The Global State of Democracy
IN FOCUS

The Global State of Democracy Indices: An overview

Summary

This *GSoD In Focus* introduces and describes the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices), which now include data on 158 countries for the period 1975–2017.

Introduction

In November 2017 International IDEA launched the first edition of a new biennial report, *The Global State of Democracy*. The report provided evidence-based analysis and data on the global and regional state of democracy. It also contributed to the public debate on democracy, informed policy interventions and examined problem-solving approaches to the challenges facing democracies worldwide.
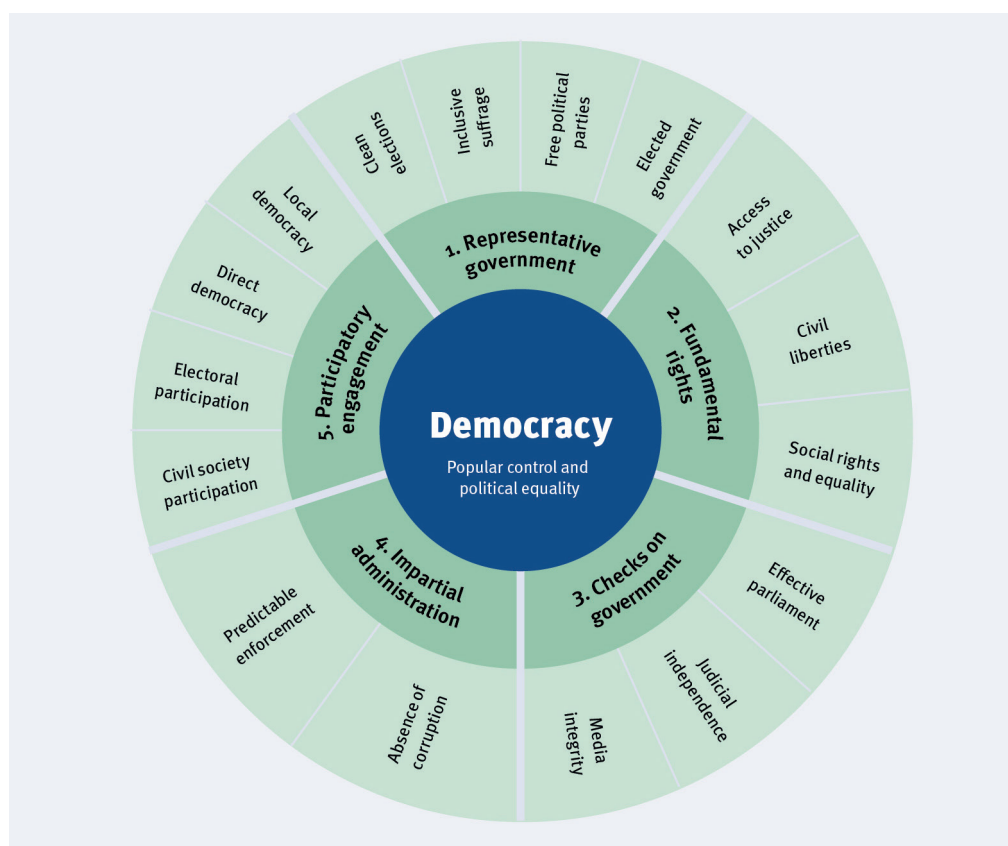
At the same time, International IDEA launched the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices), which serve as the main evidence base for the report, and provide a new, comprehensive measurement of democracy. The GSoD Indices depict democratic trends across five main attributes of democracy, as well as a number of subattributes and subcomponents. For the sake of clarity, these attributes, subattributes and subcomponents are referred to in this *GSoD In Focus* as **aspects of democracy**.

This *GSoD In Focus* introduces the GSoD Indices, which now cover a total of 158 countries for the period 1975–2017. It describes the conceptual framework that underpins both the Indices and *The Global State of Democracy*, the coverage of the data set and the sources of the data, as well as data scores and scales, units of observation and aggregation.

Future updates to the GSoD Indices data will occur on an annual basis. More detailed analyses of regional findings will be included in the second edition of *The Global State of Democracy,* which will be published in November 2019.

FIGURE 1

The GSoD Indices: Conceptual framework

Source: International IDEA

1. The GSoD Indices: Conceptual framework

The GSoD Indices are a quantitative tool for measuring the evolution of democracy globally and regionally in its different aspects over time, beginning in 1975. They capture trends at the global, regional and national levels based on International IDEA's definition of democracy (Beetham et al. 2008). The conceptual framework underpinning the Indices (see Figure 1) translates this definition—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 and 97 indicators.

The conceptual framework aims to be universally applicable and compatible with different institutional arrangements. Using this broad understanding of democracy, the GSoD Indices do not provide a single overarching democracy index with a single score for each country. This approach differentiates the GSoD Indices from several other democracy measurement methodologies, and offers a less abstract form of democracy measurement, allowing policymakers and practitioners to use the GSoD Indices to inform policy decisions on political and social developments through an analysis of global and regional democracy trends.

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 Skaaning (2018).

2. The five attributes of democracy in the GSoD Indices conceptual framework

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 Table 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 thus 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 instruments of, and for the realization of, people's 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.

TABLE 1

Subcomponents within the Fundamental Rights attribute

2. Fundamental Rights	2.1. Access to Justice	
	2.2. Civil Liberties	2.2.A. Freedom of Expression
		2.2.B. Freedom of Association and Assembly
		2.2.C. Freedom of Religion
		2.2.D. Freedom of Movement
		2.2.E. Personal Integrity and Security
	2.3. Social Rights and Equality	2.3.A. Social Group Equality
		2.3.B. Basic Welfare
		2.3.C. Gender Equality

3. The GSoD Indices: Regional and national coverage

The first iteration of the GSoD Indices covered the period 1975–2015 but the data is updated annually. In the 2018 update, the two-year time lag in the data was reduced to one year, meaning that in future the GSoD Indices will cover data from 1975 to the most recent completed year.

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, 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 2 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 (2018a).

TABLE 2

The GSoD Indices: Regional and subregional geographical divisions

REGION/SUBREGION	COUNTRIES
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¸ Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, 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
MIDDLE EAST AND IRAN	
Middle East and Iran	Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
EUROPE	
East-Central Europe	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, 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

Source: International IDEA (2018b).

4. The GSoD Indices: Data sources

The GSoD Indices aggregate indicators from a number of data sets. The first version of the Indices, featured in *The Global State of Democracy: Exploring Democracy's Resilience* (International IDEA 2017), was based on 14 data sets. Approximately 70 per cent of the data came from indicators gathered as part of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. In total, 98 indicators were used.

In the 2018 update, the number of data sets has been reduced to 11 (see Table 3). V-Dem remains the largest contributor to the Indices, and still contributes 70 per cent of the indicators. The number of indicators has been reduced to 97.

The data relies on a range of extant data sources that fall into four categories:

1. *Expert surveys* (ES). Assessments by country experts of the situation on a particular issue in a particular country.

2. *Standards-based 'in-house coding'* (IC). 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* (OD). 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* (CM). 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 (2018b).

TABLE 3

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_ooo.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)	Varieties of Democracy	‹https://www.v-dem.net/›

Source: Skaaning (2018).

5. The GSoD Indices: Additional methodological information

For a full explanation of the GSoD methodology see Skaaning (2018).

Scores and scales

The GSoD Indices consist of attribute and subattribute scores per country per year, from 1975 to the completed year of the most recent data update, which occurs annually. All 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, such as Political Participation, or formative aggregations procedures, such as Inclusive Suffrage, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy.

Units of observation

The GSoD data set includes country–year data for the 158 countries with at least 1 million inhabitants. In the calculations of regional and global averages, the scores are not weighted by population size.

Aggregation

The construction of the Indices relies mainly on item response theory modelling and Bayesian factor analysis. In a few cases, the aggregation is calculated by taking the mean or multiplying various indicators.

References

Beetham, D., Carvalho, E., Landman, T. and Weir, T., *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2008), <http://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/assessing-quality-democracy-practicalguide>

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), *The Global State of Democracy: Exploring Democracy's Resilience* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2017), <http://www.idea.int/gsod>, accessed 18 October 2018

—, 'Regions and countries in the Global State of Democracy Indices', October 2018a, <http://www.idea.int/gsod>, accessed 18 October 2018

—, 'Indicators and sources for the Global State of Democracy Indices', October 2018b, <http://www.idea.int/gsod>, accessed 18 October 2018

Skaaning, S-E., *The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology: Conceptualization and Measurement Framework, Version 2* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2018), <http://www.idea.int/gsod>, accessed 18 October 2018
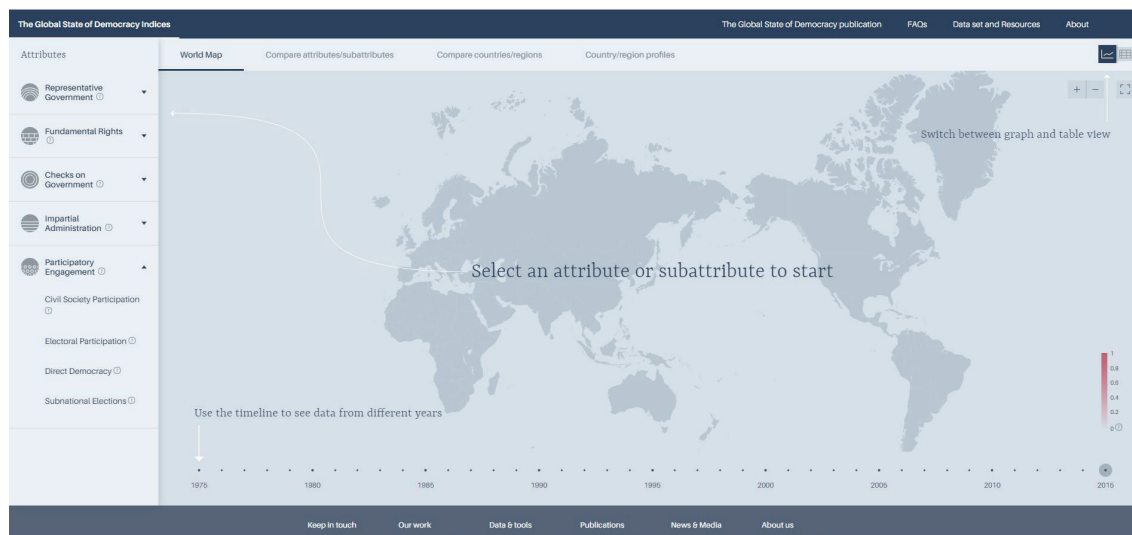
Acknowledgements

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.

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>