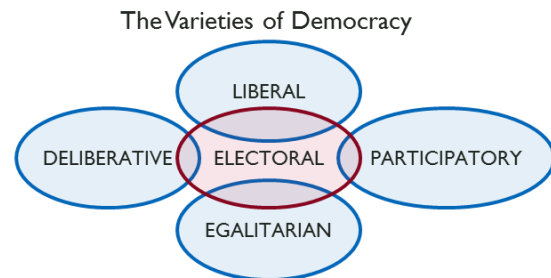


## VARIETIES OF DEMOCRACY

[Varieties of Democracy \(“V-Dem”\)](#) is a database produced by the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden which measures the many complex dimensions of democracy. More than simply a country that holds elections, V-Dem defines a democracy as having five democratic principles: electoral, liberal, deliberative, participatory, and egalitarian. Each democratic principle is measured on a scale of 0-1 (higher is better) through an index compiled from sub-indices and raw data.<sup>1</sup> [The International Data and Economic Analysis \(IDEA\) Query](#) has all V-Dem’s high-level democracy indices with their components and the three [Self-Reliance indicators](#)<sup>2</sup> with their components for the years 1900-2017. This Snapshot will briefly introduce V-Dem’s theory and vast database, highlight the Self-Reliance indicators, and present the results of recent research on democracy and development produced through USAID’s Center of Excellence on Democracy, Rights, and Governance (USAID/DCHA/DRG) continuing partnership with V-Dem.



Source: V-Dem Codebook Version 8, high level democracy indices.  
Produced by USAID Data Services.

### HOW DOES V-DEM MEASURE DEMOCRACY?

V-Dem’s multidimensional definition of democracy means that its database contains five different high-level indices that measure different democratic principles. Each index is built from a series of sub-indices, which are based on factual information from official documents combined with more subjective expert assessments on topics like political practices and compliance with de jure rules.<sup>3</sup> In a perfect electoral democracy (measured with the **Electoral Democracy Index**) suffrage is extensive, political and civil society organizations (CSOs) can operate freely, elections are clean and fair, elections affect the composition of the chief executive of the country, there is freedom of expression, and there is an independent media capable of presenting alternative views on matters of political relevance. As the existence of elections is necessary (but not sufficient) for the existence of any type of democracy, the Electoral Democracy Index components are included as part of V-Dem’s other four democracy indices.

1. The **Liberal Democracy Index** (a Self-Reliance indicator) judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on executive power.
2. The **Deliberative Democracy Index** measures whether public reasoning focused on the common good motivates political decisions (in contrast to emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests, or coercion).
3. The **Participatory Democracy Index** emphasizes citizens’ engagement in CSOs, direct democracy, and subnational elected bodies.

<sup>1</sup> Approximately half of the indicators in the V-Dem dataset are based on factual information obtainable from official documents such as constitutions and government records. The other half consists of more subjective expert assessments on topics like political practices and compliance with de jure rules. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/about/>

<sup>2</sup> In this Snapshot, “Self-Reliance” refers to the USAID initiative to realign and reorient its policies, strategies, and program practices to improve how it supports each country on the Journey to Self-Reliance — or, put another way, a country’s ability to plan, finance, and implement solutions to address its own development challenges. <https://selfreliance.usaid.gov/>

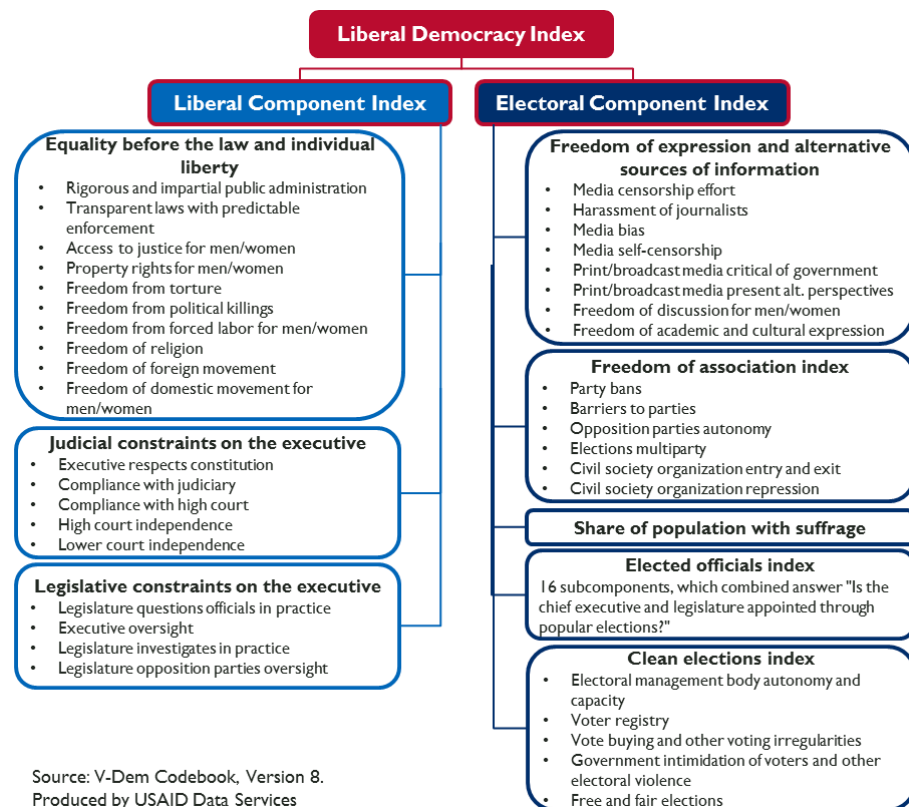
<sup>3</sup> “About V-Dem,” October 2018. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/about/>



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4. The **Egalitarian Democracy Index** measures the extent to which rights and freedoms of individuals are protected equally across all social groups, resources are distributed equally across all social groups, and individuals enjoy equal access to power.<sup>4</sup>



## WHAT DO THE V-DEM SELF-RELIANCE INDICATORS MEASURE?

Three Self-Reliance indicators are found in the V-Dem databases: Liberal Democracy, Social Group Equality, and Civil Society and Media Effectiveness (which V-Dem calls the “Diagonal Accountability Index”).

### LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

**Liberal Democracy** is one of the Self-Reliance commitment<sup>5</sup> indicators, and USAID believes that “a country will not advance in a meaningful and sustained way toward self-reliance without progress toward liberal democracy.”<sup>6</sup> The Liberal Democracy Index is one of V-Dem’s five high-level indices, and emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the majority. To make it a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account. In V-Dem’s research paper on democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean,<sup>7</sup> V-Dem’s research team concluded that liberal democracy in the region has improved since the 1970s, as a result of the democratization process experienced in the region in the 1980s and 1990s, and then stagnated in the 2000s. Considering the trends over the last decade, we may be observing the beginning of a decline in democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean, as some countries decline (Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela) while

<sup>4</sup> V-Dem Codebook, Version 8 (April 2018). <https://www.v-dem.net/en/reference/version-8-apr-2018/> (“V-Dem Codebook”)

<sup>5</sup> Here, commitment is “the degree to which a country’s laws, policies, actions, and informal governance mechanisms — such as cultures and norms — support progress towards self-reliance.” Self-Reliance Methodology at 2.

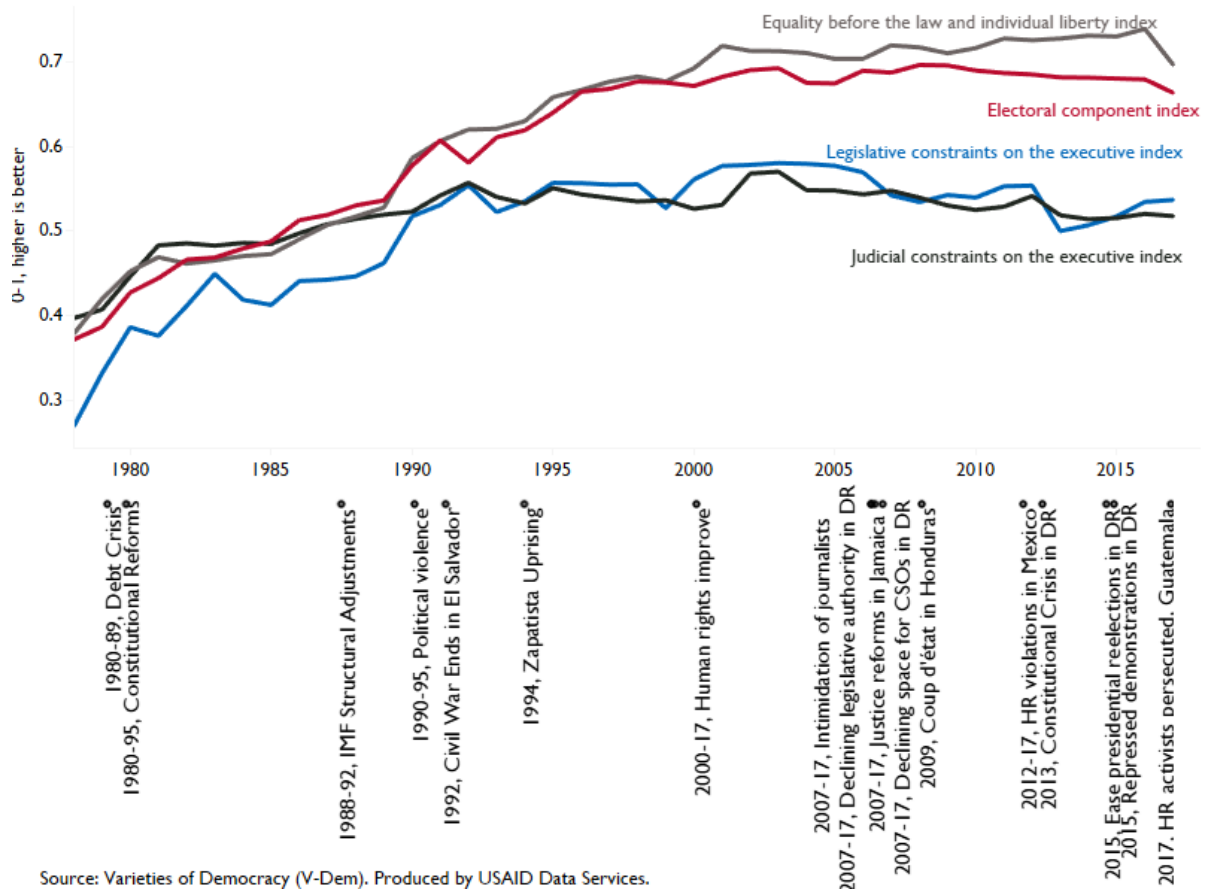
<sup>6</sup> USAID Self-Reliance Metrics FY 2019 Methodology Guide (September 2018) [https://selfreliance.usaid.gov/docs/USAID\\_Self-Reliance\\_Metrics\\_FY\\_2019\\_Methodology\\_Guide.pdf](https://selfreliance.usaid.gov/docs/USAID_Self-Reliance_Metrics_FY_2019_Methodology_Guide.pdf) (“Self-Reliance Methodology”)

<sup>7</sup> USAID/DCHA/DRG has research papers that explain the historical trends in liberal democracy in each region that USAID operates in.

others remain unchanged (Paraguay and Peru) or only improve slightly (Columbia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, and Jamaica) as can be seen in the line graph below.

Components of Liberal Democracy Index in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1970 to 2017

Average of USAID-assisted countries and selected regional timeline

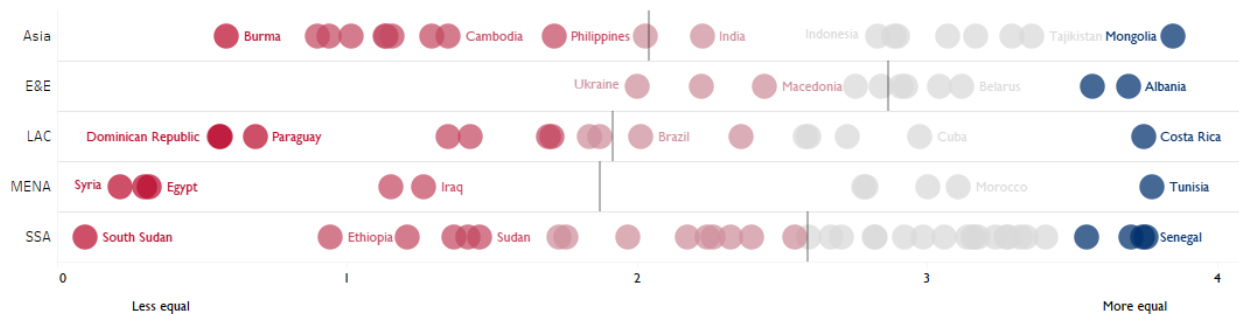


Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem). Produced by USAID Data Services.

### SOCIAL GROUP EQUALITY

**Social group equality** (with respect to civil liberties) is a self-reliance commitment indicator because it measures political inclusiveness and the political barriers marginalized populations face. The index represents the extent to which all social groups, as distinguished by language, ethnicity, religion, race, region, or caste, enjoy the same level of civil liberties. It does not measure gender inequality or income inequality. Lower scores indicate that some groups generally are in a more favorable position.<sup>8</sup> Social

Social group equality with respect to civil liberties (0-4, higher is better), 2017



Source: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem). Produced by USAID Data Services

<sup>8</sup> V-Dem Codebook

group equality is a component of V-Dem's Egalitarian Democracy Index, which measures a democracy according to how civil liberties, access to power, and resources are equal across social groups.

USAID's Self-Reliance team believes that political and economic inclusiveness are mutually reinforcing, and allow the gains and costs of development to be equally shared across social groups, and therefore are an important measure of self-reliance. If marginalized populations lack political inclusion and voice, and if a country's government does not commit to providing civil liberties equally, excluded social groups cannot hold their government to account, be productive members of society, and freely pursue private enterprise.<sup>9</sup>

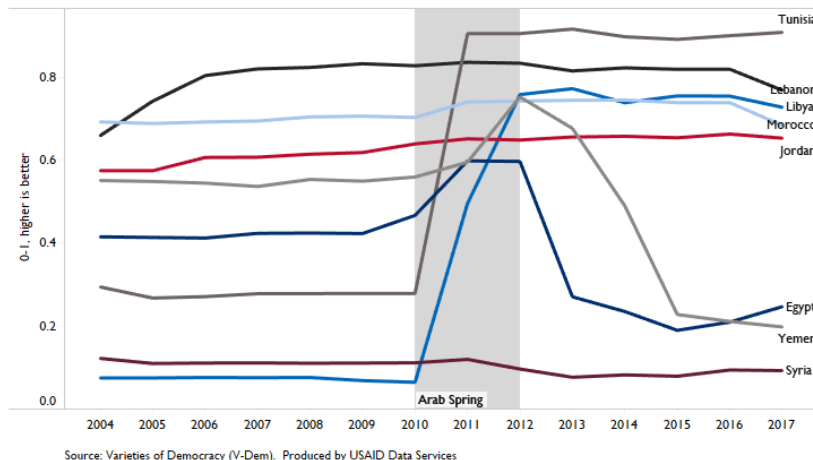
## CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA EFFECTIVENESS

**Civil Society and Media Effectiveness** (which V-Dem calls the "Diagonal Accountability Index") is a Self-Reliance capacity<sup>10</sup> indicator. It is an index that combines 14 subindicators, organized around four nodes: media freedom and capacity, civil society organizations' ability to operate freely, freedom of discussion and expression, and engaged society.<sup>11</sup> Some of these subindicators judge the legal capacity of civil society and media to check the power of the government, while others measure the actual level of engagement in civil society and diverse views in media. These mechanisms can be tools that ensure government agencies serve the interest of the people. In addition, higher levels of accountability are strongly correlated with better development outcomes such as higher life expectancy, literacy and school enrollment rates, and lower mortality of children under the age of five.<sup>12</sup> USAID believes that "enhanced capacity and effectiveness of civil society and free media go hand-in-hand with greater country capacity in other areas, including human capital, government capacity and economic capacity."<sup>13</sup>

A country can score higher by either amending their laws to create space for civil society or by having citizens become more engaged within the current system.

Looking at the measurements for Civil Society and Media Effectiveness in the Middle East and North Africa region before and after the Arab Spring, we can see massive jumps in the scores for Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen between 2010 and 2012. However, as Egypt's laws became more restrictive and Yemen descended into civil war, the scores dropped below their pre-Arab Spring levels after 2012.

Middle East and North Africa, Civil Society & Media Effectiveness  
Self-Reliance Indicator, 2004 to 2017



<sup>9</sup> Self-Reliance Methodology

<sup>10</sup> Here, capacity is defined as "how far a country has come in its ability to manage its own development journey across the dimensions of political, social, and economic development, including the ability to work across these sectors." Self-Reliance Methodology at 2.

<sup>11</sup> The media node includes: Media Bias, Print/Broadcast Media Critical, Print/Broadcast Media Perspectives, Government Censorship Effort-Media, Harassment of Journalists, Media Self-Censorship, and Internet Censorship. The civil society node includes: CSO Entry and Exit, CSO Repression, and CSO Participatory Environment. The freedom of discussion and expression node includes: Freedom of Discussion for Men, Freedom of Discussion for Women and Freedom of Academic and Cultural Expression. "Engaged society" refers to the breadth and depth of public deliberations when important policy changes are under consideration. V-Dem Codebook.

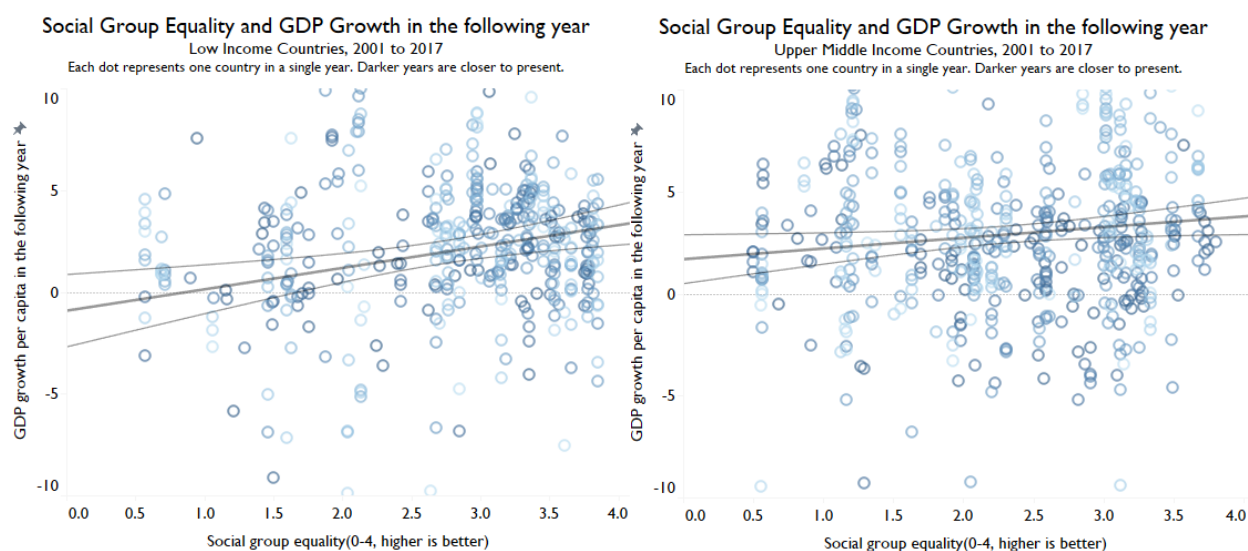
<sup>12</sup> Self-Reliance Methodology

<sup>13</sup> Self-Reliance Methodology

## WHAT CAN RESEARCH USING V-DEM'S DATA TELL US ABOUT DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT?

### CIVIL LIBERTIES CAN LEAD TO INCREASED ECONOMIC GROWTH

V-Dem's research<sup>14</sup> revealed that countries with higher degrees of respect for civil liberties, in particular private civil liberties, experience higher economic growth rates.<sup>15</sup> The Self-Reliance indicator “social group equality in respect for civil liberties” is also positively related to economic growth. In addition, political inclusion of women and LGBT people positively related to economic growth. The V-Dem researchers used several variations of their econometric models, ensuring that their results were not driven by GDP per capita, oil revenues, or the impact of countries' particular cultures, political histories or geographic features.<sup>16</sup> They concluded that “while there are strong normative and moral reasons why everyone's rights matter, this study shows that from an economic perspective, it is also economically beneficial for countries to be inclusive and extend citizens' civil rights.”<sup>17</sup>



Note: Lower middle income country relationship was not significant to the <5% p-value level in this simplified version of V-Dem's regression model, and therefore is not shown.

Source: Varieties of Democracy. Produced by USAID Data Services.

### MEDIA FREEDOM CAN HELP PRESERVE DEMOCRACY, BUT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO CREATE A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

In a separate study for USAID, V-Dem also found that states with stronger civil society and more effective media are better equipped to preserve and protect their democracies (prevent autocratization)

<sup>14</sup> USAID/DCHA/DRG has an ongoing partnership with V-Dem to expand the scope of metrics and research on democracy in USAID's partner countries. This partnership recently produced research on several topics, including the relationship between political inclusion and economic growth and the ability of an active civil society and effective media to preserve and protect a country's democracy. The full papers will eventually be publically available on V-Dem's website. For more information, please contact Andrew Greer (DCHA/DRG/L, [angreer@usaid.gov](mailto:angreer@usaid.gov)) who manages the contract.

<sup>15</sup> Sirianne Dahlum and Valeriya Mechkova, “Does political inclusion and civil rights protection promote economic development?” Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), University of Gothenburg, August 28, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Results remained significant when controlling for country fixed effects, but not when controlling with year fixed effects. This means that results may be driven by overall global trends of positive economic growth and greater civil liberties, but the results were not dependent on countries' specific cultures, political histories, or geography. Dahlum and Mechkova at 21.

<sup>17</sup> Dahlum and Mechkova at 23.

through media freedom, CSOs, and political engagement. Their study focused on instances when countries became less democratic. In countries that held elections but were not liberal democracies, having a stronger civil society and more effective media actually meant the country was *more likely* to become more autocratic and less democratic, probably because the elites felt threatened by the media and civil society, and therefore moved to secure their position of power. However, past a certain threshold of liberal democracy, the media and civil society becomes strong enough to uncover authoritarian tendencies and place constraints on the actions of incumbent elites and protect its democracy.<sup>18</sup> When they looked into the individual impacts of media freedom, CSOs, and political engagement, media freedom (measured through the Free Expression and Alternative Sources of Information Index) had the strongest impact for preventing autocratization.

## HOW CAN I FIND V-DEM DATA FOR A PARTICULAR COUNTRY OR REGION?

Find the three Self-Reliance indicators on [IDEA Query](#) by selecting the “Journey to Self-Reliance” data library on the “What?” page. You can also use our full IDEA library to find all V-Dem’s high level democracy indices with their components and the three Self-Reliance indicators with their components for the years 1900 to 2017. To further investigate and interact with the visualizations in this Snapshot, and to view similar visualizations for other regions, countries, or income groups, [view them on Tableau](#).

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For questions or more information on this Snapshot, please contact the author, Anne Bernier, at [abernier@usaid.gov](mailto:abernier@usaid.gov). To access all the data in this Snapshot, visit the International Development and Economic Analysis (IDEA) website at <https://idea.usaid.gov>. To view and interact with the charts in this Snapshot, visit the Tableau dashboard at <https://goo.gl/P9tcd5>. For questions or more information about USAID’s ongoing partnership with V-Dem to produce research and improve metrics, please contact Andrew Greer (DCHA/DRG/L) at [angreer@usaid.gov](mailto:angreer@usaid.gov).

**DISCLAIMER:** The author’s views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or the United States Government.

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<sup>18</sup> Anna Lührmann and Richard K. Morgan, “Autocratization and Diagonal Accountability: The Role of Civil Society, Media Pluralism, and Citizen Engagement in Democratic Downturns,” Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), University of Gothenburg, August 24, 2018.