
First edition

The Global State of Democracy

Exploring Democracy's Resilience



© 2017 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

This is an extract from:

The Global State of Democracy: Exploring Democracy's Resilience

International IDEA publications are independent of specific national or political interests. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of International IDEA, its Board or its Council members.

The maps presented in this publication do not imply on the part of the Institute any judgement on the legal status of any territory or the endorsement of such boundaries, nor does the placement or size of any country or territory reflect the political view of the Institute. The maps have been created for this publication in order to add clarity to the text.

References to the names of countries and regions in this publication do not represent the official position of International IDEA with regard to the legal status or policy of the entities mentioned.

Applications for permission to reproduce or translate all or any part of this publication should be made to:

International IDEA
Strömsborg
SE-103 34 STOCKHOLM
SWEDEN
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00
Email: info@idea.int

International IDEA encourages dissemination of its work and will promptly respond to requests for permission to reproduce or translate its publications.

This publication has received support from International IDEA's Member States through the Institute's core funding. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the governments of Sweden and Norway, whose generous support made this publication possible.

Text editing: Kelley Friel

Cover illustration: Michael Tompsett, <<http://www.michael-tompsett.pixels.com>>

Design and layout: Phoenix Design Aid

Printer: Trydells Tryckeri, Sweden

ISBN: 978-91-7671-129-3



Preface

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is pleased to present the first edition of *The Global State of Democracy*. The theme for this edition is 'Exploring Democracy's Resilience'.

When assessing the state of democracy from 1975 onwards, the global and regional trend analysis based on the GSoD indices shows an expansion of democracy in all parts of the world and advances in key areas such as representation, fundamental rights, checks on government and political participation

International IDEA is the only intergovernmental organization with a global mandate solely focused on democracy and elections. With 30 member states from all continents, International IDEA supports the development of stronger democratic institutions and processes and fosters more sustainable, effective and legitimate democracy around the world.

Support for democratic reform has become more challenging since the founding of International IDEA in 1995. In contrast to the optimism of the 1990s, today's democracy is influenced by the effects of globalization, geo-political power shifts, the changing role and structure of (supra) national organizations and institutions, and the rise of modern communications technologies. These developments are complicated by the dynamics of conflict and development, citizenship and state sovereignty, and increasing inequalities and marginalization of groups of people within and between societies. Some of these dynamics and related challenges have contributed to a widely expressed view, particularly in the mainstream media, that democracy is in decline.

Against this backdrop, this publication analyses global and regional democracy trends and challenges based on International IDEA's newly developed Global State of Democracy (GSoD) indices, which capture global and regional democratic trends between 1975 and 2015. In an effort to bridge the gap between academic research, policy development and democracy assistance initiatives, it offers recommendations

and problem-solving approaches to support democratic reform, and to inform policymakers and democracy practitioners worldwide. This first edition explores democracy's resilience based on a detailed analysis of the impact of the process of democratic backsliding on the quality of democracy as well as key challenges to democracy such as the crisis of representation, the increasing influence of money in politics, rising inequalities, migration and democratic transitions in the wake of conflict.

The times we live in warrant a critical analysis of democracy's strengths and weaknesses, and an open debate about what undermines (and strengthens) democracy. As such, this publication explores the health of the world's democracies, acknowledging that many regions and countries have recently seen reversals or declines in the quality of their democracy. When assessing the state of democracy from 1975 onwards, the global and regional trend analysis based on the GSoD indices shows an expansion of democracy in all parts of the world and advances in key areas such as representation, fundamental rights, checks on government and political participation. The data indicate that the state of democracy at the global level in the last decade has been one of trendless fluctuations—showing upturns and downturns in certain regions and individual countries, but with no clearly visible tendencies of progress or decline.

This publication acknowledges that challenges to democracy persist at the regional and country levels, but contests the current pessimistic view

that democracy is fragile and in decline. Instead, it argues that democracy continues to be in demand and has shown resilient properties over time given the challenges that characterize the 21st century, thanks to its inherent qualities of adaptation, recovery, flexibility and innovation.

The analysis is based on International IDEA's broad and inclusive definition of democracy, which is underpinned by two fundamental principles—popular control and political equality. The Institute acknowledges that there is no single and universally applicable model of democracy, that democracy comes in multiple forms, and that these forms are in constant evolution. However, democracy's advancement—and indeed its survival—is never guaranteed. Democracy needs constant care and protection, and there is no end to

improving it: every generation must safeguard and reclaim democracy. This means that looking towards the future, channelling all our efforts to achieve progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals requires a broad-based recognition of the fact that democracy is core to (and a wider enabler of) the entire 2030 development agenda.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to making this first edition of *The Global State of Democracy* a reality. It is our hope at International IDEA that this publication will serve as a source of inspiration, reflection and guidance for a new generation committed to making democracy stronger and more resilient.

Yves Leterme
Secretary-General
International IDEA