

## THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE GSoD INDICES, REVISED EDITION

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### SUMMARY

This GSoD In Focus explores the contribution that the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices can make to reviewing progress on the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In September 2015, world leaders called for a 'new chapter' in global development to be achieved by 2030 through 17 SDGs that range from ending poverty to taking urgent action to combat climate change. In 2023, we have reached the halfway point and many challenges remain, if we are to ensure that no one is left behind.

The UN system and member states, regional and international organizations, civil society, academia, the private sector, and other stakeholders can use the GSoD Indices to complement official indicators, in order to track trends in achieving the SDGs and their targets. In this regard, the GSoD Indices can be used to provide data on the SDGs for poverty (SDG 1), hunger (2), health and well-being (3), education (4), gender equality (5), inequality (10), and peace, justice and strong institutions (16).

This GSoD In Focus is an update of the 2019 [GSoD In Focus No. 5](#). It reflects updates in International IDEA's GSoD Indices (conducted in 2023).

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**The GSoD Indices measure democratic performance in 173 countries and provide data to track progress on 7 SDGs (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 16).**

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

International IDEA launched the GSoD Initiative in 2016. It provides evidence-based, nuanced analysis and data on the state and quality of democracy in 173 countries across the world. It aims to contribute to the public debate on democracy and inform policy interventions to strengthen democracy.

The GSoD Indices measure performance across a broad range of indicators of democracy, covering 173 countries from 1975 to 2022. The GSoD Indices are built on a conceptual framework that organizes specific metrics of democratic performance into four distinct categories: Representation, Rights, Rule of Law, and Participation. These categories are considered individually and are not combined into a single score for democracy.

**International IDEA's vision is a world in which everyone lives in inclusive and resilient democracies with accountable actors, institutions, and processes that respond to citizens' needs, protect human rights and deliver sustainable development.**

## **2. INTERNATIONAL IDEA, DEMOCRACY AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

International IDEA's vision is a world in which everyone lives in inclusive and resilient democracies with accountable actors, institutions, and processes that respond to citizens' needs, protect human rights and deliver sustainable development. This vision is anchored in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Institute believes that democratic principles are core to (and important enablers of) achieving the 2030 Agenda's objectives. These principles, which include rule of law; access to justice; accountable and transparent institutions; responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision making in line with the 'Leave no one behind' principle; and fundamental freedoms, are cornerstones to meeting the SDGs.

International IDEA's vision stems from its definition of democracy as a political system that is based on principles of 'popular control' over decision making and 'political equality' among those exercising that control. The Institute's understanding of democracy echoes a core value enshrined in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to which the 'will of the people' is the basis for the authority of governments. This reflects a common and universal desire for peace, security, and justice. International IDEA believes that democracy is a universal human aspiration based on universal principles and an experience that is pursued and lived in different ways around the world; that democracy comes in multiple forms; and that these forms are constantly evolving.

Democracy is a power-sharing mechanism that seeks to guarantee equality and basic rights and freedoms, empower ordinary people, resolve disagreements through peaceful dialogue, respect differences, and drive political and social renewal through institutional channels. International IDEA's broad concept of democracy extends beyond free and fair elections to encompass civil and political rights; social, economic and cultural rights; democratic governance; the rule of law; and political participation.

International IDEA believes that advancing democracy is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda, which is suffering from setbacks as highlighted in the 2023 report by the UN Secretary-General on progress towards the SDGs ([UN DESA 2023](#)). Democracy guarantees citizens the basic right to actively participate in their communities. Through free and fair elections, and the exercise of freedom of expression and association, people can engage in discussions and influence

public decisions and policies. This enhances the quality of public policies—from quality education (SDG 4) to climate action (SDG 13)—and increases the likelihood that they align with people’s needs.

Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, ensuring access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, are essential tasks if we are to meet the SDGs. SDG 16, which embodies these principles, is a cornerstone of the entire 2030 Agenda and is built upon the premise that democracy, peace, and sustainable development are inseparable (International IDEA Secretary-General 2023).

International IDEA has advocated within the UN that SDG 16 should be emphasized in the SDG Summit and in UN negotiations through its role as an enabler and accelerator of the 2030 Agenda. Measuring progress towards SDG 16 is therefore of utmost importance. International IDEA contributes to this evaluation through its GSoD Indices, which include metrics for all key dimensions of SDG 16, including peace, inclusivity, and access to justice.

The SDG16 Data Initiative, a consortium of 18 organizations, including International IDEA, seeks to support the open tracking of global commitments made by more than 193 countries in 2015. It also provides complementary measures and analysis of several targets and indicators of SDG 16. The initiative shows the complementary value of non-official data to monitor progress and deepen the analysis of access to justice, inclusive institutions, and the rule of law.

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### 3. THE GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY INDICES

Developed with academic rigour, the GSoD Indices are designed to be user-friendly for policymakers and civil society organizations working at global, regional and national levels. Democratic trends are depicted within a conceptual framework comprising four categories of democracy, which link to 28 factors and subfactors (see Figure 1). The categories and factors are as follows:

1. Representation covers the extent to which access to political power is free and equal, as demonstrated by competitive, inclusive and regular elections. It includes six factors: Credible Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties, Elected Government, Local Democracy and Effective Parliament.
2. Rights, as a category, addresses 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 intersects with international covenants on civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights. It includes four factors: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, Political Equality and Basic Welfare. Political Equality encompasses Gender

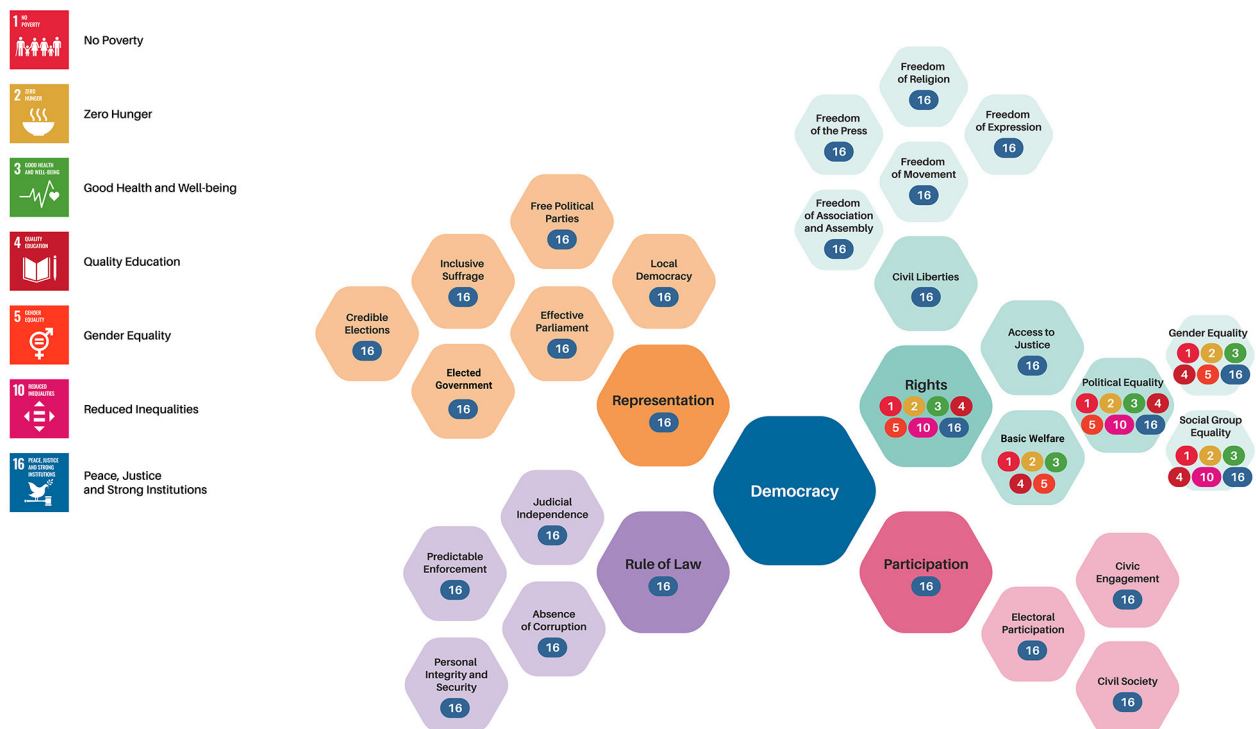
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**The GSoD Indices measure democratic performance across four dimensions: Representation, Rights, Rule of law and Participation.**

Equality and Social Group Equality. Civil Liberties includes the following subfactors: Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, and Freedom of the Press.

3. Rule of Law measures effective control of executive power through continuous public scrutiny and accountability. It includes four factors: Judicial Independence, Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement, and Personal Integrity and Security.
4. Participation measures the means and achievement of people's participation and societal engagement at different levels. It includes three factors: Civil Society, Electoral Participation and Civic Engagement.

Figure 1. The GSoD Indices: Conceptual framework and the SDGs



The Indices provide country-level data for 173 countries dating back to 1975 and are updated on an annual basis. The interactive database is freely available online (<https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gso-d-indices>).

The GSoD Indices are composite measures built from 157 individual indicators from 20 data sets collected and compiled by other organizations using different types of sources, including expert surveys, standards-based coding by research groups and analysts, and observational data. The GSoD Indices include estimated values for 28 indicators (categories and factors) per

country per year. All the indicators are scaled to vary between 0 and 1, with 0 representing the lowest achievement in the whole sample and 1 the highest.

For a full list of the data sets and indicators used in the GSoD Indices, see [the Global State of Democracy Indices Codebook](#) or GSoD In Focus No. 1 (International IDEA 2018). Further details on the Indices' conceptual distinctions and conceptual framework and the measurement procedures on which they are based can be found in the Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology ([Skaaning and Hudson 2023](#)).

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#### 4. HOW THE GSoD INDICES CONTRIBUTE TO MONITORING THE SDGS

Monitoring progress is essential to the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda. Effective implementation of the SDGs depends on ownership of the process, and the monitoring of action at local, national and international levels. People-centred monitoring of the SDGs is both empowering and ambitious. At the national level, the GSoD Indices can contribute to monitoring and reporting on the SDGs through, for example, the Voluntary National Reviews. As implementation is the responsibility of UN member states, and national ownership is central to achieving the SDGs, data gathered through the GSoD Indices may help countries track their progress towards the SDGs and their targets. Likewise, since the GSoD Indices also capture democratic trends at regional and global levels, this data may be used to monitor and report on SDG progress beyond national borders. It is worth noting that the GSoD Indices often provide data that could otherwise be missed, thereby supplementing official indicators.

The GSoD Indices focus on democracy. International IDEA understands democracy as a broad concept encompassing elements of civil and political rights, social and economic rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law. This holistic understanding of democracy ensures that the GSoD Indices measurement framework directly captures data relating to progress on 7 of the 17 SDGs—SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, and 16 (see Table 1). What's more, the GSoD Initiative itself is highly relevant to SDG 17, as the Indices and evidence-based analysis help to strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development.

Through its membership of the SDG16 Data Initiative consortium, International IDEA has contributed to monitoring the progress on various targets of SDG 16. To date, the consortium has developed an online database that tracks progress towards these targets and has published eight global reports. The consortium's SDG16 Data Initiative Report 2023 identifies positive and negative trends and assesses the likelihood of achieving SDG 16 targets, halfway towards the 2030 deadline ([SDG16 Data Initiative 2023](#); [Sachs, Lafortune, Fuller and Drumm 2023](#)). Through its GSoD Indices, International IDEA has contributed significantly to the SDG16 Data Initiative's database and reports.

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**The GSoD Indices help measure progress on 6 of the 12 targets of SDG 16.**

Table 1. The relationship between the SDG targets and the GSoD Indices

SDG	SDG target	SDG indicator	GSoD category	GSoD factor	GSoD subfactor
<b>1 Poverty</b>	<p><b>1.3</b> Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable</p> <p><b>1.4</b> Ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have access to basic services. The UN defines basic services as 'public service provision systems that meet human basic needs' and defines this indicator in terms of access to nine components: drinking water, sanitation, hygiene facilities, clean fuels and technology, mobility, waste collection, health care, education, and information services.</p>	<p><b>1.3.1</b> Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable</p> <p><b>1.4.1</b> Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services</p>	2. Rights	<p>2.3 Basic Welfare</p> <p>2.4 Political Equality</p>	<p>2.4.A Social Group Equality</p> <p>2.4.B Gender Equality</p>
<b>2 Zero Hunger</b>	<p><b>2.1</b> By 2030 end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round</p>	<p><b>2.1.1</b> Prevalence of undernourishment</p> <p><b>2.1.2</b> Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)</p>	2. Rights	<p>2.3 Basic Welfare</p> <p>2.4 Political Equality</p>	<p>2.4.A Social Group Equality</p> <p>2.4.B Gender Equality</p>
<b>3. Good Health and Well-being for all</b>	<p><b>3.8</b> By 2030, achieve universal health coverage including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all</p>	<p><b>3.8.1</b> Coverage of essential health services</p> <p><b>3.8.2</b> Proportion of population with large household expenditures on health as a share of total household expenditure or income. Coverage of essential health services is defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population.</p>	2. Rights	<p>2.3 Basic Welfare</p> <p>2.4 Political Equality</p>	<p>2.4.A Social Group Equality</p> <p>2.4.B Gender Equality</p>

Table 1. The relationship between the SDG targets and the GSoD Indices (cont.)

SDG	SDG target	SDG indicator	GSoD category	GSoD factor	GSoD subfactor
<b>4 Quality Education</b>	<p><b>4.1</b> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes</p> <p><b>4.2</b> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education</p> <p><b>4.3</b> By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university</p> <p><b>4.5</b> By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for all</p>	<p><b>4.1.2</b> The completion rate (primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education)</p> <p><b>4.2.1</b> Proportion of children aged 24–59 months (2–5 years) who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex</p> <p><b>4.2.2</b> Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex</p> <p><b>4.3.1</b> Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex</p> <p><b>4.5.1</b> Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated</p>	2. Rights	<p><b>2.3</b> Basic Welfare</p> <p><b>2.4</b> Political Equality</p>	<p><b>2.4.A</b> Social Group Equality</p> <p><b>2.4.B</b> Gender Equality</p>
<b>5 Gender Equality</b>	<p><b>5.1</b> By 2030, end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p> <p><b>5.5.</b> By 2030, ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p> <p><b>5.6.</b> By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.</p> <p><b>5A.</b> By 2030, undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property</p>	<p><b>5.1.1</b> Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex</p> <p><b>5.5.1</b> Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments</p> <p><b>5.5.2</b> Proportion of women in managerial positions</p> <p><b>5.6.2</b> The number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education</p> <p><b>5.A.1</b> The (a) proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure</p>	2. Rights	<p><b>2.3</b> Basic Welfare</p> <p><b>2.4</b> Political Equality</p>	<b>2.4.B</b> Gender Equality

Table 1. The relationship between the SDG targets and the GSoD Indices (cont.)

SDG	SDG target	SDG indicator	GSoD category	GSoD factor	GSoD subfactor
<b>10 Reduce Inequality</b>	<p><b>10.2</b> By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status</p> <p><b>10.3</b> Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard</p> <p><b>10.4</b> Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality</p>	<p><b>10.2.1</b> The proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</p> <p><b>10.3.1</b> Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law</p> <p><b>10.4.1</b> and <b>10.4.2</b> The labour share of GDP and the redistributive impact of fiscal policy</p>	2. Rights	2.4 Political Equality	2.4.A Social Group Equality

## 5. MEASURING SPECIFIC SDGS AND TARGETS

### The GSoD Indices and SDGs 1 to 4

International IDEA measures Basic Welfare under the GSoD Indices Rights category. Basic Welfare measures the material and social dimensions of democracy (e.g., access to and outcomes of nutrition, healthcare and education). It is measured according to a set of standard observable human development indicators: infant mortality rate, life expectancy, supply of kilocalories per person per day, literacy rate and average years of schooling. In addition, two expert-based indicators assess whether everyone in each society has access to basic education and healthcare. Together, these indicators reflect the extent to which the basic needs of the population are being met. They relate to SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 2 on nutrition, SDG 3 on health and SDG 4 on education and are drawn from the United Nations.

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 5

The GSoD Indices allow the tracking of SDG 5 (Gender Equality), which aims to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. The GSoD Indices measures Gender Equality through its Rights category and Political Equality factor. The Gender Equality subfactor indicators map power distributed by gender, women's access to public services and spaces, women's participation in civil society organizations, women's versus men's mean years of schooling, the proportion of lower chamber female legislators, and the appointment of women at cabinet level. The Indices also measure exclusion by gender, women's empowerment, and women's political and economic rights. Furthermore, the GSoD Indices are gender-sensitive and provide gender-disaggregated data wherever possible. Three Rights factors and subfactors—Access to Justice, Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Movement—provide



**Table 2. The relationship between the SDG target 16 and the GSoD Indices**

SDG	SDG target	SDG indicator	GSoD category	GSoD factor	GSoD subfactor
<b>16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions</b>	<b>16.1</b> By 2030, significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths rates across all countries	<b>16.1.1</b> Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age <b>16.1.2</b> Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause <b>16.1.3</b> Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months <b>16.1.4</b> Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark	<b>3.</b> Rule of Law	<b>3.4</b> Personal Integrity and Security	
	<b>16.3</b> By 2030, promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all across all countries	<b>16.3.1</b> Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms <b>16.3.2</b> Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population	<b>2.</b> Rights <b>3.</b> Rule of Law	<b>2.1</b> Access to Justice <b>3.1.</b> Judicial Independence <b>3.3</b> Predictable Enforcement	
	<b>16.5</b> By 2030, substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms across all countries	<b>16.5.1</b> Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months <b>16.5.2</b> Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months	<b>3.</b> Rule of Law	<b>3.2</b> Absence of Corruption	
	<b>16.6</b> By 2030, develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	<b>16.6.1</b> Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar) <b>16.6.2</b> Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services	<b>1.</b> Representation <b>3.</b> Rule of Law <b>4.</b> Participation	<b>1.3</b> Free Political Parties <b>1.4</b> Elected Government <b>1.5</b> Effective Parliament <b>1.6</b> Local Democracy  <b>3.1</b> Judicial Independence <b>3.3</b> Predictable Enforcement  <b>4.1</b> Civil Society <b>4.2</b> Civic Engagement	

**Table 2. The relationship between the SDG target 16 and the GSoD Indices (cont.)**

SDG	SDG target	SDG indicator	GSoD category	GSoD factor	GSoD subfactor
	<b>16.7</b> By 2030, ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	<b>16.7.1</b> Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions, by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups <b>16.7.2</b> Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group	1. Representation 2. Rights 3. Rule of Law 4. Participation	1.1 Credible Elections 1.2 Inclusive Suffrage 1.3 Free Political Parties 1.4 Elected Government 1.5 Effective Parliament 1.6 Local Democracy  2.1 Access to Justice 2.4 Political Equality  3.1 Judicial Independence  4.1. Civil Society 4.2 Civic Engagement 4.3 Electoral Participation	2.4.A Social Group Equality 2.4.B Gender Equality
	<b>16.10</b> By 2030, ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	<b>16.10.1</b> Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months <b>16.10.2</b> Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information	2. Rights 3. Rule of Law	2.2. Civil Liberties 3.3 Predictable Enforcement 3.4 Personal Integrity and Security	2.2.A Freedom of Expression 2.2.C Freedom of Association and Assembly 2.2.D Freedom of Religion 2.2.E Freedom of Movement 2.2.F Freedom of the Press

gender-disaggregated data (Access to Justice for Men and Women, Freedom of Discussion for Men and Women, Freedom of Domestic Movement for Men and Women).

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 10

Within the Rights category and Political Equality factor, the GSoD Indices measure Social Group Inequality. They track social class and identity group inequalities with regard to civil liberties and political power distribution. Four indices provide measures of socio-economic, political, social and urban–rural exclusion. This includes access to public services or participation in governed spaces, access to state jobs, and access to state business opportunities, as well as assessing the exclusion of individuals denied access to services or participation in governed spaces. These Indices are supplemented by indicators of equality treatment and political equality. The Participation category and the Civil Society factor of the GSoD Indices measure civic engagement in the form of freedom of public discourse, engagement of civil society or the extent to which civil society is consulted in policymaking.

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 16

The GSoD Indices provide valuable insights into country-, regional- and global-level progress on SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). SDG 16 builds on the premise that democratic governance matters: it states that peaceful and inclusive societies are central to achieving all other development goals. It reflects a commonly accepted understanding that democracy, peace, and development are inherently intertwined, and that representative and participatory institutions, reducing violence, limiting executive power, rule of law, delivering justice, and combating corruption are essential to achieving sustainable development.

As Table 2 illustrates, the GSoD Indices provide insight into 6 of the 12 targets under SDG 16. The GSoD Indices measure SDG 16 through a combination of its categories on Representation, Rights, Rule of Law, and Participation.

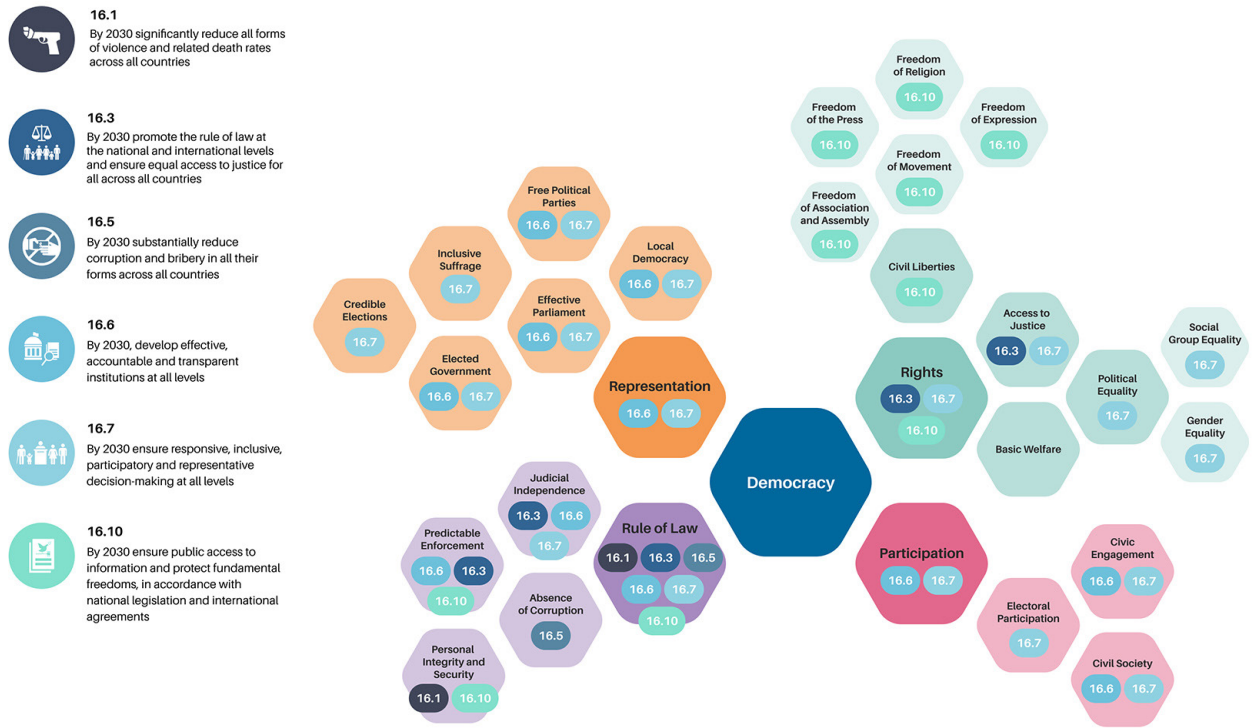
Under the GSoD Rights category, this is reflected in the Civil Liberties subfactors of Freedom of Expression, Freedom of the Press, Freedom of Assembly and Association, Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Movement, which together measure the extent to which these fundamental rights are respected.

Under the GSoD Representation category, the subfactors Credible Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties, Elected Government, Effective Parliament and Local Democracy track the freedom and fairness of elections, voting rights, the freedom of political parties to operate and stand for elections, the extent to which institutions are filled through elections, the oversight powers of parliament and the extent to which citizens can participate in free elections for local governments.

Under the GSoD Rule of Law category, the factors of Judicial Independence, Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement and Personal Integrity and Security measure the limits of political power, public scrutiny and the integrity of public administration and the judiciary. The GSoD measure for rule of law is an innovation in the GSoD conceptual framework, providing a single, reliable indicator of rule of law based on the hierarchical arrangement of Indices illustrated in Figure 2.

Under the GSoD Participation category, the factors of Civil Society and Civic Engagement measure citizen participation. The factor of Civil Society measures the extent to which the legal and political context supports civil society organizations and activities, as well as the strength of interest groups and of social capital. The Civic Engagement factor captures the extent to which people engage in political and non-political associations, and trade unions, as well as civil society traditions.

Figure 2. GSoD Indices and SDG 16



## 6. THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Citizens, parliaments, civil society organizations and watchdog organizations play a critical role in advancing the UN 2030 Agenda as they hold policymakers and political leaders to account on progress towards achieving the SDGs. In addition—alongside states—academia, international and regional organizations, subnational and local authorities, and the private sector play an important role in this work. Accountability is not an exclusive prerogative of democracies, but ‘the success of efforts to attain sustainable development is related to the quality (and representativeness) of the institutions responsible for its achievement’ (International IDEA 2015: 2). This is democratic accountability, which is people-centred and participatory; it aims to protect minorities and disadvantaged groups; it builds openness and transparency; and it underscores answerability, responsiveness and enforceability until objectives are reached (International IDEA 2015).

Democratic accountability, therefore, refers to myriad ways in which people, political parties, parliaments, media, civil society, academia, and other actors provide feedback to, reward or sanction officials responsible for setting and enacting public policy (Bjuremalm, Gibaja and Valladares Molleda 2014). This ‘citizen-led approach’ to democracy assessment (International IDEA 2014) and to accountability makes the SDG monitoring framework truly people-centred. The combination of traditional development data with other measurements of

countries' political systems makes the GSoD Indices a powerful accountability instrument.

In 2023, with just seven years left to deliver the 2030 SDG agenda of transformational change, political leaders and public institutions will need to rally all stakeholders around the SDGs and strengthen collaboration, while building trust and accountability. To reap the benefits of data collection and analysis, the monitoring, follow-up and review of the SDGs must be taken to the next level by encouraging public engagement in policymaking and decision making. Strengthening international collaboration will also enhance national and subnational accountability mechanisms, and in doing so, will accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs (UN DESA 2023).

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**A 'citizen-led approach' to democracy assessment and to accountability makes the SDG monitoring framework truly people-centred.**

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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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