

An Analysis of Democracy Indices:

Democratic Backsliding in Latin America

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Section 1: Executive Summary

Democratic Backsliding in the Western Hemisphere: An Analysis of Democracy Indices analyzes established and widely respected democracy indices. The Office of Policy, Planning, and Coordination in the Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs requested assistance from graduate students at American University's School of International Service to determine which indices that examine democracy and governance would be most helpful for State Department officers seeking to understand key developments in the region and to identify potentially beneficial actions. This report evaluates indices with a regional focus on the Western Hemisphere. It examines and compares how the indices treat the following eight countries: Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, and Peru.

State Department officers can use these indices not only to learn more about their assigned regions and countries, but also to help orient foreign assistance, programming, and policy planning activities. For example, the data in these indices can help inform budget forecasting by suggesting those areas most in need of stabilization or reform. The Indices can help suggest where of USAID, INL or DRL assistance might be most usefully deployed, for example, or what kind of an International Visitor program might best support certain civil society experts working to support threatened democratic practices and institutions.

This report analyzes the following comprehensive indices that evaluate democracy and governance around the world: 1) the Varieties of Democracy Report (V-DEM); 2) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Global State of Democracy Initiative; 3) the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI); 4) Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report; and 5) the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index Report (EIU). In addition to these comprehensive indices, this report also analyzes the following issue-specific indices that focus on more limited elements that are important for democracy: 1) The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index; 2) Global Organized Crime Index; 3) World Press Freedom Index, 4) The Capacity to Combat Corruption Index, and 5) the Vance Center Latin America Anti-Corruption Assessment. All indices were chosen from among the many available because of their recognized credibility and wide use as reputable resources. Despite their narrow focus, these issue-specific indices can be very useful to embassy officials and desk officers at the Department of State. Officers with specific portfolios related to the issue-specific indices can use these reports for more thorough research into their topics.

Of the ten indices reviewed, the project team found V-DEM and IDEA to be the most "useful." They also found two of the specialized indices, the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (WJP) and the Global Organized Crime Index (GOC), to be particularly useful.

Based on discussions with democracy and governance experts, the team developed five "usability" criteria to answer the following questions: 1) Does the index include a wide breadth of information and evaluate democracy with a variety of criteria? 2) Is the index considered

credible as an unbiased external authority? 3) Does the index use a thorough review process with multiple layers of analysis? 4) Is the index easily accessible to users and does it include data that can be searched and manipulated to gain insights? 5) Does the index collect and publish data and analyses regularly and over a long period of time?

The team hopes the findings of this study will facilitate the work of State Department Officers serving in Washington and at the U.S. missions overseas as they seek to support democracy and good governance across the Western Hemisphere.

Section 2: Introduction

Democratic Backsliding in Latin America poses significant challenges to U.S. Foreign Policy. Democratic Backsliding describes a process of moving toward a more autocratic form of government from a relatively democratic form of government. Some have coined a new word “autocratization” to describe this evolution. There are many well-known organizations that study the state of democracy and emergence of autocracy worldwide and publish reports for policymakers to use. In this report, we will analyze and identify a set of respected indices and identify those that are the most “useful” and “usable” for State Department officers serving in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs (WHA) in Washington, D.C., and for those serving in WHA embassies and missions abroad.

While the term “usability” can differ depending on context, this report considers the following factors of a democracy index in assessing its usability: 1) a usable index includes a wide breadth of information and evaluates democracy with a variety of criteria; 2) it is considered credible as an unbiased external authority; 3) it uses a thorough review process with multiple layers of analysis; 4) it is easily accessible to users and includes data that can be searched and manipulated to gain insights; and 5) it has collected and published data and analyses regularly and over a long period time.

The first component of usefulness considers a democracy index to be the most useful to the State Department if it covers a broad range of topics. There are many annual reports and indices that specialize in one or few components of democracy, such as organized crime or rule of law. However, for this project, the most useful indices identified consider a variety of criteria in assessing democracy. The second component of usefulness requires that a democracy index is unbiased and reputable and can be quoted as an external authority. The third component of usability requires that the organization uses a thorough review process with multiple layers of analysis. In other words, multiple experts should be involved in the decision-making and review process to mitigate potential bias in the index. The fourth component of usability requires that primary data are publicly available, there is a detailed breakdown of individual components, and the data is presented in a way that is intelligible for a broad audience. The fifth component of usability requires that a useful index includes data sets that cover a long enough period of time to establish meaningful trends, and that data is collected and published often enough that

it is up to date. To communicate the extent to which each index meets these criteria, each index is assigned a usability score based on how many criteria it meets out of the possible five.

Over the course of our research, we examined ten different indices. Five of these indices are “comprehensive” in that they evaluate democracy through a wide range of indicators. These are: 1) the Varieties of Democracy Report (V-DEM); 2) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Global State of Democracy Initiative; 3) the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI); 4) Freedom House’s Freedom in the World Report; and 5) the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index Report. The other five indices are issue-specific indices that focus on one element of democracy. These are: 1) The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index, 2) Global Organized Crime Index, 3) World Press Freedom Index, 4) The Capacity to Combat Corruption Index, and 5) the Vance Center Latin America Anti-Corruption Assessment.

Within the analysis of each index, we provide the following information: 1) an overview of the index, 2) its definition of democracy 3) a summary of its methodology and sources of data, 4) an overview of the strengths and weaknesses, and 5) an analysis of its potential usefulness. In order to better assess the usability of each index, we also compared their assessments of eight Latin American and Caribbean countries: Brazil, Honduras, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic.

Given that the aforementioned definition of usability requires that an index include a wide breadth of information, this report largely prioritizes the comprehensive indices – however, the issue-specific indices are also relevant to the Department of State, even though they do not meet all five “usefulness” criteria. Table 2.1 displays the five criteria of usability and indicates which comprehensive index meets which criteria. Table 2.2 displays the same for the issue-specific indices. Within the comprehensive index category, we have identified two indices that best meet the aforementioned criteria: the Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) index and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Global State of Democracy Initiative index. This can be seen in Table 2.1. In addition to V-DEM and IDEA, we have also identified BTI and Freedom House as useful comprehensive indices, although they do not meet the five aforementioned criteria as well as the other two. The tables below explain the team’s conclusions.

Table 2.1 Comprehensive Index usability scores

Usability Criteria and the Comprehensive Democracy Indices					
	V-Dem	IDEA	BTI	FH	EIU
1. Wide Breadth of Information	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
2. External Authority	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
3. Thorough Review Process and Analysis	YES	YES	NO	NO	N/A
4. Data is Accessible and Manipulable by Users	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
5. Covers a Prolonged and Frequent Data Collection	YES	YES	NO	YES	N/A

Table 2.2 Issue-Specific Index usability scores

Usability Criteria and the Issue-Specific Democracy Indices					
	WJP	GOC	RSF	CCC	Vance
Wide Breadth of Information	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
External Authority	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Thorough Review Process and Analysis	YES	YES	NO	N/A	YES
Data is Accessible and Manipulable by Users	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Covers a Prolonged and Frequent Data Collection	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO

Index Methodology:

Each index uses a different approach to collecting and calibrating data. The chart below includes five different approaches as defined by the GSoDs 2023 methodology guide: Expert Surveys, Standard-based “in-house coding”, Observational Data, Composite Measures, and Public Opinion Surveys (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 20-26). In Expert Surveys, (ES), country experts assess the situation on a particular issue in a country. In Standards-based ‘in-house coding’ (IC), coding is carried out by researchers and/or their assistants based on an evaluative assessment of country-specific information found in reports, academic publications, reference works, news articles, and so on. Observational Data (OD) uses directly observable features such as the ratio of women to men in parliament, infant mortality rates and legislative elections. Composite Measures (CM) are based on a number of variables that come from different existing data sets rather than original data collection. Public Opinion surveys rely on data obtained from public polling. Each of these methodologies of data collection exists with pros and cons, which are discussed later in this document.

Table 1.a: Index Methodology Type

Indices:	Expert Surveys (ES)	Standards-based 'in-house coding' (IC)	Observational Data (OD)	Composite Measures (CM)	Public Opinion Survey (PO)
Varieties of Democracy Dataset (V-Dem)	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
International IDEA	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
Freedom House	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Economist Intelligence Unit	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
World Justice Project (WJP)	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
Global Organized Crime Index	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
World Press Freedom (WPF)	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Capacity to Combat Corruption	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
Vance Center Latin America Anti-Corruption Assessment	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO

Section 3: Recommended Comprehensive Democracy Indices

Working with the definition of “usability” defined above, the team identified two indices that are the most useful to the State Department Bureau for Western Hemisphere Affairs: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) and IDEA. Their unique elements are also helpful for guiding policy and programming decisions of embassy staff towards the most at-risk programs. The following sections illustrate the nuances of each index.

Section 3.a. Varieties of Democracy Indices

Overview:

The “Varieties of Democracy” (V-Dem) Institute is based in the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. V-Dem is funded by a variety of donors, including the World Bank. The V-Dem report includes more than 470 measurements for 202 countries and is considered to be more granular in its approach than the other comparable indices. V-Dem includes data from as early as 1789 to 2023. Reports are published every March.

Definition of Democracy:

V-Dem's definition of democracy includes five high-level principles: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. The Electoral Democracy Index explores aspects associated with freedom of expression and association, the share of population with suffrage, clean elections, and how officials are elected. The Liberal Democracy Index explores equality before the law, individual liberties, and judicial and legislative constraints on the executive. The Participatory Democracy Index measures civil society participation, direct popular votes, and the relative power, existence, and means of election on local and regional governance. The Egalitarian Democracy Index measures equal protections for civil liberties, access by gender, socio-economic position and social group, and the equal distribution of resources in health, education, and policy. Lastly, the Deliberative Democracy Index measures the level of engagement in a society and the ability of its citizens to be heard in a public forum while engaging in respectful debate.

Methodology:

The V-Dem uses expert judgment to collect data. Five country experts are chosen per country each year from an available pool of 3,700 available total experts. They aggregate these judgments to normalize any potential bias based on how the experts perceive the scale on which they are judging the country. V-Dem offers both interval and ordinal scales and provides a point estimate. The index also has some mixed methods with raw data for items like that of the percentage of universal suffrage. Authoritarianism is also measured by how democratic institutions are weakened by the lack of constraints and bypassed by those in power, measuring vertical and horizontal accountability, and how free and open the media is. Additionally, V-Dem also offers an ordinal scale that is categorically coded that may help users better interpret the data. All versions are available for users to download from their website.

Source of Data:

V-Dem has a large mix of data within its five main democratic indices. Some data are survey-based, and others, like education level or suffrage, are interval-based. V-Dem's list of variables and data sources are found in their Appendix A.

Pros:*Long-term Data and Numerous Graphing Tools*

V-Dem contains extensive data for democracy for most countries with data going back to 1789. Regional trends distinguish between different levels of democracy and autocracy and having intermediate levels to better track each country's progression. V-Dem's index is

interactive and includes a variety of available graphing tools so that users can create instant comparisons among any variables and democratic indicators, as well as comparing other comparable indices using a ‘Country Radar Graph’ (displayed below). Other interactive graphing tools include variable graphs, color-coded graphing tools, a heat map, a variable radar map, thematic comparison, scatter charts, and more. The interactive tools are manipulatable and available for download. The V-Dem report also features a V-Forecast tool, which calculates the probability of adverse regime transition and ranks each country globally. Standard deviations and confidence intervals are also made available for users. Other helpful work that V-Dem provides on their website include an analysis of democratic backsliding, bounce back, and resilience. An additional resource is the “Demscore.” This feature allows users to compare democracy measures across indices.

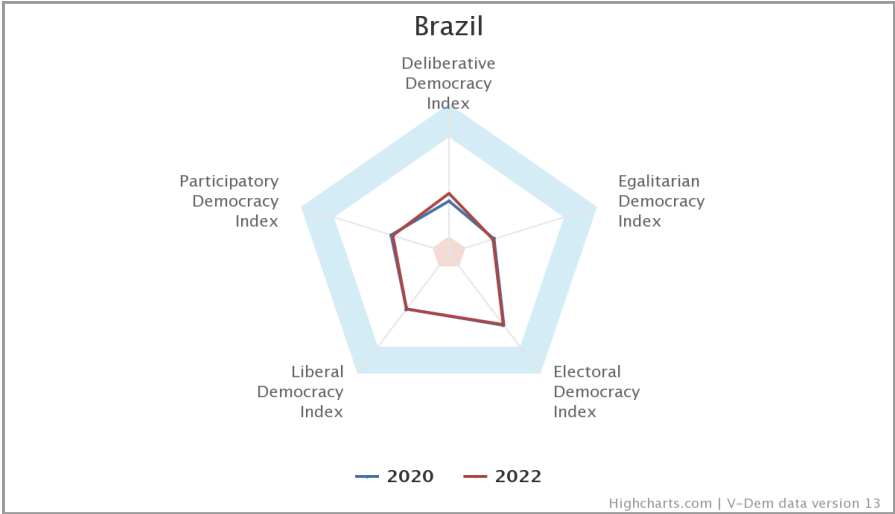
Data Manipulation

V-Dem’s research data can be viewed across time for a large number of countries. Data can be viewed side-by-side across time for different variables and indicators. In Table 3.b. below, for example, the chart displays the five larger indicators comparatively. The chart shows that Brazil experienced the most change in its Deliberative Democracy Index score.

Inclusion of Other Indices

One significant asset of V-Dem is how frequently they are used and quoted by many other reputable democracy indices. V-Dem is highly detailed, and users can even compare V-Dem indices with other index scores like Freedom House. Graphing tools can be found in the interactive tools section on the V-Dem website. Other interactive graphing tools include country radar graphs like the one referenced below, variable graphs, color-coded graphing tools, a heat map, a variable radar map, thematic comparison, scatter charts, and much more. In terms of accessible and manipulable data, V-Dem is highly usable. It includes detailed definitions of democracy, data that can be manipulated, has a strong reputation as an external authority, and its data is used by other indices.

Table 3.a.



Cons:*Challenges in working with the data*

V-Dem's data set is quite vast, which has an impact on its usability. It can be difficult for the average user to find and utilize specific measures in the index. An individual using the database would need to invest significant time to learn how to use it most productively. For an average person without the time to dig deeper through V-Dem's 483 indices, it is difficult to pick through much of the methodology. Instead, it would be better to read through V-Dem's country reports and use their interactive tools.

Usability:

According to our criteria V-Dem has a usability score of 5/5.

V-Dem earned a usability score of 5/5. Interactive tools and features like "Demscore" allow users to compare democratic measures across indices. They also have a separate index that called the "Varieties of Autocratization," which is a "research project that aims to contribute to a better understanding of why and how political regimes move towards autocracy, as well as the institutions and stability of historical and contemporary autocracies" (V-Dem 2023). All data can be found for download on their website. Their interactive tools as mentioned in the methods section are also helpful; users can manipulate data and create their own graphs, and compare multiple countries or regions at a time, and even compare multiple variables. V-Dem's annual report, country reports, and policy briefs are also available. Embassy staff can also use the Country Radar Chart graphing tool to compare the scores of the five indices (electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian), to identify those areas that are the weakest. This is significant, because in V-Dem a country's status is defined by its highest score and knowing its weakest areas can help staff orient foreign assistance, programming, and policy either to support the strongest areas or bolster the weakest.

Section 3.b. International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Indices**Overview:**

The Global State of Democracy (GSoD) Initiative was established in 2016 by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (International IDEA, 2023b), an international governmental organization founded in 1995 with the mission of supporting democracy and human rights globally (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 89). The initiative is comprised of three primary products: 1) the "GSoD Indices", which contains data for 174 countries from the beginning of the 3rd major wave of democratization in 1975 to 2022 and has a special offshoot dataset that monitors the impacts of COVID-19 on democracy and human rights up through February 2022, 2) the "Democracy Tracker", which is a regularly updated qualitative dataset monitoring key democracy and human rights-related developments in 174

countries, and 3) the “GSoD Annual Report”, which provides an overview of global and regional democracy and human rights performance (International IDEA, 2023b).

IDEA is internationally recognized as an expert in the study of democracy and human rights. It has a growing membership of states, and includes representation from every inhabited continent, including affluent and poor states, those with well-maintained democratic institutions like Sweden and Costa Rica, and those currently experiencing democratic backsliding, like Mexico and Peru (International IDEA, 2023). It is of note that the Global South is particularly well-represented, comprising more than half of the total membership. Japan and the United States hold observer status.

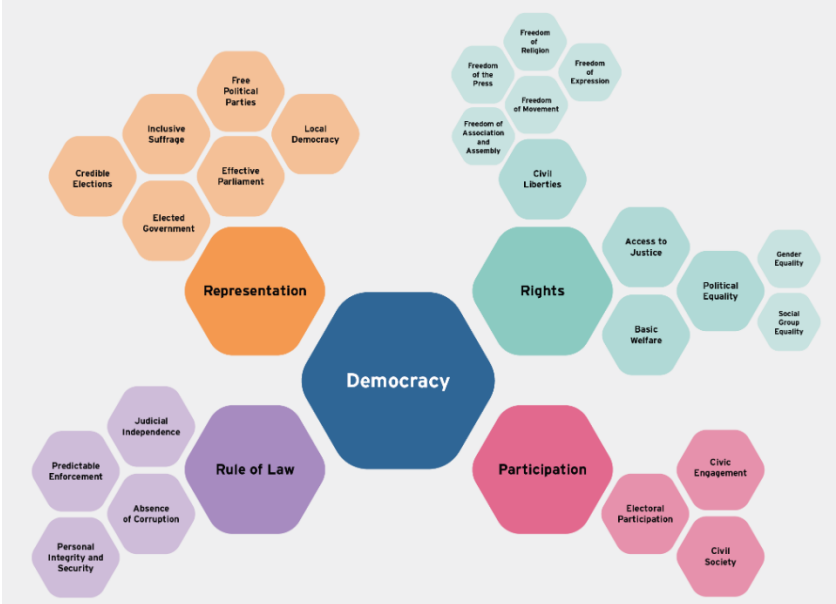
Definition of Democracy:

The GSoD defines democracy as “popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers, and equality of respect and voice between citizens in the exercise of that control” (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 10-11). Popular control and political equality are the two core principles of democracy underlying the index’s framework (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 10-11). The framework was constructed on the belief that these core democratic principles are compatible with different, context-sensitive and context-specific institutional set-ups. This includes various electoral systems from majoritarian and proportional to mixed, different governmental forms, different legal systems, different types of political parties and party systems, as well as both unitary and federal state structures. On the other hand, this inclusive definition of democracy does recognize absolutist monarchies and military and one-party dictatorships among those forms of government that are manifestly undemocratic (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 10-11). This is because they lack both popular control and political equality.

Methodology:

International IDEA stringently reviews and collects data from 157 empirical indicators spread across 20 different data sources, with the usefulness of each indicator being reassessed annually (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 22). The GSoD is composed of 29 indices each representing an aspect of democracy, which are grouped into four key attributes: representation, rights, rule of law, and participation (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 6-8). These are constructed from 17 sub-attributes, 2 of which are constructed from component indices at a lower level of aggregation as delineated in the GSoD sourced graphic below, which demarcates them by size (IDEA, 2023).

Figure 3.c.1. The Global State of Democracy framework



The data is aggregated to track democratic trends at the country, regional, and global levels from 1975 to 2022 (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 6-8). All scoring is from 0 to 1, with 0 representing the lowest score possible and 1 the highest. It is important to note that not all sub-attributes and indicators are weighted the same within the aggregation process. An example is that suffrage carries more weight within the representation score, because experts found overt suffrage to have a greater impact on who can vote than the other sub-attributes (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p.37). Table 3.c.2 provides greater detail on the four key attributes and highlights how they echo internationally recognized human rights standards (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 26-32).

Table 3.c.2: GSoD Key Attributes Explained

Representation	Rights	Rule of Law	Participation
Most important and least contested attribute of democracy.	Overlaps with the rights and liberties laid down by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.	Focuses on judicial independence, personal integrity and security, predictable enforcement mechanisms, and the absence of corruption.	Important because high levels of popular participation tend to reflect more inclusive and representative involvement in the governmental and electoral system.
Mostly covers features of electoral integrity, free and fair elections, and electoral democracy.	Emphasizes liberal and social rights supported by representation and a vertical accountability mechanism.		Focuses on the role of civil society, civic engagement, and electoral participation.
Emphasizes contested and inclusive popular elections.	Focuses on access to justice and civil liberties.		

Source of Data:

The GSoD’s 5-person Expert Advisory Board and its more than 150 expert staff stringently review and collect data from 157 empirical indicators spread across 20 different data sources, with the usefulness of each indicator being reassessed annually (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, Pg. 22). In this way, the GSoD benefits from the expertise of more than 150 of its own specialists, as well as that of the experts of the indices from which they source their data. The GSoD Expert Advisory Board and the GSoD team seek out indicators from four different sources: 1) expert surveys, 2) standards-based ‘in-house coding’, 3) observational data, and 4) composite measures (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 6-8). This is due to two reasons: first, not having to collect their own data means that they can spend more time and resources on aggregating and analyzing the data. Second, each data source has its own pros, cons, and built-in biases, and thus by aggregating them together, they cancel out the bias and examine each aspect of democracy both individually and as factors of each other. Presently they use data from 20 different sources, including a dataset that they code themselves (IDEA, 2023). While the majority of their data comes from the V-Dem index, roughly half now comes from other

sources, and this number is increasing (M. A. Lara Otaola, personal communication, July 5, 2023). Datasets from Freedom House and BTI are used as well. A complete table of the datasets, their sources, and types is available in Appendix 1 (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 24-25, 42-44, 63-80).

The IDEA Methodology Conceptualization and Measurement Framework, Version 7, was produced in 2023. According to this framework, representative surveys of the general population were not used for data collection for the following reasons: lack of available country and year data, differing standards both within and between countries, lack of nuanced knowledge of the general dynamics and performance of political institutions, and potential for respondent intimidation and coaching (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023, p. 23-25). Interestingly, in our interview with Dr. Miguel Angel Lara Otaola, a Senior Democracy Assessment Specialist, he noted that they were looking into adding indicators from public survey-based indicators in the future (M. A. Lara Otaola, personal communication, July 5, 2023).

Pros:

Transparency

A key strength of this index is its transparency. All but one of the data sets used in the GSoD is open-source. Their in-depth methodology guide and the GSoD codebook are also open-sourced (Skaaning & Hudson, 2023 ,p. 21). There is also a detailed description of how indicators are chosen, which is significant as each indicator is reevaluated annually. The indicators are numerous, allowing for a systematic study of each of the 29 attributes, and come from diverse sources. This allows for clearly defined numerical scores that make comparing democratic attributes between countries as well as social and political systems easier. The GSoD report, website, and country reports are also intended to be accessible to policymakers, analysts, scholars, journalists and civil society. The visualizations on the country report pages allow for easy assessment of democratic trends over time. In addition to the GSoD Indices and the annual report on democracy, the Democracy Tracker, which is incorporated into the country reports, provides monthly updates on important developments. The GSoD annual report for 2022 also provides insightful suggestions and policy recommendations about how to revitalize democracy at the global, regional, and national levels by renewing and modernizing social contracts thus counteracting institutional decay (International IDEA, 2022).

Reputation of Objectivity

International IDEA is an internationally recognized and respected IGO with strong ties to the UN and with a highly representative membership of states. This helps lend them credence as an independent expert observer. However, the fact that IDEA is an IGO also raises questions about how critical they are allowed to be as some of its member states are actively experiencing backsliding. To assuage this concern, we can confirm that according to IDEAs statutes membership can be suspended by a two thirds majority vote of all member states

(International IDEA's Council, 2008). This is to remove members who fail to meet the requirements of membership including a demonstrated commitment to the rule of law, human rights, the basic principles of democratic pluralism and strengthening democracy. However, Dr. Miguel Lara Otaola confirmed that no member state has been suspended.

Interactive Data

By not generating its own data the GSoD is able to build off of the expertise of thousands of experts around the world and focus its time and resources on aggregating indicator data, analyzing it, and presenting it in a way that is accessible to those beyond the academic sphere. Almost all of the data is available for download and manipulation through the GSoD website. Beyond this you can engage with the data for individual countries through the visualizations on their respective country pages. There is an interactive map that allows you to track democratic progress globally though it would be more helpful if it linked to the events that caused them to mark the country as having undergone a positive, negative, or static event (Global State of Democracy Initiative, 2023b).

Cons:

IGO: Run and Funded by Member States

The foremost weakness of the GSoD indices is that, as an IGO that is run and funded by its member states, they are more likely to be diplomatic in their criticism rather than critical. This being said their statutes do provide a mechanism for the removal of a member state who do not comply with the stated responsibilities to: 1) demonstrate a commitment to the rule of law, human rights, the basic principles of democratic pluralism, and strengthening democracy; 2) engage in the governance of the institute and meet their funding requirements; and 3) promote and support the institute's democratic objectives and working to encourage the growth and stabilization of democratic institutions around the world (International IDEA's Council, 2008). However, as this statute has never been evoked, it is difficult to know if it really is a deterrent.

Website Transition

Another weakness that will likely improve in the coming months, is that IDEA is currently redesigning their website. As a result, many of the Latin American countries we specifically looked at don't have viable country reports and some of the links for garnering more information from, for instance the Global Monitor for Covid-19 interactive map and the GSoD indices of events, do not work. Currently the country profiles have data for each of the Latin American countries which the team studies for this report, but only 3 have any form of narration or events from the democracy tracker to help explain the numeric scores. Although this is a major inconvenience, our IDEA contact Dr. Otaola, who specializes in Latin America, has assured us that all of the country reports will be up and running as of August 2023 (M. A. Lara Otaola, personal communication, July 5, 2023). Apparently, the website is being revamped and

the country reports are a new aspect of the GSoD that is in development. However, this can be seen as a possible benefit as well, if you are looking for new data then the fact that the GSoD doesn't generate its own data could be considered a weakness.

Usability:

According to our criteria the IDEA's GSoD initiative has a usability score of 5/5.

One important note is that the GSoD does not attempt to create a single democracy score; instead, it focuses on creating a universally applicable framework for measuring distinct aspects of democracy grounded in democratic thought traditions. The intention being to make it easier to compare nuanced and context specific attributes of democracy across countries as well as to recognize and accept diverse social and political systems that create democracy in often unique ways. This also means that they benefit from the expertise of the other indices experts as well as the more than 150 who work with GSoD.

GSoD strives to use indicators from data sources that are readily available, free, and easily downloadable. Thus, it is easy to access and utilize the data that is the basis of the indices through their website. The country reports available through the website also provide users with an easy way to track a specific country's progress on a particular democratic sub-attribute over time through a large spider chart and there are individual line charts for each of the four main attributes that can be easily navigated.

In addition to the index's data, which covers from 1975-2022, the GSoD also provides an analysis of recent events and their impact on democracy and human rights. This can be found on the country profiles themselves, in the searchable archive, and on the democracy tracker. The searchable archive allows you to select countries, regions, democratic attributes, time range, whether the event is considered positive, negative, or static, and whether the event is an event to watch, a red flagged event that poses a significant threat to democracy, or if it is a breaking update that has recently occurred (Global State of Democracy Initiative, n.d.). You can also search by tags like internet freedom and Nayib Bukele to get results specifically related to those tags. The results of these searches can then be downloaded as an excel document and independently analyzed.

The Democracy Tracker brings together all the events from the most recently reported month in an easily accessible way while also including links to relevant democracy notes and commentary written by IDEA staffers. These tools, in addition to the manipulable graphs for the key attributes and subattributes on the country report pages are a good way for embassy personnel to make an initial assessment of where to direct foreign assistance, programming, and policy initiatives to have the greatest positive impact on democracy and human rights in a given country.

As IDEA is an IGO internationally recognized for its decade long history of advocating for and supporting democracy and human rights, it carries weight as an external authority.

Additionally, the GSoD annual report is available in English as well as Spanish, making it more useful as an expert reference for embassy and department of state personnel. There are also Spanish language blog posts.

Limitations

One limitation to the usability of these indices is that due to an overhaul of the indices website some of the interactive visualizations and graphics that would allow researchers to better understand and manipulate the data have not been updated and do not work as they ultimately should. A glaring example of this is the Interactive Map for the GSoD indices of events, which at the moment simply provides color codes for significant events. There is no linkage or description of these events beyond whether they were positive, negative, or static.

Section 4: Three other Comprehensive Democracy Indices: Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Freedom House, and the Economist Intelligence Unit

The following section reviews three comprehensive democracy indices that meet many, but not all, of our usefulness criteria. The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), Freedom House “Freedom in the World Report,” and The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index are comprehensive democracy reports discussed below. The BTI and the Freedom in the World Report scored three out of five on usefulness. The EIU, though well-known, only scored two out of five on usefulness.

Section 4a: The Bertelsmann Transformation Index

Overview:

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) is published by the German organization Bertelsmann Stiftung. The BTI has been published biennially since 2005. The reporting period for the most recent report, published in 2022, includes data from February 1, 2019, through January 31, 2021. The three major elements of democracy highlighted in the BTI are political transformation, economic transformation, and governance.

Definition of Democracy:

The BTI differentiates its concept of democracy from other standard definitions of democracy, which it says are “limited primarily to basic civil rights and the conduct of free elections.” Instead, the BTI employs an analytical framework that considers political transformation, economic transformation, and governance. These three factors of democracy are subcategorized further by seventeen criteria. The political transformation criteria are stateness, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration. For economic transformation, the criteria are level of socio-economic development, organization of the market and competition, monetary and fiscal stability, private

property, welfare regime, economic performance, and sustainability. Finally, the criteria for governance are level of difficulty, steering capability, resource efficiency, consensus-building, and international cooperation. In summary, the BTI's definition of democracy considers these elements. BTI democracy experts consider themselves "transformation analysts." The BTI emphasizes the importance of a nation's democratic trajectory over time (BTI, 2022)

Methodology:

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index uses a unique methodology to produce a qualitative democracy analysis. The BTI utilizes their network of over 300 country experts from leading universities, civil society organizations, and think tanks to produce the biennial BTI. For each country, it relies on one country expert who analyzes seventeen criteria and drafts a report. A different country expert reviews the report, assessment, and scores. The two country experts must be of different nationalities. Neither expert may be affiliated professionally with any national government. Then, the scores are calibrated by a regional expert and are subjected to three additional interregional review cycles. The scores are then calibrated globally. The BTI publishes over 5,000 pages of country reports biennially. The uniquely qualitative nature of the BTI makes it a deep-dive resource for in-depth country summaries.

The seventeen criteria that experts consider when assigning scores are categorized by political transformation, economic transformation, and governance. Reports are generated for democracy, economy, and governance (Bertelsmann Transformation Index, 2022).

Source of Data:

The BTI utilizes their network of over 300 country experts from leading universities, civil society organizations, and think tanks to produce the biennial BTI. For each country, it relies on one country expert who analyzes seventeen criteria and drafts a report. A different country expert reviews the report, assessment, and scores. Then, the scores are calibrated by a regional expert and are subjected to three additional interregional review cycles.

Pros:

Thoroughly Qualitative Report:

One advantage of the BTI is that it produces a thoroughly qualitative report with in-depth country sections for every country. The BTI publishing cycle is biennial. Although the biennial cycle is ultimately a pitfall of BTI, it also contributes to its ability to focus on collating in-depth analyses. While other democracy indices focus on publishing yearly statistics, foreign policy experts and embassy officials can use the BTI as a resource for a deep dive into any given country.

Focus on Transformation:

It is evident in the BTI's name that it focuses on transformation. BTI defines transformation as a "comprehensive and politically driven change in which an authoritarian

system and state-dominated or clientelist economic order evolve in the direction of democracy and a market-based economy” (Bertelsmann Transformation Index). BTI examines a state’s democratic trajectory and whether a state is living up to its own democratic potential. In other words, the BTI focuses on trends and comparing a state to itself over time.

Emphasis on a Market Economy:

Unlike other comparable democracy indices, the BTI examines trends towards a market economy. According to the BTI, “comprehensive development not only aims at economic growth, but also requires successful poverty alleviation and the freedom of action and choice for as many citizens as possible” (Bertelsmann Transformation Index) An embassy official or country desk officer should consult the BTI for an evaluation of economic indicators of democracy in Latin America. This aspect is useful in scenarios in which governments and democracies are judged on whether they are delivering key goods and meeting the basic needs of the population.

Data Visualization Capacity and Usability:

The BTI website features a comprehensive world map (excluding North America, Western Europe, Australia and Japan) that allows for manipulation of visual data. Users can easily choose to view the map with applied democracy indicator filters. Users can also click on each country on the map, which takes them to the scores, overview, rankings, related blog articles, and most recent downloadable country report for that country.

Cons:

Subjectivity:

Because the BTI methodology includes only two country experts per country, the most obvious disadvantage is the capacity to control for subjectivity. See the methodology section above for more information on how country reports are generated. While the BTI does make solid efforts to reduce bias, the sample size of experts per country who are responsible for assessing and assigning scores to reflect the state of democracy in each country is quite limited. This makes it very difficult to filter out bias or to reflect other perspectives that a wider group of experts could provide. Furthermore, subjectivity may also show up more prominently in a qualitative index such as BTI.

Biennial Publishing Cycle

One major limitation of the BTI is its biennial publishing cycle. Most country desk officers working in Washington have two-year tours of duty, and many serving overseas in embassies have two-to-three-year tours. The team also notes that the state of democracy in Latin American countries can shift very rapidly, and information in a democracy index that is almost two years old can be quite out-of-date. This reality is partially why the BTI does not fully meet the project team’s “usefulness” definition.

Usability:

According to our criteria, the BTI has a usability score of 3/5. It falls short due to the aforementioned cons of the biennial publishing cycle and insufficient quantity of experts to collect and analyze data.

Section 4.b.: Freedom House**Overview:**

Freedom House is a well-known, Washington, D.C.-based non-profit, founded in 1941. Freedom House publishes an annual “Freedom in the World” report, which summarizes current trends of democratic decline both regionally and globally. These annual reports are dense with narratives, analyses, policy recommendations, and predictions for the upcoming years. While these annual reports are useful at gaining a broad overview of the status of democracy on a global and regional level, they do not provide much country-specific analysis. One of the most comprehensive functions that Freedom House publishes is their interactive map on their website. Within this interactive map, there are individual maps which analyze global freedom, internet freedom, democracy status, and global/country-based trends (Freedom House, 2023b).

Definition of Democracy:

Freedom House’s definition of democracy places heavy emphasis on individual freedom of expression and individual rights. On page 21 of their 2023 report, Freedom House defines “democracy” in its ideal state as “a system which is accountable to all citizens; a system which allows individuals the right to enjoy their ‘universal human rights to which they are entitled” (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). Further, they highlight that individuals should be afforded an equal playing field in a democratic system—regardless of their background (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023).

Methodology:

Detailed on page 21 of Freedom House’s Annual Report, as well as in their Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions document, Freedom House states that much of their methodology is based on the Universal Declaration of Human rights (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). They emphasize that their assessment is largely based on individual freedoms and real-world rights. Freedom House has two overarching indicators: political rights and civil liberties. The political rights indicator is composed of 10 sub-indicators and the civil liberties indicator is composed of 15 sub-indicators (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). Each sub-indicator is awarded 0 to 4 points, which, when added together, creates a cumulative score for each overarching indicator (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). Freedom House then combines the two overarching

indicator scores, to create an overall county score. It should also be noted that each of these sub-indicators are assigned an equal value; thus, Freedom House has apparently drawn the conclusion that each of these indicators have roughly equal impact on the quality of democracy.

In addition to their scoring system, Freedom House also categorizes countries as: “free,” “partly free,” and “not free” (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). Freedom House highlights that these rankings and scores are carefully analyzed and produced by in-house and external analysts. These analysts are composed of members from the academic community, think tanks, and human rights communities ((Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). Generally, each country and country report are assigned one expert. They state that their “2023 edition involved 128 analysts, and around 40 advisers” (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023). In comparison to other indices, this means that Freedom House has very few experts for each country. While the Freedom in the World report could benefit from more experts, there is still a revisions process for their country reports. The rankings presented by their analysts are defended in a series of reviews, which are overseen by a panel of expert analyzers.

Source of Data:

Freedom House states that they utilize a “broad range of sources, including news articles, academic analyses, reports from nongovernmental organizations, individual professional contacts, and on-the-ground research” (Freedom in the World 2023 Methodology Questions, 2023).

Pros:

Consistency and Continuity

Perhaps one of the biggest pros of the Freedom House index is the fact that its scoring process has remained consistent throughout its existence. The separate scores between political rights and civil liberties allows readers to see in which sector decline is occurring most rapidly. This broad overview/scoring system allows the reader to dive in and study the individual indicators within the area where scores have decreased. Furthermore, the continuity of data and the corresponding trends that Freedom House publishes allow embassy personnel to see a broad overview of how a country has changed over time.

Cons:

Lack of Manipulable Data

While Freedom House’s reports are full of facts and analysis, the project team found its data very difficult to manipulate. One example is that, within the country sections, Freedom House does not highlight where points were deducted or added in comparison to the previous

years' report. Thus, to understand which sub-indicator scores have changed for a country, careful cross comparison between reports is required, which can be incredibly time consuming.

In addition to this, its narratives quickly become outdated. For example, under the country reports section, Freedom House provides an overview of "key developments." All of the key developments listed under the current years' score are actually from the previous year, which makes it difficult to understand current key developments or issues of concern (Freedom House, 2023). One other major con for the Freedom House report is that they utilize so few analysts in preparing the yearly reports. Freedom House utilizes a revisions/oversight process but using just one analyst for larger countries such as Mexico or Brazil can pose serious challenges to gaining a broad overview of country and regional trends within a country. Incorporating a wider range of expert perspectives would improve the analyses.

Usability:

According to our usability criteria, Freedom House has a usability score of 3/5. This score is based on the limited number of experts conducting the country analyses and the inaccessibility of the data.

As mentioned in the overview, one of the most useful functions that Freedom House publishes is their interactive map, which contains individual country reports. While there are several maps within this interactive feature, maps such as the internet freedom map and the democracy status map are highly lacking in data for the Western Hemisphere. One map which is not lacking in data for the Western Hemisphere is the global freedom map. The global freedom map contains individual country reports that detail how scores were assigned for each indicator. This is particularly useful in understanding how the cumulative score for a country was assigned. Each country report further allows the reader to analyze which issues are of major concern for democratic backsliding within a particular country, as well as within specific issues/indicators. While the data and narrative are dense, the overall political rights score and civil liberty scores give an overview of which aspect of a society is declining the most.

Section 4c: The Economist Intelligence Unit

Overview:

The Economist Intelligence Unit (The EIU) is the research and analysis division of the Economist Group, the sister company to The Economist newspaper. The EIU is well-known for their economic focus and economic predictions, as well as their democracy indices, which they publish on an annual basis.

Definition of Democracy:

The EIU does not provide a comprehensive definition of how they define democracy.

Methodology:

The Economist Intelligence Unit's reports provide scores for countries based on the following indicators: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. In addition to the EIU's scoring system, the EIU also categorizes countries as "full democracies", "flawed democracies", "hybrid regimes" and "authoritarian regimes."

Source of Data:

While the EIU's index is well-known and frequently cited, its free reports do not allow readers to dig in to understand how data was gathered and analyzed or how scores were assigned. In order to gain a deeper understanding of indicators, methodology, sources of data, and to access country reports, the EIU requires their country reports to be purchased via their EIU store. Each report must be purchased individually, and each report can cost up to thousands of dollars.

Pros:

Since the parameters of this project do not allow us to analyze methodology or how data was gathered, it is difficult to assess overall pros of the index. While our assessment is limited, one of the major pros of the EIU is the fact that they are well-known, and their scoring system is incredibly easy to understand. The EIU seems to be particularly useful for signaling, which can be of value to urge or encourage change or to warn of dangerous developments.

Cons:

As mentioned throughout this section, the largest con of the EIU is the fact that their reports come with a price point. For example, to purchase current reports on Brazil, there are several products available: 1.) the comprehensive political and economic analysis of forecasts (priced at \$1,095 for 12 months of access), 2.) the Brazil Country Risk Service report (priced at \$1,645 for 12 months of access), 3.) the Brazil Country Forecast (priced at \$2,145 for 12 months of access), and 4.) the Brazil Country Data Set (priced at \$1,045 for 12 months of access) (EIU, 2023).

Usability:

According to our criteria, the EIU has a usability score of 2/5. Simply given the parameters of this project, as well as the cost of the reports, we are unable to provide an in-depth analysis of the EIU's methodology, reliability, and usability for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Further, the EIU's focus on political economy makes it difficult to assess which paid reports would be particularly useful in the context of democratic backsliding and overall usability.

Section 5: Summary of Issue-Specific Indices Related to Democracy: The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (WJP), The Global Organized Crime Index, Journalists Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, The Capacity to Combat Corruption Index (CCC), Vance Center Latin America Anti-Corruption Assessment

The reports discussed in this section are issue-specific democracy indices. These indices provide in-depth analysis of each issue in which they specialize. They vary in usefulness as defined by the project team for this review. Out of the five reports discussed below, The Global Organized Crime Index and the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index most closely meet the usefulness criteria for they are excellent resources for those staffers wishing to do a deep dive into a specific topic, especially including officers whose job responsibilities include the issues covered in the issue-specific report.

Section 5a: The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index

Overview:

The World Justice Project (WJP) is an independent, multidisciplinary organization. Its mission is to advance the rule of law around the world. The WJP publishes annual data on the Global Rule of Law (World Justice Project 2023).

Definition of democracy:

The WJP index measures constraints on government powers, open government, order and security, civil justice, informal justice, absence of corruption, fundamental rights, regulatory enforcement, and criminal justice (World Justice Project 2023).

Methodology:

The World Justice Project uses a questionnaire-based methodology to collect information that is synthesized into a democracy index. A set of five questionnaires was developed by democracy academics, practitioners, and community leaders internationally. The questionnaires are administered both to country and democracy experts as well as the general public. In this way, the WJP takes into account the public's perception of democratic indicators and democratic backsliding. On average, more than 300 participants contribute to the WJP's surveys (World Justice Project 2023).

After survey data is collected, the questionnaire items are translated into numeric values. Raw country scores are given by aggregating the numeric values that come from the responses. These scores then become each country's final ranking after they are subjected to calibrating tests to identify bias and errors (World Justice Project 2023).

The WJP democratic indicator ranking scores rely almost solely on survey responses. Polling and surveys are widely used for many studies, including Transparency International's

Perception of Corruption Index and the work that Pew does with surveys around the world. There is always unavoidable bias in using polling data, but the WJP employs a system that calibrates for typical biases and errors (World Justice Project 2023).

Source of Data:

The World Justice Project uses a questionnaire-based methodology. A set of five questionnaires is administered to country and democracy experts, as well as the general public. Scores are aggregated and normalized before country rankings are assigned.

Pros:

Measuring the Public's Perception

Compared to almost all other democracy indices, the WJP includes the biggest number of sources in its aggregate democratic indicator scores. Because the WJP surveys both democracy and regional experts as well as the general public, its scoring system includes the public's perception. The scores rely almost solely on survey respondents, which is a solid way of identifying a country's score based on overall consensus and can provide valuable insight for a local embassy official through identifying indicators that need improvement.

Data Visualization and Usability

The country rankings and map section of the WJP website is easily manipulated to display categories of useful data. Users can hover their mouse over a country in the map and a text box will appear with snapshots of a country information. Users can also choose to view country rankings according to each of the eight democratic indicators and can further filter the rankings by region of the world, which is particularly useful if a State Department officer focuses on one specific region.

Cons:

Limited to Rule of Law

The WJP index is limited to evaluating the rule of law to determine how well a democracy is functioning. This means it does not fully meet our criteria for a useful index.

Lack of Qualitative Summaries

The WJP report includes brief country profiles, but the WJP should not be used for deep dives into country reports. This index is most usable for quantitative rankings and scores for countries.

Usability:

According to our criteria, the WJP has a usability score of 4/5. It is a useful issue-specific index, but the fact that it only addresses one attribute of democracy makes it a less useful index than V-Dem and IDEA.

Section 5.b. The Global Organized Crime Index 2021

Overview:

The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) was created in 2013. It is a network of law enforcement, governance, and development practitioners seeking various strategies and responses to organized crime. The GI-TOC has a globally dispersed network of regional civil society observatories that work to engage with states and initiate dialogue and action between civil society, law enforcement, and other state actors. The Global Organized Crime Index 2021 is the first iteration, with the second scheduled for October 2023. As the first edition of this report, it aims to create a global baseline assessment that will eventually grow into a consistent and comprehensive resource that contextualizes the evolution and dynamics of organized crime. Much of the report is devoted to justifying the inclusion of each indicator and regional analysis. It shows the scores for individual countries with minimal further explanation. However, the interactive map on the website is comprehensive and easy to read and provides deep and thoughtful analysis on each ranking by country for all indicators and sub-indicators used in the report. The user can click through the data and pull out valuable information, which is one important dimension of this report's definition of usability.

Definition of Democracy:

The GI-TOC indicators of democracy are Criminality and Criminal Markets and Rule of Law (Resilience).

Methodology:

This index identifies a Criminality score and a Resilience score. Criminality scores are the average of ten criminal markets and four criminal actor types. Resilience scores are the average of 12 other indicators.

Over 350 expert assessments and evaluations contribute to the scores. GI-TOC conducts a literature review and general data collection. In the first round, scores are generated by experts from the GI-TOC and its Network of Experts, based upon their expertise and the data provided from the data collection stage. In the second round, scores and justifications are verified by a separate second set of experts specialized in country-level organized crime. In the third round, parallel to the second round of verification, a third set of experts specialized in criminal markets also verify the first-round scores and justifications. In the third round, data is verified to ensure that scores were accurate in geographic contexts. In the fourth and final stage, data is scored and calibrated for global comparisons, led by experts from previous rounds and finally reviewed by GI-TOC regional observatories.

Source of Data:

Expert Survey and Review process: Scores are generated by a network of experts from the GI-TOC and then undergo 2 rounds of review from a different set of experts to confirm the original findings. The first set of experts and GI-TOC regional observatories then goes back and reviews any comments or changes made by the other expert reviewers. This ensures that at least 5 sets of eyes are on all pieces of data.

Pros:*Specific Insights by Country*

This index has a map that can be used to gain specific insights into indicators and sub indicators of this report by country.

Specialized Information

This is the only index that specializes in this one specific aspect of governance and gives a unique deep dive into its factors. It clearly defines each indicator and justifies their inclusion, and the report includes an analysis limitations section.

Cons:*Lack of Important Indicators*

The report does not address cross-cutting crime issues like financial or cyber-crimes. It only considers crime alone and does not account for other indicators of democracy. However, this weakness was identified by a representative of this index and is being addressed in the updated 2023 edition.

Lack of Longitudinal Data

Because this is only the first edition of this index, it does not have longitudinal data. This will change as the index continues to be published in the coming years.

Not Published Annually

This index is published every two years, so it will not have information on the most current events and key changes in the country until the newest edition is released.

Usability:

According to our criteria, the Global Organized Crime Index has a usability score of 3/5. Its scope is limited to criminality and resilience only but gives a good assessment of crime globally. It gives regional breakdowns of indicator and sub-indicator scores and comprehensively justifies the inclusion of each indicator. The report itself has the scores for each indicator and sub-indicator by country, but for a country specific description or explanation of a score, one must refer to the map on their website. The interactive map on their website is very useful because it has specific information about crime, criminal markets,

and resilience by country. This map is easy to use and interpret, allowing the user to see overall scores by country and scores broken down by indicator and sub-indicator. Then scores are further expanded upon in individual country analyses, allowing the user to dig deeper into indicators and scores and extrapolate further information than what is only available at face value. Since this is the report's first edition, it does not yet have a longitudinal comparison of country progress. A specialist from the organization stated that this version of the report is intended to be a baseline until further longitudinal information can be collated. The report also includes a "limitation section" in which they state their intended improvements for subsequent reports.

Section 5.c. Journalists Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index

Overview:

The World Press Freedom Index is produced by a Paris-based NGO called Reporters Without Borders (RSF) (Who are we?, 2016). The organization has regional offices throughout the world and is well-respected as an expert in the study of press freedom. The index defines press freedom as "the effective possibility for journalists, as individuals and as groups, to select, produce and disseminate news and information in the public interest, independently from political, economic, legal and social interference, and without threats to their physical and mental safety" (RSF, 2023a). Data on the 180 countries that RSF studies is available through their website as part of an interactive map and their annual reports, which have been released annually since 2002 (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

Definition of Democracy:

This index does not specifically examine and evaluate democracy. This index focuses on press freedom.

Methodology:

RSF introduced a new methodology in 2022 (RSF, 2023a). The methodology was devised by experts in academia and the media sector. The index calculates a press freedom score based on qualitative and quantitative data that comes from expert surveys and the study of abuses against journalists and media outlets. Their data collection focuses on five distinct categories of indicators, each of which has its own equally weighted questions and sub-questions: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context, and safety (RSF, 2023a). Each of these indicators is assigned a numeric score from 0-100, with 0 being the lowest level of press freedom and 100 being the highest level of press freedom (RSF, 2023a). These subsidiary scores are then correlated to create the global score, which is then collected into the annual report.. The reporting period is from January to December, though RSF will also include dramatic changes that occur between the end of reporting in December and the formal publication of the report (RSF, 2023a).

Source of Data:

The index combines qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative part of the score comes from RSF staff tallying up work-related abuses against journalists and media outlets. The qualitative data comes from an analysis of responses to a survey, which is distributed to press freedom specialists (including journalists, researchers, academics and human rights defenders) within each country (RSF, 2023a).

Pros:*Clear and Concise Country Reports*

The strengths of the RSF index are that it provides clear and concise country reports on each country as well as regional breakdowns of trends. As an international non-profit organization governed by principles of democratic governance, the RSF has the ability to be more openly critical than an IGO would. Even critics of RSFs methodology argue that it is a useful tool for promoting the value of media freedom internationally and increasing awareness. The index also provides a useful, interactive map that color coordinates countries by their score.

Searchable Database

The website provides access to their database, allowing you to go through the scores and key events from the last 20 years (RSF, 2022). These can be looked at from the vantage point of the Global Score or one of the five indicators. It also highlights how the score has changed compared to the previous reporting year. There is also a press freedom barometer that allows you to sort the data by year, country, gender, type of media professional directed abuse, the contract status of the victim, and whether the situation has completed or is ongoing (RSF, 2020). The results can be quite specific, especially if you play around with the date range.

Cons:*Content Lacks Democratic Indicators*

This index does not provide a full picture of democratic trends globally. Its use is limited to a deep dive into press freedoms.

Quality of Data Collection and Methodologies

The introduction of a new methodology for the 2022 report means that scores from previous years are not exactly comparable to the new data. Though the new methodology may help dissuade the concerns of several scholars who thought the original model had issues, we were not able to confirm this. The issues included: 1) insufficient survey responses; 2) poor quality survey design; 3) a lack of technical sophistication; 4) limited transparency; and 5) deficient validity across time (Pearson, 2015). One example where the lack of transparency is apparent is in the country report for Jamaica, which describes how they have improved and are

doing well while simultaneously giving them low scores and a decreased ranking from 2022 to the present (RSF, 2019). No recent developments or events are highlighted that would account for this discrepancy. It is also argued that as the score for each state relies on the performance of the states above and below it a state can appear to have worsened or improved even when they actually have not (Pearson, 2015). One more methodological question persists regarding whether dramatic changes that occur after the end of the reporting period, but which are included in that year's report are also recorded in the next year's report or just in the report for the year that they were first mentioned.

Limited Access

Though the RSF website gives you the capability to search through its dataset, the data itself and its sources are not actually accessible. Attempting to download results from the searchable dataset results in an unintelligible excel document and data cannot be downloaded from the press freedom barometer.

Usability:

According to our criteria the RSF has a usability score of 2/5. It is recognized as an expert on issues related to press freedom and it collects and analyzes data on an ongoing basis with annual reports and a running tally of press freedom violations and instances of violence against the media.

All and all RSF only covers an attribute of democracy not democracy itself, it provides little to no information about its sources, its data is not particularly accessible or well explained, and its data cannot be manipulated to garner further insights. There is also considerable scholarly criticism regarding its methodology for collecting and analyzing data.

Section 5.c. The Capacity to Combat Corruption (CCC) Index

Overview:

The Capacity to Combat Corruption (CCC) is published by the Control Risks group, which is a global risk and strategic consulting group founded in 1975. Similar to the Economist Intelligence Unit, they have products available for purchase that give a more in-depth analysis of trends and indicators of concern, as well as on data and individual countries. Their free report, the 2023 index, lacks data on many countries in the Western Hemisphere. For example, there are no country reports on Honduras, El Salvador, and Jamaica.

Definition of Democracy:

The index does not directly outline its definition of democracy. However, the index indicates that they are specifically focused on assessing corruption in Latin America. They cite challenges such as violent crime, slow economic recovery amidst the pandemic, issues facing

media and civil society, and democratic backsliding at broad, as major issues of concern for corruption in Latin America.

Methodology:

The CCC index analyzes fourteen key variables that fall under three categories: legal capacity, democracy and political institutions, and civil society and media. Each of these categories are scored by combining the average score of their sub-indicators/14 key variables, which then contribute to the overall score and ranking of each country. On pages 38-41 of the CCC's 2023 report, they state that their data is collected from both public data and private data collected by the Control Risks group and anti-corruption experts. Some of the public data/indicators that they utilize include: Freedom House, IDEA, the World Bank, UNESCO, World Justice Project, the World Economic Forum, and others. The CCC does not list the actual number of experts who were involved in the creation of the publication. However, in their methodology section, they list an extensive set of experts they worked with to publish the report. This list includes the expert's name, as well as their qualifications. Their expert list includes members of the academic, consulting, and non-profit communities. They also have several in-house experts who participated in the creation of the publication.

Pros:

Focus on Corruption

The major benefit of this index is its sole focus on corruption. Many of their sub-indicators have a unique focus on corruption, which could prove useful if an embassy employee or desk officer wanted to thoroughly analyze corruption.

Cons:

Inaccessible Data and Details

Unfortunately, a major weakness of the index is the fact that they are owned by a consulting company; thus, extensive data and information requires purchase.

Lack of Transparency in Scoring

The lack of data on how each sub-indicator was scored makes it difficult to assess which sub-scores could be seen as an indicator of democratic backsliding or issues of major concern. In comparison to some of the other indices we have analyzed, their expert list seems to be more limited, which could be explained by the fact that their report only focuses on Latin America. In addition to the limited number of analysts and experts, there is no in-depth detail on how much data was based on public polling versus private sources, making it difficult to assess the quality of the data and scores. Despite the cons, the CCC, similar to the EIU, could prove to be valuable in signaling areas of weakness, improvement, and decline over time.

However, given the fact that their reports are not free, they may not be the most useful for digging into problems and solutions.

Usability:

According to our criteria the CCC has a usability score of 1/5. It is recognized as a well-respected authority on corruption.

Unfortunately, data and country reports are not available for all countries in the Western Hemisphere. However, the countries which are listed, scored, and analyzed have very concise sections detailing major issues of concern, as well as critical issues which should be monitored. The visualization of the sub-indicators in the CCC's report also provides a very easy overview; however, no in-depth analysis is provided on how each score was created for each sub-indicator, making it difficult to assess how usable the index actually is in the context of this project.

Section 5.e. Vance Center Latin America Anti-Corruption Assessment

Overview:

The Vance Center is a non-profit program that is a part of the New York City Bar Association. It aims to promote social justice and human rights globally. The Latin American Anti-Corruption Assessment 2022 is the second iteration of this index from the Vance Center that attempts to map legal efforts against corruption. This index evaluates the following: legislation to fight corruption, the power of authorities to implement that legislation, and how effectively the process is executed. The index captures the views of anti-corruption practitioners in various sectors, including law firms, companies, academia, civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and more. Since this resource is specialized in Latin America, the report is broken into sections by individual countries. This allows for specific information such as breakdowns of legislation by the public sector, private sector, and specialized authorities to prevent corruption and how well they are enforced. Therefore, this is an easy resource to use. However, the resource does not have an interactive map for a user to find specific data or trends of interest. It is limited to what the PDF report provides.

Definition of Democracy:

This index considers democracy through a country's strength of legislation against corruption, the capacity of the authorities (public and private) to address corruption, and effectiveness of legislative implementation.

Methodology:

The Vance Center's Lawyers Council for Civil and Economic Rights consists of eighteen lawyers from the United States and thirteen lawyers from Latin America. They aim to bring together private practice law professionals in the Americas to support the Center's goals.

The Vance Center developed two questionnaires for law firms of the members of the Lawyers Council and other allied firms in the region. The first questionnaire has 35 questions and 72 variables. Questions are divided into three categories: Legislation, authorities, and implementation. The second questionnaire has 19 open-ended, multiple-choice questions aimed to complement the information in the first questionnaire. Using information obtained from questionnaire participants, the final rating is calculated on a scale of zero to ten, where zero is the lowest rating and ten is the highest rating.

Source of Data:

The source of data is an Expert Survey and Review Process. There are two questionnaires for law firms of the members of the Lawyers Council and other allied firms in the region. The Vance Center reviews the information from these questionnaires and calculates a score on a scale from zero to ten, where zero is the lowest rating and ten is the highest rating.

Pros:*Country Categorizations*

The index has data on corruption categorized by country and sector within that country (public, private, civil society, specialized authorities, etc.) and is easily accessible. It provides thorough information about key aspects of corruption and efforts to combat corruption in each country.

Policy Recommendations

The index has concrete and apparently well-founded recommendations for the legal community and various sectors to follow for combating corruption.

Cons:*Not a Global Index*

This index only considers Latin America. There is no available data for other regions. The index does not have an interactive map for users to find specific data or trends of interest. Users are limited to only what the PDF report provides.

Lack of Indicators

This report only considers corruption and does not account for other indicators of democracy.

No Long-term Data

This index acts as a snapshot of current state of affairs and developments of recent years, but it does not provide long-term corruption trend data.

Lack of Manipulable Data

This Index does not have an interactive map for a user to find specific data or trends of interest. It is limited to the analysis and insight provided in the PDF report.

Usability:

According to our criteria, the Anti-Corruption Assessment has a usability score of 2/5. The Anti-Corruption Assessment leans solely on legal frameworks, which provides a unique perspective on corruption, but it is limited by that single perspective. Its biggest strengths are that it breaks information down by country and that it is specialized in Latin America. Therefore, it has very specific information, such as breakdowns of legislation by the public sector, private sector, and specialized authorities to prevent corruption and how well they are enforced. That information is easy to find and to read because the information is organized by country. This makes it a good resource for country specialists. Therefore, officials looking for a comprehensive assessment on a country's ability to uphold the rule of law and whether there is corruption to undermine it should use this resource. Also, this survey was widely distributed in Spanish and Portuguese among the legal community of the participating countries, making it easy to use and comprehend for stakeholders. A weak point of this index is that this edition is only its second iteration, and the previous one was incomplete (9 fewer countries participated), so long-term assessment on backsliding is not possible.

Section 6: Country Sections¹

These country sections will assess how the different broad democracy indices studied in this report rank and analyze a selection of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These countries were selected for analysis by the US Department of State's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination, due to their concern that these countries may be experiencing democratic backsliding. These countries are Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, El Salvador, and Peru.

An overview, assessment of anomalies, and country table ranks and scores are provided for each country. Two important notes regarding this are: 1) The scores and ranking for the EIU are supplied, though it is not assessed in the analysis, because they provide little to no background explanation for their scoring; 2) BTI is included in both the tables and the analysis, however, it has two major issues that make it largely incompatible with the other indices related to chronology and methodology. As BTI is a biennial report, its 2022 report only covers up to the end of January 2021, whereas the other indices cover through 2022. The other issue is

¹ In trying to establish a normalized ranking system for the GSoD Indices we selected only the 2022 data, which brought the countries in the data set down to **173**. This is because the 174th country is East Germany, which no longer existed in 2022.

that its main scores and rankings are for transformation and governance, not democracy or key attributes of democracy. Thus, comparisons can be drawn between specific indicators like rule of law, but not the overarching scores themselves.

Section 6.a: Brazil

Overview:

Table 6.a.1: Brazil Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.42/1 pts	74/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.32/1 pts	144/179
Liberal Democracy	0.52/1 pts	58/179
Electoral Democracy	0.68/1 pts	58/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.45/1 pts	106/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	0.7/1 pts	45/173
Rights	0.5/1 pts	85/173
Participation	0.69/1 pts	37/173
Rule of Law	0.47/1 pts	93/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	7.05/10 pts	29/137
Economic Transformation	6.61/10 pts	30/137
Governance Index	4.42/10 pts	85/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	72/100 pts	81/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	6.78/10 pts	51/167

All four of the indices highlight Brazil as a country of concern, with each index ranking Brazil lower than in previous years. Broadly, each of the indices treat Brazil similarly in their scoring/ranking process, highlighting the degradation of political rights and political freedoms as the main issue of concern for Brazil. Freedom House downgraded Brazil's overall ranking from 73/100 (2022) to 72/100 (2023)—the downgrade of a single place, citing political violence and a rise of external pressures within the political sphere (Freedom House, 2023b). Similarly, BTI downgraded Brazil's overall score from 7.15 (2020) to 6.83 (2022) (*BTI: Brazil, 2022*). BTI downgraded Brazil's score due to a rise in outside influence within the political spectrum, highlighting the rising influence of religious dogmas in the political sphere (*BTI: Brazil, 2022*). BTI further highlights that Brazil saw the largest global decline in international cooperation scores under President Bolsonaro.

Similarly, IDEA's GSOD indicators/indices for Brazil show significant downwards trends for all indicators, except for representation, which has been trending upwards since 2018. Rights, participation, and rule of law all received lower scores than last year (2021) (*Brazil | the Global State of Democracy, 2023*). IDEA highlights election integrity, the rise of disinformation campaigns, the rise in political corruption, and attacks on freedom of expression as major issues of concern for Brazil (*Brazil | the Global State of Democracy, 2023*). Similarly, V-Dem, finds

downwards trends for Brazil. For the fourth consecutive V-Dem report, Brazil was placed on the list of top 10 “autocratizers,” citing political polarization and outside political influence as top issues of concern (*Country Graph Brazil*, 2023).

Anomalies:

While the reports generally agree that political decline is the main issue of concern for Brazil, each index varies in how they treat the democratic indicators. For example, while IDEA downgraded all of Brazil’s indicators (aside from the upward trending “representation” indicator), Freedom House only downgraded Brazil’s score based on one of their ten political rights indicators, namely, indicator “B3” within their country report (“Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extra political means?”). In the context of Brazil, IDEA seems to have more critical data, which may better highlight issues of backsliding within rights, participation, and rule of law indicators.

Section 6.b: Colombia

Overview:

Table 6.b.1: Colombia Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.47/1 pts	36/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.38/1 pts	130/179
Liberal Democracy	0.54/1 pts	63/179
Electoral Democracy	0.69/1 pts	51/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.54/1 pts	66/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	0.64/1	56/173
Rights	0.49/1	91/173
Participation	0.58/1	85/173
Rule of Law	0.5/1	73/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	6.4/10 pts	47/137
Economic Transformation	6.5/10 pts	31/137
Governance Index	5.24/10 pts	50/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	70/100	83/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	6.78/10	53/167

Overall, Colombia’s status among the indices is trending upwards. Both Freedom House and IDEA upgraded Colombia’s score (Freedom House from 64/100 in 2022 and (70/100 in 2023)) (Freedom House, 2023b). Similarly, IDEA’s GSoD indicators all show upwards trends (*Colombia | the Global State of Democracy*, 2023). It should be noted that IDEA does not have

an updated country profile on Colombia, thus, this index may not be the most useful in analyzing Colombia. An IDEA researcher told the team that this profile should be updated sometime in August of 2023. Similar to IDEA and Freedom House, V-Dem also shows upwards trends among all of their indicators (V-Dem, 2023b). All three of these indices that highlight upward trends for Colombia cite more competitive national elections and a decline in the restriction of movements and other civil liberties as major factors that have contributed to the upgrade of Colombia's score.

Anomalies:

The main anomaly among the indices is BTI, which only publishes a report every two years. The case of Colombia perfectly illustrates why BTI may not be the most useful index in comparison to V-Dem and or IDEA. While all of the other indices have upgraded Colombia's score from 2022, BTI's scores have not been updated. BTI still ranks Colombia incredibly low (6.45/10 for 2022, in comparison to 6.67 in 2020) (*BTI 2022 Colombia Country Report, 2022*). This illustrates how quickly information and country status can change. Since IDEA does not have an updated country profile for Colombia at the moment, Freedom House and V-Dem prove to be the most useful indices in the context of Colombia. While Freedom House proves to be useful in narrative, V-Dem's breadth of data and larger pool of country experts/analysts suggest that V-Dem is the most useful index for analyzing Colombia.

Section 6.c: Dominican Republic

Overview:

Table 6.c.1: Dominican Republic Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.46/1 pts	37/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.37/1 pts	132/179
Liberal Democracy	0.47/1 pts	95/179
Electoral Democracy	0.68/1 pts	57/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.6/1 pts	20/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	0.61/1	65/173
Rights	0.5/1	84/173
Participation	0.69/1	32/173
Rule of Law	0.48/1	86/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	6.85/10	35/137
Economic Transformation	5.79/10	55/137
Governance Index	5.84/10	29/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	68/100	86/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	6.39/10	65/167

According to V-Dem, the Dominican Republic has remained consistent in the electoral democracy category. It is ranked 54th in the world and matches the regional trend of 83% of the other Latin American countries that are electoral democracies. The Dominican Republic ranking remains consistent at 0.68 since 2022 (V-DEM 2023). Through the V-Dem democratic indicators (Deliberative, Participatory, Liberal, and Egalitarian), the Dominican Republic has its lowest score in the Egalitarian Democracy Index. This index measures principles such as formal rights and liberties being protected equally across groups. This includes how resources are distributed and whether there is equal access to power.

The Dominican Republic's highest rating of democracy is observed in the Electoral Democracy Index, which embodies the values of how rulers are responsive to the populace. This analyzes whether there is electoral competition where suffrage is broad, whether elections are clean, and if elections effectively choose the chief executive. Within this category, freedom of expression between elections in the media is also important. The Dominican Republic does a fair job in this category, but there is still room for growth.

Comparatively, Freedom House rates the Dominican Republic as "partly free." The Freedom House ranking is 68/100, with a political rights scoring of 27/40 and civil liberties at 41/60. Freedom House also indicates that the country has regular elections that are mostly free but notes how the presence of corruption can undermine institutions. They also note the issue of discrimination among those of Haitian descent and the LGBTQ+ community. This is similar to V-Dem's Egalitarian Index ranking. The BTI index highlights that the Dominican Republic has done well in leveraging consensus-building in policymaking between political parties. They rate the Dominican Republic as a "defective democracy" at 6.85/10, identifying limited economic transformation at a 5.79, and governance to be moderately "good" at 5.84. According to BTI's economic transformation score, the Dominican Republic has experienced long-term growth in its tourism sector. The GSoD (IDEA 2022) sees the Dominican Republic as a mid-performing democracy, similar to the other reports in economic growth, public deliberation in policy, and concerns of violence toward discriminated groups.

Anomalies:

Among the top four indicators there are no major anomalies, just different descriptions that describe the same or similar factors.

Section 6.d: El Salvador

Overview:

Table 6.d.1: El Salvador Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	Score	Country Ranking
Participatory Democracy	0.22/1	120/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.14/1	166/179
Liberal Democracy	0.15/1	152/179
Electoral Democracy	0.38/1	112/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.15/1	148/179
International IDEA	Score	Country Ranking
Representation	0.52/1	95/173
Rights	0.34/1	137/173
Participation	0.33/1	126/173
Rule of Law	0.48/1	137/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)	Score	Country Ranking
Political Transformation	6.7/10	40/137
Economic Transformation	6.21/10	37/137
Governance Index	5.63/10	36/137
Freedom House	Score	Country Ranking
Freedom in the World	56/100	112/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	Score	Country Ranking
Democracy Index	5.06/10	93/167

All four indices show that El Salvador's democratic institutions have been declining over the last decade. According to IDEA, El Salvador was struggling earlier in the decade, then was improving slightly in a couple of attributes, and then ultimately declining in the 2020s. (International IDEA, 2023a). This aligns with the trends recorded by Freedom House, V-Dem, and BTI, all of which suggest that President Bukele's attempts to find non-democratic solutions to long-standing issues, like gang violence, have continued to degrade El Salvador's democratic institutions. Both IDEA and Freedom House note that the country has a high amount of corruption and low degree of judicial independence. V-Dem highlights major crackdowns on media and academic freedom in conjunction with a rise in government censorship (V-Dem, 2023, p. 23). According to the GSoD, downward trends in all four key attributes began around 2019 and have persisted (International IDEA, 2023a). The two most extreme sub-attribute drops were in effective parliament, which fell by ten points, and political equality, which fell by nine points (International IDEA, 2023a). The 2022 annual report ranks El Salvador as one of seven severely backsliding countries and argues that it is moving towards authoritarianism (International IDEA, 2022). El Salvador is also listed as one of the five countries in the Americas showing the most decline in sub-attribute scores (International IDEA, 2022). They suggest that the current trend makes it likely that El Salvador will be listed as a hybrid regime in the 2023 report, especially if the state of emergency, introduced in 2022 to combat gang violence, continues into its second year (International IDEA, 2022).

Freedom House's 2023 Freedom in the World Report lists El Salvador as a "partly free" state. Freedom House highlights the ways in which sitting President Bukele has degraded El Salvador's democratic institutions, such as packing the constitutional court in order to ensure his ability to run for reelection (Freedom House, 2023d, p. 5-6, 22). Political rights and civil liberties scores have dropped (Freedom House, 2023d, p. 9). The index also reports that El Salvador has experienced the thirteenth highest rate of decline in freedom over the last ten years, with a loss of 21 points (Freedom House, 2023d, p. 12). Democracy is defined as "under pressure," though the overall score is still just above half (Freedom House, 2023a).

BTI lists El Salvador as a defective democracy with limited economic freedom, but with "good" political elites in place to attempt to bring about democratic change (BTI, 2022). This will be discussed further in the "Anomalies" section below. According to V-Dem's 2023 report, El Salvador is now an electoral autocracy, and one of the eight Latin American countries that have shifted towards autocracy over the past decade (V-Dem, 2023). Prior to the current slowdown, it had been an electoral democracy for more than twenty years (V-Dem, 2023, p. 40). This shift has earned it the dubious distinction of being one of V-Dem's top three autocratizing countries (V-Dem, 2023, p. 23). Both Freedom House and V-Dem extrapolate on this further, listing El Salvador as one of the top ten autocratizing countries globally.

Anomalies:

One key area where the indices diverge is Rule of Law. According to BTI, this notable indicator has changed little since 2003, rising as high as 6.3 and as low as 5.8, but generally holding steady at an even 6.0 (BTI, 2022e). IDEA shows a more significant increase and decrease throughout the 2010s into the early 2020s. The progress of this indicator is much harder to track using Freedom House. However, we were able to find evidence of a steady decline since the 2018 report. Freedom House's 0-4 scale does not capture the same degree of fluctuation as those of IDEA and V-Dem, and can be misleading (Freedom House, 2023a). For instance, the most recent report scores Rule of Law as a 0, suggesting that it is entirely absent, which is highly unlikely and not supported by the other indices (Freedom House, 2023a).

Another anomaly between the indices is that, after accounting for differences in scale, BTI's scores are generally higher than the other indices. Continuing with the example of Rule of Law, BTI's score is 5.8/10 in 2020² and the contemporaneous scores in the other indices are: V-Dem 0.31/1 (V-Dem, 2023); Freedom House 2/4 (Freedom House, 2023a), which is closer to BTI's score; and IDEA gives it a 0.38/1 (International IDEA, 2023a).

An interesting side note to this analysis is that, though at first glance, it appears BTI's governance index score is anomalous to the other indices, they actually capture the same trend. El Salvador's governance index score says that the political leadership is "good" for

² 2020 is the most recent full year covered by BTI's reporting.

political and economic transformation, which on its face seems wholly disconnected from the reality perceived by the other indices. However, upon further examination of the data presented in the Transformation Atlas graphing tool, one can see that though the “good” ranking has not changed since the first report, the score has fluctuated. Somewhat like a wave, El Salvador’s governance score started with a 6.2/10 in the first report, rose to 6.8/10, and fell to a 5.6/10 in the latest report (BTI, 2022e). Though our group was unable to find a direct equivalent indicator within the other indices, it seems that BTI ultimately is capturing the concerns about President Bukele’s regime and its negative impact on democracy.

In short, BTI appears less critical of certain attributes of democracy than the other indices, which may be explained by their more long-term view and different thematic focus. Similarly, Freedom House’s methodology and scoring system make it difficult both to compare data between indices and to show nuanced changes in indicators over time. IDEA and V-Dem are the best for understanding the diverse aspects of democracy.

Section 6.e: Honduras

Overview:

Table 6.e.1: Honduras Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.35/1 pts	71/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.25/1 pts	147/179
Liberal Democracy	0.4/1 pts	91/179
Electoral Democracy	0.56/1 pts	80/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.38/1 pts	100/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	0.53/1	91/173
Rights	0.44/1	103/173
Participation	0.53/1	97/173
Rule of Law	0.44/1	101/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	4.42/10	82/137
Economic Transformation	5.0/10	79/137
Governance Index	4.0/10	94/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	48/100	124/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	5.15/10	91/167

In Honduras, V-Dem, IDEA, and Freedom House all show indicators that are trending upwards for democracy. V-Dem critically has Honduras transitioning from an “Electoral Autocracy” to an “Electoral Democracy,” signaling huge progress for Honduras (V-DEM, 2023). The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) does not show this trend because the assessment period ends in early 2021 for the 2022 edition. One key event that happened in Honduras was the passage of electoral reforms in May 2021 (after the most recent BTI assessment) to

increase transparency. Then, in November of 2021, Xiomara Castro was elected as Honduras' first female president, replacing the heavily criticized Juan Orlando Hernandez and ushering several democratic reforms that are reflected in three of the indices. Hernandez was arrested in Honduras and extradited to the United States for involvement in drug trafficking and fire-arms charges (*Honduras | the Global State of Democracy*, 2023).

Thus, this election was a turning point for democracy in Honduras. Prior to this event, BTI assessed a country run by Hernandez that was considered a moderate autocracy with its political leadership receiving a weak governance score. Scores were continuing to regress under former president Juan Orlando Hernandez, who was using his power to silence critics and checks on his power. There was a moderate amount of public political opposition to his power including protests against the government, but this opposition from students, healthcare workers, and teachers was often met with violence from the state (BTI, 2022d). Since Castro's election there has been a general trend of improvement in Honduras' democracy. All of V-Dem's democracy indices showed improvement from 2021 to 2022, but the largest improvements in the index between 2021 and 2022 is the Electoral Democracy Index score improving from 0.4/1 to 0.56/1 and the Liberal Democracy Index score improving from 0.25/1 to 0.4/1 in a single year. This was because the election reforms clearly bore fruit. The 2021 presidential election was much more transparent than ones in recent memory and demonstrated a peaceful transfer of power. Civil liberties are also improving (V-DEM, 2023). Freedom House's report did show signs of improvement (but less so), in part due to the enactment of a State of Exception passed in December 2022, granting emergency powers to the government to investigate extortion and drug-trafficking. This State of Exception restricts the public's freedom of movement and limits due process in the judiciary (Freedom House, 2023).

Anomalies:

The clearest difference between the indices is due to the fact that BTI's most recent data is from before the election in 2021. There were several key reforms in the electoral process which allowed for more transparent elections and a peaceful transfer of power. The election of Xiomara Castro brought about several key reforms and civil liberties are also improving according to V-Dem and IDEA (IDEA, 2023; V-DEM, 2023). BTI paints a graver picture of Honduras' state of democracy than is currently the case because it is not up to date (BTI, 2022d). Another difference between the indices is that, despite the encouraging democratic processes passed and consolidated, Freedom House seems cautious to label these as clear signs of improvement. This is because of actions like the State of Exception passed in December 2022 restricting freedom of movement and due process showing shades of the previous government. The single point increase according to Freedom House is accounted for by an increase in political rights tied to an increase in electoral transparency (Freedom House, 2023). Freedom House still labels Honduras as "Partially Free," which is different from V-Dem, who changed the

label of Honduras to an “Electoral Democracy ” this past year (Freedom House, 2023; V-DEM, 2023). IDEA mentions the State of Exception and indicates that both their “Rights” and “Rule of Law” indicators are negatively affected by the State of Exception (IDEA, 2023).

Section 6.f: Jamaica

Overview:

Table 6.f.1: Jamaica Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.53/1 pts	50/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.66/1 pts	37/179
Liberal Democracy	0.69/1 pts	34/179
Electoral Democracy	0.8/1 pts	33/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.68/1 pts	42/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	0.77/1 pts	32/173
Rights	0.71/1 pts	36/173
Participation	0.62/1 pts	42/173
Rule of Law	0.62/1 pts	60/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	8.2/10 pts	16/137
Economic Transformation	6.18/10 pts	38/137
Governance Index	5.79/10 pts	30/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	80/100 pts	69/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	7.13/10 pts	42/167

According to V-Dem, Jamaica currently exhibits a strong democracy score (V-Dem, 2023). Its strongest score is in the “electoral democracy category” with a .8 ranking. V-Dem describes electoral democracy as having meaningful competition in the electoral system, expanded suffrage, and political and civil groups that can work freely. Jamaica ranks lower in the “participatory democracy index” with a score of .53. This means there is room for improvement in active participation among citizens in electoral and non-electoral processes, civic engagement in civil society organizations, and instances of direct rule of citizens rather than delegated authorities.

Freedom House assigns a score of 80/100 and defines Jamaica as a “Free” country. Similar to V-Dem, they highlight Jamaica’s competitive elections, but mention that corruption is an issue within the country, as well as discrimination based on sexual orientation. They view participation to be strong. The metric for defining participation in their survey is: “Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?” (Freedom House, 2023c). This is different from V-Dem’s view of participation, because they also include direct rule, which can be measured by referendums.

BTI labels Jamaica as consolidated and stable, which largely follows the pattern of the other indices mentioned above. BTI’s political transformation is 8.20, the economic transformation score is 6.18, and the governance score is 5.79 (BTI Transformation Index, 2022). BTI echoes the other indices in its evaluation of Jamaica’s weaknesses in areas such as crime and corruption and the lack of inclusiveness. IDEA similarly gives a lower score for participation compared to areas of rights, representation, and rule of law. We can observe these weaknesses in all of the indices. Jamaica’s biggest strengths among all of the indices are in representation and the electoral system (Global State of Democracy Initiative, 2023).

Anomalies

There are some inconsistencies among the different indices for Jamaica. These inconsistencies are mostly due to the different definitions of “participation.” V-Dem explicitly indicates issues with direct rule, whereas the other indices do not make the same distinction. There are also observable issues with human rights among LGBTQ+, yet no direct connection is made to how civic engagement can aid political transformation. Rather, V-Dem encourages making a soft connection by observing that civic engagement and/or movement is not as strong. Other indices do not directly mention popular movements.

Section 6.g: Mexico

Overview:

Table 6.g.1: Mexico Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.4/1 pts	49/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.33/1 pts	126/179
Liberal Democracy	0.35/1 pts	93/179
Electoral Democracy	0.6/1 pts	72/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.36/1 pts	116/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	.59/1 pts	70/173
Rights	.41/1 pts	114/173
Participation	.44/1 pts	108/173
Rule of Law	.41/1 pts	132/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	5.95/10 pts	57/137
Economic Transformation	6.07/10 pts	43/137
Governance Index	4.69/10 pts	75/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	60/100 pts	104/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	5.25/10 pts	89/167

There are two main themes that are clearly visible throughout the V-Dem, IDEA, BTI, and Freedom House reports with regard to Mexico. The first is that the President Andrés Manuel

López Obrador is attempting to consolidate power in the seat of the president by weakening other independent democratic institutions that are meant to be checks on power. The second is that there is a major crime issue in the country (BTI, 2022c; Freedom House, 2022; IDEA, 2023; V-DEM, 2023). There are large portions of land where the main power is the drug cartels, and drug money is fueling corruption in the central government. In all four indices, there are clear trends downward in all of the major indicators since López Obrador took power at the end of 2018. All four cite his tendencies to attack critics and attempts to discredit any unfavorable media coverage or democratic institutional checks on his power (BTI, 2022c; Freedom House, 2022; IDEA, 2023). IDEA, Freedom House, and BTI make it a point to mention crime going unpunished, and that journalists have been killed in Mexico more than any other country in the world in 2022 (BTI, 2022c; Freedom House, 2022; IDEA, 2023; V-DEM, 2023).

In V-Dem's data, there is a clear trend downward in all of the democracy indices since 2018, with the biggest drop in the deliberative democracy category (-0.11/1.00) and liberal democracy category (-0.10/1.00) (V-DEM, 2023). IDEA also explores the general trends of their four main indicators: Representation, Rights, Participation, and Rule of Law. Each one clearly trends downwards since 2018, although none as dramatically as the V-Dem indicators (IDEA, 2023). BTI and Freedom House are both limited by older data from 2021 and 2022 (Freedom House explained in anomalies) respectively. However, both indices agree with V-Dem and IDEA that Mexico is trending in a negative direction with the clearest decline starting in 2018 (BTI, 2022c; Freedom House, 2022; IDEA, 2023; V-DEM, 2023).

Anomalies:

The four indices considered all indicate Mexico is trending downward in democracy. However, some differences arose due to the justification and timeframe of data. V-Dem is a comprehensive index that encompasses a large array of up-to-date information about their democratic trends for the country. However, they do not highlight Mexico specifically in their report and therefore it is difficult to find any other justification for their trends and score for Mexico (V-DEM, 2023). This was not the case for the other indices. BTI includes the clearest justification for which events specifically affected their scoring, but the most recent update for Mexico was January 31, 2021 (BTI, 2022c). Freedom House had scores for Mexico from 2023, but the analysis of scores in Mexico was not yet available for 2023, so the conclusions seen are from the previous edition in 2022. Overall, only IDEA had the combination of recent scores and trends with thorough justification to explain them.

Section 6.h: Peru

Overview:

Table 6.h.1: Peru Country Scores and Rankings		
V-DEM	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Participatory Democracy	0.52/1 pts	33/179
Egalitarian Democracy	0.46/1 pts	114/179
Liberal Democracy	0.63/1 pts	47/179
Electoral Democracy	0.74/1 pts	46/179
Deliberative Democracy	0.44/1 pts	115/179
International IDEA	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Representation	0.72/1 pts	42/173
Rights	0.51/1 pts	81/173
Participation	0.59/1 pts	83/173
Rule of Law	0.48/1 pts	72/173
Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Political Transformation	6.45/10 pts	45/137
Economic Transformation	6.68/10 pts	28/137
Governance Index	5.57/10 pts	32/137
Freedom House	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Freedom in the World	70/100 pts	85/210
Economist Intelligence Unit	<u>Score</u>	<u>Country Ranking</u>
Democracy Index	5.92/10 pts	75/167

All four of the comprehensive democracy indices show Peru as consistently in at least the top half among all Latin American countries studied, but trending downwards. All of the indices cite the events surrounding former President Pedro Castillo's contested election in mid-2021 and his subsequent impeachment and imprisonment in 2022 for attempting to dissolve the legislature and rule by decree as reasons for democratic backsliding. Deadly clashes between the disgraced president's supporters and the police have further contributed to this downward shift. IDEA's 2022 annual report assesses Castillo's actions since the election as an example of a populist authoritarian leader attempting to dismantle democracy by weakening public trust in electoral management bodies (International IDEA, 2022).

According to IDEA, Peru's democracy has been slowly degrading since roughly 2020, with the key attribute Rule of Law showing the most significant decline falling by three points since 2021 (International IDEA, 2022). Notably, of the seventeen sub-attributes, Local Government is the only one that improved during this period, while an equal number of the rest either stayed the same or declined (Global State of Democracy Initiative, 2023).

BTI defines Peru in 2020 through early 2021 as a "defective democracy", which seems relatively in line with the other indices (BTI, 2022a). V-Dem's 2022 report shows Peru continuing its more than 20-year trend as an electoral democracy, which is defined similarly to a defective democracy (V-Dem, 2023, p. 40). In Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2023 report, Peru still ranks in the top half for both its political rights and civil liberties sub scores,

though its overall score has decreased since 2022 (Freedom House, 2023e). It is now identified as a “partly free” state, making it one of only two states to have its overall freedom status downgraded in 2023 (Freedom House, 2023d, p. 17). IDEA, Freedom House, BTI, and V-Dem all rank Peru as doing well democratically. BTI ranks it nearly in the top 3rd of all countries studied and V-Dem ranks it in the top 30% on its liberal democracy index with a score in the upper quartile (V-Dem, 2023, p. 42).

Anomalies:

While the GSoD and Freedom House suggest that a decline in democratic progress has occurred since roughly 2020, V-Dem suggests that the overall trend has been downward sloping for a decade. Interestingly, in spite of this steady decline, Peru is still in the top 30% of states according to this metric. BTI seems to have a significantly higher score for its political participation indicator than IDEA, whose 2020 data we deemed the most likely to be analogous to BTI's most recent report. However, these two indices score Rule of Law fairly similarly with a difference of only 0.07. Ultimately, all of the indices indicate that Peru is backsliding and include similar interpretations of the reasons for this. However, they do not agree on their assessment of how long this backsliding has occurred, with V-Dem being the only one to characterize it as a long-term trend.

Section 7: Analysis and Conclusion

The goal of this project as proposed by the Office of Policy, Planning and Coordination in the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs was to identify which indices are most helpful to understand key developments of democratic backsliding in Latin America and to identify potentially beneficial actions to address those democracy and governance challenges. Indices that cover democracy broadly as well as those covering specific democratic elements are useful to the State Department for researching regional and country issues, creating policy initiatives, and determining foreign aid programming and budgeting priorities. This report analyzes ten indices chosen because of their wide use and credibility in the field.

The first five are comprehensive indices, which analyze democracy and governance as a whole around the world: 1) the Varieties of Democracy Report (V-DEM); 2) International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) Global State of Democracy Initiative; 3) the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI); 4) Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report; and 5) the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index Report (EIU). The other five indices are more issue-specific indices that focus on one element of or set of elements that are important for democracy to function well. These are: 1) The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index; 2) Global Organized Crime Index; 3) World Press Freedom Index; 4) The Capacity to Combat Corruption Index; and 5) the Vance Center Latin America Anti-Corruption Assessment. These indices were chosen because they are widely used and recognized as some of the most reputable resources available among the many similar sector specific indices offered.

In order to analyze and identify which of these indices were most useful, we first had to determine the elements of a useful index and define “usability.” To define usability, we spoke with multiple former and current US ambassadors, diplomats and experts in the field to gain a deeper understanding of what US embassy personnel do and what aspects of a democracy index would prove to be useful for State Department officers serving in WHA as well as at missions overseas. After numerous conversations and internal discussions, we developed the following usability criteria: 1) a usable index includes a wide breadth of information and evaluates democracy with a variety of criteria; 2) it is considered credible as an unbiased external authority; 3) it uses a thorough review process with multiple layers of analysis; 4) it is easily accessible to users and includes data that can be searched and manipulated to gain insights; and 5) it has collected and published data and analyses regularly and over a relatively long period time. The team then analyzed and ranked each index on a scale of zero to five based on the number of criteria that it meets.

Based on the team’s criteria, the best indices for analyzing and understanding the state of democracy and governance in Latin America are V-Dem and IDEA. V-Dem and IDEA each meet all five of the usability criteria, and they are the only two indices that do. This is shown below in Table 7.1. In particular, the accessibility and manipulability of data in those two indices allows the user to dig deeply into indicators and trends to find specific information. V-Dem has numerous graphing tools which allows the user to manipulate the data in multiple ways. This allows a user to gain different perspectives on underlying factors and trends affecting governance. V-Dem and IDEA also have very up-to-date data. IDEA, in particular, tracks recent political events that might shape the state of democracy. IDEA then identifies which indicator of democracy the event affects and if it does so in a negative or positive way. V-Dem also provides different analyses based on its global work that can be of use, such as its analysis of factors that seem correlated with countries which have bounced back from some democratic backsliding.

By definition, none of the indexes on the list of specialized indices meets the first criterion for usability because they do not evaluate democracy per se (this is shown below in Table 7.2). However, the specialized indices can still be very useful to Department of State officers, since they can provide a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of individual indicators of democracy. They are best used as a supplement to the comprehensive indices, if a researcher wants more specific information about a subset of factors and indicators that are important for democracy to flourish.

In particular, the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index (WJP) and the Global Organized Crime Index (GOC) are two specialized indices that the team found to be particularly useful and met several of its usability criteria. The WJP, in addition to its expert analysis of rule of law, also considers the public’s perception of rule of law in their own country. Public perception was identified by experts the team interviewed as a key indicator of democracy,

because the public's belief in their own government can be correlated to how willing they are to participate in the democratic process. The GOC provides a unique analysis of crime. Considering not just criminality but also criminal markets, criminal actors, and a country's resilience to crime (including its law enforcement and justice systems). The GOC data is very accessible and manipulable, and therefore easy to analyze. However, since it is published biennially, their data is somewhat limited and outdated.

In addition to individual index analysis, the team reviewed the comprehensive indices through the lens of eight Latin American countries: Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic. After doing a thorough analysis of each of the ten indices, the country analysis was conducted using the four most useful comprehensive indices: V-Dem, IDEA, BTI, and Freedom House. The EIU was excluded from the country analyses because, while the country scores are publicly available, EIU does not offer public access to their data used or its analytic processes, and therefore was not considered for this analysis. The team used these country reviews to check and confirm its findings regarding the usability of the indices considered.

The team found that the four indices reflect similar general trends for each of the eight countries, however, some notable anomalies were identified during the analysis. The first and most significant, is that it became clear how critical it is that reports include up-to-date information. This is evident with BTI in particular. BTI collected information through January of 2021, but democratic trends in Colombia and Honduras have changed dramatically in an upward trajectory since BTI's last biennial report was published in 2021. Despite BTI's advantage of having clear and thorough qualitative analysis, using BTI alone to examine democracy in these two countries gives a much more negative outlook than what is currently the case according to the other indices.

One other anomaly was found within Freedom House's scoring system, which assigns an equal value for each sub-indicator (assessed on a scale of 0 to 4). While this scoring system can be helpful for gaining deeper insight into sub-indicators, it does not capture the same degree of fluctuation or nuances of changes as do those of IDEA and V-Dem and can thus be misleading. For instance, the most recent report for El Salvador includes a score for Rule of Law as a 0, suggesting that it is entirely absent, which is not supported by the other indices.

On the other hand, V-Dem and IDEA provide thorough and complete analyses of each of the eight countries. Their data was up-to-date, clear, and gave very specific details about the state of democracy and governance in each country. This clearly indicates that they are the most useful indices when considering country analysis. They provide the most thorough and recent analyses of any other index considered, and they also meet each of our five usability criteria. Therefore, V-Dem and IDEA are recommended as the most useful indices considered in this report.

The team hopes that its analyses will help State Department desk officers as well as officers and locally employed staff working at US embassies and missions, and others working in additional Washington offices and agencies, to understand and develop good approaches to dealing with the many challenges to democracy and governance evident across the Western Hemisphere (or elsewhere in the world).

Table 7.1 Comprehensive Index usability scores

Usability Criteria and the Comprehensive Democracy Indices					
	V-Dem	IDEA	BTI	FH	EIU
1. Wide Breadth of Information	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
2. External Authority	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
3. Thorough Review Process and Analysis	YES	YES	NO	NO	N/A
4. Data is Accessible and Manipulable by Users	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO
5. Covers a Prolonged and Frequent Data Collection	YES	YES	NO	YES	N/A

Table 7.2 Specialized Index usability scores

Usability Criteria and the Issue-Specific Democracy Indices					
	WJP	GOC	RSF	CCC	Vance
Wide Breadth of Information	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
External Authority	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Thorough Review Process and Analysis	YES	YES	NO	N/A	YES
Data is Accessible and Manipulable by Users	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO
Covers a Prolonged and Frequent Data Collection	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO

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Section 9: Appendices

Appendix 1: GSoD Data Types and Sources

Expert Surveys (ES)	Standards-based 'in-house coding' (IC)	Observational Data (OD)	Composite Measures (CM)
Varieties of Democracy Dataset (V-Dem)	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI)	Varieties of Democracy Dataset (V-Dem)	Varieties of Democracy Dataset (V-Dem)
International Country Risk Guide (ICRG)	Polity V	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Food Balances	Global Gender Gap Report
	The Lexical Index of Democracy (LIED)	UNESCO Institute for Statistics	United Nations E-Government Survey
	CIRIGHTS data project	Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation's Global Educational Attainment Distributions (GHDx/IHME)	
	Civil Liberty Dataset (CLD)	International IDEA's Voter Turnout Database	
	Bjørnskov-Rode Regime Data (BRRD)	The Lexical Index of Democracy (LIED)	
	Gibney, Cornett, Wood, Haschke, Arnon, and Pisano's Political Terror Scale (PTS)	UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation's Child Mortality Estimates (CME)	
	Whiten-Woodring and Van Belle's Global Media Freedom Dataset (MFD)	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division's World Population Prospects (WPP)	
	Freedom House's Freedom on the Net		
	Freedom House's Freedom in the World		