

A faint, dotted world map is visible in the background, spanning across the middle and right sections of the cover.

# Free Access to Information and a Vibrant Civil Society as Cornerstones for Sustainable Development

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*Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) is a new approach to conceptualization and measurement of democracy. It is a collaboration between some 50+ scholars across the world hosted by the V-Dem Institute, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg, Sweden; and the Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, USA.

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In the first phase, 173 countries of the world were covered from 1900 to 2012. Currently, data for 2013-2014 is available for 113 countries. For 76 of these there is also data for 2015! V-Dem aims to be able to update the data on an annual basis, releasing new and up-to-date data in March every year.

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# **Free Access to Information and a Vibrant Civil Society as Cornerstones for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>**

## **Historical Development and Current Trends**

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## Introduction

The 2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are historic in their drive to advance security, human rights and democratic governance as integral parts of the concept of human development. Goal 16 in particular recognizes human rights, rule of law and good institutions as crucial for sustainable development. This report focuses on the historical development and current global trends in two aspects of this goal: freedom of information and independent media (SDG Target 16.10) analyzed in Part I and civil society inclusion and participation (SDG Target 16.7) analyzed in Part II. A third and final part discusses general trends since 1950, the interrelationship between civil society and access to information, and their current state of affairs.

We explore these two dimensions of Goal 16 in 20 countries from various regions of the world. The countries are categorized into four regional groups that help to highlight patterns in the historical development and current state of freedom of media and civil society worldwide. The analysis is based on the new Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data set, which provides detailed expert-coded indicators on the sub-dimensions of the target. Unlike any extant data set, V-Dem has worked with over 2,600 local and cross-national experts to provide evaluations of various indicators of democracy.<sup>2</sup> The report showcases how V-Dem data can be used to capture progress towards achieving the SDG targets.

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<sup>2</sup> For further details and information about the V-Dem methodology, see <http://v-dem.net>.

## **Part I: Freedom of Information and Media**

SDG target 16.10 aims to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.”<sup>3</sup> This section discusses the historical development and contemporary trends in access to information, as measured by the *alternative sources of information index* provided by V-Dem, for 20 countries across five groups of world regions. The index measures the extent of the media’s (a) impartial coverage of the political opposition, (b) freedom to be critical of the regime, and (c) whether the media is representative of a wide array of political perspectives. The aggregate measurement is expressed in an interval scale between 0 (lowest) and 1 (highest).<sup>4</sup>

### **Latin American and South Pacific countries**

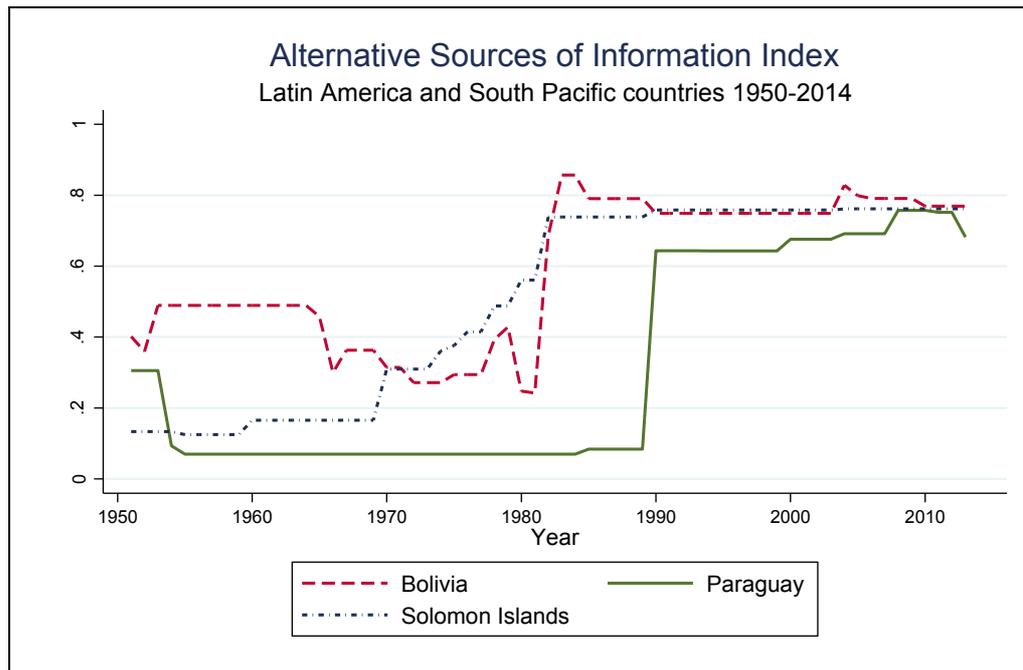
The historical progress of alternative sources of information in Latin America, as *Figure 1* portrays, reflects the major political dynamics and vicissitudes of democracy in the region since the mid-twentieth century. Despite some variations, freedom of access to information in Bolivia and Paraguay continued to generally decline in the post-war period and began to dramatically improve following democratic transition in the 1980s. The volatility and decline in Bolivia since before 1950 coincided with political violence, coups and counter-revolutions. Some progress following the MNR’s (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement) successful revolution in 1952 is evident. However, this was quickly reversed due to its ruthless suppression of dissent and eventual overthrow by the military in 1964. The deterioration, despite significant improvements in the late 1970s, continued until the transition from successive military regimes in 1982 when scores in terms of alternative sources of access to information dramatically increase from below 0.3 to above 0.8 in the late 1980s. A subsequent minor decline of levels follows but overall in the 1990s and onwards Bolivia sustains one of the highest scores on this index among the countries included in this graph.

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<sup>3</sup> UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

<sup>4</sup> Michael Coppedge et al, *V-Dem Codebook v6* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2015): 51, 255.

Figure 1.



After a period of political instability and successive authoritarian regimes, Paraguay fell under Alfredo Stroessner's military dictatorship (1954 – 1989). As a result, freedom of information levels in the second-half of the century plunge as low as 0.1, reflecting the political oppression, torture and extrajudicial killings under Stroessner's regime. After the transition to democracy in 1989, the score dramatically improves to about 0.6 in 1990 and continues to grow to close to 0.8 in the late 2000s. This expansion is slightly reversed with the political instability that followed the end of the 61-year rule of the right-wing Colorado Party (1947-2008) and the election of a left-leaning government.

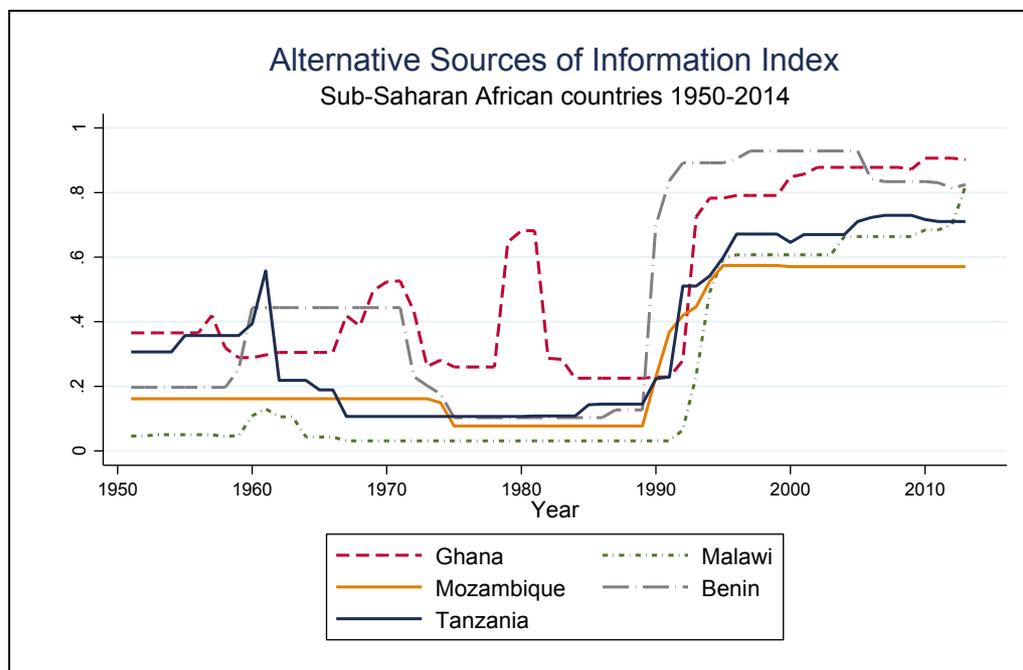
In terms of the historical development of access to information in the Solomon Islands, the country maintained a much lower record during the first seven decades. However, access to sources of information in the latter decades began to gradually grow after the adoption of a new constitution in 1970 and after independence from British rule in 1978. A stable level of 0.8 has been maintained despite some political instability during and after the 1998-2003 "ethnic" violence.

### Sub-Saharan Africa

Historical and contemporary trends in access to alternative sources of information in the five sub-Saharan African countries, displayed in *Figure 2*, share many commonalities. All experience low levels of access to information (0-0.4) prior to decolonization in the 1960s.

Most countries, except Mozambique and Malawi, witnessed remarkable expansion of freedom of information in the early post-independence years. The gains, however, were reversed fairly quickly in Tanzania and later in the early 1970s also in Benin and Ghana. The 1975-1989 period generally marks the lowest levels of freedom and impartiality of the media with political stagnation that followed the consolidation of one-party rule, personal dictatorships or military regimes in the region. Ghana stands out as an outlier, with its score spiking to over 0.6 in the early years of Rawlings' populist regime. The ground was quickly lost, but Ghana still scores high in a region with a relatively very low mean score in the 1980s. However, the eventual decline suggests that the media was not critical of the regime or offering a wide range of political views up until the early 1990s.

Figure 2.



A general revival of freedom of information begins with the “second liberation” of third wave transitions in Africa that began in Benin in 1990.<sup>5</sup> After the transition from Mathieu Kérékou’s military rule, Benin made by far the largest gains compared to the other countries in this graph, with its scores moving from below 0.2 in 1989 to about 0.9 in 2005. A decade of slow decline followed afterwards. In Ghana, access to alternative sources of information has continued to increase progressively following democratic transition in 1992 and a peaceful transfer of power from Rawlings’ National Democratic Congress (NDC) to the opposition in 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Larry Diamond, “Democracy: Africa's Second Liberation,” *Africa Report* 37 (Nov./Dec. 1992).

Tanzania and Malawi, both with scores above 0.6 on the index since the mid-2000s, witnessed impressive expansion of media freedom in the post-transition years. Malawi's development is in particular remarkable, reversing its very low standing for much of the post-colonial period under Banda's one-party regime and the political setbacks to democracy under the democratically elected Muluzi government, 1994-2004. The country has witnessed another decade of progress since the transition of power to Mutharika in 2004. Tanzania continues to experience slow but steady expansion in access to information despite challenges to democratization under the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party's continued power domination since independence. The CCM retained a virtual monopoly on media, and several national security and defamation laws enforce self-censorship, block access to information and limit effective functioning of the media.<sup>6</sup> According to the Guardian, the ruling party monitors the Internet and mobile-phone services, while independent reporting and dissident voices are threatened and critical journalists are often subjected to harassment and jail.<sup>7</sup>

Mozambique has made only modest progress since transition to multiparty politics in 1993 in comparison to the other countries. A significant expansion in access to media and information followed a period of decline and stagnation under FRELIMO's Marxist regime and a vicious civil war following independence in 1975. However, the quick expansion since transition was quickly arrested by the lack of substantial democratic progress under FRELIMO and persistent government control over the media. While freedom of expression has been legally protected, reporters are often pressured and threatened as well as practicing self-censorship, social media is monitored and academic freedom restricted.<sup>8</sup>

### **Former Soviet Republics, Central Asia and the MENA region**

Freedom of media, expression and plurality of political views in Georgia, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan were dramatically strengthened with the transition to multiparty politics and a market economy after their independence in 1991. As evident from *Figure 3*, after a brief period of expansion in the early 1990s, freedom of information in the three countries follows

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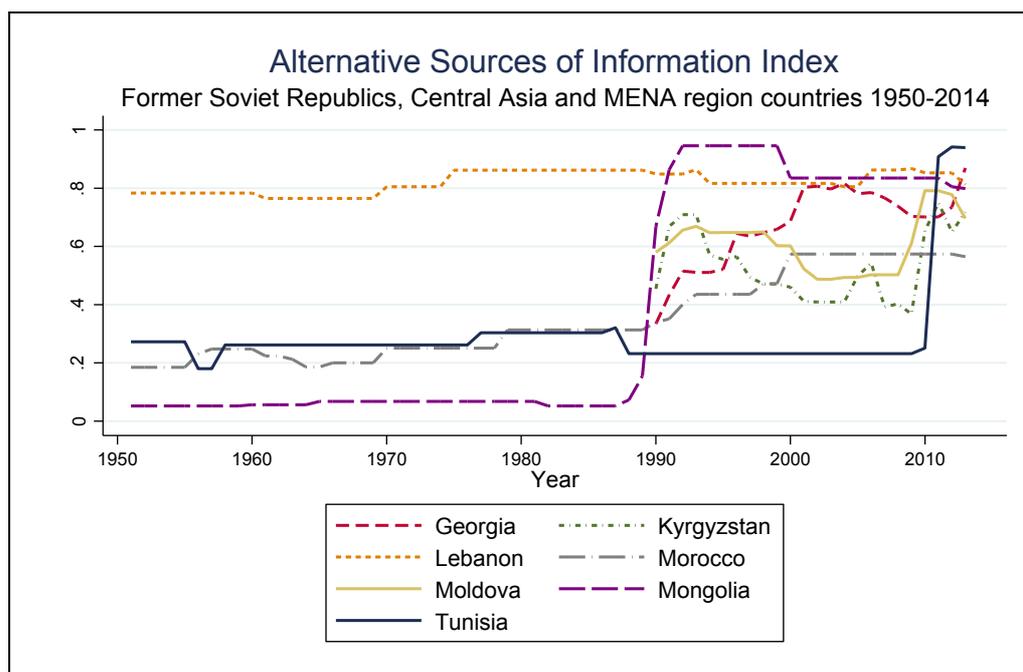
<sup>6</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2012: Tanzania," 2012, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012/tanzania>.

<sup>7</sup> Hannah McNeish, "Tanzania accused of making laws on the hoof in 'Kafkaesque' curb on free speech," *The Guardian*, July 8, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, "Mozambique: Conviction of academic and editor over Facebook post would set dangerous precedent," September 15, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/mozambique-conviction-of-academic-and-editor-over-facebook-post-would-set-dangerous-precedent/>; Freedom House (2015) "Freedom in the World: Mozambique," 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/mozambique>.

divergent trajectories, with Georgia retaining an overall upward trend while Moldova and Kyrgyzstan suffer decline for nearly two decades. The setback in Moldova reflects the return of the non-reforming Party of Communists to power in 1996 and the fragmentation of the liberal bloc until it managed to form a governing coalition in 2009 and introduced political reforms, including laws for the protection of press freedom and journalists' rights.<sup>9</sup> It is also partly related to the separatist Transnistrian authorities' continued harassment of independent media and critics, as well as restrictions on basic civil liberties. Similarly, the general deterioration in Kyrgyzstan during the past two decades is partly caused by the lack of drastic reforms and political oppression under the erstwhile communist Askar Akayev's authoritarian regime. A notable improvement after the 2005 Tulip Revolution and Akayev's ouster was quickly arrested following eruption in 2010 of inter-ethnic violence, a state of emergency and state targeting of journalists and human rights advocates.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 3.



Post-communist Georgia, on the other hand, witnessed a steady improvement in freedom of access to information despite the bloody overthrow of the first elected government in 1992 and the eruption of a civil war that ended in 1995 with the election of Edward Shevardnadze. However, a period of decline followed despite Shevardnadze's peaceful deposition in the 2003 Rose Revolution, owing largely to the escalating conflict with the separatist regions and the

<sup>9</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom of the Press 2011: Moldova," 2011, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/moldova>

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW). *World Report* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2016), 364-67.

unfulfilled promises of the revolution.<sup>11</sup> Apart from close monitoring of the opposition and dissent under Mikheil Saakashvili's government, there have been "severe limits" on media freedom and a monopoly of state-run television outside the capital.<sup>12</sup> Overall, however, Georgia's record has been unrivalled in the region, possibly aided by the Freedom of Information law that provided media outlets with legal protection from the government.<sup>13</sup>

A near-flat line, as shown by the figure, for the former Soviet-satellite state of Mongolia during much of the twentieth century encapsulates the restrictive political atmosphere under communist rule in the Soviet-led socialist bloc. Access to information in Mongolia grew dramatically after 1989 amid transition from communist rule. Even though the political prominence of the communist People's Party ended with its electoral defeat in 1996, the country experienced a slight setback in terms of freedom of media and information access in the late 90s to then stay on a level of 0.8 on the index.

Like in the former Soviet states, access to information in most countries of the MENA region remained restricted or a state monopoly until the liberalization and democratization reforms that coincided with the Cold War's conclusion.<sup>14</sup> Morocco exemplifies the subsequent expansion in access to media and information sources in the region. However, the progress in Morocco was stalled with the coronation of King Mohammed VI in 1999, whose cautious economic and social liberalization policies stifled freedom of expression through censorship, defamation laws and "legal" persecution of the media.<sup>15</sup> Tunisia's low and flattened threshold for many decades is indicative of political repression under the secular Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), from its independence in 1956 until Ben Ali's overthrow in 2011. Even though freedom of the press was formally guaranteed by the constitution and hundreds of newspapers and magazines existed in Tunisia prior to the revolution, opposition parties had very limited ownership, dissident views were suppressed and private media practiced self-

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<sup>11</sup> International Crisis Group, "Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?" *Europe Report* N°189 – 19 December 2007, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/189\\_georgia\\_\\_\\_sliding\\_towards\\_authoritarianism](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/189_georgia___sliding_towards_authoritarianism); Lincoln Mitchell, "What was the Rose Revolution for?," *Harvard International Review*, February 27, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Lincoln Mitchell, "What's Next for Georgia? The End of the Rose Revolution," *World Affairs Journal* January/February 2013.

<sup>13</sup> David Anable, "The Role of Georgia's Media and Western Aid in the Rose Revolution," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 11 (2006): 14.

<sup>14</sup> Larbi Sadiki, "Popular Uprisings and Arab Democratization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000): 71-95.

<sup>15</sup> Rashi Khilnani, "How Morocco's free media is silenced?," *opendemocracy*, April 18, 2006; CPJ, "The 10 countries where press freedom has most deteriorated," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, May 2, 2007; Human Rights Watch, *World Report* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2016); 364-67.

censorship.<sup>16</sup> The spike on the eve of the Jasmine Revolution attests to the role mass media or “liberation technology” played in consolidating opposition and organizing collective action in the face of state repression, resulting in a great expansion of freedom of information<sup>17</sup>.

Lebanon, with scores of over 0.7 since 1950, represents an island of freedom of expression and media in a region with a dismal record until recently. Yet, despite Lebanon’s lead in regional democracy<sup>18</sup> since the end of the civil war in 1990, its scores never rose above the pre-war levels. This might be related to the political instability, limitations on freedom of speech even after the 2005 Cedar Revolution, including restrictions on media freedom to criticize state institutions<sup>19</sup> and targeted assassinations of journalists particularly critical of Syria.

### **South Asia, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia**

Different political dynamics in Burma and Nepal since the mid-20th century result, as *Figure 4* shows, in divergent developments in access to information in South Asia. Nepal witnesses decades of remarkably steady growth with the rise of political parties and civil society in the late 1940s. The spike in 1990 corresponds to the constitutional reforms, which limited the power of the monarch, and a transition in 1989 to a multiparty system. A decade-long civil war (1995-2005) between the monarchy and the Communist Party of Nepal resulted in a decline in freedom of the media and information. The end of the civil war has had some positive effects, but the abolition of the monarchy and establishment of a republican democracy in 2008 under an interim constitution have yet to yield major progress. Burma is a different story. It experienced an opposite development trajectory following an era of remarkably high levels of media and information freedom (above 0.6) until the early 1960s. Its score, which plummets following the military overthrow of a multiparty system in 1962, does not recover under the oppressive, army-dominated Burma Socialist Programme Party’s regime. It slightly improves with the reintroduction in 1990 of a short-lived multiparty competition that struggled in the face of the military junta’s continued brutal crackdown on dissent and opposition. The unprecedented growth recently is associated with the military regime’s limited political reforms

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<sup>16</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press 2015: Tunisia,” 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/tunisia>.

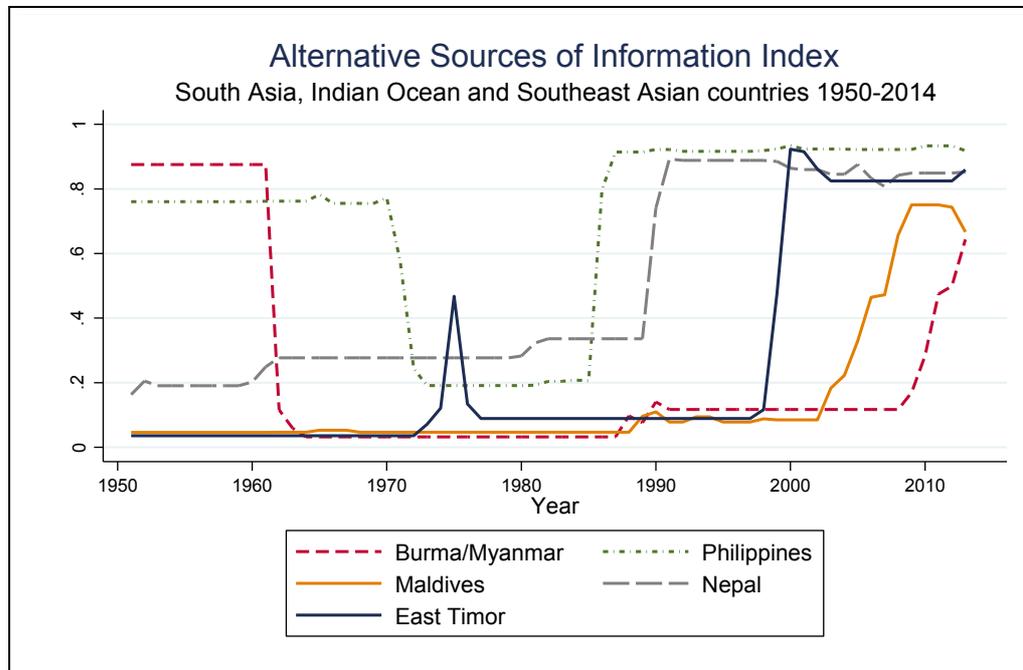
<sup>17</sup> Philip N. Howard, “Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?,” *Working Paper 2011.1* (Cornell Library: Project on Information Technology and Political Islam, 2011); Sheldon Himelfarb, *Social Media in the Middle East* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012); Raymond Schillinger, “Social Media and the Arab Spring: What Have We Learned?,” *Huffington Post*, September 20, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit (January 2015) ranked Lebanon 2nd in the Middle East and 98th out of 167 countries worldwide for its Democracy Index 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2016): 373.

that began in 2008,<sup>20</sup> particularly reforms in favor of relaxing press censorship and, after 2010, introducing democracy and a market economy.

Figure 4.



Access to information in Southeast Asian countries also developed along dissimilar lines. In the Philippines, as in Burma, rapidly expanding and relatively high levels of freedom of information followed the liberation from Japanese occupation and independence in 1945. This progress was undermined when, in 1972, the popularly elected Ferdinand Marcos abolished the multiparty system, banned private media, and declared a Martial Law that ushered in an era of political repression, censorship and massive human rights violations. A dramatic rise from 0.2 to about 0.9 corresponds with the People Power Revolution that ended Marcos' dictatorship in 1986 and heralded the return to multiparty democracy. No further growth is, however, evident since the political reforms due to various obstacles, including corruption and political instability fueled by a communist insurgency and Moro separatists that encouraged blatant human rights violations,<sup>21</sup> particularly arbitrary detention, disappearances and extra-judicial killings of journalists and political prisoners under the Arroyo and Aquino governments since 2001.<sup>22</sup> East Timor shares with Maldives a dismal record of freedom of

<sup>20</sup> M. Bunte, "Burma's Transition to Quasi-military Rule: From Rulers to Guardians?," *Armed Forces and Society* 40 (2013): 742.

<sup>21</sup> Peter M. Sales, "State Terror in the Philippines: the Alston report, Human Rights and counter-insurgency under the Arroyo Administration," *Contemporary Politics* 15 (2009): 321-336.

<sup>22</sup> CPJ, "77 Journalists Killed in Philippines since 1992: Motive confirmed," Committee to Protect Journalists, Nov. 5, 2015.

information except for a brief spike during its short-lived independence from Portuguese rule in 1975. Unprecedented levels of expansion followed the end of Indonesia's occupation in 1999. Nevertheless, despite guarantees of freedom of speech and press and an active independent media,<sup>23</sup> a notable decline after independence in 2002 is apparent, largely owing to renewed outbreaks of violence.

In the Maldives, which gained independence from British protectorate rule in 1965, freedom of information and speech continued to be stagnant despite a period of political stability and limited competition under Gayoom's rule (1978-2008). The dramatic rise since 2003, and in the period preceding the first democratic elections, is correlated to the emergence of a political opposition that pressured Gayoom for gradual political reforms. A decline in freedom of information followed the disputed ouster of the democratically elected Mohamed Nasheed by the military in 2012 and the Yameen government's broader crackdown on dissent. The new Sharia-inspired constitution has also undermined religious freedoms and other human, particularly women's, rights.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "2010 Country Reports on Human rights Practice, Timor-Leste," April 8 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/>, p.23.

<sup>24</sup> Maldives ranks high in suppression of religious freedoms by government.

## **Part II: Civil Society: Inclusion and Participation**

SDG 16.7 aims to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.”<sup>25</sup> This report focuses on the freedom of civil society, measured by the V-Dem *core civil society index* on an interval scale of 0 (lowest) and 1 (highest).<sup>26</sup> This index measures (a) government control over CSO entry and exit into public life, (b) attempts to repress CSOs, and (c) civil society participation, which includes a participatory environment, women’s participation and consultation of CSOs in policy matters.<sup>27</sup> The term civil society organizations (CSOs) in V-Dem’s definition includes interest groups, labor unions, religiously inspired organizations engaged in civic or political activities, social movements, professional associations, and classic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but not businesses, political parties, government agencies, or religious organizations primarily focused on spiritual practices. A CSO must also be at least nominally independent of government and economic institutions. The same countries and regional groupings discussed above are explored to highlight the development of civil society inclusion and participation since 1950 worldwide.

### **Latin America and South Pacific**

Like freedom of access to information, the historical progress of civil society in Latin America speaks to the region’s political dynamics since the mid-twentieth century. As evident from *figure 5*, Paraguay maintains very low levels of CSO activity for several decades, with civil society conditions worsening with Stroessner’s coming to power in 1954. Under a state of siege during his full reign, civil liberties were suspended and civil society ruthlessly repressed or, if allowed, operated only at the behest of the Colorado Party. The country witnessed resurgence in civil society inclusion and participation with the political and economic reforms following Stroessner’s overthrow in 1989. The protection of civil liberties and the rule of law under the 1992 constitution permitted civil society to attain ever greater, though too often limited, latitude of operations in an increasingly permissive political pluralism over the next decade. The election in 2008 of the former Catholic bishop and liberation theology proponent, Fernando Lugo, is an indication of CSOs increased role. Civil society actors were important and beneficiaries of Lugo’s socioeconomic reform agenda that was met by powerful vested interests that successfully blocked progress for greater citizen participation and inclusion.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

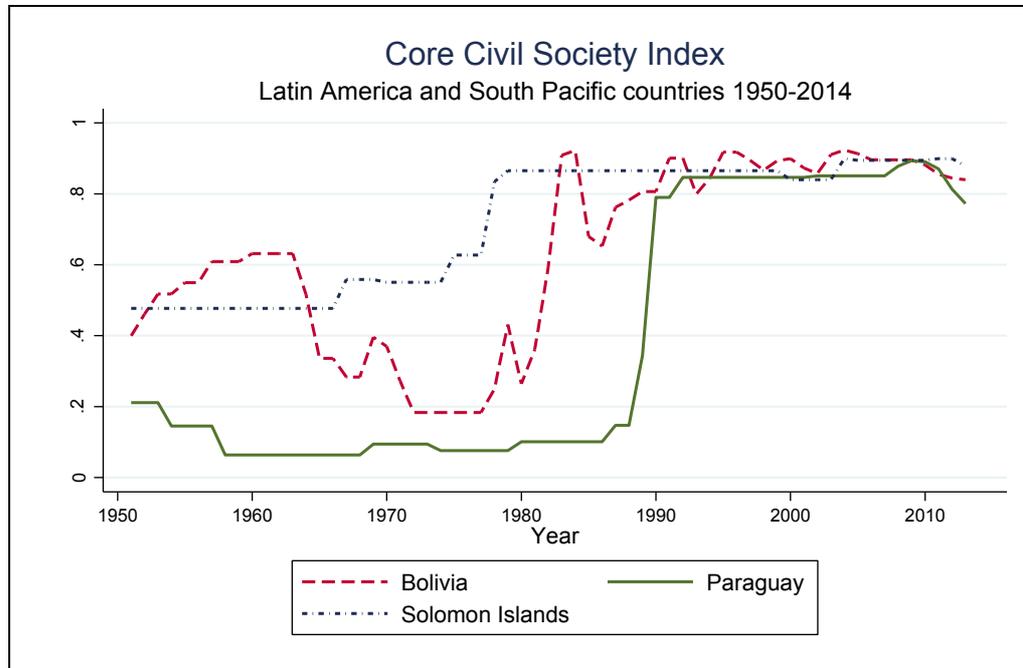
<sup>26</sup> Michael Bernhard et al, “The Varieties of Democracy Core Civil Society Index,” *Varieties of Democracy Institute Working Paper 13*, October 2015, see [https://v-dem.net/media/finder\\_public/47/2e/472eec11-830f-4578-9a09-d9f8d43cee3a/v-dem\\_working\\_paper\\_2015\\_13\\_edited.pdf](https://v-dem.net/media/finder_public/47/2e/472eec11-830f-4578-9a09-d9f8d43cee3a/v-dem_working_paper_2015_13_edited.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> V-Dem Institute, *V-Dem codebook Version 5* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2016), 230-37.

<sup>28</sup> USAID, *Paraguay Democracy and Governance Assessment* (Burlington, VT: ARD, Inc., 2009), 25, 28.

Decline is evident with Lugo's removal from office in 2012 through a highly disputed impeachment by the Colorado Party and its parliamentary supporters.

Figure 5.



Civil society conditions in Bolivia were historically slightly more favorable, but highly unstable, reflecting an overall political instability marked by coups and countercoups. A slow progress under the MNR regime was quickly reversed with its overthrow in 1964, and CSO conditions continued to deteriorate under successive military governments. Substantial improvements in the late 1970s were followed by a prolonged period of steady growth with the transition to democracy in 1982, when civil society scores dramatically increase by three-fold to above 0.8. Impressive levels of civil society freedom did not accompany the decade-long liberal political reforms and economic restructuring initiated in 1993 by Sanchez de Lozada. Despite no reported attacks on democracy, Bolivia's civil society continued to witness a slow, but steady, decline since Morales's 2005 election. The left-wing Movement Towards Socialism's advocacy of grassroots mobilization, social and cultural inclusion, and revenue redistribution—together with the virtual absence of government restrictions or crackdown on civil liberties—were expected to bolster civil society. However, increasing state intervention in the economy, social polarization, and Morales' allegedly growing authoritarian tendencies seem to be eroding the

role and freedoms of CSOs. The government has recently shown signs of repression of critical NGOs and social movements.<sup>29</sup>

As with the rise in access to information, the inclusion and participation of CSOs in the Solomon Islands began to expand with the new 1970 constitution, and quickly became elevated with the country's independence in 1978. A stable level of 0.9 was maintained until the outbreak of "ethnic" violence in 1998 and the subsequent deterioration of law and order in the next decade. However, unlike in neighboring countries, CSOs have overall enjoyed a relatively conducive environment, with trade unions, NGOs, and numerous other associations freely and actively operating. Yet, they have been numerically few and organizationally too weak to be a force to be reckoned with in public policies.<sup>30</sup>

### **Sub-Saharan Africa**

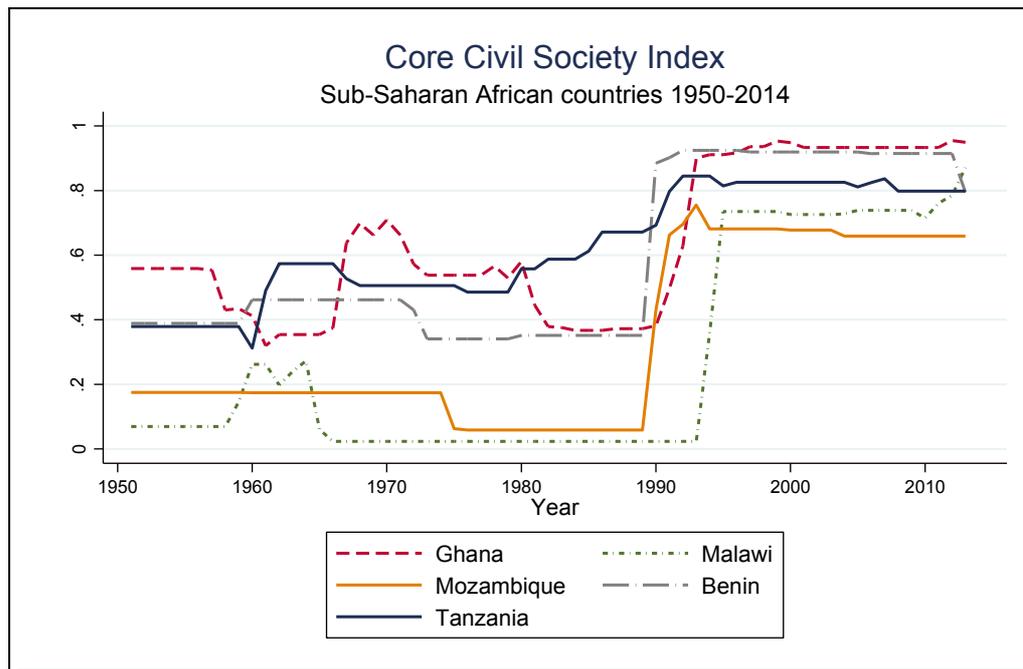
Unlike the strikingly similar pattern in the development of access to information, the conditions of civil society are immensely varied in the five sub-Saharan African countries until the beginning of the third wave transitions, as reflected in *Figure 6*. The early post-independence years generally witnessed a revival of civil society, followed by a period of divergent developments with the consolidation of various authoritarian regimes since the late 1960s. This variation seems to have much to do with the varying levels of political competition and participation allowed by each regime. A remarkable political stability and substantial degree of political competition under a single-party regime allowed CSOs in Tanzania to flourish after independence. The suppression of opposition, unions and other civil society actors amid Nyerere's drive for a single-party state and forced collectivization policies, contributed to a decade of decay in the 1970s. However, the regular elections and political competition within the ruling CCM party allowed civil society to revive much earlier than before the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the 1990s. Yet Tanzania lost its lead due to the CCM's continued political domination and lack of democratic progress.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for the government's regulation of CSOs activities, HRW, "Bolivia: Universal Periodic Review" March 16, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> ADB, "Solomon Islands 2010 Economic Report" (Mandaluyong City, Phillipines: Asian Development Bank, 2010), 70.

Figure 6.



In Ghana and Benin, on the other hand, prolonged periods of political turbulence and repression under military regimes left civil society severely battered and generally declining. Conditions worsened further under military regimes - Benin since 1972 and Ghana after 1981- that tolerated little political dissent and competition. Kerekou's Marxist ideology and Rawling's populist appeals entailed some degree of social mobilization, but none evidently incentivized civil society. Both regimes banned political parties and independent social forces, which left little or no room for civil society organizations. Civil society in both countries began to expand with the liberalization reforms of the late 1980s, and has made by far the largest sustained regional gains, aside from the decline in Benin since 2010, which correlates with the progress of democracy during the last two decades in Ghana and Benin.

Under closed one-party regimes with minimal political contestation and participation, Malawi and Mozambique once again share by far the lowest civil society scores since independence. As with its scores for alternative information sources, Malawi occupied the bottom rank for much of the post-colonial period. A fledgling civil society in the pre-independence years was undermined by the declaration of a single-party state on independence in 1964. Civil society languished for the next three decades under Banda's closed regime. The oppressive police state banned free political participation and associational life except for youth and women's groups closely allied to the ruling Malawi Congress Party. The transition in 1994 marked the rebirth of

CSOs, which have since made impressive progress despite challenges to democracy, especially under Muluzi's government.

Similarly, conditions for Mozambique's civil society only worsened after independence under FRELIMO's Marxist regime. The decline and eventual stagnation is correlated with the state's destruction of associational life and the establishment of a one-party state with no semblance of even a controlled pluralism. Civil society quickly revived with Joaquim Chissano's sweeping reforms in favor of multi-party politics and a market economy in the late 1980s. The transition to democracy in 1994 and the end of the civil war marked for CSOs a new era, characterized by a proliferation of NGOs active in post-conflict reconstruction, development and governance. Civil society has since been expanding and diversifying, but it remains weak at a level of just above 0.6 on the index, overburdened by a legacy of state oppression,<sup>31</sup> FRELIMO's long political monopoly<sup>32</sup> and government tutelage over CSOs.<sup>33</sup>

### **Former Soviet Republics, Central Asia and the MENA region**

Civil society in the former Soviet republics has generally flourished with the transition from communist rule. Even though it was conditioned by a difficult legacy of a shared totalitarian past, it nonetheless experienced different conditions under different post-transition dynamics since the demise of communism. *Figure 7* reveals that despite setbacks under Shevardnadze's rule, civil society in Georgia continued to mushroom under the auspices of Western donors, especially democracy-promotion NGOs such as the Open Society Foundation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the Eurasia Foundation that brought expertise and financial resources.<sup>34</sup> Civil society consolidated in the years prior to the 2003 Rose Revolution, which demonstrated the political role of Georgian CSOs in concert with international NGOs. Civil society entered a new stage after the revolution. However, it was undermined by the draining of experienced members into governmental positions and a shift in donor priorities towards the new state. It has yet to fully recover from this setback; but a renewed external attention has recently ushered it into another era of development.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Antonio Francisco et al, "Mozambican Civil Society Within: evaluation, challenges, opportunities and action," (FDC. 2007, 17), <http://www.unicef.org/mz/cpd/references/12-Civil%20Society%20Index,%20Mozambique%202007.pdf>

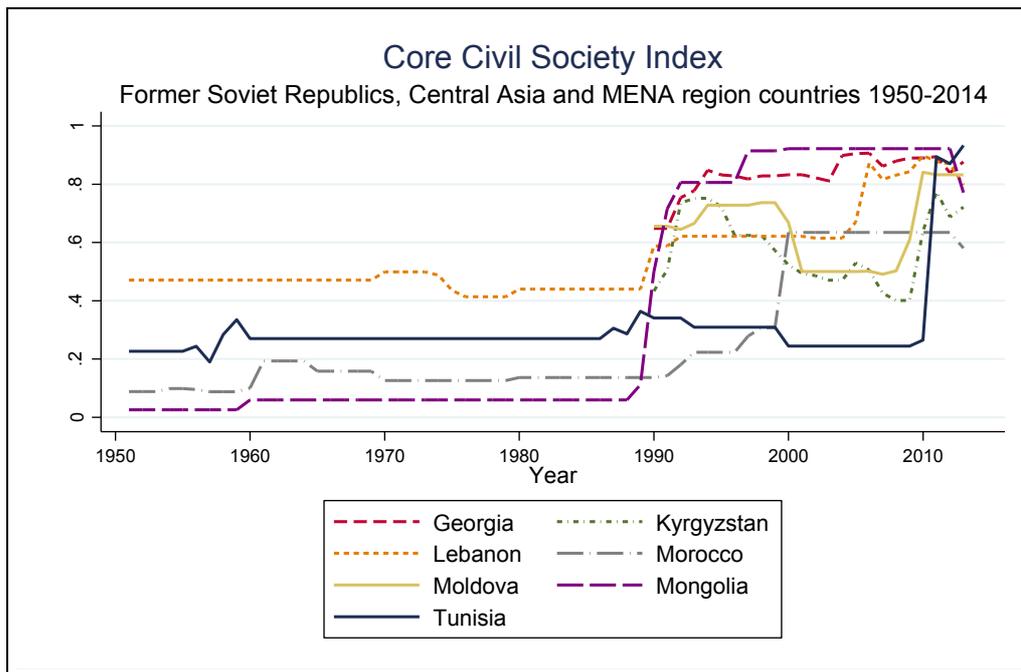
<sup>32</sup> Jason Sumich, "The party and the state: Frelimo and social stratification in post-socialist Mozambique," *Development and Change* 41 (2010): 679-698.

<sup>33</sup> Francisco, Antonio et al. "Mozambican civil society within," p.58.

<sup>34</sup> ADB. "Civil Society Briefs: Georgia" p. 1, <http://www.adb.org/>

<sup>35</sup> ADB. "Civil Society Briefs: Georgia" pp. 1-2, <http://www.adb.org/>

Figure 7.



By contrast, civil society in post-independence Moldova and Kyrgyzstan experienced prolonged periods of decline – a trend reversed only at the end of the last decade. The deterioration was particularly glaring in Kyrgyzstan, where an embryonic civil society, which mushroomed in the new liberal environment of the early 1990s, was crippled by a difficult political legacy and an increasingly restrictive political atmosphere. After backtracking on his early support for a vibrant civil society, President Akayev created an atmosphere in which autonomous civil organizations, particularly those engaged in political issues, were severely constrained and attacked by the state.<sup>36</sup> After the Tulip revolution, Kyrgyz civil society entered a third phase (2005–present) characterized by not only active participation in various social sectors but also successful influence in policy matters at the state level. Yet challenges remain that include, in the main, excessive dependence on external resources and confrontational relations with the state.<sup>37</sup> Civil society in Moldova faced a similar fate after it initially sprung up in a permissive political atmosphere, with Western support. The decline began with the return of the communist party to power in 1996. The recovery that began with its democratic ouster in 2009 has been slow because democracy is remotely consolidated as the country recovers

<sup>36</sup> John Anderson, “Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52 (January 2000): 77-93.

<sup>37</sup> In 2009, for example, President Bakiyev enacted new measures, which essentially banned local CSOs from political activities and tightened control over their activities

from communist rule and moves towards improving basic freedoms.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, CSOs in breakaway Transnistria still struggle to survive in a hostile environment in which the authorities harass and attack them.

Communist and post-communist Mongolia epitomizes two contrasting eras in the history of civil society in the former Soviet sphere. A plethora of quasigovernmental mass organizations, ranging from women's and youth wings to trade unions, existed in communist Mongolia closely tied to the MPRP party. None was independent of the state, and participation, though extensive, was semi-coerced. These organizations adhered to the party ideology and were allowed to operate insofar as they enabled the state in its mission for a '*homo socialisticus*' citizen<sup>39</sup> or the consummate transformation of society to communism. The changes of 1989-90 marked a new era. Civil society and social movements in particular, played a vital role in the transition from communism, which opened up the political space for independent citizen action and free association that spurred the blossoming of CSOs. The civil society index score skyrocketed from about zero to nearly 1.0 in a few years. Social movements that had receded into the background re-emerged very strongly after 2000 in response to widespread social and political discontent. CSOs grew stronger following the 2004 parliamentary elections that ended the MPRP's near-monopoly of political power, and helped to significantly expand the political space for independent citizen action. However, these achievements began to erode after 2010 due to state decrees against minority, such as women's and gay rights, groups, pro-democracy NGOs and restriction on freedom of association and worship.

Civil society in the MENA countries shares a long history of stunted development until the fall of the Berlin Wall. Levels of inclusion and participation significantly varied across countries but civil society during this period generally ailed under the repressive apparatus of various autocratic regimes. The liberalization reforms of the 1990s resuscitated civil society, yet it barely entered a new era, unlike in other regions. The role of civil society was critical in the democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and Latin America. This was not the case for the weak Arab civil society,<sup>40</sup> which seems to have finally wrested its mandate in the prelude to the Arab Spring. In the intervening years, however, civil society has partially graduated from outright state repression to state co-option: many NGOs became what came to be called

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<sup>38</sup> Orysia Lutsevych, "How to Finish a Revolution: Civil Society and Democracy in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine," *REP BP 2013/01* (Chatham House, January 2013), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Center for Citizens' Alliance/ICSFD Ulaanbaatar Secretariat, "State of Civil Society in Mongolia (2004-2005): CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report from Mongolia," undated, [https://www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI\\_Mongolia\\_Country\\_Report.pdf](https://www.civicus.org/new/media/CSI_Mongolia_Country_Report.pdf), p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> See Augustus Richard Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East*, 2 vols. (New York: Brill, 1994, 1996).

GONGOs – government organized non-governmental organizations – funded and staffed by governments as instruments of social control. Contrary to expectations of its role as a key driver of Middle East democratization, civil society thus became an arena of state hegemony rather than an “instrument of collective empowerment”<sup>41</sup> until the Arab Spring.

Tunisia under Ben Ali’s regime is an extreme example of the state repression of civil society. The conditions of CSOs deteriorated after signs of brief recovery with the transition of power in 1988.<sup>42</sup> Only a few CSOs were active and even fewer permitted to operate independent of the state. Constraints were especially high for human rights groups and associations promoting civil liberties. After the revolution, the country’s score on the index improves from 0.2 to 0.9. Civil society blossomed in quality and quantity, keeping itself and its demands at the front and center of the transition process. It joined hands with political society to successfully manage the bumpy road to the new Tunisian democracy. It built a consensus that continues to keep the transition on track – sparing post-revolution Tunisia the authoritarian relapse or civil turbulence that engulfed other countries. Free of state constraints, civil society played an especially important role in drafting the new constitution. Moreover, CSOs brought about new laws for freedom of association and access to information, additionally partnering with international organizations on development issues as varied as combating corruption, youth job-skills training and improved service delivery in lagging regions.<sup>43</sup>

The record of civil societies in post-1990 Lebanon and Morocco is a mixed basket of progress and retreat, albeit for different reasons. Although Lebanon had for long retained the strongest civil society in the region, its development was hampered by a narrower focus on humanitarian and local governance needs generated by the crisis of authority during the civil war. As *Figure 7* shows, CSOs quickly recovered with the restoration of central authority after the 1989 Taif peace agreement.<sup>44</sup> The recovery was also accompanied by the rebirth of a wide array of CSOs that sought to complement, rather than substitute, the state in various social sectors – a transformation demonstrated in the Cedar Revolution. Civil society was reinvigorated by the withdrawal of Syria in 2005, showing both a numerical surge and an expanded scope of

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<sup>41</sup> Shadi Hamid, “Civil Society in the Arab World and the Dilemma of Funding,” Brookings Institution, Oct. 2010, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2010/10/middle-east-hamid>.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Alexander, “Back from the Democratic Brink: Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia” *Middle East Report* No. 205 (Oct. - Dec. 1997), 34-38.

<sup>43</sup> Donia Jemal, “Tunisian civil society: from revolutionaries to peacekeepers,” *Voices and Views: the Middle East and North Africa World Bank blog*, October 15, 2015, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/tunisian-civil-society-revolutionaries-peace-keepers>.

<sup>44</sup> See, for a comprehensive history of Lebanese civil society, *Carmen Geba Civil Society and Political Reform in Lebanon and Libya: Transition and Constraint* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2016).

operations, including entry into the policy arena, political reform and human rights advocacy. The steady growth suggests that Lebanon's civil society has entered a new era of political and legal freedoms that allows for CSOs to flourish, with a score of 0.8 on the index.

Unlike Tunisia and Lebanon, post-1990 Morocco demonstrated slow growth of CSOs after political liberalization. Civil society gradually took off after decades of monarchic autocracy that curtailed the free participation and functioning of citizen groups and non-governmental associations. Its resurgence was spurred by the relaxation of state control over the public sphere and substantial state disengagement from public services. Yet, the state sought to penetrate and manipulate civil society, effectively sponsoring, promoting and building a pro-regime civic sphere.<sup>45</sup> The progress that reached 0.6 on the index was effectively stalled by renewed restrictions under King Mohammed VI since 1999. Many new protest groups and organizations emerged corresponding to the new dynamism generated by the Arab Spring. CSOs have surged numerically and diversified-including feminist, human rights, youth, and Islamist activists - creating an unprecedented dynamism in Morocco's public sphere.<sup>46</sup> They actively demanded major political reforms and were involved in the constitutional reform process that guaranteed their freedom from the state and full participation in public life. Yet the unfulfilled hopes and the little headway made towards democratization have been a disincentive to Morocco's CSOs.

### **South Asia, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia**

As with freedom of information, the development of civil society in Southeast Asia has shared many commonalities since the mid-twentieth century. Despite remarkable success (around 0.7) during the early post-independence years, the conditions of Burmese civil society, as *Figure 8* shows, represent a grim reality by any measure. Since the decline following the 1962 overthrow of the multiparty system, associational life never recovered under the climate of fear and repression of the socialist party's military regime. Civil society was virtually annihilated by the one-party state's total control over the public sphere and a centralized economic system. The short-lived opening up in the late 1980s did not materialize due to the military junta's continued crackdown on CSOs,<sup>47</sup> except for social welfare, cultural-religious, development or party-affiliated associations. Burmese civil society resurrected with the relaxation of public space

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<sup>45</sup> James Sater, *Civil Society and Political Change in Morocco* (UK: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Rashid Touhtou, "Civil Society in Morocco under the New 2011 Constitution: Issues, Stakes and Challenges" (Doha, Qatar: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2014): 1-2.

<sup>47</sup> David I. Steinberg, "A Void In Myanmar: Civil Society In Burma," Online Burma/Myanmar Library (June 2003 [Dec. 1997]), <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/Steinbergpaper.htm>, 9-15.

restrictions in the aftermath of limited political reforms and a transition to a market economy in 2008. Legal and practical constraints still remain, but the continued opening up of political “space” has allowed various local and international CSOs to flourish. Civil society is becoming more active, spurred on by the newfound political dynamism and repealing of a restrictive law in place since 1988.<sup>48</sup>

As in Burma, relatively higher civil society participation in post-independence Philippines was suddenly undermined by the abolition of the multiparty system and declaration of a Martial Law that obliterated the little space for CSOs to maneuver. Civil society was driven underground or into joining the armed struggle of the Philippines Communist Party, or sought shelter under university or religious institutions. The People Power Revolution of 1986 that ousted Marcos was mainly a product of the growing activism of a Philippine civil society<sup>49</sup> that has dramatically grown five-fold since transition, as the figure demonstrates. The restoration of democracy under President Corazon Aquino and a favorable legislative environment helped civil society to mushroom. The government’s move to institutionalize civil society participation in national and regional development was also instrumental in its consolidation. Today, Philippine civil society is widely regarded as one of the most vibrant in the region and beyond, and the country has the largest number of CSOs per capita in Asia.<sup>50</sup> It is also credited with having critically contributed to democratization,<sup>51</sup> despite slightly losing ground in the previous decade due to widespread public corruption and blatant human rights violations, among other factors. The country scores almost a 1 on the Core Civil Society Index.

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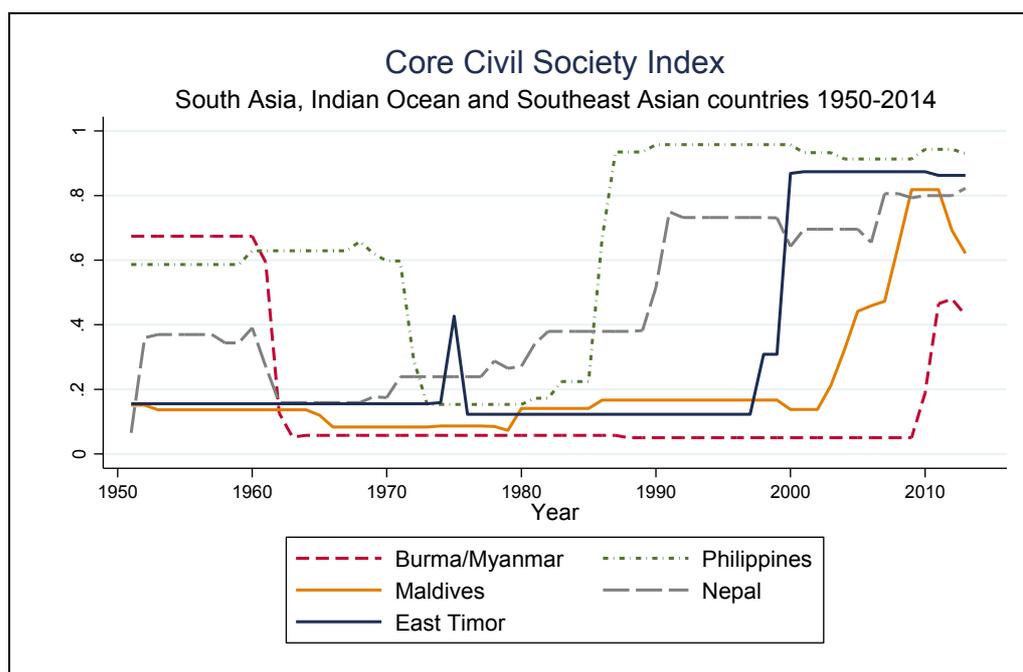
<sup>48</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), “Civil Society Briefs: Myanmar,” *ADB Publication Stock No. ARM147009-2* (Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar: Resident Mission, February 2015): 2-3; Andrew Morgan, “A hopeful moment for civil society in Myanmar,” *Online Burma/Myanmar Library* (May 2015 [March 2015]), <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2015/03/30/a-hopeful-moment-for-civil-society-in-myanmar/>, pp. 12-15.

<sup>49</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), “Civil Society Briefs: Philippines,” *ADB Publication Stock No. ARM124416* (Manila, Philippines: Philippines Country Office, February 2013), pp.2.

<sup>50</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB). “Civil Society Briefs: Philippines,” 2

<sup>51</sup> David Wurfel, “Civil Society and Democratization in the Philippines,” in *Growth & Governance in Asia*, ed. Y. Sato, (Honolulu, Hawaii: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), 215-224.

Figure 8.



East Timor and the Indian Ocean island state of Maldives share a dismal track record of civil society development throughout the twentieth century. Apart from a brief spike during a short-lived independence in 1975, East Timorese civil society began languishing under, and was largely organized as a resistance to, Indonesia's occupation. This is reflected in the figure, where the country displays a score of below 0.2 up until independence in 1999, which marked a new era for civil society. It expanded nearly nine-fold in the span of a year and has since retained the momentum in a generally supportive and permissive political atmosphere. Yet CSOs face many challenges, mostly related to weak institutional capacity, limited resources and centralized government decision-making. Maldivian civil society began a long and slow process of recovery under Gayoom's rule, which tolerated limited pluralism. The political reforms that opened up political space in 2003 marked a new era. Civil society further prospered with the freedom of association guaranteed under the 2008 constitution. However, the expansion seemed to be curbed by the barring of civil society involvement in political issues and activities deemed contradictory to Islam.<sup>52</sup> A decline is evident with the military's ouster of Nasheed in 2012 and the Yameen government's broader crackdown on basic freedoms.

Civil society in Nepal was born, along with the rise of political parties, in the late 1940s. Even though it faced major decline after King Mahendra's abrogation of the democratic experiment

<sup>52</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the nature and challenges of Maldivian CSOs, see FJS Consulting, "Comprehensive Study of the Maldivian Civil Society" (Male', Maldives: United Nations Development Programme in the Maldives and the Government of Maldives, 2011).

in 1959, civil society had been slowly and steadily expanding under the oppressive Panchayat regime (1961–1990). It was further spurred on by the relaxation of state control<sup>53</sup> after the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1989 when Nepalese CSOs nearly doubled during the transition years. Yet this resurgence was quickly arrested due to the restriction of CSOs to non-political activities, the unrestrained powers of the monarchy and the political instability that adversely affected freedom of association. The end of the civil war in 2005 and the subsequent establishment of a republican democracy in 2008 had immediate salutary effects for civil society. Civil society was instrumental in the broad political mobilization of 2006 (*janaandolan II*) that swept away the 400-year-old royal dynasty.<sup>54</sup> Yet the fragmentation of the party system in the aftermath seems to have tempered the rapid expansion of CSOs.

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<sup>53</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), “Overview of Civil Society: Nepal,” ADB (July 2005), <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/28970/csb-nep.pdf>, p.1.

<sup>54</sup> For a thoroughgoing analysis of the nature and role of Nepalese civil society in democratization, see Saubhagya Shah, “Civil society in uncivil places: soft state and regime change in Nepal” *Policy Studies* 48 (Washington DC, DC: East-West Center, 2008) and Dev Raj Dahal, “Civil Society in Nepal: Opening the Ground for Questions” (Kathmandu, Nepal: Center for Development & Governance, 2001).

### **Part III: General Trends and the Current State of Affairs**

As the foregoing analysis has demonstrated, different factors and forces have shaped, and continue to shape, the historical progress of, and challenges to, access to information and media, as well as the robustness of civil society since 1950. Even though the experience has been varied and protracted across countries and regions at different stages of social and political development, the overall trend in the analyzed countries has been one of a slow progress towards greater freedom in access to information and association until the 1980s and 1990s.

Some major political changes have marked breakthroughs in the expansion of freedoms of information and civil society participation. Three such historical junctures that heralded greater human freedoms and democratic rule for many countries in the past century were Third World decolonization, “third wave” democratization after 1974, and the demise of Communism after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Trends in the development of freedom of access to information in sub-Saharan Africa (see Figure 2), for instance, clearly illustrate the ebb and flow in conjunction with these major political and economic transformations of the second-half of the century. With the exception of Ghana, the gains made by most countries after independence in the 1960s were lost when the nominal institutions of liberal democracy inherited at independence were dismantled with the rise and consolidation of military, one-party or personalist dictatorships in the 1970s. The liberalization reforms and transitions to democracy that swept the region beginning in the early 1990s mark another episode. Despite some variations, all five countries have since witnessed historically unprecedented levels of expansion in citizens’ freedom of access to information and in the media’s ability to criticize governments and represent diverse political views.

A few countries and world regions were left behind in the latest global surge following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some like Tunisia and Kyrgyzstan have seemingly joined the wave with the help of radical political changes like the Color Revolutions and the Arab Spring that ended dictatorships. In others, like Burma and the Maldives, the expansion in freedom of information and association was spurred by renewed pushes for greater democratic freedoms and political reforms that opened up political space. These latest expansions have a striking regional dimension, which is particularly evident in the MENA region and the former Soviet sphere. Most MENA countries, apart from Lebanon, have seen significant expansion since the Arab uprisings that either ended authoritarian rule in a few countries like Tunisia, or produced more

freedoms short of full democracy in the majority of cases like Morocco, Jordan, the UAE and Algeria. Yet, amid this general global expansion since the mid-1980s, there have been setbacks. These challenges are mostly related to blatant repression by minority autocratic regimes like in Burma or to systematic abuse of civil liberties by semi-authoritarian regimes in others like Georgia, Moldova, Malawi and Paraguay. Other major hurdles include political instability, military intervention, weak institutions, public corruption and resource shortages. The periodic decline or stagnation in countries like the Philippines, East Timor, Maldives, Moldova, Lebanon, and Mozambique are all related to a multiplicity of this set of political, economic and institutional challenges.

Some variations in the trends within and across regions are inevitable. However, in most of the analyzed countries, there has been an increase in the level of media freedom and civil society participation since the end of the Cold War. This general development is both an indicator and a symptom of the expansion in electoral democracy and civil liberties worldwide. Moreover, there are striking complementarities in the development of access to information and civil society participation and inclusion overall. In the overwhelming majority of cases, an increase in one aspect of democracy most often corresponds to an increase in another aspect –an indication of the inherent relationship between different dimensions of democracy. The mushrooming of civil society and media simultaneously with the political openings in Mongolia (1989), Malawi (1994), Paraguay (1989), East Timor (1998), Burma (2008) and Tunisia (2011) clearly indicate their interconnectedness. Likewise, a decline or stagnation in one area entails a parallel decline or inertia in another area. In pre-revolution Tunisia, for example, both civil society and media development was generally stagnant (approximately 0.3) for five decades. In post-1990 Kyrgyzstan, the continuous decline in media freedom was closely paralleled by a decline in civil society participation until when both indicators expand rapidly in the post-revolution years before restarting to flounder at the beginning of this decade.

However, the seemingly intertwined development of civil society and media freedom also shows a few but interesting variations in terms of timing and scope of expansion. These variations in historical development are particularly evident in sub-Saharan African countries. Whereas sources of information appeared relatively less mature and suffered steady decline after independence, civil society in most countries scored higher and witnessed periods of growth before ‘third wave’ transitions. While all authoritarian regimes appeared hostile to

freedoms of information, some regimes seemed to be less hostile to civil society participation and inclusion. Though not as stagnant as freedom of information, civil society ailed under exclusionary one-party or repressive socialist regimes (e.g. Malawi and Mozambique, respectively). However, civil society seemed active and dynamic for most of the post-independence decades under inclusionary and social-mobilizing one-party regimes or limited multi-party systems. Nyerere's Tanzania with its goal of African socialism, and, to some extent, Kereku's Marxist regime in Benin, clearly shows that civil society can substantially expand and develop earlier compared to media freedom in the latter type of political regimes. On the other hand, civil society can also remain stable in contexts of weak or failed states. The Lebanese state ceased to exist during the civil war years or remained relatively weak after its restoration in 1990. Lebanese civil society was relatively stable throughout this period, owing largely to its new mandate to meet humanitarian and local governance needs generated by the crisis of authority. Irrespective of country and cross-regional variations, civil society also appears to emerge stronger than media from the years prior to our analysis (i.e. pre-1950). Likewise, in most cases, civil society seems to develop earlier and quicker than freedom of information following transition from authoritarian rule (e.g. Mozambique, Malawi, Paraguay, Solomon Islands).

In recent years, the Latin American and South Pacific countries experience a score between 0.7 and 0.8 on the Alternative Sources of Information index, which implies that these countries are doing fairly well in terms of ensuring public access to information as part of SDG 16.10. As suggested by the even higher scores on the Core Civil Society index, Bolivia, Solomon Islands and Paraguay provide, as stated in SDG 16.7, a good environment for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making in terms of autonomous civil society organizations being consulted on important policy issues. However, a negative trend, both in terms of access to information and freedom of civil society, has been developing in Paraguay in recent years that merits further monitoring.

In the Sub-Saharan region, the level of alternative sources of information and civil society autonomy varies even today. In Mozambique, where a score of 0.6 on both indices is achieved, further efforts are required in order to provide citizens with an impartial and critical media as well as a vibrant civil society for participation. Tanzania is another country where there is room for improvement in terms of access to information, whereas Ghana, Malawi and Benin provide scores of above 0.8 on both indices.

The countries in the former Soviet, Central Asia and the MENA region are experiencing very similar levels of access to information and freedom of civil society. Most countries in this cluster reach levels of more than 0.8, but Kyrgyzstan and Morocco are lagging behind with lower scores on both indices. In Moldova, civil society is relatively autonomous and influential, whereas the freedom of the media has declined in recent years.

The South Asian, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian category shows great variations on both indices in recent years. Burma/Myanmar display rather low levels of alternative sources of information with a score of 0.6 and even lower levels of civil society autonomy with a score of 0.4. Another country showing clear room for improvement in both aspects is Maldives, where a level of around 0.6 on both indices is obtained. On the other hand, the data suggests that East Timor and Nepal are doing fairly well in assuring an impartial media and a vibrant civil society, although the scores of 0.8 also indicate room for further enhancement. As shown by the high levels on both indices, Philippines is the country that shows the greatest development on both dimensions of democracy in this group.

The in-depth and detailed analysis of this report demonstrates the value of reliable measures in order to monitor and track progress of the SDGs over time up to the current state of affairs. Precise and reliable expert-based data plays a crucial role in locating countries and areas in particular need of attention, as well as in guiding efforts intended to generate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

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