



# The Global State of Democracy IN FOCUS

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## Monitoring achievements on Sustainable Development Goal 16 2015–2019: a Global State of Democracy Indices perspective

16 PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



### Key facts and findings

- Global progress on SDG 16 is facing significant challenges, although advances are also noted.
- Globally, overall declines are noted on 13 GSoD aspects, overall gains on 3 aspects, and stagnation on 2 aspects, since the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved in 2015.
- Africa has recorded considerable gains, particularly around Personal Integrity and Security, Absence of Corruption, and Social Group Equality. Serious challenges remain, especially on GSoD aspects related to targets 7 and 10 of SDG 16.
- The Middle East has recorded very few consequential gains such as some progress on Access to Justice. It remains the region with the lowest performance on SDG 16 targets overall.
- Latin America and the Caribbean has made some progress on Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, and Absence of Corruption. However, on most other aspects, particularly those related to targets 7 and 10, there is overall decline.
- North America (Canada and the United States) has noted overall stagnation or decline in all GSoD aspects, although from generally high or mid-range levels of performance.
- Asia and the Pacific has made considerable progress on GSoD aspects of Absence of Corruption, Access to Justice, Effective Parliament and Clean Elections. Most declines are noted under aspects related to target 16.10.
- Europe has recorded more gains than declines on Electoral Participation, but more declines than gains on targets 1, 3, 6, 7 and 10 of SDG 16.
- The COVID-19 global crisis is resulting in numerous cases of potential or de facto infringements of civil liberties (Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, Personal Integrity and Security), as well as Clean Elections. This is bound to have debilitating effects on SDG 16 targets going forward. The importance of SDG 16 as an enabler for the entire 2030 Agenda, in conjunction with setbacks on most other SDG goals and targets due to the effects of the pandemic, will have serious implications for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

### 1. Introduction and methodology

This *GSoD In Focus* serves as a monitoring tool to examine the progress made on several targets for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, underpinned by International IDEA's Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices. The GSoD Indices provide evidence-based analysis and data on the global and regional state of democracy, thus contributing to the public debate and informing policy interventions that strengthen the quality of democracy (International IDEA 2019d). The

Indices' conceptual framework, explained in Figure 1, includes measurements of aspects of democracy that complement most SDG 16 targets.

This *GSoD In Focus* builds on a previous issue of September 2019 (International IDEA 2019c) and includes new data including the year 2019. The analysis shows that global progress on SDG 16 is facing significant challenges, and only a few advances can be noted. Out of 18 GSoD aspects that track progress on SDG 16, significant declines overshadow gains,

both globally and regionally. In addition, although this *GSoD In Focus* relies on GSoD Indices data up to the end of 2019 only, it is evident that the democracy-related challenges in the COVID-19 world of 2020 are bound to considerably hamper progress on SDG 16. Setbacks are already noted in areas such as civil liberties, elections and parliamentary oversight (International IDEA 2020b).

International IDEA is convinced that democracy has an instrumental value and as such is an enabler of sustainable development (International IDEA 2018: 5–9). This conviction is shared with the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly 2014, 2015) and the SDGs framework. Even though the GSoD Indices relate to a total of 9 SDGs (International IDEA 2019b), this *GSoD In Focus* monitors the specific progress on SDG 16 (Peace, justice and accountable institutions), because this goal is directly linked with all aspects of the GSoD conceptualization of democracy.

Methodologically, this *GSoD In Focus* takes the country as the main unit of analysis. In order to monitor progress on SDG 16 targets, the GSoD Indices measure the number of countries with significant gains and declines in 18 GSoD aspects, between the baseline year of 2015—corresponding with the UN adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly 2015)—and 2019 as the cut-off point for the latest GSoD Indices data. When the number of countries with significant gains is greater than those with declines, this is marked as overall progress (colour-coded green). When countries with declines outnumber those with gains, overall regression is noted (red). When the number of countries with gains is equal to those with declines or where there were no gains or declines, this is marked as overall stagnation (yellow). Nevertheless, although Table 3 aims to consolidate all these gains and declines in a single sheet, the brief analysis on each region and each related SDG 16 target (see section 3) offers qualitative nuances and interpretations on progress or setbacks recorded.

## 2. GSoD Indices and SDG 16: a fusion of a vision of democracy

The UN’s vision of democracy and the accomplishment of SDG 16 targets stand in fusion with International IDEA’s own conceptualization of democracy, based on two fundamental principles: popular control over decision-making, and political equality among those exercising that control (Beetham et al. 2008; International IDEA 2017; International IDEA 2018). Based on this concept

FIGURE 1

### Conceptual framework of the GSoD Indices and its links to the Sustainable Development Goals



Source: International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2019), <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2019.31>>.

of democracy, International IDEA developed the GSoD conceptual framework, designed to appeal to and be understood by policymakers and civil society organizations (CSOs) alike. As illustrated in Figure 1, democracy is built around 5 main attributes, with each one of them supported by a number of subattributes and subcomponents.

1. **Representative Government** covers the extent to which access to political power is free and equal as demonstrated by competitive, inclusive and regular elections and political parties. It includes 4 subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.
2. **Fundamental Rights** dissects the extent to which individual liberties are respected, and whether people have access to resources to enable active participation in the political process. It includes 3 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 Movement, Freedom of Religion, Personal Integrity and Security, Social Group Equality, Gender Equality, and Basic Welfare.
3. **Checks on Government** measures effective control of executive power through other pillars of democracy. It

includes 3 subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity.

4. **Impartial Administration** concerns how fairly and predictably political decisions are implemented and the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and thus reflects key aspects of the rule of law. It includes 2 subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement.
5. **Participatory Engagement** measures instruments for, and the realization of, the people’s participation in decision-making. Because they capture different phenomena, the 4 subattributes of this aspect—Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy—are not aggregated into a single score (Skaaning 2018).

The GSoD Indices are based on 116 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. Based on this holistic understanding of democracy and its GSoD Indices, International IDEA can provide complementary data to track progress on the UN’s

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, together with partners such as the SDG 16 Data Initiative (2019).

Figure 1 also illustrates the complementarity of each GSoD aspect to a number of SDGs. The GSoD Indices measurement framework captures data relating to progress on 8 of the 17 SDGs (SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 16). In addition, the GSoD conceptual framework itself is highly relevant to SDG 17, as the Indices and evidence-based analysis help to strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development (International IDEA 2019b). All aspects of the GSoD Indices interface with, and contribute to, the SDG 16 targets.

There are 18 aspects of the GSoD Indices that track progress on 6 targets of SDG 16 on Peace, justice and accountable institutions. Table 1 provides an overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the respective GSoD aspects. Further, the column entitled GSoD indicators and data providers describes in some detail the nature and level of analysis under each of these aspects.

**TABLE 1**

**Overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the GSoD aspects**

SDG 16 targets	GSoD aspect	GSoD indicators
<b>SDG 16.1</b> Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Personal Integrity and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom from forced labour for women (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom from forced labour for men (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom from torture (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom from political killings (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Political terror scale inverted (PTS)</li> <li>• Internal conflict (ICRG)</li> <li>• Physical integrity rights index (CI-Rights)</li> </ul>
<b>SDG 16.3</b> Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Access to Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to justice for men (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Access to justice for women (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Judicial corruption decision (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Judicial accountability (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Fair trial (CLD)</li> </ul>
	Judicial Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High court independence (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Lower court independence (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Compliance with high court (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Compliance with judiciary (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Law and order (ICRG)</li> <li>• Independent judiciary (CI-Rights)</li> </ul>
	Predictable Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive respects constitution (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Transparent laws with predictable enforcement (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Rigorous and impartial public administration (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Criteria for appointment decisions in the state administration (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Criteria for appointment decisions in the armed forces (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Bureaucratic quality (ICRG)</li> </ul>

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the GSoD aspects

SDG 16 targets	GSoD aspect	GSoD indicators
<p><b>SDG 16.5</b> Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms</p>	Absence of Corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public sector corrupt exchanges (V-Dem)</li> <li>Public sector theft (V-Dem)</li> <li>Executive embezzlement and theft (V-Dem)</li> <li>Executive bribery and corrupt exchanges (V-Dem)</li> <li>Corruption (ICRG)</li> </ul>
<p><b>SDG 16.6</b> Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels</p>	Judicial Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See above on Judicial Independence for SDG 16.3</li> </ul>
	Effective Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislature questions officials in practice (V-Dem)</li> <li>Executive oversight (V-Dem)</li> <li>Legislature investigates in practice (V-Dem)</li> <li>Legislature opposition parties (V-Dem)</li> <li>Executive constraints (Polity)</li> </ul>
	Free Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Party ban (V-Dem)</li> <li>Barriers to parties (V-Dem)</li> <li>Opposition parties' autonomy (V-Dem)</li> <li>Elections multiparty (V-Dem)</li> <li>Competitiveness of participation (Polity)</li> <li>Multiparty (legislative) elections (LIED)</li> </ul>
	Civil Society Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSO participatory environment (V-Dem)</li> <li>Engaged society (V-Dem)</li> <li>CSO consultation (V-Dem)</li> <li>Engagement in independent non-political associations (V-Dem)</li> <li>Engagement in independent political associations (V-Dem)</li> <li>Engagement in independent trade unions (V-Dem)</li> </ul>
<p><b>SDG 16.7</b> Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels</p>	Elected Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elected officials index (V-Dem)</li> <li>Competitiveness of executive recruitment (Polity)</li> <li>Openness of executive recruitment (Polity)</li> <li>Electoral (BRRD)</li> </ul>
	Clean Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electoral management body autonomy (V-Dem)</li> <li>Electoral management body capacity (V-Dem)</li> <li>Election other voting irregularities (V-Dem)</li> <li>Election government intimidation (V-Dem)</li> <li>Election free and fair (V-Dem)</li> <li>Competition (LIED)</li> </ul>
	Electoral Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Election voting age population turnout (V-Dem)</li> </ul>
	Effective Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See above on Effective Parliament for SDG 16.6</li> </ul>
	Local Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local government index (V-Dem)</li> <li>Subnational elections free and fair (V-Dem)</li> </ul>
	Social Group Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social class equality in respect of civil liberties (V-Dem)</li> <li>Social group equality in respect of civil liberties (V-Dem)</li> <li>Power distributed by socio-economic position (V-Dem)</li> <li>Power distributed by social group (V-Dem)</li> <li>Representation of disadvantaged social groups (V-Dem)</li> <li>Exclusion by socio-economic group inverted (V-Dem)</li> <li>Exclusion by political group index inverted (V-Dem)</li> <li>Exclusion by social group index inverted (V-Dem)</li> <li>Exclusion by urban/rural location index inverted (V-Dem)</li> <li>Religious ethnic tensions (ICRG)</li> </ul>

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the GSoD aspects

SDG 16 targets	GSoD aspect	GSoD indicators
<b>SDG 16.10</b> Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Freedom of Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print/broadcast censorship effort (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Harassment of journalists (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Media self-censorship (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of discussion for women (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of discussion for men (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of academic and cultural expression (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of opinion and expression (CLD)</li> <li>• Freedom of speech and press (CI-Rights)</li> </ul>
	Media Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print/broadcast media critical (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Print/broadcast media perspectives (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Media bias (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Media corrupt (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Media freedom inverted (GMFD)</li> </ul>
	Freedom of Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of foreign movement (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of domestic movement for women (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of domestic movement for men (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of movement and residence (CLD)</li> <li>• Freedom of foreign movement (CI-Rights)</li> <li>• Freedom of domestic movement (CI-Rights)</li> </ul>
	Freedom of Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of religion (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Religious organization repression (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (CLD)</li> <li>• Freedom of religion (CI-Rights)</li> </ul>
	Freedom of Association and Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSO entry and exit (V-Dem)</li> <li>• CSO repression (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of peaceful assembly (V-Dem)</li> <li>• Freedom of assembly and association (CLD)</li> <li>• Freedom of assembly and association (CI-Rights)</li> <li>• Workers' rights (CI-Rights)</li> </ul>

Sources: BRRD = Bjørnskov-Rode regime data; CI-Rights Data Project; CLD = Civil Liberty Dataset; GMFD = Global Media Freedom Dataset; ICRG = International Country Risk Guide; LIED = Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy; Polity; PTS = Political Terror Scale; V-Dem = Varieties of Democracy.

### 3. Analysis of GSoD data

According to the GSoD data, and as illustrated in Table 2 below, global progress on SDG 16 is facing significant challenges, although advances are also noted. Out of the 18 GSoD aspects used to track progress on SDG 16, there are considerably more declines than gains recorded globally. Between 2015 and the end of 2019, overall declines (i.e. more countries with significant declines than significant gains) are noted on 13 GSoD aspects (Personal Integrity and Security, Access to Justice, Predictable Enforcement, Free Political Parties, Civil Society Participation, Clean Elections, Electoral Participation, Social Group Equality, Freedom of Expression, Media Integrity, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Association and Assembly), overall gains (i.e. more countries with significant gains than significant declines) on 3 aspects

(Judicial Independence, Absence of Corruption, Effective Parliament) and stagnation on 2 aspects (Elected Government, Local Democracy). Translated into population figures, it means that almost 3 billion people (or 39 per cent of the world's population) live in countries that for example have seen significant declines in Civil Liberties since 2015 and only 6 per cent of the world's population live in countries that have seen significant gains in Civil Liberties during the same period. Similarly, 36 per cent of the world's population live in countries that have seen significant declines in Clean Elections since 2015.

The data presented in this *GSoD In Focus* captures developments up to the end of 2019. This means that the unprecedented events that are currently taking place globally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are not captured by the GSoD Indices data. However, International IDEA

TABLE 2

**Democracy and SDG 16 targets**

SDG 16 TARGET	DESCRIPTION	OVERALL PROGRESS/REGRESS
SDG 16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.	Declines ↓
SDG 16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.	Declines ↓
SDG 16.5	Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms.	Advances ↑
SDG 16.6	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.	Mixed results →
SDG 16.7	Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.	Mixed results →
SDG 16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.	Declines ↓

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<https://www.idea.int/gso-d-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

has developed a project entitled ‘The Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights’, which is a qualitative monitor and an online, ‘one-stop-shop’ global monitoring tool of the democracy and human rights implications of measures adopted by governments around the world in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, specifically in the 162 countries included in the GSoD Indices (International IDEA 2020b).

The findings so far already show numerous cases of potential or de facto infringements on civil liberties (in areas such as freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and freedom of association and assembly). The Monitor reports that there have been alleged or confirmed reports of excessive police force to enforce COVID-19 restrictions in at least 30 countries. The measures have also resulted in many instances of election delays, or elections taking place despite the risks posed by the pandemic (International IDEA 2020c). Moreover, there are numerous cases of assaults on people’s personal integrity and security, with government-sanctioned mobile phone apps being used for contact tracing, with potential ramifications for privacy and the risk of personal data being used for political purposes other than fighting the pandemic in non-democratic contexts. The data from the Global Monitor shows that, as of the end of July 2020, more than half the countries covered (93 out of 162 countries, or 57 per cent) have implemented measures to curb COVID-19 or have experienced developments during the pandemic that have presented concerns from a democracy and human rights perspective, with a clear transgression of democratic standards, because they were either disproportionate, illegal, indefinite or unnecessary in relation to the health threat. Figure 2 depicts the current map of the world with labels for concerning developments

(exclamation mark) and developments to watch (magnifying glass) attached to the respective countries.

The developments during 2020 will likely lead to the SDG 16 targets experiencing some debilitating impacts, particularly in areas concerning civil liberties, but also checks on government, civil society, and personal integrity and security. In concrete terms, SDG 16 targets 6, 7 and 10 are bound to be exposed to this downward trend, and possibly other goals, too.

The analysis below is meant to give context and help to explain Table 3 on GSoD Indices data trends related to SDG 16 targets, and the significant gains and declines at regional and global level between 2015 and 2019. It will examine each of the related targets of SDG 16 as they apply globally and regionally, taking the country as a unit of measurement.

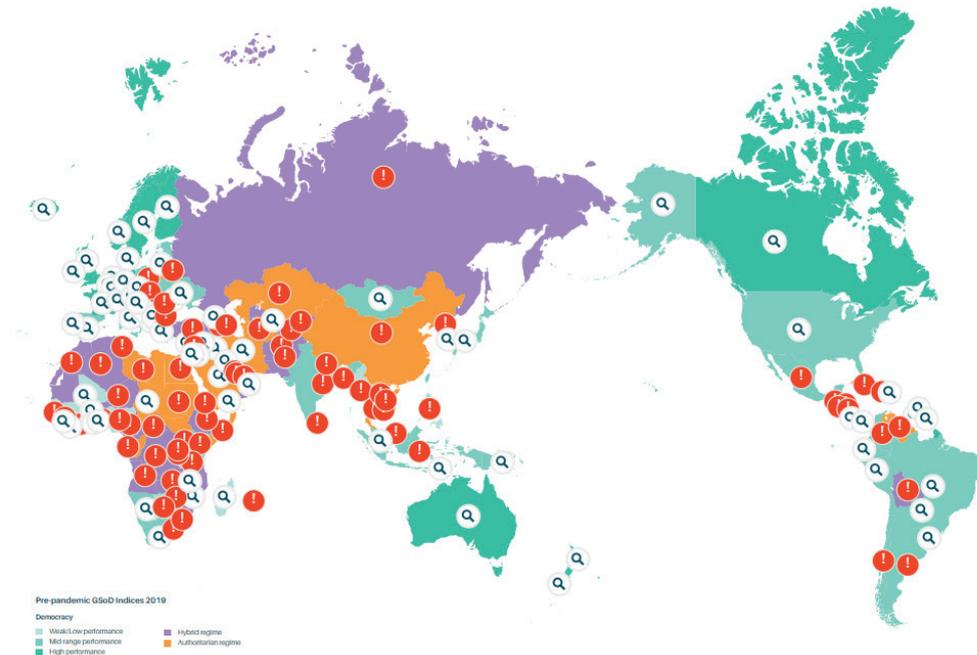
**Target 16.1: Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere**

The GSoD aspect that provides complementary data for target 16.1 on reducing violence is Personal Integrity and Security, which itself feeds into the Civil Liberties subattribute of the Fundamental Rights attribute of the GSoD Indices.

At the global level, the overall performance on GSoD’s Personal Integrity and Security shows regression, with 17 countries experiencing statistically significant declines between 2015 and 2019, compared with 13 countries noting gains for the same time period. Most declines can be identified in Europe, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific, whereas Africa presents a more promising picture.

FIGURE 2

Global map of COVID-19’s impact on democracy and human rights



**Concerning developments** from a democracy and human rights perspective. COVID-19 related measures or developments that violate human rights or democratic benchmarks, because considered either disproportionate, unnecessary, illegal or indefinite.

**Potentially concerning**—to watch COVID-19 related measures or developments to watch from a democracy and human rights perspective. These may lead to a violation of human rights or democratic benchmarks and be considered disproportionate, unnecessary, illegal or indefinite if enforced or maintained over time.

Source: International IDEA, The Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights, <<https://www.idea.int/gso-d-indices/about-covid19>>, accessed 15 August 2020.

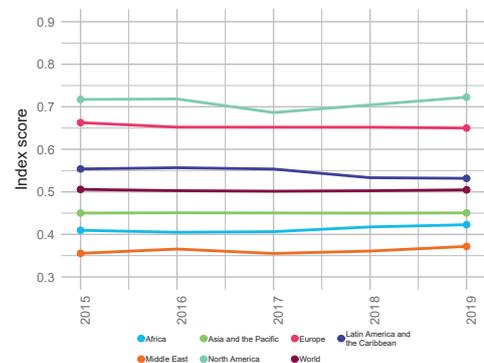
Africa is the only region here with overall progress, recording 5 statistically significant gains. Among those are countries where the baseline is quite low (authoritarian regimes such as Eritrea, or low-performing/weak democracies such as Benin, the Gambia or Guinea-Bissau). These gains are counterbalanced with 2 statistically significant declines in Uganda and Lesotho. On the other hand, Europe is the region with most declines (6), including Turkey, Serbia and Poland. Among the 4 countries that have experienced gains in the same period is Armenia, which made a transition from hybrid regime to a mid-range democracy in 2018. Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean both follow suit, with 4 declines on Personal Integrity and Security each, and 2 gains and 1 gain respectively.

Nevertheless, as Figure 3 shows, despite the noted gains and declines, Europe and North America, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean, continue to stand higher in overall performance and above the world average. Asia and the Pacific is followed by Africa, both below this average, while the Middle East is at the bottom.

The COVID-19 global pandemic is likely to lead to further regression on target 16.1, as International IDEA’s Global Monitor recorded at the end of July 2020 at least 30 countries

with alleged or confirmed reports of use of excessive police force to enforce COVID-19 measures (International IDEA 2020b). And, in late August 2020, the Global Monitor reported that more than a quarter of countries (27 per cent) had concerning developments from a democracy and human rights perspective in Personal Integrity and Security as a result of measures to curb the pandemic.

FIGURE 3  
Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Personal Integrity and Security



Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gso-d-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

### Target 16.3: Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

The GSoD aspects that provide complementary data for target 16.3 on promoting the rule of law are Access to Justice, Judicial Independence and Predictable Enforcement.

The global picture on Access to Justice records 20 declines and 16 gains, whereas on Predictable Enforcement there were 8 gains but 11 declines. However, the picture is somewhat more positive on Judicial Independence where there are more gains (15) than declines (13).

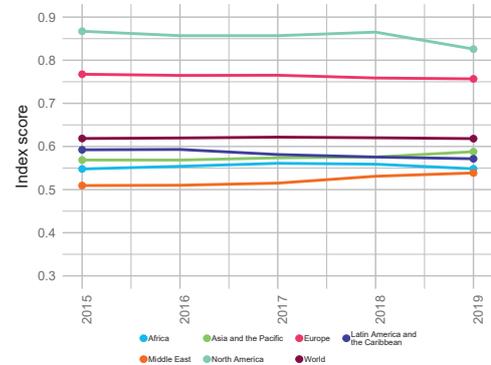
Asia and the Pacific stands out as the region with overall progress in all 3 GSoD aspects measuring this SDG 16 target. There is also notable progress in Africa. However, challenges remain, as levels of Judicial Independence remain particularly poor in Africa as a whole (International IDEA 2019c). By contrast, the situation in Europe is more dispiriting, considering that there is overall regression on 2 aspects (Access to Justice and Judicial Independence) and stagnation on Predictable Enforcement. These challenges are identified mainly across a number of countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where there have been recorded instances of intrusion in the work of the judiciary in a context of democratic backsliding (International IDEA 2019c). It is noteworthy that the Middle East records some overall progress on Access to Justice and Judicial Independence, although average levels remain lower than the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, as Figure 4 on Access to Justice indicates, Europe and North America have continuously had a significantly higher performance than the other regions (the same applies for Judicial Independence and Predictable Enforcement). Asia and the Pacific has been on a par with Latin America and the Caribbean for several years, followed by Africa and the Middle East.

Access to Justice is likely to be severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the limited operability of courts during this time. The Global Monitor records that, as of the end of July 2020, the activity of courts in two-thirds of countries (66 per cent or 107 countries) had been limited during the pandemic, either because of the closure of courts, reduced working hours, reduced caseloads, or the postponement or closure of cases during lockdowns (International IDEA 2020b).

FIGURE 4

### Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Access to Justice



Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

### Target 16.5: Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms

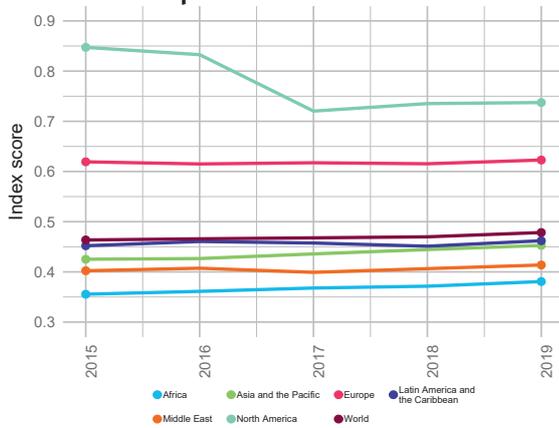
The GSoD aspect that provides complementary data for target 16.5 on reducing corruption is Absence of Corruption, which feeds into the attribute Impartial Administration.

The global picture shows overall progress since 2015, but a number of challenges remain, which translate into serious implications for the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda, as Absence of Corruption is highly correlated with human development (International IDEA 2019a).

Africa notes 14 statistically significant gains, including a number of democracies (Benin, the Gambia, Nigeria), but also hybrid and authoritarian regimes (Ethiopia, Sudan). Asia and the Pacific follows suit with overall progress, with gains noted in a number of countries that continue to be classified as authoritarian or hybrid regimes (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) or new democracies (Malaysia), while experiencing declines in high-performing democracies such as New Zealand. However, it should be noted that levels of corruption in Africa are the highest in the world alongside the Middle East, and those countries that have seen a reduction have gone from high to mid-range levels of corruption, but none has gone down to low levels of corruption. Over half (56 per cent) of countries in Africa suffer from high levels of corruption. Similarly, in Asia and the Pacific, particularly Central Asia and South East Asia, gains are recorded in the fight against corruption. Despite challenges, around 30 per cent of countries in Africa and 17 per cent of countries in Asia and the Pacific have seen levels of corruption fall in the last 5 years (International IDEA 2019a).

FIGURE 5

**Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Absence of Corruption**



Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

**Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels**

The GSoD aspects that provide complementary data for target 16.6 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions are Judicial Independence, Effective Parliament, Free Political Parties and Civil Society Participation. Judicial Independence also features under target 16.3 and will therefore not be elaborated further here.

The GSoD data that feeds into this SDG 16 target testifies to progress made in most regions of the world, with certain challenges remaining. The most visible progress is seen on Effective Parliament and Judicial Independence in most regions of the globe. Asia and the Pacific seems to have seen most overall progress compared with other regions. Data on Civil Society Participation shows a relatively bleak picture for the Americas and Europe. Shrinking civil society space, as well as assaults on civil liberties in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and South Europe, have translated into lower scores for Europe on this GSoD aspect.

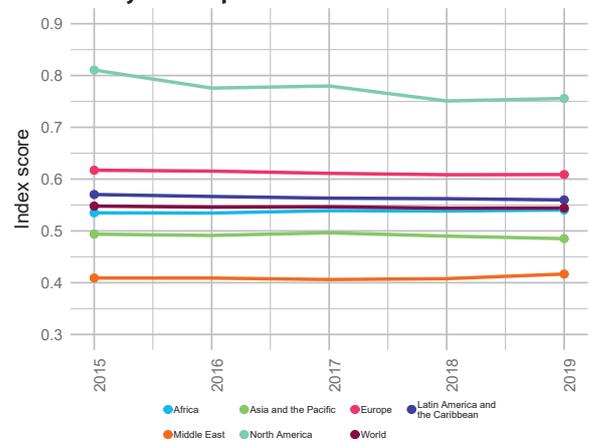
As Figure 6 on Civil Society Participation shows, North America and Europe stand above the world average. Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Africa are close to the world average, whereas Asia and the Pacific, and the Middle East are both still positioned quite firmly below this average.

The data from International IDEA’s Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights portrays a worrying picture with regard to this target. For example, the aspect of Effective Parliament is likely

to experience some setbacks due to the parliamentary limitations experienced as a result of measures against the pandemic. The Global Monitor records that parliaments in 34 countries have been suspended at some point during the pandemic due to lockdown measures. Likewise, Civil Society Participation has been affected by constraints imposed on freedom of movement and freedom of association and assembly (International IDEA 2020b).

FIGURE 6

**Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Civil Society Participation**



Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

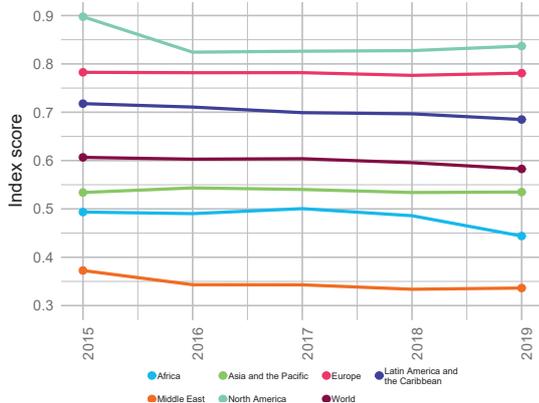
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

**Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels**

Target 16.7 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making is complemented by data from a wide range of GSoD aspects: Elected Government, Clean Elections, Electoral Participation, Effective Parliament, Local Democracy and Social Group Equality. Globally, considerable overall progress has been achieved on Elected Government and Effective Parliament, whereas on Clean Elections and Social Group Equality there are more declines than gains. On Clean Elections (see Figure 7), some of the underlying challenges relate to the curtailment of opposition political parties, the manipulation of the election process by the incumbent parties and voter intimidation (International IDEA 2019c). Effective Parliament, on the other hand, has seen some progress, which is testament to the legislative’s application of oversight powers on the executive in several countries in Africa, and Asia and the Pacific in particular. Social Group Equality has seen some gains in Africa.

FIGURE 7

**Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Clean Elections**



Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an acute impact on some of the GSoD aspects related to this SDG target, particularly in relation to electoral processes. As of early September 2020,

International IDEA recorded that at least 70 countries or territories had decided to postpone their elections (either national or subnational), which was more than the number of countries (60) deciding to go ahead with elections during the pandemic. This has resulted in serious disruptions to election cycles, giving rise to concerns about government legitimacy in some contexts. In other cases, governments have gone ahead with elections, despite the unfavourable conditions for holding them, aiming to damage the opposition and ensure a win for the incumbent party (International IDEA 2020b).

**Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements**

The GSoD aspects that provide complementary data for target 16.10 on public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms are Freedom of Expression, Media Integrity, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, and Freedom of Association and Assembly. At the global level, this is the target that is facing most challenges regardless of the region. The results indicate quite a bleak picture globally.

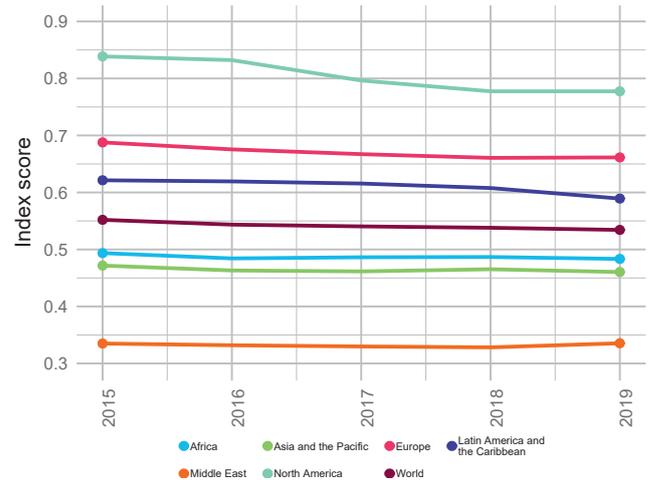
Public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms are on the retreat regardless of the region. This reinforces the widely discussed claim that some of the challenges facing democracy today are the curtailment of civic space, democratic backsliding and erosion, and encroaching authoritarian tendencies by governments that tend to undermine fundamental rights (International IDEA 2019c).

Africa has recorded overall regression on all GSoD aspects related to this target (Freedom of Expression, Media Integrity, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Association and Assembly). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the number of declines is just as comprehensive as in Africa. The picture looks just as bleak in Europe, where populist gains coupled with authoritarian tendencies of self-aggrandizing leaders have impacted on reversal of gains such as on Freedom of Expression and Media Integrity.

Figure 8 (Freedom of Expression) and Figure 9 (Freedom of Association and Assembly) illustrate the comparative angle of performance regionally between 2015 and 2019. Despite the noted gains and declines on each of these 2 aspects, the overall performance of regions is quite similar from 2015 to 2019.

FIGURE 8

**Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Freedom of Expression**



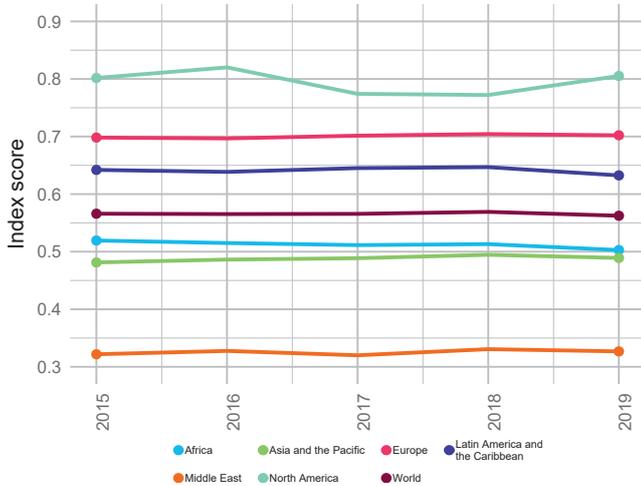
Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

The current crisis of COVID-19 is likely to cause severe challenges to target 16.10. Regardless of whether governments have announced states of emergencies or other measures, there have been unprecedented curtailments on Freedom of Movement, and Freedom of Association and Assembly during the pandemic. Further, many countries have taken steps to limit Freedom of Expression as a way of reining in disinformation or, more worryingly, to crack down on independent media (International IDEA 2020b). The Global Monitor records that at least 137 countries (or 84 per cent of countries) have placed some form of restrictions on Freedom of Assembly since the start of the pandemic, either banning public gatherings or restricting their size.

FIGURE 9

**Comparative regional differences between 2015 and 2019 for Freedom of Association and Assembly**



Note: All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement.

Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices, 1975–2019, <<http://www.idea.int/gso-d-indices>>, accessed 12 August 2020.

By 27 July, restrictions remained in place in at least 38 per cent (52) of those countries. Moreover, at least 64 countries (40 of the 162 countries covered by the GSoD Indices) have passed laws or taken action to restrict Freedom of Expression during the pandemic, often with the argument of combating disinformation about the virus. Actions include journalists, news outlets, citizens, activists or opposition politicians being detained, arrested or investigated through criminal cases for spreading information or reporting on the virus.

**4. Conclusion**

This *GSoD In Focus* provides an update on the GSoD Indices’ data that is complementary to the measurement of SDG 16 targets. The data presented is anchored around International IDEA’s conceptual framework on democracy, which rests on two fundamental principles: popular control over decision-making, and political equality among those exercising that control.

As regards the GSoD data presented herein, progress at the global level was far from certain already at the end of 2019, prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several statistically significant declines experienced across many regions show potentially disconcerting trends. This is due to several challenges facing democracy today, such as a shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding and erosion, and encroaching authoritarian tendencies by governments, which in turn weaken fundamental rights. Europe, North

America, and Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced considerable setbacks across the board, while SDG 16 targets 1, 6, 7 and 10 especially are experiencing setbacks elsewhere too. Having said that, Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific, are the 2 regions with the most gains, even though their overall progress stemming from their 2015 baseline remains below that of Europe and North America, as does the Middle East.

The data presented here extends only to the end of 2019, which means that the unfathomable global developments unfolding with the COVID-19 pandemic are not captured currently by the GSoD data. Nevertheless, International IDEA has already been working extensively in developing a Global Monitor of COVID-19’s Impact on Democracy and Human Rights for 162 countries. Although it is still early to make definitive judgements, the emerging data from this Monitor depicts worrying trends that will most likely have an impact on areas such as civil liberties, civil society participation and clean elections. This means that the likelihood that we will be witnessing quite stark and precipitous declines across the SDG 16 targets for 2020, and possibly beyond, is unfortunately quite high.

TABLE 3

**GSoD data trends related to SDG 16 targets on the number of countries with significant gains versus declines at global and regional levels between 2015 and 2019**

SDG 16	GSoD aspect	Global		Africa		Middle East		Latin America and the Caribbean		North America		Asia and the Pacific		Europe		
		Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	
SDG 16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	13	17	5	2	1	1	1	1	4	0	0	2	4	4	6
SDG 16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	16	20	7	9	2	0	1	1	3	0	1	4	1	2	6
	Judicial Independence	15	13	2	3	1	0	3	2	0	0	0	6	3	3	3
SDG 16.5	Predictable Enforcement	8	11	3	2	0	1	1	1	3	0	2	2	1	2	2
	Absence of Corruption	29	16	14	6	1	1	3	1	0	2	2	7	2	4	4
SDG 16.6	Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms	15	13	2	3	1	0	3	2	0	0	0	6	3	3	5
	Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	25	21	9	8	0	2	4	1	0	2	2	8	4	4	4
SDG 16.7	Free Political Parties	7	21	1	7	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	3	2	3	7
	Civil Society Participation	4	13	1	3	1	0	0	4	0	1	1	1	1	1	4
SDG 16.7	Elected Government	3	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Clean Elections	14	28	3	14	0	1	1	1	4	1	1	5	4	4	4
SDG 16.7	Electoral Participation	15	19	6	7	0	2	2	3	0	0	0	2	3	5	4
	Effective Parliament	25	21	9	8	0	2	4	1	0	2	2	8	4	4	4
SDG 16.7	Local Democracy	14	14	5	5	3	1	0	2	0	0	0	3	1	3	5
	Social Group Equality	8	14	6	2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	6	1	3
SDG 16.10	Freedom of Expression	18	35	6	10	0	1	3	8	0	1	6	7	3	3	8
	Media Integrity	10	26	5	8	0	1	1	6	0	0	3	6	1	5	
SDG 16.10	Freedom of Movement	2	22	1	6	0	0	0	7	0	1	1	1	0	0	7
	Freedom of Religion	2	16	2	7	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	4
SDG 16.10	Freedom of Association and Assembly	13	28	4	11	0	3	1	4	0	0	5	6	3	4	4

■ Red denotes overall regression (number of countries with declines is greater than the number of countries with gains)

■ Yellow denotes overall stagnation (number of countries with declines is equal to the number of countries with gains, or there are no declines or gains)

■ Green denotes overall progress (number of countries with gains is greater than the number of countries with declines).

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## Colophon

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In 2018, International IDEA launched the *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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## 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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