



Next Generation Democracy

Asia and Oceania

Track 1 - People and Communities

Regional Trends 2000-2017 & Scenarios 2017-2030



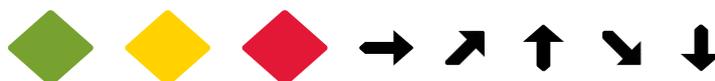
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NOTE TO THE READER

NGD regional reports for Track I, 'People and Communities' analyze trends and projections in democratic governance from a predominantly socio-political perspective on the basis of a multidimensional template specifically formulated by the Club de Madrid, with the collaboration of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, for this purpose.

NGD regional reports have been written by the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) Regional Coordinators and extensively discussed with the BTI team, the CdM Secretariat and NGD regional partners. They constitute the first step of the NGD process, which will progressively organize transformative practices and ideas according to the same template, and subsequently draft NGD regional agendas to react to signals of democratic decline and advance democracy worldwide.

NGD regional reports start with a summary of regional indicator trends according to the NGD template. The summary includes colored boxes and arrows expressing the present state of affairs and the evolution during the last 15 years of democratic governance for each relevant indicator. The sources for trend calculations are the BTI and the Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI), also developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung.



Indicator boxes are colored to differentiate between the most recent state of affairs for each regional indicator (BTI/SGI 2014). Green, yellow and red respectively indicate 'high level', 'medium level', and 'low level' in relative quality. Levels for each regional indicator are based both on inter- and intra-regional averages, thus the indicator boxes highlight the relative strengths and weaknesses of a region, but also indicate how well the region is scoring on a global scale.

Trend arrows express whether the situation improved or worsened during the last 15 years. The indicator boxes contain five types of trend arrows, signaling 'significant improvement', 'improvement', 'continuity', 'decline', and 'significant decline'. The positive or negative trend reflects changes of averages above or below a certain threshold (which varies according to the size of the country sample) in the respective regional indicator. Changes of more than double that threshold form a significant trend.

The combination of colors and arrows thus shows whether a given change, and the speed of it, is observable from a low or high starting level. In the former case, a positive trend means that modest change has occurred during the past years in a situation which remains problematic. In the latter case, depending on the speed of change, a positive change may indicate that an already high status is being further improved. In case the trend is negative and the present state of affairs is of a low quality, regression is taking place in spite of a problematic situation. Finally, negative trends against a high quality background indicate potential decline in deep-rooted aspects of democracy.

For a detailed explanation of the calculations, see NGD Methodological Note at:

www.nextgenerationdemocracy.org



| Bertelsmann Stiftung



The NGD Regional Report (Track I) for Asia-Oceania has been written by **Aurel Croissant**, Professor of political science at Heidelberg University and BTI Regional Coordinator for Asia and Oceania.

This report benefitted from the feedback of **Niranjan Sahoo**, Senior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. The edition was made by **Luis Peral**, Senior Analyst, Club de Madrid.

*The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) supported the production of this publication. The views in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of International IDEA, its Board or its Council Members.

Asia-Oceania

Track 1 – People and Communities

Trends 2000 – 2017		Projections 2017 – 2030
Political participation		
<p>Electoral process Multiparty elections are the rule, but fulfill their functions only in some countries. Some democracies have shown occasional setbacks, while others demonstrate increasing competition and electoral integrity.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political participation is deeply engrained and unlikely to be eliminated in many countries; improvements in electoral competition and means of participation are likely. Structural problems and a lack of political will remain important obstacles to participation. Institutional, cultural and socioeconomic conditions hinder improvement; the liberating potential of new media remains uncertain.
<p>Association/assembly rights Political parties and social organizations are a regular part of the political process, but playing fields are not level, and respect for these rights remains fragile.</p>		
<p>Freedom of expression Media freedom and the freedom of expression are precarious in many countries, with state controls often tight. Pressure from extremist groups and other associations has increased.</p>		
Rule of law		
<p>Separation of powers Checks and balances function in only a few countries; illiberal conceptions of democratic majoritarianism and “elected dictatorship” remain strong.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most new democracies are unlikely to become well-functioning democracies soon. Transformation of rule by law into rule of law will likely remain incomplete. Strategic management of legal system will continue undermining judicial review. Illiberal mode of democratic governance will continue to hamper respect for civil rights.
<p>Independent judiciary Judicial independence is weak in many countries. Political leaders rely on law to govern but do not accept the idea that law also binds state actors. Courts are regularly used to exercise social control.</p>		
<p>Civil rights Respect for civil rights is low and declining in many countries.</p>		

Asia-Oceania

Track 1 – People and Communities

Values and Institutions

Access and Inclusiveness

Management and Policies

Trends 2000 – 2017		Projections 2017 – 2030
Political and social integration		
<p>Party system With few exceptions, party systems are weak; strong party institutionalization in authoritarian regimes works against democratization.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Societal interests' organizational capabilities are improving, but illiberal and technocratic conceptions of governance are unlikely to improve significantly. Party politics will remain underinstitutionalized in many democracies and autocracies. Levels of social capital may further deteriorate due to internal conflicts and deepening inequalities.
<p>Interest groups Slight improvement is evident in some autocracies, as well as deterioration in some democracies. The interest-group landscape is quite unbalanced in most countries.</p>		
<p>Social capital While many countries show low levels of social trust, there is no clear region-wide trend.</p>		
Inclusiveness and non-discrimination		
<p>State identity Problems with state identity are limited to some countries in South and Southeast Asia. Democratization has not triggered conflicts over the legitimacy of the nation-state.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences among countries and sub-regions will increase. Most regimes will be unwilling or unable to improve equal access for marginalized groups or to accommodate new or excluded interests. Some countries will find it extremely difficult to overcome embedded social inequalities. This will contribute to political instability.
<p>Socioeconomic barriers Economic growth in northeast and southeast Asia has contributed to impressive successes in poverty reduction and significant improvements in human development. Deep inequalities in South Asia continue to exclude large segments of society.</p>		
<p>Equal opportunity Equality of opportunity exists only in some developed countries, with rather limited improvements evident.</p>		

Asia-Oceania

Track 1 – People and Communities

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Management and Policies

Trends 2000 – 2017		Projections 2017 – 2030
Strategic capacity and efficiency		
<p>Prioritization Few governments are strong in setting strategic priorities; however, no clear-cut difference between democracies and autocracies is evident.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The gap in strategic capacity and government effectiveness between well-governed and poorly governed countries will widen. Historical legacies and economic and cultural conditions which favor or impede well-functioning institutions will change slowly. Low strategic capacity, weak resource efficiency, and perceptions of widespread and unabated corruption will threaten regime support and ultimately political stability in democracies and autocracies in Asia.
<p>Implementation Few governments have elaborate implementation structures at their disposal. Political conflicts and state fragility have contributed to a notable decline.</p>		
<p>Efficient use of assets Few countries have administrations of consistently high bureaucratic quality able to make efficient use of available resources. Resource efficiency often remains mediocre.</p>		
<p>Anti-corruption policy Apart from a few model cases, corruption is widespread, and integrity levels are not improving</p>		
Consensus-building		
<p>Cleavage/conflict management Cleavage-based conflicts are present across the region. Polarization has reached unprecedented levels, most governments have been surprisingly successful in conflict management under these circumstances.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus-building remains an underexploited resource. In some countries, consensus-building and civil-society participation has improved, while in others, top-down and exclusionary forms of decision-making prevail. No single regional trend is evident.
<p>Civil-society participation Weak civil-society participation is a feature of the political process in most countries. Despite a few improvements, no region-wide increase in civil-society participation is evident.</p>		

Introduction

There are two perspectives on the development of democracy in **Asia-Oceania** at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Viewed from the first perspective, **Asia** has experienced a considerable number of transitions to democracy over the course of recent decades. Even though many such democracies remain defective, illiberal and poorly institutionalized, most have shown resilience despite difficult challenges. Some have made impressive (**South Korea, Taiwan**) or unexpected (**Indonesia, Bhutan** and **Timor Leste**) progress in terms of democratic consolidation. Other democracies such as **Sri Lanka** have recovered from temporary backsliding caused by actions of nominally democratic incumbents who exploited the benefits of office to restrict political contestation as well as civil and political liberties.

Meanwhile, authoritarian regimes have also undergone changes in response to rapid social transformations, the emergence of new social forces and changing political demands. Therefore, it is increasingly hard for regimes of any type to gain and exert political authority without some of the standard institutional trappings of democracy, such as regular elections and multiparty competition. In fact, during the past five to 10 years, elections have become more competitive in some autocracies (i.e., **Cambodia, Malaysia** and **Singapore**), and civil societies have become more vital as a result of the spread of emancipatory values, social-media activism and new methods of political mobilization. Other autocracies introduced more (**Myanmar**) or less (**Vietnam**) far-reaching political reforms that hold the potential to move their societies toward more responsible and participatory forms of government.

The second perspective emphasizes that authoritarian governments still outnumber democracies in **Asia**, either because they have withstood the democratization impulse altogether (**China, Laos, North Korea**) or because transitions were reversed before reaching the stage of democratic consolidation (**Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand**). Furthermore, many new democracies (especially in South and Southeast Asia) are facing debilitating challenges, including political polarization, the rapid political mobilization of diverse groups, a deinstitutionalization of leaders' roles, and the failure of political institutions to keep pace with growing demands for better governance and broader access to life opportunities. In countries such as **Pakistan** and **Thailand**, democratic crises have culminated in military coup d'états, whereas in others it has led to a worrying erosion of democratic quality (**Bangladesh, Philippines**, and temporarily also in **Sri Lanka**). At the dawn of the 21st century, many democracies are suffering from severe vulnerabilities, such as legacies of military praetorianism, internal conflict, weak democratic institutions and widening economic inequality. At the same time, the rise of authoritarian regimes that have proven to be economically successful for a sustained period of time (**China, Singapore** and **Vietnam**) arguably constitutes a pressing challenge for democracy in Asia. However, in the medium and long-term, this is also an opportunity for future democratization. First, the rise of economically successful authoritarianism increases the need for new democratic dialogue among political and social leaders in democracies and across the region. This could contribute to a new sense of "local ownership" of democracy in Asian countries. Second, economic success in **China** and **Vietnam** may change these societies in ways that will make democracy easier to sustain.

Values and institutions

Regional overview

Values and Institutions		Political Participation				Rule of Law			
		Elections	Association Assembly	Freedom of Expression	Separation of powers	Judiciary	Civil Rights		
Taiwan	9.83	9.7	10	10	9	10.0	10	10	10
South Korea	8.17	7.7	9	7	7	8.7	9	9	8
India	7.50	7.7	9	7	7	7.4	9	7	6
Bhutan	7.00	7.0	8	6	7	7.0	7	7	7
Papua New Guinea	7.00	7.7	6	9	8	6.3	6	7	6
Indonesia	6.83	7.0	8	7	6	6.7	9	5	6
Sri Lanka	6.83	7.3	8	7	7	6.3	7	7	5
Philippines	6.33	7.0	7	8	6	5.7	6	7	4
Nepal	5.67	6.7	7	6	7	4.7	5	5	4
Myanmar	4.50	5.7	7	5	5	3.3	4	3	3
Bangladesh	4.33	4.7	5	5	4	4.0	4	4	4
Singapore	4.17	3.7	5	3	3	5.7	3	5	6
Malaysia	4.00	4.0	4	4	4	4.0	3	4	5
Pakistan	3.50	4.3	6	4	3	3.0	4	3	2
Afghanistan	3.17	3.7	3	4	4	2.7	3	3	2
Cambodia	2.50	3.0	3	3	3	2.0	2	2	2
Vietnam	2.17	1.7	2	2	1	2.7	2	2	4
Thailand	2.17	1.7	1	2	2	2.3	2	3	2
China	1.67	1.7	1	2	2	2.0	1	2	3
Laos	1.50	1.0	1	1	1	2.0	1	2	3
North Korea	1.00	1.0	1	1	1	1.0	1	1	1

Indicator scores, Transformation Index BTI 2018

Note: Scores reflect situation as of January 31, 2017. Australia, Japan and New Zealand are not assessed by the BTI 2018, and therefore are not listed with indicator scores above. However, as these countries rank considerably higher than well-performing South Korea in the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Sustainable Governance Indicators, a governance assessment tool for OECD countries, we consider it safe to assume that they hold top positions in intraregional comparison. Timor Leste is not included in the BTI 2018.

With the exception of **China** and some mini-states in **Southeast Asia** and the **South Pacific**, all countries in the region at least formally possess the institutional trappings of representative democracy – that is, popular elections to a national legislature, parliaments, and some form of (often ineffective) separation of powers. The main difference among authoritarian regimes is that between party-state regimes, in which ostensibly democratic institutions exist only on paper, and electoral authoritarian regimes, in which the institutional structures of democracy provide opposition parties and civil society limited opportunities to seek political representation. Among democracies, the most important divide is between the few states advancing towards democratic consolidation (**Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, Bhutan**), countries that have experienced sharp declines in their democratic quality (**Philippines, Bangladesh, Thailand**), and a handful of new democracies that experienced autocratic reversals but recovered, at least to some

extent. Stateness problems persist, especially in **South Asia** and the **South Pacific**, while weak intermediary organizations and insufficient adherence to the rule of law are problematic in most East and Southeast Asian democracies. On average, violations of civil rights highlight the most problematic deficit with regard to the region's democratic structures, as due process, equality before the law and personal integrity are not guaranteed in almost two-thirds of the region's countries. This correlates with citizens' relatively low levels of trust in political institutions in most Asian democracies, as well as an erosion in elites' commitment to representative democracy in countries such as **Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka** and **Thailand**.

China, Laos, North Korea and **Vietnam** are authoritarian states with one-party rule, no separation of powers and severely restricted political-participation and civil rights. **Afghanistan** is a failing state with unstable and unreliable political institutions.

Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan and **Singapore** possess multiparty systems, at least a formal adherence to the rule of law, and limited access to civil rights. Participation rights, and consequently political and social pluralism, exist to some degree, but are still restricted.

In **Nepal**, elections are meaningful, and civil-society participation levels are relatively high. However, these positive aspects are tainted by insufficient protections for civil rights. In **Papua New Guinea**, elections are essentially free but not fair, and are compromised by widespread vote-buying, ballot-rigging and intimidation. However, the rule of law is reasonably well established, especially with regard to the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary. In **Thailand**, elections are contested as a means of selecting political leaders. However, elite conflicts contributed to the breakdown of democracy in a military coup d'état in May 2014. In contrast, **Sri Lanka's** democracy has experienced remarkable resilience in the face of executive aggrandizement. In fact, the **Sri Lankan** case shows that apparent setbacks in democratic practices and institutions may ultimately provide context or catalysts for further democratization.

Bhutan, Indonesia and the **Philippines**, while still demonstrating some deficiencies in democratic governance, are already advanced regarding the institutionalization of democratic processes. Political participation is ensured and the formal rule of law is reasonably well established, even though civil-rights protections show flaws in all three countries and are threatened in the **Philippines** by the heavy-handed "law and order" policies of populist governments.

Australia, Japan and **New Zealand** are consolidated democracies, while **India** and **Taiwan** face hurdles in solidifying democratic rule, which includes mass poverty and social discrimination in **India** and stateness challenges in **Taiwan**. In **South Korea**, political participation rights have increasingly been infringed upon. In all these countries, however, democracy is very unlikely to be overturned. There is uneven respect for political rights, and the rule of law is deficient in some cases, but free and fair elections constitute the only legitimate way of selecting political leaders. Differences exist with regard to the degree of party-system institutionalization, the strength of interest groups, and levels of social self-organization, but all these countries have democratically unified elites.

Analysis

Political participation

Electoral process

To what extent are political representatives determined by general, free and fair elections?

Universal suffrage and national elections are the rule in Asia-Oceania. Elections are free and there is regular turnover of governments in democracies. However, especially in **South Asia**, **Papua New Guinea** and parts of **Southeast Asia**, electoral integrity is low due to organizational problems, political violence and limited state capacities. In most moderate autocracies, semi-competitive elections are the only legitimate way to produce governments, and elections have become more competitive in recent years. Yet in contrast to some other regions, authoritarian elections in **Asia** have had little liberalizing effect, seeming rather to contribute to authoritarian resilience. One worrisome trend is the declining willingness of political elites in some democracies to accept the outcomes of elections, as well as increasing polarization due to sharp social cleavages. Moreover, in cases of protracted conflict in **Afghanistan** and elsewhere (**Bangladesh**, **Papua New Guinea** and **Thailand**), veto powers have disregarded electoral outcomes running counter to their interests. On the other hand, post-election protests in **Indonesia**, **South Korea** and **Taiwan** have not destabilized democracy, as constitutional tribunals were able to mediate these disputes.

Association/assembly rights

To what extent can individuals form and join independent political or civic groups? To what extent can these groups operate and assemble freely?

The regional state of association and assembly rights has slightly declined over the last 15 years and important changes have taken place in a number of countries, although significant differences among countries remain. Full rights to form and join political or civic groups exist in only five of the region's 24 countries. In many democracies, these rights are limited partially due to legal restrictions on leftist or ethnic minority organizations (**South Korea**, **Bhutan**) or ineffective protection against infringements by private armed groups, rouge elements of police and security forces and sectarian extremists (**Bangladesh**, **Indonesia**, **Philippines**). The ability of political parties, NGOs and civic organizations to operate and assemble without interference from the state is restricted or nonexistent in autocracies. In fragile states, this may derive from a lack of political will or state capacity to protect such groups, while other states may use coercive means to control political and civil society, with groups sometimes engaging in self-regulation as a reaction to anticipated government pressure. Governments in **China**, **Laos** and **Vietnam** are comparatively willing to cooperate with "non-political" NGOs, whereas the **North Korean** government prohibits any form of social self-organization.

Freedom of expression

To what extent can citizens, organizations and the mass media express opinions freely?

Media freedoms remain precarious, and freedom of the press is increasingly under pressure in many countries. This is also the case in many democracies, such as **Indonesia**, **South Korea**, the **Philippines** and **Nepal**. In all democracies, with the partial exceptions of **Japan**, **Timor Leste** and **Taiwan**, media pluralism is impaired by oligopolistic ownership structures. Most authoritarian regimes allow some degree of freedom of expression, and a few (**Myanmar**) have relaxed media censorship. **China**, **Laos**, **Vietnam** and especially **North Korea** remain exceptions in this regard. In some regimes, violence against media activists remains a reason for concern (**Afghanistan**, **Bangladesh**, **Cambodia** and the **Philippines**).

The capabilities, tools and websites associated with new communication technologies and social media are now ubiquitous in most (but not all) societies in **Asia** and **Oceania**. Moreover, tools that were designed to facilitate innocuous conversation and social interaction today offer new capabilities to activists and reformers in the region's semi-democratic and authoritarian regimes. Specific examples such as recent election campaigns in **Malaysia** and **Singapore**, anti-corruption movements in **India** and **Pakistan**, and the Sahbhag movement in **Bangladesh** have demonstrated that the growth of Internet use, and in particular the availability of alternative media and regime-critical blogging, have clearly made a political impact. In addition, the Internet provides an online public space in which critical voices have been able to be more freely expressed in many countries. However, it remains uncertain what the cumulative effect of all this will be on democracy and autocracy in **Asia** and **Oceania**. While there is reason to assume that the Internet and new social media will continue to contribute to democratization in Asia's autocratic and semi-democratic regimes, it is also important to caution against unrealistically euphoric views on the emancipatory, egalitarian and liberating impacts of such technologies. While the Internet may be "a raucous and highly democratic world," it clearly does have gatekeepers, often reflects existing socioeconomic and political divisions, and is increasingly commercialized. Although activists have proven extremely capable of circumventing attempts at control, governments around the world are also becoming increasingly sophisticated at filtering, surveilling and silencing critical voices. Some authoritarian governments, such as those in **China** and **Singapore**, have developed highly effective methods of regulating and controlling the Internet and new social media.

Rule of law

Apart from **Australia** and **New Zealand** in the south, and **Japan** and **Taiwan** in the northeast, the rule of law is one of the weakest elements of political development in the region. Generally, democracies adhere more strongly to the rule of law than do authoritarian regimes. Despite some notable exceptions, for example in **India** (and to a lesser extent **Pakistan**), the overall trend has been a negative one, especially with respect to judicial independence and the realization of civil rights. These developments indicate a clear trajectory towards illiberal democracy during the last fifteen years. Moreover, the idea of relatively liberal authoritarianism in Asia, based on formal adherence to the rule of law, is a myth: A few autocracies (**Malaysia**, **Singapore**) perform relatively well, but the rule of law applies to the economy and not to the political arena.

Separation of powers

To what extent is there a working separation of powers (checks and balances)?

It is only in the dimension of the separation of powers that some democracies experienced significant and sustainable positive changes. Notably, systems with a directly elected president with full authority over the cabinet (presidential or presidential-parliamentary systems) often performed better regarding political stability and democratic governance than did countries with parliamentary systems. Excluding the small number of long-established democracies such as **Australia**, **New Zealand**, **India** and **Japan**, the often-assumed virtues of parliamentary government have tended to be transformed into "elective dictatorships," whereas presidential systems have tended to do better in terms of horizontal and vertical accountability. There is little recognition throughout the region of the virtues of the separation of powers between central and local levels of government, and democratic decentralization (except in **India**, **Indonesia** and the **Philippines**) remains weak. Most countries have some form of constitutional review, but courts play a key role in enhancing democratic stability only in **India**, **Indonesia**, **South Korea** and **Taiwan**. In these states, court activity sets in motion a virtuous cycle that encourages compliance with the constitutional order and respect for basic civil and political liberties.

Independent judiciary

To what extent does an independent judiciary exist?

In most countries in **Asia-Oceania**, judicial independence is fragile. It is especially weak in countries that had or still have a socialist law regime as well as in fragile states. An important feature of weak judiciaries in **Asia** is their general lack of technical capacity, especially outside metropolitan areas and in lower-level courts. Infrastructural weaknesses; widespread corruption within the judiciary; hybrid forms of formal judicial systems; and informal, traditional systems of conflict mediation contribute to rather low levels of confidence in the judiciary, hampering prospects for strengthening the rule of law. In many cases, institutional frameworks do not provide effective guarantees of judicial independence. Moreover, in many countries, political leaders rely on the law to govern, but do not accept the idea that the law must also bind the state and state actors. In authoritarian regimes (except for **Pakistan**), courts are regularly used to advance the interests of the government, exercise social control and monitor administrative agents, and thus do not serve as sites of political counterweight.

Civil rights

To what extent are civil rights guaranteed and protected, and to what extent can citizens seek redress for violations of these rights?

The region has demonstrated a negative overall trend in the area of civil rights. This is especially troubling given that civil rights protections are already at a comparatively low level. Even in democracies, except for **Australia, New Zealand, Japan**, and to a lesser extent **South Korea** and **Taiwan**, citizens seeking redress for violations of their rights face manifold obstacles. The reasons for the weak status of civil rights in **Asia** are manifold, but two major factors can be identified. One is the prevalence of government coercion, and the associated misuse of state power by strong governments. The other is a lack of state capacity that contributes to the emergence of “brown areas” and the inability of governments to protect the rights of their citizens against violations by non-state actors.

Projections 2017 – 2030

Political participation

As the past two decades show, democratization in **Asia** has been a gradual movement. Today, multiparty elections and a slow but steady expansion of the space accorded to social organizations are the rule across the region except within the “socialist” party states. Elections have been a core element in transforming authoritarian governments into limited democracies. All new democracies in the region hold competitive and free elections to choose political leaders at the national level of government. In institutional terms, therefore, they have been successfully transformed into minimal democracies. In substantive terms, however, they will become well-functioning, full democracies only when electoral and other political institutions become increasingly responsive to the preferences of the citizenry. This has not been the case in many **Asian** democracies during the last 10 years, and is unlikely to change soon. Furthermore, elections have become a source of political instability in a number of countries, especially where there are deep cleavage-based conflicts, as in **Bangladesh** and **Thailand**. These are likely to continue or even deepen in the short term. Moreover, more than half the countries in the region have yet to introduce free and fair elections. The development of new media in the region since the turn of the century demonstrates that all technology is neutral; thus, the Internet and social-networking tools can be used to advance extremism and anti-democratic agendas just as easily as progressive or democratizing ones. In addition, technologies and software can also be manipulated to expand the reach of the state rather than minimize it. Hence, the often-proclaimed emancipatory potential of these new technologies has yet to materialize in the region.

Rule of law

Most new democracies are far from being well-functioning, liberal democracies. As in other regions, the transformation of rule by law into the rule of law is especially difficult, and most new democracies have not substantially improved their performance over the past decade. Their failures appear to be grounded in factors that are unlikely to change in the short to medium-term, including the fragility of state institutions, low levels of socioeconomic development, and the strength of “formal” rule of law under authoritarian regimes. Moreover, cultural factors also play a role with respect to the rule of law. It is hard to deny that there is a culturally based antipathy to liberal conceptions of a “thick” rule of law. Therefore, the prospects of region-wide, significant improvements are not promising. However, some authoritarian governments, especially in the economically successful countries, realize the necessity of strengthening their judicial systems in order to make credible commitments in the economic sphere. Nevertheless, this is embedded in a particular institutional, cultural and value constellation that entails a strong inclination towards the strategic management of law. Given this and the enduring illiberal mode of democratic governance in most countries, the prospects for a stronger rule of law are not good in many – and perhaps most – countries in the region.

Access and inclusiveness

Regional overview

Access and Inclusiveness		Political & Social Integration				Inclusiveness			
		Party System	Interest Groups	Social Capital	State identity	Poverty & Inequality	Equal Opportunity		
Taiwan	9.16	9.0	9	9	9	9.3	10	9	9
South Korea	7.83	7.0	6	8	7	8.7	10	9	7
Singapore	7.17	5.3	7	4	5	9.0	10	9	8
Malaysia	6.33	5.7	7	5	5	7.0	8	7	6
Indonesia	6.17	6.7	6	7	7	5.7	7	5	5
Sri Lanka	6.00	6.0	6	7	5	6.0	6	6	6
Philippines	6.00	5.7	4	7	6	6.3	7	5	7
India	5.83	6.7	7	7	6	5.0	7	4	4
Bangladesh	5.50	5.3	6	5	5	5.7	9	4	4
Bhutan	5.00	4.3	5	3	5	5.7	7	5	5
Thailand	4.83	4.0	3	4	5	5.7	7	5	4
Papua New Guinea	4.69	4.3	4	5	4	5.0	8	3	4
China	4.50	2.7	1	2	5	6.3	8	5	6
Cambodia	4.14	3.3	3	3	4	5.0	8	4	3
Vietnam	4.17	2.0	1	2	3	6.3	9	5	5
Laos	4.00	2.3	1	1	5	5.7	8	4	5
Pakistan	3.83	4.0	4	4	4	3.7	5	3	3
Nepal	3.67	4.0	3	5	4	3.3	5	2	3
North Korea	2.83	1.0	1	1	1	4.7	10	2	2
Afghanistan	2.83	2.3	2	3	2	3.3	6	1	3
Myanmar	2.67	3.0	3	3	3	2.3	3	2	2

Indicator scores, Transformation Index BTI 2018

Note: Scores reflect situation as of January 31, 2017. Australia, Japan and New Zealand are not assessed by the BTI 2018, and therefore are not listed with indicator scores above. However, as these countries rank considerably higher than well-performing South Korea in the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Sustainable Governance Indicators, a governance assessment tool for OECD countries, we consider it safe to assume that they hold top positions in intraregional comparison. Timor Leste is not included in the BTI 2018.

On average, representativeness within the Asia-Oceania region's political systems is more of a concern than is social inclusiveness, though levels of state identity are generally relatively high. However, some top performers that excel both politically and socioeconomically are generally exempt from this problem. Thus, the open and inclusive **Australia**, **Japan** and **New Zealand**, as well as the economically successful countries of **Singapore**, **South Korea** and **Taiwan**, show low levels of poverty, inequality and discrimination. With regard to political integration, however, interest-group strength and social self-organization levels are significantly lower in authoritarian **Singapore** and **Malaysia** than in democratic Indonesia and India, which in turn are hampered by low levels of socioeconomic development and equal opportunity.

On the other end of the scale, **Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh** and **Pakistan** suffer primarily from state fragility and underdevelopment, while **Afghanistan, Laos** and **North Korea** show extremely low levels of socioeconomic development while also lacking functioning intermediaries between the political system and civil society. As a bright spot for **Laos**, levels of trust and local self-organization are not as low as in the failing state of **Afghanistan** or the closed society of **North Korea**.

China, Sri Lanka, Thailand and **Vietnam** are all relatively successful in fostering socioeconomic inclusion and equal opportunity, but show deficiencies with regard to interest representation. These are particularly grave under the strict one-party rule in **China** and **Vietnam**, but are also increasingly so under military rule in **Thailand**. On a positive note, the resilience of democracy in **Sri Lanka** is supported by a significant increase in political and social integration in recent years.

No trade-off between political access and socioeconomic inclusiveness takes place in **Bhutan** and **Papua New Guinea**. Despite recent successes in **Bhutan**, rural poverty remains widespread, while intermediaries between civil society and the political system are not yet sufficiently established after a long history of monarchic rule. In impoverished **Papua New Guinea**, the party system is fragile and interest representation is personality- or clan-driven rather than representative. Access and inclusiveness are balanced at a more advanced level in the **Philippines**, with high levels of social capital existing in Filipino society.

Analysis

Political and social integration

Party system

To what extent is there a stable and socially rooted party system able to articulate and aggregate societal interests?

Political parties and party systems in **Australia** and **New Zealand** are highly institutionalized and able to articulate and aggregate social interests, while **India** and **Japan** benefit from moderately institutionalized party systems. Among the late-democratizing countries, **Taiwan** and **Indonesia** are the only ones to have developed political parties that are either well institutionalized or at least contribute positively to the democratic system's representativeness and inclusiveness. Even though deficits in democratic quality cannot be attributed to a single factor alone, the incapacity of party systems to accommodate social and political tension has contributed to deep political crises and chronic instability in countries such as **Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines** and **Thailand**. In fact, the feeble institutionalization of political parties and party systems and the lack of adequate opportunities for political representation and participation within political parties are major obstacles to democratic governance in most East and Southeast Asian democracies. In **South Asia**, these issues are often paired with the dominance of specific families and political dynasties. Several cases in Asia even support the argument that institutionalization per se is not intrinsically good for democracy, and that the institutionalization of hegemonic party systems or party-state systems can undermine democratic processes. In moderate autocracies such as **Malaysia** and **Singapore**, well-institutionalized hegemonic parties foster the "iron law of oligarchy," constrain electoral competitiveness, and maintain autocratic stability. In party-state systems such as **China** and **Vietnam**, deinstitutionalization may ultimately open up opportunities for democratization.

Interest groups

To what extent is there a network of cooperative associations or interest groups to mediate between society and the political system?

Along with **Australia** and **New Zealand**, most Asian democracies have a more or less working system of interest groups, although the spectrum of societal interests is often unbalanced. By contrast, the region's autocracies either do not allow autonomous interest groups to organize and mediate between society and the political system, or else regulate and closely monitor social movements, grassroots organizations, NGOs, trade unions, students' associations and professional associations. In some parts of the region, social movements and organizations have emerged, whose actions undermine democracy and civil society. This phenomenon has appeared in a variety of different forms, ranging from ethno-nationalist or fundamentalist religious groups in parts of South and Southeast Asia (i.e., **Myanmar**, **Indonesia** and **Malaysia**) to cycles of mass mobilization and counter-mobilization by highly partisan actors in **Bangladesh** and **Thailand**. Other obstacles to the institutionalization of a working intermediary system include political leaders' antipathy to autonomous unions, the authoritarian character of developmental states in Southeast and East Asia, deep ethnic cleavages in plural societies, and the stigmatization of "pariah entrepreneurs" (mostly Chinese) in some countries. Moreover, rural associations are often marginalized and lack organizational power. However, legacies of social self-organization in associations and interest groups that often reach back into colonial times prevail in places such as **Sri Lanka**, **Bangladesh**, **Pakistan** and the **Philippines**, despite challenging circumstances.

Social capital

To what extent have social self-organization and the construction of social capital advanced?

Although the level of social capital varies widely across countries, many countries in Asia have levels of social trust comparable to those in **Latin America**, lower than those in Eastern Europe, markedly less than in **Australia** and **New Zealand**, but higher than in **Africa** or the **post-Soviet** region. In general, developing countries tend to have lower levels of social capital than wealthier, more developed countries. However, the direction of causality remains unclear, and within the region, the distribution of social capital varies widely across countries and communities. Predominantly Catholic (i.e., **Philippines**) and Muslim societies exhibit lower levels of general trust, social cohesion and social capital than do countries such as **Japan**, **Korea** and **Taiwan**. However, levels of social capital are also low in **China** and **Vietnam**. This implies that there is no single trend in the region. With few exceptions, "Sino-Confucian" societies and countries that have a more substantial share of Buddhist populations perform better in the area of social capital and social cohesion than countries with predominantly Muslim or Hindu populations. An exception is post-genocidal **Cambodia**, which clearly reflects the corroding effect of still unhealed wounds from its genocidal past.

Inclusiveness & non-discrimination

State identity

To what extent do all groups in society have access to citizenship and naturalization? To what extent do all relevant groups in society agree about citizenship and accept the nation-state as legitimate?

Apart from **Australia**, **New Zealand**, the **two Koreas** and **Japan**, virtually all countries in Asia-Oceania suffer in one way or another from ethno-nationalist conflict. But in contrast to fears articulated in the late 1990s that democratization could trigger conflicts over nation-state legitimacy, the nation-state is widely seen as legitimate by vast majorities of citizens even within most (defective) democracies. However, there is conflict between state laicism and secular

nationalism and Islamist conceptions of statehood in Muslim countries in South (**Afghanistan, Bangladesh** and **Pakistan**) and Southeast Asia (**Indonesia, Malaysia**). In predominantly Buddhist countries (**Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Myanmar** and **Thailand**), members of minority groups belonging to Muslim, Christian or Hindu communities are denied effective citizenship rights or are even denied citizenship outright (the Karen and other “hill tribes” in the Thai-Burmese border lands, many Muslims along the **Myanmar-Bangladesh** border, Lhotshampas in **Bhutan**) because governments and parts of the local population claim they are illegal immigrants who cannot be allowed to apply for naturalization. Conflicts between competing varieties of nationalism and particularistic conceptions of national identity are the rule in most countries with ethnic minorities, sometimes provoking harsh measures by authoritarian governments. However, during the last 10 to 15 years, there has been a decline in communal and ethno-nationalist violence across most of Southeast and East Asia. Some progress has been observed in **Indonesia, Laos, Sri Lanka** and the **Philippines**, for example, while **Afghanistan, Pakistan, Thailand** and **Myanmar** remain the most precarious cases.

Socioeconomic barriers

To what extent are significant parts of the population fundamentally excluded from society due to poverty and inequality?

With respect to the poverty and deep inequalities that block parts of the population from equal participation in economic, social and even political life, there is a clear regional divide in Asia-Oceania between South Asia on the one hand and most of East and Southeast Asia on the other. While in Northeast Asia and in most Southeast Asian countries, economic growth has contributed to impressive successes in poverty reduction and significant improvements in human development, most South Asian countries are stuck in a condition of underdevelopment. For structural, cultural and political reasons, the vast majority of the population is excluded from access to life opportunities. **Afghanistan, Bangladesh** and **Pakistan** are the most problematic cases in this regard. There have been some improvements in **Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar** and **Nepal**, but to a significantly smaller degree than in **China** or **Vietnam**, for instance. Moreover, it is important to note the distinct differences among Asian democracies regarding the openness of the political system to demands from various societal groups for better social policies and adequate social services such as health insurance. While governments in Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand have adapted to growing pressure for more and inclusive social policies, elected governments in **India, Papua New Guinea** and the **Philippines** were unable to deal effectively with socioeconomic barriers in their societies.

Equal opportunity

To what extent does equality of opportunity exist?

Given the deep-rooted inequalities in South Asia, disadvantaged groups continue to face difficulties in most countries. Apart from **Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan**, and the **Philippines**, the situation in most countries in East and Southeast Asia remains highly problematic. But even the more ‘advanced’ societies such as **South Korea, Australia** and **Japan** still have a long way to go in overcoming systemic discrimination against women, indigenous people and ethnic minorities. While most countries have some form of legal provisions barring discrimination, and some have implemented affirmative-action policies on behalf of ethnic or religious minority groups, minorities in many (if not most) countries in practice lack equal access to education, public office or employment opportunities. Gender-based discrimination remains a particular concern in many countries, including the OECD democracies. Overall, there has been little improvement in the region over the last decade.

Patterns of discrimination

To what extent is the inclusiveness of societies hampered by structural discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or gender?

As in other parts of the world, discrimination based on gender is a concern of varying seriousness in all of Asia-Oceania, but is especially problematic in less developed countries. By contrast, discrimination based on ethnicity or religion is not a major inclusiveness concern in countries such as **Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea** or **Taiwan**, although it does exist. By contrast, discrimination grounded in ethnicity and religion is probably the most serious impediment to inclusiveness and non-discrimination throughout the rest of the region.

Projections 2017 – 2030

Political and social integration

Overall, social change and economic development increase the societal interests' capabilities to organize. In some countries, democratization and liberalization has contributed to the rise of social organizations and interest groups. However, illiberal conceptions of state-society relations and technocratic conceptions of authoritarian governance will likely hamper quick or strong improvements. Moreover, there is little empirical evidence supporting assumptions that the institutionalization of political parties and the party system will improve. The currently low levels of social capital may further deteriorate in some countries as a consequence of internal conflict, sectarian or ethno-nationalist strife, and deepening inequalities. But given the data available and the presence of only a few reliable studies, it is difficult to forecast precisely how social capital will develop across different dimensions of social relationships, distinct places and communities.

Inclusiveness & non-discrimination

Political and social integration varies tremendously across Asia-Oceania, providing for rather different starting points in the development of increasingly inclusive systems. While some countries have benefited from comparatively egalitarian development patterns in previous decades (often under authoritarian governments), new democracies and authoritarian regimes are often unable or unwilling to improve equal access for marginalized groups or accommodate new or excluded interests. While economic growth in most countries of East and Southeast Asia will help improve the situation, most societies in South Asia will find it extremely difficult to reduce socioeconomic barriers or overcome institutions, traditions and values that contain embedded social inequalities. Moreover, in contrast to the relatively egalitarian development in Asian developmental states of the first (**Japan**) and second (**Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan**, and to a lesser extent **Indonesia, Malaysia** and **Thailand**) generations, capitalist development in high-growth economies such as **China, India** and **Vietnam** has been more uneven, created more inequality and been less inclusive. This, in turn, provides fertile soil for new conflicts and political instability.

Management and policies

Regional overview

Management and Policies		Capacity & Efficiency					Consensus Building		
		Prioritization	Implementa-tion	Efficiency	Anti-corruption	Conflict Management	Civil soc. participation		
Taiwan	8.50	8.5	8	8	9	9	8.5	8	9
South Korea	7.00	7.0	8	6	8	6	7.0	8	6
Bhutan	6.83	7.3	6	7	7	9	6.0	7	5
Singapore	6.83	7.0	5	5	9	9	6.5	8	5
India	6.17	6.8	7	7	6	5	6.0	5	7
Sri Lanka	5.83	5.3	6	5	5	5	7.0	7	7
Indonesia	5.50	5.8	6	6	5	4	6.0	5	7
Malaysia	5.33	5.5	5	5	7	5	6.0	5	5
China	4.83	5.3	5	5	6	5	4.0	5	3
Philippines	4.67	4.5	6	4	4	4	5.0	5	5
Vietnam	4.33	4.5	5	5	4	4	4.0	6	2
Papua New Guinea	4.33	4.0	5	4	4	3	5.0	5	5
Thailand	4.00	4.8	4	5	5	5	2.5	2	3
Bangladesh	3.83	3.8	5	4	3	3	4.0	4	4
Nepal	3.50	3.0	3	3	3	3	4.5	5	4
Myanmar	3.50	3.0	3	3	3	3	4.5	4	5
Laos	3.50	3.5	4	3	5	2	3.5	6	1
Afghanistan	3.50	3.3	5	3	3	2	4.0	4	4
Pakistan	3.33	3.5	4	4	4	2	3.0	3	3
Cambodia	2.83	2.8	4	3	3	1	3.0	3	3
North Korea	1.33	1.3	1	1	1	2	1.5	2	1

Indicator scores, Transformation Index BTI 2018

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There is an apparent democracy/autocracy divide in the quality of political management in Asia-Oceania, as is perhaps to be expected when prominently including consensus-building factors such as conflict management and civil-society participation. Yet, a closer glance at the short-term trends over the past five years shows that the quality of political management has also declined in many democracies, and that anti-corruption policies and civil-society participation are the features most lacking in both democracies and non-democracies in Asia-Oceania. Nevertheless, the bottom half of this ranking is reserved almost exclusively for failing states and autocratic regimes. In Bangladesh, low government effectiveness, especially in prioritizing its own agenda, combines with deficiencies in mediating conflict as well as serious inefficiencies and poor anti-corruption programs. In Papua New Guinea, the marginalization of civil society exacerbates the inefficiencies and corrupt nature of governance. As these examples of bad democratic governance show, the democracy/autocracy divide is perhaps not as clear-cut as it appears at first glance.

Indeed, Malaysia and Singapore provide better governance than most other countries, especially in terms of efficiency. Another success story is the rise in governance quality in Bhutan, which now outperforms Indonesia and the **Philippines** in political management, especially with regard to strategic capacity, efficiency and anti-corruption policy. However, more problematic trends are visible in politically regressing countries. In **Thailand**, the society is extremely polarized, and conflict-management capabilities are weak. In **Sri Lanka**, corruption is rampant, while the ethno-nationalist government until 2015 used corruption charges as a political weapon and to discourage civil-society participation. Yet, this last country also demonstrates that democracies in Asia are able to recover from setbacks and backsliding.

Apart from well-managed **Singapore**, some consolidated democracies excel in governance. Conflict management is outstanding in **Japan**, **New Zealand** and **Taiwan**, while civil-society participation is particularly strong in **Australia**, **India**, **New Zealand** and **Taiwan**. Setting strategic priorities, implementing government policies and making effective use of resources are strong points of democratic governance in **Australia**, **New Zealand**, **South Korea** and **Taiwan**. **Australia** and **New Zealand**, together with **Singapore** and **Taiwan**, have succeeded in systematically fighting corruption, whereas in India, corruption remains an impediment to more effective democratic governance.

Analysis

Strategic capacity & efficiency

Prioritization

To what extent does the government set and maintain strategic priorities?

Setting strategic priorities is a strength of the governments in **South Korea** and **Taiwan**, as well as in those of **Australia** and **New Zealand**. The remaining democracies – **Bhutan**, **Japan**, **India**, **Indonesia**, **the Philippines** and especially **Nepal** – are generally able to set strategic priorities, but their governments also show deficits in organizing associated policy measures. Some authoritarian regimes, particularly **China**, **Singapore**, and **Vietnam**, are well-known for their ability to set and maintain strategic priorities. However, governments in these countries prioritize a strategy of economic and social development that aims at containing the political impact and democratizing potential of socioeconomic change. In other words, these governments' highest priority is the political survival of the authoritarian regime. Other authoritarian and (semi-)democratic regimes in the region are either unwilling or unable to prioritize and organize policies in a consistent manner, instead relying on ad hoc measures aiming at short-term political benefits. Though there is no single trend in the region, it is worth noting that during the past 10 years, only **China**, **Singapore**, **South Korea**, **Taiwan** and **Vietnam** (with the previous caveat) have consistently shown good economic management. On the other end of the scale, political management in **Afghanistan**, **Bangladesh**, **Cambodia**, **Pakistan** and **Sri Lanka** (not to mention **North Korea**) has been especially poor with regard to providing citizens with equal access to economic and political participation and supporting democratic institutions.

Implementation

How effective is the government in implementing its own policies?

OECD countries such as **Australia**, **New Zealand**, **Japan** and **South Korea**, as well as countries with a similar level of economic and social development such as **Singapore** and **Taiwan**, have elaborate implementation structures at their disposal. While shifting policy preferences, electoral cycles, legislative gridlock and coalition politics sometimes hinder effective policy implementation in democracies – which is not the case in **Singapore** – governments in these countries are able

to implement their policies effectively most of the time. It is worth noting that with the exception of **Australia**, these are all unitary states with strong central governments, although there is a considerable degree of democratic decentralization. The situation in other democracies is more problematic, partly due to a lack of effective decentralization, but mostly because of a legacy of fragile stateness. In fact, the most obvious implementation failures concern countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia, and are characterized by structural barriers such as weak administrative, infrastructural and extractive state capacities. On the other hand, authoritarian regimes such as **China** and **Vietnam** benefit from the legacies of early statehood, in particular a heritage of strong state institutions and meritocratic bureaucracy that survived the period of state socialism.

Efficient use of assets

To what extent does the government make efficient use of available human, financial and organizational resources?

A few countries in the region – most particularly **Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea** and **Taiwan** – have administrations in place that are able to make efficient use of available resources and whose bureaucratic quality is consistently high. In the remaining countries, bureaucratic quality is lower, emphasis on personal connections or political loyalty prevails over professional competence, and budgeting is not transparent. However, it is important to differentiate between countries such as **China, Thailand** and **Vietnam** with developed state capacities that are able to make efficient use of public resources, and disorganized or even dysfunctional bureaucracies in countries such as **Afghanistan, Cambodia** and **Myanmar**. The last decade has seen the emergence of a broader divide between countries and sub-regions, as those with good or very high government effectiveness and bureaucratic quality are pulling away from those that have been unable to reduce the waste of resources, and where the inefficient use of resources continues almost unabated.

Anti-corruption policy

To what extent does the government successfully contain corruption?

Apart from **Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore** and **Taiwan**, all countries in Asia-Oceania have difficulties fighting corruption. During the last 10 years, **South Korea** and **Taiwan** succeeded in establishing successful anti-corruption mechanisms. However, the remainder of the region has for the most part failed to implement any serious anti-corruption policy. Moreover, in some notorious cases such as **China, North Korea** and **Thailand**, corruption allegations have been used as a political tool by governments to blame individuals or political opponents for government failures, while in some countries such as **Myanmar, Pakistan** and **Papua New Guinea**, corruption is endemic.

Consensus-building

Cleavage/conflict management

To what extent is the political leadership able to moderate cleavage-based conflict?

Cleavage-based conflicts are present across the region, including in **Australia** and **New Zealand**, where democratic structures and vibrant civil societies have traditionally been factors facilitating moderation. In countries such as **Bangladesh, Pakistan** and **Thailand**, polarization has reached unprecedented levels, resulting in mass mobilization, political violence and a resurgence of the military as a moderating power. Currently, the ability to moderate cleavage-based conflict is strong in **Bhutan, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea** and **Taiwan**, but also in authoritarian regimes such as **Singapore**. By contrast, governments in countries suffering from decades-long insurgencies (i.e., **India, Indonesia, Myanmar** and **Pakistan**) continue to have difficulties in moderating conflict. A few governments such as **Laos** and (since 2015) **Sri Lanka**, have improved their ability to moderate conflicts, whereas in countries such as **Cambodia, Malaysia** and **Myanmar** (despite

the NLD-government's efforts), the situation is deteriorating.

Civil-society participation

To what extent does the political leadership enable the participation of civil society in the political process?

Weak civil-society participation is a feature of the political process in most Asia-Oceania countries. While there is a long tradition of civil-society involvement in the political process, it is only in **India** and **Taiwan**, and to some extent in **Indonesia** and **Nepal**, that civil-society actors are more or less regularly involved in consultation and decision-making. In the other democracies – including **Japan** and **South Korea** – civil-society involvement remains half-hearted, sporadic or neglected. There is remarkable variation among authoritarian regimes, with **North Korea** (no civil society participation at all) and **Malaysia**, **Sri Lanka** and **Thailand** marking opposite ends of the continuum. On a positive note, civil-society participation has increased somewhat in **Myanmar** and **Vietnam** in recent years, although it remains to be seen how durable this trend will be.

Projections 2017 – 2030

Strategic capacity & efficiency

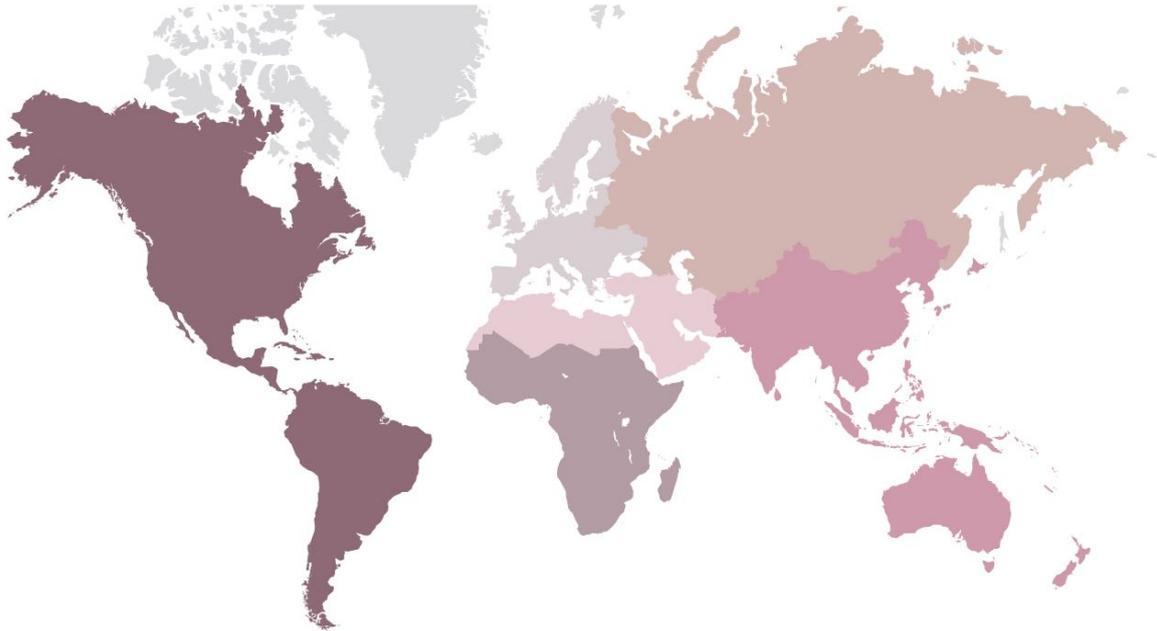
The future development of strategic capacity and government effectiveness is likely to produce a widening gap between countries already on the path to good governance and countries that today suffer from mediocre or bad governance. Existing patterns of governance in the region suggest that certain historical legacies as well as economic and cultural conditions can either favor or impede well-functioning institutions. These can be hard to change in the short-term. However, government performance, or at least the effective production of public goods, is an important source of regime legitimacy for authoritarian and democratic regimes in Asia. Indeed, political legitimacy in autocratic and democratic regimes depends at least as much on the quality of governance as on the provision of material goods. Especially important for regime support are citizens' perceptions that their governments are responsive to their needs, effective at controlling corruption, and fair and equal in their treatment of ordinary people. Thus, low levels of strategic capacity, inefficient resource use, and especially perceptions of widespread and unabated corruption will threaten regime support, and ultimately political stability as well.

Consensus-building

Appropriate consensus-building is a widely unexploited resource in most regimes in Asia-Oceania. There is an emerging consensus on the practical importance of democracy in some countries, but in most authoritarian regimes, the consensus among decision-makers is that expanding civil-society participation could pose unpredictable risks to the existing order's cohesion and resilience. Therefore, it is unlikely that authoritarian governments will engage in new and constructive forms of consensus-building. Although there are some promising signs in places such as **Myanmar**, **Nepal** and **Vietnam**, the prevailing model in most countries (including many democracies) is one of coerced acceptance rather than negotiated consensus. Recent developments in countries such as **Bangladesh**, **Pakistan**, **Sri Lanka** and **Thailand** indicate that political elites are becoming less willing to engage in forms of consensus-building that include civil-society participation.



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