



The Global State of Democracy 2017
Exploring Democracy's Resilience

Chapter

1

The global state of democracy,
1975–2015



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The Global State of Democracy: Exploring Democracy's Resilience

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The global state of democracy, 1975–2015

Has the global state of democracy declined over the past ten years? What are the major global trends in different aspects of democracy since the beginning of the third wave of democratization in 1975? Based on the newly developed Global State of Democracy (GSoD) indices, this chapter presents global and regional assessments of the state of democracy from 1975 to 2015. The global-level assessments show that, while there is much room for improvement in democracy around the world and many countries have experienced democratic decline, democracy overall has made considerable progress over the last 40 years, especially regarding free elections, respect for fundamental rights and control of government. The current situation is more positive than suggested by an increasingly gloomy view presented by many scholars, public intellectuals and practitioners who claim that democracy has been in decline for the last ten years or more. The GSoD indices demonstrate that this period appears to be one of trendless fluctuations in which gains and downturns in individual countries tend to balance each other out at the global level.

Democracy overall has made considerable progress over the last 40 years, especially regarding free elections, respect for fundamental rights and control of government

Written by
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1.1. Introduction: a systematic health check of democratic progress and resilience

This chapter provides an overview of the global state of democracy in the period 1975–2015. It analyses global and regional trends based on International IDEA's new Global State of Democracy (GSoD) indices (see Box 1.1). This 'health check' shows that democracy faces many challenges, that the resilience of democracy cannot be taken for granted, and that there is much room for improvement in virtually all aspects of democracy. However, the situation is better than suggested by increasingly pessimistic views regarding the prevalence and resilience of contemporary democracy (see Box 1.2 for a summary).

This is not to say that democracy advocates should relax their efforts. Several countries, including some major regional powers, merit special attention because their problems have become increasingly serious. Nonetheless, democracy has not experienced an overall global decline, even as progress has slowed down and in some places halted. Most aspects of democracy have improved since 1975, and most democracies are resilient over time. Moreover, recent democratic regressions have generally been short, and followed by recovery when the internal democracy-friendly forces unite to push back against leaders with authoritarian tendencies. Hence, this overview gives nuanced empirical backing to Carothers and Youngs (2017), who have recently argued that the 'tendency to view global developments through the lens of antidemocratic counterrevolution provides a distorted picture'.

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This chapter discusses some of the current challenges for democratic progress and resilience, and then assesses the global state of democracy. It first provides a brief overview of democratic trends based on a dichotomous, purely electoral understanding of democracy, and subsequently by a more elaborate and fine-grained overview of trends in the five dimensions of International

IDEA's broad understanding of democracy measured by the GSoD indices: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government, Impartial Administration and Participatory Engagement. The conclusion brings together the findings and discusses how they should affect assessments of the global state of democracy.

Democracy faces many challenges, and the resilience of democracy cannot be taken for granted

BOX 1.1

International IDEA's Global State of Democracy indices

Overview: International IDEA's new GSoD indices measure different aspects of democracy during the period 1975–2015 in 155 countries around the world.

Definition: Democracy is defined as popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and political equality between citizens in the exercise of that control.

Attributes of democracy: The indices measure five main attributes of democracy, which contain a total of 16 subattributes. They tap into five features emphasized by various traditions of democratic thought that are associated with the concepts of electoral democracy, liberal democracy, social democracy and participatory democracy:

Attribute 1: Representative Government

Subattributes: Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties, Elected Government

Attribute 2: Fundamental Rights

Subattributes: Access to Justice, Civil Liberties, Social Rights and Equality

Attribute 3: Checks on Government

Subattributes: Effective Parliament, Judicial Independence, Media Integrity

Attribute 4: Impartial Administration

Subattributes: Absence of Corruption, Predictable Enforcement

Attribute 5: Participatory Engagement

Subattributes: Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy, Subnational Elections

Sources: The data rely on a range of sources, including expert surveys, standards-based coding by research groups and analysts, observational data and composite measures on 98 indicators.

Units of observation: The GSoD data set includes country–year data for 155 countries that have at least 1 million inhabitants. In the calculations of regional and global averages, the scores are not weighted by population size.

Scales: All indices range from 0 (lowest democratic achievement) to 1 (highest democratic achievement); 0 generally refers to the worst performance in the whole sample of country–years (covered by a particular index), while 1 refers to the best country–year performance in the sample.

Aggregation: The construction of indices relies mainly on item response theory modelling and Bayesian factor analysis. In a few cases, the aggregation is calculated by taking the mean or multiplying various indicators.

Further details about the GSoD data set and associated indices can be found in Skaaning, S-E., *The Global State of Democracy Indices Methodology: Conceptualization and Measurement Framework* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2017), <<http://www.idea.int/gsood>>.

Autocracies, including several major regional powers, are developing and refining counter-strategies to democracy promotion

1.2. Challenges to democracy

The current landscape of democracy around the world is influenced by many complex processes, such as the dynamics of economic growth and inequality, violent conflict (including terrorism), the innovation and the spread of new technologies, geopolitical power shifts, migration and climate change (Ercan and Gagnon 2014; Grugel and Bishop 2014; Merkel 2015). Many democracies face major challenges, including decreasing and changing forms of political engagement (McCaffrie and Akram 2014), low levels of trust in political institutions (Dalton 2004; van der Meer 2017), dissatisfaction with the performance of democracy (Norris 2011; Stoker 2006), support for populist movements (Mudde 2016), and undemocratic forms of government (Norris 2011).

It is difficult to create resilient, high-quality democracies (see e.g. Diamond 2015; Fukuyama 2015; Haggard and Kaufman 2016; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán 2014; Møller and Skaaning 2013a). Electoral manipulation, corruption and restrictions on fundamental human rights—such as physical integrity, freedom of expression, fair trials and gender equality—are found in all corners of the world. Although many countries have achieved democratic progress, others have experienced democratic backsliding—that is, government efforts to undermine the political institutions that sustain democracy, such as independent media, academic institutions and courts (Bermeo 2016).

Democracy still has a relatively strong standing as the most legitimate form of government, but it is continuously being questioned, and the view that non-democracies can face current challenges better than democracies is at times given serious credence (see, e.g., Bell 2015; Brennan 2016). Many countries that lack relatively free, regular elections have governments that are engaged in state propaganda and the spread of misinformation (Herpen 2015; Simon 2015; Treisman 2017). Furthermore, autocracies, including several major regional powers, are developing and refining counter-strategies to

democracy promotion (Chou, Pan and Poole 2017; Tansey 2016; Whitehead 2014).

Therefore, there is a need to evaluate whether democracy is indeed in retreat at the global and regional levels, or whether it is generally resilient and able to withstand such challenges. Some observers contend that several decades of remarkable improvement in the state of democracy since the mid-1970s were followed by a slowdown or halt in democratic progress (Levitsky and Way 2015; Lührmann et al. 2017; Møller and Skaaning 2013b; Schmitter 2015). Others claim that there has been a significant decline in the global level of democracy for more than a decade, and note clear signs of a reverse wave of democratization (Diamond 2016; EIU 2017; Klaas 2016; Kurlantzick 2014; Puddington and Roylance 2017; Rich 2017).

However, such negative perceptions of the state of democracy are often based on unbalanced accounts with a biased focus on recent negative examples, or rely on data sets that lack transparency and are constructed using questionable procedures (see Coppedge et al. 2011; Munck 2009). Moreover, although such worries about a general democratic decline have become more frequent and prominent in recent years, they are not new (see Merkel 2010, 2015). People are generally too pessimistic when assessing progress in human development because they are predisposed to think things are worse than they are, and they overestimate the likelihood of hardship (Norberg 2016). This deep-seated negativity bias (see Ito et al. 1998; Rozin and Royzman 2001) is reinforced by the media's tendency to focus on crises and negative events rather than positive developments (Altheide 2002; Niven 2001; Soroka and McAdams 2015).

The popular notion that democracy is regressing could still be valid, but there appears to be a current tendency to focus too heavily on the past and to exaggerate and oversimplify current negative examples, while overlooking positive developments (see Carothers and Youngs 2017; Levitsky and Way 2015). Against this backdrop,

this chapter offers an empirical analysis, based on new data, of the following questions: Has the global state of democracy declined over the past ten years? What have been the major global trends in democracy since the beginning

of the third wave of democratization? What patterns are displayed by various dimensions and subdimensions of democracy? How do the different regions of the world fare? Box 1.2 presents the key findings.

BOX 1.2

An overview of the global state of democracy: key findings, 1975–2015

- There has been much global progress in almost all aspects of democracy since 1975, but the positive trends have flattened out since the mid-1990s. **The current global state of democracy is one of trendless fluctuations.** This means that there are upturns and downturns in individual countries, but no broad tendencies of progress or decline, and signifies democratic steadiness at the highest level in world history.
- **The majority of electoral democracies established after 1975 have survived,** and almost none of the more established electoral democracies have experienced reversals. Since 2005, there have been 24 democratic reversals and 39 democratic transitions. While some countries became electoral democracies for the first time, most of the recent transitions to democracy happened in countries with previous democratic experience.
- The number and proportion of countries that are considered **electoral democracies** have increased during the period. In 1975, competitive elections determined government power in as few as 46 countries (30 per cent); **this number had grown to 132 (68 per cent) by 2016.** One-third of countries are still under autocratic rule.
- In the period 1975–2015 substantial global progress was made in four out of five dimensions emphasized by **International IDEA's comprehensive definition of democracy** (i.e. Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government and Participatory Engagement), while the global level of Impartial Administration has changed little since 1975.
- Positive trends in the **Representative Government** dimension can be seen in all subdimensions (*Clean Elections, Inclusive Suffrage, Free Political Parties and Elected Government*) and all regions. However, stark regional differences remain. On average, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America have higher degrees of representative government than countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific and, especially, the Middle East and Iran. Many countries have formal democratic institutions, but substantial deficiencies in democratic practices.
- The **Fundamental Rights** dimension has witnessed global progress since 1975 in all of its subdimensions (*Access to Justice, Civil Liberties and Social Rights and Equality*). Developments in social rights and equality follow a positive, linear trend, while the trend for access to justice and civil liberties has gone from gradual improvement, to steep progress around 1990, to another period of gradual improvement, to relative stability after 2005. Gender equality has gradually increased in all regions, but at different speeds and starting at different levels.
- The **Checks on Government** dimension (capturing *Effective Parliaments, Judicial Independence and Media Integrity*) has shown substantial improvement since 1975. Progress seems to have come to a halt, as most countries had similar levels of checks on government in 2015 as they did in 2005. There are still notable differences in the extent to which such checks are exercised in various regions, largely following patterns similar to those for representative government.
- The global average of the **Impartial Administration** dimension (covering *Absence of Corruption and Predictable Enforcement*) demonstrates no significant change between 1975 and 2015. Corruption and predictable enforcement are as big a problem today as they were in 1975. Implementing the rule of law in public administration tends to be difficult to change in the short and medium terms. This could partially explain the dissatisfaction with democracy seen in many electoral democracies emerging after 1975.
- Opportunities for—and the realization of—**Participatory Engagement** have generally gained ground, as reflected in each of the four subdimensions related to citizen involvement (*Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Subnational Elections*). A global increase in civil society participation reflects the fact that restrictions on civil society's right to organize have been lifted. Autonomous groups now generally have better working conditions than before, although some countries still uphold (and in some cases have even increased) restrictions on civil society organizations. A global increase in electoral participation in national elections mainly reflects the replacement of non-electoral regimes with electoral regimes. Yet turnout has decreased in several countries with longer traditions of regular, competitive elections. There has been a slight increase in the availability and use of direct democracy mechanisms. However, they are rarely implemented in any region. Opportunities to participate in free and fair subnational elections have increased substantially, with considerable variations between regions.
- The **different aspects of democracy take time to develop.** They are subject to political negotiations, compromises and institutional reform processes. Changes are sometimes abrupt and characterized by major events that demarcate sudden and clear democratic progress or regress, while at other times they are more gradual.

Currently, there are more electoral democracies than autocracies globally, and the largest share of the world's population resides in electoral democracies

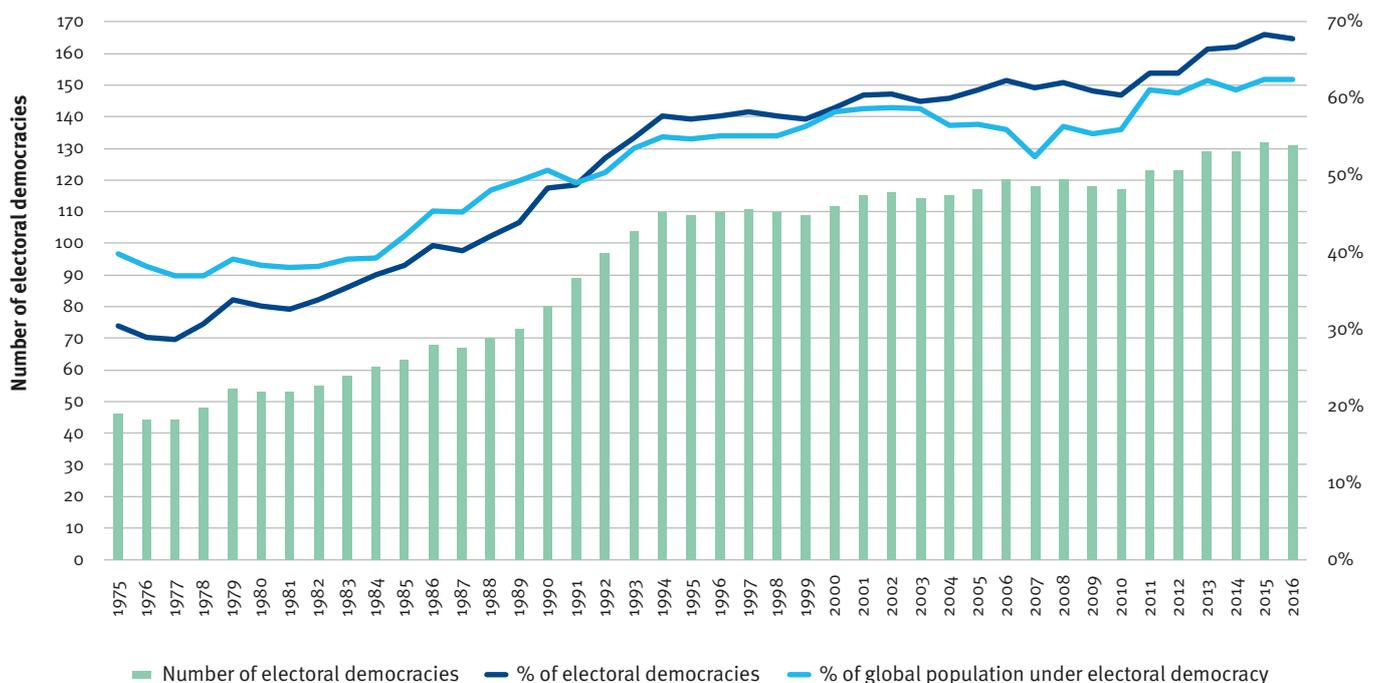
1.3. A first approximation: the spread and resilience of electoral democracies

One way to address some of these questions is to use a narrow (exclusively electoral), crisp (either/or) understanding of democracy and then count how many countries fulfil a given set of criteria for electoral democracy in different years. If the focus is on democratic transitions and reversals, including key events such as founding elections or coups d'état, an electoral and crisp understanding of democracy can be valuable (Collier and Adcock 1999). Figure 1.1 shows the number and proportion of countries considered electoral democracies in the period 1975–2016. It is based on the updated competitive elections indicator from the Index of Electoral Democracy (Skaaning, Gerring and Bartusevicius 2015). This indicator is an attempt to operationalize Schumpeter's (1974: 269) prominent definition of

democracy as 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'. The measure captures whether an electoral regime is on track (meaning that elections take place on a regular basis and are not interrupted, for instance, by a coup d'état) and whether multiparty elections are sufficiently free to allow the opposition to win government power, as judged by country-specific sources such as election reports and studies by recognized country experts. Figure 1.1 demonstrates that the number of electoral democracies has been growing since the late 1970s. In 1975, competitive elections determined government power in as few as 46 countries (30 per cent); this number had grown to 112 (68 per cent) by 2016. Until 1988, the increase was gradual, but between 1989 and 1995 there was an abrupt increase

FIGURE 1.1

Global number and percentage of electoral democracies and share of world population living in electoral democracies, 1975–2016



Notes: The percentage of electoral democracies is affected by the fact that more independent countries emerged during the period. The figures for population size used to calculate the share of the global population living in electoral democracies are taken from the World Development Indicators and Gapminder.

Source: Skaaning, Gerring and Bartusevicius (2015) (Competitive Elections Indicator).

in the share of electoral democracies from 42 per cent to 55 per cent when several Eastern European and sub-Saharan African countries transitioned to democracies. Since then, there have been more electoral democracies than autocracies globally, and the largest share of the world's population has resided in electoral democracies.

A closer look at the last ten years reveals that there is little evidence of a substantial, global decline in democracy. Instead, the number of electoral democracies has increased. The patterns are virtually identical if the sample is restricted to the 155 countries covered by the GSoD indices.

Almost one-third of countries are still under autocratic rule, including major regional powers with large populations such as China, Egypt, Russia and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, there have been 24 democratic reversals since 2005 in countries such as Fiji, Mali, Niger and Thailand. This strongly indicates that some new democracies are not resilient. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that democratization has always involved a mixture of gains and losses (Møller and Skaaning 2013a: Ch. 5). These reversals do not add up to a global decline. With the exception of Venezuela, no countries with over 40 years of continuous electoral democracy have suffered from democratic reversal, and the majority (56 per cent) of electoral democracies created after 1975 have not experience any reversals, such as Benin, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Senegal, and most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and Eastern Europe. Moreover, 39 democratic transitions have taken place since 2005. Some countries, such as Bhutan and Tunisia, became electoral democracies for the first time. Most of the transitions to democracy happened in countries with previous democratic experience, such as Honduras, Mali, Nepal and Sri Lanka. When restricting the sample to the countries covered by the GSoD indices, there have been 32 democratic transitions and 22 reversals since 2005.

Moreover, when electoral democracies turn autocratic, they often democratize again after a few years (Bermeo 2016), as in the Central African Republic, Georgia, Haiti, Honduras, Madagascar, Mali and Nepal. Thailand has experienced four democratic transitions and four reversals since 1975. Many of these countries seem to lack sufficient democratic resilience to avoid such cycles of regime change. Yet based on a narrow focus on the prevalence and resilience of electoral democracies, the evidence does not support the existence of a global, large-scale democratic regression. The question is whether this still applies when undertaking a broad and continuous analysis of the global state of democracy.

1.4. A broad and continuous understanding of democracy

Assessing the state of democracy requires the employment of a more comprehensive understanding of democracy than what is captured by dichotomous, electoral measures. International IDEA (Beetham et al. 2002; Beetham et al. 2008; Landman 2008) advocates a comprehensive definition in its State of Democracy (SoD) framework, which is a tool designed for in-country stakeholders to assess the quality of democracy. The GSoD indices build on a revised version of the SoD conceptual framework to facilitate a multifaceted and nuanced understanding of the global and regional contours of democratic developments (Skaaning 2017).

International IDEA (Beetham et al. 2008: 10–11) defines democracy as 'popular control over decision-makers and political equality of those who exercise that control'. The democratic ideal 'seeks to guarantee equality and basic freedoms; to empower ordinary people; to resolve disagreements through peaceful dialogue; to respect difference; and to bring about political and social renewal without convulsions' (Landman 2008: 17).

Hence, democracy is understood in broader terms than just free elections, and has multiple dimensions. They overlap with features

A closer look at the last ten years reveals that there is little evidence of a substantial, global decline in democracy. Instead, the number of electoral democracies has increased

emphasized by the different traditions of democratic thought associated with the concepts of electoral democracy, liberal democracy, social democracy and participatory democracy (see Coppedge et al. 2011; Cunningham 2002; Held 2006; Møller and Skaaning 2011). The Annex to this report presents a matrix demonstrating which components of the GSoD framework are shared with each of these traditions.

The democratic principles of popular control and political equality are compatible with different political institutions in the form of electoral systems (proportional–majoritarian), government systems (presidential–parliamentary) and state structure (federalist–unitary) at the national, local and supranational levels. They are thus open to a context-sensitive implementation of universal standards of democratic governance around the world.

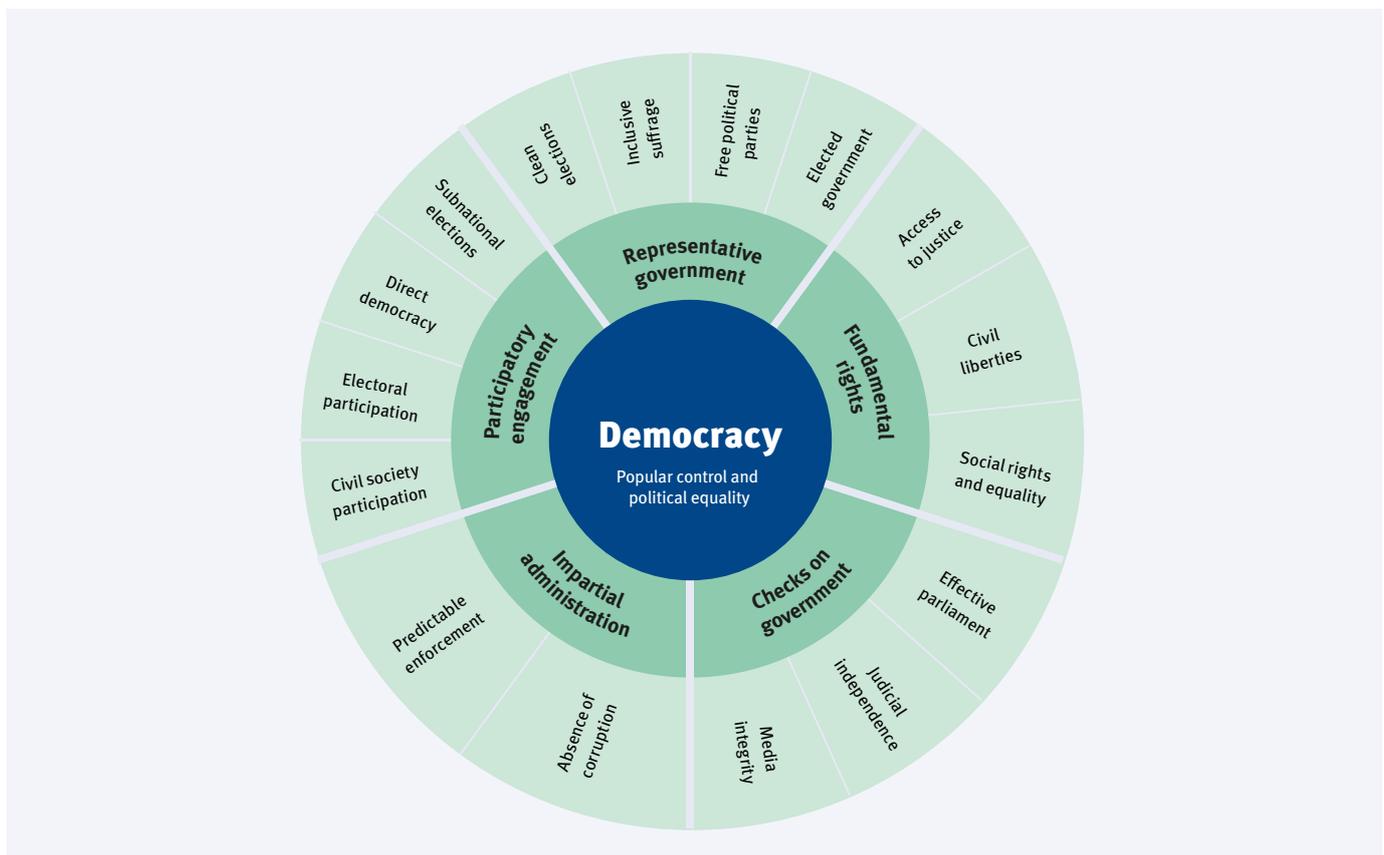
Since democratic systems can be organized in a variety of ways, countries can build their democracy in different ways, and therefore may fulfil these principles to varying degrees. Figure 1.2 illustrates the five dimensions of democracy covered by the GSoD indices.

Representative Government covers the extent to which access to political power is free and equal as signified by competitive, inclusive and regular elections. It has four subdimensions: clean elections, inclusive suffrage, free political parties and elected government.

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 dimension, which significantly overlaps with the international covenants on human rights, has three subdimensions. Two

FIGURE 1.2

Conceptual framework: The Global State of Democracy



of them (fair trials and civil liberties) relate to the concept of liberal democracy, while the third (social rights and equality) relates to the concept of social democracy.

Checks on Government measures the effective control of executive power. It has three subdimensions that are related to the concept of liberal democracy: judicial independence, effective parliament and media integrity.

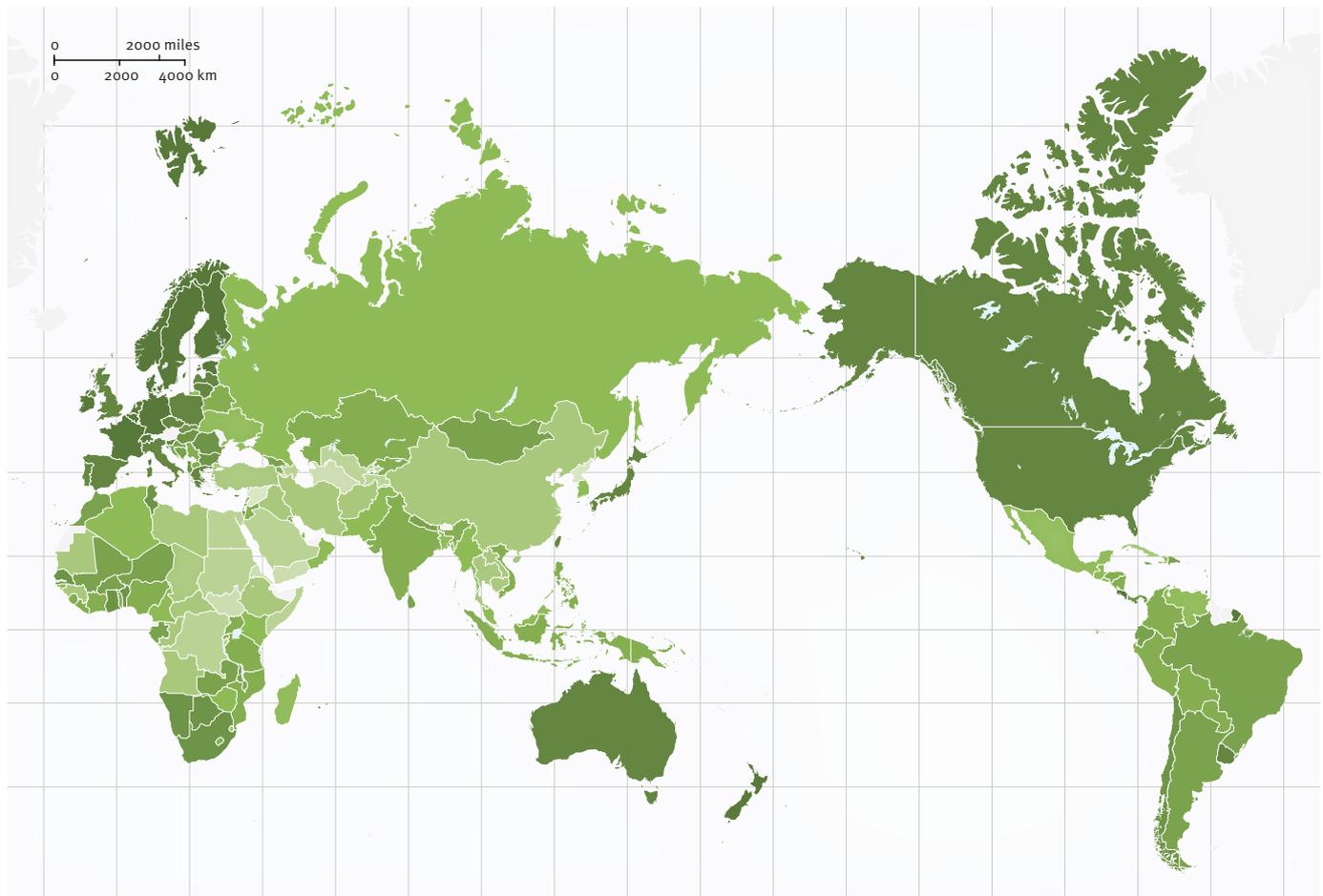
Impartial Administration concerns how fairly and predictably political decisions are implemented, and thus reflects key aspects of the rule of law. This dimension is related

to the concept of liberal democracy, which prescribes that the exercise of power must be rule abiding and predictable. This dimension has two subdimensions: absence of corruption and predictable enforcement.

Participatory Engagement concerns the extent to which instruments for political involvement are available, and the degree to which citizens use them. It is related to the concept of participatory democracy and has four subdimensions: civil-society participation, electoral participation, direct democracy and subnational elections.

FIGURE 1.3

Degree of Fundamental Rights fulfilment, 2015



Notes: Darker shades indicate high scores and light shades reflect low scores. Austria is light due to the lack of data on this dimension.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Fundamental Rights Index).



Since these dimensions, and their respective subdimensions, reflect a broad definition of democracy (see Annex and Skaaning 2017), the indices capture many aspects of popular control and political equality that go beyond the presence of free elections. Moreover, it is assumed that the more the respective dimensions are fulfilled, the more democratic a political system is. Accordingly, the different aspects of democracy can be fulfilled to varying degrees. Figure 1.3 illustrates this point and depicts variations in the extent to which different countries safeguard fundamental human rights. For example, Mongolia, Senegal and Uruguay performed better on this parameter than their neighbours, as indicated by the darker green.

1.5. Assessing the state of democracy worldwide

Scholars have long debated the extent to which free elections, civil liberties, horizontal accountability, the rule of law and popular participation follow parallel trends, and whether some of these features are harder to achieve than others (e.g. Fukuyama 2015; Møller and Skaaning 2011, 2014; O'Donnell 2010). Studies have emphasized that even though many countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean have successfully introduced relatively free elections, their democracies are in many cases deficient regarding checks on government, respect for fundamental rights or impartial administration (e.g. Merkel et al. 2006; O'Donnell 2007; Zakaria 2003).

The number of hybrid or 'grey-zone' regimes has also increased since 1975. These regimes have formal democratic institutions, primarily multiparty elections, but substantial deficiencies persist regarding the integrity of elections or in other dimensions (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Diamond 2002; Merkel 2004; Morlino 2012). Some of them barely meet the criteria for electoral democracies, while electoral integrity in others is so low that they are more accurately described as multiparty electoral autocracies (Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013).

Even in what many consider to be the modern world's first electoral democracy—the United States—there are long-standing and noteworthy shortcomings, including low turnout rates, manipulation of electoral districts (gerrymandering), skewed funding of political campaigns and unequal access to justice (e.g. Braml and Lauth 2011; Dahl 2003; Norris 2017). Studies of democracy and power distribution in the Scandinavian countries—often praised as blueprint democracies—have also identified a number of shortcomings. These include the indirect translation of material resources (large businesses and interest organizations) into political influence, and biases regarding who participates in elections and joins political parties (under-representation of young people, relatively poor people with low levels of education and ethnic minorities) (Østerud and Selle 2006; Togeby et al. 2003; Petersson 1991).

These examples underline the importance of assessing degrees of democracy and degrees of change when identifying patterns of progress and regress in democracy trends over the last ten years (e.g. Diamond 2016; Levitsky and Way 2015; Merkel 2010; Møller and Skaaning 2013b). Far from all democratic improvements and setbacks are abrupt. Not all changes are characterized by major events that demarcate sudden and clear democratic progress or regress. For example, it took struggles over several generations, temporary setbacks and adjustments before countries such as Costa Rica, France, Germany, Japan, Sweden and the USA reached their current levels of democracy. The different aspects of democracy take time to develop, and are subject to political negotiations, compromises and institutional reform processes. These factors are essential for cultivating a well-functioning democracy.

The GSoD indices provide a nuanced perspective on democratic developments by identifying varying degrees of change on the multiple dimensions of democratic governance. Ultimately, the descriptive comparison of global and regional trends can indicate the circumstances under which various aspects of

democracy move in the direction of (or away from) the democratic ideals they represent. Since democracy is a multifaceted concept, the framework does not collapse all the scores for the different dimensions into a single score.

In addition, all overviews based on the GSoD indices only use countries as the main unit of measurement (i.e. large and small countries are weighted equally). Additional analyses (not shown) demonstrate that the global trends largely remain the same if countries are assessed based on their population, although some of the upturns tend to be less pronounced and the levels a bit lower, because large countries have, on average, undergone fewer democratic changes and are somewhat less democratic in most dimensions.

A nuanced, short-term perspective on democratic resilience from 2005 to 2015

This section uses the GSoD indices to determine how many countries experienced substantial positive or negative changes in the five dimensions of democracy from 2005 to 2015.

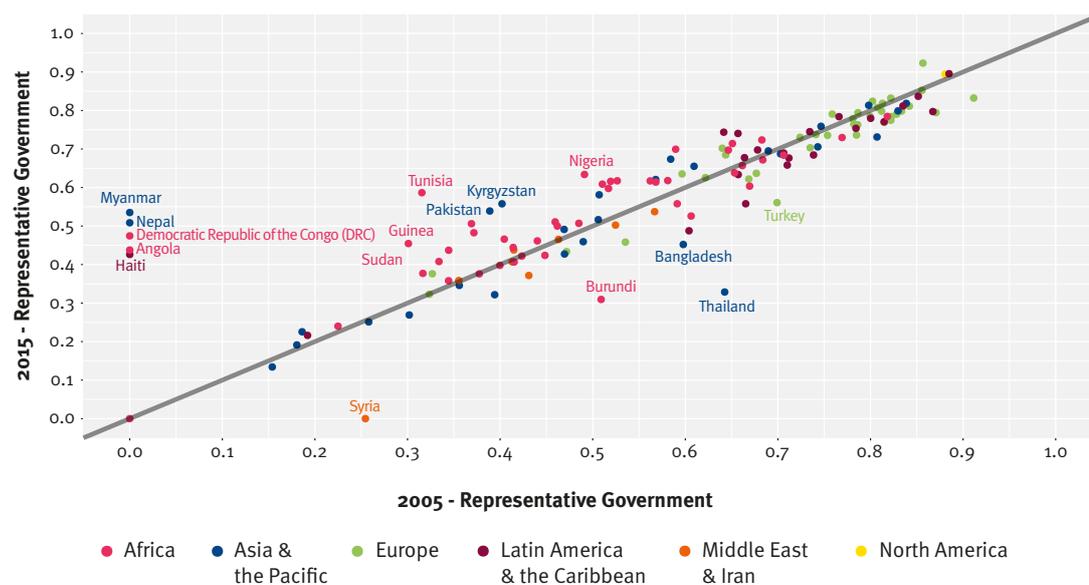
Figure 1.4 demonstrates that most countries' performance did not change substantially on the Representative Government dimension: those placed on the diagonal received the same score in 2005 and 2015. The countries showing the largest declines are Bangladesh, Burundi, Syria, Thailand and Turkey. The most substantial improvements can be seen in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Sudan and Tunisia.

Note, however, that none of the cases with substantial increases are close to the level of the best-performing cases, such as France and Uruguay. Tellingly, Myanmar has recently experienced significant liberalization and a democratic opening (Barany 2016), but there are still problems with voter registration and violence. In Angola, where election quality is even lower, the improvement is due to the fact that no elections were held between the onset of civil war in 1992 and 2008 (KAS 2008).

The GSoD indices provide a nuanced perspective on democratic developments by identifying varying degrees of change on the multiple dimensions of democratic governance

FIGURE 1.4

Changes in country performance on the Representative Government dimension, 2005–15



Notes: The vertical interval from the dots to the diagonal signifies the scale of the change from 2005 to 2015. Countries above the diagonal have improved their scores, while those below have regressed. Countries placed directly on the diagonal have kept the same score. The cases demonstrating the largest changes are labelled with the country names.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Representative Government Index).

Many of the countries that have exhibited the most progress in checks on government have also made progress in the other dimensions

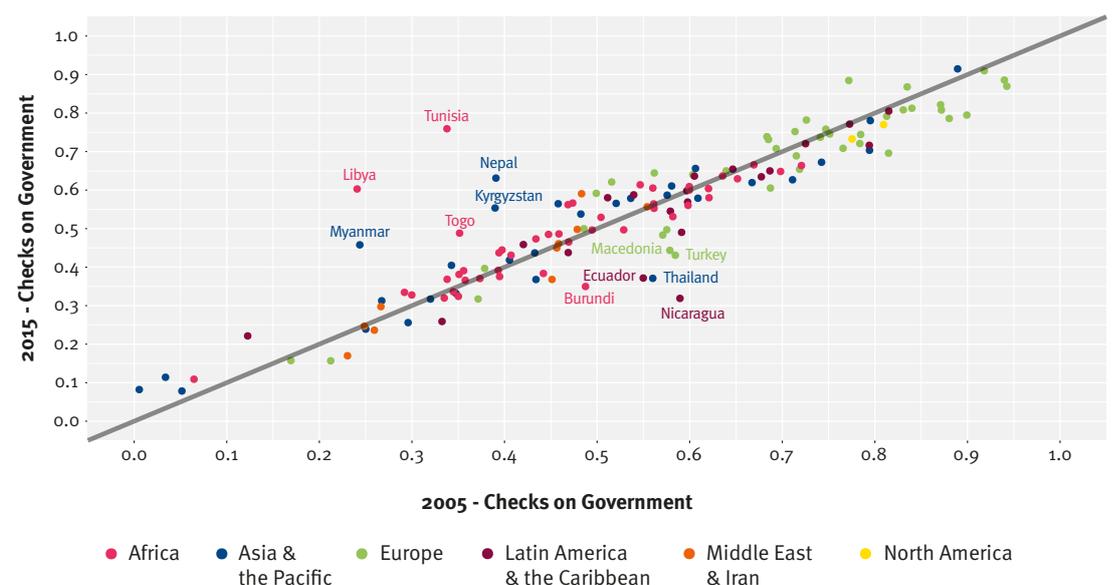
While the Fundamental Rights dimension demonstrates even greater stability, some countries—Burundi, Mauritania, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and Yemen—demonstrate substantial regression. Several of these have recently experienced fierce political struggles in the form of coup attempts, harassment of opposition members or civil wars. Major improvements have been made in Libya, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Tunisia. However, although the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in 2010 led to an improvement in civil liberties, the civil war in Libya is currently pulling the country in the opposite direction (HRW 2017). Despite recent gains, the other cases mentioned also leave considerable room for further improvements, as indicated by the countries shaded light green in Figure 1.3.

The general trend concerning checks on government (i.e. the effective control of executive power) reinforces the pattern described above. Most countries' levels of checks on government remained relatively

unchanged between 2005 and 2015. According to Figure 1.5, those experiencing the most significant losses were Burundi, Ecuador, Macedonia, Nicaragua, Thailand and Turkey. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas under the leadership of President Daniel Ortega have gradually undermined control of the executive, which signifies a partial return to their style of rule in the 1980s (Shifter 2016; Thaler 2017). Recep Tayyip Erdogan's concentration of power, appointment of loyal supporters in the courts and public sector media, mass detention of critics and dismissal of critical public employees (including many university professors) in Turkey has also made many international headlines. The decreases in checks on government under the former VMRO-DPMNE government in Macedonia (Gjuzelov 2015) and under the former president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa (Conaghan 2016; Fleischman 2016), are less well known. Many of the countries that have exhibited the most progress in checks on government have also made progress in the other dimensions. They

FIGURE 1.5

Changes in country performance on the Checks on Government dimension, 2005–15

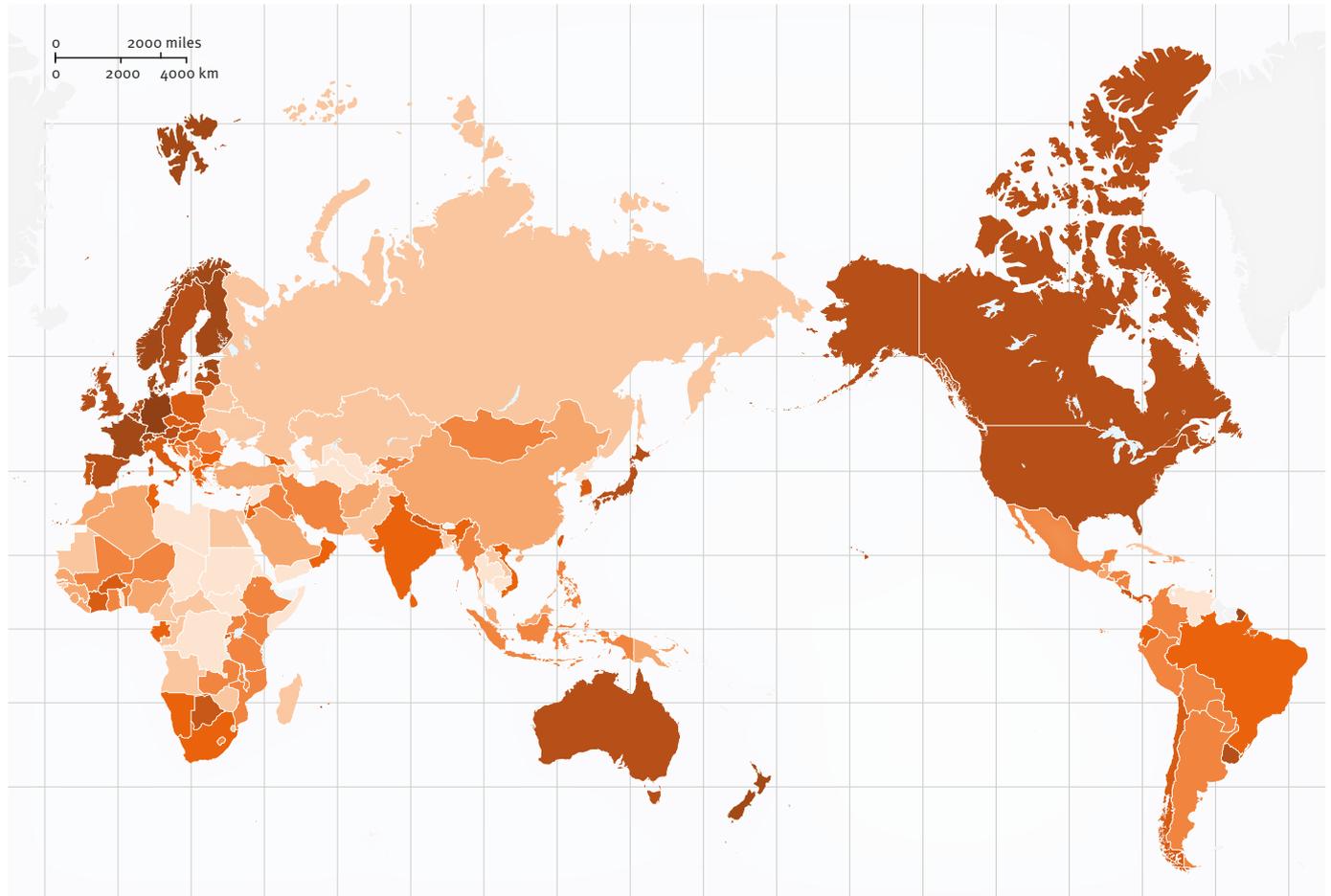


Notes: The vertical interval from the dots to the diagonal signifies the scale of the change from 2005 to 2015. Countries above the diagonal have improved their scores, while those below have regressed. Countries placed directly on the diagonal have kept the same score. The cases demonstrating the largest changes are labelled with the country names

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Checks on Government Index).

FIGURE 1.6

Degree of Impartial Administration, 2015



Notes: Darker shades indicate high scores and light shades reflect low scores.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Impartial Administration Index).



count Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Myanmar, Nepal, Togo and Tunisia. Again, Libya’s achievements should be interpreted with great caution, since two fighting groups each claim to have the right to govern the country.

The data on impartial administration reinforces the conclusion about stability when comparing 2005 and 2015. Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Latvia, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and Tunisia have experienced substantial progress in fighting corruption and ensuring more transparent and predictable enforcement. In Guinea, the Condé administration has made serious attempts to

fight decades of mismanagement (Bangoura 2015), and Latvia benefits from recent anti-corruption reforms (OECD 2015). However, Figure 1.6 demonstrates that none of these countries is among the best-performing states (e.g. Australia, Costa Rica, Estonia and Switzerland), and several countries, such as Hungary, Madagascar, Mauretania, Syria, Turkey and Venezuela, have suffered substantial declines. The negative cases are often affected by violent conflict or government attempts to centralize power. In Madagascar, a period of political turmoil and transition has resulted in institutional decay and increased corruption (TI 2014).

To summarize, for the first four dimensions, scores have not changed significantly in the large majority of countries since 2005, and substantial negative changes have generally been outweighed or at least balanced by positive changes in other countries.

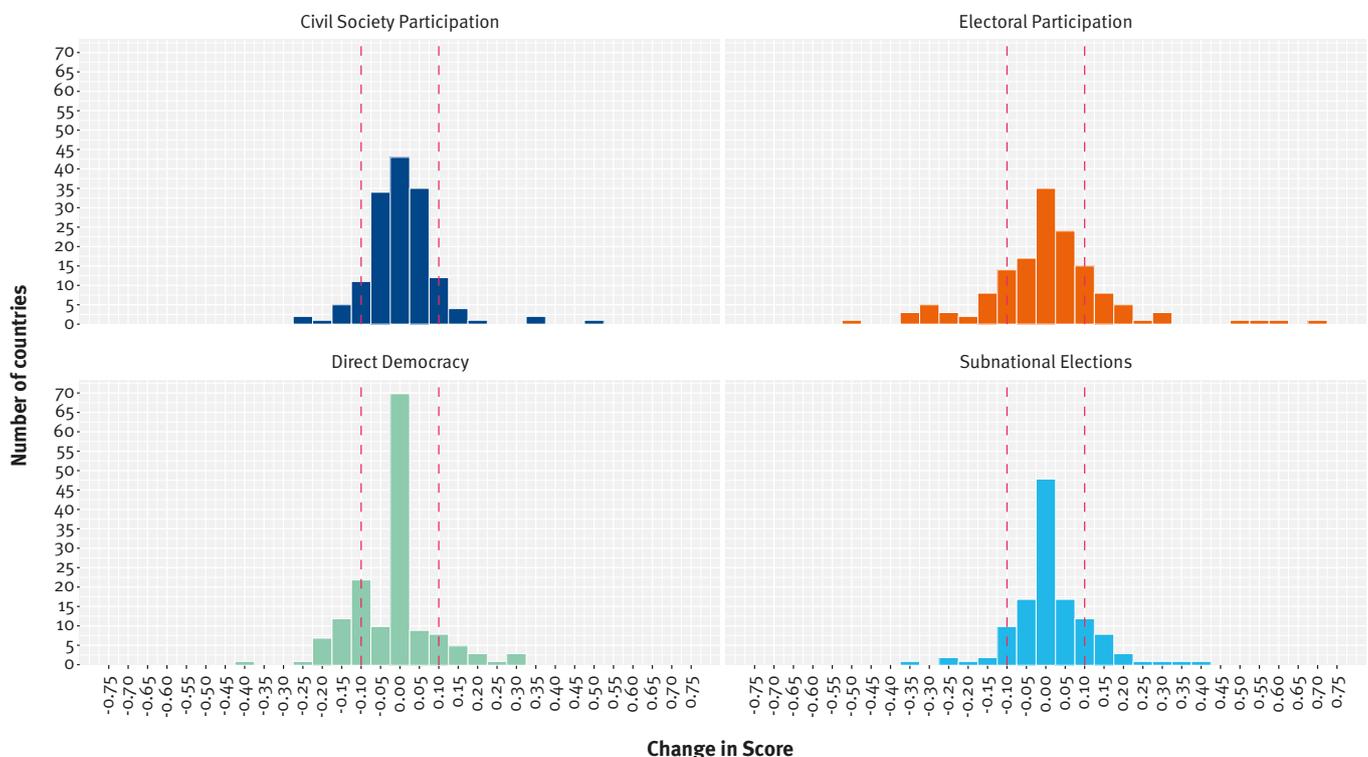
Since the subdimensions of participatory engagement (i.e. Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Subnational Elections) capture different phenomena, the GSoD indices do not aggregate them into a single index as is the case in the other four dimensions. The subdimensions are depicted separately in Figure 1.7, which illustrates that most countries had rather similar scores in 2005 and 2015. Few countries have undergone substantial negative and positive changes, as indicated by the low bars to the left

and right, respectively, of the red dotted lines. This finding applies to all four subdimensions.

One of the most interesting findings from this overview is that civil society participation has increased significantly in several African and Asian states, such as Côte D'Ivoire, Liberia, Myanmar, Nepal and Tunisia. In most of these cases, the improvements reflect the fact that severe restrictions on the rights of civil society to organize have been abandoned, and autonomous groups now have better working conditions than before. Other countries, such as Albania, Azerbaijan, Serbia, Turkey and Thailand, have been characterized by the opposite trend. The most obvious negative tendency is the relatively large drop in electoral turnout in quite a few countries, including Bangladesh, Cyprus, Greece, Guinea and the

FIGURE 1.7

Changes in Participatory Engagement by subdimension, 2005–15



Notes: The red dotted lines indicate a substantial change defined as 0.1 points on the scale ranging from 0 to 1, i.e. 10 per cent of the scale range. The left side of the scale (negative scores) illustrates declines, and the right side (positive scores) gains in the respective subdimensions. The heights of the bars indicate how many countries are characterized by the different intervals of change between 2005 and 2015.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Civil Society Participation Index, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy, Subnational Elections Index).

USA. Yet, these downturns are balanced out globally by major upturns, which are often related to the introduction or reintroduction of elections, as in Angola, Myanmar and Nepal, among others.

1.6. A nuanced, long-term perspective on democratic progress from 1975 to 2015

To further analyse the global state of democracy, an overview of long-term trends associated with the different dimensions and subdimensions of democracy is also needed. The number of electoral democracies was nearly constant at a relatively low level (fluctuating between 35 and 45) from 1950 to 1975, and pessimism flourished due to democratic reversals in Latin America and the Caribbean and several failures to introduce democratic government in the many newly independent countries (Møller and Skaaning 2013a). The explosion in electoral democracies in the aftermath of the third wave of democratization beginning with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal in 1974 (Huntington 1991) is demonstrated above. However, the variances in degree within different dimensions have yet to be documented during this period.

Representative Government: significant improvements across regions

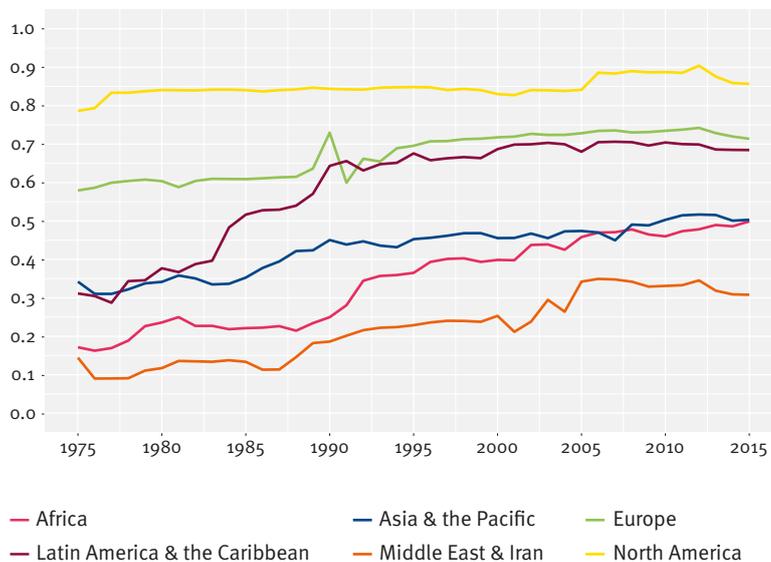
Many consider representative government, which reflects the extent to which government power is determined by free elections, to be the most essential aspect of modern democracy (Beetham 1999; Coppedge et al. 2011; Merkel 2004). Figure 1.8 demonstrates a general improvement in the state of representative government in all regions of the world (except for the region of North America, which is characterized by a stable, high level during the whole period). A steady increase until the late 1980s was followed by more abrupt growth between 1989 and 1991, around the end of the Cold War. Thereafter, slow growth has been followed by stability; since the mid-2000s, national improvements and setbacks have averaged out at the global level.

The underlying data linked to the subdimensions of representative government indicate that universal suffrage is close to being achieved in a large majority of countries, and that the great majority of governments in the sample are formally accountable to the electorate via elections. Many countries do well on the formal criteria related to universal suffrage and elected offices, which are now mentioned in the great majority of constitutions and legislation around the world, including those of most autocracies. Yet the empirical evidence indicates that formal institutions are relatively easy to introduce, and do not necessarily have a significant impact if the incumbents control the opposition and manipulate elections.

Nonetheless, since 1975 elections have become more common as well as cleaner (i.e. less fraud, manipulation and irregularities), and political parties are facing fewer barriers to organizing and participating in elections. However, many countries still have room to improve the quality of their elections and their treatment of opposition parties. There is a gap between the

FIGURE 1.8

Representative Government: regional trends, 1975–2015



Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Representative Government Index).

Since 1975 elections have become more common as well as cleaner, and political parties are facing fewer barriers to organize and participate in elections

states doing best in representative government (such as Costa Rica and Sweden, which scored close to the maximum of 1 on the scale in 2015) and most other states. Many countries severely violate the principle of representative government, which means that the third wave of democratization has had less impact on this core dimension of democracy than many hoped for—and expected—in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Fukuyama 1992; Lijphart 2000; Carothers 2002).

The global trends mask a variety of developments at the regional and country levels. By the mid-1970s, representative governments were largely restricted to a small group of countries in North and West Europe, North America and Oceania, although exceptions included Botswana, Costa Rica, India and Japan. Democratic institutions and practices in other parts of the world were then introduced (in some cases reintroduced) with the third wave of democratization. Democratic systems are now found in countries with more diverse combinations of socio-economic development, culture, national unity and state capacity.

The positive trend in the Representative Government dimension has manifested itself in all regions (see the Annex for details about the regional division of countries used in this publication). Europe experienced some early improvements when Greece, Portugal and Spain introduced free elections in the 1970s. Thereafter, the Americas experienced a steep growth pattern due to democratic openings in, for example, Argentina, Brazil, Honduras and Peru, followed by a less steep but still significant upward trend in Asia and the Pacific in the 1980s, when the Philippines and the Republic of Korea introduced democratic reforms. Dramatic changes then took place in Europe when communist regimes collapsed in 1989–91 and were replaced by electoral regimes with free elections in many countries, such as the Baltic States, Bulgaria and Hungary. In the early to mid-1990s, African countries saw major improvements. Governments selected

in relatively free multiparty elections replaced military dictatorships, one-party regimes and racial oligarchies in many countries, such as Ghana, Senegal and South Africa.

However, stark regional differences remain. The countries in North America, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean generally fulfil the criteria for representative government to a higher degree than those in the Middle East and Iran, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. While quite a few countries in the Middle East are monarchies without multiparty elections, Asia and the Pacific and especially Africa have many hybrid regimes. In such regimes, the formal criteria for representative government are fulfilled by holding multiparty elections, but there are substantial problems regarding electoral integrity, media working conditions, opposition parties and checks on government (Cheeseman 2015; Diamond 2008; Norris 2015; Rakner and van de Walle 2009). These regimes tend to have a strong incumbency bias, which undermines the integrity of elections by creating an uneven playing field for political competition (Levitsky and Way 2010) and sometimes results in electoral violence or deepens existing conflicts and polarizations.

Some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as Venezuela, and post-communist Europe face similar problems. Nonetheless, these parts of the world have seen the largest positive change since 1975. The average score of representative government for Latin America and the Caribbean more than doubled from about 0.30 in 1975 to almost 0.70 in 2015. Figure 1.9 shows that these increases are reflected in all subdimensions of representative government. Universal suffrage has become the official norm in all countries of the region. Moreover, almost all countries in the region have multiparty elections; Cuba is a consistent exception. Electoral malpractices have also been reduced in Latin America and the Caribbean, and political party freedoms have increased. Nonetheless, improvements came to a halt in the mid-1990s, and there is a notable distance between the regional average

for Latin America and the Caribbean and the scores of the best-performing countries in the region, such as Chile and Uruguay.

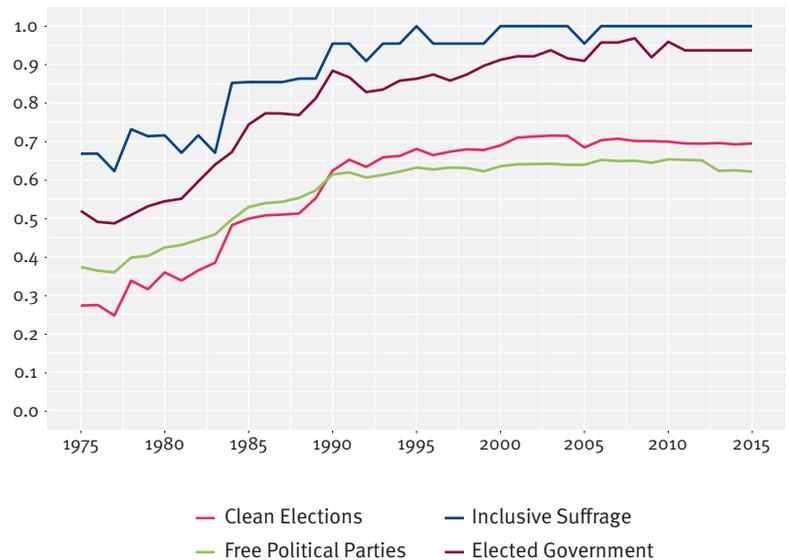
Fundamental Rights: gradual improvements, continued threats

Individual human rights in the form of access to fair trials and civil liberties, as emphasized by liberal theories of democracy, and social rights and equality, as emphasized by theories of social democracy, are important to ensure effective popular control and political equality. Thus, a well-functioning democracy must have a set of fundamental rights that is continuously protected. The regional trends illustrating respect for fundamental rights (see Figure 1.10) are very similar to those for representative government. North America and Europe generally perform better than Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, while the Middle East and Iran shows the poorest achievement. However, most regions have experienced positive trends since 1975; Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced the greatest changes. Country scores in the region began at a very low level and now rank in an intermediate position among the regions. Economic growth and redistribution policies in several Latin American and Caribbean countries have positively influenced social rights and equality (Osueke and Tsounta 2014), whereas the end of civil wars in Central America (El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua) and the Andean region (Colombia, Peru) has improved access to justice and civil liberties. Unfortunately, other types of violence related to drug trafficking and urban crime are very frequent in this region (UN 2014).

Citizens still face extreme violations of fundamental civil and political rights in countries such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Turkmenistan (e.g. personal integrity, freedom of expression and fair trial). However, it has become increasingly common for governments to use more selective, targeted, and less violent and comprehensive repression (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Way 2010; Schedler 2013). This includes legislation that is presented as legitimate, harmless and in

FIGURE 1.9

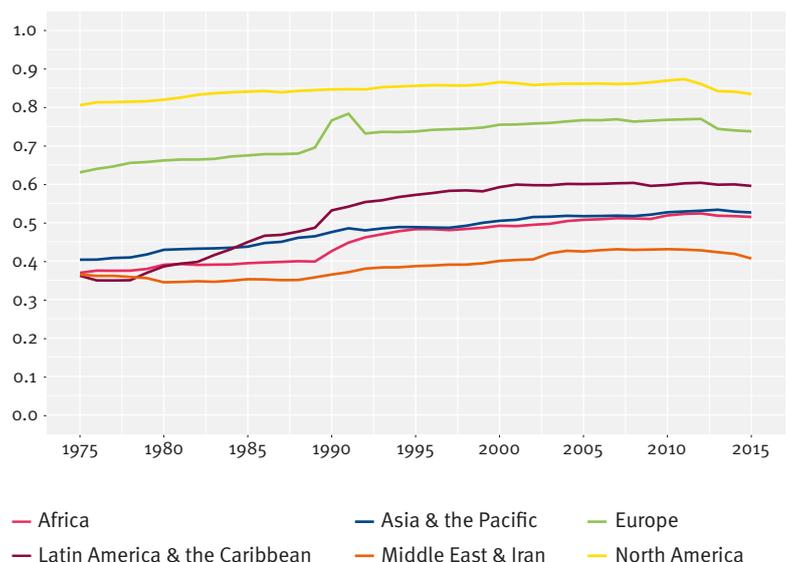
Representative Government subdimensions: Latin America and the Caribbean, 1975–2015



Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Clean Elections Index, Inclusive Suffrage Index, Free Political Parties Index, Elected Government Index).

FIGURE 1.10

Fundamental Rights: regional trends, 1975–2015



Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Fundamental Rights Index).

It has become increasingly common for governments to use more selective, targeted, and less violent and comprehensive repression. This includes legislation that is presented as legitimate, harmless and in the interest of the common good, but which is used to gradually silence critical voices and undermine the opposition.

the interest of the common good, but which is used to gradually silence critical voices and undermine the opposition, as has happened in Russia, for instance (Treisman 2017). These tactics are more sophisticated than outright censorship or imprisoning or killing opposition members, and thus are sometimes more difficult to identify.

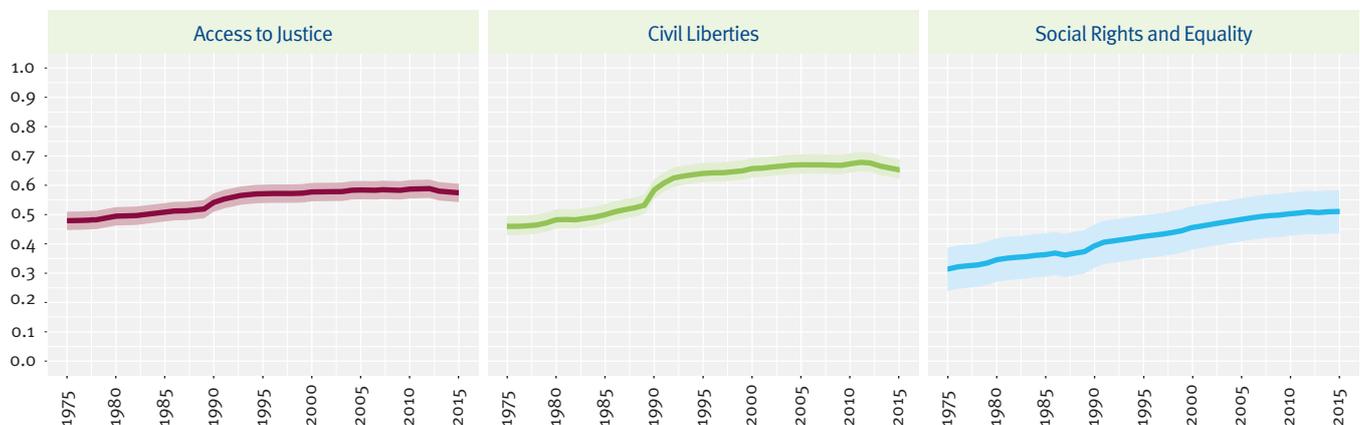
In other parts of the world, problems with fundamental rights are more closely related to social inequality and a lack of resources. In many developing countries, large portions of the population lack access to basic education, health care and social security. Various forms of discrimination and disparity in the distribution of economic and other types of resources are linked to 'low-intensity citizenship' (where a state is unable to enforce its laws and policies among selected social groups, distinguished by identity, class or gender), which O'Donnell (1993: 1361) describes in relation to many South American countries. This concept refers to a situation in which individuals and groups lack recognition and resources, and are thus disempowered to gain political influence. Accordingly, they fall short of achieving full democratic citizenship (i.e. equality in political and legal matters).

The picture is even more diverse at the country level. Some countries, such as Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Turkmenistan, engage in severe violations of virtually all democratic rights. In other countries, such as Guatemala, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, it is mostly selected social groups (distinguished by identity, class or gender) that have 'low-intensity democratic citizenship'. In these cases, members of groups that comprise persons disadvantaged due to 'age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, economic and migration status' (UN 2016: 1) do not obtain the services and treatment from public authorities to which they are entitled as citizens (MRG 2016). This type of exclusion limits, by definition, the extent to which disadvantaged and marginalized groups can participate in political life.

The exclusion of citizen groups in different domains affects their voting behaviour. While these groups may not be subjected to formal limits on voting or electing the political leadership, social and economic exclusion may influence their ability to participate in political life, which indicates that exclusions and inequalities in different domains tend to reinforce each other (UN 2016).

FIGURE 1.11

Fundamental Rights, Access to Justice, Civil Liberties and Social Rights and Equality: global trends, 1975–2015



Notes: The light-shaded bands around the lines demarcate the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimates.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Access to Justice Index, Civil Liberties Index and Social Rights and Equality Index).

The GSoD indices do not show steep, global declines in the three key components of fundamental rights: access to justice, civil liberties, and social rights and equality (see Figure 1.11). However, the data indicate that developments in social rights and equality are on a different track than access to justice and civil liberties, as they follow a positive, linear trend. The other subdimensions follow a pattern like representative government—a gradual increase, growth between 1985 and 1995, and then relative stability in the global average. However, there is a dip in civil liberties at the very end of the period. It is not statistically significant, but could be a warning sign that deserves to be taken seriously.

Subregional differences regarding gains in fundamental rights over time are noteworthy. For example, Europe has large subregional differences in access to justice. A small gradual improvement in north and western Europe is paralleled by southern European countries, which are still at a lower level, after a sudden rise in the late 1970s when authoritarian regimes ended in Greece, Portugal and Spain. A decade later, Eastern European citizens' access to justice improved due to the collapse of communist regimes. Yet access to justice improved more in East-Central European countries compared to post-Soviet European countries.

The gap between European subregions in citizens' access to justice mirrors similar gaps between these subregions in most other aspects of democracy. It continued to widen until most countries in East-Central Europe joined the European Union in 2004 or 2007. Since then, national political elites do not seem to have been able (or willing) to improve the situation.

Several Eastern European governments, such as those in Hungary and Poland, have recently attempted to undermine civil liberties as well as checks on government (Council of Europe 2017; Dawson and Hanley 2016; Greskovits 2015). After the Law and Justice Party won the 2015 national elections in Poland, it used its power to amend the laws governing

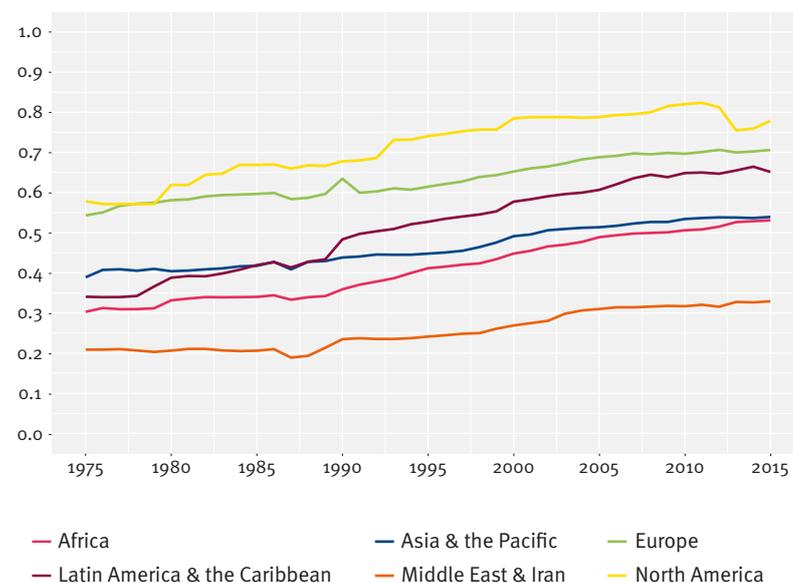
the judiciary and public media organizations, so that it could make 'friendly' management appointments and adapt editorial policies to make them more sympathetic to the government. In Hungary, Prime Minister Victor Orbán and his Fidesz Party have undermined the autonomy of public media, research institutions and the judiciary through new regulations and appointment procedures.

Looking at subregions is one way to apply a disaggregate perspective on developments; another is to focus on one of the five subcomponent indices for civil liberties or one of the three subcomponent indices for social rights and equality included in the GSoD data set. Among the latter is the Gender Equality Index. Figure 1.12 shows that gender equality has gradually increased in all regions, but at different speeds and starting at different levels. North America and Europe have seen positive trends, however obstacles to gender equality remain, particularly related to equal pay and representation in leadership positions in both the private and public sectors. In the regions with lower levels

Gender equality has gradually increased in all regions, but at different speeds and starting at different levels. In relative terms, much progress has been made, but in absolute terms, women hold far from an equal share of seats in parliaments and cabinets

FIGURE 1.12

Gender Equality: regional trends, 1975–2015



Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Gender Equality Index).

of gender equality, there is a noteworthy gap between the Middle East and Iran and the two other regions (Africa, and Asia and the Pacific), indicating the need for improvement in the Middle East and Iran.

Latin America and the Caribbean have made a remarkable jump from about 0.35 to 0.65 on the scale, which is relative to the sample: a score of 1 does not signify full gender equality, but merely the best performance registered in any of the included country–years.

Two of the indicators used to construct the GSoD gender equality index capture female representation in parliaments and cabinets. They show that the global average of women representatives in parliament has increased from around 7 per cent in 1975 to 15 per cent in 2015, whereas the share of women in cabinets has gone up from 5 per cent in the late 1980s to 14 per cent in 2015. Hence in relative terms, much progress has been made, but in absolute terms, women hold far from an equal share of seats in parliaments and cabinets.

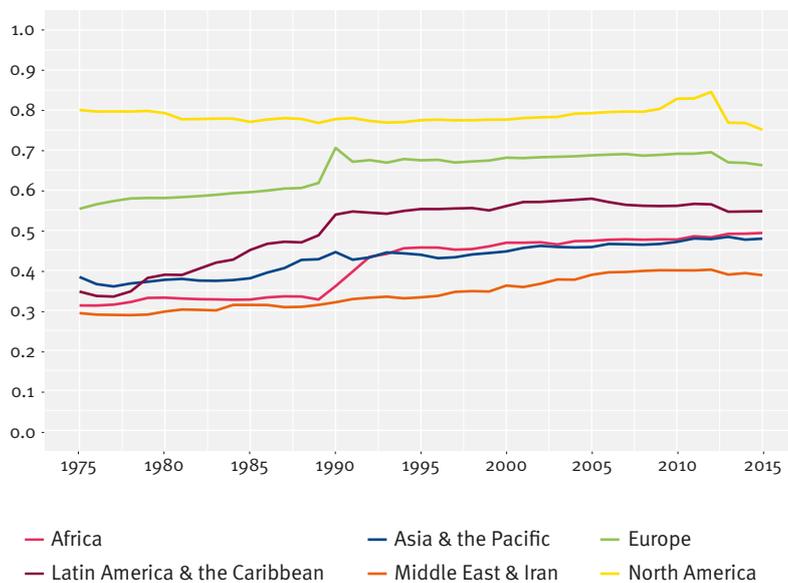
Checks on Government: sudden upturns, followed by stability

According to liberal democratic theory, an active legislature, an independent judiciary, and a critical and pluralistic press need to continuously check the government to ensure it does not abuse political power. Taking the situation in 1975 as a baseline, checks on government have been on the rise all over the world since then (see Figure 1.13). However, there are still notable regional differences in the extent to which such checks are exercised. Africa and Asia and the Pacific generally lag behind Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. The regional averages hide large differences between the trajectories of individual countries within the same region. For example, checks on government are currently much stronger in Sweden than in Russia, in Costa Rica than in Venezuela, in Ghana than in Ethiopia, and in Japan than in China.

Subtle attempts to undermine democracy by constraining the powers and autonomy of courts, the media and parliament are widespread in all regions. Efficiency and national interest are often used as an excuse to increase the powers of the executive at the expense of parliaments, for example President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's efforts in 2017 to change the Turkish Constitution to increase and prolong his grip on power. Similarly, the Polish Law and Justice Party recently tabled legislation endangering the independence of the judiciary and moved to 'neuter the constitutional court; to take control of the state media; to defund unfriendly non-governmental organizations or regulate them into irrelevance; and to put its own people in charge of public institutions' (Hanley and Dawson 2017). Other examples include President Blaise Compaoré's attempt to seek an unconstitutional third term in Burkina Faso in 2014 and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's gradual concentration of power by partially replacing the Congress, Supreme Court, electoral authorities and the attorney general with new bodies filled with his

FIGURE 1.13

Checks on Government: regional trends, 1975–2015



Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Checks on Government Index).

political allies. The problems have continued and in some respects increased since Nicolás Maduro took over the presidency from Chávez in 2013, such as the recent attempts to strip the opposition-led National Assembly of its few remaining powers (Sabatini 2016).

Frequently used means to concentrate power and silence critics include the abuse of libel and tax laws, excessive restrictions on public access to administrative and political documents, and biased appointments of judges, members of media boards and public officials (Huq and Ginsburg forthcoming; Levitsky and Way 2010; Ottaway 2003). Yet attempts to curb opposition and secure power are not always successful. President Compaoré was forced out of power by extensive demonstrations in 2014, and in the following year Maithripala Sirisena won the presidency in Sri Lanka and kept his promise to roll back some of the authoritarian measures and power concentration introduced by his predecessor, Mahinda Rajapaksa (DeVotta 2016; Dibbert 2016).

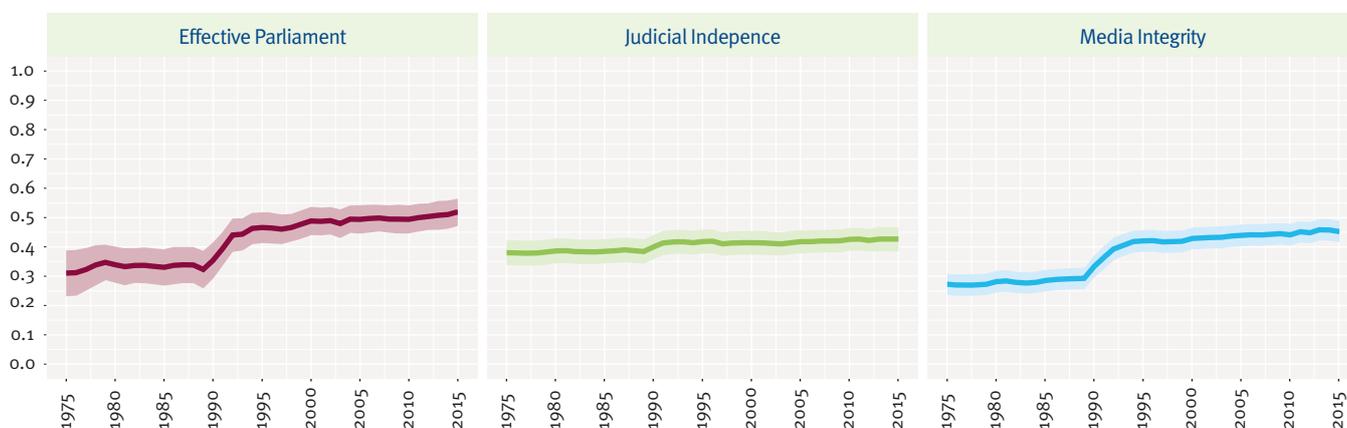
These attempts can be understood by revisiting the challenge of weak institutions and the strong focus on the executive branch in some

political systems, which undercut the mandate and influence of parliamentary institutions to perform their law-making and supervising roles. Recent events in sub-Saharan Africa, post-communist Europe and South America signal that this dimension requires attention (Bogaards and Elischer 2016; Dawson and Hanley 2016; Luna and Vergara 2016).

In relation to the Checks on Government subdimensions, Figure 1.14 focuses on Africa, which had the lowest levels from the outset. Nonetheless, the African trends on effective parliament, judicial independence and media integrity are quite representative of the trends found in other regions (not shown). The scores indicate that, in relative terms, media integrity has experienced the largest positive change, followed by more effective parliaments. The data indicate that the level of judicial independence has hardly changed. Nonetheless, although parliaments and particularly the media provide more checks on African governments today than in the past, the average performance on these features is relatively low compared to more established democracies in Canada, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

FIGURE 1.14

Checks on Government: Africa, 1975–2015



Notes: The light-shaded bands around the lines demarcate the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimates.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Effective Parliament Index, Judicial Independence Index and Media Integrity Index).

Impartial Administration: standstill at different levels

The GSoD indices also assess impartial administration—the fair and predictable implementation of public policies. Unfair and unpredictable implementation of official laws and policies undermines the rule of law. That is, a large discrepancy between laws and policies, on the one hand, and practices, on the other hand, affects the fulfilment of the democratic principles of popular control and political equality.

When looking at global developments in impartial administration, the findings stand out from most other aspects of democracy because this feature has not experienced any significant change (see Figure 1.15). In other words, corruption and predictable enforcement are as big a problem today as they were in 1975. This stability indicates that it is harder to introduce positive changes in fair and predictable public administration than in representative government or respect for civil liberties. In other words, access to political power and respect for different kinds of liberties

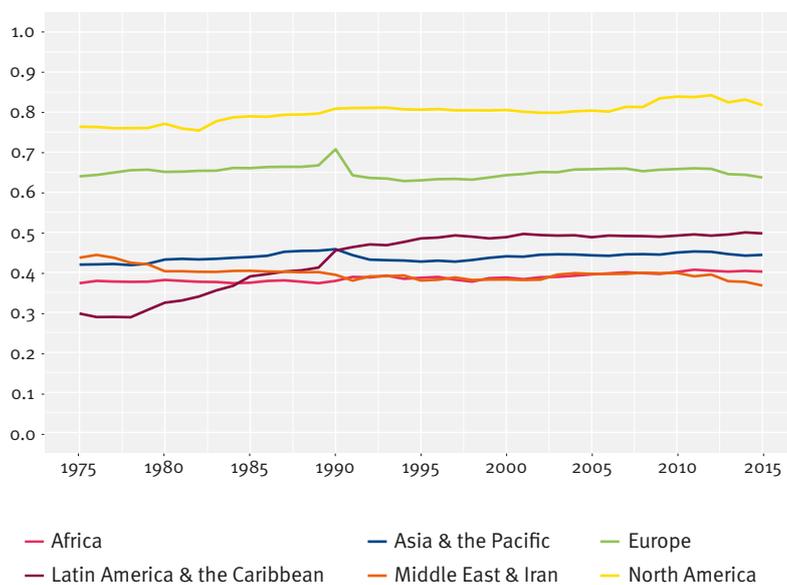
are easier to change formally depending on the design of the constitutional system, at least in the short term, than implementing the rule of law in public administration (see especially Mazzuca 2010; Møller and Skaaning 2014; O'Donnell 2010). This is troublesome, because an impartial administration influences the provision of public goods and services, public trust and satisfaction—and may even be more important than representative government (Rothstein 2011).

When considering trends at the regional level, the data reveal that only Latin America and the Caribbean experienced significant improvements in relation to impartial administration until the 1990s as countries moved away from authoritarian regimes. Europe even experienced a decline after the collapse of communist regimes. This finding is mostly related to nepotism and corruption influenced by the transition from planned to market economies (Holmes 2006). Moreover, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia into many independent countries in the early 1990s means that these areas now have a relatively greater weight than West European countries when calculating the regional average than before. This tends to decrease the scores, because the administrations in the former set of countries are generally less impartial than those found in Western Europe.

The two subindices linked to impartial administration, namely predictable enforcement and the absence of corruption, show that the world averages are quite stable for both components. Their developments since 1975 mirror each other: a small decline in the absence of corruption (that is, an increase in corruption) is observed at the same time as a slight increase in predictable enforcement. However, these changes have not yet been significant enough to warrant strong conclusions. At the regional level, this tendency applies to Africa and Asia and the Pacific, but not to Europe, or to Latin America and the Caribbean. Studies have shown that there is considerable global variation in

FIGURE 1.15

Impartial Administration: regional trends, 1975–2015



Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Impartial Administration Index).

the impartiality of public administrations, and that ineffective and corrupt institutions tend to persist (Holmberg, Rothstein and Nasiritousi 2009; Rothstein 2011; Dahlberg, Linde and Holmberg 2015).

Participatory Engagement: global progress, but room for expansion

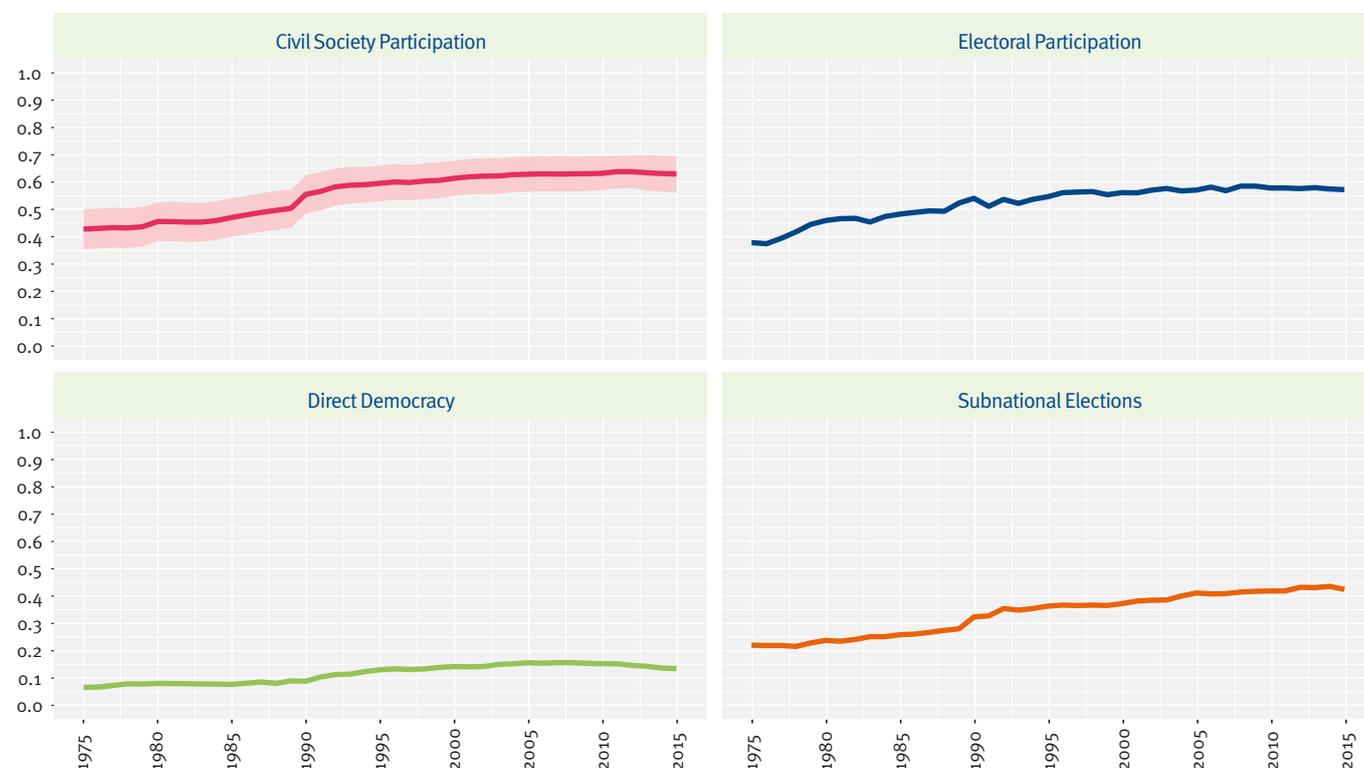
According to supporters of participatory democracy, vibrant democracy requires active citizen participation—during and between elections—as well as national representative institutions and fundamental rights. Politically engaged citizens must also be involved in different phases and levels of political agenda setting and decision-making.

The GSoD indices framework does not combine the scores into an overarching index for this

dimension, because they reflect fundamentally different aspects of participation. Figure 1.16 therefore provides separate information about four participatory mechanisms. At the global level, the scores for the different subdimensions of participatory engagement all show progress. Mechanisms of direct democracy are available and have been used more often in the last decade than in previous decades. Interpreting this trend, however, requires taking into account that direct voting is sometimes misused to control citizens from the top down rather than to represent them from the bottom up (Altman 2011). Free and fair subnational elections at the regional and local levels have become more widespread. Civil society participation has also been on the rise, and electoral participation in national elections has increased overall.

FIGURE 1.16

Civil Society Participation, Electoral Participation, Direct Democracy and Subnational Elections: global trends, 1975–2015



Notes: The band in light red around the line for Civil Society Participation demarcates the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimate (see the Annex). No confidence intervals are included for the three other subdimensions because they are based on observational data.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Civil Society Participation Index, Electoral Turnout indicator, Direct Democracy indicator and Subnational Elections Index).

At the global level, the scores for the different subdimensions of participatory engagement all show progress

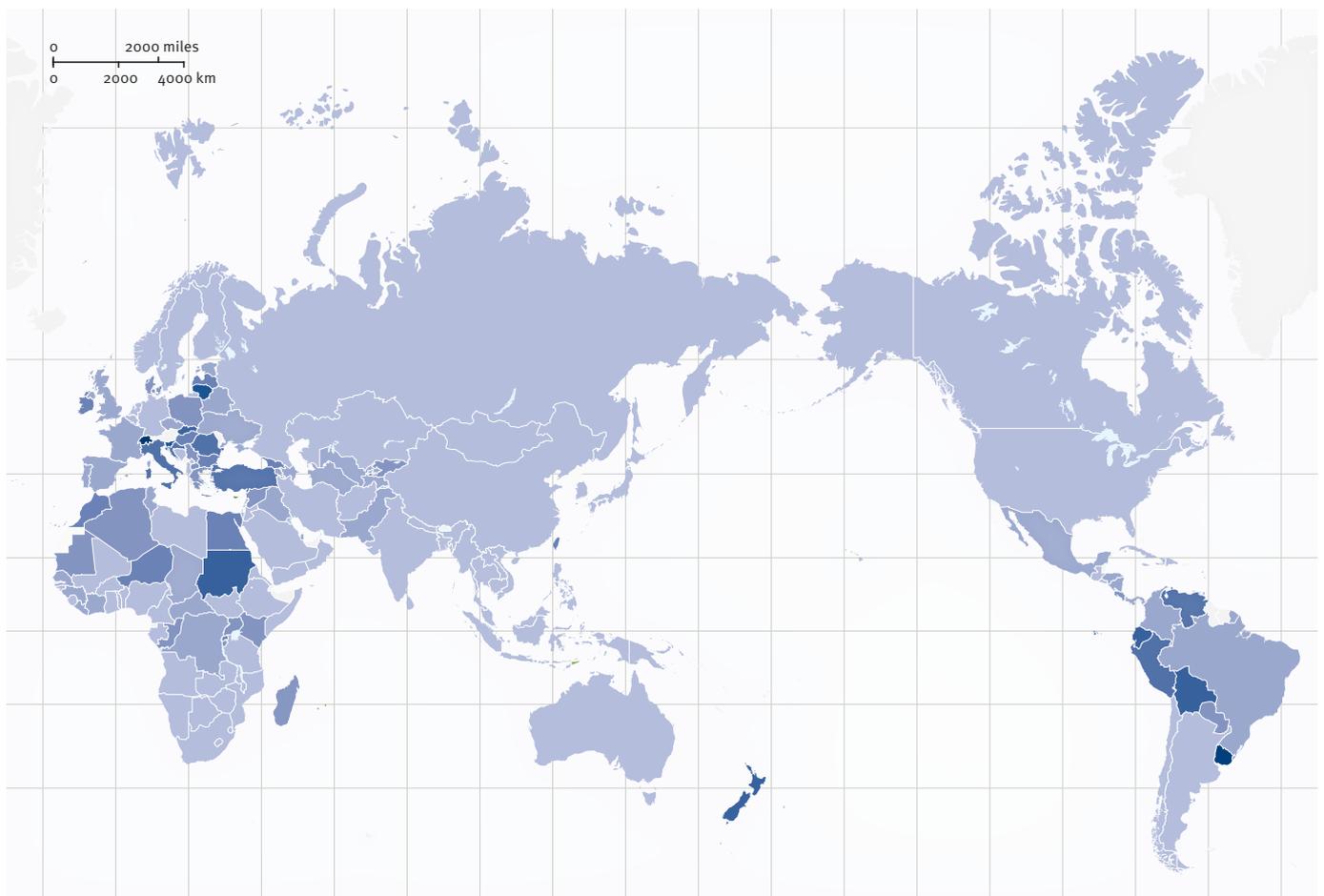
These trends are related to the positive developments in representative government and fundamental rights that have enabled citizens to participate more in public life (Bernhard et al. 2017). In centralized, non-electoral or one-party autocracies, citizens generally face more obstruction and fewer opportunities for participation than in the more open multiparty regimes that have become the norm today in most parts of the world. However, some countries, such as Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkey, have over the last five to last ten years experienced a 'shrinking of civil society space'—that is, an increase in

government activities that restrict the ability of autonomous civil society organizations to contribute to the functioning of political systems (CIVICUS 2016; Roth 2016).

The trends for civil society engagement largely mirror those of representative government: gradual improvement until 1989, then a sudden and relatively steep increase, followed by fading gradual improvement or stability. The regions also experienced sequential improvements: first Latin America and the Caribbean, then Asia and the Pacific, and then Europe and Africa after the end of the Cold War. Yet, while there are large regional

FIGURE 1.17

Degree of Direct Democracy, 2015



Notes: Darker shades indicate high scores and light shades reflect low scores.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Direct Democracy indicator).



differences in representative government, the differences between regional participatory engagement scores are less pronounced. While more traditional, institutionalized civil society participation continues to play a critical role, such as in Mongolia (Fish and Seeberg 2017), citizens around the world are also using other forms of participatory engagement, which are often loosely based on informal networks and civil resistance movements, facilitated by new social media (Shirky 2011).

The data show that turnout in national elections follows similar patterns in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, with increases mostly due to replacing non-electoral regimes with electoral regimes. Since not all electoral regimes are electoral democracies, changes in electoral turnout do not necessarily signify democratic upturns or downturns. In Europe, the downward trend in national election turnout rates is partly driven by some of the more established democracies, including France, Switzerland and the UK, where electoral participation has decreased over the last 40 years. The relatively new electoral democracies in East Europe have experienced an even more rapid decline in turnout levels. However, there are exceptions (e.g. the Scandinavian countries), where electoral participation has remained high.

The availability (and use) of direct democracy mechanisms has increased slightly in all regions. Yet they started from very low levels, and they are still not a prominent feature of democracy in any region. Asia and the Pacific represents the lowest regional average and Europe the highest (see Altman 2017). Lithuania, New Zealand, Romania, Slovenia, Switzerland, Uruguay and Venezuela are exceptions: to a relatively large degree they provide and use such mechanisms, as shown in Figure 1.17. Caution is needed when interpreting direct democracy scores, since governments in countries that do not meet the criteria for electoral democracy sometimes abuse referendums to strengthen their rule.

The opportunity for citizens to participate in free and fair subnational elections has increased substantially in Europe as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. The levels in Asia and the Pacific and especially Africa and the Middle East and Iran are lower, and progress has been slower and smaller in these regions. The developments largely reflect national-level trends in respect to the principles of representative government. However, there are some exceptions, where subnational elections either do not take place or are substantially less free and fair than national elections, such as in Argentina, Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa (Behrend and Whitehead 2016; McMann 2017). The reasons for this include geographical challenges related to organizing subnational elections, the degree of ethnic diversity of country populations and variations in subnational autonomy among federal states.

1.7. Conclusions: trendless fluctuations

The global state of democracy has improved considerably since 1975, and there has not been a significant global decline since 2005, as shown in Figures 1.16 and 1.18. Long-term progress has been observed in four of the five dimensions covered by the GSoD indices: Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government and Participatory Engagement; Impartial Administration has not shown significant progress at the global level. This finding could help explain some of the widespread public dissatisfaction and disappointment with democracy in many countries. Corruption, discrimination and ineffectiveness make citizens feel that democracy does not deliver the basic services and equal treatment that they request, and the human rights to which they are entitled.

The global trends cover significant variation at the regional level. All regions except North America (which was at a high level from the outset) experienced significant improvements in most areas; Latin America and the Caribbean

The opportunity for citizens to participate in free and fair subnational elections has increased substantially in Europe as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. The levels in Asia and the Pacific and especially Africa and the Middle East and Iran are lower, and progress has been slower and smaller in these regions

have exhibited the most progress, while the Middle East and Iran has lagged in most areas. In Europe, first southern European countries and then former communist countries have driven the positive trend, but the latter group has also experienced some setbacks. Africa and Asia and the Pacific have made substantial achievements, but most countries in these regions still show moderate to large deficits on the dimensions compared to the best-performing countries.

Positive trends are found in all major world regions, and over the past ten years democracy has been quite resilient. For some aspects of democracy, more gains than losses have been achieved at the country level. For others, areas of decline have largely been balanced by areas of improvement. The findings presented in this chapter thus challenge the pessimistic

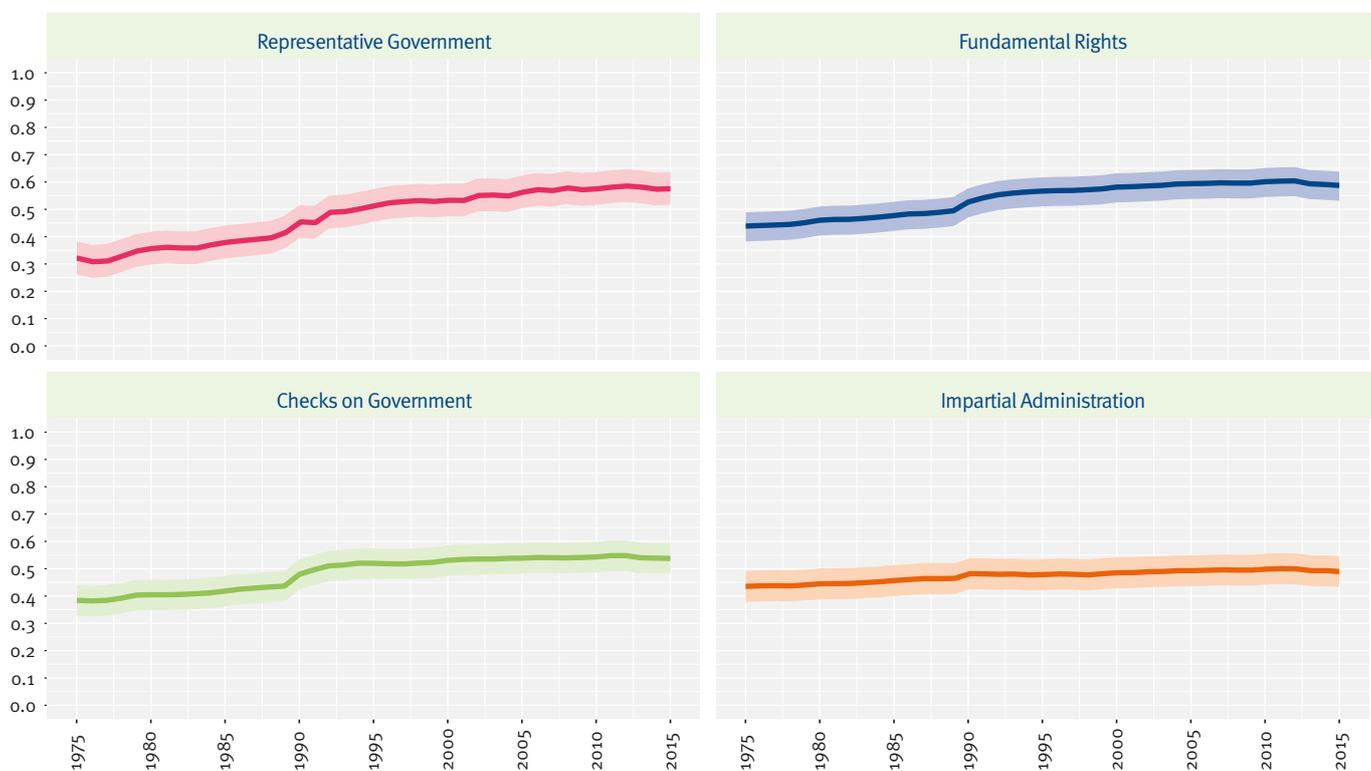
view that democracy is extremely fragile and generally in decline. Indeed, it is unsurprising that the initial scale and pace of post-Cold War democratization was not sustained, as this was an exceptional period (Møller and Skaaning 2013a: 89).

It is therefore not surprising (although many had expected and hoped for more) that overall progress has slowed for many aspects of democracy since the mid-1990s. The empirical overview suggests that the current global state of democracy is one of trendless fluctuations—upturns and downturns in individual countries, but with no broad tendencies of decline or progress (see Box 1.3).

Trendless fluctuations represent a trend in themselves—the continuity of democracy at the

FIGURE 1.18

Representative Government, Fundamental Rights, Checks on Government and Impartial Administration: global trends, 1975–2015



Notes: The light-shaded bands around the lines demarcate the 68 per cent confidence bounds of the estimates.

Source: GSoD indices 2017 (Representative Government Index, Fundamental Rights Index, Checks on Government Index and Impartial Administration Index).

highest level in world history. Considering the current challenges to democracy, this continuity indicates that in the most basic competition between democracy and dictatorship, the former tends to have the upper hand.

The repression of democratic rights and violations of democratic practices has certainly not come to an end, and no country has perfect democratic rule. While rapid and blatant reversals of democratic institutions still happen, incremental erosions of democratic features have become more common than abrupt and complete regressions through coups d'état.

Democracy should not be taken for granted. Ordinary citizens, civil society organizations and political elites need to continue their work to advocate, safeguard and advance democracy. Contemporary attempts at backsliding can be, and in many cases are, countered by democratically oriented groups. Fortunately, incremental declines in democracy generally lead to less brutal and less stable regimes than clear-cut dismissals of democratic institutions, and gradual erosions of democracy have greater chances of being rolled back (Bermeo 2016). In addition, while the threat of external promotion of autocracy may present a real danger in some cases, the authoritarian influence has generally had limited and contradictory effects. Sometimes such attempts have even unintentionally led to greater pluralism (Way 2016).

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that current views of the global state of democracy are overly pessimistic. A more

BOX 1.3

A period of trendless fluctuations

The lack of continued, large-scale progress in democratic development has caused several scholars and analysts to claim that democracy has been in decline in over the past ten years and that the pace of this trend is increasing exponentially. However, as Møller and Skaaning argue: 'one should think twice about the possible advent of a significant democratic rollback. Processes of democratization have usually been messy, with lots of movement back and forth. From a long-term perspective, this bumpy road has led to a more democratic world, but it has done so haltingly and with more than occasional setbacks. The one-and-a-half decades after 1989—showing a remarkable increase in the number of democracies—thus stand out as relatively exceptional. Seen in this light, it is not too surprising that this trend has recently changed' (2013a: 89). Apart from the interwar years, there have been no major reverse waves of modern democracy. Previous periods of 'democratic crisis' have generally been characterized by trendless fluctuations rather than large-scale decline. The current era most likely represents another of these periods—but now on a higher level of democracy than ever before.

detailed and historically longer-term view of the evolution of democracy is needed. In the words of Carothers and Youngs (2017), a 'more nuanced perspective might not dispel the gloom, but it may help prevent a lapse into disabling pessimism'. Building strong and resilient democracies takes time and proceeds incrementally. It also requires robust leadership, effective institutions and civic engagement. In some countries, democracy is under pressure: policymakers and citizens face critical choices about whether (and how) to defend or advance democracy. Other countries do not even qualify as electoral democracies. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to find that, overall, most aspects of democracy have advanced tremendously over the past 40 years and that democracy today is healthier than many contend.

The empirical overview suggests that the current global state of democracy is one of trendless fluctuations—upturns and downturns in individual countries, but with no broad tendencies of decline or progress

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