



# The Global State of Democracy IN FOCUS

No. 5, February 2019

## The Sustainable Development Goals and the Global State of Democracy Indices

### Summary

This *GSoD In Focus* explores the contribution that the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices can make to the review of progress on the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The timing of the publication of this *GSoD In Focus* is designed to coincide with the upcoming 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, convened by the UN General Assembly, to review the first four years of implementation of the SDGs.

The UN system and member states, regional and international organizations, civil society, academia, the private sector and other stakeholders may use the GSoD Indices to complement other official indicators, to acquire in-depth knowledge on trends in achieving the specific targets of individual SDGs. In this regard, the GSoD Indices can be used to provide data on the SDGs for poverty (SDG 1), hunger (2), health and well-being (3), education (4), gender equality (5), inequalities (10), sustainable cities and communities (11), peace, justice and institutions (16), and partnerships for the goals (17), as well as across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### 1. Introduction

In November 2017, International IDEA launched the first edition of a new biennial report, *The Global State of Democracy* (International IDEA 2017). The report provided evidence-based analysis and data on the global and regional state of democracy. It also contributed to the public debate on democracy, informed policy interventions and examined problem-solving approaches to the challenges facing democracies worldwide.

At the same time, International IDEA launched the GSoD Indices, which serve as the main evidence basis for the report, and provide a new, comprehensive measurement of democracy. The GSoD Indices depict democratic trends across five main attributes of democracy, sixteen subattributes and eight subcomponents, respectively.

## 2. International IDEA, democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals

International IDEA's vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable, and deliver sustainable development for all (International IDEA 2018a). This vision is anchored in, and reflects, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN General Assembly 2014, 2015) and the SDGs framework. In addition, International IDEA's GSoD Indices enable accurate progress tracking of developments linked to several SDGs at the national, regional and global levels.

International IDEA believes that democracy rests on two fundamental principles: popular control over decision-making and political equality among those exercising that control (Beetham et al. 2008). The Institute's understanding of democracy echoes a core value enshrined in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to which the 'will of the people' is the basis for the authority of governments. This reflects a common and universal desire for peace, security and justice.

Based on the premise of this broad concept of democracy, International IDEA advocated—throughout the consultation and negotiation processes on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—that improvements to fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, access to justice, the accountability and transparency of institutions, and responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making are essential to achieving the SDGs. Failure to achieve progress in these areas is likely to affect progress on each of the goals. There can be no sustainable development without democratic governance and respect for human rights. The inclusion of people's voices in monitoring progress towards achieving SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions is as essential as it is for all the SDGs. In other words, democracy is not just a key enabler, it is also of intrinsic value to sustainable development.

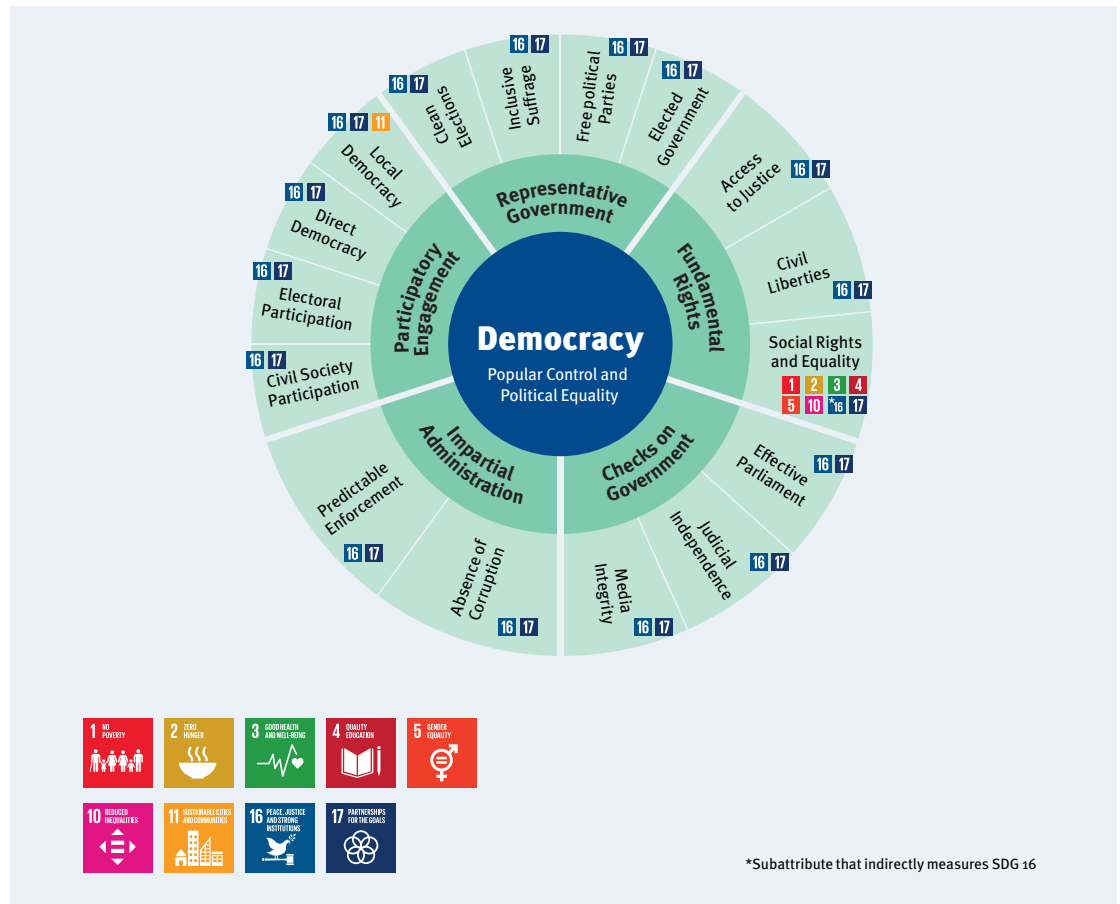
## 3. The Global State of Democracy Indices

Developed with academic rigour, the GSoD Indices are packaged so that they can be easily used by policymakers and civil society organizations working at the global, regional and national levels. Democratic development trends in five main categories are depicted as attributes of democracy (see Figure 1). Each attribute has its own subattributes and other aspects that add to the framework. The attributes and subattributes are as follows:

1. **Representative Government** covers the extent to which access to political power is free and equal as demonstrated by competitive, inclusive and regular elections. It includes four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.
2. **Fundamental Rights** captures the degree to which civil liberties are respected, and whether people have access to basic resources that enable their active participation in the political process. This aspect overlaps significantly with the international covenants on civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights. It includes three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. It also includes the following subcomponents: Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, Personal Integrity and Security, Social Group Equality, Gender Equality and Basic Welfare.
3. **Checks on Government** measures effective control of executive power. It includes three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, and Media Integrity.
4. **Impartial Administration** concerns how fairly and predictably political decisions are implemented, and thus reflects key aspects of the rule of law. It includes two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement.
5. **Participatory Engagement** measures instruments of, and the realization of, people's participation and societal engagement at different levels. Because they capture different phenomena, the four subattributes of this aspect—Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy—are not aggregated into a single index.

FIGURE 1

The GSoD Indices: Conceptual framework and the SDGs



The Indices provide country-level data for 158 countries dating back to 1975 and are updated on an annual basis. The interactive database is freely available online.

The GSoD Indices aggregate indicators from a number of data sets. Approximately 70 per cent of the data comes from indicators gathered by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project. Other sources include Polity data, the UN Statistics Division and the International Country Risk Guide. For a full list of the data sets used in the GSoD Indices, see GSoD In Focus No. 1 (International IDEA 2018b). Further details on the GSoD dataset and its associated Indices can be found in Skaaning (2018).

**4. How GSoD Indices contribute to monitoring SDGs**

Monitoring progress is essential to the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda. Effective implementation of the SDGs depends on both ownership of the process, and tracking action, at the local, national and international levels. This people-centred monitoring of the SDGs is as empowering as it is ambitious. At the national level, the GSoD Indices may contribute to monitoring and reporting on SDGs through, for example, the Voluntary National Reviews. As implementation is the responsibility of UN member states, and national ownership is crucially important in achieving the SDGs, the data gathered through the GSoD Indices may help countries in tracking their progress towards the SDGs and their targets. Likewise, since the GSoD Indices also capture democratic trends at regional and global levels, this data may be used to monitor and report on SDG progress beyond national borders. It should also be underlined that the GSoD



Indices often make data available that would otherwise be missed, thus supplementing officially approved indicators.

The GSoD Indices focus on democracy. As stated, International IDEA understands democracy as a broad concept with multiple aspects that encompass elements of civil and political rights, social and economic rights, democratic governance and the rule of law. It is this holistic understanding of democracy that means that the GSoD Indices measurement framework directly captures data relating to progress on 8 of the 17 SDGs (SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 16, see Table 1). In addition, the GSoD initiative itself is highly relevant to SDG 17, as the Indices and evidence-based analysis help to strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development.

Additionally, through its membership of the SDG 16 Data Initiative consortium, International IDEA has contributed to monitoring the progress on various targets of SDG 16. So far, the consortium has developed an online database that follows progress towards such targets, and has published two global reports. The third report, due to come out in time for the HLPF on Sustainable Development, will be published in July 2019. International IDEA, through its GSoD Indices, has contributed significantly to SDG 16 Data Initiative’s database and reports.

TABLE 1

The relationship between the SDGs and targets, and the GSoD Indices

Goal (Target)	Indicators	Attribute	Subattribute	Subcomponent
 <p>1. End poverty <b>Target 1.3</b> Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable</p>	<p>1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable</p>	<p>2. Fundamental Rights</p>	<p>2.3. Social Rights and Equality</p>	<p>2.3.B. Basic Welfare</p>
 <p>2. Zero hunger <b>Target 2.1</b> By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round</p>	<p>2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment 2.1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)</p>	<p>2. Fundamental Rights</p>	<p>2.3. Social Rights and Equality</p>	<p>2.3.B. Basic Welfare</p>



Goal (Target)	Indicators	Attribute	Subattribute	Subcomponent
<p>3. Good health and well-being for all</p> <p><b>Target 3.8</b> Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all</p>	<p><b>3.8.1</b> Coverage of essential health services (defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population)</p> <p><b>3.8.2</b> Proportion of population with large household expenditures on health as a share of total household expenditure or income</p>	2. Fundamental Rights	2.3. Social Rights and Equality	2.3.B. Basic Welfare



<p>4. Quality education</p> <p><b>Target 4.2</b> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education</p>	<p><b>4.2.1</b> Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex</p> <p><b>4.2.2</b> Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex</p>	2. Fundamental Rights	2.3. Social Rights and Equality	2.3.A. Social Group Equality 2.3.B. Basic Welfare 2.3.C. Gender Equality
<p><b>Target 4.5</b> By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations</p>	<p><b>4.5.1</b> Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated</p>			



<p>5. Gender equality</p> <p><b>Target 5.1</b> End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p>	<p><b>5.1.1</b> Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex</p>	2. Fundamental Rights	2.3. Social Rights and Equality	2.3.C. Gender Equality
<p><b>Target 5.5</b> Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p>	<p><b>5.5.1</b> Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments</p> <p><b>5.5.2</b> Proportion of women in managerial positions</p>			



Goal (Target)	Indicators	Attribute	Subattribute	Subcomponent
<p>10. Reduced inequalities <b>Target 10.3</b> Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard</p>	<p><b>10.3.1</b> Proportion of the population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed within the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law</p>	2. Fundamental Rights	2.3. Social Rights and Equality	2.3.A. Social Group Equality 2.3.C. Gender Equality



<p>11. Sustainable cities and communities <b>Target 11.3</b> By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries</p>	<p><b>11.3.1</b> Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate <b>11.3.2</b> Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically</p>	5. Participatory Engagement	5.4. Local Democracy	
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<p>16. Peace, justice and strong institutions <b>Target 16.1</b> Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere</p>	<p><b>16.1.1</b> Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age <b>16.1.2</b> Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause <b>16.1.3</b> Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months <b>16.1.4</b> Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live</p>	2. Fundamental Rights	2.2. Civil Liberties	2.2.A. Freedom of Expression 2.2.B. Freedom of Association and Assembly 2.2.C. Freedom of Religion 2.2.D. Freedom of Movement 2.2.E. Personal Integrity and Security
<p><b>Target 16.3</b> Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all</p>	<p><b>16.3.1</b> Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms <b>16.3.2</b> Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population</p>	2. Fundamental Rights 4. Impartial Administration	2.1. Access to Justice 4.2. Predictable Enforcement	



Goal (Target)	Indicators	Attribute	Subattribute	Subcomponent
<b>Target 16.5</b> Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	<b>16.5.1</b> Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months	4. Impartial Administration	4.1. Absence of Corruption	
	<b>16.5.2</b> Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months			
<b>Target 16.6</b> Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	<b>16.6.1</b> Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar)	4. Impartial Administration	4.2. Predictable Enforcement	
	<b>16.6.2</b> Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services	5. Participatory Engagement	5.1. Civil Society Participation 5.4. Local Democracy	
<b>Target 16.7</b> Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	<b>16.7.1</b> Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions	1. Representative Government	1.1. Clean Elections 1.2. Inclusive Suffrage 1.3. Free Political Parties 1.4. Elected Government	
		3. Checks on Government	3.1 Effective Parliament 3.2 Judicial Independence 3.3. Media Integrity	
	<b>16.7.2</b> Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group	5. Participatory Engagement	5.1. Civil Society Participation 5.2. Electoral Participation 5.3. Direct Democracy 5.4. Local Democracy	





Goal (Target)	Indicators	Attribute	Subattribute	Subcomponent
<b>Target 16.10</b> Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	<b>16.10.1</b> Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months	2. Fundamental Rights	2.2. Civil Liberties	2.2.A. Freedom of Expression 2.2.B. Freedom of Association and Assembly 2.2.C. Freedom of Religion 2.2.D. Freedom of Movement 2.2.E. Personal Integrity and Security
	<b>16.10.2</b> Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information	3. Checks on Government  5. Participatory Engagement	3.3. Media Integrity  5.1. Civil Society Participation	

## 5. Measuring specific SDG goals and targets

### GSoD Indices and SDGs 1 to 4

International IDEA views rights and access to basic welfare as an important dimension of democracy. Seven basic welfare indicators on access to health, education and nutrition have therefore been included under the Basic Welfare subcomponent of the subattribute Social Rights and Equality in the Fundamental Rights attribute. These relate to SDG 1 on poverty, SDG 2 on nutrition, SDG 3 on health and SDG 4 on education.

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 5

The GSoD Indices also allow tracking of SDG 5 (Gender equality), which aims to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. The GSoD Indices include a Gender Equality subcomponent (under the same Social Rights and Equality subattribute of the Fundamental Rights attribute), which maps power distributed by gender, women’s participation in civil society organizations, women’s versus men’s mean years of schooling, the proportion of lower chamber female legislators and the appointment of women at cabinet level. Furthermore, the GSoD Indices are gender-sensitive and provide gender-disaggregated data wherever possible. Four additional subcomponents provide gender-disaggregated data through the Fundamental Rights attribute (Access to Justice for Men and Women, Freedom of Discussion for Men and Women, Freedom of Domestic Movement for Men and Women, and Freedom from Forced Labour for Men and Women).

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 10

Within the Fundamental Rights attribute, the GSoD Indices provide data on the SDGs geared to poverty reduction, nutrition, health care and education. This attribute covers countries’ basic welfare (infant mortality rates, calorie intakes, literacy rates, schooling and basic health care coverage). The Fundamental Rights attribute also measures aspects of social inequalities prevalent within SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 10 (Reducing inequalities). Within this attribute, issues of inclusion, non-discriminatory participation and social equality are examined, which help complement data on both afore-mentioned SDGs.

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 11

The subattribute of Local Democracy, which supports the Participatory Engagement attribute, measures whether subnational governments are democratically elected and whether they can operate



without interference from unelected bodies at the local level. It also examines whether citizens can vote in subnational elections that are free and fair, which is conducive to democratic accountability. Therefore, this subattribute contributes to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and a number of its targets, particularly in relation to assessing how inclusive, participatory and sustainable citizen engagement in local democracy is.

### The GSoD Indices and SDG 16

The GSoD Indices provide valuable insights into country-, regional- and global-level progress on SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). In our view, SDG 16 builds on the premise that democratic governance matters: it states that peaceful and inclusive societies are central to achieving all other development goals. SDG 16 reflects a commonly accepted understanding that democracy, peace and development are inherently intertwined, and that reducing violence, delivering justice and combating corruption are essential to achieving sustainable development. As Table 1 illustrates, the GSoD Indices provide insight into 6 of the 12 targets under SDG 16, by providing data on justice, corruption, the quality of institutions, and civil liberties.

## 6. The importance of democratic accountability

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

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

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## About this series

In 2018, International IDEA launched the new *GsoD In Focus* series. These short updates apply the GSoD Indices data to current issues, providing evidence-based analysis and insights into the contemporary democracy debate.

## Where to find the data

The GSoD Indices are available on the International IDEA website. Users can generate their own data visualizations and extract data at country, regional and global levels across the attributes and subattributes for specific years or for selected time periods starting from 1975. The GSoD Indices are updated annually.

<<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>



## About International IDEA

Founded in 1995, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. The Institute is the only intergovernmental organization with a global mandate solely focused on democracy and elections, and is committed to be a global agenda-setter in the democracy-building field. With 32 Member States from all continents, International IDEA supports the development of stronger democratic institutions and processes; and fosters sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy through the provision of comparative knowledge resources, dialogues and partnerships at the global, regional and country levels.

The Global State of Democracy Initiative is headed by the Democracy Assessment and Political Analysis (DAPA) Unit. For queries regarding the GSoD Initiative or the GSoD Indices, please contact the DAPA team and GSoD Helpdesk at [GSoD.Indices@idea.int](mailto:GSoD.Indices@idea.int).

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