

# Chapter 1

## The global democracy landscape

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

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

### GLOBAL PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



#### Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

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

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

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

One of the targets where advances outnumber declines is SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. However, more sustained progress

is needed on this target as 43 per cent of countries in the world still have high levels of corruption, which is a key impediment to human development.

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



#### Gender Equality

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

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

## KEY FINDINGS



### Positive developments

- More than half of the countries in the world (62 per cent, or 97 countries) covered by the GSoD Indices are now democratic (compared to only 26 per cent in 1975), and more than half (57 per cent) of the world's population now lives in some form of democracy, compared to 36 per cent in 1975.
- The number of democracies continues to rise, from 90 in 2008 to 97 in 2018. This increase has occurred despite a slowdown in global democratic expansion since the mid-1990s.
- Popular demands for democracy are strong even in countries that have never experienced democracy. In 2018, protests and demands for democratic change in Armenia and Malaysia—both seemingly enduring hybrid regimes—led to democratic transitions in those countries. Protests in Algeria, Egypt and Sudan in 2019 demonstrate that democratic aspirations are strong and find expression even in hybrid or non-democratic contexts.
- Other countries (e.g. Ethiopia) have not yet undergone democratic transitions but are experiencing democratic reforms that provide promising prospects for a democratic opening.
- The large majority (81 per cent) of the world's 97 democracies have proven democratically resilient, having maintained their democratic status uninterrupted since 1975 or when they transitioned to democracy.
- On average, democracies have higher levels of Gender Equality and Human Development and lower levels of corruption than non-democracies and hybrid regimes. Democracies are also generally better countries in which to do business than non-democracies and hybrid regimes.
- The aspect of democracy that matters most for Human Development is Absence of Corruption. The less corrupt a country is, the more likely it is to have high levels of Human Development and vice versa.
- The number of democratic re-transitions is on the increase, pointing to the democratic fragility of many newer democracies. The number of weak democracies with low democratic quality is also increasing. The largest share of weak democracies is in Africa, but they can be found in almost all regions of the world.
- Democratic erosion is on the rise. The share of countries experiencing democratic erosion has more than doubled in the past decade compared to the decade before. North America, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific are the regions most affected by democratic erosion, with more than half of countries in these regions falling into this category. This is also the case for under half of democracies in Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
- There are signs that the quality of the world's high-performing democracies is eroding. The share of democracies with high performance on all five democratic attributes has decreased in the last decade.
- Despite some advances in political gender equality in the past decades, serious efforts are still required to achieve political equality for men and women. At the current rate of progress, it will take another 46 years to reach gender parity in parliaments (see Figure 1.23).
- In all regions of the world, and across all regime types, civic space is shrinking.
- Democratic backsliding is a particular form of democratic erosion involving the gradual and intentional weakening of checks and balances and curtailment of civil liberties. This phenomenon has become more frequent in the last decade. A total of 10 countries in the world are currently experiencing democratic backsliding.
- Venezuela represents the most severe democratic backsliding case in the past four decades. Venezuela is the only country that has gone from being a democracy with high levels of Representative Government in 1975 to a non-democracy (since 2017).
- The share of hybrid regimes has increased in the last decades. In the majority of cases, hybridity is not a transitional stage towards democracy but a defining feature of the regime. Of the world's hybrid regimes, 71 per cent have never been democracies. This is also the case for 67 per cent of the world's non-democracies.
- Non-democracies and hybrid regimes, taken together, still represent a significant share of countries (38 per cent) and of the world's population (43 per cent).
- While a number of hybrid regimes and non-democracies have seen some advances in their democratic indicators in the past 10 years, a significant number have also experienced deepening autocratization and become more repressive.



### Challenges to democracy

- Despite the continued quantitative increase in the world's democracies, the quality of the world's democracies is eroding.
- While a number of hybrid regimes and non-democracies have seen some advances in their democratic indicators in the past 10 years, a significant number have also experienced deepening autocratization and become more repressive.

## 1.1. Global democratic trends

### 1.1.1. Introduction

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

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

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

FIGURE 1.1

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



TABLE 1.1

## Democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals

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

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

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

This section provides an overview of key global democratic trends, commencing with the advances and opportunities for democracy, followed by the key challenges facing democracies today. The analysis begins by briefly examining democratic trends from a long-term perspective, looking at

developments in the last four decades, and then continues with a focus on key developments in the last five years (i.e. the period 2013–2018). A selection of issues in the current global democracy landscape are analysed in more depth in Section 1.2.

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

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

### 1.1.2. Encouraging democratic trends: advances and opportunities

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

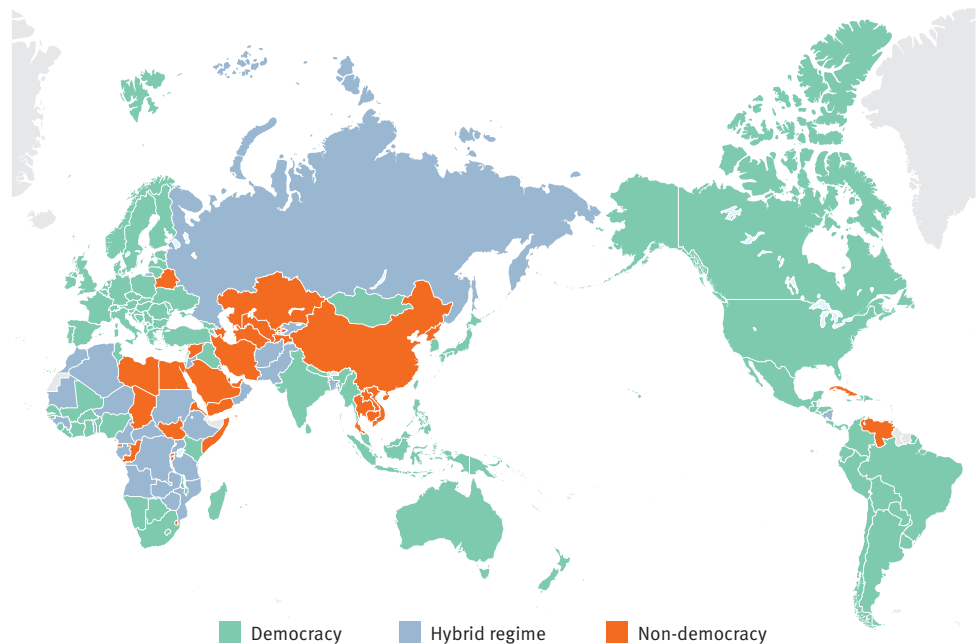
#### *The number of democracies continues to grow*

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

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

FIGURE 1.2

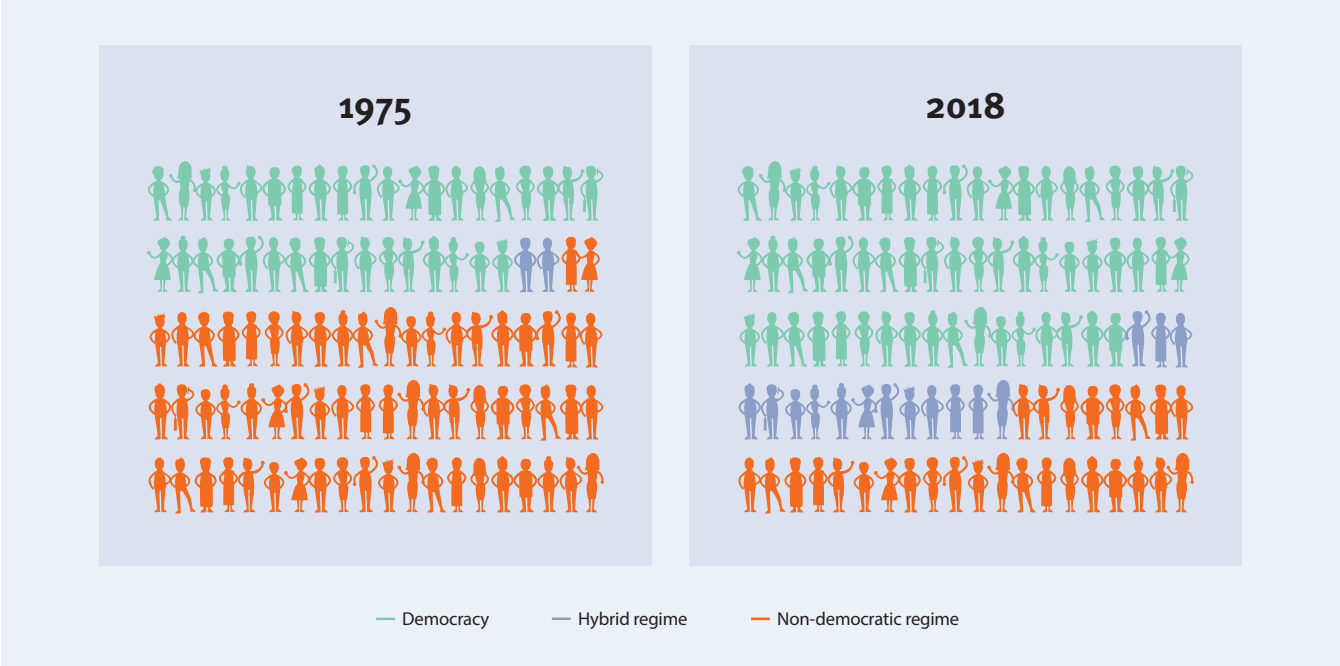
Map of the world by regime type, 2018



**Notes:** Land areas marked in grey are not included in the analysis as they either are territories or have a population of less than one million.  
**Source:** International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

FIGURE 1.3

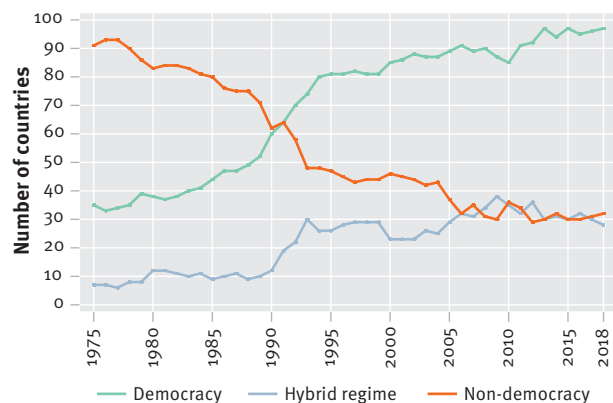
Population living in each regime type, 1975–2018



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

FIGURE 1.4

### Regime types, 1975–2018



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

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

The largest democratic expansion occurred between 1985 and 1995, when 39 countries became democracies. Of these, more than one-quarter (28 per cent) were new countries that gained independence, typically following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet/Communist bloc. Subsequently, the pace of democratic expansion slowed but continued uninterrupted until 2006. Since then, the number of democracies has continued to increase (from 90 in 2008 to 97 in 2018), although several year-to-year fluctuations have also occurred. For example, a dip

in 2009–2010 was caused by several countries sliding into hybridity, including Honduras and Madagascar (in 2009), and Burundi, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti and Sri Lanka (in 2010). There was also a noticeable increase between 2010 and 2013, and some smaller variations have been observed since then.

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

### Democratic progress continues worldwide

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

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

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

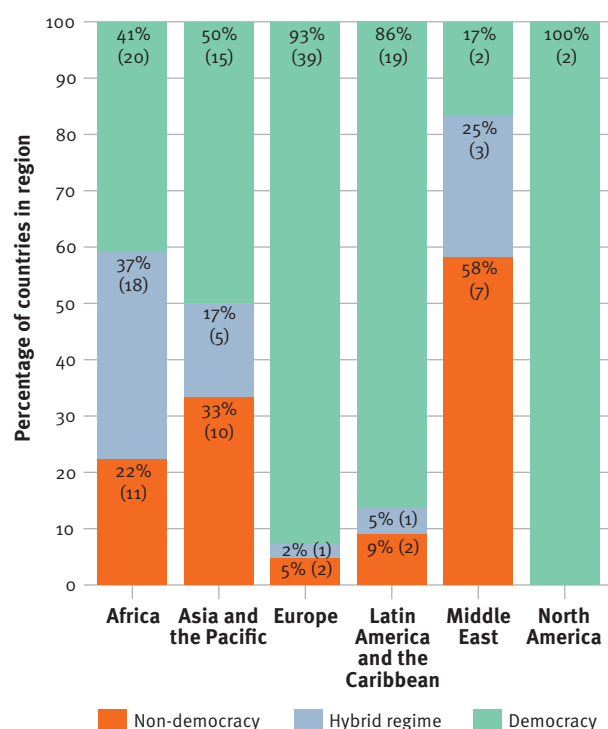
**A number of aspects of democracy have been particularly strengthened during the democratic expansion of the last four decades.** Significant global progress has been made in the quality of elections, the effectiveness of parliaments,

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



FIGURE 1.5

### Number and percentage of regime types per region, 2018



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

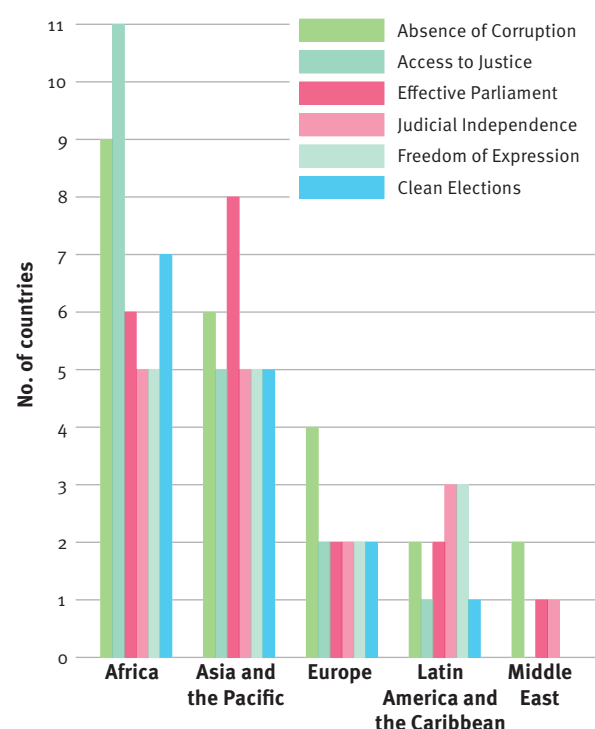
Local Democracy and levels of Electoral Participation. Furthermore, there has been an increase in freedom for political parties, enhanced Media Integrity and increased levels of Civil Society Participation. Globally, Checks on Government have been strengthened, suffrage has become more inclusive and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

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

Despite the long-term gains observed in these aspects of democracy, in the past five years, the number of countries

FIGURE 1.6

### Advances in democratic aspects by region, 2013–2018



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

with significant declines outnumber those with advances in each of those dimensions, except for Effective Parliament and Access to Justice, which have seen an equal amount of countries declining and advancing (see section on Concerning democratic trends: challenges).

### Democracy comes in many shapes and democratic performance patterns

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

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

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

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

FIGURE 1.7

### Democratic performance patterns in 2018, global level



**Notes:** Distribution and performance patterns of the world's 97 democracies. The blue bars on the right indicate the number of countries in each performance pattern.  
**Source:** International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.



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

### ***Democracy has proven resilient over time***

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

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

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

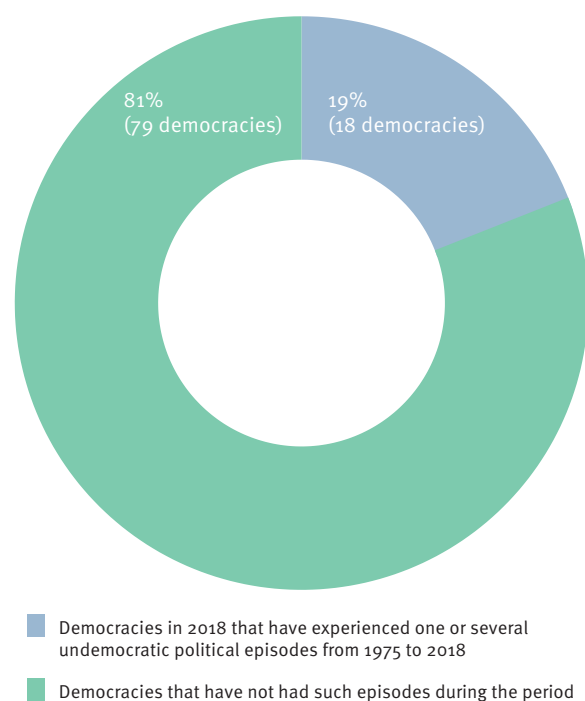
### ***Some hybrid and non-democratic regimes have made incremental gains***

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

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

**FIGURE 1.8**

### **Interruptions to democracy, 1975–2018**



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

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

### ***Democracy as an enabler of sustainable development***

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

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

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

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

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

viewed as outcomes of democracy, rather than defining characteristics (Munck 2016).

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

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

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

TABLE 1.2

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Democracies have on average significantly lower levels of corruption than non-democracies and hybrid regimes.**

The aspect of democracy that has the highest correlation with Basic Welfare and Human Development is Absence of Corruption. In other words, the more corrupt a country is, the more likely it is to have low levels of Human Development and vice versa.

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

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

TABLE 1.3

Average score by regime type and aspect of democracy, 2018

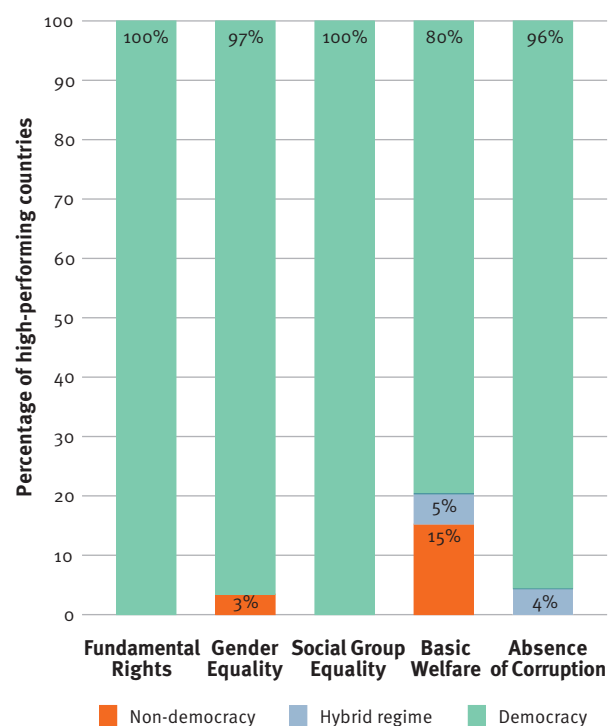
Attribute	Average GSoD Indices score		
	Democracies (n=97)	Hybrid regimes (n=28)	Non-democratic regimes (n=32)
Fundamental Rights	0.69	0.50	0.37
Gender Equality	0.64	0.51	0.44
Basic Welfare	0.68	0.50	0.57
Absence of Corruption	0.54	0.37	0.30
Human Development Index	0.74	0.62	0.66

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

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

FIGURE 1.9

High performance levels by regime type



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

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

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

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

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

TABLE 1.4

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

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

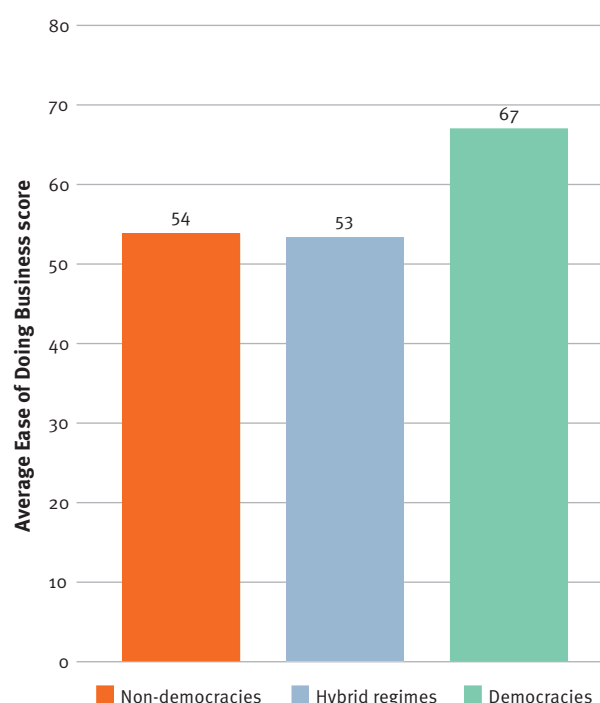
Sources: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>; World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2018a, <<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>>.

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

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

FIGURE 1.10

#### Average Ease of Doing Business score by regime type, 2018



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

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

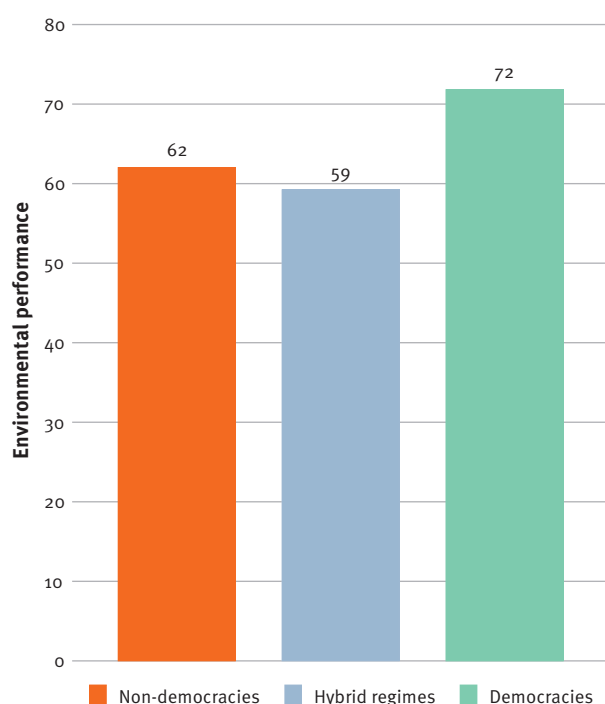
**Democracies are associated with higher average levels of environmental performance than non-democracies.** The Environmental Performance Index measures how well countries protect human health from environmental harm and preserve vital ecosystems (Wendling et al. 2018). Democracies score an average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

### 1.1.3. Concerning democratic trends: challenges

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

FIGURE 1.11

Environmental performance by regime type, 2018



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

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

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

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

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

TABLE 1.5

Democracies with weak and very weak performance, 2018

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

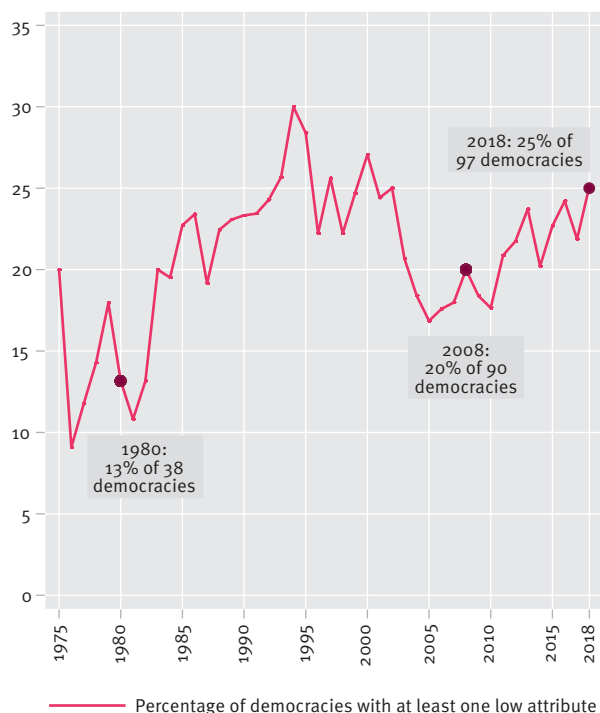
**Notes:** Weak performance is defined as a low score on at least one attribute of democracy (unless a country scores high on the other four attributes), while very weak performance is defined as a low score on at least two attributes.

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

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

FIGURE 1.12

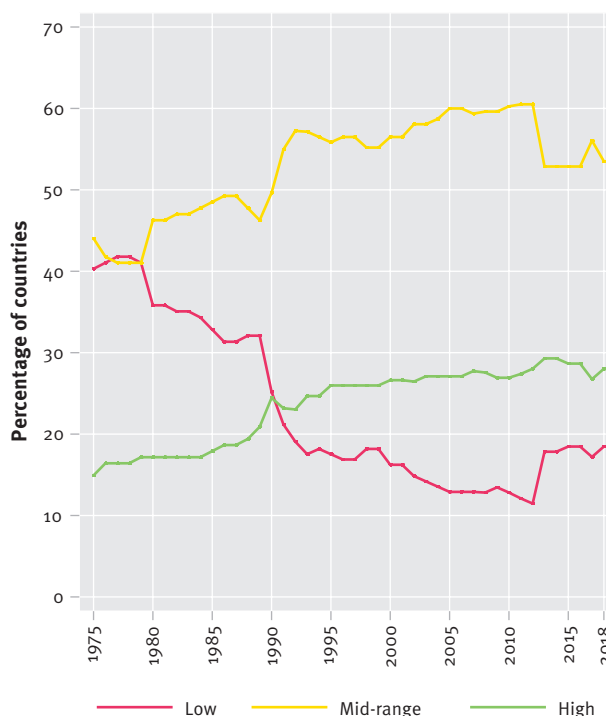
### Countries with low performance on at least one attribute of democracy, 1975–2018



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

FIGURE 1.13

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



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

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

#### *Democracy remains fragile in some transitional contexts*

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

since returned to democracy, while the remaining 40 per cent have remained in either a hybrid or non-democratic state.

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

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



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

### **Africa contains the largest share of fragile democracies.**

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

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

### **Democratic erosion is on the rise**

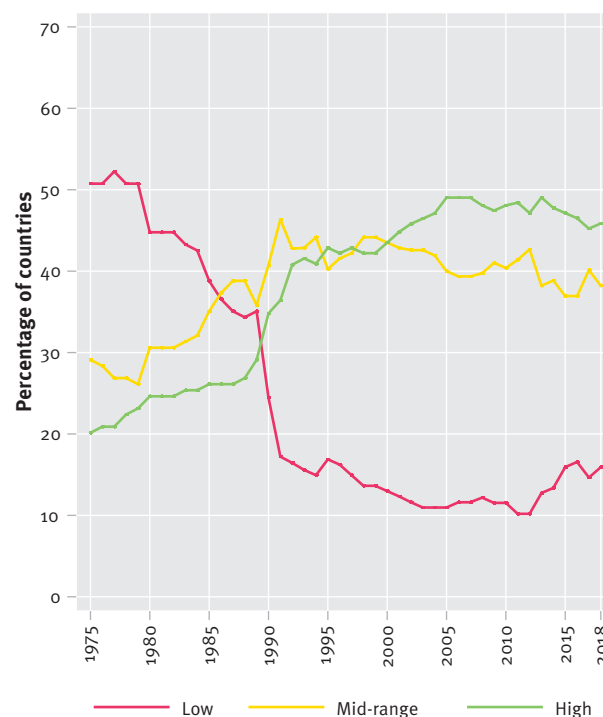
**The share of democracies experiencing democratic erosion has seen a consistent increase in the past decades and has more than doubled in the past decade compared to the decade before.** The GSoD Indices define democratic erosion as a statistically significant decline on at least one democratic subattribute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

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

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

FIGURE 1.14

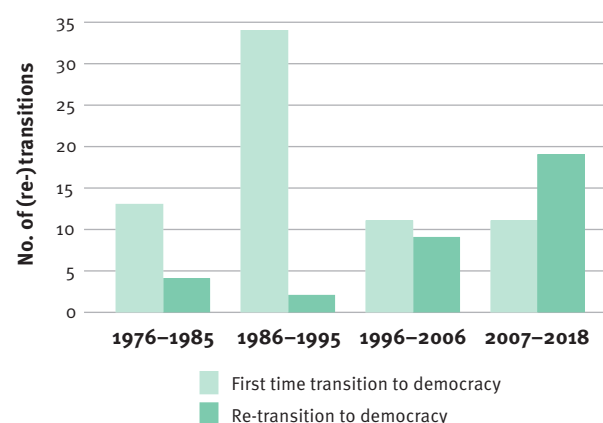
### **Share of countries by performance level in Civil Liberties, 1975–2018**



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

FIGURE 1.15

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



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

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



TABLE 1.6

### Fragile and weak democracies, 2018

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

**Notes:** Democracies that are both weak and fragile according to definitions provided in text.

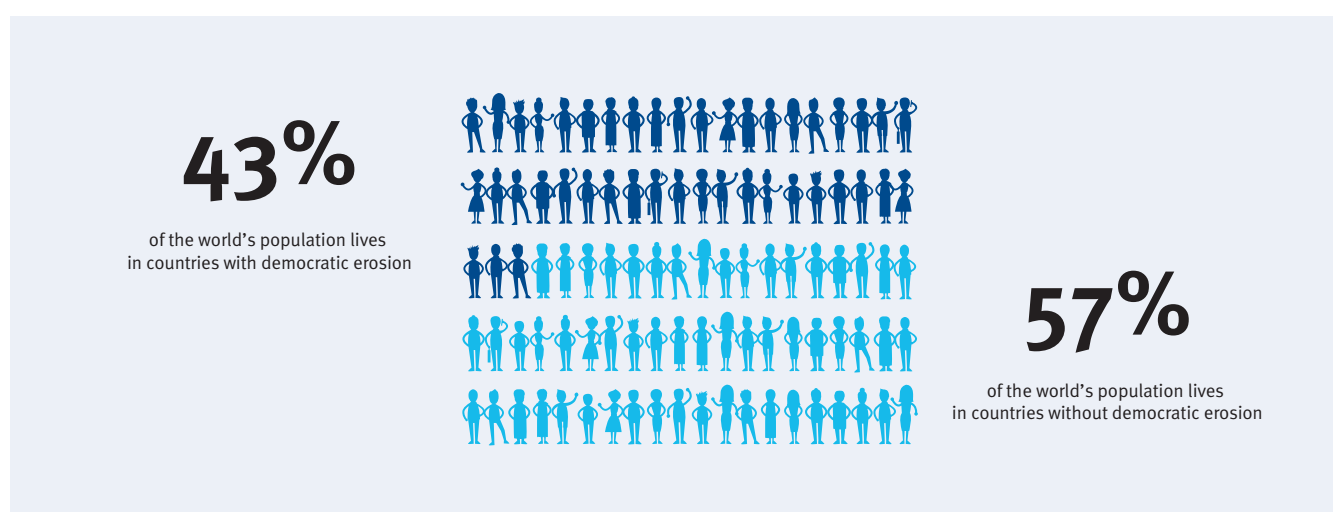
**Source:** International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

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

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

FIGURE 1.16

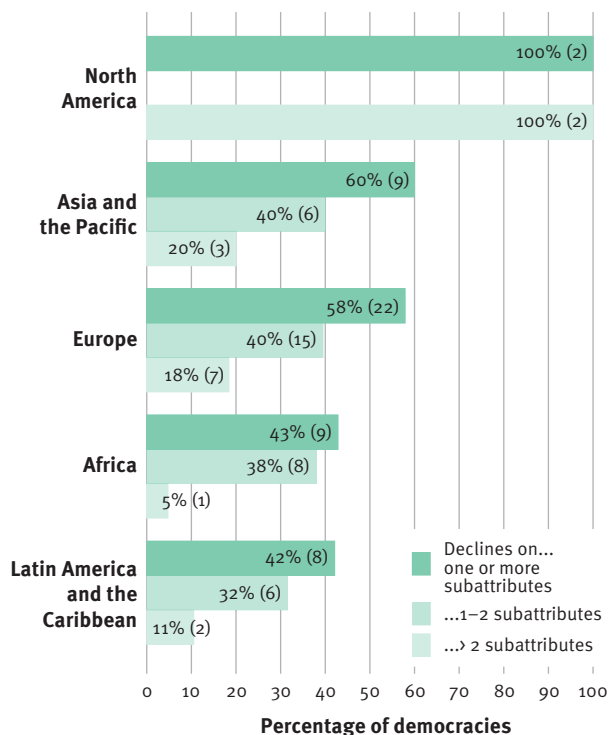
### Share of world population living in countries with and without democratic erosion, 2018



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

FIGURE 1.17

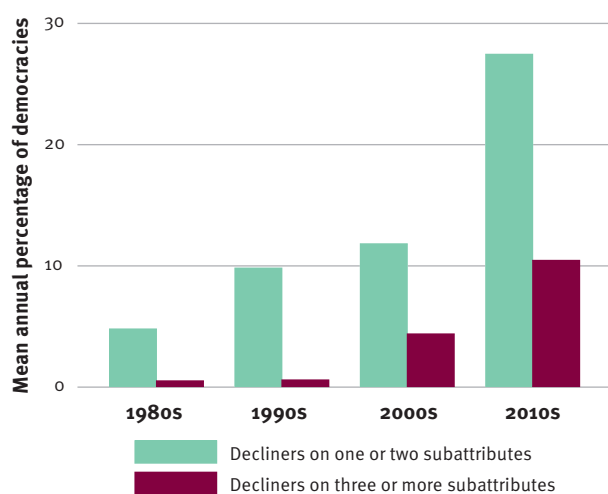
## Democratic erosion by region, 2018



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

FIGURE 1.18

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



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

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

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

FIGURE 1.19

## High performance on five GSoD Indices attributes, 1975–2018



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

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

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

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

### ***There are increasing signs of democratic backsliding***

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

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

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

### ***Civic space is shrinking***

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

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

significant declines in a number of countries (see Figures 1.20, 1.21 and 1.22).

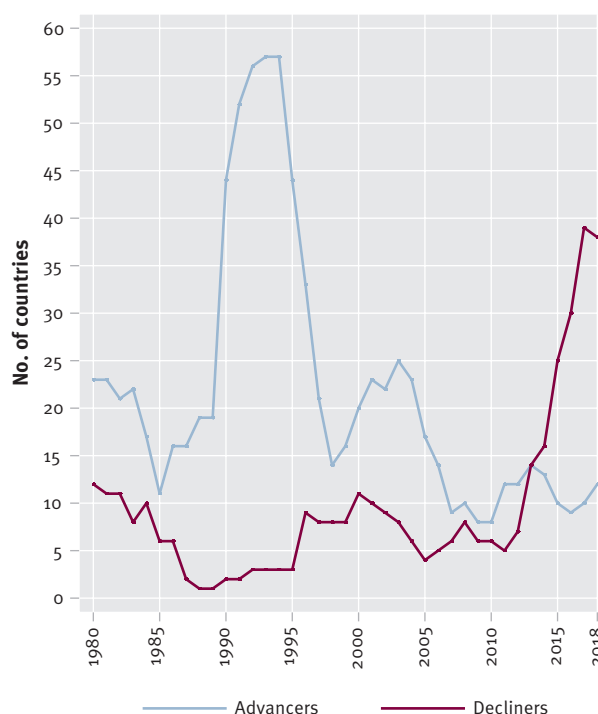
Although Europe still has higher levels of civic space than other regions of the world, it is the region that has seen the largest share of countries with declines in the Civil Liberties and Media Integrity aspects of civic space. Meanwhile Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean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

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

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

FIGURE 1.20

### **Significant declines and advances in Civil Liberties, 1980–2018**



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

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

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

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

**Political inclusion and judicial independence have not seen sufficient global improvements in the past four**

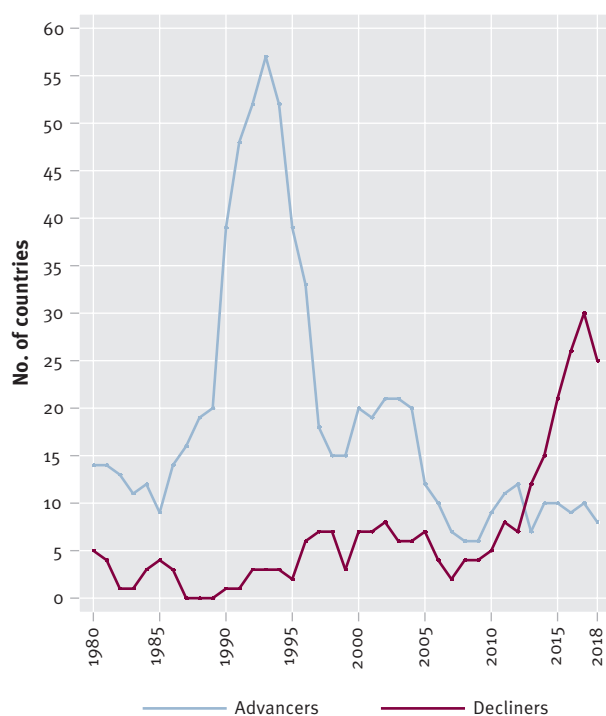
**decades.** Despite the significant economic and democratic progress that the world has made in the past 43 years, efforts to secure more equal access to political power, and to strengthen the independence of judiciaries, have significantly lagged behind other democratic advances.

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

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

FIGURE 1.21

### Significant declines and advances in Media Integrity, 1980–2018

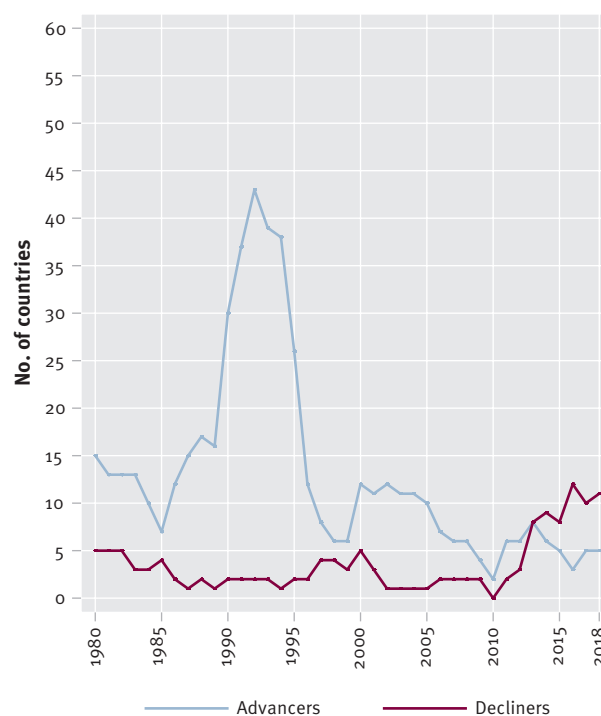


**Notes:** Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

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

FIGURE 1.22

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

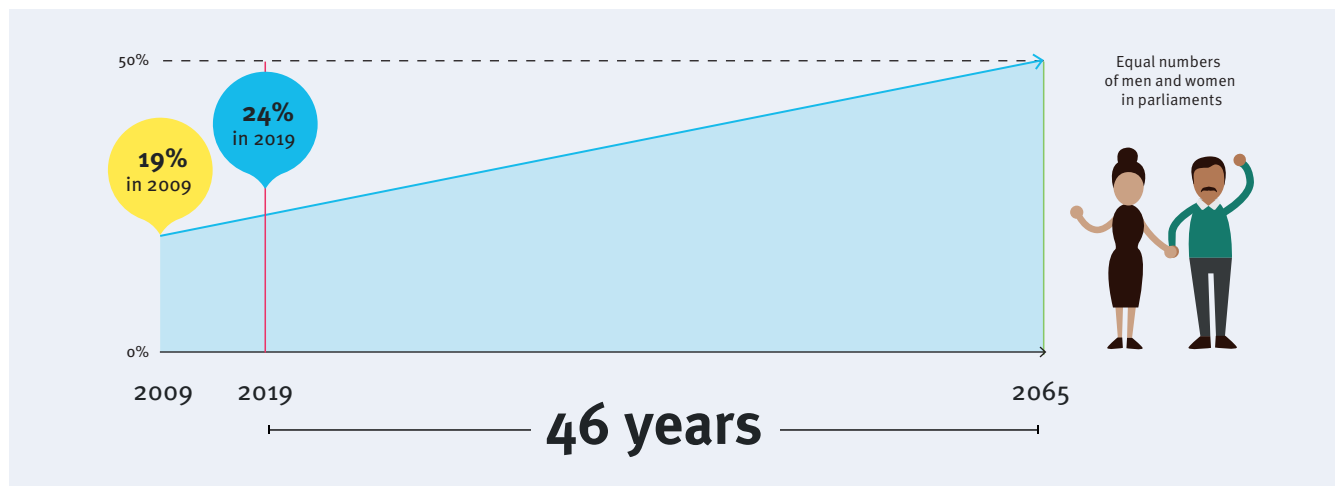


**Notes:** Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

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

FIGURE 1.23

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



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

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

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

#### ***Hybridity has increased in past decades***

**The share of hybrid regimes has increased in the past decades.** Hybrid regimes occur in countries that adopt democratic façades (often in the form of periodic, albeit non-competitive, elections), generally coupled with severe restrictions on Civil Liberties and other democratic rights.

The number of hybrid regimes has more than quadrupled since 1975, from 7 (or 5 per cent) of countries to 28 (or 18 per cent) in 2018.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Non-democratic regimes have persisted and deepened their autocratization***

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

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

The share of people living in non-democracies (28 per cent) remains significant as a number of non-democracies (i.e. China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) have large populations. Non-democracies are found across all regions of the world. The Middle East is the least democratic region in the world, with more than half (58 per cent) of its countries being non-democracies. Of the 32 non-democracies in the world, the largest share (34 per cent) are in Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific (31 per cent), and the Middle East (22 per cent). The least democratic subregions in the world are Central Asia, which has never had a democracy, and

Central Africa, which contained no democracies in 2018. North Africa and East Africa have just one democracy each.

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

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

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

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



TABLE 1.7

Countries experiencing deepening autocratization, 2013–2018

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

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

### 1.1.4. Conclusion

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

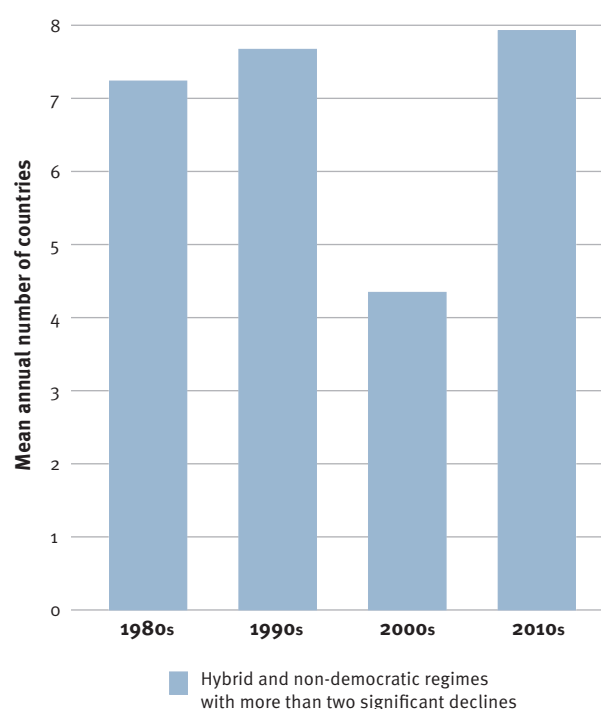
While the quantitative expansion of democracy continues today, the quality of the world's democracies is deteriorating. This deterioration takes different forms depending on the context. New democracies exhibit weak democratic performance and, even while building their democratic institutions and capacities,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

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

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

FIGURE 1.24

### Deepening autocratization per decade 1980s–2010s



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

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



TABLE 1.8

## The Global State of Democracy Indices: A global snapshot

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



### Representative Government

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



#### Elected Government:

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

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



#### Clean Elections:

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



#### Inclusive Suffrage:

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



#### Free Political Parties:

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



### Fundamental Rights

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



#### Access to Justice:

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



#### Civil Liberties:

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



#### Gender Equality:

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



#### Social Group Equality:

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

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



#### Basic Welfare:

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



#### Checks on Government

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



#### Effective Parliament:

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



#### Judicial Independence:

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



#### Media Integrity:

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



#### Impartial Administration

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



#### Absence of Corruption:

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

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

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

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



#### Predictable Enforcement:

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



### Participatory Engagement

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



### Civil Society Participation:

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



### Electoral Participation:

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



### Direct Democracy:

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



### Local Democracy:

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

## 1.2. Spotlight on key global issues in democracy landscape

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

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

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

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

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

## KEY FINDINGS

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

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

### ***Patterns and conditions of democratic backsliding***

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

### ***The empowerment of civil society in a shrinking civic space***

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

- The second key challenge for civil society is a rapidly shrinking civic space in many countries.
- Declines in civic space are seen in countries across all regions of the world and across all levels of democratic performance. These declines in civic space are occurring in contexts of democratic erosion, democratic backsliding and deepening autocratization.

### ***Managing elections as fair competition in challenging environments***

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

### ***Corruption and money in politics***

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

### **What is populism?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***The causes of populism***

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

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

Hence, rising inequalities (real or perceived) combined with increasing vulnerability, the loss of social status and related fears have made these groups particularly susceptible to the appeals of populist political movements in Western and post-

communist Eastern Europe. Sociocultural modernization has also led to the emergence of an individualistic and disintegrated political culture, with a decline in mass-membership organizations such as political parties, trade unions and churches that once gave form and substance to collective political action (Putnam 2000; van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012). *The Global State of Democracy 2017* identified a crisis of representation of political parties, with growing public frustration with political institutions and processes that seem unresponsive to their needs and loss of trust in political leaders, parties and institutions (International IDEA 2017: 98–122).

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### Drivers of populism

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

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

### The consequences of populism

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Policy considerations

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

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

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

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

TABLE 1.9

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

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

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

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

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

- *Invest in civic education and digital media literacy.* Governments and democracy assistance providers should invest in civic education to promote democratic values, equipping citizens of all ages with the skills required to engage with information in a critical manner while remaining respectful of differences. Civil society or civic educators should provide the public with opportunities for direct exposure to real-life participation, emphasize the value of community service and increase digital media literacy. Governments and democracy assistance providers should collaborate with the media to ensure that civic education is effective and reaches a broad audience. Political parties and parliaments should invest in the skills of their own staff and members to ensure that political institutions use new communication channels, such as social media, in a way that strengthens and enriches democratic practice. Academic researchers should expand our understanding of how new channels of communication affect democratic practice.
- *Ensure inclusive representative mechanisms.* Governments and political institutions, with the support of democracy assistance providers, should work to make representative mechanisms more inclusive. They should continue to invest in the inclusion of women and youth while expanding efforts to include other marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities and people with disabilities. Concrete steps in this direction should include reducing the financial and administrative barriers

to political participation, such as the costs of running for political office. Political parties have a critical role to play in nominating, and supporting the campaigns of, a broader range of candidates across all levels of politics. Governments should expand options such as subsidizing the costs of election campaigns to increase diversity and competitiveness and creating formal mechanisms through which marginalized groups can contribute to the development of policies that affect them.

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

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

### 1.2.2. Patterns and conditions of democratic backsliding

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

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

### ***What is democratic backsliding?***

**The GSoD Indices refer to democratic backsliding as the gradual weakening of checks on government and civil liberties by democratically elected governments.**

Democratic backsliding is an incremental, partly concealed institutional change that is legitimized by references to popular electoral mandates, majority decisions and laws. It is often driven by the intentional dismantling of accountability institutions. Other forms of democratic erosion are generally not driven by such explicit intentions. Not all countries experiencing democratic erosion necessarily experience democratic backsliding, but the countries that experience backsliding do so as part of a process of democratic erosion.

### **International IDEA distinguishes between modern and traditional democratic backsliding.**

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

### **Democratic backsliding is initiated and driven by executive incumbents, legislative majorities and governing political parties.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Measuring backsliding using the GSoD Indices**

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

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

the Freedoms of Expression, Association and Assembly, Religion, Movement, and Personal Integrity and Security.

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

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

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

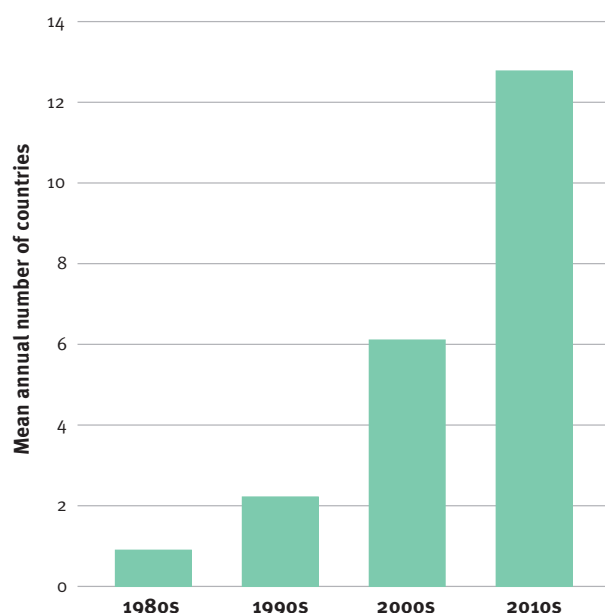
Table 1.10 lists all backsliding countries identified by the GSoD Indices. The table distinguishes between countries affected by moderate democratic backsliding and those suffering severe democratic backsliding (see Figure 1.26 for a visual representation). Both types occur in regimes that remain democratic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

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

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



FIGURE 1.25

**Average annual number of countries experiencing democratic backsliding, by decade**

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

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

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

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

***The causes of and facilitating conditions for democratic backsliding***

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

TABLE 1.10

**Episodes of democratic backsliding in the GSoD data set**

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

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

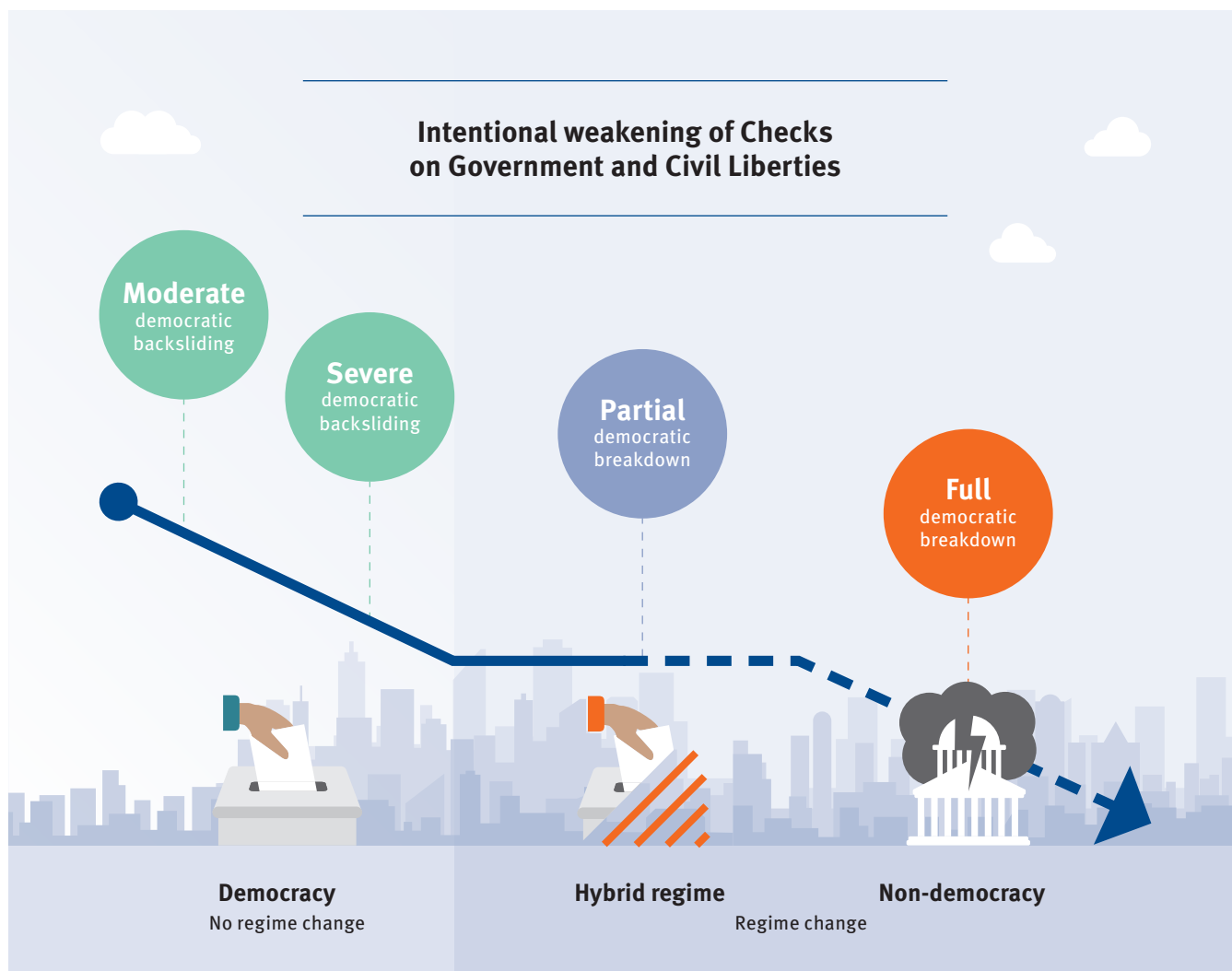
**Source:** International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

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



FIGURE 1.26

## The process of democratic backsliding



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The main finding of the GSoD Indices analysis confirms the view that a polarized society is associated with a**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Policy considerations**

- **Policies aimed at the prevention and termination of democratic backsliding should seek to address the polarization and disintegration of the public sphere that has preceded and accompanied many episodes of backsliding.** Moderate political elites should demonstrate their readiness to listen to the concerns of citizens and to bridge political divides by integrating different parts of society. Taking these concerns seriously would reduce the scope for populist challengers who exploit grievances against established political elites:
  - **Institutional reforms should seek to contribute to the reduction of polarization, for example by ensuring adequate representation and**

**protection of minorities.** Constitutional designs that facilitate efficient public administration and enable responsive and responsible government—rather than those that fragment responsibility and create deadlocks in policy delivery—may help prevent a crisis of representation from arising in the first place. Such constitutional design choices keep dissatisfaction within tolerable limits and may help strengthen democracy's self-correcting tendencies. If there is scope to pursue policies within the framework of a constitution, while respecting democratic procedure, the rights of the opposition, judicial independence and so on, then there will be less incentive to violate these norms in order to deliver on promises made to voters. While rules enabling effective and responsible government may reduce dissatisfaction, it is also important to ensure political moderation—a government must be capable of being contested, challenged, held to account, and sometimes forced to compromise.

- **Polarizing tendencies in the public sphere should be limited.** This entails acting against extremist demagogues, preventing the spread of disinformation and hate speech through social media, strengthening quality media outlets, and educating citizens to acquire critical media literacy.
- **Strengthen institutions that check the executive, such as the legislature, but also courts and an independent, pluralist media system.** These institutions enable citizens, who are faced with restrictions to their rights, to use and protect their political freedoms. Stronger checks on government may constrain the scope for quick and far-reaching policy change that is sometimes needed. At the same time, they ensure that incumbent governments reach out to other political actors and build inclusive coalitions that are likely to make policy change more sustainable.
- **Design constitutional rules to enforce deliberation.** This deliberation could be between a government and opposition in a parliamentary system; between the executive and legislature in a presidential system; between members of a governing coalition; or between different levels of government. Even if the government's view ultimately prevails, as in most Westminster-style democracies, it should be forced to justify its actions, to give an account of its reasoning, to hear the other side, and perhaps to make concessions to other views. Details of constitutional design (e.g. how and when parliament can be dissolved, who presides over the

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

- **Protect new democratic institutions against the popular disappointment that is likely to ensue if the high expectations attached to their creation are not met.** To better manage popular expectations, policymakers should engage in a rational, open dialogue with citizens that fosters an understanding of the constraints and trade-offs of democratic politics. Improved popular knowledge of policies would also enable citizens to make more informed assessments of electoral promises and their viability. Memories of the authoritarian past should be preserved and conveyed in order to remind younger generations of the achievements of democracy, therefore guarding against misleading nostalgic sentiment.
- **Governments should protect their citizens against the disruptive effects of economic crisis and globalization.** This requires policies that enable vulnerable groups of society, including immigrants, to adapt to job losses and provide them with equitable access to services, employment, opportunities and resources.
- **Strengthen and enable a vibrant civic space and counteract efforts to undermine it.**
- **Support civic and other forms of education on democracy,** to educate children, youth and adults on the value of democracy, and its benefits for society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

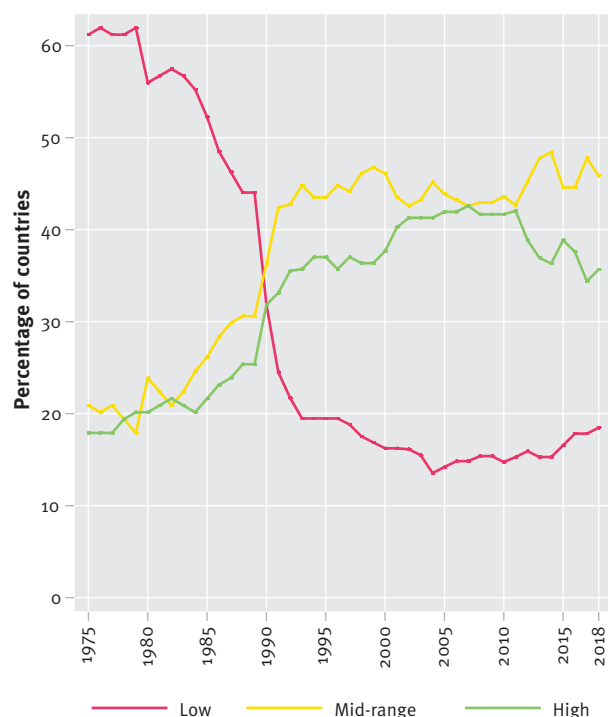
**The aspect of Civil Liberties with most countries declining (a total of 38 countries since 2013) is Freedom of Expression** (see Figure 1.27). In recent years, an increasing number of countries that previously performed highly on this dimension have slipped into the mid-range, reflecting worsening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

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

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



FIGURE 1.27

**Performance levels in Freedom of Expression, 1975–2018**

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

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

#### ***In what ways is civic space shrinking?***

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

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

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

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

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

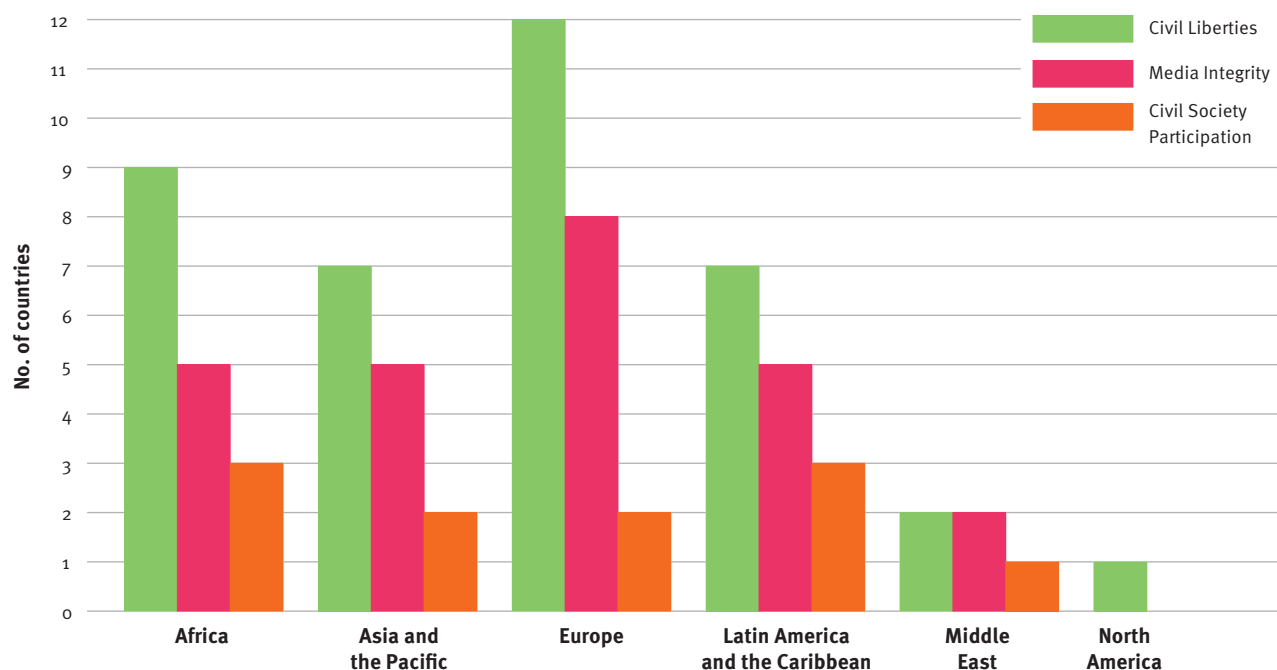
Of the 321 confirmed murders in 2018, 74 per cent occurred in Latin America. The highest numbers were recorded in Colombia (126) and Mexico (48)—which together accounted for more than half of the murders of civil society activists in 2018—followed by the Philippines (39 civil society activists killed),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

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



FIGURE 1.28

### Declines in civic space by region, 2013–2018



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

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

TABLE 1.11

### Declines in civic space, 2013–2018

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Policy considerations**

- Support the strengthening of CSOs working on democracy and human rights issues in contexts where these rights are threatened.
- Support a free media and training to journalists on democracy reporting.
- Facilitate access to regional and international civil society networks for CSOs that face restrictions, especially

those working on corruption and human rights and the weaker and less well-resourced organizations, which often tend to be those working on women's rights and LGBT issues.

#### **1.2.4. Managing elections as fair competition in challenging environments**

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

#### ***Elections have now become the norm rather than the exception***

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

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

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

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

### ***Electoral processes and the role of EMBs: opportunities***

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

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

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

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

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

While one-off measures are important, so is a practice of consistent reflection and refinement. In Indonesia, electoral reform involving many stakeholders has been continually underway since the transition to democracy two decades ago, demonstrating that a shift in institutional culture and

a change in political habits requires long-term commitment and the involvement of multiple sectors of society beyond formal government institutions (International IDEA 2005; Hamid 2014).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Global challenges to electoral processes***

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

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

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

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

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

**In democratic contexts where political stakes are high, EMBs remain exposed to the risk that results will be rejected or annulled, even when they deliver a technically well-executed process.** This is because elections reflect the society and the historical context in which they are held—for better or worse. Older and third-wave democracies alike

confront efforts to delegitimize their electoral processes, from both domestic forces and foreign election interference.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

**Digital disruption has negative effects on electoral processes.** Digital resources are increasingly applied to electoral processes to store electoral data, to register, identify,

inform and mobilize voters, to cast and count votes, and to transmit, compute and tabulate results. With opportunities come challenges and trade-offs. Voting technology can be complex, difficult to understand for many electoral stakeholders, and potentially perceived as a manipulation tool or a game changer with uncertain impacts.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

### **Policy considerations**

- **Carry out reform thoughtfully.** EMBs should make a periodic and systematic review of rules that govern the organization of elections and ensure their adjustment to modern contexts. Parameters for the design of a review process should include internal audits and consultations, peer-exchange events and examination of international comparative examples, constructive responses to election observer recommendations, and the purposeful inclusion of opposition voices in the reform process. These reviews should become standard electoral management practice.
- **Encourage new regulatory alliances.** When EMBs do not have formal powers to directly regulate all issues of concern, they should initiate such processes with relevant regulatory bodies and play a constructive role in supporting informed decisions. Critical areas may relate to the illicit financing of political parties, cybersecurity, social media regulations and prevention of electoral violence, among others. Concrete actions by EMBs could include methodological documentation and analysis of a problem with a view to distilling pieces of advice for respective legislative and regulatory agencies.
- **Invest in people.** To plan and implement election activities in difficult environments—often marked by social and political tensions, security challenges and risks of natural hazards—EMBs need knowledgeable and capable staff. To ensure that permanent and temporary staff can respond to changing circumstances, EMBs should provide continuous capacity building opportunities, for example through dedicated training departments, peer exchanges or attendance at specialized courses. The establishment of electoral training centres may provide additional opportunities for training of key electoral stakeholders.
- **Introduce technology carefully.** The introduction of technologies in electoral processes should be anchored

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

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

### **1.2.5. Corruption and money in politics**

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

#### **Why does corruption matter?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Trends in corruption***

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

This lack of progress is also seen at the regional level. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region to show some progress in reducing its regional corruption levels since 1975, while all other regions have seen slight statistically insignificant declines. Despite this, a significant share of democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean (31 per cent) still suffer

from high levels of corruption, only surpassed by the Middle East (the case for the only two democracies) and Africa (45 per cent) which both have lower levels of democratic development.

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

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

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

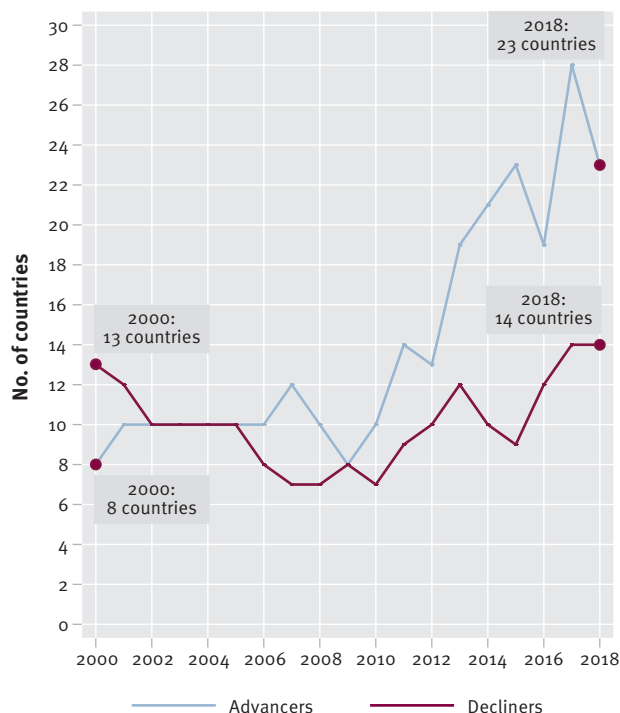
**More recent advances have nevertheless been made in fighting corruption.** Despite a stagnation in the reduction of global and regional levels of corruption, individual countries have seen advances in reducing corruption, while others have seen setbacks and increases in corruption levels.

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

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

FIGURE 1.29

### Declines and advances in Absence of Corruption, 2000–2018

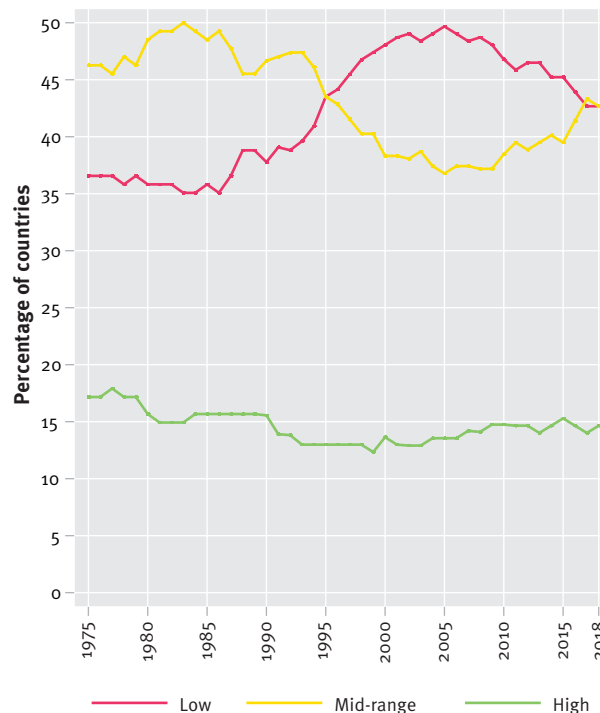


**Notes:** This graph shows the number of countries worldwide between 2000 and 2018 that have experienced statistically significant advances and declines in their Absence of Corruption scores.

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

FIGURE 1.30

### Global trends in Absence of Corruption, 1975–2018



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

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

### Political corruption and money in politics

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

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

in combination with lax regulatory frameworks, weak enforcement or weak judicial institutions has led political corruption to become a significant share of overall corruption.

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

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

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

### ***Towards a holistic and comprehensive approach to money in politics***

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

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

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

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

### ***Digital technologies for greater transparency and accountability***

**Information on how much money circulates in and around elections, where resources are coming from and how they are spent could expose the undue influence of politicians and help protect against the infiltration of**

**illicit sources of money, therefore contributing to the broader fight against corruption** (International IDEA 2017b).

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

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

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

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

### ***Closing loopholes in political finance regulations***

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

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Ensuring effective implementation***

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

Institutions responsible for political finance oversight must be independent. They require a clear mandate, legal powers

and the capacity to enforce regulations (OECD 2016). In reality, many agencies have rather limited human and financial resources to effectively deal with large volumes of oversight work.

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

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

### ***Corruption risks posed by new technologies***

**Blockchain, big-data analytics, artificial intelligence and other new technologies are changing political participation and representation across the world.**

While technologies such as digital reporting and disclosure platforms can be a major driver to increase transparency and accountability in political finance, new technologies can also pose a new regulatory challenge for anti-corruption efforts.

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

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



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

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

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

### **Policy considerations**

- Improve political finance transparency and, wherever possible, develop a holistic and comprehensive anti-corruption approach that links political finance with other related matters such as asset disclosure and lobbying registers. International instruments such as the OECD recommendations and the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiatives could support countries' anti-corruption reform efforts in that direction.
- Political parties should pledge full transparency of party finances by incorporating anti-corruption mechanisms in codes of conduct (e.g. declarations of assets from party representatives and conflict-of-interest norms), strictly regulating conflicts of interest, banning anonymous donations, and implementing sound anti-corruption policies and internal party democracy mechanisms (International IDEA 2017a).
- Consider the adoption of digital reporting and disclosure platforms for greater transparency and accountability in money in politics. Online databases also facilitate scrutiny of money in politics. Such platforms should ideally be connected to other systems such as a tax database in order to discern patterns and detect signs of corruption.
- Close loopholes in existing political finance regulations to address remaining and emerging corruption risk areas. For example, countries may consider introducing specific regulations on online media spending by political parties and candidates or adopting gender-targeted public funding to level the political playing field among all stakeholders.
- Focus on the effective implementation of existing political finance regulations. In order to do so, countries must ensure independent oversight mechanisms by providing clear mandates, legal powers and sufficient capacities to the regulatory agencies to fulfil their tasks.
- Carefully consider the pros and cons of new technologies such as cryptocurrencies and adopt necessary measures accordingly. Governments and regulatory agencies are often too slow to react to emerging corruption risks brought by new technologies.
- Promote civic education and awareness of the importance of integrity in politics and other societal and economic spheres.
- Monitor state performance, use of public resources and corruption through investigative activities and reporting, and report to judicial institutions for processing. Use media to increase pressure for integrity.
- Consider the role of the private sector. It can act as either a catalyst for, or an obstacle to, organized criminal engagement in political corruption. Working together with private companies is therefore crucial in fighting this phenomenon. One example is the role of the banking sector in monitoring transfers that may involve money laundering. Leveraging the potential for corporate social responsibility principles to encourage companies to conduct due diligence in detecting potential criminal interests in their market chain is another important avenue.



## BOX 1.1

### New technologies and democracy

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

#### *Opportunities for democracy provided by new technologies*

- **ICTs provide new and enhanced opportunities for increasing political equality and enhancing popular control.** The use of new technologies has the potentials to democratize participatory engagement, political engagement and activism and thereby strengthen political equality and help increase pressure for political and democratic change.
- **In particular, ICTs have provided citizens with new tools to voice their opinions and mobilize pressure for change.** People can now voice their opinion, mobilize for protest, organize the signature of petitions or vote from the comfort of their home, breaking down geographical, physical and gender barriers that may have hindered or prevented their meaningful political participation.
- **New technologies can help increase pressure for political and democratic change.** This was seen during the Arab Uprisings, the democratic transition processes in Armenia and The Gambia and also more recently in Algeria and Sudan, where social media helped amplify societal voices and mobilize protests. Together with other offline processes, this helped create pressure for change and accelerated democratic openings that could lead to broader democratic transitions. However, online mobilization needs to be combined with offline actions (e.g. protests, political reforms, political will, international action and electoral processes) to effect change.
- **New technologies can help strengthen representative government.** When a technology such as electronic voting is used in electoral processes, this enhances political equality as it reduces barriers to electoral participation and increases inclusivity. More inclusive electoral processes in turn strengthen representative government. Biometric technology can also improve the accuracy of voter registration and reduce the potential for vote tampering, strengthening the integrity and transparency of electoral processes (International IDEA 2017).
- **Technology can provide additional avenues for citizen participation.** Governments and parliaments can use online tools to engage citizens in public debate, consultations and referenda on particular issues. New technologies can also be used to hold political decision-makers to account, increasing societal checks on government and the means of popular control. CSOs can use new technologies to monitor government spending, and to pressure politicians to clarify

their position on issues. This can help provide incentives for reducing corruption and enhancing the impartiality of administration.

- **New technologies, particularly social media platforms, can help bridge the gap between citizens/voters and decision-makers.** Whereas such interactions were once mediated by gatekeepers such as the media and political parties, social media allows direct interaction, eliminating the need for this mediating filter (Tufekci 2018). While this can help increase proximity, it also fundamentally alters the traditional dynamics of interactions between decision-makers and citizens.
- **Anonymous speech and anonymous information access have become a critical component of the online political debate.** The ability to use Internet technologies to communicate anonymously has enabled journalists, CSOs and members of ethnic, religious or minority groups (who may be persecuted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity) to exercise their right to freedom of expression, while protecting their privacy. This has led to a diversification of the public arena, bringing more voices into the public debate and broadening the range of issues discussed, as anonymity often allows people to talk about issues previously off the agenda.

#### *Challenges to democracy posed by new technologies*

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

- Coordinated manipulation of social media can generate confusion about the trustworthiness of the information ecosystem, affecting the credibility and confidence of the political process. This reduces trust in electoral processes and, as a consequence, trust in democracy more broadly (Chertoff and Donahoe 2018).
- A reduction of trust in democratic processes can lead citizens to opt out of these processes, increase voter apathy or push voters towards political parties and leaders of a populist bent who may not always support democratic ideals.
- The ease of manipulation of online content (via anonymous human interaction, trolls and bots) enables and facilitates foreign interference in electoral processes and domestic public debate, which undermines national sovereignty, popular control and political equality.
- The use of online manipulation techniques, such as microtargeting or astroturfing, means that individuals may be excluded from political information flows and lose the ability to form opinions freely and independently without fear of reprisals (United Nations 1966: Article 18). This is also applicable online (United Nations 1966: Comment 25 to Article 19).
- Social media contributes to the polarization of the political debate, and undermines its civility, which is central to the democratic conversation. Social media platforms, by design, seek to capture the attention of users. This generates filter bubbles and echo chambers, and reinforces already-held views, reducing access to alternative viewpoints. The effect is deepened polarization rather than balanced opinion shaping.
- The GSoD data shows that increase polarization is a key contributing factor for democratic backsliding.
- Social media and other Internet platforms can contribute to a weakened media environment through fragmentation and monopolization, and a reduction in quality, with online content published without editorial oversight and quality control. This weakens the role of the media as an independent check on government performance (Tufekci 2018).
- The shaping of public opinion and agenda setting shifts from the public arena and its traditional actors (media and politicians) to the private arena. The latter includes a number of global technology giants that control key communication platforms, which manage large information flows, vast amounts of personal data as well as research into artificial intelligence and algorithms.
- **Technologies are tools that, in the hands of non-democratic regimes, can be used to reinforce authoritarianism, increase citizen surveillance and disseminate propaganda.** V-Dem data shows that 70 per cent of non-democratic regimes use the Internet to manipulate the information environment in their countries (V-Dem 2019).
- **Governments are grappling with how to curb the harmful spread of disinformation, while balancing other democratic rights such as free speech.** This is a difficult balancing act in democracies, but can easily go overboard in non-democracies, where the curbing of disinformation can provide a legitimizing façade to crack down on free speech.

FIGURE 1.31

### New technologies and social media impact on democracy



### Conclusion

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

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

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

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