

# Chapter 3

## The state of democracy in the Americas

This chapter focuses on the Americas, a region which is not defined in the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices, but which is used in this report as an umbrella term for two regions covered in separate sections: Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. The Latin American and Caribbean section provides an overview of the current democratic landscape in the region, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. The analysis highlights current gains and opportunities for democracy as well as democratic challenges. The North America section provides an overview of the most recent GSoD Indices data on the region. The section also features a case study on the state of democracy in the United States.

### LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



#### Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen mixed progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) since 2015, and significant challenges remain.

It is the region after Europe with the largest share of SDG 16 indicators that have seen declines. Of the 18 GSoD indicators used to measure progress on SDG 16, 72 per cent (13) have seen more countries with declines than gains since 2015.

This is the case for SDG 16.1 on reducing violence and for SDG 16.10 on fundamental freedoms, where all indicators have seen declines, except for Freedom of Association and Assembly, which has seen stagnation. Stagnation is seen on SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. Mixed results are seen on SDG 16.6 on accountable institutions, with gains outnumbering declines for

independent judiciaries, effective parliaments, political parties and civil society participation.

SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making has seen declines in Clean Elections, Elected Government, Electoral Participation and Social Group Equality, as well as increases in Effective Parliament, but stagnation in Local Democracy.



#### Gender Equality

Latin America and the Caribbean performs third, after North America and Europe, on Gender Equality and SDG 5.5 on the political representation of women. The GSoD Indices subattribute of (political) Gender Equality for Latin America and the Caribbean has seen one country (Brazil) decline since 2015; no country has advanced on this measure.

## KEY FINDINGS



### Positive developments

- **Latin America and the Caribbean is the third-most democratic region in the world, after North America and Europe, with all but three countries classified as democracies.** Democracies in the region have proven resilient. Of the five countries that were democracies in 1977, four (Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) have remained democracies uninterrupted. Among the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1977, almost 75 per cent have remained democracies without interruptions.
- **Latin America and the Caribbean has a heterogeneous democratic landscape.** At the same time, a small number of democracies stand out for their high performance. Of the top five countries in the world with the highest levels of Representative Government, three (Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay) are in Latin America. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay were the two countries in the region (from a total of 21 in the world) that scored highly on all democratic attributes. Costa Rica, Chile and Jamaica score highly on four of the five attributes. The democratic performance of these five countries is also high compared to the rest of the world—they all score among the top 25 per cent in the world on Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government and, with the exception of Jamaica, Impartial Administration.
- The best performing aspects of Latin American democracy compared to the rest of the world are **Electoral Participation** (on which measure the region has the highest levels in the world, together with Asia and the Pacific) and **Freedom of Religion** (on which measure the region scores higher than Europe). On all other aspects of democracy, Latin America and the Caribbean performs third-best, after North America and Europe.
- Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with most advances in political gender equality in the past decades. Together with Europe, the region has the highest representation of women in parliament, averaging 27 per cent, which is above the world average of 24 per cent.
- **Venezuela is the region's most democratically ailing country.** It has undergone a process of severe democratic backsliding over the past two decades, which resulted in a full democratic breakdown in 2017. In fact, Venezuela is the only country in the world that has gone from being a democracy with high levels of Representative Government (from 1975 to 1996) to a non-democracy.
- **A number of other countries have suffered from backsliding or democratic erosion (or both).** Nicaragua has undergone a process of severe democratic backsliding in recent years, regressing into the category of hybrid regime in 2016. Brazil has experienced democratic erosion in the past five years. It is the democracy in the region with declines on most subattributes (8 out of 16) and among the top five countries in the world with the largest number of declines since 2013. During the same period, Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Haiti have experienced declines on at least one subattribute of democracy.
- **Some countries in the region are characterized by democratic fragility.** Of the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1977, 5 have had undemocratic interruptions, backsliding into hybrid regimes, but 4 (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras and Peru) have since returned to democracy. Dominican Republic, Haiti and Honduras are also the weakest democracies in the region, together with Guatemala, judging from their low performance on one or more of their democratic attributes.
- **The region suffers from the highest levels of socio-economic inequalities in the world, which has translated into highly unequal access to political power.** This has also resulted in Latin America and the Caribbean having the highest rates of crime and violence in the world. Combined with high levels of corruption, this undermines trust in democracy and fuels civic discontent.
- **Political parties in Latin America are suffering from a crisis of representation.** This crisis derives from their difficulty in adapting to societal transformation and increasing expectations of a middle-class population deceived by lack of delivery in reducing corruption and inequalities. It has pushed voters in some countries away from traditional parties towards anti-establishment leaders.
- **Similar to other parts of the world, Latin America and the Caribbean has also experienced a shrinking of civic and media space in recent years.** Limitations on civic space are often, but not always, linked to advocacy or investigation into corruption and illicit networks.
- **The region is also facing new challenges, including migration.** These are driven, in part, by democratic breakdown in Venezuela and Nicaragua, as well as a less porous border between Mexico and the United States, which diverts migration flows from Central America to the rest of the region.
- **There is a marked decline in the support for democracy across the region.** Public opinion surveys show a 12-point drop in support for democracy over the last decade, from 70 per cent in 2008 to 58 per cent in 2017, with close to a 9-point decline in the last three years alone (Latinobarómetro 2018).



### Challenges to democracy

- **The quality of Latin American democracy varies widely: 12 different democratic performance patterns can be identified.** The most common democratic performance patterns are (a) mid-range on four of five attributes; and (b) low performance on at least one attribute of democracy.
- **Cuba is the only country in the region not to have undergone a democratic transition since 1975 and to have persisted as a non-democratic regime for the past four decades.** Cuba's role in the democratic breakdown of Venezuela should not be underestimated. Venezuela has supplied Cuba with oil in exchange for Cuban doctors, teachers and intelligence advisors.

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### 3.1. The state of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean

This section provides an overview of long-term democratic trends in the Latin American and Caribbean region as well as an overview of the current democratic landscape, using the Global State of Democracy conceptual framework as a basis. It highlights the current opportunities for democracy in the region, as well as the challenges it faces. The analysis is based on the GSoD Indices as the principal data source, but also draws on a number of other complementary sources.

The GSoD Indices for Latin America and the Caribbean cover 22 of the 29 countries in the region, as only countries with more than one million inhabitants are included in the GSoD sample. Furthermore, not all non-GSoD data sources used in the chapter are available for the Caribbean. Therefore, when the chapter refers only to Latin America this means that data was not available for the Caribbean.

#### 3.1.1. Introduction

The third wave of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean began in 1978 and the region has since undergone a profound democratic transformation. In the 1970s, the region was mostly dominated by authoritarian regimes under military rule. Now, all those countries have transitioned to democracy, with the exception of Cuba, the only country in the region not to have experienced democracy.

Latin America and the Caribbean is now the third-best democratically performing region in the world, after North America and Europe. It even outperforms these two regions on some aspects (e.g. both regions on Electoral Participation, and Europe on Freedom of Religion). However, despite its significant democratic advances, Latin America and the Caribbean faces a number of challenges to its democratic landscape.

Cuba's non-democratic persistence provides a model to regimes, including Venezuela and Nicaragua, that have recently significantly backslid from democracies to hybrid regimes or non-democracies. The democratic collapse of Venezuela has had spill-over effects on the rest of the region, generating the most severe migration and humanitarian crisis in Latin America's history (BBC News 2018b). Even the democracies in the region face significant challenges. High levels of corruption, inequality (the highest in the world), insecurity, crime and violence have undermined people's trust in democracy, with levels of support for democracy now at their lowest in a decade.

A number of democracies have also seen an erosion of their democratic performance in recent years, and some suffer from weak democratic performance. This disenchantment has pushed voters towards anti-establishment strongmen on both the left and right of the political spectrum, who have gained access to the reins of government in a number of countries in the region. The GSoD Indices data shows, with the examples of Venezuela and Nicaragua, that if leaders with populist authoritarian tendencies sustain themselves in power through the electoral channel and constitutional means, this can over the medium term contribute to democratic backsliding which may ultimately result in democratic breakdown.

In order to continue to advance democratically, build on the region's democratic momentum and re-establish citizens' trust in democracy, countries in Latin America and the Caribbean need to tackle the societal problems they face, reduce their high levels of inequality, strengthen their judicial institutions to more effectively reduce corruption, and reinvigorate their political party systems.

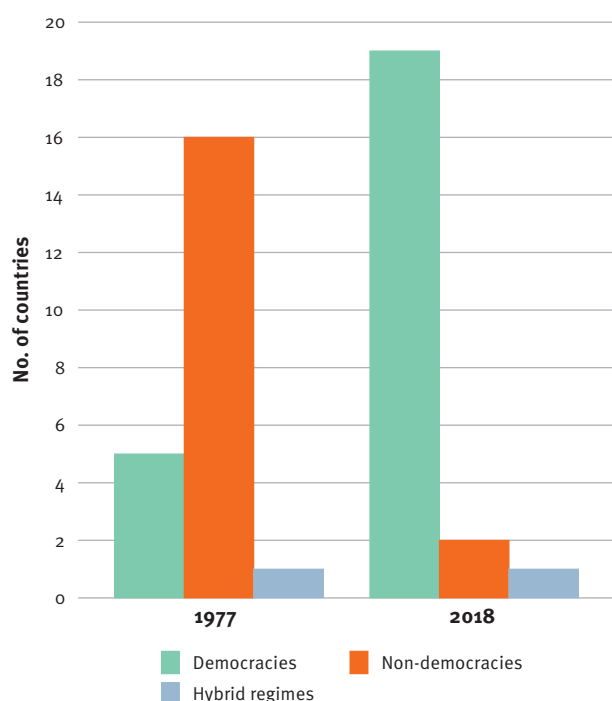
#### 3.1.2. Taking the long-term perspective: democratic developments since 1975

**Latin America and the Caribbean has experienced an historically unprecedented democratic expansion** and its longest democracy cycle, during the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991). In the region, this wave of democratization started in 1978 when the Dominican Republic transitioned from authoritarianism to democracy. This was followed by democratic transitions in Ecuador (1979); Peru (1980); Honduras (1982); Argentina (1983); El Salvador (1984); Bolivia, Brazil and Uruguay (all in 1985); Guatemala (1986); Paraguay (1989); Chile, Nicaragua and Panama (all in 1990); and Mexico (starting gradually in the period 1977–1997 and culminating in 2000).

Because the region's third wave of democratization started in 1978, 1977 is used as the baseline year to study the democratic transformation of the region. Hence, in 1977, 16 of the 22 countries in the region covered by the GSoD Indices were classified as non-democracies, mostly in the form of authoritarian military regimes, while today all but three countries in the region are democracies (see Figure 3.1).

**Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions in the world that has seen most democratic advances since the 1970s.** Its average regional increase across all democratic aspects during this period was 65 per cent, well above the world average increase of 41 per cent. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world that has seen some advances in reducing corruption since 1975 (19 per cent improvement), while all other regions have seen average increases in corruption.

FIGURE 3.1

**Regime types in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1977–2018**

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

**These advances have expanded the democratic space in the region.** The democratic aspects measured by the GSoD Indices that have seen most improvements are Direct Democracy, Representative Government and specifically Clean Elections, all of which have nearly doubled since 1975. Significant improvements have also been observed in Effective Parliament, Social Rights and Equality, Local Democracy, and Gender Equality.

Through these gains, citizens in the region have gained various new rights, including enhanced protection for indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, children, LGBT groups and people with disabilities, among other underprivileged groups. Many of these new social rights have been enshrined in recent constitutions. Others have been strengthened thanks to the adoption of international covenants.

As a result of democratic transition processes, between 1984 and 2017 a total of nine Latin American countries held assemblies to write new constitutions, while other nations reformed parts of existing constitutions (International IDEA 2018). These processes have helped affirm basic

democratic principles and enabled institutional changes that strengthen democracy in the region—with the exception of the constitutional amendment processes in Nicaragua and Venezuela, which have been used to weaken democracy.

**Alongside advances in access to rights and political freedoms, the region has also experienced an important process of institutional development.** Key institutions for electoral democracy have been put in place, with some countries creating new electoral management bodies (EMBs) or substantially reforming existing EMBs in ways that have greatly enhanced their capacity and performance.

Governments have also incorporated a variety of new instruments for accountability related to anti-corruption and transparency. These include international covenants advanced by the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) and other international initiatives to enhance the transparency and openness of governments. In addition, governments have strengthened national policy frameworks for auditing agencies, established asset disclosure requirements for public officials, adopted access to information laws, implemented public procurement systems and passed campaign-finance and money-laundering regulations and norms, while gradually setting up the instruments needed for e-government (Casas-Zamora and Carter 2017).

**The pace of democratic progress in the region has varied.** It was fastest between 1978 and 1990 but slowed down until mid-2000; progress has since stagnated across all dimensions except Basic Welfare and Electoral Participation. Some (statistically non-significant) regional declines have even been observed on Free Political Parties, Civil Society Participation and Media Integrity since mid-2000. From 2013 to 2018, no dimension has seen any significant advances in regional averages, although some country-level advances have occurred.

**Democracies in the Latin American and the Caribbean region have proven remarkably resilient in the past four decades.** Of the five countries in the region that were democracies in 1977, four (Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago) have remained democracies uninterrupted until today. Of the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1978, almost three-quarters (11 countries) have remained democracies without interruptions. Of these, Uruguay has made most democratic advances, scoring low on four out of five attributes in 1975; now, together with Trinidad and Tobago (and 19 other countries in the world) Uruguay records high performance on all democratic attributes. Uruguay, together with Costa Rica, can be seen as a democratic success for the region (see Box 3.1).

Of the four countries that have had undemocratic interruptions since 1978, two (Dominican Republic and Peru) have since returned to democracy without any further interruptions, for more than 23 and 18 years, respectively.

**While the region has seen significant democratic advances since 1975, not all aspects of democracy have advanced at the same pace, with some dimensions trailing behind others.** The subattributes that have seen the slowest advances, and where the region scores in the

mid-range today, are Absence of Corruption, Access to Justice and Social Group Equality.

**While the large majority of countries that transitioned during the third wave have remained democracies, several have been characterized by greater democratic fragility.** Of the 16 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1978, four had democratic interruptions but then returned to democracy: **Dominican Republic** (1994–1995), **Haiti**, **Honduras** (2009–2012) and **Peru** (1992–2000). Haiti

### BOX 3.1

#### Two democratic success stories: Costa Rica and Uruguay

**Costa Rica** presents a case of high-performing democratic endurance in a democratically weak subregion (Central America). Its democratic performance, as measured by the GSoD Indices, has been consistently high for four decades. Costa Rica scored in the top 25 per cent in the world on 13 of 16 subattributes in 1975; in 2018 it recorded similarly high scores on 15 democratic subattributes. Costa Rica also has the highest levels of Representative Government in the world, with the maximum score, and just ahead of Chile and Sweden.

While not entirely blemish-free, Costa Rica's recipe for democratic success includes a combination of features that reinforce each other. Its democratic history is stable, with no democratic interruptions since 1949 and a relatively homogenous and small population (4.8 million people). It enjoys the highest level of Representative Government in the world and higher levels of Social Group Equality than other countries in the region. It has a presidential system with proportional representation in parliament and a well-developed and free multiparty system—in fact, on Free Political Parties its score is the second highest in the world, after the United States. Costa Rica's political culture is built on compromise, based on long-held public trust in political institutions and a strong regard for the rule of law.

Costa Rica also enjoys high levels of Basic Welfare and human development, and near-universal access to healthcare and primary education, enabled by a comprehensive social security system. Its social spending levels are high, enabled in part by a significant reduction in military spending following the abolition of the army in 1948. Its use of its natural resources is sustainable, and its economic structure has been transformed, enabling sustained levels of economic growth that have cushioned the country against the effects of economic crises (OECD 2017; Peeler 1986; Dabène 1988).

However, despite these strengths, Costa Rica's democracy is not immune to challenges, including political polarization, an increasingly fragmented party system and the infusion of religion into politics, as shown by the fact that an evangelical pastor came close to winning the 2018 presidential election

(Murillo 2018). Additional challenges relate to the strain of immigration caused by the worsening political situation in Nicaragua, and high levels of income inequality. Costa Rica is now the sixth-most income-unequal country in the region (see e.g. World Bank 2018).

**Uruguay** presents a case of unequalled democratic advances. In 1975 it was one of the region's authoritarian regimes, scoring low on four out of five democratic attributes. Uruguay is now one of the two democracies in the region that scores high on all democratic attributes and the only country in the region to score among the top 25 per cent in the world on all 16 subattributes.

Uruguay, like Costa Rica, enjoys lower levels of inequality in access to political power and in enjoyment of civil liberties compared to other countries in the region. However, Uruguay has significantly lower levels of income inequality. Other common features include the establishment of a social contract, which provided the basis for the development of a welfare state, with strong social protection and based on redistributive tax policies; and sustainable management of natural resources.

Uruguay also has a long democratic tradition, with democracy only interrupted twice since 1918—first, briefly, in 1933 and then during the authoritarian period between 1973 and 1985. Its multiparty system is stable and competitive, with three main political parties alternating in power, a small and homogenous population (3.4 million people) and strong rule of law and Impartial Administration.

Unlike Costa Rica, Uruguay records high levels of Direct Democracy (the highest in the region). However, even a high-performing democracy such as Uruguay is not flawless. Challenges to democracy in the country include rising levels of crime and violence (often linked to the drug trade), corruption and declining trust in democracy, although Uruguay still performs better than other countries in the region on these aspects (Chasqueti 2017; Petit 2017; Rodríguez Cuitiño 2018; Goñi 2016).



presents a complex case, having been a hybrid regime between 1999 and 2004, a non-democratic regime in 2005, a democracy from 2006 to 2009, a hybrid regime again between 2010 and 2015, and finally a weak democracy from 2016 onwards. Honduras' democracy remains weak, with the OAS characterizing its 2017 elections as marred by irregularities (OAS 2017). Nicaragua backslid into a hybrid regime in 2016.

**Cuba is the only country in the region that has endured as a non-democratic regime since the start of the third wave of democracy, and Venezuela presents a case of democratic backsliding that has resulted in full breakdown.** In fact, Venezuela is the only one of the five democracies in the region in 1977 that has backslid into a non-democratic regime since that time.

### 3.1.3. The current democracy landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the democratic challenges the region faces.



#### Representative Government

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries' performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

#### Summary: Representative Government performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

| Regional average: Mid-range (0.64) |   |  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| High<br>(≥0.7)                     | Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay |  |
| Mid-range<br>(0.4–0.7)             | Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay      |  |
| Low<br>(<0.4)                      | Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela   |  |

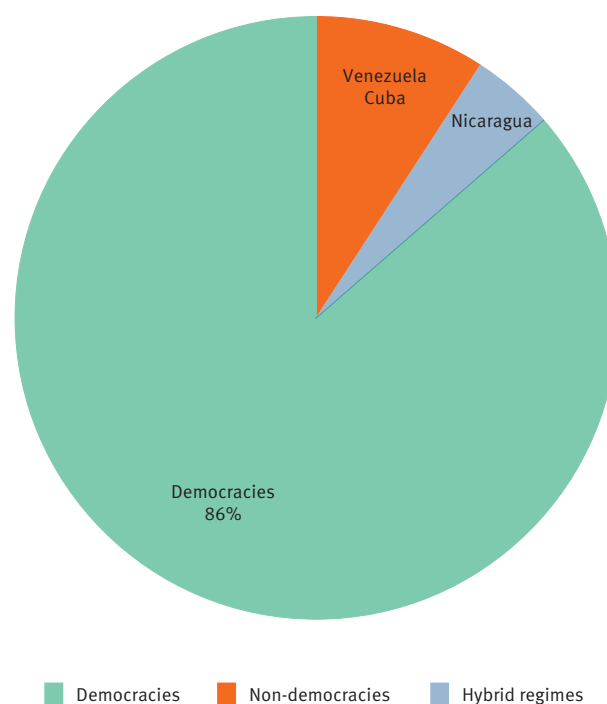
### The democratic landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean is heterogeneous

**Latin America and the Caribbean is today a largely democratic region.** Thanks to democratic advances over the past 40 years, the region currently has the third-largest share of democracies (86 per cent), after North America (100 per cent) and Europe (93 per cent). Latin America and the Caribbean is home to 19 democracies, one hybrid regime and two non-democracies (see Figure 3.2). Of the region's democracies, more than half (53 per cent) have high levels of Representative Government, while a little less than half (47 per cent) have mid-range levels.

**Democratic performance patterns and the quality of democracy still vary widely between democracies in the region.** A total of 12 different democratic performance patterns can be discerned among the democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean, with only two countries (Uruguay, and Trinidad and Tobago) recording high performance across all attributes (see Table 3.1). All other countries perform better on some aspects than others, pointing to uneven levels of democratic quality in the region.

FIGURE 3.2

#### Share of regime types in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018



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

TABLE 3.1

Heat map of democratic performance patterns in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

| Country             | GSoD attribute            |                    |                      |                          |                          |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                     | Representative Government | Fundamental Rights | Checks on Government | Impartial Administration | Participatory Engagement |
| Uruguay             | High                      | High               | High                 | High                     | High                     |
| Trinidad and Tobago | High                      | High               | High                 | High                     | High                     |
| Chile               | High                      | High               | High                 | High                     | Mid-range                |
| Costa Rica          | High                      | High               | High                 | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Jamaica             | High                      | High               | High                 | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Argentina           | High                      | High               | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Peru                | High                      | Mid-range          | High                 | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Brazil              | High                      | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Panama              | High                      | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Colombia            | High                      | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | Mid-range                |
| Bolivia             | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | High                     |
| Ecuador             | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | High                     |
| El Salvador         | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | Mid-range                |
| Paraguay            | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | Mid-range                |
| Mexico              | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Mid-range                | Mid-range                |
| Guatemala           | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Low                      | Mid-range                |
| Dominican Republic  | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Low                      | Mid-range                |
| Honduras            | Mid-range                 | Mid-range          | Mid-range            | Low                      | Mid-range                |
| Haiti               | Mid-range                 | Low                | Mid-range            | Low                      | Low                      |

■ High ■ Mid-range ■ Low

**Notes:** This heat map shows the performance of the 19 democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean by attribute in 2018. Green indicates high performance, while yellow denotes mid-range performance, and red shows low-range performance.

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

Of the other eight countries with high levels of Representative Government, Chile, Costa Rica and Jamaica record high performance on four attributes; Argentina and Peru on three; Brazil and Panama on two attributes; and Colombia on one. El Salvador, Mexico and Paraguay perform in the mid-range on all attributes. Weaker levels of democratic performance are found in Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Honduras, which record low

performance on one attribute; and Haiti, which has seen low performance on three attributes.

***Cuba is the enduring exception to democratization in the region***

**Cuba is the only country in Latin America and the Caribbean that has not experienced a transition to democracy in the last four decades.**

Cuba's 1959 revolution turned the country into a Communist one-party state. In 2018, Cuba scored in the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world on 12 of its 16 democratic subattributes. The transition of power in 2018 to Miguel Díaz-Canel, a non-Castro family member, has given some observers hope that the regime may be opening up for a potential transition. However, Raul Castro remains the first secretary of the Communist Party and a February 2019 referendum on a new constitution reaffirmed the party's grip on power, strengthening the irrevocable character of Cuba's socialist regime (Augustin 2019).

Cuba's close ties with other non-democratic and hybrid regimes in Latin America has implications for the democratic landscape in the region, as their political, financial and human-resource barter trade give these regimes lifelines in the face of international sanctions. For example, Venezuela supplies Cuba with oil in exchange for Cuban doctors, teachers and intelligence advisors (Labrador 2019).

While Cuba classifies as a non-democracy, it does not score poorly on all its democratic aspects. In fact, on the GSoD Indices subcomponent of Basic Welfare, Cuba outperforms all other countries in the region and even scores among the top 25 per cent in the world. The same is true for Gender

Equality, and for Electoral Participation, although Cuba's elections are not classified as free or fair.

### ***Backsliding has resulted in democratic breakdown in Nicaragua and Venezuela***

While the large majority of countries in the region have undergone democratic transition and consolidation in the past decades, two countries stand out from that pattern. Nicaragua and Venezuela are the two countries in the region—and among ten countries in the world—that have suffered from severe democratic backsliding.

Nicaragua underwent a democratic transition in 1990 but from 2005 onwards it gradually deteriorated in terms of its democratic performance and weakened checks on government, finally backsliding into a hybrid regime in 2016 (see Box 3.3). Venezuela was one of the six democracies in the region in 1977 but backslid to a hybrid regime in 2008–2016 before undergoing a full democratic breakdown in 2017 (see Box 3.2).

Nicaragua and Venezuela's backsliding patterns differ in terms of their depth and timeframe, and their levels of democratic performance (see Table 3.2). Venezuela's backsliding has been the most severe, dropping an average of 0.31 points across

**TABLE 3.2**

### **Comparative table of democratic backsliding: Venezuela and Nicaragua**

|  | Venezuela   |   | Nicaragua   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Timeframe of democratic backsliding</b> | 1998–2018 (20 years)<br>Deepening autocratization since 2009–2010   |   | 2005–2018 (13 years)  |   |
| <b>Level of democratic performance</b>     | <b>Prior to backsliding</b><br>Democracy uninterrupted, 1975–2007<br>High levels of Representative Government in 1998<br>Hybrid regime: 2008–2016   | <b>Since backsliding</b><br>Non-democracy since 2017<br>In bottom 25% of the world on 12 of 16 GSoD subattributes | <b>Prior to backsliding</b><br>Democracy, 1990–2015   | <b>Since backsliding</b><br>Hybrid regime since 2016<br>In bottom 25% of the world on 11 of 16 GSoD subattributes |
| <b>Depth of backsliding</b>                | Decline of 0.42 on Checks on Government and 0.34 on Civil Liberties (1998–2018)<br>Average GSoD Indices decline of 0.31 points (49 per cent) (1997–2018)<br>Significant declines across 11 of 16 GSoD subattributes (1998–2018) |   | Decline of 0.30 on Checks on Government and 0.48 on Civil Liberties (2005–2018)<br>Average GSoD Indices decline of 0.23 points (39 per cent) (2005–2018)<br>Significant declines across 12 of 16 GSoD subattributes (2005–2018) |   |

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



## BOX 3.2

### Venezuela: A case study of democratic breakdown

Venezuela has experienced the most severe democratic backsliding process in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years, resulting in full democratic breakdown in 2017. The democratic breakdown in the country is also unparalleled in the world.

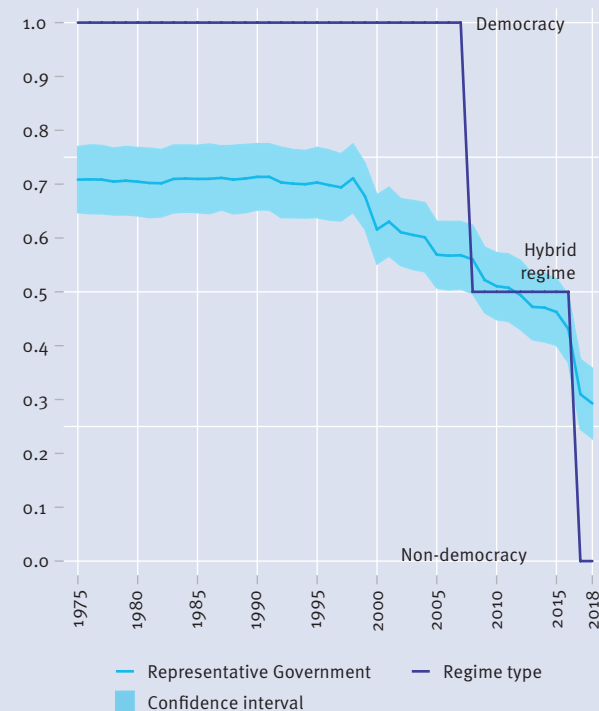
According to the GSoD Indices, in 1996 Venezuela was a democracy with high levels of Representative Government (0.70), well above the world (0.49) and Latin American and the Caribbean (0.65) averages. Venezuela's score on this dimension has more than halved in two decades (to 0.29) and is now among the bottom 25 per cent in the world (see Figure 3.3). A similar decline can be seen in Venezuela's Civil Society Participation, Judicial Independence, Media Integrity and Impartial Administration scores (see Table 3.3), while its scores on Civil Liberties have nearly halved over the same period. Venezuela is now, along with Cuba, in the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world on 12 of its 16 democratic subattributes.

**The democratic backsliding process in Venezuela has occurred over a period of two decades.** It began in 1998 with the 'Bolivarian Revolution' initiated by the democratically elected government of Hugo Chávez and further deepened during the presidency of Nicolás Maduro following Chávez's death in 2013. The process was enabled by the significant public support enjoyed by Chávez, who won the 1998 elections with more than half of the votes, based on promises of fundamental reform to a corrupt and centralized party system. Indeed, prior to Chávez's election, Venezuela suffered from comparatively high levels of corruption, hovering in the lower bracket of mid-range and recording a borderline low score of 0.45 in 1996.

While Chávez's sweeping reforms sought to tackle a corrupt party system, they also led to a severe weakening of Checks

FIGURE 3.3

### Regime type and Representative Government in Venezuela, 1975–2018



**Notes:** The light-shaded band around the Representative Government line demarcates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimates.

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

TABLE 3.3

### The state of democracy in Venezuela, 1996 and 2018

| Year | GSoD attribute score      |                    |                      |                          |                          |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|      | Representative Government | Fundamental Rights | Checks on Government | Impartial Administration | Participatory Engagement |
| 1996 | 0.70                      | 0.62               | 0.68                 | 0.50                     | High                     |
| 2018 | 0.29                      | 0.39               | 0.25                 | 0.08                     | Low                      |

■ High ■ Mid-range ■ Low

**Note:** Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes are not aggregated.

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

on Government, debilitating and ultimately dismantling institutions of representative democracy in favour of mechanisms of direct participation (Ollier 2018). Venezuela has had the largest increase in the world in the last 20 years in terms of its Direct Democracy score, with a peak score of 0.56 in 2003, second only to Switzerland and Uruguay.

Between 1999 and 2013 the country held seven referenda. The first, in April 1999, related to the establishment of a National Constituent Assembly, and succeeded with a 90 per cent approval rating. The aim of the assembly was to draft a replacement for the 1961 Constitution, which was also approved in a popular referendum with 72 per cent of votes (Reuters 2011).

The 1999 Constitution gave the executive significant powers over the legislature and the judiciary, which then enabled the expansion of control over other governmental institutions, such as the National Electoral Commission, the Comptroller's Office (Contraloría) and the Public Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalía). It also enabled Chávez to increase the presidential term limit from five to six years—making it one of the longest in Latin America—and introduce the possibility of presidential re-election. In 2007, another constitutional amendment, again approved in a referendum, removed limits on the number of times a president could be re-elected, catapulting Venezuela into a hybrid regime.

Earlier, by 2004, Chávez had re-legitimized his presidency through a revocatory referendum on his presidency, which enabled him to consolidate his grip on power. The constitutional reforms in combination with strong popular support enabled Chávez's governing coalition to effectively control the National Assembly, where they held 64 per cent of seats from 2000 to 2005, 96 per cent of seats from 2005 to 2010 (in part due to an electoral boycott by the opposition in 2005) and 59 per cent between 2010 and 2015 (IPU 2000, 2005 and 2010).

This, in turn, enabled the National Assembly to delegate powers to the executive to approve a number of laws that further undermined formal and informal democratic checks and balances, strengthened presidential control and weakened fiscal and budgetary transparency. It also enabled Chávez to nominate loyal supporters to the Supreme Court and other institutions. He was then in a position to dispose of the country's large oil income (during the oil boom) at his discretion, and to expand state media and social programmes, which often had a clientelistic character. While this fuelled corruption, it strengthened Chávez's political support among large parts of the population, boosting levels of electoral participation to facilitate his re-election in 2000, 2006 and 2012.

The process of decentralization initiated in Venezuela in the 1990s was also reversed, undermining local democracy. Regional governments were stripped of their control over public services and a significant portion of their financial resources. Moreover, new participatory mechanisms such as the Communal Councils were created as direct competition to regional and municipal governments, further undermining their

decision-making authority and political legitimacy (Penfold 2009; López Maya 2011).

Finally, Chávez secured the loyalty of the military through a constitutional reform which gave the president full control over military promotions without needing approval from parliament. He also purged military ranks to ensure key positions were held by supporters, who were guaranteed access to political and economic power, and the financial resources enabled by the oil boom. Military officials were awarded ministerial posts and given control of the state oil company, banks and other financial institutions—a tradition continued by Maduro (BBC News 2019a).

**While most of Venezuela's democratic indicators dropped under the Chávez and Maduro regimes, Electoral Participation levels rose to unprecedented historical highs.** During Chávez's rule, the country's score on this measure rose from 49 per cent (in 1994) to 82 per cent (in 2012). Similarly, levels of Direct Democracy rose by 5,700 per cent between 1996 and 2013, as a key pillar of the Bolivarian Revolution was to introduce a more participatory form of democracy, which in practice reinforced the president's hold on power and ultimately resulted in the erosion of representative democracy in Venezuela.

Venezuela deepened its autocratization process after the death of Chávez in 2013 and the handover of power to Maduro, who was not able to sustain the popular electoral support enjoyed by his predecessor. Maduro won contested presidential elections in 2013 by a very narrow margin, and again in 2018 amid allegations of fraud by the opposition (Phillips 2018). Maduro further autocratized the country by silencing critical voices, banning the main opposition parties and disabling the direct democracy mechanisms so widely used by Chávez. He also took control of the media, closing outlets and harassing and imprisoning journalists to quell dissent (Corrales and Penfold 2015).

Maduro's mandate coincided with a drop in international oil prices, which together with mismanagement of the economy led to a severe economic crisis, hyperinflation and plummeting of basic welfare and a significant increase in poverty to nearly 82 per cent in 2016 (Freitez 2016). As popular discontent grew, the opposition parties succeeded in winning the legislative elections in 2015, obtaining a majority of seats in the National Assembly. This enabled them to partially renew the composition of judicial institutions. However, in 2017, under orders from the president, the Supreme Court annulled the functioning of the National Assembly and transferred its legislative powers to the parallel National Constituent Assembly established under Chávez. It also recognized the results of the 2018 presidential election, in which Maduro was re-elected. This was despite the fact that the elections were boycotted by the main opposition forces and were viewed as fraudulent and illegitimate by leading international bodies and most Latin American governments.

Venezuela's opposition parties have historically been fragmented. The severe repression of opposition parties throughout Venezuela's democratic backsliding process has

made the task of uniting the opposition even more difficult. However, the building of alliances between a new generation of political leaders has now enabled the rallying of the opposition behind the figure of Juan Guaidó, which has helped strengthen the voice of a more unified Venezuelan opposition in its communications with the outside world (Lozano 2018; Moleiro 2019).

**Despite being endowed with one of the largest oil reserves in the world, Venezuela is now experiencing general socio-economic disintegration as a consequence of its democratic decline.** The economy has collapsed, with the country's gross domestic product (GDP) falling by half in the last five years, and hyperinflation spiralling to more than 1.7 million per cent in 2018 (*The Economist* 2019b). Venezuela has also

experienced a sharp deterioration in basic public services and living standards, and now records some of the highest crime and homicide rates in the world, as by-products of the regime's autocratic deepening and isolation.

Venezuela's complete breakdown has caused an exodus of more than three million people in the past two years, resulting in the most severe migration crisis in Latin American history, with humanitarian implications for the entire region. Neighbouring Colombia bears the brunt of this burden, but Brazil, Ecuador and nine other countries in the region have all been affected (BBC News 2018b). There are no signs that the Maduro regime is ready to negotiate or cede power. Despite international backing for Guaidó, the president looks likely to cling on to power as long as he has the backing of the military.

all GSoD Indices aspects since 1997, and with significant declines across 11 subattributes including severe declines in Elected Government, Clean Elections, Local Democracy, Civil Society Participation, Judicial Independence, Absence of Corruption and Media Integrity. Nicaragua's democratic backsliding, when measured in terms of its average point drop since 2005 (−0.23), is not yet as severe as Venezuela's.

The two countries also differ in their democratic departure and endpoints. Venezuela's democratic performance before its backsliding process started in 1996 was in the high range on Representative Government (0.70) but dropped to the

bottom 25 per cent in the world in 2018. Nicaragua, in contrast, had lower levels of democratic performance before its backsliding process started. However, as in Venezuela, its performance on Representative Government is now among the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Venezuela and Nicaragua now score among the bottom 25 per cent in the world on 12 and 11 of their 16 democratic subattributes, respectively. The economic and humanitarian collapse of Venezuela is also more severe than Nicaragua's.

In both countries the backsliding process has been gradual. In Venezuela, it has occurred during the presidencies

### BOX 3.3

#### Nicaragua: A case study of democratic backsliding

Nicaragua is the second country in Latin America and the Caribbean, after Venezuela, to have experienced severe democratic backsliding in recent years, with an average decline of 39 per cent across all democratic dimensions since 2005.

According to the GSoD Indices, Judicial Independence has seen most declines, with a 79 per cent drop since 2005. Nicaragua's levels of Judicial Independence are now lower than they were in 1975 under the dictatorship of President Anastasio Somoza. Similarly, its Representative Government score has dropped by 44 per cent since 2005, and its Civil Liberties score by 63 per cent with Freedom of Association and Assembly suffering the greatest declines with a nearly 71 per cent drop (see Figure 3.4). Nicaragua now scores in the bottom 25 per cent in the world on 11 of 16 subattributes.

Somoza was overthrown in 1979 by the left-wing Sandinista movement whose leader, Daniel Ortega, served as President for the first time between 1985 and 1990. Nicaragua transitioned to

democracy in 1990 when the Sandinistas were defeated in general elections, with the opposition presidential candidate, Violeta Chamorro, defeating Ortega. In 1996 Chamorro was, in turn, defeated, leading to the election of Arnoldo Alemán as President.

In 2000, Nicaragua's National Assembly approved constitutional reforms that reduced the minimum share of votes needed to win the presidential election from 45 to 35 per cent as part of a deal between Alemán and Ortega, then opposition leader. The reforms also allowed both leaders' parties to divide politically appointed seats on the Supreme Court and Electoral Council, and other democratic institutions, thereby allowing Ortega and the Sandinistas to secure political influence over these bodies.

Ortega was elected president for the second time in 2007 and has since ruled the country through alliances with the Catholic Church, the private sector, the judiciary and the army. Nicaragua backslid from a democracy to a hybrid regime in 2016 but, as in Venezuela, the process of democratic backsliding has been gradual.

In 2010, the Sandinista-controlled Supreme Court lifted a ban on consecutive presidential re-election, allowing Ortega to run again in 2011. In elections marred by accusations of fraud, the Sandinistas won 62 per cent of the votes, granting them an absolute majority in the National Assembly (The Carter Center 2011). This then enabled the assembly to pass fiercely criticized constitutional changes in 2014 that strengthened Ortega's hold on power, enabling him to run for re-election for a third consecutive term in 2016. In addition to abolishing term limits altogether, the constitutional revisions allowed the president to issue decrees with force of law, and to appoint active-duty police and military officials to government positions formerly reserved for civilians.

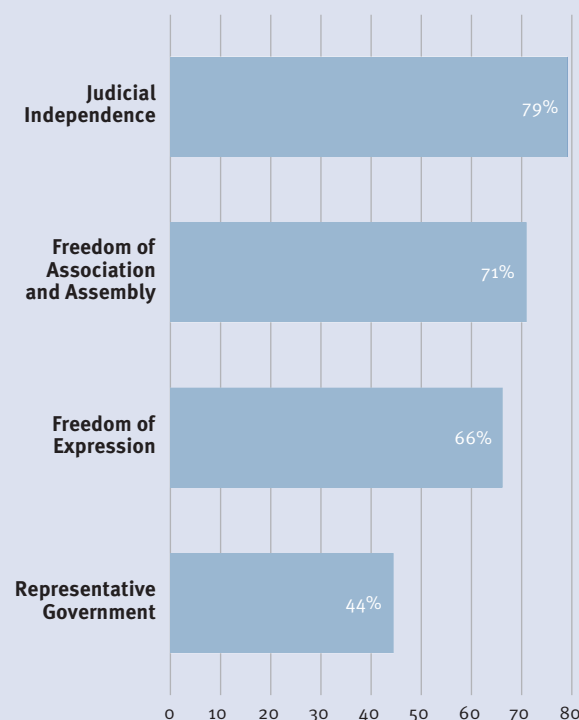
Weeks before the 2016 general elections, the Supreme Court ousted the leader of the main opposition party, the Independent Liberation Party (PLI), and appointed a new party leader with strong ties to Ortega. In 2018, a broad civil movement organized a series of protests, initially in opposition to pension-sector reforms, but increasingly focused against Ortega's nepotistic and repressive regime. In response, Ortega unleashed a violent wave of repression against the protestors.

By July 2019, at least 325 people were estimated to have been killed, including students, civil society activists and journalists, with attacks carried out to a large extent by paramilitary groups operating at Ortega's behest. Since the wave of repression began, independent news sources, human rights organizations and other civic groups have been bullied or closed, and protests have been banned, significantly reducing civic and democratic space in the country (BBC News 2019b).

Venezuela has been key to maintaining Ortega in power, funnelling large amounts of financial resources in oil cooperation into the country since 2007 via a party-controlled company with little external oversight. Venezuela's fate is therefore likely to play a key role in the unfolding developments in Nicaragua.

FIGURE 3.4

### Selected indicators and percentage decreases from 2005–2018 in Nicaragua



**Notes:** This figure demonstrates the percentage drop between 2005 and 2018 across the Representative Government attribute, the Judicial Independence subattribute, and the Freedom of Association and Assembly and Freedom of Expression subcomponents in Nicaragua.

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

TABLE 3.4

### The state of democracy in Nicaragua, 2005 and 2018

| Year | GSoD attribute score      |                    |                      |                          |                          |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|      | Representative Government | Fundamental Rights | Checks on Government | Impartial Administration | Participatory Engagement |
| 2005 | 0.64                      | 0.59               | 0.59                 | 0.43                     | Mid-range                |
| 2018 | 0.36                      | 0.34               | 0.29                 | 0.23                     | Low                      |

High Mid-range Low

**Note:** Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes are not aggregated.

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

of two left-wing populists: Hugo Chávez (1999–2013) and Nicolás Maduro (2013–present). In Nicaragua, the backsliding process has occurred under another left-wing populist, President Daniel Ortega (2007–present), although the country's decline in democratic performance began during the conservative government of Enrique Bolaños in 2005. Other similarities include the use of constitutional revisions in both countries to abolish presidential term limits; the expansion of executive power over the legislature; and weakened checks on government—both formal (e.g. weakened judicial independence) and informal (e.g. crackdowns on media and civil society).

In both countries, regional and global geopolitics also interacts with the democratic backsliding processes, with powerful non-democracies providing their backing to the regimes. Apart from providing moral backing to Nicaragua, Cuba has supplied Venezuela with human resources in areas where the latter faces skill shortages (e.g. medical and intelligence services) in exchange for oil. Russia plays a role in both countries—although to a greater extent in Venezuela—by supplying military equipment. China has been a key partner for Venezuela, with a loan-for-oil deal under which Venezuela supplied China with oil in exchange for generous Chinese loans, and infrastructure and technology investment, including in identity registration and voting technologies (Labrador 2019; Seligman 2019).

**Latin America and the Caribbean has experienced signs of democratic erosion in recent years.** The share of countries with high performance levels has declined since 2012–2013 on Judicial Independence, and on the dimensions related to civic space, freedom of political parties and levels of electoral participation. Brazil, while still performing in the high range on Representative Government in 2018, had the highest number of subattribute declines in the region between 2013 and 2018, with significant declines on 8 of 16 democratic dimensions.

Bolsonaro's election in Brazil in late 2018 has been seen as a protest vote against the traditional political parties and their perceived inability to stave off corruption, reduce social inequalities, reduce crime and violence, and revive an ailing economy. However, detractors worry that Bolsonaro, a former army captain, expresses sympathy and praise for the country's former military regime. He has been criticized for defending patriarchal values and displaying disdain towards dissenters, the political left, underprivileged racial and ethnic groups and sexual minorities. The presence of retired military officers in his cabinet has also raised concerns. At the same time, others believe Brazilian institutions are strong enough to prevent an autocratic relapse (Bevins 2018).

However, other countries in the region have also experienced a deterioration in democratic performance, with declines on one or more subattributes. This includes countries in the higher range of performance (e.g. Chile, with declines on three democratic subattributes); in the mid-range (e.g. Colombia, with two declines); and in the lower tier of performance (e.g. Dominican Republic). In addition, Argentina, Costa Rica and Haiti have declined on one subattribute since 2013. All of these declines are generally linked to aspects of civic space, but also to increases in corruption (e.g. in Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Guatemala), and declines in Judicial Independence (e.g. in Bolivia and Honduras) and Clean Elections (e.g. in Honduras).

### ***The region's electoral landscape is in a process of profound transformation***

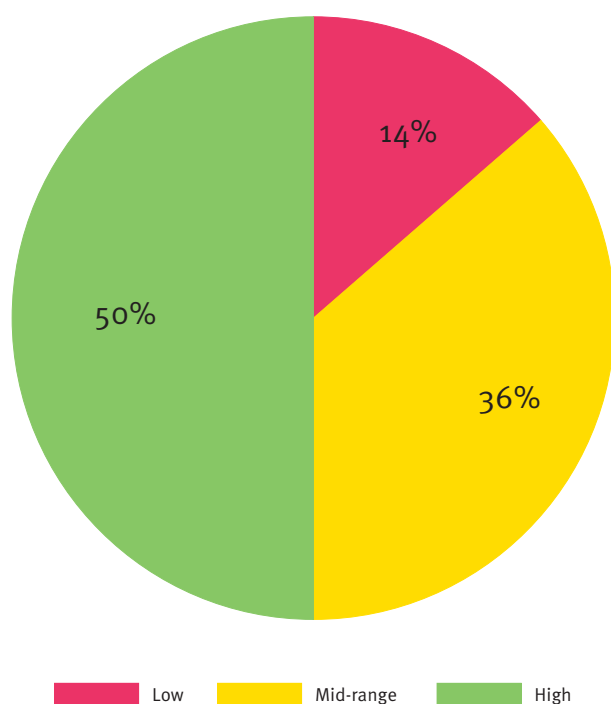
**Competitive, free and fair elections are the norm in the region.** Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean—apart from Cuba and, most recently, Venezuela and Nicaragua—have committed to competitive, periodic, free, fair and clean elections as the main channel to elect their governments. Moreover, electoral norms and practices in many countries in the region are of a high democratic calibre, with half (11) of the countries in the region having high levels of Clean Elections (see Figure 3.5). Of these countries, seven (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Panama and Uruguay) score among the top 25 per cent in the world.

The years 2017 to 2019 have been depicted as 'electoral marathon years' for the region, with 15 of 18 countries holding elections during this time (Zovatto 2018). In 2017, Chile, Ecuador and Honduras held elections, while in 2018 elections took place in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela. A total of six elections have been held so far in 2019: three presidential elections in Central America (in El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama), and three presidential elections in South America (in Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay). With the exception of the 2019 elections in Bolivia, the 2018 elections in Venezuela—and the 2017 presidential elections in Honduras, which have been viewed as being marred by irregularities—all of these elections have been considered largely free and fair.

**The average level of Electoral Participation in the region is high.** Latin America and the Caribbean records the highest levels of voter turnout in the world, at 67 per cent (compared to 63 per cent for Europe and 55 per cent for North America). However, this is not necessarily a sign of higher levels of political engagement and can be partially explained by the existence of compulsory voting laws in 14 countries in the region. In fact, Latin America and the Caribbean is the region with the largest share of



FIGURE 3.5

**Clean Elections in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018**

**Notes:** A low level is characterized as a score below 0.4, while a high score is characterized as a score at or above 0.7.

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

countries with such laws, although these are applied with varying degrees of enforcement.

Levels of Electoral Participation are significantly higher in the subregion of South America (72 per cent) than in Central America and the Caribbean (65 per cent), which can also be partially explained by the higher prevalence of mandatory voting in South America. All South American countries, with the exception of Chile, Colombia and Venezuela, have enacted compulsory voting laws, whereas only two Central American countries (Costa Rica and Honduras) have enacted such laws, which are not enforced. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, no Caribbean country has made voting obligatory for its citizens.

Voter turnout rates for the 14 Latin American and the Caribbean countries that have compulsory voting laws have averaged 68 per cent over the two most recent electoral cycles in each country, while in countries without such laws turnout over the same number of electoral cycles has

averaged 60 per cent (International IDEA Voter Turnout Database 2019). Chile, which abolished compulsory voting in 2012, has seen a sharp decline in voter turnout, from 87 per cent in the 2010 presidential elections to 42 and 47 per cent in the 2013 and 2017 general elections, respectively. However, this decline also coincided with the simultaneous switch to automatic voter registration, which increased the number of people on the voting rolls (Bodzin 2011).

**In some countries, electoral norms are distorted and used as facades to legitimize non-democratic regimes.** Elections in these countries do not uphold the principles of popular control and political equality. For example, Cuba, one of the region's two non-democracies, held elections in 2018 to elect local representatives, as well as members of the national parliament, and the president. While this led to the transition of power to a non-Castro family member for the first time since the Cuban revolution in 1959, there are no signs that the country is moving towards democracy and a commitment to make elections genuinely competitive.

In Venezuela, which backslid into a non-democracy in 2017, elections have been held continuously for the past four decades, although their integrity has gradually been hollowed out as the institutions that manage and administer them have been severely weakened and no longer guarantee democratic principles or independence from the executive.

**Presidential re-election rules and norms have been altered to suit incumbents.** Recent controversies over presidential re-election rules (by governments on both sides of the political spectrum) illustrate this phenomenon and reinforce the personalization of political power. However, the use of constitutional amendments to enable presidential re-election is not a recent phenomenon in the region. In the 1990s, such revisions were also passed under presidents Menem in Argentina, Fujimori in Peru and Cardoso in Brazil (International IDEA 2016a).

Between 1978 and 2012, 18 countries in the region introduced changes to the rules of presidential re-election. Of these countries, 11 have made it more permissive through consecutive or indefinite re-election (International IDEA 2018)—the cases of Nicaragua and Venezuela (see Boxes 3.3 and 3.2, respectively) are arguably the most blatant examples. In Honduras, despite a constitutional ban and a 2009 Supreme Court ruling against re-election, President Juan Orlando Hernández stacked the court with supporters which then passed a ruling in 2015 that made his re-election possible, resulting in the OAS characterizing the 2017 elections as marred by 'irregularities and deficiencies' (OAS 2017; Shifter 2017).



In Bolivia, President Evo Morales' efforts to secure another presidential run by reforming the Constitution via a referendum were defeated at the polls in 2016. Morales then appealed to the Supreme Court and obtained a ruling authorizing his 2019 presidential bid. Subsequently, in 2017 the Constitutional Court responded to a government petition to eliminate term limits for all political offices, appealing to regional human rights legislation, which enabled Morales to run again in the 2019 presidential elections (*The Economist* 2017). This makes Bolivia, Nicaragua and Venezuela the three Latin American countries (as well as 22 others in the world) to have eliminated presidential term limits.

In Ecuador in 2015, as part of a significant weakening of the judiciary and clampdown on the media, President Rafael Correa abolished presidential term limits, although they were reinstated in 2018 by his successor, Lenín Moreno, in an interesting case of a reversal of democratic backsliding (*The Guardian* 2018). Finally, in Paraguay in 2017, President Horacio Cartes sought to bypass constitutional norms barring presidential re-elections through a simple legislative vote. This triggered major street protests and the partial burning of the Congress before Cartes backed down.

**As in other regions in the world, new technologies and social media are contributing to a profound change in electoral dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean.** Information and communications technologies (ICTs) now play an increasingly important role as political tools across the political spectrum, and the dissemination of political messages through social media has been a frequent feature in most recent elections, including those in Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico.

In some cases, social media is used as a communication tool to complement traditional forms of political communication, while in others it has been favoured over traditional channels. In El Salvador in 2019, Nayib Bukele won the presidential elections, thanks in large part to his anti-corruption promises, but also to his strong social media presence. During the campaign, he used social media as his primary mode of communication with voters, granting few interviews and avoiding live presidential debates (*The Economist* 2019a).

In Brazil, Bolsonaro's 2018 presidential election campaign was conducted in large part via Twitter and WhatsApp after he was stabbed during a rally and hospitalized. However, widespread access to ICTs and alternative news sources via social media applications also means that citizens in the region are more susceptible to disinformation. This development is expected to have a growing political impact,

as demonstrated in the 2018 Brazilian elections, where WhatsApp became a conduit for disinformation during the election campaign (Isaac and Roose 2018).

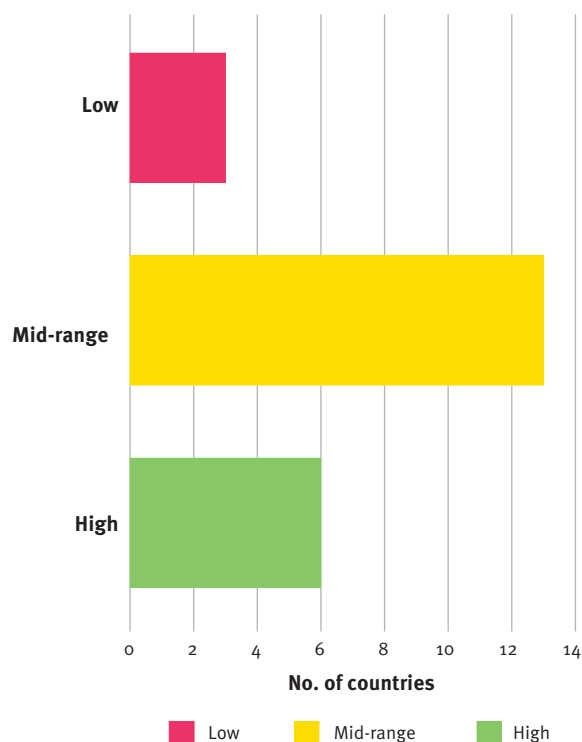
### **Political parties in an era of representational crisis**

**The political party arena in Latin America and the Caribbean is largely free.** All countries in the region except Cuba have multiparty systems and allow opposition parties to operate, although the latter are severely restricted in Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela are the only three countries in the region scoring below the world average on Free Political Parties. The majority of countries in the region (59 per cent) score in the mid-range on this indicator, while six score high and eight countries (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay) are in the top 25 per cent in the world on this measure (see Figure 3.6). All political parties in the region,

FIGURE 3.6

### **Free Political Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018**



**Notes:** A low level is characterized as a score below 0.4, while a high score is characterized as a score above 0.70.

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

with the exception of those in Bolivia and Venezuela, have access to public funding, although this funding varies across the region in terms of levels, purpose (e.g. campaign funding versus funding for party operations) and source (e.g. direct versus indirect funding).

**The political party arena in Latin America and the Caribbean is also more diverse and more inclusive than ever.** Historically marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, have now gained greater access to the political party arena. Indigenous peoples represent 8 per cent of the population in the region (or 42 million people). Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru, with more than 80 per cent of the regional total, are the countries with the largest indigenous populations (World Bank 2015).

In the past decades, indigenous-based social movements have emerged throughout the region; some have morphed into political parties. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, indigenous organizations have chosen to compete in the electoral arena through existing political parties. Other countries have seen the emergence of indigenous political parties, either at the regional (e.g. Nicaragua) or national level (e.g. Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela). Bolivia and Ecuador have the strongest indigenous parties. In Bolivia—where 41 per cent of the population is indigenous—the indigenous and worker-based Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism, MAS) is led by Evo Morales, the country's first indigenous President (World Bank 2015). Morales came to power in 2005, and was re-elected in 2009 and 2014. After abolishing term limits in 2019 Morales ran for a fourth term and won a highly disputed first round of the presidential election.

**However, despite these historical advances and relative strengths, political parties in Latin America and the Caribbean also suffer from a crisis of political representation.** In the last 30 years, the region has seen the demise of various established parties and the overhaul of a number of party systems, notably in Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela (Levitsky et al. 2016; Mainwaring 2018). Political party fragmentation and in some cases severe weakening of the political party arena in these contexts has become a serious challenge driven by the increased personalization of representation, exacerbated by the frequent use of preferential voting in party primaries and an increase in the number of independent candidates without a party base.

This fragmentation is also driven by the spread of populist discourses throughout the region, which often portray political parties as a 'pathological agent of democracy'. The presidential systems common in the region further reinforce the personalization of political power (Casas-Zamora 2019). One explanatory factor is that political parties and parliaments have lost considerable prestige and legitimacy in a context of state weakness and high levels of socio-economic inequalities and corruption, and such candidates tap into that discontent (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). There is also a perception that traditional parties have not kept up with changing social realities and the increased demands for change they have brought about—that they have remained '19th-century institutions, with 20th-century paradigms, unequipped to tackle 21st-century problems'.<sup>11</sup>

Party fragmentation and reliance on pork barrelling and corruption to sustain presidential coalitions have also slowed the legislative process. Given their weak capacity to deliver, political parties and parliaments have been at the centre of much of the region's sense of civic discontent. The decline or collapse of traditional parties in the centre and on the right in several countries in the region (including Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru) can be harmful for democracy. It potentially also leaves a void that authoritarian leaders can fill, as wealthy elites may opt for authoritarian alternatives for lack of other options (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

**Contributing to this loss of prestige is the sense that politicians are far removed from citizens.** Social media further exacerbates the distance between parties and voters, bypassing and thereby undermining the mediating function of political parties, as individual politicians increasingly opt for direct communication with voters. This detachment further exacerbates mistrust towards political parties.

**The democratic quality of political debates is also hampered by the polarization and degradation of public deliberation and discourse, including the appeal to false dilemmas, stigmas, and ridicule to humiliate opponents, which is reinforced by the increasing use of social media.** Lack of concern for factual truths and a willingness to undermine the credibility of science and data as a basis on which to ascertain truths represent a potential threat to democracy as they undermine the quality and civility of public discourse, which is key to a healthy democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

11 Comments made by International IDEA's Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Daniel Zovatto, at the conference organized by International IDEA and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 'El estado de la democracia en América Latina: 40 años del inicio de la Tercera Ola Democrática' [The state of democracy in Latin America: 40 years since the beginning of the Third Democratic Wave], in Santiago de Chile, 26–28 November 2018.

**In Latin America, the current election cycle reveals increasing levels of political polarization, as well as the depth of frustration with political elites and the ‘old style of politics’.** These developments suggest that the deeper malaise appears to be with politics as it is practised, rather than with the idea of democracy itself. Recent elections of presidential candidates often described by the media as anti-establishment—including Andrés Manuel López Obrador on the left in Mexico, Bolsonaro on the right in Brazil, and most recently Nayib Bukele in El Salvador—have largely been driven by a sense of civic anger, often directed at corrupt elites, and exhibited a strong anti-establishment bent, along with a quest to find a political redeemer. In Brazil, the 2018 elections also revealed growing signs of political polarization and societal intolerance.

**In this anti-establishment setting, charges and counter-charges of corruption have been exploited in campaigning by all sides, therefore showing the extent to which accusations of corruption can be used to derail political opponents.** However, it is unclear if the region’s newly elected leaders will be able to combat its continuing high levels of corruption and solve their countries’ societal ills, or whether they will go down the same path as their predecessors who failed in this task. The results of the current electoral cycle in the region have heightened party fragmentation, and as a consequence, in all countries except Mexico, presidents will have difficulties in establishing majority coalitions in their respective legislatures, and will face greater governing challenges, which does not bode well for forceful policy implementation.

**Religion is also playing an increasing role in Latin American politics.** Evangelical churches, in particular, have played a more visible role in politicizing debates over matters of gender and sexual orientation, reflecting some public resistance to societal changes at stake. Countries where evangelical Christian churches have recently exerted increasing influence on party politics include Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica (Corrales 2018).

**This crisis of representation is reflected in the high levels of public mistrust of political parties and parliaments, and in the widespread perception that countries in the region are governed by oligarchies.** According to the public opinion survey Latinobarómetro, in 2018, only 13 per cent of Latin Americans trusted their political parties, which were the least trusted among public institutions. Moreover, four out of five Latin Americans believed their leaders favoured the interests of the privileged few over those of the majority. This sentiment reached exceptionally high levels in Brazil (90

per cent), Mexico (88 per cent), Paraguay (87 per cent), Venezuela (86 per cent) and El Salvador (86 per cent) (Latinobarómetro 2018).

Underlying the severe lack of confidence in political parties are real apprehensions about the quality of existing political leadership, including their experience, integrity and motivations for public office. These frustrations, in turn, are exacerbated by the perceived mercantilization of politics through the purchase of legislative seats to reap immediate gains or act in the interests of wealthy campaign funders.



### Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

### Summary: Fundamental Rights performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

| Regional average: Mid-range (0.63) |   |  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| High<br>(≥0.7)                     | Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay   |  |
| Mid-range<br>(0.4–0.7)             | Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru |  |
| Low<br>(<0.4)                      | Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela   |  |

### *The region has seen advances in political gender equality despite patriarchal power structures*

The GSoD Indices focus on the political dimension of Gender Equality, measuring women’s representation in parliament and their participation in civil society, political power as distributed by gender, and men’s and women’s mean years of schooling.

**Latin America and the Caribbean’s levels of political Gender Equality are now relatively high compared to other regions of the world.** The agenda for gender equality



Seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean score in the top 25 per cent in the world on the GSoD Indices measure of political Gender Equality. Five of these countries (Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay) are democracies, while two (Cuba and Venezuela) are non-democracies.

has made gradual yet discernible progress in the region. Levels of political Gender Equality are in the mid-range (0.63), or third-best after North America (0.75) and Europe (0.70). The steady build-up of women's associations and grassroots activities, along with the adoption of international covenants and national laws, and the formation of state agencies designed to protect women's rights and increase women's participation in the political and economic sphere, have facilitated this important transformation. The impact of these and a myriad of other undertakings has empowered women and fostered attitudinal changes in favour of gender equality and helped strengthen political equality.

**Women's participation in politics has increased in visible ways.** In Latin America and the Caribbean, as in Europe, women hold an average of 27 per cent of seats in parliament—this is the highest share in the world, and above the world average of 24 per cent (IPU 2019). In nine parliaments in the region, women hold more than 30 per cent of seats. Two countries (Bolivia and Cuba) are among the three countries in the world where women hold more than half of parliamentary seats.

In the last decade, four women have served as presidents in the region (Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil and Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica) and a number of women have also been top presidential contenders (in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Paraguay and Peru). According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), women's representation in subnational legislatures is at 29 per cent, slightly above the national average, with Bolivia topping the list at 51 per cent (ECLAC 2018). The regional average for women in ministerial cabinet-level positions is 27 per cent and the average representation of women in positions in the highest courts of justice increased by 12 percentage points between 2004 and 2014, reaching a regional average of 29 per cent (ECLAC 2018).

**The relatively high levels of women's parliamentary representation in Latin America have largely been driven by the introduction of gender quotas.** In 1991, Argentina

was the first country in the world to introduce a quota law for female representation in parliament. Other countries have since followed suit. According to a 2017 report, 19 countries in the region have adopted some form of legislative quota for women, 5 of which have shifted to parity regimes requiring 50:50 gender representation (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017: 38–42). Four of these countries—Bolivia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico—are among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of women's representation in national parliaments. Moreover, in 2019, the Mexican Senate and Chamber of Deputies approved a bill requiring all three branches and levels of government to have 50 per cent representation of women. This reform, once approved by a majority of state legislatures, will be the first of its kind worldwide (Cámara de Diputados 2019).

**The expansion and strengthening of Latin American civil society have also opened up spaces for women's engagement.** According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, women's participation in civil society has increased by 30 per cent over the last four decades (Coppedge et al. 2018). Efforts to advance gender equality and economic improvement, and deter violence against women, have raised new issues on the public agenda.

These developments have been propelled by the establishment of national organizations, regional and global networks, and actions to foster women's participation in community development. Massive mobilizations have been carried out to protest violence against women, including the #NiUnaMenos (NotOneLess) movement which started in Argentina, in 2015, and spread thereafter to Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay, among other places. In Brazil, women convened large rallies across Brazil during the 2018 presidential campaign, under the hashtag #EleNão (NotHim), to oppose Bolsonaro's patriarchal views on women (Darlington 2018).

**Despite these important advances, a number of challenges must be overcome if Latin America and the Caribbean is to achieve equality for women and men in political, social and economic life.** Regional averages conceal stark disparities between countries in political gender equality. While women hold over 30 per cent of seats in almost half of the national parliaments in the region, eight countries have levels below the world average of 24 per cent, including Honduras (21 per cent); Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama and Paraguay (15 per cent); and Haiti, with only 2.5 per cent (IPU 2019).

According to the Gender Equality Observatory of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the



Caribbean (ECLAC), in most countries that have adopted parity targets for women in the legislature, there is still a notable gap between women's representation in these legislatures and the proportion of women in other state institutions. Currently, not one head of state in the region is a woman, and only 15.5 per cent of mayors are women (ECLAC n.d.).

The proportion of women in cabinet-level positions is highest in the hybrid regime of Nicaragua (47 per cent), followed at some distance by democracies such as Chile and Uruguay (36 per cent), while Brazil only has two female cabinet members. On average, women account only for 10 per cent of political party presidents and 13 per cent of general secretaries (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017: 40; ECLAC 2018). Moreover, weak political participation and representation of indigenous women and women of African descent remains an important challenge.

Worryingly, the share of countries with high levels of Gender Equality has decreased (see Figure 3.7). Countries in the region which have recorded declines from high to mid-range levels in their Gender Equality scores since 2014 include Argentina and Brazil, with the latter experiencing the most significant decline in the region on this dimension.

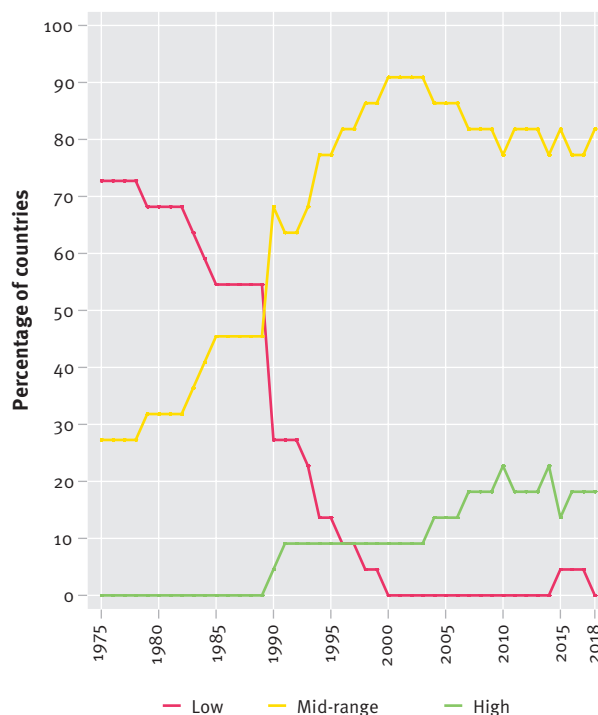
**While advances have been made on political gender equality, there has been an increase in discrimination and violence against women in the political sphere.** This reflects the backlash which women's advancement in highly patriarchal societies may encounter (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017). There are also manifestations of a growing backlash from some sectors of Latin American society towards the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities. This is partly being led by conservative sectors of the Catholic Church and a rising number of Protestant churches, mostly of a Pentecostal bent. Their campaigns against what is described as the 'ideology of gender' have stirred greater polarity around matters dealing with homosexuality and women's reproductive rights. The climate of greater hostility on these issues reflects the concerns raised by social advancements made in this domain (Corrales 2018).

**Deep economic and social inequalities translate into the political arena and distort political equality**

**The region's longstanding social disparities, underscored by high concentration of wealth, constitute a barrier to democracy and contribute to undermine democratic progress in Latin America and the Caribbean** (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; International IDEA 2016a).

FIGURE 3.7

### Gender Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

Latin America has the world's largest asymmetries in income and land distribution. Of the 26 most unequal countries in the world (as measured by the Gini coefficient), over half (15) are in Latin America, with Brazil topping the regional list as the fifth-most unequal country in the world (World Bank 2018). While relative levels of inequality have declined across the region since 2002, the reduction in inequality has stagnated since 2015 (ECLAC 2018; Lopez-Calva and Lustig 2010). Moreover, studies that focus on absolute levels of inequality have found rising income disparities in Latin America and the Caribbean (see e.g. Niño-Zarazúa, Roope and Tarp 2017).

Ordinary people are generally inclined to perceive variations in absolute, as opposed to relative, inequality (Payne 2018). Therefore, while policymakers celebrated 'Latin America's inequality reduction', public discontent about the region's levels of inequality rose. During the last decade, on average, four of every five people in the region regarded their societies as unjust (Latinobarómetro 2018: 44). In addition, despite Latin America's increased

wealth, approximately one-third of its population still lives in poverty and another one-third in a state of vulnerability. These citizens often lack effective legal rights, as well as basic information about these rights and the resources to pay for legal representation. As voters, many are susceptible to clientelist politics.

**The region's socio-economic inequalities translate into the political arena in terms of unequal access to power, unequal representation and unequal enjoyment of civil liberties.** This constitutes a vicious cycle, as unequal access to influence over public policies and political decisions contributes, in turn, to perpetuating inequality and a 'culture of privilege' that impedes change (UNDP 2010; ECLAC 2018: 26).

Access to political power by different social groups is measured by the GSoD Indices subcomponent of Social Group Equality (see Figure 3.8). Democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean perform particularly poorly on this aspect. The average for the region is 0.46, which is similar to the averages recorded by Africa (0.45) and Asia and the Pacific (0.43), which have significantly lower levels of democratic development.

One-third (36 per cent) of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean now record low scores on this indicator and eight (Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay) score in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. With the exception of Nicaragua, all of these countries are democracies. Only 14 democracies in the world have low levels of Social Group Equality; 7 are in Latin America and the Caribbean. However, two countries in the region (Costa Rica and Uruguay) stand out, with high levels of Social Group Equality.

Table 3.5 illustrates the relationship between Social Group Equality score and inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient for 18 of the 22 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The table also includes their regime status, level of Representative Government, Social Group Equality score, and the score each country received according to the Gini Index.

**Citizens' disenchantment with democracy in the region is a product of the political effects produced by extreme wealth inequalities.** These effects subvert democracy's principle of political equality; undermine the development of the rule of law and respect for human rights; and nurture social discontent, which fuels mistrust, exacerbates societal tensions, give rises to crime and violence and fosters recurrent instability.

FIGURE 3.8

### Social Group Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

Societies with severe wealth disparities exhibit distorted power relations that bend the rules of the game and produce disproportionate political representation (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010; Payne 2018). As a result, politics and public policies—including subsidies, taxation and legal enforcement—are configured to favour the interests of the well-to-do (Levitsky and Murillo 2014; Oxfam International 2014). The privileged can subvert democratic institutions designed to ensure accountability and fairness. This propagates a culture of distrust that undercuts the legitimacy of the political process.

### **Deep inequalities also lead to crime and violence, which further undermines trust in democracy**

High levels of socio-economic and political inequalities are also one of the causes of the high and rising levels of crime and violence in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Organized crime is also tied to drug trafficking. Rising levels of crime and violence constitute a serious impediment to strengthening the quality of democracy in the region (Morlino 2018;



TABLE 3.5

Social Group Equality and Gini coefficient in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012–2018

| Country            | Regime type   | Level of Representative Government | Social Group Equality score | Gini coefficient |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Costa Rica         | Democracy     | High                               | 0.74                        | 48.3             |
| Uruguay            | Democracy     | High                               | 0.72                        | 39.5             |
| Argentina          | Democracy     | High                               | 0.57                        | 40.6             |
| Bolivia            | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.60                        | 44.0             |
| Brazil             | Democracy     | High                               | 0.42                        | 53.3             |
| Chile              | Democracy     | High                               | 0.51                        | 46.6             |
| Ecuador            | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.48                        | 44.7             |
| Mexico             | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.41                        | 43.4             |
| Panama             | Democracy     | High                               | 0.50                        | 49.9             |
| Peru               | Democracy     | High                               | 0.45                        | 43.3             |
| Colombia           | Democracy     | High                               | 0.31                        | 49.7             |
| Dominican Republic | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.35                        | 45.7             |
| El Salvador        | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.29                        | 38.0             |
| Guatemala          | Democracy     | High                               | 0.27                        | 48.3             |
| Haiti              | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.27                        | 41.1             |
| Honduras           | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.36                        | 50.5             |
| Nicaragua          | Hybrid regime | Mid-range                          | 0.29                        | 46.2             |
| Paraguay           | Democracy     | Mid-range                          | 0.33                        | 48.8             |

■ High ■ Mid-range ■ Low

**Notes:** Representative Government is not scored numerically in this table but rather categorized according to one of the three levels: low, mid-range and high. Social Group Equality is scored from 0 to 1, where a higher number indicates high levels of Social Group Equality. The Gini Index measures income or wealth distribution within a population from 0 per cent to 100 per cent, where 100 per cent represents absolute inequality and 0 per cent represents perfect equality. The logic of interpreting the Gini Index is in contrast to interpreting the GSoD scores. Gini coefficient figures represent the most recent available data from 2012 to 2018.

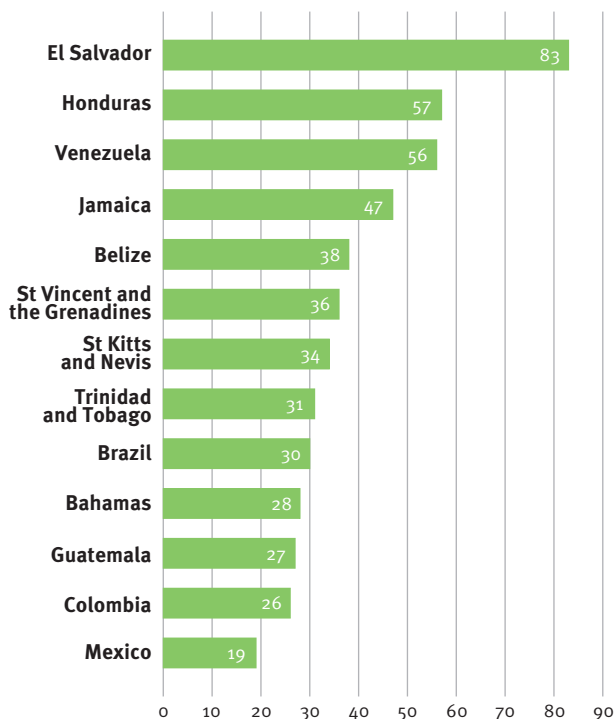
**Source:** International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>; World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2019, <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>>.

UNDP 2013). Homicide rates in Latin America and the Caribbean are the highest in the world—at 24 per 100,000 inhabitants, five times the global average (see Figure 3.9 for national breakdowns)—and are closely tied to levels of inequality, weak judicial institutions and the region’s failed drug war (Jaitman 2017). Much of this is related to violence over the illicit drug trade and the rising number of urban street gangs, especially in Central

America’s northern triangle of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (Labrador and Renwick 2018).

**Crime and violence can weaken democracy in several ways.** Despite significant advances in economic and human development, high levels of crime and violence produce feelings of insecurity. This can fuel fear among citizens and frustration over the state’s inability to provide

FIGURE 3.9

**Homicide rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2016**

**Notes:** This figure shows the number of homicides per 100,000 people for 13 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2016.

**Source:** World Development Indicators, World Bank based on UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Global Study on Homicide, <[https://dataunodc.un.org/GSH\\_app](https://dataunodc.un.org/GSH_app)>.

public security, which can negatively impact on trust in democracy (Casas-Zamora 2013a).

According to data for 2016–2017 from the AmericasBarometer survey produced by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 44 per cent of citizens felt unsafe in their neighbourhoods, and nearly one in five people claimed they were very unsafe. Almost one-quarter of citizens had been victimized by crime in the preceding year (Cohen, Lupu and Zechmeister 2017: 71–79).

Political leaders can draw on public sentiments to galvanize support by promising to restore order through forceful policies (*mano dura* or iron fist). These are often based on simplistic solutions that can further aggravate, rather than address, problems or even undermine democracy through human rights abuses. Moreover, the perceived inability of the state to tackle crime and violence is a compounding factor that can further reduce public trust in democracy. Public

insecurity also reduces interpersonal trust, which hampers the development of social capital that a vibrant civil society requires (OECD 2018).

Latin America and the Caribbean has very low levels of interpersonal trust, with only 14 per cent of respondents to the 2018 Latinobarómetro survey (which covers 18 countries in the region) stating that they can trust most people. Interpersonal trust is lowest in Brazil, at only 4 per cent of those surveyed (Latinobarómetro 2018: 46–47). Moreover, the close connection between crime and violence, illicit financing and politics in some countries in the region (e.g. in Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico) also negatively impacts on democracy as it distorts principles of political equality and popular control (Casas-Zamora 2013b).

**Checks on Government**

The Checks on Government attribute aggregate scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

**Summary: Checks on Government performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018**

| Regional average: Mid-range (0.56) |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| High (>0.7)                        | Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay   |
| Mid-range (0.4–0.7)                | Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay |
| Low (<0.4)                         | Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela   |

**Judicial institutions have been strengthened, but challenges to the rule of law remain**

Considerable efforts have been made in recent decades to strengthen the capacity of judicial institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean. These efforts have been accompanied by attempts to boost the capacity of prosecutors, police investigators and judges. Considerable efforts have also been made to professionalize Latin America's civil service, by introducing meritocratic criteria

in hiring and promotion, and enhancing overall effectiveness (Hammergren 2007, 2008; Arantes 2011; Cortázar Velarde, Lafuente and Sanginés 2014).

In Brazil, had these efforts not been made, it is unlikely that the so-called Odebrecht corruption scandal (referred to as *Lava Jato* or 'Operation Car Wash' in Brazil)—the largest foreign bribery case in history—would have been uncovered. Between 2001 and 2015 the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht configured a network of public officials, politicians and local companies in 10 countries in the region (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Venezuela through which they channelled more than USD 788 million in bribes and payoffs to secure public contracts (Deutsche Welle 2018).

**However, despite these advances, progress in setting up impartial, transparent and accountable public administrations in the region has been slow, imbalanced and beset by implementation problems and enforcement difficulties.** The incongruence between formal rule-making and de-facto power holders, and wide discretion over enforcement, has been a constant predicament for effective institution building in Latin America. It is also one of the reasons for the slow progress of the region in combating corruption.

**The judiciary is generally perceived as one of the most problematic branches of the state in Latin America and the Caribbean and remains weak in many countries.** Almost one-third (32 per cent) of countries score low on Judicial Independence, with five countries (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela) in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Only two countries in the region (Jamaica and Uruguay) have high levels of Judicial Independence (see Figure 3.10).

**Weak judicial capacity affects the ability of countries to adequately combat corruption, crime and violence and the illicit trade associated with it.** For example, illicit networks have penetrated parts of the state in Mexico, which is among the 20 countries in the world with the highest homicide rates (UN Office on Drugs and Crime n.d.). Mexico has four times fewer judges and magistrates than any other country in the world and also has the fourth-highest levels of impunity (Global Impunity Dimensions 2017). Of the 10 countries in the world with high levels of impunity, five (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela) are Latin American. Of these countries, all apart from Peru are among the countries in the world with the highest levels of homicide rates (Global Impunity Dimensions 2017).

FIGURE 3.10

### Judicial Independence in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

**The weakness of the judiciary is also mirrored in public sentiment.** Only 24 per cent of people in Latin America trust the judiciary, while 43 per cent believe that magistrates are deeply corrupt (Latinobarómetro 2018: 48, 67). Underlying these sentiments is the perceived influence of organized crime on the judiciary, and the feeling that 'justice can be bought' by those with money and power. In the minds of ordinary people, this accounts for the fact that those who often end up in prison are overwhelmingly poor, illiterate and deprived of connections. The region's performance on Access to Justice further compounds this problem. Half of Latin America and the Caribbean countries score at or below the global average on the measure, with six in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

**Perceptions of politicization compound judiciaries' problems with impunity and weak enforcement capacity.** Controversies over the judicialization of politics—whereby courts at different levels play an increasingly political role—not only reveal the use of *de jure* powers but suggest the judiciary can also act as a de-facto power holder (Sieder,

Schjolden and Angell 2005: 2). Few mechanisms are available to hold such powers accountable or prevent the judiciary from undermining democratic norms. Moreover, in some countries, high-court magistrates are susceptible to political pressure.

### ***The bending of constitutional norms undermines checks on government***

Since 1978, most countries in the region have enacted new constitutions, and all have amended existing constitutional frameworks (International IDEA 2018). Some of these constitutional changes have been made as part of transitions from authoritarianism to democracy with the aim of strengthening the democratic framework. However, a number of revisions have also been made that weaken checks on government, both as part of processes of democratic backsliding and breakdown (e.g. in Nicaragua and Venezuela) and in democracies with varying levels of performance and on both the left and right of the political spectrum (e.g. Bolivia, Honduras and Paraguay). Examples of changes that have bent constitutional norms include extending presidential re-election limits and increasing executive powers over the judiciary and other control organs of the state.

**Balance-of-power issues among key democratic institutions remain an enduring source of political dispute in Latin America.** The legacies of *caudillismo* (or strongman leaders) in the region have fuelled numerous cases of presidential overreach, facilitated by systems whose constitutional design traditionally concentrates more power in the executive, leading to Latin American systems being dubbed as ‘hyper-presidential’ (International IDEA 2016a; Ollier 2018). Such systems have been used by leaders with authoritarian tendencies to exercise their powers in ways deemed largely unaccountable to the legislative and judicial branches. This has given rise to what scholars have referred to as ‘delegative democracies’, exemplified most recently by Correa’s presidency in Ecuador in the period 2007–2017 (O’Donnell 1999; Conaghan 2016).

**Recent instances of impeachment have also set off intense national debates over the appropriate use of this extreme measure in a presidential democracy.** The controversial impeachments of presidents in Paraguay (2012) and Brazil (2016), in a manner akin to a parliamentary no-confidence vote, have stirred criticism. The impeachment trial of President Fernando Lugo in Paraguay was completed within less than 24 hours and prompted international condemnation of the ‘parliamentary coup’ (*The Guardian* 2012). In Brazil, while proponents celebrated the ‘legality’ of the impeachment vote against President Dilma Rousseff, critics maintained that this act of legislative overreach had undermined the president’s electoral legitimacy (Taub 2016).

In both countries, Supreme Court decisions to uphold the impeachment votes did little to settle the polarized disputes and lingering mistrust stirred by these measures.

**Presidential and legislative overreach, and other misuses of institutional rules, suggests that the main risk to democracy in Latin America is the misuse of democracy’s own instruments.** The main challenges no longer come from external actors (e.g. the military) but from players who gain authority through open elections and then use this power in ways that corrode democratic institutions and practices. This erosion tends to be gradual, drawing on public support and using legal instruments. Its political entrepreneurs stoke the fears and discontent of citizens, while making strong appeals to national symbols and promising to restore law and order.



### **Impartial Administration**

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.

### **Summary: Impartial Administration performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018**

| Regional average: Mid-range (0.47) |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| High (>0.7)                        | Chile, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay  |
| Mid-range (0.4–0.7)                | Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru |
| Low (<0.4)                         | Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela                                      |

### ***Weak rule of law and low judicial capacity hamper efforts to combat corruption***

**Despite democratic advances, levels of corruption remain high in a number of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.** This constitutes a serious impediment to strengthening the quality of democracy in the region (Morlino 2018; International IDEA 2016a). Corruption is viewed as one of the main reasons for the growing dissatisfaction with, and decline of trust in, governments. It also contributes to the weakening of what is often termed ‘the social contract’, with negative consequences for democracy (OECD 2018, World Bank 2018).

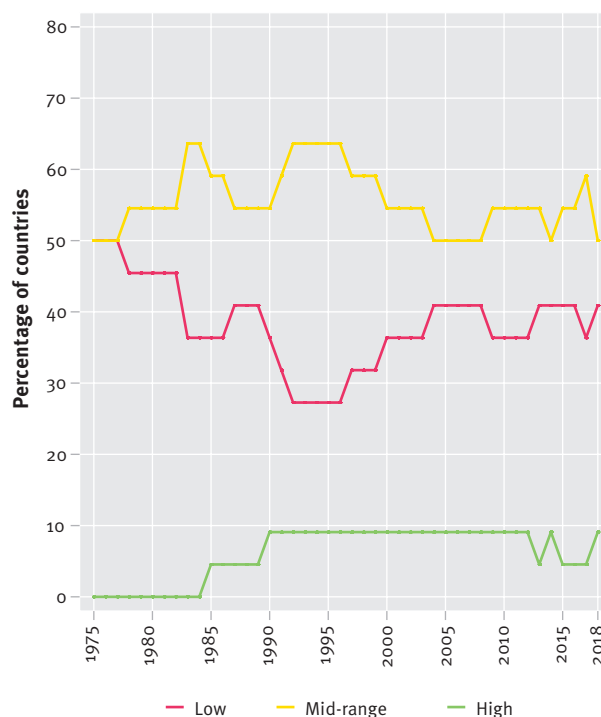
According to the GSoD Indices, of all the aspects of Latin American and the Caribbean democracy in the past decades, the lowest and slowest progress has been made in reducing corruption. Almost half (41 per cent) of countries in the region have high levels of corruption, including almost one-third of the region's democracies (see Figure 3.11). After the Middle East and Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean has the largest share of democracies (31 per cent) with high levels of corruption (Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay), despite having much higher levels of overall democratic development (see Table 3.6).

Moreover, the hybrid regime of Nicaragua and the non-democracies of Cuba and Venezuela all have high levels of corruption. This was also the case in Nicaragua prior to the start of its democratic backsliding process, while Venezuela's levels of corruption were formerly in the mid-range, or at borderline low levels. Five of the countries (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela) have been vulnerable to backsliding into hybridity or experiencing full democratic breakdown in recent decades. Chile and Uruguay are the only countries in the region that currently have low levels of corruption.

Since 2000, six presidents in the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala and two in Peru) have been forced out of power before their term was up due to corruption scandals (BBC News 2018a). In the past 10 years, almost half of the Latin American region's ex-presidents have been accused of, or indicted for, corruption (Lagos 2018).

FIGURE 3.11

### Absence of Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

TABLE 3.6

### Levels of corruption and regime types in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

| Regime type   | Level of corruption |   |   |
|---------------|---------------------|---|---|
|               | Low                 | Mid-range   | High  |
| Democracy     | Chile, Costa Rica   | Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago | Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Paraguay |
| Hybrid regime |                     |   | Nicaragua   |
| Non-democracy |                     |   | Cuba, Venezuela   |

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



**Efforts to fight corruption in the region have often faced stiff resistance from those with political power.** This resistance stems from the fact that corruption in a number of countries is deeply embedded within the political structure and reaches the highest levels of political power. The recent attempts by Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales to shut down the UN International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala, CICIG), which is mandated to fight corruption in Guatemala, is one example of the type of resistance anti-corruption efforts encounter in the region (Partlow 2018).

**Corruption represents an impediment to democratic strengthening and can undermine democracy, as high levels of corruption have been shown to reduce citizens' trust in democracy** (International IDEA 2016a; OECD 2018). Public opinion data shows that dissatisfaction with high levels of corruption and perceived ineffectiveness in reducing corruption are a significant source of civic discontent. Only 35 per cent of citizens in the region are satisfied with how their governments are tackling corruption (OECD 2018: 16).

**As the Odebrecht scandal revealed, much of the large-scale corruption in Latin America revolves around public works contracts and election campaign financing.** Campaign finance remains a vexed problem for democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, despite efforts to improve its regulation. The costs of running for office have increased substantially in the last two decades and this deters promising candidates from entering the field. Opacities and inconsistencies in regulatory frameworks, and weak enforcement capacities, add to the uneven application of existing laws. Adequate controls over the financing of local and provincial elections (and primary polls in selected countries) appear to be particularly lacking. In some parts of Latin America, public resources are still ostensibly (and illegally) used to underwrite political campaigns (International IDEA and Clingendael Institute 2016).

**Public funding of political parties, although constructive, has not been the panacea many had expected.** In addition, laws regarding limits on campaign spending have been difficult to impose. Close relations between political parties and large corporations—which have been observed in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and other countries—fuel perceptions of corruption and elite capture.

The role of illicit funding sources—narco-mafias and crony capitalists—remains a critical problem, particularly at the local level, given their ability to elect legislators and other public officials linked to criminal groups. In Colombia, for instance, about one-third of the legislators in the National Congress in 2005 were allegedly linked to paramilitary squads (International IDEA and

NIMD 2014). In Guatemala, 25 per cent of campaign funds are estimated to come directly from organized crime (Beltrán and Hite 2019). In Mexico, 44 per cent of businesses report having made unofficial payments to public officials (International IDEA 2016b). Among poorer citizens, clientelism and vote buying remain an enduring practice, in some countries palpably more so than others (Casas-Zamora 2013b).

**Organized criminal networks have exploited state fragility**  
**Corruption in the region is often, but not always, linked to illicit financing.** The expansion of narco-mafia forces and criminal groups in Latin America and the Caribbean fuels not just corruption but crime and violence as well.

Organized criminal networks are adept at exploiting elements of state fragility in the region. The main source of wealth for these groups originates in the narcotics trade. The huge profit margins generated by this illicit enterprise have enabled mafia groups and illicit criminal networks to influence various parts of the state and the political system in democracies such as Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico. They have done so by financing election campaigns; bribing judges, military officers, and police and government officials; or using violence and intimidation to pursue their ends.

Acts of collusion between state agents, elements of the financial sector involved in money-laundering, and narco-mafias are not uncommon. While the so-called war on drugs has led, on occasions, to the arrest of mafia network leaders, it has not changed the incentive structure that fuels their illicit business model, or the extensive corruption and violence derived from it (International IDEA, OAS and Inter-American Dialogue 2015; Casas-Zamora 2013b; International IDEA and NIMD 2014; International IDEA and Clingendael Institute 2016).

By boosting corrupt practices within the political arena and the state, notably through illicit campaign contributions and bribes to public security and court officials, the narcotics economy is also responsible for undermining the credibility of the region's democratic processes and public institutions.



#### Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens' participation in civil society organizations (CSOs) and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.



## Summary: Participatory Engagement performance in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018

| Regional average: Mid-range |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| High                        | Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay |
| Mid-range                   | Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay               |
| Low                         | Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela   |

### *An empowered citizenship and vibrant civil society face a shrinking civic space*

The notable expansion of political freedoms in Latin America and the Caribbean has led to a significant transformation of its civil society and to an increasingly empowered citizenship. The expansion of political freedoms has allowed for the organization and incorporation of historically marginalized sectors of society into the civil society arena. Examples include groups led by women, indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, landless peasants, urban squatters, the disabled and sexual minorities.

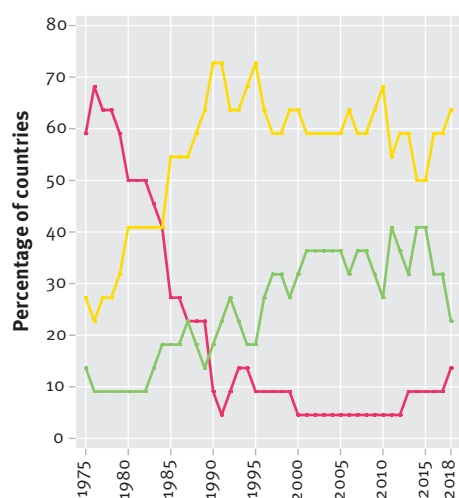
A parallel delegitimization of political parties has led rising middle classes in the region to increasingly channel their demands through civic organizations and new forms of civic activism—which are more spontaneous and fragmented and less based on formal organizational structures—in the form of both online and offline protests (International IDEA 2016a).

Examples of citizens' movements against corruption include 'Justicia Ya' (Justice Now) in Guatemala, the protests against corruption in Brazil in 2016–2018, and protests in 2019 in Honduras against reforms to the education and health sectors and to denounce illicit campaign finance. By providing forums for new voices and bringing in new issues through more diverse channels, these movements have helped democratize—and significantly reshape—the public agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, as in other parts of the world, Latin America and the Caribbean has also experienced a shrinking civic and media space in recent years. The share of countries in the region with high levels of Civil Society Participation and Media Integrity has been halved since 2015 (see Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13). The share of countries with high levels of Civil Liberties has also seen a significant decline, while the share of countries with low levels has increased (see Figure 3.14).

FIGURE 3.12

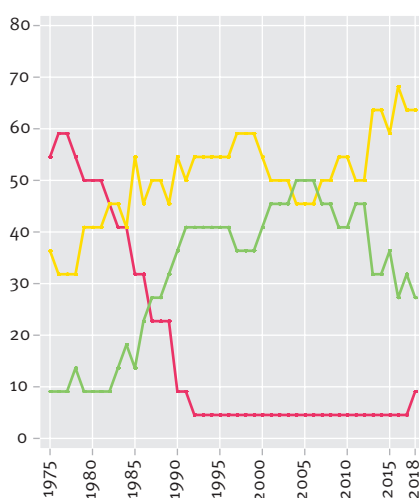
### Civil Society Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

FIGURE 3.13

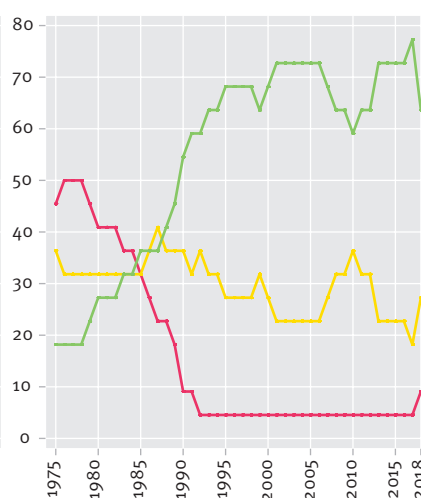
### Media Integrity in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

FIGURE 3.14

### Civil Liberties in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2018



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

Limitations on civic space are often, but not always, linked to corruption and illicit networks (CIVICUS 2016). Two clusters of countries can be identified: (a) those that experience shrinking civic space as part of a general democratic breakdown (e.g. Venezuela and Nicaragua); and (b) countries experiencing different degrees of democratic erosion, and which have restricted the space for civil society or the media through specific regulatory measures that affect the right to protest and operate, as well as media freedom.

In Brazil the limiting of civic space has occurred in a context of democratic erosion, where CSOs and activists face increasing threats and have been subject to violence. Brazil is the only democracy in the region that has seen declines on all three aspects of civic space measured in the GSoD Indices: Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation. Colombia and Chile have seen declines in two dimensions of civic space (Civil Liberties and Media Integrity), while other countries have seen declines in one dimension only, including Argentina (Media Integrity), and Costa Rica and Haiti (Civil Liberties).

**Civic space in the region has been restricted via a wide range of legislation regulating civil society's activities.** Legislation has been approved and implemented in three main areas.

First, governments have regulated CSO registration, operation and access to funding, or renewed existing legislation. Examples include legislation passed in Venezuela in 2010, Ecuador in 2013 (but reversed in 2017), Bolivia in 2013 and Panama and Colombia in 2017. Second, governments have regulated protest, as shown by laws passed in Argentina, Brazil and Chile in 2017, and in Nicaragua in 2018. Third, governments have regulated the Internet, with laws passed in Bolivia, Guatemala and Honduras in 2017.

In addition, governments have regulated media organizations and journalists through legislation affecting free speech (in Venezuela) and concentration of media ownership (in Argentina). Defamation lawsuits and threats against journalists have been used, leading to self-censorship (in Dominican Republic and Panama), while harassment or killings of civil society activists, including human rights defenders and journalists, have also occurred.

**Similar to other regions, Latin America has also seen a recent increase in violence against journalists and civil society activists fighting to protect the environment and human rights and advance social rights among the poor.**

Front Line Defenders (2019) reports that, in 2018, 74 per cent of the 321 human rights activists murdered worldwide were killed in Latin America, with the highest number recorded in Colombia (126), followed by Mexico (48), Guatemala (26), Brazil (23), Honduras (8) and Venezuela (5). Mexico is the deadliest country in the world for journalists outside a conflict zone, with nine journalists murdered in 2018.<sup>12</sup> In total, 14 journalists were killed in Latin America in 2018. Generally, journalists reporting on political corruption (especially at the local level) and organized crime are targeted (Reporters Without Borders 2018).

In Brazil, the number of murders of members of the LGBT community has seen a sharp increase, to 420 in 2018 (Telesur 2019). The country has also experienced a spike in assassinations of peasant and indigenous activists in recent years, with a total of 182 killings between 2015 and 2017 (Comissão Pastoral da Terra 2018: 23). Violent acts and efforts to intimidate social activists induce fear and restrict their public engagement, and therefore reduce the civic space needed for democracy.



Between 2013 and 2018, two countries in the region (Brazil and Venezuela) have seen significant declines across all dimensions of civic space (Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation). In the same time period, Costa Rica has seen declines in Freedom of Expression, due to defamation lawsuits, and Argentina on Media Integrity due to concentration of media ownership.

### ***The transformation of the media landscape has implications for civic space and democracy***

**Large media conglomerates continue to set much of the news agenda across Latin America and the Caribbean.**

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in most countries, one firm controls about half of the market in each media category. In Colombia, three conglomerates dominate more than 60 per cent of the country's radio, print and Internet market. In Chile, two companies share more than 90 per cent of the nation's newspaper readers (*The Economist* 2018; UNESCO 2018). A free, unbiased and critical press is key to healthy democracies, as is a diverse media environment that provides a wide range of perspectives. An environment in which media ownership is highly concentrated can therefore be harmful for democracy.

<sup>12</sup> Front Line Defenders is an international human rights organization and is one of several organizations collecting data on threats against human rights activists. However, data on the killings of human rights activists is highly contested as there is no global agreement on who should be classified as such. Moreover, the data coverage tends to be incomplete, especially in countries where human rights activists are exposed to high levels of repression.

**Along with the concentration of news media, studies have detected large numbers of ‘news deserts’ or towns without local news coverage.** In Brazil, more than half of all municipalities have no local news outlets, while another 30 per cent of these towns are virtual ‘news deserts’ with only one or two homegrown news media organizations. All told, 64 million Brazilians, one-third of the country’s population, are deprived of adequate news coverage, and therefore impoverished in terms of the quality of democratic debate (see Atlas da Notícia 2018). The existence of media oligopolies and ‘news deserts’ have triggered discussions over how to improve access to information and ensure the representation of a plurality of ideas and interests in the public arena.

**Information and communications technologies are redefining the political landscape in Latin America**  
**Citizens of Latin America and the Caribbean have gained significant access to the Internet and ICTs.** Nine out of 10 adults in the region have a mobile phone, and nearly half have a smartphone, while 44 per cent have Internet connections in their homes. The number of Facebook users has tripled in the region over the last 10 years, rising to 60 per cent of the population in 2018, and is surpassed only by the number of WhatsApp users, which amounts to 64 per cent of the region’s inhabitants (Latinobarómetro 2018: 76–78).

As a result of these technological changes, Latin American societies have become more sophisticated in terms of the opportunities available for people to access information and communicate with their fellow citizens. With these changes, Latin American citizens and particularly those in the growing middle sectors have found new instruments to make their voices heard and amplify demands to fight corruption, curb elite privileges and enhance government effectiveness. The Internet has helped democratize access to information, notably through the creation of alternative news outlets and blogs.

However, the growing number of independent, professionally run online news sources—such as Aristegui Noticias in Mexico, Connectas in Colombia, Nexo and Agência Pública in Brazil—have had to contend with the rise of tawdry and dishonest practices on the Internet and elsewhere. Disinformation is not a new phenomenon, although the Internet and social media have accelerated the speed with which it can be reproduced. Disinformation can prey on people’s ignorance and reinforce and amplify existing prejudices.

Countering disinformation can be a challenging task for journalists, as they navigate the hazard of amplifying its negative effects in the process of seeking to debunk it. Attempts to regulate disinformation in the press and on

social media need to find a balance between the right to information and other rights, such as freedom of expression.

**There has been a decline in popular support for democracy**  
**Societal frustration with existing democracies increases the risk of democratic deterioration.** Data from two region-wide public opinion surveys—LAPOP and the Latinobarómetro—show a decline in the support for democracy across the region. LAPOP records a 12-point drop in support for democracy over the last decade, from 70 per cent in 2008 to 58 per cent in 2017, with close to a 9-point decline in the last three years alone. Trust in elections has remained low, at 39 per cent, and has fallen by six points in recent years. Similarly, trust in political parties remains very low, at 18 per cent, and has fallen every year since 2012 (Cohen, Lupu and Zechmeister 2017).

Latinobarómetro shows a similar trend. Between 2010 and 2018 support for democracy declined by 13 points, from 61 per cent to 48 per cent—the lowest figures recorded in Latin America since 2001, amid a regional economic slump. Over 2018 alone, support for democracy fell by five points. Young people (aged 16 to 25), recorded the lowest levels of support for democracy, at 44 per cent, with nearly one-third (31 per cent) saying they felt indifferent about living in a regime that was either democratic or undemocratic (Latinobarómetro 2018: 15 and 22).

Latinobarómetro also found increasing levels of dissatisfaction with democracy, which rose by 12 points over the last decade, from 59 per cent in 2008 to 71 per cent in 2018. Equally, satisfaction with democracy has declined by 20 points in the last eight years, to 24 per cent in 2018. These shifts were particularly acute in 2018, which registered a six-point drop from 2017. This development has been most pronounced in Brazil, where satisfaction with democracy fell from 49 per cent in 2010 to 9 per cent in 2018 (Latinobarómetro 2018: 35–37).

**The political empowerment of the middle classes, and their expectations and frustrations, is crucial for democracy.** The World Bank estimates that the Latin America and Caribbean middle class grew by 50 per cent between 2000 and 2010, increasing from 100 million to 150 million people for the first time in the history of the region (Ferreira et al. 2013). These new middle classes have generated a ‘revolution of expectations’, demanding effective solutions to the societal challenges affecting the region (International IDEA 2016a: 21).

The middle classes often feel vulnerable in the context of economic (including technological) changes that can lead to occupational skidding (the inability of workers to obtain jobs aligned with their skills and qualifications) and greater

job anxiety. Concerns over public insecurity, an immigration surge, lingering class and racial tensions, or rapid changes in gender relations, can exacerbate fears and feelings of mistrust, resentment, discrimination and hatred. Politics that are perceived to have been ‘captured by elites’, ridden with corruption, ineffective and unresponsive to people’s needs and expectations, unable to guarantee basic social rights and offer a ‘fair deal’ are susceptible to bursts of civic rage.

Democracy in the region hinges on how the middle classes’ anger and frustration are channelled, whether through public protests or electoral change. In the latter case, the risk is that they will embrace strong leaders with weaker democratic aspirations at the expense of democrats. These elements of societal combustion—and the deeper forces of disintegration from which they stem—need to be addressed in ways to counteract their negative impact on democracy.

### 3.1.4. Conclusion

Latin America and the Caribbean has seen significant democratic advances in the past decades and the region can take pride in being the most democratic region in the world, after North America and Europe. It has made significant advances in areas such as Electoral Integrity and Gender Equality, significantly narrowing the gap that once existed between it and these two regions in just a few decades.

However, as Article 3 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter indicates, it is not sufficient for governments to access power by legitimate means; power must also be exercised legitimately (Zovatto and Tommasoli in International IDEA 2016a). Hence, improvements in regional averages mask wide variations between countries, ranging from severe democratic backsliding, in cases such as Nicaragua and Venezuela, to other more moderate—but no less worrying—cases of democratic erosion.

In order to deepen democracy and rebuild citizens’ trust in democratic systems of government, several areas are in need of special attention. In the fight against corruption, determination and enforcement are required. Socio-economic inequalities need to be reduced. The strengthening of judicial and other institutions is also essential for healthy democracies.

In addition, a number of emerging issues require concerted effort across the region. The growing immigration crisis, fuelled by a large exodus of people from Nicaragua and Venezuela, but also Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras, poses a challenge to governments unused to large migration flows and has the potential to sow the seeds for a potential backlash in receiving countries.

TABLE 3.7

## The GSoD Indices Snapshot: Policy considerations for Latin America and the Caribbean

This table offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure. It presents policy recommendations across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.



### Representative Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.64)



### Elected Government:

All but three countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (86 per cent) are democracies with democratically Elected Governments. Nicaragua backslid into a hybrid regime in 2016 and Venezuela to a non-democracy in 2017. Cuba is the only country in the region to have persisted as a non-democracy since 1975.

### Priority areas for reform:

- Define and implement holistic visions and strategies to build a virtuous circle to strengthen democracy, create sustainable development and improve citizens’ quality of life.
- Support civic education for democracy. Consider developing democracy education in schools to educate young people about the value and purpose of democracy. This can be done in collaboration with non-partisan CSOs.
- Regional support an eventual transition of power in Venezuela, and to measures such as the dissolution of the illegally convoked National Constituent Assembly, and the re-establishment of the functioning of the Venezuelan parliament and the restoration of impartial checks and balances and the institutions that enable those (e.g. electoral, judicial), the legalization of political parties and support to planning the timing of elections at national and subnational levels and other measures needed to restore democracy in Venezuela.



#### Clean Elections:

Although the regional average on Clean Elections is mid-range (0.66), half the countries (11) in the region have high levels of Clean Elections. Of these countries, seven score among the top 25 per cent in the world.

#### Priority countries for reform:

Haiti and Honduras (democracies);  
Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (hybrid and non-democracies)

#### Priority areas for reform:

- Strengthen the integrity of elections.
- Restore limits to presidential mandate periods where these have been abolished.
- Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (if a transition occurs): restore the independence of electoral institutions.

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



#### Inclusive Suffrage:

All countries in the region have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage.



#### Free Political Parties:

The majority of countries in the region (59 per cent) score in the mid-range on Free Political Parties and eight countries score among the top 25 per cent in the world with high levels of political party freedom.

#### Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen and reinvigorate political parties to serve as effective and legitimate conduits for popular representation by reducing distance to voters, enhance communication with citizens, effectively respond to citizen concerns and operate with integrity.

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Panama and Uruguay



### Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.59)



#### Access to Justice:

Access to Justice is the aspect on which Latin America and the Caribbean performs the poorest (0.55) compared to the rest of the world (0.59). Half (11) of Latin America and the Caribbean countries score below the global average with six in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

#### Priority democracies for reform:

El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti

#### Priority areas for reform:

Strengthen the capacity, autonomy, accountability, accessibility, meritocracy and transparency of the judiciary.

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



#### Civil Liberties:

Latin America has generally high levels of Civil Liberties (0.70), with 64 per cent of countries scoring in the high range.

Latin America is the second-best performing region in the world on Freedom of Religion and the third-best on Freedom of Movement.

#### Priority countries for reform:

Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

#### Priority areas for reform:

- Tackle crime and violence through effective solutions that strengthen rather than undermine democracy.
- Advocate for civil liberties protection in countries with significant declines.

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



**Gender Equality:**

The region's average levels of political Gender Equality are in the mid-range (0.63), performing third-best, but still significantly lower than North America (0.75) and Europe (0.70).

Seven countries in Latin America and the Caribbean score in the top 25 per cent in the world on political Gender Equality: Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela. Five of these are democracies, while two are non-democracies (Cuba and Venezuela).

Haiti, while in the mid-range in absolute level of performance, scores lowest in the region and in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

**Priority democracies for reform:**

Haiti (democracy)

**Priority areas for reform:**

- Keep up and expand efforts to strengthen political gender equality in all spheres and at all levels, by enforcing quota laws where they exist and adopting parity laws, to ensure equal representation of women beyond the legislative (i.e. in political parties, in the executive and in local administrations).
- Strengthen quota laws and make requirements more specific, to avoid exploitation of loopholes in their design—for example placing women in secondary or alternative positions on ballots.
- Electoral bodies can improve incentives for compliance and impose sanctions for noncompliance in order to ensure effective implementation of parity standards or quotas at all levels.
- Extend quota laws to all realms of the political sphere: legislative, executive and judicial (for more detailed recommendations, see International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).
- Play a greater role in promoting gender equality and empowering women's political participation. To ensure state compliance with women's rights treaties, regional organizations should mobilize their mandates to pressure governments to complement their treaty obligations, and to fulfil any commitments made in regional declarations. Regional organizations can also facilitate the exchange of best practices across countries, and provide crucial technical expertise to governments, politicians, and civil society groups seeking to promote women's political participation (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).

**Good-practice countries for regional learning:**

Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago

**Social Group Equality:**

Social Group Equality is one of the aspects on which Latin America and the Caribbean performs the poorest (0.46), with the largest share of low-performing countries (36 per cent) compared to other aspects.

One-third (36 per cent) of the countries in the region score below the global average, with eight countries in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. With the exception of Nicaragua, which is a hybrid regime, all of the countries in the bottom 25 per cent of the world are democracies: Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay.

**Priority countries for reform:**

Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay;  
Brazil and Mexico (mid-range but below the world average)

**Priority areas for reform:**

- Policies designed to reduce stark inequalities should be prioritized. ECLAC and other agencies have developed a robust policy agenda to tackle inequalities in the region. This includes important measures of redistributive taxation, asset redistribution, and improvement in basic public services. Efforts to reduce inequalities should build on these policy prescriptions. Social programmes should focus on tackling inequalities and should not be used for electoral or political purposes.
- Strengthen the political and social representation of under-represented groups, including women, youth and indigenous peoples. This should translate into proactive policies designed to ensure the inclusion of these groups in the decision-making and executive fabric of the region's democracies (International IDEA, CoD and UNDP 2017).

**Good-practice countries for regional learning:**

Top 25% in world: Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

**Basic Welfare:**

The overwhelming majority of countries (77 per cent) in Latin America and the Caribbean have mid-range levels of Basic Welfare; no country scores in the low range.

The four countries with the highest levels of Basic Welfare are Cuba, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay. Of these, all but Cuba are democracies.

**Priority countries for reform:**

Venezuela as well as support to receiving countries of Venezuelan migrants (e.g. Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru)





### Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.56)



#### Effective Parliament:

More than two-thirds (64 per cent) of countries in the region score in the mid-range on Effective Parliament.

#### Priority country for reform:

Dominican Republic

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



#### Judicial Independence:

Judicial Independence is one of the four democratic aspects on which Latin America and the Caribbean performs the poorest (at 0.46). Of the region's countries, 32 per cent score below the global average, with five countries in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Only two countries (Jamaica and Uruguay) have high levels of Judicial Independence.

The share of countries with low levels of Judicial Independence has increased from five in 2008 to seven in 2018.

#### Priority countries for reform:

Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Honduras (democracies)  
Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela (after transition): restore the independence of the judiciary (hybrid regime and non-democracies)

#### Priority areas for reform:

- Strengthen the capacities of the judiciary and reduce its politicization, susceptibility to corruption and institutional weaknesses. Strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of the judiciary will have positive repercussions on efforts to reduce corruption, tackle crime and violence, and improve access to justice.

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



#### Media Integrity:

Well over half (14) of the countries in the region score in the mid-range on Media Integrity, and one-quarter score highly.

#### Priority countries for reform:

Venezuela (after transition)

#### Priority areas for reform:

- Addressing disinformation on social media will require innovative cross-sectoral strategies. Foster regional and global cross-sectoral dialogues to identify solutions to address the spread of disinformation, without harming core values of democracy such as free speech.
- Guarantee an independent, diverse and vibrant media landscape, and avoid concentration of media in a few hands.
- Provide protection to journalists, including those investigating corruption, in countries with high levels of attacks against journalists.

#### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



## Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: Mid-range (0.47)



### Absence of Corruption:

Absence of Corruption is one of the four democratic aspects on which Latin America and the Caribbean scores the poorest (at 0.45) and which has seen slowest progress in the past four decades. More than one-third of countries have high levels of corruption and only two (Chile and Uruguay) have low levels. All the non-democracies have high levels of corruption, as do six democracies.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the region in the world with the largest share of countries with both high levels of Representative Government and high levels of corruption.

### Priority countries for reform:

#### *Democracies:*

First priority: High levels of corruption: Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Paraguay.

Second priority: Mid-range levels of corruption: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru

*Hybrid regimes and non-democracies:* Nicaragua and Venezuela

### Priority areas for reform:

- The fight against corruption requires strong political will, intolerance of impunity and a political impartial and integrated approach at national and subnational levels. Promoting a culture of integrity must become a core priority for all governments. This requires the input of multiple state institutions at all levels, as well as the private sector and civil society, and commitment across party lines. Their strategies must combine efforts to identify and minimize corruption risks, prevent and sanction corruption and illicit financing, improve the state's technical capacity to investigate and enforce existing laws in a timely and visible way, and reward integrity. Modernizing the state and strengthening the capacity of a merit-based civil service and public administration and the full implementation of open and transparency strategies are also key to the fight against corruption.
- Strengthen political finance regulations and their enforcement, together with measures to promote integrity and transparency in elections and lobbying activities to ensure inclusive policymaking. Election campaign expenditure also needs to be reduced to level the playing field for candidates and reduce opportunities for corruption. Measures could include public finance for elections; setting legal limits on campaign costs; and curbing expenditure by facilitating free access to television, radio and social media (International IDEA 2016b; OECD 2018).
- Facilitate the exchange of good practices and cross-country and regional learning in the fight against corruption, institutional and judicial strengthening, combating crime and violence and in reducing inequalities.

### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



### Predictable Enforcement:

Predictable Enforcement is one of the four poorest performing aspects of Latin America and the Caribbean's democracy (with an average of 0.46). All five low-scoring countries are in the bottom 25 per cent in the world. Three countries score highly: Costa Rica, Chile and Uruguay.

### Priority democracies for reform:

Dominican Republic and Haiti

### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Chile, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



## Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices performance: Mid-range



### Civil Society Participation:

Levels of Civil Society Participation are on average in the mid-range in Latin America and the Caribbean (0.60), but 5 countries (almost 25 per cent) have high levels and 14 (more than two-thirds) have mid-range levels. The region's two non-democracies (Cuba and Venezuela) and its hybrid regime (Nicaragua) have low levels, performing in the bottom 25 per cent in the world.

### Priority countries for reform:

Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela

### Priority areas for reform:

- Ensure an enabling legal and policy environment for CSOs to operate, access funding, monitor government performance and advocate for change, particularly in countries with recent declines.
- Improving channels for citizens' participation and consultation in local and national governance can foster greater trust in democracy and complement mechanisms of representative democracy. Other institutionalized venues for social dialogue should be studied and encouraged. However, such mechanisms should not be implemented at the expense of the mechanism of representative democracy.

### For civil society organizations:

- Monitor state performance and hold governments to account. Scale up and learn from (including cross-regional learning) existing civil society watchdog efforts to monitor the state and hold governments to account for their reform efforts in different areas, for example in reducing corruption and strengthening judicial reform. Civil society observatories and other monitoring activities can generate information, identify bottlenecks, fuel awareness and galvanize the coalitions needed to pursue change. Using different types of media channels (including traditional and social media) to publicize the information gathered can help increase pressure for change.
- Denounce efforts to weaken democratic institutions, such as the judiciary, electoral institutions and other accountability organs, and ensure their independence and professional capacity.



### Electoral Participation:

Latin America has the highest levels of Electoral Participation in the world, with an average regional score of 0.67, together with Asia and the Pacific. Close to half (41 per cent) of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have high levels of voter turnout.

### Priority areas for reform:

- Increase voter turnout in Haiti (low) and Chile and Jamaica (mid-range).

### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay



### Direct Democracy:

Levels of Direct Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean are the second-highest in the world, after Europe. Of the top 25 per cent of countries in the world with high levels of Direct Democracy, eight are in Latin America and the Caribbean. All of these countries are democracies, except Venezuela. Uruguay is the country in the region with the highest levels of Direct Democracy, followed by Ecuador and Peru.

### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Top 25% in world: Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay



### Local Democracy:

Latin America and the Caribbean has, on average, mid-range levels of Local Democracy, but more countries score highly (10) than in the mid-range (7). A total of eight countries in the region (Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Jamaica, Peru and Uruguay) are among the top 25 per cent in the world with high levels of Local Democracy.

### Priority country for reform:

Haiti

### Good-practice countries for regional learning:

Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay

TABLE 3.8

**Regime classification, Latin America and the Caribbean, 2018**

Table 3.8 shows the regime classification for all of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

| Country                | GSoD Attribute            |                    |                      |                          |                          |
|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                        | Representative Government | Fundamental Rights | Checks on Government | Impartial Administration | Participatory Engagement |
| <b>Democracies</b>     |                           |                    |                      |                          |                          |
| Argentina              | 0.78 =                    | 0.74 =             | 0.64 =               | 0.55 =                   | High                     |
| Bolivia                | 0.63 =                    | 0.55 =             | 0.49 =               | 0.53 =                   | High                     |
| Brazil                 | 0.704 –                   | 0.59 =             | 0.62 =               | 0.47 =                   | High                     |
| Chile                  | 0.84 =                    | 0.74 =             | 0.72 =               | 0.77 =                   | Mid-range                |
| Colombia               | 0.74 =                    | 0.52 =             | 0.58 =               | 0.47 =                   | Mid-range                |
| Costa Rica             | 0.85 =                    | 0.84 =             | 0.80 =               | 0.69 =                   | High                     |
| Dominican Republic     | 0.59 =                    | 0.63 =             | 0.41 =               | 0.26 –                   | Mid-range                |
| Ecuador                | 0.65 =                    | 0.62 =             | 0.55 =               | 0.57 =                   | High                     |
| El Salvador            | 0.66 =                    | 0.47 =             | 0.59 =               | 0.408 =                  | Mid-range                |
| Guatemala              | 0.66 =                    | 0.45 =             | 0.61 =               | 0.38 =                   | Mid-range                |
| Haiti                  | 0.48 =                    | 0.37 =             | 0.51 =               | 0.25 =                   | Low                      |
| Honduras               | 0.50 =                    | 0.52 =             | 0.44 =               | 0.36 =                   | Mid-range                |
| Jamaica                | 0.73 =                    | 0.73 =             | 0.73 =               | 0.60 =                   | High                     |
| Mexico                 | 0.66 =                    | 0.55 =             | 0.62 =               | 0.49 =                   | Mid-range                |
| Panama                 | 0.76 =                    | 0.66 =             | 0.58 =               | 0.54 =                   | High                     |
| Paraguay               | 0.63 =                    | 0.57 =             | 0.54 =               | 0.44 =                   | Mid-range                |
| Peru                   | 0.709 =                   | 0.64 =             | 0.706 =              | 0.54 =                   | High                     |
| Trinidad and Tobago    | 0.73 =                    | 0.79 =             | 0.701 =              | 0.72 =                   | High                     |
| Uruguay                | 0.83 =                    | 0.83 =             | 0.77 =               | 0.75 =                   | High                     |
| <b>Hybrid regimes</b>  |                           |                    |                      |                          |                          |
| Nicaragua              | 0.36 –                    | 0.34 –             | 0.29 =               | 0.23 –                   | Low                      |
| <b>Non-democracies</b> |                           |                    |                      |                          |                          |
| Cuba                   | 0.21 =                    | 0.405 =            | 0.22 =               | 0.30 =                   | Low                      |
| Venezuela              | 0.29 –                    | 0.39 =             | 0.25 =               | 0.08 =                   | Low                      |

■ High   ■ Mid-range   ■ Low

**Notes:** = denotes no statistically significant increase or decrease in the last five-year period; + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; - denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

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

## 3.2. The state of democracy in North America

This section focuses on North America and provides an overview of the most recent Global State of Democracy Indices data on the region. The section also features a case study on the state of democracy in the United States.

### 3.2.1. The state of democracy in the United States *Introduction*

How is democracy faring in the United States? Is democracy really backsliding under President Donald Trump? If so, how is this manifested and what are the causal explanations for the trends observed? This case study aims to provide answers to these questions based on data from the GSoD Indices, and to suggest possible factors that explain the current state of democracy in the USA.

The GSoD Indices data indicates that the USA remains a democracy with relatively high performance, although significant declines have been recorded in recent years, suggesting signs of democratic erosion. Indeed, the USA is among the 12 countries in the world with most subattribute declines since 2013 (five in total). However, these declines are not serious enough to be labelled democratic backsliding, which is defined in the GSoD framework as the gradual and intentional weakening on Checks on Government and accountability institutions, coupled with declines in Civil Liberties.

According to the GSoD Indices, the USA performs highly on four out of five attributes of democracy (see Table 3.13) and scores among the top 25 per cent in the world on 12 out of its 16 subattributes. However, this is a decrease from 2013, when the USA was in the top 25 per cent on 13 subattributes. Furthermore, until 2016, the USA was among the few countries in the world that performed highly on all five attributes of democracy. This is no longer the case, as the country's performance on Participatory Engagement slipped into the mid-range in 2016 and has remained there since.

Moreover, since 2012 the USA has recorded significant declines on several democratic subattributes, although most of these still perform in the high range, except on Participatory Engagement. Under the Representative Government attribute, declines have been recorded in Clean Elections (until 2018) and Free Political Parties. Under Fundamental Rights, there have been declines on Civil Liberties. Under Checks on Government, declining performance has been observed on Media Integrity and, until 2018, Effective Parliament. Under Impartial Administration, declines have occurred on Absence of Corruption. Finally, under the Participatory Engagement attribute, the USA has seen declines in its Local Democracy.

Deep economic inequalities and continuing structural discrimination affect the legitimacy and strength of a variety of democratic institutions in the USA. Problematic electoral administration, restrictive voter identification laws, low

## NORTH AMERICA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



### Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

The two countries in North America score among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on the majority of the 18 indicators related to Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16). The USA scores among the top 25 per cent on 14 indicators, while Canada records similar scores on 16 indicators.

However, regional stagnation has been noted on more than half (56 per cent) of the indicators, with declines in 38 per cent and only one advance: electoral participation in the USA.

North America has seen stagnation on SDG 16.1 on reducing violence. Declines are noted in both countries in relation to SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. Stagnation has occurred on SDG 16.3 on rule of law.

Progress on SDG 16.6 on effective institutions has seen declines in all indicators except Civil Society Participation, where stagnation is noted. SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making has seen declines in Local Democracy, Clean Elections and Effective Parliament but increases in Electoral Participation and Social Group Equality.

Finally, SDG 16.10 on freedom of expression and fundamental freedoms has seen declines on Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion, whereas Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Association and Assembly, and Media Integrity have stagnated.



### Gender Equality

SDG 5.5 on the political representation of women has seen stagnation in both Canada and the USA since 2015.



levels of voter turnout, the growing influence of government ‘insiders’, limits on US citizens’ exercise of fundamental freedoms (including freedom of expression) and weakening government oversight (until 2018) have all contributed to drops in the USA’s GSoD Indices scores in recent years.

These recent democratic declines, in addition to a number of distortions built into the way in which democracy is practised in the USA, contribute to the weakening and delegitimization of democracy in the country. They reduce the public’s trust in democratic institutions and increase societal and political polarization, which has heightened in recent years. However, some recent developments also provide some reason for hope. US democratic institutions, while increasingly tested, are demonstrating their robustness in the face of these challenges. For example, the current US Congress is the most racially and ethnically diverse in that institution’s history and the percentage of women in the House of Representatives and Senate (25 per cent in each) has never been higher.

### ***The current democracy landscape in the United States***

The analysis in this section covers issues linked to Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, highlighting the current opportunities for democracy in the USA, as well as the democratic challenges it faces.



#### **Representative Government**

The GSoD Indices use the Representative Government attribute to evaluate countries’ performance on the conduct of elections, the extent to which political parties are able to operate freely, and the extent to which access to government is decided by elections. This attribute is an aggregation of four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.

The USA has high levels of Representative Government and performs among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on this dimension. Under the US Constitution of 1789, the country’s national executive and lawmakers are all elected, and the elected Senate approves other key officials, such as federal judges and Cabinet officers. The effectiveness of elected government is abetted by two other key strengths of US democracy: the freedom of political parties, and strong civil society participation in electoral and political affairs (see e.g. Connolly 2018; Wilson 2017).

However, despite this continued comparatively high performance, levels of Representative Government in the

**TABLE 3.9**

### **Representative Government in the United States, 2012–2018**

| Attribute                 | Subattribute           | GSoD Indices score |      |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------|
|                           |                        | 2012               | 2018 |
| Representative Government |                        | 0.92               | 0.76 |
|                           | Clean Elections        | 0.95               | 0.78 |
|                           | Free Political Parties | 1                  | 0.82 |

■ High    ■ Mid-range    ■ Low

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

USA have seen a drop since 2012 (see Table 3.9). The decline has mainly been caused by a significant decline in the GSoD Indices indicator on Clean Elections, although an increase was seen in 2018, after the mid-term elections to the US Congress. Declines have also been noted in the indicator of Free Political Parties. There have been two periods during the timeframe of the GSoD Indices (1975–2018) in which the USA has not been in the top 25 per cent globally on Clean Elections: 2000–2005 and 2016–2017. However, in 2018, a mid-term year, the US re-entered the top 25 per cent globally on this indicator.

Electoral processes face a number of complex challenges. A number of factors contributed to the 2016–2017 declines in the USA’s GSoD Indices scores, and to an overall system in which ordinary voters in the USA, especially poor and minority voters, increasingly struggle to access and participate on equal terms in the electoral process. Issues such as gerrymandering, weak campaign finance regulation, the electoral college system, strict voter identification (ID) laws and, more recently, foreign interference in elections, contribute to an electoral system that is weak on inclusion and works to maintain the status quo. To a large extent, wealth and access to power still determine political decision-making and undermine political equality (Wang 2016; Greenwood 2016).

The GSoD Indices subattribute of Social Group Equality measures access to political power and enjoyment of civil

liberties by social group. In the USA, levels of Social Group Equality are in the low mid-range at 0.53—closer to the Latin American and Caribbean average (0.46) than to North and Western Europe (0.77), which has more similar levels of Representative Government. Moreover, Social Group Equality has not improved in the last four decades. On the contrary, it has experienced statistically significant declines over the past 20 years. At 0.65, levels were higher in 1998 than they are today (Figure 3.15).

While the 116th US Congress is more ethnically diverse than it has ever been, only 22 per cent of lawmakers are from racial or ethnic minorities—including one-quarter of the House of Representatives and 9 per cent of the Senate—although they represent 39 per cent of the US population (Bialik 2019). Furthermore, only 24 per cent of lawmakers are women; while this represents an historic high, the USA has not yet reached the critical threshold of 30 per cent women's participation and is far from achieving gender parity (IPU 2019).

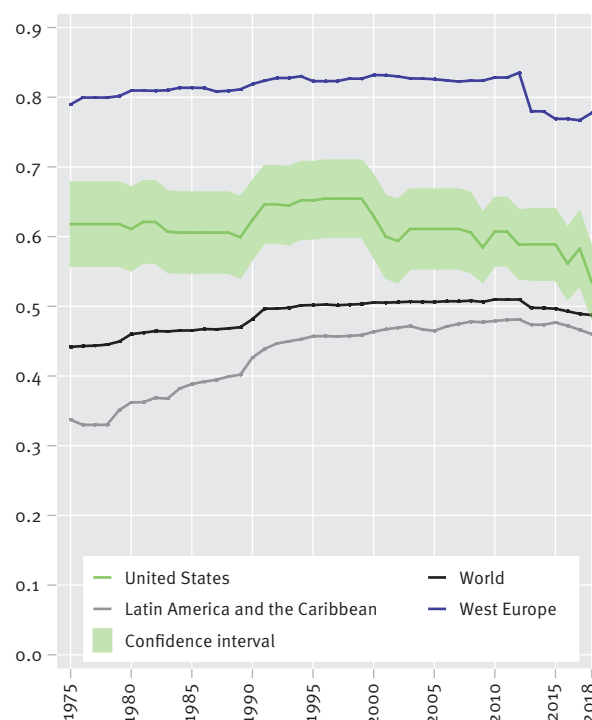
Among the factors that explain the decline in the USA's Clean Elections score were the alterations made by the US Supreme Court in 2013 to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which were first applied in the 2016 presidential election; and the passing of a number of **voter identification laws**, which have had a negative impact on equal access to the ballot box. By 2019, 35 US states had laws—seven of which were classified as 'strict photo ID' rules—requiring voters to show some form of identification at the polls (Underhill 2019). Such regulations have been shown to depress turnout, especially among youth and minority populations (US Government Accountability Office 2014), who are more likely to struggle to obtain the necessary identification (Gaskins and Iyer 2012; Barreto, Nuno and Sanchez 2009). Strict voter ID regulations have a disproportionate effect on certain segments of the population and are discriminatory against people of colour (Erickson 2017; Bentele and O'Brien 2013). They therefore undermine the strength of representative government by violating the constitutional and international principle of universal suffrage.

Electoral integrity in the USA has also been negatively affected by **indications of Russian interference**, primarily via social media, in the 2016 presidential election. Russian operatives allegedly targeted election systems in 18 US states, accessed voter registration databases and conducted malicious access attempts on voting-related websites (US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence 2018). They also allegedly used psychological campaigns to persuade people to vote a certain way—or not at all—which included the targeting of African-American voters (Jamieson 2018).

A number of other elements in the US electoral system contribute to the weakening of the principles of popular control and political equality. First, the **representational asymmetry of voting districts caused by gerrymandering** involves altering electoral boundaries to provide a political advantage for a particular party. Gerrymandering has been extensively practised by lawmakers in both the Republican and Democratic parties. It contributes to the distortion of representation, undermines voters' freedom to make political choices and dilutes opposition parties' ability to represent constituents' interests (Wang 2016; Greenwood 2016). The representational asymmetry caused by gerrymandering can be so severe that a party could theoretically gain 20 per cent of the vote share without any corresponding gain in seats. This practice can also contribute to the dilution of minority votes (Royden, Li and Rudensky 2018). Moreover, a recent legal case, *Shelby County v Holder*, largely ended the US Justice Department's ability to check discriminatory boundaries, which significantly weakens the judiciary's role in ruling against such political distortion (Neely and McMinn 2018).

FIGURE 3.15

### Trends in Social Group Equality in the United States, 1975–2018



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

Second, the **lack of effective checks on electoral campaign donations**, spending and disclosure has significantly undermined the principle of popular control and the degree to which ordinary US voters can control their government. It also creates an uneven playing field for candidates to compete for political power and puts at a disadvantage those who do not have access to networks, influence and money, further reinforcing unequal representation for women and minorities. In fact, a group of wealthy donors—as small as 1 per cent of the US population, or a total of 26,783 individuals—is estimated to be responsible for an overwhelming majority of campaign funding (Drutman 2012).

One study showed that, compared to donors, average citizens have little or no independent influence on government policy, concluding that the majority ‘does *not* rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes’ (Gilens and Page 2014: 576). This inequality has been compounded in the aftermath of the US Supreme Court’s decision in *Citizens United v FEC*, which allows corporations and unions to spend unlimited amounts of money in support of candidates. The struggle to pass more effective campaign finance regulations is partly due to the judiciary’s longstanding view that political spending is a form of ‘free speech’ which, in the same way as other forms of speech, cannot be limited. Regulation requires lawmakers to distinguish electoral speech from non-electoral speech, something which is difficult to implement in any circumstance but especially so when the political divide is so deep (Briffault 2015).

Third, the **Electoral College** provides disproportionate voting power to US states with smaller populations and contributes to the dilution of the principle of political equality of each citizen’s vote on election day (Petrocelli 2016). Indeed, the system tilts politicians’ attention towards competitive states with large numbers of electors. Since electoral votes are allocated on the basis of a once-in-a-decade census, minority voters living in fast-growing urban centres are often undercounted. Indeed, the number of voters affected by this discrepancy in the five most populous US states is more than the total voting population of six small states (Dreyfuss 2016). While the electoral vote has given the same result as the popular vote in most recent US elections, this was not the case in the presidential elections in 2000 (in which George W. Bush defeated Al Gore) and 2016 (in which Donald Trump defeated Hillary Clinton). There are increasing calls for a modification or elimination of this system, as a way to enhance political equality in representation in the USA (Birnbaum 2019).



### Fundamental Rights

The Fundamental Rights attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. Overall it measures the fair and equal access to justice, the extent to which civil liberties such as freedom of expression or movement are respected, and the extent to which countries are offering their citizens basic welfare and political equality.

Declines have been observed in levels of Civil Liberties in the USA since 2012, particularly on aspects relating to Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion (see Table 3.10).

#### *Civil Liberties and Freedom of Expression are on the decline*

The right to free speech, expressed in the First Amendment to the US Constitution, is a hallmark of democracy in the USA. Indeed, laws in the USA protect a vast range of expression. In recent years, however, levels of Freedom of Expression in the USA have declined, although the start of the decline predates the Trump administration.

In 2012 the USA recorded the highest score in the world (0.99) on Freedom of Expression but by 2018 its score had dropped to 0.85 (which was still in the high range) (see Figure 3.16). Declines on this dimension in 2012–2013 can be partially attributed to alleged increased surveillance by the National Surveillance Administration (NSA), which permitted the NSA to examine the metadata of text messages and phone calls of US citizens, potentially violating individual privacy rights (Reddick et al. 2015). During the

TABLE 3.10

#### Civil Liberties in the United States, 2012 and 2018

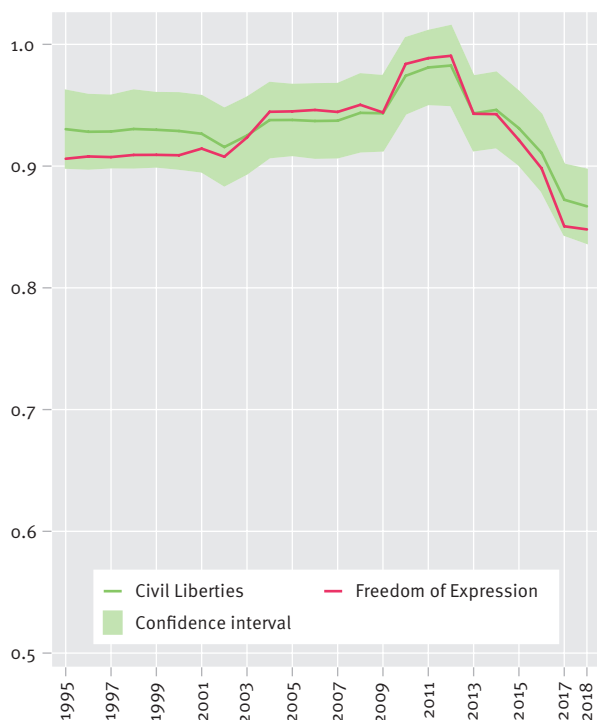
| Civil Liberties subcomponent | GSoD Indices score |      |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------|
|                              | 2012               | 2018 |
| Freedom of Expression        | 0.99               | 0.85 |
| Freedom of Movement          | 0.93               | 0.83 |
| Freedom of Religion          | 0.95               | 0.83 |

■ High    ■ Mid-range    ■ Low

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

FIGURE 3.16

### Trends in Civil Liberties and Freedom of Expression in the United States, 1995–2018



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

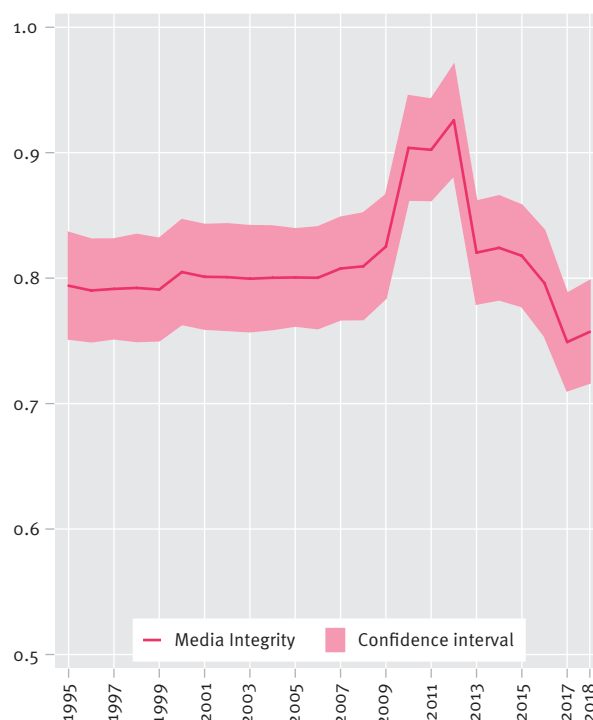
Obama administration, heightened restrictions were also placed on reporters' access to administration officials and to government information (Freedom House 2015).

Media freedom has continued to be threatened since 2016–2017, when Trump's election campaign—and then administration—excluded reporters from certain events and some Trump supporters intimidated journalists. President Trump's verbal attacks on the press and his selective allegations of 'fake news' have unfairly raised doubts about verifiable facts and increased the risk of journalists being targeted with violence (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018). In the long term, such fear can lead to media self-censorship and mute public participation, especially among the most marginalized sectors of society. This presents a serious threat to the health of US democracy.

US media also struggles to be broadly representative in its coverage and reporting. This is due in part to the low levels of minority representation in newsrooms. As of 2017, minorities made up 24 per cent and 12 per cent of the television and radio

FIGURE 3.17

### Trends in Media Integrity in United States, 1995–2018



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

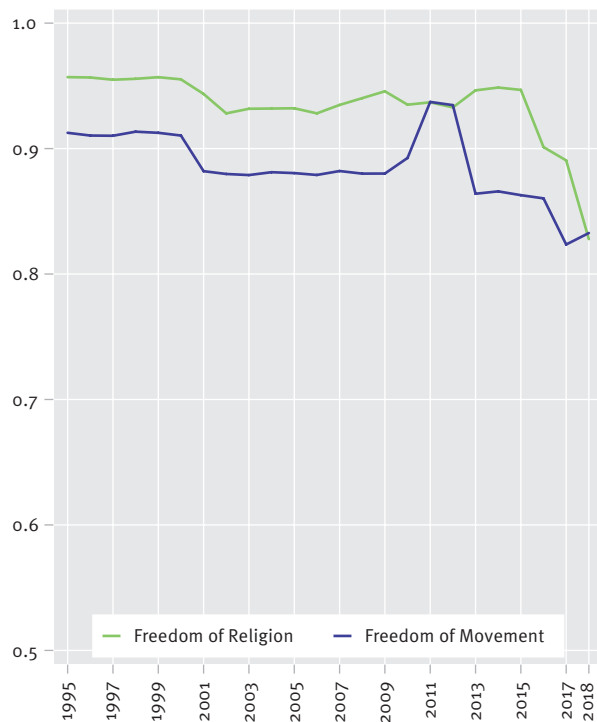
workforce, respectively, despite a national minority population of 38 per cent (Radio Television Digital News Association 2017). The poor representation of minorities in newsrooms has implications for whether—and how—minority communities and their concerns are addressed by the media (Gerson and Rodriguez 2018). Compounding the issue, the high concentration of media ownership and an increasingly partisan media coverage contribute to a polarized media landscape in the USA. The GSoD Indices indicator on Media Integrity, which measures diversity of media perspectives, has seen a decline from 0.93 in 2012 to 0.76 in 2018 (see Figure 3.17).

#### *Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion are under threat*

The GSoD Indices score on Freedom of Movement has seen a statistically significant decline in the USA, declining from 0.93 in 2012 to 0.83 in 2018 (see Figure 3.18). This decline reflects recent moves towards a more restrictive immigration policy, including restrictions affecting those seeking immigrant and non-immigrant visas from several Muslim-majority countries (BBC News 2018c), as well as widely reported cases in 2018 regarding the treatment of migrants crossing the border from

FIGURE 3.18

### Trends in Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion in the United States, 1995–2018



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

Mexico into the USA and the alleged policy of separating children from parents on arrival (Sacchetti 2018).



#### Checks on Government

The Checks on Government attribute aggregates scores from three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity. It measures the extent to which parliament oversees the executive, as well as whether the courts are independent, and whether media is diverse and critical of the government without being penalized for it.

US citizens enjoy access to an open and independent system of justice that is perceived as possessing a high degree of integrity, and that has the authority to check abuses by other branches of government. Indeed, on the three GSoD Indices indicators relating to the rule of law (Judicial Independence, Access to Justice and Predictable Enforcement), the USA scores among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world.

TABLE 3.11

### Effective Parliament in the United States, 2013–2018

|                    | Year |      |      |
|--------------------|------|------|------|
|                    | 2013 | 2017 | 2018 |
| GSoD Indices score | 0.80 | 0.65 | 0.71 |

■ High ■ Mid-range ■ Low

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

#### Effective Parliament in the USA has seen both declines and recent advances

The past five years (between 2013 and 2018) have been marked by a significant decline in Effective Parliament in the USA, due mainly to a dearth of congressional oversight of the executive, especially in relation to foreign affairs (Blanc 2018; Fowler 2018). In 2017, for the first time in the GSoD Indices, the USA fell to a mid-range score, although it regained its position as a high-performing country in 2018 (see Table 3.11). This recovery reflects the results of the 2018 mid-term elections to the US Congress, where Democrats now hold a majority in the House of Representatives, although Republicans still control the Senate. Experts claim that oversight has too often become a vehicle for ‘partisan politics’ instead of strong and independent investigation (Chaddock 2011). Laxity in congressional oversight poses a serious threat to democracy, increasing the chances that a president can overrule the people’s will on key issues. It therefore impacts Representative Government. The lack of oversight prior to 2018 was partly due to the structure of government, as well as increasing partisanship (Goldgeier and Saunders 2018). Members of Congress must regularly choose between their interest in maintaining Congress as a strong, vibrant institution and their personal interests in re-election, attaining a party leadership position, or advancing their constituents’ goals (Devins 2018).



#### Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration is the aggregation of two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement. It measures the extent to which the state is free from corruption, and whether the enforcement of public authority is predictable.



### Corruption continues to undermine democracy

Corruption and the perception of corruption in Washington, DC, are nothing new. Since the Watergate era, high-profile corruption scandals involving public officials have emerged on a regular basis. US citizens have expressed alarm about more than just bribes and bagmen. In a 2017 survey the percentage of citizens who believed that the government does what is right ‘just about always’ or ‘most of the time’ stood at only 18 per cent (Pew Research Center 2017). Table 3.12 shows the USA’s performance on the GSoD Indices attribute of Impartial Administration, and its subattribute of Absence of Corruption.

Many troubling practices have existed for decades, such as the US political system’s alleged ‘pay-to-play’ culture for accessing lawmakers and abuse of the ‘revolving door’, which allows lobbyists to become government officials—and officials and lawmakers to become lobbyists—without adequate restrictions or accountability (Purdum 2006; OpenSecrets.org n.d.). Recent developments, such as the US Government’s perceived failure to adequately hold accountable financial leaders following the 2008 financial crisis and the loosening of campaign finance restrictions, have contributed to a belief that the wealthiest US citizens operate under different rules than other citizens and enjoy disproportionate political clout in the USA (Sanders and Weissman 2015).

Confidence in the integrity of Congress remains very low. In a 2017 Transparency International survey, more than one-third (38 per cent) of Americans responded that they believed ‘most’ or ‘all’ members of Congress were corrupt

(Transparency International 2017). Confidence in the integrity of the White House has declined, although dissatisfaction with the executive branch appears to be based heavily on party affiliation (Transparency International 2017; Ladd, Tucker and Kates 2018).

Transparency International also reported that more than two-thirds of Americans surveyed believe that the government is doing ‘very badly’ or ‘fairly badly’ combating corruption in its own ranks (Transparency International 2017). The Mueller investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election has cast a cloud of uncertainty regarding the integrity of the Trump administration (Murray 2018). Even federal law enforcement agencies, which would normally be counted on to address illegal acts of political corruption, have suffered from a decrease in public confidence (Kahn 2018; Santhanam 2018).



### Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement is the only attribute that does not have a score, as its four subattributes (Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy) are not aggregated. The subattributes measure citizens’ participation in civil society organizations and in elections, and the existence of direct democracy instruments available to citizens, as well as the extent to which local elections are free.

TABLE 3.12

### Impartial Administration in the United States, 2012 and 2018

| Attribute                | Subattribute          | GSoD Indices score |      |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------|
|                          |                       | 2012               | 2018 |
| Impartial Administration |                       | 0.83               | 0.73 |
|                          | Absence of Corruption | 0.83               | 0.69 |

■ High ■ Mid-range ■ Low

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

The USA’s levels of Electoral Participation—as expressed by voter turnout—are among the lowest for the world’s democracies. The USA’s score in 2018 (0.47) is below the world average (0.56). The GSoD Indices data shows that levels of electoral participation are generally higher in presidential elections (where turnout has averaged 56.6 per cent since 1975) than in the mid-term elections (where the average was 36.9 per cent until 2018). The persistently low levels of voter turnout in the USA contribute to weakening US democracy, undermining the core principle of popular control.

However, the 2018 mid-term elections to the US Congress showed a record turnout of 53 per cent of the voting-eligible population, which was the highest turnout for a mid-term election since the US Census Bureau began tracking turnout in 1978. This increase in turnout was particularly noticeable among younger voters, who saw a 16-point increase from 2014 to 2016 (US Census Bureau 2019). Despite these gains, the turnout was still below the 61.4 per cent turnout in the 2016 presidential election (US Census Bureau 2017).

The low levels of voter turnout in the USA may be due to the institutional set up of US democracy—where due to a system of first-past-the-post elections, a single vote may seem less meaningful—along with the diffused nature of checks and balances, which makes it harder for voters to reward or punish politicians for policy success or failures (Martinez 2010). While these institutional issues are difficult to remedy, smaller fixes such as automatic voter registration could lower bureaucratic barriers for citizens to vote and, in turn, increase turnout (Stockemer 2017).

### Conclusion

Despite a range of challenges, the USA maintains a high position in the GSoD Indices and is still a leading democracy in several respects. At the same time, decreasing popular control and political equality are a grave concern and a growing threat to the strength and legitimacy of the US model of democratic rule, which has suffered erosion in recent years.

Implementing legislation and policies that promote transparency, facilitate genuine universal and equal suffrage, ensure freedom of expression and strengthen ethical obligations will be essential. However, leaders in the USA will first need to overcome extreme political polarization and tackle a number of challenges. These include the underlying problems of racial and other forms of inequality and the growing gap between the rich and the poor—conditions that can have severe effects on democracy.

Finally, measures need to be taken to reduce the perceived dominance of moneyed interests in the US political process.

### Policy considerations

- Consider restoring the Voting Rights Act, requiring states and localities with a history of voting discrimination to get ‘preclearance’ from the US Justice Department before making changes to voting processes.
- Consider legislation that checks the perceived dominance of moneyed interests in the political process. At a minimum, disclosure laws governing donations in support of candidates or political causes, and interactions between lobbyists and public officials or lawmakers, should be strengthened.
- Review and strengthen restrictions regarding the ‘revolving door’ between private lobbyists and public officials and lawmakers.
- Strengthen ethics laws and regulations by including stricter requirements on financial transparency for candidates for federal office. Rules regarding the conversion or transfer of certain assets that may lead to a conflict with official duties following election could be clarified and strengthened.
- Consider expanding laws prohibiting nepotism in hiring for any federal position, including positions within the White House.

TABLE 3.13

### Regime classification for North America in 2018

This table shows the regime classification for all of the countries in North America covered by the GSoD Indices, as well as their respective scores on the five GSoD attributes.

| Country            | Attribute                 |                    |                      |                          |                          |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                    | Representative Government | Fundamental Rights | Checks on Government | Impartial Administration | Participatory Engagement |
| <b>Democracies</b> |                           |                    |                      |                          |                          |
| Canada             | 0.79                      | 0.84               | 0.74                 | 0.79                     | High                     |
| United States      | 0.76 –                    | 0.79               | 0.77                 | 0.73 –                   | Mid-range                |

■ High   ■ Mid-range   ■ Low

**Notes:** + denotes a statistically significant increase in the last five-year period; – denotes a statistically significant decrease in the last five-year period.

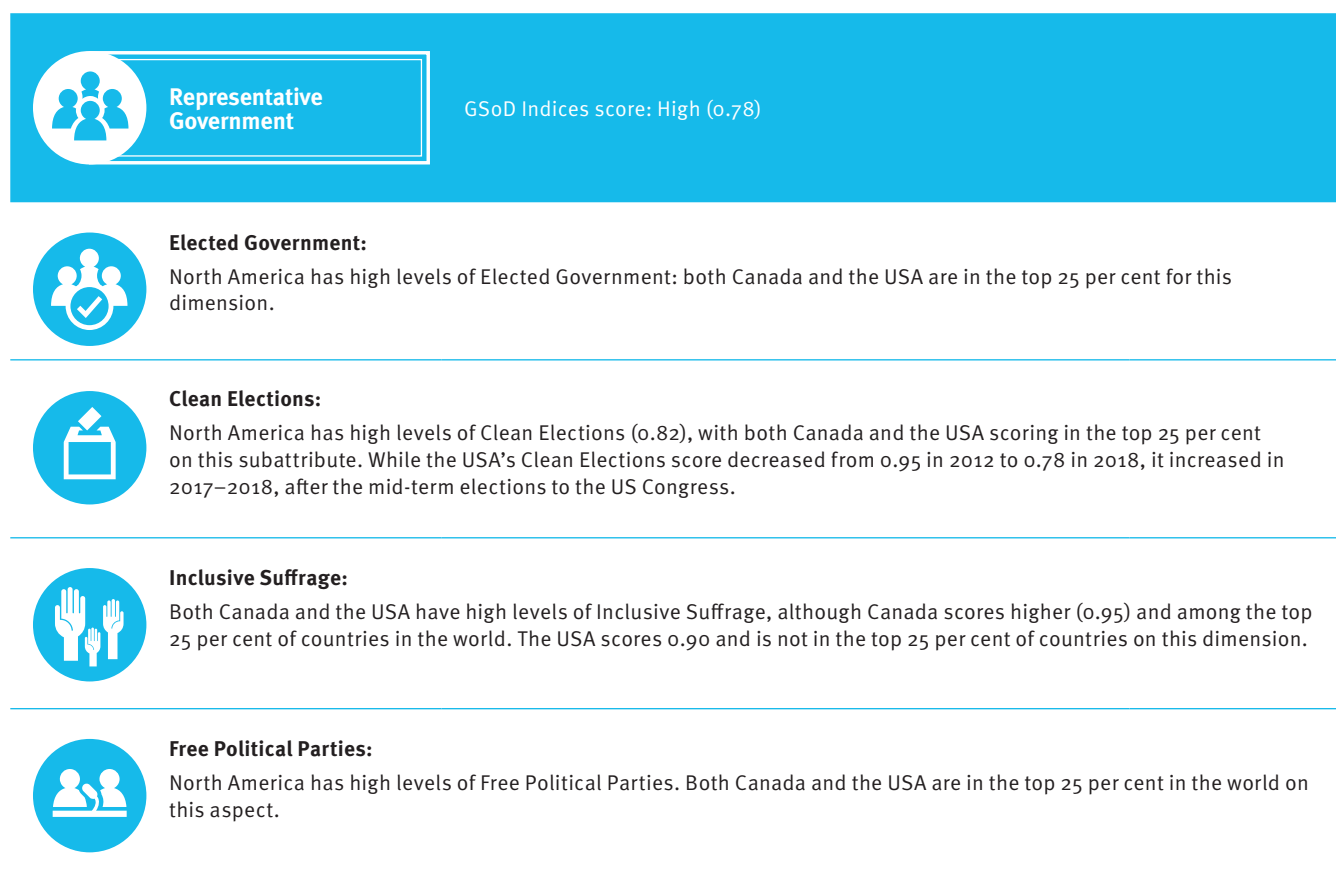
**Source:** International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019), <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

- Consider reforming the Electoral College system.
- Consider removing the power to draw district boundaries from the hands of elected officials and transfer it to independent redistricting committees.
- Protect and update election infrastructure by conducting audits and threat analyses of voter registration systems
- Consider instituting automatic voter registration at the national level, to lower the bureaucratic barriers to electoral participation.
- and by purchasing new, secure voting machines to replace outdated, vulnerable machinery.

TABLE 3.14

### The GSoD Indices Snapshot: Democracy in North America

Table 3.14 offers a snapshot of the state of democracy in North America, using the GSoD conceptual framework as an organizing structure across the five main attributes of democracy—Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement.





## Fundamental Rights

GSoD Indices score: High (0.82)



### Access to Justice:

North America has high levels of Access to Justice. Both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent for this dimension.



### Civil Liberties:

North America has high levels of Civil Liberties. Both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent of countries for this dimension.

However, the USA has seen a decline in Civil Liberties, from 0.98 in 2012 to 0.87 in 2018.



### Gender Equality:

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



### Social Group Equality:

North America has mid-range performance on Social Group Equality. Canada scores 0.65 and the USA 0.53 on this dimension.



### Basic Welfare:

North America has high performance on Basic Welfare with both the USA and Canada performing in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world.



## Checks on Government

GSoD Indices score: High (0.75)



### Effective Parliament:

North America has mid-range levels of Effective Parliament. Canada continues to be in the top 25 per cent of countries, while the USA returned to the top 25 per cent in 2018, after a drop in 2017. In the last years, the USA has seen statistically significant declines on Effective Parliament, falling from 0.84 in 2012 to 0.71 in 2018.



### Judicial Independence:

Judicial Independence is high in North America, with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world. Canada has seen a statistically significant decline since 2012 (from 0.78) but still scores highly (0.70 in 2018).



### Media Integrity:

Media Integrity is high in North America, with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent of countries. While the USA saw a significant decline on its scores on this dimension between 2012 and 2017, it still scores in the high range (0.76).



### Impartial Administration

GSoD Indices score: High (0.76)



#### Absence of Corruption:

While corruption remains low in North America, both Canada and the USA have seen statistically significant declines on their Absence of Corruption scores, with Canada falling from 0.87 in 2012 to 0.79 in 2018 and the USA falling from 0.83 in 2012 to mid-range (0.69) in 2018. At the same time, both countries remain above the world average.



#### Predictable Enforcement:

Predictable Enforcement is high in North America with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world. Canada has seen a decline in its score since 2012 but still performs in the high range.



### Participatory Engagement

GSoD Indices performance: High



#### Civil Society Participation:

Civil Society Participation is high in North America, with both Canada and the USA scoring in the top 25 per cent in the world. Since 2013, Canada has seen a slight increase in its Civil Society Participation score, increasing from 0.74 to 0.84.



#### Electoral Participation:

On Electoral Participation, North America scores particularly poorly, at 0.54. On this aspect, North America is outperformed by all regions except for Africa and the Middle East (which score at 0.49 and 0.22 respectively). North America performs slightly below the world average (0.56) and well below the best performing region (Latin America, at 0.67). The USA's low score (0.47) on Electoral Participation drags down the regional average: Canada scores at 0.62, above the world average.



#### Direct Democracy:

North America has the world's lowest score on Direct Democracy (0.01). Its score on this dimension is below the world average of 0.12 and well below the score of the best-performing region: Europe (0.21). It should be noted that this subattribute only captures direct-democracy mechanisms at the national level.



#### Local Democracy:

Canada scores high on Local Democracy and is in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on this indicator. The USA broke with recent trends in 2018, falling out of the top 25 per cent. It now scores in the mid-range category. In fact, the USA has seen declines over the past five years, scoring 0.95 in 2013 and 0.69 in 2018.



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