Global governance report highlights future shock risks as democratic accountability slips and state capacity plateaus

Thursday 7 May, 2026

Los Angeles/DNA

The newly released 2026 Berggruen Governance Index (BGI) paints a mixed picture of global governance heading into a future of mounting shocks, finding widespread gains in public-goods provision from 2000 to 2023 even as democratic accountability edged down and state capacity showed little overall improvement.

The BGI, presented Wednesday by an international group of governance scholars, analyses measurable benchmarks of democratic accountability across 145 countries.

On a 100-point scale, the global score for democratic accountability slipped slightly from 65 in 2000 to 64 in 2023, the most recent data used in the project. The wave of democratisation observed in the closing decades of the last century has stalled in the last 15 years. Democratic accountability fell in 54 countries while it improved in 48 countries.

Yet the BGI — a collaborative project of the Luskin School of Public Affairs at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Berlin's Hertie School and the Berggruen Institute, a think tank headquartered in Los Angeles — captures remarkably widespread growth in provision of public goods.

Encompassing healthcare, education, infrastructure, environmental sustainability and conditions to foster employment and rising prosperity, public goods improved in 135 of the countries studied, while declining slightly in just four. The global average jumped from 58 to 69 points from 2000 to 2023.

The third component of what the BGI authors refer to as the "governance triangle" is state capacity, defined as the ability to tax, borrow and spend, control territory, operate scrupulous, competent bureaucracies and administer predictable rule of law. The index finds the global average ticking up from 48 to 49 points; 56 countries had increased state capacity while 57 declined.

"What does it tell us about the world ahead?" Prof. Helmut K. Anheier, a Luskin School sociologist and BGI principal investigator, asked during the public release of the 2026 BGI on the UCLA campus.

"Countries are not really improving in their governance performance in significant ways. … We're not really having forward-looking investment in governance capacity. There is considerable inertia."

The largest improvements across all three BGI components occurred in Gambia, which the report groups with "low-capacity developing states." These states score low across the board, particularly in the provision of public goods. This cluster constitutes the poorest countries with the least developed economies, which face the most serious challenges.

"They have the greatest exposure to likely future crises, whether it's global warming, whether it's a new pandemic, whether it's another financial crisis, whether it's the impact of AI," Anheier said. "And they have the least capacity to respond to it."

Bhutan, Georgia, Iraq and Tunisia — which make up the remaining top five countries with the largest improvements in the BGI — are classified as "capacity-constrained states." They tend to be middle-income with struggling democracies. These countries score higher across the board than the low-capacity developing states, but their state capacity tends to lag compared to public goods and democratic accountability.

The capacity-constrained states risk falling into "a cycle that erodes the institutions they have built," Anheier said.

"Consolidated democratic states", a cluster of most of the world's richest countries, which score highly in all three BGI components, have to confront domestic complacency. Further, in the United States and some others, "political dysfunction" is leaving mounting problems unaddressed and risking erosion of state capacity, Anheier said.

Media:



Related Sectors:

Government ::

Related Keywords:

Governance :: Economy :: Democracy :: Berggruen Governance Index ::

Scan Me:

At the other end of the spectrum, the country with the farthest fall on the BGI since 2000 is Nicaragua. Second from last is Venezuela, followed by Hong Kong, Hungary and Turkey. The rest of the bottom 10 are Russia, Iran, Poland, El Salvador and Belarus.

Since 2023, which is the last year of data available for the study, Poland and Hungary have both seen government changes via election, despite serious democratic backsliding. Both had fallen out of the group of “consolidated democratic states” by 2023 and moved into the capacity constrained cluster.

The other eight countries at the bottom of the list are all places that once had some semblance of competitive elections, but by now have little or no remaining pretense of democracy. They are grouped by the authors among the “authoritarian and hybrid states”, which have by far the lowest democratic accountability but outperform even some struggling democracies in delivering public goods.

These regimes have tended toward faster economic growth in the period observed. But that seeming prosperity, typically fueled by extractive industries or overreliance on exports, masks “serious institutional weaknesses in these countries, including divided elites,” Anheier said.

Relatively few countries — 21 of the 145 — changed enough for better or worse to be classified in a new group by the end of the 23-year study period.

“Movement between them is rare, but this is largely what we should expect,” said Stella Ghervas, a UCLA historian on a panel of experts who discussed the BGI findings Wednesday. “Government systems are not created in a moment. They evolve over long periods of time.”

Local conditions shaping governance in each country can rarely be quickly reset through political will or even external shocks, Joseph C. Saraceno, a Luskin School data scientist and BGI co-author, said Wednesday.

“Despite all the talk of major transformations happening in global affairs, the underlying configuration of governance simply doesn't appear to change very much,” Saraceno said. “We use the term inertia to describe this reoccurring pattern. In other words, the structures of global governance are resistant to movement as the conditions beneath them are quite sticky: political economies, demographics, resource endowments. These are deeply layered, and they push each country toward the world that it already inhabits.”

But the challenges lurking around the world may not wait for the slow and difficult processes of political change and development to catch up.

“With the few exceptions of those countries in the consolidated democratic world,” Anheier said, “the great majority of the countries in the world is ill-prepared for the future.”

The full report, ' 2026 Berggruen Governance Index - The Four Worlds of Governance', can be viewed and downloaded from the website of the UCLA's Luskin School.

Frank Fuhrig, DNA

This text and the accompanying material (photos and graphics) are an offer from the Democracy News Alliance, a close co-operation between Agence France-Presse (AFP, France), Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (ANSA, Italy), The Canadian Press (CP, Canada), Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa, Germany) and PA Media (PA, UK). All recipients can use this material without the need for a separate subscription agreement with one or more of the participating agencies. This includes the recipient's right to publish the material in own products.

The DNA content is an independent journalistic service that operates separately from the other services of the participating agencies. It is produced by editorial units that are not involved in the production of the agencies' main news services. Nevertheless, the editorial standards of the agencies and their assurance of completely independent, impartial and unbiased reporting also apply here.

Contact:

Democracy News Alliance
Christian Röwekamp
roewekamp.christian@dpa.com

Company Contact:

_

news aktuell

E. desk@newsaktuell.de
W. https://www.newsaktuell.de/

View Online

Additional Assets:

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.newsaktuell.pressat.co.uk