

Measuring the Reduction of All Forms of Violence and Related Death Rates in SDG Target 16.1 with V-Dem Data



Photo by Silvia & Frank (pixel2013).

KEY FINDINGS

- As an independent research institute, V-Dem contributes valuable measures for SDG 16.1, providing data with worldwide coverage and in the period from 1900-2016.
- The current indicators to measure SDG Target 16.1 do not cover all forms of violence in the world.
- V-Dem can contribute to SDG Target 16.1 with an additional indicator that measures freedom from political killings, shedding light on the extent of violence and killings perpetuated by state agents.

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. A sound indicator framework and statistical data is crucial to monitor and evaluate progress on the SDGs.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 16.1, identifying the main challenges posed by the official indicators and introducing a complementary V-Dem indicator, thereby contributing to measuring an additional aspect of SDG Target 16.1.

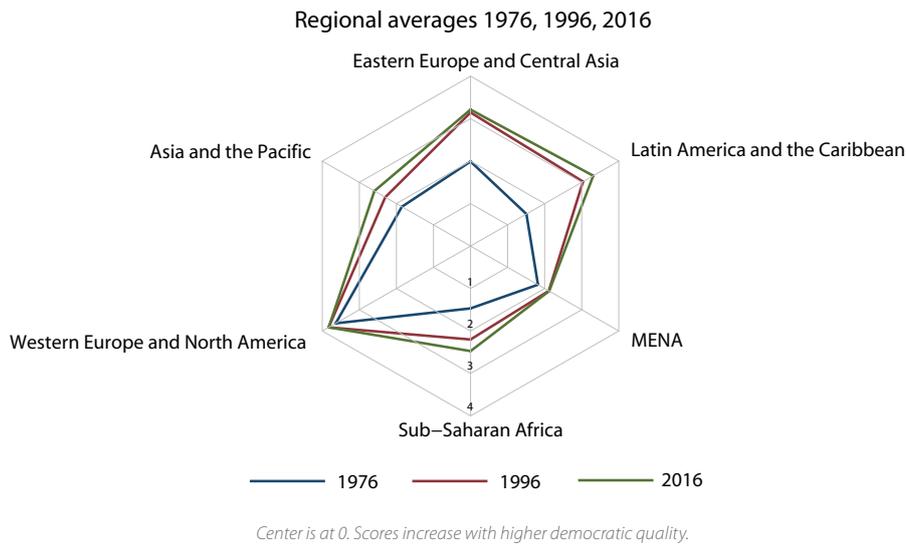
SDG Target 16.1 and its Indicators

SDG Target 16.1 aims to reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. UNSTATS has currently decided on four indicators that capture relevant information to shed light on the current state and progress of SDG Target 16.1.⁴

- 1 *“Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age.”⁵*
This indicator measures extreme forms of violent crime and provides a direct indication of lack of security at national levels.
- 2 *“Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause.”⁶*
Similar to indicator 16.1.1, this indicator measures conflict-related deaths that typically occur in countries at war.
- 3 *“Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months.”⁷*
Data collected through sample surveys of the adult population captures experiences of violence suffered by the adult population of both sexes.
- 4 *“Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live.”⁸*
This final indicator employs the concept of “fear of crime” to measure this feeling among respondents, which makes it dependent on different cultural, physical and language contexts.

¹ UNDP (2017) ² UN (2017) ³ UNDP/BMZ (2015) ⁴ UNSTATS (2017a) ⁵ UNSTATS (2017b) ⁶ UNSTATS (2016) ^{7,8} UNSTATS (2017b)

FIGURE 1. FREEDOM FROM POLITICAL KILLINGS



The currently proposed indicators measure different forms of violence, such as homicide, but also physical, psychological or sexual violence, as well as actual fear of crime. Such violence can also negatively influence wellbeing, and thus pose an obstacle to sustainable development. National institutions of criminal justice and public health provide data on homicides, while conflict related deaths are estimates produced by international databases. Limitations to the collected data arise due to the problem that violence is heavily underreported to authorities and there is a risk of missing or incomplete data. Special surveys are used to collect data on indicators 16.1.3 and 16.1.4, aiming to capture individual experiences of violence and fear. These surveys might not correctly portray levels and trends within an entire population, and through their rather context specific nature they do not enable cross-national comparability.⁹

All the suggested indicators measuring SDG Target 16.1 focus on violence within civil society and the experiences of citizens, thereby neglecting an important aspect when intending to cover all forms of violence: violence perpetrated by the state or political authorities.

The next section of this policy brief will introduce a V-Dem indicator that can complement the measurement of SDG Target 16.1, taking into account state related violence.

Measuring SDG Target 16.1 with V-Dem Data

State related violence and political killings is another form of violence relevant to SDG Target 16.1 and as such is especially relevant to SDG 16's overall goal of providing access to justice for all and building accountable institutions at all levels.⁸

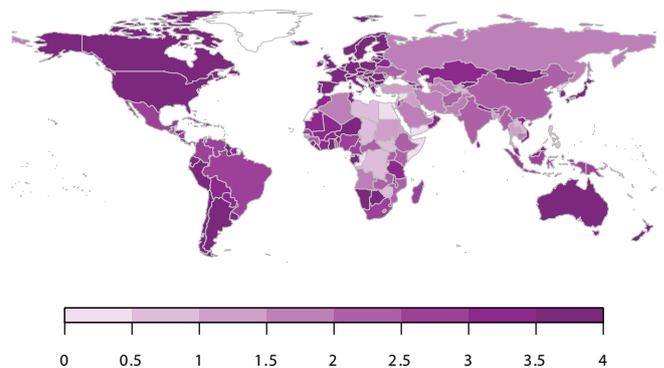
V-Dem provides the complementary indicator **Freedom from Political Killings** that measures the occurrence of political killings and their approval by leaders of governments. Political killings are killings by the

state or its agents without due process of law for the elimination of political opponents. Agents can be the police, security forces, prison officials or other agents of the state.⁹

Figure 1 shows the levels of political killings in different regions in the world, and how they have developed over the last forty years. Freedom from political killings has significantly increased in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in Eastern Europe and Central Asia between 1976 and 1996. While the levels have increased in all regions in the world, scores are still lowest in the MENA region.

V-Dem collects data in 177 countries within the period 1900 to 2016 through expert surveys that make it possible to gather information about sensitive topics such as violence in a country. Due to the V-Dem Methodology, the data can be compared cross-nationally and –regionally. Figure 2 depicts the level of Freedom from Political Killings in 177 countries in 2016. Freedom from political killings increases with darker color. Systematic political killings (0-0.5) in 2016 occur for example in Egypt. At the same time, political killings are non-existent (3.5-4), for example, in Western European countries, Mongolia or Argentina.

FIGURE 2. FREEDOM FROM POLITICAL KILLINGS, WORLD MAP 2016



⁹ UNSTATS (2017b) ¹⁰ UN (2017) ¹¹ Coppedge et al. (2017a) ¹² Coppedge et al. (2017b)

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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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