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## Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index II: Initial results, 2000–2019

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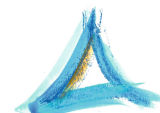
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## SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index II: Initial results, 2000–2019

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## Abstract

This article presents an overview of some of the main findings from our analysis of the Berggruen Governance Index for the 2000–2019 period. It first examines overall governance performance across world regions, singles out general trends and identifies top and bottom performers. It then briefly reviews the comparative governance performance of world powers like the United States, Brazil, China, major European countries, India and Russia as well as other selected countries in the post-Soviet space. Finally, we address more analytic questions to show the versatility of the index for hypothesis testing and theoretical purposes.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This article presents an overview of some of the main findings from our analysis of the Berggruen Governance Index (BGI), which is described in more detail in this special issue's opening article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: I. Conceptual and Methodological Framework.' Given the scale and scope of the BGI, it will not be possible to review all countries, indices and indicators. Instead, we first look at overall governance performance across world regions, single out general trends and identify top and bottom performers. We then review the performance of major world powers including Brazil, China, the European Union (EU), India, Russia and the United States (US) and of selected countries in the post-Soviet space. We use this comparison also to explore the versatility of these measurements to address key conceptual issues and for theoretical purposes. Prominent among them is a look at the twin fallacies of governance: the 'democratic fallacy', which assumes that democracy is sufficient for improved governance performance, and the 'autocratic fallacy', which assumes that state capacity alone matters for the delivery of public goods. The purpose

of this article is mainly descriptive, and rather than generating hypotheses we will point to critical questions as they emerge and prepare the ground for the conceptual implications that are the topic of Anheier and Kononykhina's article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: III. Implications for Theory and Policy', also in this special issue.

## 2 | GOVERNANCE PERFORMANCE BY DIMENSION

As explained in this special issue's opening article 'Introducing the Berggruen Governance Index: I. Conceptual and Methodological Framework', the BGI's conceptualisation of governance sees public goods provision resulting from the interplay of state capacity and democratic accountability, depicted in the Governance Triangle. Following the approach outlined in that article and its Appendix S1, we estimated index scores for these three dimensions and their corresponding subdimensions. The Appendix S1 to this article provides the results of the 134 countries covered by the BGI in alphabetical order on each dimension for 2000,

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2010 and 2019, and then in descending order according to the sum of the three index scores for 2019.<sup>1</sup> In this section, we offer an overview of the results by key dimension.

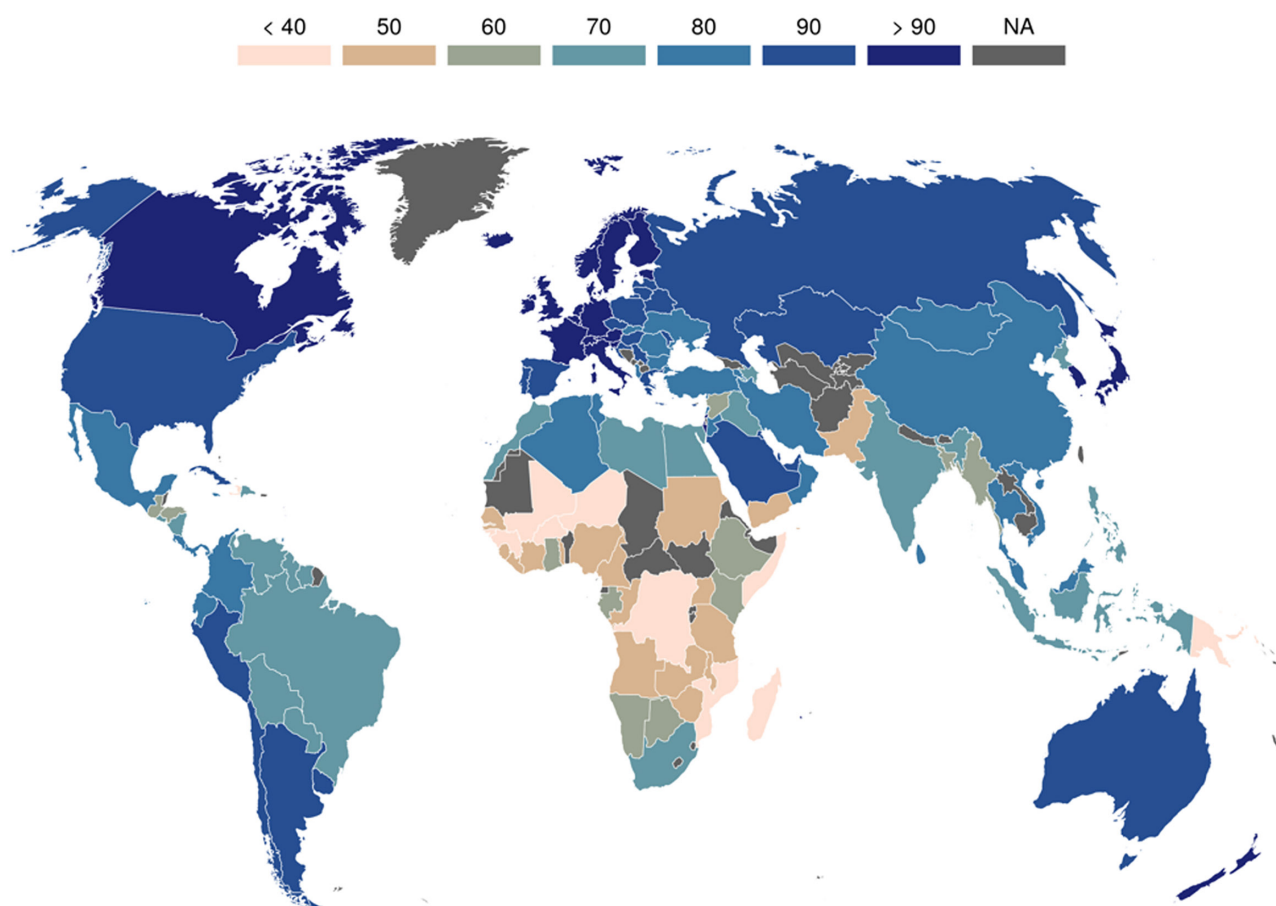
## 2.1 | Public goods provision

Not surprisingly, whether governments can provide high levels of public goods varies both between and within regions. [Figure 1](#) shows that while public goods scores in the year 2019 in Europe, the Americas and East Asia are generally higher than in other regions, there are nonetheless substantial variations within each region as well. For example, Western European countries like Germany (95), France (91) and the Netherlands (92) along with Scandinavia (ranging between 91 and 94) provide higher levels of public goods than Eastern European countries like Bulgaria (72), Romania (75) and Hungary (82). Similarly, within the Americas, Canada (93) delivers public goods better than the United States (86), and the latter better than Mexico (76). In Latin America, Chile (83) and Uruguay (83) offer higher public goods levels than Brazil (69) and Colombia (73). Taking a closer look at Asia, China (74)

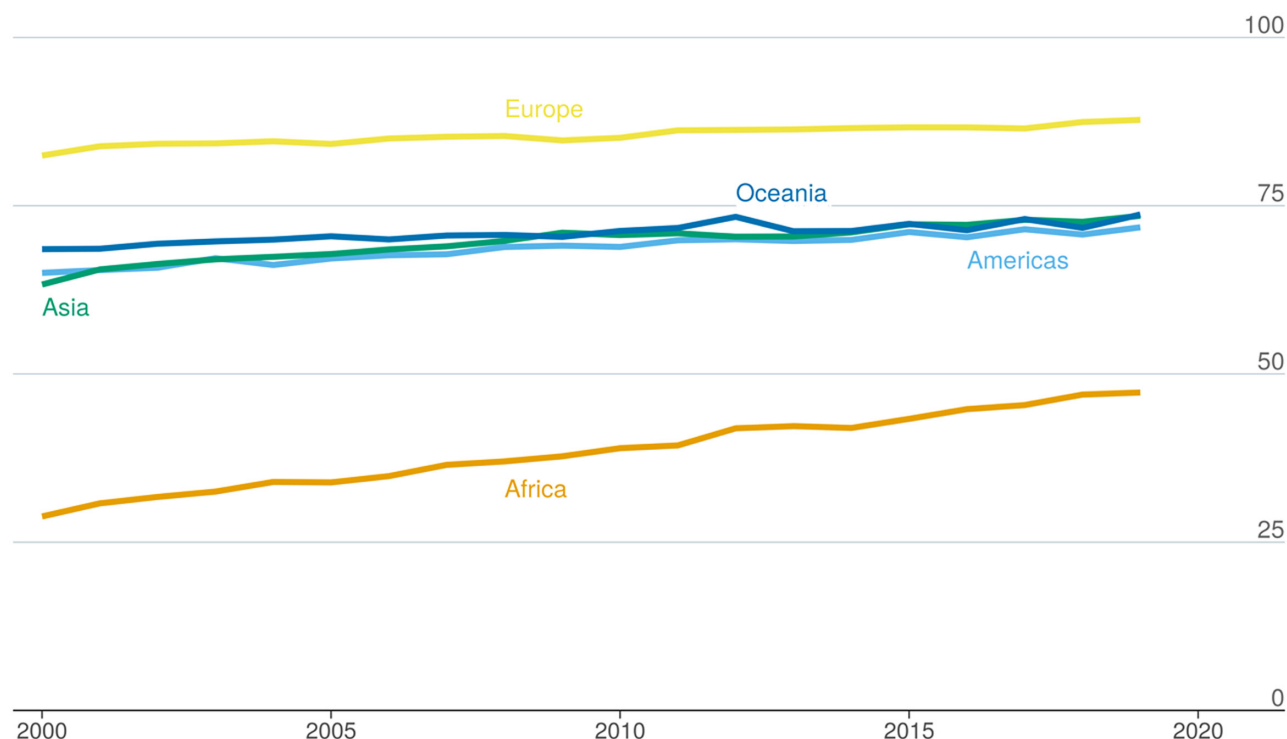
outperforms India (64) in public goods provision, and Japan (100) and South Korea (92) perform even better than China. Finally, countries in Northern and Southern Africa, e.g., Algeria (75), Morocco (65), South Africa (63) and Botswana (52), supply public goods more extensively than most countries in Central Africa, e.g., Mali (38) and Mozambique (29).

While a 2019 snapshot of world regions is helpful in developing a sense of overall cross-country variations in public goods provision, a look at regional averages over time offers additional insights. Most striking about the trends revealed in [Figure 2](#) is that public goods provision in Africa has clearly improved since the early 2000s, from a 2000 average of 30 to 48 in 2019. Often seen as the world's most deprived continent in terms of poverty, political instability, lagging economic and institutional development, low life expectancy and poor health, Africa has nonetheless made substantial progress—albeit frequently from a rather low level of public goods provision.<sup>2</sup>

For example, Angola's level of public goods provision increased from 24 in 2000 to 42 by 2019, Burkina Faso's from a low of 8 to 35, and Ghana's from 35 to 57 in the same period. Several countries in the region show moderate increases (Botswana from 47 to 52), and importantly



**FIGURE 1** Public Goods Index by country, 2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 2** Changes in Public Goods Index by region, 2000–2019. Source: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

there is virtually no backsliding on public goods provision among the sub-Saharan African countries included in the BGI. The substantial improvement in Africa—before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic—is remarkable. Since the public goods index documents a longer-term trend towards improved levels of provision in most African countries, that achievement could now come under threat due to vaccine nationalism, a slowing world economy, looming debt crises and the impact of Russia's war on Ukraine on world food supplies.

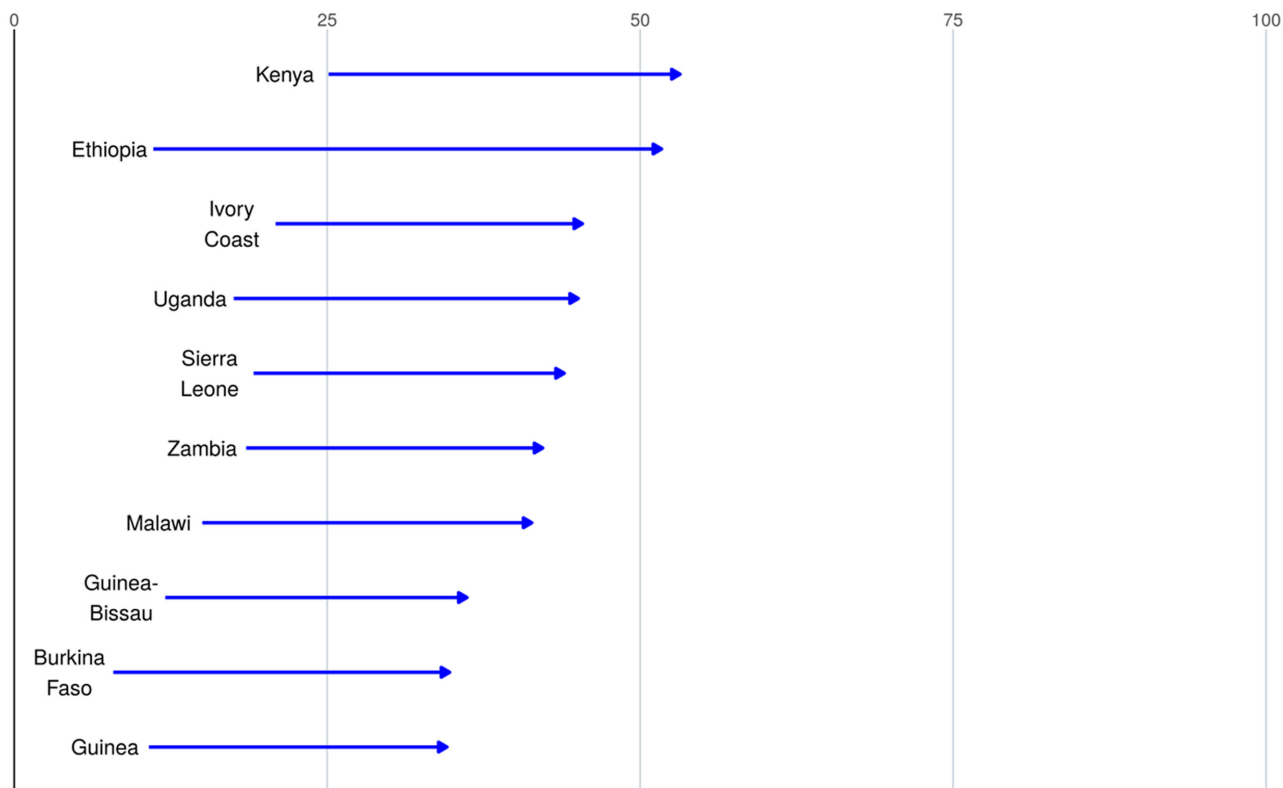
As Figure 2 shows, all regions are in fact better off but have not improved to the same extent as Africa. On average, Europe, the Americas, Asia and Oceania have only slightly raised the supply of public goods between 2000 and 2019, all improving in the single digits.<sup>3</sup> Latin America, after the 'lost decades' of the late 20th century, when the region was plagued by financial and political instability (Sims & Romero, 2013), seems to have gained ground, moving from 63 to 70.<sup>4</sup> Chile (from 74 in 2000 to 83 in 2019), Ecuador (64–79) and Peru (63–80) showed the largest gains in Latin America, while all other countries in the region showed mostly smaller improvements.

Stating that all world regions progressed does not mean that all countries did so at the same rate or even moved forward at all. By looking at regional averages, we naturally tend to miss specific country successes and failures as they are essentially 'averaged out'. In Africa, Nigeria, the continent's economically most powerful country, is a case in point. Even though its public goods index scores increased from 23 in 2000 to

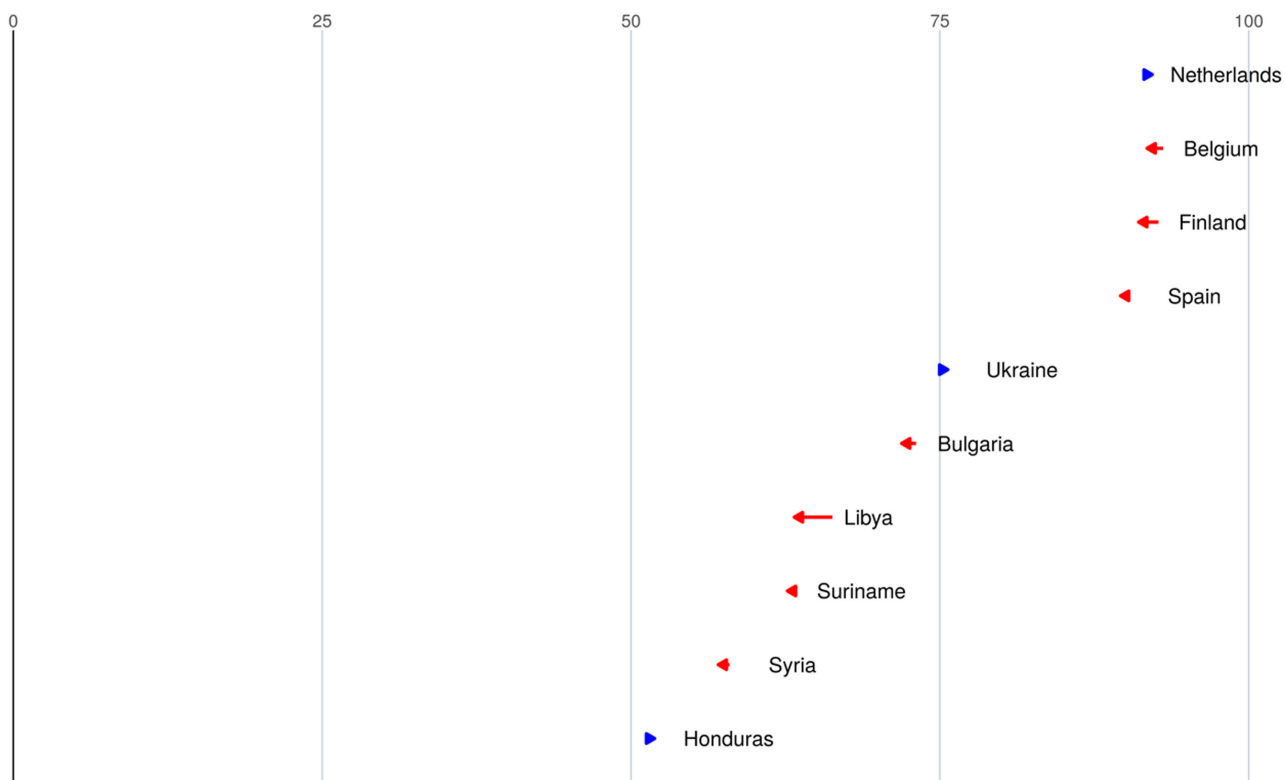
43 in 2019, its performance remains close to the sub-Saharan averages (26–45). Likewise, Brazil's score improved only slightly from 65 to 69 over the same period and is similar to the Latin American average, and in Asia, Malaysia remained largely stable (74–78) as well. Disproportionate improvement in performance took place not among the regional powerhouses, but more in smaller and mid-sized countries, with Madagascar as a case in point in Africa (see below), Chile in Latin America and South Korea in Asia.

Overall, however, Africa deserves special mention because the improvements are not just visible in regional averages, but also if we look at the ten worst and best-performing countries on the entire public goods index in terms of 2000–2019 changes. Figure 3 illustrates that the 10 most improved countries on the public goods index are, in fact, all located in Africa. Even though very low starting levels doubtlessly matter for this outcome, the score improvements in countries like Kenya (from 25 to 53) and Ethiopia (from 11 to 52) are nonetheless noteworthy. We will explore below to what extent these increases coincided with increases in state capacity and democratic accountability. For now, we simply note that the public goods index captures a significant upward trend in public goods provision in Africa and a more moderate upward trend in other world regions.

A similar look at the ten least improved countries in Figure 4 essentially confirms that public goods provision has generally improved in most countries. There appear to be no countries where public goods declined significantly. Even war-torn countries like Libya (a 6-point drop)



**FIGURE 3** Countries with most improvement in public goods provision, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 4** Countries with least improvement or decline in public goods provision, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

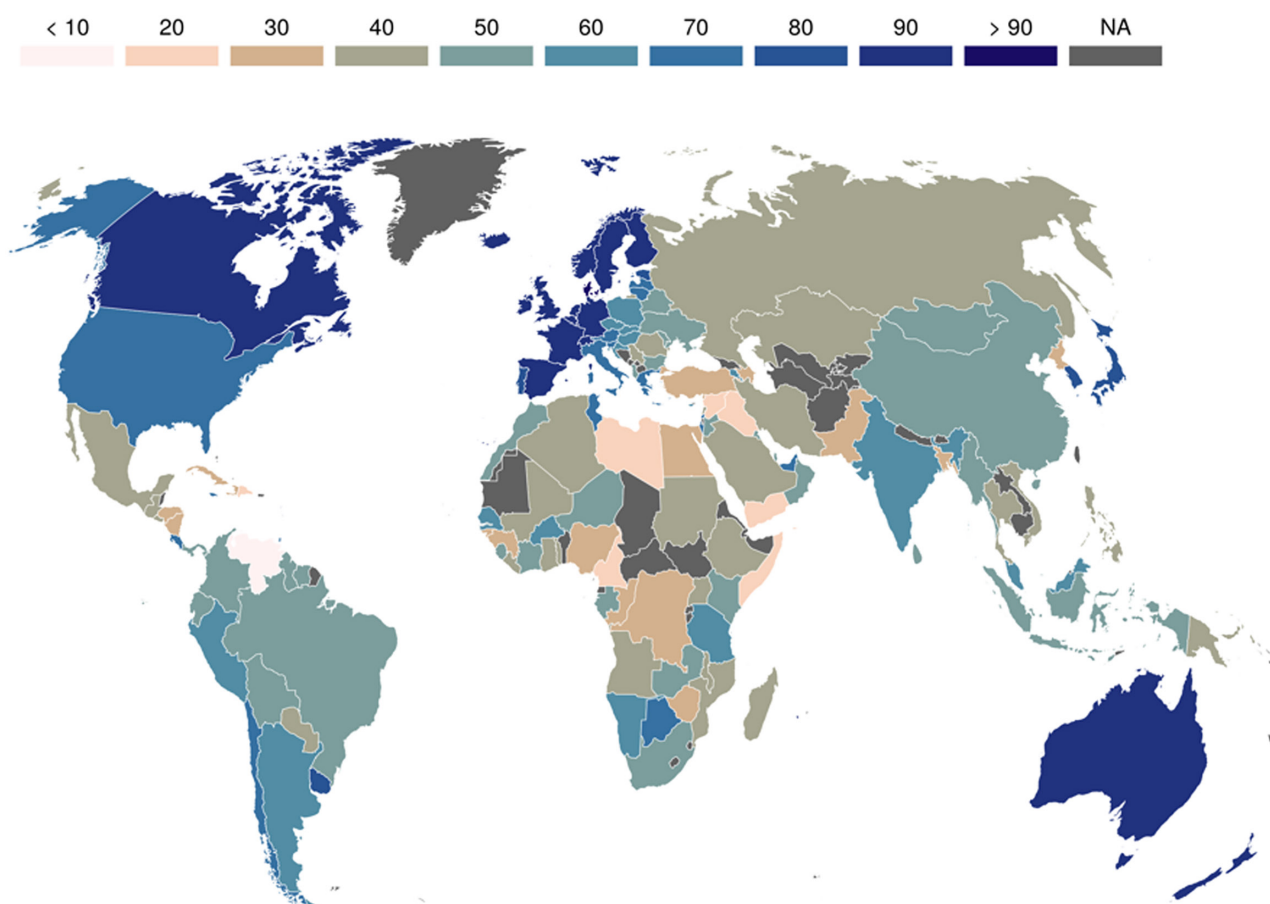
and Syria (a 1-point drop)<sup>5</sup> have apparently not seen quantitatively substantial worsening of public goods provision, although the data likely cover only parts of the country, and their resilience could be attributable to international relief efforts and humanitarian assistance. In Libya, for example, economic and environmental public goods, two of the subindices that constitute the public goods provision index, have suffered more heavily than social public goods, the third subindex. It is important to stress, however, that this does not mean that the quantitatively small public goods losses that countries like Libya and Syria have seen are not experienced as catastrophic by local populations. If a country is generally only able to provide a limited amount of medical care, education or environmental quality to some part of its population, then any further worsening of public goods provision can imply a fundamental decline in well-being for all.

By contrast, similar decreases in public goods provision in countries with already high levels of public goods provision do not imply similarly fundamental declines in well-being. Finland, for instance, lost productive knowledge after its IT industry started to decline in the 2010s; yet it seems rather problematic to compare Finland's decline (from 93 in 2000 to 91 in 2019) or Belgium's (from 93 to 92) in public goods provision to Libya's and

Syria's decline. Likewise, among European countries, the Netherlands and Spain are the only ones whose index scores were the same at the start and end of the period (92 for the former and 90 for the latter). The same holds for Honduras at 52. Such declines and lack of sustainable gains set in at rather different levels. For Honduras, stagnation may imply misery for large parts of the population, whereas it would hardly be noticeable to Dutch or Spanish citizens.<sup>6</sup> We will return to this issue below, when we relate increases and decreases in public goods provision to increases and decreases in state capacity and democratic accountability.

## 2.2 | State capacity

While public goods provision generally increased across world regions and for many countries, the development of state capacity is more varied. The BGI shows that state capacity in 2019 tends to be highest on average in Western Europe (81), North America (62) and East Asia (60) (Figure 5). Yet Figure 5 also reveals that there are relatively high-capacity countries in regions with generally limited state capacity. Botswana (65) and Namibia (58) are examples of countries with higher state capacity



**FIGURE 5** State Capacity Index by country, 2019. Source: Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



scores in Africa (average is 38), compared to Nigeria (27) or Somalia (16). Similarly positive examples can be found in other regions as well, as the examples of Uruguay (75), Chile (68) and Costa Rica (66) in Latin America (average 41) demonstrate. They stand out against other countries like Brazil and Colombia (both 49) or Bolivia (43).

On average, state capacity increased only in Africa and Asia, however, rising from 34 in 2000 to 38 in 2019 and 43–45, respectively (see Figure 6). The Americas, by contrast, were on a downward trajectory well before the COVID-19 pandemic. In North America, only Canada showed a slight improvement (from 80 in 2000 to 82 in 2019) whereas both the US and Mexico revealed substantial losses: from 79 to 65 for the US and from 49 to 40 for Mexico during the same period. In Latin America, most state capacity scores for 2019 range from a low of 38 for Paraguay (up from 29 in 2000) to a high of 75 for Uruguay (up from 72 in 2000). However, most countries are in the 40s–50s range, except for Chile with 68, down from 74 in 2000. Brazil too suffered a slight decline (from 52 to 49), as did Suriname (down 4 points), with all others showing slight to modest improvements.

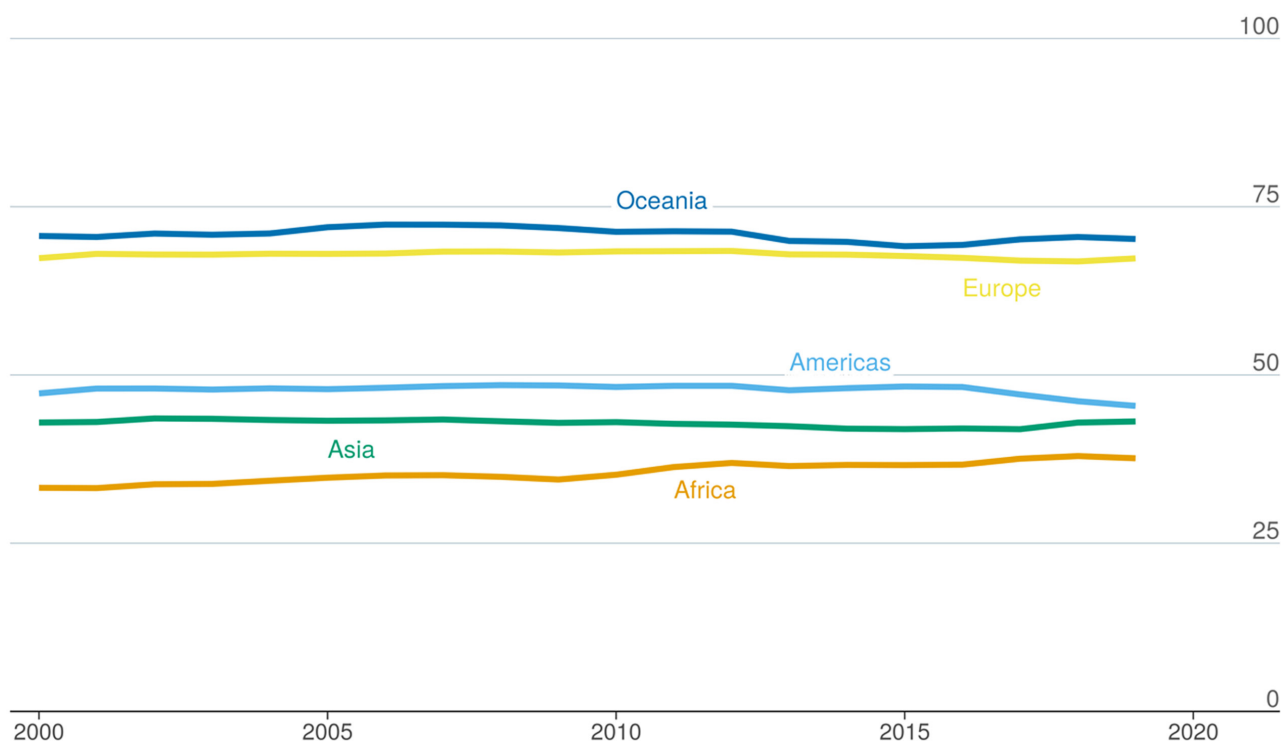
Europe and Oceania achieved the highest average scores on the state capacity index, but have not improved much during the last decades.<sup>7</sup> For example, Belgian, Dutch and French state capacities remained at roughly the same level, but Austria's and Germany's declined. And while New Zealand started and ended the period with a score near 89, Australia's state capacity declined slightly (89–86).

Asia shows a more varied picture. Myanmar had the largest increase in state capacity, starting from a low score of 21 in 2000 and reaching the 50-point mark by 2019. China had a moderate improvement in state capacity, from 38 to 44 over the period in question, as did India (48–51), Indonesia (40–43) and Vietnam (37–40), whereas Japan and South Korea remained stable at much higher capacity levels in the lower- to mid-70s. Several countries in the region, however, suffered a substantial loss in state capacity. For example, Thailand dropped from 43 in 2000 to 33 in 2019.

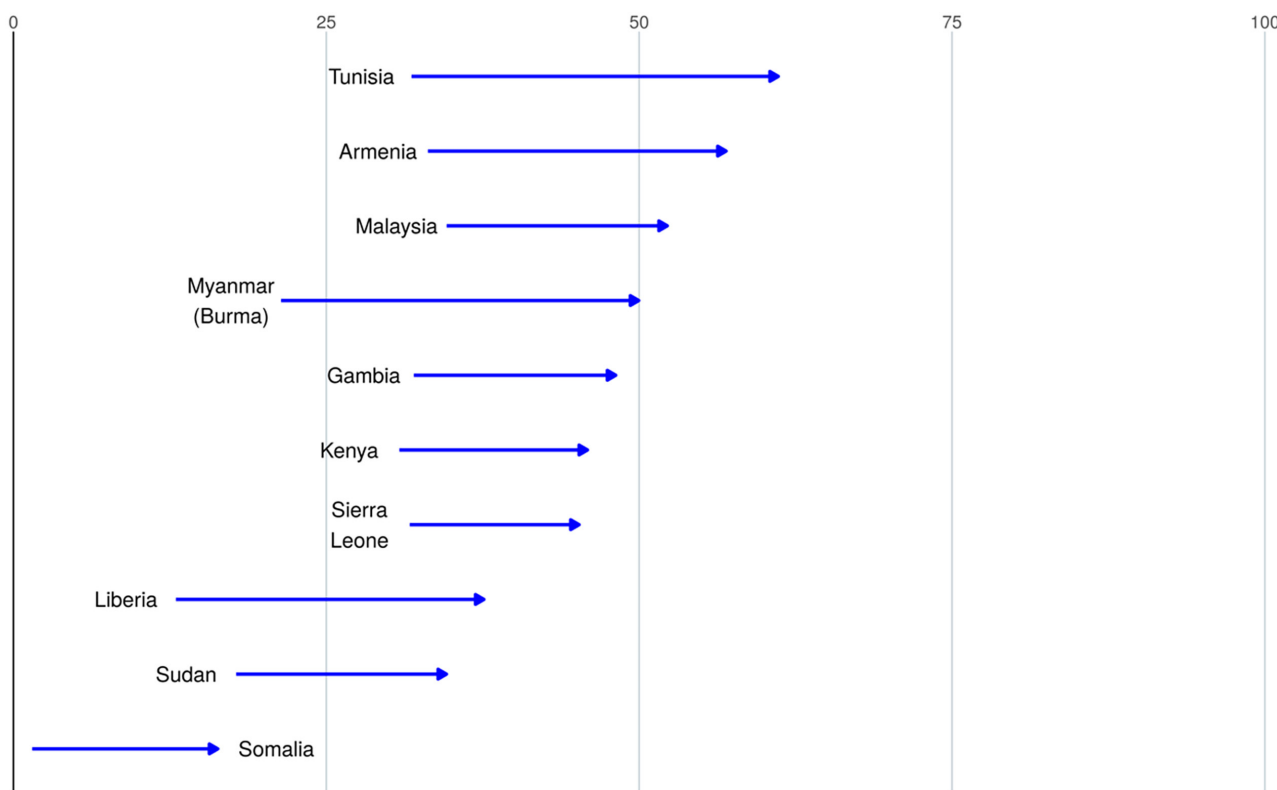
Figure 7 shows that there is no European, Oceanian or American country among the most improved on the state capacity index; only African and Asian countries have seen significant jumps in state capacity between 2000 and 2019.

What is worth noting, however, is that the countries with the largest increases in state capacity in Africa (Tunisia, from 32 in 2000 to 61 in 2019) and Asia (Myanmar, from 21 to 50) have recently experienced 'soft' (Tunisia) and 'hard' (Myanmar) coups (Yee, 2021). These dramatic reversals in both countries' governance underline Hirschman's (1986) concern about the narrow path towards better and sustainable governance. It might be that large increases in state capacity (and democratic accountability) can be particularly difficult to sustain if either externally or internally induced crises and upheavals render it difficult to achieve public goods increases.

Yet even at higher levels of public goods provision, the loss of state capacity can be worrisome as it might



**FIGURE 6** Changes in State Capacity Index by region, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 7** Countries with the most improvement in state capacity, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

foreshadow future declines in public goods provision. [Figure 8](#) suggests that the United States was, in fact, among the ten countries that have suffered a significant deterioration in state capacity over the last decades: from 79 in 2000 to 65 in 2019, with a drop of 14 points occurring in the 2010s.<sup>8</sup> This decline may have left the United States surprisingly ill-prepared to contain, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the US state capacity in 2019 was substantially below that of Canada (82) and most Western European countries like the United Kingdom (84), France (81) and Germany (88).

### 2.3 | Democratic accountability

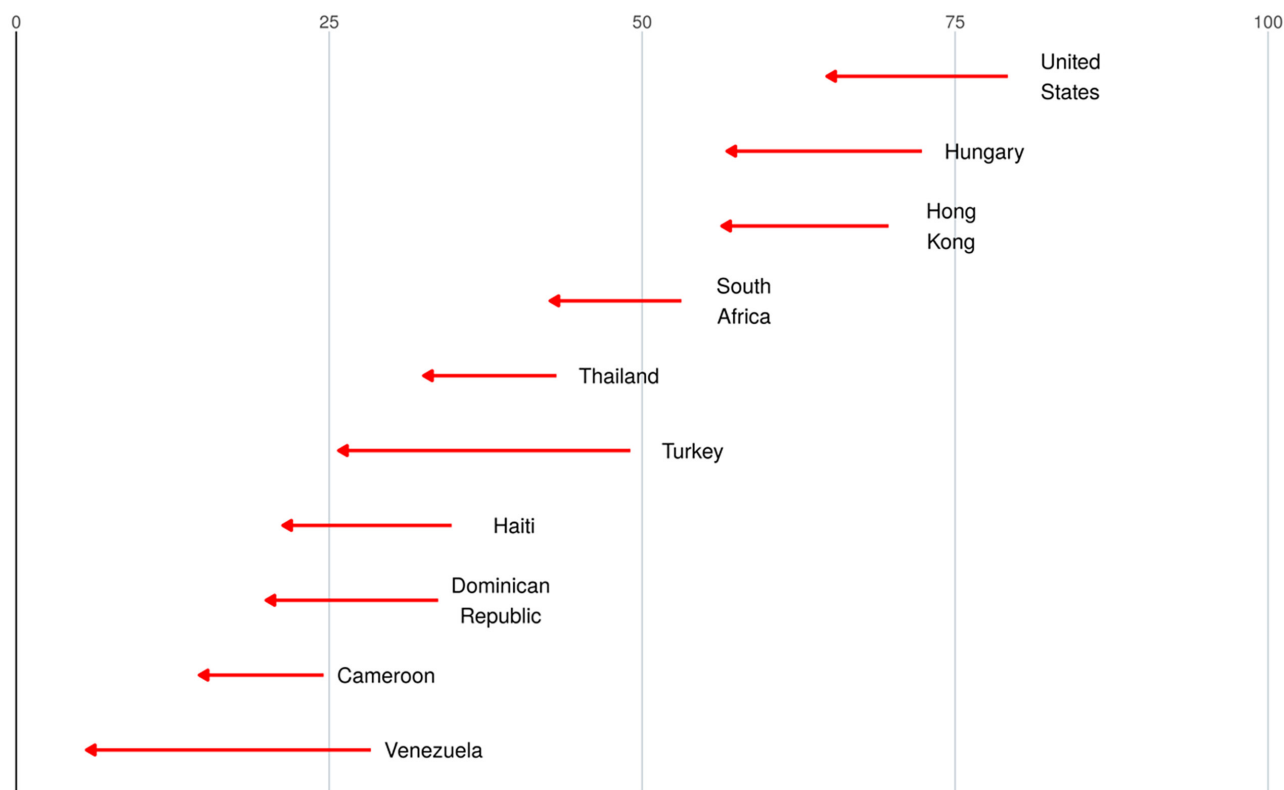
Democratic accountability varies widely between and within regions. In other words, except Oceania, all regions have countries with comparably low and high levels of accountability. In fact, within-region variations for accountability are more pronounced than those for the other two main dimensions of governance. [Figure 9](#) shows that there are countries on democratic and autocratic paths in Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa. Syria with a score of 5, Saudi Arabia (8), Qatar (11) and China (14) show the lowest level of democratic accountability, with none having improved between 2000 and 2019. By contrast, Denmark (97), Germany, Norway and Sweden (at 95 each) and

Costa Rica, Switzerland, New Zealand, Finland and Estonia (93 each) reveal the highest scores.

A look at regional averages in [Figure 10](#) suggests an overall increase in accountability in Africa since the 2010s, rising from 55 to 58 over that decade, up from 51 in 2000. Several countries in the region made significant headway: Gambia (from 36 in 2000 to 65 in 2019), Liberia (from 51 to 69), Sierra Leone (50–69) as well as Sudan (20–43) stand out. Other countries, however, fell back, among them Botswana (from 78 to 68), Cameroon (45–39), Uganda (54–46) and especially Egypt, from an already low score of 34 in 2000 to 26 by 2019. Nigeria remained stable in terms of democratic accountability, which means that the country can look back at the longest period of being a democracy since becoming independent in 1960.

In terms of improvement in democratic accountability, the African case offers significantly more good news than bad. In other world regions, however, accountability seems to have generally declined over the same time period. Neither Oceania nor Europe experienced a democratic renewal, although accountability remains at a high level in most countries in those regions. For example, among EU member states, only five scored below 80 in 2019 (Hungary with 57, Poland 69, Bulgaria with 73, Romania with 74 and Croatia with 77). Hungary and Poland suffered significant losses in democratic accountability, down from 83 and 90 in 2000, respectively. Other EU countries are more or





**FIGURE 8** Countries with highest decline in state capacity, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

less stable, as are the United Kingdom, Norway and Switzerland.

In the Americas and Asia, accountability is clearly on a downward trajectory. Indeed, countries showing declining democratic accountability between 2000 and 2019 are mainly located in the Americas and Asia. In North America, both Canada (86) and Mexico (71) remained stable, while the US experienced a decline from 90 in 2000 to 83 in 2019, though the score had risen in between. In Latin America, some countries like Bolivia (from 77 to 53) and Brazil (87–72) suffered major losses, while Argentina (83–79) and Ecuador (72–68) experienced a more modest decline, with Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay beginning and ending the period with roughly the same score, but masking positive improvements in between. Only Colombia (from 67 to 72) and Peru (53–81) stand out with an increase in democratic accountability.

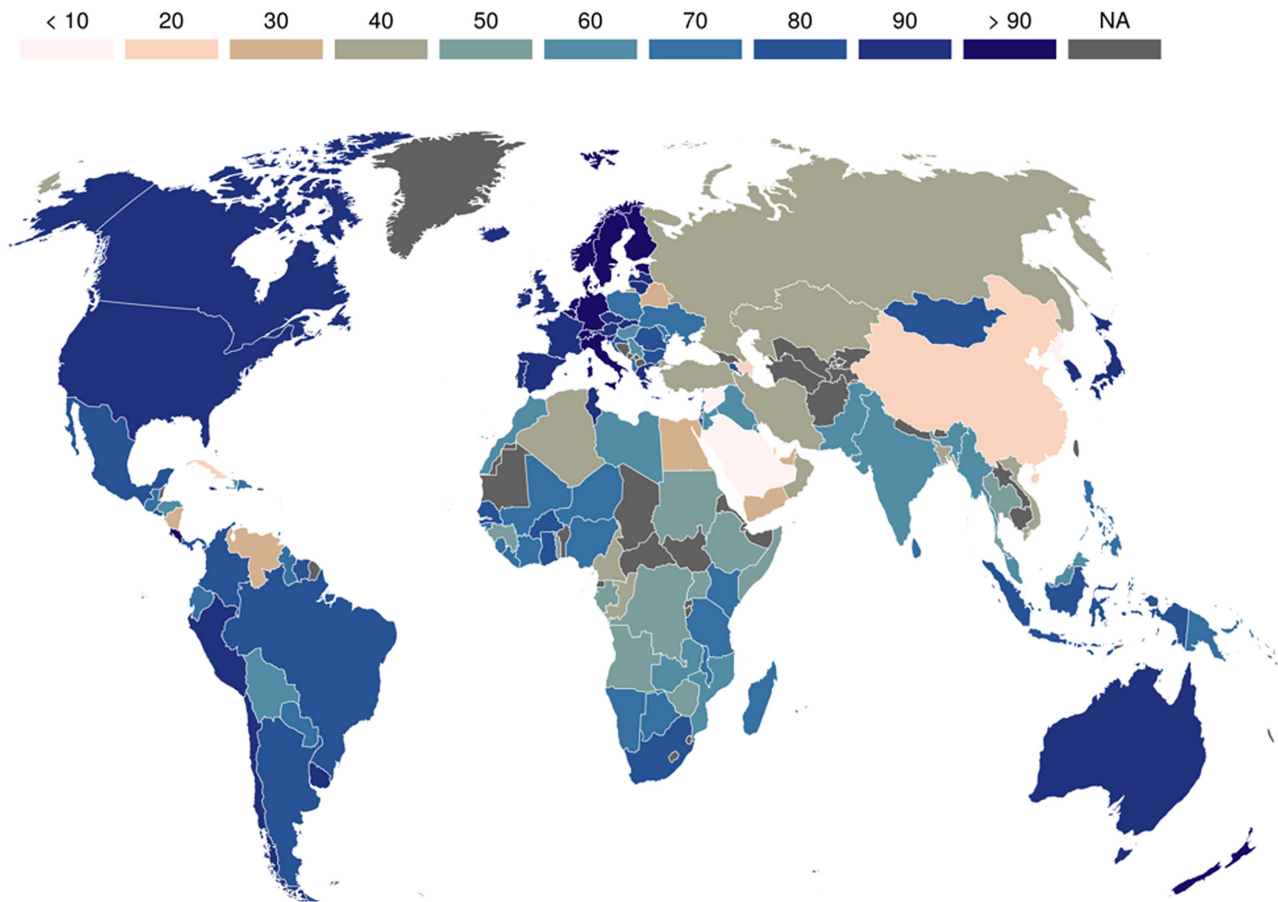
The picture from Central America and the Caribbean is mixed at best. Cuba continues to rank lowest on democratic accountability in the region, even though it improved its score from 14 in 2000 to 19 in 2019. Costa Rica has by far the highest score (93) followed by Jamaica (85) and Trinidad (80). However, several countries show declining scores: the Dominican Republic (from 66 to 60), Honduras (60–53), and especially Nicaragua, with a significant drop to 24, down from 66 in 2019, and Venezuela (from 59 to 28).

Asia offers a bleaker picture. Only a few countries show gains over the period in question (Myanmar from 9 to 59;

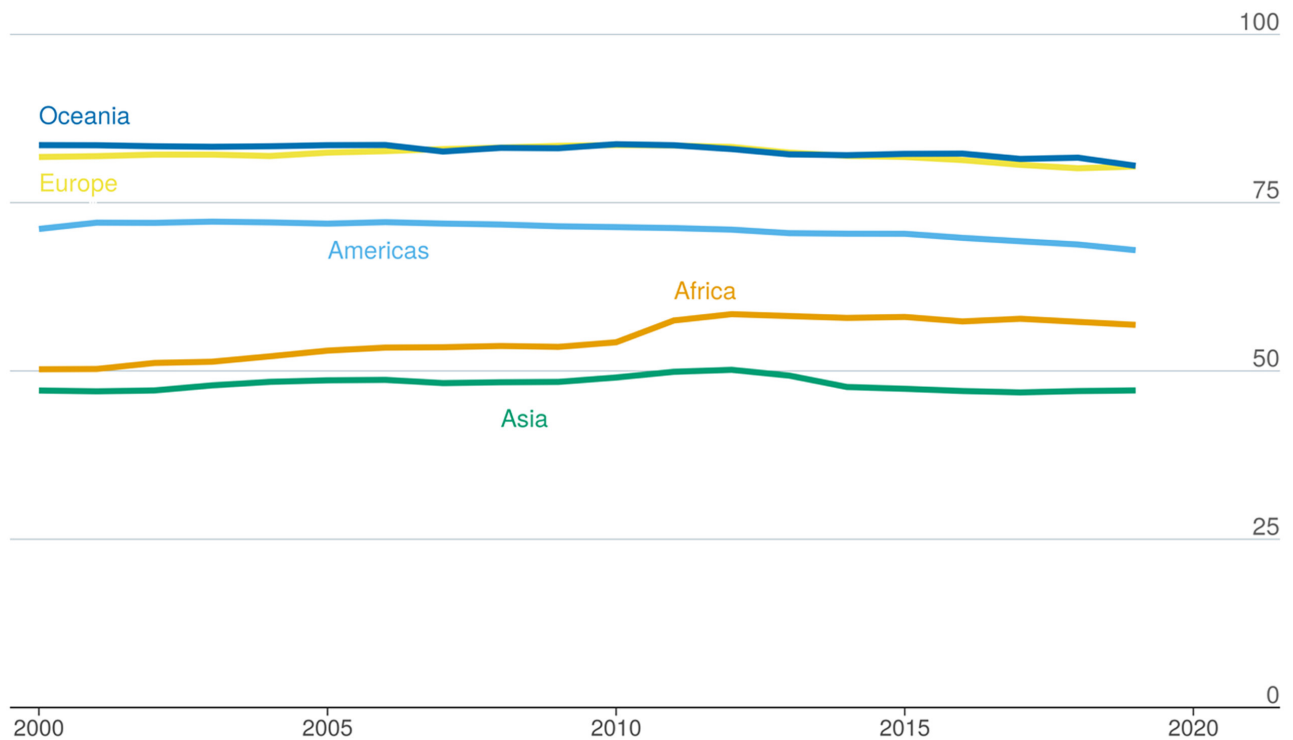
Pakistan from 49 to 53; Sri Lanka from 57 to 68), and in Myanmar, the gains were essentially lost with the 2021 military coup. While some democracies like Japan, South Korea and Mongolia remain stable at 85, 87 and 72, respectively, and Singapore (47) and Vietnam (34) likewise though at much lower levels, it is the decline in democratic accountability in other countries that stands out: Bangladesh (from 56 to 36), China (21–14), Hong Kong (70–57), India (80–59) and Thailand (67–42) are cases in point.

Given the increase in average accountability in Africa, it should not come as a surprise that some of the most improved countries on the democratic accountability index can be found in Africa (Figure 11). This is consistent with the results of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), which also detected a steady rise in governance performance in Africa from 2010 to 2018, with only a small drop in 2019. In fact, the IIAG argues that ‘in 2019, 61.2% of Africa’s population lives in a country where Overall Governance is better than in 2010’ (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020). According to the BGI, the performance of Tunisia (from 21 to 81)<sup>9</sup> and Gambia (36–65) stood out, achieving much higher values in 2019 than in 2000. But there are also accountability success stories in other regions: in the Americas, Peru (from 53 to 81) has gained substantially in accountability; in Asia, Armenia (from 51 to 71) has at least intermittently received higher accountability scores.

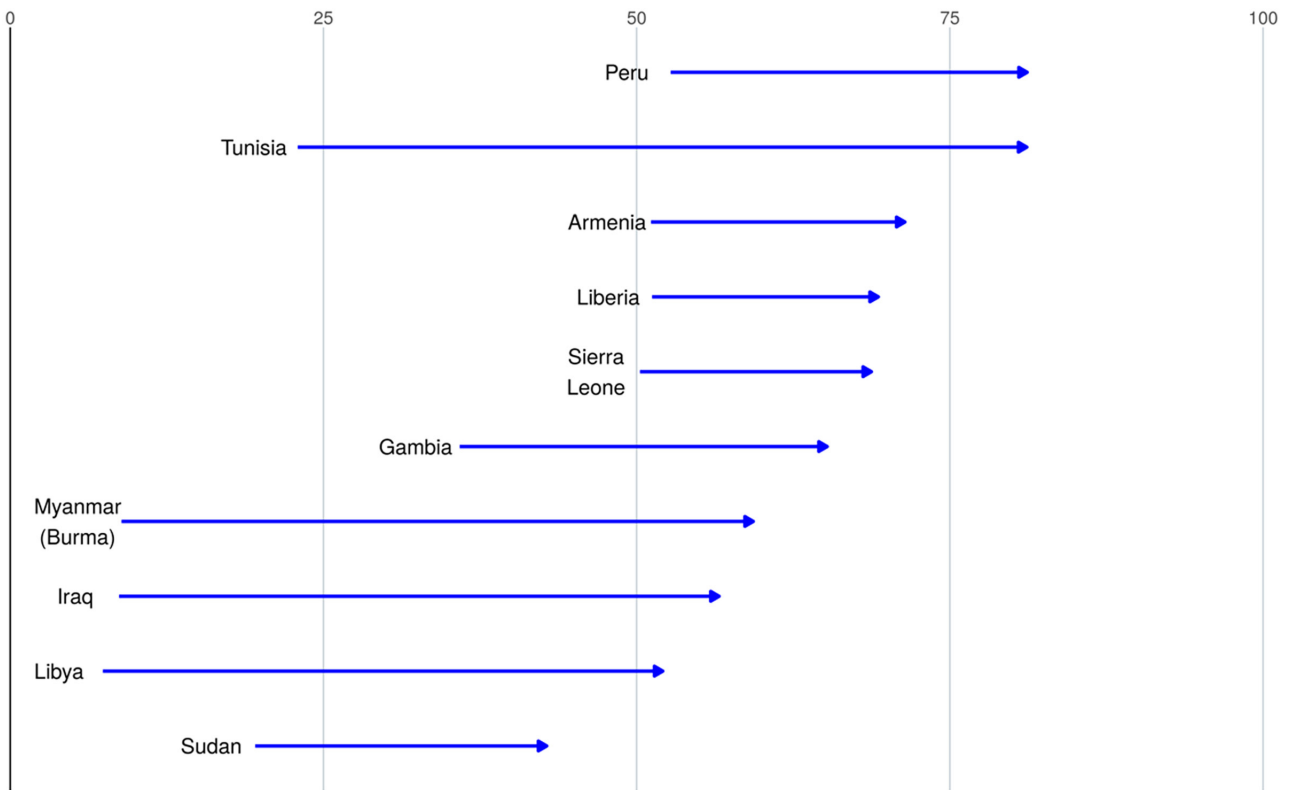
By contrast, those countries whose scores worsened most in terms of democratic accountability are mostly located in the Americas and Asia (Figure 12).



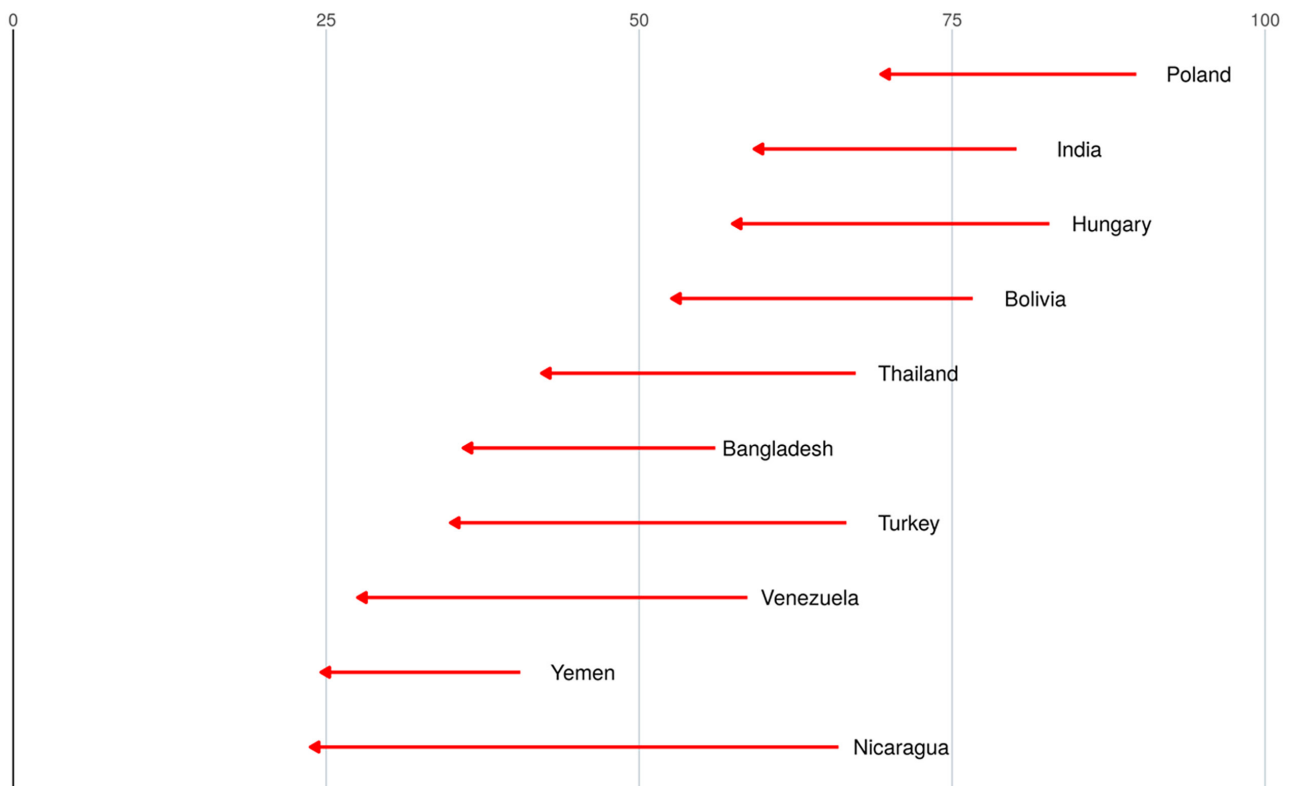
**FIGURE 9** Democratic Accountability Index by country, 2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 10** Changes in Democratic Accountability Index by region, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 11** Countries with the most improvement in democratic accountability, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 12** Countries with the highest declines in democratic accountability, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

As we have seen, Venezuela, Nicaragua and Bolivia saw significant deterioration in accountability, as did Bangladesh, India and Thailand in Asia. Turkey, too, shows a major drop in democratic accountability from 67 to 35 over the period, as did Yemen, a country torn by bitter conflict, from 41 to 25. Finally, as noted earlier, two EU member states, Poland and Hungary, have been on a steady downward trajectory in this regard.

### 3 | CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Let us turn now to comparing governance performance among countries focusing first on a select group of large economies and countries and then on countries in the post-Soviet space. When looking at the world's major powers and economies, it is particularly noteworthy that the US is the only world power where both accountability and state capacity declined significantly between 2000 and 2019: accountability dropped from 90 to 83, and state capacity from 79 to 65. While China (21–14) and Russia (53–37) became more autocratic and while India (80–59) and Brazil (87–72) also experienced democratic back-sliding, only Brazil showed a slight drop in state capacity (52–49), whereas the others experienced a slight increase in state capacity. Thus, it is the dual decline that makes the US stand out.

By contrast, the EU5<sup>10</sup> (the European Union's 5 largest economies, consisting of Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands) is the other outlier: accountability (with an average score of 91 in 2000 and 2019) and state capacity (80 versus 79) remained stable and well above the global average as well as above the US, and well ahead of China, Russia, India and Brazil. Indeed, in terms of accountability, the gap between the EU5 and the other powers widened. The gap grew in the case of state capacity as well, except for China and Russia (albeit marginally).

In terms of public goods provision the US, the EU5 and Brazil saw smaller improvements, with bigger jumps in Russia (from 63 in 2000 to 81 in 2019), India (from 42 to 64) and China (63–74). In the case of Russia, improvements in public goods provision were mostly in the field of social public goods, i.e., social security and related services which are largely subsidised by Russia's energy export earnings. This can be a familiar tactic to shore up support for autocratic regimes: citizens are less likely to rebel against the state if social goods provision remains high (Justino & Martorano, 2018; Taydas & Peksen, 2012). We will see another example of this approach to governance further below with the case of Belarus.

Figure 13 shows two clusters: a highly developed cluster with the US and EU5 more towards the right and what could be called an emerging economy cluster with Brazil, China, India and Russia, towards the left. Whereas the

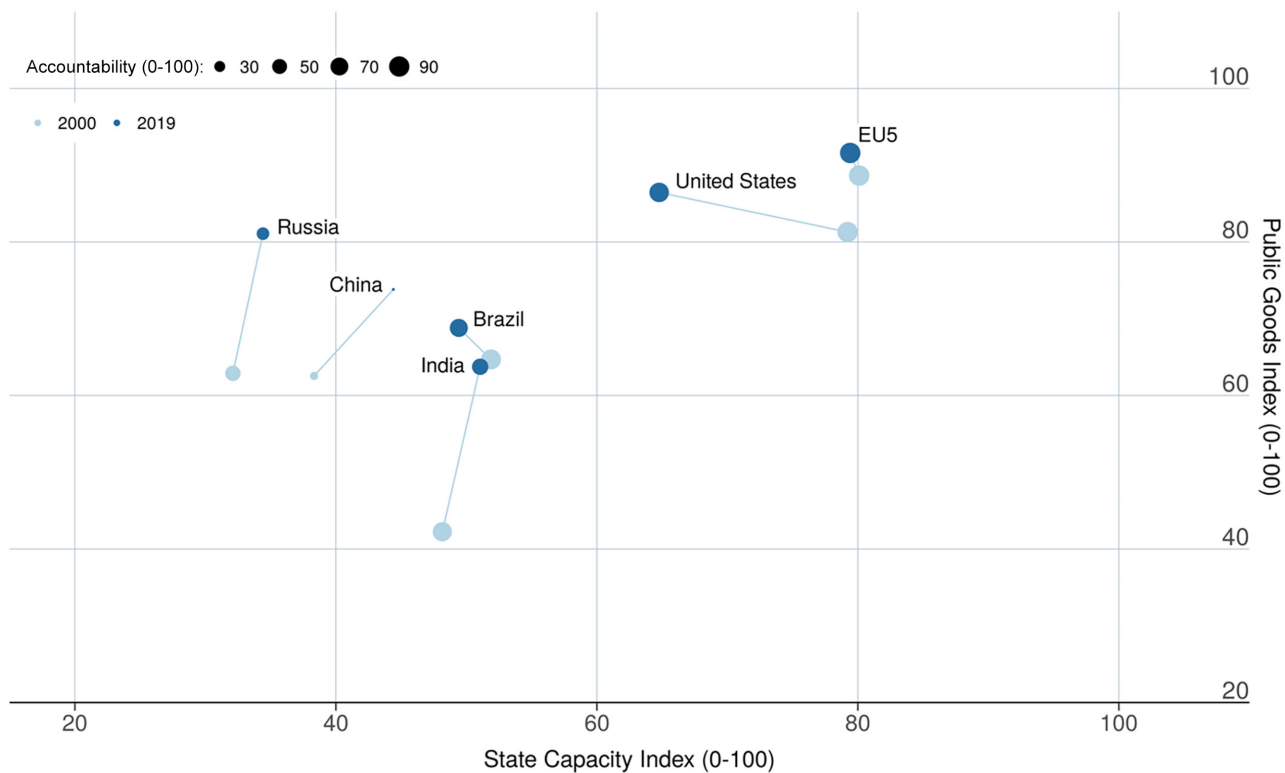
developed cluster clearly positions the EU5 at the top and shows the US drifting away from it, the emerging cluster moves closer together in terms of delivery of public goods and autocratic tendencies. At the same time, we can observe three trajectories. First, the EU5 are more or less stable and more of an outlier in 2019 than they were in 2000. Then the US and Brazil share a decline in accountability and a drop in state capacity with a modest increase in public goods provision. Both countries move slightly towards the upper-left in Figure 13. Then, we have a third trajectory, shared by China, India and Russia.<sup>11</sup> These countries, all with declining accountability, slightly improved state capacities, and a disproportionate jump in public goods provision, show an upward trajectory.

For the EU5, the challenge becomes one of sustaining the virtuous cycle among the three dimensions, as discussed above, whereas for the US and Brazil, the questions are how to reverse the dual drop in accountability and state capacity, and how and for how long levels of public goods provision could be maintained otherwise. For the 'upwards' cluster, the key issue becomes how higher levels of public goods provision can be maintained given low and lower accountability and more or less stagnating state capacity. How will priorities be set, and where do the resources come from?

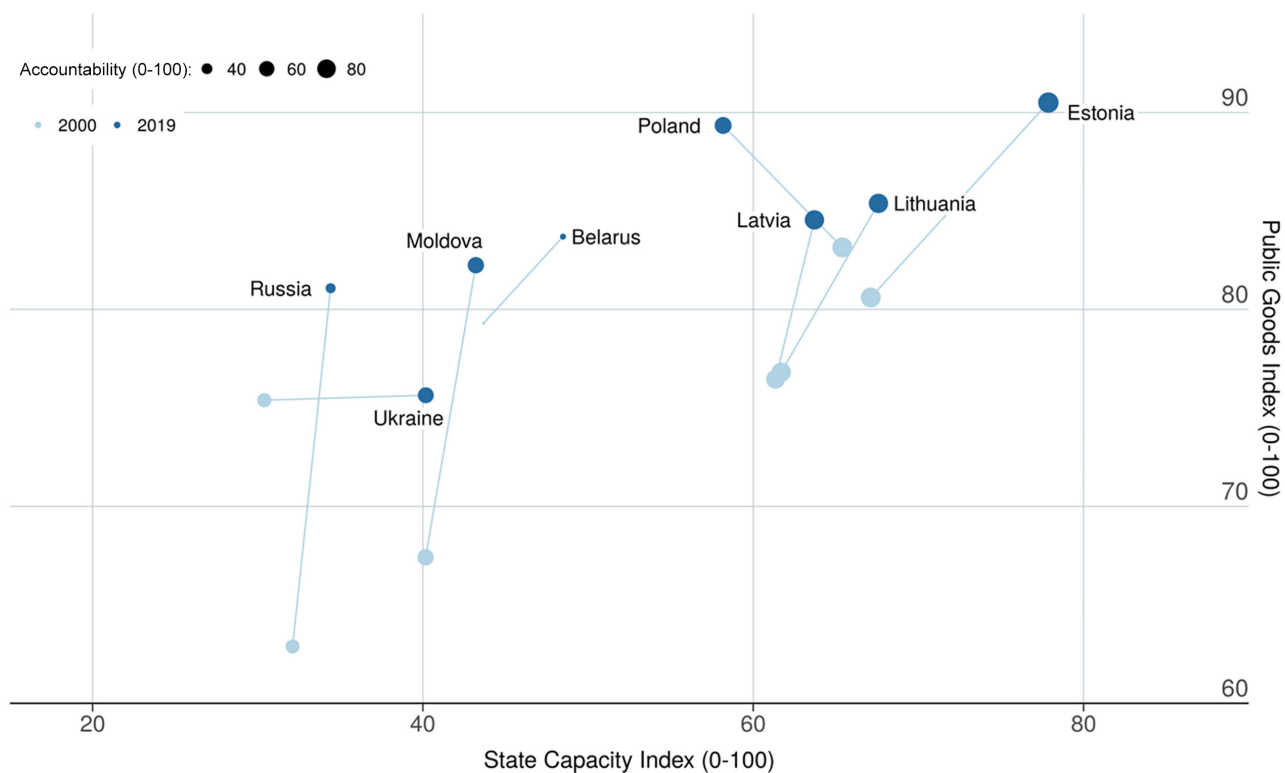
How does Russia compare to other countries in the Eastern European region, almost all of which were part of the former Soviet Union? Figure 14 shows two clear clusters: in the upper right-hand corner are the three Baltic countries and Poland, and on the left are other countries in the region. Let us take a look first at the upper-right cluster: the Baltic countries are clearly a success when it comes to reaching an upward trajectory in terms of public goods provision while improving both state capacity and accountability. For the three Baltic countries, accountability scores ranged between 82 and 90 in 2000, and between 85 and 93 in 2019. Likewise, their state capacity scores range from 61 to 67 in 2000 and 64 to 78 some two decades later.

Poland diverges from this pattern, as we have already seen, and is on a different trajectory, with accountability and state capacity declining substantially, even though public goods provision increased. Poland is an outlier in this respect, and its trajectory more like that of Brazil and the United States. As in these cases, we can speculate how long this trajectory can be maintained, especially as the European Union threatens Poland with reduced funding given the country's accountability record, which is in violation of EU law.

Moldova seems like a country at the doorstep of what could become a virtuous cycle of governance, and similar to some of the African countries we reviewed previously. With accountability stable, though not very high at 66 in both 2000 and 2019 and a slightly improving state capacity (from 40 to 43), it managed to achieve a high public goods provision level of 82, up from 67 in 2000. However, this pattern is typically neither resilient



**FIGURE 13** State capacity, public goods provision and democratic accountability by major global powers, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.



**FIGURE 14** State capacity, public goods provision and democratic accountability by selected Eastern European countries, 2000–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

nor self-sustaining and can be fragile. Especially if Moldova should be drawn further into the Russia-Ukraine conflict, much of the progress the country has achieved over the last decades could be in jeopardy.

This brings us to Ukraine, which is also the focus of Fröhlich's article, 'Unfinished Revolutions: The Post-Soviet Crisis of Governance in Ukraine', in this special issue. Until the Russian invasion of 2022, the country seemed to be on a solid course to improve accountability (from 54 in 2000 to 63 in 2019) and state capacity (from 30 to 40). Even though these scores are well below the European average, and much lower than those for the Baltic countries, they suggest that Ukraine has left behind an era of corruption and that the Maidan revolution of 2014 was showing significant trends towards more democracy and better functioning public administrative systems. Its record in terms of public goods provision remained near 75, essentially the same in 2019 as it was in 2000, the lowest among the countries depicted.

Finally, Belarus, which shows accountability scores persistently well below the European average, has a pattern similar to Russia's, with mid-level state capacity scores (improving over the period) and higher levels of public goods provision.<sup>12</sup> However, the source of each country's wealth differs: Russia relies largely on natural resources, while Belarus retains much of the state-centric industrial economy from the Soviet era. Still, both countries display the characteristics of autocracies and face the same long-run dilemma of how to maintain such high levels of public goods provision with little accountability and state capacity. The Baltic countries likely face no such problem: they are well on their way to navigating the narrow corridor towards good governance. Poland is backsliding on this path, whereas the Ukraine and Moldova could likely have progressed more if it were not for external constraints.

#### 4 | FIRST ANALYTIC STEPS: WHAT MAKES FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE?

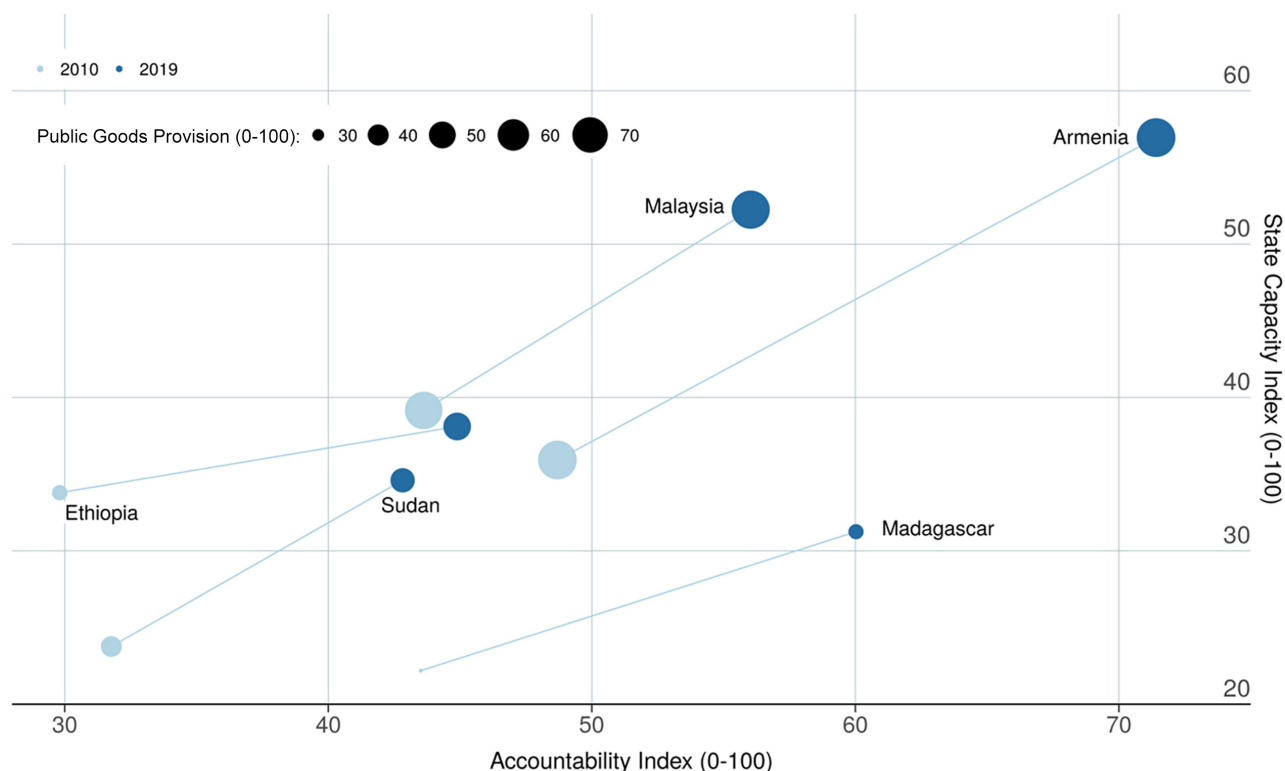
So far, we have looked at the BGI mainly from a descriptive perspective and explored some of the main findings for each of its dimensions separately and in cross-national comparison. We now address a topic that allows us to show the versatility of the BGI in shedding light on substantive issues and helping generate hypotheses. In particular, we show how the BGI can be used to identify countries that have simultaneously managed to advance public goods provision, state capacity and accountability—or conversely experienced declines across all three. By focusing on countries that have either experienced across-the-board increases or decreases, we examine the most extreme cases that reveal the most about what makes for good and bad governance. The ability to identify advances and failures by countries at similar or different starting

levels is critical because it can provide important lessons that 'may conceivably be followed by others', as Hirschman (1986) suggests. This question also addresses the twin fallacies of governance: the 'democratic fallacy', which assumes that democracy is sufficient for superior governance performance, and the 'autocratic fallacy', which assumes that state capacity alone matters for the delivery of public goods.

Figure 15 illustrates how countries with significant improvements on the democratic accountability index have more recently (since 2010) performed on the state capacity and public goods indices. Madagascar, at the bottom of Figure 15, for instance, has during that period seen a remarkable increase in accountability (from 44 to 60), and a 9-point increase in state capacity (from 22 to 31). Therefore, the country moved from the lower left of the graph upwards and to the right. We can also see that public goods provision substantially increased given that a barely visible grey dot in 2010 with a score of 27, became a clearly visible blue dot in 2019 with a score of 33. These increases came after a political crisis between 2009 and 2013 from which Madagascar seems to have partially recovered.<sup>13</sup> It is, however, only at the beginning of a path towards better and more sustainable governance. Similar to World Bank (2021) and IMF (2020) country assessments, as well as the BTI Transformation Index (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020), our indices suggest that improvements are still at a very low level. For the same period, we can detect trajectories like Madagascar's in the cases of Ethiopia and Sudan. In contrast to Sudan and Madagascar, however, Ethiopia saw a substantial increase in accountability (from 30 to 45) but not in state capacity, which increased only marginally (from 34 to 38) before the country's accountability deteriorated during COVID-19, and a brutal civil war created a full-blown humanitarian crisis.<sup>14</sup> Ethiopia is a particularly interesting case to explore the relevance of state capacity and public goods provision in more detail, as we know from existing research that the country struggled with the poor employment performance of large companies and the poor productivity performance of smaller companies (Diao et al., 2021). Sudan's overall performance is similar to Ethiopia's: an increase in accountability (from 32 to 43) coincides with an improvement of state capacity (from 24 to 35) and a slightly better public goods provision (from 40 to 45). As is the case in Ethiopia, gains were soon reversed as political instability and repeated military coups destroyed the emerging yet fragile virtuous cycle that had led to improved governance conditions.<sup>15</sup>

A focus on all three indices and their inter-relations is useful for pinpointing major strengths and weaknesses, especially in the context of political and economic developments that lie outside the BGI itself, such as domestic and international armed conflicts or economic recessions. Countries like Madagascar, Ethiopia and Sudan that manage to develop a virtuous relationship





**FIGURE 15** Accountability, state capacity and public goods provision by selected most improved countries, 2010–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

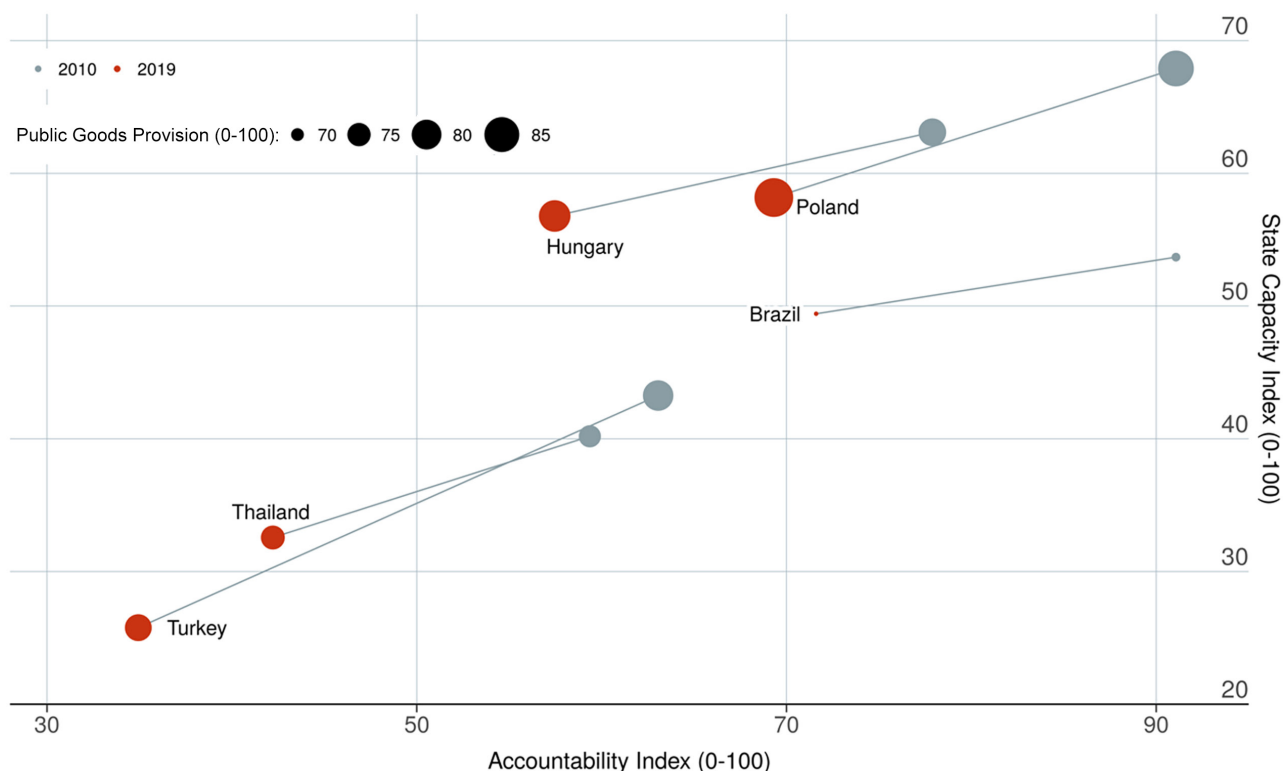
between the three dimensions of governance while still relatively underdeveloped in overall performance may not have the resilience to withstand internal and external jolts. They are vulnerable to shocks while negotiating the narrow corridors (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019) towards a more resilient level of development, and backsliding is likely.

Figure 15 also shows that increases in accountability and state capacity in Malaysia (accountability increased by 12 points and state capacity by 13) and Armenia (22- and 21-point increases) are similar to those of Madagascar between 2010 and 2019. Yet these improvements do not seem sufficient to produce equally large increases in public goods provision. For Malaysia, public goods provision remained basically stable (from 76 to 78) as it did for Armenia (from 79 to 80). This finding might indicate decreasing public goods returns from accountability and state capacity gains at higher levels of public goods provision. But it is also possible that shorter-term events have an important role to play.<sup>16</sup> In such cases, the BGI is helpful in identifying countries with similar trajectories even if the countries are geographically and culturally distinct.

The BGI governance dimensions can also help identify and explore cases of democratic backsliding. Figure 16 shows that Hungary and Poland saw substantial declines in both state capacity and accountability between 2010 and 2019. For Poland that decline in accountability was from a high score of 91 (identical to the Netherlands' and

higher than France's with 89) to 69, which is lower than the scores for Bulgaria (73) and Romania (74). Poland's state capacity dropped to 58 in 2019, down from 68 in 2010, below the EU average. For Hungary, the accountability scores declined from 78 in 2010 to 57 in 2019, and state capacity from 63 to 57. Yet neither country saw corresponding declines in public goods provision. Indeed, scores improved somewhat from 78 to 82 for Hungary and from 86 to 89 for Poland. Most likely, the relatively high levels of EU transfers both countries receive are part of the reason why they managed to achieve considerable levels of public goods provision.<sup>17</sup> In future research, we could explore whether Hungary's and Poland's position in global value chains might also play a role, especially the deep integration of their economies with large export economies like Germany's. More generally, the loss of accountability accompanying partial developmental successes—a phenomenon referred to as the Hirschman tunnel effect (Hirschman & Rothschild, 1973)—has been observed in other cases as well. The effect suggests that a population, at least for a while, will accept greater levels of inequality and autocratic tendencies if a popular sentiment of general improvement prevails.

Whereas Hungary and Poland appear to have weathered declines in democratic accountability and state capacity at least for the time being, Turkey and Thailand fared relatively less well. Turkey's accountability score declined from 63 in 2010 to 35 in 2019 and its state capacity from 43 to 26, more fitting the



**FIGURE 16** Accountability, state capacity and public goods provision by selected least improved countries, 2010–2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

profile of an autocracy in the developing world. For Thailand, the scores were 59–42 and 40–33, respectively. Nevertheless, public goods provision hardly declined in the case of Turkey, did not decline in the case of Thailand and seems generally unlikely to decline in spectacular fashion, particularly not if gains in basic medical care, health, productive knowledge or environmental quality have already been achieved. Even though such public goods appear to be extremely difficult to provide for countries with low state capacity scores, their provision appears to become easier once respective administrative systems and processes are in place.<sup>18</sup>

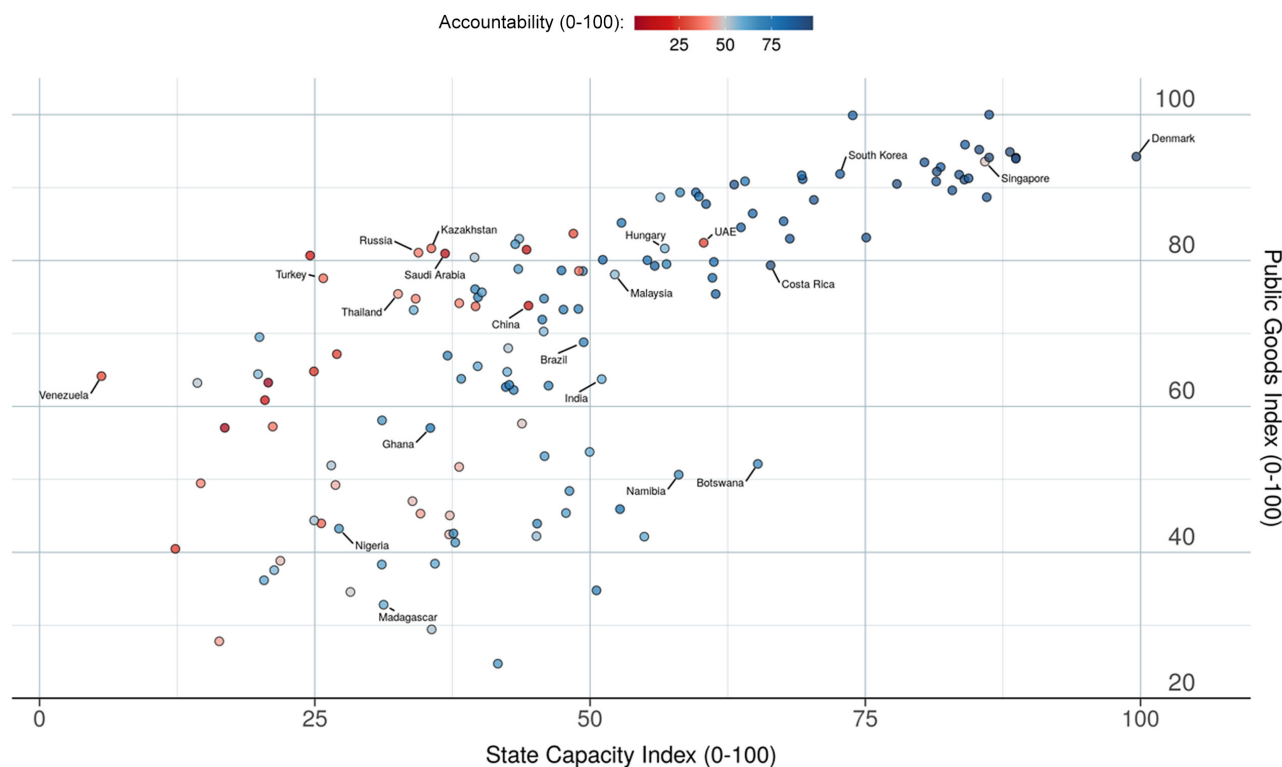
This dynamic could help explain why countries with weak accountability that somehow manage to increase state capacity and even economic growth up to a certain threshold tend to be able to achieve a relatively high level of public goods provision. More accountable countries, by contrast, appear to be on a narrower path if they seek to increase accountability, state capacity and public goods provision all at the same time. In doing so, they may achieve what Fukuyama describes as the ‘sweet spot’ of a high capacity and relatively autonomous bureaucracy (Fukuyama, 2013: 362), which enables countries to efficiently provide public goods.

To explore this argument further Figure 17 relates state capacity to public goods provision while factoring in levels of accountability in a single year (2019) rather than over time. The pattern revealed in Figure 17

suggests that at below-average state capacity levels, it can be difficult for more accountable countries (blue dots) to reach public goods scores similar to those of less accountable countries (red dots). Ghana, India and Brazil, for instance, have not managed to reach public goods scores as high as Turkey, Thailand or China despite comparable state capacity levels.

However, at above-average state capacity levels, the public goods advantages of less accountable countries apparently cease to be important. While there are historically important examples of countries with low accountability and high state capacity and public goods scores, such as Imperial Germany in the early twentieth century or Singapore<sup>19</sup> today (with an accountability score of 47, state capacity at 86 and public goods provision at 94), countries with high state capacity and public goods provision tend to also have high accountability scores.

These findings are important because we have deliberately not ‘democratised’ our public goods index: it reflects basic development achievements that are likely as important to countries such as Turkey, Thailand and China, as they are to Ghana, India and Brazil. This is similar to what Fukuyama (2013, p. 351) has in mind when he stresses that it is important to develop ‘measures that will work for both authoritarian and democratic regimes’. However, our findings do shed light on the dual fallacies mentioned above. Nigeria is a case in point for the ‘democratic fallacy’, which assumes that democracy is sufficient for improved



**FIGURE 17** State capacity, public goods provision and accountability by country, 2019. *Source:* Berggruen Governance Index 2022.

governance performance but fails to take into account that a sufficient and resilient state capacity is needed for improved public goods production. The fact that there is no other case like Singapore is evidence of the ‘autocratic fallacy’, which assumes that state capacity alone matters for the delivery of public goods but disregards the need for democratic accountability in setting priorities for state capacity to deliver public goods at higher levels.

Taken together, all three dimension-level indices allow users to explore constellations in which some countries were able to achieve better governance outcomes, but others continued to struggle or even backslide. In future publications, we will explore how some of the implicit hypotheses generated here can be tested with both current tools for causal identification and historical case studies that allow for the consideration of contextual factors.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

The BGI opens the ‘black box’ of governance. The Governance Triangle with its three dimensions of democratic accountability, state capacity and public goods provision allows us to examine whether countries can turn the key to unlocking good governance: achieving a balance among the three dimensions on an upward and sustainable trajectory. The BGI operationalises

these dimensions, with three main indices and nine subindices. Having collected data from a variety of sources for 134 countries spanning the period from 2000 to 2019, we aggregated the data using Bayesian factor analysis. Recapping the initial findings dimension by dimension:

- **Public Goods Provision**
  - There is significant variation between and within regions as well as over time.
  - On average, all world regions are providing a higher level of public goods in 2019 than they were in 2000.
  - The African continent has shown the greatest improvement since 2000.
  - The ten most improved countries are all African.
  - There are no countries showing major declines.
- **State Capacity**
  - As with public goods provision, there is significant variation between and within regions, and over time.
  - Most improvements have taken place in Africa and Asia; in fact, only African and Asian countries have shown large gains.
  - In North America, both the US and Mexico lost state capacity, whereas Canada gained ground.
  - Europe remained largely stable.
- **Democratic Accountability**
  - There has been an increase in accountability scores in many African countries.

- Europe, again, stays mostly stable except for Hungary and Poland, which experienced major declines.
- The US, the world's most powerful democracy, shows significant backsliding.
- The Americas and Asia experienced a downward trend.

In summary, the BGI reveals that during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, countries have, on average, improved in terms of public goods provision, but have done so to a lesser and more uneven degree in the realms of state capacity and democratic accountability. While Africa shows the best improvement record across all three main indices, and Europe, with a few notable exceptions, remains basically stable at a high level, the Americas and Asia reveal troubling trends in declining state capacity and democratic accountability.

Taking a different lens, we examined select groups of countries, first the major world powers and then Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space. Remarkably, we found that the United States is the only world power where both accountability and state capacity declined significantly between 2010 and 2019. This dual decline makes the US stand out and gives cause for concern. In the post-Soviet space, we found that the countries are drifting apart on all three governance dimensions, but particularly with regard to democratic accountability.

When we explored analytical issues, we found that a focus on all three indices and their inter-relations is useful to pinpoint major strengths and weaknesses of a country's governance, also in the context of political and economic developments such as domestic strife, international armed conflicts or economic recessions. Specifically:

- One of the most important findings, and one with considerable currency in the current geopolitical context, is what could be called the liability of democracy: at below-average state capacity levels, it can be difficult for countries with higher levels of democratic accountability to reach public goods scores similar to those of less accountable countries. However, at above-average state capacity levels, public goods advantages of less accountable countries apparently begin to fade and higher democratic accountability begins to matter more and turns into what could be named the liability of autocracy.
- Countries in the Global South, even while developing a virtuous governance balance, may not have the resilience to withstand internal and external jolts. They are vulnerable and backsliding is likely.
- The 'democratic fallacy', which assumes that democracy is sufficient for improved governance performance, fails to take into account that a sufficient and resilient state capacity is needed for improved and sustainable levels of public goods production.
- The 'autocratic fallacy', which assumes that state capacity alone matters for the delivery of public goods,

disregards the need for democratic accountability in setting priorities for state capacity to deliver public goods at higher levels.

What does all this mean for the future of global governance? The most simple takeaway is that there is no one formula to move towards high performance on all three indices. As we demonstrate, certain mixes of democratic accountability and state capacity can be pitfalls at specific stages, and neither high state capacity nor high democratic accountability is sufficient by itself. The possibility of exogenous shocks—whether positive ones like resource discovery or negative ones like wars—also cautions us against applying a 'one size fits all' approach. Still, cases of steady progress do exist, demonstrating that while there may be no silver bullets in global governance, neither is genuine progress impossible.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.


## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at <https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/datasets/>.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The full dataset is available for download in various formats at <https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/datasets/>. A data exploration tool offers readers a variety of ways to examine the data; available at <https://governance.luskin.ucla.edu/index/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more detailed analysis of selected Sub-Saharan African countries, see 'Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards Better Governance and Sustainability?', by Anheier, Fröhlich and List, in this special issue.

<sup>3</sup> This relative stagnation could even become backsliding, according to the United Nations. The 2021 SDG progress report finds that 'COVID-19 has wiped out 20 years of education gains' and that 'the pandemic has halted or reversed progress in health'. See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/overview/>.

<sup>4</sup> See Knudsen's article, 'Escape from the "Lost Decades"? Governance Challenges in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela', in this special issue.

<sup>5</sup> Syria has experienced civil war since 2011 and Libya's second civil war took place from 2014–2020. The UNFPA finds 'dire' consequences in both countries, with access to health, housing and



- education negatively affected by a large population displacement as a result of the wars. See <https://www.unfpa.org/data/emergencies/libya-humanitarian-emergency> [Accessed 5 May 2022].
- <sup>6</sup> In 2019, the Netherlands had a Human Development Index score of 0.94 and Spain was at 0.90, while Honduras substantially trails both at only 0.63. <https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137506>.
- <sup>7</sup> Europe's average state capacity was around 69 in both 2000 and 2019, while Oceania's was around 71 in those years.
- <sup>8</sup> For more on the US case, see Knudsen's article 'A Falling Star? The Causes of Declining State Capacity and Democratic Accountability in the United States', in this special issue.
- <sup>9</sup> Since President Kaïs Saïed's 'soft' coup in 2021, Tunisia's gains have been reversed, with Freedom House assessing the country as partly free rather than fully free. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2022>
- <sup>10</sup> Knudsen's article, 'Stable or Stagnant? Governance in the Large Western European Economies since 2000', in this special issue, takes a closer look at France, Germany and Italy, as well as the UK.
- <sup>11</sup> For more on these countries' trajectories, see Yang's article 'Lessons and Challenges of China's State-Led and Party-Dominated Governance Model', Yang's article 'India: Developmental Challenges Faced by a Dual Economy', and Fröhlich's article 'Debunking the Autocratic Fallacy? Improving Public Goods Provision in Russia', all in this special issue.
- <sup>12</sup> Belarus has been criticised for its lack of post-communist democratic reforms, yet has retained a strong social welfare state compared to many other post-Soviet countries. Indeed, strong social protections like 'nearly full employment, no large-scale privatisation and high levels of security provision' (Yarashevich, 2014, p. 1704) likely exist primarily to shore up President Lukashenko's grip on power. Reasonably strong economic growth has facilitated this. As Yarashevich (2014, p. 1703) finds, 'in purely statistical terms Belarus fared no worse and often much better than many other post-communist countries.'
- <sup>13</sup> Other studies also find Madagascar to be a recent success story. The BTI Transformation Index (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022, p. 3) finds that economic reforms 'since 2014 enabled the country to experience continuous economic growth until 2019. Madagascar's economy grew by 4.4% in 2019.' Engstrom (2022) also finds that post-2014 reforms have had a positive impact after a "costly period of institutional decay" from 2009 to 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> The Tigray region of Ethiopia in particular is facing severe crisis, with conflict and famine resulting in food insecurity for about 7 million people, with almost a million displaced (United Nations, 2021).
- <sup>15</sup> Sudan has also been in a state of crisis, with conflict and climate events resulting in about two-thirds of its population (roughly 9 million people) being in need of humanitarian assistance (UN OCHA, 2022).
- <sup>16</sup> Both countries were hit hard by the global financial crisis. In addition, the 2020 Russia-Georgia war spilled over to Armenia. Malaysia has been in crisis for several years now, with the original corruption scandal from 2015 resulting in the first shift of party in power since independence, and then spiralling out of control during COVID ('Malaysia's Political Crisis', 2020).
- <sup>17</sup> Hungary received a net of 5 billion euros from the European Union in 2018, while Poland received 11.6 billion net. <https://www.statista.com/chart/18794/net-contributors-to-eu-budget/> [Accessed 5 May 2022].
- <sup>18</sup> Turkey had a 2019 HDI score of 0.82 while Thailand was at a similar level with 0.78. <https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137506>.
- <sup>19</sup> Singapore's ability to generate effective governance and high state capacity in the absence of full democracy has become legendary since its independence in 1965. As Menon (2007, p. 1) writes, 'Its governing system has become widely known for efficiency and competence, especially in terms of its role in generating an "economic miracle".'

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

### Appendix S1.

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