



# The Global State of Democracy IN FOCUS

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## Taking stock of progress on gender equality using the Global State of Democracy Indices

### Twenty-five years since the Beijing World Conference on Women

#### Key facts and findings

- Since 1995, the world has made important strides in advancing gender equality. The increase in female representation in parliaments across the globe has been driving these advances, although there has been some progress on other indicators used to measure Gender Equality in the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices.
- Democracies provide better guarantees for gender equality. Out of 29 countries that scored highly in the GSoD Indices on Gender Equality in 2018, 28 of them are democracies.
- There are wide regional variations in Gender Equality, with North America and Europe seeing the highest scores, and the Middle East the lowest. However, the greatest progress over the 25-year period has been achieved in Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- The representation of women in parliament is considerably better today than 25 years ago. The world average has increased from 10 per cent in 1995 to 23 per cent in 2018 (and 24 per cent in 2019). The percentage of women legislators is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (28 per cent), and lowest in the Middle East (11 per cent).
- Despite progress made to date, at the current rate it will take another 46 years to reach gender parity in all parliaments.
- Civic space is shrinking across all regions of the world and across all levels of democratic performance. The shrinking of civic space has had severe effects on women's participation in civil society, as women's organizations tend to be the most vulnerable, the least well-resourced and the least networked.
- Over the 25-year period since 1995, the global average of women's participation in civil society organizations has seen very slow improvement. While the Middle East is the lowest performer, North America and Europe have the highest scores, although Europe has witnessed some declines in the last five years.

#### 1. Introduction

This year marks the 25-year anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (UN Women 1995). The participants of the Fourth World Conference on Women, who gathered in Beijing in September 1995, stressed that 'women's rights are human rights', and that 'women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation

in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace' (UN Women 1995). The Platform for Action called for an agenda for women's empowerment that would remove 'all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making' (UN Women 1995).

The theme of the 2020 International Women’s Day is *I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights*, which is aligned with the UN Women’s campaign, Generation Equality, that marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN n.d.).

In order to take stock of the progress made on gender equality, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is marking this 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration by publishing a *GSoD In Focus* on the same theme. Coincidentally, this is also the 25th anniversary of the foundation of International IDEA. This issue of *GSoD In Focus* is based on data stemming from the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices that provide democracy measurements at the country, regional and global level, up until the end of 2018. One of the subcomponents of the GSoD Indices measures the political aspects of gender equality.

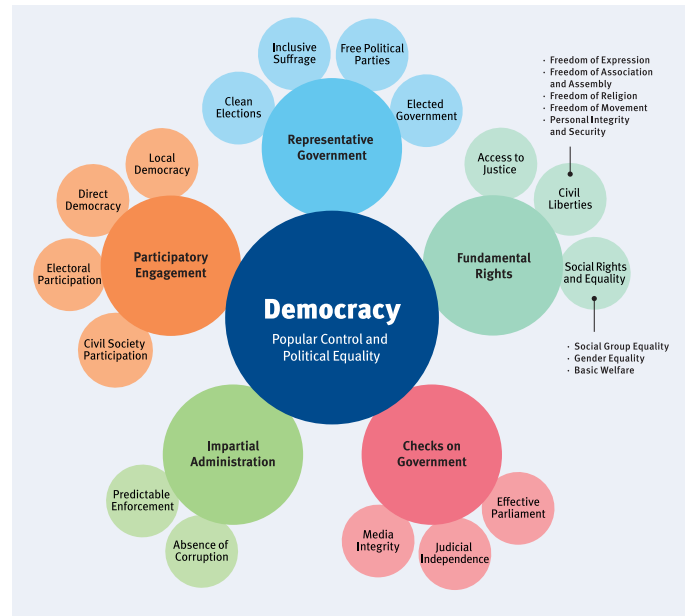
## 2. Measurement of gender equality through the GSoD Indices

Driven by its definition of democracy as ‘popular control of decision-making and political equality in the exercise of that control’, International IDEA developed its GSoD conceptual framework, packaging it in a way that is easily understood by policymakers and civil society organizations (CSOs). Based on this definition, democracy is measured by using five main attributes (Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement), with each of them supported by several subattributes and subcomponents, as illustrated in Figure 1. The GSoD Indices are based on 97 indicators collected from a number of data sets, with approximately 70 per cent of the data coming from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Beetham et al. 2008; International IDEA 2019b).

The GSoD Indices include Gender Equality as a specific subcomponent, reflecting its importance in the conception of democracy. The GSoD measurement on Gender Equality is closely connected to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, specifically target 5.1 (to ‘end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere’), and target 5.5 (to ‘ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’) (UN General Assembly 2015). It can be used to complement the UN minimum set of gender

FIGURE 1

### Conceptual framework of the GSoD Indices



Source: Skaaning (2019).

indicators to monitor progress in the implementation of SDG 5.

The GSoD Indices’ subcomponent on Gender Equality measures women’s access to political power. These indicators cover gender equality in the number of elected officials, along with additional indicators on women’s political participation and empowerment. As explained in Table 1, five indicators from two different data sets have been used to create this measurement.

The analysis below will offer succinct data on the GSoD aspect of Gender Equality, but will also explore the theme of women in parliament (covered by the indicator ‘Lower chamber female legislators’) and that of women in civil society (covered by the indicator ‘CSO women’s participation’). The analysis will provide overviews on data and trends at the global, regional and country levels, from 1995 (the year of the Beijing World Conference on Women) to 2018 (GSoD Indices’ latest data).

## 3. Political Gender Equality

The following section will offer a short comparative overview of data for political Gender Equality at the global and regional level, focusing on the years 1995 and 2018 as reference points. Examples of countries as outliers will also be referred to below.

TABLE 1

**Gender Equality according to GSoD Indices**

INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	DATA SET
Power distributed by gender	Expert surveys: Is political power distributed according to gender?	V-Dem
CSO women’s participation	Expert surveys: Are women prevented from participating in CSOs?	V-Dem
Female vs male mean years of schooling	Observational data	Global Health Data Exchange (GHDx)
Lower chamber female legislators	Observational data	V-Dem
Election women in the cabinet	Observational data	V-Dem

Source: Skaaning (2019).

**Global overview**

Since 1995, the world has made important strides in advancing gender equality. In the GSoD Indices scale between 0 to 1, the world average on Gender Equality in 1995 was 0.48, and by 2018 it had risen to 0.58, representing a 21 per cent increase. The increase in the numbers of women in parliament across the globe has been driving the advances, although some progress is also noted on the other indicators used to measure Gender Equality.

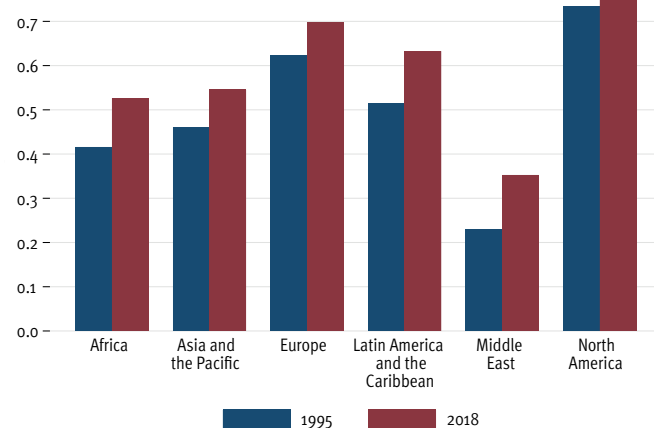
However, progress on gender equality remains uneven between regions. The region of North America (comprising Canada and the USA) was and continues to be the region with the highest score for Gender Equality (0.75). Europe performs second best (0.70), although within Europe, North and West Europe as a subregion outperforms all regions, at 0.84, even above North America. Europe is followed by Latin America and the Caribbean in its performance on Gender Equality. The average performance in Africa, and in Asia and the Pacific, is almost on a par (with a slightly higher score for the latter region), well below North America and Europe. Middle East continues to be the region with the lowest score for political Gender Equality (Figure 2).

Countries with high levels of gender equality can be found across all regions of the world, except the Middle East. However, out of the top 10 countries in the world with the highest scores for Gender Equality (Table 2), 7 are in Europe. All of them are democracies.

The Middle East is the region with the most countries (4) ranked in the bottom 10 countries in the world for Gender Equality, but a significant share are also found in Asia and the Pacific (3), and in Africa (2)—see Table 3. One country is found in Europe (Turkey). Of the bottom 10, Papua New Guinea and Turkey are democracies, while the rest are hybrid regimes and non-democracies.

FIGURE 2

**Gender Equality scores per region in 1995 and 2018**



Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 3 March 2020.

TABLE 2

**Countries with highest scores for Gender Equality**

COUNTRY (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)	GSOD INDICES SCORE FOR 2018
Costa Rica	0.92
Denmark	0.88
Finland	0.92
France	0.94
Germany	0.83
Jamaica	0.85
New Zealand	0.94
Norway	0.92
Sweden	0.92
Switzerland	0.89

Note: High scores are defined as scores between 0.83 and 0.94.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 3 March 2020.

**TABLE 3**

**Countries with lowest scores for Gender Equality**

Afghanistan, Bahrain, Eritrea, Libya, Oman, Papua New Guinea, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Yemen

*Note:* Low scores are defined as scores between 0.1 and 0.35.

*Source:* International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 1 March 2020.

Out of the three GSoD-based regime classifications—democracies, hybrid regimes and non-democracies—the data shows that democracies provide better guarantees for gender equality. Out of the 29 countries that had a high score for Gender Equality in 2018, 28 are democracies. The only non-democracy that scores high on Gender Equality is Rwanda. As many as 50 per cent of non-democracies have low levels of Gender Equality, compared with only three democracies (Iraq, Papua New Guinea and Turkey).

**Regional and country overview**

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen significant advances in gender equality since 1995, with the levels of political Gender Equality performance in the mid-range (0.63) in 2018—or third best after North America (0.75) and Europe (0.70). Two countries in the region (Costa Rica and Jamaica) score among the top 10 countries in the world, while seven countries in the region feature among the top 25 per cent of countries for this GSoD aspect. However, two countries in the region are among the three countries in the world that have seen significant declines in Gender Equality over five-year periods—Argentina in 2016 and 2017, and Brazil in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Overall, gender equality advances in the region are attributable to 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. The impact of these and other undertakings has empowered women and fostered attitudinal changes in favour of gender equality, as well as helping to strengthen political equality.

Africa continues to perform below the global average for Gender Equality and has the second lowest scores for political Gender Equality in the world after the Middle East. However, it is the region with the second largest share of countries (12 countries in the region) to see significant improvements

over five-year periods in Gender Equality since 1995—after Latin America. A large majority (84 per cent) of countries in Africa now score in the mid-range on Gender Equality. However, 15 countries in Africa feature among the bottom 25 per cent in the world for Gender Equality. The largest share of those countries are non-democracies (eight), while five are hybrid regimes, but two (Kenya and Nigeria) are democracies. However, there are two countries in the region that score in the top 25 per cent in the world for Gender Equality; of these, one is a democracy (Senegal) and one is a non-democracy (Rwanda). It is also one of the two regions that have achieved the most statistically significant gains over the 25-year period—the other being Latin America and the Caribbean (Table 4).

The highest performance on Gender Equality is found in North America. Canada scores highly for Gender Equality

**TABLE 4**

**Average global and regional score for Gender Equality in 1995 and 2018**

	1995	2018
World	0.48	0.58
Africa	0.42	0.53
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.52	0.63
North America	0.73	0.75
Asia and the Pacific	0.46	0.55
Middle East	0.23	0.35
Europe	0.62	0.70

■ High ■ Mid-range ■ Low

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

(0.81) but the USA dropped from high-scoring to mid-range in 2017 (0.69). Nevertheless, both Canada and the USA perform in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world for Gender Equality.

Although, overall, Gender Equality in the GSoD Indices has improved by 52 per cent since 1995, the Middle East remains the worst-performing region in the world for Gender Equality, with an average score of 0.35, and all the countries in the region are among the bottom 25 per cent in the world in 2018. If measuring in absolute terms, only Lebanon and Jordan performed in the mid-range, while the remaining countries in the region have low scores.

Despite some progress in Asia and the Pacific since 1995, significant challenges to achieve gender equality remain, and the region still performs below the global average. There have been advances in gender equality in some countries, but efforts are needed to increase the representation of women, not only in new democracies but also in countries such as Japan and South Korea. One-fifth of countries in the region perform below the world average for Gender Equality, and nine countries score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

Europe is the region that scores highest, after North America, on Gender Equality and more than half of its countries (55 per cent) score among the top 25 per cent in the world. The region has largely stagnated on this indicator in the last five years, however, with no countries making statistically significant gains. There are more troubling signs: while the declines in the performance of countries including Croatia, Poland, Serbia and Turkey are not significant, the downward trend seen in the last five years is cause for concern. 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 have low levels of Gender Equality.

#### 4. Women in parliament

##### Global overview

Women are more represented in parliament today than 25 years ago. As illustrated in Table 5 and Figure 3, trends for the ‘Lower chamber female legislators’ Gender Equality indicator show overall improvements in every region of the world. Today, women are in more positions of political power and are more represented in the political sphere.

While the world average for ‘Lower chamber female legislators’ in 1995 stood at just under 10 per cent, by the end of 2018 it had increased to 23 per cent. Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the largest percentage of legislators that are women (28 per cent), followed by Europe (27 per cent) and North America (23 per cent), then Africa (22 per cent) and Asia and the Pacific (21 per cent). The Middle East continues to be the region with the largest share of non-democratically elected parliaments, as well as the lowest representation of women, at just 11 per cent (Coppedge et al. 2019; International IDEA 2019a).

The implementation of gender quotas has played an important role in increasing women’s representation in legislatures (Tripp and Kang 2007). The adoption of gender

TABLE 5

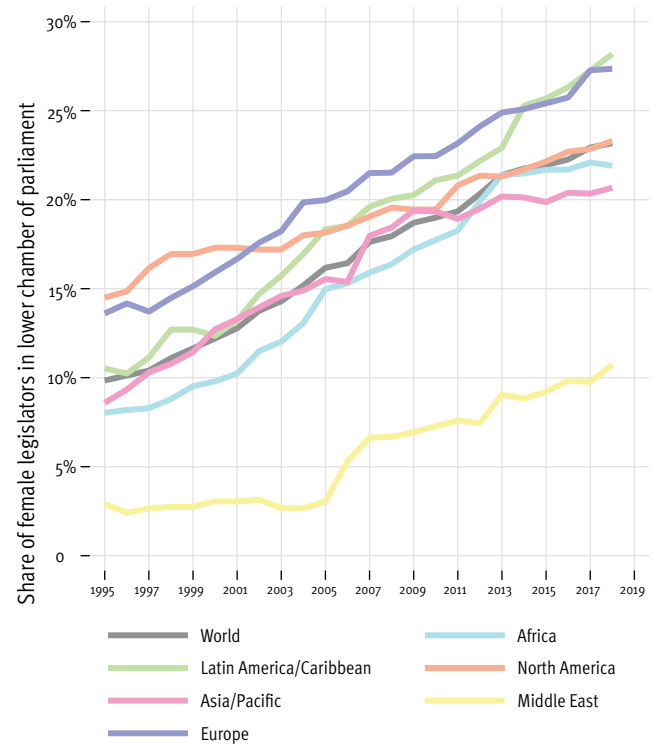
#### Original percentages at global and regional levels for ‘Lower chamber female legislators’ in 1995 and 2018

	1995	2018
World	10%	23%
Africa	8%	22%
Latin America and the Caribbean	10%	28%
North America	14%	23%
Asia and the Pacific	9%	21%
Middle East	3%	11%
Europe	14%	27%

Source: Coppedge, M. et al. (2019).

FIGURE 3

#### Global and regional trends for ‘Lower chamber female legislators’ from 1995 to 2018

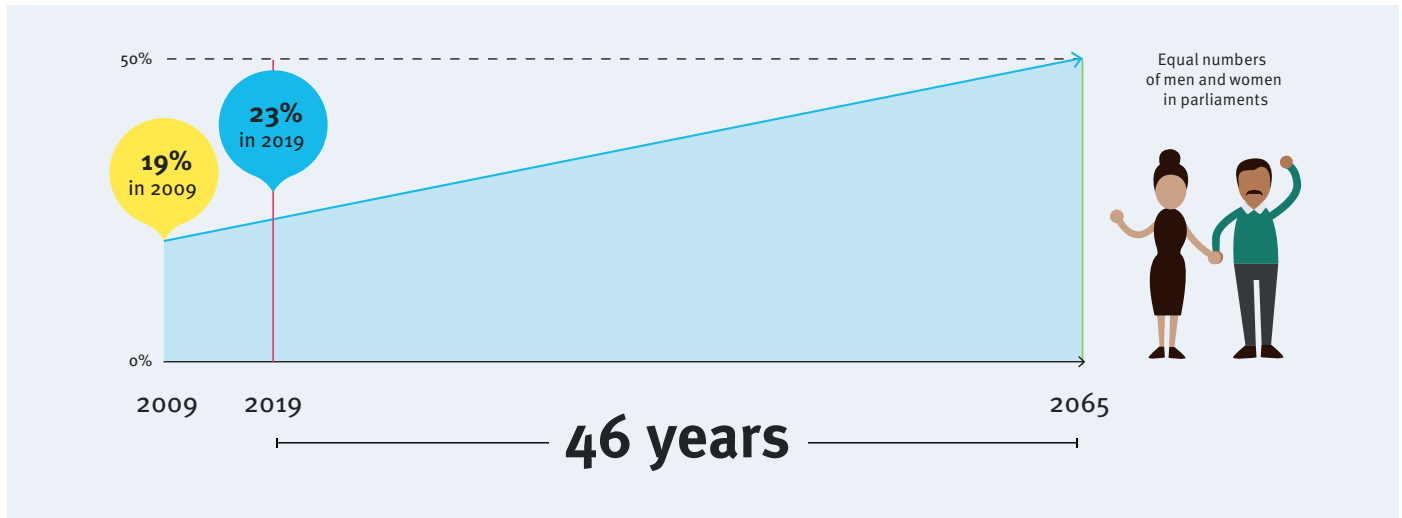


Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 3 March 2020 based on Coppedge et al. (2019).

quotas increased from 3 per cent of countries in 1990 to 40 per cent in 2015 (Huges et al. 2017). These developments follow increased international attention being paid to gender equality, which led to the inclusion of gender equality in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later in the SDGs. However, the adoption of quota systems was not accompanied by a transformation of the political

FIGURE 4

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



Source: International IDEA (2019b).

and institutional systems, which remain male-dominated, hampering the promotion of gender equality. Attaining sustainable gender equality and women’s empowerment will require stepping up political commitments and the implementation of a broad range of interventions that transform the unequal gender power relations in all spheres of life.

Despite progress made to date, at the current rate it will take another 46 years to reach gender parity in parliaments. No regional average has reached the ‘critical minority point of 30 per cent of legislators being women’ (International IDEA 2019a), 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 (Coppedge et al. 2019). Despite advances, serious efforts are therefore still required to achieve political equality for women.

**Regional and country overview**

Alongside Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean has the highest representation of women in parliament, averaging 28 per cent, which is above the world average of 23 per cent. 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, Mexico and Nicaragua—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).

Asia and the Pacific has more than doubled the percentage of legislators that are women between 1995 and 2018. By the end of 2018, four 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) and Australia (30 per cent) (IPU 2019). Myanmar, Nepal and New Zealand have seen the greatest quantitative improvements in their Gender Equality scores since 1975. The region also has the lowest average share of female legislators (18 per cent in 2019) in the world, with three democracies (Japan, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea) among the lowest levels of women’s representation in parliament in the world (under 12 per cent of legislators). Three countries in the region are the only countries in the world with no women in parliament (Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu—all Pacific Islands) (IPU 2019).

Africa has also doubled the percentage of legislators that are women over the 25-year period, to reach just over 20 per cent in 2018. The year 2016 also marked the beginning of the second phase of the African Union’s (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. As of the end of 2018, the countries with over 30 per cent female representation in the lower chamber in Africa are: Rwanda (61 per cent), Namibia (46 per cent), South Africa (43 per cent), Senegal (43 per cent), Mozambique (40 per cent), Ethiopia (39 per cent), Tanzania (37 per cent), Burundi (36 per cent), Tunisia (36 per cent), Uganda (35 per cent), Zimbabwe (32 per cent), Cameroon (31 per cent) and Angola (30 per cent) (IPU 2019).

The region with the lowest percentage of legislators that are women is the Middle East with 11 per cent. As of January 2020, it increased to 14 per cent. Some countries—for example, Iraq—have introduced quotas for women in the legislative branch. Saudi Arabia has established quotas for the appointment of women in the Shura Council (Consultative Council). Nevertheless, in elections conducted in late 2019, the percentage of women in the lower chamber in the United Arab Emirates went up to 50 per cent (IPU 2020; Gulf News 2019). However, this is perceived more as an effort to appease Western partners than as a reflection of fundamental reform in favour of gender equality.

## 5. Women in civil society

### Global overview

Civic space is shrinking across all regions of the world and across all levels of democratic performance. 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 in Media Integrity, since 2014 in Civil Liberties and since 2015 in Civil Society Participation. 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. These declines now outnumber the number of countries with gains.

One explanatory factor for the shrinking of civic space is the rise of nationalist political parties, 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 and promote law and order and national security. In some countries (e.g. Egypt,

TABLE 6

### Average global and regional score on women’s participation in CSOs in 1995 and 2018

	1995	2018
World	0.53	0.58
Africa	0.42	0.53
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.56	0.63
North America	0.82	0.84
Asia and the Pacific	0.43	0.50
Middle East	0.22	0.28
Europe	0.77	0.74 ↓

■ High    ■ Mid-range    ■ Low

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 3 March 2020.

Nicaragua and Venezuela), attacks have aimed at limiting the space for opposition and critical voices.

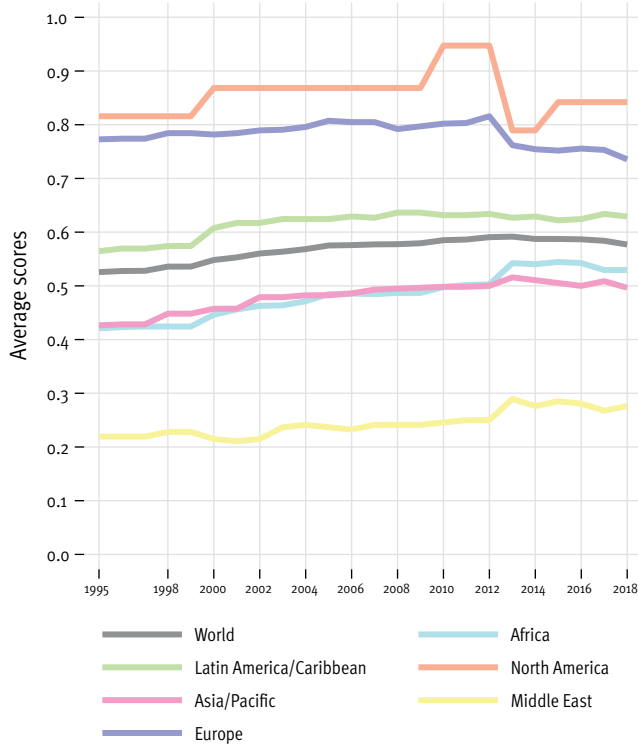
The shrinking of civic space has had severe effects on women’s participation in civil society, as women’s organizations tend to be the most vulnerable, the least well-resourced and the least networked.

Over the 25-year period, the global average of women’s participation in CSOs has seen very slow improvement (Table 6 and Figure 5). Most gains are recorded in Africa, followed by some gains in Latin America, and Asia and the Pacific. Some gains are also recorded in the Middle East. Most worryingly, levels of women’s participation in civil society in Europe have not advanced since 1995, and in fact they have seen a statistically insignificant decline since then.

### Regional and country overview

Latin America has seen some gains in women’s participation in civil society over the 25-year period. 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 to Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay, among other places. In Brazil, women convened large rallies across the country during the 2018 presidential campaign, under the hashtag #EleNao (#NotHim), to oppose Bolsonaro’s patriarchal views on women (Darlington 2018).

**FIGURE 5**  
**Global and regional trends for women’s participation in CSOs from 1995 to 2018**



Source: Coppedge et al. (2019).

Europe and North America are the only regions with high performance on this indicator, but with no discernible progress over the 25-year period. In fact, Europe has seen a downward trend in this regard. This is linked to the shrinking civic space witnessed in the last decade in several countries, as well as indirect restrictions imposed on CSOs. These restrictions take different forms, including bureaucratic registration rules for CSOs, a wider interpretation of what constitutes inadmissible ‘political’ activities, wider limitations on ‘insulting’ governments and leaders, and controlling access to, and the uses of, public funding (Civil Society Europe 2018; FRA 2017). Of the 10 countries currently experiencing democratic backsliding, 8 have seen levels of women participation in CSOs trending downwards during the backsliding period of which 3 are in Europe (Poland, Serbia and Ukraine).

In Africa, despite advances in civil society in some countries, the empirical evidence shows that there have been many setbacks. This is also tied to the fact that, in 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.

In Asia and the Pacific, there has been a general expansion of civil society over the 25-year period. However, women’s participation in civil society continues to lag considerably behind the average found in Europe and North America.

The Middle East saw an increase in the number of active CSOs during the 1990s, 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, which continues to mean this region is ranked as lowest performing on this indicator.

## 6. Conclusion

Despite the advances seen in gender equality over the past 25 years since the first Beijing Declaration, including some advances across all regions, there are large variations in performance between regions and even within regions. The greatest advances have been observed in women’s representation in parliaments, although it will take another 46 years to reach gender parity at the global level. The shrinking of civic space across the world is affecting women’s participation in civil society and provides a great cause for concern. More efforts are needed to step up progress in these areas to ensure that women are equally represented in both politics and civil society the world over.



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## Colophon

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## About this series

In 2018, International IDEA launched the new *GSoD In Focus* series. These short updates apply the GSoD Indices data to current issues, providing evidence-based analysis and insights into the contemporary democracy debate.

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- Tracking progress on Sustainable Development Goal 16 with Global State of Democracy Indices, *GSoD In Focus* No. 8
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- The Global State of Democracy: Key findings and new data, *GSoD In Focus* No. 2
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## Where to find the data

The GSoD Indices are available on the International IDEA website. Users can generate their own data visualizations and extract data at the country, regional and global levels across the attributes and subattributes for specific years or for selected time periods starting from 1975. The Indices are updated annually.

<<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>

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Founded in 1995, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. The Institute is the only intergovernmental organization with a global mandate solely focused on democracy and elections, and is committed to be a global agenda-setter in the democracy-building field. With 32 Member States from all continents, International IDEA supports the development of stronger democratic institutions and processes; and fosters sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy through the provision of comparative knowledge resources, dialogues and partnerships at the global, regional and country levels.

The Global State of Democracy Initiative is headed by the Democracy Assessment and Political Analysis (DAPA) Unit. For queries regarding the GSoD Initiative or the GSoD Indices, please contact the DAPA team and GSoD Helpdesk at [GSoD.Indices@idea.int](mailto:GSoD.Indices@idea.int).

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