

Summary

# The Global State of Democracy 2019

Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise



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*Summary*

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# Introduction

**Democracy is ill and its promise needs revival.** Indeed, the value, viability and future of democracy are more contested now than ever before in modern history, or at least since the 1930s. While the past four decades have seen a remarkable expansion of democracy throughout all regions of the world, recent years have been marked by declines in the fabric of both older and younger democracies. While the idea of democracy continues to mobilize people around the world, the practice of existing democracies has disappointed and disillusioned many citizens and democracy advocates.

Democratic erosion is occurring in different settings and contexts. New democracies are often weak and fragile. Their governments and political representatives face the challenge of building and strengthening democratic institutions in resource-constrained environments. Older democracies are struggling to guarantee equitable and sustainable economic and social development. The share of high-quality democracies is decreasing and many of them are confronted with populist challengers, which combine exclusionary claims with a disregard for democratic principles.

Both old and young democracies are suffering from a shrinking civic space, with declines in civil liberties, clampdowns on civil society, and restrictions on freedom of expression. The present report contains a number of examples of countries where governments intentionally limited civic space and weakened constitutional checks on executive authority, resulting in democratic backsliding and a deteriorating rule of law. In some countries, this illness has been so severe that it has resulted in partial (with examples such as Nicaragua and Pakistan) or full democratic breakdown (Venezuela).

Modern democratic backsliding occurs from within the democratic system: through legislative and constitutional reforms and policy decisions by democratically elected majorities. The gradual hollowing-out of the non-electoral pillars in backsliding democracies ultimately damages democracy's core principles of popular control and political equality.

Democratic backsliding coincides with the rise of populist politicians and movements that appeal to growing numbers of voters, most notably in Europe, but also in the Americas and Asia and the Pacific, although forms vary according to cultural and regional contexts.

The rise of populist politics is linked to a variety of context-specific factors, but some common drivers include a disenchantment with traditional political actors; the perceived inability of current political systems to address core societal and economic problems; and a clash between expectations of what democracy should provide and what it actually delivers. Populists tap into citizen discontent about rising inequalities (perceived or actual), corruption, increasing mass migration (again, perceived or actual), unemployment and precarity of employment, and increased digitalization and its impact on labour market structures.

A feature of populist rhetoric and practice is disrespect for the accountability institutions that check government, protect political pluralism and constitute democracy. This inherent predisposition for unconstrained power turns populism into a threat for democracy. However, some also argue that populist politicians have helped put on the agenda important issues—such as for example corruption in democracies—that democracies need to tackle in order to regain their legitimacy.

At the same time, a number of large countries with political and economic clout seem immune to democracy. These political regimes not only persist as non-democracies (e.g. China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia) or hybrids regimes (e.g. Singapore), but have also begun to export their model of governance to other countries.

Despite this gloomy picture, there are also reasons for optimism. Democratic transitions continue to occur in political regimes that seemed staunchly undemocratic or stuck in the hybrid grey zone between democracy and non-democracy. Examples include The Gambia in 2017, promising democratic openings in Ethiopia in 2018, and the transitions to democracy in 2018 of two of the world's most enduring hybrid regimes: Armenia and Malaysia.

Popular demands for democratic reforms backed by intense social mobilization have been witnessed across the world in places such as Algeria, Armenia, Hong Kong, Egypt, Russia and Sudan. New democracies such as Timor-Leste and Tunisia and more recently The Gambia have also consolidated some of their democratic gains.

One of the main findings of this report is that democracy has not always produced the sustainable and prosperous

outcomes that many expected. A number of democratically elected governments have failed to substantially reduce corruption, advance gender equality, reduce social, political and economic inequalities or produce employment and economic growth.

However, the Global State of Democracy Indices (GSoD Indices) data shows that most hybrid forms of democracy that flirt with authoritarianism, and non-democracies, have generally not delivered and sustained better policy outcomes, with some exceptions. The data shows that democracies are more likely to create the conditions necessary for sustainable development compared to non-democracies or hybrid regimes. Levels of gender equality are overall higher in democracies, access to political power is more equal, there is generally less corruption, there is generally more basic welfare, and it is often easier to do business in democracies. The choice is therefore not between non-democracy or illiberal or hybrid forms of it and democracy. The world needs more and better democracy, to revive the democratic promise.

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

This Summary provides a summary of the contents of the second edition, *The Global State of Democracy 2019*. It outlines democratic developments in the last four decades, as well as short-term trends, focusing on key developments since 2013.

# Chapter 1

## Conceptual framework

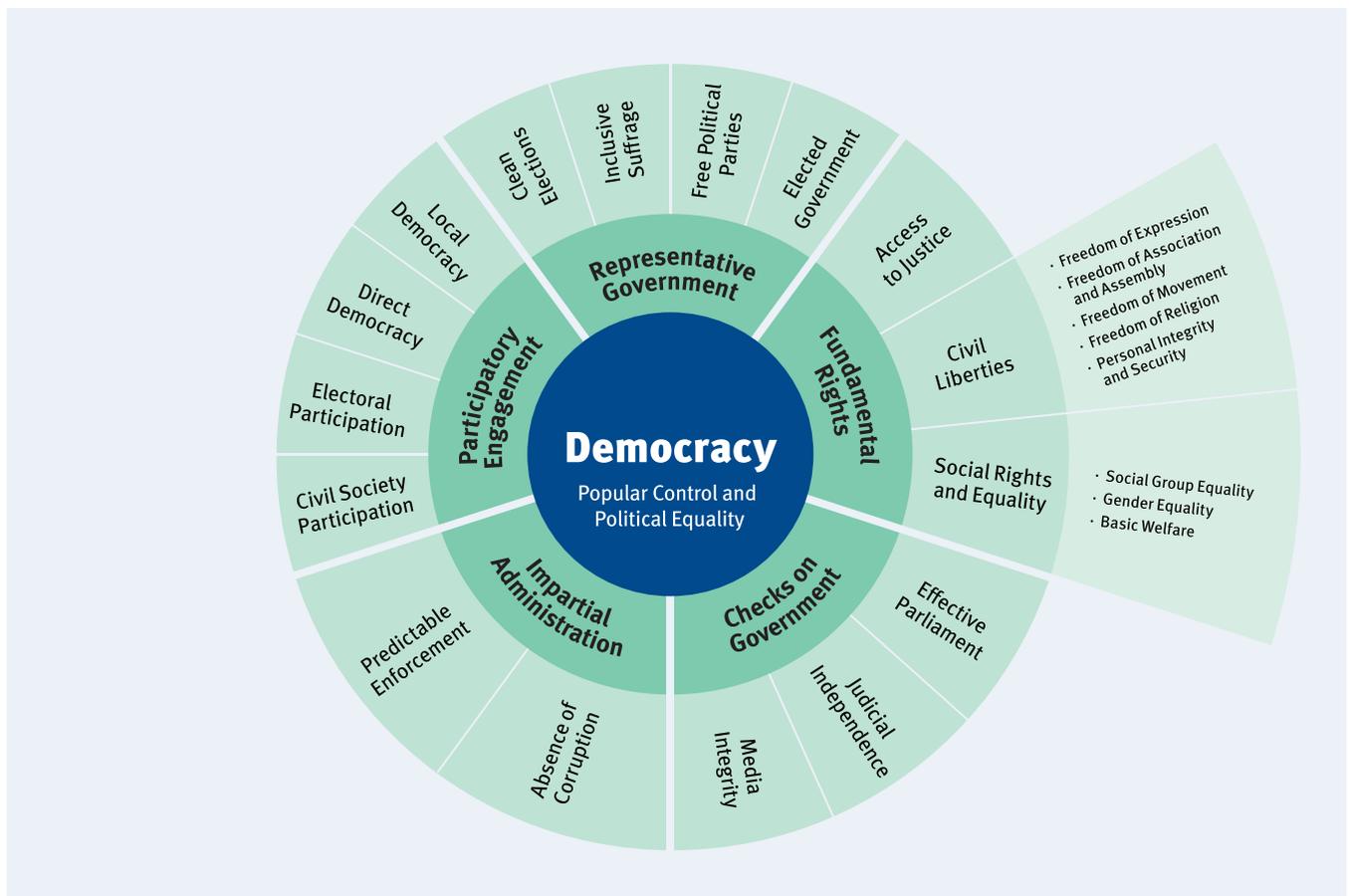
The GSoD Indices serve as the main evidence base for *The Global State of Democracy Report*. The Indices provide a new, comprehensive measurement of democracy based on International IDEA’s State of Democracy assessment framework, a tool designed for policy-makers to assess the quality of democracy (International IDEA 2008). They have been developed by International IDEA staff with the support of external experts and under the supervision of an

advisory board composed of leading experts in the field of democracy measurement.

The GSoD Indices are a quantitative tool for measuring the evolution of democracy in its different aspects over time, beginning in 1975 until today. They capture trends at the global, regional and national levels. The conceptual framework underpinning the Indices (Figure 1.1) translates International

FIGURE 1.1

### Conceptual framework for The Global State of Democracy



Source: International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology: Conceptualization and Measurement Framework* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2018b), <<https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2018.66>>.

IDEA's definition of democracy—which emphasizes popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control—into five main democracy attributes that contain 16 subattributes and 97 indicators. The Indices are based on 12 different data sources, the largest share of which are generated by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project.

The conceptual framework underpinning the GSoD Indices and *The Global State of Democracy 2019* aims to be universally applicable and compatible with different institutional arrangements. Using this broad understanding of democracy, the GSoD Indices do not provide an overarching democracy index with a single score for each country that would allow democracies to be ranked. This approach differentiates the GSoD Indices from several other democracy measurement methodologies and enables a more multi-faceted analysis and understanding of democracy.

In addition, compared to some other democracy measurements, the GSoD Indices are distinguished by their relatively high degree of coverage in terms of years (since 1975, with annual updates) and number of countries (158); the incorporation and use of different data sources; and the availability of uncertainty estimates for users, which allows them to assess whether differences in scores are statistically significant. For a more detailed comparison between the GSoD Indices and other measurements see International IDEA (2018b).

The GSoD Indices consist of attribute and subattribute scores per country per year (country-year). The scoring runs from 0 to 1, where 0 represents the lowest achievement in the sample and 1 is the highest.

*The Global State of Democracy 2019* introduces a political regime classification based on the GSoD Indices. The classification aims to facilitate understanding of the Indices, enhance the analysis and ensure greater policy relevance of the data. The GSoD Indices define three broad political regime types: (a) democracies (of varying performance), (b) hybrid regimes and (c) non-democracies.

The first iteration of the GSoD Indices covered the period 1975–2015. The data is updated annually and therefore this report includes data until 2018, but not for 2019. The GSoD Indices now cover 158 countries in the world. The decision was taken to exclude countries with a population of less than one million because of the uneven availability of data in those countries.

## The five attributes of democracy in the GSoD conceptual framework

### Attribute 1: Representative Government

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.

### Attribute 2: Fundamental Rights

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.

### Attribute 3: Checks on Government

Checks on Government measures effective control of executive power. It includes three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity.

### Attribute 4: Impartial Administration

Impartial Administration concerns how fairly and predictably political decisions are implemented, and therefore reflects key aspects of the rule of law. It includes two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement.

### Attribute 5: Participatory Engagement

Participatory Engagement measures formal and informal citizen participation in political processes. Because they capture different phenomena, the subattributes of this aspect—Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy—are not aggregated into a single index.

The GSoD Indices also cover six regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Iran (referred to in the report as the Middle East), and North America. The grouping of countries within these regions primarily follows a geographical logic, but also takes account of historical and cultural links, particularly in the regional subdivisions. For more information on the geographical definition of regions in the GSoD Indices see International IDEA (2017a).

# Chapter 2

## Key global findings

This section provides an overview of global democratic developments in the last four decades, as well as a depiction of short-term trends, focusing on key developments since 2013.



The analysis in *The Global State of Democracy 2019* reflects the data in the GSoD Indices for the period 1975–

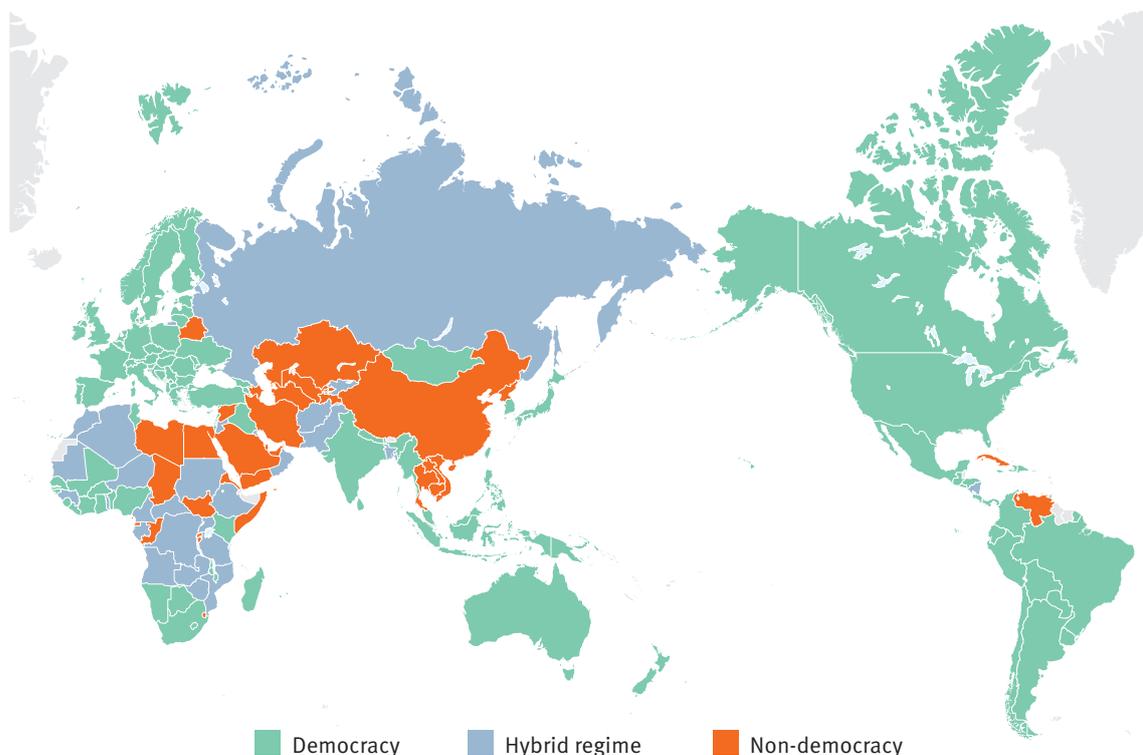
2018, which shows that democracy continues to expand its reach around the world, with the number of democracies continuing to grow. Democracy has also proven resilient over time. Furthermore, democracies provide better conditions for sustainable development than hybrid regimes or non-democracies.

### The number of democracies continues to grow

- **The world is more democratic than it has ever been.** As illustrated in Figure 2.1, more than half of the countries in the world (62 per cent, or 97 countries) are now democratic (compared to only 26 per cent in

FIGURE 2.1

### Map of the world by regime type, 2018



**Notes:** Land areas marked in grey are not included in the analysis as they are either territories or have a population of less than one million.

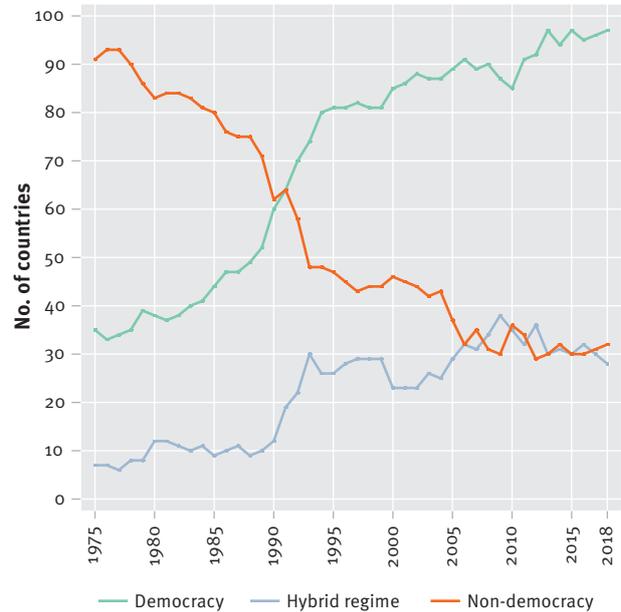
**Source:** International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019a)*, <<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>>.

1975), and more than half (57 per cent) of the world’s population and more than four billion people, now live in some form of democracy, compared to 36 per cent in 1975. The share of non-democracies has more than halved since 1975 (68 per cent of countries in 1975 versus only 20 per cent in 2018) (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

- **The majority (72 per cent) of today’s democracies were established after 1975 as part of the so-called third wave of democratization.** Of these, more than three-quarters transitioned before 2000 (early third wave), while less than one-quarter transitioned after 2000. The remaining 28 per cent of the world’s current democracies, all of which were established prior to 1975, have experienced uninterrupted democracy between 1975 and today, except Sri Lanka.
- **Democracies can now be found across all regions of the world.** In North America and Europe, 100 and 93 per cent of countries are democracies, closely followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (86 per cent of countries). Europe contains the largest share of the world’s democracies (39 countries, or 40 per cent of the global total), followed by Africa (21 per cent and 20 democracies), and Latin America and the Caribbean

FIGURE 2.2

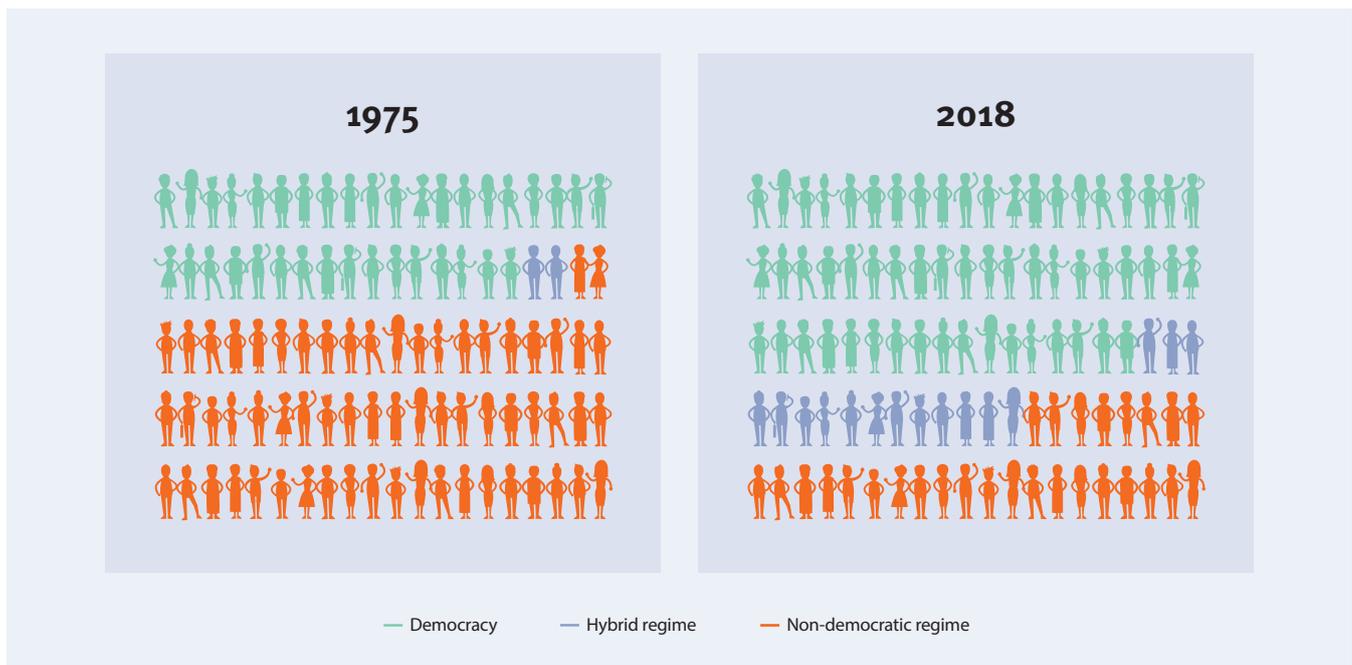
Regime types, 1975–2018



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

FIGURE 2.3

Population living in each regime type, 1975–2018



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

(20 per cent and 19 democracies). In Asia, the total number of democracies is equal to the combined total of hybrid regimes and non-democracies, while in Africa and the Middle East democracies constitute less than half of countries (41 per cent and 17 per cent respectively) (Figure 2.4).

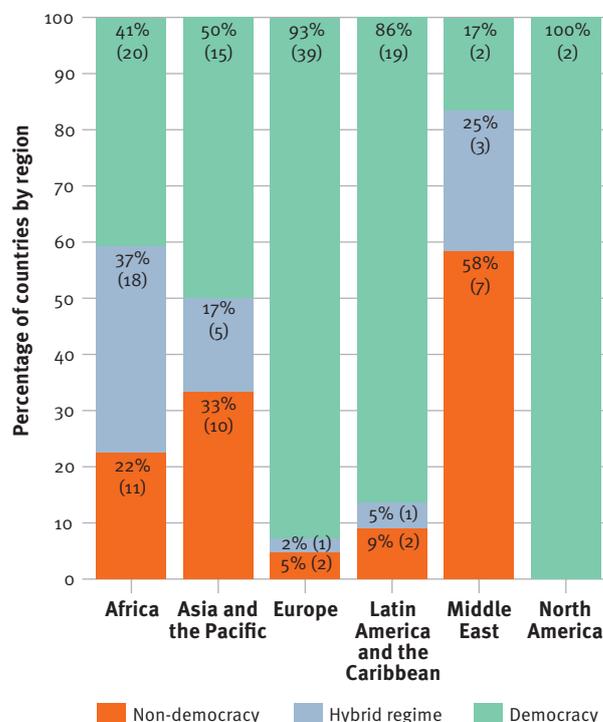
- **There is democratic variation among subregions.** The most democratic subregions in the world are Oceania, North and West Europe, South Europe, and East-Central Europe, which only contain democracies. Other subregions with a large share of democracies are South America (90 per cent), Central America (86 per cent), the Caribbean (80 per cent), and West Africa (73 per cent).
- **Democracy comes in many shapes and forms.** A total of 23 different democratic performance patterns can be identified among the world's 97 democracies. However, only a small percentage of democracies (22 per cent) are high performing on all democratic attributes. The largest share of these are older democracies located in Northern and Western Europe, although they can be found across all the regions of the world, except the Middle East. Mid-range performance across all attributes is also a common performance pattern, with 20 countries in the world in this category. The remaining 56 democracies perform better on some aspects of democracy than others, in 21 different performance constellations (Figure 2.5). This suggests that the world's democracies vary in terms of both democratic performance and performance patterns.

### Democratic progress continues worldwide

- **The number of democracies continues to rise.** This increase has occurred despite a slowdown in global democratic expansion since the mid-1990s (Figure 2.2). In fact, between 2008 and 2018 the number of democracies continued to rise, from 90 to 97. This data therefore does not support the hypothesis of a 'reversed' third wave of democratization (i.e. a significant and sustained decline in the number of democracies).
- **Democracy continues to spread to countries that have never experienced democracy.** In the past 10 years (i.e. since 2008), 11 countries transitioned to democracy for the first time in their history. Four of these transitions have occurred in the past four years: Burkina Faso and Myanmar in 2015, Armenia and Malaysia in 2018. This is more than the previous decade and equals the number of new transitions in the first decade of the third wave (1975–1985).

FIGURE 2.4

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



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

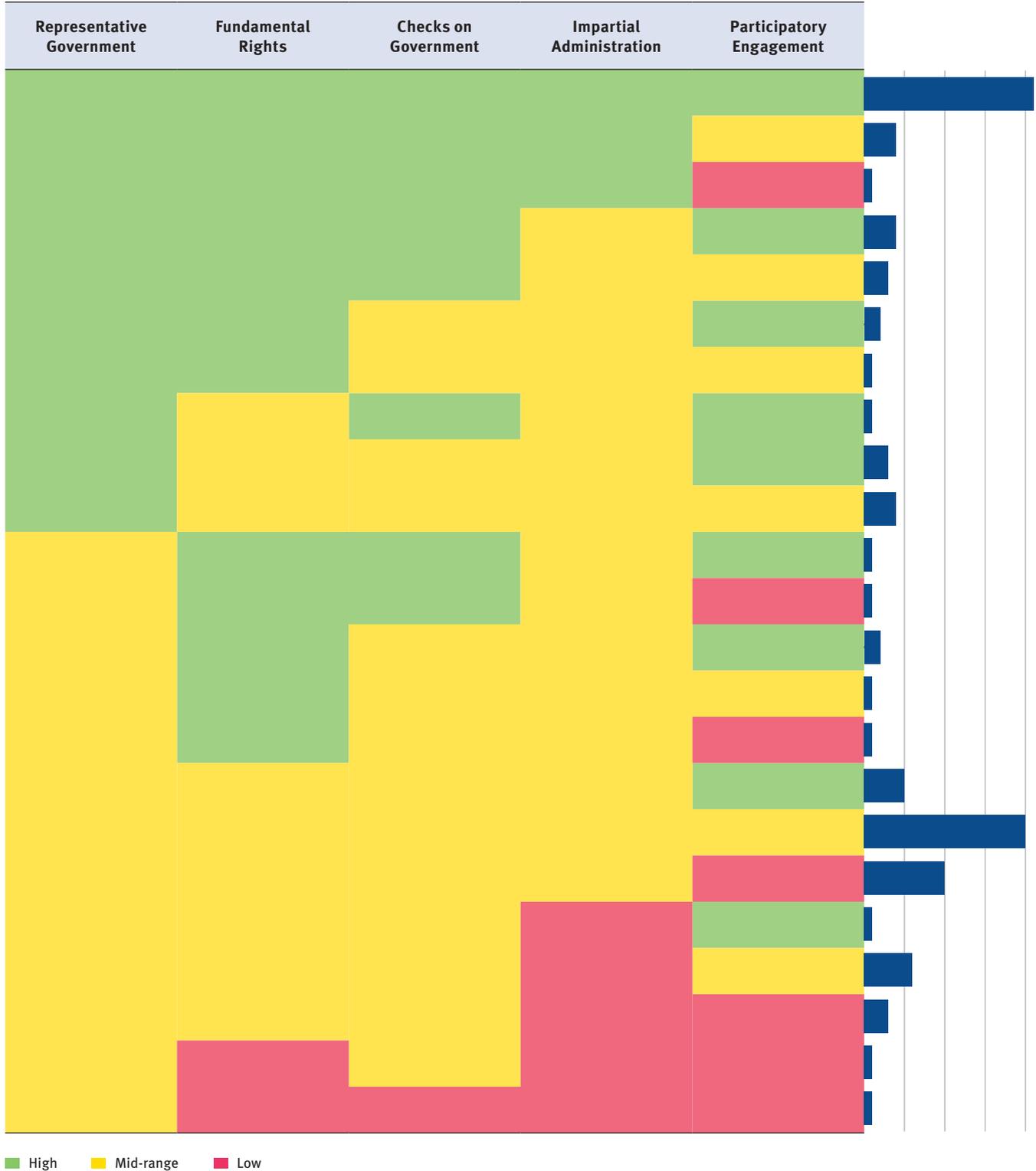
- **Popular demands for democracy are heard in countries that have never experienced democracy.** In 2018, protests and demands for democratic change in Armenia and Malaysia—both seemingly enduring hybrid regimes—led to democratic transitions in those two countries. Protests in Algeria, Egypt, Hong Kong and Sudan in 2019 demonstrate that democratic aspirations are strong and find expression even in hybrid or non-democratic contexts. Other countries (e.g. Ethiopia) have not yet undergone democratic transitions but are experiencing democratic reforms that provide promising prospects for a democratic opening.

### Democracy has proven resilient over time

- The large majority (81 per cent) of the world's 97 democracies have proven democratically resilient, having maintained their democratic status uninterrupted since 1975 or when they transitioned to democracy (Figure 2.6).

FIGURE 2.5

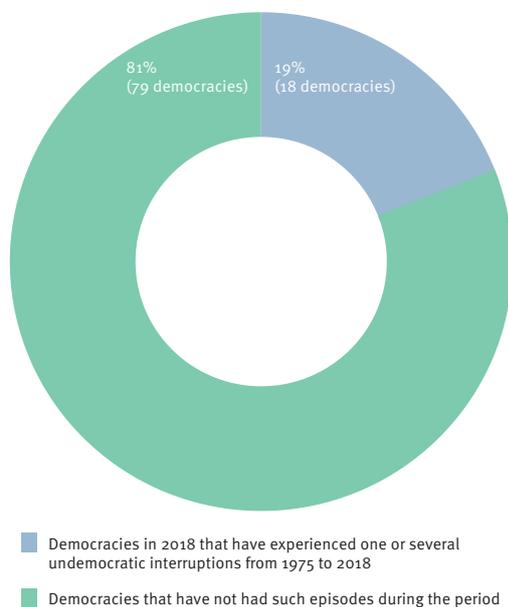
Democratic performance patterns in 2018, global level



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

FIGURE 2.6

### Share of countries with democratic resilience, 2018



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

- **Older democracies have shown more democratic resilience than third-wave democracies.** A total of 28 countries in the world were democracies before 1975, when the third wave of democratization began. Democracy has been interrupted in just two of these countries: Sri Lanka, which re-transitioned back to democracy in 2015, and Venezuela, which is the only country to have experienced a gradual democratic backsliding over the past two decades, and which ultimately became a non-democracy in 2017.
- **Third-wave democracies have proven relatively resilient, although less so than the older democracies.** Of the 83 countries that transitioned to democracy after 1975, well over half (64 per cent) have remained democracies uninterrupted. Of the current third-wave democracies, 76 per cent have remained democracies uninterrupted since their transition.
- More than half (56 per cent) of the countries that experienced partial or full democratic breakdown after 1975 have now returned to democracy.

### Democracy as an enabler of sustainable development

International IDEA views democracy as a universal human aspiration and as a goal worth pursuing because of its

intrinsic value to societies. However, it also believes that democracy has an instrumental value, as an enabler of sustainable development (International IDEA 2018a: 5–9).

*The Global State of Democracy 2019* provides some backing for this view, while recognizing that more research is needed beyond descriptive statistics to explore when, how and under what circumstances democracy can lead to more sustainable societal, economic and environmental outcomes. International IDEA acknowledges that regime type is only one of the factors that comes into play when determining sustainable development outcomes and is therefore not a sufficient condition for this determination. Indeed, a number of democracies have low levels of sustainable development. For this reason, *The Global State of Democracy 2019* does not claim a direct causal link between democracy and sustainable development.

However, the GSoD Indices provide some backing for the following claims on the association between democracy and certain aspects of sustainable development:

- **Democracies generally outperform hybrid regimes and non-democracies on aspects not generally considered core to democracy.** The GSoD framework incorporates a broader range of democratic characteristics than many other conceptions of democracy, including aspects such as Basic Welfare, Access to Justice, Gender Equality, Social Group Equality and Absence of Corruption, which link to social, human and economic development. In other definitions of democracy, these dimensions are often viewed as outcomes of democracy, rather than part of the defining characteristics of democracy (Munck 2016). While several hybrid regimes and non-democracies perform highly on these aspects, they are the exception rather than the rule. Democracy is not a sufficient condition for high performance and not all democracies perform well on these aspects. However, democracies are more likely to have high performance than hybrid regimes or non-democracies.
- On average, democracies have higher levels of **Fundamental Rights** (including Access to Justice, enjoyment of Civil Liberties and Social Rights and Equality) than hybrid regimes and non-democracies (Table 2.1). All the countries with high levels of Fundamental Rights are democracies. Inversely, 59 per cent of non-democracies have low levels of Fundamental Rights. There are only two democracies in the world with low levels of Fundamental Rights: Haiti and Turkey.

- On average, democracies have higher levels of **Gender Equality** than non-democracies and hybrid regimes (Table 2.1). All but one of the countries with high levels of Gender Equality are democracies, while this is the case for only one non-democracy (Rwanda). Half of non-democracies have low levels of Gender Equality, while only three democracies (Iraq, Papua New Guinea and Turkey) have low levels of Gender Equality.
- On average, democracies have higher levels of **Basic Welfare** (which in the GSoD Indices aggregates indicators on nutrition, literacy, life expectancy and health equality) and **Human Development** (United Nations Development Programme 2018) than non-democracies or hybrid regimes (Table 2.1). Close to half of the world’s democracies (48 per cent) have high levels of Basic Welfare, while this is the case for only 28 per cent of non-democracies and 11 per cent of hybrid regimes.
- The aspect of democracy that has the highest correlation with Basic Welfare and Human Development is **Absence**

TABLE 2.1

**Average score by regime type and aspect of democracy, 2018**

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

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

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

**of Corruption.** In other words, the more corrupt a country is, the more likely it is to have low levels of Human Development and vice versa.

- On average, democracies have **significantly lower levels of corruption** than non-democracies and hybrid regimes (Table 2.1). More than two-thirds (78 per cent) of non-democracies have high levels of corruption, as do 64 per cent of hybrid regimes, while no non-democracy has low levels of corruption. The fact that only one hybrid regime (Singapore) has low levels of corruption confirms that Singapore constitutes the exception rather than the rule. In comparison, only 25 per cent of democracies have high levels of corruption.

According to the GSoD Indices and some academic studies, **economic and environmental performance also seems to differ according to regime type**, although a direct causal link is not claimed in *The Global State of Democracy 2019*:

- The GSoD Indices find that democracies with high and mid-range levels of **Representative Government** have achieved higher rates of long-term gross domestic product (GDP) growth than non-democracies with low levels of Representative Government (Table 2.2). Moreover, transitions from non-democracy to democracy have been found to increase GDP per capita by about 20 per cent for 25 years, compared to income levels in countries that remained non-democratic (Acemoglu et al. 2019: 48).

TABLE 2.2

**Mean GDP per capita by level of Representative Government, 1975 and 2018**

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

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

- **Democracies are better for doing business.** Democracies provide better regulations for business and protect property rights more effectively than other regime types. The average score on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Score (World Bank 2018b) is 67 for democracies, compared to 53 for hybrid regimes and 54 for non-democracies (Figure 2.7). Regime type is also significant when controlling for other factors in the regression analysis.
- **Democracies are associated with higher average levels of environmental performance than non-democracies.** Democracies score an average of 72 out of 100 on the Environmental Performance Index, compared to an average of 62 for non-democracies and 59 for hybrid regimes. The Environmental Performance Index measures how well countries protect human

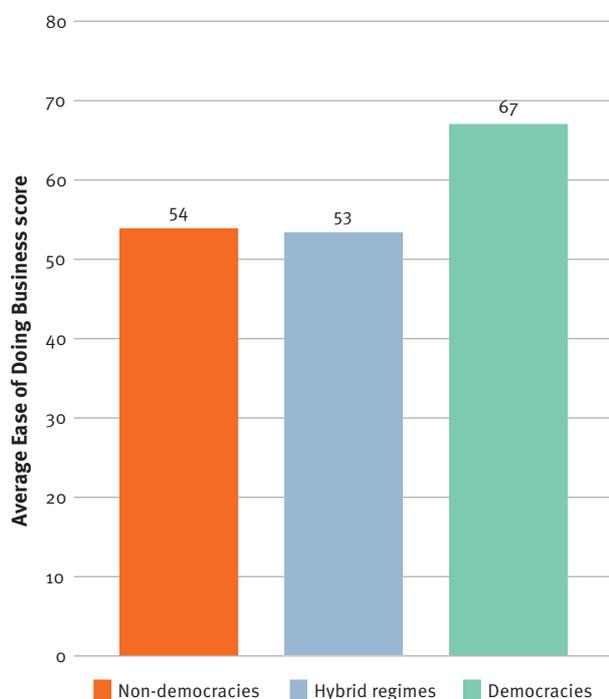
health from environmental harm and preserve vital ecosystems. However, the difference loses significance when controlling for income levels (Wendling et al. 2018).

### Concerning democratic trends: challenges

Despite the significant democratic achievements observed in most regions of the world and the continued increase in the number of democracies, which do not support the hypothesis of a current 'reverse' third wave of democracy, there are other concerning signs of democratic erosion. This condition is defined by number of challenges, including a loss in democratic quality in both older and third wave democracies and challenges related to the difficulties in meeting citizens' expectations of high and equitable democratic, social and economic performance.

FIGURE 2.7

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



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

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

#### Democratic performance remains weak

- **The democratic performance and quality of many of the third-wave democracies remain weak and the share of weak democracies is on the rise.** Democracies that score low on at least one attribute of democracy have been labelled weak democracies. They are characterized by having weak formal and informal democratic institutions, processes and practices. The share of democracies with weak democratic performance has increased in the last decade, from 20 per cent in 2008 to 25 per cent in 2018 (Figure 2.8). Of these weak democracies, just over one-half (13 countries) transitioned to democracy between 1975 and 2000 but remained in a state of democratic fragility and vulnerable to breakdown, while the remainder, a little less than one-half (11), transitioned to democracy after 2000.
- **Africa is the region with the largest share of weak democracies.** However, weak democracies are present across almost all regions of the world, with four each in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe; three in Asia and the Pacific; and the two democracies in the Middle East (Table 2.3).
- **The increase in the share of countries with low democratic performance is particularly seen in relation to aspects such as Fundamental Rights, Social Group Equality, Civil Society Participation and Electoral Participation.** The decrease in Fundamental Rights is particularly visible in aspects related to Access to Justice

TABLE 2.3

Democracies with weak and very weak performance, 2018

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

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

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

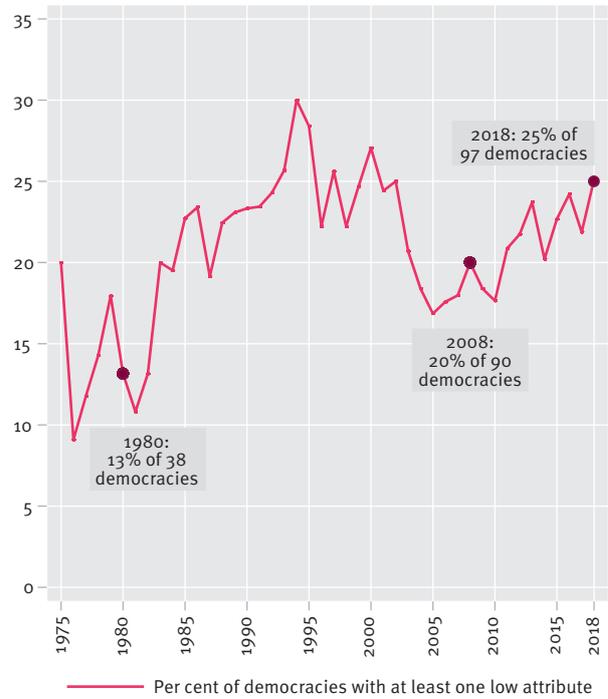
and Civil Liberties—mostly in relation to Freedom of Association and Assembly and Personal Integrity and Security, but also Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Religion. Since 2016, the share of countries with low levels of Clean Elections has also seen a slight increase (from 20 per cent to 23 per cent of countries).

Democracy remains fragile in some transitional contexts

- **The majority of countries that underwent a democratic transition after 1975 have kept their democratic status uninterruptedly.** Nevertheless, around 36 per cent have experienced democratic fragility and partial (to hybrid) or full (to non-democracy) democratic breakdowns at some point in the past four decades. More than half of these countries (17 in total) have since returned to democracy (and are labelled fragile democracies), while the remaining 13 countries have remained in either a hybrid or non-democratic state.
- **The increasing number of re-transitions to democracy points to the democratic fragility of a number of**

FIGURE 2.8

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



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

**third-wave democracies.** In the period 2007–2018, there were 19 such transitions—more than twice as many as in the previous decade (Figure 2.9). All of these countries had transitioned to democracy at some point after 1975, experienced a partial (to hybrid) or full (to non-democracy) democratic breakdown and then returned to democracy. The most recent examples include Sri Lanka (2015), Haiti (2016), The Gambia (2017) and Lebanon (2018). Therefore, while the world continues to experience a quantitative increase in the number of democracies, the quality of many of these democracies remains low and subject to democratic fragility.

- **The majority of countries with partial or full democratic breakdowns experienced only one such episode.** However, 9 of the 30 experienced several breakdowns since 1975, and 4 of those (Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Nepal and Sri Lanka) have currently returned to democracy (note that Guinea-Bissau and Haiti are also weak democracies). Six countries (Bangladesh, Nicaragua, Niger, Zambia and most recently Pakistan)

with previous democratic breakdowns have remained in a hybrid state while Thailand remained in a non-democratic state until 2019.

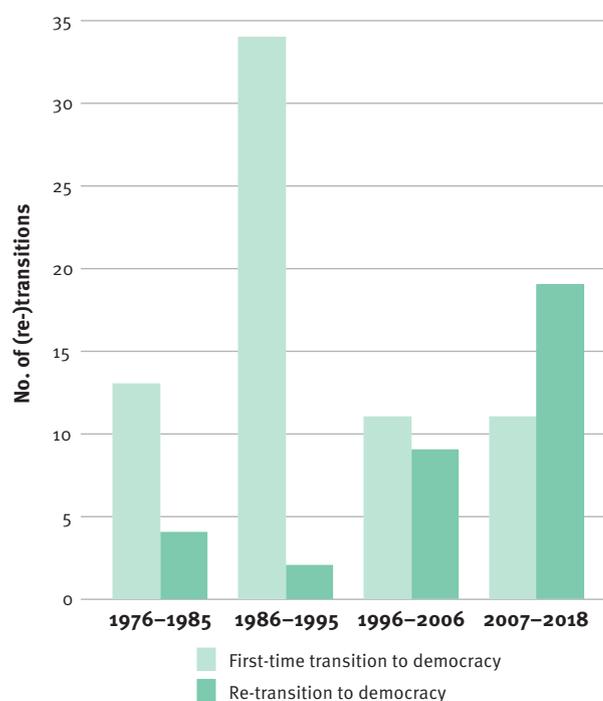
- Africa contains the largest share of fragile democracies.** A total of seven fragile democracies (i.e. those that returned to democracy) are in Africa but Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia and the Pacific also contain fragile democracies. Two-thirds of fragile democracies are early third-wave democracies (i.e. those that transitioned before 2000), while the remainder are third-wave democracies that transitioned after 2000.
- Democratic weakness and fragility are closely interlinked.** Two-thirds (12 of 18) of fragile democracies (i.e. those that have experienced undemocratic interruptions) are also low-performing weak democracies. Half of these weaker democracies have experienced at least one undemocratic interruption since their first transition to democracy and can be described as fragile in their democratic stability. The largest share of those weak, low-quality and fragile democracies is found in Africa, but they can also be found in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Europe and in the Middle East (Table 2.4). Democratic weakness and low democratic quality make democracies more vulnerable to partial (into hybridity) or full (into non-democracy) democratic backsliding or breakdown, therefore reinforcing their democratic fragility.

### Democratic erosion is on the rise

- The share of democracies experiencing democratic erosion has seen a consistent increase in the past**

FIGURE 2.9

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



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

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

TABLE 2.4

### Fragile and weak democracies, 2018

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

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

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

decades and has more than doubled in the past decade compared to the decade before (Figure 2.10). The GSoD Indices define democratic erosion as a statistically significant decline on at least one democratic subattribute over a five-year period in democracies. Democratic erosion can occur at different levels of democratic development.

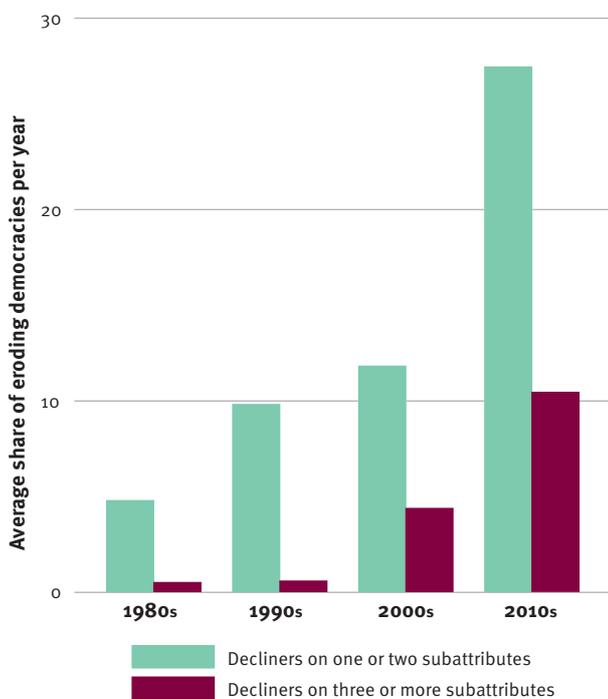
- In 2018, one-half (50 per cent) of the world’s democracies experienced democratic erosion, with declines on at least one subattribute of democracy, and 15 per cent experienced declines on three subattributes or more.
- Nearly half of the world’s population (43 per cent) live in countries that have experienced some form of democratic erosion in the last five years.
- The regions with the largest share of democracies experiencing democratic erosion are North America,

Asia and the Pacific, and Europe (Figure 2.11). Democratic erosion affects more than half of the democracies in these regions, and a little less than half of all democracies in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean (43 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively) (Figure 2.11). Roughly half the countries in both older (48 per cent) and third-wave (53 per cent) democracies have experienced democratic erosion in the last five years. The democracies that have seen the most widespread democratic erosion in the past five years, judging by the number of democratic subattributes declines, are six third-wave democracies (Brazil, Hungary, Kenya, Poland, Romania and Turkey) as well as two older democracies: India and the United States.

- In 2014, in another sign of global democratic erosion, countries with significant democratic declines in Fundamental Rights started to outnumber those with significant advances. Furthermore, in 2016, for the first time since 1975, the number of countries with

FIGURE 2.10

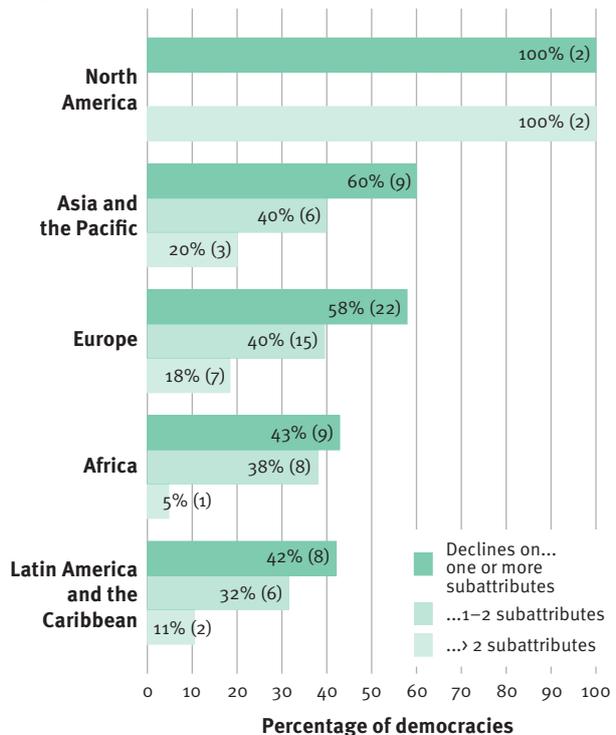
Significant declines on one or more subattributes of democracy, 1980s to 2010s



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

FIGURE 2.11

Share of countries with democratic erosion by region, 2018



Notes: This figure shows the percentage of democracies per region that are experiencing democratic erosion.

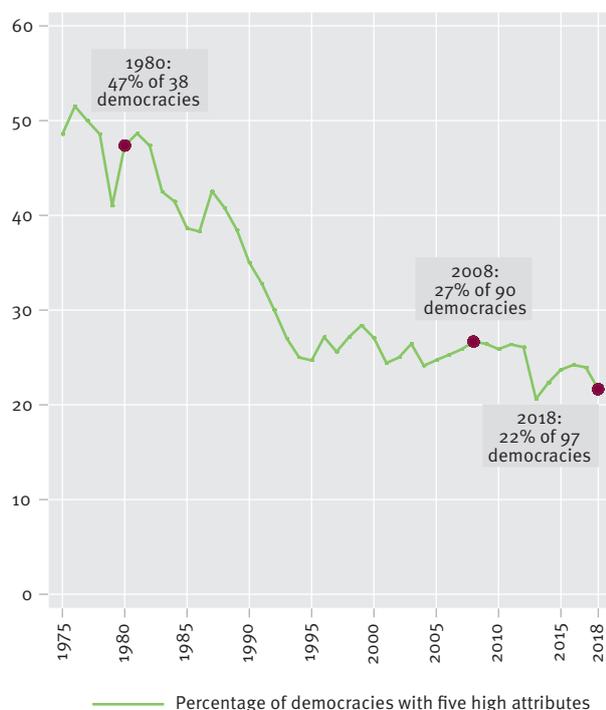
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices (2019a), <<http://www.idea.int/gsoi-indices>>.

significant declines in Representative Government and Checks on Government also began to outnumber those with significant advances.

- **While democratic weakness and fragility affects a number of third-wave democracies, there are also signs that the quality of the world's high-performing democracies is eroding.** This erosion has been particularly marked in the last decade. High performance in this context refers to a high score on all five attributes of democracy. Despite the number of democracies more than doubling in the past four decades, the share of democracies with high performance on all five democratic attributes has been cut by more than half during the same period (from 47 per cent in 1980 to 22 per cent in 2018). In the past decade alone (i.e. since 2008), the share of high-performing democracies has been reduced from 27 per cent to 22 per cent (Figure 2.12).

FIGURE 2.12

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



**Notes:** This figure shows the percentage of countries with high performance on all 5 GSoD Indices attributes over time. It illustrates how the quality of democracy has declined in former high-performing democracies.

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

- **The aspects of democracy that have eroded most in high-performing democracies are those related to civic space.** The GSoD Indices measure this erosion via indicators on Civil Society Participation, Media Integrity and Civil Liberties (in particular Freedom of Religion, Personal Integrity and Security, and Freedom of Expression) as well as Electoral Participation and Free Political Parties. Declines are also seen in Judicial Independence. The share of countries with high performance on Judicial Independence, Free Political Parties, and Personal Integrity and Security was lower in 2018 than in 1990, while Media Integrity and Freedom of Expression had regressed to 1990s levels.

### There are increasing signs of democratic backsliding

- **Democratic backsliding, a particular form of democratic erosion involving the gradual intentional weakening of checks and balances and curtailment of civil liberties, has become more frequent in the last decade.** The GSoD Indices define democratic backsliding as a gradual and intentional weakening on checks on government and accountability institutions, accompanied by declines in civil liberties.
  - A total of 10 countries in the world are currently experiencing democratic backsliding. The most severe cases are Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. However, countries such as India, the Philippines and Ukraine are also affected. In Nicaragua (2016) and Pakistan (2018), the backsliding was so severe that it led to a regression into hybridity (partial democratic breakdown).
  - **Venezuela represents the most severe democratic backsliding case in the past four decades.** Venezuela is the only country that has gone from being a democracy with high levels of Representative Government in 1975 to a non-democracy today.
  - **One of the features that distinguishes modern democratic backsliding from traditional forms of democratic breakdown is the length of the backsliding process.** The average length of backsliding episodes observed in the GSoD Indices is nine years.
  - **Low levels of popular support for democracy as well as societal and political polarization appear to be linked to an increased probability and extent of backsliding.**

- Populist presidents and governments tend to make backsliding more likely and to increase the scope of democratic decline.
- Countries with higher shares of foreign trade appear to be more susceptible to backsliding, supporting views that interpret backsliding as linked to fears of economic globalization among vulnerable groups of society.
- **Higher levels of Effective Parliament and Civil Society Participation appear to effectively prevent the start of a backsliding process**, make continued backsliding less probable and reduce the scope of backsliding.

### Some democracies are becoming increasingly hybridized

- **The share of hybrid regimes has increased in the last few decades.** Hybrid regimes occur in countries that adopt democratic façades (often in the form of periodic, albeit non-competitive, elections), generally coupled with severe restrictions on Civil Liberties and other democratic rights. The number of hybrid regimes has more than quadrupled since 1975, from 7 countries (or 5 per cent of countries) to 28 countries (or 18 per cent) in 2018.
- **More than half of the world's hybrid regimes are located in Africa.** The Middle East also contains a significant number of such regimes. Hybrid regimes are found in all regions except North America. In 2018 Pakistan and Tanzania became the most recent democracies to regress into hybridity.
- **Hybridity is not a transitional stage towards democracy, but a defining feature of the regime, in the majority of cases.** Of the world's hybrid regimes, 71 per cent have never been democracies. Less than one-third (30 per cent) of third-wave democracies underwent a hybrid phase before transitioning to democracy. A very small share (20 per cent) of the world's hybrid regimes and non-democracies experienced democratic interruptions at some point in the last four decades.
- **However, in 2018, two of the world's most enduring hybrid regimes transitioned to democracy: Armenia and Malaysia.** Malaysia became a democracy after more than four decades of hybridity following the 2018 general elections in which the monopoly of the National Front Coalition (Barisan Nasional) came

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

- **Hybridity is linked to democratic weakness and fragility.** For a little less than half of the fragile democracies, hybridity was a transitional stage for those that regressed to non-democracy (reverse transition). For the remainder of fragile democracies, the undemocratic interruption plunged them into hybridity but never led to a full reversal to non-democracy.

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

- **Non-democracies and hybrid regimes together still represent 38 per cent of countries. More than 3 billion people or 43 per cent of the world's population live in such regimes. The share of non-democracies has been significantly reduced in the past decades (from 68 per cent of countries to only 20 per cent).**
- Non-democratic regimes include autocracies, authoritarian regimes, one-party rule, military regimes, authoritarian monarchies and failed states or war-torn, conflict-ravaged countries without a centralized monopoly on the use of force.
- **In most non-democratic regimes, civil liberties tend to be systematically curtailed.** There is often no clear separation of power, the judiciary is usually controlled by the executive, oppositional political parties are often barred from operating freely, and the media tends to be systematically restricted as are critical voices within civil society, although in non-democracies that are failing states and countries ravaged by civil war, the executive usually lacks autocratic repressive powers over the judiciary and opposition parties.
- **The share of people living in non-democracies (28 per cent) remains significant as a number of non-democracies (i.e. China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia) have large populations.** Non-democracies are found across all regions of the world, except North America. The Middle East is the least democratic region in the world, with more than half (58 per cent) of its countries being non-democracies. Of the 32 non-democracies in

the world, the largest share (34 per cent) are in Africa, followed by Asia and the Pacific (31 per cent), and the Middle East and Iran (22 per cent). The least democratic subregions in the world are Central Asia, which has never had a democracy, and Central Africa, which contained no democracies in 2018. North Africa and East Africa have just one democracy each.

- **Even within non-democracies, performance patterns vary.** Some non-democracies score low on all democratic attributes—almost half of all non-democracies (16) can be found in this category across all regions with such regimes—while others score mid-range on some of their attributes. The United Arab Emirates is the only non-democracy that scores high on a democratic attribute, namely Impartial Administration (due to its low levels of corruption). If performance at the subattribute or subcomponent level is analysed, some non-democracies also score exceptionally high on some aspects. Cuba, for example, scores in the top 25 per cent in the world on both Basic Welfare and Gender Equality.
- **A significant share of the world’s non-democracies has proven remarkably persistent and has never**

**experienced democracy.** More than half of the world’s non-democracies (18 out of 32) and the large majority (73 per cent) of hybrid and non-democracies combined have never been a democracy at any point since 1975. The influence of these persistent non-democracies on the global democracy landscape should not be underestimated. The actions of China (and Russia) in Venezuela, providing the regime of Nicolás Maduro with favourable loans in exchange for subsidized oil, are seen as key factors in the regime’s maintenance of power. In the case of Cambodia, no-string financial loans to the government from China, in addition to large economic investments, have also been seen as key in understanding the country’s deepening autocratization, helping to shield the regime from international pressure. China invests in all regions of the world and also reportedly exerts its political and economic influence by exporting surveillance technology to non-democratic regimes.

- **While a number of hybrid regimes and non-democracies have seen some advances in their democratic indicators in the past 10 years, a significant number have also become increasingly autocratic.** This process (referred to as deepening

TABLE 2.5

Countries experiencing deepening autocratization, 2013–2018

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

Notes: Hybrid regimes or non-democracies experiencing significant declines in at least three democratic subattributes during a five-year period.

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

autocratization) is defined in the GSoD Indices as significant declines in at least three of the democratic subattributes of hybrid regimes or non-democracies during a five-year period (Table 2.5). In some cases, this has pushed some hybrid regimes into non-democracies, as was the case in Venezuela in 2017 and Cambodia in 2018. The number of countries experiencing deepening autocratization has increased in the last decade and has now reached its highest peak since 1975.

### Civic space is shrinking

- **The global democratic expansion in the past four decades has enabled a transformation of civic space across all regions of the world.** This expansion has been brought about by the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and by the transformation of political parties, with a shift towards individual engagement beyond formal organizational structures, citizen mobilization and networking into looser and more fluid forms of interaction, often facilitated by social media.
- **There are two key challenges related to civic space: the shrinking of civic space and the emergence of more ‘uncivil’ elements in civil society.**
- **In all regions of the world and across all regime types, civic space is shrinking.** The GSoD Indices show most countries declining on aspects of democracy related to civic space. This decline is observed in various contexts, including democratic erosion, democratic backsliding and deepening autocratization. This has serious implications for democratic health and sustainability—a vibrant civic space is key to building and sustaining healthy democracies and safeguarding them against threats, such as democratic backsliding.
- The aspects of civic space that have seen declines in the largest number of countries are **Civil Liberties** (particularly Freedom of Expression, but also Freedom of Association and Assembly, Personal Integrity and Security, Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Movement) and **Media Integrity**. Levels of **Civil Society Participation** have also seen significant declines in a number of countries. Since 2012–2013, these three aspects have seen more countries with declines than gains for the first time in over 40 years (Figures 2.13, 2.14 and 2.15).
- Although **Europe** still has higher levels of civic space than other regions of the world, it is the region that has seen the largest share of countries with declines in

the Civil Liberties and Media Integrity aspects of civic space. Meanwhile Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean have seen an equal number of countries declining on Media Integrity.

- At the same time, while uncivil elements have always existed within civil society, new forms have taken shape and acquired a more potent voice and become more visible in recent years, often with the help of social media. Some of these voices are the product of democratic societies and constitutionally acquired rights (e.g. freedom of expression) and include movements on the extreme right in older democracies such as Germany, Sweden or the United States.

### Progress on other crucial aspects of democracy has been slow

- **The democratic aspects that have seen the slowest advances in the past four decades relate to reducing corruption, advancing Gender Equality, increasing Social Group Equality, and strengthening Judicial Independence.**
- **Absence of Corruption** is the only aspect of democracy that has deteriorated globally in the past four decades, with a 3 per cent decrease since 1975, except in Latin America and the Caribbean. The share of democracies with high levels of corruption has more than doubled in 40 years: in 1975, 9 per cent of the democracies had high levels of corruption (3 of 35), while this was the case for 25 per cent of democracies in 2018 (24 of 97). Hence, democracy does not provide a guarantee against corruption. Corruption not only affects people’s trust in politicians but can also contribute to the undermining of trust in government and democracy more broadly. Corruption has serious implications for the sustainability, stability and health of older and newer democracies alike. The perceived inability of some countries to effectively curb corruption is seen as one of the causes of the rise of populism. At the same time, non-democracies and hybrid regimes are by and large much more corrupt than democracies. In total, almost half (43 per cent) of countries in the world suffer from high levels of corruption.
- The GSoD Indices show that Absence of Corruption is the aspect of democracy that is most highly correlated with Basic Welfare (which is aggregated in the GSoD Indices via indicators on nutrition, literacy, life expectancy and health equality). High levels of corruption are therefore an impediment to human development and to the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda.

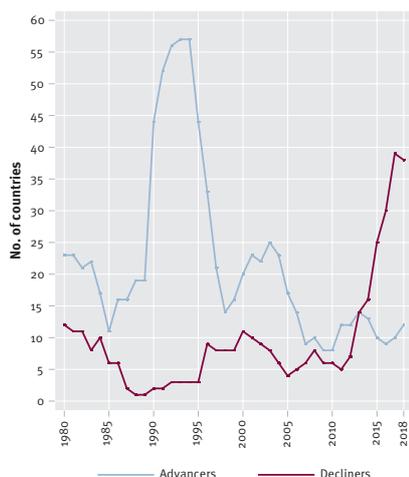
- **Social Group Equality**, which measures equality in access to political power and enjoyment of Civil Liberties by social group, has only increased by 10 per cent, making it the second-slowest advancing aspect in the GSoD framework. Similarly, global levels of **Judicial Independence** have only advanced by 15 per cent since 1975.
- **At the rate of progress of the past 10 years, it will take another 46 years to reach gender parity in parliaments.** Only 24 per cent of parliamentary seats in the world are occupied by women. No regional average has reached the ‘critical minority’ point of 30 per cent of women legislators (International IDEA 2019b), although some subregions—including North and West Europe (36 per cent), East Africa (34.5 per cent), and Central America and Mexico (32 per cent)—have done so (V-Dem 2019). Despite these advances, serious efforts are still required to achieve political equality for men and women.

### Populism is again on the rise

- **Over the past decade populist parties and politicians have increased their electorates in many countries.** Disenchantment with traditional political parties’ perceived lack of capacity to address societal and economic problems has encouraged many voters to support alternative paths of political action, thereby contributing to the rise of extremist parties and movements on both the right and left of the political spectrum. More than half the countries in which modern democratic backsliding has occurred in the past decades have been led by populist governments.
- **Populist actors often show disrespect for the accountability institutions that check government, protect political pluralism and constitute liberal democracy.** This inherent predisposition for unconstrained power turns populism into a threat for democracy. However, some also argue that populists have helped to put important issues on the agenda (such as corruption in democracies) that democracies should do well in tackling, to regain their legitimacy.
- **Drivers of the rise of populism vary across countries, but can broadly be divided into political and economic factors.**
- **Political factors driving populist mobilization** include the crisis of representation of traditional political parties; the decline in party membership; and more politically aware and mobilized middle-class populations. Other factors include the transformation

FIGURE 2.13

### Advances and declines in Civil Liberties, 1980–2018

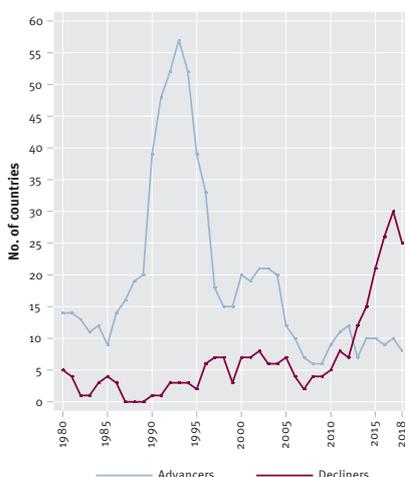


**Notes:** Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

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

FIGURE 2.14

### Advances and declines in Media Integrity, 1980–2018

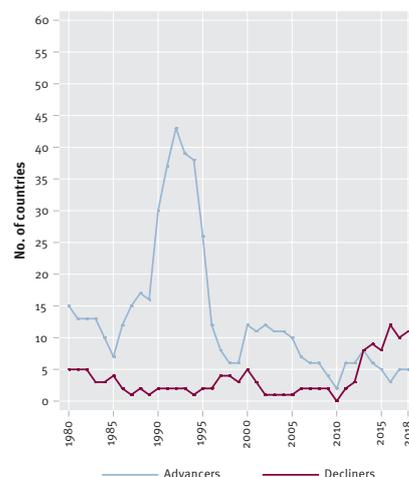


**Notes:** Advancers and decliners refer to countries with statistically significant declines or advances over five-year periods from 1980 to 2018.

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

FIGURE 2.15

### Advances and declines in Civil Society Participation, 1980–2018



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

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

and disintegration of political culture caused by increasing individualism; and the fragmentation and polarization of the public sphere, deepened by the emergence of new technologies and social media.

- **Economic factors driving voters' support for populism** include expectations of democracy from rising middle classes disenchanted by democracy's perceived weak delivery (e.g. in promoting growth and employment or in reducing corruption); labour-market transformation caused by technological advances, which in turn has led to an increase in domestic socio-economic disparities; globalization and loss of national control over key policy decisions; and vulnerability ensuing from the economic and financial crises of 2008.
- **The GSoD Indices show that populist governments diminish the quality of democracy compared to non-populist governments.** The only aspect of democracy that has improved more under populist governments is Electoral Participation.

#### **Electoral principles are increasingly being distorted for non-democratic purposes**

- **A total of 62 per cent of countries in the world now regularly hold free, fair and competitive elections and of the world's democracies, more than half (59 per cent) have high levels of Clean Elections.**
- **While elections have become the norm rather than the exception, many undemocratic regimes use elections as means of internal and external legitimization.** In

country contexts ruled by hybrid or non-democratic regimes, elections can serve the purpose of reinforcing a democratic façade. This distortion of electoral principles for non-democratic purposes can contribute to undermine public trust in the value of the electoral process in democracies.

- **Most electoral processes that take place around the world manage to successfully overcome the inevitable technical hiccups and facilitate orderly transitions of power.** However, when confronted with serious technical challenges and significant efforts of delegitimization, electoral processes may fail to deliver credible or trusted results. Failed elections may trigger political crises with profound negative effects on societies. Recent contexts where genuine or perceived irregularities and flaws in electoral processes have led to delayed, cancelled, disputed or re-run elections include Kenya (2017); the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and Venezuela (2018); Turkey, Nigeria and Bolivia (2019).
- **For countries undergoing significant democratic reforms as part of transition processes, revising electoral rules and strengthening electoral systems is key to ensuring the sustainability of such processes.** In addition, social media provides a communication channel in which rumours and disinformation spread at an unprecedented rate and this can also contribute to the undermining of trust in electoral processes. A need for more rigorous regulation of social media platforms has become increasingly apparent.

BOX 2.1

### New technologies and democracy

New technologies, including ICTs and social media, are contributing to a profound transformation of the global democracy landscape. They provide unprecedented potential to deepen democracy, while also creating new challenges and risks for democracy.



BOX 2.2

Key findings: Democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals



The GSoD Indices provide complementary data to official indicators to track progress on eight Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDG 16 and SDG 5.5 (Table 2.6 and Figure 2.16).<sup>1</sup>

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

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

One of the targets where advances outnumber declines is SDG 16.5 on reducing corruption. However, more sustained progress is needed on this target as 43 per cent of countries in the world still have high levels of corruption, which is a key impediment to human development.

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



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

TABLE 2.6

Democracy and the Sustainable Development Goals

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

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

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

FIGURE 2.16

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



# Chapter 3

## Key regional findings

The GSoD Indices build on 97 indicators that measure trends in democratic development for 158 countries, subdivided into six main regions: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East,

and North America. *The Global State of Democracy 2019* provides an overview of the state of democracy in these regions; this section summarizes the regional findings in the full report.

### Regional findings: Africa and the Middle East

#### Regional findings: Africa



#### Positive developments

- **The expansion of democracy in Africa since 1975 is second only to Latin America and the Caribbean.** Africa has experienced a remarkable democratic expansion in the last few decades, particularly since the early 1990s when many countries in the region introduced multiparty elections.
- In 1975, 41 countries were non-democracies while only three countries were classified as democracies. By 2018, the share of democracies had increased fivefold to 20 countries, making democracy the most common regime type in the region (41 per cent).
- **Representative Government has been strengthened in Africa.** Of the 20 countries categorized as democracies, the large majority has mid-range levels of Representative Government. However, only one country (Mauritius) has a high level of Representative Government.
- Between 1975 and 2018, the gains recorded on Representative Government were followed by advances on Checks on Government and Fundamental Rights.
- **Democratic aspirations in Africa remain strong.** Popular mobilizations demanding democratic change in countries with long-standing autocratic leaders have been seen recently in Ethiopia (2014–2018) and The Gambia (2016), resulting in incipient democratic reforms in the former and a democratic transition in the latter after 22 years of non-democratic rule. The large pro-democracy protests that rocked Algeria, Egypt and Sudan in 2019 also testify to the growing demands for democracy in enduring hybrid and non-democratic regimes in the region.

- **Civil Liberties are one of the best-performing aspects of democracy in Africa.** In 2018, 33 per cent of countries experienced high levels of Civil Liberties. The high performance is concentrated in the subregion of West Africa, followed by Southern Africa. Of the countries that score highly on this measure, 87 per cent (14) are democracies, while only 12 per cent (2) are hybrid regimes. No non-democratic regime has high levels of Civil Liberties.
- **Elections have become the norm rather than the exception throughout Africa.** Only four countries in the region (Eritrea, Libya, Somalia and South Sudan) hold no form of elections, scoring zero on Clean Elections and Inclusive Suffrage and, as a result, on Representative Government. Although Libya and South Sudan held elections in 2014 and 2010 respectively, regular elections are not held in these two countries because of protracted civil war. In countries in West Africa such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, democratic elections and stronger governments have replaced long-standing civil wars.
- **Of the new third-wave democracies, Tunisia has seen most democratic advances and now scores among the top 25 per cent in the world on seven of its democratic subattributes.** The Gambia is another new third-wave democracy that has seen significant democratic advances since its transition in 2017.



#### Challenges to democracy

- **While democracy is the most common regime type in the region, a total of 11 African countries are still categorized as non-democracies, representing 22 per cent of countries in the region.**

- Africa also has the largest share of hybrid regimes in the world, with more than one-third of countries (18) in this category. The latest country to regress into hybridity is Tanzania, in 2018.
- **Despite gains in the past decades, the conduct of elections in a number of African countries remains flawed.** While the region has witnessed a rise in the number of transitions from ruling to opposition parties, many countries have failed to enact key reforms that would enhance the integrity of electoral processes. Disputed elections are a common feature of electoral processes in the region, sometimes leading to the outbreak of election-related violence.
- **Another set of challenges to democratic consolidation seen in many parts of Africa today relates to conflict and civil war.** In several countries, earlier gains have been reversed due to violence, a return to military rule, or failure to transform the political process.
- **An array of challenges inhibits the implementation of regional and country-level initiatives in Africa on Gender Equality.** To varying degrees, women in Africa lack equal access to political power and socio-economic status, and their inclusion remains a major hurdle for most countries.
- **Despite the expansion of democracy in the region, several countries have experienced significant declines in recent years.** Such declines are discernible in countries such as Egypt which, following the Arab Uprisings, experienced further democratic declines and deepening autocratization.
- **Judicial Independence is one of the weakest aspects of democracy in Africa.** Levels of Judicial Independence are low in almost half of the countries in the region.
- **Africa is the region with the highest levels of corruption as well as the highest share of democracies with high levels of corruption.** High levels of corruption are highly correlated with low levels of Human Development. This, therefore, has detrimental effects for sustainable development in the region.

## Regional findings: The Middle East



### Positive developments

- **According to the GSoD Indices, the Middle East contained just two democracies in 2018: Iraq, which is considered a very weak democracy; and Lebanon, which is a fragile democracy.**
- **Iraq is the only country in the Middle East where democracy is proving to be resilient.** Although its democratic institutions remain fragile, it has not backslid into hybridity since its transition to democracy in 2010. The country is a very weak democracy, with low levels of Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, and has levels of Fundamental Rights among the bottom 25 per cent of countries in the world.
- **Some efforts have been made on Gender Equality in the Middle East.** Much work is still needed, but small steps are observed. Iraq has introduced quotas for women in the legislative branch. Saudi Arabia has established quotas for the appointment of women in the Shura Council (Consultative Council). However, this is perceived as more of an effort to appease Western partners than a reflection of fundamental reform in favour of gender equality.



### Challenges to democracy

- **The Arab Uprisings in 2010–2011 raised hopes for democratic progress in the Middle East and seemed to be a turning point in the democratic history of the region.** However, many of the movements that demanded greater democracy for the Middle East and North Africa have since fizzled out. With the exception of Tunisia in North Africa, the expected transitions have been aborted.
- **The Middle East remains the least democratic region in the world.** This is readily apparent from its low number of democracies (two out of 12 countries in the region). It is also the region with the largest share of non-democracies. More than half of the countries in the Middle East (58 per cent) are non-democracies, while one-quarter are hybrid regimes.
- **Non-democracies in the region have, unfortunately, also proven resilient.** Of the 12 countries in the region, 10 have never experienced democracy. The regime status of six of these countries has never changed, while the remaining four have had periods of hybridity.

## Regional findings: The Americas

### Regional findings: Latin America and the Caribbean



#### 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 heterogenous 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. Chile, Costa Rica 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.
- **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.



#### Challenges to 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.
- **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. Since 2013 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, five have had undemocratic interruptions, backsliding into hybrid regimes, but four (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 nine-point decline in the last three years alone (Latinobarómetro 2018).

## Regional findings: North America



### Positive developments

- **North America has high levels of Clean Elections.** The regional score on this measure is 0.86, with both Canada and the United States scoring in the top 25 per cent in the world. While the USA's Clean Elections score decreased from 0.95 in 2012 to 0.78 in 2018, it increased in 2017–2018, after the mid-term elections.
- **Both Canada and the USA have high levels of Inclusive Suffrage.** Canada scores higher (0.95) and among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world, while the USA scores 0.90.
- **North America has high levels of Access to Justice and Civil Liberties.** Both Canada and the USA are in the top 25 per cent on both of these dimensions.
- **Both Canada and the USA perform in the top 25 per cent for Gender Equality.** Gender Equality is high in Canada (0.81) but dropped from high to mid-range in the USA in 2017 (0.69).
- **Predictable Enforcement is high in North America.** Both Canada and the USA score in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on this measure. Canada has seen a decline in its score since 2012, but still performs in the high range.
- **Civil Society Participation in the region is high.** Both Canada and the USA score in the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on this measure. While Canada has seen a slight increase in its Civil Society Participation score since 2013, from 0.74 to 0.84, this increase is not statistically significant.



### Challenges to democracy

- **North America has mid-range performance on Social Group Equality, and on Effective Parliament.** On Social Group Equality, Canada scores 0.65 and the USA 0.53. On Effective Parliament, Canada continues to be in the top 25 per cent of all countries, while the USA returned to the top 25 per cent in the world in 2018, after a drop in 2017. However, in the last five years the USA has seen statistically significant declines on this measure, from 0.84 in 2012 to 0.71 in 2018.
- **Media Integrity is also high, but the region has seen some declines.** The USA in particular saw a significant decline on its scores on Media Integrity between 2012 and 2017, although it still scores in the high range (0.76).
- **While corruption remains low in North America, both Canada and the USA have seen statistically significant declines on their Absence of Corruption scores.** Canada's score fell from 0.87 in 2012 to a still high 0.79 in 2018, while the USA's score fell from 0.83 in 2012 to mid-range (0.69) in 2018. At the same time, however, both countries remain above the world average.
- **On Electoral Participation, North America scores particularly poorly, and is outperformed by all regions except Africa and the Middle East.** The USA's score (0.47) on Electoral Participation drags down the regional average (0.54) and is among the lowest among the world's democracies. Levels of Electoral Participation are generally higher in presidential elections (average of 56.6% since 1975) than in the mid-term elections (average of 36.9% until 2018). The persistently low levels of voter turnout in the United States contribute to weakening American democracy as low turnout undermines the core principle of popular control.

- **The USA has also seen a decline in Civil Liberties.** On this measure, its score fell from 0.98 in 2012 to a still high 0.87 in 2018. The declines have been greatest in Freedom of Expression, although declines are also noted in Freedom of Movement and Freedom of Religion.
- **In the USA, a combination of factors contributes to an electoral system in which ordinary American voters, especially poor and minority voters, increasingly struggle to access and participate on equal terms.** Issues such as gerrymandering, weak campaign-finance regulation, the electoral college system and strict voter ID laws (and, more recently, foreign interference in elections) contribute to an electoral system that is weak on inclusion, and in which wealth and access to power undermine political equality.
- **While Canada scores highly on Local Democracy, in 2018 the USA fell out of the top 25 per cent of global scores on this measure.** Canada is in the top 25 per cent of the world on this indicator, but the USA has seen declines over the past five years, from 0.95 in 2013 and 0.69 in 2018. It now scores in the mid-range on this measure.

## Regional findings: Asia and the Pacific



### Positive developments

- **Asia and the Pacific has experienced a significant democratic expansion in the past four decades.** The number of democracies has doubled (from 7 to 15) and there has been a reduction of non-democracies (from 14 to 10). This expansion has been driven by democratic transitions, with 12 countries becoming democracies for the first time since 1975. Two of these countries (Malaysia and Myanmar) made the transition in the last four years. Sri Lanka, one of the region's five pre-1975 democracies, re-transitioned back to democracy in 2015, after its second hybrid hiatus.
- Malaysia, one of the region's two most persistent hybrid regimes (together with Singapore), transitioned to democracy for the first time after the 2018 elections ended the ruling party's 60-year monopoly on power.
- **The older democracies in Asia and the Pacific have proven resilient.** Of the seven extant democracies in 1975, five have remained so uninterruptedly until today: Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Of the 12 countries that became democracies after 1975, all but two remain democracies, and half have not had any undemocratic interruptions.
- **Of all the early third-wave democracies (i.e. those that transitioned between 1975 and 2000), the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Taiwan have made the most democratic advances.** Of the newer democracies, Timor-Leste stands out for its democratic gains. These are the only third-wave democracies that have high levels of Representative Government.
- **The region's democracies come in many shapes and forms.** Only Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Taiwan have

high performance on all five of their democratic attributes, followed by Japan which performs high on four attributes. The most common performance (40 per cent of the region's democracies) is mid-range on all attributes.



### Challenges to democracy

- **Half of the countries in Asia and the Pacific do not have democratically elected governments.** Some countries in the region have suffered from deepening autocratization in recent years. For example, Cambodia, which never fully transitioned to democracy, ultimately became a non-democratic regime in 2018. After the Middle East and Africa, Asia is home to the largest number of countries that have never experienced democracy at any time in their history (40 per cent of countries in the region).
- **Democracies in Asia and the Pacific suffer from democratic fragility and weak democratic performance.** Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka have experienced undemocratic interruptions since their transitions. Others, such as Malaysia, Myanmar and Papua New Guinea, show low performance on at least one of their democratic attributes. Still others have experienced democratic erosion.
- **Asia and the Pacific is one of the regions most affected by democratic erosion, with more than half of its democracies suffering from it.** India is currently experiencing democratic backsliding and has the highest number of democratic subattribute declines since 2013. The Philippines, also a democratically backsliding country, follows India in number of democratic declines. Older democracies such as Australia, Japan and New Zealand have suffered some erosion, as have Indonesia, Mongolia and Timor-Leste.

- **Several countries in the region have experienced democratic fragility, with democratic breakdowns since their first transition to democracy.** Bangladesh (since 2014) and Pakistan (since 2018) have regressed into hybridity. Thailand backslid into military rule in 2014, although elections in 2019 have paved the way for a civilian government.
- **A number of Asian countries suffer from weak human rights protection.** Human rights violations are perpetrated by both state and non-state actors. These violations are sometimes related to internal conflicts which are further aggravated by waves of re-emerging ethno-nationalism.
- **Despite advances in Gender Equality in some countries in the last few decades, progress in Asia and the Pacific has not kept the same pace as the rest of the world.** Significant challenges remain to achieve Gender Equality and SDG 5.5 on political representation of women. Efforts are needed to increase the representation of women, not only in new democracies but also in countries such as Japan and South Korea.
- **Recent attacks on institutions central to the integrity of functioning democracies constitute a significant challenge to democracy in Asia and the Pacific.** Institutions threatened include the judiciary, court systems, electoral commissions, parliaments and institutions fighting corruption.
- **Despite some recent advances in reducing corruption (SDG 16.5), almost half of all countries in Asia and the Pacific still suffer from high levels of corruption.** This situation is compounded by weak judicial systems lacking capacity to combat corruption.
- **There have been attempts throughout the region to undermine civic space, freedom of speech and a free media in recent years.** In Cambodia, for example, the shrinking of civic space has occurred in a context of deepening autocratization, while in Thailand a similar shrinkage occurred after the democratic breakdown in 2014. In other countries, it has occurred in contexts of democratic erosion and backsliding, explained by the rise of nationalist political parties, and justified by arguments of national sovereignty, law and order, national security and responses to terrorism.
- The SDG 16 target that presents most cause for concern is SDG 16.10, with more countries declining than advancing in Media Integrity and Freedom of Association and Assembly since 2015.

## Regional findings: Europe



### Positive developments

- **After North America, Europe is the second-most democratic region in the world, with 93 per cent of countries classified as democracies.** Europe has the largest share of the world's democracies, with 39 countries classifying as democracies, which constitutes 40 per cent of the global share.
- **The largest share of third-wave democracies can be found in Europe.** Since 1975, a total of 28 countries in the region have transitioned to democracy, of which almost half (12) are new countries that gained independence following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet/Communist bloc. Europe's democracies have proven remarkably resilient. While two third-wave democracies (Albania and Georgia) backslid into hybridity for some time, they have since returned to democracy.
- **Of the 21 democracies in the world with high scores on all five GSoD attributes, 14 are in Europe.** The majority (11) are older democracies in North and West Europe, while one is in South Europe (Spain) and two more (Estonia and Slovenia) are in East-Central Europe.

- In countries such as Denmark, Finland, Latvia and the United Kingdom, an increasing number of initiatives give European citizens potential avenues for direct participation in public decision-making, including citizen initiatives at the local level, e-petitions or e-platforms.
- **Armenia was the only country in Europe to transition from being a hybrid regime in 2017 to a democracy in 2018.** It also recorded the highest number of statistically significant advances in Europe for 2018: on Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement, and on eight related democratic subattributes.



### Challenges to democracy

- **Although the largest concentration of democracies is in Europe, the region has seen a decline in the quality of its democracies in the last 10 years.** The share of countries with high levels of Checks on Government, Civil Liberties, Media Integrity and Civil Society Participation has declined. Therefore, most democratic declines in Europe are related to weakening Checks on Government and a shrinking civic space, and are occurring in contexts of democratic erosion and democratic backsliding.

- **Over half (56 per cent) of democracies in Europe suffer from democratic erosion.** And of the 10 democracies in the world currently experiencing democratic backsliding, six—Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Ukraine—are in Europe.
- **There is a general malaise within mainstream political parties across most of Europe and particularly in Western European countries.** This contributes to the rise of non-traditional parties, such as populist, extremist and anti-establishment parties. Democratic backsliding is often associated with such parties gaining access to government. The phenomenon of ruling political parties showing autocratic tendencies can be discerned in several countries in the region, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.
- **Europe has recently experienced a populist wave.** Its origins can be traced back to several interacting factors, including economic and cultural globalization, which have transformed the social structure and political culture of many countries in the region. Political drivers of populism include reduced trust in political parties and a crisis of representation as well as the fragmentation and polarization of the public sphere further deepened by the emergence of new technologies and social media. Socio-economic drivers of populism include labour market transformation, an increase in domestic socio-economic disparities and a gap between citizens' expectations of what democracy can deliver and disenchantment with democracy's perceived failure to deliver wellbeing for all.

# Chapter 4

## Policy considerations

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

- **Defend and safeguard democracy.** Governments, civil society, political institutions (including parliaments and political parties) and democracy assistance providers and donors need to make the case for democracy and safeguard it against threats. In defending democracy, these actors should be both honest and specific about the flaws in existing systems, show greater precision in describing the problems that democratic institutions currently confront, and explore constructive solutions for how to tackle them.
- **Get creative and serious about political participation.** Governments, political parties and parliaments should make use of a wider range of participatory mechanisms to deepen democratic practices beyond elections.
- **Ensure inclusive representative mechanisms.** Governments and political institutions, with the support of democracy-assistance providers, should work to make representative mechanisms more inclusive. They should continue to invest in the inclusion of women and youth while expanding efforts to include other marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities.
- **Strengthen institutions that check the executive, including the legislature, but also courts and independent, pluralist media systems.** These institutions enable citizens, who are faced with restrictions on their rights, to use and protect their political freedoms. Stronger checks on government may constrain the scope for quick and far-reaching policy change that is sometimes needed. But they ensure that incumbent governments reach out to other political actors and build inclusive coalitions that are likely to make policy change more sustainable.
- **Improve the integrity and transparency of political institutions.** Governments, civil society and democracy-assistance providers should improve the integrity of political institutions by tackling corruption, increasing transparency and implementing effective policies to tackle social and economic inequalities.
- **Improve political finance transparency.** Wherever possible, develop a holistic and comprehensive anti-corruption approach that links political finance with other related matters such as asset disclosure and lobbying registers. International instruments such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's recommendations and the Open Government Partnership's initiatives could support countries' anti-corruption reform efforts in that direction.
- **Protect new democratic institutions against popular disappointment that is likely to ensue if the high expectations attached to their creation are not met.** To manage popular expectations better, policymakers should engage in a rational, open dialogue with citizens that fosters an understanding of the constraints and trade-offs of democratic politics. Improved popular knowledge of policies would also enable citizens to make more informed assessments of electoral promises and their viability. Memories of the authoritarian past should be preserved and conveyed in order to remind younger generations of the achievements of democracy, therefore guarding against misleading nostalgic sentiment.
- **Governments should protect their citizens against the disruptive effects of economic crises and globalization.** This requires policies that enable vulnerable groups within society, including immigrants, to adapt to job losses and provide them with equitable access to services, employment, opportunities and resources.
- **Policies should seek to address societal polarization.** Moderate political elites should demonstrate their readiness to listen to the concerns of citizens and to bridge political divides by integrating different parts of

society. Taking these concerns seriously would reduce the scope for populist challengers who exploit grievances against established political elites.

- **Invest in civic education on democracy and digital media literacy.** Governments and democracy-assistance providers should invest in civic education to promote democratic values, equipping citizens of all ages with the skills required to engage with information in a critical manner while remaining respectful of differences.
- **Support the strengthening of civil society organizations working on democracy and human rights issues in contexts where these are threatened.** Facilitate access to regional and international civil society networks for civil society organizations that face backlashes, especially those working on corruption and human rights and the weaker and less well-resourced organizations, which often tend to be those working on women's rights and LGBT issues.
- **Support a free, diverse and critical media.** A diversity of media perspectives and the existence of robust investigative journalism free from threats, that can provide critical and balanced reporting and scrutinize government

power, is key to healthy democracies. Facilitate access to data and information to such journalists, to strengthen their evidence-base and data sources.

- **Carefully consider the introduction of technology.** The introduction of technologies in electoral processes should be anchored in thoughtful and context-aware discussions and analysis of the benefits and risks of the options at hand. When there is already a lack of trust in democratic and electoral institutions, the introduction of technology can be controversial. Where the introduction of technologies in elections is based on well-informed decisions, and is managed properly, technology can potentially contribute to the resolution of long-standing electoral problems.
- **Protect democratic gains against risks.** Trust in electoral processes and institutions can be easily lost. When it happens, trust is difficult to restore. Therefore, electoral management bodies should institutionalize risk management and resilience-building processes. Risk management will help them to anticipate and address various risks before they negatively impact the process and results. Resilience-building will strengthen the capacity of the system to deal with inevitable shocks and stresses.

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# About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with the mission to advance democracy worldwide, as a universal human aspiration and enabler of sustainable development. We do this by supporting the building, strengthening and safeguarding of democratic political institutions and processes at all levels. Our vision is a world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable and deliver sustainable development to all.

International IDEA's vision is firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and considers that democratic principles are core to and important enablers for the realization of the entire 2030 Agenda.

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## What does International IDEA do?

In our work we focus on three main impact areas: electoral processes; constitution-building processes; and political participation and representation. The themes of gender and inclusion, conflict sensitivity and sustainable development are mainstreamed across all our areas of work. International IDEA provides analyses of global and regional democratic trends; produces comparative knowledge on good international democratic practices; offers technical assistance and capacity-building on democratic reform to actors engaged in democratic processes; and convenes dialogue on issues relevant to the public debate on democracy and democracy building.

International IDEA also contributes to the democracy debate through analysis of democratic trends through its Global State of Democracy initiative, which includes the biennial Global State of Democracy Report, the Global State of Democracy Indices (<http://www.idea.int/gsod-indices>) and the Global State of Democracy In Focus briefings.

## Where does International IDEA work?

Our headquarters is located in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa and West Asia, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

<<http://www.idea.int>>

## Democracy is under threat and its promise needs revival.

The value, viability and future of democracy are more contested now than ever before in modern history. While the past four decades have seen a remarkable expansion of democracy throughout all regions of the world, recent years have been marked by declines in the fabric of both older and younger democracies. The idea of democracy continues to mobilize people around the world but the practice of existing democracies has disappointed and disillusioned many citizens and democracy advocates.

Democratic erosion is occurring in different settings and contexts. New democracies are often weak and fragile. Older democracies are struggling to guarantee equitable and sustainable economic and social development. The share of high-quality democracies is decreasing and many of them are confronted with populist challengers.

At the same time, democratic transitions occur in political regimes that seemed staunchly undemocratic and popular democratic aspirations continue to be expressed and defended around the world. Despite the challenges, democracy has proven resilient. Democracies have also shown, with some exceptions, to provide better conditions for sustainable development.

This Summary of International IDEA's publication *The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise* outlines the key global and regional findings of the report. The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) 2019 Report provides a health check of democracy, identifying encouraging democratic trends as well as the key challenges to democracy. It draws on data from the GSoD indices and lessons learned from International IDEA's on-the-ground technical assistance to understand the current democracy landscape. It aims at informing strategies, programmes and policy interventions in support of democracy.