granting them an absolute majority in the National Assembly (The Carter Center 2011). This then enabled the assembly to pass fiercely criticized constitutional changes in 2014 that strengthened Ortega's hold on power, enabling him to run for re-election for a third consecutive term in 2016. In addition to abolishing term limits altogether, the constitutional revisions allowed the president to issue decrees with force of law, and to appoint active-duty police and military officials to government positions formerly reserved for civilians.

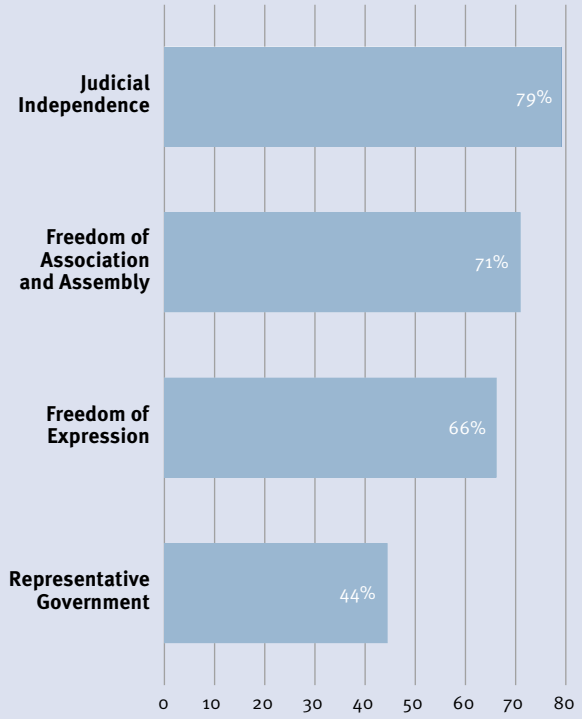
Weeks before the 2016 general elections, the Supreme Court ousted the leader of the main opposition party, the Independent Liberation Party (PLI), and appointed a new party leader with strong ties to Ortega. In 2018, a broad civil movement organized a series of protests, initially in opposition to pension-sector reforms, but increasingly focused against Ortega's nepotistic and repressive regime. In response, Ortega unleashed a violent wave of repression against the protestors.

By July 2019, at least 325 people were estimated to have been killed, including students, civil society activists and journalists, with attacks carried out to a large extent by paramilitary groups operating at Ortega's behest. Since the wave of repression began, independent news sources, human rights organizations and other civic groups have been bullied or closed, and protests have been banned, significantly reducing civic and democratic space in the country (BBC News 2019b).

Venezuela has been key to maintaining Ortega in power, funnelling large amounts of financial resources in oil cooperation into the country since 2007 via a party-controlled company with little external oversight. Venezuela's fate is therefore likely to play a key role in the unfolding developments in Nicaragua.

FIGURE 3.4

Selected indicators and percentage decreases from 2005–2018 in Nicaragua



Notes: This figure demonstrates the percentage drop between 2005 and 2018 across the Representative Government attribute, the Judicial Independence subattribute, and the Freedom of Association and Assembly and Freedom of Expression subcomponents in Nicaragua.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 3.4

The state of democracy in Nicaragua, 2005 and 2018

Year	GSoD attribute score				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
2005	0.64	0.59	0.59	0.43	Mid-range
2018	0.36	0.34	0.29	0.23	Low

High Mid-range Low

Note: Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes are not aggregated.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

of two left-wing populists: Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and Nicolás Maduro (2013–present). In Nicaragua, the backsliding process has occurred under another left-wing populist, President Daniel Ortega (2007–present), although the country's decline in democratic performance began during the conservative government of Enrique Bolaños in 2005. Other similarities include the use of constitutional revisions in both countries to abolish presidential term limits; the expansion of executive power over the legislature; and weakened checks on government—both formal (e.g. weakened judicial independence) and informal (e.g. crackdowns on media and civil society).

In both countries, regional and global geopolitics also interacts with the democratic backsliding processes, with powerful non-democracies providing their backing to the regimes. Apart from providing moral backing to Nicaragua, Cuba has supplied Venezuela with human resources in areas where the latter faces skill shortages (e.g. medical and intelligence services) in exchange for oil. Russia plays a role in both countries—although to a greater extent in Venezuela—by supplying military equipment. China has been a key partner for Venezuela, with a loan-for-oil deal under which Venezuela supplied China with oil in exchange for generous Chinese loans, and infrastructure and technology investment, including in identity registration and voting technologies (Labrador 2019; Seligman 2019).

Latin America and the Caribbean has experienced signs of democratic erosion in recent years. The share of countries with high performance levels has declined since 2012–2013 on Judicial Independence, and on the dimensions related to civic space, freedom of political parties and levels of electoral participation. Brazil, while still performing in the high range on Representative Government in 2018, had the highest number of subattribute declines in the region between 2013 and 2018, with significant declines on 8 of 16 democratic dimensions.

Bolsonaro's election in Brazil in late 2018 has been seen as a protest vote against the traditional political parties and their perceived inability to stave off corruption, reduce social inequalities, reduce crime and violence, and revive an ailing economy. However, detractors worry that Bolsonaro, a former army captain, expresses sympathy and praise for the country's former military regime. He has been criticized for defending patriarchal values and displaying disdain towards dissenters, the political left, underprivileged racial and ethnic groups and sexual minorities. The presence of retired military officers in his cabinet has also raised concerns. At the same time, others believe Brazilian institutions are strong enough to prevent an autocratic relapse (Bevins 2018).

However, other countries in the region have also experienced a deterioration in democratic performance, with declines on one or more subattributes. This includes countries in the higher range of performance (e.g. Chile, with declines on three democratic subattributes); in the mid-range (e.g. Colombia, with two declines); and in the lower tier of performance (e.g. Dominican Republic). In addition, Argentina, Costa Rica and Haiti have declined on one subattribute since 2013. All of these declines are generally linked to aspects of civic space, but also to increases in corruption (e.g. in Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Guatemala), and declines in Judicial Independence (e.g. in Bolivia and Honduras) and Clean Elections (e.g. in Honduras).

The region's electoral landscape is in a process of profound transformation

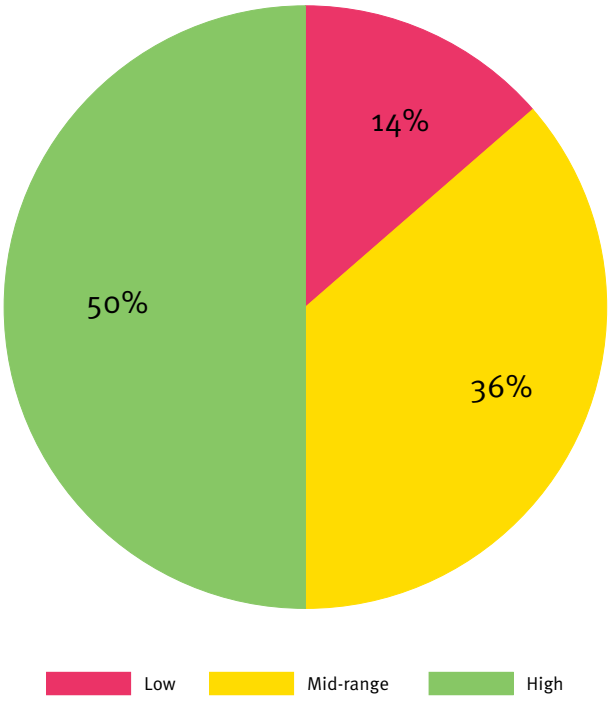
Competitive, free and fair elections are the norm in the region. Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean—apart from Cuba and, most recently, Venezuela and Nicaragua—have committed to competitive, periodic, free, fair and clean elections as the main channel to elect their governments. Moreover, electoral norms and practices in many countries in the region are of a high democratic calibre, with half (11) of the countries in the region having high levels of Clean Elections (see Figure 3.5). Of these countries, seven (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Panama and Uruguay) score among the top 25 per cent in the world.

The years 2017 to 2019 have been depicted as 'electoral marathon years' for the region, with 15 of 18 countries holding elections during this time (Zovatto 2018). In 2017, Chile, Ecuador and Honduras held elections, while in 2018 elections took place in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela. A total of six elections have been held so far in 2019: three presidential elections in Central America (in El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama), and three presidential elections in South America (in Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay). With the exception of the 2019 elections in Bolivia, the 2018 elections in Venezuela—and the 2017 presidential elections in Honduras, which have been viewed as being marred by irregularities—all of these elections have been considered largely free and fair.

The average level of Electoral Participation in the region is high. Latin America and the Caribbean records the highest levels of voter turnout in the world, at 67 per cent (compared to 63 per cent for Europe and 55 per cent for North America). However, this is not necessarily a sign of higher levels of political engagement and can be partially explained by the existence of compulsory voting laws in 14 countries in the region. In fact, Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the largest share of

FIGURE 3.5

Clean Elections in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018



Notes: A low level is characterized as a score below 0.4, while a high score is characterized as a score at or above 0.7.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

countries with such laws, although these are applied with varying degrees of enforcement.

Levels of Electoral Participation are significantly higher in the subregion of South America (72 per cent) than in Central America and the Caribbean (65 per cent), which can also be partially explained by the higher prevalence of mandatory voting in South America. All South American countries, with the exception of Chile, Colombia and Venezuela, have enacted compulsory voting laws, whereas only two Central American countries (Costa Rica and Honduras) have enacted such laws, which are not enforced. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, no Caribbean country has made voting obligatory for its citizens.

Voter turnout rates for the 14 Latin American and the Caribbean countries that have compulsory voting laws have averaged 68 per cent over the two most recent electoral cycles in each country, while in countries without such laws turnout over the same number of electoral cycles has averaged 60 per cent (International IDEA Voter Turnout Database 2019). Chile, which abolished compulsory voting in 2012, has seen a sharp decline in voter turnout, from 87 per cent in the 2010 presidential elections to 42 and 47 per cent in the 2013 and 2017 general elections, respectively. However, this decline also coincided with the simultaneous switch to automatic voter registration, which increased the number of people on the voting rolls (Bodzin 2011).

In some countries, electoral norms are distorted and used as facades to legitimize non-democratic regimes. Elections in these countries do not uphold the principles of popular control and political equality. For example, Cuba, one of the region's two non-democracies, held elections in 2018 to elect local representatives, as well as members of the national parliament, and the president. While this led to the transition of power to a non-Castro family member for the first time since the Cuban revolution in 1959, there are no signs that the country is moving towards democracy and a commitment to make elections genuinely competitive.

In Venezuela, which backslid into a non-democracy in 2017, elections have been held continuously for the past four decades, although their integrity has gradually been hollowed out as the institutions that manage and administer them have been severely weakened and no longer guarantee democratic principles or independence from the executive.

Presidential re-election rules and norms have been altered to suit incumbents. Recent controversies over presidential re-election rules (by governments on both sides of the political spectrum) illustrate this phenomenon and reinforce the personalization of political power. However, the use of constitutional amendments to enable presidential re-election is not a recent phenomenon in the region. In the 1990s, such revisions were also passed under presidents Menem in Argentina, Fujimori in Peru and Cardoso in Brazil (International IDEA 2016a).

Between 1978 and 2012, 18 countries in the region introduced changes to the rules of presidential re-election. Of these countries, 11 have made it more permissive through consecutive or indefinite re-election (International IDEA 2018)—the cases of Nicaragua and Venezuela (see Boxes 3.3 and 3.2, respectively) are arguably the most blatant examples. In Honduras, despite a constitutional ban and a 2009 Supreme Court ruling against re-election, President Juan Orlando Hernández stacked the court with supporters which then passed a ruling in 2015 that made his re-election possible, resulting in the OAS characterizing the 2017 elections as marred by 'irregularities and deficiencies' (OAS 2017; Shifter 2017).

In Bolivia, President Evo Morales' efforts to secure another presidential run by reforming the Constitution via a referendum were defeated at the polls in 2016. Morales then appealed to the Supreme Court and obtained a ruling authorizing his 2019 presidential bid. Subsequently, in 2017 the Constitutional Court responded to a government petition to eliminate term limits for all political offices, appealing to regional human rights legislation, which enabled Morales to run again in the 2019 presidential elections (*The Economist* 2017). This makes Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela the three Latin American countries (as well as 22 others in the world) to have eliminated presidential term limits.

In Ecuador in 2015, as part of a significant weakening of the judiciary and clampdown on the media, President Rafael Correa abolished presidential term limits, although they were reinstated in 2018 by his successor, Lenín Moreno, in an interesting case of a reversal of democratic backsliding (*The Guardian* 2018). Finally, in Paraguay in 2017, President Horacio Cartes sought to bypass constitutional norms barring presidential re-elections through a simple legislative vote. This triggered major street protests and the partial burning of the Congress before Cartes backed down.

As in other regions in the world, new technologies and social media are contributing to a profound change in electoral dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) now play an increasingly important role as political tools across the political spectrum, and the dissemination of political messages through social media has been a frequent feature in most recent elections, including those in Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico.

In some cases, social media is used as a communication tool to complement traditional forms of political communication, while in others it has been favoured over traditional channels. In El Salvador in 2019, Nayib Bukele won the presidential elections, thanks in large part to his anti-corruption promises, but also to his strong social media presence. During the campaign, he used social media as his primary mode of communication with voters, granting few interviews and avoiding live presidential debates (*The Economist* 2019a).

In Brazil, Bolsonaro's 2018 presidential election campaign was conducted in large part via Twitter and WhatsApp after he was stabbed during a rally and hospitalized. However, widespread access to ICTs and alternative news sources via social media applications also means that citizens in the region are more susceptible to disinformation. This development is expected to have a growing political impact, as demonstrated in the 2018 Brazilian elections, where WhatsApp became a conduit for disinformation during the election campaign (Isaac and Roose 2018).

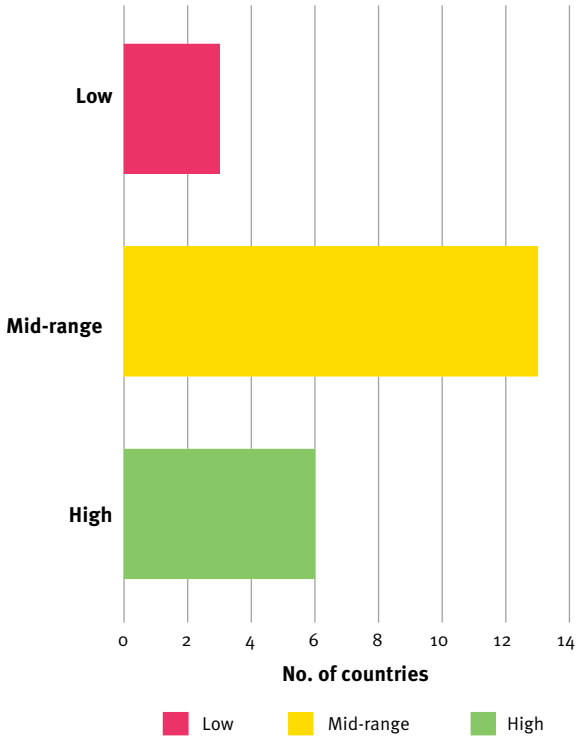
Political parties in an era of representational crisis

The political party arena in Latin America and the Caribbean is largely free. All countries in the region except Cuba have multiparty systems and allow opposition parties to operate, although the latter are severely restricted in Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela are the only three countries in the region scoring below the world average on Free Political Parties. The majority of countries in the region (59 per cent) score in the mid-range on this indicator, while six score high and eight countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay) are in the top 25 per cent in the world on this measure (see Figure 3.6). All political parties in the region,

FIGURE 3.6

Free Political Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018



Notes: A low level is characterized as a score below 0.4, while a high score is characterized as a score above 0.70.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

with the exception of those in Bolivia and Venezuela, have access to public funding, although this funding varies across the region in terms of levels, purpose (e.g. campaign funding versus funding for party operations) and source (e.g. direct versus indirect funding).

The political party arena in Latin America and the Caribbean is also more diverse and more inclusive than ever. Historically marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, have now gained greater access to the political party arena. Indigenous peoples represent 8 per cent of the population in the region (or 42 million people). Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, with more than 80 per cent of the regional total, are the countries with the largest indigenous populations (World Bank 2015).

In the past decades, indigenous-based social movements have emerged throughout the region; some have morphed into political parties. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, indigenous organizations have chosen to compete in the electoral arena through existing political parties. Other countries have seen the emergence of indigenous political parties, either at the regional (e.g. Nicaragua) or national level (e.g. Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela). Bolivia and Ecuador have the strongest indigenous parties. In Bolivia—where 41 per cent of the population is indigenous—the indigenous and worker-based Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism, MAS) is led by Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous President (World Bank 2015). Morales came to power in 2005, and was re-elected in 2009 and 2014. After abolishing term limits in 2019 Morales ran for a fourth term and won a highly disputed first round of the presidential election.

However, despite these historical advances and relative strengths, political parties in Latin America and the Caribbean also suffer from a crisis of political representation. In the last 30 years, the region has seen the demise of various established parties and the overhaul of a number of party systems, notably in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela (Levitsky et al. 2016; Mainwaring 2018). Political party fragmentation and in some cases severe weakening of the political party arena in these contexts has become a serious challenge driven by the increased personalization of representation, exacerbated by the frequent use of preferential voting in party primaries and an increase in the number of independent candidates without a party base.

This fragmentation is also driven by the spread of populist discourses throughout the region, which often portray political parties as a 'pathological agent of democracy'. The presidential systems common in the region further reinforce the personalization of political power (Casas-Zamora 2019). One explanatory factor is that political parties and parliaments have lost considerable prestige and legitimacy in a context of state weakness and high levels of socio-economic inequalities and corruption, and such candidates tap into that discontent (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). There is also a perception that traditional parties have not kept up with changing social realities and the increased demands for change they have brought about—that they have remained '19th-century institutions, with 20th-century paradigms, unequipped to tackle 21st-century problems'.[11]

Party fragmentation and reliance on pork barrelling and corruption to sustain presidential coalitions have also slowed the legislative process. Given their weak capacity to deliver, political parties and parliaments have been at the centre of much of the region's sense of civic discontent. The decline or collapse of traditional parties in the centre and on the right in several countries in the region (including Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru) can be harmful for democracy. It potentially also leaves a void that authoritarian leaders can fill, as wealthy elites may opt for authoritarian alternatives for lack of other options (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

Contributing to this loss of prestige is the sense that politicians are far removed from citizens. Social media further exacerbates the distance between parties and voters, bypassing and thereby undermining the mediating function of political parties, as individual politicians increasingly opt for direct communication with voters. This detachment further exacerbates mistrust towards political parties.

The democratic quality of political debates is also hampered by the polarization and degradation of public deliberation and discourse, including the appeal to false dilemmas, stigmas, and ridicule to humiliate opponents, which is reinforced by the increasing use of social media. Lack of concern for factual truths and a willingness to undermine the credibility of science and data as a basis on which to ascertain truths represent a potential threat to democracy as they undermine the quality and civility of public discourse, which is key to a healthy democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

11 Comments made by International IDEA's Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Daniel Zovatto, at the conference organized by International IDEA and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 'El estado de la democracia en América Latina: 40 años del inicio de la Tercera Ola Democrática' [The state of democracy in Latin America: 40 years since the beginning of the Third Democratic Wave], in Santiago de Chile, 26–28 November 2018.

In Latin America, the current election cycle reveals increasing levels of political polarization, as well as the depth of frustration with political elites and the 'old style of politics'. These developments suggest that the deeper malaise appears to be with politics as it is practised, rather than with the idea of democracy itself. Recent elections of presidential candidates often described by the media as anti-establishment—including Andrés Manuel López Obrador on the left in Mexico, Bolsonaro on the right in Brazil, and most recently Nayib Bukele in El Salvador—have largely been driven by a sense of civic anger, often directed at corrupt elites, and exhibited a strong anti-establishment bent, along with a quest to find a political redeemer. In Brazil, the 2018 elections also revealed growing signs of political polarization and societal intolerance.

In this anti-establishment setting, charges and counter-charges of corruption have been exploited in campaigning by all sides, therefore showing the extent to which accusations of corruption can be used to derail political opponents. However, it is unclear if the region's newly elected leaders will be able to combat its continuing high levels of corruption and solve their countries' societal ills, or whether they will go down the same path as their predecessors who failed in this task. The results of the current electoral cycle in the region have heightened party fragmentation, and as a consequence, in all countries except Mexico, presidents will have difficulties in establishing majority coalitions in their respective legislatures, and will face greater governing challenges, which does not bode well for forceful policy implementation.

Religion is also playing an increasing role in Latin American politics. Evangelical churches, in particular, have played a more visible role in politicizing debates over matters of gender and sexual orientation, reflecting some public resistance to societal changes at stake. Countries where evangelical Christian churches have recently exerted increasing influence on party politics include Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica (Corrales 2018).

This crisis of representation is reflected in the high levels of public mistrust of political parties and parliaments, and in the widespread perception that countries in the region are governed by oligarchies. According to the public opinion survey Latinobarómetro, in 2018, only 13 per cent of Latin Americans trusted their political parties, which were the least trusted among public institutions. Moreover, four out of five Latin Americans believed their leaders favoured the interests of the privileged few over those of the majority. This sentiment reached exceptionally high levels in Brazil (90 per cent), Mexico (88 per cent), Paraguay (87 per cent), Venezuela (86 per cent) and El Salvador (86 per cent) (Latinobarómetro 2018).

Underlying the severe lack of confidence in political parties are real apprehensions about the quality of existing political leadership, including their experience, integrity and motivations for public office. These frustrations, in turn, are exacerbated by the perceived mercantilization of politics through the purchase of legislative seats to reap immediate gains or act in the interests of wealthy campaign funders.

Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Summary: Fundamental Rights performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range (0.63)	
	High (›0.7)	Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay
	Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru
	Low (‹0.4)	Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

The region has seen advances in political gender equality despite patriarchal power structures

The GSoD Indices focus on the political dimension of Gender Equality, measuring women's representation in parliament and their participation in civil society, political power as distributed by gender, and men's and women's mean years of schooling.

Latin America and the Caribbean's levels of political Gender Equality are now relatively high compared to other regions of the world. The agenda for gender equality

Seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean score in the top 25 per cent in the world on the GSoD Indices measure of political Gender Equality. Five of these countries (Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay) are democracies, while two (Cuba and Venezuela) are non-democracies.

has made gradual yet discernible progress in the region. Levels of political Gender Equality are in the mid-range (0.63), or third-best after North America (0.75) and Europe (0.70). The steady build-up of women's associations and grassroots activities, along with the adoption of international covenants and national laws, and the formation of state agencies designed to protect women's rights and increase women's participation in the political and economic sphere, have facilitated this important transformation. The impact of these and a myriad of other undertakings has empowered women and fostered attitudinal changes in favour of gender equality and helped strengthen political equality.

Women's participation in politics has increased in visible ways. In Latin America and the Caribbean, as in Europe, women hold an average of 27 per cent of seats in parliament—this is the highest share in the world, and above the world average of 24 per cent (IPU 2019). In nine parliaments in the region, women hold more than 30 per cent of seats. Two countries (Bolivia and Cuba) are among the three countries in the world where women hold more than half of parliamentary seats.

In the last decade, four women have served as presidents in the region (Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil and Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica) and a number of women have also been top presidential contenders (in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru). According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), women's representation in subnational legislatures is at 29 per cent, slightly above the national average, with Bolivia topping the list at 51 per cent (ECLAC 2018). The regional average for women in ministerial cabinet-level positions is 27 per cent and the average representation of women in positions in the highest courts of justice increased by 12 percentage points between 2004 and 2014, reaching a regional average of 29 per cent (ECLAC 2018).

The relatively high levels of women's parliamentary representation in Latin America have largely been driven by the introduction of gender quotas. In 1991, Argentina was the first country in the world to introduce a quota law for female representation in parliament. Other countries have since followed suit. According to a 2017 report, 19 countries in the region have adopted some form of legislative quota for women, 5 of which have shifted to parity regimes requiring 50:50 gender representation (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017: 38–42). Four of these countries—Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico—are among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of women's representation in national parliaments. Moreover, in 2019, the Mexican Senate and Chamber of Deputies approved a bill requiring all three branches and levels of government to have 50 per cent representation of women. This reform, once approved by a majority of state legislatures, will be the first of its kind worldwide (Cámara de Diputados 2019).

The expansion and strengthening of Latin American civil society have also opened up spaces for women's engagement. According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, women's participation in civil society has increased by 30 per cent over the last four decades (Coppedge et al. 2018). Efforts to advance gender equality and economic improvement, and deter violence against women, have raised new issues on the public agenda.

These developments have been propelled by the establishment of national organizations, regional and global networks, and actions to foster women's participation in community development. Massive mobilizations have been carried out to protest violence against women, including the #NiUnaMenos (NotOneLess) movement which started in Argentina, in 2015, and spread thereafter to Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay, among other places. In Brazil, women convened large rallies across Brazil during the 2018 presidential campaign, under the hashtag #EleNão (NotHim), to oppose Bolsonaro's patriarchal views on women (Darlington 2018).

Despite these important advances, a number of challenges must be overcome if Latin America and the Caribbean is to achieve equality for women and men in political, social and economic life. Regional averages conceal stark disparities between countries in political gender equality. While women hold over 30 per cent of seats in almost half of the national parliaments in the region, eight countries have levels below the world average of 24 per cent, including Honduras (21 per cent); Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama and Paraguay (15 per cent); and Haiti, with only 2.5 per cent (IPU 2019).

According to the Gender Equality Observatory of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the

Caribbean (ECLAC), in most countries that have adopted parity targets for women in the legislature, there is still a notable gap between women's representation in these legislatures and the proportion of women in other state institutions. Currently, not one head of state in the region is a woman, and only 15.5 per cent of mayors are women (ECLAC n.d.).

The proportion of women in cabinet-level positions is highest in the hybrid regime of Nicaragua (47 per cent), followed at some distance by democracies such as Chile and Uruguay (36 per cent), while Brazil only has two female cabinet members. On average, women account only for 10 per cent of political party presidents and 13 per cent of general secretaries (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017: 40; ECLAC 2018). Moreover, weak political participation and representation of indigenous women and women of African descent remains an important challenge.

Worryingly, the share of countries with high levels of Gender Equality has decreased (see Figure 3.7). Countries in the region which have recorded declines from high to mid-range levels in their Gender Equality scores since 2014 include Argentina and Brazil, with the latter experiencing the most significant decline in the region on this dimension.

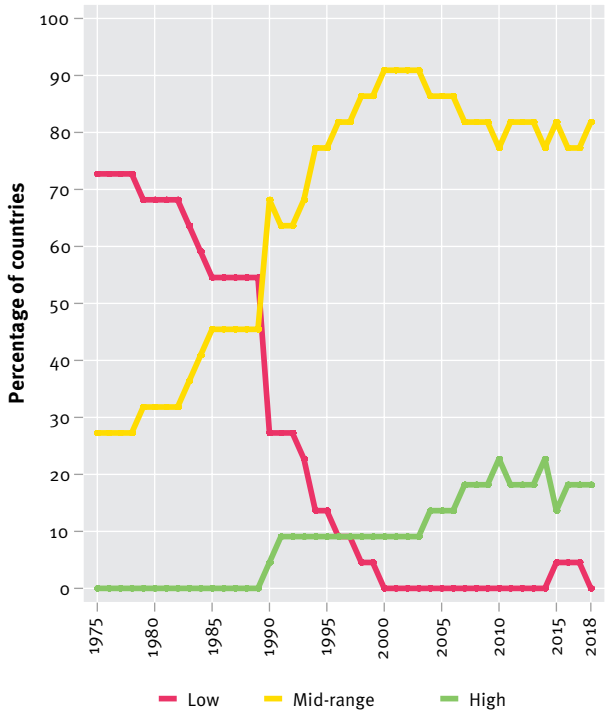
While advances have been made on political gender equality, there has been an increase in discrimination and violence against women in the political sphere. This reflects the backlash which women's advancement in highly patriarchal societies may encounter (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017). There are also manifestations of a growing backlash from some sectors of Latin American society towards the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. This is partly being led by conservative sectors of the Catholic Church and a rising number of Protestant churches, mostly of a Pentecostal bent. Their campaigns against what is described as the 'ideology of gender' have stirred greater polarity around matters dealing with homosexuality and women's reproductive rights. The climate of greater hostility on these issues reflects the concerns raised by social advancements made in this domain (Corrales 2018).

Deep economic and social inequalities translate into the political arena and distort political equality

The region's longstanding social disparities, underscored by high concentration of wealth, constitute a barrier to democracy and contribute to undermine democratic progress in Latin America and the Caribbean (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; International IDEA 2016a).

FIGURE 3.7

Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Latin America has the world's largest asymmetries in income and land distribution. Of the 26 most unequal countries in the world (as measured by the Gini coefficient), over half (15) are in Latin America, with Brazil topping the regional list as the fifth-most unequal country in the world (World Bank 2018). While relative levels of inequality have declined across the region since 2002, the reduction in inequality has stagnated since 2015 (ECLAC 2018; Lopez-Calva and Lustig 2010). Moreover, studies that focus on absolute levels of inequality have found rising income disparities in Latin America and the Caribbean (see e.g. Niño-Zarazúa, Roope and Tarp 2017).

Ordinary people are generally inclined to perceive variations in absolute, as opposed to relative, inequality (Payne 2018). Therefore, while policymakers celebrated 'Latin America's inequality reduction', public discontent about the region's levels of inequality rose. During the last decade, on average, four of every five people in the region regarded their societies as unjust (Latinobarómetro 2018: 44). In addition, despite Latin America's increased

wealth, approximately one-third of its population still lives in poverty and another one-third in a state of vulnerability. These citizens often lack effective legal rights, as well as basic information about these rights and the resources to pay for legal representation. As voters, many are susceptible to clientelist politics.

The region's socio-economic inequalities translate into the political arena in terms of unequal access to power, unequal representation and unequal enjoyment of civil liberties. This constitutes a vicious cycle, as unequal access to influence over public policies and political decisions contributes, in turn, to perpetuating inequality and a 'culture of privilege' that impedes change (UNDP 2010; ECLAC 2018: 26).

Access to political power by different social groups is measured by the GSoD Indices subcomponent of Social Group Equality (see Figure 3.8). Democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean perform particularly poorly on this aspect. The average for the region is 0.46, which is similar to the averages recorded by Africa (0.45) and Asia and the Pacific (0.43), which have significantly lower levels of democratic development.

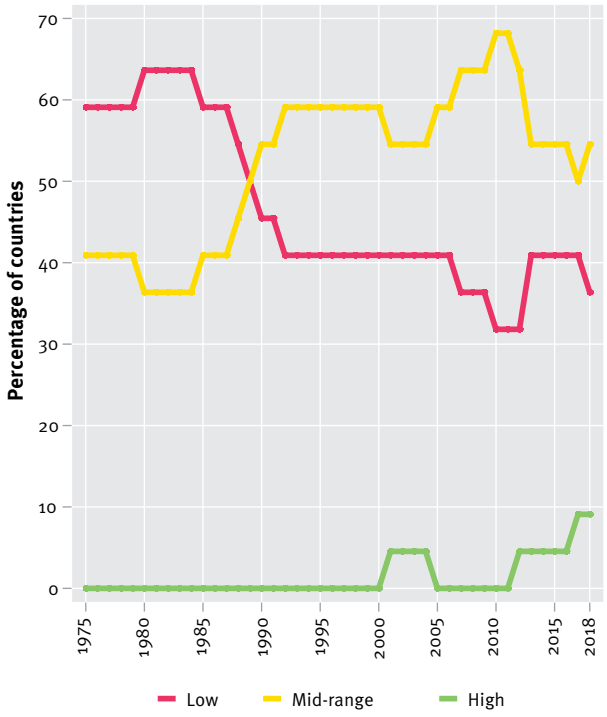
One-third (36 per cent) of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean now record low scores on this indicator and eight (Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay) score in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. With the exception of Nicaragua, all of these countries are democracies. Only 14 democracies in the world have low levels of Social Group Equality; 7 are in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, two countries in the region (Costa Rica and Uruguay) stand out, with high levels of Social Group Equality.

Table 3.5 illustrates the relationship between Social Group Equality score and inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient for 18 of the 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The table also includes their regime status, level of Representative Government, Social Group Equality score, and the score each country received according to the Gini Index.

Citizens' disenchantment with democracy in the region is a product of the political effects produced by extreme wealth inequalities. These effects subvert democracy's principle of political equality; undermine the development of the rule of law and respect for human rights; and nurture social discontent, which fuels mistrust, exacerbates societal tensions, give rises to crime and violence and fosters recurrent instability.

FIGURE 3.8

Social Group Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Societies with severe wealth disparities exhibit distorted power relations that bend the rules of the game and produce disproportionate political representation (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Payne 2018). As a result, politics and public policies—including subsidies, taxation and legal enforcement—are configured to favour the interests of the well-to-do (Levitsky and Murillo 2014; Oxfam International 2014). The privileged can subvert democratic institutions designed to ensure accountability and fairness. This propagates a culture of distrust that undercuts the legitimacy of the political process.

Deep inequalities also lead to crime and violence, which further undermines trust in democracy

High levels of socio-economic and political inequalities are also one of the causes of the high and rising levels of crime and violence in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Organized crime is also tied to drug trafficking. Rising levels of crime and violence constitute a serious impediment to strengthening the quality of democracy in the region (Morlino 2018;

TABLE 3.5

Social Group Equality and Gini coefficient in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012–2018

Country	Regime type	Level of Representative Government	Social Group Equality score	Gini coefficient
Costa Rica	Democracy	High	0.74	48.3
Uruguay	Democracy	High	0.72	39.5
Argentina	Democracy	High	0.57	40.6
Bolivia	Democracy	Mid-range	0.60	44.0
Brazil	Democracy	High	0.42	53.3
Chile	Democracy	High	0.51	46.6
Ecuador	Democracy	Mid-range	0.48	44.7
Mexico	Democracy	Mid-range	0.41	43.4
Panama	Democracy	High	0.50	49.9
Peru	Democracy	High	0.45	43.3
Colombia	Democracy	High	0.31	49.7
Dominican Republic	Democracy	Mid-range	0.35	45.7
El Salvador	Democracy	Mid-range	0.29	38.0
Guatemala	Democracy	High	0.27	48.3
Haiti	Democracy	Mid-range	0.27	41.1
Honduras	Democracy	Mid-range	0.36	50.5
Nicaragua	Hybrid regime	Mid-range	0.29	46.2
Paraguay	Democracy	Mid-range	0.33	48.8

High Mid-range Low

Notes: Representative Government is not scored numerically in this table but rather categorized according to one of the three levels: low, mid-range and high. Social Group Equality is scored from 0 to 1, where a higher number indicates high levels of Social Group Equality. The Gini Index measures income or wealth distribution within a population from 0 per cent to 100 per cent, where 100 per cent represents absolute inequality and 0 per cent represents perfect equality. The logic of interpreting the Gini Index is in contrast to interpreting the GSoD scores. Gini coefficient figures represent the most recent available data from 2012 to 2018.

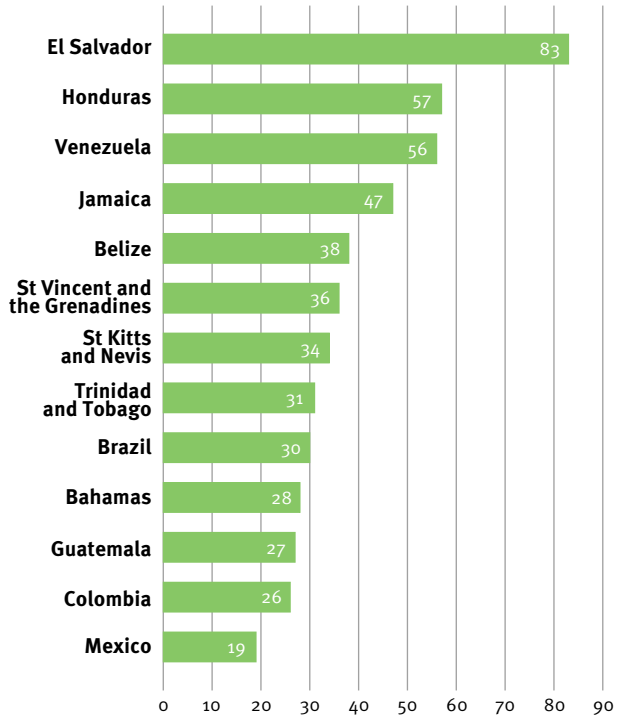
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>; World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>.

UNDP 2013). Homicide rates in Latin America and the Caribbean are the highest in the world—at 24 per 100,000 inhabitants, five times the global average (see Figure 3.9 for national breakdowns)—and are closely tied to levels of inequality, weak judicial institutions and the region's failed drug war (Jaitman 2017). Much of this is related to violence over the illicit drug trade and the rising number of urban street gangs, especially in Central America's northern triangle of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (Labrador and Renwick 2018).

Crime and violence can weaken democracy in several ways. Despite significant advances in economic and human development, high levels of crime and violence produce feelings of insecurity. This can fuel fear among citizens and frustration over the state's inability to provide

FIGURE 3.9

Homicide rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016



Notes: This figure shows the number of homicides per 100,000 people for 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2016.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank based on UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Homicide, ‹https://dataunodc.un.org/GSH_app›.

public security, which can negatively impact on trust in democracy (Casas-Zamora 2013a).

According to data for 2016–2017 from the AmericasBarometer survey produced by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 44 per cent of citizens felt unsafe in their neighbourhoods, and nearly one in five people claimed they were very unsafe. Almost one-quarter of citizens had been victimized by crime in the preceding year (Cohen, Lupu and Zechmeister 2017: 71–79).

Political leaders can draw on public sentiments to galvanize support by promising to restore order through forceful policies (*mano dura* or iron fist). These are often based on simplistic solutions that can further aggravate, rather than address, problems or even undermine democracy through human rights abuses. Moreover, the perceived inability of the state to tackle crime and violence is a compounding factor that can further reduce public trust in democracy. Public insecurity also reduces interpersonal trust, which hampers the development of social capital that a vibrant civil society requires (OECD 2018).

Latin America and the Caribbean has very low levels of interpersonal trust, with only 14 per cent of respondents to the 2018 Latinobarómetro survey (which covers 18 countries in the region) stating that they can trust most people. Interpersonal trust is lowest in Brazil, at only 4 per cent of those surveyed (Latinobarómetro 2018: 46–47). Moreover, the close connection between crime and violence, illicit financing and politics in some countries in the region (e.g. in Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico) also negatively impacts on democracy as it distorts principles of political equality and popular control (Casas-Zamora 2013b).

Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

Summary: Checks on Government performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range (0.56)	
	High (›0.7)	Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay
	Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay
	Low (‹0.4)	Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

Judicial institutions have been strengthened, but challenges to the rule of law remain

Considerable efforts have been made in recent decades to strengthen the capacity of judicial institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean. These efforts have been accompanied by attempts to boost the capacity of prosecutors, police investigators and judges. Considerable efforts have also been made to professionalize Latin America's civil service, by introducing meritocratic criteria

in hiring and promotion, and enhancing overall effectiveness (Hammergren 2007, 2008; Arantes 2011; Cortázar Velarde, Lafuente and Sanginés 2014).

In Brazil, had these efforts not been made, it is unlikely that the so-called Odebrecht corruption scandal (referred to as *Lava Jato* or 'Operation Car Wash' in Brazil)—the largest foreign bribery case in history—would have been uncovered. Between 2001 and 2015 the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht configured a network of public officials, politicians and local companies in 10 countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela through which they channelled more than USD 788 million in bribes and payoffs to secure public contracts (Deutsche Welle 2018).

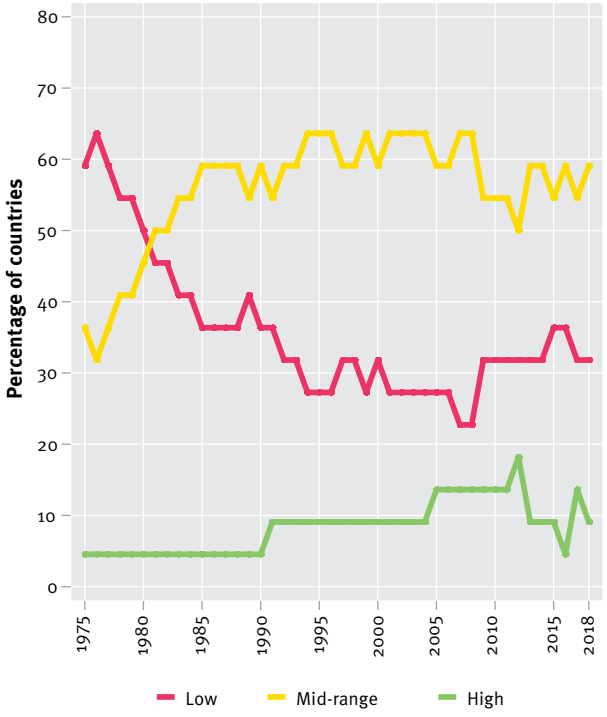
However, despite these advances, progress in setting up impartial, transparent and accountable public administrations in the region has been slow, imbalanced and beset by implementation problems and enforcement difficulties. The incongruence between formal rule-making and de-facto power holders, and wide discretion over enforcement, has been a constant predicament for effective institution building in Latin America. It is also one of the reasons for the slow progress of the region in combating corruption.

The judiciary is generally perceived as one of the most problematic branches of the state in Latin America and the Caribbean and remains weak in many countries. Almost one-third (32 per cent) of countries score low on Judicial Independence, with five countries (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela) in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Only two countries in the region (Jamaica and Uruguay) have high levels of Judicial Independence (see Figure 3.10).

Weak judicial capacity affects the ability of countries to adequately combat corruption, crime and violence and the illicit trade associated with it. For example, illicit networks have penetrated parts of the state in Mexico, which is among the 20 countries in the world with the highest homicide rates (UN Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.). Mexico has four times fewer judges and magistrates than any other country in the world and also has the fourth-highest levels of impunity (Global Impunity Dimensions 2017). Of the 10 countries in the world with high levels of impunity, five (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela) are Latin American. Of these countries, all apart from Peru are among the countries in the world with the highest levels of homicide rates (Global Impunity Dimensions 2017).

FIGURE 3.10

Judicial Independence in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

The weakness of the judiciary is also mirrored in public sentiment. Only 24 per cent of people in Latin America trust the judiciary, while 43 per cent believe that magistrates are deeply corrupt (Latinobarómetro 2018: 48, 67). Underlying these sentiments is the perceived influence of organized crime on the judiciary, and the feeling that 'justice can be bought' by those with money and power. In the minds of ordinary people, this accounts for the fact that those who often end up in prison are overwhelmingly poor, illiterate and deprived of connections. The region's performance on Access to Justice further compounds this problem. Half of Latin America and the Caribbean countries score at or below the global average on the measure, with six in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

Perceptions of politicization compound judiciaries' problems with impunity and weak enforcement capacity. Controversies over the judicialization of politics—whereby courts at different levels play an increasingly political role—not only reveal the use of *de jure* powers but suggest the judiciary can also act as a de-facto power holder (Sieder,

Schjolden and Angell 2005: 2). Few mechanisms are available to hold such powers accountable or prevent the judiciary from undermining democratic norms. Moreover, in some countries, high-court magistrates are susceptible to political pressure.

The bending of constitutional norms undermines checks on government

Since 1978, most countries in the region have enacted new constitutions, and all have amended existing constitutional frameworks (International IDEA 2018). Some of these constitutional changes have been made as part of transitions from authoritarianism to democracy with the aim of strengthening the democratic framework. However, a number of revisions have also been made that weaken checks on government, both as part of processes of democratic backsliding and breakdown (e.g. in Nicaragua and Venezuela) and in democracies with varying levels of performance and on both the left and right of the political spectrum (e.g. Bolivia, Honduras and Paraguay). Examples of changes that have bent constitutional norms include extending presidential re-election limits and increasing executive powers over the judiciary and other control organs of the state.

Balance-of-power issues among key democratic institutions remain an enduring source of political dispute in Latin America. The legacies of *caudillismo* (or strongman leaders) in the region have fuelled numerous cases of presidential overreach, facilitated by systems whose constitutional design traditionally concentrates more power in the executive, leading to Latin American systems being dubbed as 'hyper-presidential' (International IDEA 2016a; Ollier 2018). Such systems have been used by leaders with authoritarian tendencies to exercise their powers in ways deemed largely unaccountable to the legislative and judicial branches. This has given rise to what scholars have referred to as 'delegative democracies', exemplified most recently by Correa's presidency in Ecuador in the period 2007–2017 (O'Donnell 1999; Conaghan 2016).

Recent instances of impeachment have also set off intense national debates over the appropriate use of this extreme measure in a presidential democracy. The controversial impeachments of presidents in Paraguay (2012) and Brazil (2016), in a manner akin to a parliamentary no-confidence vote, have stirred criticism. The impeachment trial of President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay was completed within less than 24 hours and prompted international condemnation of the 'parliamentary coup' (*The Guardian* 2012). In Brazil, while proponents celebrated the 'legality' of the impeachment vote against President Dilma Rousseff, critics maintained that this act of legislative overreach had undermined the president's electoral legitimacy (Taub 2016). In both countries, Supreme Court decisions to uphold the impeachment votes did little to settle the polarized disputes and lingering mistrust stirred by these measures.

Presidential and legislative overreach, and other misuses of institutional rules, suggests that the main risk to democracy in Latin America is the misuse of democracy's own instruments. The main challenges no longer come from external actors (e.g. the military) but from players who gain authority through open elections and then use this power in ways that corrode democratic institutions and practices. This erosion tends to be gradual, drawing on public support and using legal instruments. Its political entrepreneurs stoke the fears and discontent of citizens, while making strong appeals to national symbols and promising to restore law and order.

Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

Summary: Impartial Administration performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.47)	
High (>0.7)	Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru
Low (<0.4)	Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela

Weak rule of law and low judicial capacity hamper efforts to combat corruption

Despite democratic advances, levels of corruption remain high in a number of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. This constitutes a serious impediment to strengthening the quality of democracy in the region (Morlino 2018; International IDEA 2016a). Corruption is viewed as one of the main reasons for the growing dissatisfaction with, and decline of trust in, governments. It also contributes to the weakening of what is often termed 'the social contract', with negative consequences for democracy (OECD 2018, World Bank 2018).

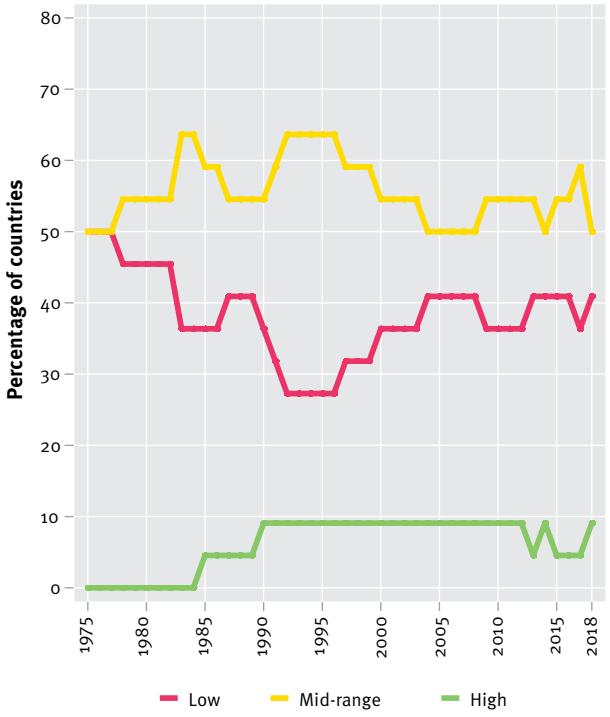
According to the GSoD Indices, of all the aspects of Latin American and the Caribbean democracy in the past decades, the lowest and slowest progress has been made in reducing corruption. Almost half (41 per cent) of countries in the region have high levels of corruption, including almost one-third of the region's democracies (see Figure 3.11). After the Middle East and Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean has the largest share of democracies (31 per cent) with high levels of corruption (Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay), despite having much higher levels of overall democratic development (see Table 3.6).

Moreover, the hybrid regime of Nicaragua and the non-democracies of Cuba and Venezuela all have high levels of corruption. This was also the case in Nicaragua prior to the start of its democratic backsliding process, while Venezuela's levels of corruption were formerly in the mid-range, or at borderline low levels. Five of the countries (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela) have been vulnerable to backsliding into hybridity or experiencing full democratic breakdown in recent decades. Chile and Uruguay are the only countries in the region that currently have low levels of corruption.

Since 2000, six presidents in the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala and two in Peru) have been forced out of power before their term was up due to corruption scandals (BBC News 2018a). In the past 10 years, almost half of the Latin American region's ex-presidents have been accused of, or indicted for, corruption (Lagos 2018).

FIGURE 3.11

Absence of Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 3.6

Levels of corruption and regime types in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

Regime type	Level of corruption		
	Low	Mid-range	High
Democracy	Chile, Costa Rica	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago	Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Paraguay
Hybrid regime			Nicaragua
Non-democracy			Cuba, Venezuela

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Efforts to fight corruption in the region have often faced stiff resistance from those with political power. This resistance stems from the fact that corruption in a number of countries is deeply embedded within the political structure and reaches the highest levels of political power. The recent attempts by Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales to shut down the UN International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIG), which is mandated to fight corruption in Guatemala, is one example of the type of resistance anti-corruption efforts encounter in the region (Partlow 2018).

Corruption represents an impediment to democratic strengthening and can undermine democracy, as high levels of corruption have been shown to reduce citizens' trust in democracy (International IDEA 2016a; OECD 2018). Public opinion data shows that dissatisfaction with high levels of corruption and perceived ineffectiveness in reducing corruption are a significant source of civic discontent. Only 35 per cent of citizens in the region are satisfied with how their governments are tackling corruption (OECD 2018: 16).

As the Odebrecht scandal revealed, much of the large-scale corruption in Latin America revolves around public works contracts and election campaign financing. Campaign finance remains a vexed problem for democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, despite efforts to improve its regulation. The costs of running for office have increased substantially in the last two decades and this deters promising candidates from entering the field. Opacities and inconsistencies in regulatory frameworks, and weak enforcement capacities, add to the uneven application of existing laws. Adequate controls over the financing of local and provincial elections (and primary polls in selected countries) appear to be particularly lacking. In some parts of Latin America, public resources are still ostensibly (and illegally) used to underwrite political campaigns (International IDEA and Clingendael Institute 2016).

Public funding of political parties, although constructive, has not been the panacea many had expected. In addition, laws regarding limits on campaign spending have been difficult to impose. Close relations between political parties and large corporations—which have been observed in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and other countries—fuel perceptions of corruption and elite capture.

The role of illicit funding sources—narco-mafias and crony capitalists—remains a critical problem, particularly at the local level, given their ability to elect legislators and other public officials linked to criminal groups. In Colombia, for instance, about one-third of the legislators in the National Congress in 2005 were allegedly linked to paramilitary squads (International IDEA and NIMD 2014). In Guatemala, 25 per cent of campaign funds are estimated to come directly from organized crime (Beltrán and Hite 2019). In Mexico, 44 per cent of businesses report having made unofficial payments to public officials (International IDEA 2016b). Among poorer citizens, clientelism and vote buying remain an enduring practice, in some countries palpably more so than others (Casas-Zamora 2013b).

Organized criminal networks have exploited state fragility

Corruption in the region is often, but not always, linked to illicit financing. The expansion of narco-mafia forces and criminal groups in Latin America and the Caribbean fuels not just corruption but crime and violence as well.

Organized criminal networks are adept at exploiting elements of state fragility in the region. The main source of wealth for these groups originates in the narcotics trade. The huge profit margins generated by this illicit enterprise have enabled mafia groups and illicit criminal networks to influence various parts of the state and the political system in democracies such as Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. They have done so by financing election campaigns; bribing judges, military officers, and police and government officials; or using violence and intimidation to pursue their ends.

Acts of collusion between state agents, elements of the financial sector involved in money-laundering, and narco-mafias are not uncommon. While the so-called war on drugs has led, on occasions, to the arrest of mafia network leaders, it has not changed the incentive structure that fuels their illicit business model, or the extensive corruption and violence derived from it (International IDEA, OAS and Inter-American Dialogue 2015; Casas-Zamora 2013b; International IDEA and NIMD 2014; International IDEA and Clingendael Institute 2016).

By boosting corrupt practices within the political arena and the state, notably through illicit campaign contributions and bribes to public security and court officials, the narcotics economy is also responsible for undermining the credibility of the region's democratic processes and public institutions.

Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in civil society organizations (CSOs) and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

Summary: Participatory Engagement performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range	
	High	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay
	Mid-range	Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay
	Low	Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela

An empowered citizenship and vibrant civil society face a shrinking civic space

The notable expansion of political freedoms in Latin America and the Caribbean has led to a significant transformation of its civil society and to an increasingly empowered citizenship. The expansion of political freedoms has allowed for the organization and incorporation of historically marginalized sectors of society into the civil society arena. Examples include groups led by women, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, landless peasants, urban squatters, the disabled and sexual minorities.

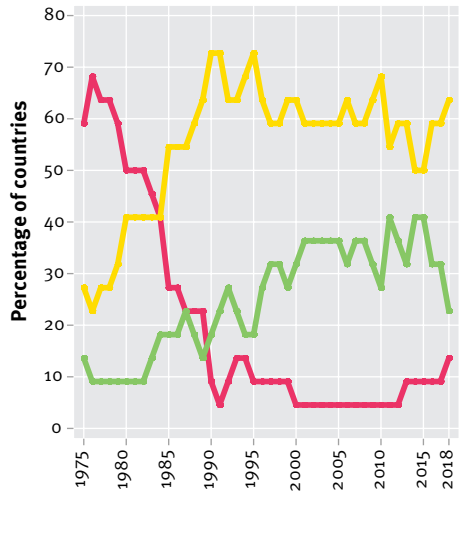
A parallel delegitimization of political parties has led rising middle classes in the region to increasingly channel their demands through civic organizations and new forms of civic activism—which are more spontaneous and fragmented and less based on formal organizational structures—in the form of both online and offline protests (International IDEA 2016a).

Examples of citizens' movements against corruption include 'Justicia Ya' (Justice Now) in Guatemala, the protests against corruption in Brazil in 2016–2018, and protests in 2019 in Honduras against reforms to the education and health sectors and to denounce illicit campaign finance. By providing forums for new voices and bringing in new issues through more diverse channels, these movements have helped democratize—and significantly reshape—the public agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, as in other parts of the world, Latin America and the Caribbean has also experienced a shrinking civic and media space in recent years. The share of countries in the region with high levels of Civil Society Participation and Media Integrity has been halved since 2015 (see Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13). The share of countries with high levels of Civil Liberties has also seen a significant decline, while the share of countries with low levels has increased (see Figure 3.14).

FIGURE 3.12

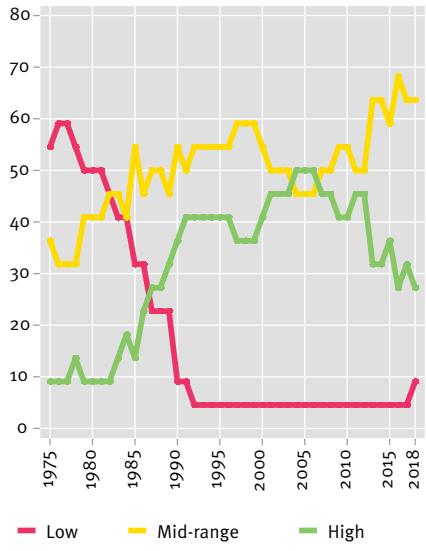
Civil Society Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 3.13

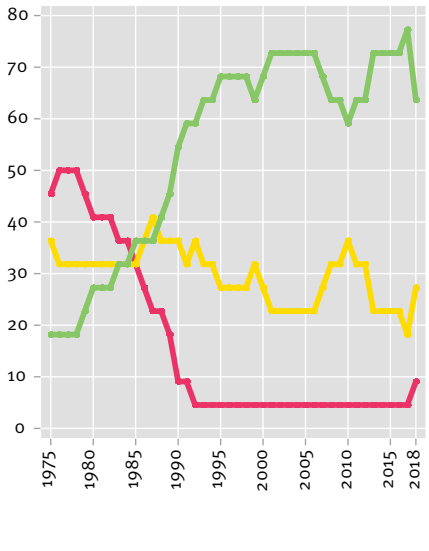
Media Integrity in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 3.14

Civil Liberties in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Limitations on civic space are often, but not always, linked to corruption and illicit networks (CIVICUS 2016). Two clusters of countries can be identified: (a) those that experience shrinking civic space as part of a general democratic breakdown (e.g. Venezuela and Nicaragua); and (b) countries experiencing different degrees of democratic erosion, and which have restricted the space for civil society or the media through specific regulatory measures that affect the right to protest and operate, as well as media freedom.

In Brazil the limiting of civic space has occurred in a context of democratic erosion, where CSOs and activists face increasing threats and have been subject to violence. Brazil is the only democracy in the region that has seen declines on all three aspects of civic space measured in the GSoD Indices: Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation. Colombia and Chile have seen declines in two dimensions of civic space (Civil Liberties and Media Integrity), while other countries have seen declines in one dimension only, including Argentina (Media Integrity), and Costa Rica and Haiti (Civil Liberties).

Civic space in the region has been restricted via a wide range of legislation regulating civil society's activities. Legislation has been approved and implemented in three main areas.

First, governments have regulated CSO registration, operation and access to funding, or renewed existing legislation. Examples include legislation passed in Venezuela in 2010, Ecuador in 2013 (but reversed in 2017), Bolivia in 2013 and Panama and Colombia in 2017. Second, governments have regulated protest, as shown by laws passed in Argentina, Brazil and Chile in 2017, and in Nicaragua in 2018. Third, governments have regulated the Internet, with laws passed in Bolivia, Guatemala and Honduras in 2017.

In addition, governments have regulated media organizations and journalists through legislation affecting free speech (in Venezuela) and concentration of media ownership (in Argentina). Defamation lawsuits and threats against journalists have been used, leading to self-censorship (in Dominican Republic and Panama), while harassment or killings of civil society activists, including human rights defenders and journalists, have also occurred.

Similar to other regions, Latin America has also seen a recent increase in violence against journalists and civil society activists fighting to protect the environment and human rights and advance social rights among the poor. Front Line Defenders (2019) reports that, in 2018, 74 per cent of the 321 human rights activists murdered worldwide were killed in Latin America, with the highest number recorded in Colombia (126), followed by Mexico (48), Guatemala (26), Brazil (23), Honduras (8) and Venezuela (5). Mexico is the deadliest country in the world for journalists outside a conflict zone, with nine journalists murdered in 2018.[12] In total, 14 journalists were killed in Latin America in 2018. Generally, journalists reporting on political corruption (especially at the local level) and organized crime are targeted (Reporters Without Borders 2018).

In Brazil, the number of murders of members of the LGBT community has seen a sharp increase, to 420 in 2018 (Telesur 2019). The country has also experienced a spike in assassinations of peasant and indigenous activists in recent years, with a total of 182 killings between 2015 and 2017 (Comissão Pastoral da Terra 2018: 23). Violent acts and efforts to intimidate social activists induce fear and restrict their public engagement, and therefore reduce the civic space needed for democracy.

Between 2013 and 2018, two countries in the region (Brazil and Venezuela) have seen significant declines across all dimensions of civic space (Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation). In the same time period, Costa Rica has seen declines in Freedom of Expression, due to defamation lawsuits, and Argentina on Media Integrity due to concentration of media ownership.

The transformation of the media landscape has implications for civic space and democracy

Large media conglomerates continue to set much of the news agenda across Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in most countries, one firm controls about half of the market in each media category. In Colombia, three conglomerates dominate more than 60 per cent of the country's radio, print and Internet market. In Chile, two companies share more than 90 per cent of the nation's newspaper readers (*The Economist* 2018; UNESCO 2018). A free, unbiased and critical press is key to healthy democracies, as is a diverse media environment that provides a wide range of perspectives. An environment in which media ownership is highly concentrated can therefore be harmful for democracy.

12 Front Line Defenders is an international human rights organization and is one of several organizations collecting data on threats against human rights activists. However, data on the killings of human rights activists is highly contested as there is no global agreement on who should be classified as such. Moreover, the data coverage tends to be incomplete, especially in countries where human rights activists are exposed to high levels of repression.

Along with the concentration of news media, studies have detected large numbers of 'news deserts' or towns without local news coverage. In Brazil, more than half of all municipalities have no local news outlets, while another 30 per cent of these towns are virtual 'news deserts' with only one or two homegrown news media organizations. All told, 64 million Brazilians, one-third of the country's population, are deprived of adequate news coverage, and therefore impoverished in terms of the quality of democratic debate (see Atlas da Notícia 2018). The existence of media oligopolies and 'news deserts' have triggered discussions over how to improve access to information and ensure the representation of a plurality of ideas and interests in the public arena.

Information and communications technologies are redefining the political landscape in Latin America

Citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean have gained significant access to the Internet and ICTs. Nine out of 10 adults in the region have a mobile phone, and nearly half have a smartphone, while 44 per cent have Internet connections in their homes. The number of Facebook users has tripled in the region over the last 10 years, rising to 60 per cent of the population in 2018, and is surpassed only by the number of WhatsApp users, which amounts to 64 per cent of the region's inhabitants (Latinobarómetro 2018: 76–78).

As a result of these technological changes, Latin American societies have become more sophisticated in terms of the opportunities available for people to access information and communicate with their fellow citizens. With these changes, Latin American citizens and particularly those in the growing middle sectors have found new instruments to make their voices heard and amplify demands to fight corruption, curb elite privileges and enhance government effectiveness. The Internet has helped democratize access to information, notably through the creation of alternative news outlets and blogs.

However, the growing number of independent, professionally run online news sources—such as Aristegui Noticias in Mexico, Connectas in Colombia, Nexo and Agência Pública in Brazil—have had to contend with the rise of tawdry and dishonest practices on the Internet and elsewhere. Disinformation is not a new phenomenon, although the Internet and social media have accelerated the speed with which it can be reproduced. Disinformation can prey on people's ignorance and reinforce and amplify existing prejudices.

Countering disinformation can be a challenging task for journalists, as they navigate the hazard of amplifying its negative effects in the process of seeking to debunk it. Attempts to regulate disinformation in the press and on social media need to find a balance between the right to information and other rights, such as freedom of expression.

There has been a decline in popular support for democracy

Societal frustration with existing democracies increases the risk of democratic deterioration. Data from two region-wide public opinion surveys—LAPOP and the Latinobarómetro—show a decline in the support for democracy across the region. LAPOP records a 12-point drop in support for democracy over the last decade, from 70 per cent in 2008 to 58 per cent in 2017, with close to a 9-point decline in the last three years alone. Trust in elections has remained low, at 39 per cent, and has fallen by six points in recent years. Similarly, trust in political parties remains very low, at 18 per cent, and has fallen every year since 2012 (Cohen, Lupu and Zechmeister 2017).

Latinobarómetro shows a similar trend. Between 2010 and 2018 support for democracy declined by 13 points, from 61 per cent to 48 per cent—the lowest figures recorded in Latin America since 2001, amid a regional economic slump. Over 2018 alone, support for democracy fell by five points. Young people (aged 16 to 25), recorded the lowest levels of support for democracy, at 44 per cent, with nearly one-third (31 per cent) saying they felt indifferent about living in a regime that was either democratic or undemocratic (Latinobarómetro 2018: 15 and 22).

Latinobarómetro also found increasing levels of dissatisfaction with democracy, which rose by 12 points over the last decade, from 59 per cent in 2008 to 71 per cent in 2018. Equally, satisfaction with democracy has declined by 20 points in the last eight years, to 24 per cent in 2018. These shifts were particularly acute in 2018, which registered a six-point drop from 2017. This development has been most pronounced in Brazil, where satisfaction with democracy fell from 49 per cent in 2010 to 9 per cent in 2018 (Latinobarómetro 2018: 35–37).

The political empowerment of the middle classes, and their expectations and frustrations, is crucial for democracy. The World Bank estimates that the Latin America and Caribbean middle class grew by 50 per cent between 2000 and 2010, increasing from 100 million to 150 million people for the first time in the history of the region (Ferreira et al. 2013). These new middle classes have generated a 'revolution of expectations', demanding effective solutions to the societal challenges affecting the region (International IDEA 2016a: 21).

The middle classes often feel vulnerable in the context of economic (including technological) changes that can lead to occupational skidding (the inability of workers to obtain jobs aligned with their skills and qualifications) and greater

job anxiety. Concerns over public insecurity, an immigration surge, lingering class and racial tensions, or rapid changes in gender relations, can exacerbate fears and feelings of mistrust, resentment, discrimination and hatred. Polities that are perceived to have been 'captured by elites', ridden with corruption, ineffective and unresponsive to people's needs and expectations, unable to guarantee basic social rights and offer a 'fair deal' are susceptible to bursts of civic rage.

Democracy in the region hinges on how the middle classes' anger and frustration are channelled, whether through public protests or electoral change. In the latter case, the risk is that they will embrace strong leaders with weaker democratic aspirations at the expense of democrats. These elements of societal combustion—and the deeper forces of disintegration from which they stem—need to be addressed in ways to counteract their negative impact on democracy.

3.1.4. Conclusion

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen significant democratic advances in the past decades and the region can take pride in being the most democratic region in the world, after North America and Europe. It has made significant advances in areas such as Electoral Integrity and Gender Equality, significantly narrowing the gap that once existed between it and these two regions in just a few decades.

However, as Article 3 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter indicates, it is not sufficient for governments to access power by legitimate means; power must also be exercised legitimately (Zovatto and Tommasoli in International IDEA 2016a). Hence, improvements in regional averages mask wide variations between countries, ranging from severe democratic backsliding, in cases such as Nicaragua and Venezuela, to other more moderate—but no less worrying—cases of democratic erosion.

In order to deepen democracy and rebuild citizens' trust in democratic systems of government, several areas are in need of special attention. In the fight against corruption, determination and enforcement are required. Socio-economic inequalities need to be reduced. The strengthening of judicial and other institutions is also essential for healthy democracies.

In addition, a number of emerging issues require concerted effort across the region. The growing immigration crisis, fuelled by a large exodus of people from Nicaragua and Venezuela, but also Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras, poses a challenge to governments unused to large migration flows and has the potential to sow the seeds for a potential backlash in receiving countries.

TABLE 3.7

The GSoD Indices Snapshot: Policy considerations for Latin America and the Caribbean

This table offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. It presents policy recommendations across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.64)

Elected Government:

All but three countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (86 per cent) are democracies with democratically Elected Governments. Nicaragua backslid into a hybrid regime in 2016 and Venezuela to a non-democracy in 2017. Cuba is the only country in the region to have persisted as a non-democracy since 1975.

Priority areas for reform:

- Define and implement holistic visions and strategies to build a virtuous circle to strengthen democracy, create sustainable development and improve citizens' quality of life.
- Support civic education for democracy. Consider developing democracy education in schools to educate young people about the value and purpose of democracy. This can be done in collaboration with non-partisan CSOs.
- Regional support an eventual transition of power in Venezuela, and to measures such as the dissolution of the illegally convoked National Constituent Assembly, and the re-establishment of the functioning of the Venezuelan parliament and the restoration of impartial checks and balances and the institutions that enable those (e.g. electoral, judicial), the legalization of political parties and support to planning the timing of elections at national and subnational levels and other measures needed to restore democracy in Venezuela.

Clean Elections:

Although the regional average on Clean Elections is mid-range (0.66), half the countries (11) in the region have high levels of Clean Elections. Of these countries, seven score among the top 25 per cent in the world.

Priority countries for reform:

Haiti and Honduras (democracies);
Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (hybrid and non-democracies)

Priority areas for reform:

- Strengthen the integrity of elections.
- Restore limits to presidential mandate periods where these have been abolished.
- Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (if a transition occurs): restore the independence of electoral institutions.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Inclusive Suffrage:

All countries in the region have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage.

Free Political Parties:

The majority of countries in the region (59 per cent) score in the mid-range on Free Political Parties and eight countries score among the top 25 per cent in the world with high levels of political party freedom.

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen and reinvigorate political parties to serve as effective and legitimate conduits for popular representation by reducing distance to voters, enhance communication with citizens, effectively respond to citizen concerns and operate with integrity.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Uruguay

Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.59)

Access to Justice:

Access to Justice is the aspect on which Latin America and the Caribbean performs the poorest (0.55) compared to the rest of the world (0.59). Half (11) of Latin America and the Caribbean countries score below the global average with six in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

Priority democracies for reform:

El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen the capacity, autonomy, accountability, accessibility, meritocracy and transparency of the judiciary.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Civil Liberties:

Latin America has generally high levels of Civil Liberties (0.70), with 64 per cent of countries scoring in the high range.

Latin America is the second-best performing region in the world on Freedom of Religion and the third-best on Freedom of Movement.

Priority countries for reform:

Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

Priority areas for reform:

- Tackle crime and violence through effective solutions that strengthen rather than undermine democracy.
- Advocate for civil liberties protection in countries with significant declines.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Gender Equality:

The region's average levels of political Gender Equality are in the mid-range (0.63), performing third-best, but still significantly lower than North America (0.75) and Europe (0.70).

Seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean score in the top 25 per cent in the world on political Gender Equality: Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. Five of these are democracies, while two are non-democracies (Cuba and Venezuela).

Haiti, while in the mid-range in absolute level of performance, scores lowest in the region and in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

Priority democracies for reform:

Haiti (democracy)

Priority areas for reform:

- Keep up and expand efforts to strengthen political gender equality in all spheres and at all levels, by enforcing quota laws where they exist and adopting parity laws, to ensure equal representation of women beyond the legislative (i.e. in political parties, in the executive and in local administrations).
- Strengthen quota laws and make requirements more specific, to avoid exploitation of loopholes in their design—for example placing women in secondary or alternative positions on ballots.
- Electoral bodies can improve incentives for compliance and impose sanctions for noncompliance in order to ensure effective implementation of parity standards or quotas at all levels.
- Extend quota laws to all realms of the political sphere: legislative, executive and judicial (for more detailed recommendations, see International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).
- Play a greater role in promoting gender equality and empowering women's political participation. To ensure state compliance with women's rights treaties, regional organizations should mobilize their mandates to pressure governments to complement their treaty obligations, and to fulfil any commitments made in regional declarations. Regional organizations can also facilitate the exchange of best practices across countries, and provide crucial technical expertise to governments, politicians, and civil society groups seeking to promote women's political participation (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago

Social Group Equality:

Social Group Equality is one of the aspects on which Latin America and the Caribbean performs the poorest (0.46), with the largest share of low-performing countries (36 per cent) compared to other aspects.

One-third (36 per cent) of the countries in the region score below the global average, with eight countries in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. With the exception of Nicaragua, which is a hybrid regime, all of the countries in the bottom 25 per cent of the world are democracies: Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay.

Priority countries for reform:

Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay;
Brazil and Mexico (mid-range but below the world average)

Priority areas for reform:

- Policies designed to reduce stark inequalities should be prioritized. ECLAC and other agencies have developed a robust policy agenda to tackle inequalities in the region. This includes important measures of redistributive taxation, asset redistribution, and improvement in basic public services. Efforts to reduce inequalities should build on these policy prescriptions. Social programmes should focus on tackling inequalities and should not be used for electoral or political purposes.
- Strengthen the political and social representation of under-represented groups, including women, youth and indigenous peoples. This should translate into proactive policies designed to ensure the inclusion of these groups in the decision-making and executive fabric of the region's democracies (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Basic Welfare:

The overwhelming majority of countries (77 per cent) in Latin America and the Caribbean have mid-range levels of Basic Welfare; no country scores in the low range.

The four countries with the highest levels of Basic Welfare are Cuba, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay. Of these, all but Cuba are democracies.

Priority countries for reform:

Venezuela as well as support to receiving countries of Venezuelan migrants (e.g. Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru)

Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.56)

Effective Parliament:

More than two-thirds (64 per cent) of countries in the region score in the mid-range on Effective Parliament.

Priority country for reform:

Dominican Republic

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Judicial Independence:

Judicial Independence is one of the four democratic aspects on which Latin America and the Caribbean performs the poorest (at 0.46). Of the region's countries, 32 per cent score below the global average, with five countries in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Only two countries (Jamaica and Uruguay) have high levels of Judicial Independence.

The share of countries with low levels of Judicial Independence has increased from five in 2008 to seven in 2018.

Priority countries for reform:

Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Honduras (democracies)
Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (after transition): restore the independence of the judiciary (hybrid regime and non-democracies)

Priority areas for reform:

- Strengthen the capacities of the judiciary and reduce its politicization, susceptibility to corruption and institutional weaknesses. Strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of the judiciary will have positive repercussions on efforts to reduce corruption, tackle crime and violence, and improve access to justice.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Media Integrity:

Well over half (14) of the countries in the region score in the mid-range on Media Integrity, and one-quarter score highly.

Priority countries for reform:

Venezuela (after transition)

Priority areas for reform:

- Addressing disinformation on social media will require innovative cross-sectoral strategies. Foster regional and global cross-sectoral dialogues to identify solutions to address the spread of disinformation, without harming core values of democracy such as free speech.
- Guarantee an independent, diverse and vibrant media landscape, and avoid concentration of media in a few hands.
- Provide protection to journalists, including those investigating corruption, in countries with high levels of attacks against journalists.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.47)

Absence of Corruption:

Absence of Corruption is one of the four democratic aspects on which Latin America and the Caribbean scores the poorest (at 0.45) and which has seen slowest progress in the past four decades. More than one-third of countries have high levels of corruption and only two (Chile and Uruguay) have low levels. All the non-democracies have high levels of corruption, as do six democracies.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the region in the world with the largest share of countries with both high levels of Representative Government and high levels of corruption.

Priority countries for reform:

Democracies:
First priority: High levels of corruption: Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay.
Second priority: Mid-range levels of corruption: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru

Hybrid regimes and non-democracies: Nicaragua and Venezuela

Priority areas for reform:

- The fight against corruption requires strong political will, intolerance of impunity and a political impartial and integrated approach at national and subnational levels. Promoting a culture of integrity must become a core priority for all governments. This requires the input of multiple state institutions at all levels, as well as the private sector and civil society, and commitment across party lines. Their strategies must combine efforts to identify and minimize corruption risks, prevent and sanction corruption and illicit financing, improve the state's technical capacity to investigate and enforce existing laws in a timely and visible way, and reward integrity. Modernizing the state and strengthening the capacity of a merit-based civil service and public administration and the full implementation of open and transparency strategies are also key to the fight against corruption.
- Strengthen political finance regulations and their enforcement, together with measures to promote integrity and transparency in elections and lobbying activities to ensure inclusive policymaking. Election campaign expenditure also needs to be reduced to level the playing field for candidates and reduce opportunities for corruption. Measures could include public finance for elections; setting legal limits on campaign costs; and curbing expenditure by facilitating free access to television, radio and social media (International IDEA 2016b; OECD 2018).
- Facilitate the exchange of good practices and cross-country and regional learning in the fight against corruption, institutional and judicial strengthening, combating crime and violence and in reducing inequalities.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Predictable Enforcement:

Predictable Enforcement is one of the four poorest performing aspects of Latin America and the Caribbean's democracy (with an average of 0.46). All five low-scoring countries are in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Three countries score highly: Costa Rica, Chile and Uruguay.

Priority democracies for reform:

Dominican Republic and Haiti

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Chile, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices performance: Mid-range

Civil Society Participation:

Levels of Civil Society Participation are on average in the mid-range in Latin America and the Caribbean (0.60), but 5 countries (almost 25 per cent) have high levels and 14 (more than two-thirds) have mid-range levels. The region's two non-democracies (Cuba and Venezuela) and its hybrid regime (Nicaragua) have low levels, performing in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

Priority countries for reform:

Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

Priority areas for reform:

- Ensure an enabling legal and policy environment for CSOs to operate, access funding, monitor government performance and advocate for change, particularly in countries with recent declines.
- Improving channels for citizens' participation and consultation in local and national governance can foster greater trust in democracy and complement mechanisms of representative democracy. Other institutionalized venues for social dialogue should be studied and encouraged. However, such mechanisms should not be implemented at the expense of the mechanism of representative democracy.

For civil society organizations:

- Monitor state performance and hold governments to account. Scale up and learn from (including cross-regional learning) existing civil society watchdog efforts to monitor the state and hold governments to account for their reform efforts in different areas, for example in reducing corruption and strengthening judicial reform. Civil society observatories and other monitoring activities can generate information, identify bottlenecks, fuel awareness and galvanize the coalitions needed to pursue change. Using different types of media channels (including traditional and social media) to publicize the information gathered can help increase pressure for change.
- Denounce efforts to weaken democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, electoral institutions and other accountability organs, and ensure their independence and professional capacity.

Electoral Participation:

Latin America has the highest levels of Electoral Participation in the world, with an average regional score of 0.67, together with Asia and the Pacific. Close to half (41 per cent) of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have high levels of voter turnout.

Priority areas for reform:

- Increase voter turnout in Haiti (low) and Chile and Jamaica (mid-range).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

Direct Democracy:

Levels of Direct Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean are the second-highest in the world, after Europe. Of the top 25 per cent of countries in the world with high levels of Direct Democracy, eight are in Latin America and the Caribbean. All of these countries are democracies, except Venezuela. Uruguay is the country in the region with the highest levels of Direct Democracy, followed by Ecuador and Peru.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay

Local Democracy:

Latin America and the Caribbean has, on average, mid-range levels of Local Democracy, but more countries score highly (10) than in the mid-range (7). A total of eight countries in the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Peru and Uruguay) are among the top 25 per cent in the world with high levels of Local Democracy.

Priority country for reform:

Haiti

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

TABLE 3.8

Regime classification, Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

Table 3.8 shows the regime classification for all of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

Country	GSoD Attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Democracies					
Argentina	0.78 =	0.74 =	0.64 =	0.55 =	High
Bolivia	0.63 =	0.55 =	0.49 =	0.53 =	High
Brazil	0.704 –	0.59 =	0.62 =	0.47 =	High
Chile	0.84 =	0.74 =	0.72 =	0.77 =	Mid-range
Colombia	0.74 =	0.52 =	0.58 =	0.47 =	Mid-range
Costa Rica	0.85 =	0.84 =	0.80 =	0.69 =	High
Dominican Republic	0.59 =	0.63 =	0.41 =	0.26 –	Mid-range
Ecuador	0.65 =	0.62 =	0.55 =	0.57 =	High
El Salvador	0.66 =	0.47 =	0.59 =	0.408 =	Mid-range
Guatemala	0.66 =	0.45 =	0.61 =	0.38 =	Mid-range
Haiti	0.48 =	0.37 =	0.51 =	0.25 =	Low
Honduras	0.50 =	0.52 =	0.44 =	0.36 =	Mid-range
Jamaica	0.73 =	0.73 =	0.73 =	0.60 =	High
Mexico	0.66 =	0.55 =	0.62 =	0.49 =	Mid-range
Panama	0.76 =	0.66 =	0.58 =	0.54 =	High
Paraguay	0.63 =	0.57 =	0.54 =	0.44 =	Mid-range
Peru	0.709 =	0.64 =	0.706 =	0.54 =	High
Trinidad and Tobago	0.73 =	0.79 =	0.701 =	0.72 =	High
Uruguay	0.83 =	0.83 =	0.77 =	0.75 =	High
Hybrid regimes					
Nicaragua	0.36 –	0.34 –	0.29 =	0.23 –	Low
Non-democracies					
Cuba	0.21 =	0.405 =	0.22 =	0.30 =	Low
Venezuela	0.29–	0.39 =	0.25 =	0.08 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period; + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; - denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

3.2. The state of democracy in North America

This section focuses on North America and provides an overview of the most recent Global State of Democracy Indices data on the region. The section also features a case study on the state of democracy in the United States.

3.2.1. The state of democracy in the United States

Introduction

How is democracy faring in the United States? Is democracy really backsliding under President Donald Trump? If so, how is this manifested and what are the causal explanations for the trends observed? This case study aims to provide answers to these questions based on data from the GSoD Indices, and to suggest possible factors that explain the current state of democracy in the USA.

The GSoD Indices data indicates that the USA remains a democracy with relatively high performance, although significant declines have been recorded in recent years, suggesting signs of democratic erosion. Indeed, the USA is among the 12 countries in the world with most subattribute declines since 2013 (five in total). However, these declines are not serious enough to be labelled democratic backsliding, which is defined in the GSoD framework as the gradual and intentional weakening on Checks on Government and accountability institutions, coupled with declines in Civil Liberties.

According to the GSoD Indices, the USA performs highly on four out of five attributes of democracy (see Table 3.13) and scores among the top 25 per cent in the world on 12 out of its 16 subattributes. However, this is a decrease from 2013, when the USA was in the top 25 per cent on 13 subattributes. Furthermore, until 2016, the USA was among the few countries in the world that performed highly on all five attributes of democracy. This is no longer the case, as the country's performance on Participatory Engagement slipped into the mid-range in 2016 and has remained there since.

Moreover, since 2012 the USA has recorded significant declines on several democratic subattributes, although most of these still perform in the high range, except on Participatory Engagement. Under the Representative Government attribute, declines have been recorded in Clean Elections (until 2018) and Free Political Parties. Under Fundamental Rights, there have been declines on Civil Liberties. Under Checks on Government, declining performance has been observed on Media Integrity and, until 2018, Effective Parliament. Under Impartial Administration, declines have occurred on Absence of Corruption. Finally, under the Participatory Engagement attribute, the USA has seen declines in its Local Democracy.

Deep economic inequalities and continuing structural discrimination affect the legitimacy and strength of a variety of democratic institutions in the USA. Problematic electoral administration, restrictive voter identification laws, low

NORTH AMERICA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The two countries in North America score among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on the majority of the 18 indicators related to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16). The USA scores among the top 25 per cent on 14 indicators, while Canada records similar scores on 16 indicators.

However, regional stagnation has been noted on more than half (56 per cent) of the indicators, with declines in 38 per cent and only one advance: electoral participation in the USA.

North America has seen stagnation on SDG 16.1 on reducing violence. Declines are noted in both countries in relation to SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. Stagnation has occurred on SDG 16.3 on rule of law.

Progress on SDG 16.6 on effective institutions has seen declines in all indicators except Civil Society Participation, where stagnation is noted. SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making has seen declines in Local Democracy, Clean Elections and Effective Parliament but increases in Electoral Participation and Social Group Equality.

Finally, SDG 16.10 on freedom of expression and fundamental freedoms has seen declines on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion, whereas Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Association and Assembly, and Media Integrity have stagnated.

Gender Equality

SDG 5.5 on the political representation of women has seen stagnation in both Canada and the USA since 2015.

levels of voter turnout, the growing influence of government 'insiders', limits on US citizens' exercise of fundamental freedoms (including freedom of expression) and weakening government oversight (until 2018) have all contributed to drops in the USA's GSoD Indices scores in recent years.

These recent democratic declines, in addition to a number of distortions built into the way in which democracy is practised in the USA, contribute to the weakening and delegitimization of democracy in the country. They reduce the public's trust in democratic institutions and increase societal and political polarization, which has heightened in recent years. However, some recent developments also provide some reason for hope. US democratic institutions, while increasingly tested, are demonstrating their robustness in the face of these challenges. For example, the current US Congress is the most racially and ethnically diverse in that institution's history and the percentage of women in the House of Representatives and Senate (24 per cent in each) has never been higher.

The current democracy landscape in the United States

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the USA, as well as the democratic challenges it faces.

Representative Government

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

The USA has high levels of Representative Government and performs among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on this dimension. Under the US Constitution of 1789, the country's national executive and lawmakers are all elected, and the elected Senate approves other key officials, such as federal judges and Cabinet officers. The effectiveness of elected government is abetted by two other key strengths of US democracy: the freedom of political parties, and strong civil society participation in electoral and political affairs (see e.g. Connolly 2018; Wilson 2017).

However, despite this continued comparatively high performance, levels of Representative Government in the USA have seen a drop since 2012 (see Table 3.9). The decline has mainly been caused by a significant decline in the GSoD Indices indicator on Clean Elections, although an increase was seen in 2018, after the mid-term elections to the US Congress. Declines have also been noted in the indicator of Free Political Parties. There have been two periods during the timeframe of the GSoD Indices (1975–2018) in which the USA has not been in the top 25 per cent globally on Clean Elections: 2000–2005 and 2016–2017. However, in 2018, a mid-term year, the US re-entered the top 25 per cent globally on this indicator.

TABLE 3.9

Representative Government in the United States, 2012–2018

Attribute	Subattribute	GSoD Indices score	
		2012	2018
Representative Government		0.92	0.76
	Clean Elections	0.95	0.78
	Free Political Parties	1	0.82

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Electoral processes face a number of complex challenges. A number of factors contributed to the 2016–2017 declines in the USA's GSoD Indices scores, and to an overall system in which ordinary voters in the USA, especially poor and minority voters, increasingly struggle to access and participate on equal terms in the electoral process. Issues such as gerrymandering, weak campaign finance regulation, the electoral college system, strict voter identification (ID) laws and, more recently, foreign interference in elections, contribute to an electoral system that is weak on inclusion and works to maintain the status quo. To a large extent, wealth and access to power still determine political decision-making and undermine political equality (Wang 2016; Greenwood 2016).

The GSoD Indices subattribute of Social Group Equality measures access to political power and enjoyment of civil

liberties by social group. In the USA, levels of Social Group Equality are in the low mid-range at 0.53—closer to the Latin American and Caribbean average (0.46) than to North and Western Europe (0.77), which has more similar levels of Representative Government. Moreover, Social Group Equality has not improved in the last four decades. On the contrary, it has experienced statistically significant declines over the past 20 years. At 0.65, levels were higher in 1998 than they are today (Figure 3.15).

While the 116th US Congress is more ethnically diverse than it has ever been, only 22 per cent of lawmakers are from racial or ethnic minorities—including one-quarter of the House of Representatives and 9 per cent of the Senate—although they represent 39 per cent of the US population (Bialik 2019). Furthermore, only 24 per cent of lawmakers are women; while this represents an historic high, the USA has not yet reached the critical threshold of 30 per cent women's participation and is far from achieving gender parity (IPU 2019).

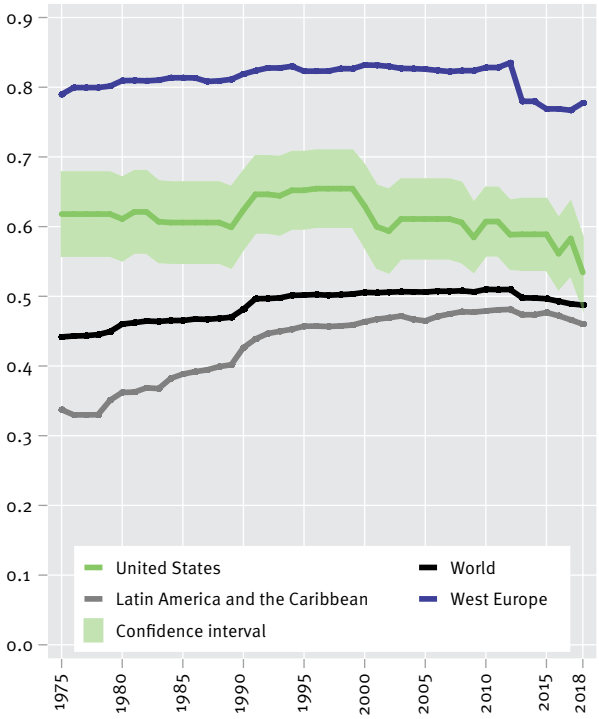
Among the factors that explain the decline in the USA's Clean Elections score were the alterations made by the US Supreme Court in 2013 to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which were first applied in the 2016 presidential election; and the passing of a number of **voter identification laws**, which have had a negative impact on equal access to the ballot box. By 2019, 35 US states had laws—seven of which were classified as 'strict photo ID' rules—requiring voters to show some form of identification at the polls (Underhill 2019). Such regulations have been shown to depress turnout, especially among youth and minority populations (US Government Accountability Office 2014), who are more likely to struggle to obtain the necessary identification (Gaskins and Iyer 2012; Barreto, Nuno and Sanchez 2009). Strict voter ID regulations have a disproportionate effect on certain segments of the population and are discriminatory against people of colour (Erickson 2017; Bentele and O'Brien 2013). They therefore undermine the strength of representative government by violating the constitutional and international principle of universal suffrage.

Electoral integrity in the USA has also been negatively affected by **indications of Russian interference**, primarily via social media, in the 2016 presidential election. Russian operatives allegedly targeted election systems in 18 US states, accessed voter registration databases and conducted malicious access attempts on voting-related websites (US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2018). They also allegedly used psychological campaigns to persuade people to vote a certain way—or not at all—which included the targeting of African-American voters (Jamieson 2018).

A number of other elements in the US electoral system contribute to the weakening of the principles of popular control and political equality. First, the **representational asymmetry of voting districts caused by gerrymandering** involves altering electoral boundaries to provide a political advantage for a particular party. Gerrymandering has been extensively practised by lawmakers in both the Republican and Democratic parties. It contributes to the distortion of representation, undermines voters' freedom to make political choices and dilutes opposition parties' ability to represent constituents' interests (Wang 2016; Greenwood 2016). The representational asymmetry caused by gerrymandering can be so severe that a party could theoretically gain 20 per cent of the vote share without any corresponding gain in seats. This practice can also contribute to the dilution of minority votes (Royden, Li and Rudensky 2018). Moreover, a recent legal case, *Shelby County v Holder*, largely ended the US Justice Department's ability to check discriminatory boundaries, which significantly weakens the judiciary's role in ruling against such political distortion (Neely and McMinn 2018).

FIGURE 3.15

Trends in Social Group Equality in the United States, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Second, the **lack of effective checks on electoral campaign donations**, spending and disclosure has significantly undermined the principle of popular control and the degree to which ordinary US voters can control their government. It also creates an uneven playing field for candidates to compete for political power and puts at a disadvantage those who do not have access to networks, influence and money, further reinforcing unequal representation for women and minorities. In fact, a group of wealthy donors—as small as 1 per cent of the US population, or a total of 26,783 individuals—is estimated to be responsible for an overwhelming majority of campaign funding (Drutman 2012).

One study showed that, compared to donors, average citizens have little or no independent influence on government policy, concluding that the majority 'does *not* rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes' (Gilens and Page 2014: 576). This inequality has been compounded in the aftermath of the US Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v FEC*, which allows corporations and unions to spend unlimited amounts of money in support of candidates. The struggle to pass more effective campaign finance regulations is partly due to the judiciary's longstanding view that political spending is a form of 'free speech' which, in the same way as other forms of speech, cannot be limited. Regulation requires lawmakers to distinguish electoral speech from non-electoral speech, something which is difficult to implement in any circumstance but especially so when the political divide is so deep (Briffault 2015).

Third, the **Electoral College** provides disproportionate voting power to US states with smaller populations and contributes to the dilution of the principle of political equality of each citizen's vote on election day (Petrocelli 2016). Indeed, the system tilts politicians' attention towards competitive states with large numbers of electors. Since electoral votes are allocated on the basis of a once-in-a-decade census, minority voters living in fast-growing urban centres are often undercounted. Indeed, the number of voters affected by this discrepancy in the five most populous US states is more than the total voting population of six small states (Dreyfuss 2016). While the electoral vote has given the same result as the popular vote in most recent US elections, this was not the case in the presidential elections in 2000 (in which George W. Bush defeated Al Gore) and 2016 (in which Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton). There are increasing calls for a modification or elimination of this system, as a way to enhance political equality in representation in the USA (Birnbaum 2019).

Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Declines have been observed in levels of Civil Liberties in the USA since 2012, particularly on aspects relating to Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion (see Table 3.10).

Civil Liberties and Freedom of Expression are on the decline

The right to free speech, expressed in the First Amendment to the US Constitution, is a hallmark of democracy in the USA. Indeed, laws in the USA protect a vast range of expression. In recent years, however, levels of Freedom of Expression in the USA have declined, although the start of the decline predates the Trump administration.

In 2012 the USA recorded the highest score in the world (0.99) on Freedom of Expression but by 2018 its score had dropped to 0.85 (which was still in the high range) (see Figure 3.16). Declines on this dimension in 2012–2013 can be partially attributed to alleged increased surveillance by the National Surveillance Administration (NSA), which permitted the NSA to examine the metadata of text messages and phone calls of US citizens, potentially violating individual privacy rights (Reddick et al. 2015). During the

TABLE 3.10

Civil Liberties in the United States, 2012 and 2018

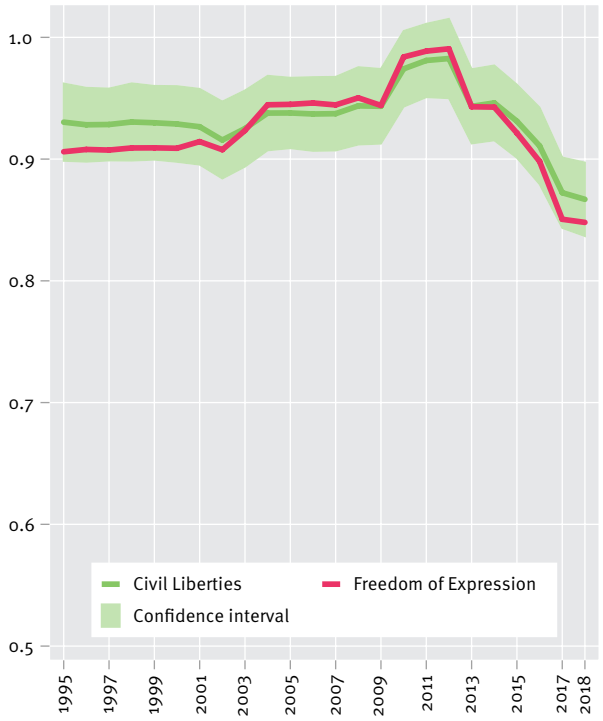
Civil Liberties subcomponent	GSoD Indices score	
	2012	2018
Freedom of Expression	0.99	0.85
Freedom of Movement	0.93	0.83
Freedom of Religion	0.95	0.83

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 3.16

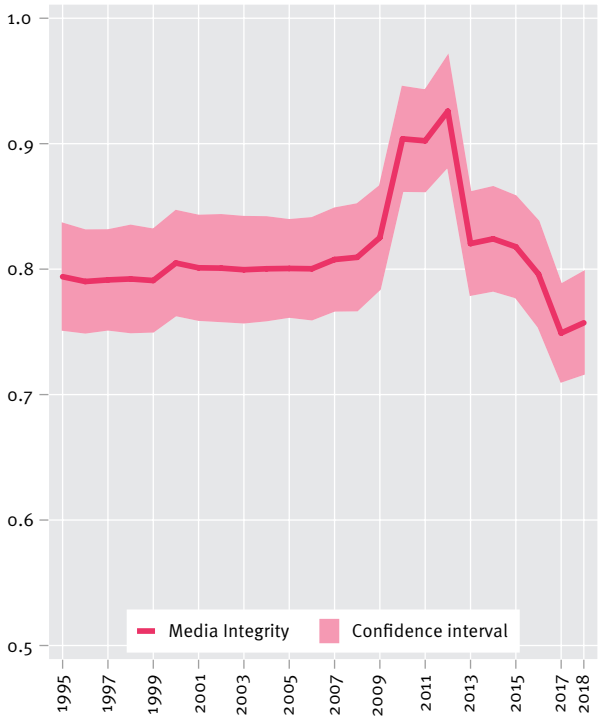
Trends in Civil Liberties and Freedom of Expression in the United States, 1995–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

FIGURE 3.17

Trends in Media Integrity in United States, 1995–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Obama administration, heightened restrictions were also placed on reporters' access to administration officials and to government information (Freedom House 2015).

Media freedom has continued to be threatened since 2016–2017, when Trump's election campaign—and then administration—excluded reporters from certain events and some Trump supporters intimidated journalists. President Trump's verbal attacks on the press and his selective allegations of 'fake news' have unfairly raised doubts about verifiable facts and increased the risk of journalists being targeted with violence (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018). In the long term, such fear can lead to media self-censorship and mute public participation, especially among the most marginalized sectors of society. This presents a serious threat to the health of US democracy.

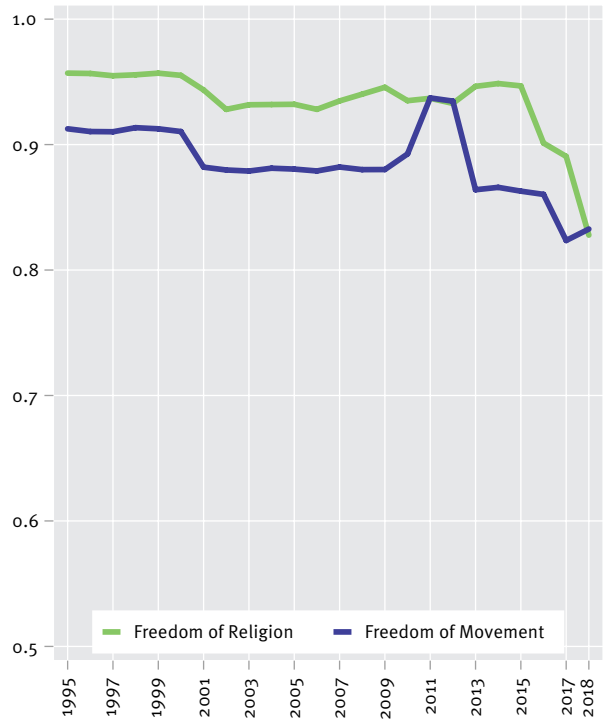
US media also struggles to be broadly representative in its coverage and reporting. This is due in part to the low levels of minority representation in newsrooms. As of 2017, minorities made up 24 per cent and 12 per cent of the television and radio workforce, respectively, despite a national minority population of 38 per cent (Radio Television Digital News Association 2017). The poor representation of minorities in newsrooms has implications for whether—and how—minority communities and their concerns are addressed by the media (Gerson and Rodriguez 2018). Compounding the issue, the high concentration of media ownership and an increasingly partisan media coverage contribute to a polarized media landscape in the USA. The GSoD Indices indicator on Media Integrity, which measures diversity of media perspectives, has seen a decline from 0.93 in 2012 to 0.76 in 2018 (see Figure 3.17).

Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion are under threat

The GSoD Indices score on Freedom of Movement has seen a statistically significant decline in the USA, declining from 0.93 in 2012 to 0.83 in 2018 (see Figure 3.18). This decline reflects recent moves towards a more restrictive immigration policy, including restrictions affecting those seeking immigrant and non-immigrant visas from several Muslim-majority countries (BBC News 2018c), as well as widely reported cases in 2018 regarding the treatment of migrants crossing the border from

FIGURE 3.18

Trends in Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion in the United States, 1995–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Mexico into the USA and the alleged policy of separating children from parents on arrival (Sacchetti 2018).

Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

US citizens enjoy access to an open and independent system of justice that is perceived as possessing a high degree of integrity, and that has the authority to check abuses by other branches of government. Indeed, on the three GSoD Indices indicators relating to the rule of law (Judicial Independence, Access to Justice and Predictable Enforcement), the USA scores among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world.

TABLE 3.11

Effective Parliament in the United States, 2013–2018

	Year		
	2013	2017	2018
GSoD Indices score	0.80	0.65	0.71

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Effective Parliament in the USA has seen both declines and recent advances

The past five years (between 2013 and 2018) have been marked by a significant decline in Effective Parliament in the USA, due mainly to a dearth of congressional oversight of the executive, especially in relation to foreign affairs (Blanc 2018; Fowler 2018). In 2017, for the first time in the GSoD Indices, the USA fell to a mid-range score, although it regained its position as a high-performing country in 2018 (see Table 3.11). This recovery reflects the results of the 2018 mid-term elections to the US Congress, where Democrats now hold a majority in the House of Representatives, although Republicans still control the Senate. Experts claim that oversight has too often become a vehicle for 'partisan politics' instead of strong and independent investigation (Chaddock 2011). Laxity in congressional oversight poses a serious threat to democracy, increasing the chances that a president can overrule the people's will on key issues. It therefore impacts Representative Government. The lack of oversight prior to 2018 was partly due to the structure of government, as well as increasing partisanship (Goldgeier and Saunders 2018). Members of Congress must regularly choose between their interest in maintaining Congress as a strong, vibrant institution and their personal interests in re-election, attaining a party leadership position, or advancing their constituents' goals (Devins 2018).

Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

Corruption continues to undermine democracy

Corruption and the perception of corruption in Washington, DC, are nothing new. Since the Watergate era, high-profile corruption scandals involving public officials have emerged on a regular basis. US citizens have expressed alarm about more than just bribes and bagmen. In a 2017 survey the percentage of citizens who believed that the government does what is right 'just about always' or 'most of the time' stood at only 18 per cent (Pew Research Center 2017). Table 3.12 shows the USA's performance on the GSoD Indices attribute of Impartial Administration, and its subattribute of Absence of Corruption.

Many troubling practices have existed for decades, such as the US political system's alleged 'pay-to-play' culture for accessing lawmakers and abuse of the 'revolving door', which allows lobbyists to become government officials—and officials and lawmakers to become lobbyists—without adequate restrictions or accountability (Purdum 2006; OpenSecrets.org n.d.). Recent developments, such as the US Government's perceived failure to adequately hold accountable financial leaders following the 2008 financial crisis and the loosening of campaign finance restrictions, have contributed to a belief that the wealthiest US citizens operate under different rules than other citizens and enjoy disproportionate political clout in the USA (Sanders and Weissman 2015).

Confidence in the integrity of Congress remains very low. In a 2017 Transparency International survey, more than one-third (38 per cent) of Americans responded that they believed 'most' or 'all' members of Congress were corrupt (Transparency International 2017). Confidence in the integrity of the White House has declined, although dissatisfaction with the executive branch appears to be based heavily on party affiliation (Transparency International 2017; Ladd, Tucker and Kates 2018).

Transparency International also reported that more than two-thirds of Americans surveyed believe that the government is doing 'very badly' or 'fairly badly' combating corruption in its own ranks (Transparency International 2017). The Mueller investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election has cast a cloud of uncertainty regarding the integrity of the Trump administration (Murray 2018). Even federal law enforcement agencies, which would normally be counted on to address illegal acts of political corruption, have suffered from a decrease in public confidence (Kahn 2018; Santhanam 2018).

TABLE 3.12

Impartial Administration in the United States, 2012 and 2018

Attribute	Subattribute	GSoD Indices score	
		2012	2018
Impartial Administration		0.83	0.73
	Absence of Corruption	0.83	0.69

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in civil society organizations and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

The USA's levels of Electoral Participation—as expressed by voter turnout—are among the lowest for the world's democracies. The USA's score in 2018 (0.47) is below the world average (0.56). The GSoD Indices data shows that levels of electoral participation are generally higher in presidential elections (where turnout has averaged 56.6 per cent since 1975) than in the mid-term elections (where the average was 36.9 per cent until 2018). The persistently low levels of voter turnout in the USA contribute to weakening US democracy, undermining the core principle of popular control.

However, the 2018 mid-term elections to the US Congress showed a record turnout of 53 per cent of the voting-eligible population, which was the highest turnout for a mid-term election since the US Census Bureau began tracking turnout in 1978. This increase in turnout was particularly noticeable among younger voters, who saw a 16-point increase from 2014 to 2016 (US Census Bureau 2019). Despite these gains, the turnout was still below the 61.4 per cent turnout in the 2016 presidential election (US Census Bureau 2017).

The low levels of voter turnout in the USA may be due to the institutional set up of US democracy—where due to a system of first-past-the-post elections, a single vote may seem less meaningful—along with the diffused nature of checks and balances, which makes it harder for voters to reward or punish politicians for policy success or failures (Martinez 2010). While these institutional issues are difficult to remedy, smaller fixes such as automatic voter registration could lower bureaucratic barriers for citizens to vote and, in turn, increase turnout (Stockemer 2017).

Conclusion

Despite a range of challenges, the USA maintains a high position in the GSoD Indices and is still a leading democracy in several respects. At the same time, decreasing popular control and political equality are a grave concern and a growing threat to the strength and legitimacy of the US model of democratic rule, which has suffered erosion in recent years.

Implementing legislation and policies that promote transparency, facilitate genuine universal and equal suffrage, ensure freedom of expression and strengthen ethical obligations will be essential. However, leaders in the USA will first need to overcome extreme political polarization and tackle a number of challenges. These include the underlying problems of racial and other forms of inequality and the growing gap between the rich and the poor—conditions that can have severe effects on democracy.

Finally, measures need to be taken to reduce the perceived dominance of moneyed interests in the US political process.

Policy considerations

- Consider restoring the Voting Rights Act, requiring states and localities with a history of voting discrimination to get 'preclearance' from the US Justice Department before making changes to voting processes.
- Consider legislation that checks the perceived dominance of moneyed interests in the political process. At a minimum, disclosure laws governing donations in support of candidates or political causes, and interactions between lobbyists and public officials or lawmakers, should be strengthened.
- Review and strengthen restrictions regarding the 'revolving door' between private lobbyists and public officials and lawmakers.
- Strengthen ethics laws and regulations by including stricter requirements on financial transparency for candidates for federal office. Rules regarding the conversion or transfer of certain assets that may lead to a conflict with official duties following election could be clarified and strengthened.
- Consider expanding laws prohibiting nepotism in hiring for any federal position, including positions within the White House.

TABLE 3.13

Regime classification for North America in 2018

This table shows the regime classification for all of the countries in North America covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

Country	Attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Democracies					
Canada	0.79	0.84	0.74	0.79	High
United States	0.76 –	0.79	0.77	0.73 –	Mid-range

High Mid-range Low

Notes: + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

- Consider reforming the Electoral College system.
- Consider removing the power to draw district boundaries from the hands of elected officials and transfer it to independent redistricting committees.
- Protect and update election infrastructure by conducting audits and threat analyses of voter registration systems and by purchasing new, secure voting machines to replace outdated, vulnerable machinery.
- Consider instituting automatic voter registration at the national level, to lower the bureaucratic barriers to electoral participation.

TABLE 3.14

The GSoD Indices Snapshot: Democracy in North America

Table 3.14 offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in North America, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: High (0.78)

Elected Government:

North America has high levels of Elected Government: both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent for this dimension.

Clean Elections:

North America has high levels of Clean Elections (0.82), with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent on this subattribute. While the USA's Clean Elections score decreased from 0.95 in 2012 to 0.78 in 2018, it increased in 2017–2018, after the mid-term elections to the US Congress.

Inclusive Suffrage:

Both Canada and the USA have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage, although Canada scores higher (0.95) and among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world. The USA scores 0.90 and is not in the top 25 per cent of countries on this dimension.

Free Political Parties:

North America has high levels of Free Political Parties. Both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent in the world on this aspect.

Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: High (0.82)

Access to Justice:

North America has high levels of Access to Justice. Both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent for this dimension.

Civil Liberties:

North America has high levels of Civil Liberties. Both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent of countries for this dimension.

However, the USA has seen a decline in Civil Liberties, from 0.98 in 2012 to 0.87 in 2018.

Gender Equality:

Gender Equality is high in Canada (0.81) but the USA dropped from high to mid-range in 2017 (0.69). Nevertheless, both Canada and the USA perform in the top 25 per cent of countries for Gender Equality.

Social Group Equality:

North America has mid-range performance on Social Group Equality. Canada scores 0.65 and the USA 0.53 on this dimension.

Basic Welfare:

North America has high performance on Basic Welfare with both the USA and Canada performing in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world.

Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: High (0.75)

Effective Parliament:

North America has mid-range levels of Effective Parliament. Canada continues to be in the top 25 per cent of countries, while the USA returned to the top 25 per cent in 2018, after a drop in 2017. In the last years, the USA has seen statistically significant declines on Effective Parliament, falling from 0.84 in 2012 to 0.71 in 2018.

Judicial Independence:

Judicial Independence is high in North America, with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world. Canada has seen a statistically significant decline since 2012 (from 0.78) but still scores highly (0.70 in 2018).

Media Integrity:

Media Integrity is high in North America, with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent of countries. While the USA saw a significant decline on its scores on this dimension between 2012 and 2017, it still scores in the high range (0.76).

Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: High (0.76)

Absence of Corruption:

While corruption remains low in North America, both Canada and the USA have seen statistically significant declines on their Absence of Corruption scores, with Canada falling from 0.87 in 2012 to 0.79 in 2018 and the USA falling from 0.83 in 2012 to mid-range (0.69) in 2018. At the same time, both countries remain above the world average.

Predictable Enforcement:

Predictable Enforcement is high in North America with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world. Canada has seen a decline in its score since 2012 but still performs in the high range.

Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices performance: High

Civil Society Participation:

Civil Society Participation is high in North America, with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent in the world. Since 2013, Canada has seen a slight increase in its Civil Society Participation score, increasing from 0.74 to 0.84.

Electoral Participation:

On Electoral Participation, North America scores particularly poorly, at 0.54. On this aspect, North America is outperformed by all regions except for Africa and the Middle East (which score at 0.49 and 0.22 respectively). North America performs slightly below the world average (0.56) and well below the best performing region (Latin America, at 0.67). The USA's low score (0.47) on Electoral Participation drags down the regional average: Canada scores at 0.62, above the world average.

Direct Democracy:

North America has the world's lowest score on Direct Democracy (0.01). Its score on this dimension is below the world average of 0.12 and well below the score of the best-performing region: Europe (0.21). It should be noted that this subattribute only captures direct-democracy mechanisms at the national level.

Local Democracy:

Canada scores high on Local Democracy and is in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on this indicator. The USA broke with recent trends in 2018, falling out of the top 25 per cent. It now scores in the mid-range category. In fact, the USA has seen declines over the past five years, scoring 0.95 in 2013 and 0.69 in 2018.

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Chapter 4
The state of democracy in Asia and the Pacific

This chapter offers an overview of the long-term democratic trends in Asia and the Pacific, and an analysis of the current democratic landscape, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the democratic challenges it faces. The analysis is based on the GSoD Indices as the principal data source, complemented by other sources. The section concludes with an overview of policy considerations relevant to democratic trends and challenges in Asia and the Pacific.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Asia and the Pacific has made some progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) since 2015, although significant challenges remain.

Of the 18 GSoD Indices indicators used to measure progress on SDG 16, nearly half (eight) have seen more countries with gains than declines since 2015. This is the case for SDG 16.3 on rule of law and SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption.

SDG 16.6 on accountable institutions has seen gains outnumbering declines for independent judiciaries, effective parliaments and civil society, but not on political parties. SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making has seen advances in Clean Elections and Local Democracy, but stagnation in Elected Government and Social Group Equality, and declines in Electoral Participation.

Despite these recent advances, a large number of countries continue to have low levels of performance on all these dimensions compared to the rest of the world. The target that presents most cause for concern is SDG 16.10, on which Media Integrity and Freedom of Association and Assembly have seen more countries declining than advancing since 2015, pointing to a shrinking civic space in the region. More than a third (39 per cent) of the people in Asia and the Pacific live in countries that have seen declines on these aspects since 2015.

Gender Equality

Significant challenges continue to hinder the achievement of gender equality and SDG 5.5 on political representation of women. The GSoD Indices measure of (political) Gender Equality for Asia and the Pacific has seen stagnation since 2015, with no countries declining or advancing. Almost one-third of countries in the region perform below the world average on Gender Equality.

KEY FINDINGS

Positive developments

- **Asia and the Pacific has experienced a significant democratic expansion in the past four decades.** The number of democracies has doubled (from 7 to 15) and there has been a reduction of non-democracies (from 14 to 10). This expansion has been driven by democratic transitions, with 12 countries becoming democracies for the first time since 1975. Two of these countries (Malaysia and Myanmar) made the transition in the last four years. Sri Lanka, one of the region's five pre-1975 democracies, returned to democracy in 2015, after its second hybrid hiatus.
- Malaysia, one of the region's two most persistent hybrid regimes (together with Singapore), transitioned to democracy for the first time after the 2018 elections ended the ruling party's 60-year monopoly on power.
- **The older democracies in Asia and the Pacific have proven resilient.** Of the seven extant democracies in 1975, five have remained so uninterruptedly until today: Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Of the 12 countries that became democracies after 1975, all but two remain democracies, and half have not had any undemocratic interruptions.
- **Of all the early third-wave democracies (i.e. those that transitioned between 1975 and 2000), the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Taiwan have made the most democratic advances.** Of the newer democracies, Timor-Leste stands out for its democratic gains. These are the only third-wave democracies that have high levels of Representative Government.
- **The region's democracies come in many shapes and forms.** Only Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan have high performance on all five of their democratic attributes, followed by Japan which performs high on four attributes. The most common performance (40 per cent of the region's democracies) is mid-range on all attributes.

Challenges to democracy

- **Half of the countries in Asia and the Pacific do not have democratically elected governments.** Some countries in the region have suffered from deepening autocratization in recent years. For example, Cambodia, which never fully transitioned to democracy, ultimately became a non-democratic regime in 2018. After the Middle East and Africa, Asia is home to the largest number of countries that have never experienced democracy at any time in their history (40 per cent of countries in the region).
- **Democracies in Asia and the Pacific suffer from democratic fragility and weak democratic performance.** Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka have experienced undemocratic interruptions since their transitions. Others, such as Malaysia, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea, show low performance on at least one of their democratic attributes. Still others have experienced democratic erosion.
- **Asia and the Pacific is one of the regions most affected by democratic erosion, with more than half of its democracies suffering from it**. India is currently experiencing democratic backsliding and has the highest number of democratic subattribute declines since 2013. The Philippines, also a democratically backsliding country, follows India in number of democratic declines. Older democracies such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand have suffered some erosion, as have Indonesia, Mongolia and Timor-Leste.
- **Several countries in the region have experienced democratic fragility, with democratic breakdowns since their first transition to democracy.** Bangladesh (since 2014) and Pakistan (since 2018) have regressed into hybridity. Thailand backslid into military rule in 2014, although elections in 2019 have paved the way for a civilian government.
- **A number of Asian countries suffer from weak human rights protection.** Human rights violations are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. These violations are sometimes related to internal conflicts which are further aggravated by waves of re-emerging ethnonationalism.
- **Despite advances in gender equality in some countries in the last decades, progress in Asia and the Pacific has not kept the same pace as the rest of the world.** Significant challenges remain to achieve gender equality and SDG 5.5 on political representation of women. Efforts are needed to increase the representation of women, not only in new democracies but also in countries such as Japan and South Korea.
- **Recent attacks on institutions central to the integrity of functioning democracies constitute a significant challenge to democracy in Asia and the Pacific.** Threatened institutions include the judiciary, court systems, electoral commissions, parliaments and institutions fighting corruption.
- **Despite some recent advances in reducing corruption (SDG 16.5), almost half of all countries in Asia and the Pacific still suffer from high levels of corruption**. This situation is compounded by weak judicial systems lacking capacity to combat corruption.
- **There have been attempts throughout the region to undermine civic space, freedom of speech and a free media in recent years.** In Cambodia, for example, the shrinking of civic space has occurred in a context of deepening autocratization, while in Thailand a similar shrinkage occurred after the democratic breakdown in 2014. In other countries, it has occurred in contexts of democratic backsliding and erosion, explained by the rise of nationalist political parties, and justified by arguments of national sovereignty, law and order, national security and responses to terrorism.
- The SDG 16 target that presents most cause for concern is SDG 16.10, with Media Integrity, and Freedom of Association and Assembly, having seen more countries declining than advancing since 2015.

4.1. Introduction

Asia and the Pacific is the most populous region covered by the GSoD Indices. It includes 30 countries across five subregions: Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, South East Asia and Oceania (which includes Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea). As the GSoD Indices only cover countries with more than one million inhabitants, most Pacific Islands are not included. However, if these island nations are counted, the Asia and the Pacific region is composed of 50 countries. In order to ensure coverage for Pacific Islands, qualitative analysis and other data sources have been used to analyse these smaller countries.

Asia and the Pacific is also the most democratically diverse region covered by the GSoD Indices. It includes all regime types: democracies, hybrid regimes and non-democracies. Among the democracies, the region is home to both older and third-wave democracies of varied performance ranges. Among the non-democracies, the region includes absolute monarchies, Communist one-party states, autocracies and authoritarian regimes. This large heterogeneity makes it difficult to draw general conclusions that are valid for the entire region.

Moreover, some countries in Asia and the Pacific are outliers compared to the rest of the world. Unlike other regions, a number of Asian countries have achieved unprecedented economic growth and societal modernization under authoritarian rule. This challenges the common view on democracy and economic and social performance. Some of these countries (e.g. South Korea and Taiwan) transitioned to democracy after their economic development while others (e.g. Cambodia, China, Singapore and Viet Nam) never made the transition or (as in the case of Malaysia) only did so very recently.

Apart from their economic performance, some hybrid regimes and non-democracies also perform better than a number of democracies on other aspects measured by the GSoD Indices. For example, on Impartial Administration, Singapore has the lowest levels of corruption in the world, and China and Viet Nam record mid-range levels of Impartial Administration. In addition, a number of the region's democracies also defy conventional wisdom on gender equality. For example, three democracies (Japan, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea) have among the lowest levels of women's representation in parliament in the world (under 12 per cent of legislators).

However, as will be seen in this chapter and throughout this report, while the economic and other performance of some hybrid regimes and non-democracies may seem impressive in the short term, this performance represents an exception to the rule. The large majority of these countries do not guarantee other important dimensions of sustainable development, such as low levels of corruption, environmental sustainability or gender equality.

Democracy faces a number of challenges in Asia and the Pacific. These include democratic fragility, recurrent interference of the military in the political sphere, enduring hybridity, pockets of autocratic persistence, deepening autocratization, conflict, the rise of ethnonationalism and anti-establishment leaders, a shrinking civic space, the spread of disinformation, and weakened checks on government.

The region's democracies have a lot to be proud of as well. First, they have proven resilient over the past decades. Of the region's 15 democracies, all but three have remained democracies without interruptions. Moreover, the region hosts some of the third-wave democracies with the highest levels of Representative Government, Gender Equality, Social Group Equality and Civil Society Participation in the world.

4.2. Taking the long-term perspective: democratic developments since 1975

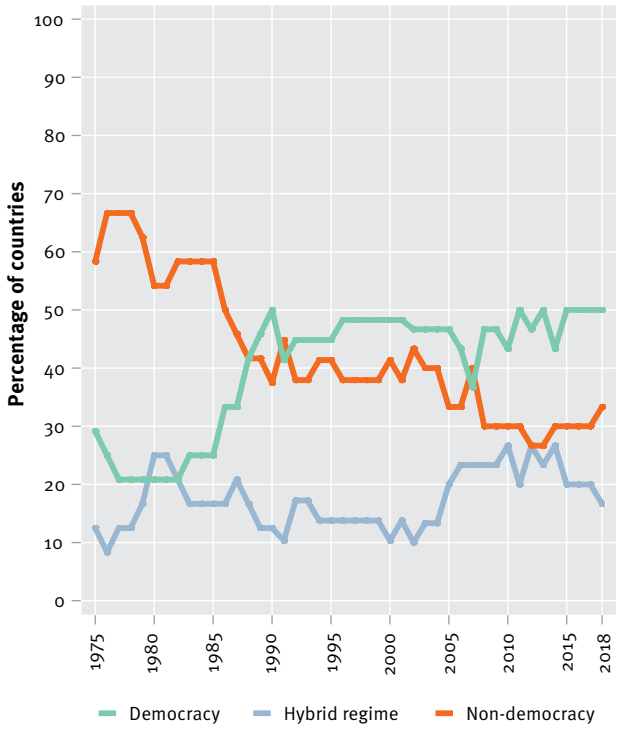
Asia and the Pacific has experienced significant democratic expansion in the past four decades. The share of democracies increased from 29 per cent in 1975 to 50 per cent of countries in 2018. There has also been a reduction in the share of non-democracies, from 58 per cent to 33 per cent. However, the share of hybrid regimes increased from 12 per cent in 1975 to 17 per cent in 2018 (see Figure 4.1).

The democratic aspects with the most improvements in Asia and the Pacific between 1975 and 2018 have been Direct Democracy, Basic Welfare, Local Democracy and Electoral Participation. Other aspects that have seen improvements in the past four decades are Representative Government, Gender Equality, Clean Elections and Civil Society Participation.

The expansion of democracy in Asia and the Pacific has been driven by democratic transitions in a number of countries. Since 1975, a total of 11 countries in the region have transitioned to democracy and Timor-Leste became a democracy when it gained independence from Indonesia in 2002. These 12 countries are referred to as 'third-wave democracies'. Of these, two-thirds transitioned during the early third-wave period (i.e. before 2000) and three (Myanmar, Timor-Leste and most recently Malaysia) transitioned after 2000 as part of the so-called new third wave. Nepal and Sri Lanka experienced re-transitions to democracy in 2008 and 2015, respectively, after going through hybrid hiatuses.

FIGURE 4.1

Regime types in Asia and the Pacific 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

At the subregional level, in East Asia, Japan was the lone democratic country in the region until Mongolia, South Korea and Taiwan transitioned to democracy from the late 1980s onwards.

In South Asia, democracy has demonstrated significant resilience, and overall democratic gains have outweighed setbacks (Rikkila Tamang and Bakken 2017). The absolute monarchy in Bhutan paved the way for democracy under a new Constitution in 2008, a year which also saw the country's first elections.

Nepal initiated its first transition to a fragile democracy in 1991, backsliding into non-democracy again between 2002 and 2007, and then returning to democracy in 2008 in what is usually marked as its democratic transition after a decade-long civil war. A new Constitution was adopted in 2015, transforming the country into a multiparty, federal, secular and democratic republic. Such constitution-building processes have been at the heart of many of the region's democratic transitions (Ginsburg 2018). Over the last decade Nepal has advanced in its transition to federalism, establishing provinces and, despite an electoral collapse of pro-federalist opposition forces, hosting elections at three levels of government.

Pakistan's first transition to democracy occurred in 1988, although a military coup in 1999 returned the country to military rule for almost a decade. In 2008, Pakistan experienced its second transition to democracy. The 18th amendment to its Constitution in 2010 was envisaged to end a tradition of military coups and leadership instability, constraining executive power, increasing decentralization and thereby increasing democratic space. Despite these important changes in Pakistan's democracy framework, the last decade has been marked by advances in some areas, but also significant democratic weaknesses . In 2018, the country regressed into hybridity.

Sri Lanka was considered a democracy in 1975, regressed into a hybrid regime in 1977 and returned to democracy in 1989 for a period of 20 years, after which it regressed into hybridity again between 2010 and 2014. The country was ravaged by a brutal civil war from 1983 to 2009. In 2015, a coalition of various opposition parties won a landslide electoral victory, which led the country back to democracy.

A number of South East Asian countries have also made significant strides towards democracy following the turbulence of post-colonial statehood. Countries previously under decades-long, non-democratic rule have transitioned to democracy, including the Philippines in 1986 after two decades of rule by President Ferdinand Marcos; and Indonesia in 1999 after 30 years under the military rule of President Suharto. Timor-Leste became independent from Indonesia in 2002. Seven years after a UN Peacekeeping Mission left the country it remains democratic and has significantly strengthened its democratic performance.

Myanmar, previously under military rule for 25 years, has gradually democratized since the adoption of the 2008 Constitution and the first democratic elections in 25 years held in 2015, although severe human rights violations and restrictions on press freedom persist. Malaysia and Singapore have been the region's most enduring hybrid regimes, although the prospects of strengthened democracy in Malaysia were raised with the unprecedented results of the 2018 general elections, which ended the 60-year monopoly on power of the National Front (Barisan Nasional, BN), on the back of a united opposition and a strong civil society. Although Malaysia made the transition to democracy in 2018, major political rights reforms are still pending.

In the Pacific Islands, democracy has survived in most countries since the achievement of independence in the 1960s, apart from Fiji, which experienced a series of democratic breakdowns and military interventions in 1987, 2000 and 2006. Governance in Pacific Island countries can be understood within a historical and cultural context in which highly privileged kinship is expressed through the distribution of power, wealth and opportunities. With the exception of Fiji and Solomon Islands, democratic elections have been held regularly in most Pacific Island countries (Firth 2018). A Westminster-type parliamentary system is the most common institutional setup, with some countries adopting a presidential or hybrid system. A number of countries have constitutionally mandated councils reserved for chiefs and traditional leaders. The type of legislature and electoral system also varies across the subregion (Corbett 2015).

As a result of these democratization processes, independent accountability institutions have been established across Asia and the Pacific, with varied results. Judiciaries that can review official acts and adjudicate political disputes are now in place. The creation of constitutional courts in, for example, Indonesia and the Philippines (see e.g. Chen and Harding 2018), as well as anti-corruption bodies (in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam), to strengthen the integrity and accountability of state institutions and bureaucracies, are positive examples in this respect. National human rights institutions have also been established in many countries (e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Timor-Leste) to promote and protect human rights.

Both older and third-wave democracies in Asia and the Pacific have proven remarkably resilient over the past four decades. Of the seven countries that were democracies in 1975, five (Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea) have remained democracies uninterruptedly. Of the two remaining democracies in 1975, Sri Lanka has experienced democratic interruptions and Thailand backslid into non-democracy in 1976, a situation which was not reversed until 1983.[13]

Of the 10 countries that became democracies after 1975 and remain democracies today, all but five have remained democracies without interruptions. Of all the early third-wave democracies, South Korea and Taiwan have made the most democratic advances. Of the post-2000 democracies, Timor-Leste stands out for its democratic gains, having increased by an average of 72 per cent across all its democratic aspects since independence. In addition, together with South Korea and Taiwan, Timor-Leste records high levels of Representative Government.

Six third-wave countries have either suffered from democratic fragility or experienced democratic interruptions since their transitions. Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand had full democratic breakdowns (Nepal and Pakistan once, Bangladesh twice and Thailand four times), while the Philippines regressed into hybridity for four years between 2007 and 2010 and Sri Lanka regressed on two occasions, between 1977 and 1988 and between 2010 and 2014. Of these six countries, Bangladesh regressed into hybridity in 2014 and Pakistan in 2018. Table 4.1 presents a timeline of these episodes.

While the region has seen significant democratic advances since 1975, not all aspects of democracy have advanced at the same pace, with some dimensions trailing behind and even declining. The regional average on Absence of Corruption has declined by 11 per cent since 1975, meaning that average levels of corruption in the region are higher today than they were 43 years ago. Social Group Equality and Freedom of Religion have seen insignificant advances (with an average increase of 6 per cent). Finally, while Asia and the Pacific's Gender Equality score has increased by 47 per cent since 1975, the rate of progress is slower than other regions in the world, including Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa.

4.3. The current democracy landscape in Asia and the Pacific

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the democratic challenges the region faces.

Representative Government

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

13 For this reason, it is more appropriate to state that Thailand was a third-wave democracy until 2013.

Summary: Representative Government in Asia and the Pacific, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.48)	
High (›0.7)	Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore and Sri Lanka
Low (‹0.4)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Kazakhstan, Laos, North Korea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam

The democratic landscape in the region is heterogenous

Today's democratic landscape in Asia and the Pacific presents great levels of heterogeneity in democratic performance. While half (15) of the countries in the region covered by the GSoD Indices hold competitive elections as the basis for electing their governments, and are therefore considered democracies, there is wide variety in their performance. A total of seven democratic performance patterns can be discerned among the region's democracies (see Table 4.2).

Four countries in the region perform highly on all five attributes of democracy: two (Australia and New Zealand) are older democracies, while the other two (South Korea and Taiwan) are early third-wave democracies. Japan, also an older democracy, performs high on all attributes except Participatory Engagement. India performs in the mid-range on all five of its democratic attributes. This is also the most common performance pattern in the region, with four other countries in that bracket: Mongolia, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

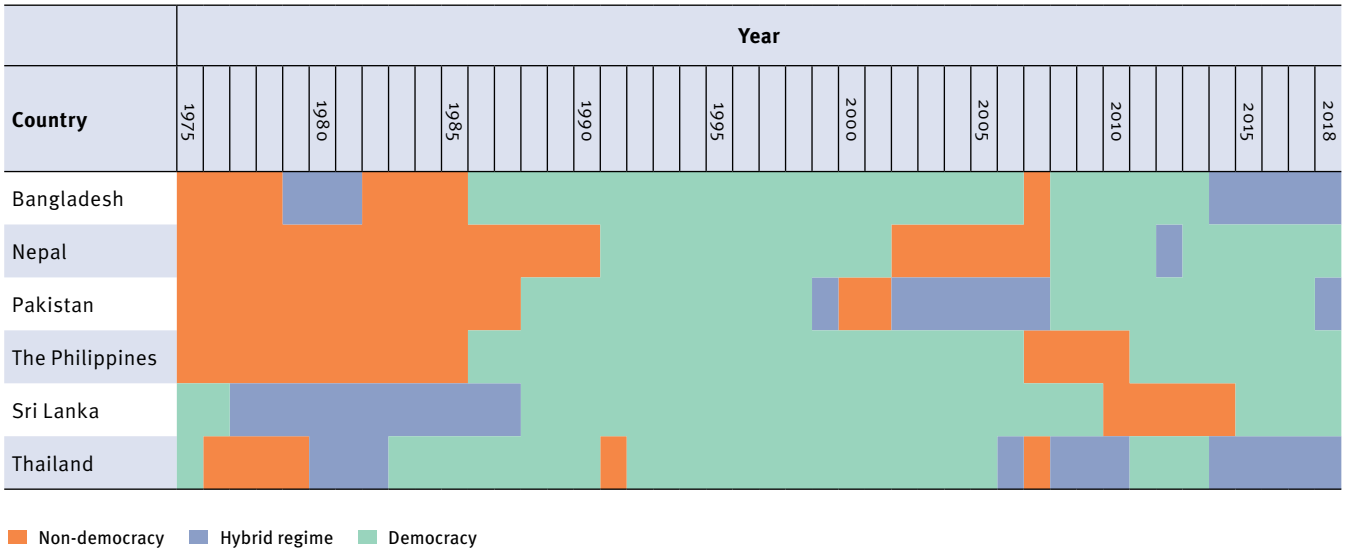
Democratic performance also varies across subregions (see Figure 4.2). All subregions in Asia contain democracies, except Central Asia, where all the countries except Kyrgyzstan (considered a hybrid regime) are classified as non-democracies. The most democratic subregion is Oceania, where all countries are democracies, followed by East Asia where two-thirds of countries are democracies.

Asia and the Pacific also hosts a large number of non-democracies (10) and five hybrid regimes (see Table 4.7). After the largely non-democratic Central Asia, South East Asia has the largest share of non-democracies and hybrid regimes, and South Asia also has three hybrid regimes.

Even hybrid regimes and non-democracies present wide variations in performance. A country such as Singapore,

TABLE 4.1

Changes in regime type in third-wave democracies in Asia and the Pacific, 1975–2018



Notes: Cell colours denote types of political regimes. Green: Democracy; Blue: Hybrid regime; Dark orange: Non-democracy. This timeline displays the changing regime types in Asia and the Pacific between 1975 and 2018 in countries that experienced hybridity or democracy at some point during that period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 4.2

Heat map of democratic performance patterns in Asia and the Pacific, 2018

Country	GSoD Indices attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Australia	High	High	High	High	High
South Korea	High	High	High	High	High
New Zealand	High	High	High	High	High
Taiwan	High	High	High	High	High
Japan	High	High	High	High	Mid-range
Timor-Leste	High	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	High
Indonesia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
India	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Mongolia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Nepal	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Philippines	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Sri Lanka	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range
Malaysia	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Myanmar	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low
Papua New Guinea	Mid-range	Mid-range	Mid-range	Low	Mid-range

High Mid-range Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

which is classified as a hybrid regime because it does not hold competitive elections, nonetheless has high levels of Impartial Administration and the lowest levels of corruption in the world, outperforming democracies such as Australia and New Zealand in this respect. Viet Nam, classified as a non-democracy on account of being a one-party state, has mid-range levels of Fundamental Rights and Impartial Administration; and China, which is also classified as a non-democracy, performs in the mid-range on Impartial Administration. Hence, when analysing democracy at the country level, regime classifications can be used as a general reference point, but they should always be contextualized and complemented by nuanced multi-dimensional analysis.

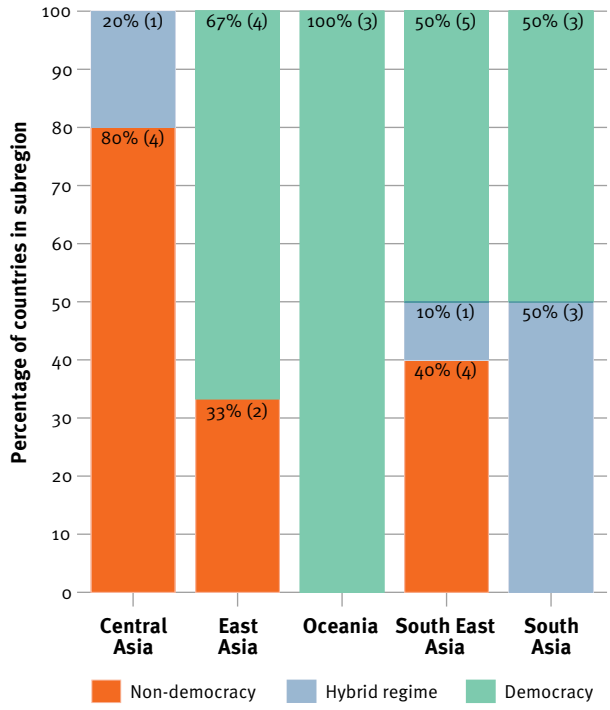
Democratic resilience bodes well for sustained gains in Representative Government

Asia and the Pacific's older and third-wave democracies have shown democratic resilience. Of the region's five older democracies, only Sri Lanka has experienced hybrid regressions (twice). Of the 15 democracies today, twelve have remained democracies uninterruptedly. This is the case for all the older democracies, five of the seven early third-wave democracies (Indonesia, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, South Korea and Taiwan) and three of the newer third-wave democracies (Malaysia, Myanmar and Timor-Leste). Three

The majority of Asia and the Pacific's older and third-wave democracies have shown democratic resilience. Of the region's five older democracies, only Sri Lanka has experienced hybrid regressions (twice). Of the 12 countries that became democracies after 1975 and remain democracies today, more than half have remained democracies uninterruptedly.

FIGURE 4.2

Regime types by subregion in Asia and the Pacific, 2018



Notes: The absolute number of countries in each subregion is also shown in brackets within each column.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

(or a little less than half) of the countries in the region that have had interruptions of a hybrid or non-democratic nature subsequently returned to democracy, namely Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

Democratic fragility still poses risks for some third-wave democracies

Despite the democratic resilience shown by a number of third-wave democracies, democratic fragility still poses challenges to representative government in a number of countries in the region. The three democracies that returned to democracy after experiencing undemocratic interruptions (Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka) provide an indication that these democratic gains remain fragile and need to be consolidated to avoid repeated regression. Indeed, two countries (Bangladesh and Pakistan) have currently backslid into a state of hybridity, while a third (Thailand[14]) experienced a full democratic breakdown from 2014 up to the elections of 2019.

Bangladesh, a previously fragile democracy, regressed to a hybrid regime in 2014. However, the process of backsliding began earlier than that. Since winning the 2008 general elections, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League has waged full-scale attacks on the press, using defamation laws and other lawsuits, and reportedly physical attacks and harassment against journalists. The tightening of a series of laws has given the Bangladeshi Government broad powers to limit media that is critical of the government or its security forces, or deemed to threaten national security (Rocha 2018; Reporters Without Borders 2019).

The Awami League has also used restrictions on civil liberties to oppress opposition parties, including arresting opposition leaders and banning the Jamaat-e-Islami party on the basis of a constitutional prohibition on religious parties. After elections were announced in 2018 approximately 21,000 opposition members were arrested; and in attacks by non-state organizations led by Awami League members, impunity reigned, despite widespread reports of arson and public beating (Asadullah and Savoia 2018).

The opposition rejected the results of the December 2018 elections, in which Sheikh Hasina won 96 per cent of the votes and the Awami League secured 258 out of the 299 parliamentary seats up for election, reducing the opposition to a very small minority (Asadullah and Savoia 2018).

The military contributes to inhibit representative government in some countries

The role of the military partly explains the democratic fragility that characterizes some countries in the region. Military forces have historically played pivotal roles in either endorsing or withdrawing support for elected civilian authorities, thereby continuing to inhibit both popular control and political equality. Indeed, authoritarian resurgence has been a constant threat to new democracies and the representativity of governments in the region, particularly in South East Asia.

Thailand is the country in the region that has experienced most democratic breakdowns (four in total) in the past 43 years, each driven by coups that installed military governments, the most recent of which lasted from 2014 until 2019. In 2017, Thailand's parliament approved the country's 20th Constitution, which transformed the Senate into a 250-seat non-elected body. The 2017 Constitution and National Strategy Act assures the Thai military of its continuing role as an overseer of national political life (see e.g. Marcan-Markar 2018). Similar to the 2008 Myanmar

14 The GSoD Indices data for 2019, which would show the country's regime status following the 2019 elections, is not yet available.

Constitution, it also provides guarantees of military immunity against both civil and criminal prosecutions.

Pakistan, which regressed from a fragile democracy to a hybrid regime in 2018, has retained a strong military presence in political life since its first transition to democracy in 1988. Military support for the current Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has allegedly assumed a variety of guises including pressuring politicians from other parties to defect, and the press to provide positive coverage of the President's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which came to power in elections held in 2018 (Fair 2018).

Myanmar was under military rule for 25 years but transitioned to democracy in 2015, when the first fully free and fair elections were held and Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory. However, the army continues to exert significant political influence, thereby undermining representative government. The 2008 Constitution guarantees the armed forces 25 per cent of parliamentary seats and gives the commander-in-chief of the armed forces the power to appoint three government ministers (AsiaWatch 2019).

This type of provision, and the continued influence it gives the military over political decision-making in Myanmar, contributes to dilute the principle of popular control. In 2019, the NLD presented a motion to establish a constitutional amendment committee in order to revise these provisions. The 45-member committee presented a report to the Union Parliament in July 2019, which listed more than 3,000 proposed changes to the Constitution (Joint Committee to Amend the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Constitution 2019). Although the armed forces sent representatives to sit in the committee, they did not present any proposals. Any amendments to the Constitution are likely to face opposition from the armed forces (Win Ko Ko Latt and Wai Mar Tun 2019; Thant 2019).

In the Pacific Islands, Fiji is a strong state whose historically fragile democracy is nonetheless gaining in strength. The country has held competitive elections since 2014, before which it experienced a 10-year undemocratic hiatus. The state apparatus it inherited from British colonizers remains largely intact. Its present stability relies on former military commander and current Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama and the military. Democracy was partially restored by the 2014 elections and further consolidated by the 2018 elections.[15]

Representative government has not necessarily prevented political instability

Even uninterrupted and relatively well-performing third-wave democracies in the region have experienced political instability. Timor-Leste, which became a democracy when it was granted independence from Indonesia in 2002, is the region's newest third-wave democracy with the highest levels of Representative Government (well above the regional and world average) and high levels of Participatory Engagement. However, it has also struggled to maintain a stable political system, having experienced an attempted coup and civil conflict in 2006 as well as fierce rivalry among its political leadership that intermittently affects the Timorese Government's capacity to govern. Indeed, disputes between national leaders—which usually play out in public—tend to stifle national political life (Guterres 2018).

Government instability also affects the older democracies in the region. In Australia, the electoral and political-party systems have been undermined by a number of challenges in recent years, of which one is the regular ousting and resignation of prime ministers (within the same ruling party). Since 2007, Australia has had five prime ministers, with none of them finishing a full term. Causes cited for the political instability in the form of changes in political leadership include the type of parliamentary system, short-term mandates, internal party rules, internal party divisions, party fragmentation, and perceived lack of progress on key policy reforms (Noack 2018; Stober 2018).

Over the past two decades an 'arc of political instability' has also stretched over the Pacific (Wallis 2015: 39). This has been compounded by weak institutional capacities, as Pacific Island countries such as Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are 'states-in-formation' characterized by significant ethno-linguistic diversity that poses a challenge to attempts to assert traditional, mono-ethnically derived conceptions of nationhood (Firth 2018: 1).

Despite being an uninterrupted democracy since 1974, Papua New Guinea has persistently recorded low scores on a number of measures relating to its democratic performance. For example, it scores in the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world on Inclusive Suffrage and on measures relating to Social Rights and Equality, including both Basic Welfare and Gender Equality.

The political instability experienced by Pacific Island countries has manifested itself in frequent changes of

15 Fiji is not covered by the GSoD Indices.

government (Aqorau 2016). The concept of 'terminal event' is used to denote 'the frequency of changes of government and the political instability that these changes represent' (International IDEA 2015: 1). Between 1968 and 2018, there were 125 'terminal events' in the subregion; 66 of these were associated with executive instability such as early elections, successful no-confidence motions and resignations. Successful no-confidence motions are the most common event, especially in Nauru (International IDEA 2015).

In other parts of the subregion stability has been restored after a series of political upheavals. In Vanuatu, the coalition government of Prime Minister Charlot Salwai (in power since 2016) has survived two attempted no-confidence motions. In 2017, Solomon Islands experienced political turbulence after the Prime Minister was ousted in a no-confidence vote that occurred after members of his cabinet defected to the opposition. However, the Prime Minister managed to negotiate a coalition of opposition members and members of his former administration in order to form a new government and returned as Prime Minister in 2019 (Blades et al. 2017).

In the grey zone of representative government: Asia's hybrid regimes

The region's hybrid regimes exist in the grey zone of representative government. **Of the world's hybrid regimes, 18 per cent are located in Asia and the Pacific and this share has increased in the past decades.** Hybrid regimes are countries that combine democratic with non-democratic characteristics. They tend to hold regular elections, although these are not considered to be fully competitive. Five countries in the region currently classify as hybrids: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Singapore. Cambodia was also classified as a hybrid regime until 2018, as was Malaysia uninterruptedly from 1975 until it transitioned to democracy in 2018.

Of the currently five hybrids, only Bangladesh and Pakistan have ever been categorized as democracies in the 43 years covered by the GSoD Indices. Singapore has been a hybrid regime uninterruptedly for the past 43 years and flourished under export-led growth strategies facilitated by the strong hand of the state. Unlike the other three so-called Asian tigers—South Korea, Taiwan, and more recently Malaysia—Singapore has never fully transitioned to democracy (Acharya 2018).

Afghanistan has never been classified as a democracy, having transitioned from a non-democracy to a hybrid regime in 2005 and remaining in this category for the past 14 years. Similarly, Cambodia developed into a hybrid regime in 1993, after the civil war and Vietnamese occupation, and remained a hybrid for 14 years until it backslid into a non-democracy in 2018. Hence, hybridity has not been a transitional stage leading to democracy for any of these regimes—rather, hybridity is a defining feature of their political systems, which sit somewhere in the grey zone of democracy. Indeed, these are countries that have allowed multiparty systems, but only under highly restrictive conditions and with severe limits on civil liberties. However, there are wide variations in performance between these hybrid regimes.

Malaysia was a hybrid regime until 2018, when the BN's single-party hold on power ended. The country has held regular elections, although they were not classified as competitive until 2018.

In Afghanistan, the end of the Taliban rule in 2001, the holding of elections and the promulgation of the 2004 Constitution, which included provisions for freedom of speech and universal suffrage, media and civil society to flourish, and laid the foundation for a transition to hybridity. However, these democratic advances were quickly subsumed by violent conflict, which persists 18 years after the defeat of the Taliban. Moreover, ambiguities in the Constitution, and instability perpetuated by the ongoing conflict, have led to a confrontational relationship between parliament and the executive. The executive has expanded its power using emergency declarations, knowing it can do so with impunity, while the parliament has proven unable to effectively oversee the executive according to its powers as outlined in the Constitution (Pasarlay and Mallyar 2019).

Singapore offers an alternative to China's hybrid model of development and governance that may seem similarly attractive to countries in the region. Singapore does not hold competitive elections but scores in the mid-range on Representative Government, Fundamental Rights and Checks on Government. It scores highly on Impartial Administration, where it performs among the top 25 per cent in the world, with the lowest levels of corruption in

A total of 5 countries (17 per cent) in Asia and the Pacific are hybrid regimes. The region is home to 18 per cent of the world's hybrid regimes. Two (Bangladesh and Pakistan) have experienced alternating periods of democracy, hybridity and non-democracy in the last four decades, while three (Afghanistan, Singapore and Kyrgyzstan) have never fully experienced democracy. Malaysia transitioned to a weak democracy in 2018, after more than six decades of hybridity.

BOX 4.1

Deepening autocratization in Cambodia

A multiparty system was instituted in Cambodia in 1993 after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreement following a bloody civil war and genocide perpetrated during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979) in which almost two million people were killed. Elections supported by the international community were held in 1993 and occurred regularly until 2018, when the country backslid into a non-democracy. However, its classification as a hybrid regime up to that point was based on the monopolization and concentration of political power for 30 years by Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

Until the elections in 2013, Cambodia allowed a limited space for opposition parties that had representation in parliament. Since then, however, Hun Sen has not disguised his efforts to suppress democracy. During 2017 and 2018, he completed the process of eliminating opposition forces, outlawing the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and incarcerating its leaders, as well as silencing civil society voices and the media through violent repression and weaponizing the law and legal processes. The judiciary commands very little support from the population and is perceived as highly corrupt (International Bar Association 2015), routinely violating fair-trial rights and being patently biased in favour of the ruling CPP (Lipes 2018).

Before the 2018 national elections, the courts handed out prison sentences to CNRP leaders and dissolved the party. This rendered the 2018 elections non-competitive and unfair, and in the absence of an effective opposition the ruling CPP won by a landslide in elections that were denounced by the international community. Cambodia's score on Clean Elections is now among the bottom 25 per cent in the world. China is thought to play a key role in supporting the Cambodian regime economically through investments and no-strings financial loans, which has enabled Cambodia to avoid both aid conditionalities and wider international criticism (*The Economist* 2019).

the world. Singapore also enjoys a highly effective public administration and is the only high-income economy in an otherwise mostly low- and medium-income region.

A factor widely believed to have played a role in the ability of Singapore (and Malaysia, up until 2018) to maintain a state of hybridity is the high levels of economic performance that have helped legitimize its regime. This also partly explains why Cambodia, which is still a low-income economy but has experienced one of the highest growth rates in the region in the past decade, persisted as a hybrid regime until 2018, although the memory of the bloody Khmer Rouge regime also provides an explanation for popular yearnings for political stability in the country (Öjendal and Sedara 2011; *The Economist* 2019).

In some countries, hybridity has evolved into non-democracy. For example, Cambodia, which never fully transitioned to democracy, has suffered from deepening autocratization in recent years (see Box 4.1). This is the term used in the GSoD Indices to refer to hybrid regimes or non-democracies that have experienced significant declines on at least 3 of their 16 democratic subattributes in the past five years.

Non-democracies in the region are persistent, with alternatives models of development and governance

After the Middle East and Africa, Asia and the Pacific is home to the largest share of countries which have never experienced democracy at any time during the third wave of democratization. A total of 12 countries (or 40 per cent of the countries in the region) have never experienced democracy (Figure 4.3). Of these, five have alternated between periods of hybridity and non-democracy, and Singapore has remained a hybrid uninterruptedly.

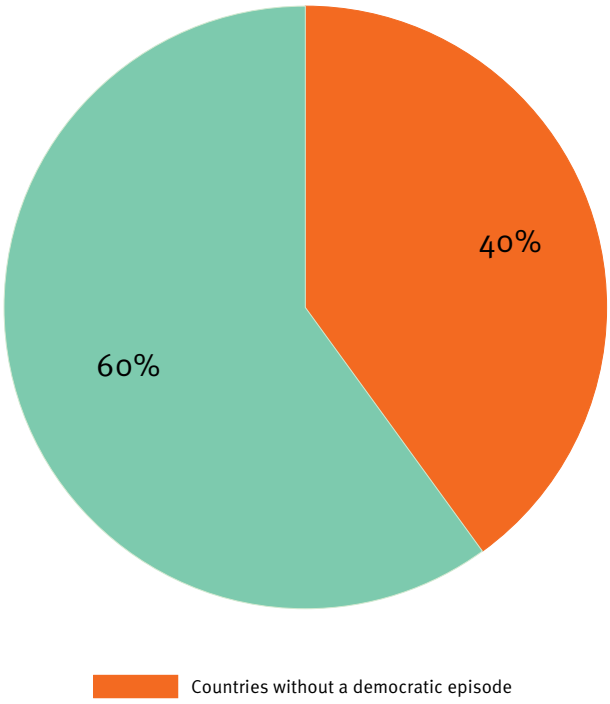
The remaining six countries have never been anything but non-democracies, with governments that cannot be considered as either representative or upholders of the principles of popular control and political equality. This is the case for only 18 countries in the world, and Asia is home to one-third of those regimes.

Therefore, despite the democratic gains made in Asia and the Pacific over the past decades, pockets of autocracy remain, specifically in Central Asia, East Asia and South East Asia. Central Asia is the only subregion that has never undergone a process of full democratic transition, and where there are no democracies. In East Asia, China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) persist as autocracies, while South East Asia is home to three non-democratic regimes: Brunei Darussalam, Laos and Viet Nam.

According to the GSoD Indices, the five Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) are all considered non-democracies, of which Kyrgyzstan, given recent political openings, is the

FIGURE 4.3

Percentage of countries in Asia and the Pacific that have never been democracies



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

only hybrid regime. Uzbekistan has seen some democratic advances in recent years, but not yet sufficient to be classified even as a hybrid regime.

In contrast to Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, Central Asia did not undergo any democratic transitions following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given the absence of strong democratic movements that could have enabled revolutions from below, power was largely left concentrated within regime elites based on subnational clan identities and patronage networks (Cummings 2002; Collins 2006). Therefore, Central Asia experienced a process of non-rupture as, one by one, presidents opted for authoritarian alternatives (Cummings 2012). Democratic reforms were mostly used by elites to enhance their ability to capture distributive gains during the transition. However, all Central Asian regimes paid lip service to electoral democracy and held elections (Cummings 2012). Over the last 25 years, analysts have continued to wonder when—and how—a process of democratization might begin to emerge in Central Asia.

Some identify the highly patriarchal and hierarchical nature of Central Asian society as the root cause of authoritarianism in the subregion (Anderson 1997; Hale 2015). Others argue that it is tightly connected to debates over regional political culture (Heathershaw and Schatz 2017). Some contend that the root causes are located in clan politics (Collins 2006). Others emphasize the importance of political will and the new elite's ability to forge unity and negotiate with oppositional elites (Cummings 2012), while still others claim that the presidential function inherited from the Soviet Union constitutes the chief causal factor (Ishiyama 2002).

Since 2012 almost all Central Asian states have instigated a wave of constitutional or legal reforms pursued under the rubric of democratization, although critics have condemned the use of ostensibly democratic tools such as constitutional reviews to implement reforms aimed at further entrenching non-democratic rule and practices (Landau 2013). The most promising may be those in Kyrgyzstan, the only hybrid regime in the subregion (since 2005), whose 2010 Constitution instituted a premier-presidential form of governance headed towards parliamentarism (Fumagalli 2016), followed by several constitutional amendments in 2016–2017. These latest amendments, passed through a highly contested referendum, have, however, been criticized for strengthening the presidential grip on power, undermining human rights, especially those of LGBT groups, and weakening adherence to international human rights treaties.

Since holding elections in 2016, Uzbekistan, still classified as a non-democracy, has undergone an unprecedented reform process with respect to taxation, economic and monetary policy as well as administrative and constitutional reforms. If implemented and able to help provide the basis for a viable opposition and democratic plurality, these reforms could increase the potential for democratization in Uzbekistan and, indeed, the subregion. Uzbekistan's statistically significant gains since 2016 are also reflected in its GSoD Indices scores, specifically in five subattributes:

None of the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) has transitioned to democracy since breaking away from the Soviet Union in 1991. Nonetheless, Uzbekistan has seen some statistically significant advances in five of its GSoD Indices scores over the past five years, although these advances are not yet sufficient to classify the country as a hybrid regime, let alone a democracy.

Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, Absence of Corruption, Effective Parliament and Civil Society Participation.

Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have both undertaken reforms that strengthen their constitutional courts, although these two countries' political systems largely remain closed, lacking any form of competitive elections. The resignation in 2019 of Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, after three decades in power, paves the way for a leadership change, although it does not seem to suggest a political opening in the country: Nazarbayev remains in charge of the army and intelligence services, and political reforms have not occurred (*New York Times* 2019).

The influence of Russia on Central Asian countries' economies and national security, and the ways in which this influence extends to the political sphere through the lens of norm diffusion, is seen by many as key to understanding the regional political landscape (Kembayev 2016). The shift away from international human rights treaties in Kyrgyzstan's constitutional revisions, for example, reflects both the current Russian approach to international law and its relationship with the European Court of Human Rights and other international bodies (Ziegler 2016).

China is another source of influence which, some argue, has undermined democratization efforts in Central Asia. Specifically, China's influence is viewed as extending through such measures as offering alternative sources of donor assistance, investment, generous lending and economic cooperation, but without good governance and environmental protection conditionalities (Omelicheva 2015). As a result, China has become a key economic partner to all countries in Central Asia. It is also seeking to exert influence through its alternative development model, which promotes norms based on authoritarian governance and a socialist market economy with an emphasis on public ownership and state-owned enterprises within an overarching market economic structure.

China's model of authoritarian capitalism has adapted elements from the East Asian developmental models of Japan, South Korea and even Singapore (Horesh 2015). This model, although not openly praised by Central Asian countries, is appealing to them, as it offers political stability without requiring them to fundamentally alter their political systems in order to achieve economic development (Sharshenova and Crawford 2017; Ibañez-Tirado and Marsden 2018).

The expeditious growth of China's alternative development model provides a politically significant counter-narrative to liberal democracy norms in Asia and the Pacific, and therefore continues to play an important role in understanding the region's changing democratic landscape beyond Central Asia (Benner 2017). The model has been reinforced under President Xi Jinping, who has been criticized for further autocratizing the political system, moving away from a more collective leadership towards greater personalistic rule (Shirk 2016).

In 2018, at the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s 19th Party Congress, Xi explicitly rejected Western-style liberal democracy and offered the Chinese authoritarian, single-party political model as a system for the world to emulate (Glaser 2018). China's political model may seem appealing as it provides promises of economic gains to hybrid regimes, non-democracies and new and fragile democracies. Beyond its economic performance, the Chinese Government is perceived as fighting corruption, although this has not yet translated into a statistically significant increase in its Absence of Corruption score (which only saw an insignificant increase, from 0.43 in 2016 to 0.45 in 2018).

China's economic influence stretches across the region and beyond. It has helped launch the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a multi-nation, USD 100 billion initiative to finance infrastructure needs in Asia and the Pacific, which is likely to further increase the country's economic influence over the region. The Belt and Road Initiative, a strategy adopted by the Chinese Government to fund infrastructure development in countries across all regions of the world, is also seen as an effort to extend Chinese dominance in global affairs (Chatzky and McBride 2019).

China also uses its economic clout to export its own model of 'digital authoritarianism', in particular Internet censorship, to like-minded countries. In 2017–2018, for example, a total of 36 countries reportedly sent representatives to Chinese training programmes on censorship and surveillance, and another 18 purchased monitoring technology or facial recognition systems from Chinese companies (Romaniuk and Burgers 2018; Freedom House 2018a).

In recent years, non-democratic countries have created a Eurasian alliance consisting of Russia, China and the Central Asian states which has worked closely to challenge democratic norms and values and dismantle human rights guarantees. Recently Turkey has also signalled its intent to join this alliance (Cooley 2012).

At the same time, the potential for economic development combined with the growth of an educated middle class could potentially disrupt the foundation of non-democratic

regimes such as China's (Fortunato 2015). For China, where there is strong support for the existing regime across classes, an analysis of data from the Asian Barometer Survey indicates that 'Chinese citizens who identify themselves as the middle class express a stronger preference for liberal democracy than those in either a higher or lower class, and they also tend to regard democracy as the best form of government' (Wu, Chang and Pan 2017: 349). Overall, and as the Chinese middle class continues to grow, this may lead to greater demands for democratic reform, although signs of such a development are barely visible yet.

China has also recently shifted its strategy in trying to influence domestic politics in Taiwan. After conducting live-fire military exercises and launching missiles close to the Taiwan Strait since the 1990s, China opted for a subtler strategy in the context of the 2018 Taiwanese local elections. Specifically, it is reported to have mobilized 'influence operators'—local ethnic-Chinese front groups trying to influence domestic politics—in elections that resulted in a major defeat for the ruling pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party and a political comeback for the pro-Beijing Kuomintang Party. Allegedly, similar attempts have been made in other countries as well (McGregor 2018).

Therefore, both China's rising power and Russia's assertiveness pose significant challenges to democratic governance: not only in the subregion of Central Asia, but arguably throughout the whole world. Both have assiduously expanded their networks of client states by leveraging no-strings-attached financial aid, lending and investment (in the case of China) and weapons sales (in the case of Russia).

One country where this influence is currently playing out in the open is Venezuela, which for years has supplied oil to both countries in exchange for low-interest loans and military equipment, which are believed to play key roles in maintaining Venezuela's President, Nicolás Maduro, in power (Seligman 2019; Cara Labrador 2019). Both countries offer a potent narrative regarding the alleged advantages and successes of 'strongman rule' (Kendall-Taylor and Shullman 2018).

South East Asia also hosts a number of non-democracies. While not covered by the GSoD Indices, Brunei Darussalam is an absolute monarchy where the Sultan possesses all state powers (Black 2011). Laos and Viet Nam are also countries that, while lacking the economic clout of China, have to date proved immune to genuine democratization. Both are still classified as non-democracies by the GSoD Indices, and although Viet Nam has mid-range levels of Impartial Administration, its civil society is restricted. Both countries practise a form of 'socialist law-based state' or 'constitutional socialism' through one-party rule (Bui 2014; Deinla 2017).

In Viet Nam, the so-called *doi moi* economic reforms, initiated in 1986 with the goal of creating a 'socialist-orientated market economy', have taken a liberal turn in the economic sphere, along with a relaxation in some aspects of the political arena. Although a closed leadership is responsible for policy and decision-making, the past few years have seen moves to both tackle widespread corruption in government in Viet Nam (which has increased the country's Absence of Corruption score from 0.4 in 2012 to a mid-range level of 0.50 in 2018) and extend elections to the provincial level.

In contrast, Laos has maintained the status quo (Gainsborough 2012), although there have allegedly been some discussions in elite circles over how to bring about some form of democracy (High 2013). Dubbed the 'world's most closed political system after North Korea' (*The Economist* 2016), Laos held elections for provincial representatives in 2016 for the first time. While not considered competitive, free or fair by GSoD Indices standards, the fact that 73 per cent of the seats in the 149-member National Assembly were elected for the first time is a small step towards a potential political opening (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016). At the same time, only five officially approved 'independent' candidates (i.e. non-members of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party) were elected.

Electoral processes in Asia and the Pacific present opportunities and challenges

Asia and the Pacific has made significant advances in strengthening its electoral processes and institutions in the past decades, but a number of challenges remain. More than half (eight) of the region's democracies have high levels of electoral integrity (referred to in the GSoD Indices as Clean Elections), while 47 per cent have mid-range levels (Figure 4.4). High levels of electoral integrity can be found not only in four older democracies (Australia, India, Japan and New Zealand), but also in three early third-wave democracies (Indonesia, South Korea and Taiwan) and a new third-wave democracy (Timor-Leste).

Mongolia is another third-wave democracy that has had levels of Clean Elections well above the world average, although it scores mid-range in absolute terms (at 0.68). Nepal is also a recently re-transitioning democracy that has significantly increased its levels of electoral integrity, with its score on Clean Elections increasing from 0.53 in 2012 to 0.65 in 2018, and with elections for the three levels of government effectively carried out in 2017.

More than half (53 per cent) of democracies in Asia and the Pacific have high levels of Clean Elections: Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste. A little less than half (47 per cent) have mid-range levels.

One challenge affecting the region relates to the use and abuse of elections as a legitimizing façade by weak or non-representative governments, such as hybrid regimes and non-democracies. All countries in the region, even non-democratic regimes such as China, conduct some form of elections at some level of government, even though these cannot be considered clean, competitive or fair.

In the Chinese case, for example, local people's congresses are directly elected, although only members of the CCP can stand as candidates (Sudworth 2016). In the GSoD Indices for the region, only China scores 0 (out of 1) on Clean Elections. However, all other non-democracies in the region score between 0.16 (Laos and North Korea) and 0.44 (Thailand) on this indicator. All hybrid regimes conduct regular elections, although they are not classified as fully competitive. When non-democratic regimes hold elections, it distorts the meaning of such processes for democracies, as they do not uphold the core principles of popular control and political equality. Electoral tokenism in non-democracies may also undermine the credibility and trust in elections in democracies.

Another challenge relates to elite representation, which can distort the meaning of popular representation. Although regional elites are not cohesive (Case 2017), political elites—incumbents and their families, or those with extensive political, military or economic ties or influence—have often dominated politics in the region. While the nature of these elites varies in each country, elite politics, rather than inclusive and broad-based political participation, has been at the heart of democratization in Asia and the Pacific.

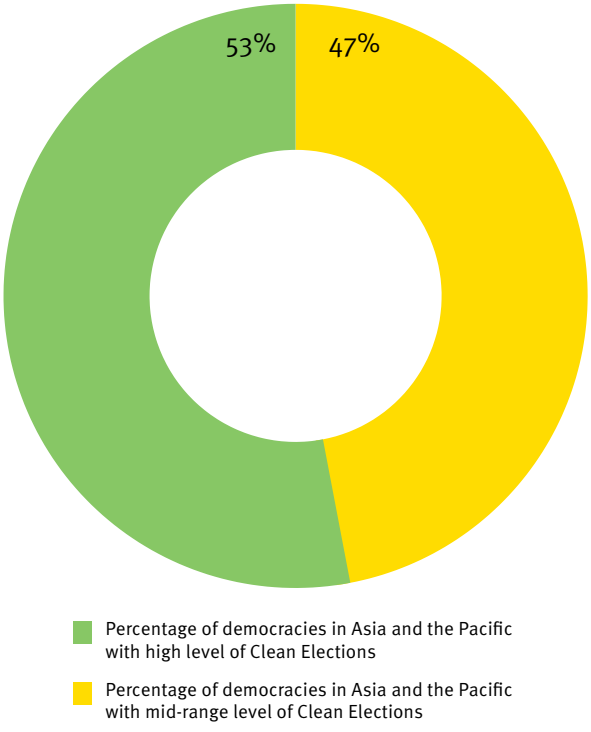
This is also reflected in the region's levels of Social Group Equality (which measures equality in access to political power and enjoyment of Civil Liberties by social group and class), which is the second lowest in the world (at 0.43) after the Middle East (0.30). Asia and the Pacific's low score on this measure can be partially explained by the fact that many democratic transition processes in the region were elite-driven and negotiated transitions, rather than resulting from bottom-up social mobilization.

Almost half of the countries in the region have low levels of Social Group Equality. Of these, two (Myanmar and the Philippines) are democracies; the Philippines scores among the bottom 25 per cent in the world. However, elite representation does not only affect the newer democracies in the region. Older democracies in the region also suffer from low levels of cultural and ethnic diversity in their representative structures.

In Australia, the challenges of equitable ethnic representation are manifested in the national parliament's composition. Fewer than 20 of the 226 members of parliament serving in the federal parliament come from a non-English speaking background, despite the fact that the 2016 national census found that almost 50 per cent of Australians were born overseas or have a parent born overseas, and that almost one-quarter of the population speaks a language other than English at home (Tasevski 2018).

FIGURE 4.4

Percentage of democracies in Asia and the Pacific with high and mid-range levels of Clean Elections



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Indigenous communities in Australia have made calls for greater recognition in the democratic system, most notably through the Uluru Statement from the Heart, produced by delegates to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Referendum Convention in May 2017, which called for an indigenous 'Voice to Parliament' aimed at enhancing the input of indigenous communities in the legislative process (Referendum Council 2017). However, this call was denied by the Australian Government on the basis that it would be seen as a third chamber of parliament (Remeikis 2019). At the state level, the Government has committed to negotiating a treaty with Aboriginal communities in the state. If successful this would be the first indigenous–state treaty in Australia's history, which may provide a model for others to follow (Rimmer, Saunders and Crommelin 2019).

Moreover, intimidation and violence are also persistent features of political contests in many countries in the region. In particular, countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea all have high levels of electoral violence. Political violence, particularly at the local level and during the election period, has also been a problem in the Philippines (see e.g. Maitem and Navales 2019).

Finally, social media is contributing to profound changes in the electoral and political landscape of Asia and the Pacific, as it is in the rest of the world (see Box 4.2).

Populism and ethnonationalism are on the rise, as is the infusion of religion into politics

Asia and the Pacific's democratic expansion and consolidation have been challenged by resurgent nationalism and nascent populism. If unchecked, nationalism and populism can lead to a gradual erosion of democratic institutions and processes (Daly 2017). While populism has swept across Europe in recent years, and is also seen in Latin America, the phenomenon is not as stark in Asia and the Pacific, although the region is by no means immune from it.

Some Asian politicians have been described as having populist characteristics, the most well-known being Duterte in the Philippines, but also to some extent Modi in India, albeit with a Hindu-nationalist bent. Since 2013, and under the tenure of these political leaders, both countries have seen significant declines in their democratic scores: India on Civil Liberties, Civil Society Participation, Media Integrity and Effective Parliament; and the Philippines on Civil Liberties, Effective Parliament and Predictable Enforcement.

Other Asian politicians have also been described as exhibiting some populist features, including the current President of Mongolia, Khaltmaagiin Battulga, who rode a wave of voter discontent with the country's ruling party to win the 2017 elections on an anti-corruption and anti-poverty platform (Denyer 2018).

These politicians all vary widely in style, programmatic focus and political leanings, but share the cloaking of their regimes in nationalist discourse, with some having a more anti-establishment bent than others.

Similar to other parts of the world, nationalism and nationalist discourse are on the rise in a number of countries in the region. In China, President Xi, under the slogan of 'realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', has successfully mobilized nationalist sentiment to consolidate political power and legitimize his uncontested leadership. Xi's brand of Chinese nationalism is 'suffused with a cocktail of economic achievement, political nostalgia, and national grievance together with a new culture of political self-confidence' (Rudd 2018).

Rising nationalism, and in particular ethnonationalism, has led to the infusion of religion in politics in a number of countries. This contributes to the weakening of democracy by undermining secularism and pluralism, increasing societal polarization and, in the worst cases, heightening conflict. An increasingly globalized world affects established social identities, belief systems and patterns of living. Faced with these social dislocations, some politicians, religious leaders and citizens seek refuge in identity politics, or claim that other groups and identities threaten established identities.

In the past, India, one of the region's older democracies, served as a model for much of South Asia by establishing a democratic system that prioritized a secular state identity and safeguarded pluralism. Today, India with its strong Hindu-nationalist currents is itself experiencing challenges to these principles (Vaishnav 2019).

A weakening of commitments to secularism and pluralism in the face of majoritarian, and often religious, movements is not, however, unique to India.

In Sri Lanka, with the next parliamentary elections due in 2020, the political revival of ex-President Mahinda Rajapaksa—on the back of an ever-present but latent Buddhist nationalism among the majority Sinhalese population—constitutes a critical challenge to the country's future democratic trajectory. Sri Lanka's two

BOX 4.2

Social media, elections and democracy

In recent years, social media and new technologies have contributed to a profound reshaping of the democratic landscape in Asia and the Pacific.

The use of social media is having a profound impact on democratic politics in the region, providing a powerful platform for candidates to deliver their messages during election campaigns, a sophisticated means for spreading disinformation, and an instrument for civil society activists to hold politicians and security forces accountable.

All too often, however, debate over this impact collapses into a good versus evil exchange, with social media viewed as either the answer to every political challenge or, conversely, the source of every conceivable problem. Like all major technological innovations, however, social media in and of itself is neither good nor bad. Rather, the way in which social media is used determines whether its impact on society is either benign or malignant.

Social media's rise to prominence brings new political and social challenges. Politically, governments—and increasingly key platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp too—are coming under pressure to develop a meaningful regulatory framework designed to prevent or at least curtail dissemination of the worst online excesses, including hate speech, disinformation and pornography. However, regulatory attempts face stark criticism from free speech advocates, who argue that any attempt to regulate online speech undermines democratic principles such as freedom of expression. In parallel, many countries are waking up to the need to educate young people in responsible online user habits, starting in the classroom.

South East Asia encompasses a large and ever-growing population of digital users that analysts increasingly compare in scope to the global digital 'superpowers', including China, Europe and the United States. Whether via computer, tablet, mobile phone or other e-device, social media communication, principally (but not exclusively) via Facebook and the WhatsApp messaging service, now constitutes a core element of regional online activity (AseanUp 2019).

In terms of the impact of social media on democratic politics, regional experiences can broadly be categorized as positive or negative. On the positive side, in some countries social media use has helped to both expose official corruption and, as in the case of Malaysia, unseat a graft-friendly regime at the polls. The negative impact of social media is exemplified by the case of the Philippines, where a social media-savvy President, Rodrigo Duterte, has successfully deployed the full array of 'fake news'-producing instruments—online troll armies, 'buzzers' and Facebook campaigns in particular—to smear and even crush opponents.

The outcome of Malaysia's 2018 elections, which saw former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad unseat the incumbent, Najib Razak, represented an impressive—and, to many, unexpected—vindication of democratic process in a country where the BN has won all 13 elections since independence from the United Kingdom in 1957. Despite rolling out a relatively sophisticated social media campaign in a country with high Internet penetration, the BN failed to overcome the obstacle posed by corruption allegations—notably the 2015 1MDB scandal—swirling around former Prime Minister Razak.

In addition, as one commentary noted, 'all-round internet access allowed for increased transparency by making it easier for citizens to perform fact-checks and background-checks, facilitating higher involvement in civic issues'. This, in turn, 'provided more space for dissent and competing narratives, leading to a further distrust in authority' (Abdullah and Anuar 2019). The fact that Malaysians increasingly access news via social media platforms which, unlike traditional media, are not government-controlled, made it much harder for the Razak camp to dominate the political narratives, despite determined official efforts to label reports critical of him as 'fake news' (Abdullah and Anuar 2019). This may well be of growing relevance for elections across the region.

The picture with respect to social media's impact on Indonesia's political landscape is complex. The April 2019 election campaign, which for the first time culminated in simultaneous presidential and legislative elections, saw widescale deployment of the full array of social media instruments. Both the incumbent civilian President, Joko Widodo, and his opponent, former general Prabowo Subianto, used social media campaigns to reach voters, and in particular young people, who constitute half of Indonesia's population (Abraham et al. 2019). Common to both candidates' campaigns were efforts to appeal to the electorate using nationalist and religious sentiments, which were further amplified by social media, leading to a climate of political polarization (Gunia 2019; Tehusijarana 2019).

In South Asia, too, social media's political impact is far-reaching. India, the world's largest democracy, exemplifies this pattern. Social media communications were a feature of campaigning for the 2019 general elections, involving an estimated 900 million prospective voters (Mahapatra 2019). Two key factors played a role: (a) the immediacy of the engagement facilitated by social media, combined with the deep social penetration readily obtained by viral online posts; and (b) the suspension of prevailing norms of rational discourse and facilitation of highly polarized, often identity-based exchanges owing to the anonymous nature of people's online engagement.

Keen to build on its powerful and highly effective use of social media during the 2014 election campaign, in the run-up to the 2019 elections the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) targeted ordinary smartphone-owning voters. Reportedly more

than 900,000 'cell phone pramukhs' (volunteers driving the WhatsApp-based campaign ahead of the Indian parliamentary election) created neighbourhood-based WhatsApp groups to disseminate information about the BJP's achievements and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign activities. The opposition Indian National Congress sought to counter this campaign with the launch of its smartphone application and the appointment of an extensive group of volunteers to coordinate local digital campaigns (Williams and Kamra 2019).

In Sri Lanka, social media played a critical role in the successful campaign to unseat President Mahinda Rajapaksa in the January 2015 presidential elections. For years, the Rajapaksa regime's tight grip on all forms of opposition meant that online communication constituted one of the few areas of public life not wholly subject to official scrutiny and control.

Recently, however, social media platforms have also become tools for the dissemination of hate speech towards minority groups, and in particular Muslim communities. The March 2018 anti-Muslim riots instigated by small but organized radical Buddhist formations led the Sri Lankan Government to impose temporary restrictions on access to social media. This also occurred in the aftermath of 2019 bombings on Christian churches (Wakefield 2019).

In Myanmar, the proliferation of online hate directed at the Rohingya minority has contributed to demands that social media platforms become more proactive in moderating and blocking all forms of hate speech. However, this is also causing resistance among freedom-of-speech advocates, who argue that this undermines democracy.

Taken together these developments have brought into sharp relief social media's potential to make or break key democratic processes and events. The question of how best to respond to these challenges will likely continue to dominate the democracy debate in the foreseeable future.

dominant Sinhalese parties have both tried to appeal to Buddhist nationalism, which has limited the political system's ability to accommodate Tamil and Muslim minorities. The 2015 presidential election offered an opportunity to address such ethnic tensions, which Sinhalese nationalists resisted (Staniland 2019). Nepal, possibly influenced by India, has also expressed doubts about secularization and pro-Hindu nationalism is gaining strength in the country, alongside the strong nationalist current represented by the Nepalese Government and its policies.

In Pakistan, the military, through its support for Prime Minister Imran Khan, also empowered three political parties with known ties to terrorism and a commitment to radical religious edicts. These include the Pakistani Tehreek-i-Labbaik, a party 'whose single position is the strict enforcement of the country's controversial blasphemy law', which has led to many murders and extrajudicial killings based on (mostly false) allegations of offences committed against the Prophet Mohammed (Fair 2018). The military's interest in recruiting these parties demonstrates the level of popular support they currently enjoy in Pakistan, and the threat they pose to the development of a more secularized, tolerant Pakistani democracy.

In Indonesia, while civil society was one of the key political forces in the democratization process, democratic consolidation has also spawned groups that do not share the democratic ethos. The emergence of radical Islamic and conservative nationalist groups, outside of the mainstream moderate Islamic movement, has been successfully exploited by certain political interests in Indonesia (Nabbs-Keller 2018). These groups demonstrated their disruptive potential to undermine pluralist democracy in South East Asia's largest Muslim democracy by staging protests in 2016 and initiating a blasphemy case in 2017 against Basuki 'Ahok' Purnama, the then-Governor of Jakarta and a prominent Chinese–Indonesian Christian (Hadiz 2017).

Indonesia's national law already adopts some aspects of sharia law for Muslims (e.g. provisions on marriage and inheritance). However, efforts by certain Muslim groups—primarily the United Development Party and Partai Bulan Bintang (Crescent Star Party), as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) such as the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front)—to reinforce sharia law in Indonesia's legal system could present a potential threat to democracy.

The two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, have rejected calls for the further reinforcement of Islamic law, as have nationalist groups. At the same time, while efforts to implement Islamic law at the national level have subsided in Indonesia, a number of regional bylaws with clear sharia influences having already been passed, even if their implementation often remains unclear (Assyaukanie 2007; Buehler 2013; Salim 2008). This has caused significant concern in areas with primarily non-Muslim populations. In other areas, such as Aceh (the only province in Indonesia to enforce sharia provisions due to its special autonomy), the drive to reinforce Islamic law has even threatened to undermine the principle of inclusion essential to democracy.

In Bhutan, resistance to democracy has been brewing in some sectors of society on the grounds that it inhibits Bhutanese 'happiness'. While ethnonationalism has not been encouraged by any single party or leader, this 'popular' resistance to constitutional democracy is often based on ethno-religious norms. Many observers have commented that party politics in Bhutan are divisive and negatively affect community relationships; this divisiveness is often framed as contrary to aspects of Bhutanese Buddhist culture (see e.g. Berthelsen 2013; Slater 2018).

Some Bhutanese express dissatisfaction with the democratic system in place for the past 10 years and a longing for the monarchy. This rising homegrown resistance to democracy could easily be grafted onto the Bhutanese Government's efforts to preserve culture—always welcomed by the populace—and thereby threaten the country's democratic gains.

Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Summary: Fundamental Rights in Asia and the Pacific, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range (0.54)	
	High (>0.7)	Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste
	Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore and Sri Lanka
	Low (<0.4)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Kazakhstan, Laos, North Korea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam

Ethnonationalism, conflict and democracy interact in numerous ways

Historic and re-emerging ethnonationalism is also at the core of deep-seated pockets of conflict in Asia and the Pacific. Beyond their impact on geopolitical stability, these conflicts also undermine democratic principles and erode respect for human rights, heighten democratic fragility, and reduce prospects for democratic consolidation in the region. Ethnonationalist conflict across the region encompasses continuing violence in older, early and new third-wave democracies (including India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka) and non-democracies (including China).

However, this list is not exhaustive and does not include other types of conflict, such as Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, West Papua in Indonesia and Afghanistan.

Among the democracies, **India** suffers from three central conflict nodes. First, the tensions and sporadic violence in the northern border state of Jammu and Kashmir are long-standing. Second, a swathe of Maoist/Naxalite-inspired insurgencies continues, spread across more than 60 districts of the country, many dating back a number of decades and all directed against the central authorities. These insurgencies continue to pose a stark challenge to the established order. To date, more than 6,000 people have died in the fighting. The Indian Government continue to view this as essentially an issue of law and order, while the Maoists view it as a political conflict and there is no sign to date of moves towards a peaceable ending (Routray 2018). Third, a rash of often tribally based insurgences in many of India's north-eastern states, many dating back to the late 1940s, should also be noted in this context.

Sri Lanka, formally at peace since the end of its civil war in 2009, is still dealing with the legacy of that conflict. Until a definitive political solution to the underlying ethnic conflict is achieved, it can be argued, Sri Lanka will remain a fragile democracy subject to unpredictable upsurges in ethnic tension and violence. This view, moreover, draws a measure of support from the experience of recent years, during which the country has seen a rise in ethno-religious tensions.

In 2018, anti-Muslim riots, whose leaders included a number of radical Sinhalese Buddhist monks, left several dead and many properties destroyed, and led the Sri Lankan Government to declare a state of emergency accompanied by a temporary shutdown of access to social media (*The Economist* 2018). Most recently, in April 2019, a series of large-scale suicide bombings targeted the country's Christian minority, as well as foreign tourists, leaving over 250 dead and many hundreds more injured (Associated Press 2019).

Myanmar has experienced ethnic insurgency campaigns since it achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1948. The ethnonationalist violence in the shape of a wave of brutal security-force assaults, starting in August 2017, on

the country's predominantly Muslim Rohingya minority has received the most international attention. Insurgencies continue to affect other parts of Myanmar, including Kachin, Karen and Shan states (Human Rights Watch 2019b).

Less widely reported on than other regional conflicts, latent ethnic tensions in southern **Thailand** over the last decade have led to intermittent conflict between Thai security forces and armed militants from the south's majority-Muslim, ethnic-Malay population (Küng 2018).

Even less well-known internationally is **China's** increasingly repressive treatment of the majority Muslim Uyghur population in the autonomous north-western Xinjiang province. Mass detention camps exist in which an estimated one million Uyghurs and Kazakhs have been incarcerated to date and there is systematic destruction of mosques and other architectural monuments, all accompanied by electronic surveillance. Responding to the critics, the Chinese Government argues that it is aimed at targeting religious extremism, and that the detention camps are in fact vocational training centres (Kuo 2018, 2019).

The expansion of civil liberties has been countered by a resurgence of human rights violations and unabated impunity

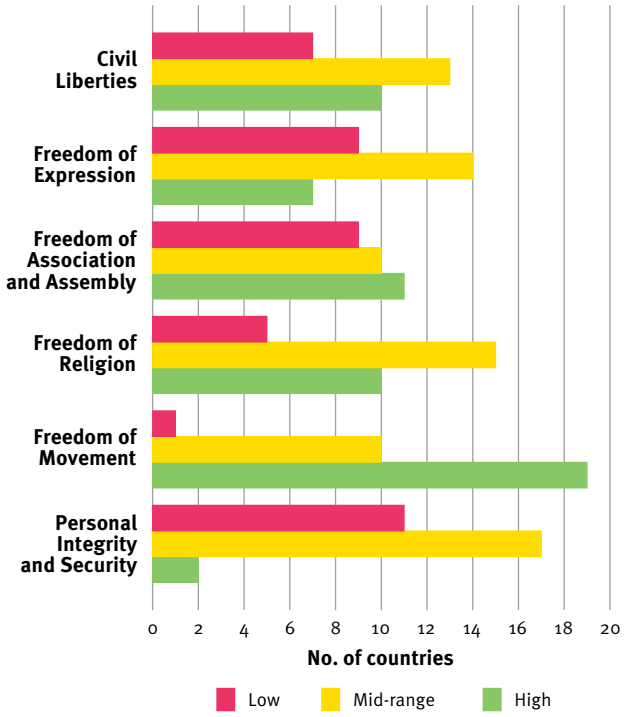
The democratization process in Asia and the Pacific has led to an expansion of civil liberties over the past four decades. Civil Liberties is one of the region's three best-performing aspects, judging from the share of countries with high score performance: almost one-third of countries in the region have high levels of Civil Liberties. The regional performance is particularly high on Freedom of Movement (where 19 countries score highly) and Freedom of Association and Assembly (on which 11 countries record high scores). Figure 4.5 illustrates performance of countries in Asia and the Pacific on Civil Liberties and its five subcomponents in 2018.

However, the protection of human rights in a number of countries in the region is weak. A total of 11 countries in Asia and the Pacific have low levels of Personal Integrity and Security, of which two (Myanmar and the Philippines) are democracies. Moreover, seven countries have seen significant declines in Civil Liberties in the past five years—four of these countries (India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand) were democracies in 2013 although only India and the Philippines were still classified as democracies in 2018 (see Table 4.3). In Thailand (until 2019, at least), these declines coincided with democratic breakdown, while in Cambodia they occurred in the context of deepening autocratization.

In some countries, human rights abuses are occurring within the context of ethnic conflict, while other violations take different forms, including suppression of the freedoms of expression, the press and assembly; arbitrary detention;

FIGURE 4.5

Countries with high, mid-range and low performance on Civil Liberties and its five subcomponents in Asia and the Pacific, 2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 4.3

Countries in Asia and the Pacific with statistically significant declines on Civil Liberties, 2013–2018

Countries with declines in Civil Liberties	Cambodia, Tajikistan, Thailand until 2019, Viet Nam (non-democracies) Pakistan (hybrid regime) India, the Philippines (democracies)

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

poor access to justice through lack of due process and an inability to seek counsel or legal aid; poor prison conditions; widespread human trafficking; and the denial of basic education and health services to refugees and migrants (see e.g. US State Department 2018; Human Rights Watch 2018). These violations occur to a significantly larger extent in the non-democracies in the region, as well as in the hybrid regimes, but also in democracies, undermining the prospects for democratic consolidation.

In 2017, two years after **Myanmar**'s first free and fair elections, a massive and violent military crackdown against the Rohingya minority in Rakhine state resulted in a humanitarian disaster, displacing more than 730,000 people and leading to the deaths of at least 6,700 people by conservative estimates (Médecins Sans Frontières 2017; Human Rights Watch 2018), constituting a serious setback to Myanmar's democratic path. The UN Human Rights Council's Independent Fact-Finding Mission to Myanmar found patterns of both gross human rights violations and systematic ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya, and recommended prosecution of the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's armed forces) for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (UN Human Rights Council 2018).

The military-led transition and the strong presence of the military in the democratic institutions of the country, plus the fact that Myanmar's Constitution guarantees military immunity from civil and criminal prosecutions, go a long way towards explaining why these crimes occurred without reprisals. Another explanation is the lack of domestic public condemnation of the military's actions, due to historical anti-Muslim, anti-Rohingya sentiment among the majority Buddhist population in Myanmar (Albert and Chatzky 2018).

Laws that privilege national interests over fundamental freedoms exist in many countries. In Viet Nam (which scores 0.40 on the GSoD Indices attribute of Civil Liberties, well under the world average), activists are routinely beaten up and charged under article 79 of the 1999 Penal Code for carrying out activities allegedly aimed at threatening the government (Human Rights Watch 2019d).

Human rights violations in the region are also perpetrated by non-state actors. Such violations have chiefly been committed in the context of armed conflicts by secessionists, radical groups or organized criminal groups. One of South East Asia's biggest problems is human trafficking: it is estimated that at least 225,000 women and children are trafficked every year for sexual exploitation or forced labour (International Organization for Migration 2015). A combination of factors related to poverty, gender, education and lack of law enforcement have facilitated human trafficking in both destination countries (including Malaysia and Thailand) and countries of origin (including Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines).

The resurgence of gross human rights violations in Cambodia, Myanmar and the Philippines over the past five years testifies to the systemic failure of accountability and justice institutions in these countries. It also shows that this type of failure—when coupled with a leadership that exhorts or condones the use of violence—can all too easily result in the gravest forms of human rights violations and impunity.

The role of the military, police and other security personnel in the perpetuation of widespread human rights violations is evident in all three of these countries. In particular, it has been argued that the war on drugs in the Philippines cannot be decoupled from the issue of corruption in the police force (Jensen and Hapal 2018; see also Box 4.3). Moreover, when security personnel act under a mantle of democracy in the name of public security, the danger of impunity becomes higher, as perpetrators are more easily cleared of responsibility and accountability.

Advances have been made in Gender Equality but significant challenges remain

The Asia and the Pacific countries with the highest levels of political Gender Equality are Australia, New Zealand and Taiwan, while the countries with the lowest levels are Afghanistan, North Korea, Papua New Guinea and Tajikistan, which all score in the bottom 25 per cent in the world on Gender Equality.

Asia and the Pacific has seen significant gains in Gender Equality in the past decades, although significant challenges remain if gender parity is to be achieved.

Asia and the Pacific has increased its average regional score on the GSoD Indices measure of Gender Equality by 47 per cent since 1975. Five countries in the region have reached the critical minority point of 30 per cent women's representation in the legislature: New Zealand (40 per cent), followed by Timor-Leste (34 per cent), Nepal (33 per cent), the Philippines and Australia (both 30 per cent) (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019). Myanmar, Nepal and New Zealand have seen the greatest quantitative improvements in their Gender Equality scores since 1975.

BOX 4.3

The war on drugs in the Philippines

Duterte entered the fray with one basic campaign promise: to end corruption and the proliferation of illegal drugs by all means, extrajudicial killings included (Teehankee and Thompson 2016).

Shortly after Duterte's election as President in 2016 and emboldened by his many public pronouncements on his intent to kill key personalities in the drug-dealing world, the Philippines National Police (PNP) issued Command Memorandum Circular No. 16-2016, otherwise known as the PNP Anti-illegal Drugs Campaign Plan: Double Barrel. Thus began a campaign of house-to-house visits with police personnel visiting suspected drug users and, initially at least, requesting their surrender. Many drug suspects have been killed, either by vigilantes or by members of the PNP.

Despite making democratic progress since its transition in 1986, the Philippines still suffers from an impunity crisis, as manifested by the failure to hold government officials accountable for the widespread human rights abuses of the Marcos regime; continued extrajudicial killings of journalists and government critics; the enduring cycle of violence in conflict zones; and Duterte's so-called war on drugs which, based on official reports, has claimed more than 4,000 lives. Other estimates put the total of fatalities at anywhere between 12,000 and 20,000 (Santos 2018).

Despite the high death toll, and reports of abuses to date, only a few police personnel have been prosecuted (Baldwin and Marshall 2017). As the primary agency implementing the war on drugs, the PNP has been depicted as brutal, corrupt and prone to using paid killers, and there are persistent allegations of quotas and rewards in effect for the number of drug suspects killed per operation (Jensen and Hapal 2018). With resounding, blanket protection from the Philippine Government backed by the president's order to kill (Ernst 2017), the PNP has become widely prone to abuse and exploitation by 'rogue' police personnel. For example, in 2017 PNP officers were caught on closed-circuit television planting evidence on alleged drug suspects in the National Capital Region (Santos 2017), prompting a senate committee to investigate the matter.

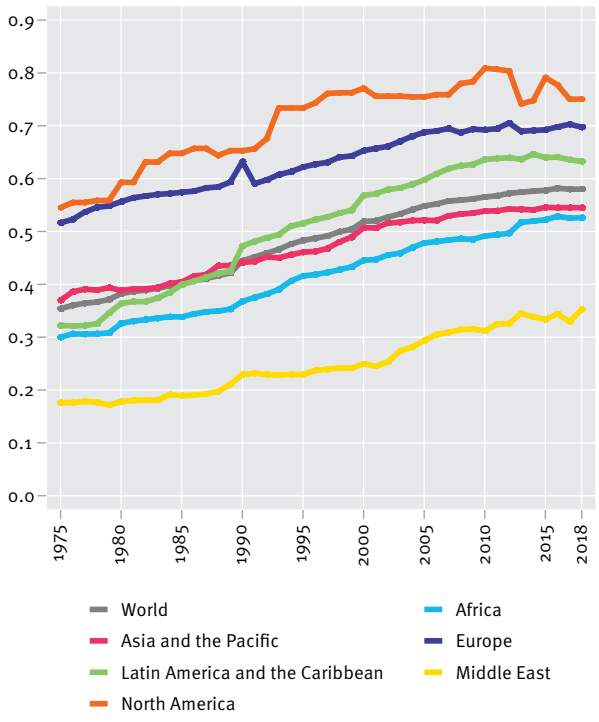
The introduction of a 33 per cent parliamentary quota in Nepal's 2015 Constitution and the implementation of a parity regime in Timor-Leste have been crucial in increasing women's representation in parliament in these two countries (International IDEA 2019a). However, despite these important gains, significant challenges to gender equality persist throughout the Asia and the Pacific region.

Despite these advances, the rate of increase in Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific has not kept pace with increases in the rest of the world. Both Latin America and Africa have advanced at a faster rate in the last four decades. Asia and the Pacific's regional average on Gender Equality is now below the world average (although it was slightly above the world average in 1975) (see Figure 4.6). The region also has the lowest average share of female legislators (18 per cent in 2019) in the world. At the country level, the average share of female legislators ranged from 0 per cent in Papua New Guinea to 40 per cent in New Zealand.

Democracy has not necessarily paved the way for an increase in women's political representation in the region. In Japan, an older democracy, women hold just 10 per cent of seats in the parliament. In South Korea, which transitioned to democracy in 1988 during the early third wave, the share is just 17 per cent. The democracies in the Pacific Islands

FIGURE 4.6

Trends in Gender Equality by region, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

are among the countries with the lowest share of women legislators, and the only countries in the world with no women in parliament (Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu).

In Malaysia and Myanmar, two much more recent democracies, women occupy just 14 and 11 per cent of seats, respectively, in the legislature (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019). Explanatory factors include a combination of cultural norms and a lack of institutional solutions to address their underrepresentation (Moon 2016; UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 2015). Gender discrimination in the region has also manifested itself in the form of gender-based violence. Cambodia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam have all recorded a high incidence of violence against women (UN Women 2015).

Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

Summary: Checks on Government in Asia and the Pacific, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range (0.50)	
	High (>0.7)	Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan
	Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste
	Low (<0.4)	Cambodia, China, Kazakhstan, Laos, Malaysia, North Korea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Gender Equality is not necessarily correlated with democratic performance in Asia and the Pacific. North Korea (16 per cent) and China (25 per cent), which do not have democratically elected legislatures, have more women in their respective legislative bodies than Japan and South Korea (True et al. 2014). Indeed, promoting gender equality and women's participation has been part of the legitimizing ideologies of both the CCP and the Communist Party in North Korea. In China, the inclusion of women deputies and the concomitant gradual increase of their numbers within both national and local people's congresses are mandated by the electoral law.

Dismantling and weakening of integrity institutions, checks and balances

Recent attacks on institutions central to the integrity of functioning democracies represent a significant challenge to democracy in the region. Institutions under attack include the judiciary, the court system, electoral commissions, the parliament and institutions fighting corruption. According to the GSoD Indices, Asia and the Pacific scores 0.46 on Judicial Independence, which is below the world average, making it one of the poorest performing aspects of the region's democracies.

Recent attacks on judicial institutions have occurred in a number of countries and they pose a serious impediment to democratic strengthening. Cases include Bangladesh, which regressed into hybridity in 2014 and Afghanistan. As one commentator notes, in order to survive, democracy and constitutionalism rely on a commitment to 'horizontal accountability'—to 'core institutions interacting to uphold the values that undergird the system' (Davis 2017: 152). When institutions fail to speak, listen and respond to each other—or, worse, when they attack one another—the principles of democracy and separation of powers break down, putting nations at risk of authoritarian reversal or democratic backsliding (Davis 2017; Deinla 2014). In this context, 'guaranteeing institutional autonomy in the face of entrenched power is one of the hardest challenges' for Asian democracies (Davis 2017: 156).

In Bangladesh, the governing Awami League has significantly undermined anti-corruption efforts through political interference, using the Anti-Corruption Commission and the politicization of judicial processes to bring cases against opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party's leaders. This has, in turn, undermined accountability, institutional integrity and political competition, thereby weakening democracy (Human Rights Watch 2019a).

In Afghanistan, constitutional ambiguities, combined with instability perpetuated by ongoing conflict, have resulted in a confrontational relationship between parliament and the executive. Since the end of the Taliban regime, parliament has only passed two laws, with the executive branch passing the rest (Pasarlay and Mallyar 2019). This breakdown in the separation of powers does not bode well for Afghanistan's

democratization, even as the country advances towards peace talks with the Taliban and negotiates the exit of US and international troops. In addition to the conflictual legislature–executive relationship, accusations of overt political interference in the functioning of the Independent Election Commission, undermining its autonomy and effectiveness, have been made (Haidary 2018). The end of a conflict is an opportunity for democratic consolidation, but without strong institutions and oversight this could lead to a return to authoritarian rule if power vacuums and competition rather than cooperation come to define the democratic landscape.

Using the law and the judiciary to silence the opposition is a long-established practice among non-democracies in Asia and the Pacific. However, it also occurs in democracies such as the Philippines. Known for its defence of constitutional democracy and fundamental freedoms, the Philippine Supreme Court and its chief justices have become the object of political contestation.

In what is dubbed a 'supermajority', with two-thirds of House of Representatives and Senate members aligned with President Duterte, reforms and impeachments can now pass easily through the Philippine political system. Impeachment has therefore been used as a tool for deposing constitutionally protected officials who oppose the policies of the present government. For example, in May 2018, after the House of Representatives conducted impeachment proceedings, the Supreme Court removed the country's first female Chief Justice, Maria Lourdes Sereno.

By the time Duterte's term ends in 2022, he will have been able to appoint 12 of the 15 Supreme Court justices (*Manila Times* 2016). This concentration of power and weakening of checks and balances both compromises and erodes the institutional integrity and independence of congress, and also contributes to weakening the democratic system.

However, despite these cases where judicial institutions have been severely undermined, the region also presents some more hopeful cases in which the judiciary was able to act with independence.

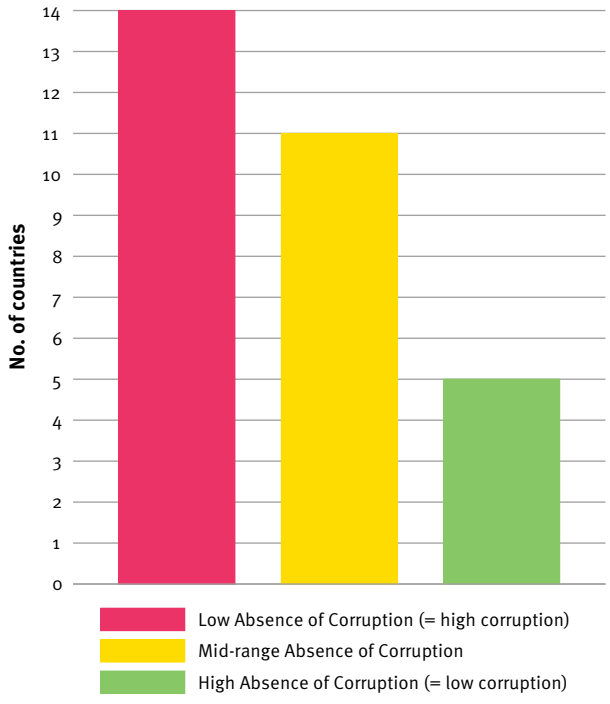
In Sri Lanka, by ousting and replacing the Prime Minister in 2018 without consultation, undermining the role of the courts and parliament in order to complete an attempted transition of power, President Sirisena disregarded democratic norms and the Constitution. The resilience of the country's democratic institutions was demonstrated by the Supreme Court's willingness to protect constitutional order, by suspending the presidential order to dissolve parliament (Safi and Perera 2018).

Nonetheless, the fact that the President considered himself able to act unconstitutionally demonstrates the inherent weakness of Sri Lanka's current democratic system (Welikala 2019). Moreover, the deadly terrorist bombings that occurred in 2019 are widely believed to have been enabled by the rivalry and distance between the President and the reinstituted Prime Minister, which led to the withholding of key information that could have prevented the coordinated attacks (Beswick 2019).

In the Maldives, President Abdulla Yameen attempted to fill the electoral commission with members of his own party in advance of the September 2018 elections, with a view to protecting his claim to power against the opposition coalition (Zulfa 2018). After the announcement of his record loss in the elections, Yameen

FIGURE 4.7

Countries with low, mid-range and high Absence of Corruption in Asia and the Pacific, 2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

went on to petition the Supreme Court to annul them. Nonetheless, the Supreme Court rejected the petition, holding that there was no legal or constitutional basis on which to question the elections' legality (*Maldives Independent* 2018). The court's decision was hailed by the opposition.

In Pakistan in early 2019, in a blasphemy case, the Supreme Court upheld its decision to overturn the conviction and death sentence of Asia Bibi, a woman originally convicted in 2010 after being accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad in a quarrel with her neighbours, and who spent eight years on death row (Safi 2019). This ruling shows that, despite challenges to institutional and process integrity, courts are manifesting both resilience and a willingness to protect democracy.

Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

Summary: Impartial Administration in Asia and the Pacific, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.46)	
High (>0.7)	Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	China, India, Indonesia, Malayisa, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam
Low (<0.4)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

More than half (53 per cent) of democracies in Asia and the Pacific have high levels of Clean Elections: Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste. A little less than half (47 per cent) have mid-range levels.

Endemic corruption undermines the impartiality of administration

A number of Asian countries suffer from high levels of corruption. This situation is compounded by weak judicial systems lacking the capacity to combat corruption. Weakened checks on governments further contribute to the undermining of efforts to combat corruption.

According to the GSoD Indices, Impartial Administration is the attribute of democracy on which Asia and the Pacific records its lowest performance, with Absence of Corruption (on which the region scores 0.45) being one of its four lowest-performing aspects overall. Almost half of the countries in the region have high levels of corruption, which is the highest share in the world after Africa and the Middle East (see Figure 4.7). Of these, nine score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

Levels of corruption are, on average, significantly lower for the democracies in the region (0.55) than for the hybrid regimes (0.28) or non-democracies (0.29), with some exceptions (e.g. Singapore). At the same time, three democracies in the region (Mongolia, Nepal and Papua New Guinea) also have high levels of corruption (see Table 4.4). This poses serious challenges to democracy, as it undermines and distorts accountability and increases discontent with democracy as a system of government, fuelling support for anger-based politics, and reinforcing candidates with populist tendencies who promise to restore law and order through means that are not always compatible with democratic practices.

Money, politics and patronage are closely linked to corruption in the region. This is true for democracies such

TABLE 4.4

Average Absence of Corruption score in Asia and the Pacific by regime type, 2018

Regime type	Average Absence of Corruption score
Democracies	0.55
Hybrid regimes (except Singapore)	0.28
Non-democracies	0.29

Note: Absence of Corruption scores range from 0 to 1, with a lower score indicating high levels of corruption (0–0.4) and a higher score indicating lower levels of corruption (mid-range 0.4–0.7).

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

as Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan and the Philippines—a fact which, despite these countries' elections being considered free and fair, serves to undermine their competitive electoral dynamics (Aspinall and Sukmajati 2016; Teehankee 2016).

Vote buying is so widespread in Indonesia that it was recently established that one in three Indonesians is exposed to the practice (Muhtadi 2018). The quality of Indonesian democracy has been eroded by corruption. Despite advances in anti-corruption reform and an increase in the number of cases prosecuted, citizen perceptions of corruption in Indonesia have only slightly improved since the transition to democracy in 1998 (Silva-Leander 2015). Strong public discontent persists regarding the 'endemic' government corruption (Crouch 2010: 228; Butt 2011: 383), which is seen as 'a core norm of Indonesia's political economy' (Sorensen, Juwono and Timberman 2006: 9, quoted in Silva-Leander 2015). Decentralization has contributed to the deepening of democratization but also dispersed power and corruption to regional and local levels.

Corruption is also present in the Philippines and can help explain Duterte's rise to power, given that he promised to rid the country of the illness. Duterte's predecessor, Benigno Aquino III, had gained traction through greater transparency and anti-corruption initiatives, as a result of which the Philippines had achieved a respectable ranking compared to its peers in the region. However, Aquino's administration was nonetheless shaken by a pork-barrelling scam involving fake non-profit organizations securing funds from members of parliament (Espiritu 2014; Sidel 2015).

When Duterte assumed the presidency in 2016 he issued a stern warning to corrupt government officials and requested their resignations, although his efforts in this regard were accused of being partisan. In the Philippines, as across the region, highlighting corruption has also become a precarious task for both the media and whistleblowers who expose corruption. Indeed, the Philippines has been cited as one of the top three offenders in the Asia and the Pacific region in terms of the intimidation and murder of members of the media who investigate corruption (Transparency International 2018).

Singapore, a hybrid regime with the lowest levels of corruption in the world, constitutes the exception to the rule in the GSoD Indices. Other countries in the region could take note of Singapore's successful efforts to fight corruption. Its recipe includes a highly professional and impartial public administration and effective formal checks on government, with a functioning and independent judiciary.

Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in civil society organizations and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

Summary: Participatory Engagement in Asia and the Pacific, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range	
	High	Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste
	Mid-range	India, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Sri Lanka
	Low	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, North Korea, Pakistan, Singapore, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam

While East Asia has seen the most significant growth in terms of the GSoD Indices measure of Civil Society Participation, Oceania is currently the subregion with the highest levels, and Central Asia has the lowest.

The countries with the highest levels of Civil Society Participation in the region are Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Korea and Taiwan.

Among the democracies in the region, the countries with the lowest levels of Civil Society Participation are Malaysia, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea, which all score within the range of 0.51–0.58, but also record mid-range scores compared to the rest of the world. India's levels of Civil Society Participation went from high (0.78) in 2013 to mid-range (0.59) in 2017, a statistically significant drop of 25 per cent in only five years.

Civil society has expanded while civic space has contracted

Democratic expansion has opened up spaces for greater public deliberation and civil society participation in the Asia and the Pacific region. Since 1975, Asia and the Pacific's level of Civil Society Participation has increased by

46 per cent. The region's vibrant civil society first emerged in the form of concerted resistance against authoritarian regimes in the region. It was then a key player in service delivery, advocacy, democracy and human rights promotion, including monitoring governments and holding them to account. At times, civil society has also safeguarded democracy when it has been threatened. In this sense, the emergence of a strong civil society in the region has been a defining feature of the democratic era.

In the Philippines, for example, CSOs have played a key role in recovery efforts after natural disasters, working with the state in the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance. CSOs are also represented in local government and are usually engaged in policymaking processes through a variety of national-level advocacy and interest groups. When judicial independence was threatened by the removal of the chief justice in 2018, the Integrated Bar of the Philippines intervened and made public its opposition, and a Coalition of Justice (made up of CSOs, personalities and activists) was formed to criticize the executive's interference with judicial integrity (Terrazola 2018).

Since the transition to democracy in Indonesia, civil society has grown exponentially, in line with the range of issues with which it engages. A large number of watchdog NGOs that monitor government performance in areas such as environmental management, education, health, human rights, legislative performance, public spending, local governance and anti-corruption reform have been created. These are active both in exposing corruption cases and in advocating for legislative reform, usually in tandem with the media (Silva-Leander 2015). In Sri Lanka, together with political parties, parliament and the courts, CSOs played a key role in both condemning and ultimately blocking President Sirisena's unconstitutional move to oust Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and replace him with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa in late 2018.

As part of the expansion of Asian civil society, and especially in East Asia, a series of protest movements in which youth political activism has played a key role has emerged as a potent political force on the political landscape, defending democracy, holding political leaders to account and serving as a potential source of reform in non-democracies. In Taiwan in 2014 the Sunflower Student Movement opposed what it saw as an unfair trade agreement with China (Morris 2018). In South Korea, the 'Candlelight Revolution' protests of 2016–2017 against then-President Park Geun-hye's contentious proposals on labour laws and history textbooks eventually morphed into mass demonstrations against state corruption demanding the President's impeachment (Chang 2017). In Japan in 2015, there were mass demonstrations against Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's new military legislation (Aizawa 2016).

The impact of youth political engagement has also been visible in Mongolia, which was rocked by mass anti-corruption protests in 2018 (Dierkes 2017; Bittner 2019). Even in non-democracies, youth have the potential to disrupt the prevailing political situation. Acknowledging the influence and possible impact of 'Western values', President Xi has ordered universities to adhere to the ideology and leadership of the CCP, out of fears of liberal democratic values trumping the party's grip on the loyalty of the country's youth (Fish 2017).

The most recent expression of civic voice and social mobilization in the region was seen in Hong Kong in 2019. The largest street protests paralyzing Hong Kong since the 2014 pro-democracy protests (the so-called Umbrella Movement) shook the special administrative region. The 2019 protests were triggered by a draft extradition bill proposed by the Hong Kong Government, which would have allowed suspects to be sent to mainland China for trial. The protesters argued that such legislation would threaten the status arrangement under which Hong Kong's legal system operates (also known as 'one country, two systems').

While the draft bill triggered the protests, the sentiments of protesters had been brewing for a long time, and their demands also included full representation in the legislative body, and direct election of the chief executive.

The emergence of both the youth-led Sunflower Student Movement in Taiwan and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong in 2014 and 2019 is indicative of a democratic push back against China's growing influence (Ichihara 2017). Given their shared concern regarding China's encroachments, Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party and New Power Party (an offshoot of the Sunflower Student Movement) collaborated in June 2017 and formed the Taiwan Congressional Hong Kong Caucus which seeks to support democracy-building efforts in Hong Kong.

In addition to this synergy, the pro-democracy movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong have helped inspire youth activism in Japan. Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy, a youth-led movement in Japan, was formed in 2014 to protest against Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's military legislation (to deploy military overseas). Activists contend that such legislation will unconstitutionally allow Japan to exercise its right to collective self-defence and deploy military forces overseas to defend allies that are under attack (Soble 2015).

More recently, a grouping of youth activists from East and South East Asia has been created to resist entrenched authoritarianism. Calling themselves the Network of Young Democratic Asians, the nascent organization includes the Umbrella Movement, the Sunflower Movement and the antijunta movement in Thailand. Apart from resisting authoritarianism, some of its members plan to stand for election. In 2016, Hong Kong activist Nathan Law, at 23 years of age, became the youngest legislator elected in the history of Hong Kong (Solomon 2016).

These efforts within the region may assume increasing geopolitical significance given the incessant growth of China's politico-economic influence and encroachments.

However, in recent years, there have been notable attempts to undermine civic space, freedom of speech and the media throughout Asia and the Pacific.

In countries such as Cambodia and Thailand (until 2019), the shrinking of civic space has occurred in the context of a general democratic breakdown. In other cases, it has occurred in a context of democratic backsliding (as is the case in India and the Philippines) or erosion, explained by the rise of nationalist political parties, and justified by arguments of national sovereignty, law and order, national security and responses to terrorism. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, these restrictions on civic space have been aimed at limiting the space for opposition and manipulating electoral processes (table 4.5). In India and Nepal, they have sought to undermine civil society activity.

The weakening of civil society in Asia and the Pacific represents a significant threat to the health of the region's democracies. A vibrant and democratic civil society constitutes a safeguard against democratic backsliding, ensures a diversity of voices in society and helps build social capital, which is key to the healthy fabric of democratic societies.

In an increasingly globalized world, closing civic space in one country may have spillover effects in others. This, in turn, occurs through the domino effect that such phenomena in large countries may have on others in a particular region (Hossain et al. 2018). Added to this is the role of countries such as China that provide (and export) a model of governance in which limited civic space is an intrinsic feature.

India has played an inspirational role as the world's largest democracy where three million CSOs and vibrant social movements enjoy constitutionally protected rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. At the same time, civil society groups such as CIVICUS, an online platform that tracks civic spaces across the globe, have expressed alarm at what they describe as an obstructed civic space in the country (CIVICUS 2017).

This concern on the part of civil society groups is partly based on a specific piece of legislation, the 2010 Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act (FCRA), which regulates Indian NGOs' external (i.e. foreign) funding, and which is increasingly being used to stymie civil society activities. NGOs affected by enforcement of the Act's provisions include Greenpeace India, whose FCRA registration was cancelled in September 2015, ostensibly on the grounds of 'prejudicially affecting the public interest and economic interest of the state' (Singh 2015).

This shrinking of civic space is confirmed by the GSoD Indices, which identify India as one of seven countries in the world (alongside Brazil, Burundi, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela and Yemen) and the only democracy apart from Brazil that has seen significant declines in all three aspects of civic space in the past five years, namely Civil Liberties, Civil Society Participation and Media Integrity. The largest Civil Liberties declines in India are seen in Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly (see Figure 4.8).

The shrinking of civic space in India has also occurred in the context of democratic backsliding, which the GSoD Indices

TABLE 4.5

Countries in Asia and the Pacific with declines in one to three aspects of civic space, 2013–2018

Extent of decline	Examples
Declines on all three aspects of civic space	India (moderate democratic backslidingc), Thailand until 2019 (democratic breakdown 2014–2019)
Declines on two aspects of civic space	Pakistan (regressed to a hybrid regime in 2018)
Decline on one aspect of civic space	**Democracies**: Indonesia, Mongolia and the Philippines (moderate democratic backsliding) **Non-democracies**: Cambodia, Tajikistan and Viet Nam

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

define as a gradual and intentional weakening on checks on government and accountability institutions coupled with declines in Civil Liberties. India and the Philippines have been identified as two of the 10 countries in the world experiencing democratic backsliding. In both cases, the backsliding is classified as moderate (see Chapter 1).

CIVICUS has also highlighted formal restrictions on the right to form associations, assemble peacefully and without arms, and the specific targeting of human rights defenders and journalists, which violates the right to freedom of expression. Although these are all part of constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights, in Indian law they are subject to certain broad restrictions such as state security provisions, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, contempt of court, defamation, incitement to offence and the sovereignty and integrity of India. These provisions have, moreover, been used by successive governments to clamp down on civil society (Human Rights Watch 2019c; see also Box 4.4).

On the positive side, in September 2018 India's Supreme Court struck down a section of the country's penal code criminalizing consensual adult same-sex relations. The ruling followed decades of determined efforts by activists, lawyers and members of LGBT communities to change colonial-era legislation criminalizing homosexuality (Safi 2018).

BOX 4.4

Case study: India's shrinking civic space

A number of factors explain the shrinking civic space in India, a development that became evident from 2010 onwards in the wake of the introduction of the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act (FCRA) passed by the ruling United Progressive Alliance, which replaced an earlier act of 1976.

One factor is the pushback against new social movements that have questioned the established Indian development and governance model, including Narmada Bachao Andolan, which opposes large dams and their impact on the most vulnerable sections of the population, and the People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy in Kudankulam.

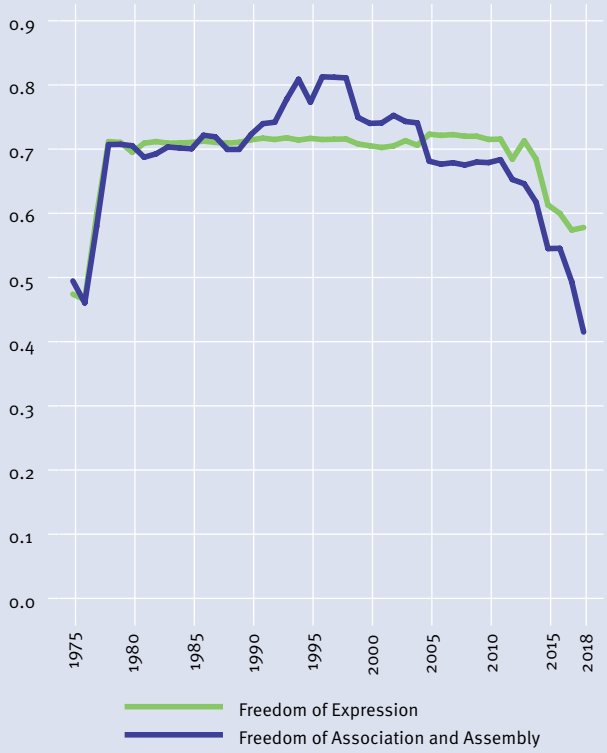
In 2011–2012 the India Against Corruption group challenged the idea that lawmaking was the exclusive task of elected legislators. This, in turn, created a debate around the role of civil society in India, with many legislators expressing the view that laws should be made in parliament by legislators, and that civil society activists were exceeding their mandate in claiming a space in the legislative drafting process.

The second factor relates to current global narratives around terrorism, which have provided ammunition for restrictions on civic space in India under the rubric of protecting national security. Moreover, so-called elite capture of many central government systems and the private sector, together with a dwindling foreign aid supply, have made NGOs more dependent on government and the corporate sector, with all the limitations this implies.

While the right to form associations is protected by the Constitution, the Indian Government can place restrictions on the foreign funding an NGO can receive, as it does indirectly through the FCRA. In 2015, the Ministry of Home Affairs made amendments to FCRA rules by increasing reporting requirements for CSOs and making it compulsory for all registration applications to be completed online.

FIGURE 4.8

Trends in Freedom of Association and Assembly and Freedom of Expression in India, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Under the amended rules, organizations receiving funding from foreign sources must publish audited statements of these funds. The statements must include information on donors, the amount received and the date of the donation. An additional clause was introduced making it mandatory to report any funds received from foreign sources within 48 hours. Predictably, this new act was enacted to prevent foreign contributions 'for any activities detrimental to the national interest and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto'. By not defining these activities, the Indian Government has created a large space within which it can act according to its own discretion.

The FCRA also prohibits funding for any political organization. As a result, the foreign funding of 4,000 small NGOs has been revoked. While the government claims that this is due to procedural violations, critics have pointed out that human rights organizations opposed to government policies have been particularly targeted (Lakshmi 2013).

In India, as elsewhere, freedom of expression—which is often seen as one of the most significant markers of the health of civil society—cannot be delinked from the Internet and freedom of the press. Civil society has contested both government and private efforts to monitor Internet activity and penalize dissenting online voices. Freedom House's 2018 Freedom on the Net Report ranked India as 'partly free' in terms of Internet freedom, based on yardsticks related to government censorship of public information and surveillance (Freedom House 2018c).

The report also identifies India as the country in the world with the highest number of Internet shutdowns, with more than 100 reported incidents in 2018 alone (Freedom House 2018b). Responding to this challenge, in 2018 a group of lawyers and policy analysts unveiled a community project backed by the Internet Freedom Foundation called Save our Privacy, with a view to developing a model citizen law for data protection, surveillance and interception (Save Our Privacy 2018).

The restrictive provisions of the Indian Penal Code, and particularly section 124A, which adopts a broad definition of sedition, have given the Indian Government a great deal of freedom to target speech that is critical of the government (including content shared on social media) and label it seditious. Journalists, bloggers and media agencies have been targeted by both state and non-state actors, for example on the grounds of prevention of communal unrest, or during election periods.

In Nepal, despite initial optimism that the new 2015 Constitution—which civil society played a central and significant role in formulating—provided an opportunity for deepening democracy, the May 2018 merger of the two largest parties into the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) effectively signalled the opposition's collapse (Baral 2018). Since then, Nepal's vibrant civil society has been under attack. As one commentator noted, 'Not only is Nepal's civic space shrinking, but the pillars of democracy, like freedom of the press, equality, and liberty, are facing the hammer of new draconian laws (Budhathoki 2018). Even before the passage of these new laws, experts highlighted concerns that the Constitution was in many ways more restrictive than its 2007 counterpart, due to limitations on the rights of freedom of expression and association, with one group observing that the 'underlying laws and Government of Nepal decisions do not respect the independence of civil society' (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2017: 6).

In addition to these problematic constitutional provisions, a proposed law on a national integrity policy would have further restricted civil society space by allowing increased government monitoring of, and interference in, CSO activities, although it has been met with harsh criticism from the international community. The Association Registration Act also allows the Nepali Government to investigate associations, instruct them to work on certain issues and terminate those that do not comply with these instructions.

Between 2013 and 2018, seven Asia and the Pacific countries (Cambodia, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Tajikistan, Thailand and Viet Nam) registered significant declines in Civil Liberties. These declines particularly affected Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly. The regional mean score on Civil Liberties has decreased by 6 per cent since 2013—the third-highest decrease among the world's regions for this period.

The media in Nepal face similar challenges, with the Nepali Government using licensing and registration requirements to restrict freedom of speech. Indeed, overall there are concerns that Nepal's democracy has become more restrictive under the 2015 Constitution and the CPN's leadership (see e.g. Budhathoki 2018; Manandhar 2018; International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2017).

Restrictions on civil liberties have also affected other older democracies in the region. In Japan, concerns have been

raised regarding the passage of a 2017 anti-conspiracy law, which is viewed as potentially contributing to undermine civil liberties (Osaki 2017). The law, which amends the country's anti-organized crime legislation to address potential terrorist threats, earned a rebuke from UN Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy, Joseph Cannataci, in a May 2017 letter addressed to Prime Minister Abe (*The Mainichi* 2017).

The Japanese Government justified the law's passage as part of the country' counter-terrorist preparations ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Members of Japan's vibrant civil society have, however, echoed the UN Rapporteur's concerns. The controversy forms a backdrop to rising concerns about Japan's deteriorating press freedom. In fact, between 2010 and 2018, Japan declined from 11th to 62nd in the world in global press freedom rankings (Hurst 2017; Reporters Without Borders 2010, 2018) and has also seen declines on the GSoD Indices' Freedom of Expression indicator since 2012.

In Australia, Civil Liberties including Freedom of Expression and Movement, and Personal Integrity and Security, have been put under pressure due to a variety of developments. Free speech has been restricted by a number of laws, including the 2014 Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Act in Tasmania, which was struck down by the High Court in October 2017 on the basis that it significantly restricted protest, particularly regarding environmental issues.

Concerns regarding adequate protections for journalists' metadata have also been raised: in at least one case the Australian Federal Police has admitted to accessing a journalist's metadata without the special warrant required. In the sphere of national security, serious concerns have been raised by UN special rapporteurs regarding the potential for broadly worded espionage offences in the 2018 National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act to restrict expression and access to information that is central to accountability and public debate.

An ongoing challenge regarding the protection of civil liberties in Australia is the absence of any federal Bill of Rights (although a number of rights instruments exist at subnational levels). This diminishes the capacity of the democratic system as a whole to identify the nature and scope of core civil liberties, and to subject rights-restricting laws to adequate scrutiny in both political and judicial forums during the drafting of legislation, and after enactment (Kaye, Forst and Ní Aoláin 2018).

Attacks on media freedom are a sign of repression in an age of disinformation

In the context of different forms of democratic backsliding and shrinking civic space, Asia and the Pacific has experienced a number of attacks on media freedom and integrity in recent years, which has contributed to a decline in the region's Media Integrity scores in the GSoD Indices. Moreover, under the disguise of counteracting disinformation, freedom of both offline and online speech has been subjected to severe restrictions in a number of countries in the region.

With the advent of dedicated online disinformation campaigns, the threat to media integrity has become both more pervasive and harmful. This constitutes a serious threat to democracy in the region, as democracy thrives on a diversity of critical and less critical media perspectives that monitor state performance and hold the state to account for its actions.

In the **Philippines**, many mainstream media outlets have resorted to self-censorship as President Duterte has threatened not to renew their licences or initiate legal proceedings against them. Rappler, the country's most popular independent online news outlet, and which is also critical of Duterte's administration, has been the target of numerous legal assaults by government agencies.

In 2018, the Securities and Exchange Commission first attempted to revoke Rappler's certificate of incorporation, subsequent to which the Department of Justice filed five tax evasion charges against Rappler and its editor in 2018 (BBC News 2018a, 2018b). This was denounced by the domestic and international press as an attempt to silence Rappler and fire a warning to other media outlets.

In the last three years of the Aquino administration, parliament had failed to pass a freedom of information (FOI) law that would allow citizens and interested parties access to unreleased information in the possession of government agencies. Three weeks after assuming the presidency, as part of his campaign promise for transparency and to fight corruption, Duterte signed an executive order to operationalize FOI within the executive. A 24/7 service facility was installed to enable citizens to scrutinize government transactions and file complaints about corruption cases.

Emboldened by this move, the media sector intensified its reporting, including widespread coverage of Duterte's controversial statements and those of his spokespersons. In response to the intensive coverage of the Philippine Government's drug war, Duterte bolstered his own social

media army, appointing a blogger popularly known as 'Mocha' to the Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO).

The PCOO and Mocha became the president's alternative channel for reaching the public, through which they could spin and tailor their message to counter negative coverage of Duterte from credible media outlets. Although Mocha eventually resigned in 2018, she had by then amassed an estimated 5.7 million Facebook followers, and earned for herself the title 'Queen of Fake News' among online critics of the government.

A recent Oxford University research project also concluded that cybertroops or troll armies have been deployed by the Philippine Government to manipulate public opinion via social media (Bradshaw and Howard 2017:15; Cabanes and Cornelio 2017; Williams 2017; Ong 2018). The intensity of the exchanges has been seen as contributing to polarize Philippine society and the divisiveness is evident in public political debate, which often classifies citizens as either 'dutertards' (red) or 'dilawan' (yellow).

These developments have prompted the Philippine Senate to conduct investigations into trolls and disinformation. Facebook has also intensified its security features and closed fake accounts. The Philippine Government's attempts to silence critical media outlets have not, however, prevented the propagation of disinformation. Instead, it has threatened non-renewal of the ABS-CBN franchise, conducted continuing and consistent attacks on the *Philippines Daily Inquirer*, and pursued the case against Rappler.

Being able to express one's opinion without the threat of harm or the fear of retaliation is a fundamental democratic tenet. The developments in the Philippine social media landscape undermine the fabric of credible media reporting in the country, which can be harmful for democracy.

In **Cambodia**, attacks on online, printed and offline speech and media increased substantially ahead of the general elections in 2018. Some of the country's last remaining independent news sites were closed down or sold off as part of an ongoing media crackdown. Arrests and prison sentences for online speech increased in an attempt to silence dissent (Lamb 2018).

Myanmar has also seen the imposition of significant restrictions on media freedom since its transition to democracy in 2015. A symbolic event that drew strong international criticism was the imprisonment in 2018 of two Reuters journalists investigating a massacre by the military in a village in Rakhine state, although they were released in 2019 (Richardson 2018). Hate speech against the Rohingya minority has also proliferated on Facebook, which was strongly criticized by the international community for further deepening polarization in the country. In response, Facebook hired local staff in Myanmar to review and take down hate speech from its platform in the country.

In the Pacific Islands, there have also been attempts to stifle dissent and censor the Internet. Most recently, governments in the subregion have made efforts to regulate the Internet through legislation relating to the prosecution of cyber-criminals and restrictions on the use of social media platforms such as Facebook (Kant et al. 2018).

A notable example is the Papua New Guinean Government's justification of the 2016 Cybercrime Code Act on the grounds that cybercrime is a threat in the context of the country's market liberalization (Mou 2016). Critics, however, did not subscribe to this argument. Questions regarding the act's implications for freedom of expression and the apparent lack of public consultation prior to its certification have plagued the government (Kant et al. 2018).

Making matters worse, there have also been recent attempts in Papua New Guinea to temporarily block Facebook and investigate how the social media platform can be regulated. Similar censorship attempts have been made in Fiji. Enacted in May 2018, according to the Fijian Government, the Online Safety Act was passed to protect citizens from cases of cyberbullying and harassment (Singh 2018). While the implications of the law are yet to be realized, commentators have cautioned that it may have undesirable effects on political expression, given Fiji's history of censorship (Kant et al. 2018).

Legislation governing cybercrime is also pending in Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Such legislation is predicated on factors such as online sexual exploitation and alleged excessive liberties (Kant et al. 2018). For example, in 2015 the Nauruan Government banned Facebook to combat pornography. However, the ban was perceived as an effort to silence opposition groups and suppress communications at the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, an offshore immigration and detention centre run by Nauru on behalf of the Australian Government, in which human rights violations have been documented (Martin 2015; Olukotun 2015).

4.4. Conclusion

The democracy landscape in Asia and the Pacific is varied, with a number of significant advances achieved in the last few decades but increasing challenges evident across all of its subregions and in countries at all stages of democratic development.

As one of the few regions in the world that continues to see first-time democratic transitions (Myanmar in 2015 and Malaysia in 2018) as well as returns to democracy (Sri Lanka in 2015), Asia and the Pacific presents a number of opportunities for democracy building.

The end of formal military rule in Thailand in 2019, marked by multiparty elections and the formation of a civilian government, also provides grounds for optimism, although the military will continue to exert significant influence over Thai politics, as has been the case historically.

However, a number of countries suffer from significant democratic weaknesses, including those that have recently transitioned (Malaysia and Myanmar), but also countries that transitioned in the early third wave (e.g. Papua New Guinea) or now show signs of democratic fragility (e.g. Nepal and Sri Lanka), or which have regressed into hybridity (e.g. Bangladesh in 2014 and Pakistan in 2018).

Moreover, several countries have suffered deepening autocratization in recent years. Cambodia, for example, regressed from a hybrid regime to a non-democracy in 2018. The region's persistent non-democracies are also a concern, particularly as their economic and political influence is expanding across the region as well as globally.

Efforts should focus on strengthening new democracies and on opening civic and democratic space in contexts where it is currently shrinking.

The aspect of SDG 16 that requires closest attention is SDG 16.10 on access to information, freedom of expression and media integrity. More attention also needs to be paid to achieving SDG 5 on Gender Equality, on which stagnation is currently observed, and where Asia and the Pacific continues to perform poorly compared to the rest of the world.

TABLE 4.6

The GSoD Indices snapshot: Policy considerations for Asia and the Pacific

This table offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in Asia and the Pacific, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. It presents policy considerations across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.48)

Elected Government:

Half (15) of the 30 countries in Asia and the Pacific covered by the GSoD Indices hold competitive elections to determine their governments. The region also has 10 non-democracies (the largest number of which are in South East and Central Asia) and five hybrid regimes.

The total number of democracies in the region has remained stable at 15 since 2014, and the number of hybrid regimes was reduced from six in 2015 to five in 2018, while the number of non-democracies increased from nine in 2015 to 10 in 2018, when Cambodia went from a hybrid regime to a non-democracy. While the total number of democracies remained the same, Pakistan backslid to hybrid in 2018 and Malaysia became a democracy the same year.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Timor-Leste

Clean Elections:

Almost half (12) the countries in the region have mid-range levels of Clean Elections, while 10 countries have low levels and eight have high levels. Of the countries with low scores, 90 per cent are non-democracies and 10 per cent are hybrid regimes. 53 per cent of democracies have high levels of Clean Elections, while 47 per cent have mid-range levels.

From 2013 to 2018, five countries experienced significant increases in Clean Elections while four saw declines.

Priority countries for reform:

Hybrid regimes with some space for reform (e.g. Afghanistan and Pakistan)

Priority areas for reform:

Further strengthen the integrity of elections; strengthen capacity of EMBs; reduce electoral violence.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste

Inclusive Suffrage:

All countries in the region apart from China (which scores low) have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage. However, some democracies, including Myanmar, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, have levels of Inclusive Suffrage on a par with non-democracies. One hybrid regime (Singapore) has levels of Inclusive Suffrage on a par with older democracies such as New Zealand.

Priority countries for reform:

Papua New Guinea (democracy among the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world). Hybrid regimes (except Singapore) and non-democracies

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen inclusive suffrage in countries with weaknesses in this area.

Free Political Parties:

More than half of the democracies in the region (67 per cent) score in the mid-range on Free Political Parties and five countries score highly (Australia, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand and Taiwan).

From 2013 to 2018, no countries experienced significant increases in Free Political Parties, while four saw declines.

Priority countries for reform:

Hybrid regimes with some space for reform (e.g. Afghanistan and Pakistan)

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen the social base of political parties and make political party leadership more inclusive and diverse, including for women.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand and Taiwan

Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.54)

Access to Justice:

The majority of countries (60 per cent) score in the mid-range on Access to Justice, while six score in the high range and nine score low. Of the countries that score low on Access to Justice, one is a hybrid regime, and five are non-democracies.

From 2013 to 2018, five countries experienced significant increases in Access to Justice, while three saw declines.

Priority countries for reform:

Hybrid regimes with some space for reform (e.g. Afghanistan and Pakistan)

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen access to justice for poor and marginalized groups, including women.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan

Civil Liberties:

One-third of countries in the region have high levels of Civil Liberties. The regional performance is particularly high on Freedom of Movement (where 19 countries score highly) and Freedom of Association and Assembly (on which 11 countries also score highly).

However, more countries (seven) have seen significant declines in Civil Liberties since 2013 than advances (five). Of the declining countries, four were democracies in 2013 (India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand), one was a hybrid regime (Cambodia) and two were non-democratic regimes (Tajikistan and Viet Nam). In two cases these declines coincided with a declining regime status (Cambodia and Thailand).

The region performs particularly poorly on some aspects of Civil Liberties: of the 11 countries which have low levels of Personal Integrity and Security, 64 per cent are non-democracies, 18 per cent are hybrid regimes and 18 per cent are democracies.

Priority countries for reform:

Democracies with significant declines (e.g. India and the Philippines)

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen freedom of expression and remove legislation and regulation that stymie freedom of expression; strengthen freedom of association and assembly, in particular in relation to funding and operation of CSOs; strengthen human rights protection.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Timor-Leste

Gender Equality:

The region's level of Gender Equality is in the mid-range (0.55), slightly above Africa (0.53). The majority of countries in the region (77 per cent) also score in the mid-range.

Almost one-third of countries (nine) score in the bottom 25 per cent in the world on Gender Equality. The largest share of low scores are non-democracies: Cambodia, China, North Korea, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan; three are hybrid regimes (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan), but one is a democracy (Papua New Guinea).

Six countries (all democracies) score in the top 25 per cent in the world on Gender Equality: of these, two are older democracies (Australia and New Zealand) while the others transitioned to democracy after 1975 (Taiwan, South Korea, the Philippines and Nepal most recently).

No countries have experienced significant declines or advances in Gender Equality since 2013.

Priority countries for reform:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, North Korea, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (among bottom 25 per cent in the world)

Priority areas for reform:

Expand efforts to strengthen political gender equality in all spheres and at all levels, by adopting quota or parity laws or enable better enforcement, to ensure equal representation of women in legislatures, in political parties, the executive and in local administrations. (For more detailed recommendations see International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Nepal, the Philippines, Taiwan and New Zealand; India for local-level quotas, Fiji

Social Group Equality:

Social Group Equality is one of the democratic aspects on which Asia and the Pacific performs the poorest. Almost half (47 per cent) of all countries in the region have low levels of Social Group Equality, indicating highly unequal access to political power and enjoyment of Civil Liberties by social group. Only two countries score highly (Japan and New Zealand).

More than half (64 per cent) of the highly politically unequal countries are non-democracies (Cambodia, China, Kazakhstan, Laos, North Korea, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and three are hybrid regimes (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan), while two are democracies (Myanmar and the Philippines).

Priority countries for reform:

Myanmar, the Philippines (democracies with low performance); Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan (hybrid regimes with low performance)

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand South Korea and Taiwan (among top 25 per cent in the world)

Basic Welfare:

The majority of countries (57 per cent) have mid-range levels of Basic Welfare, but more than one-third have high levels, making it one of the four democratic aspects with a high-performance share over 37 per cent.

Levels of Basic Welfare vary across regime types. Six countries in the region are among the bottom 25 per cent in the world with the lowest levels of Basic Welfare; of these, half are democracies (Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste).

Of the 11 countries with high levels of Basic Welfare, 64 per cent are democracies (Australia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Taiwan), but one is a hybrid regime (Singapore) and two are non-democracies (China and Kazakhstan).

Priority countries for reform:

Afghanistan, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste (among bottom 25 per cent in the world)

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan (among top 25 per cent in the world)

Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.50)

Effective Parliament:

About half (47 per cent) of countries score mid-range on Effective Parliament. However, the number of low-performing countries (10) is almost double the number of high performers (6). Of the low performers, 90 per cent are non-democracies and 10 per cent are hybrid regimes.

From 2013 to 2018, eight countries experienced significant increases in Free Political Parties while two saw declines.

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen the capacities and enhance transparency and effectiveness of parliaments

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan

Judicial Independence:

Judicial Independence is low in a large number (nine) of countries in the region. Of these, one is a hybrid regime and eight are non-democratic regimes. Only two countries have high levels (Australia and New Zealand), both of which are democracies.

Five countries have seen advances in Judicial Independence since 2013, while three have seen declines.

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen the capacities of the judiciary and reduce its politicization, susceptibility to corruption and institutional weaknesses

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia and New Zealand

Media Integrity:

Levels of Media Integrity in the region are fairly equally split between high (7) and low (9) performance, with a large mid-range category (14, or 47 per cent of countries).

Worryingly, five countries have seen levels of Media Integrity decline in the past five years.

Priority countries for reform:

Countries that have experienced significant declines since 2013 (India, Mongolia and Pakistan, and Thailand until 2019)

Priority areas for reform:

- Addressing disinformation on social media will require innovative cross-sectoral strategies and dialogue across regions. Foster regional and global cross-sectoral dialogues to identify solutions to address the spread of disinformation, without harming core values of democracy such as free speech
- Guarantee an independent, diverse and vibrant media landscape, and safety for journalists and avoid concentration of media in a few hands

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan

Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.46)

Absence of Corruption:

Absence of Corruption is one of the poorest performing aspects of democracy in Asia and the Pacific. Almost half (47 per cent) of countries record low scores, with the largest share of these being non-democracies (57 per cent) followed by hybrid regimes and democracies (both 21 per cent).

Only five countries have low levels of corruption: the hybrid regime of Singapore has the lowest levels of corruption in the world and the rest are democracies (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea).

Priority countries for reform:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Priority areas for reform:

- Strengthen institutions, including judicial, to more effectively combat corruption
- Review and strengthen political finance regulations and their enforcement, together with measures to promote integrity and transparency in elections and lobbying activities, of finances of political parties; consider introducing public subsidies to political parties and for women, especially for the funding of their ordinary activities to level the playing field of candidates; place reasonable regulations on donations from legal persons as well as consider caps for party spending; provide oversight authorities, particularly those in charge of auditing financial reports, with independence and sufficient capacities to conduct meaningful investigation and apply sanctions (International IDEA 2019b)

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and South Korea

Predictable Enforcement:

Levels of Predictable Enforcement are low in Asia and the Pacific; 47 per cent of countries have low levels. Of these, two are democracies, three are hybrid regimes and nine are non-democracies.

Only four countries have high levels of Predictable Enforcement. All four are democracies (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Taiwan).

Priority countries for reform:

Papua New Guinea and the Philippines (democracies); Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan (hybrid regimes with low performance)

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Taiwan

Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range

Civil Society Participation:

Levels of Civil Society Participation have grown by 12 per cent in the last two decades, but average levels (0.54) are still below the world average (of 0.59).

Of the six countries with the highest levels, five are democracies, of which most are third-wave democracies (Indonesia with the highest level in the region, South Korea and Taiwan) and one is a hybrid. The remaining two, Australia and New Zealand, are older democracies.

Priority countries for reform:

India, and Thailand until 2019 (countries with significant declines)

Priority areas for reform:

Revert legislation that restricts funding and operations of CSOs; provide a free and enabling environment for civil society

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Indonesia, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste

Electoral Participation:

Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean are the equal-best-performing regions in the world on Electoral Participation (with an average regional score of 0.66).

Almost half (47 per cent) of countries in Asia and the Pacific have high levels of voter turnout. Of the countries with high Electoral Participation, 64 per cent are democracies, while 36 per cent are non-democratic regimes.

Priority countries for reform:

Afghanistan (hybrid regime with low levels)

Priority areas for reform:

Ensuring absentee voting, voter education.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, India (voter education), Indonesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste

Direct Democracy:

Levels of Direct Democracy in Asia and the Pacific are below the world average. Taiwan stands out as the country with the highest levels of Direct Democracy in the region with a score of 0.81, followed by New Zealand with a score of 0.49.

Four countries score among the top 25 per cent in the world with the highest levels of Direct Democracy. Of these, three are democracies (Australia, New Zealand and Taiwan), but one is not: Kyrgyzstan (hybrid regime).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, New Zealand and Taiwan

Local Democracy:

Levels of Local Democracy are in the low range, with more countries scoring low (17) than high (6).

Taiwan is one of the six countries in the world with the highest levels of Local Democracy; five other countries also score among the top 25 per cent (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and Timor-Leste).

Nine countries in the region score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world with the lowest levels of Local Democracy: 6 of the 10 non-democracies in the region (China, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), one hybrid regime (Singapore) and two democracies (Malaysia and Myanmar).

Priority countries for reform:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Singapore (hybrid regimes with low levels); Malaysia and Myanmar (democracies with low levels)

Priority areas for reform:

Balance of power through decentralization, inclusion of local governments

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste

TABLE 4.7

Regime classification, Asia and the Pacific, 2018

This table shows the regime classification for all of the countries in Asia and the Pacific covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

Country	GSoD attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Democracies					
Australia	0.81 =	0.85 =	0.87 =	0.83 =	High
India	0.69 =	0.57 =	0.58 =	0.53 =	Mid-range
Indonesia	0.65 =	0.61 =	0.62 =	0.51 =	High
Japan	0.78 =	0.83 =	0.75 =	0.79 =	Mid-range
Malaysia	0.54 =	0.65 +	0.57 +	0.51 =	Low
Mongolia	0.64 =	0.67 =	0.60 =	0.48 =	Mid-range
Myanmar	0.44 =	0.49 =	0.55 =	0.49 =	Low
Nepal	0.62 =	0.63 =	0.65 +	0.43 =	Mid-range
New Zealand	0.80 =	0.84 =	0.82 =	0.85 =	High
Papua New Guinea	0.47 =	0.51 =	0.62 =	0.38 =	Mid-range
The Philippines	0.59 =	0.60 =	0.58 =	0.41 =	Mid-range
Republic of Korea (South Korea)	0.77 =	0.83 =	0.77 =	0.71 =	High
Sri Lanka	0.66 =	0.65 +	0.61 =	0.50 =	Mid-range
Taiwan	0.81 =	0.82 =	0.72 =	0.71 =	High
Timor-Leste	0.705 =	0.56 =	0.60 =	0.53 =	High
Hybrid regimes					
Afghanistan	0.38 =	0.36 =	0.54 =	0.33 =	Low
Bangladesh	0.38 =	0.44 =	0.43 =	0.27 =	Low
Kyrgyzstan	0.52 =	0.61 =	0.59 =	0.39 =	Low
Pakistan	0.52 =	0.46 =	0.56 =	0.407 +	Low
Singapore	0.50 =	0.64 =	0.46 =	0.83 =	Low

Country	GSoD attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Non-democracies					
Cambodia	0.31 =	0.36 =	0.30 =	0.18 =	Low
China	0 =	0.394 =	0.22 =	0.43 =	Low
Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)	0.12 =	0.13 =	0.07 =	0.16 =	Low
Kazakhstan	0.33 =	0.50 =	0.28 =	0.38 =	Low
Laos	0.16 =	0.32 =	0.32 =	0.31 =	Low
Tajikistan	0.27 =	0.31 =	0.27 =	0.21 =	Low
Thailand	0.20 –	0.42 –	0.38 =	0.25 –	Low
Turkmenistan	0.25 =	0.32 =	0.15 =	0.22 +	Low
Uzbekistan	0.28 =	0.41 =	0.19 =	0.33 +	Low
Viet Nam	0.23 =	0.46 =	0.34 =	0.50 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period; + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019c), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

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Chapter 5
The state of democracy in Europe

This chapter begins by offering a brief overview of the long-term democratic trends in the Europe region, followed by an analysis of the current democratic landscape. It follows the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) conceptual framework as an organizing structure, covering issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, and highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the democratic challenges it faces. The analysis is based on the GSoD Indices as the principal data source but includes other sources to complement the analysis.

EUROPE AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Europe is, together with North America, the region that scores best on the GSoD indicators linked to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16).

However, it is also the region that has seen most declines on the indicators that measure progress on SDG 16 since 2015. On 17 of the 18 GSoD indicators used to measure SDG 16, the number of countries with significant declines outnumber those with advances. This is the case for SDG 16.1 on violence, SDG 16.3 on rule of law, SDG 16.5 on absence of corruption and SDG 16.6 on effective institutions. This is also the case for all of the indicators on SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making, while only Social Group Equality has seen stagnation.

After North America, Europe is the region that scores highest on levels of political Gender Equality and political representation as set out by SDG 5.5. The region has largely stagnated on this indicator since 2015, with no countries making statistically significant gains and only Italy suffering a significant decline.

5.1. Introduction

After North America, Europe continues to be the region in the world with the largest share of democracies (39, or 93 per cent of countries in the region). Overall, the level of democracy in Europe is still firmly above that of most other regions, with only one country classifying as a hybrid regime (Russia) and two as non-democracies (Azerbaijan and Belarus). The largest share of the world's older, as well as third-wave, democracies is located in Europe.

However, as the GSoD Indices show, in recent years the quality of democracy in Europe has witnessed a general decline and a number of democracies—both older and newer—are experiencing democratic erosion and democratic backsliding. The decline of democratic quality in Europe cannot be disassociated from the rise of anti-establishment parties. The GSoD Indices indicate correlations between non-traditional and non-mainstream parties in government and the decline in democratic quality. These developments

KEY FINDINGS

Positive developments

- **After North America, Europe is the second-most democratic region in the world, with 93 per cent of countries classified as democracies.** Europe has the largest share of the world's democracies, with 39 countries classifying as democracies, which constitutes 40 per cent of the global share.
- **The largest share of third-wave democracies can be found in Europe.** Since 1975, a total of 28 countries in the region have transitioned to democracy, of which almost half (12) are new countries that gained independence following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet/Communist bloc. Europe's democracies have proven remarkably resilient. While two third-wave democracies (Albania and Georgia) backslid into hybridity for some time, they have since returned to democracy.
- **Of the 21 democracies in the world with high scores on all five GSoD attributes, 14 are in Europe.** The majority (11) are older democracies in North and West Europe, while one is in South Europe (Spain) and two more (Estonia and Slovenia) are in East-Central Europe.
- **In countries such as Denmark, Finland, Latvia and the United Kingdom,** an increasing number of initiatives give European citizens potential avenues for direct participation in public decision-making, including citizen initiatives at the local level, e-petitions and e-platforms.
- **Armenia was the only country in Europe to transition from being a hybrid regime in 2017 to a democracy in 2018.** It also recorded the highest number of statistically significant advances in Europe for 2018: on Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, and on eight related democratic subattributes.

Challenges to democracy

- **Although the largest concentration of democracies is in Europe, the region has seen a decline in the quality of its democracies in the last 10 years.** The share of countries with high levels of Checks on Government, Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation has declined. Therefore, most democratic declines in Europe are related to weakening Checks on Government and a shrinking civic space, and are occurring in contexts of democratic erosion and democratic backsliding.
- **More than half (56 per cent) of democracies in Europe suffer from democratic erosion.** Of the 10 democracies in the world currently experiencing democratic backsliding, 6—Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and to a lesser extent, Ukraine—are in Europe.
- **There is a general malaise within mainstream political parties across most of Europe and particularly in Western European countries.** This contributes to the rise of non-traditional parties, such as populist, extremist and anti-establishment parties. Democratic backsliding is often associated with such parties gaining access to government. The phenomenon of ruling political parties showing autocratic tendencies can be discerned in several countries in the region, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.
- **Europe has recently experienced a populist wave.** Its origins can be traced back to several interacting factors, including economic and cultural globalization, which have transformed the social structure and political culture of many countries in the region. Political drivers of populism include reduced trust in political parties and a crisis of representation as well as the fragmentation and polarization of the public sphere further deepened by the emergence of new technologies and social media. Socio-economic drivers of populism include labour market transformation, an increase in domestic socio-economic disparities and a gap between citizens' expectations of what democracy can deliver and disenchantment with democracy's perceived failure to deliver wellbeing for all.

have raised the stakes for non-populist parties which, to keep attracting votes and fight off the wave of populism, should be prepared to tackle societal problems more effectively.

In terms of the main gainers, Armenia is currently leading the list with statistically significant advances on eight GSoD subattributes, transitioning from a hybrid regime to democracy in 2018. North Macedonia as a reverse backslider is also bucking the trend in the region, with significant democratic advances on three of its democratic subattributes in the past five years. Improvements on one or two aspects of democracy are also noted in countries such as Georgia, Ireland, Kosovo, Portugal and Spain in the last five years.

5.2. Taking the long-term perspective: democratic developments since 1975

Of the world's 27 older democracies, 14 (52 per cent) are located in Europe, of which 12 are in North and West Europe, and 2 in South Europe. These democracies have proven to be remarkably resilient: none have experienced an undemocratic interruption since 1975. **The largest share of the third-wave democracies can be found in Europe.** Since 1975, 28 countries have transitioned to democracy, of which almost half (12) are new countries that gained independence following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet/Communist bloc. Most of these are located in Eastern and East-Central Europe, although some are also found in Southern Europe. These countries, which are referred to as third-wave democracies, have also proven remarkably resilient. Only two (Albania and Georgia) have experienced partial democratic breakdowns during this period, with both countries slipping into spells of hybridity but then returning to democracy.

Globally, only a small percentage of countries covered by the GSoD Indices (22 per cent or 21 countries) have high performance on all of their democratic attributes. Of these 21 countries, 14 are in Europe, including 11 older democracies in North and West Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom), 1 in South Europe (Spain) and 2 in East-Central Europe (Estonia and Slovenia).

Europe is the region in the world with the largest share of democracies (39, or 93 per cent of countries in the region) (see Figure 5.1.).

5.3. The current democracy landscape in Europe

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the democratic challenges it faces.

Representative Government

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

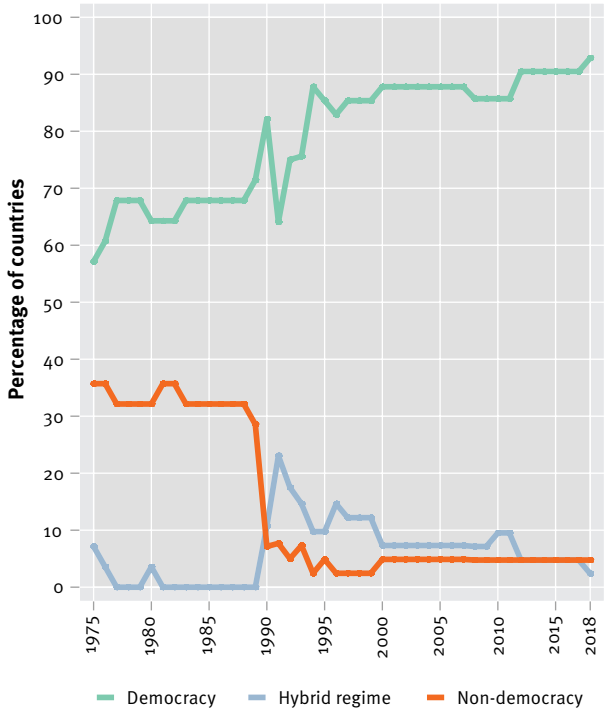
Summary: Representative Government in Europe, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.68)	
High (>0.7)	Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Israel, Kosovo, Latvia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine
Low (<0.4)	Azerbaijan and Belarus

The democratic performance patterns and quality of democracy in Europe show multi-faceted variation from country to country. As illustrated in Table 5.1, of 39 democracies in the region, 14 score high on all five GSoD attributes. Following that, 14 democratic performance patterns can be discerned. For example, Ireland, Portugal and Slovakia score highly on four out of five attributes (although each records different performances on Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement). Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania score highly on just one attribute (and mid-range on the remaining four). Another group of seven democracies, starting with Albania, score mid-range on all attributes. Towards the end of the table are several countries which, although still defined as democracies, show low performance on one or more attributes (referred to

FIGURE 5.1

Regime types in Europe, 1975–2018

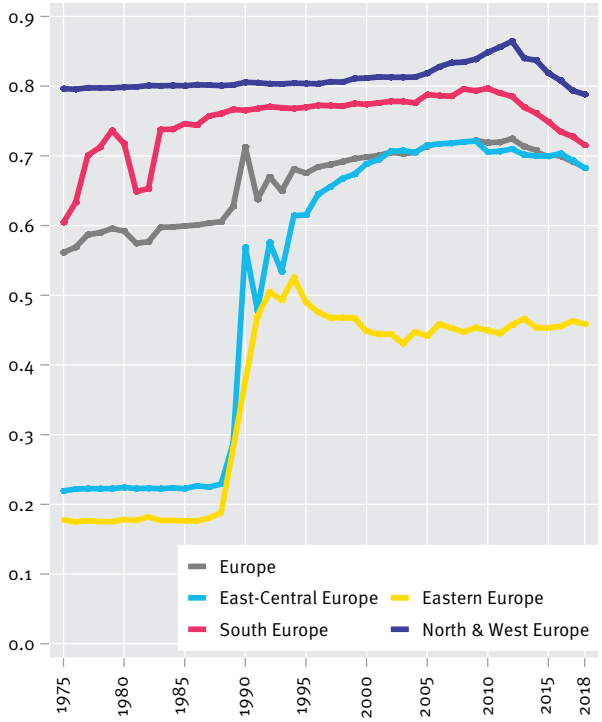


Notes: This graph shows that the percentage of democracies in Europe has increased since 1975, and all but 7 per cent of countries in Europe are considered democracies according to the GSoD Indices.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

FIGURE 5.2

Representative Government in Europe and its subregions, 1975–2018



Notes: The y-axis denotes the attributes score, ranging from 0 to 1 where 1 indicates a government that is completely representative and 0 indicates no representation. The graph presents both a temporal and spatial comparison by subregion. Eastern Europe (i.e. post-Soviet Europe) has increased its score over time. However, in 2018 Eastern Europe performed well below the regional and subregional averages on Representative Government.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

as weak democracies). Turkey is the most extreme example, scoring low on four out of five attributes but mid-range on Representative Government.

Warning signs of democratic erosion and democratic backsliding

After North America, Europe is the second most democratic region in the world, with 93 per cent of countries in the region classified as democracies. Europe has the largest share of democracies, with its 39 democracies making up 40 per cent of the global share. Of these, 25 have high levels of Representative Government.

The most democratic subregions in Europe are North and West Europe, South Europe and East-Central Europe, which only have democracies (see Figure 5.2). However, while the quality of democracy in most European countries continues to be above that of other regions, Europe has seen a decline in the quality of its democracies in the past 10 years. Although there is a relatively large share of countries with high performances on Representative Government, in the recent past Europe has witnessed setbacks related to checks and balances on government, as well as curtailment of civic space.

As a result, the share of countries with high levels of Checks on Government, Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation has been declining. These declines are occurring both in contexts of democratic erosion (declines on one or more aspects of democracy) and in the particular form of erosion termed democratic backsliding.

More than half of the democracies in Europe have suffered democratic erosion in recent years. Of the 10 democracies in the world currently experiencing democratic backsliding, six—Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine—are in Europe.

The region's third-wave democracies have been more prone to democratic erosion than the older democracies, with more than half (61 per cent) suffering from different degrees of erosion, versus a little more than one-third (36 per cent) of the older democracies. More than half (14) of the countries suffering democratic erosion are found in East-Central Europe and Eastern Europe, but a little less than one-quarter (5) are found in Western Europe and 3 in South Europe. Most of the declines are concentrated in aspects linked to civic space, namely Media Integrity and Civil Liberties, particularly Freedom of Expression.

A number of democracies in Europe have also suffered from more severe forms of democratic erosion, referred to in the GSoD Indices as democratic backsliding. The GSoD Indices refer to (modern) democratic backsliding as the gradual weakening of checks on government accompanied by declines in civil liberties in democracies. This tends to be the result of intentional policies to weaken accountability institutions and checks and balances. The GSoD Indices record moderate and severe forms of democratic backsliding, linked to the severity of declines in Checks on Government and Civil Liberties average indicators. According to the GSoD Indices, 10 democracies in the world are currently experiencing democratic backsliding. Of these, six are located in Europe, out of which five suffer from severe forms of democratic backsliding and one suffers from moderate democratic backsliding.

Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Turkey are currently experiencing severe forms of democratic backsliding. Although each country context differs, common characteristics include weakening of

TABLE 5.1

Heat map of democratic performance patterns in Europe, 2018

Country	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Austria					
Belgium					
Denmark					
Estonia					
Finland					
France					
Germany					
Netherlands					
Norway					
Slovenia					
Spain					
Sweden					
Switzerland					
United Kingdom					
Portugal					
Slovakia					
Ireland					
Cyprus					
Italy					

Notes: This heat map shows the performance of the 39 democracies in Europe by attribute in 2018. Green indicates high performance, while yellow denotes mid-range performance and red shows low-range performance.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

accountability institutions, executive aggrandizement of officials in leadership positions, curtailing of dissent, and efforts to ensure long-term rule by stifling opposition and civil society (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017: 75; Mechkova, Lührmann and Lindberg 2017; Bermeo 2016). Ukraine has been facing a more moderate form of democratic backsliding, while North Macedonia was in the same category until 2016. In some cases, democratic backsliding is so severe that it results in partial (to hybrid) or full (to non-democracy) democratic breakdown. This was the case in Russia which, as a result of backsliding leading to democratic breakdown, backslid to a hybrid regime in 2004. See Table 5.2 for examples of episodes of democratic backsliding in the GSoD Indices data set.

Severe democratic backsliding represents a top-down, orchestrated hollowing-out of democratic institutions, via the means and instruments of democratic decision-making. Ruling parties in countries such as Hungary, Poland and Turkey have skilfully used democratic rules to dominate democratic institutions (including the parliament, judiciary and media), and change the rules (e.g. electoral laws, judicial appointment procedures and constitutional provisions) with the purpose of maintaining hold on those institutions indefinitely (Bieber, Solska and Taleski 2019). Encroaching political interference in judicial matters, stifling of parliamentary opposition voices and the curtailment of civic space and media freedoms have slowly led to severe democratic backsliding, which in turn translates to declines in the GSoD Indices on Checks on Government and Civil Liberties.

Other countries, such as Serbia, face predicaments associated with state capture. In these contexts, elites have taken control of the state to further the private political or commercial interests of a select group. The Western Balkans is characterized by regimes that formally accept democratic rules but retain power through authoritarian practices (Levitsky and Way 2010). In 2018 the European Commission referred to the Western Balkans as a subregion where 'countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organized crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration, as well as a strong entanglement of public and private interests' (European Commission 2018a: 3). As a result, Serbia has been marked as a a country undergoing severe democratic backsliding since 2010. The severe democratic backsliding in neighbouring Romania started more recently (in 2017) but is also of great concern in terms of its severity, with significant declines in Civil Liberties, Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, and also Civil Society Participation and Access to Justice.

In South Europe, Turkey is suffering severe democratic backsliding. The backsliding in Turkey began in 2010 and continues to date. Turkey is the country in the world that has suffered the most democratic declines in the past five years, declining on 11 of its democratic subattributes.

Ukraine presents a situation of moderate democratic backsliding, which it has experienced since 2010. Ukraine is a weak democracy, with mid-range levels of Representative Government, declining from 0.6 in 2009 to 0.45 in 2018. Ukraine performs in the mid-range on four of its attributes of democracy, and records a low score on Impartial Administration. In the recent past, it has experienced declines in Checks on Government. According to GSoD Indices data, in 2018 it also suffered significant declines in the subattribute of Civil Liberties (specifically, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Movement). Ukraine's declines in Civil Liberties are partially a consequence of the country's political tension with Russia and the events leading up to, and following, the Maidan Revolution. Ukraine has also suffered consecutive declines on Clean Elections and Free Political Parties since 2013. The evidence behind such declines can be seen in government institutions that favour the political party of the president, the curtailment of opposition parties' manoeuvring space (OSCE ODIHR 2018c), and the encroaching influence of the business sector in politics (Razumkov Centre 2017).

North Macedonia had an eight-year spell of moderate democratic backsliding commencing in 2008 and ending in 2016. These deteriorations were noted on Checks on Government and Civil Liberties, largely due to political interference in the judiciary, the media and civil society by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (known by its Macedonian acronym, VMRO-DPMNE) led by Nikola Gruevski. The situation has seen some improvement since the 2017 elections which brought about a new government headed by Zoran Zaev (Reef 2017; Ceka 2018).

In some countries, state capture has taken the form of long-ruling families and close acquaintances bringing

TABLE 5.2

Episodes of democratic backsliding in Europe in the GSoD Indices data set

Moderate democratic backsliding	Severe democratic backsliding	Severe democratic backsliding resulting in democratic breakdown	
		Partial democratic breakdown (from democracy to hybrid regime)	Full democratic breakdown (from democracy to non-democracy)
Ukraine 2010–2018	Hungary (2006–2018) Poland (2013–2018) Romania (2017–2018) Serbia (2010–2018) Turkey (2008–2018)	N/A	N/A
North Macedonia (2008–2016)		Russia (1999–2010)	N/A

Notes: The data in the GSoD Indices reflects events up to the end of 2018. Cases of democratic backsliding listed as occurring up to and including 2018 may therefore have since evolved or changed. For more information on the definitions of moderate and severe democratic backsliding see the Methodology section of this report.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

under their control large sectors of the economy and political power. Azerbaijan and Belarus fit this mould. They are the only countries in Europe to classify as non-democracies in the GSoD Indices data set. Azerbaijan is the only country in the region with low performance scores in all five attributes. Belarus scores mid-range on Fundamental Rights, but overall it is still classified as a non-democracy, with no clear signs of a potential democratic transition in the near future.

Political parties in Europe: between renewal and calcification

The Free Political Parties subattribute of the GSoD framework measures the extent to which political parties are free to form and campaign for office, including the competitiveness of political participation, the autonomy of opposition parties and the extent of multiparty elections (International IDEA 2018b).

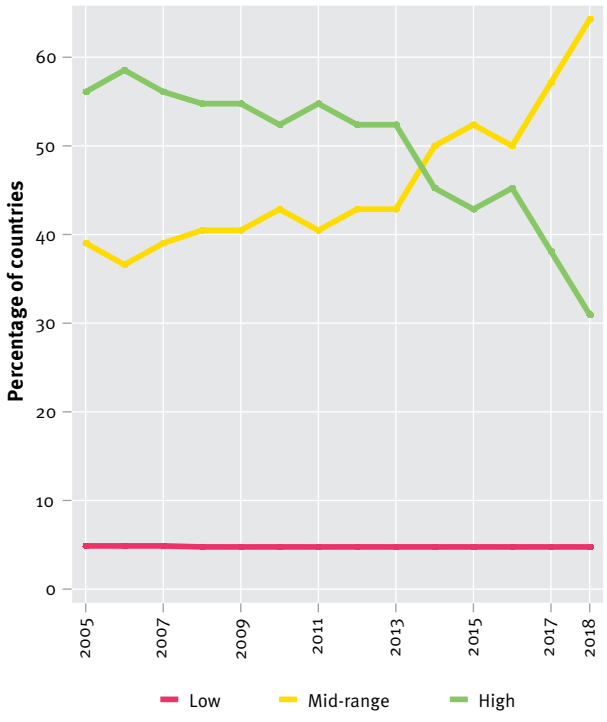
Europe has the largest number of countries (13) scoring highly on Free Political Parties, while 27 countries score in the mid-range, and 2 have low scores (see Figure 5.3). In some countries political parties are also experiencing a surge in membership. For instance, the British Labour Party greatly increased its membership in recent years, in partnership with a grassroots movement, Momentum. The movement presented itself as a new form of politics that bridged traditional party structures and civic activism. Momentum led the development of new digital campaign and recruitment techniques, including peer-to-peer texting and mobile-banking applications. Its community-level organization has fed into a national movement that has more than doubled the Labour Party's membership since September 2015, including many young people (Hobolt 2018; Whiteley et al. 2019), although membership is reported to have fallen by around 10 per cent in 2019 due to the party's stance on Brexit (Stewart, H. 2019).

Similarly, in France, the new La République en Marche! party has shaken up traditional political alignments. Moreover, it has done so from an avowedly liberal and democratic position. The party took root and grew in record time. It was in some ways a top-down phenomenon, organized to service Emmanuel Macron's presidential bid. In other ways, however, it resembled a bottom-up movement, growing out of local circles and policy deliberations with ordinary citizens (Chwalisz 2018). The party drew heavily on crowdsourced ideas and donations, and was organized around a decentralized network of local councils where people of all ages and backgrounds were empowered to contribute to decision-making with minimal red tape. These councils engaged with citizens in a range of informal ways, including meals and youth events. Prior to the 2017 elections it prided itself on breaking ranks with traditional politicking by leading a door-to-door campaign in a project titled 'La Grande Marche pour l'Europe' (March for Europe), interviewing and talking to hundreds of thousands of citizens (Schultheis 2018). Macron's presidency and level of support, however, have since also suffered setbacks, as exemplified by the *Gilets Jaunes* (Yellow Vests) movement that began in November 2018 with protests against rising fuel prices and turned into a wider protest movement against worsening living conditions and rising inequalities (*The Economist* 2019).

Mainstream parties—mainly across Western and Northern Europe—are facing increasing pressure, therefore contributing to the rise of non-traditional parties. This has consequently helped produce populist, nativist, extremist or simply non-traditional political parties on both the left and right of the political spectrum. Some examples include the right-wing populist party Vox in Spain,

FIGURE 5.3

Free Political Parties in Europe, 2005–2018



Notes: The graph illustrates that the percentage of mid-range countries has increased and now makes up the majority of countries in Europe, while the percentage of high-performing countries has nearly halved since 2005.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

which won 10 per cent of votes and entered parliament for the first time in the 2019 elections, or the far-right Alternative für Deutschland, created in 2013 and now the third-largest party in Germany. Despite the initial surge in the popularity of parties such as La République en Marche! and the British Labour Party, the impact of populist and extremist parties has been increasingly felt across many other countries in Europe and has left a mark in France and the UK. The ongoing developments stemming from the Brexit referendum, and the strain it has placed on the British political spectrum, are a vivid case in point.

In several countries in Central and Eastern Europe, political parties do not evolve to become membership-based mechanisms that articulate and channel citizens' concerns. Instead, most parties are driven by narrow party leadership and lack intra-party pluralism, which results in the calcification of these parties. Political parties play quite a dominant role in public life in these countries (Günay and Dzihic 2016). Moreover, ruling parties attract high membership rates as this is crucial for employment in the public sectors. In such scenarios, the measurement of indicators for this subattribute—such as the autonomy of opposition parties, or the competitiveness of party participation, or multiparty elections—can only be fully understood by recognizing the extent to which these parties are centralized (Bochsler 2010; Laverty 2015). This is reflected in the mid-range Free Political Parties scores for Kosovo (0.55), North Macedonia (0.61) and Serbia (0.56). See Figure 5.4 for a summary of the evolution of the GSoD subattribute of Free Political Parties in the Western Balkans.

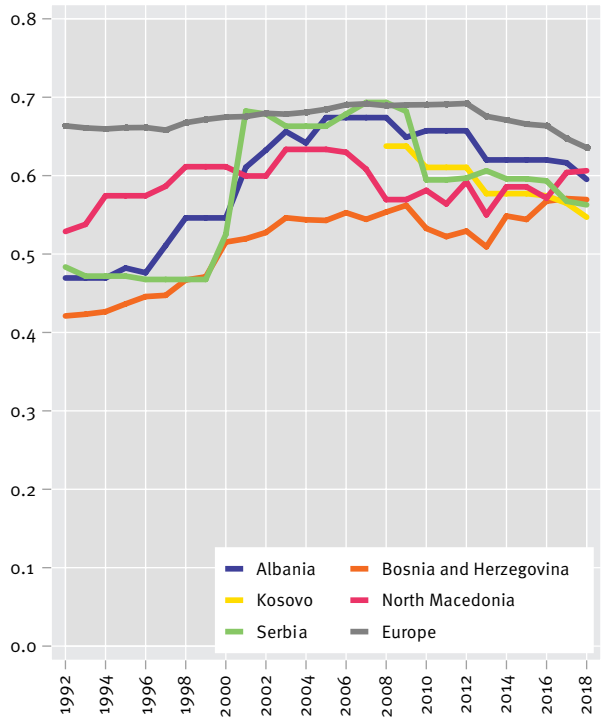
This pattern can also be identified in some post-Soviet Europe countries with 'parties of power'—pragmatic groups that aim to support ruling governments and are defined by their relationship to the state, without significant independent policy agendas, combining civil servants, business elites and government officials (Laverty 2015). Such parties have, until recently, prevailed in Armenia (scoring mid-range at 0.62) and Ukraine (scoring mid-range at 0.46), and have been the main parties in hybrid regimes or non-democracies such as Russia (scoring mid-range at 0.40) and Azerbaijan (scoring low at 0.36), respectively.

Some political parties, including several ruling parties, exhibit autocratic tendencies. This phenomenon can be discerned in several countries in the region, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Such parties, and the regimes led by them, are based on ideological platforms combining conservatism, nationalism and a rejection of liberal democracy, as epitomized by Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS) in Poland, Fidesz in Hungary, and the VMRO-DPMNE in North Macedonia (in power until 2016). These regimes often claim to rule in the name of the people and describe their opponents as traitors whom they rhetorically exclude from the nation (Petkovski 2016). Historically embedded narratives, nativist ideologies and global conspiracy theories are recurring motives for these regimes and parties.

When referring to parties in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Western Balkans more specifically, some have noted the dominance of 'Big Men' (Kanin 2003)—politicians with authoritarian tendencies, or patrons of family-based and clientelist networks who continue to dominate the region and co-opt international support by speaking the language of modernity and offering promises of stability and reform (Dolenec 2013). Others have noted these parties' centralization: most parties in the Western Balkans are 'controlled by a small circle of elites, who have

FIGURE 5.4

Free Political Parties in the Western Balkans, 1992–2018



Notes: The score for Kosovo begins in 2008 as that is the year the country gained independence.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

managed to centralize power in their hands', which gives them 'excessive influence over candidate selection and thereby making every MP more dependent' (Keil 2018: 68). There are several distinct patterns of 'state capture' within the region (Bieber 2018: 347). Albania and North Macedonia are in essence two- to three-party states, with a number of minority (i.e. ethnic Albanian) parties in the latter. Croatia and Serbia have a single heavily-dominant party and several smaller opposition parties. Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina are predominantly communal: at the national level, all decisions are made by a virtually unchanging group of six to seven party leaders, while single parties dominate in some regional and most municipal jurisdictions. Kosovo's parties are based on loyalty to a small leadership cadre dating back to the pre-independence period; most have little or no clear ideological leaning. The common denominator of all these examples is that governing parties function as patron–client machines, and party loyalty usually trumps other considerations in decision-making (Keil 2018; Wise and Agarin 2017; Stewart, B. 2019; Bajovic and Manojlovic 2013).

Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Summary: Fundamental Rights in Europe, 2018

Regional average: High (0.73)	
High (>0.7)	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia and Ukraine
Low (<0.4)	Azerbaijan and Turkey

Declining civil liberties and democratic backsliding

In the last decade Europe has seen a gradual decline in Civil Liberties. The share of countries with high levels of Civil Liberties declined from 80 per cent in 2008 to 71 per cent in 2018. In the early 2000s, for the first time since the start of the GSoD Indices data set (1975), there was a sharp spike in the number of countries with significant declines on Civil Liberties. The deterioration was particularly seen in East-Central Europe and South Europe. Turkey's levels of Civil Liberties have declined from mid-range to low; its score on this dimension (0.35) has nearly halved since 1975. As it stands, Turkey is the only democracy in Europe with low levels of Civil Liberties.

Figure 5.5 shows the GSoD Indices levels for Europe on the Fundamental Rights attribute, while Figure 5.6 shows the levels for the Civil Liberties subattribute. Since 1975, there have consistently been more high scoring countries than any other category in Europe on both indicators, while those countries with mid-range scores have outnumbered those with low scores since 1985 (for Fundamental Rights) and since 1990 (for Civil Liberties).

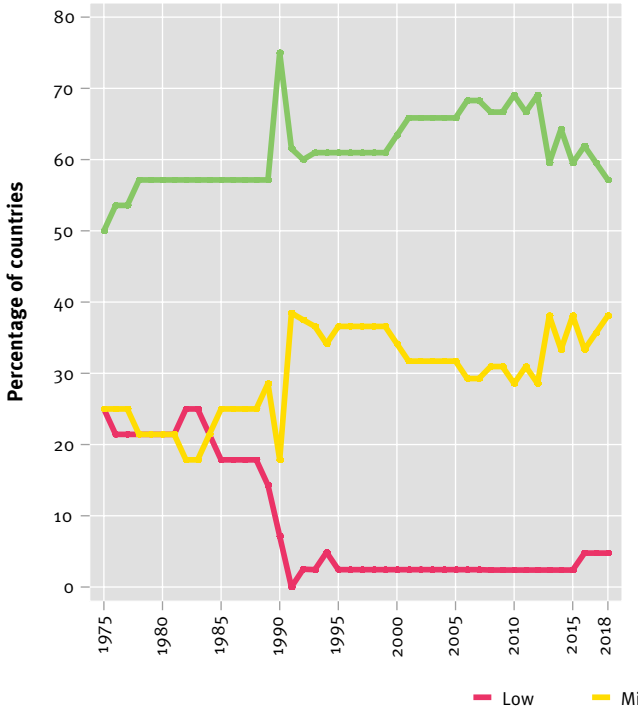
Freedom of Expression has seen a downward trend in Europe, particularly in the last five years. As a GSoD aspect that focuses on issues of harassment of journalists, self-censorship of journalists, freedom of discussion for men and women, and freedom of opinion and expression, this downward trend should be of great concern for the region. The share of countries with high levels has declined from 74 per cent in 2008 to 60 per cent in 2018. A total of 13 countries have seen significant declines on Freedom of Expression between 2013 and 2018—the highest regional total. These declines have all occurred in democracies, predominantly positioned around the subregion of East-Central Europe.

However, a few advances on Civil Liberties have been identified in certain parts of East-Central Europe and Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe. North Macedonia and Kosovo have seen improvements on Freedom of Association and Assembly, while Armenia has recorded gains on Freedom of Movement.

Europe's performance on Gender Equality has plateaued considerably in the last five years. There are more troubling signs: while the performance of countries such as Croatia, Poland, Serbia and Turkey do not show significant declines, their downward trend in the last five years is cause for concern.

FIGURE 5.5

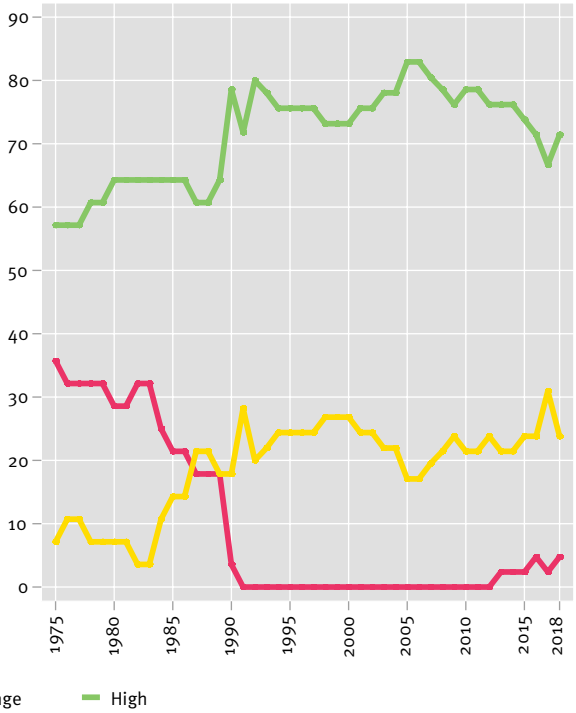
Fundamental Rights in Europe, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 5.6

Civil Liberties in Europe, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

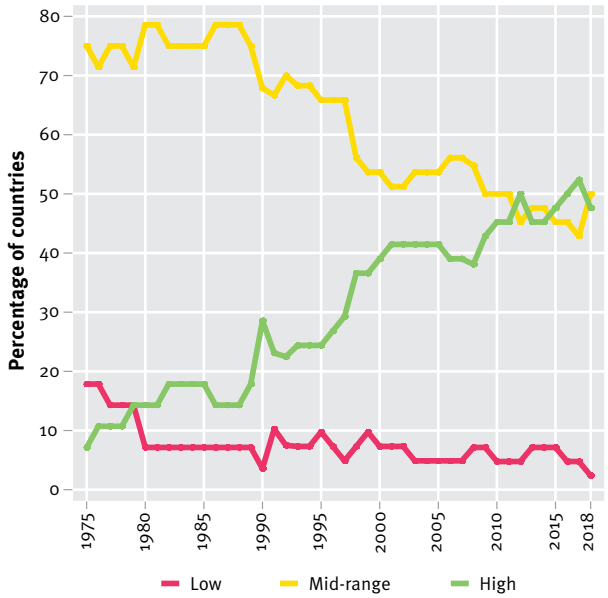
Azerbaijan and Turkey are the two countries in the region that score the lowest on Gender Equality. Turkey is one of the three democracies in the world that has low levels of Gender Equality. For more information see Figure 5.7.

Along with Papua New Guinea (0.26) and Iraq (0.39), Turkey is one of three democracies in the world to score low on Gender Equality (0.34).

Turkey stands out as the country with most declines in the GSoD Indices subattributes in the last five years—11 of them overall. By 2018, despite being classified as a democracy, Turkey is a fragile and very weak one, and the only country in Europe to have suffered statistically significant declines in four of the five GSoD attributes: Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement. Turkey now scores mid-range (0.44) on Representative Government.

FIGURE 5.7

Gender Equality in Europe, 1975–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Approximately a decade ago, Turkey's score on Representative Government was relatively high: it was on par with the rest of Europe, slightly below the scores recorded in Southern Europe but above the world average. It was increasingly celebrated as a model of how other countries—especially countries in the Middle East—could combine Islam as the majority religion with a pluralist, representative democracy that respects minorities and fundamental freedoms. Turkey's soft power as a successful democratic reformer in the Middle East region was on the ascendancy and further democratic reform was on the agenda (Altunişik 2008).

Today, on most attributes, Turkey scores lower than the European average (see Box 5.1). Its democratic standards have deteriorated sharply and in a very short timeframe. Its GSoD Indices scores even suggest a return to its 1980s standards in some respects. Today the country has become a reference point for authoritarian regimes which seek ways to minimize their democracies around the conduct of elections while showing disregard for civil liberties, civil society and clear separation of powers (Özbudun 2015; Schedler 2006). The March 2019 municipal elections (and the June rerun in Istanbul) might have heralded the turn of a new page in Turkish politics. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) conceded defeat in both Ankara and Istanbul, bringing to an end 16 years of the party's rule in Ankara, and 25 years in Istanbul (BBC News 2019a; Gall 2019). This undoubtedly represents a significant blow to the party's dominance over local politics. However, the removal of three Kurdish opposition mayors in August 2019 and the crackdown on opposition politicians show that Erdoğan uses other tactics to silence critics.

The deterioration of Turkey's democracy has occurred in juxtaposition with the country's deteriorating prospects for accession to the European Union. As its chances of EU membership became fraught with difficulties and mutual acrimony, Turkey's political and administrative reforms towards more freedoms, accountability, openness and reduced corruption lost pace and were eventually reversed. Relations with the EU have now acquired a pragmatic and transactional character (Economist Intelligence Unit 2018) centred on mutual gains from cooperation on a select number of policy areas, such as the fight against terrorism and migration. In March 2019, the European Parliament even called for a freeze on Turkey's membership talks as a rebuke to the country's human rights violations (Reuters 2019).

Hungary, a country suffering from severe democratic backsliding, has seen significant erosion of democratic checks and balances for the best part of a decade. After coming to power in 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party began using its parliamentary majority to introduce a series of changes, including undercutting judicial independence; transforming public television and radio into mouthpieces of the government; attacking critical media outlets; disempowering local self-government; mobilizing popular fears and resentment through governmental propaganda campaigns; and assaulting civil society (Bánkúti, Halmai and Scheppele 2012).

Monitoring of the April 2018 elections documented the Hungarian Government's unequal distribution of electoral resources, control of media coverage and influence over

BOX 5.1

Turkey: a precipitous slide towards authoritarian rule

Many factors have contributed to Turkey's democratic decline, not least military influence over civilian politics, undue political influence over the judiciary, limited press freedom and curtailment of civic space. More recently, this negative trend, which overturned previous gains, has seen a drastic acceleration. See Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9 for illustrations of how this is reflected in Turkey's GSoD Indices scores.

President Erdogan has continued to tighten his grip on power, particularly since the failed coup attempt in July 2016, which led to the declaration of a state of emergency. In operation until 2018, this provided space for the government to circumvent principles of the rule of law (Barkey 2017; Al Jazeera 2017). The June 2018 elections 'marked the transformation of the political system in Turkey into one with extensive presidential powers, limited parliamentary oversight and reduced independence of the judiciary' (OSCE ODIHR 2018b).

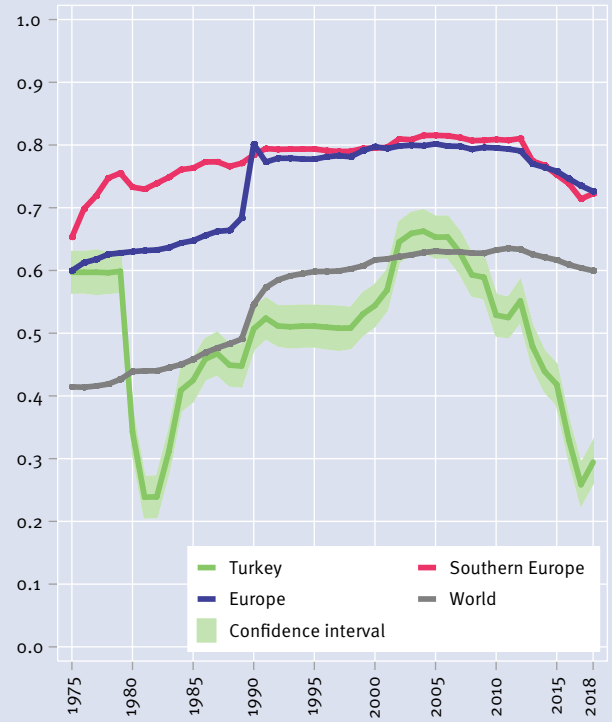
There have been renewed incursions by Turkish security forces into Kurdish settlement areas in Turkey. The work of civil society has been under threat, with NGO closures and arrests without due legal process. Civil society organizations (CSOs) whose views do not match those of state officials have been increasingly marginalized; only preferred organizations with access to power are now able to influence policy (Aybars, Copeland and Tsarouhas 2018). In addition, elected mayors have been replaced by government appointees, squeezing the opposition out from hundreds of municipalities. In particular,

nearly all those held by the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party have been replaced by pro-government figures. The Turkish Government has brought spurious judicial cases against members of the Republican People's Party, the largest opposition party, and an increasing number of journalists have been detained.

It remains to be seen if, and how, the consequences of the 2019 local elections, and the end of the AKP's political dominance in Ankara and Istanbul, will affect the democratic landscape of the country and lead to a reversal of the democratic backsliding that Turkey has experienced since 2008.

FIGURE 5.8

Freedom of Expression in Turkey and the rest of the world, 1975–2018

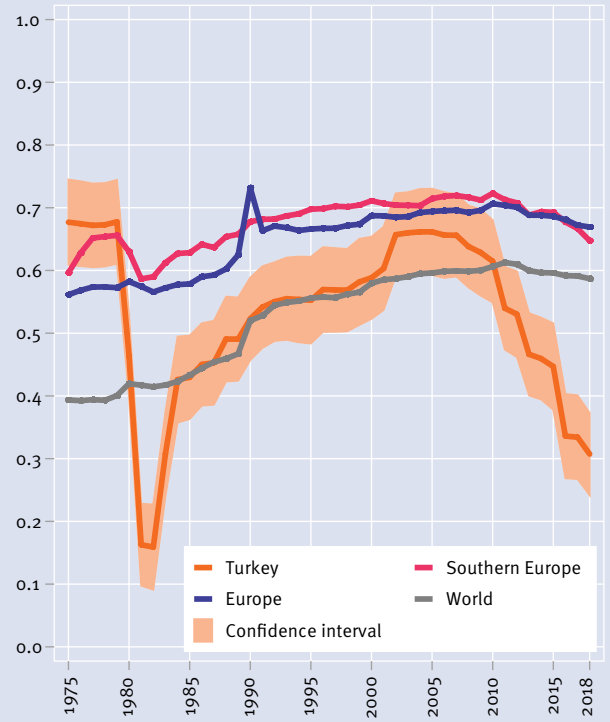


Notes: The shaded band around Turkey's score indicates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 5.9

Civil Society Participation in Turkey and the rest of the world, 1975–2018



Notes: The shaded band around Turkey's score indicates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

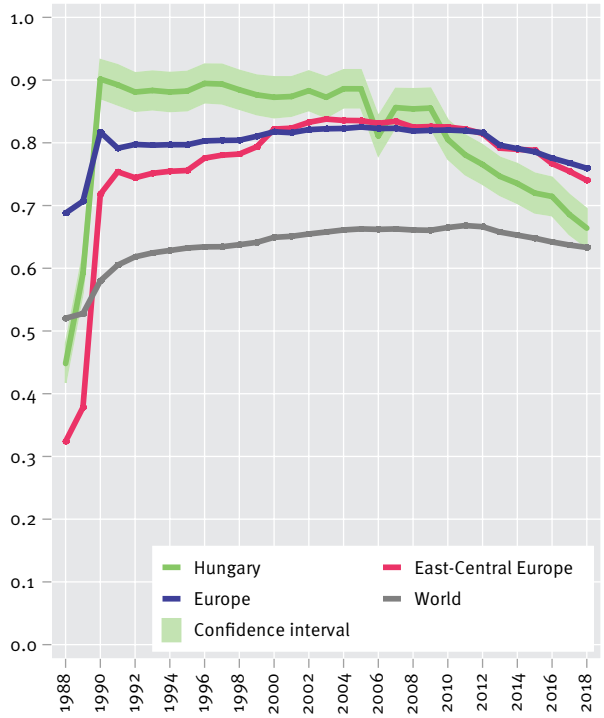
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

the national electoral commission. One monitoring report stated that the elections were characterized by a 'pervasive overlap between state and ruling party resources, undermining contestants' ability to compete on an equal basis' (OSCE ODIHR 2018a: 1). Treatment of the Roma minority has worsened and is a particularly serious concern. Moreover, from mid-2017 onwards, the government has advanced legislation severely restricting non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It even moved to close one of Hungary's most prestigious independent universities, the Central European University (Redden 2018).

These developments are captured by the GSoD Indices data, showing that in the last five years alone Hungary has experienced statistically significant declines on four subattributes: Clean Elections, Free Political Parties, Civil Liberties (see Figure 5.10) and Media Integrity. On Civil Liberties, Hungary has also seen statistically significant

FIGURE 5.10

Civil Liberties in Hungary and the rest of the world, 1988–2018



Notes: The shaded band around Hungary's line indicates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

declines on two subcomponents: Freedom of Expression, and Freedom of Association and Assembly. It now falls below the average in Europe and the subregion. On Freedom of Association and Assembly, Hungary is on a par with Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Turkey. Furthermore, it has gone from high levels of Representative Government in 2008 to mid-range levels in 2018.

The democratic backsliding in Poland is illustrated by six declines in the country's GSoD subattributes for 2018. Of particular concern are the country's overall declines on Civil Liberties and Checks on Government. On Civil Liberties, there is a general deterioration noted on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly. Checks on Government have experienced setbacks on all three subattributes measured in the GSoD Indices: Media Integrity, Judicial Independence and Effective Parliament. This is reflective of the PiS regime's actions in controlling the parliament and diluting its oversight role, its political encroachment in the judiciary, and its stifling of free speech and free media (see Box 5.2).

Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

Summary: Checks on Government in Europe, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.66)	
High (›0.7)	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine
Low (‹0.4)	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Turkey

Europe has suffered declines on Checks on Government in recent years. At the country level, Poland, Romania and Turkey have seen statistically significant declines on this attribute, which has caused a downward pull on the regional average. Armenia is the only country to score a statistically significant advance between 2013 and 2018, but this has proven insufficient to offset the regional European average (see Figure 5.13).

There is an ongoing debate on the underlying causes which might explain the weakening of Checks on Government in the region. Many of these discussions point to the rise of illiberalism, the increasing polarization of the political spectrum, or the EU's disconnect with the electorate at the local level (see e.g. Bieber, Solska and Taleski 2019; Dawson and Hanley 2016; Greskovits 2015; Havlík 2016; Krastev 2018; Mair 2013).

BOX 5.2

Poland: backpedalling on democratic gains

Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS) came to power in Poland in 2015 and has since sought to increase the power of the executive and transform the legislative and constitutional structure of the political system to advance its continued stronghold on power.

In coming to power, and to justify the sweeping changes it undertook, PiS emphasized moral and traditional values. It focused on social redistribution and re-establishment of public trust in state institutions. It consistently appealed to young people, pensioners and inhabitants of rural and suburban areas (Markowski 2016). Judging by the pattern witnessed in the country, which aims to centralize power and control opposition voices, Poland resembles other regimes in the subregion that have recently shown signs of authoritarian tendencies (Giordano and Hayoz 2013; Markowski 2019; Kotwas and Kubik 2019).

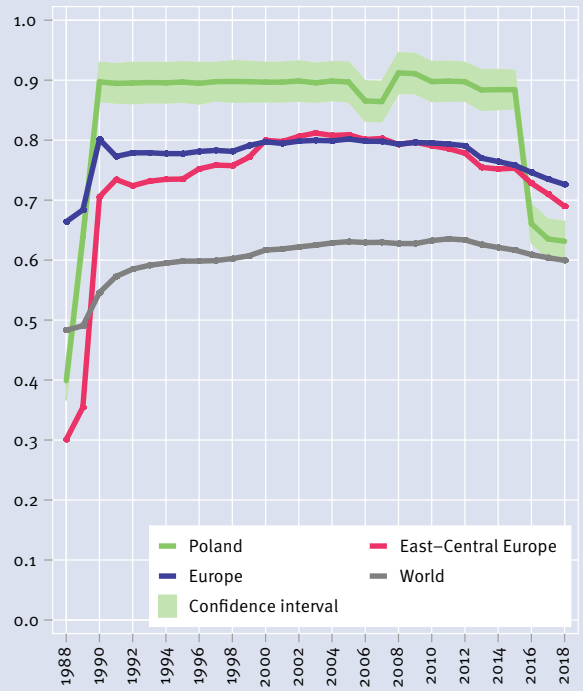
PiS has sought control over key media appointments. It has changed the rules governing the Constitutional Tribunal, the National Council of the Judiciary and the Supreme Court, in a manner that gives it control over key decisions, such as the appointment of judges. Furthermore, the party has placed its supporters in key positions in these courts and placed courts of general jurisdiction under the strict control of the minister of justice (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016). PiS has also centralized the management of civil society funding, creating a new organization, the National Freedom Institute, overseen by the deputy prime minister (Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights 2017).

In addition, in 2016 PiS introduced anti-terrorism legislation which extended options for Internet surveillance without a court order (Amnesty International 2017). It has also increased the period that suspects can be held without charges and broadened the Internal Security Agency's access to data (Matthes, Markowski and Bönker 2018: 20; Human Rights Watch 2017).

Figure 5.11 and Figure 5.12 show Poland's GSoD Indices scores on Freedom of Expression, and Freedom of Association and Assembly, respectively, compared with the scores for East-Central Europe, Europe and the world.

FIGURE 5.11

Freedom of Expression in Poland and the rest of the world, 1988–2018

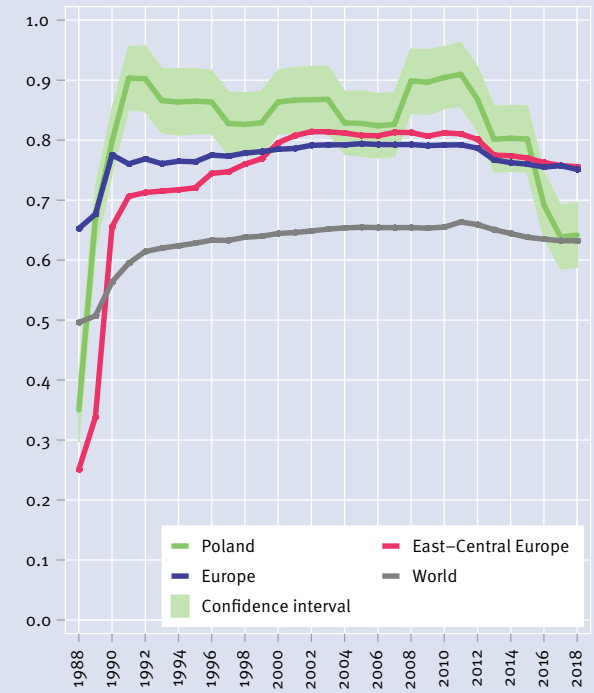


Notes: The shaded band around Poland's score indicates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 5.12

Freedom of Association and Assembly in Poland and the rest of the world, 1988–2018

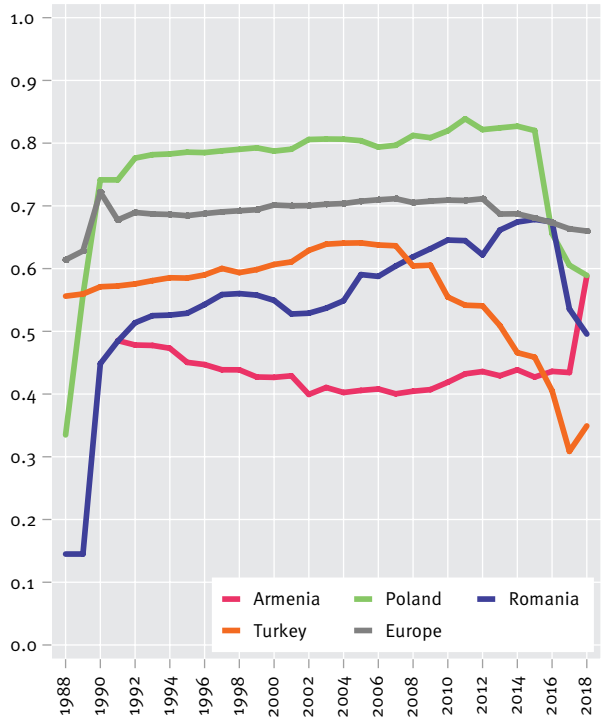


Notes: The shaded band around Poland's score indicates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 5.13

Checks on Government in selected European countries, 1988–2018



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

The rise of illiberalism and polarization, and the hollowing of the centre

One of the main backdrops of Europe's democratic malaise is the rise of illiberal identities and disappointment with mainstream politics. Many factors point to this rise, not least the fear, felt by many citizens, that globalization and technological advancements are putting pressure on their traditional values; and the increase in economic uncertainties and inequalities. Certain political parties are exploiting these fears, suggesting simple answers to not-so-simple questions.

The decline of democratic quality in Europe is linked to the misuse of governmental powers to dismantle constitutional checks and balances. Incumbent political elites have eroded the rule of law to become less accountable in the public realm, appropriate state resources for partisan and private purposes, and expand informal patronage networks in order to penetrate society. These elites have been voted into office by citizens disappointed with the performance of democracy and mainstream political forces. Such popular dissatisfaction has translated into electoral support for anti-establishment and populist parties that have further contributed to the polarization of political competition in many countries. Faced with these challengers, mainstream parties are struggling to find appropriate policy and political responses.

Many surveys in recent years have shown rising support for illiberal and even quasi-authoritarian values in some parts of Europe (Foa and Mounk 2017). Most of the extreme right-wing parties in Europe today appeal to such sentiments. In this political climate, the protection of minorities and tolerance of their views is counterbalanced by a perceived fear that majority values are under pressure. Examples of this can be seen in Austria and Italy (until August 2019), where far-right parties have become part of government. In Austria, the far-right Freedom Party was in a coalition with the conservative People's Party since December 2017 (Heinisch 2017). However, in May 2019 the coalition collapsed, following revelations that Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of the Freedom Party, had promised state contracts in exchange for financial support for his party (Karnitschnig 2019). In Italy, the right-leaning, populist Lega Nord (Northern League, recently rebranded as Lega) formed a governing coalition with the left-leaning Five Star Movement in 2018 (Horowitz 2018). However, in August 2019, Matteo Salvini, the League's leader and the country's Deputy Prime Minister, broke ranks with his coalition partners, seemingly motivated by a gamble to obtain more power in early elections. By the end of August 2019, the gamble appeared to have gone amiss, with the caretaker Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, reaching a deal to form a new government with the centre left (BBC News 2019b).

Declines in Checks on Government are contributing to an increasing polarization across Europe that puts at risk consensual trust in democratic institutions. Societies in many European states are withdrawing into opposing camps that not only contest each other politically but also have little interaction with each other at a social or cultural level, or through any shared media use. The result of this polarization has been that voters are dragged away from centrist political parties.

Across the EU, the centre ground has suffered as parties follow voters towards more extreme positions. In Denmark, the Social Democrats won the 2019 elections after moving to a more restrictive stance on issues such as immigration (Orange 2019). In the Netherlands, the Labour Party attempted to implement a centrist programme but lost support in the 2017 elections (Graham 2017). The

2018 elections in Latvia saw traditional parties and the centrist coalition lose out to two new—populist and anti-corruption—parties (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2018a). Other recently successful populist parties are arguably Smer–Sociálna Demokracia in Slovakia and ANO 2011 in Czechia (Havlík 2016; Matthes 2016), which are closely tied to non-transparent business interests and display limited respect for the rule of law and institutional independence (Greskovits 2015).

The result of these developments is that mainstream political parties and mainstream politics can no longer operate unchallenged. Instead, they are under constant threat from other, newer political forces on the left and right. The weakening pull of the EU and the somewhat embattled model of liberal democracy have encouraged authoritarian actors. Russia has become a more important player, supporting populist and authoritarian leaders and parties, fermenting political instability, and cultivating close ties with leaders such as Hungary's Orbán (Buzogány 2017). Other countries, such as China and Turkey, have also increased their influence, particularly in South-East Europe. By doing so, they counterbalance the EU by encouraging or condoning authoritarian impulses.

The European Union and the disconnect with democracy

Any analysis of the European democratic landscape is incomplete without acknowledging the role of the EU. Democratic gains and challenges are so tightly entwined with EU-level developments that they have a concrete impact on national politics. In fact, many analysts identify the disconnect between the EU and grassroots democracy, and the perceived distance of citizens from technocratic EU institutions, as key explanatory factors driving illiberal populism and anti-democratic opinion in European countries (see e.g. V-Dem 2019; Rupnik 2018). It is also seen as one of the explanatory factors for the popular support for Brexit in the UK referendum in 2016.

One of the key developments relates to the financial recession of 2011 and the Eurozone's difficulties with addressing the debt crises emerging in several of its member states. The ensuing austerity measures undertaken in countries such as Greece, Italy, Spain and the UK were accompanied by years of economic difficulties that are felt to this day (McDowell 2011). These developments, which were not just political but also economic and financial in nature, helped deepen the EU's democratic deficit in the eyes of the electorate.

Additionally, the supranational powers of oversight and intervention that have been transferred to the EU's decision-making bodies over the years are viewed by parts of the electorate as having reduced the scope of action of national governments, and simultaneously having exacerbated the distance between citizens and decision makers. Various studies point to the interplay between the democratic malaise in Europe as a whole and the lack of trust in EU institutions (Brechenmacher 2018; Pew Research Center 2017).

Furthermore, according to a recent Eurobarometer survey, more than half of people in the EU (56 per cent) do not trust government institutions, while more than 40 per cent do not trust the legal system, and 61 per cent do not trust the media (European Commission 2017). Such survey results correspond to a considerable degree with the GSoD Indices data. As shown in Table 5.3, between 2013 and 2018, there are more countries with significant declines than gains on Checks on Government.

TABLE 5.3

Significant declines and gains on Checks on Government subattributes in Europe, 2013–2018

Country	Score		
	2013	2018	Change
Effective Parliament			
Poland	0.77	0.62	–
Moldova	0.70	0.55	–
Romania	0.63	0.48	–

Country	Score		
	2013	2018	Change
Lithuania	0.79	0.70	–
Turkey	0.51	0.37	–
Spain	0.62	0.70	+
Armenia	0.43	0.66	+
Judicial Independence			
Germany	0.74	0.65	–
Poland	0.81	0.53	–
Czechia	0.70	0.63	–
Romania	0.70	0.42	–
Denmark	1	0.87	–
Turkey	0.54	0.32	–
North Macedonia	0.29	0.37	+
Armenia	0.34	0.46	+
Media Interity			
France	0.96	0.83	–
Germany	0.91	0.73	–
Poland	0.84	0.59	–
Hungary	0.61	0.49	–
Croatia	0.77	0.63	–
Serbia	0.57	0.43	–
Slovenia	0.78	0.68	–
Turkey	0.49	0.39	–
North Macedonia	0.50	0.60	+
Armenia	0.52	0.60	+

High Mid-range Low

Notes: – denotes decline; + denotes gain.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

However, the increase in voter turnout in the 2019 European elections, at levels not seen in 20 years, provides reason for hope that voters have begun to re-engage with European politics.

Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

Summary: Impartial Administration in Europe, 2018

Regional average: Mid-range (0.64)	
High (›0.7)	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Mid-range (0.4–0.7)	Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia
Low (‹0.4)	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine

A total of 16 European countries score highly on Impartial Administration, of which 12 are in North and West Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK), 2 are in East-Central Europe (Estonia and Slovenia), and 2 are in South Europe (Portugal and Spain).

Performance on Impartial Administration is inconsistent across the region

Performance on Impartial Administration reveals uneven progress across Europe's subregions. The majority of countries in North and West Europe score highly, while most countries in East-Central Europe score in the mid-range. Five countries have low scores, of which four are in Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) and one is in South Europe (Turkey).

The older democracies (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Sweden and the UK) generally tend to perform better on Impartial Administration. Countries that made the transition to democracy during the post-Cold War era (e.g. Bulgaria, Czechia, Georgia, Slovakia and Slovenia) tend to fall in the mid-range category. However, there are several exceptions. Cyprus, Greece, Israel and Italy, all of which made the transition to democracy before the 1990s, score in the mid-range on Impartial Administration. North Macedonia has also experienced significant gains in Impartial Administration and Absence of Corruption (see Box 5.3).

BOX 5.3

North Macedonia: a case of reverse democratic backsliding with potential for the future

After experiencing a downward spiral towards authoritarian rule, a series of scandals related to deep and massive government malfeasance led to a second transition to democracy and the installation of a new government in 2017. Since then, North Macedonia has reversed course and is now making promising strides towards democratic consolidation, recovering quicker than any other Western Balkan state.

Early in 2015 a large quantity of evidence of illegal behaviour by the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) had begun leaking into public view. The evidence included thousands of illegal wiretaps of opposition leaders and a wide range of corrupt, criminal or otherwise embarrassing acts.

The amount and seriousness of the revelations required a drastic response. Under strong pressure from the EU and the United States, North Macedonia called early parliamentary elections and set up a special prosecutor. In May 2017, the opposition Social Democratic Union took office in coalition with several ethnic Albanian parties (Ceka 2018; Keil 2018; Reef 2017).

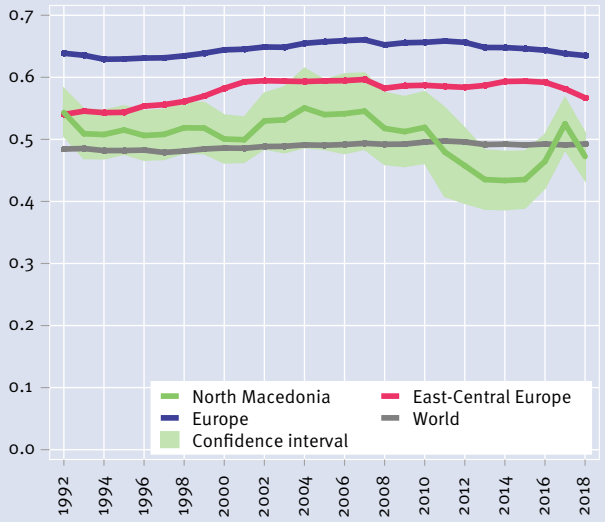
The country's relationship with Greece is on the mend, following the adoption of a new name ('the Republic of North Macedonia') in January 2019 (Stamouli 2019). This has helped accelerate the country's long-stalled integration into the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Relations between North Macedonia's Macedonian majority population and its considerable ethnic-Albanian minority need careful monitoring, building on full respect for the 2001 Ohrid Agreement. In this context, the signing of the Language Law, which recognizes Albanian as the second official language of the country, by the Speaker of the Macedonian Parliament in January 2019 is encouraging (European Western Balkans 2019).

North Macedonia's most dramatic gains in the GSoD Indices have been on the attributes of Checks on Government and Impartial Administration (see Figure 5.15). Within the region, North Macedonia has moved from last place on both attributes to fourth and second place, respectively. Many other attributes and subattributes show significant improvement, notably Representative Government, Judicial Independence, Predictable Enforcement, Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Association and Assembly (see Figure 5.14 for 2018 scores).

FIGURE 5.15

Impartial Administration in North Macedonia, 1992–2018



Notes: The shaded area around North Macedonia's line indicates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

FIGURE 5.14

Overall GSoD Indices scores, North Macedonia, 2018

Notes: The lines in the middle of each column indicate the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

TABLE 5.4

Low Absence of Corruption scores in Europe by subregion, 2018

Country	Score on Absence of Corruption	European subregion
Albania	0.29	East-Central Europe
Azerbaijan	0.12	Eastern Europe/ post-Soviet Europe
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.39	East-Central Europe
Moldova	0.32	Eastern Europe/ post-Soviet Europe
Russia	0.25	Eastern Europe/ post-Soviet Europe
Turkey	0.36	South Europe

Note: Absence of Corruption scores range from 0 to 1, with a lower score indicating high levels of corruption (0–0.4) and a higher score indicating lower levels of corruption (mid-range 0.4–0.7).

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

Judging by the large number of countries with high levels of corruption, Europe as a region performs particularly poorly on the GSoD subattribute of Absence of Corruption. As illustrated in Table 5.4, the majority of countries in North and West Europe have high scores on Absence of Corruption. Most of the countries that score in the mid-range on this dimension are in East-Central Europe. Of the five countries that score low on this subattribute, two (Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) are in East-Central Europe; three (Azerbaijan, Moldova and Russia) are in Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe; and one (Turkey) is in South Europe (see Table 5.4). In 2018, significant declines on Absence of Corruption were recorded in Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Moldova and Turkey.

Europe's generally poor performance in fighting corruption is reflected in the Eurobarometer surveys. According to its November 2018 special edition, while 65 per cent of the EU population is generally satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Europe, only a minority of respondents (36 per cent) were satisfied with the fight against corruption (European Commission 2018b).

In the last five years only two countries in Europe saw significant improvements on Predictable Enforcement: Ireland (0.86) and Kosovo (0.48). However, during the same period four countries saw significant declines on the same subattribute: Germany (0.88), Poland (0.50), Greece (0.54) and Turkey (0.23).

Levels of Predictable Enforcement are generally high in Europe, with 15 countries (36 per cent) having high performance, and 21 (50 per cent) having mid-range performance in 2018. Only six countries (14 per cent) have low performance. The subregional spread is similar to that for Absence of Corruption and Impartial Administration: high scores are concentrated in North and West Europe, mid-range countries are mainly situated in East-Central Europe, and low performance can mainly be found in Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine). Of the two low-performing countries, one is in South Europe (Turkey), and one in East-Central Europe (Romania).

Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in civil society organizations and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

Summary: Participatory Engagement in Europe, 2018

	Regional average: Mid-range	
	High	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
	Mid-range	Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine
	Low	Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ireland, Moldova, Russia and Turkey

There are signs of a shrinking civic space

Civic space in Europe is shrinking. The GSoD Indices envisage civic space as a nexus that integrates a country's performance on Media Integrity together with Civil Liberties (e.g. Freedom of Expression, and Freedom of Association and Assembly) and Civil Society Participation. Considering this nexus, the data shows that Europe as a region is regressing on its average performance on civic space. In fact, Europe is the region in the world with the most countries declining on both Civil Liberties (12 countries) and Media Integrity (8 countries) since 2013. Two countries have also seen significant declines on Civil Society Participation in the last five years: Romania (from 0.67 in 2013 to 0.47 in 2018) and Turkey (from 0.47 to 0.31).

Figure 5.16 shows the performance of countries in Europe on the subattribute of Civil Society Participation. Since the early 1990s, the share of countries with low performance has remained at or under 10 per cent, while the shares of high-performing and mid-range countries fluctuate between 35 and 55 per cent. However, since 2012, the percentage of high performing countries has seen a steep decline, while the share of low-performing countries has increased.

One underlying reason for the shrinking of civic space is the fact that several European governments have placed direct or indirect restrictions on CSOs. These restrictions may take different forms, including more bureaucratic registration rules for CSOs; a wider interpretation of what constitutes inadmissible 'political' activities; restrictions on CSO meetings under counter-terrorism laws against large-scale assembly; wider limitations on 'insulting' governments and leaders; and controlling access to, and the uses of, public funding (Civil Society Europe 2018; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights 2017).

Some of those restrictions on civil society relate to an overall deterioration in the rule of law, and in Civil Liberties, Fundamental Rights or Checks on Government. They are often linked to severe democratic backsliding, as witnessed in countries such as Hungary, Poland, Serbia and Turkey. In addition, the rise of right-wing and populist parties and the spread of hate speech have acted as a discouraging or marginalizing factor for civic space, particularly for representatives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities, or migrant communities. The evidence shows that CSOs working on 'human rights issues, including with migrants and refugees, LGBT rights, and ethnic minorities are often the target of political representatives of conservative parties all across Europe, including in countries traditionally supportive of civil society like Austria, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom' (Civil Society Europe 2018: 22).

Restrictions on Civil Society Participation are most notable across East-Central Europe and Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe. Of the 18 countries that scored in the mid-range on this dimension in 2018, 15 are in these two subregions: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Kosovo, Lithuania, Moldova, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. The remaining three are in South Europe (Israel, Italy and Portugal). The low-performing countries on this dimension are Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia (all in Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe) as well as Turkey (South Europe).

FIGURE 5.16

Civil Society Participation in Europe, 1975–2018

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

Ireland represents a somewhat anomalous case in terms of its GSoD Indices scores. While it has very high scores on four attributes, placing it on par with other mature European democracies, Ireland scores low on the fifth attribute, Participatory Engagement. However, this is not due to the country's performance on Civil Society Participation, which in 2018 was high (0.81). Instead, it reflects Ireland's performance on two other subattributes.

First, Ireland records a low score on Direct Democracy (0.27), owing to the fact that the country's legal framework does not envisage frequent direct democracy mechanisms (e.g. plebiscites). Second, Ireland recorded a low score on Electoral Participation for 2018 (0.39), partly because of the relatively low voter turnout in the 2016 national elections (Kerrigan 2016; Kelly 2016).

Direct democracy and democratic accountability are on the rise at the local level

An increasing number of initiatives give European citizens potential avenues for direct accountability over public institutions at the local level. According to the GSoD Indices, 26 countries score high on the Local Democracy subattribute, spread across the subregions of North and West Europe, East-Central Europe and South Europe. A further 11 countries score in the mid-range, of which 6 are in East-Central Europe, 2 are in Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe (Armenia and Ukraine), 2 are in South Europe (Cyprus and Turkey), and 1 is in North and West Europe (Ireland). The five low-scoring countries are all in Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe.

However, citizens do not only participate through local-level elections. Examples of direct-democracy mechanisms at the local and national levels abound. Finland introduced citizens' initiative provisions at the national level in 2012 (Population Register Centre n.d.) and Denmark created a similar tool in early 2018 (Danish Parliament 2018); both are widely used. The British Government introduced an e-petition website in 2015 (BBC News 2015). Latvia's Manabalss.lv online petitioning platform has become a widely emulated leader in the field. Estonia has similar provisions and, most notably, has incorporated direct citizen engagement in formal decision-making processes (Mangule 2016).

The EU is also making efforts to move beyond the so-called Brussels bubble, and to reflect this participatory ethos through new initiatives at the European level (International IDEA 2018a). For example, the European Commission has intensified its long-running series of Citizens' Dialogues, which involve Commissioners attending meetings with citizens to explain key EU policies and answer questions (European Commission 2018c). In addition, in 2018 an EU-wide process of Citizens' Consultations, which grew out of French President Macron's idea for 'democratic conventions' across Europe, took place in all member states (Thillaye 2019).

The grassroots power of citizen mobilization is growing

Despite a shrinking civic space, social movements, non-violent protests and civic engagement make a difference in governance and constitute an opportunity for democracy across Europe. Throughout the region there have been compelling success stories of the power of social movements, from Solidarity in Poland culminating in 1989, to Otpor! in Serbia almost a decade later, to Maidan in Ukraine in 2013–2014. In North Macedonia, several waves of protests, the last being the Colourful Revolution, led to a change of government following the 2016 elections (Reef 2017).

In the late 1990s, waves of democratization, spearheaded by people power, unseated a number of authoritarian regimes and leaders in the region, from Ion Iliescu in Romania to Vladimír Mečiar in Slovakia, followed by Croatia and Serbia (Boduszyński 2010). This second wave of breakthroughs, also described as coloured revolutions, spread to the post-Soviet space with the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004.

These regime-changing developments, while spearheaded by political opposition groups, fed on rising public discontent with the ruling elites and outbursts of discontent in mass public protests not seen before in these countries (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). The gradual build-up of anti-government sentiments, particularly in Georgia and Ukraine, was to a large extent the product of active civic education, investigative journalism and strategic outreach by civic groups on issues such as fraudulent elections, impunity for corruption and lack of effective governance by incumbent regimes.

Civic protests have continued to occur in various contexts. Between May and August 2013, Turkish security forces put down the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, but other activist forums remained active in their wake. France has seen several rounds of protests, from the *Nuit Debout* (Up all night) to the Yellow Vests movements. In 2017 Hungarians protested against the regime's efforts to close the Central European University, and again in large numbers in April 2018 after President Orbán won a third election.

Finally, in April–May 2018, Armenia was engulfed by weeks of popular anti-government protests that led to the removal

of an entrenched political elite. The opposition leader, Nikol Pashinyan, who in May 2018 began his tenure as Prime Minister of an interim cabinet, went on to score a landslide victory with his alliance in the December 2018 elections (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2018b; Human Rights Watch 2019). Armenia is the latest example showing clear and tangible results emanating from citizen mobilization. It remains to be seen whether Armenia's improving scores in the GSoD Indices will translate into long-lasting positive changes for the country.

Armenia is the only country in Europe to have transitioned from a hybrid regime in 2017 to a democracy in 2018. The country has recorded statistically significant advances on eight GSoD subattributes in 2018: Clean Elections, Free Political Parties, Civil Liberties, Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, Media Integrity, Absence of Corruption and Civil Society Participation. This is the highest number of advances for any country in the region in 2018. Moreover, Armenia has achieved statistically significant advances on three GSoD attributes: Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Russia was shaken by a wave of protests in the summer of 2019, protesting the authorities' decision to ban opposition and independent candidates from running in the local elections, resulting in a decline in support for the ruling party.

Popular anti-government initiatives led by civic activists do not always reach their purported goals—whether they involve regime change, or reversal of policies—but they do provide an essential watchdog function and may help steer further developments in a direction more conducive to transparent and effective decision-making. The example of Ukraine's Maidan Revolution and the ensuing important steps towards reforming the country's judicial and anti-corruption institutions, is a case in point. Although Ukraine still faces a number of governance challenges, not least on corruption, its record on civic engagement is in many respects an example for others (see Box 5.4).

BOX 5.4

Ukraine and civic activism

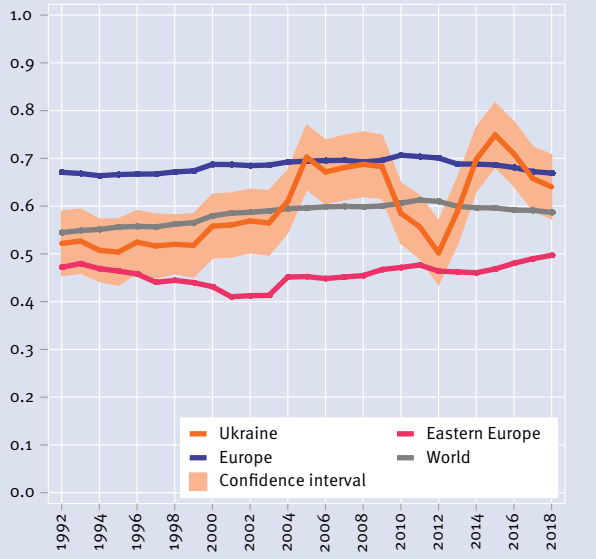
After gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine underwent several major shifts in terms of its democratic development. The country's willingness to pursue democratization was demonstrated by the first democratic turnover of power in the 1994 parliamentary and presidential elections, and the new 1996 Constitution. However, hopes for democratization and quick economic and human development gave way to democratic fatigue with the so-called transition period as the promises for changes and institutional reforms failed to materialize.

Democratic consolidation in the country was hindered, as successive Ukrainian presidents attempted to concentrate power in their own hands, undermining the independence of institutions such as the legislature and the judiciary. State capture and lack of political will to break the tight connection between the business and political sectors led to oligarchs gaining control of political parties, the judiciary and the media. The combination of collusion of interests between political leaders, the lack of strong political parties, and problems of state capture led to a failure to govern efficiently and execute meaningful reforms (Sydorchuk 2014).

However, the people's resilience and willingness for change was demonstrated during the Orange Revolution. Since the Maidan protests, civil society has remained active and seeks

FIGURE 5.18

Civil Society Participation in Ukraine, 1992–2018



Notes: The shaded area around Ukraine's line represents the 68 per cent confidence interval.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>.

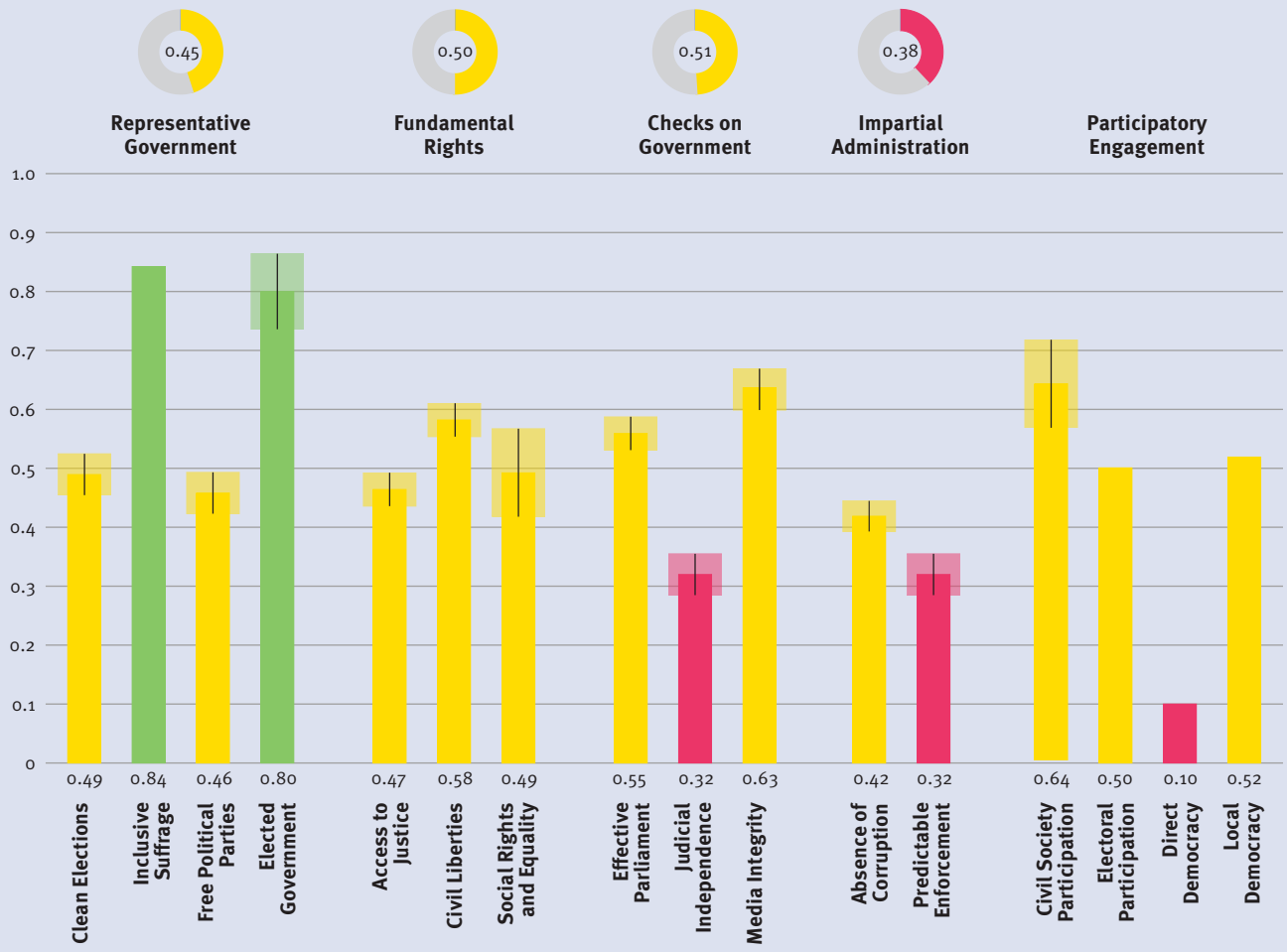
to hold the government to account. Following the protests, important reforms occurred in the judiciary and in anti-corruption efforts. Examples include the creation of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Anti-Corruption Court (Al Jazeera 2019), the transparent merit-based appointment of judges, as well as the demand to declare conflicts of interest. However, the failure to prosecute high-level corruption cases has undermined the popularity of the former administration (Transparency International 2019). In the case of the media, the introduction of reforms is stalled to a considerable degree. The media is greatly conditioned by the interests of oligarchs, and journalists are still subjected to harassment and surveillance (Reporters Without Borders 2019).

Ukraine's economic crisis, as well as the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the ongoing conflict in the eastern part of the country and the related raised tensions with Russia, could also significantly jeopardize the country's democratic prospects.

It remains to be seen whether Ukraine's gains on the GSoD Indices attribute of Civil Society Participation (see Figure 5.18) will be sustained in the future. The March 2019 presidential election was characterized as competitive and was held with respect for fundamental freedoms (OSCE ODIHR 2019). The election in April 2019 of President Volodymyr Zelensky, a former actor who became popular via a television series in which he played a fictitious Ukrainian president (Yaffa 2019), is arguably another sign of the public's willingness to hold leaders accountable at the ballot box. It also echoes examples in other countries in which voters replace mainstream and well-established candidates with relatively inexperienced leaders who promise to start with a clean slate and stand up for ordinary citizens (see Figure 5.17 for 2018 scores).

FIGURE 5.17

Overall GSoD Indices scores for Ukraine, 2018



Notes: The shaded area with vertical lines represent confidence intervals.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

5.4. Conclusion

Europe continues to be the region with the largest share of democracies, after North America. The trajectory of advances in the European democratic landscape has been constant and on the rise since the dawn of the third wave of democratization. However, the GSoD Indices data shows that in the last 10 to 15 years Europe's expansion has slowed down considerably. In the last five years there has even been a reversal of previously achieved gains and a dwindling of the quality of democracies in the region.

Europe faces a number of challenges related to democratic erosion and its more severe form, democratic backsliding, as well as the authoritarian tendencies manifested by a number of regimes in the region, including Turkey in South Europe, and Hungary, Poland and Romania in East-Central Europe. These countries record the highest number of declines in GSoD subattributes in the region and exhibit a significant, gradual and intentional weakening of checks on government, accountability institutions and civil liberties.

Further challenges to democracy are posed by the rise of extremist parties and ideologies, the rejection of liberal principles, and the consolidation of executive power by regime leaders who seek to weaken democracy while using democratic instruments. At the same time, several countries in the region, including Armenia and North Macedonia, have recently shown potential signs of rekindling their democratic ideals and reversing democratic backsliding.

TABLE 5.5

The GSoD Indices snapshot: Policy considerations for Europe

This table offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in Europe, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. It presents policy considerations across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.68)

Elected Government:

Europe is the most democratic region in the world after North America, with 93 per cent of countries classified as democracies. Of the region's 39 democracies, 25 have high levels of Representative Government. The highest levels can be found in North and West Europe.

The region is also home to two non-democracies (Azerbaijan and Belarus) and one hybrid regime (Russia).

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Russia and Turkey (countries with mid-range performance in Elected Government)

Priority areas for reform:

Initiate and implement legislation that accounts for more inclusive, free and fair elections, and which ensures adherence to European values of democracy and human rights.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Estonia, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden (sample of five out of 39 countries with high performance in Elected Government)

Clean Elections:

A large majority of countries in the region (67 per cent) have high levels of Clean Elections.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan and Belarus (countries with low performance in Clean Elections)

Priority areas for reform:

Ensure and build stakeholder trust in the impartiality and neutrality of EMBs to strengthen public confidence in electoral processes. Invite domestic and international elections observers, and welcome and implement their recommendations on the free and fair election processes.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Estonia, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom (countries with the highest performance in Clean Elections)

Inclusive Suffrage:

All countries in Europe have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage.

N/A

Free Political Parties:

Europe has the largest number of countries (13) scoring highly on Free Political Parties, while 27 score in the mid-range, and 2 have low scores.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan and Belarus (countries with low performance in Free Political Parties)

Priority areas for reform:

Take a holistic approach to political representation and establish long-term ideology-based political parties with programme-oriented goals. Develop and strengthen the culture of programme-based party platforms and party organizations that seek close links with citizen constituents and are accountable to voters.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (countries with the highest performance in Free Political Parties)

Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: High (0.73)

Access to Justice:

In Europe, 24 countries (57 per cent) score high on Access to Justice, while 16 (38 per cent) score in the mid-range.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan and Turkey (countries with low performance in Access to Justice)

Priority areas for reform:

Support the work of the judiciary by ensuring clear division of powers and non-interference in the completion of judicial tasks.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Norway (countries with the highest performance in Access to Justice)

Civil Liberties:

In the last decade Europe has seen a gradual decline in Civil Liberties. The share of countries with high levels of Civil Liberties declined from 79 per cent in 2010 to 71 per cent in 2018. In fact, for the first time since the start of the GSoD Indices data set in 1975, the early 2000s saw a sharp spike in the number of countries with significant declines on Civil Liberties.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan and Turkey (countries with low performance in Civil Liberties)

Priority areas for reform:

Reverse decisions that curtail freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly, and abide by European standards and conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR 1950).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Denmark, Estonia, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland (countries with the highest performance in Civil Liberties)

Gender Equality:

Europe's performance on Gender Equality has plateaued in the last five years.

Priority countries for reform:

Turkey (country with low levels in Gender Equality)

Priority areas for reform:

Increase efforts to strengthen political gender equality in all spheres and at all levels. Strive to enforce quota laws where they exist and adopt parity laws, to ensure equal representation of women at national and local government levels (for more detailed recommendations, see International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

France, Finland, Norway and Sweden (countries with the highest performance in Gender Equality)

Social Group Equality:

Levels of Social Group Equality are high compared to the global average (and on par with North America) but Europe's score is in the mid-range (0.63) in absolute levels. A total of 17 countries (40 per cent) in the region score in the high range; the majority of these are concentrated in North and West Europe. A group of four countries score in the low range on Social Group Equality.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine (countries with low performance in Social Group Equality)

Priority areas for reform:

Introduce legislative and policy measures to enhance and advocate for the representation of disadvantaged groups such as minorities, people living with disabilities and people of minority ethnic or religious backgrounds to ensure that they are represented in national legislative and local government assemblies.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Denmark and Norway (countries with the highest performance in Social Group Equality)

Basic Welfare:

Levels of Basic Welfare are high in Europe, with 35 countries (83 per cent) scoring in the high range. While there are no low-range performances, the following countries score in the mid-range: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia and Turkey.

Priority countries for reform:

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia and Turkey (countries with mid-range performance in Basic Welfare)

Priority areas for reform:

Introduce legislative framework reforms to ensure inclusive and equitable delivery of basic services such as education, healthcare and social security.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the UK (countries with the highest performance in Basic Welfare)

Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.66)

Effective Parliament:

On Effective Parliament, while only two countries recorded statistically significant gains between 2013 and 2018, five countries experienced declines for the same years.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Turkey (countries with low performance in Effective Parliament)

Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen the oversight functions of parliaments by ensuring that the executive branch of the government is always accountable and responsive to the legislature.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (countries with the highest performance in Effective Parliament)

Judicial Independence:

While Europe has a relatively large share of countries (almost one-third) with high levels of Judicial Independence, this is one of the weaker performing aspects of European democracy. The second-largest share of countries (six countries in total) score low on this aspect.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, North Macedonia, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine (countries with low performance in Judicial Independence)

Priority areas for reform:

Carry out sustained judicial reforms to build a more robust, accountable and results-oriented judiciary. Avoid political interference by building a consolidated legal framework and providing robust financial support for judicial authorities.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Norway and Switzerland (countries with the highest performance in Judicial Independence)

Media Integrity:

Europe is the region with the largest number of countries (eight) with significant declines in their Media Integrity scores in the past five years.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Turkey (countries with low performance in Media Integrity)

Priority areas for reform:

Reform and align media legislation, regulatory frameworks and institutions to international standards on media freedom, independence and pluralism. Governments should prioritize the journalists' safety and prevent attacks and harassment on members of the media.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (countries with the highest performance in Media Integrity)

Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.64)

Absence of Corruption:

Absence of Corruption is one of the poorest-performing aspects of democracy in Europe. A total of 21 countries have mid-range levels of corruption, and 6 have high levels of corruption (i.e. low scores on Absence of Corruption).

Priority countries for reform:

Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Russia and Turkey (countries with low performance in Absence of Corruption)

Priority areas for reform:

Political goodwill and consensus are preconditions for improving public administration and fighting corruption. Necessary legislation should be passed and enacted on matters related to party and political finances.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (countries with the highest performance in Absence of Corruption)

Predictable Enforcement:

Levels of Predictable Enforcement are generally high in Europe, with 15 countries (35 per cent) having high performance, and 21 (50 per cent) having mid-range performance in 2018. Only six countries (15 per cent) have low performance.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine (countries with low performance in Predictable Enforcement)

Priority areas for reform:

Governments should strengthen the capacity and independence of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to improve the rule of law and the predictability of law enforcement.

Good practice countries for regional learning:

Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (countries with the highest performance in Predictable Enforcement)

Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range

Civil Society Participation:

Europe's levels of Civil Society Participation are now in the mid-range (0.67), having slipped from the high range since 2012.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia and Turkey (countries with low performance in Civil Society Participation)

Priority areas for reform:

Using the inherent strength and resilience of civil society, relevant actors should stimulate the inclusion of civil society representatives, young professionals and external experts in policymaking and political debates and encourage deliberative democracy.

Good practice countries for regional learning:

Norway, Denmark and Switzerland (countries with the highest performance in Civil Society Participation)

Electoral Participation:

Levels of Electoral Participation are only mid-range in an overwhelmingly democratic region and have even dropped slightly in the last 10 years.

Priority countries for reform:

Ireland and Switzerland (countries with low performance in Electoral Participation)

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Turkey (countries with the highest performance in Electoral Participation)

Direct Democracy:

Levels of Direct Democracy in Europe are the highest in the world.

Priority countries for reform:

Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Germany, Israel (5 out of 33 countries with low performance in Direct Democracy)

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Switzerland (country with high performance in Direct Democracy)

Local Democracy:

Levels of Local Democracy are in the mid-range (0.64). Every subregion except for Eastern Europe/post-Soviet Europe has a 50 per cent share (or higher) of countries with high levels of Local Democracy.

Priority countries for reform:

Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Russia (countries with low performance in Local Democracy)

Priority areas for reform:

New forms of civic participation and citizens' forums have multiplied across most European countries. Yet their impact on overall democratic quality remains limited. Emerging forms of citizens' participation need to be broadened in scope to speak more directly to the political trends of today.

Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden (countries with the highest performance in Local Democracy)

TABLE 5.6

Regime classification for Europe, 2018

Regime classification for all of the countries in Europe covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

Country	GSoD attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Democracies					
Albania	0.62 =	0.68 =	0.58 =	0.44 =	Mid-range
Armenia	0.54 =	0.64 =	0.59 +	0.52 +	Mid-range
Austria	0.77 =	0.80 =	0.74 =	0.77 =	High
Belgium	0.80 =	0.89 =	0.78 =	0.89=	High
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0.50 =	0.57 =	0.56 =	0.45 =	Mid-range
Bulgaria	0.68 =	0.69 =	0.64 =	0.49 =	Mid-range
Croatia	0.75 =	0.65 =	0.60 =	0.55 =	Mid-range
Cyprus	0.72 =	0.82 =	0.73 =	0.66 =	Mid-range
Czechia	0.74 =	0.83 =	0.69 =	0.62 =	Mid-range
Denmark	0.80 =	0.94 =	0.88 =	0.91 =	High
Estonia	0.81 =	0.87 =	0.85 =	0.83 =	High
Finland	0.80 =	0.90 =	0.82 =	0.86 =	High
France	0.80 =	0.86 =	0.73 =	0.75 =	High
Georgia	0.62 =	0.68 =	0.61 =	0.65 =	Low
Germany	0.78 =	0.91 =	0.78 =	0.89 -	High
Greece	0.80 =	0.81 =	0.69 =	0.57 =	High
Hungary	0.61 =	0.66 =	0.54 =	0.54 =	High
Ireland	0.73 =	0.86 =	0.81 =	0.87 =	Low
Israel	0.63 =	0.71 =	0.68 =	0.63 =	High
Italy	0.78 =	0.85 =	0.78 =	0.64 =	Mid-range
Kosovo	0.56 =	0.52 =	0.50 =	0.51 +	Mid-range
Latvia	0.60 =	0.82 =	0.78 =	0.696 =	High
Lithuania	0.78 =	0.79 =	0.74 =	0.65 =	Mid-range
Moldova	0.58 =	0.64 =	0.57 =	0.44 =	Low
Netherlands	0.81 =	0.85 =	0.86 =	0.85 =	High
North Macedonia	0.63 =	0.61 =	0.52 =	0.47 =	Mid-range
Norway	0.78 =	0.93 =	0.91 =	0.91 =	High
Poland	0.77 =	0.68 -	0.59 -	0.59 =	Mid-range
Portugal	0.82 =	0.86 =	0.83 =	0.74 =	Mid-range

Country	GSoD attribute				
	Representative Government	Fundamental Rights	Checks on Government	Impartial Administration	Participatory Engagement
Romania	0.71 =	0.64 =	0.50 -	0.42 =	Mid-range
Serbia	0.57 =	0.58 =	0.46 =	0.48 =	Mid-range
Slovakia	0.80 =	0.72 =	0.74 =	0.61 =	High
Slovenia	0.78 =	0.84 =	0.77 =	0.72 =	High
Spain	0.81 =	0.84 =	0.79 =	0.84 =	High
Sweden	0.84 =	0.89 =	0.88 =	0.91 =	High
Switzerland	0.79 =	0.92 =	0.86 =	0.91 =	High
Turkey	0.44 –	0.35 –	0.35 –	0.30 –	Low
Ukraine	0.45=	0.50 =	0.51 =	0.38 =	Mid-range
United Kingdom	0.77 =	0.82 =	0.78 =	0.88 =	High
Hybrid regimes					
Russia	0.41 =	0.45 =	0.26 =	0.33 =	Low
Non-democracies					
Azerbaijan	0.27 =	0.36 =	0.17 =	0.18 =	Low
Belarus	0.33 =	0.55 =	0.26 =	0.32 =	Low

High Mid-range Low

Notes: = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period; + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), ‹http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices›.

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Methodology

This section explains the conceptual framework of the GSoD Indices and provides an explanation of the new regime classification that *The Global State of Democracy 2019* has introduced, as well as definitions of some of the key concepts used in the analysis.

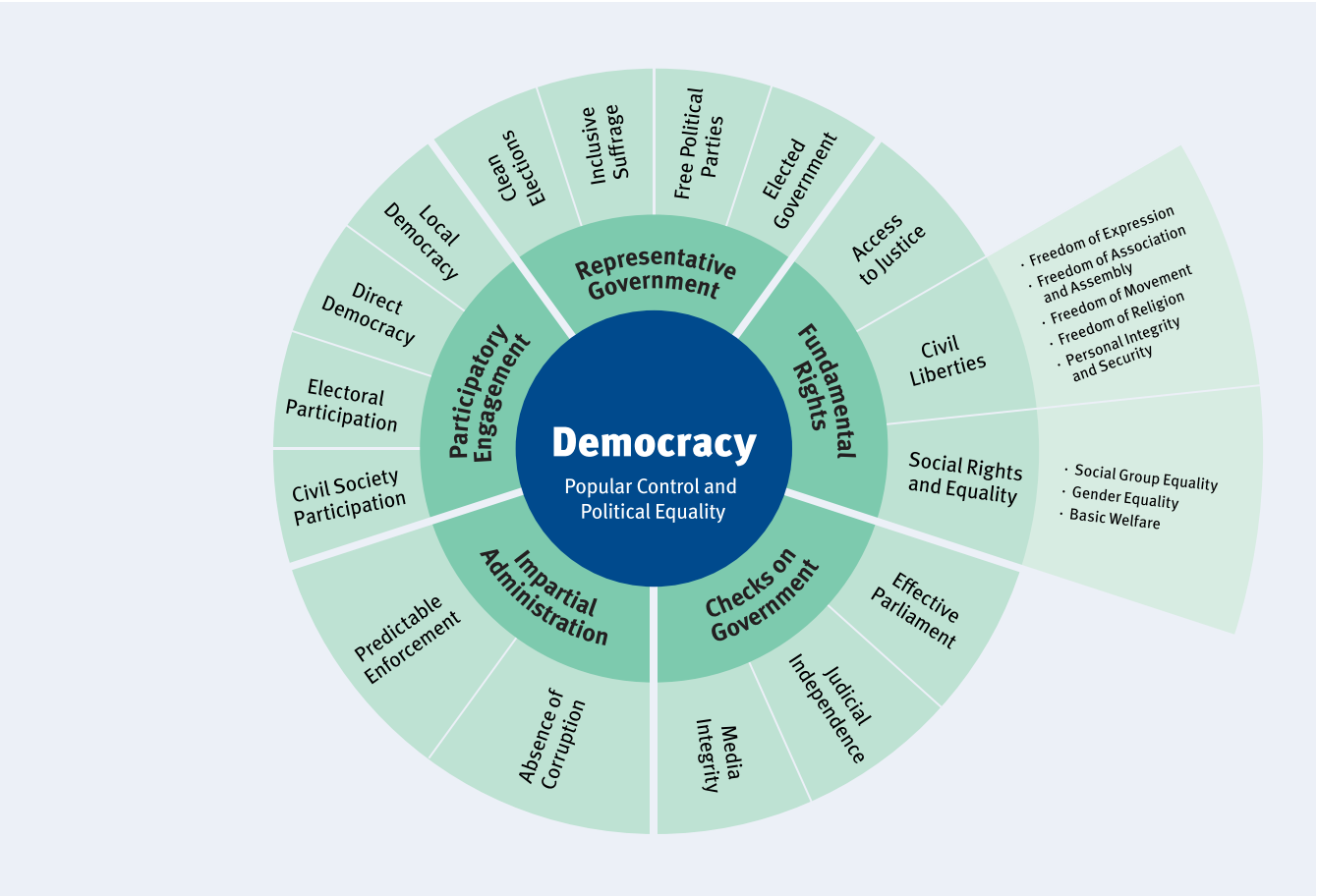
The GSoD framework and the GSoD Indices

In November 2017 International IDEA launched the first edition of its new biennial report, *The Global State of Democracy*. The report provided evidence-based analysis and data on the global and regional state of democracy, with a focus on democracy's resilience. It also contributed to the public debate on democracy, informed policy interventions and examined problem-solving approaches to the challenges facing democracies worldwide.

The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise is the second edition of this report. As an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide, International IDEA

FIGURE M.1

The GSoD Indices conceptual framework



defines democracy as a political system that is based on popular control and political equality. One of the Institute's core principles is that democracy is a universal value for citizens and a globally owned concept for which there is no universally applicable model.

Democracy is an ideal that seeks to guarantee equality and basic freedoms, empower ordinary people, resolve disagreements through peaceful dialogue, respect differences, and bring about political and social renewal without economic and social disruption. Therefore, International IDEA's broad concept of democracy encompasses more than just free elections—it has multiple dimensions, including civil and political rights, social and economic rights, democratic governance and the rule of law.

International IDEA's broad understanding of democracy overlaps with features emphasized by different traditions of democratic thought associated with the concepts of electoral democracy, liberal democracy, social democracy and participatory democracy. This concept of democracy reflects a core value enshrined in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), that the 'will of the people' is the basis for the legitimacy and authority of sovereign states. It reflects a common and universal desire for peace, security and justice. Democracy reflects the fundamental ethical principles of human equality and the dignity of persons and is therefore inseparable from human rights.

In 2017 International IDEA constructed a new set of indices, the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices), based on the core principles of democracy and on the Institute's State of Democracy assessment framework (a tool designed for in-country stakeholders to assess the quality of democracy). The Indices were developed by International IDEA staff with the support of external experts and the supervision of an expert advisory board consisting of five leading experts in the field of democracy measurement.

The GSoD Indices are a quantitative tool for measuring the performance of democracy globally and regionally in its different aspects over time, beginning in 1975. They serve as the main evidence base for the report, and provide a new, comprehensive measurement of democracy. They capture trends at the global, regional and national levels based on International IDEA's definition of democracy (International IDEA 2008). In this second edition of *The Global State of Democracy*, the GSoD Indices have been expanded to cover 158 countries over the period 1975–2018. In 2018, the Indices cover a total of 157 countries.

The conceptual framework underpinning the Indices (see Figure M.1) translates International IDEA's definition of democracy—which emphasizes popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control—into five main democracy attributes that contain 16 subattributes based on 97 indicators.

This framework aims to be universally applicable and compatible with different institutional arrangements. Using this broad understanding of democracy, the GSoD Indices do not provide an overarching democracy index with a score for each country that would allow democracies to be ranked. This approach differentiates the GSoD Indices from several other democracy measurement methodologies. It is used to enable a more multi-faceted analysis and understanding of democracy.

In addition, compared to some other democracy measurements, the GSoD Indices are distinguished by their relatively high degree of coverage in terms of years covered (since 1975, with annual updates) and number of countries included (158); the incorporation and use of different data sources; and the availability of uncertainty estimates for users, which allows them to assess whether differences in scores are statistically significant. For a more detailed comparison between the GSoD Indices and other measurements see International IDEA (2018a).

The five attributes of democracy in the GSoD Indices conceptual framework

The GSoD Indices conceptual framework is based on five attributes of democracy: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.

Attribute 1: Representative Government

Representative Government covers the extent to which access to political power is free and equal as demonstrated by competitive, inclusive and regular elections. It includes four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

Attribute 2: Fundamental Rights

Fundamental Rights captures the degree to which civil liberties are respected, and whether people have access to basic resources that enable their active participation in the political process. This aspect overlaps significantly with the international covenants on civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights. It includes three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. It also includes the following

subcomponents: Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Movement, Personal Integrity and Security, Basic Welfare, Social Group Equality and Gender Equality (see Figure M.1).

Attribute 3: Checks on Government

Checks on Government measures effective control of executive power. It includes three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity.

Attribute 4: Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration concerns how fairly and predictably political decisions are implemented, and therefore reflects key aspects of the rule of law. It includes two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement.

Attribute 5: Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement measures people's political participation and societal engagement at different levels. Because they capture different phenomena, the subattributes of this aspect—Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy—are not aggregated into a single index.

The GSoD Indices: regional and national coverage

The first iteration of the GSoD Indices covered the period 1975–2015. The data is updated annually and therefore this report includes data until 2018, but not for 2019. The GSoD Indices now cover 158 countries in the world. The decision was taken to exclude countries with a population of less than one million because of the uneven availability of data in those countries.

The GSoD Indices also cover six regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Iran (referred to in the report as the Middle East), and North America. The grouping of countries within these regions primarily follows a geographical logic, but also takes account of historical and cultural links, particularly in the regional subdivisions. Some further modifications needed to be made to enable meaningful analyses of relatively coherent regions with comparable social, political and historical backgrounds.

Table M.1 outlines the GSoD Indices' regional and subregional geographical divisions. For more information on the geographical definition of regions in the GSoD Indices see International IDEA (2017b).

TABLE M.1

The GSoD Indices: regional and subregional geographic divisions

Region/subregion	Country
Africa	
East Africa	Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda
Central Africa	Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo
Southern Africa	Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe
West Africa	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo
North Africa	Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, South Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia
Latin America and the Caribbean	
The Caribbean	Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago
Central America and Mexico	Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama

South America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela
North America	
North America	Canada, United States of America
Asia and the Pacific	
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
East Asia	China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Taiwan
South Asia	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
South East Asia	Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam
Oceania	Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea
The Middle East and Iran	
The Middle East	Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
Iran	Iran
Europe	
East-Central Europe	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia
Eastern Europe/Post-Soviet Europe	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine
North and West Europe	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom
South Europe	Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey

The GSoD Indices: data sources

The GSoD Indices aggregate indicators from a number of data sets. In the 2018 update, the number of data sets has been reduced from 14 to 12. The number of indicators used is 97, of which V-Dem indicators constitute 70 per cent.

The data relies on a range of extant data sources that fall into four categories:

1. *Expert surveys*. Assessments by country experts of the situation on a particular issue in a particular country.

2. *Standards-based 'in-house coding'*. Coding carried out by researchers and/or their assistants based on an evaluative assessment of country-specific information found in reports, academic publications, reference works, news articles and so on.

3. *Observational data*. Data on directly observable features such as the proportion of parliamentarians who are women, infant mortality rates and the holding of legislative elections.

4. *Composite measures*. This data is based on a number of variables that come from different extant data sets rather than original data collection. For a full list of the indicators sourced from the various data sets see International IDEA (2018a).

TABLE M.2

Data sets used in the compilation of the GSoD Indices

Data set	Data provider	Reference
Bjørnskov-Rode Regime Data (BRRD)	Bjørnskov and Rode	‹http://www.christianbjoernskov.com/bjoernskovrodedata/›
Civil Liberties Dataset (CLD)	Møller and Skaaning	‹http://ps.au.dk/forskning/forskningsprojekter/dedere/datasets/›
Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) statistics	FAO	‹http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#home›
Global Health Data Exchange (GHDx)	Global Health Data Exchange	‹http://ghdx.healthdata.org/›
International Country Risk Guide (ICRG)	Political Risk Services	‹http://epub.prsgroup.com/products/icrg›
Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (LIED)	Skaaning, Gerring and Bartusevicius	‹http://ps.au.dk/forskning/forskningsprojekter/dedere/datasets/›
Media Freedom Data (MFD)	Whitten-Woodring and Van Belle	‹http://faculty.uml.edu/Jenifer_whittenwoodring/MediaFreedomData_000.aspx›
Political Terror Scale (PTS)	Gibney, Cornett, Wood, Haschke, Arnon and Pisanò	‹http://www.politicalterrorscale.org/›
Polity IV	Marshall, Jaggers and Gurr	‹http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html›
United Nations (UN) Demographic and Social Statistics	UN Statistics Division	‹https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/index.cshtml›
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics	UNESCO	‹http://data.uis.unesco.org/›
Varieties of Democracy data set	V-Dem	‹https://www.v-dem.net/›

The GSoD Indices: additional methodological information

For a full explanation of the GSoD methodology see International IDEA (2018a).

Scores and scales

The GSoD Indices consist of attribute and subattribute scores per country per year (country–year). The scoring runs from 0 to 1, where 0 represents the lowest achievement in the sample and 1 is the highest.

For almost all the attributes and subattributes, the annual scores for each country are accompanied by uncertainty estimates (confidence intervals) that assess whether differences between countries and within countries over time are statistically significant. The only exceptions are the subattributes based on a single observational indicator (e.g. Political Participation) or formative aggregations procedures (e.g. Inclusive Suffrage, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy).

Methodology

Both the GSoD Indices and the analysis contained in this report respond to the lack of analytical material on democracy building and the quality of democracy at the global and regional levels; most studies focus on the national level. The GSoD initiative strives to bridge the gap between academic research, policy development and

democracy-assistance initiatives. The data and the report are intended to inform policymakers and decision-makers, civil society organizations and democracy activists, policy influencers and think tanks, and democracy support providers and practitioners.

As an Institute-wide project, the publication employs a mixed methodology. It incorporates input from staff members across International IDEA's headquarters and regional offices, including external contributors. It was peer reviewed by a group of external academic experts and practitioners. Building on International IDEA's regional presence and expertise in the field of democracy, it also draws on the Institute's in-depth regional knowledge of democratic trends.

Regime classification

The Global State of Democracy 2019 introduces a political regime classification based on the GSoD Indices. The classification aims to facilitate understanding of the Indices, enhance the analysis, and ensure greater policy relevance of the data. The GSoD Indices define three broad regime types: (a) democracies (of varying performance), (b) hybrid regimes and (c) non-democracies.

This regime classification was adopted by International IDEA in 2019 and is based on a consultative process with scholars from the GSoD Indices Expert Advisory Board, which advised on the creation of the Indices and continues to provide methodological support to the Indices.[16]

The regime classification adopted by International IDEA is not intended to be seen as a central part of the analysis of the report, rather as a generic reference point to enhance analytical simplicity for a policymaking audience and complemented by attribute-level performance analysis and nuanced qualitative analysis. The classification is focused on the electoral component of democracy and is not used to rank countries but to cluster democratic and non-democratic performance into broad categories in order to facilitate analysis.

Regime classifications are useful for making sense of, and assigning meanings to, the abstract numerical GSoD Indices scores. They can be used for overall global and regional trends analysis, as reference points to analyse country cases or to detect intertemporal and/or cross-national patterns in the data set. However, when describing a country, International IDEA aims to complement the regime typology with attribute- and subattribute-level analysis whenever possible to retain the nuances captured by the GSoD Indices data set.

Labelling performance of attributes

The first step in the regime classification is to determine performance levels for each attribute. These levels can also be applied to subattributes, as needed. Based on numeric threshold values, three levels are distinguished: high, mid-range and low levels (see Table M.3).

Defining and identifying types of political regimes

The classification distinguishes between three broad regime types: democracies, hybrid regimes and non-democracies.

TABLE M.3

Attribute-level labels

IF value >0.7	>=0.4 & value =<0.7	IF value <0.4
High Representative Government	Mid-range Representative Government	Low Representative Government
High Fundamental Rights	Mid-range Fundamental Rights	Low Fundamental Rights
High Checks on Government	Mid-range Checks on Government	Low Checks on Government
High Impartial Administration	Mid-range Impartial Administration	Low Impartial Administration
High Participatory Engagement	Mid-range Participatory Engagement	Low Participatory Engagement

16 They include Professors Gerardo Munck (principal peer reviewer of the 2019 edition of *The Global State of Democracy*), Svend-Erik Skaaning (Principal GSoD Indices Methodologist) and Claudiu Tufiș (GSoD Indices Data Manager).

Democracies

Drawing on International IDEA's notion of democracy, which emphasizes 'popular control over decision-making and political equality among those exercising that control' (International IDEA 2008: 20), the GSoD Indices classify political regimes as 'democratic' if they have governments emerging from sufficiently inclusive, clean and competitive elections.

This concept is rooted in scholarly theories and popular perceptions of democracy that view electoral contestation and participation rights as core elements of a democracy (see International IDEA 2018: 13). However, the concept specifies only the minimum requirements for a political regime to qualify as a democracy. Countries classified as democratic by these standards may differ widely in the quality of their democracy and in the performance of their different democratic attributes.

The Representative Government attribute of the GSoD Indices substantiates this basic concept of democracy and relates it to empirical evidence. This attribute measures the integrity of elections, the inclusiveness of voting rights, the extent to which political parties are free to campaign for political office and the extent to which national representative government offices are filled through elections. To be classified as a democracy, a political regime must score at least 0.35 on Representative Government.

Since Representative Government is an aggregate measure summarizing four subattributes and 18 underlying indicators by means of a statistical estimation, it is sometimes difficult to identify which of its component indicators are responsible for classifying a country as non-democratic. Therefore, International IDEA uses the Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy (LIED), which is one of the indicators used to calculate the Representative Government score, as a measure to help distinguish democracies from other types of political regimes.

The LIED has seven clearly defined levels that measure whether countries select their legislature and executive through competitive elections (Skaaning et al. 2015). To qualify as a democracy, a political regime must score at least 4 on the LIED—that is, it must have minimally competitive multiparty elections for its legislature and executive.

In alignment with International IDEA's commitment to the multi-dimensionality of democracy, the GSoD Indices do not further distinguish between democracies by comparing and ranking them on a single aspect. Instead, the levels of the five attributes of democracy and the more disaggregated indices and indicators in the data set are used to describe different types of democratic performance. In 2018, there are 23 different democratic performance patterns among the 97 countries classified as democracies in the GSoD Indices, ranging from countries that score high on all five attributes, to countries that score high on only one attribute.

Hybrid regimes

In addition to democracies, International IDEA's GSoDrframework creates separate categories for hybrid regimes and non-democratic regimes, to reflect the diversity of the current global democracy landscape. The common denominator of these two types of regimes is that they do not hold competitive elections (as measured by the LIED). However, hybrid regimes may combine democratic and non-democratic characteristics, while non-democracies will have fewer democratic features and more non-democratic features. Therefore, patterns of attribute pcrformance will vary between hybrid and non-democratic regimes, as outlined below.

International IDEA considers a hybrid regime category necessary in order to avoid equating political regimes that exist on the boundary between autocracy and democracy with consolidated autocracies, and to mark the gradations of 'democratic-ness' characterizing many of these boundary countries with unsettled political–authority relations, and to show that many of these countries exhibit both democratic and authoritarian features in different combinations.

Hybrid regimes are defined in International IDEA's 2018–2022 Strategy as 'having the combination of elements of authoritarianism with democracy (…). These often adopt the formal characteristics of democracy (while allowing little real competition for power) with weak respect for basic political and civil rights' (International IDEA 2018b: 11).

Therefore, for International IDEA, hybrid regimes may have some nominally democratic institutions and some democratic processes and practices but are characterized by pervasive informal practices eroding the functioning of formal institutions, which may also include weakened checks and balances (Bogaards 2009; Morlino 2009; Mufti 2018).

Hybrid regimes are defined operationally by International IDEA as political regimes that score at least 3.5 on the GSoD Representative Government attribute and less than 4 on the LIED (i.e. they do not hold competitive elections).

While criteria based on numerical thresholds have been defined in order to classify hybrid regimes in the GSoD framework, International IDEA also recognizes the inherent challenge of classifying such regimes, as by their nature they can extend conceptually into both the democracy and non-democracy category.

Non-democratic regimes

Non-democratic regimes include autocracies, authoritarian regimes, one-party systems, military regimes, authoritarian monarchies and failed states or war-torn, conflict-ravaged countries without a centralized monopoly on the use of force. Of these terms, 'authoritarian' regime is used as a generic descriptor for those that meet the basic criteria of statehood, in terms of an established central monopoly on the use of force.

Authoritarian regimes, similar to hybrid regimes, do not hold competitive elections. Even if they do hold some form of elections, incumbent political elites in authoritarian regimes disadvantage their opponents, and restrict the competitiveness of these elections 'so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than instruments of democracy' (Schedler 2013: 3; see also Levitsky and Way 2010: 5).

Moreover, in such regimes, civil liberties tend to be systematically curtailed, there tends to be no clear separation of power, the judiciary tends to be controlled by the executive, oppositional political parties tend to be barred from operating freely, and the media tends to be systematically restricted, as are critical voices within civil society. Therefore, in non-democratic regimes as opposed to hybrid regimes, the 'democratic' features are significantly less numerous and the authoritarian features more prominent.

When observing the attribute-level classification of non-democratic regimes, these regimes tend to score low on most attributes. In rare instances, they may score mid-range on one attribute—generally an attribute that is not considered a core element of democratic systems by mainstream definitions of democracy. Examples of attributes on which non-democratic regimes could score in the mid-range include Impartial Administration (and if so, generally on Absence of Corruption) or Fundamental Rights (generally due to higher levels of Basic Welfare). There are eight different attribute-level performance patterns for non-democracies in 2018.

Political regimes that score below 3.5 on Representative Government and below 4 on the LIED are classified as non-democracies (see Table M.4).

TABLE M.4

GSoD regime classification

	Democracy	Hybrid regime	Non-democracy
Necessary and sufficient condition	RG ≥ 0.35	RG ≥ 0.35	RG < 0.35
	& LIED ≥ 4	& LIED < 4	& LIED < 4

Notes: RG: Representative Government; LIED: Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy.

TABLE M.5

Definitions and terminology

Term	Definition
Crisis of representation	The crisis of representation can be defined as a lack of faith in, or loyalty to, representative democracy, or a disengagement from its institutions and processes.
Deepening autocratization	The term 'deepening autocratization' is used to describe at least three statistically significant subattribute declines within hybrid regimes or non-democracies over a five-year period.
Democracy	International IDEA defines democracy as popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control.

TABLE M.5

Definitions and terminology (cont.)

Term	Definition
Democratic backsliding	The report uses the term '(modern) democratic backsliding' to describe the gradual and usually intentional weakening of checks on government and civil liberties by democratically elected governments. Democratic backsliding occurs in those countries that have suffered a net decline of at least 0.1 points on the average score of Checks on Government and Civil Liberties over a period of five years. Four different severities of democratic backsliding are identified: 1. **Moderate:** countries with declines of less than –0.15 on their averaged Checks on Government/Civil Liberties indicator during their episode of backsliding. 2. **Severe:** countries with declines above –0.15. 3. **Partial democratic breakdown:** countries with backsliding so severe that it results in a shift to a hybrid regime. 4. **Full democratic breakdown:** countries with backsliding so severe that it results in a shift to non-democracy. Democratic backsliding is always used to describe countries that were democratic at the onset of the backsliding episode. Democratic backsliding is a form of **democratic erosion.**
Democratic breakdown	The term 'democratic breakdown' is used in the report to describe the movement of a country from democracy to a hybrid regime (partial breakdown) or to a non-democracy (full breakdown).
Democratic erosion/ deterioration	When country-level declines in one or more subattribute of democracy are observed, but do not fit the conceptual and quantitative description of democratic backsliding, these are referred to as forms of democratic erosion or democratic deterioration. These two terms are used interchangeably in the report.
Democratic fragility	The term 'democratic fragility' is used to describe democracies that have experienced at least one episode of partial or full democratic breakdown since their first transition to democracy. Very fragile democracies are democracies that have experienced several episodes of partial or full democratic breakdown.
Democratic performance	When democratic performance is referred to in the report, it generally focuses on the scores (between 0 and 1) for the 28 aspects of the GSoD framework. Performance is analysed in absolute terms, based on a three-tier scale: low (‹0.4), mid-range (0.4–0.7) and high (›0.7). In those few cases when relative performance is used, the world average is used as a benchmark and is always specified.
Democratic weakness	The term 'democratic weakness' or weak democracy is used in connection with countries that score low on one or more of their democratic attributes (unless they score high on four out of five attributes).
Older and third-wave democracies	This report defines older democracies as those countries that were democracies before 1975. It defines as third-wave democracies those countries that transitioned to democracy after 1975. These are sub-divided into early third-wave democracies (those countries that transitioned to democracy between 1975 and 2000) and new third-wave democracies (those that transitioned after 2000).
Populism	Populism is used in the report as an umbrella term to define populist parties or leaders on the left or right of the political spectrum that promote nationalist and ethnonationalist ideologies, and that may have a more anti-establishment bent. It therefore aligns with a view of populism as a 'thin' ideology that is combined with other ideologies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017).
Resilience	International IDEA defines resilience as the ability of social systems to cope with, innovate, survive and recover from complex challenges and crises presenting stress or pressure that can lead to systemic failure. Democracy's resilience is seen as the ability of a political system to recover, adapt and/or flexibly address such complex challenges, crises and breakdowns (International IDEA 2017a). In this report, it specifically refers to the ability of regimes that have regressed into hybridity or non-democracy to return to democracy.

TABLE M.5

Definitions and terminology (cont.)

Term	Definition
Significant advances and declines	All declines and advances referred to in the report are statistically significant, unless otherwise specified. These advances and declines are always assessed based on the 16 subattributes in the GSoD framework, as using the 28 aspects of the framework (which also include subcomponents) would lead to double counting and measurement errors. Statistically significant declines and advances are generally measured in five-year intervals, unless otherwise specified.
Top and bottom 25 per cent	In the report, the top and bottom 25 per cent of performers refers to the 39 countries that score in the top and bottom 25 per cent of countries in the GSoD Indices sample of 157 countries in 2018. The GSoD Indices do not rank countries within these groupings, although score performance varies between countries within these percentile categories.

Policy considerations

At the end of each regional chapter, a table with a list of policy considerations is provided to address the challenges and harness the opportunities identified in the analysis. These policy considerations build on the democracy assessment provided by the GSoD indices. The table is organized into the attributes and subattributes of the GSoD framework and provide first a snapshot of some basic GSoD data for the attribute pertaining to the region, followed by: a) Priority countries for reform: the democracies in the region that perform low on the attribute—unless a political opening is foreseeable in the near future or recent political reforms have been observed, the priority countries for reform do generally not include the hybrid regimes or non-democracies; b) Priority areas for reform: these draw on good-practice recommendations provided in other International IDEA knowledge products or on experience from technical assistance provided by International IDEA in the region; c) Good-practice countries for regional learning: these generally refer to the countries in the region with a high performance on the attribute.

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About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

International IDEA's vision is firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and considers that democratic principles are core to and important enablers for the realization of the entire 2030 Agenda.

What does International IDEA do?

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work. International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on good international democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on democratic reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

International IDEA also contributes to the democracy debate through analysis of democratic trends through its Global State of Democracy initiative, which includes the biennial Global State of Democracy Report, the Global State of Democracy Indices (http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices) and the Global State of Democracy In Focus briefings.

Where does International IDEA work?

Our headquarters is located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa and West Asia, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

<http://www.idea.int>

Democracy is under threat and its promise needs revival.

The value, viability and future of democracy are more contested now than ever before in modern history. While the past four decades have seen a remarkable expansion of democracy throughout all regions of the world, recent years have been marked by declines in the fabric of both older and younger democracies. The idea of democracy continues to mobilize people around the world, but the practice of existing democracies has disappointed and disillusioned many citizens and democracy advocates.

Democratic erosion is occurring in different settings and contexts. New democracies are often weak and fragile. Older democracies are struggling to guarantee equitable and sustainable economic and social development. The share of high-quality democracies is decreasing and many of them are confronted with populist challengers.

At the same time, democratic transitions occur in political regimes that seemed staunchly undemocratic and popular democratic aspirations continue to be expressed and defended around the world. Despite the challenges, democracy has proven resilient. Democracies have also shown, with some exceptions, to provide better conditions for sustainable development.

International IDEA's report *The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise* provides a health check of democracy and an overview of the current global and regional democracy landscape. It analyses the encouraging democratic trends as well as the key current challenges to democracy. The Report draws on data from the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) indices and lessons learned from International IDEA's on-the ground technical assistance to understand the current democracy landscape. It aims at informing strategies, programmes and policy interventions in support of democracy.

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ISBN: 978-91-7671-270-2 (Print)
ISBN: 978-91-7671-271-9 (PDF)