



Individual empowerment

Global societal trends to 2030:
Thematic report 3

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EUROPE

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Abbreviations

ACTA anti-counterfeiting agreement

ESPAS European Strategy and Policy Analysis System

EUISS Institute for Security Studies

HDI Human Development Index (United Nations)

ICT information and communications technology

PPP purchasing power parity

Preface

This Research Report forms part of our series on global societal trends and their impact on the EU in 2030. This analysis is embedded within the framework of the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) set up to develop a lasting framework to assess global trends and to develop policy responses across EU institutions over the next institutional cycle (2014–2019). The first phase of the project assessed the long-term, international, domestic, economic and political trends facing the European Union over the next two decades; the second phase of the project split trends into three streams, namely the economy, governance and power, and society. RAND Europe’s assessment of likely global societal trends constituted ‘Trend Report 2 – Society’ for this second phase.

This report presents the evidence base, uncertainties and potential trajectories surrounding trends in one of the six major themes which form part of Trend Report 2 – Society, namely individual empowerment. Other themes studied as part of this series include the rise of the global ‘middle class’; the spread of information and knowledge through technology, the new media and education; the changing demographic profile of the world’s population; the role of migration and mobility; and transformations in the world of work and the labour market. Overall findings from all reports may be found in the Synthesis Report published by RAND Europe, while evidence for the other themes may be found in the research reports published as part of this series.

This work is based on desk research in the form of a non-systematic review of the academic and grey literature on the major trends for this theme. It also includes additional information for each of the themes studied which was harnessed through a Delphi with international participants, as well as through a series of semi-structured interviews with experts from academia and think tanks, policymakers and leading thinkers from the private or voluntary sector further exploring the findings from the Delphi exercise and desk research. Acknowledgements, and a full list of contributors, can be found in the Synthesis Report.

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Abbreviations

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1.1. The context for this study and the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System effort

Over recent years, the European Union has experienced a number of challenges. Facing these issues has required much effort from European policymakers. These reflect the unstable and fast-changing global environment in which the Union is navigating. In the long term, this may challenge the Union's economic and political influence, and perhaps its ideals and values.

In this new context, expanding the Union's capacity to anticipate future challenges and outcomes and to coordinate responses across institutions will be crucial. The objective of this study was to help the European Union to prepare for a future strategic landscape that will be more competitive and perhaps less cooperative than before, and certainly more uncertain than a superficial reading of opinion pieces and forward-looking reports might suggest.

The European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) project emerged in 2010 when the European Commission sought to investigate the global trends that will prevail in 2030 and to determine the challenges that European policymakers will be faced with in the coming decades. Its purpose is embedded within a wider context of building a permanent EU forecasting capacity, relying on the collaboration of various EU institutions and actors in the individual Member States, and it also aims to set up a continuous framework to assess global trends and to develop policy responses across the EU institutional framework.

The initial effort, carried out by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS 2012), aimed at assessing 'the long-term, international and domestic, political and economic environment facing the European Union over the next 20 years'. The report acted as a pilot project setting the scene for further investigation and evaluation of global trends in 2030 in the field of (i) international relations and governance, (ii) society, and (iii) macroeconomic trends.

In 2012, the Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA) commissioned RAND Europe to investigate further the theme of societal changes by drawing from the experience of the pilot project, by analysing key global trends in this field and by drawing their implications for the Union. The task force at BEPA identified six main thematic areas which were to be refined, documented and analysed, namely:

1. The rise of a global 'middle class'
2. The role of new technologies, new media and increased access to education
3. The empowerment of individuals
4. The changing demography of a globalised world and its impact on different societies

5. The role of mobility and migrations and their impact on identities
6. Old and new labour – and work.

Each of the research reports published as part of this series revolves around one of the six themes. This report focuses on education, technology and connectedness. The overall findings from the analysis may be viewed in the Synthesis Report (Hoorens et al., 2013). The research team has sought to cluster the trends identified above into five major areas in the Synthesis Report. In addition, the Synthesis Report introduces a number of cross-cutting issues that may interact with each of these six themes to influence the long-term strategic landscape and the policy challenges that the European continent may face in the future. In doing so, it relies extensively on strategic and long-term analysis, an approach which may help policymakers grasp the contours of the future and understand how global trends are likely to interact, converge and influence the future landscape.

1.2. The methods used for this Research Report designed to set out the evidence base for major trends

This Research Report presents the reader with findings on individual empowerment, as well as on their impact on the EU landscape, including potential policy challenges for the next 20 years.

Several reports – most of which are referenced in this analysis – have attempted to describe, assess and determine which trends are likely to shape the international strategic landscape or the landscape of a specific region, the EUISS report and the regular efforts of the National Intelligence Council being perhaps among the most notable examples in this context. The objective of the research team as a result is not to replicate these existing efforts, but rather to bring the existing uncertainty surrounding these trends to policymakers' attention.

The findings analysed in this report are based on two phases of research, namely a non-systematic review of the literature available on each of the major trends listed under the six themes identified by ESPAS for the Society Trend Report, and analysis of the quantitative data available. Our approach is designed to identify the consensus as well as the disagreement on a given trend within a specific theme, and therefore to describe this trend, relying on previous analysis and literature. It has allowed the research team to identify the drivers behind the trends and the conditions and assumptions under which they will materialise. The team has sought to review and discuss the evidence for these assumptions and conditions and the level of uncertainty surrounding them. When appropriate, and relying on the assessment of this uncertainty, the researchers have been able to generate alternative narratives for specific trends, which stand in contrast to the consensus.

The second phase of the research (expert consultation) harnessed the knowledge of leading experts worldwide for each of the themes studied through an approach based on the Delphi method. This effort was followed by a series of interviews with leading academics, policymakers and thinkers from the private or voluntary sector to build on findings from the Delphi exercise. Information from the expert consultation phase was used to discuss and to uncover further the surrounding uncertainty for each of the global trends derived from the literature review.

This approach is not, of course, without limitations. The report considers trends one by one and therefore in isolation from all others when in fact they are likely to interact with each other. We try to alleviate this issue by making clear the assumptions of the literature we review.

By emphasising uncertainty and by attempting to raise policymakers' awareness of alternative narratives and paths, we hope to contribute to the debate on global trends that will prevail in 2030, and to facilitate the goals of greater flexibility and resilience. While this approach contrasts with previous, widely publicised strategic analysis reports, it also looks to complement these analyses.

Chapter 1. Delimiting individual empowerment

The empowerment of individuals has frequently been cited as a major future trend. However, to date there is no universally accepted definition of the term ‘empowerment’, and no succinct way to show its evolution. Before we may begin to outline and quantify empowerment trends over time, we must first make an effort to comprehend fully the concept of individual empowerment. In that respect, it is necessary to understand first how it is perceived by different organisations and how it drives their policies.

The EUISS considers, for instance, that ‘individuals are being empowered by the social and technological progress of the last decades. The main drivers of this trend are the global emergence of the middle class with particular force in Asia, near-universal access to education, the empowering effects of ICT, and the betterment of the status of women around the world.’ (EUISS 2012)

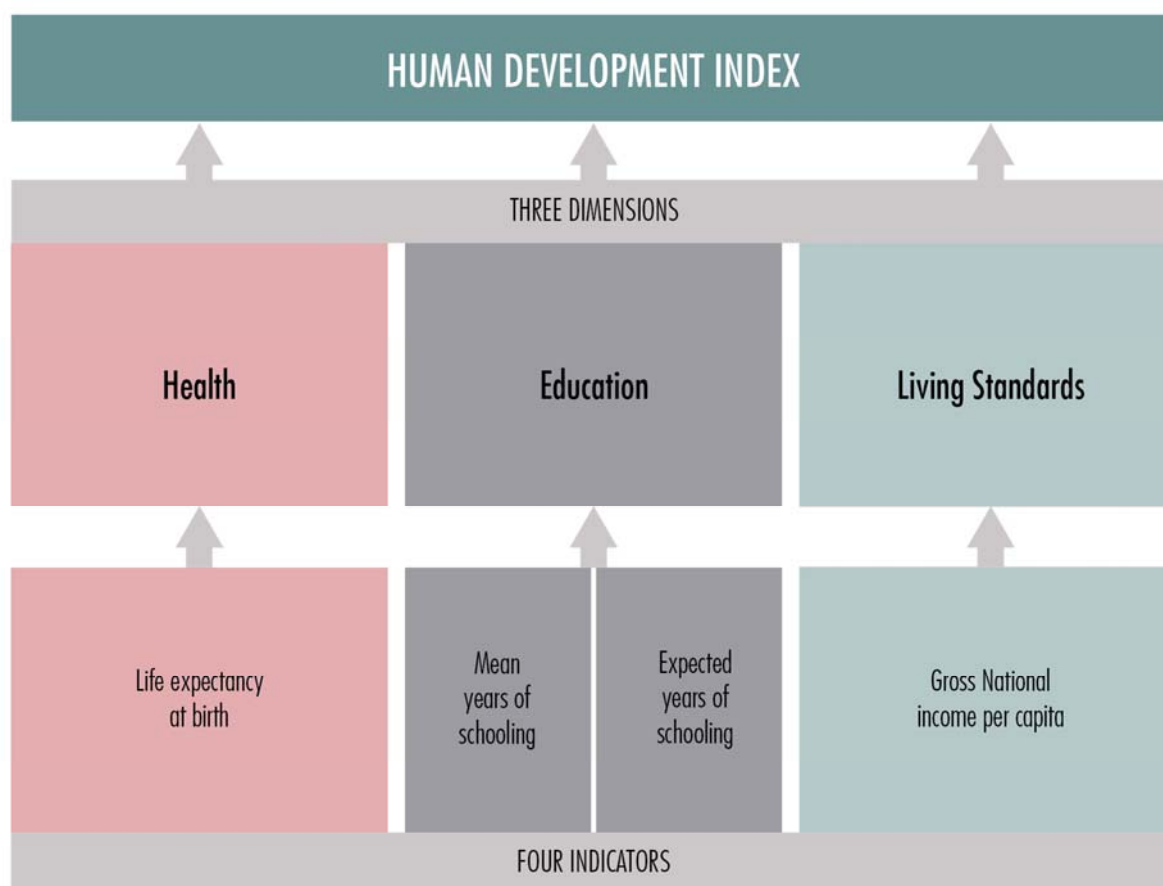
The World Bank (2013) argues that

empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organisational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets.... In essence, empowerment speaks to self-determined change. It implies bringing together the supply and demand sides of development – changing the environment within which poor people live and helping them build and capitalise on their own attributes. Empowerment is a cross-cutting issue. From education and healthcare to governance and economic policy, activities that seek to empower poor people are expected to increase development opportunities, enhance development outcomes and improve people’s quality of life.

While its framework of empowerment-enhancing policies encompasses a wide range of issues, the major focus of the World Bank remains on access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organisational capacity (World Bank 2013).

For the purpose of trends analysis, however, the approach taken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seems most applicable; in its annual Human Development Report the United Nations provides an overview over a number of indicators that it deems to be suitable proxies for individual empowerment. The core of this initiative is the Human Development Index (HDI), a measure that rates countries according to a combination of indicators including life expectancy, educational attainment and income. In some ways, the HDI is a first attempt at representing a number of empowerment indicators in a single metric and on a 0 to 1 scale, using the geometric mean of the individual components – see Figure F.1.1.

Figure F.1.1: Components of the Human Development Index



Source: UNDP (2012)

The education component of the HDI is now measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age....

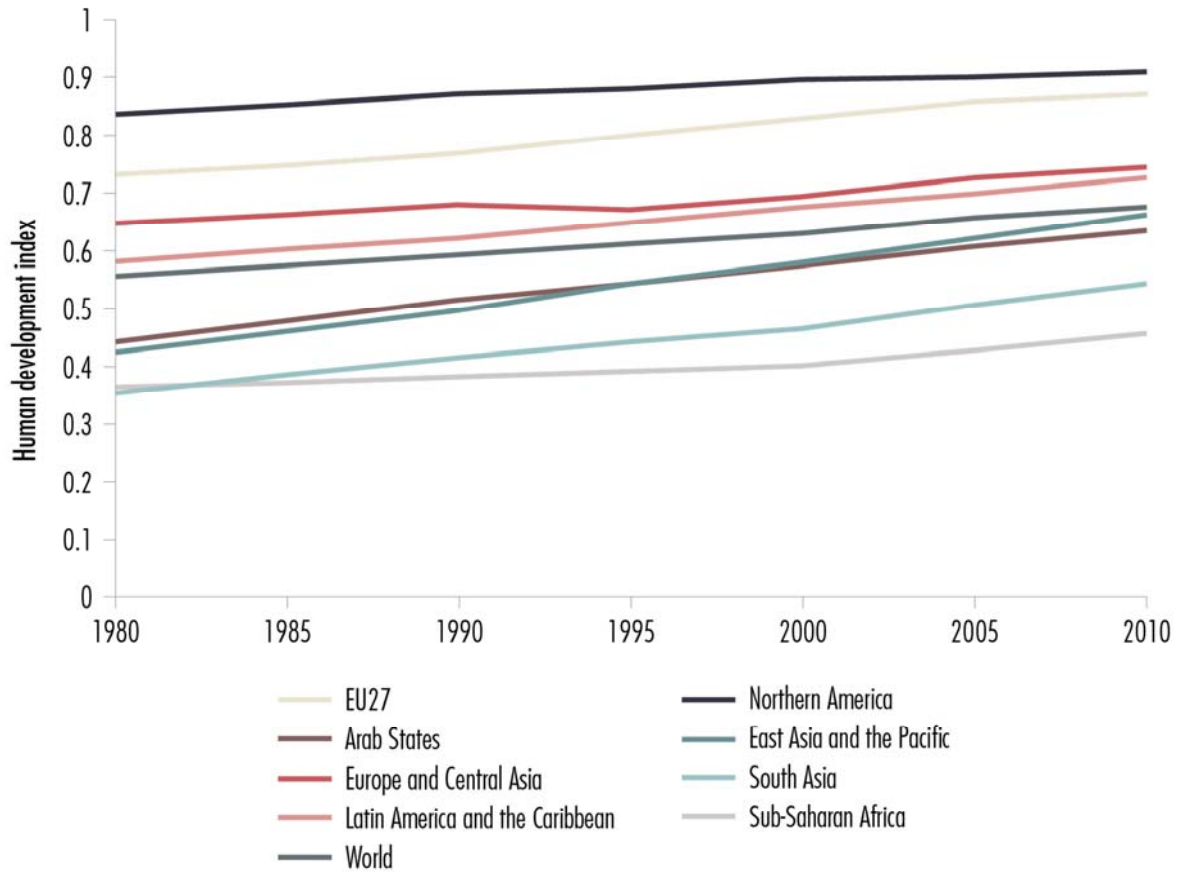
The life expectancy at birth component of the HDI is calculated using a minimum value of 20 years and maximum value of 83.4 years. This is the observed maximum value of the indicators from the countries in the time series, 1980–2010....

For the wealth component, the goalpost for minimum income is \$100 (PPP) and the maximum is \$107,721 (PPP), both estimated during the same period, 1980–2011.... The decent standard of living component is measured by GNI per capita (PPP\$) instead of GDP per capita (PPP\$). (UNDP 2012)

When looking at these three definitions, a number of similarities may be observed at first glance: for the first two organisations, education, participation, gender equality and some measure of quality of life such as health or life expectancy seem to be linked to the empowerment of individuals. Furthermore, the EUISS points out that information and communications technology (ICT) has evolved as a facilitating factor in recent years.

The United Nations approach, on the other hand, focuses on factors that are generally more easily observable and measurable. While this implies disregarding a significant dimension of empowerment, namely political participation and civil society, it provides a workable starting point for comparison of the state of human development across world regions.

Figure F.1.2: Human Development Index by world region

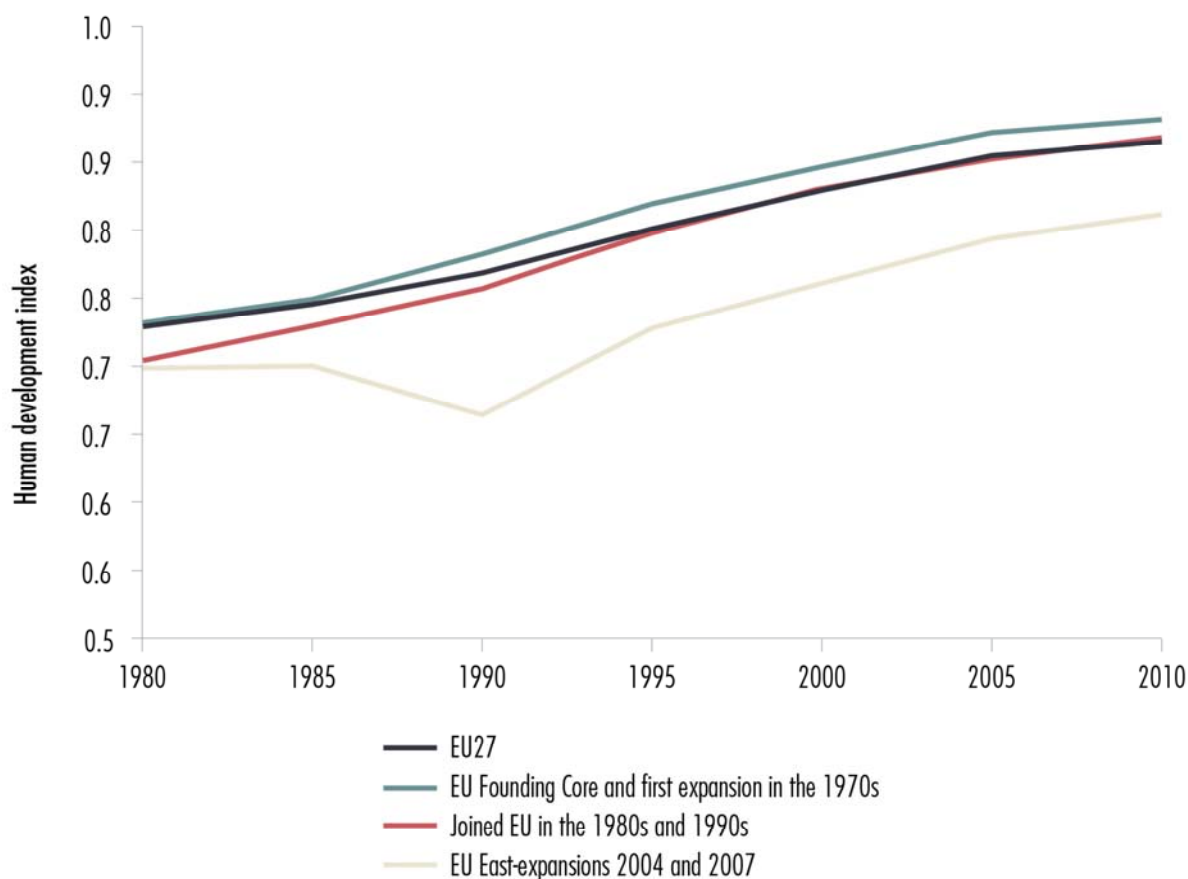


Source: UNDP (2012)

Looking at the historical evolution of the HDI by world region provides a number of insights – see Figure F.1.2. While the overall trend is positive, and people across the world are generally becoming more and more empowered – or in this case experience higher levels of human development as defined by the UNDP – it is also apparent that strong regional disparities persist. Since the early 1980s, improvements have been made at a resoundingly similar pace in all regions, although regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia have so far struggled to catch up with high-income countries.

The European Union consistently ranks high in terms of human development and favourably compares to other highly developed regions such as North America. However, it should be noted that the European and Central Asia region contains a number of countries that have joined the European Union in 2004 and 2007 respectively. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the intra-EU breakdown of the HDI to analyse whether development varies with accession date and to test whether EU tenure has had an overall positive effect on empowerment.

Figure F.1.3: Human Development Index by EU accession date



Source: UNDP (2012)

Breaking down the HDI by accession to the EU reveals notable differences between the core – mostly Western – EU Member States and newer states. In the 1980s, values were at almost equally high levels in both Eastern and Western Europe, but it seems that the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s has caused a drop in human development across its former member states. Ever since that point, the East has been showing positive tendencies and seems to improve at a similar rate to its counterparts in Western Europe. Nevertheless, the gap between the established and newer EU members is significant and provides grounds for further investigation.

To comprehend fully why these differences have not yet been overcome, and why the gaps both across world regions and within the European Union do not seem to diminish at a quicker pace, we must look to the factors influencing the HDI. Moreover, complementing this analysis with a discussion of other dimensions outlined by EUISS and the World Bank will help create a well-rounded explanation of the phenomenon of individual empowerment and will present policymakers with a framework for tackling future trends in the area.

Chapter 2. Access to education as a driver of empowerment

The rise of global literacy rates and educational levels is well documented in the literature. The trend is especially visible at the elementary level where the gap between developed nations and emerging and developing countries is closing, as recent UNESCO reports have found (UNESCO 2012). The general expectation is that this phenomenon will contribute to empowerment at the individual level.

Nevertheless, primary education marks only the beginning of a global convergence. Unless this translates into notable improvements in higher educational levels, the actual impact will remain limited. Only if people across the world are reaching higher levels of education overall can they be truly considered empowered through education. The value of basic literacy has declined in a world where overall literacy levels hover around 75–80% and are no longer considered a major issue, despite the fact that some regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab states, are lagging behind (World Bank Development Indicators 2012). Increasingly, the debate is shifting towards access to further educational opportunities as a predictor for empowerment, away from people's ability to read and write.

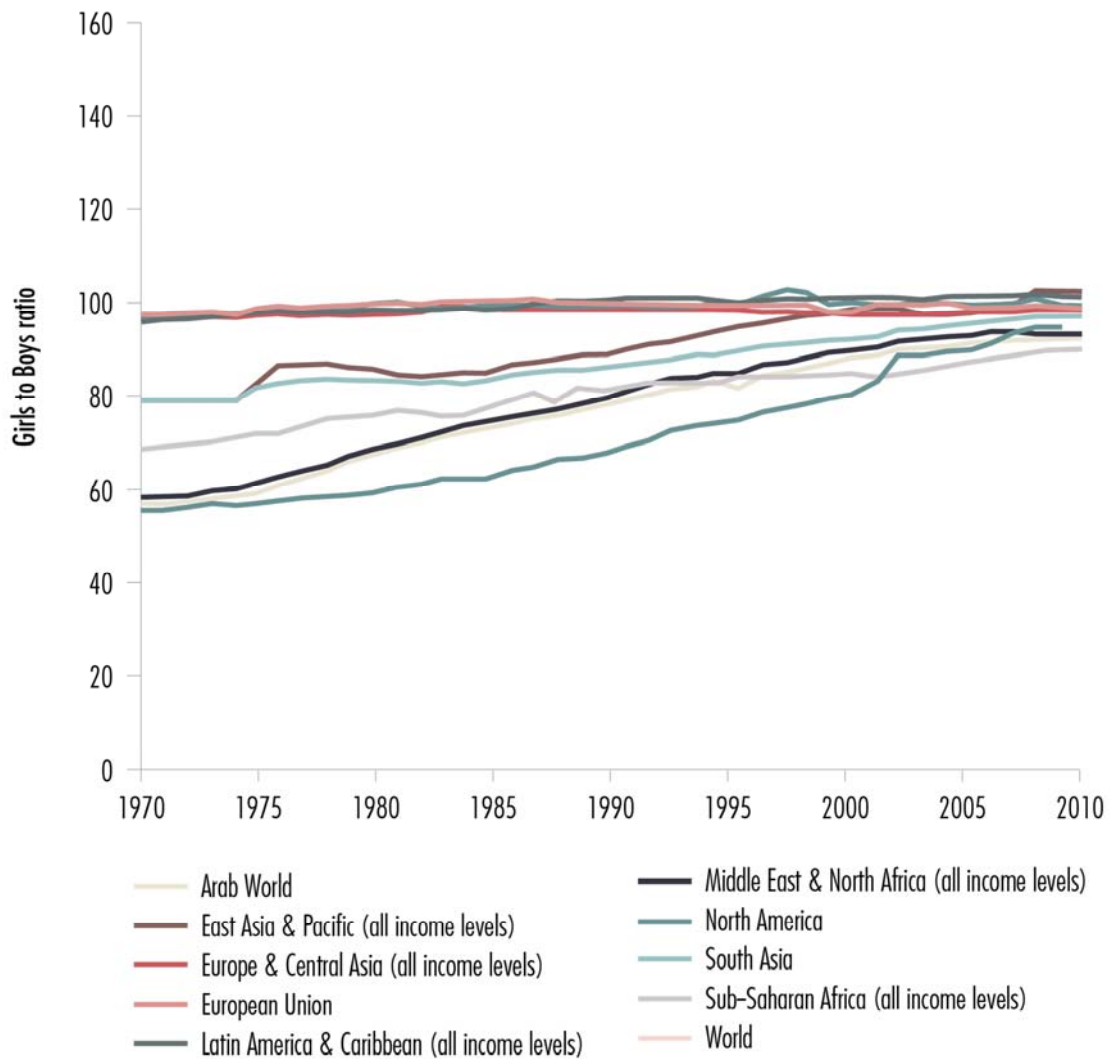
Moreover, changing values and behaviours are significant variables to consider in the wake of greater individual empowerment and education. While there is emerging evidence that the investment in quality of higher education in countries such as India and China has increased in the recent past, the relationship between broadened access to education, regional values and the forthcoming education strategies of developing countries whose leaders are largely educated in foreign institutions remains open (Levin 2010; Zhao & Sheng 2008). Additionally, proficiency in English is fast becoming an essential skill for people across the globe, even in regions where languages such as French (as in North Africa) had for a long time been the predominant foreign language (Euromonitor International 2012). Based on this, a certain convergence of attitudes and on-going globalisation of values may occur (Constant & Tien 2010), but regional resilience to these overarching trends is conceivable, under the pressure of nationalistic sentiments and desire to preserve traditional cultures and beliefs (Sathyamurthy 1998). In the same vein, the general advancement in human rights notwithstanding, certain regions may be insulated from progress because of the same process of preserving local values and traditions.

Additionally, the question of educational quality, particularly at the university level, remains unanswered; while college enrolment levels have increased consistently over the last decades, there is little evidence regarding the actual impact this has had on the overall quality of education (Damme 2001).

Chapter 3. Gender equality: a dimension of individual empowerment

When thinking about access to education, we need to pay special attention to gender equality and the difference in opportunities for women and men. Education is at the heart of equal opportunity, enabling men and women across the world to participate in the labour market and the economy as a whole, as well as to take on leadership roles in society, politics and management. To some extent, access to education must therefore be seen as a gateway to equality. When looking at the girls-to-boys ratio in primary education, positive developments may be observed, with all regions nearing a one-to-one ratio – see Figure F.3.1. The differences were much more striking in the 1970s, with girls experiencing a significant lack of access particularly in South Asia, the Arab world and Latin America, but the disparities have declined sharply over time, reaching at least 80% of male enrolment in all world regions.

Figure F.3.1: Girls-to-boys ratio in primary education across world regions

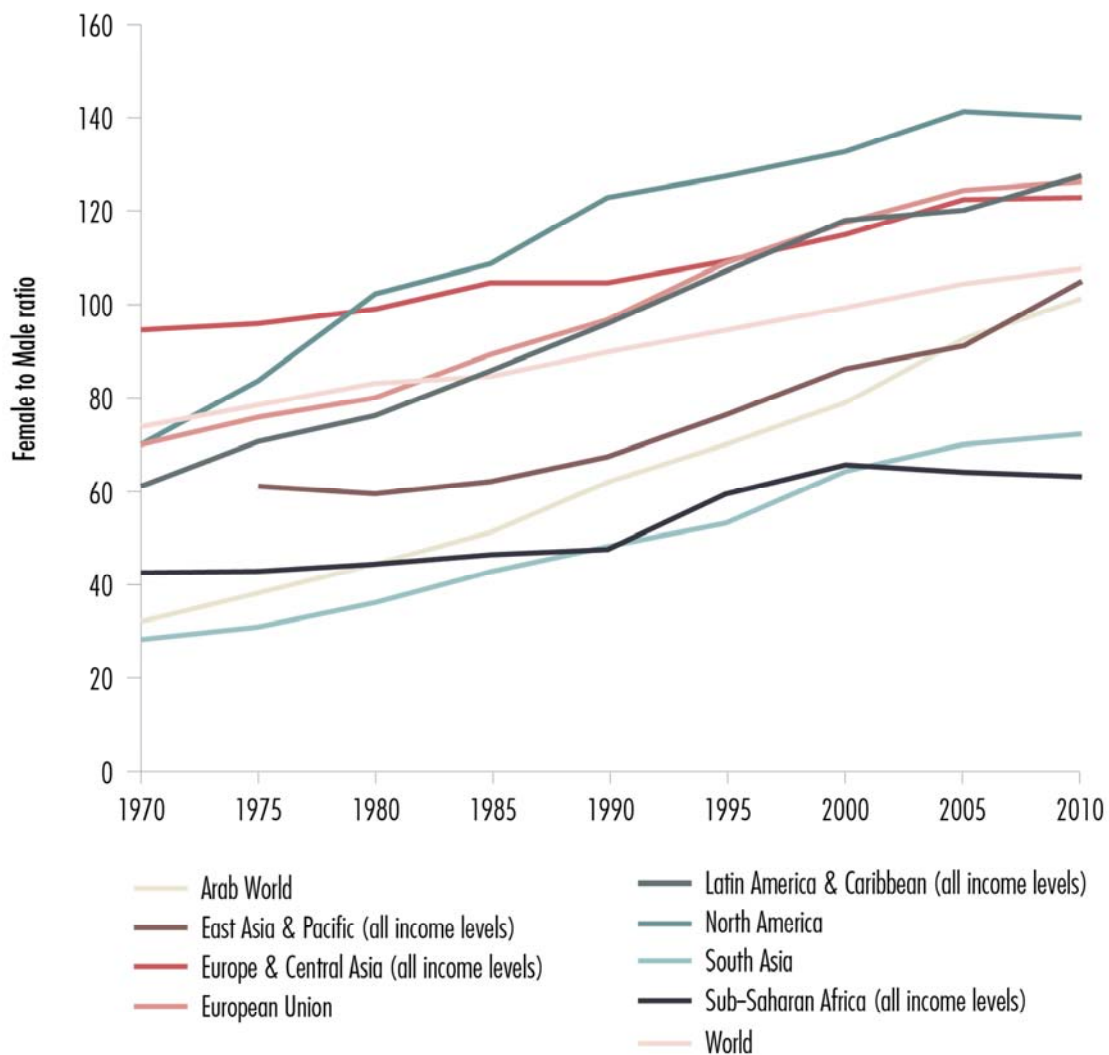


Source: World Bank World Development Indicators (2012)

Note: European Union represents EU-27

Although this trend may appear encouraging and seems to point to greater equality levels in the near future, it touches on only part of the issue. Like literacy rates, access to primary education measures access to very basic educational levels. In order to understand fully the levels of equal access to education and the outlook for a global equal opportunity agenda, we need to consider access to education that is directly relevant for people's professional careers. It has become obvious that there are limited gender disparities in basic educational indicators such as literacy rates and primary education enrolment, but participation in society hinges strongly on access to tertiary education.

Figure F.3.2: Female-to-male ratio in tertiary education enrolment across world regions



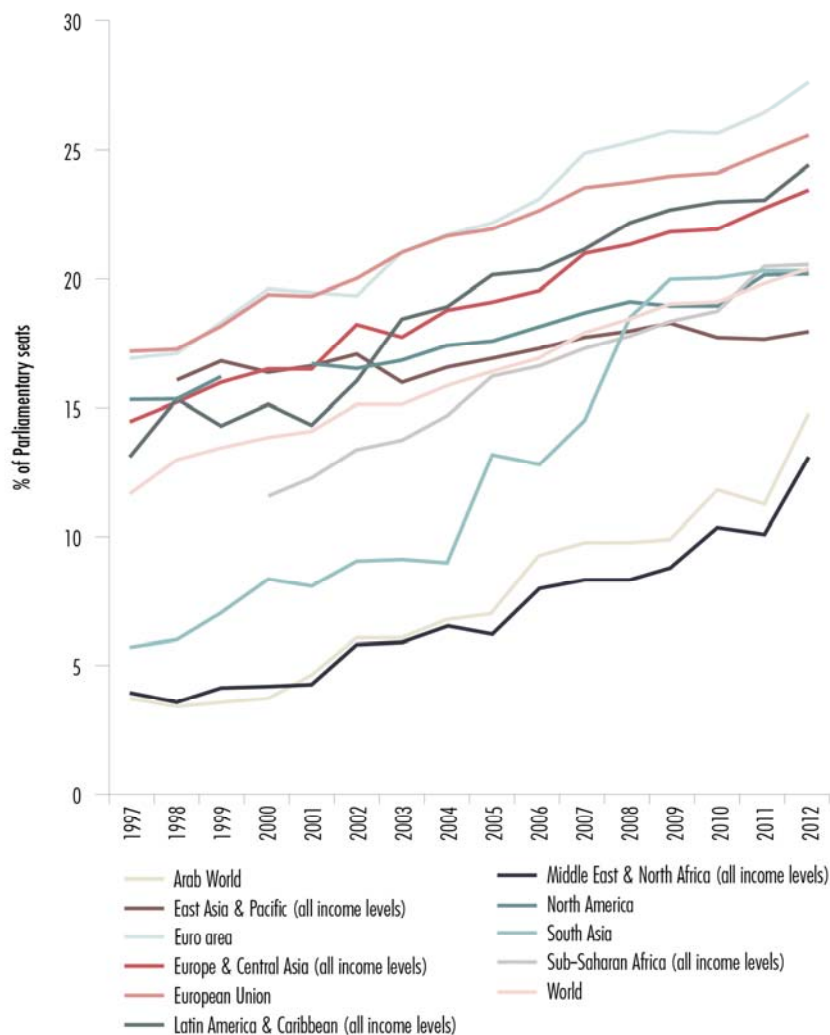
Source: World Bank World Development Indicators (2012)

Note: European Union represents EU-27

The breakdown of gender parity in tertiary education reveals more discrepancies than the breakdown of more basic indicators does – see Figure F.3.2. Economic and political leadership in societies across the globe is typically distributed among university graduates. Therefore, tertiary education may be understood as something of a precondition for equal opportunity and gender equality. In Western societies this does not seem to be an issue as we observe that, surprisingly, there are proportionately more females enrolled in education in North America and Europe, and also in Latin America. This seems to be a phenomenon distinctly found in the developed world (a situation that differs from that in basic education). Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia show low levels of enrolment for females in comparison with their male counterparts. For both regions, only about one woman for every two men enrolls in tertiary education, and this percentage has been more or less stable since the 1970s. In other developing regions that have been experiencing strong economic growth over the past 20 years – East Asia and the Arab world – the outlook appears more promising, with enrolment ratios continually rising towards a 1:1 ratio.

As more and more societies across the world are in a state of transition from industrialised economies and towards knowledge-based ones, access to tertiary education as well as its overall quality will become an essential predictor of power and economic prosperity. Consequently, it is interesting to note that traditional Western powers are now experiencing higher numbers of female students compared to male students, and the way in which this recent trend translates into the leadership structure of these societies may provide fruitful insights. In a number of highly developed countries, such as Germany and the United States, women have obtained prominent roles in the federal government. In order to rule out that these are just a few encouraging outliers, we must look at the overall breakdown of elected officials across the world and investigate whether the ratio of women elected into office is actually increasing and approaching equality in politics – see Figure F.3.3.

Figure F.3.3: Percentage of parliamentary seats held by women across world regions



Source: World Bank World Development Indicators (2012)

Note: European Union represents EU-27

There is much variation worldwide when it comes to the percentage of women holding parliamentary seats (Paxton, Hughes and Green, 2006; World Bank World Development Indicators 2012). While the

European Union and the Euro Area in particular display a strong tendency towards convergence and are currently topping the list with 25–30% of women in national parliaments, regions such as the Middle East and North Africa are lagging behind at 10%. Figures for female involvement in politics in North America tend to display lower equality levels than in the European Union.

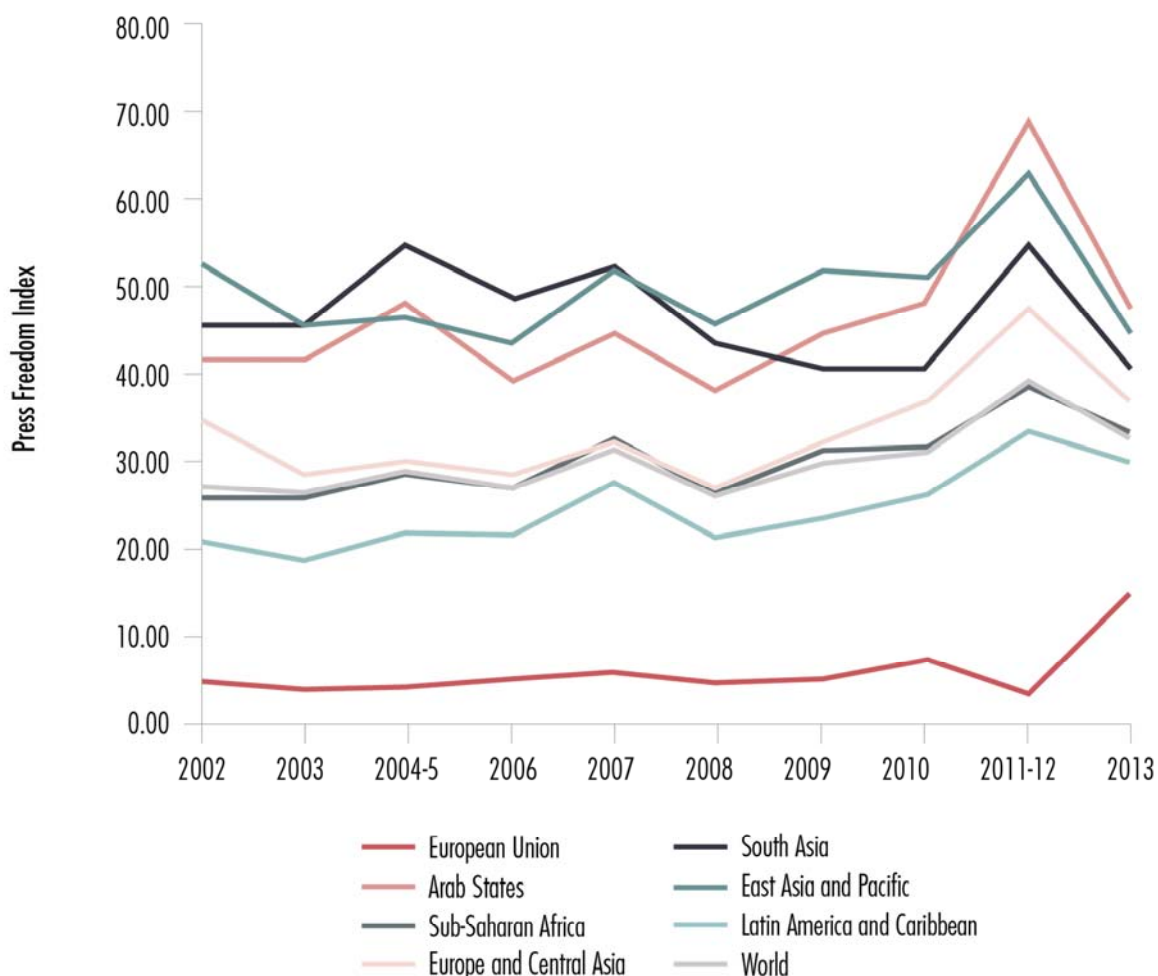
At first glance, the situation of women seems to be improving worldwide, leading to increased levels of educational attainment and enhanced possibilities for participation in politics, the labour market and civil society. However, when taking a closer look at the drivers and predictors of equal opportunity such as tertiary education and the proportion of women in national parliaments, the overall picture appears more nuanced. These indicators are showing encouraging tendencies over time and seem to be improving regardless of region, but differences remain. A number of countries are struggling with the transition from patriarchal structures to post-industrial societies in which traditional gender norms and equality standards are put into question.

Chapter 4. The spread of human rights as a corollary of empowerment

Besides the empowerment of women (Womanstats.org 2013), the development of broader human rights across the globe is a phenomenon characterising the empowered individual. The desire for freedom and democracy in particular is a universal human aspiration, but it has traditionally been a luxury demanded by citizens in highly developed societies. Once their basic needs for safety are fulfilled, they become occupied with values such as freedom, participation and democracy. Along those lines, the World Value Survey indicates that there is a strong correlation between mass self-expression values in developed societies and both the emergence of grassroots movements and the formation of civil society to fight for these universal human rights (Welzel & Inglehart 2008). In the past, the systematic oppression of certain parts of the population such as women and minorities in various regions of the world has been a major inhibitor to development in a number of societies. The access of these groups to education (UNESCO 2012) and their opportunities to participate in the political process (Paxton, Hughes and Green, 2006; World Bank World Development Indicators 2012) are crucial to the empowerment of individuals and the advancement of societies. But while the UN Human Rights Watch and Reporters without Borders both report progress in the provision of basic human rights, global disparities still remain strikingly high – the general advancement in human rights notwithstanding, certain regions seem to be insulated from progress (Reporters without Borders 2012). The preservation of local values and traditions appears to prevail over the adoption of ‘Western’ concepts of equality.

The traditional Western understanding of human rights revolves around basic concepts such as equality, freedom of speech, privacy, fair trial and rule of law. While the protection of these rights is difficult to measure, the regional breakdown of Reporters without Borders’ Press Freedom Index provides useful insights for further analysis (see Figure F.4.1).

Figure F.4.1: Press Freedom Index by world region



Source: Reporters without Borders (2013)

Note: European Union represents EU-27

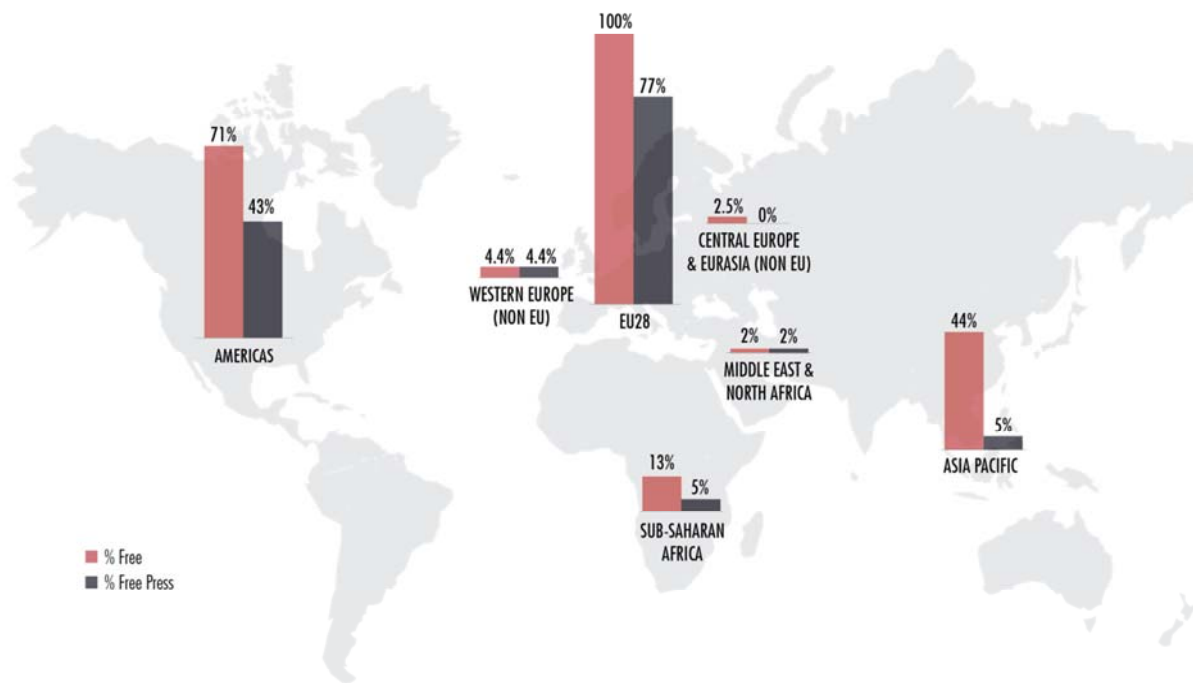
The index scores and compares countries in terms of pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, the legislative framework, the transparency of their institutions and their information infrastructure (Reporters without Borders 2013). When looking at the evolution of the indicator – which measures press freedom in terms of lowest possible extent of violation – over time and across world regions, it appears that scores for the EU Member States are higher than for other regions, including the ‘developing’ world. However, press freedom in the EU seems to be evolving, which is contradictory to the various other world regions. While most other regions experienced problems in 2011–2012, mainly owing to the Arab Spring and the related upheaval, European countries experienced similar developments around 2013, when the indexes across other countries returned to pre-revolution levels.

There are a number of alternative explanations for this observation. In its description of the index, Reporters without Borders points to political transformations in Member States such as Italy, Hungary and Greece that cause concern. Some of them related to the financial crisis, others related to recent election outcomes and failures of democratic rule. Alternatively, it should be pointed out that the

indicator in question is based on responses to questionnaires that are distributed to local journalists and leaders of civil society. While the set of questions asked remains the same across all regions, a certain level of subjectivity and degree of interpretation from the respondents cannot be ruled out. Press freedom across Europe may still be high and may improve, even compared with other regions, and journalists may have grown accustomed to new standards of protection and therefore may have an entirely different definition of freedom.

In a knowledge society that has become largely enabled by advancements in ICTs, basic human rights have grown to involve the internet and cover an entirely new set of issues, such as online censorship and privacy. Increasingly, internet freedom is becoming a proxy for freedom of speech and freedom of opinion. Data show a discrepancy between internet freedom in middle-income and low-income states and in Europe, for instance (see Figure F.4.2).

Figure F.4.2: Freedom on the internet 2012 - Freedom House Index, regional breakdown (2013)



Source: Freedom House (2013)

Note: The list of countries included under each world region may be found on Freedom House's website, and may be accessed here: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/regions>. The countries listed under Western Europe (non-EU) include the following: Andorra, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Switzerland, Turkey) Central Europe and Eurasia refer to the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

The importance of internet freedom and the power of technology have been displayed in the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011. However, it is proving difficult to assess the actual influence that technology has had on these revolutions and mass movements in general.

An alternative way of thinking about human rights has recently been adopted by the United Nations Security Council. In 2012, a resolution was passed that declares access to internet as a universal human right (New York Times 2012). This constitutes a progressive approach to the enforcement of human rights, but may only reflect the reality of concerns of the citizens of highly developed countries.

Chapter 5. Political participation and the evolution of grassroots movements

Technological advancements and, particularly, the rise of social media over the past decade have significantly altered the way in which people report and absorb information:

The new forms of what we are calling networked journalism rely on a growing array of new media platforms. They are available at all hours of the day and they are often interactive, at least to some extent. In general, they are inexpensive to produce or, alternatively, they are heavily subsidised as a result of their access to news content produced initially for the traditional news media (Beckett & Mansell 2008).

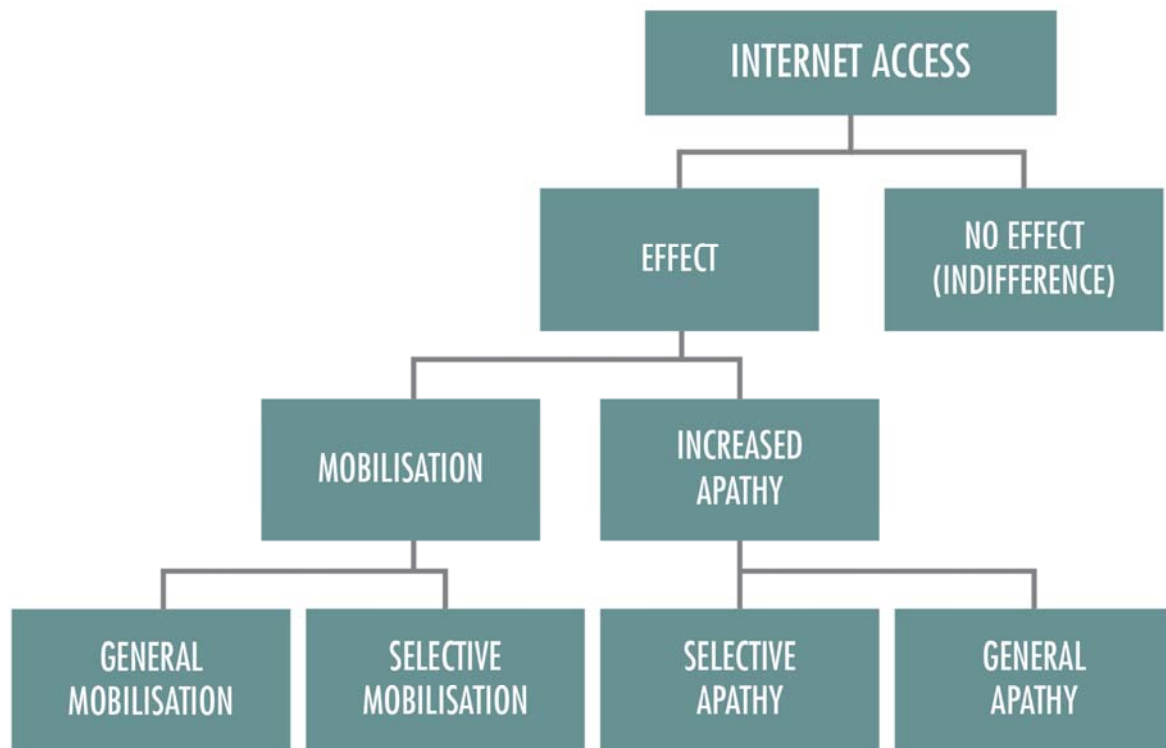
With the internet and increasing connectivity across the globe, people have more access to information. Where traditional media outlets used to be, and to some extent still are, predominantly utilised to obtain information, social media now enable citizens to enter in a direct exchange of information. The flow of information has transformed their usage more into a collective sharing process, rather than that of simple individual media consumption (Beckett & Fenyo 2012).

Consequently, information technologies have come to be an indispensable tool for those looking to influence people in innovative ways and to coordinate individuals on a very large scale (Norris 2006; Williams 2008). A powerful illustration of these new realities is the development of grassroots movements (Della Porta 2008) which have become a new political vehicle, largely enabled by technological progress and new communication technologies. Granovetter (1973) describes the strength of weak ties, and the fact that the size of someone's network over time is becoming more important than the intensity of that person's relationships. The rise of social media in particular has altered the way in which people interact and exchange information and the amount of people with whom they can remain loosely affiliated. Weak ties have a bigger reach and are less redundant in their coverage; therefore dispersing information via social networks has become very attractive to advertisers and activists around the globe.

However, there are similarities to education in that it remains to be seen whether this increased availability of information equals a better-informed population, or whether the mere flood of information becomes overwhelming and leads to dilution and manipulation. Overall, there seem to be two competing definitions of how technological progress contributes to social change (Morozov 2012). According to the instrumentalist view, the internet itself is only a tool for communication and information that is used by humans either in good or bad ways. In that case, technology accelerates social movements and acts as a vehicle for mass communication, bearing huge potential for misuse. According to the ecological view, however, the net goes beyond being a simple tool; it creates an entirely new, digital networked space.

Following an approach first used by Emmer and Vowe (2004), we need to ask how the internet affects the way in which people participate in society and politics. As depicted in Figure F.5.1, the effect of the internet on general engagement and involvement must be tested thoroughly, and the fact that there is an effect cannot be taken for granted without further investigation. In testing the hypotheses outlined below, Emmer and Vowe find that the picture remains unclear. While there is some evidence to reject the hypothesis that the internet does not affect people’s communication about politics, the actual effect cannot be specified further. Ultimately, the effect of the internet on political participation may range from increased political apathy over selective mobilisation to general mobilisation. As an example, people may not engage more in the political process because their passions have increased, but because the internet has significantly lowered the barriers of participation and presents somewhat of a convenience factor.

Figure F.5.1: How does the internet affect political participation – a longitudinal study design



Source: Emmer & Vowe (2004)

Through social media, activists can now easily reach a large audience, which gives their campaigns an order of magnitude that had previously been unheard of (Beckett & Fenyoe 2012; Keck & Sikkink 1998). The rise of the five-star movement in Italy and its transformation into a nationally relevant political party, MS5, constitutes the first evidence of a successful transition of internet activism into hands-on politics. Starting out as an online movement, its leaders have managed to translate online support into votes – a phenomenon that we are starting to observe in other countries as well, notably with the Pirate Party in Sweden and Germany. To some degree, these newly emerging political parties give voice to more specialised concerns and may represent a future trend in voting, particularly since they have managed to mobilise voters and contribute to higher voting turnouts (Campante et al. 2013). Miner (2012)

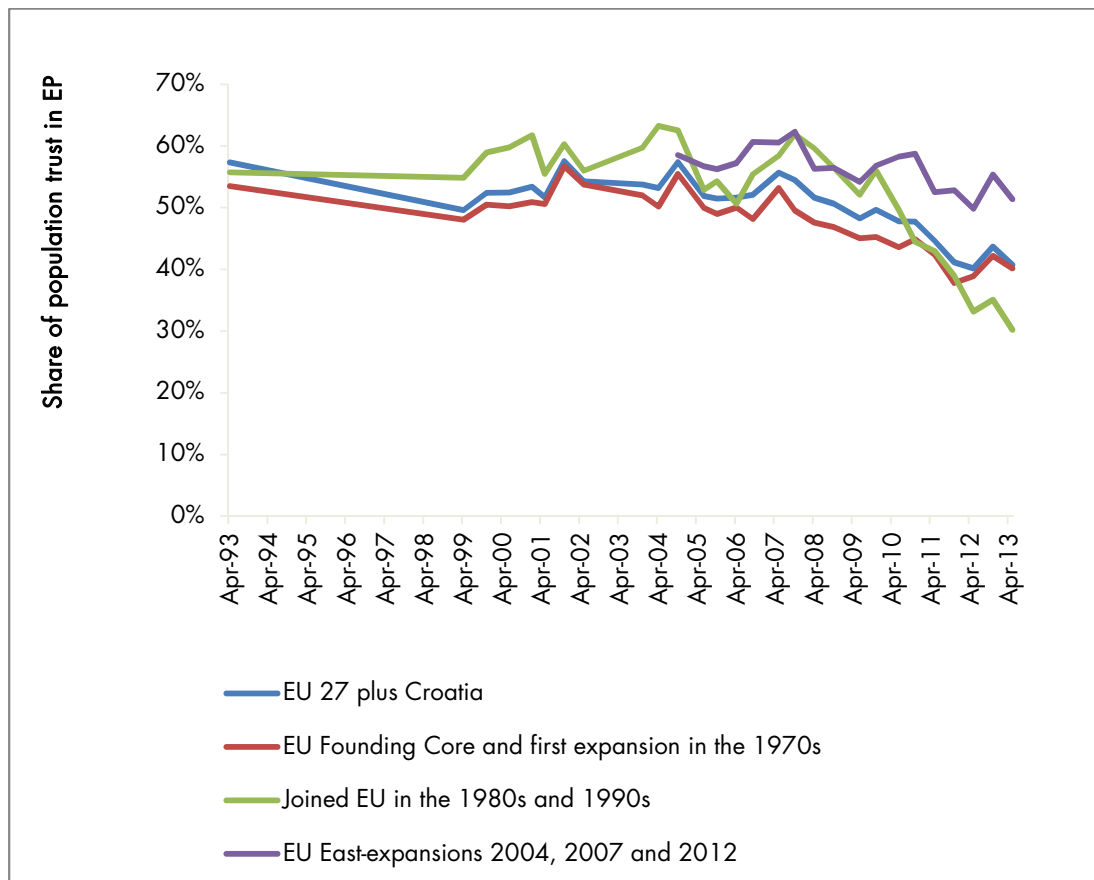
furthermore finds that internet penetration and increased access to information may have significant impacts in semi-authoritarian regimes. The availability of free internet in Malaysia has led to devastating losses by the ruling party in the last elections and holds the potential to continue to change the country's political landscape as it goes forward.

While traditional media outlets such as newspapers and TV stations mainly engage in the top-down, one-way provision of information, there exists now an abundance of low-cost, easy-access information through the web. With the internet in particular, a certain level of credibility and reliability of information is lost. Traditional outlets such as the BBC and CNN acted as trusted gatekeepers, but citizens are now responsible for processing the information they obtain more critically. This is because of the sheer amount of information, which makes it ever more difficult for individuals to find trustworthy news sources in a reporting world where quality controls and checks and balances are becoming increasingly harder to maintain. More and more, peer recommendations, celebrity endorsements, trusted organisations, media brand names and transparency become the main predictors of trust in the online space (Beckett & Fenyo 2012). To some extent, there is a trade-off between the quality and reliability of reporting on one side and accuracy and timeliness on the other side. However, as Falck and colleagues (2012) point out, the internet provides users with a much wider, unbiased array of information, whereas traditional media coverage is somewhat biased around certain ideologies and issues (DellaVigna & Kaplan 2007). Their caveat that self-selected media consumption may also lead to people becoming locked into certain opinions and becoming increasingly polarised is addressed and tentatively rejected by Grentzkow and Shapiro (2011). Looking at news consumption across the United States, they find that people online in fact consume a balanced range of information, rarely relying solely on one side of the political spectrum. The ability of citizens to understand and process this new kind of information will be a major driver of individual empowerment and has become a key element of the European Commission's digital agenda:

Media literacy may be defined as the ability to access, analyse and evaluate the power of images, sounds and messages which we are now being confronted with on a daily basis and are an important part of our contemporary culture, as well as to communicate competently in media available on a personal basis. Media literacy relates to all media, including television and film, radio and recorded music, print media, the Internet and other new digital communication technologies.

While it has become much easier for individuals to take part in the political process, the extent to which the phenomenon is beneficial on a wider scale and leads to mass interest in politics or is one that only an organised few take advantage of remains to be seen. In particular, in Western societies where the opportunities for participation have been higher for quite some time, a certain policy fatigue may be observed (Norris 2008), as evidenced by the low turn-out levels in some of Europe's most prosperous and advanced countries. This phenomenon is further highlighted by the declining amount of trust that EU citizens seem to have in the European Parliament, the EU institution for which they may directly vote, as shown below in Figure F.5.2.

Figure F.5.2 Eurobarometer – levels of trust in the European Parliament



Source: Eurobarometer (2013)

It is of particular note that the countries which joined Europe in the 1980s and 1990s – such as Spain, Portugal and Greece – are the ones exhibiting steeply declining levels of trust in the European Parliament. This fact is most likely a direct result of the Eurocrisis and the financial struggles these countries have gone through in the past years. It needs to be pointed out that the overall levels of trust are relatively high across the board, at around 50-60% of the population, particularly when keeping in mind the low approval rates that national parliaments and governments typically attain in developed societies. Nonetheless, even trust for the European Parliament, a body originally elected from citizens to represent citizens directly, trust is declining. In respect of political participation, increased education leads to better-defined political opinions and thus a decentralisation of power in developed countries. While political participation used to occur in a top-down, government-directed fashion through voting, it now occurs more around certain issues and in a form in which educated and empowered citizens challenge established authorities.

It may be that grassroots movements and civil society are slowly replacing traditional forms of democracy and pushing systems more towards a form of direct participation that is largely issue based (Norris & Curtice 2006).

However, the effect of broadband internet access on political participation is a fairly new and highly disputed subject of debate. Czernich (2012) views the internet as the next element in a chain of media outlets such as TV, radio and newspapers. Along those lines, ‘an increase in the range of available media

may therefore change people's knowledge of parties, politicians and politics, and eventually their voting behaviour... Thus, the introduction of new medium outlets leads to a change of media consumption behaviour. However, depending on a number of circumstances, this may lead to more or less knowledge of and interest in politics.' In general, advances in ICT have led to the formation of so-called smart mobs – loosely coordinated grassroots movements around certain issues. 'At this point, connections between the behaviour of smart mobs and the behaviour of swarm systems must be tentative, yet several of the earliest investigations have shown that the right kinds of online social networks know more than the sum of their parts: connected and communicating in the right ways, populations of humans can exhibit a kind of "collective intelligence". (Rheingold 2003)

This transformation has been particularly acute in the media, where blogs have contributed to lowering the threshold of entry to the global debate for traditionally unheard voices, particularly in poorer areas of the world (Coleman 2005). Social media have changed the ways in which activists can participate in the political process. The recent policy debate over a global anti-counterfeiting agreement (ACTA) may be viewed as a case of organised interests using social media and online petitions to influence policymaking directly. While this has been previously observed in developing countries, especially in the Arab Spring revolutions, ACTA marks the first significant online engagement facilitated by the new media and revolving around online privacy (Matthews 2012). In summary, the rise of non-state actors holds the potential to have both a positive and a negative impact on policy, with the benefits largely materialising through an enhanced capability to tackle transnational issues and a more inclusive approach to global governance and the challenges lying in greater fragmentation of society, decentralisation and polarisation (European Environment Agency 2013).

Matrix for key trends in empowerment

Trend	Drivers	Indicators	Evidence-base (0/+/++/+++)	Time horizon	Outcomes for the EU	Uncertainty (low/ medium/ high)
Human development as measured by the HDI is growing over time	Improvements in education, health and wealth	HDI 1990–2010	+++	Medium to long term	Within the EU, high variation of human development across regions, with the newer Member States struggling to catch up to the Western core	Low
Narrowing the gender gap in many parts of the world	Women's growing involvement in politics, women's increased participation in the job market, proportion of women graduates	World Bank Development indicators 2012, female to male ratio in higher education and elementary school, breakdown of seats held by women in national parliaments	+++	Short to medium term	Closing the gender pay gap, increasing female labour force participation, societal conflicts due to changing gender roles, likely persistence of gender inequalities in developing countries	Low
Improving global human rights situation	Democratisation of developing countries leads to greater respect for human rights, people's definition of human rights is changing over time, nowadays privacy on the internet has become a human right	Reporters without Borders Press Freedom Index 2013, Freedom House Freedom on the Net 2012	++	Short to medium term	Persisting disparities in the enforcement of human rights across the Union	Medium
Grassroots movements and activism dictate policy. Moving from traditional political participation to issue-based participation.	Technological progress and growing degree of interconnectedness, social media platforms such as Twitter present an opportunity to rally around specific issues and push societies closer to a new form of direct democracy	Cases: ACTA and the EU, emergence of political platforms such as Avaaz.org MS5 in Italy, Pirate Party, Arab Spring online	+	Short term	Effects of changing levels of citizen involvement and internet entrepreneurs on democratic process; maintaining legitimacy of EU institutions in the face of changing political engagement	High
Access to internet and social media leads to increased political participation	Internet access means increased availability of information on either side of the political spectrum,	NBER working papers, emergence of political platforms such as	+	Short term	Availability of internet and greater access to information lead to a generally better-educated population, to policymakers this means greater accountability and	High

Trend	Drivers	Indicators	Evidence-base (0/+/++/+++)	Time horizon	Outcomes for the EU	Uncertainty (low/ medium/ high)
	social media enable like-minded people to exchange views on certain issues and form movements / voice their opinions	Avaaz.org online			requires actively involving citizens in the policy formulation process	

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