

Measuring Responsive, Inclusive, Participatory and Representative Decision-Making at all Levels in SDG Target 16.7 with V-Dem Data



Photo by Edwin Andrade.

As part of a new UN Sustainable Development agenda, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the overall aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, were adopted in September 2015. Building on the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs address democratic governance in Goal 16: the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.¹

All goals, together with their specific targets, should be achieved by 2030. To review and follow-up the implementation of the SDGs there is a need to develop a sound indicator framework and for statistical data to monitor and evaluate progress.² The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute is part of the virtual network of stakeholders and experts summoned by the United Nations Statistics Division and the SDG 16 Data Initiative. V-Dem contributes by identifying suitable indicators to measure SDG 16, and the UNDP Virtual Network Sourcebook contains 60 V-Dem indicators and indices.³

This policy brief focuses on SDG Target 16.7, identifying the main challenges posed by the official indicators, and introducing complementary V-Dem indicators to address these challenges.

KEY FINDINGS

- Official indicators exhibit limitations in comprehensively measuring SDG Target 16.7.
- As an independent research institute, V-Dem provides additional complementary indicators that account for key aspects of SDG Target 16.7.
- V-Dem data, with worldwide coverage, can reliably capture responsiveness, inclusiveness, participation and representation at all levels of decision-making processes.
- Proposed V-Dem measures include the deliberative-, participatory- and civil society participation indices as well as an indicator measuring how power is distributed among social groups.

SDG Target 16.7

SDG Target 16.7 aims to "Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels." The current list of global SDG indicators mentions the following two measures to monitor SDG Target 16.7:

16.7.1 Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions.

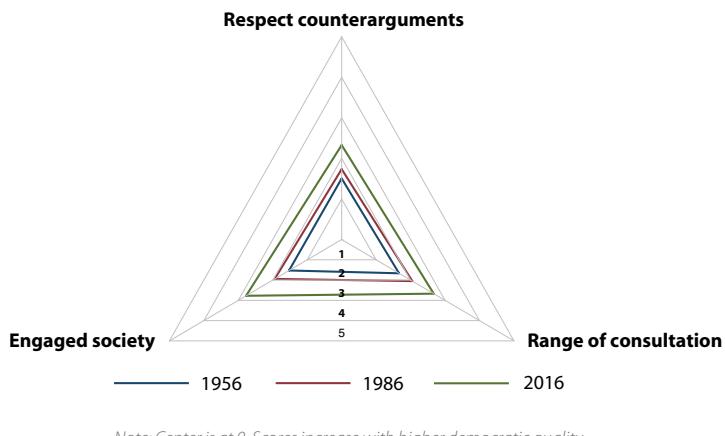
16.7.2 Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group.⁴

The first indicator focuses on the aspect of representativeness that further links to inclusion and responsiveness in decision-making, while the second indicator complements with perceptions to better capture inclusivity and responsiveness. However, these two indicators do not comprehensively measure all aspects of Target 16.7. Neither of the indicators capture *if and how* citizens can participate in decision-making processes. The first indicator measures the formal inclusion of different groups in public institutions, but not to what extent such representatives are actually included in a decision-making process, and thus to

¹ UNDP (2017) ² UN (2017) ³ UNDP/BMZ (2015) ⁴ UNSTATS (2017)

FIGURE 1. DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX DISAGGREGATED

Global averages 1956, 1986, 2016



Note: Center is at 0. Scores increase with higher democratic quality

what extent decision-making processes are inclusive or representative. The complementary second indicator captures the population's assessment of decision-making processes, which makes it difficult to compare cross-nationally. This indicator is likely to reflect varying expectations about inclusiveness and responsiveness due to different societal values, rather than measuring the actual difference in experience.

Complementary V-Dem Indicators for Target 16.7

V-Dem data enables cross-national comparison of 177 countries in a time span from 1900-2016.⁵ The following V-Dem indices can contribute to measuring SDG Target 16.7 comprehensively:⁶

- 1) **The Deliberative Component Index** focuses on the process by which decisions are reached in a polity. Hereby, public reasoning, focused on the common good, motivates political decisions. Respectful dialogue should be held at all levels during all stages, from preference formation to final decision, and among informed and competent participants who are open to persuasion. The V-Dem Deliberative Component Index measures these features by determining the extent to which political elites give public justifications for their positions on matters of public policy, justify their positions in terms of the public good, acknowledge and respect counter-arguments; and how wide the range of consultation is at elite levels. Figure 1 shows three of the indicators that compose the Deliberative Component Index and how each has developed over the past sixty years on global average. When considering important policy changes, the range of consultation at elite levels, the respect for counterarguments, as well as the width and independence of public deliberations have increased over the last sixty years. Disaggregating V-Dem indices thus allows further delving into the development and state of particular aspects of decision-making, thereby measuring SDG Target 16.7.

- 2) **The Participatory Component Index** focuses on active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral. It emphasizes engagement in civil society organizations, direct democracy, and the power of subnational elected bodies.
- 3) As part of the Participatory Component Index the **Civil Society Participation Index** measures aspects of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), organizations where citizens pursue their collective interests and ideals. The index captures whether policymakers routinely consulted CSOs; the extent to which people are involved in CSOs; the possibility for women to participate; and whether the process of legislative candidate nomination within party organizations is highly decentralized or is performed through party primaries.

All three V-Dem indices can be compared cross-nationally, as illustrated in Figure 2, which shows the scores of 12 sample countries for 2016. Tunisia scores relatively highly on the Deliberative Component Index as well as in Civil Society Participation, significantly higher than the Global Average. While Canada has the highest level on the Participatory Component Index, Civil Society Participation is strongest in the United States. All countries in Figure 2 are above the global average for Deliberative Democracy except for Oman, Russia and Brazil.

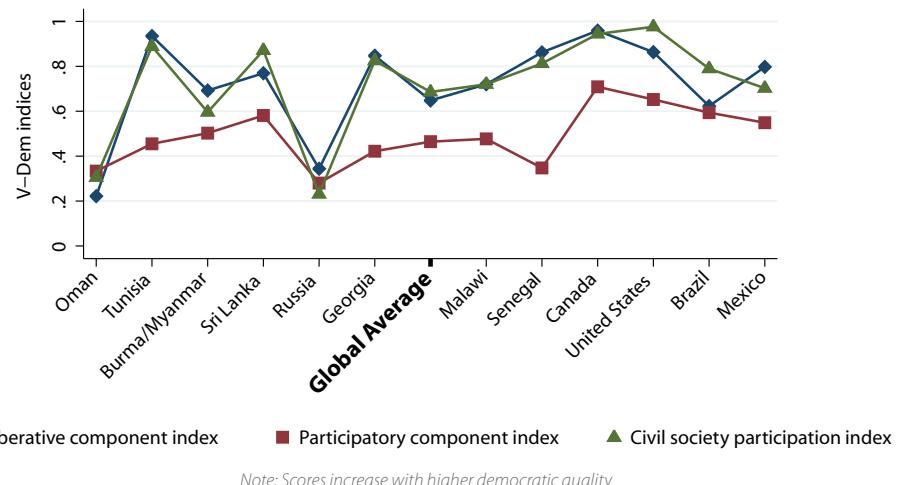
V-Dem further provides an additional indicator that complements measuring SDG Target 16.7:

- 4) The V-Dem indicator on **Power Distributed by Social Group** measures whether political power is distributed according to social groups within a society. Social groups are hereby identified by caste, ethnicity, language, region, religion, or some combination thereof. Figure 3 compares how power is distributed by social group in different regions across the world and developments in such from 1900 to 2016. In Western Europe and North America, all social groups overall possess some political power or social group characteris-

⁵ For further details about the V-Dem methodology, see Coppedge et al. (2017c).

⁶ More details about the V-Dem data (indices, indicators, scores) can be found in the V-Dem codebook (Coppedge et al. 2017a) and dataset (Coppedge et al. 2017b).

FIGURE 2. CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON OF V-DEM INDICES, 2016



tics are not relevant to politics in general. In other regions, political power is monopolized by one or several social groups, albeit with a general trend of more groups getting access to power. In Sub-Saharan Africa this positive development has been most pronounced over the last 70 years. By now – on regional average – several social groups comprising a majority of the population alternate in power.

V-Dem indices and indicators each account for one or more aspects of SDG Target 16.7. The Participatory Component and the Civil Society Participation Index measure the aspect of participation and, especially, how citizens can participate in decision-making processes. The Deliberative Component Index measures how decisions are reached in a polity,

which helps to assess how responsive governance is. Finally, the indicator Power Distributed by Social Group further contributes with insights into the inclusiveness of decision-making.

Disaggregating V-Dem indices allows for further delving into the development and state of particular aspects of SDG Target 16.7, inquiring, for example, about responsive or representative decision-making as illustrated in Figure 1.

The complementary V-Dem indices and indicator discussed in this policy brief can thus contribute to reviewing and following-up the progress of the implementation of the SDG Target 16.7.

FIGURE 3. POWER DISTRIBUTED BY SOCIAL GROUP

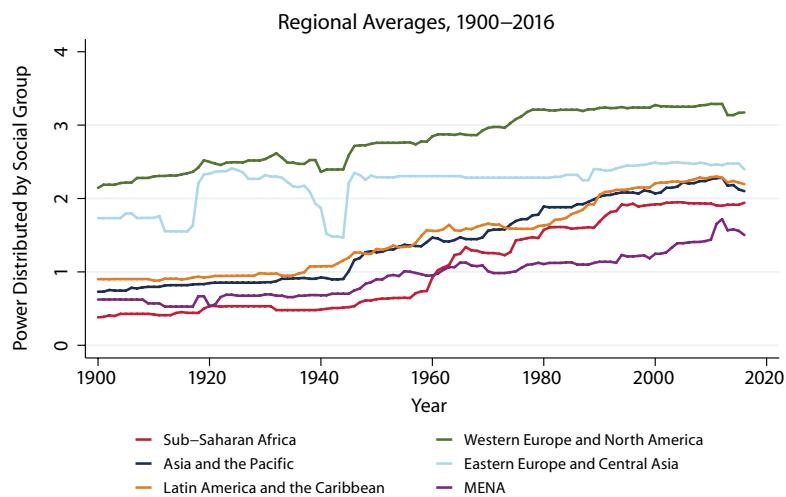


Figure 3. Power Distributed by Social Group in different regions across the world, developments from 1900 to 2016.⁷

⁷ Score 0 corresponds to political power being monopolized by one social group comprising a minority of the population, while score 4 indicates that social groups have roughly equal political power, or alternatively, that there are no strong social group differences to speak of.

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ABOUT V-DEM INSTITUTE

V-Dem is a new approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy. The project's multidimensional, nuanced and disaggregated approach acknowledges the complexity of the concept of democracy. With four Principal Investigators, two Project Coordinators, fifteen Project Managers, more than thirty Regional Managers, almost 200 Country Coordinators, several Assistant Researchers, and approximately 2,600 Country Experts, the V-Dem project is one of the largest-ever social science data collection projects with a database of over 15 million data points.



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