

# City Strength of Democracy Index





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The German Marshall Fund Cities program (GMF Cities) seeks to better understand and strengthen liberal democracy at local levels in Europe and the United States. To assist with this effort, Gallup offers to partner with GMF to develop the City Strength of Democracy Index (CSDI), which will be a comprehensive framework built by identifying local, publicly available indicators. After a literature review to inform an initial framework, the indicators will be piloted in 25 cities, refined and then fielded as a full survey in 123 cities in Europe and North America. The survey results from the 123 cities will serve as a benchmark of resident voices that tracks changes in aspects of democracy in each city over time. This unique set of indicators will give public policy experts the necessary depth to conduct rigorous empirical research and provide policymakers with practical insights into the health of democracy in their cities.



A resilient liberal democracy is rooted in local politics and the will of the people. The bond between local representatives and residents is essential to creating robust and thriving local institutions, which in turn are the foundation for democracy at the national level. Cities are a microcosm of this bottom-up process of democracy in action. City officials should uphold the basic tenets of democracy and strive to deepen the connection to residents by serving them effectively and equitably. As frontline “laboratories of democracy,” cities must be recognized and responsible for their role in upholding these democratic principles.

The quality of local democratic political systems across cities varies significantly, affecting residents’ ability to flourish in a free and fair society. The CSDI seeks to advance liberal democratic practices and institutions in three ways:

- Benchmark cities across fundamental dimensions of democracy
- Reveal the benefits that accompany higher levels of liberal democracy
- Identify and incentivize ways cities can strengthen liberal democracy

The CSDI will provide critical insight for city officials into the state of local democracy and create data-informed strategies to strengthen it. Similarly, residents, civil society leaders, academics, non-profit organizations and businesses will be able to use the CSDI to identify and target areas for improvement, advocate for change, and track progress on initiatives, projects, and activities at a citywide level.

GMF Cities’ rich expertise in solutions-oriented research for urban centers combined with Gallup’s deep experience in qualitative and quantitative methodologies presents the ideal partnership to launch discussions on democratic performance in Europe and the United States. Together, this effort will elevate the importance

and understanding of democracy at the local level.

### THE PROJECT

Several democratic diagnostics have emerged over the past few decades.<sup>1</sup> These measures have provided policymakers and international organizations perspective on democratic performance and advanced research on issues related to democratic transitions, consolidation, and backsliding. Over time, measures such as confidence in leadership or civic engagement have become more robust and precise, offering nuanced assessments for each sub-dimension of democracy. Yet these improved measures remain incomplete in two key aspects: the local political reality and the voice of residents because they are based on national statistics and expert opinions.

Existing democracy indices track and measure politics at the national level—*consistently the least-trusted level of government*—leaving local variations of democracy under-examined. Given falling confidence in the ability of democratic national governments to function well<sup>2</sup>, a shift in focus to cities—the engines of democracy with *consistently higher levels of trust in government*—will reveal the micro-dynamics of democracy in action. By focusing on the local level in urban centers, CSDI will illuminate cities' agency in strengthening democracy and reveal what policies and initiatives yield a local democracy dividend. **The CSDI will capture the institutional landscape and bottom-up processes where cities excel or fall short of the democratic ideal at the local level, such as participatory activities, voting eligibility, and equitable provision of public services.**



Current democracy indices rely on objective measures that capture basic principles of democratic governance and subject matter expert assessments for concepts difficult to measure with traditional indicators. Yet, democracy works through input and involvement by the people; a measure for resident voice provides an alternative perspective to examine democracy grounded in lived experience. The CSDI will help identify how well residents believe institutions and public officials are serving their interests. It will provide a detection system that objective measures often miss, such as perceptions on issues of accessibility and inclusivity. Resident voices also provide insight into self-reported levels of participation in the democratic process and perceptions of the effectiveness of such participation.

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1 Some prominent examples include the Center for Systemic Peace's Polity data series, Freedom House's Freedom in the World, the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index and Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem).

2 <https://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm>

CSDI's emphasis on local governance and resident voice offers a bottom-up assessment of democracy that complement existing top-down measures. Filling in these gaps with easily understood, methodologically sound indicators will lead to actionable insights that key stakeholders can use to improve the functionality and resilience of local democracy.

### *Target Audiences*

For practitioners, such as elected officials, public servants, civil society organizations, academics, and local organizers, the CSDI will provide a transparent benchmark that identifies how cities rank along various dimensions with their peers. Such public attention will also spur greater accountability by identifying specific areas where democratic deficits exist in a city. Public policy insights will further support practitioners by revealing data-driven strategies to strengthen local democracy.

For researchers and academics, the CSDI will provide a rich set of comparable indicators for democracy at the local level that do not currently exist. Like democracy indices at the national level, CSDI will provide a focal point for more research on the drivers of democratic consolidation and backsliding at the local level. Moreover, the indicators will reveal how democracy is associated with other outcomes of interest, like health and wellbeing.

### *Approach*

GMF Cities and Gallup will employ a multi-phased approach to produce the CSDI. The concept development phase will lay the groundwork for subsequent phases through stakeholder interviews, a literature review, and extant indicators available from public data sources. Findings will inform the data collection and analysis phase that will incorporate the results from survey data collected from citizens in 123 cities in Europe and North America. The final stage of the project will focus on the communication and dissemination plan for the findings with the aim of raising the CSDI's public profile.



## *Phases and Activities*

### **Phase 0: Concept Development 2020 -2021**

Activity Number	Activity Title
1	Project kickoff
2	Literature review
3	Stakeholder interviews
4	Public data exploration
5	Creation of preliminary index
6	Questionnaire design
7	Questionnaire programming
8	Fielding and data collection of pilot test in 13 North American and 12 European cities
9	Data analysis of pilot test in all 25 cities
10	Validation of index

### **Phase 1: Global Launch 2021-2022**

Activity Number	Activity Title
1	Public data exploration
2	Fielding and data collection in 123 cities (N = 500 per city)
3	Data analysis of all 123 cities
4	Validation of index
5	20-page analytical report
6	Public dissemination activities and strategic communications



## Phase 2 Ongoing Measurement 2022-2026

Activity Number	Activity Title
1	Public data exploration
2	Fielding and data collection in 123 cities (N = 500 per city)
3	Data analysis of all 123 cities
4	20-page analytical report
5	Public dissemination activities and strategic communications

### *Qualitative Research and Public Data Review*

In the qualitative research phase of the project, GMF Cities and Gallup will conduct stakeholder interviews, a literature review, and a thorough assessment of existing data sources. The findings in this phase will culminate in the development of the survey instrument that is a principal component of the primary research phase.

**Literature Review:** Gallup will distill the vast body of literature on democracy at the national and local levels. The primary goal will be adaptation/adoption of a clear, easily understood conceptual framework that captures the key dimensions and sub-dimensions of democracy at the local level. This solid foundation will help anchor subsequent activities that focus on ways to measure these underlying dimensions through publicly available indicators and survey items capturing citizens' voices.

**Stakeholder Interviews:** Zacc Ritter, Ph.D., an experienced Gallup qualitative researcher will conduct eight to 10 stakeholder interviews with subject matter experts and other leading authorities in academic, policy, and advocacy circles. A critical aspect of the interviewee selection process will entail inclusion of diverse voices that offer unique perspectives on issues surrounding local democracy. These semi-structured conversations will help refine the conceptual framework developed in the literature review by identifying what dimensions and sub-dimensions are omitted, redundant, or are overlooked by traditional frameworks. This pressure testing process will ensure the index serves the dual purpose of scientific rigor and practical application. Gallup will provide GMF Cities with a brief summary from each stakeholder interview.

**Public Data Exploration:** GMF Cities will compile an inventory of publicly available data related to the qualities and outcomes of democracy at the local level. This inventory will align indicators to the core dimensions identified during the stakeholder interviews and literature review. Available indicators across mid- and large-sized cities will be provided by GMF Cities, and Gallup will compile them into a unified data set that will serve as the foundation for the objective set of measures to the index. This exercise will also identify data gaps for dimensions lacking proper indicators, which will help inform what to capture in the survey instrument.

### *Primary Research*

Leveraging the insights gathered in Phase I, GMF Cities researchers and Gallup methodologists will develop an initial pilot survey instrument to measure the qualities of democracy from the residents' perspective. After being tested in a small subsample of cities, analyzed, and refined, Gallup will develop the final survey instrument. Both the pilot and final instruments will focus on dimensions of local democracy that are inadequately captured through publicly available data, such as extent of social capital, sense of political agency, perceived responsiveness of local government, etc. Gallup will administer web surveys in relevant local languages to residents of cities in North America and Europe. The data collected will be weighted to correct for nonresponse to ensure the sample reflects the demographics of each local population.

### **Piloting**

From the identification of key index measures on dimensions of local democracy, Gallup will create a pilot survey instrument that will be tested in 13 cities in the North America and 12 cities in Europe to assess whether the survey items have the intended understanding and capability to measure dimensions of local democracy. In each of the 25 cities, Gallup would collect 250 responses, of adults aged 18 and over. After data collection, Gallup will analyze the data to determine how well the survey matches the intended results. Gallup will share a brief report with GMF on the results. Gallup will then adjust the pilot survey and scale up to full implementation in 123 cities.





## Sampling

Gallup will sample a minimum of 500 residents for each of the 123 cities in North America and Europe. These respondents will include adults aged 18 and over who live full-time in each city. Gallup will include demographic quotas (e.g., by age, gender, education level, and racial/ethnic group) to ensure the final sample reflects each city's population. Respondents will be recruited via a web panel to participate in the survey. Gallup will work with its long-time web panel partner Dynata to sample and survey respondents. Dynata has verified that it will be able to obtain the target number of survey completes in each city listed in the Potential City List.



## Data Collection

As noted, Gallup will field the survey in local languages, and all survey invitations will be carefully crafted for the study. The invitation will describe the purpose and importance of the survey and establish the legitimacy of the survey request. The invitation and survey introduction will also stress the confidentiality of results and that individual respondents cannot be identified. Gallup plans for the survey to take an average of 12 minutes to complete. Gallup expects that the field period will last four weeks, which is adequate for web-based data collection and nonresponse conversion efforts.

## Quality Assurance

Gallup will review data quality within an hour of the survey launch, again within 24 hours of the survey launch and weekly throughout the field period. Dynata, Gallup's sample vendor, will construct weights to ensure that each sample is reflective of each city's residents. Throughout the project, Gallup will store and protect data on its secure, on-site servers, including delivery of data to GMF Cities through its secure FTP site.



### Data Compliance and GDPR

Gallup has a comprehensive system to maintain data confidentiality and safeguard respondents' identity through data collection, storage, and reporting processes. Gallup is fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), with all provisions and systems in place for data protection, and its requirements for protecting respondents' confidentiality are in accordance with industry standards. To prove the trustworthiness of Gallup's security capability, Gallup routinely undergoes audits of its information technology to confirm that its policies, procedures and security controls meet or exceed the gold-standard requirements that its clients expect. Additional details on this matter are available upon request.



### Data Analysis and Reporting

Gallup will develop an analysis plan based on preliminary findings from Phase I and Phase II and work with GMF Cities to generate the index, highlighting major outcomes and discoveries uncovered by primary data collection.

Gallup's analysis will primarily focus on city-level results, highlighting each city's strength of democracy across a number of key dimensions. Cities will then be compared with the full sample of cities in the CSDI and/or a list of peer cities defined by region, population, or other characteristics. Some demographic reporting may also be possible within and across individual cities, exploring how attitudes and experiences vary across different groups. Finally, in subsequent phases of the project, Gallup will analyze how strength of democracy has evolved over time within the sample of cities. This will give Gallup and GMF Cities the ability to evaluate how particular interventions or policies have improved outcomes in individual cities.

### *Public Dissemination*

Gallup and GMF Cities will work closely on a dissemination strategy that promotes the ongoing community transformation efforts. Gallup has effectively conducted this work for many government, non-profit and foundational, community-based organizations, and for-profit firms in both the United States and in Europe. Outreach engagements will be conducted either virtually or through Gallup's UK, Germany, or U.S. offices to ensure maximum dissemination and impact, working with the appropriate local media contacts. Outreach engagements will be conducted either virtually or through GMF and Gallup's North American and European offices to ensure maximum dissemination and impact, working with the appropriate local media contacts. Outreach will include roundtable discussions, published blogs and news articles, and a public release event to provide maximum exposure for the project and the major findings that come out of the research conducted.

### **GALLUP AND GMF CITIES CAPABILITIES AND EXPERIENCE**

Gallup brings extensive experience in developing globally validated and methodologically rigorous indexes, while generating the world's most trusted research on public perceptions. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its ability to field surveys in more than 140 countries on an annual basis, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of citizens than any other organization in the world. Gallup gives voice to citizens across the globe on topics such as civic engagement, government and politics, law and order, and trust in institutions.



Gallup has the necessary global reach to successfully collect high-quality data across cities in Europe and the United States. Since 2005, Gallup has conducted hundreds of thousands of surveys in European countries—and millions in the case of the United States. Gallup has the ability to adapt and scale the Cities Index based on GMF Cities' priorities and where the insights lead. Gallup's reputation as the most trusted name in research, coupled with its unprecedented reach, will ensure the research and insights have the necessary visibility to advance a global conversation on the strength of democracy and amplify city residents' voices.

Founded in 1972 as a non-partisan, nonprofit organization through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition



to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has offices in Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, Bucharest, and Warsaw.

The GMF Cities program supports leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in North America and Europe by facilitating the transatlantic exchange of knowledge for building inclusive, sustainable, and globally engaged cities. GMF Cities contributes research and analysis on public policy issues impacting cities on both sides of the Atlantic and champions the successes of those within its network by amplifying individual innovations and new models.

GMF Cities works in selected cities that share a set of common challenges and desire to explore solutions through transatlantic exchange. GMF Cities has an extensive and successful history of working cooperatively with public, private, and NGO leaders to apply these insights to improve local and regional policies and programs.

### *Potential City List*

Albuquerque, New Mexico	Hamburg, Germany	Portland, Oregon
Amsterdam, Netherlands	Helsinki, Finland	Prague, Czech Republic
Anaheim, California	Henderson, Nevada	Québec City, Quebec
Antwerp, Belgium	Honolulu, Hawaii	Raleigh, North Carolina
Arlington, Texas	Houston, Texas	Riga, Latvia
Athens, Greece	Indianapolis, Indiana	Riverside, California
Atlanta, Georgia	Istanbul, Turkey	Rome, Italy
Aurora, Colorado	Jacksonville, Florida	Rotterdam, Netherlands
Austin, Texas	Kansas City, Missouri	Sacramento, California
Bakersfield, California	Krakow, Poland	Saint Paul, Minnesota
Baltimore, Maryland	Kyiv, Ukraine	San Antonio, Texas
Barcelona, Spain	Las Vegas, Nevada	San Diego, California
Belfast, UK	Lexington, Kentucky	San Francisco, California
Belgrade, Serbia	Lisbon, Portugal	San Jose, California
Berlin, Germany	Liverpool, UK	Santa Ana, California
Bilbao, Spain	London, UK	Seattle, Washington
Bologna, Italy	Long Beach, California	Sofia, Bulgaria
Boston, Massachusetts	Los Angeles, California	St. Louis, Missouri
Bratislava, Slovakia	Louisville, Kentucky	Stockholm, Sweden
Bristol, UK	Lyon, France	Stockton, California
Brussels, Belgium	Madrid, Spain	Stuttgart, Germany
Bucharest, Romania	Manchester, UK	Tallinn, Estonia
Budapest, Hungary	Marseille, France	Tampa, Florida
Calgary, Alberta	Memphis, Tennessee	Thessaloniki, Greece
Charlotte, North Carolina	Mesa, Arizona	Torino, Italy
Chicago, Illinois	Miami, Florida	Toronto, Ontario
Cincinnati, Ohio	Milan, Italy	Toulouse, France
Cleveland, Ohio	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	Tucson, Arizona
Colorado Springs, Colorado	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Tulsa, Oklahoma
Columbus, Ohio	Montréal, Quebec	Vancouver, British Columbia
Copenhagen, Denmark	Munich, Germany	Vienna, Austria
Corpus Christi, Texas	Nashville, Tennessee	Vilnius, Lithuania
Dallas, Texas	New Orleans, Louisiana	Virginia Beach, Virginia
Denver, Colorado	New York, New York	Warsaw, Poland
Detroit, Michigan	Oakland, California	Wichita, Kansas
Dublin, Ireland	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	Zagreb, Croatia
Edmonton, Alberta	Oslo, Norway	Zurich, Switzerland
El Paso, Texas	Ottawa, Ontario	
Fort Worth, Texas	Paris, France	
Frankfurt, Germany	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	
Fresno, California	Phoenix, Arizona	
Geneva, Switzerland	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	



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