



# The Global State of Democracy IN FOCUS

No. 8, September 2019

## Tracking progress on Sustainable Development Goal 16 with Global State of Democracy Indices

### Key facts and figures

- The GSoD Indices enable to measure progress on six targets of SDG 16 (Targets 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 10). This GSoD In Focus assesses progress in implementing SDG 16 since 2015.
- According to GSoD data, global progress on SDG 16 is facing significant challenges, although some advances can be noted. Of the 18 GSoD aspects used to measure progress on SDG 16, 12 of them have seen significant declines, 5 have recorded advances, and 1 of them has seen stagnation.
- Public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms (linked to SDG 16.10) are under threat across all regions. The underlying causes include the curtailment of civic space, democratic backsliding and erosion, and encroaching authoritarian tendencies by governments, which contribute to undermine fundamental rights.
- Over half of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean live in countries that have seen declines in aspects related to SDG 16.10. 39 per cent of people in Asia Pacific and 28 per cent in Europe live in countries that have seen declines on this target.
- Africa has made the most progress in implementing SDG 16 targets. However, significant challenges remain for achieving SDG 16, particularly for effective, accountable and transparent institutions (target 16.6), and public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms (target 16.10). Levels of democratic development in the region remain low compared with the rest of the world.
- The Middle East has made some progress, although it remains the lowest-scoring region in the world on all aspects linked to SDG 16.
- Asia-Pacific has made progress in implementing SDG 16, with significant challenges remaining on GSoD aspects, particularly those related to target 16.10.
- Latin America and the Caribbean have seen mixed progress, and closer attention is warranted on reducing all forms of violence and related death rates (targets 16.1), and 16.10. It is the region after Europe with the largest share of declines on GSoD aspects relating to SDG 16.
- Europe provides high overall scores on GSoD Indices linked to SDG 16. However, it is also the region that has seen the most declines on the GSoD aspects that measure progress on SDG 16.
- North America (United States and Canada) scores among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on 14 and 16 (respectively) of the 18 aspects related to SDG 16. However, stagnation is noted on more than half of the aspects (55 per cent) and declines in 44 per cent of them while only one saw an advance.

Sustainable development will not be achieved without sustainable democracy

Kevin Casas-Zamora,  
Secretary-General of  
International IDEA

## 1. Introduction and methodology

This *GSoD In Focus* provides an overview of the progress in implementing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by using the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Indices as complementary data to the official indicators. It does so based on the assumption that democracy has an instrumental value, as an enabler of sustainable development (International IDEA 2018: 5–9).

Although the GSoD Indices pertain to a total of nine SDGs (International IDEA 2019b), this *GSoD In Focus* zooms in on the progress on SDG 16 (Peace, justice and accountable institutions) at the global, regional and country levels. The data presented contributes to the current debate on inclusion, equal treatment and participation, which coincides with this year's theme of the UN International Democracy Day, as advocated by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres. This *GSoD In Focus* is published on 15 September as a contribution by International IDEA to marking this day.

Methodologically, this *GSoD In Focus* takes the country as the main unit of analysis. In order to measure progress on SDG 16 targets, the GSoD Indices measure the number of countries with significant gains and declines between the baseline year of 2015 and 2018. When the number of countries with significant gains is greater than those with declines, this is marked as progress (colour-coded Green). When the number of countries with declines outnumbers those with gains, regression is noted (Red). When the number of countries with gains is equal to those with declines or where there were no gains or declines, this is marked as stagnation (Yellow). Additionally, this *GSoD In Focus* converts some of the same country-based information into population data. This dual approach provides the reader with different perspectives on the data offered: while it sets a number on gains and declines per country and region, it also offers the reader the opportunity of examining those gains and declines based on population data where stark differences are most noted.

## 2. Complementarity of GSoD Indices with SDG 16

In its work, International IDEA promotes a vision of the world in which democratic processes, actors and institutions are inclusive and accountable, and deliver sustainable development for all (International IDEA 2018). The Institute's conceptualization of democracy builds on two fundamental principles: popular control over decision-making, and political equality among those exercising that control (Beetham et al. 2008; International IDEA 2017). This understanding of democracy mirrors a core value enshrined in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to which the 'will of the people' provides the basis for the authority of governments (United Nations 1948). Moreover, this vision is anchored in, and reflects, the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly 2014, 2015) and the SDGs framework.

Based on this broad concept of democracy, International IDEA developed the GSoD conceptual framework, packaging it in a way that is easily understood by policymakers and civil society organizations (CSOs). As illustrated in Figure 1, democracy is built around five main attributes, with each one of them supported by a number of subattributes and subcomponents.

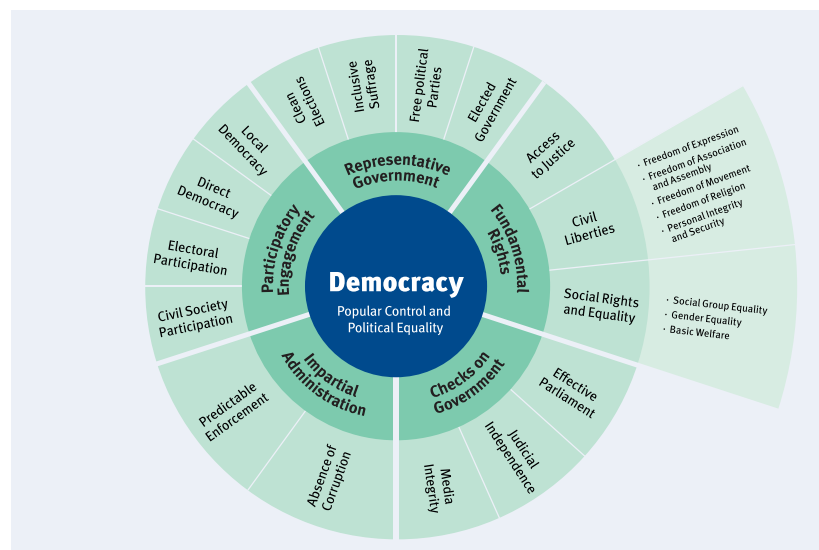
1. **Representative Government** covers the extent to which access to political power is free and equal as demonstrated by competitive, inclusive and regular elections and political parties. It includes four subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government.
2. **Fundamental Rights** dissects the extent to which individual liberties are respected, and checks whether people have access to resources to enable active participation in the political process. It

Failure to achieve progress on SDG 16 is likely to affect progress on all the SDGs

International IDEA 2018: 7

- includes three subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, and Social Rights and Equality. It also includes the following subcomponents: Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Association and Assembly, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, Personal Integrity and Security, Social Group Equality, Gender Equality and Basic Welfare.
3. **Checks on Government** measures effective control of executive power through other pillars of democracy. It includes three subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity.
  4. **Impartial Administration** concerns how fairly and predictably political decisions are implemented, and thus reflects key aspects of the rule of law. It includes two subattributes: Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement.
  5. **Participatory Engagement** measures instruments for, and the realization of, the people's participation in decision-making. Because they capture different phenomena, the four subattributes of this aspect—Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Local Democracy—are not aggregated into a single score (Skaaning 2018).

**FIGURE 1**  
**Conceptual framework of the Global State of Democracy Indices**



Source: Skaaning (2018).

The GSoD Indices are based on 97 indicators collected from a number of data sets, with approximately 70 per cent of the data coming from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project.

Based on this holistic understanding of democracy and its GSoD Indices, International IDEA is able to provide complementary data to track progress on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, together with partners such as the SDG 16 Data Initiative (2019).

The GSoD Indices measurement framework captures data relating to progress on 8 of the 17 SDGs (SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11 and 16). In addition, the GSoD conceptual framework itself is highly relevant to SDG 17, as the Indices and evidence-based analysis help to strengthen the global partnership for sustainable development (International IDEA 2019b).

There are 18 aspects of the GSoD Indices that track progress on six targets of SDG 16 on Peace, justice and accountable institutions. Table 1 provides an overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the respective GSoD aspects. Further, the column entitled GSoD indicators describes in some detail the nature and level of analysis under each of these aspects.

TABLE 1

Overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the GSoD aspects

SDG 16 targets	GSoD aspect	GSoD indicators
<b>SDG 16.1</b> Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	Personal Integrity and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom from forced labour for women<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom from forced labour for men<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom from torture<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom from political killings<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Political terror scale<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Internal conflict<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
<b>SDG 16.3</b> Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	Access to Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to justice for men<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Access to justice for women<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Judicial corruption decision<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Judicial accountability<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Fair trial<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
	Judicial Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Court independence<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Lower Court independence<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Compliance with High Court<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Compliance with judiciary<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Law and order<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
	Predictable Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive respects constitution<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Transparent laws with predictable enforcement<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Rigorous and impartial public administration<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Bureaucratic quality<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
<b>SDG 16.5</b> Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms	Absence of Corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public sector corrupt exchanges<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Public sector theft<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Executive embezzlement and theft<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Executive bribery and corrupt exchanges<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Corruption<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
<b>SDG 16.6</b> Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	Judicial Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Court independence<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Lower Court independence<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Compliance with High Court<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Compliance with judiciary<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Law and order<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
	Effective Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislature questions officials in practice<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Executive oversight<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Legislature investigates in practice<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Legislature opposition parties<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Executive constraints<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>
	Free Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Party ban<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Barriers to parties<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Opposition parties' autonomy<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Elections multiparty<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Competitiveness of participation<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Multiparty (legislative) elections<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
	Civil Society Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSO participatory environment<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Engaged society<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• CSO consultation<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> V-Dem as data provider source.

<sup>2</sup> Political Terror Scale as data provider source.

<sup>3</sup> International Country Risk Guide as data provider source.

<sup>4</sup> Civil Liberty Dataset as data provider source.

<sup>5</sup> Polity as data provider source.

<sup>6</sup> Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy as data provider source.

<sup>7</sup> Bjørnskov-Rode regime data as data provider source.

<sup>8</sup> Global Media Freedom Dataset as data provider source.

TABLE 1 (CONT.)

**Overview of the reciprocal relations between SDG 16 targets and the GSoD aspects**

SDG 16 targets	GSoD aspect	GSoD indicators
<b>SDG 16.7</b> Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels	Elected Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elected officials index<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Competitiveness of executive recruitment<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Openness of executive recruitment<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Electoral<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>
	Clean Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electoral management bodies autonomy<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• EMB capacity<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Election other voting irregularities<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Election government intimidation<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Election free and fair<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Competition<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
	Electoral Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election voting age population turnout<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
	Effective Parliament	See above on Effective Parliament in SDG 16.6
	Local Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local government index<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Subnational elections free and fair<sup>1</sup></li> </ul>
<b>SDG 16.10</b> Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Social Group Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social class equality in respect of civil liberties<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Social group equality in respect of civil liberties<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Power distributed by socio-economic position<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Power distributed by social group<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Representation of disadvantaged social groups<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Religious tensions<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Ethnic tensions<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>
	Freedom of Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print/broadcast censorship effort<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Harassment of journalists<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Media self-censorship<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of discussion for women<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of discussion for men<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of academic and cultural expression<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of opinion and expression<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
	Media Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print/broadcast media critical<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Print/broadcast media perspectives<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Media bias<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Media corrupt<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Media freedom<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>
	Freedom of Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of foreign movement<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of domestic movement for women<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of domestic movement for men<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of movement and residence<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
	Freedom of Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of religion<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Religious organization repression<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of thought, conscience and religion<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>
Freedom of Association and Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSO entry and exit<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• CSO repression<sup>1</sup></li> <li>• Freedom of assembly and association<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>	

<sup>1</sup> V-Dem as data provider source.

<sup>2</sup> Political Terror Scale as data provider source.

<sup>3</sup> International Country Risk Guide as data provider source.

<sup>4</sup> Civil Liberty Dataset as data provider source.

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<sup>7</sup> Bjørnskov-Rode regime data as data provider source.

<sup>8</sup> Global Media Freedom Dataset as data provider source.

### 3. Analysis of GSoD data

The analysis below is divided into two parts: the first part, entitled Global and regional outline, takes the country as a unit of measure and offers a global picture of net declines and gains. The narrative is meant to give context and help to explain Table 2. The second part of the analysis offers concise but focused analyses on each of the SDG 16 targets covered in Table 2, highlighting some of the main trends noticed. Population data will also be presented on some of those main gains and declines.

#### Global and regional outline

According to the GSoD data, global progress on SDG 16 is facing significant challenges, although some advances can be noted. Out of the 18 GSoD aspects used to track progress on SDG 16, there are considerably more declines than gains recorded at country and regional level. Between 2015 and 2018, declines are noted on 12 GSoD aspects, there were gains on five, while one aspect shows stagnation.

**Africa** has made the most progress in implementing SDG 16 targets, if measured by the number of GSoD aspects that have seen more countries advancing than declining. However, significant challenges remain as levels of democratic development measured by this goal remain low compared with the world average. Target 16.6 on accountable institutions has encountered some serious challenges, with declines outnumbering advances for institutions pertaining to the GSoD aspect on Judicial Independence, and setbacks recorded on the aspect of Civil Society Participation. Target 16.10 has also seen significant challenges.

The **Middle East** has also made some progress, although significant challenges remain, while stagnation is seen on half of the 18 aspects used to measure progress. This region remains the lowest-scoring region in the world on all GSoD aspects linked to SDG 16.

For both **Africa and the Middle East**, statistically significant advances are recorded, particularly around GSoD aspects of Access to Justice, Predictable Enforcement (related to SDG 16.3) and Absence of Corruption (related to target 16.5). Some of the more pressing challenges pertain to Clean Elections and Electoral Participation (related to target 16.7) as well as Civil Liberties aspects (related to target 16.10).

**Latin America and the Caribbean** has seen mixed progress in implementing SDG 16, with significant challenges remaining. It is the region after Europe with the largest share of GSoD aspects relating to SDG 16 having seen declines. Of the 18 GSoD aspects used to measure progress on SDG 16, 72 per cent (13) have seen more countries with declines than gains since 2015. This is the case for target 16.1 on reducing violence and for 16.10 on fundamental freedoms, where all GSoD aspects have seen declines, except for Freedom of Association and Assembly, which has seen a stagnation.

**North America** (USA and Canada) scores among the top 25 per cent of countries in the world on 14 and 16 (respectively) of the 18 GSoD aspects related to SDG 16.

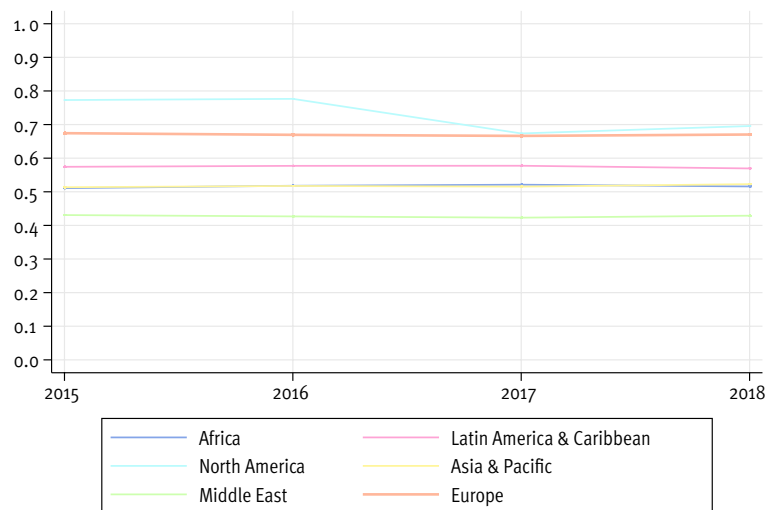
In both **Latin America and the Caribbean**, and **North America** declines are noted in most areas covered by the GSoD aspects, such as on Civil Liberties (related to target 16.10), Free Political Parties and Civil Society Participation (related to target 16.6).

**Asia-Pacific** has made some progress in implementing SDG 16 since 2015, although significant challenges remain. Most challenges relate to GSoD aspects of Personal Integrity and Security (related to target 16.1), or Civil Liberties (related to target 16.10). However, significant gains are discernible around GSoD aspects that complement SDG 16 targets 3, 5, 6 and 7.

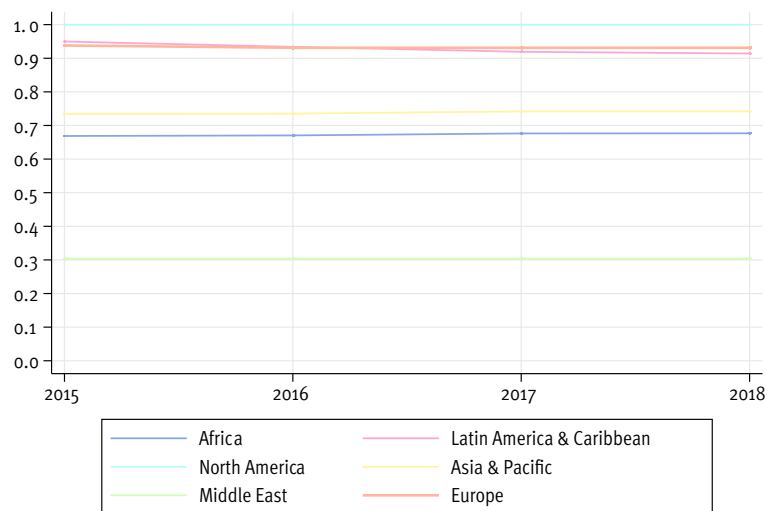
**Europe**, like North America, is the region that scores best on GSoD aspects linked to SDG 16. However, it is also the region that has seen most declines on the aspects that measure progress on SDG 16. In fact, there is no net gain on any of the GSoD aspects recorded since 2015.

Table 2 offers a summary of the GSoD data related to SDG 16 targets on the number of countries with significant gains versus declines at global and regional levels between 2015 and 2018. The colour codes indicate whether there is a net sum of more gains than declines (Green), or more declines than gains (Red), or a levelling of both (Yellow). In relation to their respective regional situations in 2015, the table shows Europe especially performing quite poorly, while Africa and the Middle East, and Asia-Pacific do comparatively better. However, it should be remembered that the baseline of each region’s performance differs considerably. This means that Europe’s or North America’s performance on the aspects relating to SDG targets is generally higher than other regions in the world. To illustrate this point, Figures 2 and 3 represent the comparative regional difference between 2015 and 2018 on two GSoD aspects that relate to target 16.6 and target 16.7 respectively: Effective Parliament and Elected Government.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Comparative regional difference between 2015 and 2018 for Effective Parliament**



**FIGURE 3**  
**Comparative regional difference between 2015 and 2018 for Elected Government**



*Note:* All scoring runs from 0 to 1, with 1 representing the highest achievement  
*Source:* Global State of Democracy Indices, 2019.

TABLE 2

**GSoD data trends related to SDG 16 targets on the number of countries with significant gains versus declines at global and regional levels between 2015 and 2018**

SDG 16	GSoD aspect	Global		Africa		Middle East		Latin America and the Caribbean		North America		Asia-Pacific		Europe	
		Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines	Gains	Declines
SDG 16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	6	14	3	1	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	4	0	4
SDG 16.3	Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all	14	13	8	4	1	0	1	2	0	0	3	2	1	5
	Judicial Independence	12	13	4	6	1	0	2	1	0	0	3	1	2	5
	Predictable Enforcement	12	10	8	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	1	1	4
SDG 16.5	Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms	17	9	7	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	5	1	1	2
SDG 16.6	Judicial Independence	12	13	4	6	1	0	2	1	0	0	3	1	2	5
	Effective Parliament	15	12	4	3	1	0	2	1	0	1	6	2	2	5
	Free Political Parties	2	9	1	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	1	3
SDG 16.7	Civil Society Participation	3	8	1	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	2
	Elected Government	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Clean Elections	7	14	2	5	0	1	1	3	0	1	3	2	1	2
	Electoral Participation	9	16	4	5	0	3	1	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
	Effective Parliament	15	12	4	3	1	0	2	1	0	1	6	2	2	5
	Local Democracy	13	12	8	6	0	0	1	1	0	1	3	1	1	3
	Social Group Equality	4	4	3	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
SDG 16.10	Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	11	29	2	7	0	1	3	6	0	1	4	4	2	10
SDG 16.10	Media Integrity	5	19	3	4	0	2	0	4	0	0	2	3	0	6
	Freedom of Movement	2	13	2	6	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	2
	Freedom of Religion	2	7	1	2	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	1
	Freedom of Association and Assembly	12	16	3	6	1	0	2	2	0	0	4	5	2	3

*Legend:* Red colour denotes overall regression (# of countries with declines is greater than the # of countries with gains)  
Yellow colour denotes overall stagnation (# of countries with declines is equal to the # of countries with gains, or there are no declines or gains)  
Green denotes overall progress (# of countries with gains is greater than the # of countries with declines).



### **Target 16.1. Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere**

One of the SDG 16 targets currently facing the most challenges is target 16.1 on reducing violence. The GSoD aspect that pertains to this target is Personal Integrity and Security. Globally, there have been 14 declines and six advances on this aspect, with Africa the only region reversing this trend. While the Americas and Asia-Pacific record one and two gains respectively, Europe records no advances and four declines.

### **Target 16.3. Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all**

The global picture on the attainment of this target looks comparatively more promising, as indicated by three GSoD aspects that provide complementary data: Access to Justice (14 gains vs 13 declines), Judicial Independence (12 gains vs 13 declines) and Predictable Enforcement (12 gains vs 10 declines). There is notable progress in Africa. However, challenges remain, as levels of Judicial Independence remain particularly poor in Africa as a whole (International IDEA 2019c, forthcoming). On Access to Justice, for example, 35 per cent of people in Africa have benefited from this progress. By contrast, the situation is more dire in Europe where all three GSoD aspects that complement target 16.3 have witnessed declines, affecting 18 per cent of the region's overall population on Access to Justice, 27 per cent on Judicial Independence and 26 per cent on Predictable Enforcement. Challenges to Judicial Independence in Europe are generally noted in a few countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where there have been recorded instances of intrusion in the work of the judiciary in a context of democratic backsliding (International IDEA 2019c).

### **Target 16.5. Substantially reduce bribery and corruption in all their forms**

The GSoD aspect that provides direct complementary data for this target is Absence of Corruption. The global situation shows many achievements since 2013, but a number of challenges remain. 43 per cent of countries in the world suffer from high levels of corruption and only 15 per cent of countries have low levels. This has serious implications for the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda as Absence of Corruption is highly correlated with Human Development (GSoD 2019, forthcoming). Europe has not seen any significant progress since 2015. In North America statistically significant declines are recorded on Absence of Corruption scores. But Africa, particularly West Africa, has seen some gains in reducing corruption. Overall, 27 per cent of the population in Africa live in countries that have seen levels of corruption reduced. However, it should be noted that levels of corruption in Africa are the highest in the world together with the Middle East, and those countries that have seen a reduction have gone from high to mid-range levels of corruption, but none has gone down to low levels of corruption. Over half (65 per cent) of countries in Africa suffer from high levels of corruption. Similarly, in Asia-Pacific, particularly Central Asia and South East Asia, gains are recorded in the fight against corruption. Despite challenges, around 30 per cent of countries in Africa and 17 per cent of countries in Asia-Pacific have seen levels of corruption fall in the last five years (International IDEA 2019a).

### **Target 16.6. Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels**

The GSoD data that feeds into this SDG 16 target testifies to progress made in most regions of the world, with certain challenges remaining. The most visible progress is seen on Effective Parliament and Judicial Independence in most regions of the globe. In Asia-Pacific, Judicial Independence has noted small gains, affecting just 2 per cent of the overall population of the continent. Data on Civil Society Participation shows a relatively bleak picture for the Americas and Europe. Shrinking civil society space, as well as assaults on civil liberties in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and South Europe, have translated into low scores for Europe on this GSoD aspect. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a few declines are noted, which affects 37 per cent of the overall population in the region.

### **Target 16.7. Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels**

This SDG target is complemented by data from a wide range of GSoD aspects: Elected Government, Clean Elections, Electoral Participation, Effective Parliament, Local Democracy and Social Group Equality. Globally, considerable progress is achieved on Effective Parliament and Local Democracy, followed by progress coupled with some challenges on Clean Elections, Electoral Participation, and Social Group Equality.

For instance, some of the underlying challenges on Clean Elections relate to the curtailment of opposition political parties, the manipulation of the election process by the incumbent parties, and voter intimidation (International IDEA 2019c). Effective Parliament, on the other hand, has seen some progress, which is testament to the legislative's application of oversight powers on the executive in a number of countries in Africa and Asia-Pacific in particular. Social Group Equality has seen some gains in Africa and small gains are also detected in the Middle East.

Asia-Pacific has recorded some gains in Clean Elections, Effective Parliament, and Local Democracy, while the Americas has seen some progress on Effective Parliament and Electoral Participation. Lastly, Europe has seen stagnation on Social Group Equality, whereas on Effective Parliament five countries have experienced declines and two countries have achieved gains, which is equivalent to 17 per cent of the region's population seeing declines versus 6 per cent with gains.

### **Target 16.10. Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements**

Another target facing numerous challenges is target 16.10 on public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms. The GSoD aspects that pertain to this SDG 16 target derive from the areas of Civil Liberties and Fundamental Rights, and measure Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Movement, Freedom of Religion, and Freedom of Association and Assembly. Additionally, Media Integrity also captures data useful for measuring this target. The results indicate quite a bleak picture globally, with no substantial advances recorded for this target.

Public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms are on the retreat regardless of the region. This reinforces the widely discussed claim that some of the challenges facing democracy today are the curtailment of civic space, democratic backsliding and erosion, and encroaching authoritarian tendencies by governments that tend to undermine fundamental rights (International IDEA 2019c).

For instance, since 2015 Africa and Middle East have recorded eight countries declining on Freedom of Expression. There have been two gains in Africa.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, data on Media Integrity shows that 51 per cent of the region's population live in countries experiencing declines in Media Integrity (representing significant declines in four countries).

In Asia-Pacific, the data on Freedom of Association and Assembly shows that there are four countries with recorded gains, but five countries with declines. In actual population numbers, this translates to 39 per cent of the overall population living in countries with declines in Freedom of Association and Assembly, versus 2 per cent in countries experiencing gains.

In Europe, declines are noted in all GSoD aspects that complement target 16.10. Freedom of Expression notes 10 declines, spread across the region, and just two gains. This means that more

than a quarter (28 per cent) of the region's population are affected by declines on Freedom of Expression as well as Media Integrity.

#### 4. Conclusion

To mark this year's International Democracy Day, International IDEA launched the *GSoD In Focus No. 8* with the aim of offering complementary data to the measurement of SDG 16 targets. The data presented is based on the Institute's conceptual framework on democracy that contains aspects that feed into specific targets of SDG 16.

The data presented shows that there has been an uneven progress globally, with statistically significant declines experienced in many regions. This is due to several challenges facing democracy today, related to a shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding and erosion, and to encroaching authoritarian tendencies by governments that in turn weaken fundamental rights. Regions such as Europe, North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced considerable setbacks across the board, while SDG 16 targets 1, 6, 8 and 10 especially are experiencing setbacks elsewhere too. Having said that, Africa is followed by Asia-Pacific as the two regions with the most gains, even though their overall progress stemming from their 2015 baseline, as well as that of the Middle East, remains below that of Europe and North America.

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## Acknowledgements

This *GSoD In Focus* was written by Armend Bekaj. The methodology for assessing progress on SDG 16 was developed by Annika Silva-Leander. Content input was provided by Massimo Tommasoli and Martin Brusis.

## About this series

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

## Where to find the data

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

<<http://www.idea.int/gso-d-indices>>



## About International IDEA

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

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

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Design and layout by International IDEA based on an original design concept by Phoenix Design.