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This book evaluates the global status and prospects of democracy, with an emphasis on the quality of democratic institutions and the effectiveness of governance as key conditions for stable democracy. Bringing together a wide range of the author's work over the past three decades, it advances a framework for assessing the quality of democracy and it analyzes alternative measures of democracy. Drawing on the most recent data from Freedom House, it assesses the global state of democracy and freedom, as of the beginning of 2015, and it explains why the world has been experiencing a mild but now deepening recession of democracy and freedom since 2005.

A major theme of the book across the three decades of the author's work is the relationship between democratic quality and stability. Democracies break down, Diamond argues, not so much because of economic factors but because of corrupt, inept governance that violates individual rights and the rule of law. The best way to secure democracy is to ensure that democracy is accountable, transparent, genuinely competitive, respectful of individual rights, inclusive of diverse forms and sources of participation, and responsive to the needs and aspirations of ordinary citizens. Viable democracy requires not only a state that can mobilize power to achieve collective goals, but also one that can restrain and punish the abuse of power—a particularly steep challenge for poor countries and those with natural resource wealth.

The book examines these themes both in broad comparative perspective and with a deeper analysis of historical trends and future prospects in Africa and Asia. Concluding with lessons for sustaining and reforming policies to promote democracy internationally, this book is essential reading for students and scholars interested in democracy, as well as politics and international relations more generally.