PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

A Survey about How People Assess Democracy around the World

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Contents

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
GSoD	Global State of Democracy
HDI	Human Development Index
PODS	Perceptions of Democracy Survey
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Expert views and popular perceptions about how political institutions are doing do not always align. People are generally much more sceptical than experts.

Data from the Perceptions of Democracy Survey (PODS) point to three broad findings. First, most people from a diverse array of countries[1] around the world lack confidence in the performance of their political institutions and their access to them, and they are more dissatisfied than satisfied with their governments. Second, self-identified minorities, women and low-income groups tend to perceive more obstacles to access and are generally more doubtful about institutional performance. Third, expert views and popular perceptions about how political institutions are doing do not always align. People are generally much more sceptical than experts.

These findings raise important questions about who decides on how democracy is faring and who ultimately has the power to grant legitimacy (or not) to institutions and governments. Both sets of perceptions matter and are useful for different purposes. Going forward, it is critical to remember that the everyday, functional health of a democracy depends largely on people's perceptions. Finding ways to integrate these views more systematically into expert analysis and the global narrative on democratization will be pivotal in the years ahead.

CORE FINDINGS

Credible elections

In 11 of the 19 countries surveyed, less than half of the respondents expressed confidence in the most recent elections in their respective countries. In Taiwan, which experts consider to be high-performing with regard to electoral credibility, less than 40 per cent of respondents expressed confidence in the 2020 election. The same is true in the USA, which experts consider to be on

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[1]   The survey covers Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, The Gambia, India, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, South Korea, Taiwan, Tanzania and the United States.

the cusp of high performance but where only 47 per cent of respondents expressed faith in credible electoral processes. In a majority of countries, self-identified minorities and low-income communities are more likely to express the view that the most recent elections were not free and fair. In Iraq, Pakistan, Romania and the Solomon Islands, for example, more than half of low-income respondents do not believe the most recent election in their country was free and fair. This pattern holds for countries that experts consider to be in the mid-range and high range of performance. Women have mixed views, and in the majority of contexts women are more likely to assess electoral credibility as 'complicated', meaning that there were both positive and negative elements.

Access to justice

People expressed severe dissatisfaction with courts around the world. In only one country (Denmark) did a majority of people feel that the courts often or always provide equal access to justice. In a majority of countries, less than a third of respondents feel this way. A notable point is that expert and popular perceptions vary starkly. Iraq has one of the lowest expert assessments among the 19 countries, but Iraqis have almost as much faith in access to justice in their courts (28 per cent 'always' or 'often') as the Taiwanese (31 per cent), and more in fact than Americans (26 per cent). Both the latter countries are high-performing, according to experts. In at least 15 of the 19 countries surveyed, self-identified minority and low-income groups are also less likely to express confidence in the courts, including in high-performing contexts. Women share these sentiments. There are exceptions, including in Brazil, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and other countries.

Freedom of expression

In most countries, a majority of respondents feel that they usually or always have the freedom to say what they think publicly. The exceptions are Colombia, Pakistan, Romania and Senegal. In Brazil half of the respondents feel that they can speak freely. People tend to be more sceptical than experts. For example, experts consider Romania to be high-performing with regard to freedom of expression, but less than half of Romanian respondents have confidence in their ability to exercise this right. A similar gap exists in countries like South Korea and the United States, which are considered high-performing by experts but in which only around half of the people have confidence in their freedom to speak publicly. Minorities, low-income groups and women are less likely to have confidence in their ability to freely express themselves, and the significant gaps between these groups and others is especially notable in relatively wealthy, high-performing contexts, such as Chile, Denmark and Taiwan. Also notable is the fact that women in Lebanon, the Solomon Islands and Tanzania have greater confidence in their freedom of expression than women in the USA.

Democratic values

It does not appear to be the case that living in a high-performing country with strong political institutions makes people less likely to support non-democratic leadership. In only six countries in the data set do a majority of people have some degree of unfavourable feelings about a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections. India and Tanzania stand out, with more

People expressed severe dissatisfaction with courts around the world.

than half of Indians and almost half of Tanzanians expressing favourable views of this kind of leader. Even in Denmark, which sits at the top of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's (International IDEA) Global State of Democracy (GSoD) rankings, less than half of respondents say they have 'extremely unfavourable' thoughts about these kinds of leaders. The most common feeling around the world is a lack of any negative predisposition towards such a leader. Self-identified minorities and low-income groups have mixed views, with no clear pattern emerging.

Satisfaction with government

People are generally more dissatisfied than satisfied with their governments. In 17 of the 19 countries, less than half of the people are satisfied with their governments, and this pattern holds for self-identified minorities and low-income groups, including in countries experts consider high-performing. India and Tanzania stand out again, with 59 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively, expressing satisfaction or complete satisfaction with their national governments. In about half the contexts (nine countries), self-identified members of minority groups are more likely to be highly dissatisfied with their governments than others. In the USA, the gap between minorities and others in satisfaction is 12 percentage points. Gaps in satisfaction in Denmark (6 points), Italy (6 points) and Taiwan (20 points) are also significant. These four countries are also among those where low-income residents are likely to have the greatest dissatisfaction with government relative to the rest of the country. In nearly every country, women are roughly as satisfied with the government or slightly less satisfied than men. Only in Iraq are women more satisfied by a significant margin (7.6 percentage points), and Lithuania represents the opposite extreme, where men were more likely than women (by 11.9 points) to say they are satisfied with the performance of the government.

Intergenerational progress

In only four countries do a majority of respondents feel that they are better off than their parents.

People are also quite pessimistic about how much things have improved over time. In only four countries do a majority of respondents feel that they are better off than their parents. In at least 12 of 19 countries, more self-identified minorities than others believe that they are worse off than their parents. In a trio of wealthy European states—Denmark, Italy and Lithuania—minority groups tend to be significantly more pessimistic than non-minorities. It is also notable that the gaps between the proportion of people who are within and outside the low-income group are significant. In Italy, for example, the proportion of low-income respondents who felt they were relatively better off than or doing the same as their parents was 23 percentage points lower than other respondents. This gap was similar or even wider in other wealthy, high-performing countries. Women did not feel very differently from men here, but notable contexts where women felt less optimistic included Denmark, Pakistan and Taiwan.

There are, of course, cases across all the themes that diverge from the overall trends. India and Tanzania stand out for high levels of confidence in institutions and satisfaction with governments. Additionally, there are countries where self-identified minorities feel more confident and optimistic than others. These are identified throughout the analysis.

Figure E.1. **Positive responses by country and question**
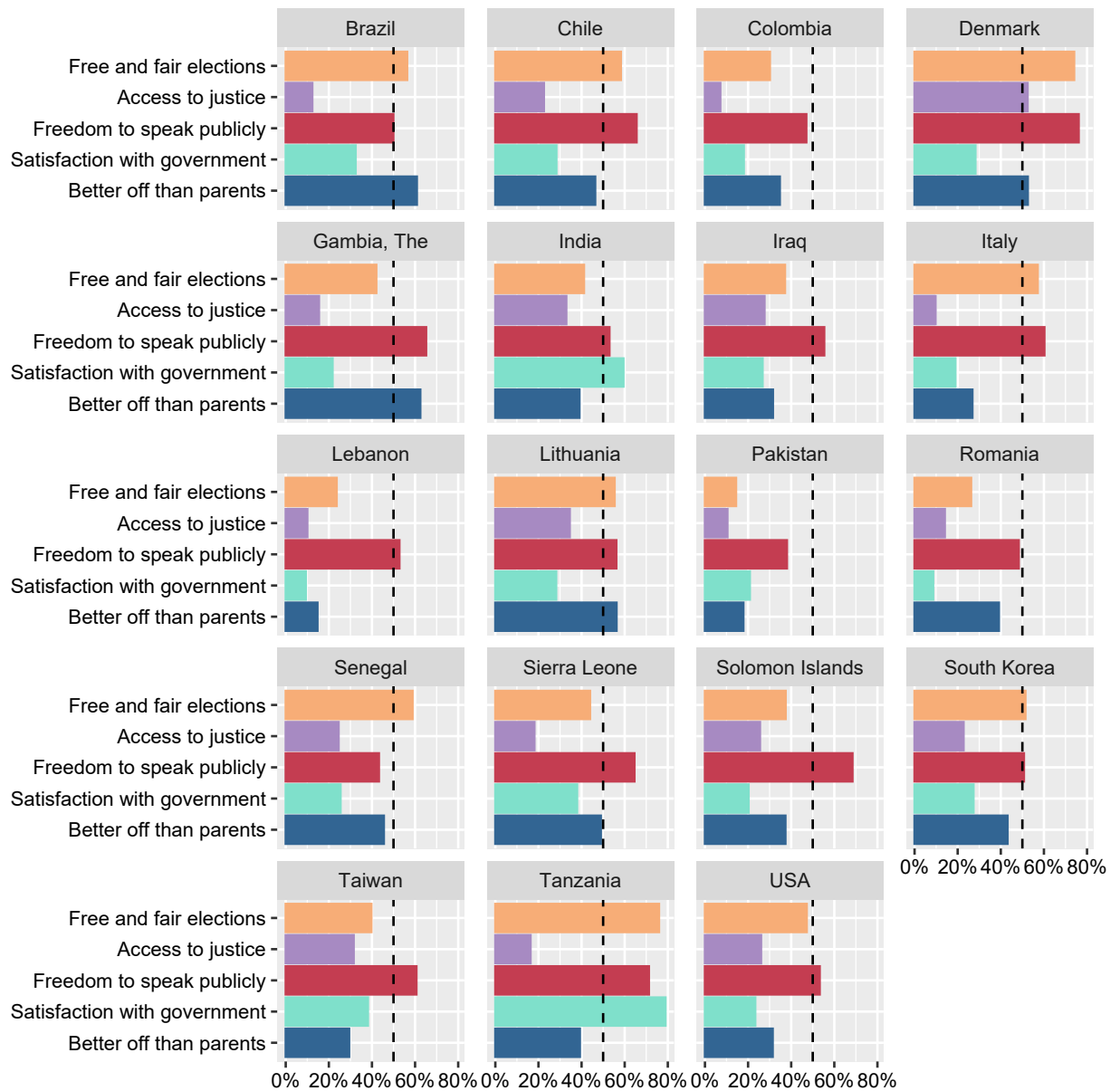
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.
Note: Researchers who wish to access the PODS data are welcome to contact the Democracy Assessment Unit at gsod.
indices@idea.int.

Researchers and democracy assessment experts must systematically integrate public perceptions and experiences into their evaluations, including with a focus on marginalized groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings point to the need for specific action by a wide group of actors, including the following:

- Researchers and democracy assessment experts must systematically integrate public perceptions and experiences into their evaluations, including with a focus on marginalized groups. It is clear that there are systematic differences between expert and public evaluations, and data drawing on both these perspectives over time will contribute to the best targeted and most relevant action plans. It is important to understand what drives people's perceptions so that it is clear whether the gap between them and experts is explained by actual institutional performance, people's lived, personal experiences or by external factors that influence people's judgements but which are not direct reflections of their own lives.

- Pollsters must systematically integrate sampling methods that allow for focused attention on how marginalized communities perceive and experience democracy and democratic institutions compared with average respondents. Disaggregated results must be disseminated widely and regularly so that the commonalities and gaps between these groups' experiences become part and parcel of how experts and people at large understand and talk about democracy.

- Given that there are countries in which self-identified minorities and low-income groups have more confidence in political institutions and processes than in others, it is important for donors to incentivize and support more peer-to-peer learning mechanisms through which political institutions can share lessons learned and practical models of what has worked (and what has been tried but has not worked as well). They should particularly incentivize exchanges between countries that have performed differently in expert assessments.

- Democracy-focused policymakers should also look beyond expert data sets to understand the state of democracy in particular contexts. In places where popular and expert views diverge, the most effective policies will need to address the gaps in perceptions and work to bridge them.

- Civil society groups and other advocacy-based groups should channel information about gaps in access and attitudes to policymakers who are responsible for improving the performance of institutions. They should also prioritize integrating information about these gaps into public education campaigns.

- Civil society and other advocacy organizations should also create consistent messaging about the need to constantly defend democratic institutions and norms, even in places where institutions are strong and ranked highly by experts. 'High-performing' does not necessarily correlate

with strong and broad public satisfaction, and ensuring that public support for democracy does not erode is critical.

- The coalition of actors working to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—and particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16—should integrate these findings into their research and advocacy. In order to create the accountable and inclusive institutions at the heart of SDG 16, it is critical that everyone understands how people perceive these institutions now and how the most marginalized sectors of society face special hurdles to access and equal treatment.

The findings also point to the need for academics and other researchers to investigate the following points:

- What is the rationale behind popular evaluations of electoral integrity? Given that the evidence shows, for example, that women face more barriers to the ballot box than men, it is surprising that women do not evaluate electoral credibility more negatively across the board.

- How and why do marginalized communities feel less safe to freely express themselves, even in countries where experts are confident that these rights are respected?

- Why do voters living in countries with strong democratic institutions not reject the notion of undemocratic leaders more often? Specifically, it is important to understand if (and how) political institutions are contributing to this sentiment through certain weaknesses or failures, or if the motivation behind such feelings lies elsewhere.

- What explains countries in which people express high levels of satisfaction with government performance and favourable opinions about strong leaders who do not have to bother with parliaments and elections? Does this result mean that leaders are showing the kind of 'strength' that people want and therefore evoking public satisfaction? If so, what can we learn here that could be applied to democratic innovation?

- What explains cases where people express high levels of satisfaction with their governments but do not believe that they are better off than their parents? If people are not confident that things have improved for them and their families, what do they expect (and apparently receive) from their governments?

METHODOLOGY

For this first edition of the PODS data set, we selected a diverse set of 19 countries and hired two survey firms to collect the data, with one firm responsible for the survey in each country. In countries with a high level of Internet penetration and where online panels can deliver valid results, we contracted YouGov to run the survey. In countries where this method is not effective, we contracted GeoPoll to run the survey using phone-based interviews.

These countries, which include three of the world's largest democracies (Brazil, India and the USA), were chosen to include a wide range of geographic, economic and political contexts. Some countries have significant minority populations, while others are largely homogeneous. Some are long-established democracies that score at a high level in International IDEA's GSoD Indices, while others have recent experience of dictatorship, war and major social crises.

In each country our survey research providers contacted a representative sample[2] of the population (approximately 1,000 people) and an additional sample of people whose household income indicated that they were experiencing poverty (approximately 500 people).[3] This oversampling of the poorest and most marginalized people allows us to have confidence in our assessment of how these diverse groups of people differ from the rest of the population. For analysis we pooled the representative sample and the oversample, and weighted each respondent so that the reported frequencies were not unduly influenced by imbalances in the sample. In the graphs and discussion below, we most often report the weighted proportion of respondents who gave a particular answer to a question.

PODS includes several measures relating to marginalization, and we use two of these extensively in this report. The first is self-identification as a member of a minority group. We left this as open as possible, allowing respondents to decide for themselves the grounds on which they might consider themselves to be part of a minority group. In most cases these grounds are related to ethnicity, but sexual orientation or gender identity, religion, political views and other matters are also relevant to how some respondents understand their position as a member of a minority group. In this analysis we refer to this group as 'self-identified minorities'. The second measure of marginalization that we use in this report is a binary distinction between those in the lowest income category used in the survey for each country (roughly corresponding to the national poverty line) and those whose earnings are above the national poverty line. In this analysis we refer to the former group as 'low-income respondents'.

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[2]   The nature of the sample varies slightly from country to country. In 16 of the 19 countries, the main sample (1,000 people) was nationally representative. In Colombia, India and Taiwan the sample is online representative.

[3]   One significant exception to this approach is the Solomon Islands, where the small population posed significant challenges for data collection, and the sample size is only 526 people, 309 of whom were in the lowest income category.

INTRODUCTION

The Perceptions of Democracy survey (PODS) is a unique poll of people's attitudes about democracy and access to democratic institutions. Unlike other perception surveys, PODS is designed to identify important but often neglected differences between various groups' assessments of and attitudes related to democracy, namely between (a) experts and the public; and (b) representative groups and marginalized communities (the latter are made up of self-identified minorities and low-income groups).

The analysis described in this report tells a story about how people from around the world perceive and experience some of what democratic governance promises: popular control over decision makers (through elections), access to a fair and equal justice system, and the space to speak freely. At this level it adds depth to International IDEA's latest cross-national data set (the GSoD Indices), which shows that credible elections, access to justice and freedom of expression are among the most broadly and seriously declining aspects of democracy around the world (International IDEA 2023b). At a second level, this analysis describes the extent to which people prize democratic values and investigates whether people are satisfied with their governments. In these ways the analysis begins to answer one of the key questions of our time: is democracy delivering? The unique sampling method (see the section 'Motivation and method') also allows the analysis to go one step further and ask a much less researched question: who is it (and who is it not) delivering for?

The findings reveal that people do not believe democracy is delivering in most cases. First, the data show that the foundational institutions and practices of democracy (elections, the courts and respect for civil liberties) are failing to live up to their promises. In 11 of the 19 countries surveyed, less than half of the people say that the most recent election in their country was 'free and fair', including in contexts where experts express high levels of confidence in electoral credibility. In the majority of countries, minorities are more doubtful about electoral credibility than others.

The Perceptions of Democracy survey is a unique poll of people's attitudes about democracy and access to democratic institutions.

Second, the responses related to the idea of access to justice stand out for the relatively severe levels of negative public perceptions. Respondents in nearly every country have a negative perception of the ability of the courts to provide access to justice and remedy, with only one country (Denmark) home to a majority of respondents who are confident that the courts often or always provide equal and fair access to justice. In a few cases, people in countries with highly divergent expert evaluations of the courts (Iraq and Taiwan) are aligned in their perceptions of access to justice. Minorities, women and the most economically disadvantaged groups are less likely to believe in equal access to justice, even in high-performing countries.

While majorities in most countries feel that they always or usually have the freedom to speak publicly, certain groups feel differently.

Third, while majorities in most countries feel that they always or usually have the freedom to speak publicly, certain groups feel differently. For low-income groups and women, this freedom is lacking, including in countries that are considered high-performing in the GSoD Indices measure of freedom of expression.

Fourth, living in a democracy does not necessarily mean that people completely reject the idea of non-democratic leadership. In Denmark, which sits at the top of the GSoD Indices' rankings for Representation (a measure of electoral credibility, performance of the legislature and local democracy), 25 per cent of respondents expressed some level of favourable feeling towards the idea of a 'strong leader who doesn't have to bother with parliaments or elections'. Moreover, there is no country in which a majority of people have 'extremely unfavourable' feelings about non-democratic leadership.

Given this context it is not surprising that people are more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with their governments. In most countries less than 40 per cent of respondents expressed any level of satisfaction. India and Tanzania are outliers here, with 59 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively, satisfied or completely satisfied with the government. There are also important gaps between expert and popular assessments, with Danes and Iraqis expressing similar levels of satisfaction with the government despite widely differing expert assessments. Notably, in the wealthy states of Denmark, Italy, Taiwan and the USA, an overlap between the levels of dissatisfaction on the part of self-identified minority and low-income groups may reveal the effects of intersectional discrimination in these contexts. Hope is in short supply around the world, with respondents from only four countries (Brazil, Denmark, The Gambia and Lithuania) expressing a belief that things have gotten better over time. In three of the wealthiest countries in the data set (Denmark, Italy and Lithuania), minorities were markedly more pessimistic than others about intergenerational progress.

These comparisons bring two critical issues to the forefront of the quest to strengthen the legitimacy of the democratic model. One is the limits of expert-coded data currently used to conduct the assessments of democracy that inform international policymaking, strategic planning and donor funding. Whose evaluations should inform these important decisions? If experts and popular evaluations diverge, how should decisions about interventions

and programming respond to those gaps? The second critical issue is the experiences of marginalized groups and the ways in which they differ from the 'average' person. What can these groups' experiences of and attitudes about democracy reveal about where democratic institutions are most vulnerable, and can these viewpoints help spark innovations in the design of democratic institutions?

The findings suggest that expert-coded data, which have long shown a decline in the quality of democracy around the world, tell only part of the story. In some cases, popular assessments and expert evaluations diverge significantly, raising important questions about who is best placed to legitimize systems and institutions. In other cases, comparing the views of representative samples with those of marginalized groups adds a completely new perspective, highlighting how expert assessments of 'high performance' do not reveal the relative lack of access experienced by the most vulnerable groups. Understanding such gaps in access may help stakeholders target interventions to bolster or improve these institutions. It could also help stakeholders better comprehend what people believe democracy is supposed to deliver or is capable of delivering (economic equality, employment, etc.). Understanding these gaps is especially critical as a form of public oversight of expert scientific analysis and public policy, as it is necessarily the public at large that will have the final say not only on whether a democracy is delivering but also on whether elections are clean and credible and whether the government truly represents the governed (Feyerabend 1987). This may help democracy support become responsive to people's stated needs and priorities.

Expert-coded data, which have long shown a decline in the quality of democracy around the world, tell only part of the story.

MOTIVATION AND METHOD

This project seeks to answer questions that the most consistent assessments of democracy—those that build quantitative data out of *expert* assessments— cannot.[4] While useful for revealing trends and patterns over time, data sets that rely on the judgement of experts with similar academic and social backgrounds cannot, by definition, reflect the variety of people's circumstances. PODS is a first step towards the development of regular global data on popular understandings and assessments of democracy that can compare expert and lay priorities and that provide a focused set of data on comparative views of marginalized groups. Such data will enable analysts to identify what these groups agree on and disagree on, thereby facilitating relevant interventions. In areas where there is agreement, it could be the case that the popular data reinforce the strength or weakness of particular institutions. In areas where there is disagreement, it is important to determine why experts and laypeople— or a certain population of laypeople—perceive things differently.

[4]   Well-known assessments based on expert assessments include those produced by Freedom House, the Economist Intelligence Unit, Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) and Polity.

For this first edition of the PODS data set, we selected a diverse set of 19 countries and hired two survey firms to collect the data, with one firm responsible for the survey in each country. In countries with a high level of Internet penetration and where online panels can deliver valid results, we contracted YouGov to run the survey. In countries where this method is not effective, we contracted GeoPoll to run the survey using phone-based interviews.[5] In this first edition, the surveyed countries were Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, The Gambia, India, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Lithuania, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands, South Korea, Taiwan, Tanzania and the USA (see Figure I.1). These countries were chosen to include a wide range of geographic, economic and political contexts. Some countries have significant minority populations, while others are largely homogeneous. Some score at a high level in the International IDEA GSoD Indices, while others have recent experience of dictatorship, war and major social crises.

One of the considerable difficulties with using surveys to assess popular perceptions of democracy is that the poorest and most marginalized people in society are difficult to reach with surveys, and even when they are in the sample, their numbers are often too small for researchers to be able to speak with confidence about the views of people in these groups. PODS addresses this problem directly by oversampling the poorest in society.

In each surveyed country, our research providers contacted a representative sample[6] of the population (approximately 1,000 people) and an additional sample of people whose household income indicated that they were experiencing poverty (approximately 500 people).[7] This oversampling of the poorest and most marginalized people enables us to have confidence in our assessment of how these diverse groups of people differ from the rest of the population. For analysis, we pooled the representative sample and the oversample, and weighted each respondent so that the reported frequencies were not unduly influenced by imbalances in the sample.[8] In the graphs and discussion throughout the rest of this document, we most often report the weighted proportion of respondents who gave a particular answer to a question.

PODS includes several measures relating to marginalization, and we use two of these extensively in this report. The first is self-identification as a member of a minority group. We left this as open as possible, allowing respondents to decide for themselves the grounds on which they might consider themselves to be part of a minority group. In most cases these grounds are related to

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[5]   YouGov ran surveys in Colombia, Denmark, India, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, South Korea, Taiwan and the USA. GeoPoll ran surveys in Brazil, Chile, The Gambia, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, the Solomon Islands and Tanzania.

[6]   The nature of the sample varies slightly from country to country. In 16 of the 19 countries the main sample (1,000 people) was nationally representative. In Colombia, India and Taiwan the sample is online representative.

[7]   The one exception to this approach is the Solomon Islands, where the small population posed significant challenges for data collection, and the sample size is only 526 people, 309 of whom were in the lowest income category.

[8]   The survey providers used very different weighting schemes. For the countries surveyed by YouGov, the data were weighted by age, voter turnout, vote choice, gender, education and income. In the countries surveyed by GeoPoll, the data were weighted by age, gender and region.

ethnicity, but sexual orientation or gender identity, religion, political views and other matters are also relevant to how some respondents understand their position as a member of a minority group. In this analysis we refer to this group as 'self-identified minorities'.[9] The second measure of marginalization that we use in this report is a binary distinction between those in the lowest income category used in the survey for each country (roughly corresponding to the national poverty line) and those whose earnings are above the national poverty line. In this analysis we refer to this group as 'low-income respondents'. The experience of poverty is in itself likely to have important effects on how people perceive the quality of their democracy. However, we also use poverty as a proxy for other forms of marginalization, as intersectional and coinciding categories of exclusion are likely to be experienced by those with the lowest income levels (Crenshaw 1989; Ragin and Fiss 2017).

With oversampling that permits a focus on the attitudes and experiences of marginalized communities, PODS seeks to identify and describe tangible indicators of models of democracy that fall outside the liberal conception that dominates in the West. It aims to capture cultural heterogeneity and reveal the ways in which a reliance on a liberal democratic lens limits the possibilities of policy reform, democratic support and research. By doing so PODS aims to uncover what about the liberal model works for minority groups and those experiencing poverty, what is less useful and what other, lesser-known practices these groups may engage in that could be more actively brought into conceptions of democracy.

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[9]   While PODS includes a question for self-identified minority status in all countries, this question was not always interpreted by survey respondents in the expected manner. The data for self-reported minority status do not pass a face-validity test for Iraq, Pakistan or the Solomon Islands, so we do not report this measure for those countries.

Figure I.1. **PODS surveyed countries (2023)**

Countries included in PODS are filled in blue
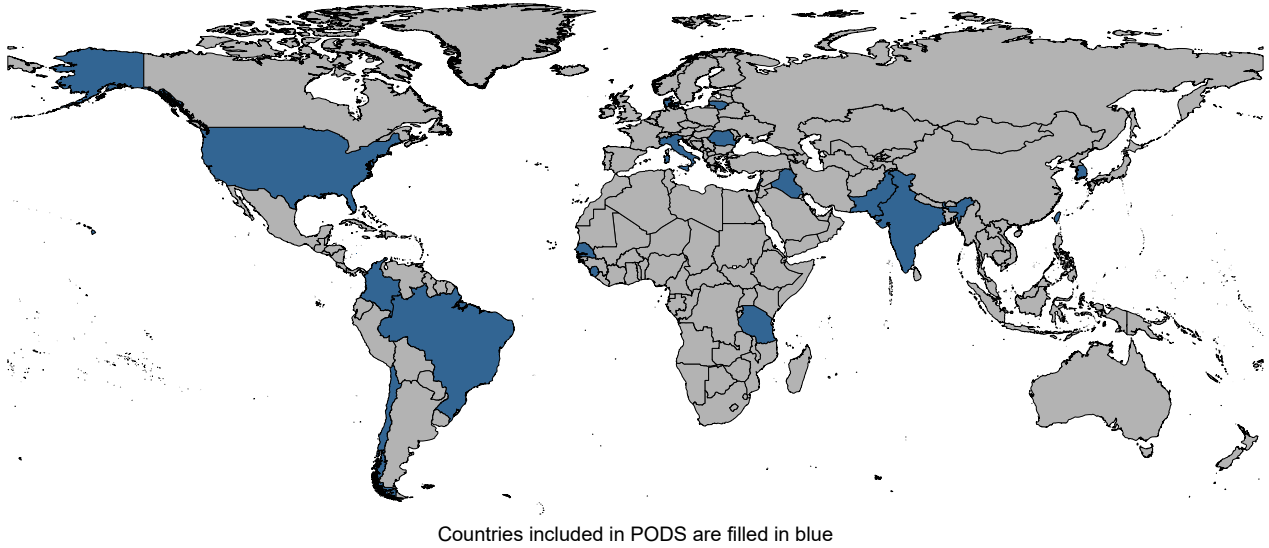
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Chapter 1
ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Other surveys, including the World Values Survey, Democracy Perception Index, AmericasBarometer and those conducted by Gallup, have found declining support for democracy in recent years. Many of these concerns seem tied to a belief that contemporary democracies are failing to deliver core public goods and services as well as core social and economic outcomes (Krastev 2016; Norris 2017; Rousseau 1762). Does this mean we are experiencing an instrumental failure of democracy? Or can other social, economic, cultural or political forces explain this decline?

This analysis has two primary goals. First, we aim to compare the views of experts with those of the population at large. In order to accomplish this task, we compare the survey responses with related measures of democracy in the GSoD Indices, which like most cross-national democracy measurement frameworks, depend heavily on the judgements of expert coders. Where do these expert assessments align with popular understandings of democracy in different countries, and where do they depart? What might explain any divergences, and what do the results mean for policymakers and researchers?

Second, we compare the views of a representative sample with those of marginalized groups, including self-identified minorities and low-income communities. In cases where the data show important differences, we also investigate how gender identity and underlying value orientation (such as favourable opinions of strong yet undemocratic leaders or about military rule) may impact opinions and experiences. Ultimately, these data are relevant for a wide range of stakeholders who are interested in and make decisions regarding democracy support. They identify important gaps in how different groups of people experience and feel about democratic institutions and shed critical light on how people experience things differently from how experts assess them. Such information is key to more targeted, relevant and effective action.

The themes upon which this analysis is based—access to institutions, freedom of expression, values, satisfaction with government and economic progress—

Other surveys have found declining support for democracy in recent years. Many of these concerns seem tied to a belief that contemporary democracies are failing to deliver core public goods and services.

cover a key portion of the PODS survey. The data reveal, for example, how different social groups think about the credibility of electoral processes and the value of elections in ensuring good governance, as well as core issues such as whether or not people feel they are doing better than their parents, and whether they have equitable access to public goods.

These findings will serve as a basis for further analysis using this data set, including on issues such as how violence is experienced across societies, beliefs about how laws should be made and enforced, as well as how respondents do and do not participate in a wide range of political activities. These and other issues will be dealt with in forthcoming reports from International IDEA, which will include both broad overviews and international comparisons as well as case studies focused on the minutiae of individual countries.

Chapter 2
ACCESS TO POLITICAL PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS: ELECTIONS, COURTS AND RIGHTS

2.1. ELECTORAL CREDIBILITY

Main takeaways

- In 11 of the 19 countries surveyed, less than half of the people say that the most recent election in their country was 'free and fair'.
- Expert and lay evaluations of credible elections generally align, but there are some countries where voters are notably pessimistic (Romania, Taiwan), and some where they are especially optimistic (Denmark, Tanzania).
- Marginalized people do not always have more negative views of electoral credibility, but they are less likely to trust elections in 10 of the 19 countries.

What does it mean for an election to be 'credible', and do popular views always comport with the judgement of experts and election observers? More broadly, do regular elections actually confer public legitimacy on governments, or does this come from the way they govern or some other source?

The way voters understand electoral credibility, and the faith they report in elections, has never been more important. The year 2024 is unique in human history (thus far), as more people will take part in elections than ever before. Among the known challenges to electoral integrity this year are political attacks on the independence of electoral management bodies, a polarized political environment, disinformation, and even public health emergencies and natural disasters (Alihodžić 2023).

While the constant development of new technologies has always had relevance for elections (as we saw with the advent of radio, television, the Internet and social media), recent advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI) may have the potential to influence elections and perceptions of electoral

credibility in ways that are not yet well understood. There is evidence that disinformation campaigns have negative impacts on the ability of voters to accurately assess the credibility of elections (Mauk and Grömping 2023). The survey data reported here may include voters so affected, but not yet by the use of generative AI in such campaigns.

In this section we describe answers to a simple but broad question: 'Taking into account election day, the election campaign, and the vote counting process, would you consider the most recent national election in [your country] to have been free and fair?'[10] In 11 of the 19 countries, less than half of respondents expressed confidence in elections.

Figure 2.1. **Share of people who say that the most recent election in their country was 'free and fair' (sum of 'Yes' and 'Yes, somewhat' responses)**
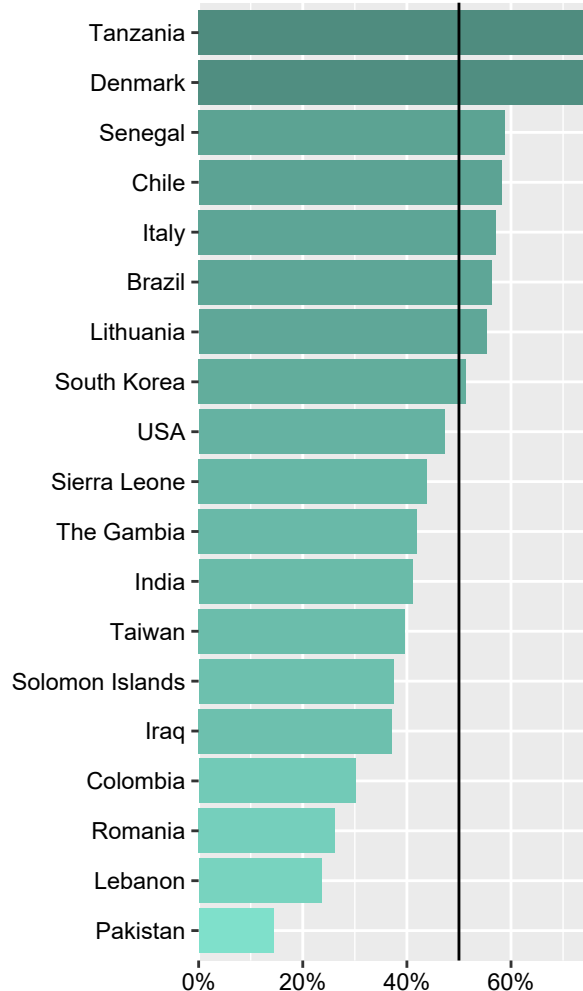
Sources: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024; International IDEA, Global State of Democracy Indices, v7.1, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gsod-indices>, accessed 15 March 2024.

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10   The wording of this question is copied from the Varieties of Democracy project's expert survey for the variable *v2elfrfair* (Coppedge et al. 2024).

### Expert and popular views of credible elections

A key baseline point of comparison is the extent to which popular views (as captured in PODS) correlate with expert assessments (as measured in the GSoD Indices' Credible Elections index). The Credible Elections index aggregates 10 variables that measure matters such as the extent of government intimidation of opposition parties, the autonomy and capacity of electoral management bodies, as well as irregularities in the electoral process, and it provides an overall assessment of the extent to which an election was 'free and fair'. While the index's metrics and popular survey responses to the question quoted earlier in this section are not directly comparable, we should expect that in contexts where information about the electoral process is widely available, experts and voters should come to similar conclusions about the quality of the election.

As illustrated in Figure 2.2, there is a weak positive correlation (r = 0.37) between popular and expert assessments (though this is marginally outside the standard thresholds for statistical significance, p = 0.11). There are many countries in which the two kinds of assessments broadly agree—for example, in Chile and Iraq. Even so, the level of disagreement between expert coders and the voters themselves is often stark. In Taiwan, for example, the Credible Elections index score is very high (0.80), but less than 40 per cent of the actual voters in Taiwan say that the most recent election there (in 2020) was 'free and fair'. The USA is situated in the centre of the overall cross-national trend but shows similarly stark differences between experts and the voters. The USA is just outside the high range in the Credible Elections index (0.69), but less than half of Americans (47 per cent) say that the most recent US election (2020) was 'free and fair'.

The outliers (countries far from the central tendency) are the most interesting for further analysis. Tanzania stands out as a case where popular assessments of the credibility of the 2020 general election are far brighter than the expert data aggregated in the GSoD Indices. Moreover, Danes and Tanzanians have very similar levels of faith in the credibility of their elections despite the wide separation in their expert-coded scores. Romania also stands out, but in the opposite direction. Romania's Credible Elections index value is very similar to those of Brazil and the USA, but Romanians are much more sceptical about the credibility of their 2020 election than Brazilians and Americans are about their own elections.

When we consider all the survey responses, the shape of the distributions provides additional valuable information. In Figure 2.3, we can pick out countries where the distribution appears to be bimodal, indicating a strong difference of opinion among respondents, rather than the normal distribution that one might expect. The Gambia, Senegal and Sierra Leone particularly stand out as cases where popular evaluations of the credibility of the respective elections appear to be polarized. While there is a partisan difference in the USA (as discussed below), it does not stand out in this broader analysis.

Figure 2.2. **Comparison between expert and popular evaluations of elections**
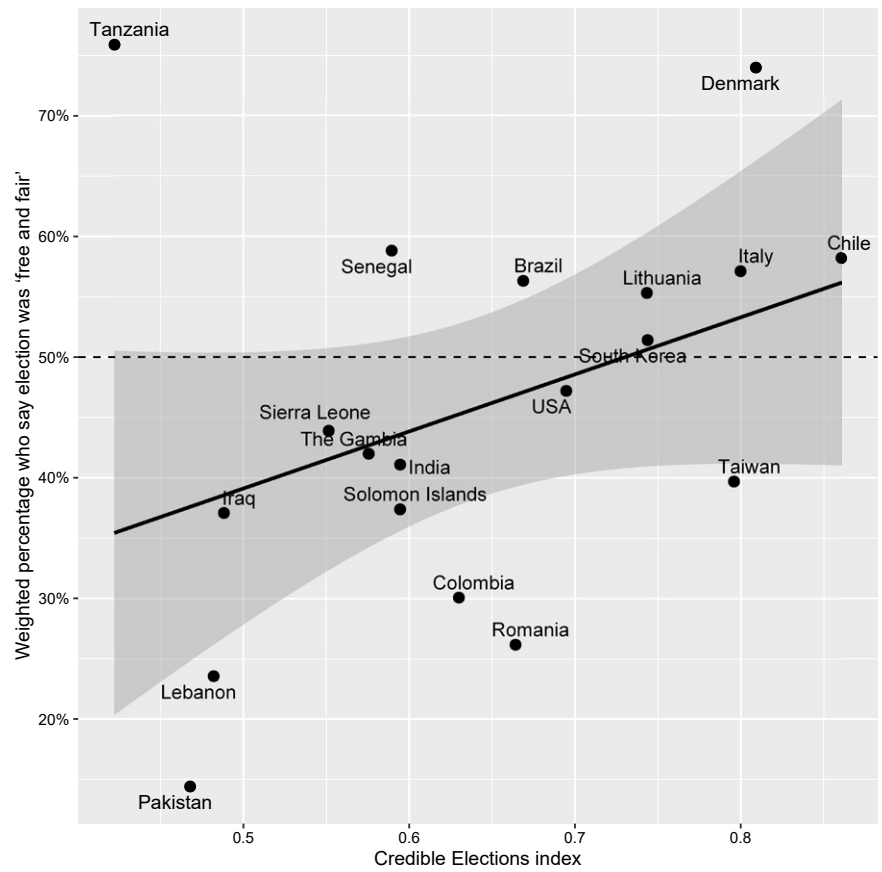
Sources: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024; International IDEA, Global State of Democracy Indices v7.1, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gsod-indices>, accessed 15 March 2024.

Figure 2.3. **Evaluations of 'free and fair' elections by country (ordered by sum of 'Yes' and 'Yes, somewhat' responses)**
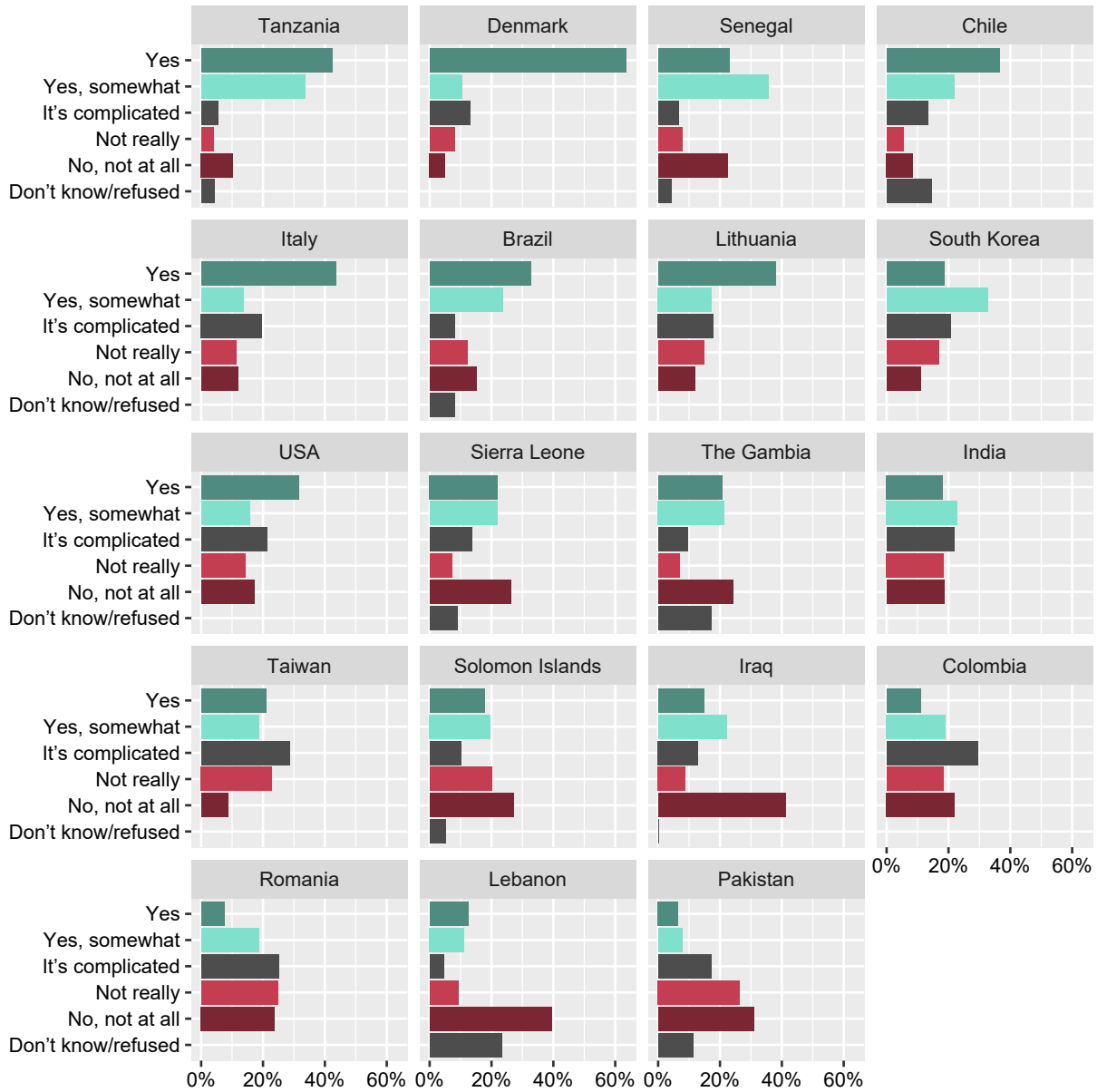
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Such polarized evaluations of the fairness or credibility of an election are often tied to partisanship, and specifically whether or not one's favoured party won the election. In Figure 2.4 we compare the distributions of answers making a binary distinction between those who voted for the winning candidate (in a presidential election) or a party represented in the government (in a parliamentary election). The differences on this basis are less stark than one might have expected, but there are a few countries where partisanship appears to make a difference. In Brazil (37 percentage point gap), Colombia (33 point gap), Sierra Leone (30 point gap) and the USA (47 point gap), there are strong differences in positive responses between those who voted for the winner (in orange) and those who did not (in grey-blue). In Brazil and the USA, this level of partisan influence on evaluations of the fairness of elections is undoubtedly related to the political styles of the two losing candidates, Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump, respectively (Fuks, Ribeiro and Borba 2021; Arceneaux and Truex 2023). In Sierra Leone the close relationship between geography, ethnicity and partisanship helps to explain why the distributions look so different (Lavali and M'Cormack-Hale 2023). Beyond these examples there are also noticeable differences in the distributions for Colombia and Romania.

There are strong reasons to believe that, for minorities in many countries, electoral processes are less than fair.
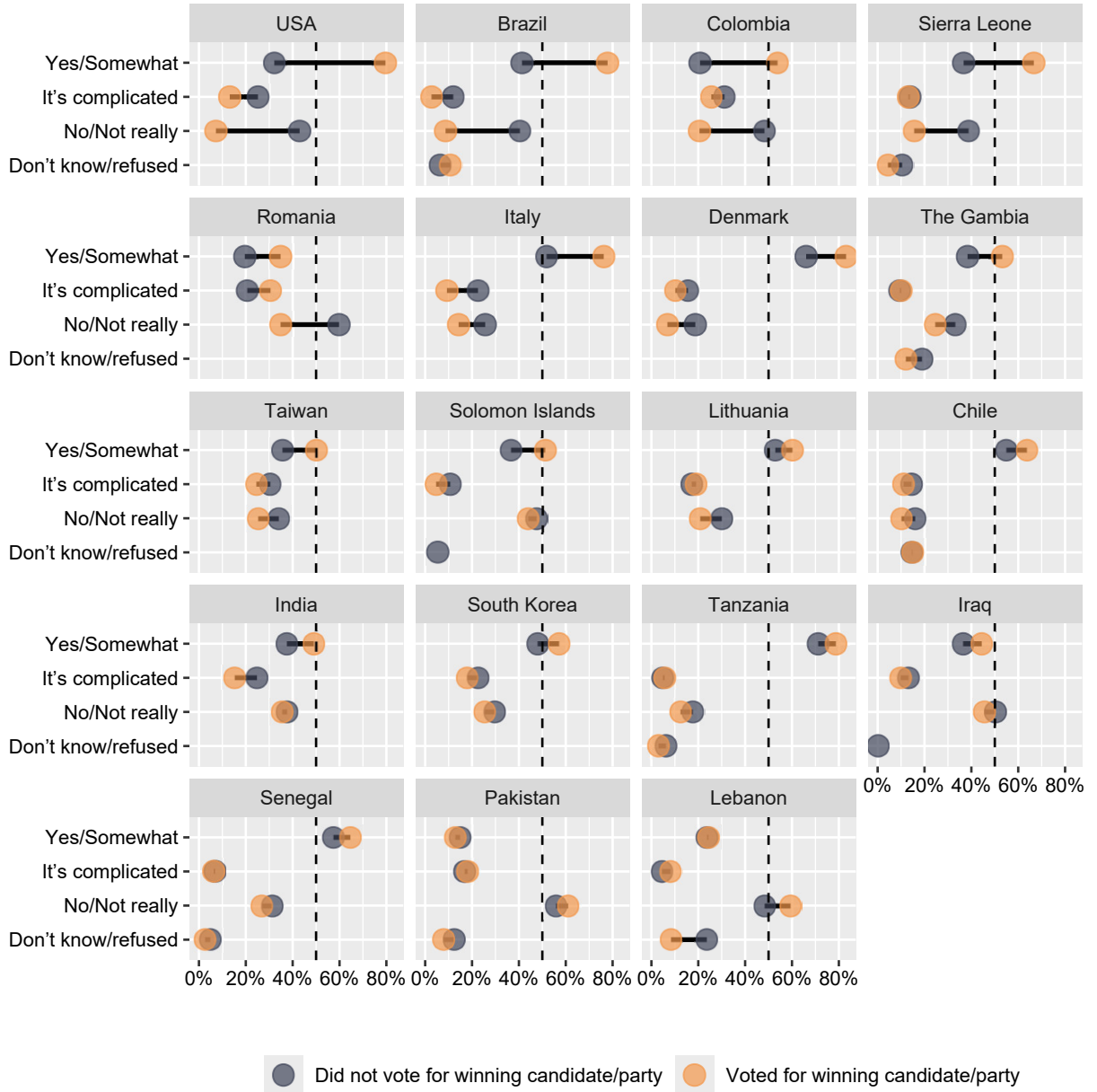
Credible elections and minorities

There are strong reasons to believe that, for minorities in many countries, electoral processes are less than fair. For example, there is a growing body of research that shows that minority candidates face greater difficulty in winning elections (Martin and Blinder 2021), may be discouraged from voting by politically exclusionary rhetoric (Simonsen 2021) and in some jurisdictions face additional challenges in exercising their right to vote (Kuk, Hajnal and Lajevardi 2022). However, minority status on the basis of one or more ascriptive categories may not be the strongest predictor of views on the fairness of an electoral process.

In Figure 2.5 we distinguish between self-identified minorities and the rest of the population regarding the credibility of the most recent election in each country.[11] In the majority of the countries in our survey, self-identified minorities were less confident than majority groups about the credibility of electoral processes. This gap is especially notable in Chile (a 15 percentage point gap in positive responses), Denmark (20 points), India (15 points) and Taiwan (8 points).

Against our expectations, however, minorities had more faith in the credibility of the elections in several countries. Minority voters were notably positive in their assessments in Brazil, The Gambia and Italy. Even in the USA, where a number of recent laws have made it more difficult for racial and ethnic minority citizens to vote, minorities expressed greater faith in the credibility of the elections than did their majority neighbours.

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[11]   The data for self-reported minority status do not pass a face-validity test for Iraq, Pakistan or the Solomon Islands, so we do not report this measure for those countries, and they are not included in graphs that distinguish between self-identified minorities and the rest of the population.

Figure 2.4. **Evaluation of 'free and fair' elections, comparing vote choices**

Did not vote for winning candidate/party   Voted for winning candidate/party

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Figure 2.5. **Evaluation of 'free and fair' elections, comparing minority and majority groups**
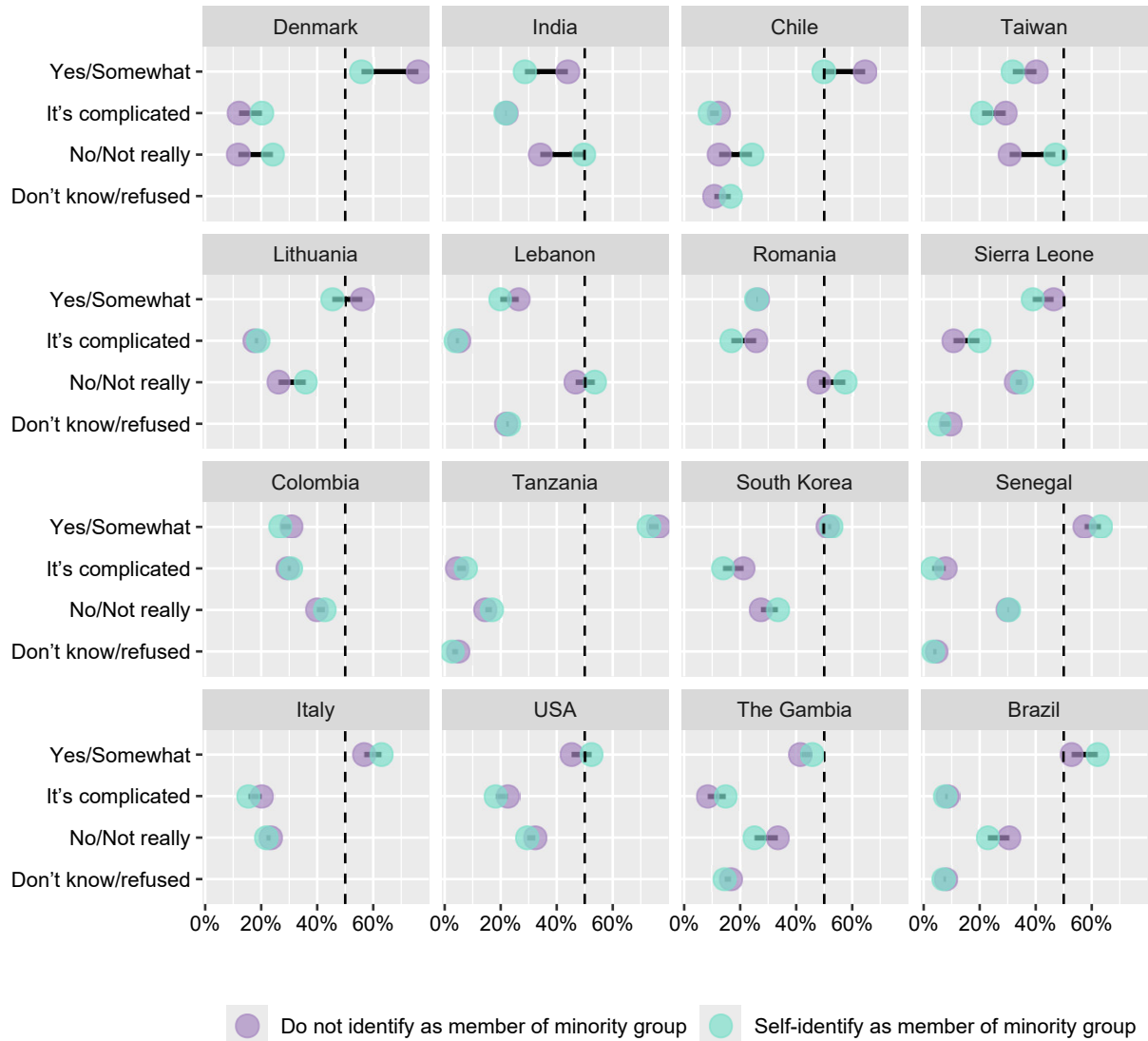
Do not identify as member of minority group   Self-identify as member of minority group

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Credible elections and poverty

Poverty can also be a significant barrier to the exercise of democratic rights. When we consider the differences in evaluations of electoral credibility between those experiencing relative poverty and the rest of the population, some cross-national differences again stand out. In most countries those at the lowest income levels see elections as less credible than their richer fellow citizens do. Three European countries that have each experienced the politicization of migration over the last decade—Denmark (16 percentage point gap in positive responses), Italy (16 point gap) and Lithuania (17 point gap)— show a high level of divergence between the views of the poorest and the rest of the population. Notably, economically marginalized groups in Brazil, The Gambia and Sierra Leone are more positive than majority groups.

Figure 2.6. **Evaluation of 'free and fair' elections, comparing income groups**


Low-income group   Other income groups

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

If one looks solely within the low-income group in each country, a fundamental lack of faith in electoral processes becomes apparent for several countries. Figure 2.7 plots the share of those in the low-income group who answered 'No' or 'No, not really' in response to the question about the extent to which the most recent election in their country was 'free and fair'. The countries at the top of the graph are not unexpected given the data described above, but the proportion of those in the low-income group who fundamentally lack faith in the credibility of their elections is startling, nonetheless. In Pakistan, Romania, the Solomon Islands and Iraq, more than half of those in the low-income group

do not think that the most recent election in their country was free and fair. In India and Lebanon, just about half of low-income respondents have low confidence. In Colombia, Taiwan and South Korea, classified as middle- or high-range in the GSoD Credible Elections index, more than a third of low-income respondents doubt the credibility of their most recent election. Further down the list, we see that 36 per cent of Americans in the low-income group do not believe that the 2020 election was free and fair.

Figure 2.7. **Negative evaluations of elections among low-income groups (sum of 'No' and 'Not really' responses)**
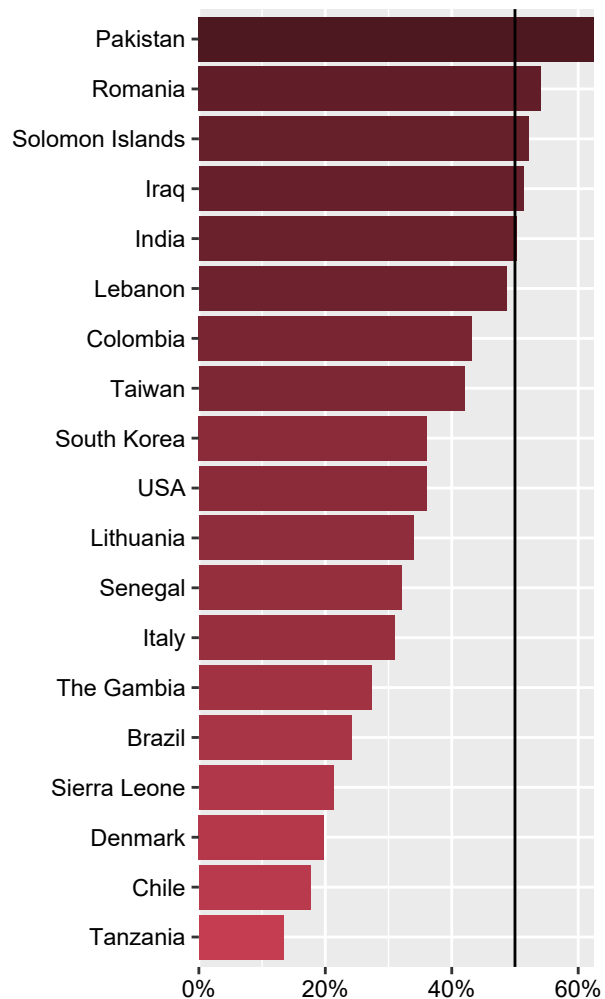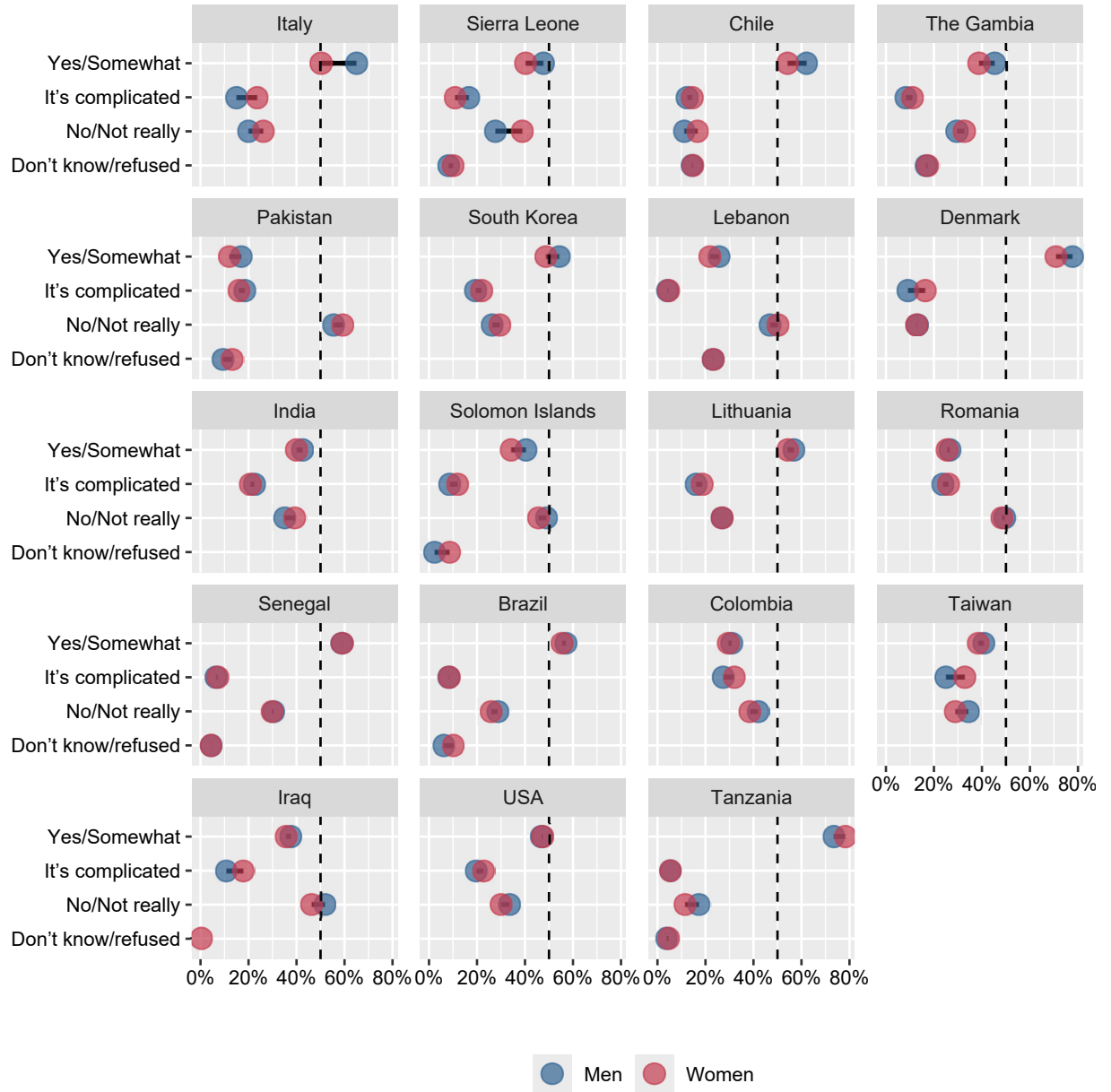

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Credible elections and gender

We can also consider how evaluations of the credibility of elections vary between men and women within the voting public.[12] Across the vast majority of countries, women face barriers to participation in public life that men do not (Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes 2007). These barriers pertain particularly to running for public office, but they also affect opportunities for participation as basic as voting in elections. However, research from the USA has shown that turnout decisions are remarkably similar for men and women (Corder an Wolbrecht 2006). We expected to find that women would see elections as less free and fair than men do. The data do not fully support that expectation, and in fact there are three countries in which more women expressed faith in the electoral process (responding 'Yes' or 'Yes, somewhat') than men—Tanzania, the USA and Senegal. At the other end of the response options, there were far fewer women who expressed doubts about the most recent election in their country (those who responded 'No, not at all' or 'Not really') in Brazil, Colombia, Iraq, Taiwan, Tanzania and the USA. Towards the bottom of Figure 2.8, Italy (15 percentage point gap), Sierra Leone (7 points) and Chile (8 points) all stand out as countries where men provided much higher evaluations of the fairness of the respective elections than women did. Notably, however, women were more negative than men in several contexts, and women were more likely to assess the credibility of an election as 'complicated' (meaning including both positive and negative elements) in the majority of countries.

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[12]   In most countries we also included at least an 'other' gender response option, and in some countries we provided more specific other gender identity options. However, the number of responses in the other categories was very low, so we have chosen to focus the analysis here on the differences between those identifying as men and those identifying as women.

Figure 2.8. **Evaluation of 'free and fair' elections by gender**

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

2.2. **ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

Main takeaways

- In 18 of the 19 countries, less than half of the people surveyed believe that the courts 'always' or 'often' provide access to justice.
- Popular views of access to justice broadly align with expert assessments, but popular views tend to be more pessimistic (notably in Colombia, The Gambia and Italy).
- In 15 of the 19 countries, minority groups express less confidence in their access to justice than majority groups do.

When people think of justice, do they see it as something their country's court system can or should provide, or do they look elsewhere? Are people from different groups in society equally happy with their access to justice? PODS asked respondents, 'In your experience, does the court system provide equal and fair access to justice?'[13] This question provided five response options running from 'Always' to 'Never', while also providing respondents with the option to say that they do not know (an important response here in particular, as not everyone has experience with the courts in their countries).

Figure 2.9 shows that only in Denmark did more than half of respondents say they could consistently count on access to justice. Lithuania is a distant second, with just 34 per cent of people answering that they believe the courts 'always' or 'often' provide access to justice. Less than a third of respondents in each of the other countries expressed this confidence. However, countries as different as Italy and Lebanon and the USA and the Solomon Islands have similar levels of popular confidence in the ability of the courts to deliver justice. Colombians were remarkably negative in their assessment of access to 'equal and fair' justice, with only 7 per cent choosing 'Always' or 'Often'.

Expert and popular assessments of access to justice
Figure 2.10 shows the correlation between the expert-coded data that inform the GSoD Indices' Access to Justice index and the proportion of the population in each of the surveyed countries that says that the courts 'always' or 'often' deliver justice. The Access to Justice index includes seven variables that measure inequalities in the justice system, aspects of fair trials and procedural justice. We find that the two different forms of assessment (using similar questions) are fairly highly correlated (r = 0.52), but that the percentage of the population that believes that the courts 'always' or 'often' deliver justice is startlingly low in most countries. The substantive pessimism about justice in the surveyed countries suggests serious deficits in the legitimacy of the legal orders.

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13   The wording of this question is intended to reflect the concept as understood by the GSoD Indices' Access to Justice index (*access_just_est*) (Tufis and Hudson 2023).

Figure 2.9. **Overall level of confidence in access to justice**
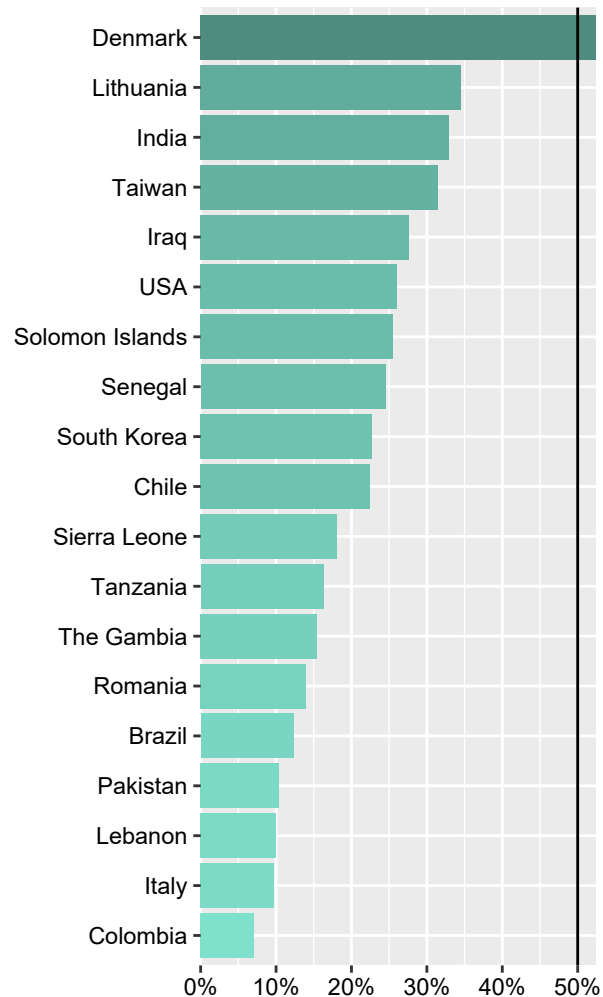
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

There are also several countries in which the popular assessment notably diverges from the overall trend. For example, Iraq has one of the lowest expert assessments among the 19 countries, with a score of 0.31 in the Access to Justice index, but Iraqis have almost as much faith in access to justice in their courts (28 per cent responded 'Always' or 'Often') as the Taiwanese (31 per cent), and more in fact than Americans (26 per cent). Running in the opposite direction, Italians have a negative view of access to justice in their courts (just under 10 per cent responded 'Always' or 'Often'), with a similar level of faith to that of Brazil (12 per cent), despite a wide difference in the expert assessments of the capacities of the court systems.

In many of these countries, there are sizeable segments of the population that answered 'Sometimes' or 'Don't know'. Even so, in a country in which the courts enjoy a healthy level of public legitimacy, one would expect that more than half of the population would believe that the courts deliver justice at least often.

Figure 2.10. **Expert and popular assessments of access to justice**
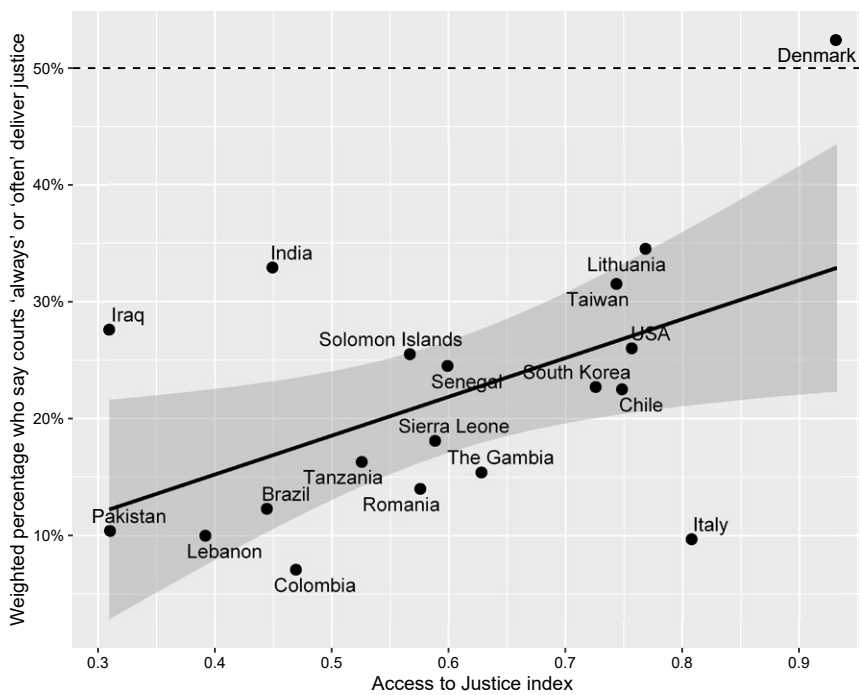
Sources: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024; International IDEA, Global State of Democracy Indices v7.1, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gsod-indices>, accessed 15 March 2024.

Figure 2.11. **Distribution of answers regarding access to justice**
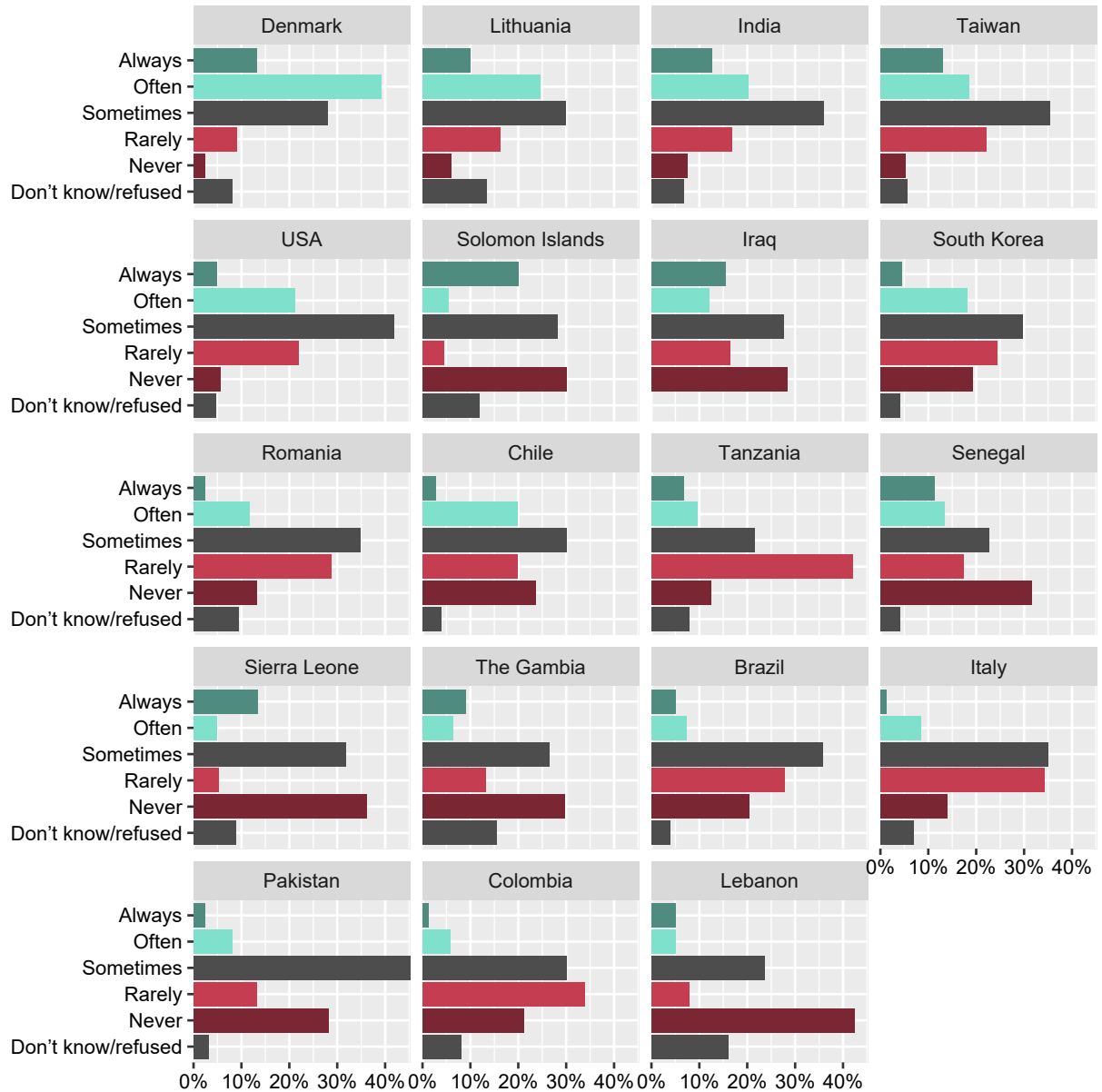
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.
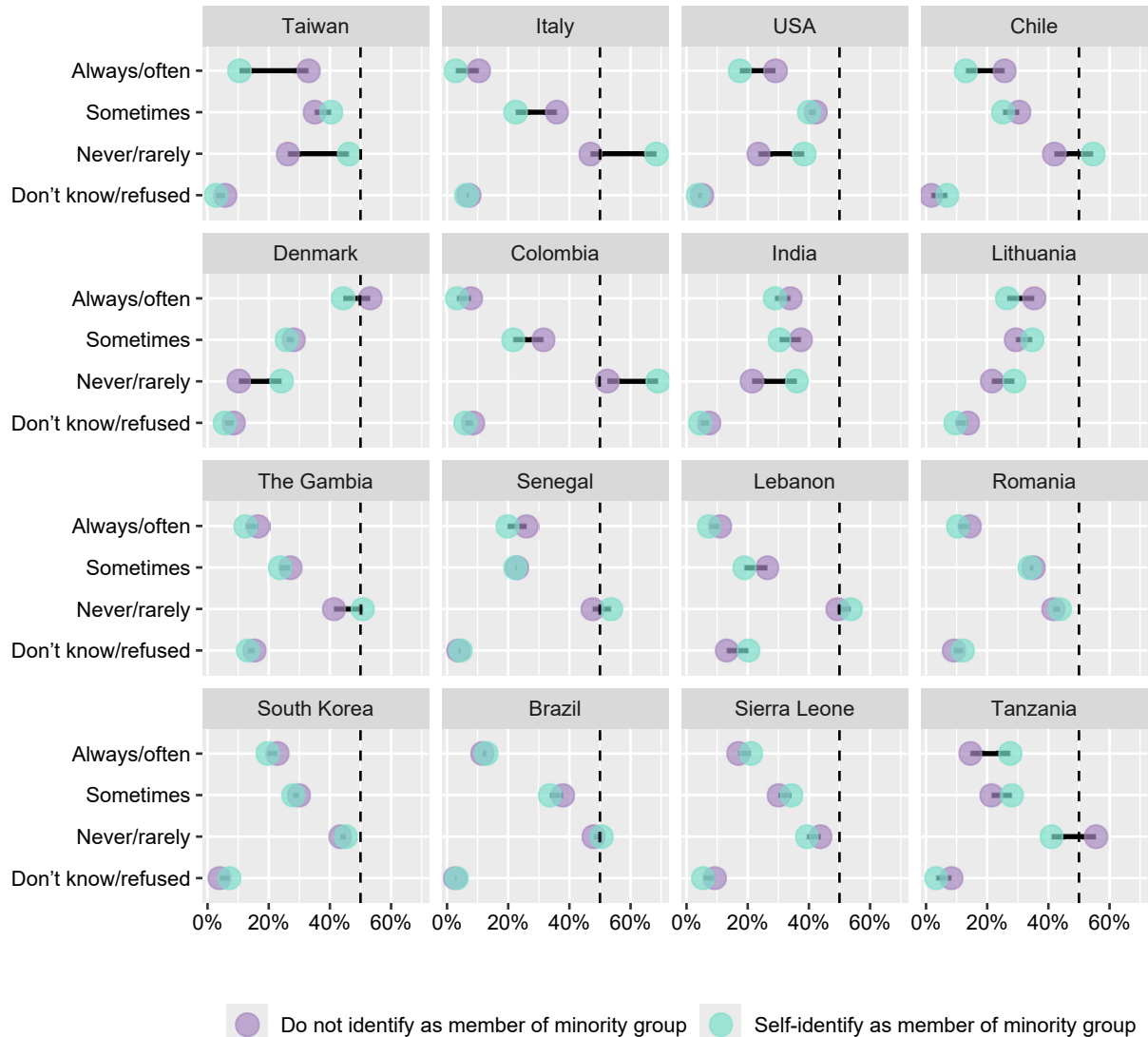
Access to justice and minorities

Across many political and cultural contexts, racial and ethnic minority groups encounter the legal system in profoundly different ways from their majority group fellow citizens. For example, research in the USA has found that for minority groups in that country, negative encounters with the criminal justice system reduce citizens' willingness to seek justice in the civil justice system (Greene 2016), thus compounding inequalities in access to justice. Similar problems have been found in many countries around the world (Ghai and

Cottrell 2009). We would therefore expect to find that survey respondents who self-identify as members of a minority group would provide more negative evaluations of their access to justice than those who do not identify this way.

In at least 15 of the 19 countries surveyed, that expectation holds, and self-identified minority groups express less confidence in their access to justice than majority groups do. The three exceptions are Brazil, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, where more people who identify as minorities have higher levels of confidence in the courts as sources of justice than do their majority group fellow citizens. With the exceptions of Tanzania, these differences are small. In Tanzania those who identify as racial or ethnic minorities are not likely to be economically disadvantaged, and the answers among this group indicate more positive assessments than among the majority population.

On the opposite side, Colombia (17 percentage point gap), Denmark (14 points), Italy (21 points), Taiwan (20 points) and the USA (15 points) have large imbalances at the lower end of the response options, with minorities much more likely to answer that the courts 'rarely' or 'never' deliver justice. The fact that (apart from Colombia) these countries perform well in expert measures emphasizes the importance of both asking citizens about their experiences and disaggregating these responses by social group. Despite the high GSoD Indices scores in these countries, there are real problems with access to justice for some groups within each country.

Figure 2.12. **Access to justice, comparing minority and majority groups**

Do not identify as member of minority group   Self-identify as member of minority group

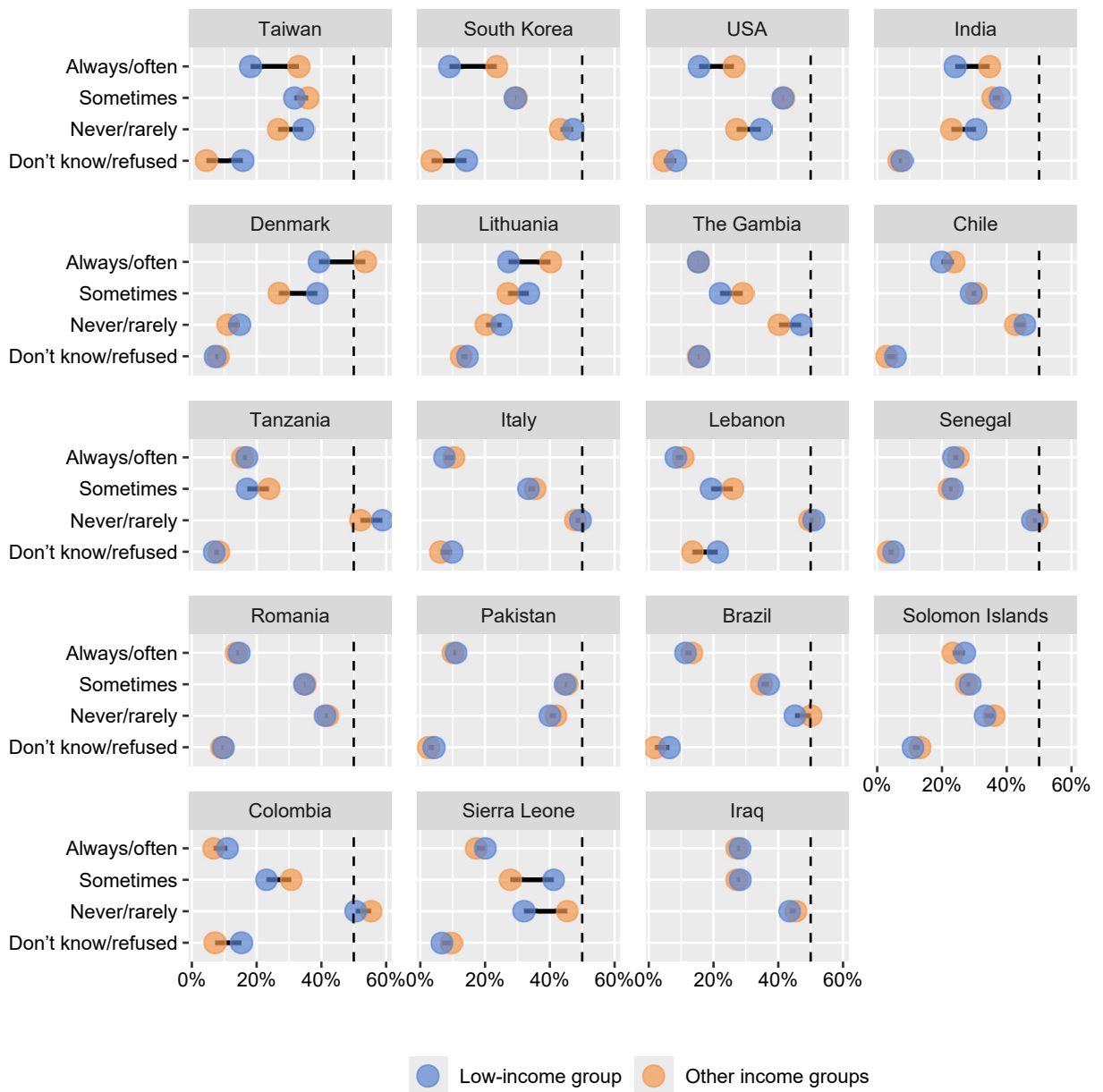*Source:* International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

In 15 countries low-income respondents were more likely to say that the courts 'never' provided equal access to justice.

Access to justice and poverty

When we consider differences between the poorest in society and the rest of the population, similar patterns emerge to those that we saw with regard to minority status. In 15 countries low-income respondents were more likely to say that the courts 'never' provided equal access to justice. Notably, however, those in the lowest income category surveyed in Colombia, Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands were marginally more likely than their wealthier fellow citizens to answer that the courts 'always' or 'often' provided justice. These are three countries with mid-range scores in the GSoD Indices' Access to Justice index. By contrast, three countries with high scores in this index—Denmark (3 percentage point gap), Taiwan (8 points) and the USA (7 points)—all have the

opposite imbalance, with more frequent 'Never' and 'Rarely' responses from the poorest citizens. In countries that the GSoD Indices consider low-performing with regard to Access to Justice (Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan), more low-income respondents felt the court system never provided fair access to justice. Understanding why marginalized groups experience obstacles in access to justice is vital to improving overall performance in these countries.

Figure 2.13. **Access to justice, comparing income groups**

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Access to justice and gender

In many countries women, and especially racialized women, are less likely to be taken seriously and to be treated fairly by the justice system (Richie 2012). We therefore expected to find that women would answer the question about access to justice in more negative ways than men would. That expectation holds for most of the countries surveyed, including in several of the countries with the highest scores on the GSoD Indices measure of Access to Justice—for example, in Denmark (with a 14 percentage point gap) and the USA (15 points). However, there were exceptions: women are more positive about the possibility of achieving a just outcome from court proceedings in Taiwan, Romania and Senegal. The margins are close in most of these countries, but Taiwan stands out for a gender divide in which women are remarkably positive.

Figure 2.14. **Access to justice, comparing gender groups**
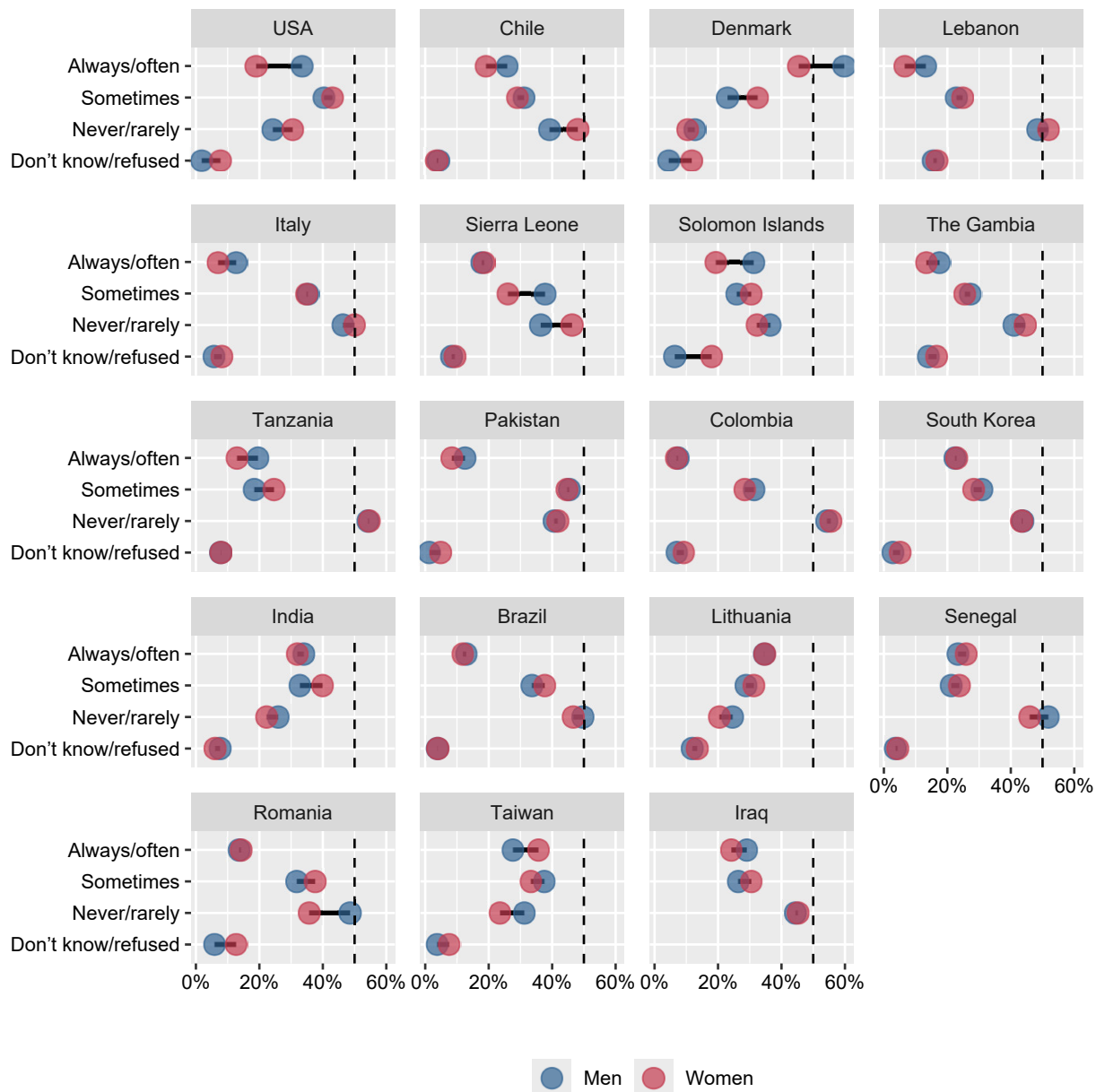
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

2.3. **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

Main takeaways

- In most countries surveyed, most citizens feel they enjoy freedom of expression, but in many countries responses are polarized between two extremes.
- Popular and expert assessments of freedom of expression are largely aligned.
- There are notable gaps between low-income groups and others in perceptions of freedom of expression, most markedly in rich and well-established democracies.

Any assessment of the democratic bona fides of a government or a political system must include evaluations of how free people feel to express their beliefs about issues of public importance. Democracy is a system in which ruling parties lose elections and where citizens can discuss and debate the issues and ideas that decide those elections more or less freely (Przeworski 1991; Habermas 1991). To test this, we asked respondents if they felt they had the freedom to speak publicly on issues of social importance 'always', 'usually', 'about half of the time', 'rarely' or 'never'.

As shown in Figure 2.15, a slight majority of respondents feel they are able to speak freely in nearly every country in the data set. Brazil, Romania, Colombia, Senegal and Pakistan are notable exceptions. In many countries, however, the distribution of answers appears starkly polarized, with answers tending towards the 'Always' and 'Never' extremes of the scale. In Brazil, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands, this polarization is marked, revealing significant public disagreements over the bounds of the public sphere.

Figure 2.15. **Freedom to speak publicly (sum of 'Always' and 'Usually' responses)**
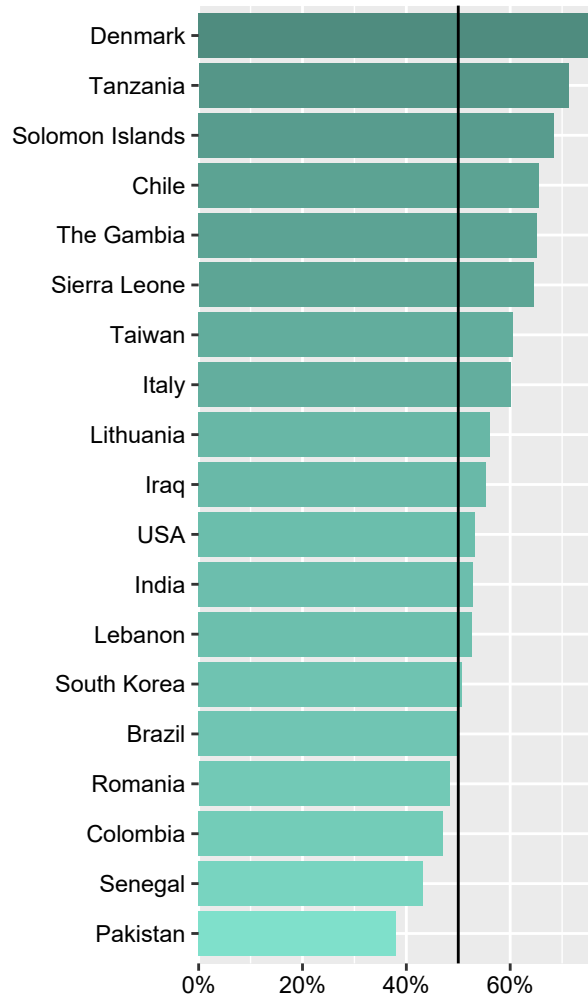
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Figure 2.16. **Freedom to speak publicly, overall distributions**

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Expert and popular views of freedom of expression

Expert and public assessments of freedom of expression are, in comparison with other issues discussed in this paper, relatively in line with each other (the Pearson correlation is 0.42). This is largely intuitive, as experts are likely making their assessments of the strength of a country's freedom of expression using the same analytical lenses as everyday respondents: what the mass media talk about and what they avoid talking about, as well as the ever-popular Internet-age pastime of talking about what can and cannot be talked about.[14] At the same time, though, the high GSoD Indices scores and relatively low percentages of the public who feel confident about this right are notable in Romania, Senegal, South Korea and the USA (see Figure 2.17).

Figure 2.17. **Expert and popular evaluations of freedom of expression**
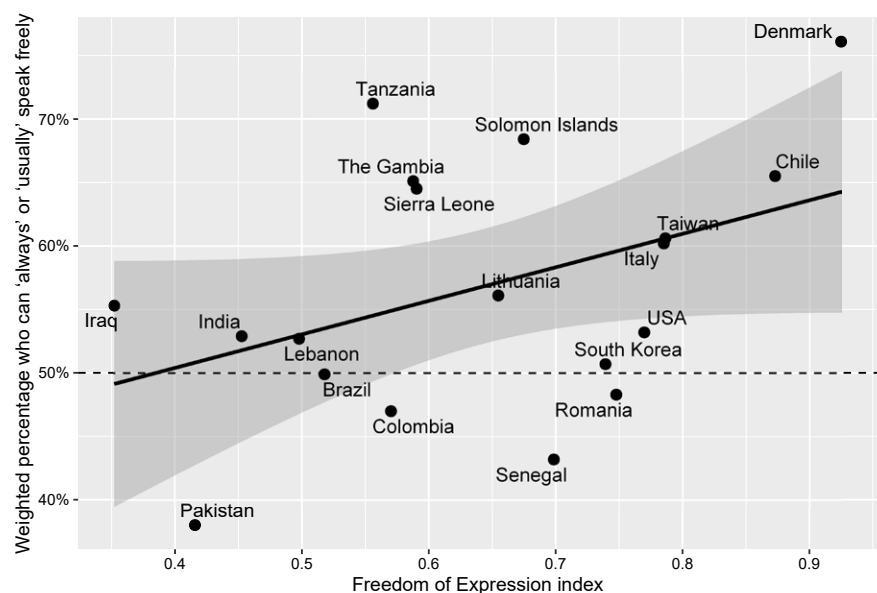
Sources: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024; International IDEA, Global State of Democracy Indices v7.1, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gsod-indices>, accessed 15 March 2024.

Freedom of expression and minorities

Self-identified minorities' perception of freedom of expression differs significantly—sometimes better, sometimes worse—from that of majority populations across the data set. Self-identified minorities in Tanzania (7 percentage points more likely than majority respondents), Senegal (6 points more likely) and Sierra Leone (5 points more likely) are more likely to say they always or usually have the freedom to speak publicly, while self-identified minorities in Denmark are 14 points less likely than majority respondents to say so. The same disparity occurs in Chile (12 percentage points less

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likely), Lithuania (10 points less likely) and Taiwan (8 points less likely). It is noteworthy that the minorities who feel most constrained relative to the majority population are in some of the highest-performing and wealthiest countries in the data set.

While the gaps are not as large as in the aforementioned countries, minorities in Italy, South Korea and the USA are also less likely to enjoy the same levels of freedom of speech as the majority. The drivers of these issues likely vary widely between countries, but it reflects the tension between libertarian and egalitarian aspects of the liberal democratic tradition—the balance of protecting freedom of expression while regulating hate speech and discrimination (Yong 2011). If, as is widely argued, tolerating offensive ideas is the price to pay for living in a liberal democracy, it is also the case that these costs are neither evenly nor justly distributed (Brink 2001).

Figure 2.18. **Freedom to speak publicly, comparing minority and majority groups**
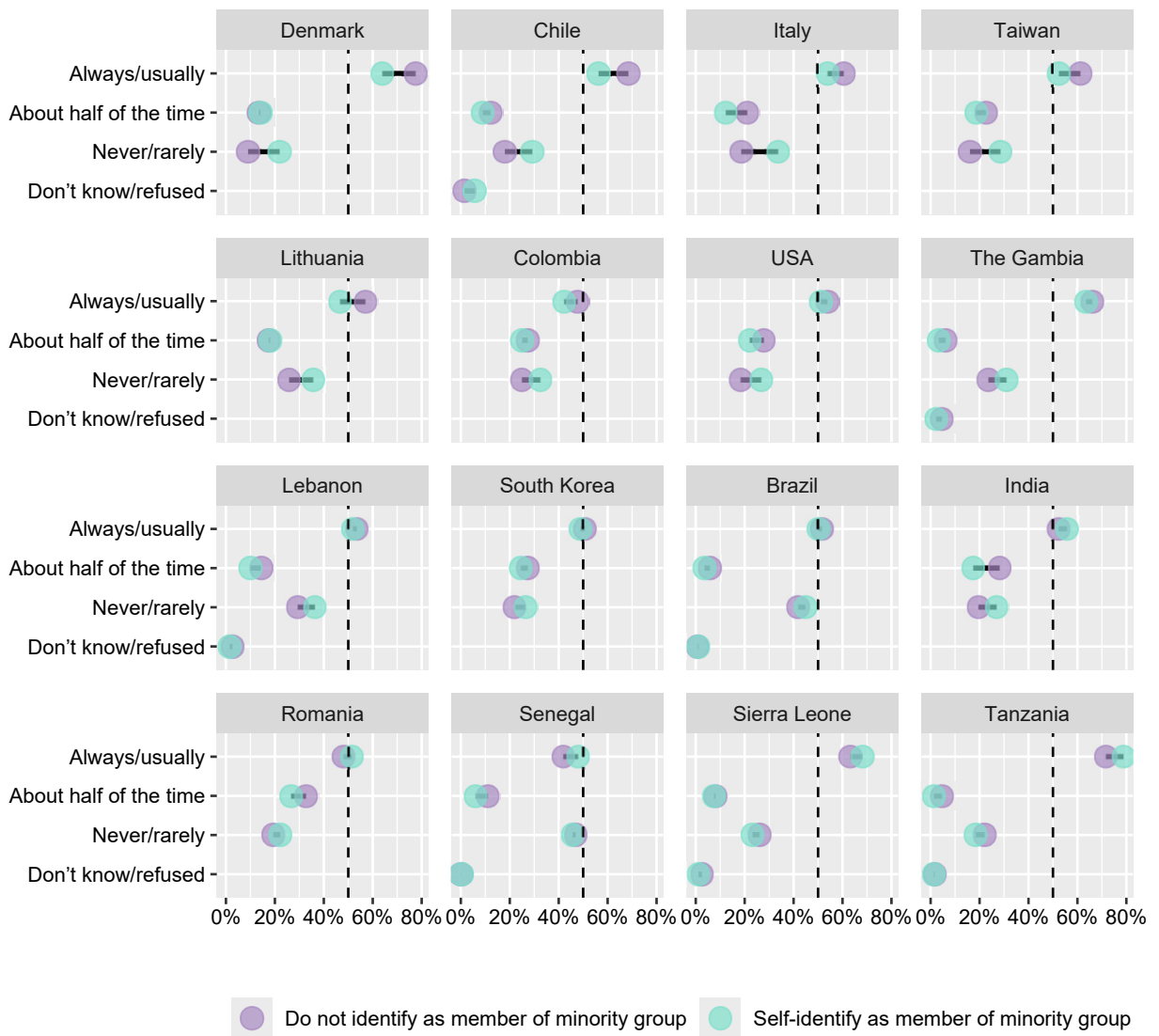
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Freedom of expression and poverty

Freedom of expression is also frequently experienced unequally across income groups, both in countries with significant minority populations, such as the USA, and in much more homogeneous states like Italy, Lithuania and South Korea. This phenomenon seems to hold even in high-performing democracies such as Denmark, where the low-income cohort is 15 percentage points less likely than the rest of the population to usually or always feel able to exercise their freedom of expression. Similar results are found in Italy (13 points less likely), Lithuania (13 points less likely) and the USA (13 points less likely), as well as in South Korea (16 points less likely).

These discrepancies can be understood as a consequence of the high levels of economic inequality prevalent in highly developed economies: the relative socio-economic cost to low-income people for voicing an unpopular opinion in public can be high enough for those living in precarity that the extensive exercise of free speech becomes a de facto luxury good (Voerman-Tam, Grimes and Watson 2023).

Figure 2.19. **Freedom to speak publicly, comparing income groups**

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Freedom of expression and gender

Differences in the freedom to express oneself on sensitive issues are clearly observable between men and women. In nearly every country in the data set, women feel less able to speak freely in public than men. The disparity is particularly stark in Iraq, Senegal and the Solomon Islands, as seen in Figure 2.20. That women are typically less willing to voice unpopular opinions because of traditional patriarchal norms, even in established liberal democratic societies, is well understood, but perhaps of greatest interest is where the gap is the smallest (Fraser 1994). Brazilian women (only 2 percentage points less than men) are far more likely to enjoy their freedom of speech relative to men than Chilean women (9 points less). South Korean (1 point less), Lebanese (1 point less) and Tanzanian women (4 points less) enjoy greater relative freedom of speech than Americans (6 points less). Perhaps the most striking example is the Solomon Islands, where women are 18 percentage points less likely than men to feel they can always or usually exercise their freedom of expression.

Figure 2.20. **Freedom to speak publicly, comparing gender groups**
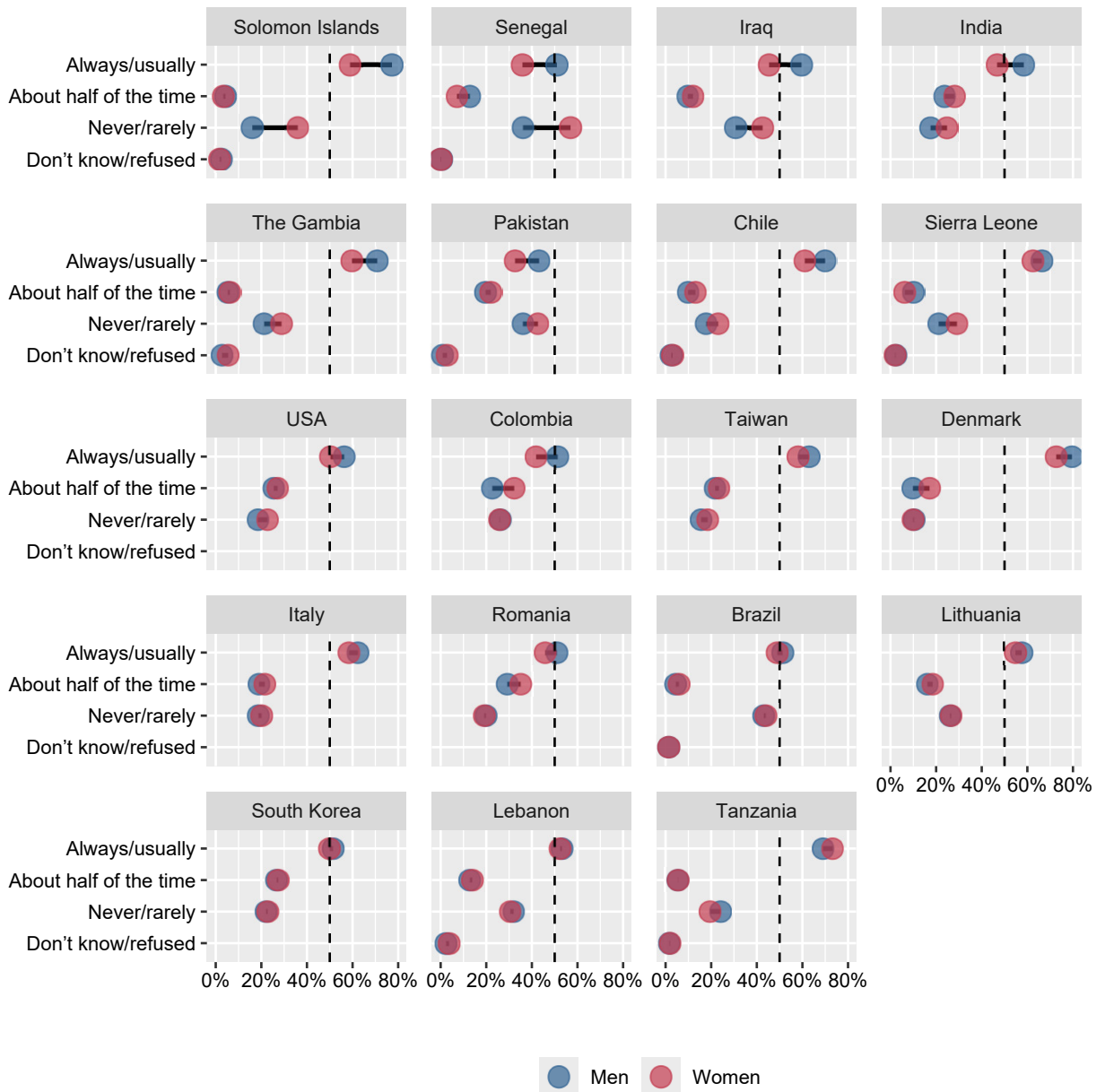
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Chapter 3

VALUES, SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT AND PROGRESS OVER TIME

3.1. DEMOCRATIC VALUES

> **Main takeaways**
>
> - In 8 of the 19 countries, more people have favourable views of a 'strong leader' than have unfavourable views.
> - There is no country in which a majority of respondents have 'extremely unfavourable' thoughts about non-democratic leadership. Internationally, the most common predisposition is to lack any sort of negative predisposition towards such a leader.
> - People in countries with higher levels of representation have lower support for a 'strong leader', but India and Tanzania stand out as countries with high levels of support for a 'strong leader'.

People's access to institutions is only part of the picture. It is also important to understand the values that underpin people's worldviews and preferences. When asked about the degree of favourable and unfavourable thoughts or feelings about a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections, the responses make it clear that living in a strong democracy does not guarantee a rejection of non-democratic leaders.[15] In Denmark, which sits at the top of the GSoD Indices' rankings for Representation, a quarter of respondents have some degree of favourable feelings in this regard.

In only six countries—Denmark, Colombia, Italy, South Korea, Taiwan and the USA—did a majority of respondents have some degree of unfavourable feelings about strong yet undemocratic leaders. There is no country in which a majority of respondents have 'extremely unfavourable' thoughts about non-democratic leadership. Internationally, the most common predisposition is to lack any

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15   The wording of this question is copied from a survey conducted by the United Kingdom think tank Onward (Stanley et al. 2022).

sort of negative predisposition towards such a leader. This is a critical point, demonstrating that democracy may not be an obvious good to everyone and highlighting how important it is to consistently prove and defend its benefits.

PODS assessed popular attitudes towards strong leaders using two sets of ordered questions, first asking if the respondents had favourable (or unfavourable) thoughts and feelings towards strong leaders, and then, as relevant, about the intensity of those thoughts and feelings. These response options and the approach to questioning take into account the possibility that a person may have both favourable and unfavourable views about being governed by a strong leader. However, most respondents either have a fixed preference in one direction or expressed no opinion at all.

In Figure 3.1 we plot the share (weighted proportion) both of respondents who have favourable thoughts and feelings (in red) and of those who have unfavourable thoughts and feelings (in blue). The countries are ordered from a balance towards unfavourable to a balance towards favourable (the latter being less compatible with democracy). The countries from Denmark to the Solomon Islands all have a greater share of the population who have unfavourable views. From The Gambia to Iraq, more people have a favourable view than an unfavourable view. Note also the countries where a small number of people expressed either a favourable or an unfavourable view, such as Chile, The Gambia and Lithuania.

Figure 3.1. **Favourable and unfavourable views of being governed by a 'strong leader'**
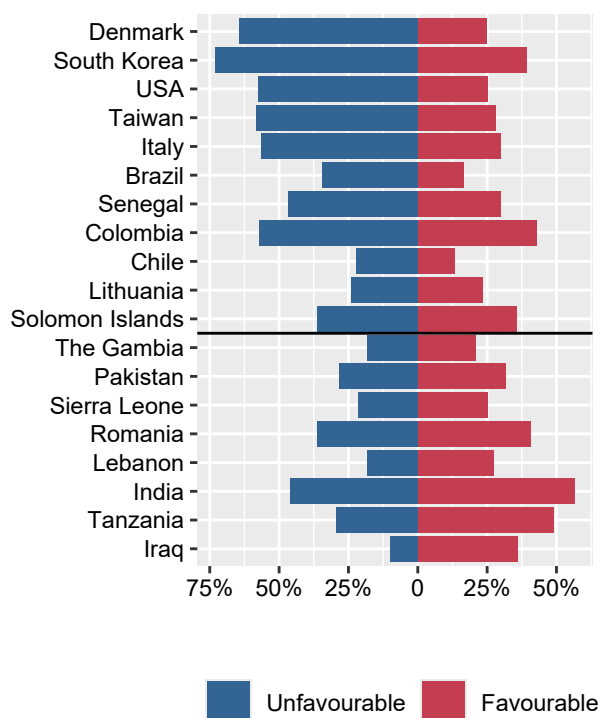
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Only in India and Tanzania—also, perhaps not coincidentally, the only two countries where a majority indicated satisfaction with their government—did a number approaching half say that they had any favourable feelings of the idea of a strong leader who did not have to bother with elections (56 per cent in India and 49 per cent in Tanzania). Relatively strong sentiments also exist in countries with varying lengths of democratic history. The balance towards unfavourable views is intuitive in most countries, particularly those with a more recent history of authoritarian rule, such as Brazil (34 per cent unfavourable), Chile (22 per cent unfavourable), South Korea (73 per cent unfavourable) and Taiwan (58 per cent unfavourable). There does not seem to be a clear relationship between feelings about strong, non-democratic leaders and the longevity of democracy in an international perspective. Iraq stands out as a case where the balance of views tilts strongly towards favourable thoughts and feelings about strong leaders. This is not likely to be a preference for the kind of authoritarian rule experienced under Saddam Hussein but may be a reaction to the instability that has characterized Iraq's political system over the past decade.

Figure 3.2. **Distributions of *favourable* thoughts and feelings about a 'strong leader'**
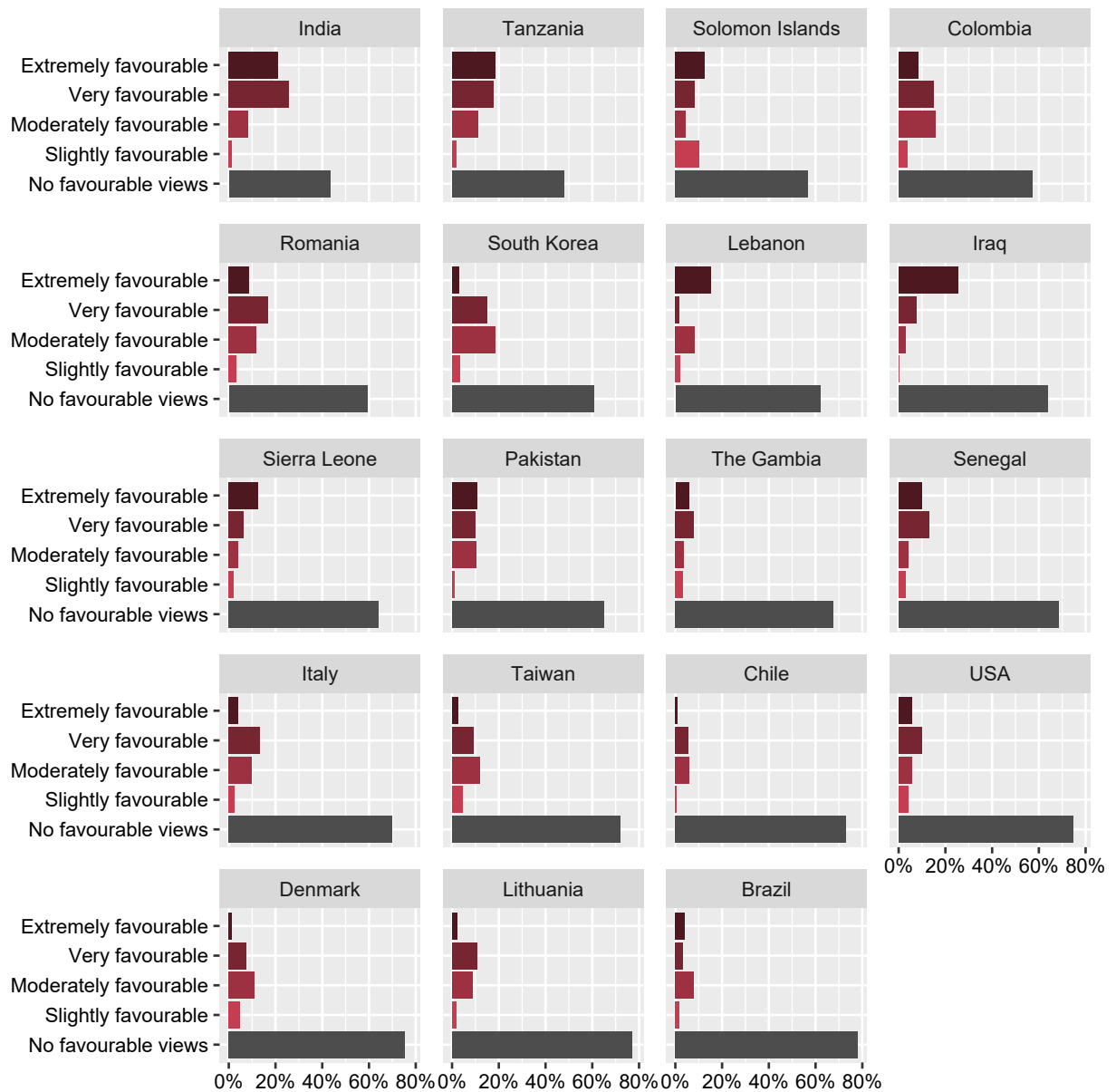
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

A key consideration for democratic resilience is not just the lack of positive feelings towards would-be authoritarians but also strong negative dispositions towards such figures. As is clear in Figure 3.3, it is striking that there is no country in which a majority of respondents have 'extremely unfavourable' thoughts about strong leaders who do not have to bother with elections. This is especially notable in cases like Denmark, which sits atop the GSOD rankings but where only less than half of respondents say they have 'extremely unfavourable' thoughts about these kinds of leaders. It is also the case for

Romania and South Korea, where relatively large numbers of people have some degree of favourable thoughts about these kinds of leaders despite these countries having high Representation scores in the GSoD Indices (Figure 3.4). Clearly, successful democracy, as assessed by experts, does not always engender unambiguous disapproval of non-democratic leaders.

Figure 3.3. **Distributions of *unfavourable* thoughts and feelings about a 'strong leader'**
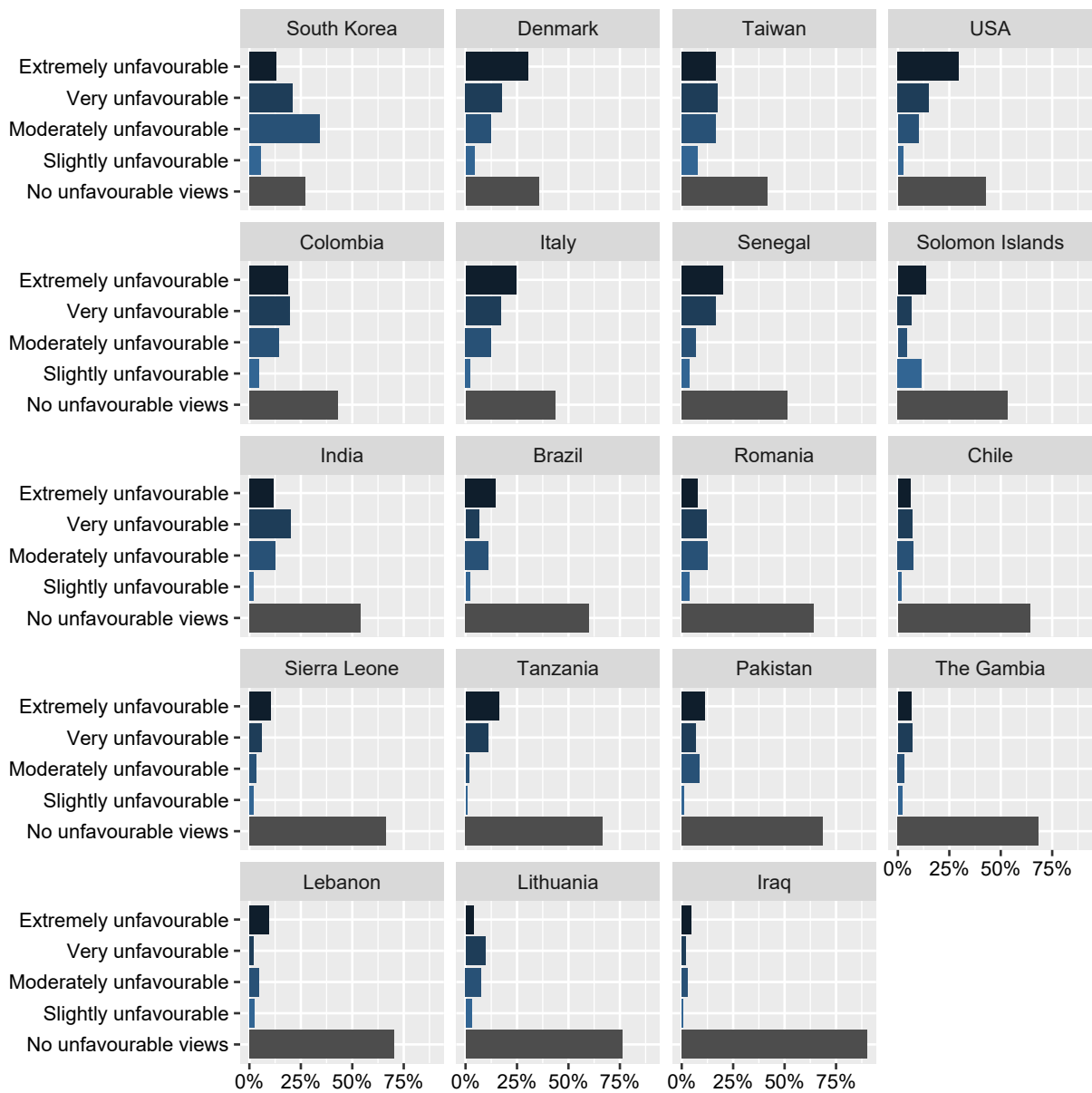
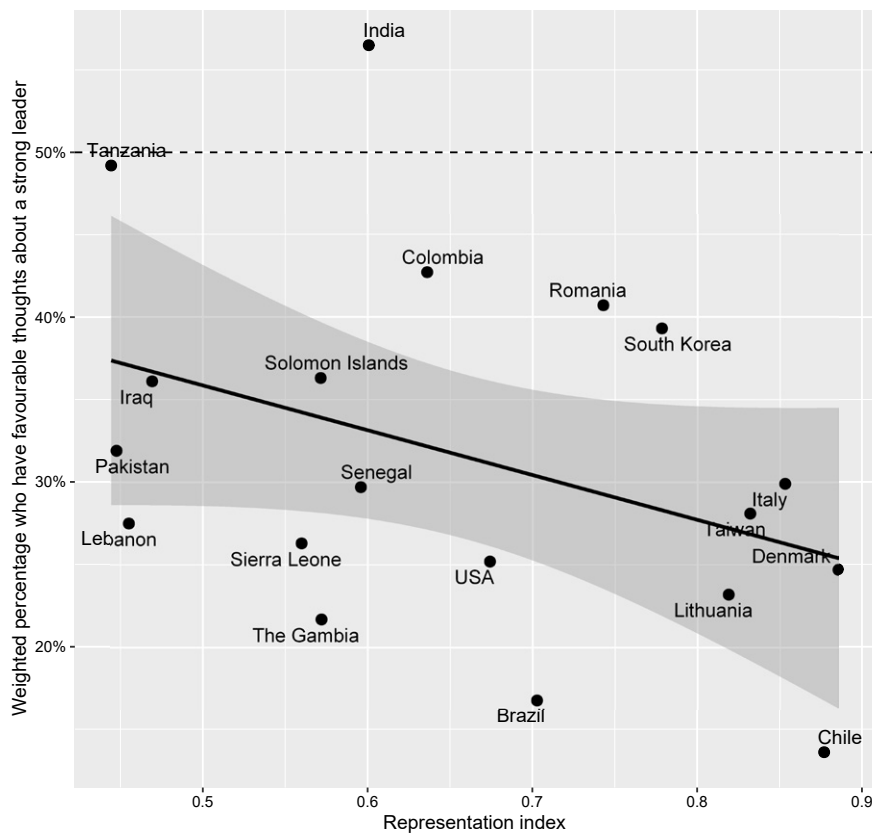*Source:* International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Broadly speaking, one would expect that these dispositions towards the possibility of a strong leader would be negatively associated with measures of democracy. Figure 3.4 plots the relationship between the GSoD index of Representation (which measures a range of factors related to credible electoral processes and parliamentary oversight capacity) and the proportion of the population who have at least some favourable thoughts and feelings about strong leaders. The data do not strongly confirm[16] the claim that people in more democratic countries are less likely to have favourable views of strong leaders, but the tendency seems to be in that direction.

Figure 3.4. **Favourability towards a 'strong leader' in comparison with expert-assessed level of Representation**

Sources: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024; International IDEA, Global State of Democracy Indices v7.1, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/gsod-indices>, accessed 15 March 2024.

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[16]   The Pearson correlation is -0.38, but the relationship is marginally insignificant (p = 0.11).

Minorities and views on strong leaders

Preferences regarding strong leaders may also be related to status as a member of a minority group. Many authoritarian governments over the past century have particularly persecuted members of minority groups—Iraqi Kurds under Saddam Hussein, the Tuareg under various Sahelian governments and the Ixil Maya in Guatemala under Efraín Ríos Montt (Baser and Toivanen 2017; Human Rights Watch 2013; Perrin 2014). Broadly speaking, autocracies are comparatively more likely than democracies to pre-emptively repress already marginalized ethnic groups (Beiser-McGrath 2019). On this basis we might expect that people who self-identify as a member of a minority group would be more likely to have unfavourable views about strong leaders.

The survey data (see Figure 3.5) show first that self-identified members of a minority group are generally more likely to express an opinion in one direction or the other than those who do not identify as such.[17] In most countries it is indeed the case that minorities are more likely to express unfavourable views, but Lebanon and Senegal do not follow this pattern. The survey data also show (perhaps unexpectedly) that those who identify as members of a minority group are more likely to express favourable views about strong leaders in most countries. Of course, as noted above, it is possible for someone to express both positive and negative views on this issue (likely with different intensities). Chile and the USA are notable among the surveyed countries in the consistency of the comparison, with minorities being both more unfavourable towards strong leaders and less favourable towards them.

Figure 3.5. **Favourable and unfavourable views of a 'strong leader', comparing minority and majority groups**
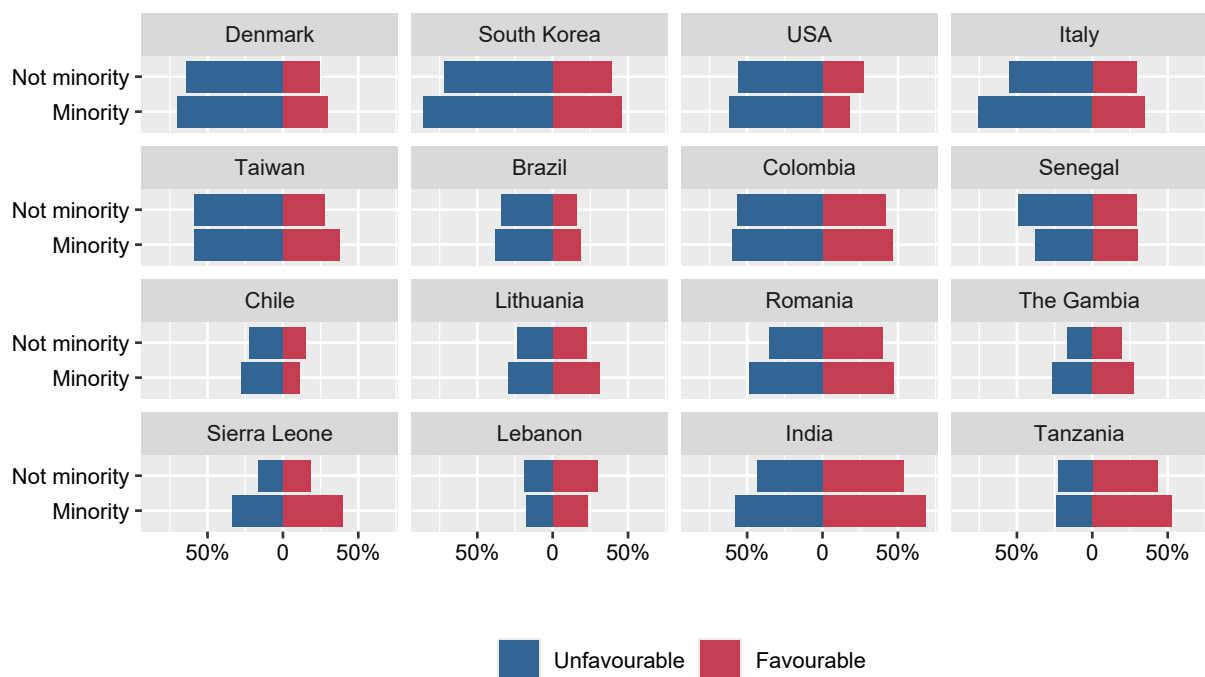
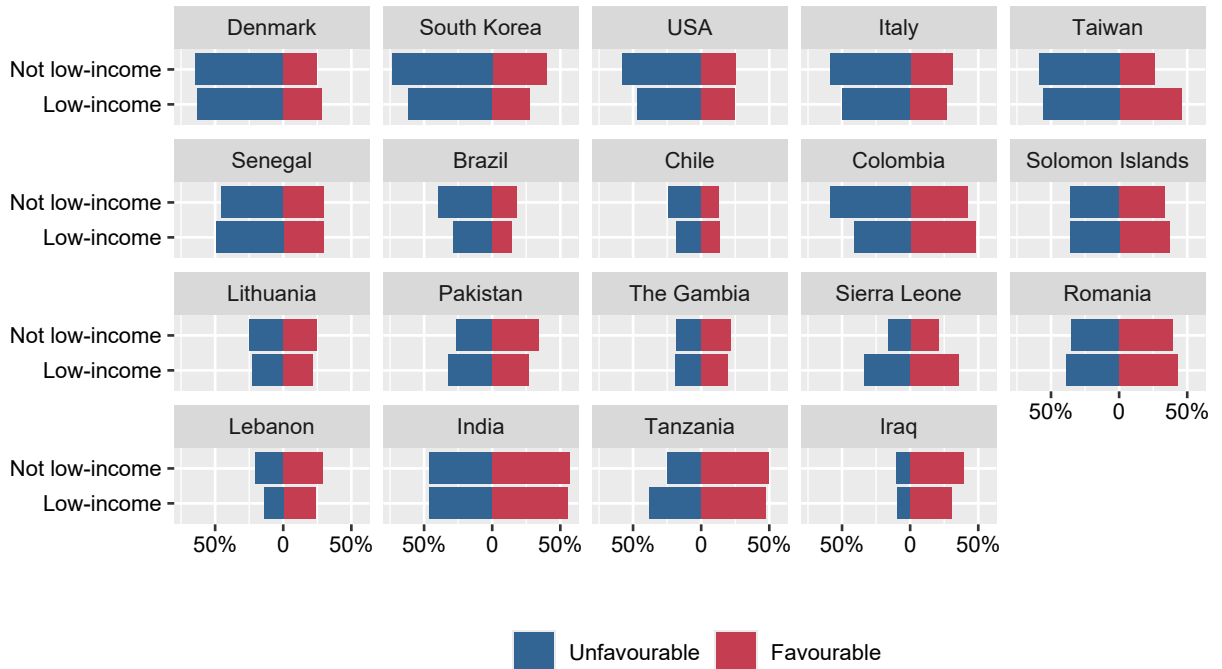*Source:* International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

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17   Note that we do not include self-reported minority status for Iraq, Pakistan or the Solomon Islands.

Views on strong leaders and poverty

The directionality of the relationship between being among the poorest in society and amenability to a strong leader who does not have to bother with elections is less clear. It could be that economic precarity would make one more strongly opposed to the arbitrariness of the exercise of power by a strong leader. It could also be the case that economic precarity would lead one to view the potential stability of predictable non-democratic rule favourably. The picture is also complicated by the strong overlap in many countries between low-income and minority statuses. As illustrated in Figure 3.6, few strong differences stand out in this comparison. In many of the surveyed countries, those in the lowest income category were less likely to express a view one way or the other.

Even so, a few countries display a relatively consistent internal picture. In Denmark, Chile, Colombia and Taiwan, those in the lowest income category are both less unfavourable and more favourable towards strong leaders. The USA almost fits this pattern, but those in the lowest income category were marginally less supportive of strong leaders than the rest of the population.

Figure 3.6. **Favourable and unfavourable views of a 'strong leader', comparing income groups**

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Views on strong leaders and gender

Gender is not a consistent predictor of favourability towards being ruled by a strong leader. In most of the surveyed countries, men were more likely to express an opinion on one side or the other, with women more likely to have neither favourable nor unfavourable views on the subject (see Figure 3.7). The only countries where the gender differences on the two sides of the question vary in a coherent way are Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan. In these three countries, men were more favourable and less unfavourable towards strong leaders than women were. The Gambia and Senegal show a similar pattern, but in both of these countries men were slightly more unfavourable towards strong leaders than women were—though men were significantly more favourable towards strong leaders.

Figure 3.7. **Favourable and unfavourable views of a 'strong leader', comparing genders**
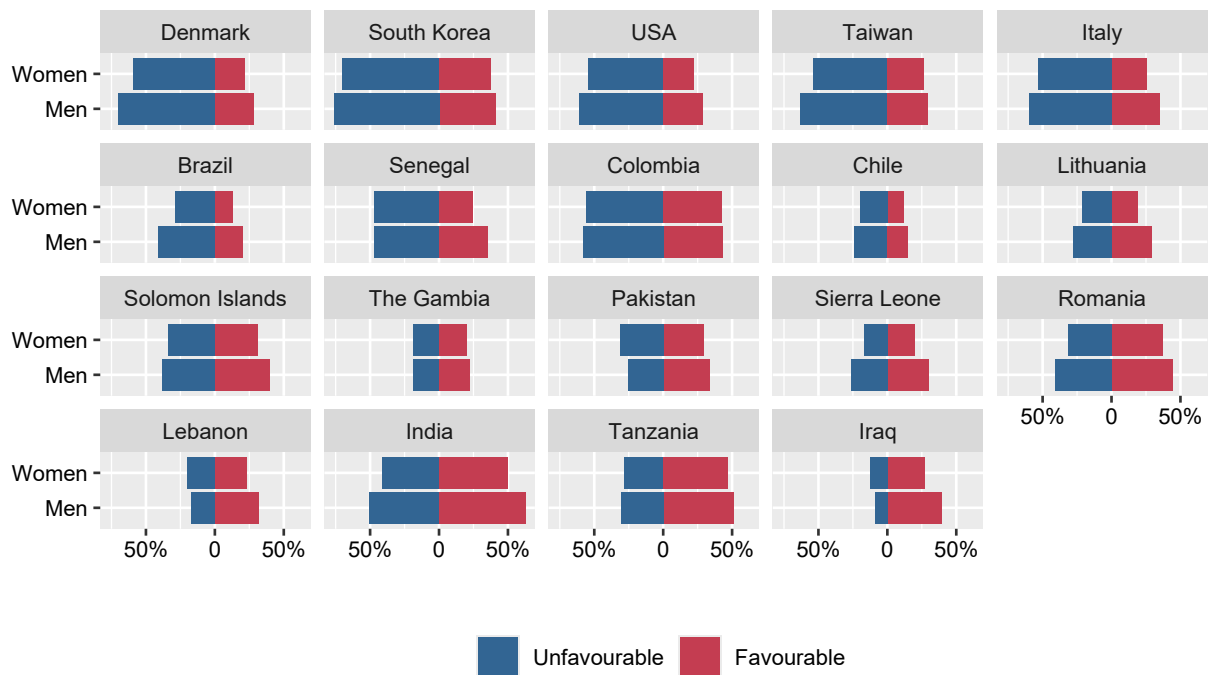
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

3.2. **SATISFACTION WITH GOVERNMENT**

Main takeaways

- In 17 of the 19 countries, less than half of the people are satisfied with their governments.
- Only in India and Tanzania is a majority of the population satisfied with the performance of the national government.
- Politics can, in some countries, trump absolute economic outcomes. In Brazil, Colombia, Senegal and Sierra Leone, the poorest in society are more likely to approve of the government's performance than the rest of the population.

Given the generally low evaluations of core institutions and rights, it is perhaps not surprising that people are more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with the performance of their national governments in the majority of countries in the data set. In the large majority of countries surveyed, less than 40 per cent of respondents expressed any level of satisfaction with their respective governments. On the lower end of the spectrum, only 27 per cent of South Koreans, 19 per cent of Italians and 9 per cent of Romanians expressed any degree of satisfaction. The two positive outliers are Tanzania and India, where 79 per cent and 59 per cent, respectively, are satisfied or completely satisfied with their respective national government. In India this is in line with other public opinion polls, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi's domestic approval rating has long held at or above 66 per cent (The Indian Express 2024). Low levels of satisfaction with the Lebanese and Romanian governments (9 per cent in both cases) is also in line with expectations, given the former's severe economic and political crisis and the latter's history of political 'stable instability' (Dagher and Altug 2023; Anghel 2022)

Satisfaction with government and minorities
In about half the contexts (nine countries), self-identified members of minority groups are more likely to be dissatisfied with their governments than others. In the USA the gap is 13 percentage points. The gaps in Denmark (16 points), Italy (23 points) and Taiwan (37 points) are also significant. These four countries are also among those where low-income residents are likely to have the greatest dissatisfaction with government relative to the rest of the country— suggesting both an overlap between these two groups and the effects of intersectional discrimination in these wealthy, high-performing democratic countries. Those in the low-income group are 12 percentage points less likely to be satisfied with the government in Taiwan. In Lithuania this figure is 11 percentage points; in South Korea, 11 percentage points; in Italy, 9 points; and in the USA, 7 points (see Figure 3.11). The gaps are concerning and highlight the need for more research into the drivers, especially discrimination.

Self-identified minorities are most likely to be relatively satisfied with their governments in Senegal (12 percentage points higher), Brazil (5 points higher)

Figure 3.8. **Satisfaction with government, sum of 'Completely satisfied' and 'Satisfied' responses**
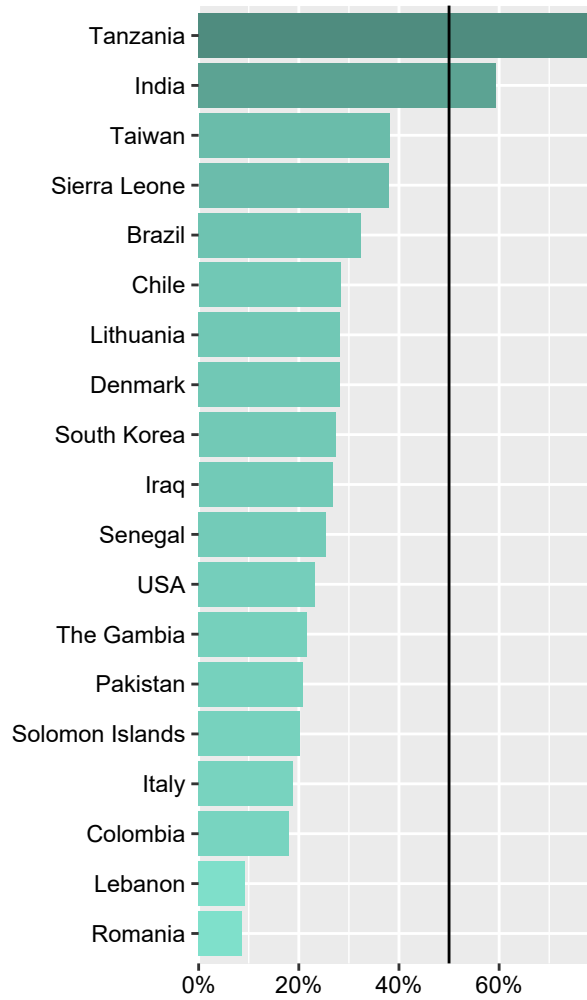
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Figure 3.9. **Distribution of answers regarding satisfaction with government**
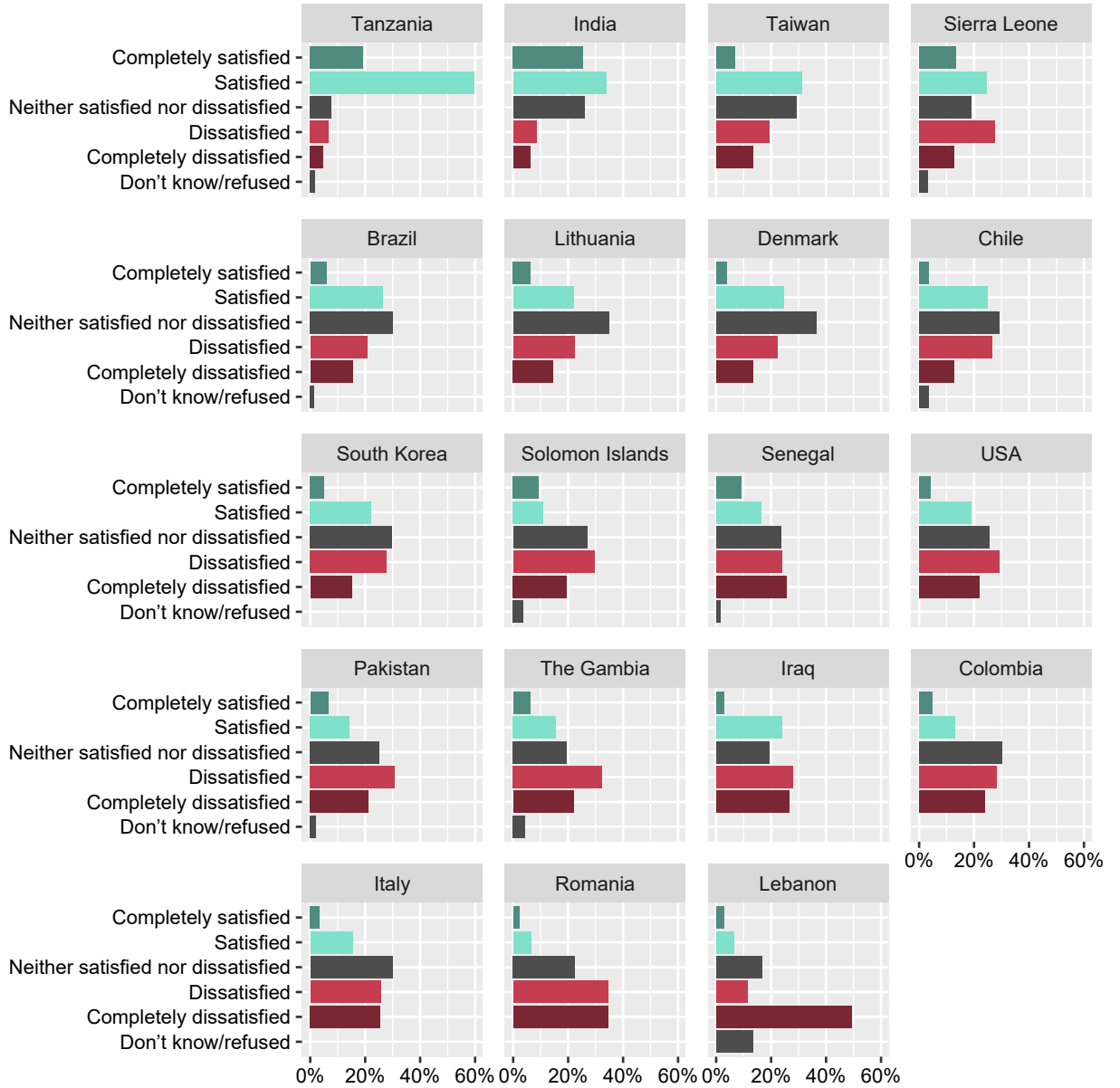
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

and Sierra Leone (4 points higher). It will be important for future research to investigate what lessons can be learned from these cases.

Figure 3.10. **Satisfaction with government, comparing minority and majority groups**
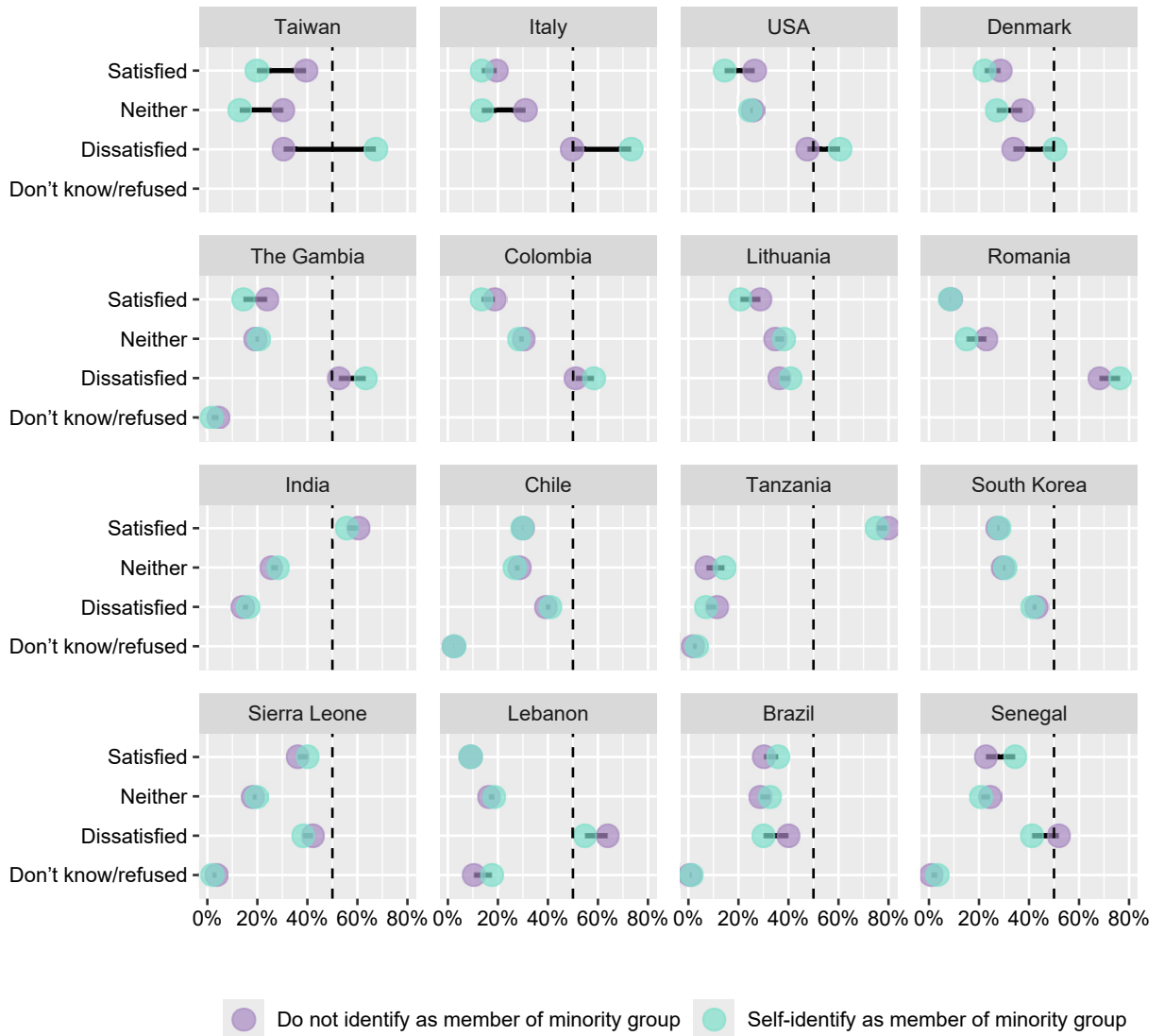
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Satisfaction with government and poverty

In the aggregate, respondents in the low-income group are less likely than the rest of the population to be satisfied with the performance of their government. While it is intuitive that low-income citizens in a given country would be more critical of their national government's overall performance, this is not always the case: in Sierra Leone (12 percentage points more satisfied), Romania

(6 points more), Brazil (4 points more) and Colombia (3 points more), the reverse is true. In Brazil and Colombia, this could be attributed to the election of pro-poor leftist presidents in late 2022 (Al Jazeera 2022; Turkewitz 2022), but government policy alone does not explain the phenomenon: Sierra Leone has suffered from persistent, significantly high levels of poverty and a cost-of-living crisis so severe it precipitated a coup attempt in November 2023 (UNDP 2023a; Mammone 2023).

Figure 3.11. **Satisfaction with government, comparing income groups**
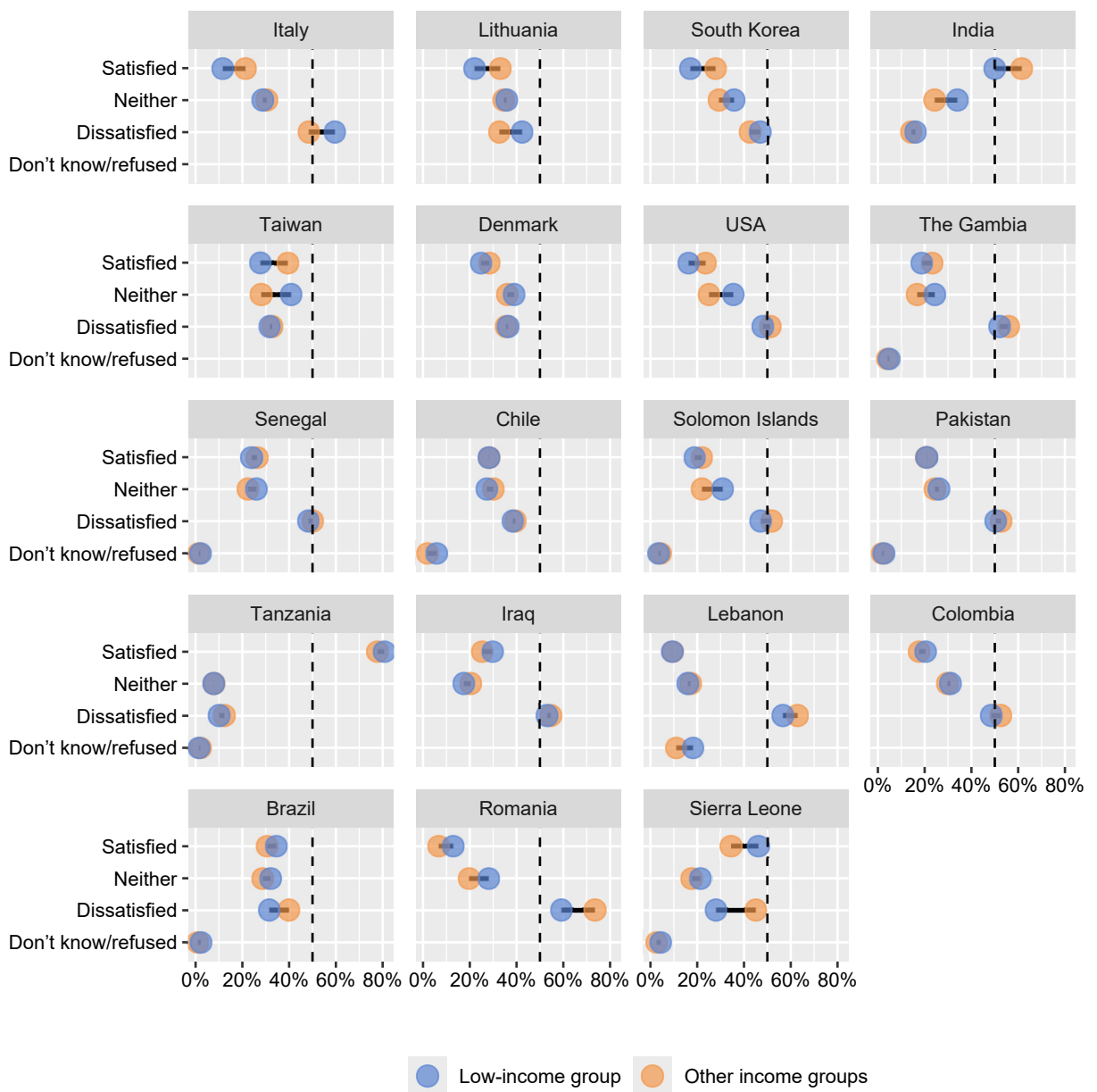
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Satisfaction with government and gender

In nearly every country, women are roughly as satisfied with their government or slightly less satisfied than men, when compared to the gaps seen between other groups in other issues. Only in Iraq and Tanzania are women more satisfied by a significant margin (8 and 7 percentage points, respectively), and Lithuania and Italy represent the opposite extreme, where men are 12 and 9 percentage points, respectively, more likely than women to say they are satisfied with the performance of their government. There are five countries where men are much more likely than women to express outright dissatisfaction with the government: Brazil (10 percentage points), Denmark (9 points), Iraq (11 points), Romania (9 points) and Taiwan (12 points). The largest divergence on either satisfaction or dissatisfaction is found in Sierra Leone, where women are 13 percentage points more likely than men to be dissatisfied with the national government.

Figure 3.12. **Satisfaction with government, comparing gender groups**

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

3.3. **INTERGENERATIONAL PROGRESS**

> **Main takeaways**
>
> - In only four countries—The Gambia, Brazil, Lithuania and Denmark—do a majority feel they are doing better economically than their parents.
> - There is a weak correlation between popular perceptions of progress and statistics on economic development, even when using holistic indicators like the United Nations Human Development Index.
> - In wealthy European democracies, self-identified minorities and people experiencing poverty are significantly more likely to believe they are doing worse than their parents, while the opposite is true in sub-Saharan Africa.

For many people the promise of democracy is not philosophical or abstract but anchored in the belief that a democratic society is also the best option for providing the material and political goods that society demands. We asked respondents whether they are better or worse off than their parents. Overall, in only four countries—The Gambia (62 per cent), Brazil (61 per cent), Lithuania (56 per cent) and Denmark (53 per cent)—did a majority of respondents feel that they were better off than their parents. In Lebanon 70 per cent felt that they were decidedly worse off than previous generations, followed by Iraq and Italy at 48 per cent and 45 per cent, respectively.

In some countries—such as Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone and South Korea—a significant majority of citizens are polarized between those with optimistic and pessimistic outlooks on their personal economic situation. In all four cases, at least 72 per cent of citizens felt that they were either better or worse off than their parents, with the differences between the two groups ranging from 2 percentage points in Romania to 14 points in South Korea. And respondents in general seem to be fairly capable of determining their own relative economic situation, given what we know about macroeconomic trends in each country—Italy's (45 per cent responded 'Worse off') stagnation and struggles with quality youth employment are immediately visible, as is Lebanon's (70 per cent responded 'Worse off') dire economic crisis.

Expert and popular views on progress
We chose the change in the UN Human Development Index (HDI) from 2005 to 2021 as an expert measure of intergenerational socio-economic progress, as its holistic approach to human well-being is more likely to cohere with ordinary people's conception of progress than alternatives like gross domestic product per capita. The time frame was chosen to be long enough to reflect long-term changes in the socio-economic situation in a given country, as well as to provide comparable data for as many countries in the data set as possible.[18]

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[18]   Given that data for Taiwan are not available from UN sources, they do not appear in Figure 3.14.

Figure 3.13. **Distribution of answers regarding economic progress**
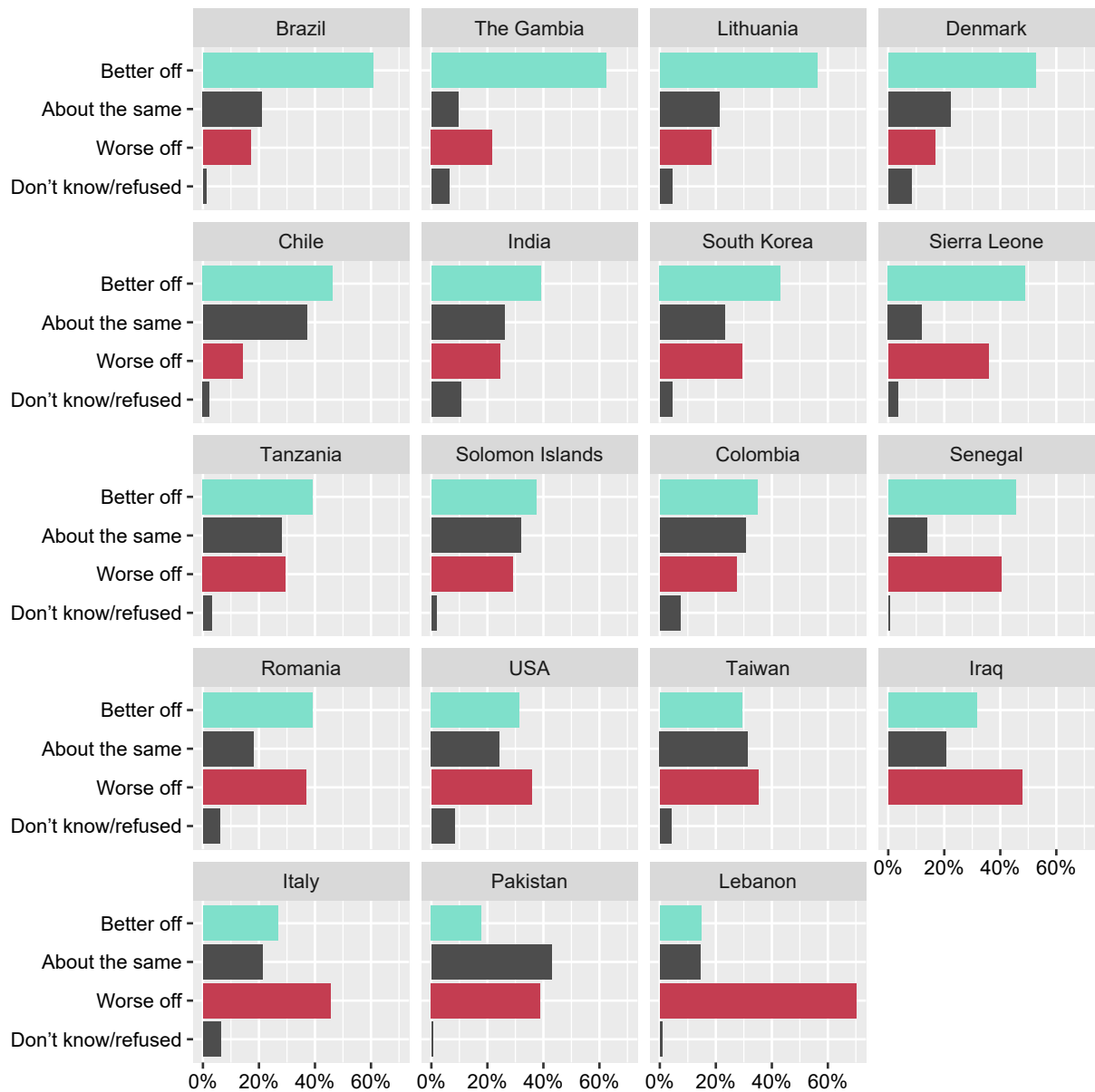
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

As seen in Figure 3.14, there is only a weak statistical correlation (r = 0.44) between socio-economic progress as defined by changes in the HDI from 2005 to 2021 and a belief among citizens in a given country that they are better off than their parents. The weakness of this correlation suggests that even a holistic and broad-based indicator like the HDI at best only partially explains how citizens understand changes in their quality of life over time. Notably, no correlation at all exists if we exclude the outlier of Lebanon. Clearly, people's experiences of improvement are not in line with what is observable in the data.

The question of intergenerational progress is a core one for the sustainability of any political system. The responses in many countries do not come close to mapping onto existing economic data, reflecting the complex and necessarily political understanding individuals have of changing economic conditions.

Figure 3.14. **Economic progress, comparing expert and popular evaluations**
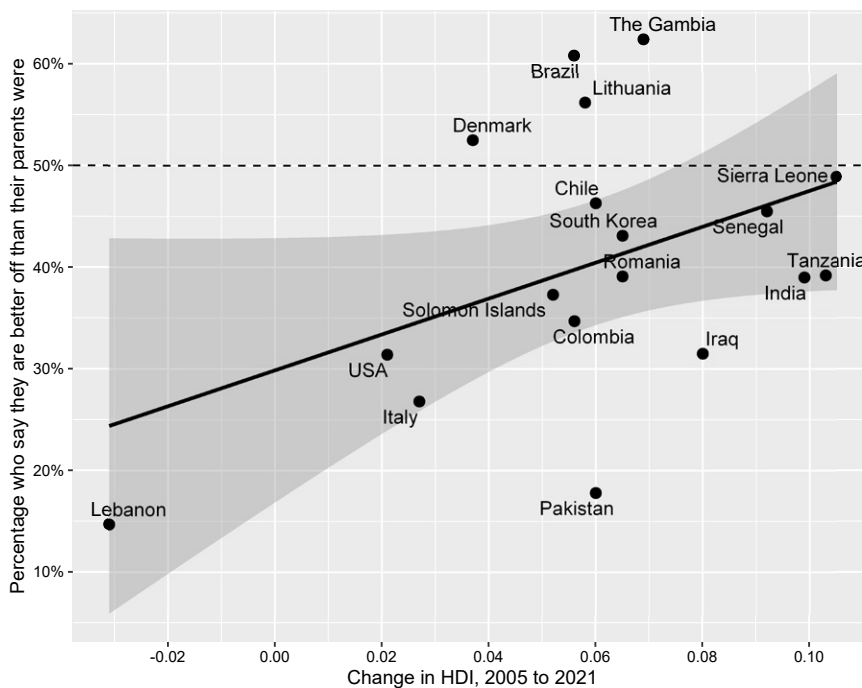
Sources: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024; UNDP, *Human Development Report 2021/2022—Uncertain Times, Unsettled Lives: Shaping Our Future in a Transforming World* (New York: UNDP, 2022).

Evidence for what might initially seem to be an excess of pessimism in Pakistan is not difficult to understand, as the PODS survey was conducted in the lead-up to Pakistan's contentious 2024 general election and after the devastating floods that hit the country in 2022 (Runey 2023). Conversely, Brazilians could be subject to a surplus of optimism following the defeat and successful removal of right-wing former president Jair Bolsonaro, who allegedly conducted a failed coup in an attempt to remain in office (Paraguassu, Brito and Stargardter 2024). It is also notable that the proportion of respondents who feel they are better off than their parents is relatively low, even in countries like India, Sierra Leone and Tanzania, which have experienced progress in the HDI.

Progress and minorities

In at least 12 of the 19 countries surveyed, self-identified minorities believe they are worse off than their parents more than other groups do. In a trio of wealthy European states—Denmark, Italy and Lithuania—minority groups tend to be significantly more pessimistic than non-minorities. In these cases the difference is stark: minorities are 17 percentage points less likely to believe they are better off than or doing the same as their parents in Italy; 18 percentage points, in Denmark; and 8 points, in Lithuania. The case of minority pessimism in the European Union could be a result of the growth of politicized xenophobia and especially Islamophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric. These forces are more mainstream in Denmark and Italy now than in the 1980s or 1990s; further research and analysis will be necessary to understand how these forces are connected with perceived economic outcomes (Donà 2022; Rydgren 2010). In Lithuania this pessimism may be tied to a combination of

Figure 3.15. **Economic progress, comparing minority and majority groups**

Do not identify as member of minority group   Self-identify as member of minority group
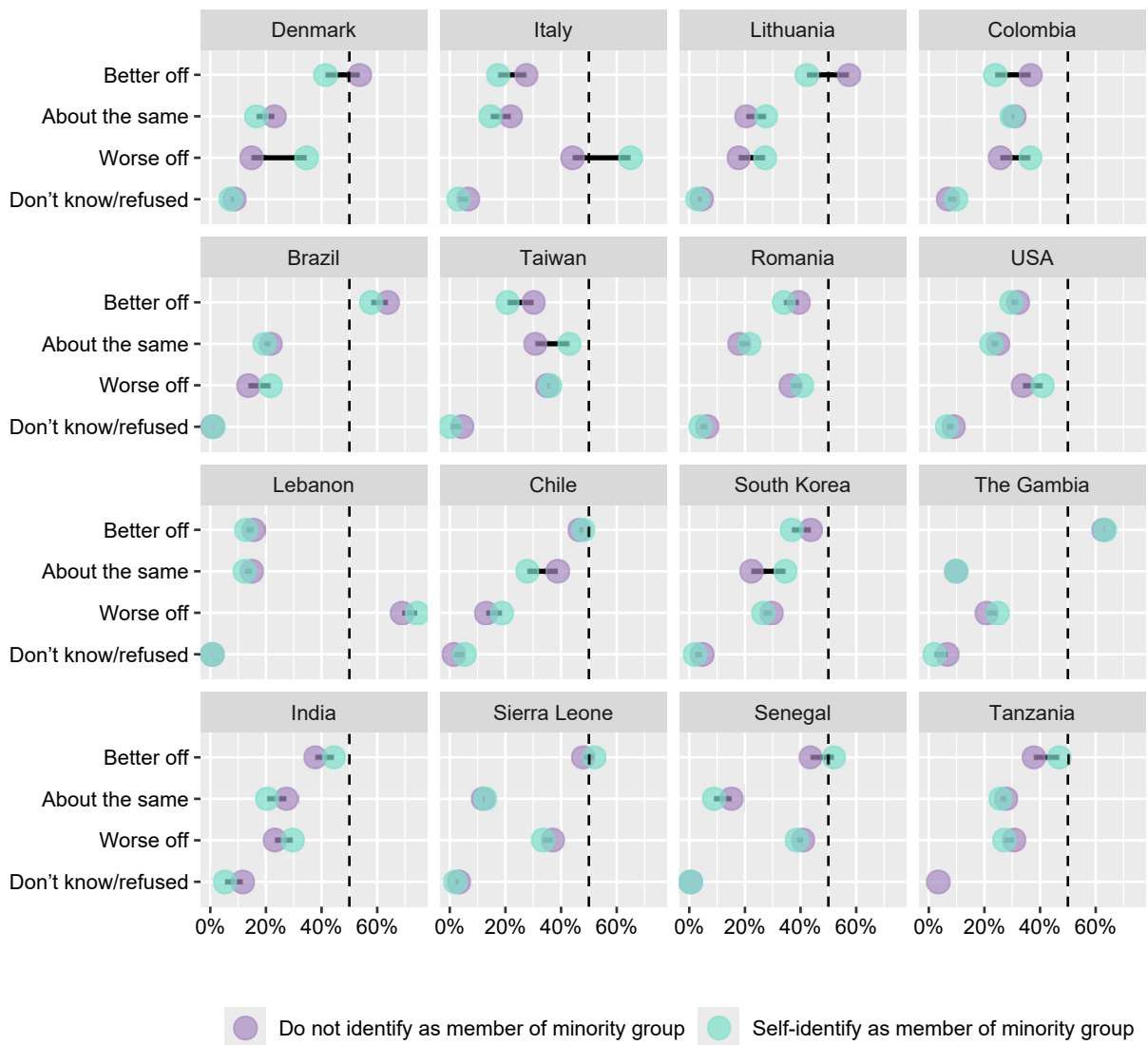
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Soviet nostalgia and the real socio-economic challenges faced by the republic's Russian minority (Klumbytė 2010; Wallace and Patsiurko 2014).

Conversely, it is in Senegal, Sierra Leone and Tanzania that minorities claim to be better off than or doing the same as their parents, by margins of 2, 5 and 7 percentage points, respectively. More research is needed to understand who identified as a minority and the specific drivers of this confidence.

Progress and poverty

A majority of people outside of the low-income group in 18 of the 19 countries in the data set believe they are better off than or doing the same as their parents (Lebanon is the sole exception, where only 31 per cent think this way). At first glance this is encouraging: respondents are being asked to compare their own living situation with that of their parents over a time of significant economic growth, and these types of responses give credence to the old economic maxim that 'a rising tide lifts all boats'. Indeed, in some of the low- and middle-income countries in the data set—such as Brazil, The Gambia, India, Senegal, Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands—people across the income spectrum broadly hold the same kinds of opinions as to whether they are doing better or worse than their parents.

However, the differences between the trajectories of those inside and outside the low-income group are significantly more acute in most of the high-income countries (high-income Chile is a positive outlier in this regard, while upper-middle-income Iraq is a negative one). Although 53 per cent of Danes in the low-income group believe they are doing the same as or better than their parents, this is 24 percentage points lower than the rest of the population. In Taiwan this gap is 18 points; in the USA, 19 points; and in Italy and South Korea, 23 points. Among these countries only in Denmark do a majority in the low-income group believe they are not doing worse than their parents.

One possible explanation for the varied responses in countries with similar development trajectories could be the role of domestic inequality.[19] Although the number of Indians living in multidimensional poverty declined by 415 million from 2005 to 2021 (UNDP 2023b),[20] this massive reduction in poverty took place alongside a dramatic increase in income inequality. As seen in Figure 3.16, the collective earnings of the bottom 50 per cent of Indians is only about half the income of the top 1 per cent. Since 1995 the top 10 per cent of earners have grown their share of the national income pie from 39 per cent to 57 per cent, while income earned by the bottom 50 per cent has shrunk from 18 per cent to 13 per cent.

Given the responses visible in Figure 3.9, on satisfaction with government, a question of future interest should be the attitudes of the significant proportion of Indians and Tanzanians who are satisfied or completely satisfied with their government but are pessimistic enough about their economic situation to believe they are worse off than their parents.

A majority of people outside of the low-income group in 18 of the 19 countries believe they are better off than or doing the same as their parents.

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[19]   The UNDP has produced an Inequality Adjusted Human Development Index. With data going back only to 2011, however, it is not yet sufficient to compare with surveys comparing intergenerational developments.
[20]   The latest year that data are available is 2021.

Figure 3.16. **Trends in income inequality in India, 1990−2022**
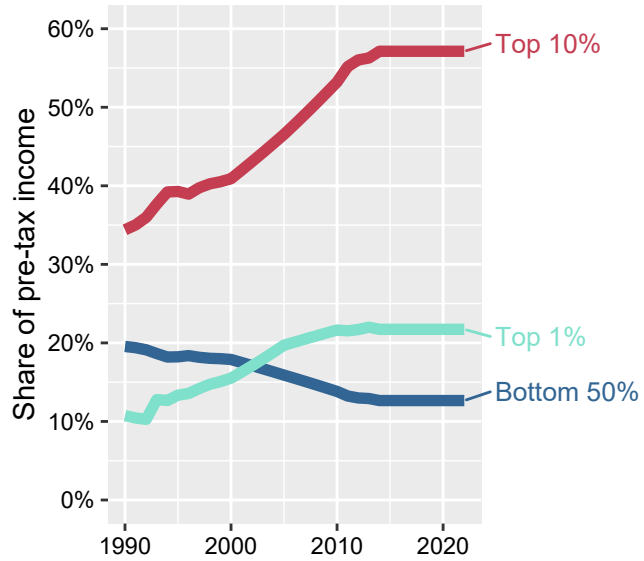
Source: World Inequality Database, [n.d.], <https://wid.world/data>, accessed 25 March 2024.

Here we can return to two of the countries that produced the most polarized responses: South Korea and Romania. In South Korea high levels of economic inequality have become entrenched since the 1997−1998 Asian financial crisis, further fuelling political polarization in the country (Lee 2005). Similar divides are visible in Romania, which, like many post-communist Eastern European countries, has struggled with the unevenly distributed benefits and costs of rapid-fire 1990s liberalization (Ban 2016).

Figure 3.17. **Trends in income inequality in South Korea (1990−2022) and Romania (1990−2022)**
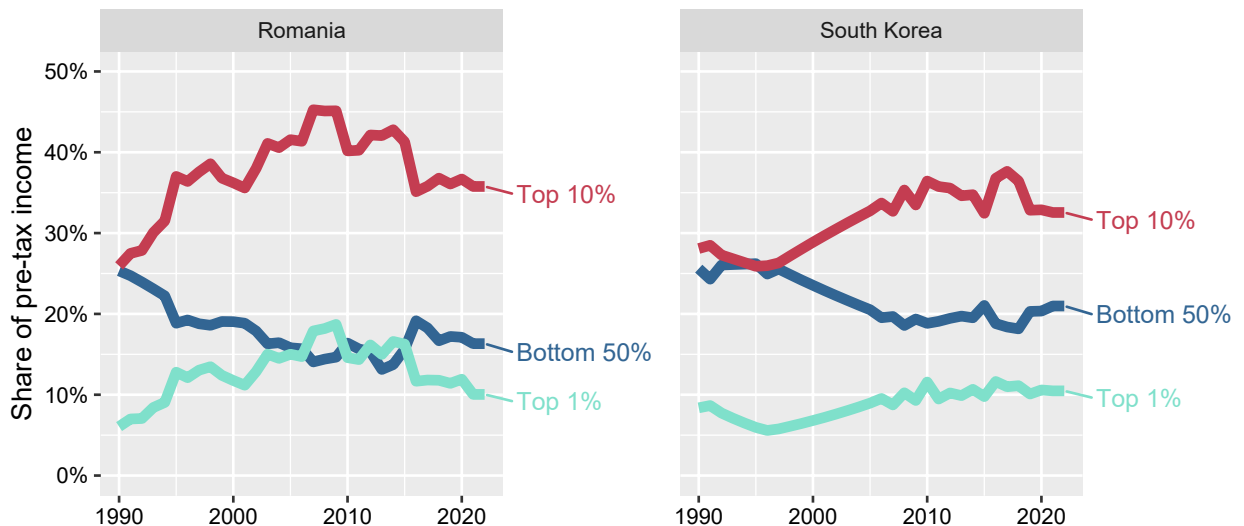
Source: World Inequality Database, [n.d.], <https://wid.world/data>, accessed 25 March 2024.

Figure 3.18. **Economic progress, comparing income groups**

○ Low-income group   ○ Other income groups

Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Caution should be taken when drawing economic conclusions from this data, as individuals' inherently subjective understandings of their own and their parents' situation may not line up with objective reality, and may be more a reflection of personal political or ideological dispositions. A conservative in a country dominated by social democrats may be unduly pessimistic about the course of their personal finances, or a committed trade unionist might overstate the consequences of decades of neoliberalism for them personally.

However, from a political or policy perspective, this is moot: people who believe they are doing worse off than their parents will vote and otherwise engage in

politics as such. This was the case in the 2016 US election, where a fear of losing status, rather than strict economic precarity, proved to be the stronger predicter of support for Donald Trump (Mutz 2018).

Progress and gender

In most cases respondents' views as to whether they were better off economically than their parents do not differ significantly by gender. The largest divergences were in Denmark, Taiwan and Pakistan, where women were, respectively, 7.5, 6.3 and 6.2 percentage points less likely than men to say they were doing better off than or about the same as their parents.

Figure 3.19. **Economic progress, comparing gender groups**
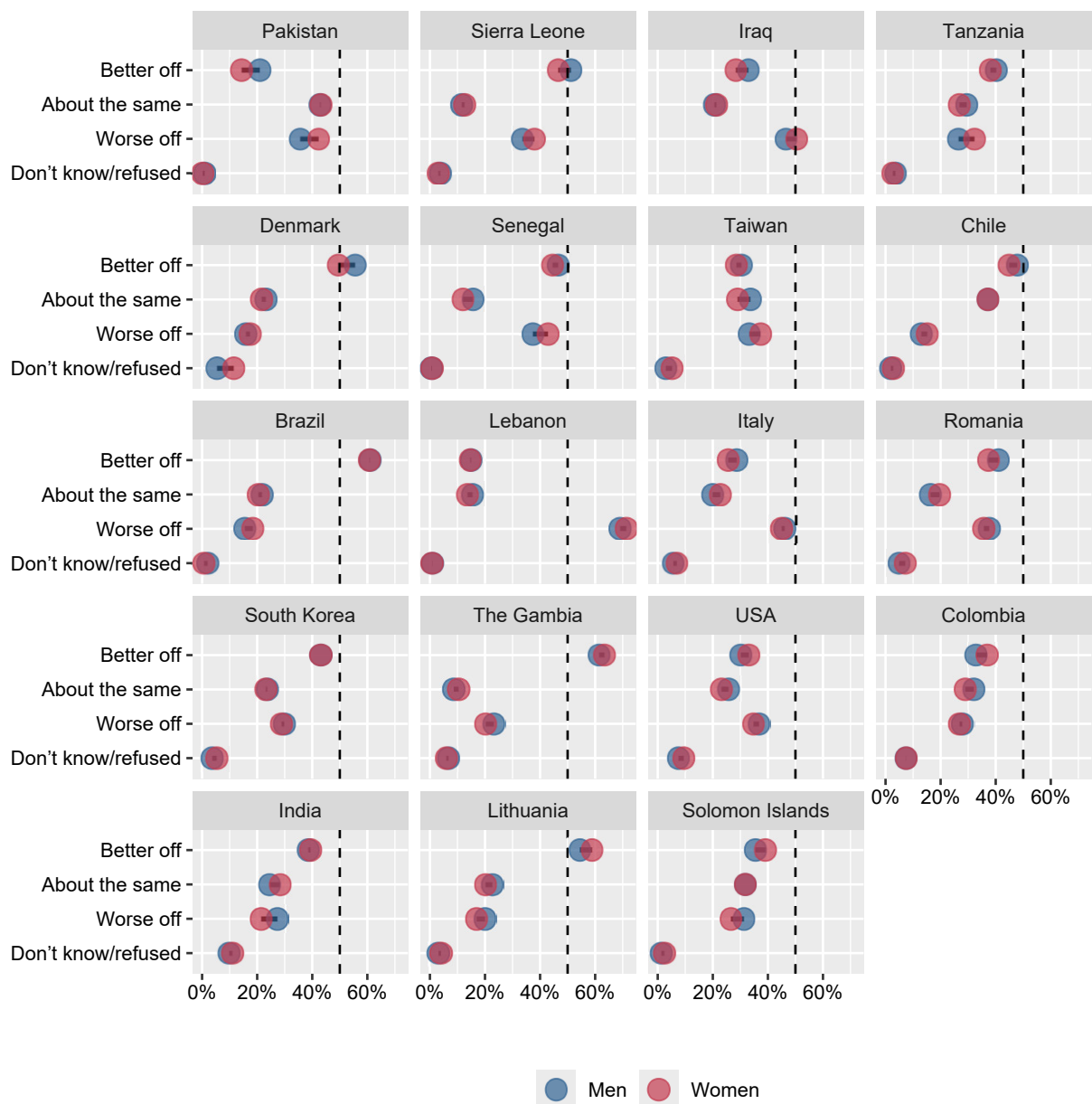
Source: International IDEA, Perceptions of Democracy Survey v1, 2024.

Chapter 4
CONCLUSION

It is clear that democratic institutions are falling short of people's expectations. In a wide variety of cases, public assessments of the bedrock institutions of democratic systems are poor, with doubts about the legitimacy of electoral processes, free and equal access to justice, and people's ability to freely express their beliefs. In this context it is not surprising that people tend to be more dissatisfied than satisfied with the performance of their governments. Yet there are important exceptions, notably in India and Tanzania, where popular evaluations of several aspects of democratic performance are relatively high, despite lower expert evaluations. Iraq also stands out in the data set, with the public there often expressing greater levels of satisfaction and access than in more established democracies like the USA.

The data also reveal the limits of expert assessments. Evaluations of the state of democracy that do not systematically integrate popular views lack significant depth and mask the information that only lived experience can generate. The USA is a case in point. Despite high expert scores with regard to freedom of expression, nearly half of American respondents felt that they always or often could express their views. Italy also stands out here for the stark contrast between the high expert rating on access to justice and the low proportion of people who have confidence in the courts. The differences are even more apparent with regard to electoral credibility. Experts are much more confident than the public in countries like Romania and Taiwan.

Differences between various segments of the population are perhaps most illuminating. In many cases marginalized communities struggle to access institutions and have less confidence in their freedom to exercise their rights. This struggle exists even in countries that experts consider high-performing. When taken together with the finding that the most economically marginalized groups have significantly less confidence than others about how things have improved over time, it is clear that more focused attention on the experiences of these communities is critical. Expert assessments are unable to reveal such

It is clear that democratic institutions are falling short of people's expectations.

insights, leaving policymakers with a blind spot in terms of strategic decision making.

The findings in this report are not necessarily surprising for stakeholders who have investigated and taken the time to understand people's everyday experiences of democracy and political institutions. Global movements that seek to focus attention on the plight of historically marginalized groups, especially over the last several years, are a testament to both public anger and the demand for solutions. It is past time that people's perceptions are centred in conversations about the future of democracy; this analysis is a small but important first step towards that effort.

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Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings point to the need for specific action by a wide group of actors, including the following:

- Researchers and democracy assessment experts must systematically integrate public perceptions and experiences into their evaluations, including with a focus on marginalized groups. It is clear that there are systematic differences between expert and public evaluations, and data drawing on both these perspectives over time will contribute to the best targeted and most relevant action plans. It is important to understand what drives people's perceptions so that it is clear whether the gap between them and experts is explained by actual institutional performance, people's lived, personal experiences or by external factors that influence people's judgements but which are not direct reflections of their own lives.

- Pollsters must systematically integrate sampling methods that allow for focused attention on how marginalized communities perceive and experience democracy and democratic institutions compared with average respondents. Disaggregated results must be disseminated widely and regularly so that the commonalities and gaps between these groups' experiences become part and parcel of how experts and people at large understand and talk about democracy.

- Given that there are countries in which self-identified minorities and low-income groups have more confidence in political institutions and processes than in others, it is important for donors to incentivize and support more peer-to-peer learning mechanisms through which political institutions can share lessons learned and practical models of what has worked (and what has been tried but has not worked as well). They should particularly incentivize exchanges between countries that have performed differently in expert assessments.

Researchers and democracy assessment experts must systematically integrate public perceptions and experiences into their evaluations, including with a focus on marginalized groups.

- Democracy-focused policymakers should also look beyond expert data sets to understand the state of democracy in particular contexts. In places where popular and expert views diverge, the most effective policies will need to address the gaps in perceptions and work to bridge them.

- Civil society groups and other advocacy-based groups should channel information about gaps in access and attitudes to policymakers who are responsible for improving the performance of institutions. They should also prioritize integrating information about these gaps into public education campaigns.

Civil society and other advocacy organizations should create consistent messaging about the need to constantly defend democratic institutions and norms.

- Civil society and other advocacy organizations should also create consistent messaging about the need to constantly defend democratic institutions and norms, even in places where institutions are strong and ranked highly by experts. 'High-performing' does not necessarily correlate with strong and broad public satisfaction, and ensuring that public support for democracy does not erode is critical.

- The coalition of actors working to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—and particularly Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16— should integrate these findings into their research and advocacy. In order to create the accountable and inclusive institutions at the heart of SDG 16, it is critical that everyone understands how people perceive these institutions now and how the most marginalized sectors of society face special hurdles to access and equal treatment.

The findings also point to the need for academics and other researchers to investigate the following points:

- What is the rationale behind popular evaluations of electoral integrity? Given that the evidence shows, for example, that women face more barriers to the ballot box than men, it is surprising that women do not evaluate electoral credibility more negatively across the board.

- How and why do marginalized communities feel less safe to freely express themselves, even in countries where experts are confident that these rights are respected?

- Why do voters living in countries with strong democratic institutions not reject the notion of undemocratic leaders more often? Specifically, it is important to understand if (and how) political institutions are contributing to this sentiment through certain weaknesses or failures, or if the motivation behind such feelings lies elsewhere.

- What explains cases where people express high levels of satisfaction with their governments but do not believe that they are better off than their parents? If people are not confident that things have improved for them and their families, what do they expect (and apparently receive) from their governments?

- What explains the dynamics in countries where people express high levels of satisfaction with their governments and have favourable thoughts about non-democratic leadership? What are the limits of those favourable feelings?

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Annex A. Methodology

In addition to the points raised in the methodological summary near the beginning of the report, readers may wish to know further details about sample sizes, survey dates, methods of contact, participation incentives and the margin of error for each country.

Our goal for sampling was to have 1,000 people from a nationally representative sample and an additional sample of 500 people whose household income indicates that their family experiences poverty. The World Bank's definition of an international poverty line (USD 2.15 per day) was an initial guide, but we defined an income threshold differently for each country on the basis of local income distributions. In Italy and Lithuania, for example, we specified the threshold in the low-income oversample to be an annual household income below EUR 20,000, whereas the threshold for Senegal was XOF 1,200,000 (EUR 1,824). In most countries we were able to get a sample of the type and size that we planned. In Brazil, Chile, the Solomon Islands and Taiwan, however, we were not able to recruit as large a sample as planned. In three of these cases, the difference in sample size was not consequential, but the Solomon Islands' sample size was only one third of the target (525 respondents), and this had an impact on the margin of error (up to 4 per cent). However, given the lack of survey data from other sources for the Islands, we decided to include the data we had in this report.

For the online surveys completed by YouGov, we used the company's existing panels. Participants opted in to participate in those panels; they were not randomly selected. This means that the margin of error reported below is only indicative. The real margin of error could be higher because the sample was not random. Participants in the YouGov panel received points that can be redeemed for rewards in a system YouGov administers as compensation for their time. In the telephone surveys (technically, computer-assisted telephone interviews), respondents were contacted through random digit dialling. They received airtime credits as compensation for their time.

In most countries we were able to achieve a nationally representative sample. The samples for Colombia, India and Taiwan were online representative. In the countries where data collection was curtailed (Brazil, Chile, the Solomon Islands), the sample was not fully balanced. However, in our analysis we did not report the frequencies of responses across the sample. Instead, we weighted each respondent and reported the weighted frequencies of responses for each question. The survey providers used different weighting schemes. For the countries surveyed by YouGov, we weighted the data by age, voter turnout, vote choice, gender, education and income. In the countries surveyed by GeoPoll, the data were weighted by age, gender and region.

Table A.1. **Data collection details**

Country	Method	Data collection dates	Sample type	Sample size	Margin of error[1]
Brazil	Telephone	27 July 2023 to 6 November 2023	Nationally representative	1,259	3%
Chile	Telephone	29 July 2023 to 7 November 2023	Nationally representative	1,345	3%
Colombia	Internet	28 July 2023 to 30 August 2023	Online representative	1,500	3%
Denmark	Internet	28 July 2023 to 31 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,500	3%
The Gambia	Telephone	27 July 2023 to 12 October 2023	Nationally representative	1,565	2%
India	Internet	4 January 2024 to 16 January 2024	Online representative	1,500	3%
Iraq	Telephone	2 August 2023 to 3 September 2023	Nationally representative	1,606	2%
Italy	Internet	28 July 2023 to 17 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,500	3%
Lebanon	Telephone	3 August 2023 to 5 September 2023	Nationally representative	1,503	3%
Lithuania	Internet	3 August 2023 to 31 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,500	3%
Pakistan	Telephone	5 August 2023 to 1 September 2023	Nationally representative	1,604	2%
Romania	Internet	31 July 2023 to 24 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,500	3%
Senegal	Telephone	28 July 2023 to 20 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,598	2%
Sierra Leone	Telephone	27 July 2023 to 17 October 2023	Nationally representative	1,632	2%
Solomon Islands	Telephone	27 September 2023 to 6 November 2023	Nationally representative	525	4%
South Korea	Internet	3 August 2023 to 23 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,500	3%
Taiwan	Internet	13 July 2023 to 5 September 2023	Online representative	1,300	3%
Tanzania	Telephone	26 July 2023 to 11 August 2023	Nationally representative	1,628	2%

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[1]   The confidence interval was 95 per cent.

Table A.1. **Data collection details (cont.)**

Country	Method	Data collection dates	Sample type	Sample size	Margin of error
USA	Internet	11 December 2023 to 19 December 2023	Nationally representative	1,500	3%

Annex B. Survey questions

The following questions were developed by International IDEA and through examining a broad range of public opinion surveys and democracy measurement methodologies. Surveys and democracy measurement questionnaires consulted included Afrobarometer, Arab Barometer, Asia Barometer, European Social Survey, Latinobarómetro, World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, and the World Values Survey. Some questions were repeated from the standard batteries developed for these surveys, others were paraphrased for PODS. We also adapted some questions from the expert survey developed by the Varieties of Democracy project.

[q1] How confident are you that you know who your representative is in [US House of Representatives?|] [fill customized to ask lower house in each country]?

<1> Completely confident
<2> Fairly confident
<3> Somewhat confident
<4> Slightly confident
<5> Not confident at all

[q3] When the government fails to provide something it owes you – anything from a pension payment to good schools for your children – to whom do you go for help?

<1>Elected representative
<2>Local bureaucrat
<3>Community leader
<3>Family member
<4>Other [specify]

[q4] How satisfied are you with the overall performance of the national government in [COUNTRY]?

<1>Completely satisfied
<2> Satisfied
<3>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
<4> Dissatisfied
<5> Completely dissatisfied

[q5] In your experience, does the court system provide equal and fair access to justice?

<1>Never
<2>Rarely
<3>Sometimes
<4>Often
<5>Always
<6>Don't know

[q7] Taking into account election day, the election campaign, and the vote counting process, would you consider the most recent national election in [fill: COUNTRY] to have been free and fair?

<1> **No, not at all.** The elections were fundamentally flawed and the official results had little if anything to do with the 'will of the people' (i.e., who became president or who won the legislative majority);

<2> **Not really.** While the elections allowed for some competition, the irregularities in the end affected the outcome of the election;

<3> **It's complicated.** There was substantial competition and freedom of participation but there were also significant irregularities. It is hard to determine whether the irregularities affected the outcome or not;

<4> **Yes, somewhat.** There were deficiencies and some degree of fraud and irregularity but these did not in the end affect the outcome (as defined above);

<5> **Yes.** There was some amount of human error and some logistical restrictions but these were largely unintentional and without significant consequences.

[q8] If the government (president or prime minister in particular) were engaged in unconstitutional, illegal or unethical activity, how likely is it that the legislature would conduct an effective investigation?

<1> Extremely unlikely
<2> Unlikely
<3> As likely as not
<4> Likely
<5> Certain or nearly certain

[q12] Of the major media sources that you may read, listen to, or watch, how often are they critical of the government?

<1> None
<2> Only a few marginal outlets
<3> Some important outlets routinely criticize the government but there are other important outlets that never do
<4> All major media outlets criticize the government, at least occasionally.

[q13] Do you feel that you have the freedom to publicly say what you really think about issues in your community?

<1> Always
<2> Usually
<3> About half of the time
<4> Rarely
<5> Never

[q15] Do you have the freedom to pursue the goals that matter to you, and to build the kind of life that you want for yourself?

<1> Always
<2> Usually
<3> About half of the time
<4> Rarely
<5> Never

[q16] Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Voting is a meaningful way of impacting the government.

<1> Strongly agree
<2> Somewhat agree
<3> Neither agree nor disagree
<4> Somewhat disagree
<5> Strongly disagree

[q21_grid] Please select all of the activities in which you have participated in the last 12 months:

– [vote] Voted in a national or local election
– [rally] Attended a rally
– [signed] Signed a petition
– [participated] Participated in an industrial action (such as a strike)
– [politicalparty]Attended meetings held by a political party
– [tradeunion] Attended meetings held by a trade union
– [community] Attended meetings held by a community or professional organization (such as village associations, environmental groups, women's rights groups, farmers' associations, faith-based organizations, labour unions, co-operatives, professional associations, chambers of commerce);
– [civildis] Engaged in civil disobedience
– [rentstrike] Participated in a rent strike
– [encouraged] Encouraged others to vote or participate in politics
– [informal] Attended informal gatherings of neighbors
– [other] Other [specify]

[q24] How often are people like you denied or provided inferior access to public services?

<1> Never
<2> Sometimes
<3> Often
<4> Always
<5> Don't Know

[q29] Comparing your personal economic conditions with those of your parents' when they were about your age, would you say that you are better off, worse off or about the same?

<1> Better off
<2> Worse off
<3> About the same
<4> Don't know

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being much worse and 5 being much better, how would you rate your access to each of the following resources, in comparison to others in [fill: COUNTRY]?

[q31] A quality education in your community
[q33] Opportunities to make a living
[q34] Housing of an acceptable standard

[q37] On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being much worse and 5 being much better, how vulnerable do you feel you are to violence, in comparison to others in [fill: COUNTRY]?

<1> Much worse
<2>
<3>
<4>
<5> Much better

[q38] How easy or difficult is it to obtain [fill: national identification cards] (or other government issued identification in [fill: COUNTRY]?

<1> Very easy
<2>Easy
<3>Difficult
<4>Very difficult

[grid]To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

 – [q41] Governments should risk losing the elections when they have done a bad job.
 – [q42] The party or group that wins the election should be able to govern and make policies however they want.
 – [q44] It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no say over what it does.
 – [q46] People should be restricted from discussing politics in public if they are criticizing the government.
 – [q47] The courts should be able to stop the government if it violates the constitution.
 – [q49] Gender equality in political representation is a goal that we should pursue.

<1> Agree
<2> Disagree

[q51_q54grid] Next, we will describe various types of political systems. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very good and 5 being very bad, indicate how good or bad you believe each system is for governing this country.

 – [q51] Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country
 – [q52] Having the army rule
 – [q53] Having a democratic political system
 – [q54] Having a system governed by religious law

<1> Very good
<2>
<3>
<4>
<5> Very bad

{Q55_INTRO} You might have favorable thoughts or feelings about having a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with parliament or elections. Or you might have unfavorable thoughts or feelings about having a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with parliament or elections. Or you might have some of each. We would like to ask you first about any favorable thoughts and feelings you might have about a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with parliament or elections. Then in a moment, we will ask you some separate questions about any unfavorable thoughts and feelings you might have.
{end Q55_INTRO}

[q55] {open} First, do you have ANY favorable thoughts or feelings about a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with Parliament or elections, or do you NOT have any?

<1> Yes, I have one or more unfavorable thoughts.
<2> No, I don't have any unfavorable thoughts.

[q56 if q55==1] How favorable are your favorable thoughts and feelings about a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with Parliament or elections?
<1> Extremely favorable
<2> Very favorable
<3> Moderately favorable
<4> Slightly favorable

[q57] Do you have ANY unfavorable thoughts or feelings about a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with Parliament or elections, or do you NOT have any?
<1> Yes
<2> No

[q58 if q57==1] How unfavorable are your unfavorable thoughts and feelings about a strong leader who doesn't have to bother with Parliament or elections?
<1> Extremely unfavorable
<2> Very unfavorable
<3> Moderately unfavorable
<4> Slightly unfavorable

[q59] In your view, how should laws be made at the national level?

<1> By a legislature
<2> By the people themselves
<3> By elders
<4> By custom or tradition
<5> Don't know
<6> Other [specify]

[q60] In your view, where should people go for justice when they feel they have been wronged?

<1>The government
<2> Communities
<3> Elders
<4> Families
<5> Individuals
<6> Other [specify]

[q61] In your view, who should be primarily responsible for caring for vulnerable people in the community?

<1>The government
<2> Communities
<3> Elders
<4> Families
<5> Individuals
<6> Other [specify]

[q62] In your view, who should be primarily responsible for regulating economic activity?

<1>The government
<2> Communities
<3> Elders
<4> Families
<5> Individuals
<6> Other [specify]

[q70] {mult} Which are the most important values children should learn? (*select all that apply*)

<1> Obedience
<2> Equality
<3> Justice
<4> Honesty and integrity
<5> Accountability
<6> Resilience
<7> Empathy
<8> Faith
<9> Family
<10> Patriotism
<11> Other [specify]

Representative and demographic questions

[gender4] What is your gender?

<1> Man
<2> Woman
<3 fixed> Non-binary
<4 fixed> Other [gender4_other] {open varlabel = "Gender – Other"}

[sexuality] Which of the following best describes your sexuality?

<1> Heterosexual / straight
<2> Lesbian / gay woman
<3> Gay man
<4> Bisexual
<5> Other
<6> Prefer not to say

[birthyr] In what year were you born?

[assets]. Do you or any member of your family have any of the following goods? (read each one of the goods and tick an answer for each).

<1> House in which the parents have a separate bedroom from the children
<2> Own house
<3> Washing machine
<4> Running hot water
<5> Sewage system
<6> At least one meal a day
<7> Drinking water
<8> Heating/air conditioner

Response options:
<1> Yes
<2> No

[assets]. Do you or any member of your family own any of the following goods? (read each one of the goods and choose an answer for each).

<1> Car
<2> Computer
<3> Fixed telephone
<4> Mobile phone
<5> Smartphone
<6> Internet Connection at home

Response options:
<1> Yes
<2> No

[educ_years] How many years of formal education have you completed?

Dropdown options range from 0 to 22, with "Not sure" as an option.

[q84] Do you identify as being part of a minority group within your country?

<1> Yes [if yes, specify]
<2> No
<3> Not sure

[employ_custom] Which of the following best describes your current employment status? Select all that apply.

<1> Employed – full time (32 or more hours weekly)
<2> Employed – part time (15 to less than 32 hours weekly)
<3> Employed – less than 15 hours
<4> Self-employed
<5> Helping family member
<6> Unemployed
<7> Student, in school, in vocational training
<8> Retired
<9> Housewife, homemaker, home duties
<10> Permanently disabled
<11> Others, not in labor force

[pew_religimp] How important is religion in your life?

<1> Very important
<2> Somewhat important
<3> Not too important
<4> Not at all important

[religpew] What is your present religion, if any? (Tailored to each country)

<1/"Protestant"> Protestant
<2/"Roman Catholic"> Roman Catholic
<3/"Mormon"> Mormon
<4/"Eastern or Greek Orthodox"> Eastern or Greek Orthodox
<5/"Jewish"> Jewish
<6/"Muslim"> Muslim
<7/"Buddhist"> Buddhist
<8/"Hindu"> Hindu
<9/"Atheist"> Atheist
<10/"Agnostic"> Agnostic
<11/"Nothing in particular"> Nothing in particular
<12/"Something else"> Something else [religpew_t] {open}

[race] What racial or ethnic group best describes you? (Tailored to each country)

<1> White
<2/"Black"> Black or African-American
<3/"Hispanic"> Hispanic or Latino
<4/"Asian"> Asian or Asian-American
<5> Native American
<8> Middle Eastern
<6/"Two or more races"> Two or more races
<7/"Other"> Other [txt] {open varlabel=Race, other"}

[language] What language(s) do you speak at home?

<Open-ended>

About the PODS project

This report is the first in a planned series. Future reports will focus on the analysis of some of the other questions in the survey, which focus on political activities and engagement, access to public goods, beliefs about society and government, opinions on how laws should be made and a broad range of values. Pending funding, PODS will be replicated in more countries in the future.

Acknowledgements

About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 34 Member States founded in 1995, with a mandate to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

WHAT WE DO

We develop policy-friendly research related to elections, parliaments, constitutions, digitalization, climate change, inclusion and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and Democracy Tracker.

We provide capacity development and expert advice to democratic actors including governments, parliaments, election officials and civil society. We develop tools and publish databases, books and primers in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to gender quotas.

We bring states and non-state actors together for dialogues and lesson sharing. We stand up and speak out to promote and protect democracy worldwide.

WHERE WE WORK

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

OUR PUBLICATIONS AND DATABASES

We have a catalogue with more than 1,000 publications and over 25 databases on our website. Most of our publications can be downloaded free of charge.

<https://www.idea.int>

Data from the Perceptions of Democracy Survey (PODS) point to three broad findings. First, most people from a diverse array of countries around the world lack confidence in the performance of their political institutions and their access to them, and they are more dissatisfied than satisfied with their governments. Second, self-identified minorities, women and low-income groups tend to perceive more obstacles to access and are generally more doubtful about institutional performance. Third, expert views and popular perceptions about how political institutions are doing do not always align. People are generally much more sceptical than experts.

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