V-Dem INSTITUTE

10TH EDITION

DEMOCRACY REPORT 2026

Unraveling The Democratic Era?



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

V-Dem is a unique approach to measuring democracy employing state-of-the-art methodology.

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) produces the largest global dataset on democracy with over 32 million data points for 202 countries and territories from 1789 to 2025. Involving over 4,200 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures over 600 different attributes of democracy.

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The Democracy Report 2026 will soon be available in Spanish and Portuguese.

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Executive Summary

1. Democracy in the World 2025

- Democracy is back to 1978 levels for the average global citizen. The gains of the "third wave of democratization", starting 1974 in Portugal, are almost eradicated.
- The level of democracy for the average citizen in Western Europe and North America is at its lowest level in over 50 years, primarily due to ongoing autocratization in the USA.
- The USA loses its long-term status as a liberal democracy – for the first time in over 50 years.

Autocracies and Democracies

- The world has 92 autocracies and 87 democracies at the end of 2025.
- 74% of the world population (6 billion) now live in autocracies.
- Only 7% of the world population (0.6 billion) live in liberal democracies.

The "Great Reversal": 2000 vs. 2025

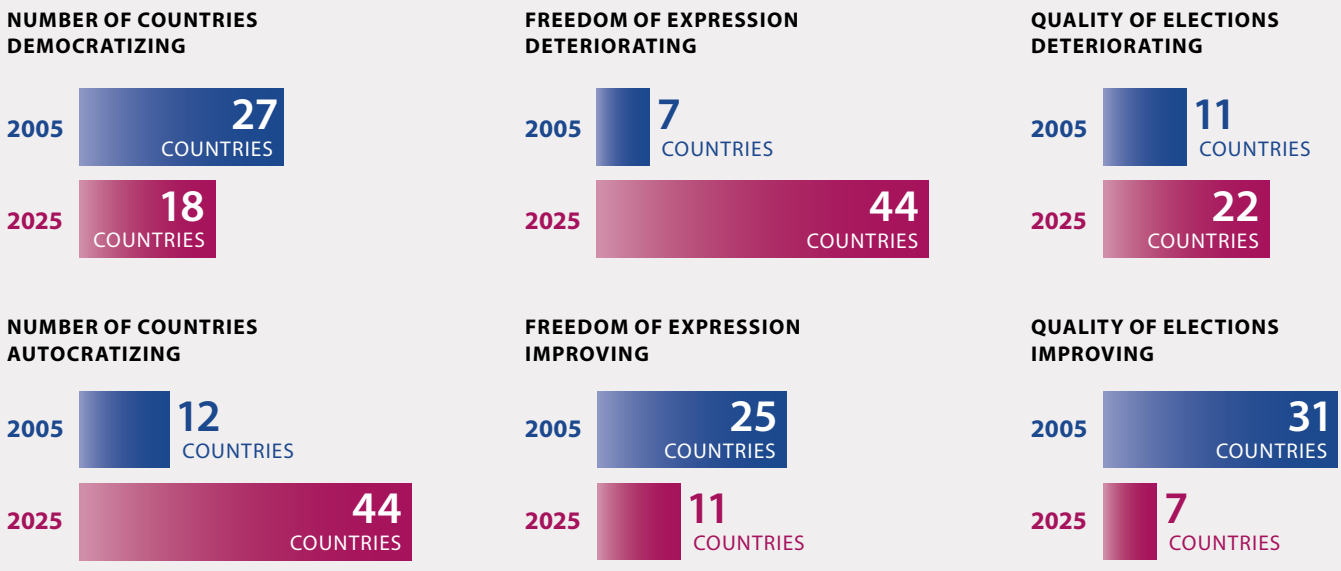
- Almost all aspects of democracy register far-reaching declines during the last decade – a dramatic reversal compared to 25 years ago.
- Freedom of expression is the most hard-hit: 44 countries are declining in 2025.
- Torture is now increasingly used to suppress political opposition – 33 countries are substantially degenerating in 2025.

2. Trends of Regime Transformation

- The world has never before seen as many countries autocratizing at the same time as during the last few years of the "third wave of autocratization".
- A record of 41% (3.4 billion) of the world population currently reside in autocratizing countries.
- The European Union is greatly affected. Autocratization in Europe affects seven EU member states and two of its main allies – the UK and the USA.

3. Autocratizing Countries

- Nearly a quarter of the world's nations are now on the list of autocratizers: 44 countries.
- 44 autocratizers divide into 24 stand-alone autocratizers and 20 Bell-turns.
- 10 new autocratizers identified in 2025.
- Among the new autocratizers are five European countries: Croatia, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the UK.
- Media censorship remains the most common tactic among autocratizing governments with 32 countries (73%) resorting to it.
- Repression of civil society has surged to affect 30 autocratizing countries (68%).



4. Democratizing Countries

- The world is facing 15 years of stagnation for democratization.
- Only 18 countries are democratizing. Of them, 8 are stand-alone democratizers, and 10 are U-turns.
- Only 3 new democratizers identified in 2025. All 3 are U-turns.
- The success rate for autocracies that start a democratization episode is high – 70%.
- Yet Zambia illustrates how fragile U-turns can be.

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5. In Focus: Autocratization in the USA

- Under Trump's presidency democracy in the USA has fallen back to the same level as in 1965. Yet the situation is fundamentally different than during the Civil Rights era.
- President Trump's second term can be summarized as a *rapid and aggressive concentration of powers in the presidency.*
- The speed with which American democracy is currently dismantled is unprecedented in modern history.
- Legislative Constraints – the worst affected aspect of democracy – is losing one-third of its value in 2025 and reaching its lowest point in over 100 years.
- Civil Rights & Equality before the Law, and Freedom of Expression & Media are now at their lowest levels in 60 years.
- Electoral components of democracy, however, remain stable – for now.

SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES



2005: 9%

2025: 41%

SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRACIES



2005: 50%

2025: 74%

SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES



2005: 11%

2025: 5%

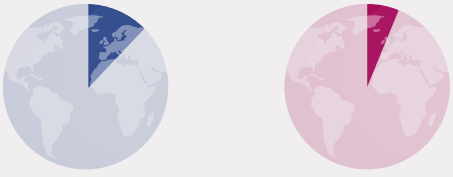
SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN DEMOCRACIES



2005: 50%

2025: 26%

SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES



2005: 17%

2025: 7%



March Against Repression And Presidential Veto. On July 23, 2025, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Miguel M. Caamano/NurPhoto, Getty Images)

1 | Democracy in the World 2025 – 10th edition

- **Democracy is back to 1978 levels for the average global citizen. The gains of the "third wave of democratization" starting 1974 in Portugal, are almost eradicated.**
- **The level of democracy for the average citizen in Western Europe and North America is at its lowest level in over 50 years, primarily due to ongoing autocratization in the USA.**
- **The USA loses its long-term status as a liberal democracy – for the first time in over 50 years.**
- **The world has 92 autocracies and 87 democracies at the end of 2025.**
- **Nearly three quarters of the world population (74%, or 6 billion) live in autocracies.**
- **There are now more people living in closed autocracies (28%, or 2.3 billion) than in electoral and liberal democracies combined (26%, or 2.2 billion).**
- **Only 7% of the world population (0.6 billion) live in liberal democracies.**
- **Freedom of expression continues to be the most attacked aspect of democracy, worsening in 44 countries by 2025.**

As we issue this 10th edition of the *Democracy Report*, democracy is facing existential challenges around the world. The "third wave of autocratization"[1] is deepening and spreading and has recently reached one of the major democratic strongholds, the United States of America (USA).

Box 1. Democracy

V-Dem offers a unique approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy. The V-Dem dataset includes five core indices of democracy: electoral, liberal, egalitarian, participatory, and deliberative.

Electoral democracy is at the core of any type of democracy. It exists when elections are free, fair, and recurring; elected officials wield political power de facto; suffrage is universal; political parties and candidates can form and compete freely; and there is a reasonably level playing field around elections in terms of freedoms of speech, media, and civil society.

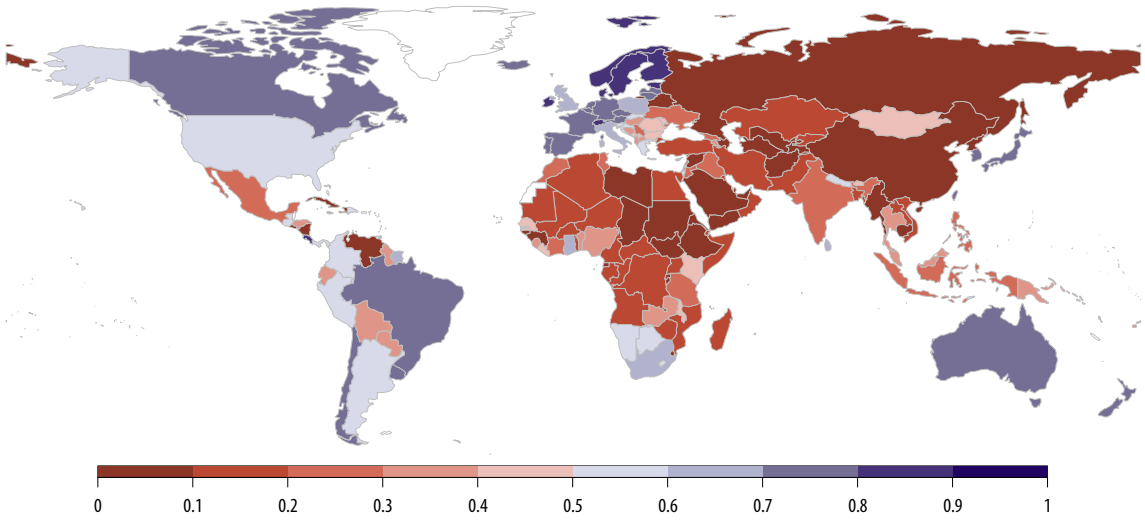
The *Democracy Report* mostly centers on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI). It combines the above core institutions of electoral democracy with the liberal dimension: well-functioning checks and balances on the executive power by the legislature and the judiciary, and a strong rule of law ensuring that equal civil liberties are respected.

For the average global citizen, democracy is now back to 1978 levels. In effect, almost all democratic gains of the "third wave of democratization,"[2] starting with the Portugal's Carnation Revolution of 1974, have been erased.

Three distinct patterns within this wave are clear: Democratic backsliding in some traditionally stable democracies; significant reversals and often breakdown of democracy in countries that successfully democratized during the late 20th and early 21st centuries; and deepening of autocracy in already autocratic states.

The world map in Figure 1 shows the state of democracy in 2025 based on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI)[3]. Democracy is most widespread in Western Europe and North America, as well as in parts →

FIGURE 1. STATE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY (LDI) IN 2025



1 Lührmann, A. and S.I. Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What Is New About It?" *Democratization* 26(7).
2 Huntington, S.P. 1993. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
3 The *Democracy Report 2026* is based on V-Dem dataset v16. Each year, V-Dem improves the quality of the data, engages more experts, and recalculates the entire dataset covering all years. This leads to correction of scores reported in previous years' reports. V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) captures both electoral and liberal aspects of democracy and goes from the lowest (0) to the highest (1) levels of democracy. The electoral component is measured by the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) that captures the extent to which all elements of Robert Dahl's (1971) famous articulation of "polyarchy" are present: the quality of elections, individual rights, as well as freedoms of expression, the media, and association (Dahl, R. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press). The Liberal Component Index (LCI) captures checks and balances on the executive, respect for civil liberties, the rule of law, and the independence of the legislature and the judiciary.

of East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Lower levels of democracy are more common in the Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The countries with the highest LDI scores in 2025 – Denmark, Sweden, and Norway – are in Northern Europe. The ones at the lowest echelon are spread across East Asia (China, Myanmar, and North Korea), Eastern Europe (Belarus), the Gulf region (Saudi Arabia), Latin America (Nicaragua and Venezuela), South and Central Asia (Afghanistan and Turkmenistan), and Sub-Saharan Africa (Eritrea and Sudan).

Democratic Gains Since 1978 Eradicated

The global democratic decline is notable and ongoing, whichever measure we use. For the average global citizen, the level of democracy is now back to 1978 (Figure 2, Panel B). It means that the enormous expansion of freedoms and rights achieved with the "third wave of democratization" is almost entirely eradicated.

Several major global and regional powers, including now the USA, are undergoing (or did so recently) notable democratic declines magnifying the global implications of the "third wave of autocratization."

Figure 2 shows the trajectory of democracy over the past 50 years by **country-based** averages (Panel A), **population-weighted** (Panel B), **territory-weighted** (Panel C), and **GDP-weighted** (Panel D) averages. The red lines in Figure 2 trace the 2025-level of democracy back in time for each measure.

The level of democracy in 2025 is back to 1995 by **country-based** averages (Panel A). Thus, even by this metric, democracy in the world has been rolled back some 30 years. It is a measure of democracy level in a "statistically average country," meaning that microstates like Timor-Leste count as much as a populous nation like India, a huge country like Russia, or a vast economy like China. The current decline constitutes a 10% drop from the peak of 0.41 in 2012 and has been statistically significant at 95% confidence level since 2020.

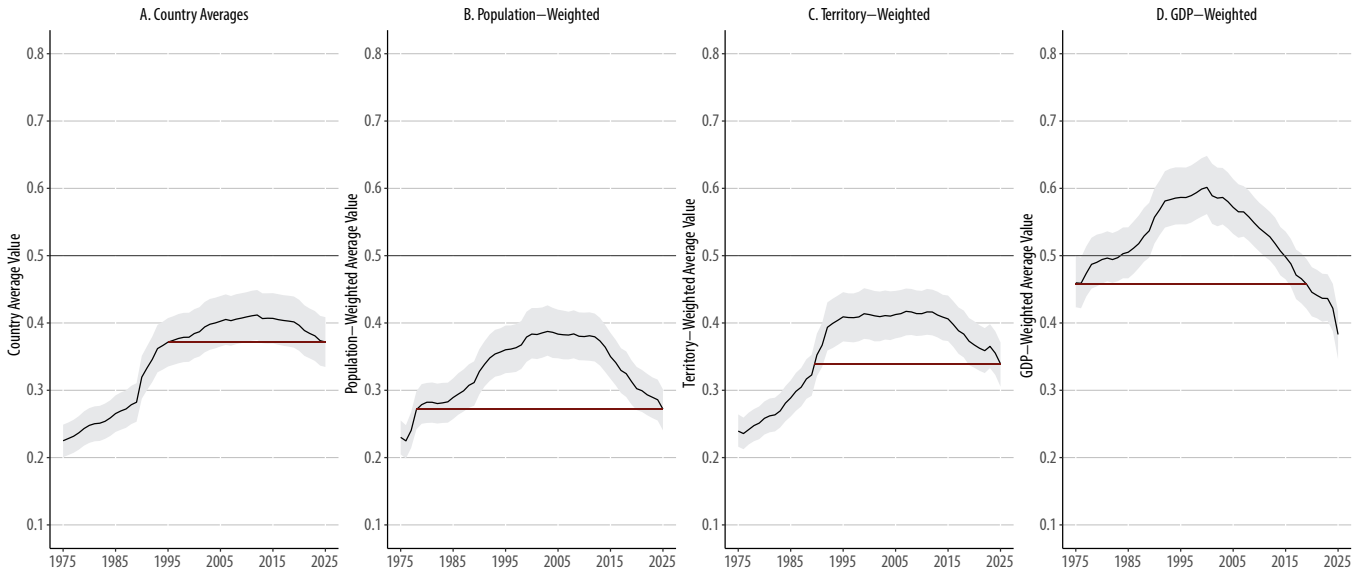
By **population-weighted** averages, the democratic decline brings the world back to the level of democracy in 1978 (Panel B). At the global level, we have lost almost all democratic advances made since the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal which set off the "third wave of democratization". The population-weighted measure seeks to capture the experience of a "statistically average citizen," meaning that more populous countries receive more weight. By this metric, democracy in the world has declined by 30% from the peak of 0.39 in 2003. At the end of 2025, four of the five world's most populous countries are autocracies (India, China, Indonesia, and Pakistan), and the USA is rapidly autocratizing.

The global level of democracy by **territory-weighted** averages is back to 1989-levels (Panel C) – the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. This reflects that several of the ten largest countries in the world (Argentina, India, Russia, the USA, and until recently Brazil), experienced autocratization during the last two decades, alongside numerous midsized countries.

By **GDP-weighted** averages, the picture is even more dire and demonstrates the enormous gravity of losses for democracy in the world, in terms of economic power. Democracy is at its lowest level in over 50 years since 2019, after declining persistently for 25 years (Panel D). This metric weighs larger economies (China, the USA, countries of the EU) over smaller ones and thereby captures how much economic power is rested with democracy in the world. The decline by this measure is over 36% from the peak of 0.60 in 2000 and accelerating. The recent deterioration of democracy in the USA is behind the sharp drop from 2024 to 2025.

The erosion of democracy by these four different measures reflects a bleak reality: *The "center of gravity" for human experience and global governance has shifted heavily toward authoritarianism.* Many large, populous, and economically powerful countries are autocratizing. Several of these countries possess the economic and political weight to reshape international organizations, norms, and trade, effectively altering the global order.

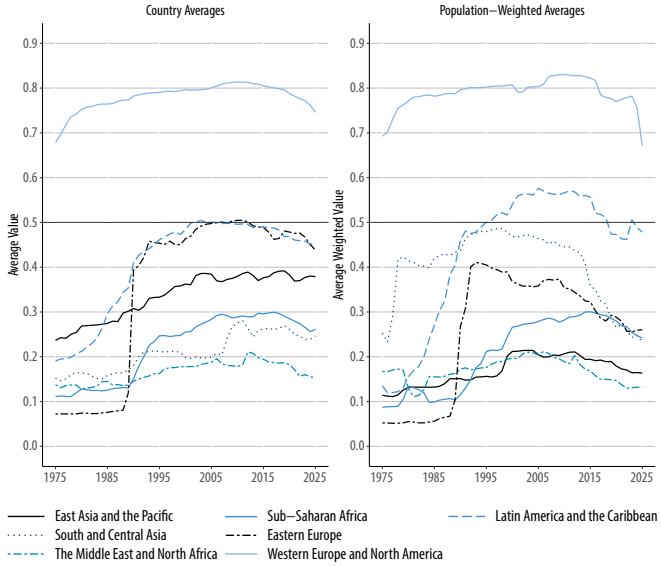
FIGURE 2. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY – WORLD AVERAGES, 1975–2025



The black lines represent global averages on the LDI with the grey area marking the confidence intervals. Panel A is based on conventional country averages. Panels B, C, and D show global levels of democracy weighted by population, territory, and GDP, respectively. The data for the latter three panels are drawn from the World Bank WDI dataset and Fariss et al. 2022[4]. Both are included in the V-Dem dataset v16.

4 Fariss et al. 2022 "New Estimates of Over 500 Years of Historic GDP and Population Data". *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66(3).

FIGURE 3. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY – REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1975–2025



The lines are regional averages on the LDI. Panel A is based on conventional country averages. Panel B shows levels of democracy weighted by population size using data from the World Bank, included in the V-Dem dataset v16.

THE WEST IN DECLINE

Autocratization is now truly global. All regions register declines on the LDI in the past two decades by country and population-weighted averages, even if by country averages they remain more democratic today than 50 years ago. Only **East Asia and the Pacific** fluctuates around similar LDI levels by country-based averages since mid-2000s.

In 2025, **Western Europe and North America** registers the most notable decline on both country- and population-weighted averages. This is primarily due to the recent developments in the USA (see Section 5). The democratic weakening in **Latin America and the Caribbean** that seemed to reverse with the U-Turn in Brazil in 2023 (by population-weighted averages) is now turning back downwards due to autocratization in Argentina and Mexico.

Figure 3 captures these changes on the LDI across world regions by country averages (left panel) and by population-weighted averages (right panel).

Western Europe and North America retains the highest LDI levels both by country and population-weighted averages. However, it registers a substantial decline on population-weighted averages in 2025, down to the lowest level in over 50 years. Autocratization episodes now ongoing in Italy (59 million), the UK (70 million), and not the least in the USA (343 million – the third most populous country in the world) are driving this change.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most democratic region in the world by 2025. Peaking on both democracy measures in the early 2000s, it is in decline since then. While improvements in Brazil led to a notable uptick on population-weighted averages in 2023, deteriorations in Argentina, Mexico, and Peru are now reversing the trend again.

Democracy in **Eastern Europe** was expanding drastically after the end of the Cold War, panning out by country averages at the turn of the century, and registering only marginal declines during the last decade. However, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average citizen was in decline since the mid-1990s, stabilizing around its 1990 level more recently. There are many populous countries in the region undergoing autocratization during the last two decades, such as Romania, Russia, Ukraine, and until recently Poland.

East Asia and the Pacific is more democratic on country averages than on population-weighted averages throughout the whole period and relatively stable by country averages since the mid-2000s. By level of democracy for the average citizen, however, the region is in a slow decline since the mid-2000s and is now back to its 1998 level. While small states like Fiji and Timor-Leste are improving, larger countries such as Indonesia and The Philippines are becoming less democratic over this period.

While **Sub-Saharan Africa** turned more democratic in the "third wave of democratization," recent declines are palpable. The level of democracy in the region is now back to its early 2000s level by both measures. A resurgence in military coups in the Sahel region and autocratic deepening in countries like Central African Republic, Mozambique, and Togo are contributing to this negative development.

The trends in **South and Central Asia** diverge. By country-averages, democracy is much below most of the world and relatively stable. The average citizen, however, is suffering the most severe autocratization across all regions. The 2025 scores fall back to the same level as in 1976. Naturally, India as the most populous country in the world, is driving much of this deterioration. However, autocratic regressions in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are also contributing substantially.

The Middle East and North Africa is the least democratic region by both measures since the beginning of the 21st century. The Gulf monarchies are among the most autocratic countries in the world, and recent downturns in Libya, Tunisia, and Türkiye are contributing to a recent decline on population-weighted averages. →

Box 2. Why Population-Weighted Measures?

In essence, democracy is *rule by the people*. For "how much" democracy we have in the world, it therefore arguably matters *how many people* enjoy democratic rights and freedoms. Population-weighted measures in the *Democracy Report* are showing how much democracy a (statistically) average global citizen enjoys. Country-averages, by contrast, show the level of democracy in a (statistically) average country. They give the same weight to advances in small countries like the Seychelles or Timor-Leste as to declines in huge countries like India or the United States. When speaking of how much of the world is undergoing autocratization, we, the authors of the *Democracy Report*, do not think that advances in small countries compensate for declines in large ones. This is why we focus more on population-weighted measures while also reporting country-averages.



Xi Jinping, Narendra Modi and Vladimir Putin at the 2025 SCO Summit. (Source: www.kremlin.ru)

Autocracies and Democracies

- **The world has 92 autocracies and 87 democracies at the end of 2025.**
- **Nearly three quarters of the world population (74%, or 6 billion) live in autocracies.**
- **There are more people living in closed autocracies (28%, or 2.3 billion) than in electoral and liberal democracies combined (26%, or 2.2 billion).**
- **Only 7% of the world population (0.6 billion) live in liberal democracies.**
- **The USA loses its long-term status as a liberal democracy – for the first time in over 50 years.**

The world continues to turn more autocratic. By the Regimes of the World (RoW) measure, the world now has 87 democracies (liberal and electoral) and 92 autocracies (electoral and closed), see Figure 4.

While the world is still more democratic today than it was 50 years ago, when democracies numbered only 36 in total, the decline in the past decades is unmistakable (Figure 5). For the second year in a row, there are more autocracies than democracies in the world.

Figure 5 (left panel) shows the number of countries in each regime category over the past 50 years. The RoW categorization (see Box 3 for details) is based on the same data that goes into the LDI and provides a *simplified* lens capturing some broader global trends in terms of democracy and autocracy.

BACKSLIDING AMONG ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACIES

The first clear pattern from Figure 5 is that autocratization now affects well-established democracies, leading to a significant decline in their overall quality. **Liberal democracies** – now the least common regime type in the world – decline in numbers from the peak of 45 in 2009 to 31 in 2025. In the same period, the number of **electoral democracies** increases from 46 to 56. Thus, liberal characteristics of established democracies – such as checks and balances on the executive, respect for civil liberties, and the rule of law – are eroding. That electoral democracies are growing in numbers should not be misinterpreted as good news.

FIGURE 5. REGIME TYPES BY NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, 1975–2025

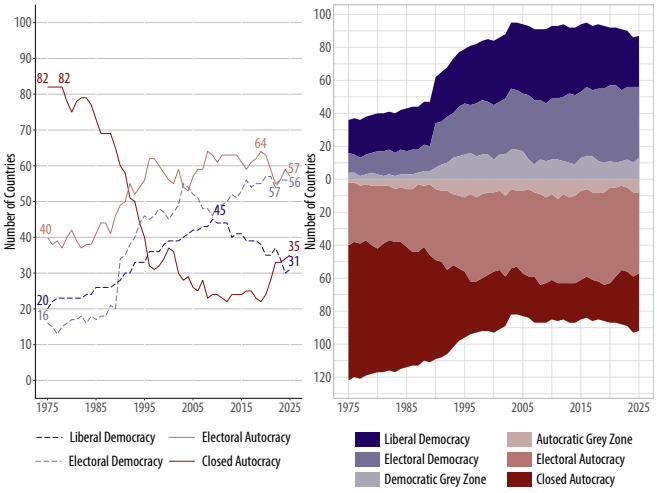


Figure 5 plots the number of countries (left panel) by regime type. The right panel takes into account measurement uncertainty, highlighting the number of "grey zone" countries above or below the line, distinguishing between democracies and autocracies.

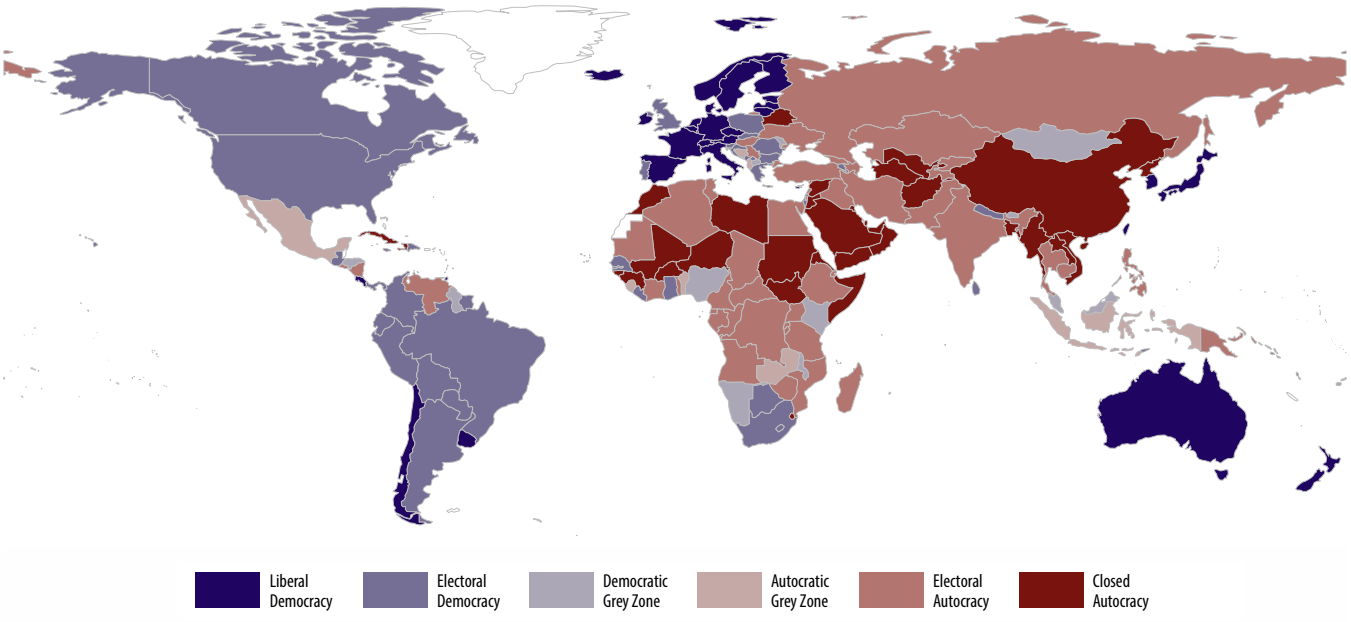
BREAKDOWNS LEADING TO AUTOCRACIES IN MAJORITY

The second pattern is that the total number of **democracies** in the world is in a slow decline from its peak of 95 countries in 2016 to 87 in 2025. At the same time, **autocracies** are increasing in numbers from a minimum of 82 in 2004 to 92 now. Democracy is declining also in quantity.

AUTOCRACIES BECOMING MORE REPRESSIVE

Thirdly, autocratic states are becoming more autocratic. The number of **closed autocracies** is increasing from 22 in 2019 to 35 in 2025, meaning that autocratic regression drove 13 **electoral autocracies** into the lowest regime category in that short time span. Even so, **electoral autocracy** remains the most common regime type in the world, just like it has been for most of the time since the end of the Cold War.

FIGURE 4. REGIMES OF THE WORLD, 2025



"GREY ZONE" COUNTRIES

The distinction between electoral autocracies and electoral democracies represents a critical "tipping point" in some assessments. Therefore, the dividing line deserves a note. Typologies like the RoW naturally sacrifice some nuances and therefore risk misclassifying countries when data puts them very close to thresholds because of the potential for measurement errors. Some uncertainty therefore remains about regimes that are close to the threshold between democracy and autocracy.[5]

Figure 5 (right panel) shows that there are countries where the classification is associated with some level of uncertainty. As of 2025, 13 countries are in the "lower bound" of electoral democracies (could potentially be autocracies) and 8 countries are in the "upper bound" of electoral autocracies (potentially democracies). We treat these countries as **"grey zone" regimes**.

We list all countries' RoW classification with "grey zone" regimes marked in Table 1, along with information on whether they shifted regime category in 2025, and whether they are in an episode of regime transformation (autocratization or democratization).

Overall, taking the "grey zone" uncertainty into account, the number of democracies could range from 74 to 95, with 87 being our best estimate, while the number of autocracies might range from 84 to 105 countries, with 92 being our best estimate.

Most People Live in Autocracies

Three out of four people in the world – 74% – now live in autocracies, while only 26% reside in democracies (Figure 6, left panel). The total population in democracies is just over two billion, versus six billion in autocracies (Figure 6, right panel).

FIGURE 6. REGIME TYPES BY SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION, 1975–2025

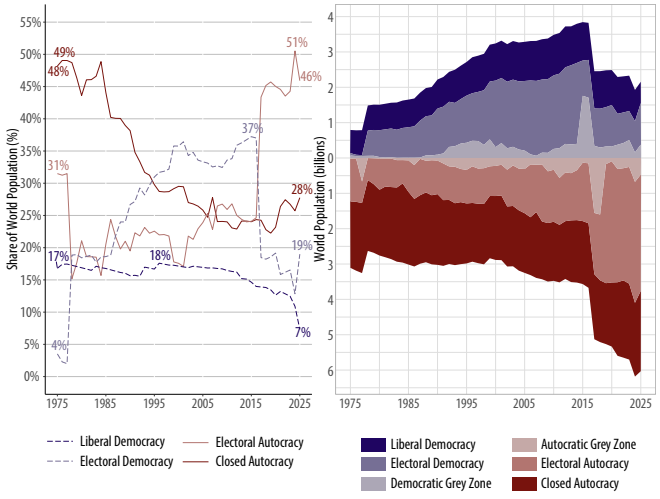


Figure 6 plots the share of the world population (left panel) and size (in billions, right panel) by regime type. The right panel highlights the size of the population living in "grey zone" countries for which the classification as democracies or autocracies is associated with some measurement uncertainty. Population data come from the World Bank, included in the V-Dem dataset v16.

Liberal democracies are home to a mere 7% of people in the world (600 million). It is the lowest in over 50 years. The substantial drop in 2025 is largely due to the USA losing its status of liberal democracy.

The number of people living in **electoral democracies** is also in decline overall but jumps in 2025 to 19% (1.6 billion) when the USA joins this category.

Electoral autocracy is the most populous regime type in 2025, home to nearly half of the world population – 46% (3.8 billion). India, Pakistan, and most recently also Indonesia, are among the most populous electoral autocracies in the world.

The share of people residing in **closed autocracies** increased to 28% (2.3 billion) in 2025, with Bangladesh moving into this category. There are now more people living in closed autocracies than in all democracies (liberal and electoral) combined.

REGIONAL DISTINCTIONS

There are significant regional variations in the share of people that enjoy democratic rights and freedoms (Figure 7). **Western Europe and North America** remains the most democratic region, followed by **Latin America and the Caribbean** like in previous years. **Eastern Europe** now appears roughly similar to **Sub-Saharan Africa** in terms of the share of population living in democracies.

In **East Asia and the Pacific**, only 11% of people live in democracies: 9% in liberal democracies, such as Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, and 2% in electoral democracies, such as Timor-Leste and Vanuatu. 12% of the population live in an autocratic "grey zone" – Indonesia, while 9% reside in electoral autocracies, such as Cambodia, The Philippines, and Thailand. Closed autocracies, such as China, Myanmar, and North Korea, harbor the largest share of the population – 68%.

In **South and Central Asia**, only 2% of people enjoy (electoral) democracy – in Nepal and Sri Lanka. A negligibly small proportion resides in the three "grey zone" democracies – Bhutan, Mongolia, and The Maldives. A vast majority – 85% – live in electoral autocracies, such as India, Kazakhstan, and Pakistan. Closed autocracies, such as Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, now account for 13% of the population, with Bangladesh descending into this category in 2025.

The **Middle East and North Africa** is the most autocratic region in the world. Only 2% of the population reside in an electoral democracy – Israel, which lost status of a liberal democracy in 2023. 67% live in electoral autocracies, such as Egypt, Iran, and Türkiye, and 31% in closed autocracies, such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, 34% of the population live in democracies: 10% residing in electoral democracies, such as Botswana, Ghana, and South Africa, and 24% in democratic "grey zone" countries, such as Kenya and Nigeria. The only liberal democracy of the region – The Seychelles – is too small to show up in the statistic. The vast majority – 66% – live under autocratic regimes. Electoral autocracies, such as Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda are home to 48% of the people. Closed autocracies, such as Burkina-Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and Sudan, account for 14% of the population.

In **Eastern Europe**, only 29% of people enjoy democracy: 5% live in the liberal democracies Czechia and the Baltics while 24% reside in electoral democracies, such as Bulgaria or Poland. A large majority – 65% – live in electoral autocracies, such as in Hungary, Russia, or Serbia. Belarus is the only closed autocracy, with 3% of the population. "Grey zone" regimes account for the remaining 3%, residing in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, and North Macedonia.

Western Europe and North America is the only region in the world where all countries are democratic: 42% live in liberal democracies, and 58% in electoral democracies. Yet, this constitutes a substantial *worsening* compared to just last year, when 82% lived in liberal democracies.

Most people in **Latin America and the Caribbean** – 71% – live in democracies, making it the second most democratic region. →

5 Similar reasoning, naturally, applies to the distinction between liberal and electoral democracies, as well as between electoral and closed autocracies. Table 1 takes possible uncertainty of the classification into account, and reports all "grey zones" between RoW regime types.

FIGURE 7. REGIONAL SHARES OF POPULATION BY REGIME TYPE, 2025

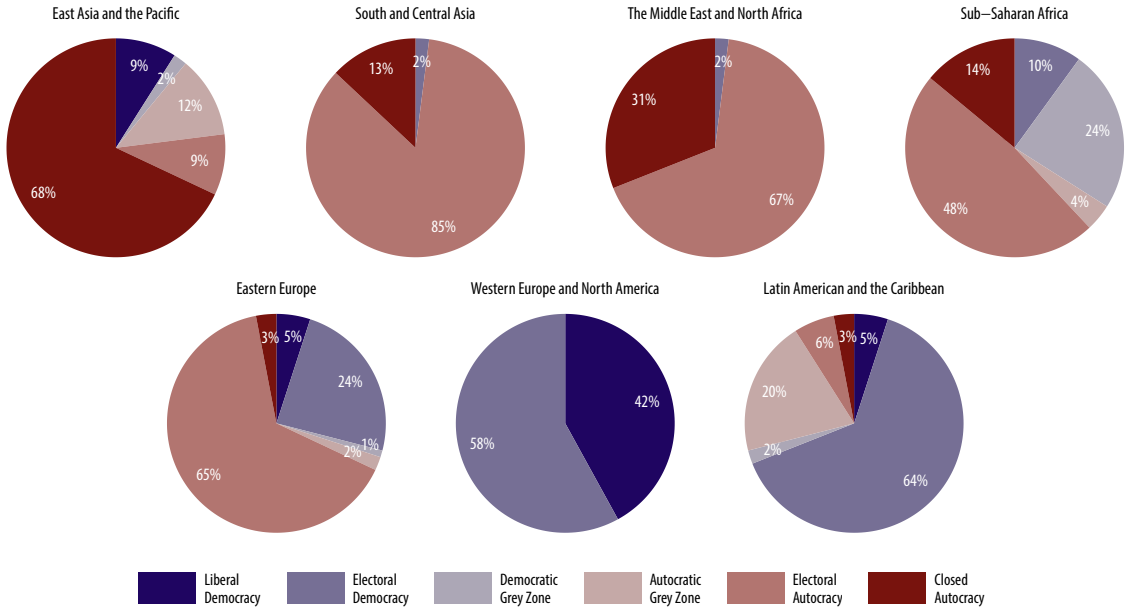


Figure 7 plots the share of population living in liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies, including "grey zone" subcategories, by regions of the world.

Yet only 5% reside in liberal democracies, such as Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, while 64% live in electoral democracies, such as Argentina and Brazil. "Grey zone" democracies (Guyana and Honduras) account for 2%. Autocracies harbor the remaining 29%: 20% are in Mexico – a "grey zone" electoral autocracy; 6% in the electoral autocracies El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela; and 3% in the two closed autocracies, Cuba and Haiti.

The "Great Reversal": 2000 vs. 2025

- **Almost *all* aspects of democracy register far-reaching declines during the last decade – a dramatic reversal compared to 2000, the beginning of the "third wave of autocratization."**
- **Freedom of expression is the most hard-hit: From 52 countries improving in 2000 to 44 declining by 2025.**
- **Freedom of association drops from improving in 54 countries in 2000 to diminishing in 24 countries by 2025.**
- **Freedom and fairness (cleanliness) of elections also retracts dramatically from advancing in 43 countries in 2000 to deteriorating in 22 by 2025.**
- **Media censorship efforts by the government remains the most frequently used tactic of autocratizers – worsening in 44 countries in the last ten years.**
- **Torture is now progressively more used as a tool to suppress political opposition – 33 countries are substantially degenerating by 2025.**

Almost all aspects of democracy are declining in more countries than they are improving, when comparing 2025 levels to ten years ago. This presents a stark contrast to 25 years ago – the beginning of the "third wave of autocratization" – when the opposite was true, taking the status in 2000 compared to ten years before.

Freedom of Expression is the most hard-hit in this global decline over the last quarter-century: From 52 countries improving and only five declining in 2000 to 44 declining and only eleven improving in 2025. **Freedom of Association**, **Clean Elections** and **Deliberation** are the other three aspects of democracy experiencing significant global declines over the past 25 years.

Figure 8 shows the number of countries improving and declining on different aspects of democracy over a 10-year period. The left-hand panel compares the 2000 levels to 1990, thus capturing the situation at the beginning of the "third wave of autocratization." The right panel compares the 2025 levels to 2015, highlighting developments of the last decade.

Freedom of Expression shows the most drastic global decline. In 2025, 44 countries are deteriorating in terms of freedom of expression compared to 2015 and only eleven are improving (right panel). By contrast, only five countries were limiting freedom of expression in 2000, while 52 were expanding it (left panel).

Equally jarring is the contrast between the early 2000s and 2025 for political parties and civil society. In 2000, **Freedom of Association** was rallying in 54 countries and deteriorating in only two. The situation is fully reversed in 2025. It is now the third *worst affected* aspect of democracy, substantially worsening in 24 countries and improving in only five.

The **Clean Elections Index** – a core aspect of democracy – measures the extent to which national elections are free and fair, including the integrity of the entire electoral process. This core aspect was improving in 43 countries in 2000 and deteriorating in 17. The quality of elections is now deteriorating in 22 countries and improving in only seven.

Deliberation – the democratic principle that political decisions should be motivated by public reasoning and that the government should respect opposition, pluralism, and counterarguments – is also in sharp decline over the last decade. In 2025, this aspect of democracy is worsening in 26 countries, while advancing in eleven. It was one of the most progressing aspects in 2000, with 41 countries registering substantial advances and only nine – deteriorations.

Finally, **liberal aspects** of democracy are vanishing in a worrying number of countries, reflecting the global erosion of executive oversight.

FIGURE 8. DEMOCRATIC ASPECTS IMPROVING AND DECLINING, 2000 AND 2025

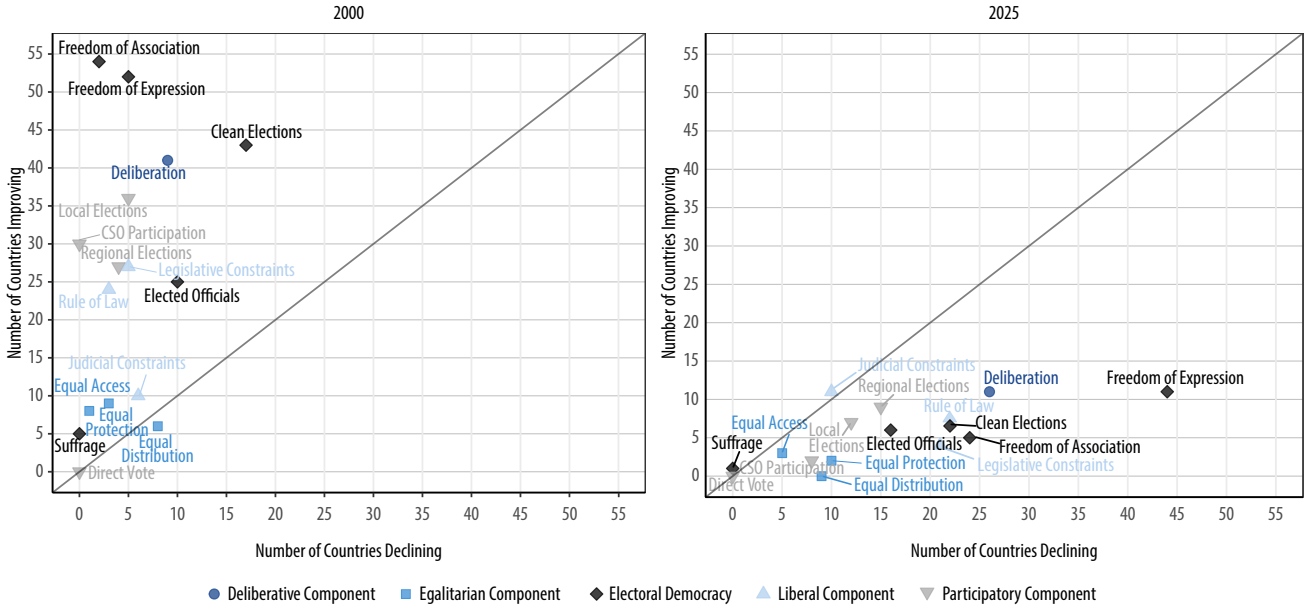


Figure 8 shows the number of countries improving and declining significantly and substantially over a 10-year period on indices measuring different components of democracy. An index is declining substantially and significantly if its 2025 value is at least 0.05 lower than its 2015 value on a scale ranging from 0 to 1, and the confidence intervals do not overlap. The left panel compares changes between 2000 and 1990, and the right panel compares changes between 2025 and 2015.

Rule of Law is now fading in 22 countries while advancing in seven, while **Legislative Constraints** on the executive are worsening in 21 countries and advancing in only four. These aspects were also improving in a lot more countries than they were diminishing 25 years ago.

ZOOMING IN

Zooming in on the individual indicators that go into the indices in Figure 8, we find that **government censorship of the media** is the most commonly used tactic during autocratization. **Freedom from torture** appears for the first time among the top 20 most globally declining indicators. We note that torture seems to be used increasingly by present-day autocrats to suppress political opposition.

Figure 9 displays the top 20 indicators that register the most widespread decline over the last decade. This list provides a more precise understanding of which specific democratic rights and freedoms are under attack nowadays.

Freedom of expression indicators are most frequently diminishing, with nine of the top 20. It is often the first "domino" to fall when countries autocratize. **Government efforts at censoring of the media** – top of the list – is deteriorating substantially in 44 countries. Governments in Hong Kong, Mexico, Myanmar, Slovenia, and Togo are some of the top offenders of the last decade.

Freedom of academic and cultural expression is second, with deteriorations in 41 countries, including Hungary, Indonesia, Nicaragua, and Russia. Backsliding democracies are also on the list: Substantial corrosions are registered in countries like Argentina, the UK, and the USA.

Media self-censorship is a growing issue across 39 countries, including Belarus, Hong Kong, Slovenia, Vietnam, and again, the UK and the USA. The practice of self-censorship serves as a preemptive measure to avoid direct censorship or persecution when governments in autocratizing countries tighten their grip.

Other globally declining aspects of freedom of expression include **media bias**, **harassment of journalists**, and **print and broadcast media perspectives**. They deteriorate in 34, 34, and 30 countries, respectively. Offenders include Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Nicaragua.

FIGURE 9. TOP 20 DECLINING INDICATORS, 2015–2025

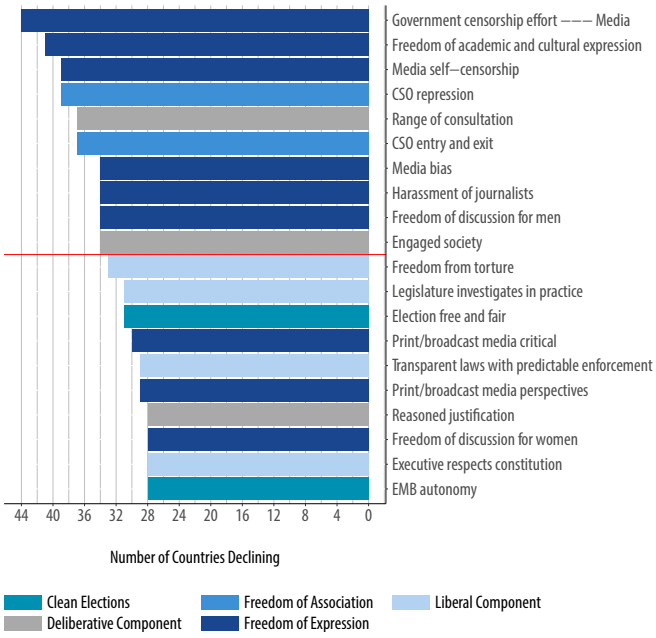


Figure 9 plots the top 20 indicators that decline significantly and substantially in the largest number of countries between 2015 and 2025.The red line marks the top 10 indicators. The indicator is declining substantially and significantly if its 2025 value is at least 0.5 points lower than its 2015 value on a scale from 0 to 4 (for most indicators) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

Civil society is also experiencing severe pressure globally. **Repression of civil society organization (CSOs)** is deteriorating in 39 countries, while **CSOs' entry and exit** is increasingly controlled by the governments in 37 countries. For example, governments in Georgia, Mali, and Russia, to name just a few, are now employing increasingly more restrictive laws to limit, monitor, or criminalize the activities of human rights defenders and civil society activists. →

Range of consultations at elite levels is worsening in 37 countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Peru, The Philippines, and the USA. The extent to which **society is engaged** in policy debates is declining in 34 countries, including Burkina Faso, Hong Kong, Russia, and the USA; while the extent to which governments provide **reasoned justification** for their actions is declining in 28 countries, with Hong Kong and the USA at the top of this list.

Two election-indicators are on the top 20 list. 31 countries are declining on the **free and fair election-indicator**, while 28 countries record significant relapses in the **autonomy of the Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)**. Countries declining on both include Cambodia, Ivory Coast, and Serbia.

Finally, among liberal aspects, governments in 33 countries are increasingly resorting to **political torture** to suppress political opposition, 31 countries are worsening in terms of **legislature's capacity to investigate** the executive's unconstitutional behavior, 29 are deteriorating in terms of **transparent laws with predictable enforcement**, and in 28 countries, members of the **executive** are increasingly not **respecting the constitution**. Countries that have declined on several of these indicators include El Salvador, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. ■



Puebla, Mexico – June 1, 2025. A person casts their ballot into a voting box during the first-ever judicial election in Mexico. (Alejandro Munoz R, Shutterstock)

Box 3. Regimes of the World – Democratization and Autocratization

Democratization means that a country is becoming more democratic, regardless of its start and end point. **Autocratization** is the opposite. Both are depicted in Figure 1.

Democratization can start in an autocracy (liberalization) or in a democracy (deepening). Liberalization does not necessarily lead to a democracy, but when it does, we talk about *democratic transition*. Inversely, autocratization can start in a democracy (backsliding) or in an autocracy (regression). Backsliding does not always lead to an autocracy, but when it does, we talk about *democratic breakdown*.

We distinguish between four types of regimes: Closed and Electoral Autocracies, and Electoral and Liberal Democracies using the *Regimes of the World* (RoW) measure (variable *v2x_regime*). A more fine-grained RoW measure that accounts for potential measurement error in the data (variable *v2x_regime_amb*) identifies countries falling into the "grey zone" category: confidence intervals in the data overlap making their classification more uncertain (see Table 1).

RoW builds on V-Dem data as well as V-Dem's liberal and electoral democracy indices, but it is an index created by its authors (just like many other indices in the V-Dem dataset).

For details, see Lührmann et al. 2018. **"Regimes of the World (RoW)"**. *Politics and Governance* 6(1). Open access.

FIGURE 1. REGIMES AND REGIME CHANGE

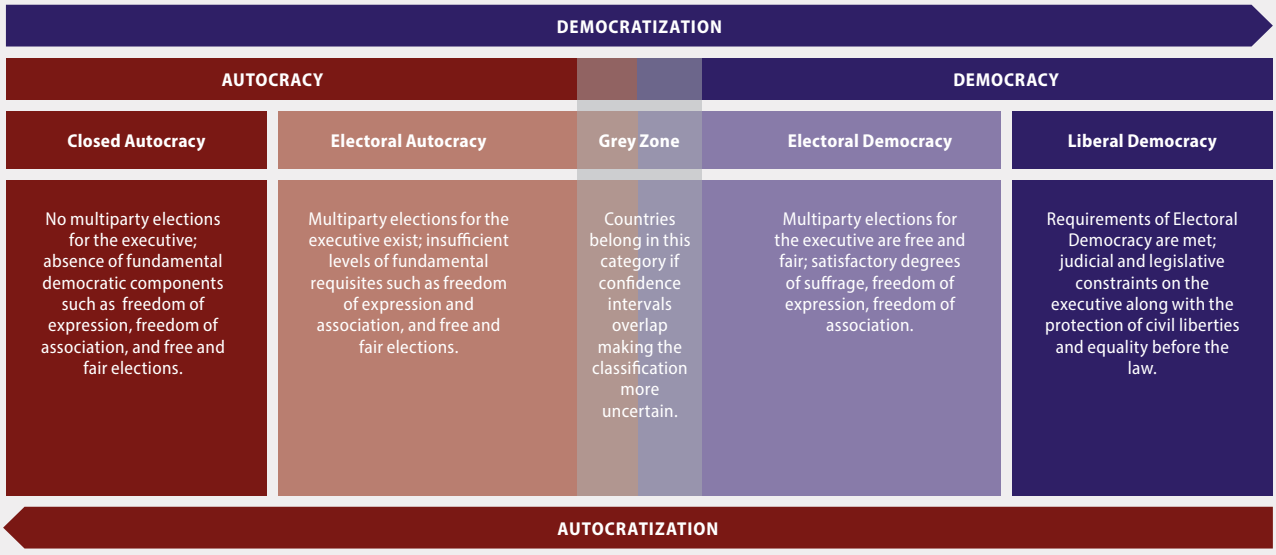


TABLE 1. REGIMES OF THE WORLD, 2025

Table 1 presents the classification of countries according to the Regimes of the World measure. Countries are sorted by regime type in 2025, and within regime type – in alphabetical order.

We use the plus/minus sign to indicate the possible uncertainty of the classification, and to underline that some countries are placed in the "grey zone" between regime types. This is based on the V-Dem's confidence intervals and accounts for potential measurement errors that may arise due to the nature of the data.

The typology is published in Lührmann et al. 2018. Regimes of the World (RoW), Politics and Governance 6(1). While based on the V-Dem's data, this measure is not officially endorsed by the Steering Committee of V-Dem (only the main V-Dem democracy indices have such an endorsement).

LD Liberal Democracy
ED Electoral Democracy
EA Electoral Autocracy
CA Closed Autocracy
– indicates that the country could also belong to the lower category
+ indicates that the country could also belong to the higher category
↑ ↓ indicates a country moving from one category to another
↘ In an episode of autocratization, as of 2025
↗ In an episode of democratization, as of 2025
Grey zone democracies/autocracies are marked

LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2025	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2025
Australia	LD		
Belgium	LD		
Costa Rica	LD		
Czechia	LD		
Denmark	LD		
Estonia	LD		
Finland	LD		
Germany	LD		
Iceland	LD		
Ireland	LD		
Japan	LD		
Latvia	LD		
Luxembourg	LD		
Netherlands	LD		
New Zealand	LD		
Norway	LD		
Seychelles	LD		↗
South Korea	LD	↑	
Spain	LD		
Sweden	LD		
Switzerland	LD		
Taiwan	LD		
Austria	LD-		
Barbados	LD-		
Chile	LD-		
Cyprus	LD-		
France	LD-		
Italy	LD-		↘
Lithuania	LD-	↑	
Trinidad and Tobago	LD-		
Uruguay	LD-		

ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2025	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2025
Brazil	ED+		↗
Canada	ED+		
Gambia	ED+		↗
Israel	ED+		
Malta	ED+		
Mauritius	ED+	↑	↗
Montenegro	ED+		↗
USA	ED+	↓	↘
United Kingdom	ED+		↘
Vanuatu	ED+		
Argentina	ED		↘
Armenia	ED		↘
Bolivia	ED		↗
Botswana	ED		↗
Bulgaria	ED		
Cape Verde	ED		
Colombia	ED		
Croatia	ED		↘
Dominican Republic	ED		↗
Ecuador	ED		
Ghana	ED		
Greece	ED		↘
Guatemala	ED		↗
Jamaica	ED		
Kosovo	ED		
Lesotho	ED		↗
Liberia	ED		
Nepal	ED		
Panama	ED		
Paraguay	ED		
Peru	ED		↘
Poland	ED		↗
Portugal	ED		
Romania	ED		↘
S.Tomé & P.	ED		
Senegal	ED		↘
Slovakia	ED		↘
Slovenia	ED		↘
Solomon Islands	ED		↗
South Africa	ED		
Sri Lanka	ED		↗
Suriname	ED		
Timor-Leste	ED		↗
Bhutan	ED-		
Fiji	ED-		↗
Guyana	ED-	↑	
Honduras	ED-		
Kenya	ED-		
Malawi	ED-		
Malaysia	ED-		
Maldives	ED-		
Moldova	ED-		↘
Mongolia	ED-	↑	
Namibia	ED-		
Nigeria	ED-	↑	
North Macedonia	ED-		

ELECTORAL AUTOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2025	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2025
Albania	EA+	↓	
Benin	EA+		↗
Bosnia Herzegovina	EA+	↓	
Indonesia	EA+		↘
Mexico	EA+		↘
Sierra Leone	EA+		
Somaliland	EA+		
Zambia	EA+	↓	↗
Algeria	EA		
Angola	EA		
Azerbaijan	EA		
Burundi	EA		
CAR	EA		↘
Cambodia	EA		↘
Cameroon	EA		
Chad	EA		
Comoros	EA		
Congo	EA		
DRC	EA		
Djibouti	EA		
Egypt	EA		
El Salvador	EA		↘
Equatorial Guinea	EA		
Ethiopia	EA		
Gabon	EA	↑	
Georgia	EA		↘
Hungary	EA		↘
India	EA		↘
Iraq	EA		
Ivory Coast	EA		↘
Kazakhstan	EA		
Kyrgyzstan	EA		↘
Lebanon	EA		
Madagascar	EA		↘
Mauritania	EA		↘
Mozambique	EA		↘
Nicaraqua	EA		↘
Pakistan	EA		↘
Palestine/West Bank	EA		
Papua New Guinea	EA		
Philippines	EA		↘
Russia	EA		
Rwanda	EA		
Serbia	EA		↘
Singapore	EA		
Tajikistan	EA		
Tanzania	EA		
Thailand	EA		↗
Togo	EA		↘
Tunisia	EA		
Türkiye	EA		
Uganda	EA		
Ukraine	EA		↘
Venezuela	EA		
Zanzibar	EA		
Zimbabwe	EA		
Iran	EA-		

CLOSED AUTOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2025	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2025
Guinea-Bissau	CA+	↓	↘
Turkmenistan	CA+		
Uzbekistan	CA+		
Afghanistan	CA		↘
Bahrain	CA		
Bangladesh	CA	↓	
Belarus	CA		↘
Burkina Faso	CA		↘
China	CA		
Cuba	CA		
Eritrea	CA		
Eswatini	CA		
Guinea	CA		↘
Haiti	CA		↘
Hong Kong	CA		↘
Jordan	CA		
Kuwait	CA		↘
Laos	CA		
Libya	CA		↘
Mali	CA		↘
Morocco	CA		
Myanmar	CA		↘
Niger	CA		↘
North Korea	CA		
Oman	CA		
Palestine/Gaza	CA		
Qatar	CA		
Saudi Arabia	CA		
Somalia	CA		
South Sudan	CA		
Sudan	CA		
Syria	CA		
UAE	CA		
Vietnam	CA		
Yemen	CA		



A woman reacts with emotion during ACT Wazalendo party's political rally in Kigoma, Tanzania, on June 21, 2025 (Ericky Boniphace, Shutterstock)

Box 4. ERT Methodology (Episodes of Regime Transformation)

Since Democracy Report 2024, we use the ERT method (Maerz et al. 2024) to identify democratizing and autocratizing countries. This scientific method is more cautious than the one used in our previous reports and takes underlying measurement uncertainty into account. The switch means that numbers in this year's Democracy Report are not fully comparable to Democracy Reports released before 2024.

A large team working on the FASDEM-project led by Professor Lindberg, developed the ERT method over several years. It has been vetted by extensive peer review in the scientific community through publications in several high-ranking journals. All details, including the code and a visualization app, can be found in associated publications and on Github.

Reduced to the bare bones, one can say that the ERT method works by first identifying small annual changes (>0.01 on the 0-1 scale) in a country's level of democracy measured by V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI). If they accumulate within several years to substantial (>0.1), it is an episode of regime transformation. If changes are smaller, it is deemed mere fluctuations without substantial change that could result from uncertainty in the underlying measures. The ERT then classifies the outcome of democratization and autocratization episodes.

The ERT has several advantages over the method used in *Democracy Reports* before 2024 that simply took the difference between scores ten years ago and the last year. The most important difference is that the sophisticated, multilayered, and tested decision-rules for coding in the ERT, ensure greater confidence about "democratizers" and "autocratizers" than before. The ERT also allows us to distinguish between episodes that are 1) substantial and ongoing right now like autocratization in Hungary; from those that 2) recently ended but still qualify as substantial when compared to their score ten years ago, like in Türkiye. We make use of that feature since *Democracy Report 2024*.

In the *Democracy Report*, we use the latest version of the ERT on EDI to identify start- and endpoints for episodes, including a couple of smaller methodological adjustments of the method done with this year's ERT release. For the purposes of the *Democracy Report* we then, however, display countries' scores on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) (and the EDI is one the two main components of the LDI).

The ERT method is superior in increasing precision for identifying which countries are in ongoing episodes of change, which countries have ended such processes, and determining start and end dates of these episodes. It introduces a precautious set of coding rules taking uncertainty into account to avoid wrongfully declaring countries "autocratizers" or "democratizers." Yet, that increase in sophistication also means bringing along some uncertainty about the last couple of years' counts. More countries may add to the counts of autocratizers and democratizers post-factum, if and when their magnitude of change makes them qualify. The ERT method then back-dates the start year of those processes of change to the year the change began in earnest.

Featured Article:
Maerz, Seraphine F., Amanda B. Edgell, Matthew C. Wilson, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2024. Episodes of Regime Transformation. *Journal of Peace Research* 61(6).

Codebook:
Edgell, Amanda B., et al. 2023. Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset and Codebook.

Data, Code & Codebook Repository:
github.com/vdeminstitute/ERT

Shiny App for Visualizations:
episodes.shinyapps.io/validation/

2 | Trends of Regime Transformation

- **The world is increasingly volatile. The number of countries in regime transformation is up to 62 in 2025 from 44 just ten years ago.**
- **The world has never before seen as many countries autocratizing at the same time as during the last few years.**
- **In 2025, 44 autocratizing countries harbor 41% of the world population, cover 26% of the world land area, and account for 39% of the world GDP.**
- **A mere 5% of the world population reside in 18 democratizing countries.**
- **The European Union is greatly affected. Autocratization dominates in Eastern Europe, affects seven member states and two main allies – the UK and the USA.**

Section 2 of *Democracy Report 2026* identifies and analyzes countries that are right now in change – that is, in episodes of regime transformation (by the ERT methodology, see Box 4)[1]: 62 countries are in processes of regime transformation: 44 countries are autocratizing and only 18 democratizing, as of 2025.

Autocratization affects every region, altering the world in profound ways. It is a global trend stretching back at least 25 years and accelerating over the last decade. No country, including long-standing Western democracies, is immune to the erosion of democratic norms. These are times of *systemic global shifts*, in which the world's remaining democracies face severe challenges.

The United States of America (USA) stands out as a conspicuous example. It is an exceptional new autocratizer due to both far-reaching changes in 2025 and their implications for the rest of the world. The extensive damage already done to American democracy under the second Trump presidency – in just *one* year – stands out on the world map (Figure 10). Typically, autocratizing countries of the "third wave" have taken about a decade to make such a deep dive, and the speed of decline is comparable to some coups d´états.[2] Section 5 provides a detailed analysis of the developments in the USA.

The world map in Figure 10 shows countries in active regime transformation – democratizing (blue) or autocratizing (red).[3] The intensity of the colors indicates the magnitude of change since the year the process of regime transformation started in each country (for details, see Sections 3 and 4).

Figure 10 provides evidence that the "third wave of autocratization" is a truly global trend affecting diverse regions, including both fragile and well-established democracies. The global environment is becoming increasingly favorable to autocratic rule.

The "Third Wave" of Autocratization Dominates

For the past 25 years, by some analyses[4] even 30 years, the number of countries autocratizing at the same time has been increasing, even accelerating over the last decade.

The world seems to be in uncharted territory. Recent scientific findings show that *there has never been more countries autocratizing at the same time in the world, as now*. The assessment holds true both in absolute numbers, in terms of share of the world's nations, and in terms of share of the world's population (see Box 5). →

FIGURE 10. THE 62 COUNTRIES DEMOCRATIZING VS. AUTOCRATIZING, 2025

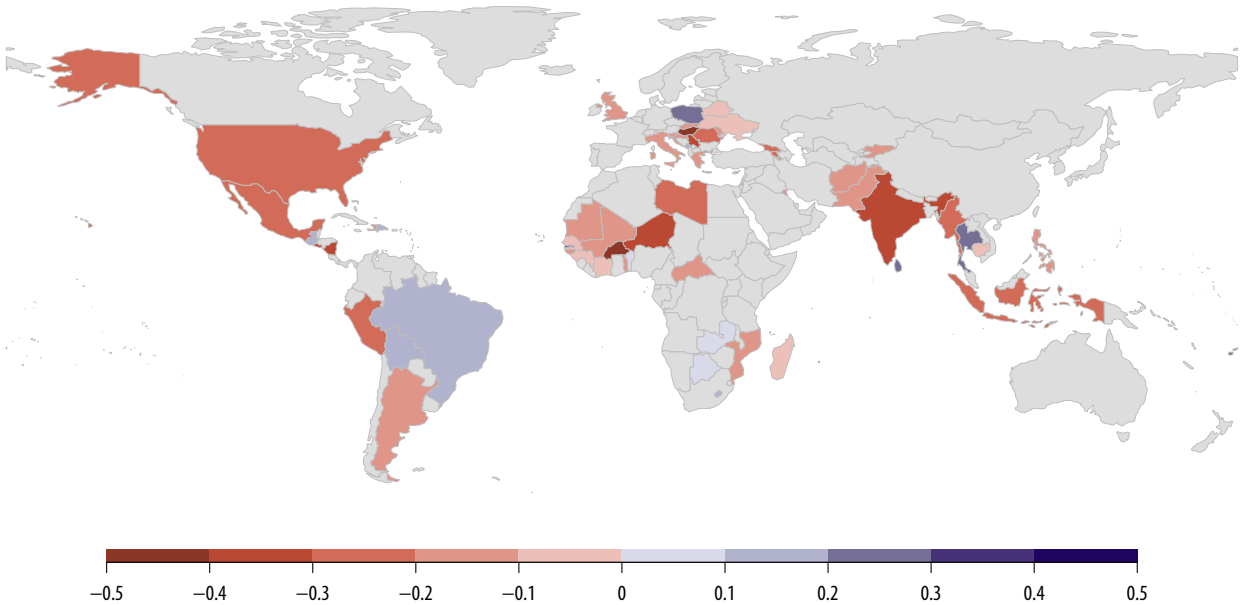


Figure 10 shows countries which are democratizing (blue) or autocratizing (red) in 2025. Color intensity shows the magnitude of change on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) since the start of regime transformation. Countries in gray are not in an ongoing regime transformation.

1 Since the V-Dem data is updated each year, with more experts and better data each year, also for years back in time, the ERT also updates numbers and findings going back in time. This sometimes leads to differences from what was reported in previous years. This is a sign of better and more accurate data and not a bug.
2 Only six countries register larger one-year drops on the LDI since 2000. Five of them are military coups: Burkina Faso (2022), Fiji (2000), Myanmar (2021), Thailand (2006), Thailand (2014), and one is self-coup: Tunisia (2022). Moreover, there are only 35 instances (0.14%) of larger one-year drops on the LDI since 1789 across the whole V-Dem dataset.
3 This perspective is different from Section 1 that looked at the state of democracy in the world in terms of average levels of democracy, and trends for regime types.
4 Lührmann, A. and S.I. Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What Is New About It?" *Democratization* 26(7).

Box 5. Research Evidence – Worse Than the 1930s

FIGURE 1. THREE WAVES OF DEMOCRATIZATION AND AUTOCRATIZATION

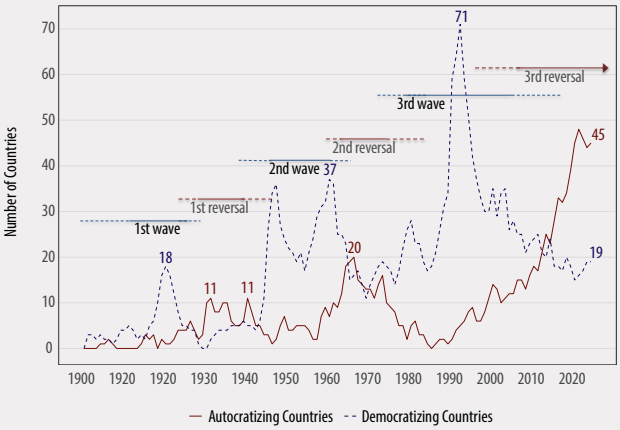


Figure 1 is reproducing Figure 4 in Lindberg 2026. It shows trends of democratization and autocratization as identified with the ERT method (as in Democracy Report). Data come from the V-Dem Dataset v15.

A recent scientific article reflects on the global trends of democratization and autocratization. It takes stock of the 50 years of the "third wave of democratization" that transformed many dictatorships into democracies. Between 1970 and 2024, 149 democratization episodes occurred in 110 nondemocratic countries. Yet, over the past 25 years, it came to overlap with a growing "third wave of autocratization" with a tally of 105 autocratization episodes in 75 countries.

Among other things, the article compares the last 25 years' "third wave of autocratization" to the "first wave" in the 1930s winding up with the end of World War II. The analysis provides evidence that the current wave of autocratization is *unprecedented* in length, scope, and magnitude – worse than the 1930s in all these regards.

Source: Lindberg, S.I. 2026. "Fifty Years of the Third Wave(s): From Democratization to Autocratization." *Democratization*, Online First (open access).

Figure 11 visualizes the global **trends of autocratization** and **democratization** over the last 50 years. Until the turn of the century, democratization was the dominant global trend (blue line, left panel). The number of democratizers peaked at 73 in 1992, slumped to 18 in 2012, and has been hovering around 18–20 for the past 15 years. Some recent positive news – U-Turns (countries such as Brazil and Poland that have halted and turned around autocratization) – show prominently on the world map in Figure 10.

The number of autocratizing countries (red line) increases from the mid-1990s-early 2000s, to surpass the number of democratizing countries in 2012. Autocratization is the dominant global trend since the early 2010s, and it is accelerating over the last decade. Following a historical record of 50 countries autocratizing in 2021, there are 44 in 2025.

THE CREST OF THE WAVE?

We *cautiously* note the small decline in the number of simultaneously autocratizing countries since 2022. It *could* indicate that the "third wave" crested – yet, one should be very careful with drawing such conclusions.

First, there is a lot more volatility behind these numbers than it seems. Out of 44 autocratizers in 2025, 10 are new – identified by the ERT method for the first time this year (with the V-Dem Dataset v16). Meanwhile, 11 autocratization episodes – that were reported as ongoing in *Democracy Report 2025* – are now marked as "finished" by the ERT rules. In other words, the *total* number of countries affected by the "third wave of autocratization" is higher than the 44 that are currently autocratizing.

Second, in some countries, autocratization ended not because it failed, but because it succeeded. Some notable examples include Russia and Türkiye who "finished" their episodes with establishing stable autocratic regimes. The "worst" therefore will not be over until we see a decrease in autocratizers accompanied by an increase in democratizers.

Third, the count may increase post-factum (as it did for 2021, for example, in this *Democracy Report*). The ERT method is very "conservative" (as scientific methods should be) with asserting that a country has entered a period of regime transformation. The high thresholds are important to avoid "false positives" that could be resulting from measurement error and noise in the underlying data. Hence, the 44 autocratizers for 2025 could increase further in the coming years – for example, if deteriorations continue in countries on the Watchlist (see Appendices, page 41).

A RECORD OF 41% OF WORLD POPULATION IN AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES

This year registers a new record of 41% of the world population living in the 44 autocratizing countries (see Figure 11, right panel). There have never been so many people (3.4 billion) living in autocratizing countries, as now. The autocratizers cover 26% of the world land area, and account for 39% of the world GDP.

Meanwhile, a mere 5% of the world population reside in countries where democracy is improving, covering 9% of the world land area, and generating only 4% of the world GDP. Brazil alone accounts for more than half of these numbers.

FIGURE 11. AUTOCRATIZING VS. DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 1975–2025

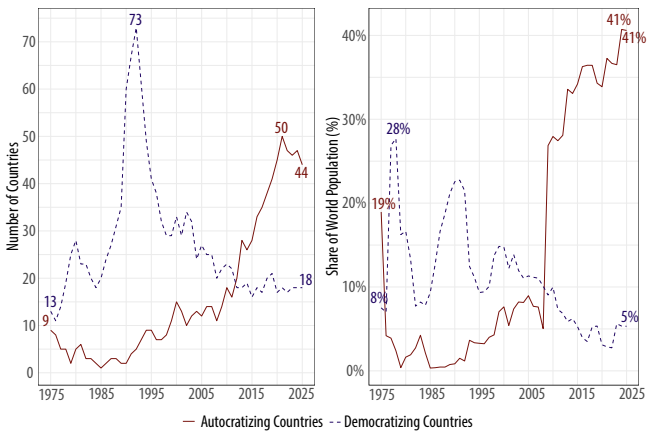
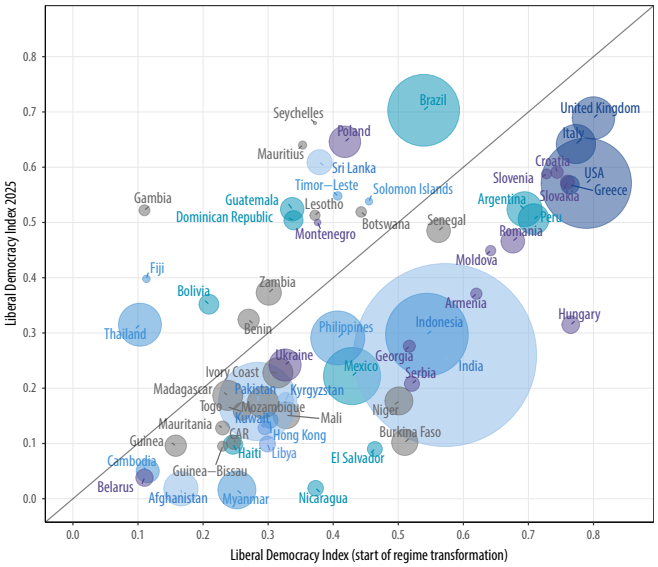


Figure 11 shows trends of democratization and autocratization over the last 50 years. The left panel displays the number of countries in each category, and the right panel shows the share of the world population living in autocratizing and democratizing countries.

FIGURE 12. DEMOCRATIZERS VS. AUTOCRATIZERS, BY POPULATION SIZE IN 2025



East Asia and the Pacific
Sub–Saharan Africa
Latin America and the Caribbean
South and Central Asia
Eastern Europe
The Middle East and North Africa
Western Europe and North America

Figure 12 displays country scores on the LDI in 2025 (y-axis) and at the start of autocratization / democratization episodes (x-axis), which varies by country (start years can be found in Figures 14 and 18). Size of the bubbles reflects population size. Countries above the diagonal line are democratizing, whereas countries below the diagonal line are autocratizing, as of 2025.

Figure 12 visualizes the heavy tilting of the world towards autocratization. The figure compares each country's level of democracy in 2025 with the level it had at the start of its current episode; the size of each country's bubble is proportional to its population size. Countries above the diagonal line are the 18 democratizers, countries below are the 44 autocratizers.

Among the democratizers (above the diagonal line), **Brazil** is by far the largest one in terms of population size, followed by **Thailand** and **Poland**. All three are U-Turns, meaning that they are *recovering* from autocratization of the last decade, and restoring their initial levels of democracy. Other countries undergoing democratization, and especially "stand-alone" democratizers, tend to be relatively small countries in terms of population. For comparison, the share of the world population living in all "stand-alone" democratizers is only 0.005% – about 40 million people. We discuss democratizers in Section 4.

In contrast, many of the autocratizers (below the diagonal line) are countries with large populations, such as **India**, **Indonesia**, **Mexico**, **Pakistan**, **the UK**, and **the USA**. Many of these countries are influential regional or global powers, who can influence the future of their regions and shape international politics. We analyze the developments in autocratizing countries in Section 3.

Regime Transformation Across Regions

Figure 13 shows the spread of regime transformations across world regions. Autocratization is more prevalent than democratization in every region of the world. The **European Union (EU)** is also greatly affected, as autocratization is ongoing in seven of its member states →



A student holds a flag bearing a symbol adopted by Gen Z protest movements worldwide, in Antananarivo, Madagascar on October 9, 2025. (LUIS TATO/AFP, Getty Images)

and many neighboring countries in **Eastern Europe**, as well as in two of its main allies – **the UK** and **the USA**.

In the **East Asia and the Pacific**, four countries (or 18% of the region[5]) are in ongoing episodes of democratization: Fiji, Solomon Islands, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. However, five countries (23% of the region) are autocratizing: Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Myanmar, and The Philippines.

In **South and Central Asia**, Sri Lanka is the only (7% of the region) democratizing country. Four countries (29% of the region) are autocratizing: Afghanistan, India, Kyrgyzstan, and Pakistan. India, with a population of almost 1.5 billion, and Pakistan, with 251 million, are among the most populous countries in the world.

The Middle East and North Africa has the lowermost regional level of democracy (see Figure 3), and no country there is democratizing in 2025. Two countries are autocratizing, Kuwait and Libya, making up 10% of the region.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, seven countries (14% of the region) are democratizing: Benin, Botswana, The Gambia, Lesotho, Mauritius, The Seychelles, and Zambia. Comprising the largest number of countries (*N*=51)[6], the region also has the largest number of autocratizers, 12 (or 24% of the region) in 2025: Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

In **Eastern Europe**, only two countries are democratizing: Montenegro and Poland, making up 8% of the region. Autocratization predominates, with eleven autocratizing countries – up from eight last year. That corresponds to 46% of the region and affects 32% of its population. The "third wave of autocratization" now affects **the EU** since it involves EU member states and its close neighbors. Among autocratizing EU members in Eastern Europe, we find Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, while neighbors include Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine.

No country in **North America and Western Europe** is democratizing but the region is now also affected by the "third wave of autocratization." Greece used to be the only country in the region in democratic decline. There are three additions this year: Italy, the UK, and the USA. These are large and very influential countries that account for 59% of the region's population. Greece and Italy are **EU** members, while the UK and the USA are its main allies. It is a distressing development for democracy's outlook in the world today.

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, there are four democratizing countries (or 16% of the region): Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. Bolivia, Brazil, and Guatemala are U-turn democratizers – countries that are reversing autocratization. Yet, autocratization continues in six countries (or 24% of the region): Argentina, El Salvador, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. ■

FIGURE 13. DEMOCRATIZATION AND AUTOCRATIZATION ACROSS REGIONS, 2025

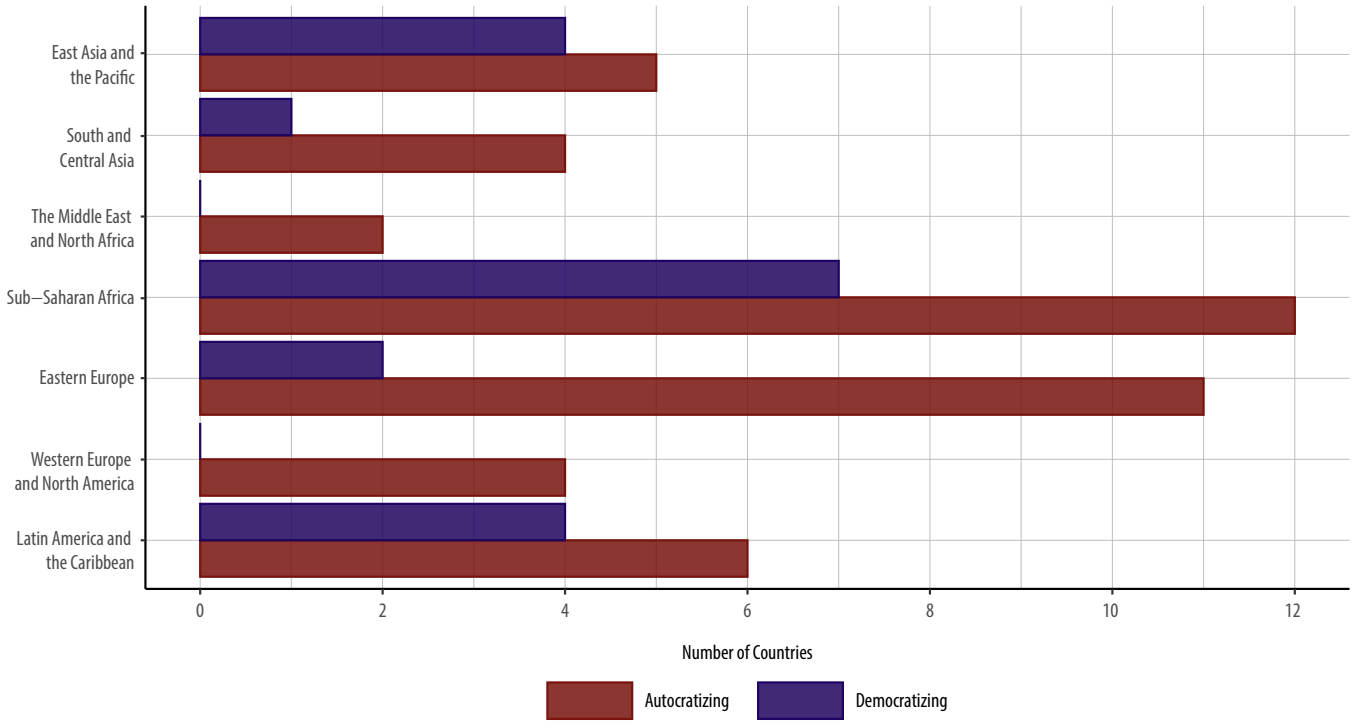


Figure 13 plots the number of countries that are democratizing and autocratizing in each region in 2025.

5 The percentages in this section are calculated in relation to the total number of countries included in the V-Dem dataset in 2025. For details, see the V-Dem "Country Coding Units" in v-dem.net/data/reference-documents/.

6 "Countries" in the V-Dem dataset include some semi-sovereign territories. In Sub-Saharan Africa, that includes Somaliland and Zanzibar. They are coded separately beyond the sovereign states.

3 | Autocratizing Countries

- **Nearly a quarter of the world's nations (44) are now on the list of autocratizers, after 11 autocratization episodes ended and 10 new ones were identified in 2025.**
- **28 of the 44 autocratizers were democracies at the start of their episodes. Only 13 remain democracies in 2025.**
- **5 of the new autocratizers were liberal democracies at the start of autocratization.**
- **The 44 autocratizers divide into 24 stand-alone autocratizers and 20 Bell-turns.**
- **Among the new autocratizers are five European countries: Croatia, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the UK.**
- **Media censorship remains the most popular tactic among autocratizing governments with 32 countries (73%) resorting to it. Yet repression of civil society has surged to affect 30 countries (68%).**

Nearly a quarter of the world's nations (44) are now on the list of autocratizers, echoing a precipitous rise in autocratization. As recently as ten years ago, this number was only 28, and some 25 years ago – less than a dozen (see Figure 11 in Section 2). →

FIGURE 14. ALL 44 CASES OF ONGOING AUTOCRATIZATION, 2025

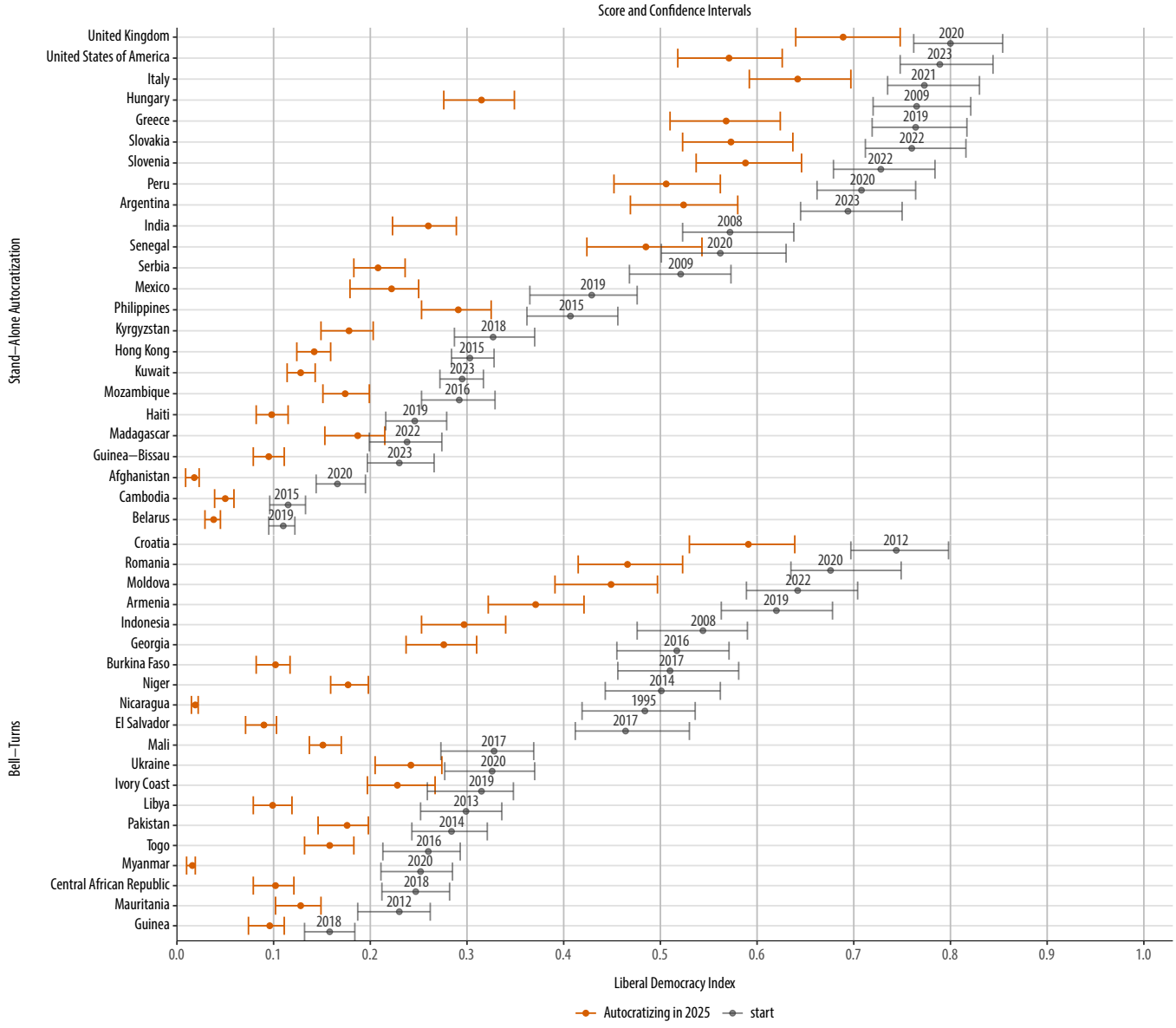


Figure 14 shows the LDI scores and confidence intervals at the start of autocratization (in black). These are technically ERT "pre-episode" years, meaning that the following year was the first year recording a decline. For Bell-Turns, only the autocratization part of the episode is displayed. The values for 2025 (orange) reveal the total magnitude of deterioration. The ERT uses the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for identifying episodes. For consistency with the rest of the analyses in the Democracy Report, we display countries' respective values on the LDI. A country may change more on the EDI than on the LDI, which explains cases with overlapping confidence intervals (they do not overlap on the EDI).

If a democracy begins to autocratize, it is more likely to break down than to survive. Among the 44 current autocratizers, 28 were democracies when autocratization started.[1] Democracy has already broken down in 15 of the 28 – like recently in **Georgia** and **Mexico** – a casualty rate of 54%. Of the remaining 13, eight were only recently identified – this year or last – so they are early in their process.

Autocratization also strikes in autocracies, making them more repressive. 16 of the 44 autocratizers were already autocracies when further regression got underway. Of these, 14 were electoral autocracies and for six of them – or 43% – autocratization led to closed autocracy – such as **Afghanistan** and **Belarus**. The other eight became more repressive but remain electoral autocracies. **Hong Kong** and **Kuwait** started autocratization as closed autocracies and retain that status.

44 autocratization episodes in Figure 14 divide into 24 "**stand-alone**" processes – where autocratization follows a period of relative stability, and 20 "**Bell-turns**" – where a decline follows and is related to a recent period of democratization (see also Box 6). Within each group, countries are ordered by the LDI levels at the onset of autocratization. The LDI scores for 2025 are marked in orange, indicating the total magnitude of deterioration.

10 NEW AUTOCRATIZERS

There are ten new autocratizers identified this year with the new data for 2025: eight stand-alone and two Bell-turns (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. AUTOCRATIZERS APPEARING ON THE LIST IN 2025

	Stand-Alone	Episode Start		Bell-Turns	Episode Start
1	Cambodia	2015	1	Croatia	2012
2	Italy	2021	2	Togo	2016
3	Madagascar	2022			
4	Kuwait	2023			
5	Slovakia	2022			
6	Slovenia	2022			
7	United Kingdom	2020			
8	United States of America	2023			

Four of the ten new cases were featured as Watchlist cases of autocratization in *Democracy Report 2025* – countries bordering to become autocratizers. The ERT method now with certainty identifies episodes of autocratization in these countries: **Madagascar**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, and **Togo**. Two more – **Croatia** and **Italy** - were identified as "near misses" of autocratization, or countries that were at least halfway toward becoming autocratizers. We continue to provide Watchlist countries also in this year's *Democracy Report* (see Appendices, page 41).

In two of the ten new cases, **Kuwait** and **the USA**, the magnitude of deteriorations in 2025 was so large that they are now among the top 10 ongoing "stand-alone" autocratizers. In **Cambodia**, marginal year-to-year deteriorations of the last decade accumulated into a substantial aggregate decline. In **the UK**, the aggregate drop on the democracy index is largely driven by a substantial decline in freedom of expression and the media, which has fallen to its lowest levels in decades.

11 AUTOCRATIZATION EPISODES ENDING

Eleven autocratizers left the list, compared to last year's *Democracy Report*. Table 3 shows the list of these episodes and their end years.

TABLE 3. AUTOCRATIZERS DISAPPEARING FROM THE LIST IN 2025

	Stand-Alone	Episode End		Bell-Turns	Episode End
1	Comoros	2020	1	Bangladesh	2021
2	Gabon	2024	2	South Korea	2023
3	Guyana	2023	3	Sudan	watchlist
4	Lebanon	2024			
5	Mauritius	2023			
6	Mongolia	2024			
7	Sierra Leone	watchlist			
8	Tanzania	2021			

Four of the eleven cases in this group are "good news" for democracy: **Gabon**, **Lebanon**, **Mauritius**, and **South Korea**. Autocratization was halted and reversed in **Mauritius** with the 2024 election (see Section 4). **South Korea** defended its democracy in 2025, following the failed 2024 martial law attempt by President Yoon Suk Yeol. South Korea is only a small margin away from making a second U-turn. **Gabon** and **Lebanon** – both electoral autocracies at the start of autocratization – experienced significant turning points with elections in 2025 and are now close to restoring their initial (low) levels of democracy. For **Gabon** it was the first election after the 2023 coup. **Lebanon** elected (indirectly) a president after nearly two years of turbulence. **Gabon** and **South Korea** are now on the Watchlist for democratizers (see Appendices, page 41).

The other seven cases are more of "bad news" for democracy. Five processes of autocratization merely stalled at lower levels of democracy. **Comoros** remains stable (at low levels) since 2021. In **Guyana** and **Mongolia**, autocratization ended with marginal improvements in 2025, leading to re-classification of both countries as "grey zone" electoral democracies. In **Bangladesh** and **Tanzania**, autocratization episodes of the 2010s finished with several years of stability (at low levels) in the early 2020s. Both countries, however, register further worrying declines in 2025.

Finally, **Sierra Leone** and **Sudan** have been balancing around the ERT thresholds for the last several years, at low levels on the LDI. They remain on the Watchlist for autocratizers (see Appendices, page 41).

Stand-Alone Autocratization

Nine of the top 10 stand-alone autocratizers (Figure 15) were democracies when autocratization got underway. Four of these have already broken down.

Figure 15 shows the trajectories of these countries, tracing the developments back in time to their onsets using the precision of the ERT methodology (see Box 4). Table 4 ranks the 10 stand-alone autocratization episodes by total magnitude of decline on the LDI.

We start with discussing the five countries that are still democracies, in alphabetic order:

Autocratization in **Argentina** began with the presidency of Javier Milei. Under his libertarian far-right populist rule, freedom of expression, media freedom, and civil society organizations came under attack.[2] However, Milei's popularity remains high, and his self-founded coalition Liberty Advances was the big winner in Argentina's 2025 midterm elections.[3]

Autocratization in **Greece** started in 2020, and almost immediately led to the loss of its liberal democracy status. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis gradually weakened the rule of law and

1 Figure 14 does not include information on each country's regime type at the start of the episode and at end of 2025, but that information is found in Appendices, Table A1.
2 rsf.org/en/argentina-javier-milei-s-first-year-president-marked-sharp-decline-press-freedom/
3 www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentines-vote-high-stakes-test-mileis-libertarian-vision-2025-10-26/

FIGURE 15. TOP 10 "STAND-ALONE" AUTOCRATIZERS, 2025

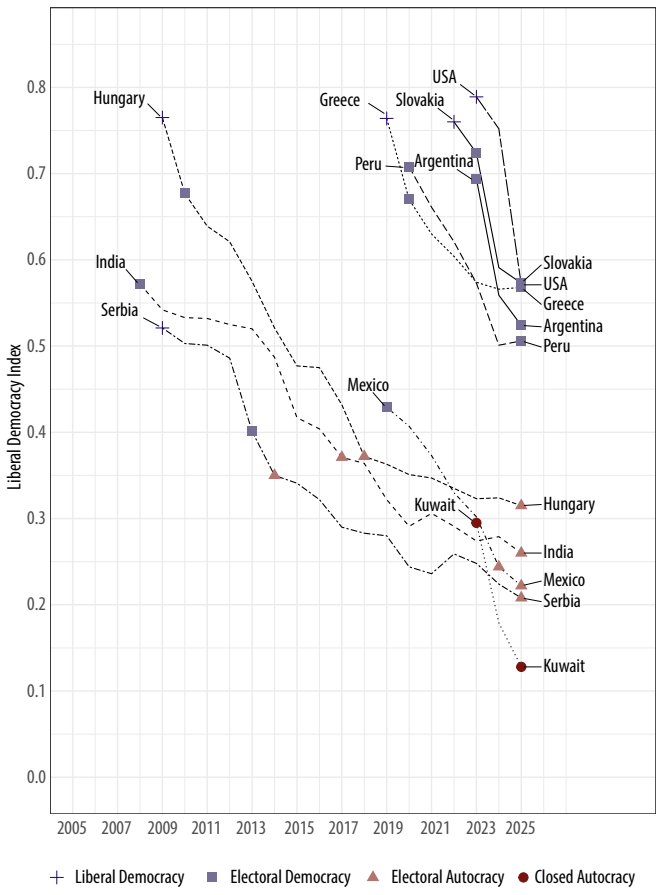


Figure 15 plots the LDI values for the top 10 stand-alone autocratizing countries. For technical details, see note under Figure 14.

TABLE 4. MAGNITUDE OF DECLINE, FIGURE 15

Rank	Country	Episode Start	Change on LDI
1	Hungary	2009	–0.451
2	Serbia	2009	–0.313
3	India	2008	–0.309
4	USA	2023	–0.218
5	Mexico	2019	–0.207
6	Peru	2020	–0.200
7	Greece	2019	–0.195
8	Slovakia	2022	–0.187
9	Argentina	2023	–0.171
10	Kuwait	2023	–0.167

attacked media freedom.[4] The worsening seems to have paused in the past two years.

Peru is not a case of autocratization via "executive aggrandizement" – the typical process over the last 25 years. Some argue instead that autocratization is a result of legislative authoritarianism.[5] Institutional instability in Peru is so high that, between the time when the autocratization episode started (2021) and the publishing of this report, Peru has had seven different presidents, only one directly elected for the post.[6] Freedom of association, freedom of expression, and accountability are behind the decline.



Pride Day Celebration on July 11th, 2015, in Budapest, Hungary. (Conejota, Shutterstock)

Slovakia appeared on the Watchlist of autocratizers in last year's *Democracy Report*. The decline reflects Prime Minister Robert Fico's government – a nationalist-populist coalition – undermining judicial independence, attacking civil society organizations, and exerting political control over the media.[7] In 2024 for example, the government took direct control of all law enforcement, closed the Special Prosecutor's Office, and effectively took control of the judiciary and the public service broadcasters.[8] Multiple unions and industries and people at NGOs have spoken out.[9]

The USA joins the list of autocratizers under President Donald J. Trump's administration. In only one year, the USA *already* ranks fourth in magnitude of deteriorations – just behind the top three most flagrant cases who have been autocratizing for over a decade. While the electoral aspects of the USA democracy remain largely unaffected, all other aspects have substantially deteriorated, driving the democracy index down. Freedom of expression, checks and balances, rule of law, and civil rights are among the most severely affected aspects by 2025. We discuss autocratization in the USA in detail in Section 5.

Five of the top 10 stand-alone autocratizers are now autocracies. Four of them are classified as electoral:

Hungary ranks top in terms of total magnitude of deteriorations. It was a liberal democracy, when Viktor Orbán and his party Fidesz came to power in 2010. His government gradually removed checks and balances on the executive, interfered with the quality of elections, and severely restricted press freedom and the access to information. More recently, anti-government protests have increased[10] and →

4 www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0069_EN.html/
5 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/the-rise-of-legislative-authoritarianism/
6 www.americasquarterly.org/article/perus-political-instability-enters-a-new-chapter-under-balcazar/
7 www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/slovakia/
8 balkaninsight.com/2024/09/03/slovakias-new-period-of-normalisation-attacks-on-freedoms-and-rights/
9 balkaninsight.com/2025/01/08/slovakia-in-2025-continuing-down-a-dark-road/
10 www.gmfus.org/news/hungarys-sudden-protests-punch-hole-orbans-legitimization-narrative

the opposition to Fidesz is organizing ahead of the April 2026 election.[11] Hungary is an electoral autocracy since 2018.

India's autocratization (since 2009) is a slow but systematic dismantling of democratic institutions. The ruling anti-pluralist, Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Modi's derailing of democracy include deteriorations in freedom of expression and independence of the media, harassments of journalists critical of the government, and attacks on civil society and the opposition.[12] India is classified as an electoral autocracy since 2017.

Mexico is a rare case of left-wing driven autocratization during the "third wave". The autocratic turn followed the 2018 election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA). MORENA now controls the executive branch and holds a majority in the legislative. They have also led a reform to introduce general elections for the judiciary, politicizing the courts.[13] MORENA won a second election and Claudia Sheinbaum took office in 2024. Mexico is an electoral autocracy since 2024.

Serbia was a liberal democracy when its autocratization episode began. Democracy broke down into electoral autocracy already in 2014. President (and previous Prime Minister) Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) have increasingly undermined the quality of Serbian elections, which are no longer considered as free and fair.[14] In 2024, protests broke out in Serbia after the deadly collapse of a roof in a newly renovated railway station in Novi Sad, and the anti-government demonstrations continued throughout 2025.[15]

Finally, one case among the top 10 shows substantial worsening in already a closed autocracy:

Kuwait's autocratization began when the Emir announced in 2024 the dissolution and indefinite suspension of the National Assembly. This move concentrated the power in the Emir and his cabinet, removing constrains on the executive. Moreover, some constitutional articles were suspended with the promise of a constitutional revision.[16]

Bell-Turn Autocratization

Bell-turns can be thought of as episodes of *"failed democratization"*, or re-autocratization shortly after a period of substantial democratic improvement. 14 of the 20 ongoing Bell-turns were democracies at some point during their episodes. Only four remain democracies in 2025. The fatality rate is 70%.

Figure 16 shows the trajectories of the top 10 Bell-turn cases, while Table 5 ranks them by total magnitude of decline on the LDI during re-autocratization.

Nine of the top 10 were democracies after the initial democratization, **Myanmar** is the only country that was autocratic throughout the whole Bell-turn episode.

Only two of the top 10 remain democracies by 2025 – **Armenia** and **Romania**. The other Eastern European country on the list – **Georgia** – is an electoral autocracy. The remaining seven cases are either electoral or closed autocracies.

FIGURE 16. TOP 10 BELL-TURN AUTOCRATIZERS, 2025

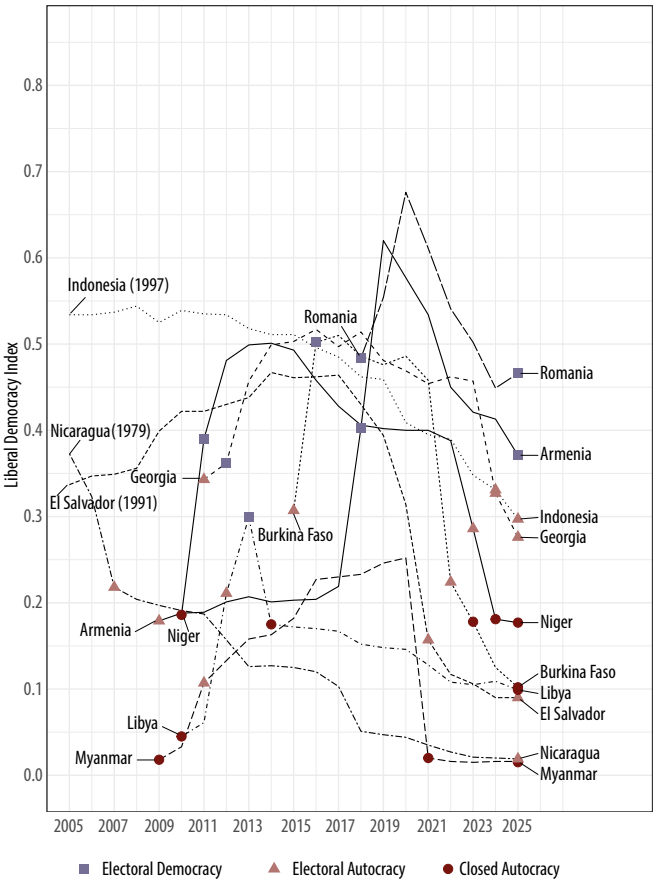


Figure 16 plots the LDI values for the top 10 Bell-Turn autocratizing countries. For El Salvador, Indonesia, and Nicaragua, the first years are not shown. For technical details, see note under Figure 14.

TABLE 5. MAGNITUDE OF DECLINE, FIGURE 16

Rank	Country	Start of Reversal	Change on LDI
1	Burkina Faso	2009	–0.408
2	El Salvador	2009	–0.375
3	Nicaragua	2008	–0.353
4	Niger	2023	–0.325
5	Indonesia	2019	–0.249
6	Armenia	2020	–0.249
7	Georgia	2019	–0.243
8	Myanmar	2022	–0.237
9	Romania	2023	–0.212
10	Libya	2023	–0.202

We begin with discussing the two cases that remain democracies.

Armenia's initial period of democratization in the early 2010s culminated with the 2018 Velvet Revolution[17] and transition to an electoral democracy. The re-autocratization coincides with the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020. Nikol Pashinyan's government resorted to personalistic style of governance, restricting freedom of expression, civic space, and civil liberties.[18] Growing spread of hate speech, disinformation, and polarization fueled the democratic decline, along with Azerbaijan's victory in the war by 2023.[19]

11 www.politico.eu/article/hungary-viktor-orban-fidesz-peter-magyar-tisza-5-key-questions-election-2026/
12 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-indias-democracy-is-dying/
13 www.wilsoncenter.org/article/mexicos-2024-judicial-reform-politicization-justice/
14 www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/why-aspiring-autocrats-are-watching-serbia/
15 www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/how-serbian-students-created-the-largest-protest-movement-in-decades/
16 carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/research/2025/03/kuwaits-parliament-suspension-emir-democracy/
17 Lanskoy, M., and E. Suthers. 2019. "Armenia's Velvet Revolution". *Journal of Democracy* 30(2).
18 www.civilnet.am/en/news/994719/2025-a-year-of-democratic-backsliding-in-armenia/
19 freedomhouse.org/country/armenia/freedom-world/2025

Box 6. Bell-Turns and U-Turns

Bell-turns are episodes of regime transformation where democratization is directly followed by autocratization. Inversely, U-turns are episodes of regime transformation where autocratization is closely followed by democratization.

We use the ERT to identify episodes of democratization and autocratization (see Box 4). We adopt a rule of no more than five years between the episodes to make a Bell- or a U-turn. This comes from the recently published academic article "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-turns since 1900."

Simply put, Bell-turns are episodes where democratization turns into autocratization within no more than five years after the end of democratic advances. U-turns are episodes where autocratization is stopped and reversed within an equivalent period.

Featured Article: Nord, Marina, Fabio Angiolillo, Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2025. "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900". *Democratization* 32(5).

Romania democratized from 2019, but re-autocratization started already in 2021. Intimidation of the opposition, suppression of civil society, attacks on the media, and interventions by external intelligence services became common.[20] Romania's Constitutional Court took the unprecedented step of annulling the presidential election results in 2024, following the accusation of Russian interference. Romania went back to the polls in 2025,[21] registering a small uptick on the LDI.

Eight of the top 10 Bell-turn countries are now autocracies. Four of them are classified as electoral:

Georgia's period of democratization with improvements in judicial independence, freedom of speech, and civil liberties, lasted until 2016. The reversal was gradual until the 2024 electoral process, marred with accusations, irregularities, and silencing of the media and the opposition.[22] Several observers labelled the 2024 elections "rigged"[23] and subject to Russian influence.[24] The outcome of the 2024 elections is still disputed.[25] The deep political crisis manifests the split between the ruling party Georgian Dream behind Prime-Minister Irakli Kobakhidze[26] and the opposition supported by President Salome Zourabichvili. Democracy scores plummeted in 2023–2025, turning Georgia into an electoral autocracy.

Indonesia's democratization started in 1998 with the toppling of the authoritarian President Suharto and lasted until the late 2000s. Re-autocratization set off in the early 2010s and intensified during Joko Widodo's presidency. His coalition included powerful special interest groups from business, conservative Islam, the National Police, and the Indonesian Military (TNI).[27] Under his government, civil liberties declined, legislative and judicial checks weakened, free- and fairness of elections diminished, and the role of the military in civilian affairs increased.[28] Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo, a retired military officer and minister of defense from 2019 to 2024, won a contested presidential elections in 2024 and is following in the footsteps of Widodo.[29] After being electoral democracy for more than two decades, Indonesia is classified as an electoral autocracy since 2024.

The neighbors El Salvador and Nicaragua are electoral autocracies led by personalistic authoritarian leaders. **El Salvador**, under President Nayib Bukele, is marred with arbitrary arrests and mass incarcerations, restrictions to freedom of expression, the replacement of high court judges, and manipulation of term limits.[30] The rapid and drastic fall on the LDI in El Salvador in 2019–2021 is comparable almost only to military coups (like Burkina Faso discussed below). Despite constitutional bans on immediate re-election, Bukele secured a second term in 2024, after the Congress controlled by his party replaced the Supreme Court judges. In 2025, the Congress abolished presidential term limits, consolidating Bukele's power.[31] El Salvador is an electoral autocracy but among the most oppressive in this category.

In **Nicaragua**, President Daniel Ortega (since 2007) and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) undermined the quality of elections, abolished presidential term limits, and shut down or silenced the opposition, the media, and civil society organizations.[32] A new constitution in 2025 cemented their rule.[33] As of 2025, Nicaragua is among the least democratic states in the world, despite technically holding multiparty elections and therefore remaining an electoral autocracy.

Finally, four of the Bell-turns have led to the (re-)establishment of closed autocracies:

Burkina Faso and **Niger** went through military coups in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Military rule has been further entrenched in both countries, with both juntas consolidating power, suppressing opposition, and postponing elections (and thereby transition to civilian rule).[34]

Libya's very brief liberalization period began with the overthrow of Colonel Gaddafi's regime during the Arab Spring.[35] After just one year as an electoral democracy after the 2012 elections, Libya went back to being a closed autocracy in 2014, when a civil war broke out. After years of conflict, crisis, and divided governments, Libya remains politically unsteady and autocratic.[36]

Myanmar went through a period of liberalization under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi in the 2010s. The 2021 military coup reversed all reforms, and the LDI score plummeted. Myanmar held the first election after nearly five years of military rule in December 2025. The electoral process did not conclude by the end of 2025, but observers declared that the electoral process was not free and fair.[37] Myanmar remains classified as a closed autocracy. →

20 liberalforum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Research-paper-5-The-State-of-Democracy-in-Romania-A-Future-Problem-on-the-EU-Agenda.pdf
21 carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2025/02/russian-interference-coming-soon-to-an-election-near-you
22 odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/584050
23 politicsgeo.com/how-georgias-2024-elections-were-systematically-rigged-a-look-at-the-numbers/
24 carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2025/02/russian-interference-coming-soon-to-an-election-near-you
25 www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/31/georgia-election-final-recount-ruling-party-victory-electoral-commission
26 transparency.ge/en/post/oligarch-bidzina-ivanishvili-real-ruler-georgia-and-architect-georgias-pro-russian-shift
27 indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/jokowis-10-year-presidency-a-tragedy-for-indonesias-democracy/
28 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/indonesia-jokowi-sidelines-democracy/
29 www.abc.net.au/news/2024-02-14/indonesia-election-key-takeaways/103456122
30 www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/02/el-salvadors-democracy-is-dying
31 www.bbc.com/news/articles/czd04q87zryo
32 Stuenkel, O., and A. E. Feldman. 2017. "The Unchecked Demise of Nicaraguan Democracy". Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
33 constitutionnet.org/news/voices/nicaragua-new-absolutist-constitution-tailor-made
34 www.dw.com/en/burkina-fasos-junta-extends-military-rule-for-another-five-years/a-69183574;www.dw.com/en/what-has-changed-in-niger-two-years-after-the-coup/a-73415504
35 carnegieendowment.org/posts/2016/02/why-libyas-transition-to-democracy-failed
36 www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-libya
37 www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)782583

DIRE OUTLOOK FOR FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

Freedom of expression – particularly the media – is almost universally under direct and acute attacks during autocratization: roughly 75% of autocratizers increasingly silence independent media.

Repression of civil society is increasing. It is now the second most common tactic used by autocratizers – occurring in almost 70% of all cases.

Undermining election integrity and weakening checks and balances are also common, with roughly 50% of all autocratizing governments increasingly resorting to these practices.

Figure 17 displays the top 20 indicators declining in the largest number of autocratizing countries. The colors show what aspect of democracy (component index) each indicator belongs to. The figure shows that current episodes of autocratization share striking similarities across countries, particularly regarding which democratic rights and freedoms are being targeted and dismantled.

FIGURE 17. TOP 20 DECLINING INDICATORS, AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2025

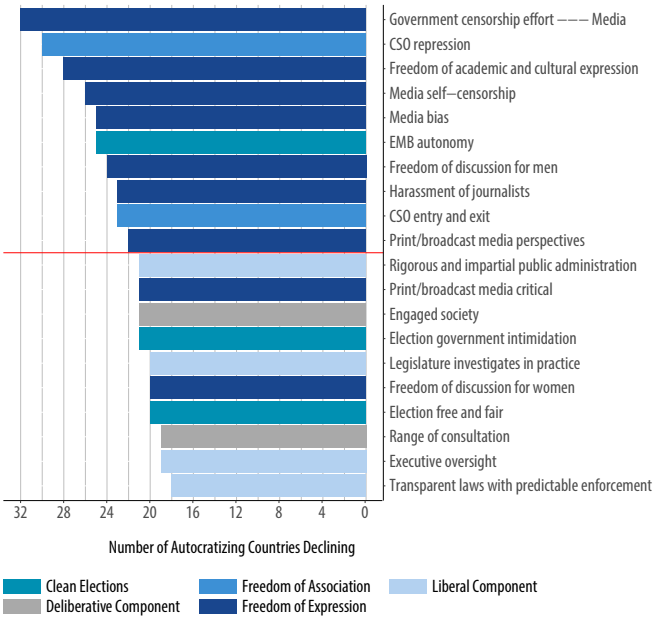


Figure 17 plots the top 20 indicators that decline significantly and substantially in the largest number of autocratizing countries since the beginning of the episode. The red line marks the top 10 indicators. The indicator is declining substantially and significantly if its 2025 value is at least 0.5 points lower than its value at the start of the autocratization episode, on a scale from 0 to 4 (for most indicators) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

Freedom of expression is the most frequently attacked aspect of democracy, with *all* of its indicators among the top 20 declining ones (see also Figure 9, Section 1). **Government effort at censoring the media** tops the top 20 list, declining in 32 out of 44 autocratizers (or 73%). Media censorship is thus the "preferred weapon of choice" for *all* modes of autocratization, from executive aggrandizement to military coups. Nicaragua ranks first place in terms of scale of deteriorations on this and many other indicators of freedom of expression and these freedoms are now nearly nonexistent.[38]

Among other indicators of freedom of expression, **freedom of academic and cultural expression** is deteriorating in 28 autocratizing countries (64%), including most recent autocratizers Argentina, Slovakia, the UK, and the USA. **Media self-censorship** is becoming worse in 26 countries, among them Cambodia, Italy, Pakistan, Romania, and the UK. **Media bias** favoring ruling incumbents is rising in 25 autocratizers, including Italy, Slovakia, and the USA. **Freedom of discussion** is weakening significantly for both men (24 countries) and women (20 countries), and **harassment of journalists** is surging in 23 cases. Countries registering declines on both include Burkina Faso, Georgia, The Philippines, and Togo. Finally, the provision of a broad set of **print/broadcast media perspectives** is disappearing in 22 countries, and that the **print/broadcast media critically** reviews governments' decisions and actions is vanishing in 21; examples include Hungary, India, and the USA.

Attacks on civil society organizations have become more common among autocratizers, compared to *Democracy Report 2025*, rising from 22 out of 45 countries (49%) in 2024, to 30 out of 44 (68%) in 2025. **CSO repression** is now second on the top 20 list, substantially worsening in two-thirds of all autocratizing countries, for example, in Belarus, El Salvador, Georgia, Guinea, and Mexico. Another aspect of freedom of association in decline is the extent to which governments assert direct control over **CSO entry and exit**, which is increasing in 23 autocratizing countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Madagascar, and Mozambique.

Three aspects of election integrity are in decline. Attacks on the **Election Management Body (EMB) autonomy** are becoming more common in 25 countries, including Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, Indonesia, and Romania.

Election government intimidation is increasing in 21 countries, for example, in Hong Kong, Ivory Coast, Togo, and Serbia. Finally, **free- and fairness of elections** is declining in 20 countries, such as Cambodia, Madagascar, and Nicaragua.

There is also evidence of widespread removal of checks and balances, leading to executive aggrandizement. Indicators from the liberal component appear on the second half of the top 20 list. **Rigorous and impartial public administration** is worsening in 21 countries, including Armenia, Indonesia, Mauritania, and Slovakia. The extent to which the **legislature investigates in practice** if governments engage in illicit actions is weakening in 20 countries, among them Georgia, Greece, Haiti, India, and Mali. **Executive oversight** by the legislature is fading in 19 countries, including Belarus, Central African Republic, Kyrgyzstan, and Niger. 18 countries are declining in **transparent laws with predictable enforcement**, including Argentina, Croatia, Mauritania, and Nicaragua.

Notably, the USA declines on *all* of the four indicators from the liberal component, indicating rapid erosion of checks and balances on the executive. The USA also *tops* the list for the greatest deterioration in the **executive oversight** indicator in 2025.

Finally, two aspects of deliberation show up on the top 20 list. The **engaged society** indicator is worsening in 21 countries, including Armenia, India, Serbia, and the USA, while the **range of consultation** before important decisions are made, is declining in 19 countries, for example, in Ivory Coast, El Salvador, Peru, Slovakia, and again, the USA. ■

38 upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2025-04/JS4_UPR47_Nicaragua_0.pdf

4 | Democratizing Countries

- **The world is facing 15 years of stagnation for democratization. Only 18 countries are democratizing, after 4 democratization episodes ended and 3 new ones were identified in 2025. All new cases are U-turns.**
- **The success rate for autocracies that start a democratization episode is high – 70%.**
- **Among the 10 ongoing U-turns, 5 avoided breakdown of democracy and 3 quickly restored democracy after a breakdown.**
- **Yet Zambia illustrates how fragile U-turns can be. It is backsliding again into a "grey zone" electoral autocracy while technically still qualifying as a U-turn.**
- **Media freedom and deliberation are improving in more than 60% of all democratizing countries, while the quality of elections – in roughly 50%.**

The world is facing 15 years of stagnation for democratization, with the number of democratizers floating between 15 and 20 since the early 2010s (see Figure 11 in Section 2). Only 18 of the world's nations (10%) are currently democratizing.

The success rate for autocracies that start a democratization episode is high – 70%. Of the 18 democratizers, ten were autocracies when democratization started.[1] Seven of them are democracies by 2025, with **The Seychelles** being the only liberal democracy.

The remaining eight were already democracies. Of these, the **Dominican Republic** and **Solomon Islands** are in the process of democratic deepening, while the other six countries are recovering after autocratization (U-turns).

The 18 democratization episodes in Figure 18 divide into eight "**stand-alone**" processes – where democratization follows a period of relative stability, and ten "**U-turns**"[2] – where an improvement follows and is related to a recent period of autocratization (see also Box 6). Within each group, countries are ordered by the LDI levels at the onset of democratization. The LDI scores for 2025 are marked in blue, indicating the total magnitude of improvement.

3 NEW DEMOCRATIZERS

The three new democratizers identified with the new data for 2025 are U-turns: **Botswana**, **Guatemala**, and **Mauritius** (Table 6).

TABLE 6. DEMOCRATIZERS APEARING ON THE LIST IN 2025

	Stand-Alone	Episode Start		U-turns	Episode Start
	None		1	Botswana	2023
			2	Guatemala	2023
			3	Mauritius	2023

Notably, all three cases were featured in *Democracy Report 2025*: **Guatemala** as a Watchlist democratizer, while **Botswana** and **Mauritius** as "notable elections" during the 2024 super year of elections. We discuss all three cases in detail below.

4 DEMOCRATIZATION EPISODES ENDING

One stand-alone and three U-turn democratizers disappeared from the list, compared to *Democracy Report 2025* (Table 7). By the precautious ERT method (see Box 4), it is only now, in hindsight, that we can identify the end of these episodes. →

FIGURE 18. ALL 18 CASES OF ONGOING DEMOCRATIZATION, 2025

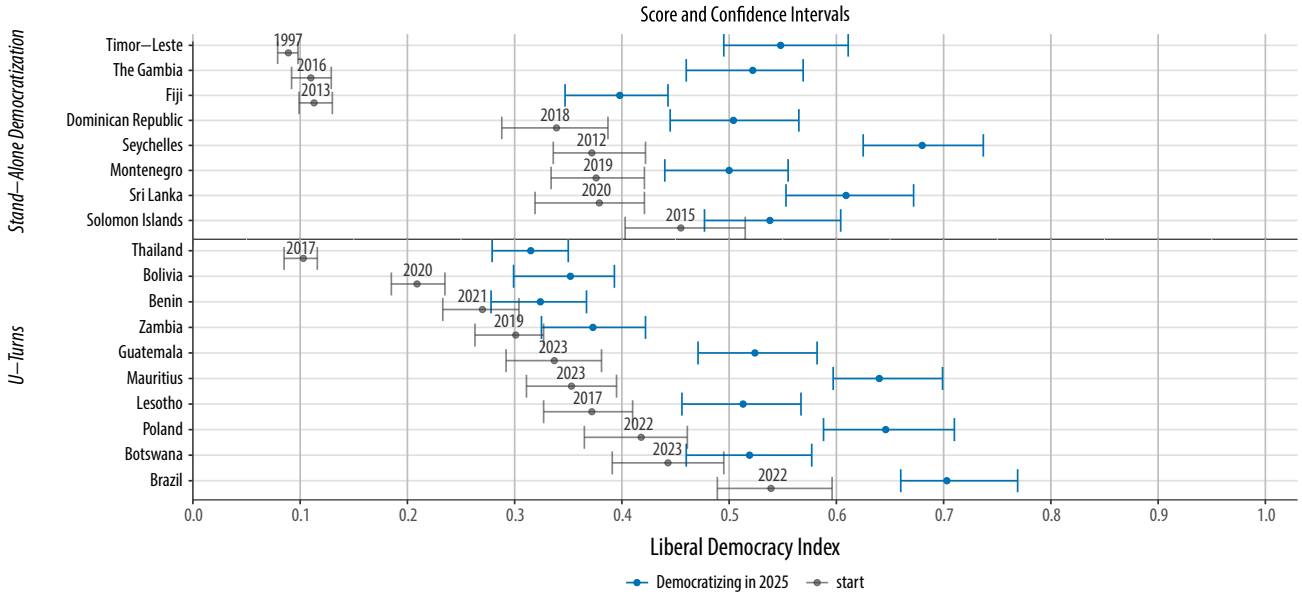


Figure 18 shows the LDI scores and confidence intervals at the start of democratization (in black). These are technically ERT "pre-episode" years, meaning that the following year was the first year recording an improvement. For U-Turns, only the democratization part of the episode is displayed. The values for 2025 (blue) reveal the total magnitude of improvement. The ERT uses the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for identifying episodes. For consistency with the rest of the analyses in the Democracy Report, we display countries' respective values on the LDI. A country may change more on the EDI than on the LDI, which explains cases with overlapping confidence intervals (they do not overlap on the EDI).

1 Figure 18 does not include information on each country's regime type at the start of the episode and in 2025, but that information is found in Appendices, Table A1.
2 Nord, M., et al. 2025. "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900". *Democratization* 32(5).

TABLE 7. DEMOCRATIZERS DISAPPEARING IN 2025

	Stand-Alone	Episode End		U-turns	Episode End
1	Honduras	2022	1	Ecuador	2022
			2	Maldives	2023
			3	Tunisia	2023

The end year of the episode is the last year when a country was still registering improvements.

In two out of the four cases this does not bring encouraging news for democracy. In **Ecuador** and **Tunisia**, democratization processes stalled but seem to backtrack in the last year(s).

In **Ecuador**, democratization process of the last years is now being reversed, gradually transforming U-turn into a potential Bell-turn. Ecuador is facing a period of increased violence associated with organized crime, to which the government is responding with an iron fist, after the 2023 election brought Daniel Noboa to power, and his re-election in 2025.[3] The deteriorations of the last years have brought Ecuador on the list of potential autocratizers (see Appendices, page 41).

Tunisia was a "technical" U-turn, registering some improvements on the EDI with the return of elections after President Saïed's 2021-self-coup.[4] Parliamentary and presidential elections were held in 2022–2024, yet both were designed to legitimize Saïed's rule and were boycotted by most parties. Declines on the EDI in 2024–2025 brought an end to this "technical" U-turn.

The two other cases are potentially "good news."

Honduras' 2021 elections were largely free and fair with a record turnout, improved the country's earlier record after a series of electoral reforms,[5] and marked a transition to democracy. Then followed substantial advances on civil liberties and freedom of expression.[6] Yet a decline on the EDI was registered in 2025, the year of national elections, which faced challenges, despite being considered free and fair.[7] Honduras, nevertheless, remains above its pre-democratization level and maintains its status of "grey zone" electoral democracy.

The Maldives' episode of U-turn ended with a decline on the EDI following the 2023 election of the pro-China candidate Mohamed Muizzu. His government has been accused of undermining freedom of expression, suppression of dissent, removal of top judges in attempts to consolidate power, and bypassing the parliament.[8] Yet, The Maldives is still substantially above its pre-democratization level and remains a "grey zone" electoral democracy.

Stand-Alone Democratization

There are only eight ongoing episodes of stand-alone democratization (Figure 19). All of them are now democracies. Three started in already democratic countries – they are episodes of democratic deepening: the **Dominican Republic**, **Sri Lanka**, and **Solomon Islands**. The remaining five cases were autocracies, and all five transitioned to democracy by 2025.

Notably, stand-alone democratizers are very small countries with a combined population of only 40 million, or a mere 0.005% of the world population.

Figure 19 details the trajectories of the eight stand-alone democratizers, while Table 8 ranks them by the total magnitude of improvement on the LDI.

FIGURE 19. 8 STAND-ALONE DEMOCRATIZERS, 2025

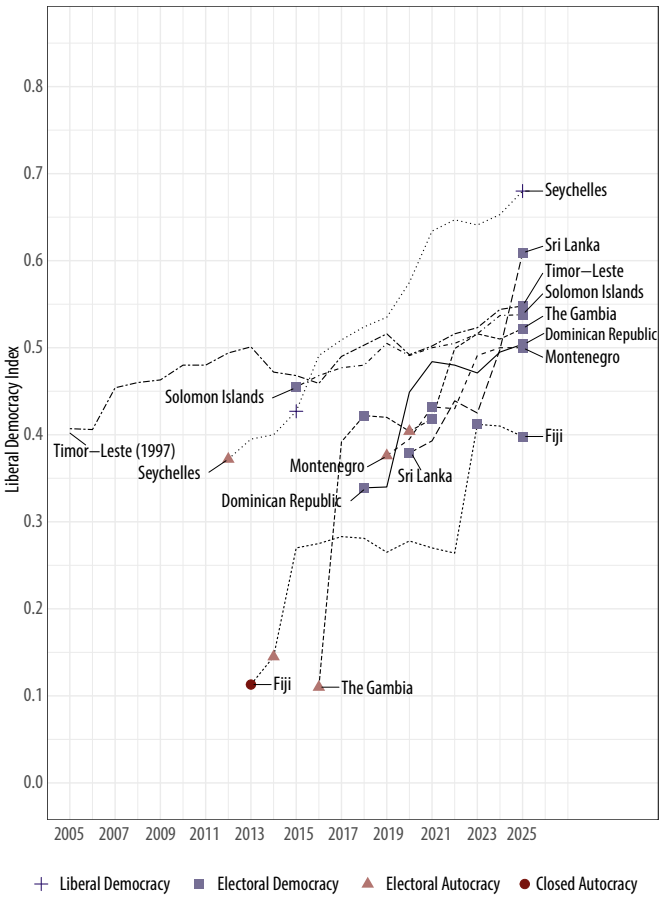


Figure 19 plots the LDI values for the stand-alone democratizing countries. For Timor-Leste, the first years are not shown. For technical details, see note to Figure 17.

TABLE 8. MAGNITUDE OF IMPROVEMENT, FIGURE 19

Rank	Country	Episode Start	Change on LDI
1	The Gambia	2016	0.412
2	The Seychelles	2012	0.307
3	Fiji	2013	0.284
4	Sri Lanka	2020	0.234
5	Dominican Republic	2018	0.166
6	Timor-Leste	1997	0.141
7	Montenegro	2019	0.124
8	Solomon Islands	2015	0.083

We begin with discussing the three cases of democratic deepening, in alphabetic order:

In the **Dominican Republic**, deepening of democracy followed the election of President Luis Abinader in 2020. He has conducted a series of constitutional reforms, including some that seek to safeguard the independence of the judiciary and to guarantee the alternation of power.[9] After his re-election in 2024, he is now in his last term in office.[10] In 2025, institutional reforms were enacted, including enhanced electoral transparency and increased anti-corruption measures.[11]

Sri Lanka's democratic deepening followed the 2019 economic crisis and public protests, mass resignations across the government,

3 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/crime-crackdowns-and-democracy-in-ecuador/
4 carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2024/09/tunisia-presidential-election-saied-candidates-jailed?lang=en
5 www.un.org/peacebuilding/es/content/success-story-honduras
6 srfreedex.org/statement-by-irene-khan-on-her-visit-to-honduras-16-27-october-2023/
7 www.idea.int/news/elections-honduras-2025-democratic-resilience-face-persistent-challenges
8 maldivesvoice.com/2025/06/16/muizzus-power-grab-and-threat-to-democracy/
9 www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/dominican-republic
10 cnnespanol.cnn.com/2024/10/19/asamblea-nacional-republica-dominicana-reformas-constitucion-orix/
11 fc-abogados.com/en/The-main-legal-developments-in-the-Dominican-Republic-during-2025/



A vendor arranges newspapers on a stall in Cotonou, on December 08, 2025. Benin's president said the "situation is completely under control" in his country after the government thwarted an attempted coup. (OLYMPIA DE MAISMONT, Getty Images)

and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigning and leaving the country in 2022. 20 years of rule by one family was over.[12] Sri Lankans elected Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) president in September 2024, the first from non-traditional parties. Following his election, AKD called for early parliamentary elections where the party he founded – the National People's Power (NPP) – won a supermajority.[13] Political reforms are underway in 2025, including abolition of the executive presidency, anti-corruption and rule of law reforms, and empowering of civil society.[14] With substantial improvements of the last two years, Sri Lanka has reached the highest democracy score in its history.

Solomon Islands' process of democratic deepening over the last decade is gradual and characterized by regular elections and peaceful and constitutional transfers of power throughout, including the 2024 election. Nevertheless, issues with rule of law, media freedom, and corruption endure.[15] Improvements on the EDI in 2025 are marginal, yet enough to sustain the ongoing trend of democratic deepening.

The five cases of successful democratic transitions are:

Fiji's democratization process got going in 2013 with a new constitution and holding of fresh elections in 2014. After muddling through for several years, the 2022 elections marked the first constitutional transfer of power in the 21st century,[16] and a full breakthrough to democracy followed in 2023. In 2025, the Supreme Court affirmed the lawfulness of the 2013 Constitution while significantly lowering the thresholds for amendments.[17] Fiji's democracy scores remained stable in 2023–2025, signifying a consolidation of previous gains.

The Gambia was one of Africa's few long-standing democracies when it succumbed to a coup in 1994. Its latest re-democratization process began with a peaceful transfer of power in the 2016 presidential election. President Barrow was then re-elected in 2021, while transparency, freedom of expression, and freedom of association continued to expand.[18] In 2023–2024, some concerns were raised about the harassment of journalists and political opponents in The Gambia.[19] Yet, a further (marginal) improvement on the EDI in 2025 is sustaining democratization.

Montenegro started to democratize with the 2020 elections ending nearly three decades of rule by the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS). A peaceful transition of power to the opposition established electoral democracy while corruption and polarization remain a challenge.[20] Further advances charted the 2023 →

12 www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62160227
13 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/sri-lankas-peaceful-revolution/
14 carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/11/sri-lanka-democracy-protest-one-year-later
15 www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/solomon-islands-democracy-ballot
16 www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/case-study-fiji-gsod-2023-report
17 www.idea.int/blog/explainer-supreme-court-fijis-advisory-opinion-amendment-provisions-2013-constitution-fiji
18 rsf.org/en/country/gambia;www.dw.com/en/free-speech-is-gambia-sliding-back-into-dictatorship/a-67053483
19 www.article19.org/resources/the-gambia-crackdown-on-free-speech-must-stop/
20 freedomhouse.org/country/montenegro/nations-transit/2021

election, whereafter democracy scores are holding steady suggesting that the country might be struggling to improve further.

The Seychelles is a "star pupil" of democratization of the last 25 years. It was a rather dismal electoral autocracy in 2012 but gradually transformed into a liberal democracy, the only one in Sub-Saharan Africa. The first peaceful transfer of power to opposition leader Wavel Ramkalawan in 2020 sealed that status. The 2025 general elections concluded with yet another peaceful transfer of power to the opposition and further improvements on the democracy scores.

Timor-Leste has been in a democratization episode since the 1999 referendum that ended the Indonesian occupation. The first elected parliament and president took office in 2001 and 2002, respectively. In a record-setting, slow-motion process Timor-Leste has been consistently improving on democracy levels since then.

U-Turn Democratization

There are only ten ongoing U-turns in 2025. U-turns are countries that, after a period of autocratization, are now re-democratizing. They can be thought of as cases of "*stopped and reversed autocratization*".[21]

Nine countries started their episodes as democracies. In five of them – **Brazil**, **Botswana**, **Guatemala**, **Lesotho**, and **Poland** – autocratization was turned around before a democratic breakdown. These are particularly interesting cases demonstrating *Breakdown Resilience*.[22]

In three cases – **Bolivia**, **Mauritius**, and **Zambia** – autocratization led to a breakdown of democracy which was quickly reversed. These are noteworthy instances of "*Bounce-Back*" *Resilience*.[23] **Zambia** is an illustrative case of how fragile U-turns can be – the new government is currently undoing institutions and rights, turning the country back to an electoral autocracy.[24]

One country – **Benin** – has not restored democracy after a breakdown. Its uptake is very modest and largely looks like a "technical" U-turn.

Thailand is the only U-turn that remains autocratic throughout the whole episode.

The trajectories of the ten U-turns on the LDI are displayed in Figure 20, while Table 9 ranks them by total magnitude of improvement during re-democratization.

We begin with discussing the five countries reverting autocratization before a democratic breakdown – cases of *Breakdown Resilience*.

Brazil's autocratization began with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff and accelerated after the election of right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. Attacks on the media,[25] attempts to undermine elections, the legislature, and the judiciary followed.[26] The turnaround came when Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva backed by a coalition of nine parties won the 2022 elections. Yet Brazil's society remains deeply polarized, and the 2026 elections will be decisive for the future. Bolsonaro, however, is barred from office after being convicted of abuse of power[27] and an attempted coup.[28]

FIGURE 20. ALL 10 U-TURN DEMOCRATIZERS, 2025

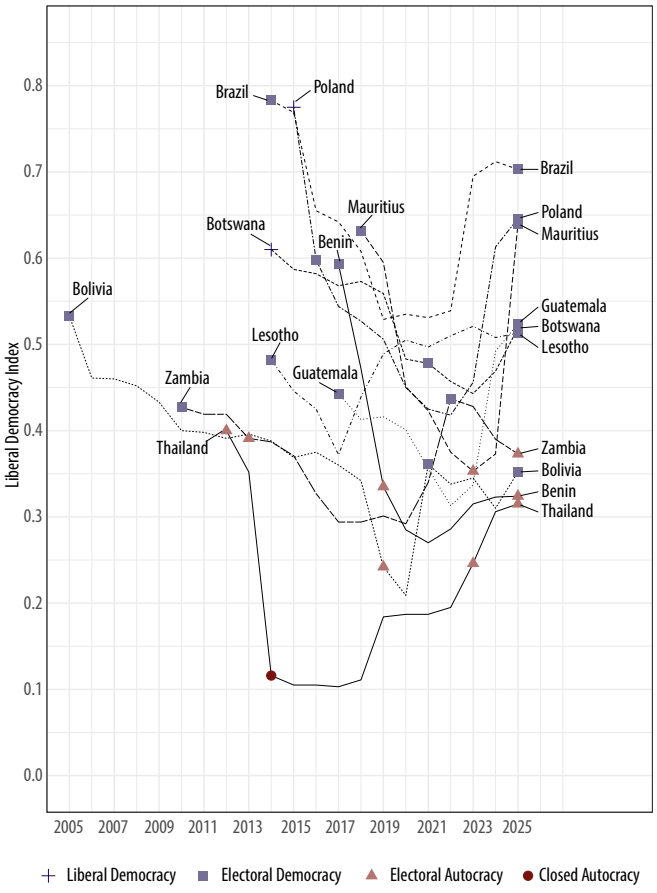


Figure 20 plots the LDI values for the 10 U-turn democratizing countries. For technical details, see note under Figure 18.

TABLE 9. MAGNITUDE OF IMPROVEMENT, FIGURE 20

Rank	Country	Start of Reversal	Change on LDI
1	Mauritius	2023	0.286
2	Poland	2022	0.228
3	Thailand	2017	0.212
4	Guatemala	2023	0.185
5	Brazil	2022	0.164
6	Bolivia	2020	0.143
7	Lesotho	2017	0.140
8	Botswana	2023	0.076
9	Zambia	2019	0.074
10	Benin	2021	0.052

Botswana has always been a stronghold of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa, classified as a democracy for over 50 years. It declined from a liberal to an electoral democracy in 2021 following a period of democratic backsliding. Autocratization stopped with the 2024 general election resulting in a historic defeat for the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) and ending its nearly six-decade rule. The peaceful transition of power to the opposition marked a turnaround.

21 Nord, M., et al. 2025. "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900". *Democratization* 32(5); Bianchi, M., Cheeseman, N., & Cyr, J. (2025). "The Myth of Democratic Resilience". *Journal of Democracy* 36(3).
22 Boese, V., et al. 2021. "How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-Stage Process". *Democratization* 28(5).
23 Nord, M. and S.I. Lindberg. 2025. U-Turns – The Hope for Democratic Resilience. V-Dem Institute Policy Brief 42.
24 Despite being classified as a "grey zone" election autocracy in 2025, Zambia still qualifies as a case of "*Bounce-Back Resilience*." By the ERT rules, democratic breakdown occurs only if a country holds an autocratic founding election (i.e., the first direct national-level election for the parliament or the executive after becoming an autocracy on the RoW measure).
25 rsf.org/en/bolsonaro-family-vents-more-anger-ever-brazil-s-media
26 www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/10/25/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-misinformation.html
27 www.npr.org/2023/06/30/1185364211/brazil-bolsonaro-court-banned-election
28 edition.cnn.com/2025/11/25/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-begins-prison-sentence-latam-intl

Guatemala was featured in *Democracy Report 2025* as a Watchlist democratizer, and this year made it to the list as a U-turn. After years of autocratization (2018–2022), with restrictions to freedom of expression and civil society, the 2023 election marked a notable turning point.[29] The opposition candidate Bernardo Arévalo defeated the ruling elites and took office in 2024, despite many attempts to overturn his election.[30] Guatemala's 2025 LDI score shows a full recovery from autocratization, with a current standing slightly higher than its 2017 level.

Lesotho's latest round of autocratization began with an attempted military overthrow of the government and a series of politically motivated assassinations in 2014–2015. Prime Minister Thabane's own party forced him to resign. 2018–2019 marked significant liberalization with series of reforms and a turnaround to (re-)democratization. The 2022 general elections were hailed as free and fair,[31] and Lesotho then restored its initial democracy level.

Poland's U-turn started with autocratization in 2015, under the regime of the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party.[32] The 2023 election brought a broad coalition government led by Donald Tusk to power. The new government started (re-)democratization immediately trying to undo state capture and restore freedom of expression. While advances have been achieved, some of the legacy from the previous government has proven difficult to undo.[33] As of 2025, Poland remains below its 2015 democracy levels.

Three countries restored democracy after a democratic breakdown – cases of *Bounce-Back Resilience*:

Bolivia started its autocratization episode under President Evo Morales (2006–2019) and his party, Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). This period was characterized by a "dual legacy" of social advances, reduced inequalities, and greater representation for indigenous communities on the one hand, and substantial centralization of power and a disregard for constitutional norms on the other.[34] Democratic breakdown came with the annulled 2019 general elections. The military forced Morales to resign, and after a year of institutional instability, MAS' Luis Arce was elected in 2020. Bolivia restored its status as an electoral democracy in 2021. The pivotal 2024 elections were preceded by nation-wide protests and uncertainty.[35] Opposition center-right candidate Rodrigo Paz won the 2025 presidential election, ending nearly 20 years of rule of the leftist MAS party.

A welcome and dramatic turnaround is occurring in **Mauritius**. While still listed as an autocratizer in last year's *Democracy Report*, it now leads the U-turn list in terms of magnitude of improvement. During its autocratization period, the government censored the media, harassed journalists,[36] and was caught with wiretapping, altogether undermining democracy.[37] One of the longest-standing and most enduring democracies in Africa, Mauritius descended to a "grey zone" electoral autocracy in 2023. Yet the 2024 general elections brought a change in government and halted authoritarian transgressions. In 2025, Mauritius regained its standing as an electoral democracy.



Nürnberg, Bayern, Germany – 20.1.2024: People protesting against far-right political party AfD. (Corinna Haselmayer, Shutterstock)

Zambia is a case demonstrating that U-turns can be fragile. The autocratization episode started in 2011, turning Zambia into an electoral autocracy by 2013. Further deteriorations followed with Edgar Lungu from the Patriotic Front (PF) as President.[38] The 2021 election brought Hakainde Hichilema from the United Party for National Development (UPND) to power, marking the start of a re-democratization period that restored electoral democracy by 2022. Yet human rights, media freedom, and freedom of speech came under renewed attacks under the new government.[39] Further deteriorations of rights, freedoms and institutions caused Zambia to revert to a "grey zone" electoral autocracy in 2025.

Finally, two countries remained autocratic throughout their re-democratization episodes.

Benin's President Talon is another autocratizer of the "third wave" elected in relatively free and fair elections in 2016. A dramatic autocratization process (2018–2021) quickly transformed democratic Benin into a dictatorship,[40] with democracy breaking down already in 2019. Incremental liberalization in 2022 led to the 2023 election that brought the opposition back to parliament with 24% of the seats.[41] 2024 was marked by rumors that Talon might be preparing for a third term in 2026.[42] The improvements since 2021 have been very modest and Benin remains an electoral autocracy by 2025. →

29 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/how-guatemala-defied-the-odds/
30 freedomhouse.org/article/guatemala-when-hope-and-reality-collide
31 freedomhouse.org/country/thailand/freedom-world/2024
32 carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2023/06/judy-asks-is-polands-democracy-in-danger?lang=en
33 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/democracy-after-illiberalism-a-warning-from-poland/
34 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-bolivias-mas-collapsed/
35 Ibid
36 freedomhouse.org/country/mauritius/freedom-world/2024
37 rsf.org/en/five-journalists-targeted-wiretapping-mauritius-rsf-calls-independent-investigation
38 Resnick, D. 2022. "How Zambia's Opposition Won". *Journal of Democracy* 33(1).
39 www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/zambia
40 freedomhouse.org/country/benin/freedom-world/2024
41 www.electionguide.org/elections/id/4033/
42 republic.com.ng/december-24-january-25/benin-alleged-coup-plot/

Thailand started the U-turn process as an electoral autocracy. The 2014 coup established a five-year military dictatorship. The 2019 general elections restored electoral autocracy, followed by the slightly more competitive elections in 2023.[43] Yet the Constitutional Court dissolved the winning Move Forward Party in August 2024, removed Prime Minister, and banned the opposition leaders from politics for ten years.[44] In 2025, the Constitutional Court dismissed another Prime Minister.[45] While a case of some liberalization, it is yet to see a clear opening for a transition to democracy.

DETAILS OF (RE-)DEMOCRATIZATION

Freedom of expression is the most common aspect to improve during (re-)democratization. More than 60% of all ongoing episodes register improvements in media freedom and freedom of academic and cultural expression.

Deliberation and civil society involvement are also frequently recuperating. Inclusive public reasoning, justifying policy with the common good, and consultation with civil society and the public, are improving in more than half of all cases.

The quality of elections is improving in half of all democratizing countries, most importantly free- and fairness of elections and the EMB autonomy.

Figure 21 shows the indicators that most often improved in democratizing countries. It considers the improvement from the beginning of each (re-)democratization episode until 2025. The colors indicate what component index each indicator belongs to.

FIGURE 21. TOP 20 IMPROVING INDICATORS, DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2025

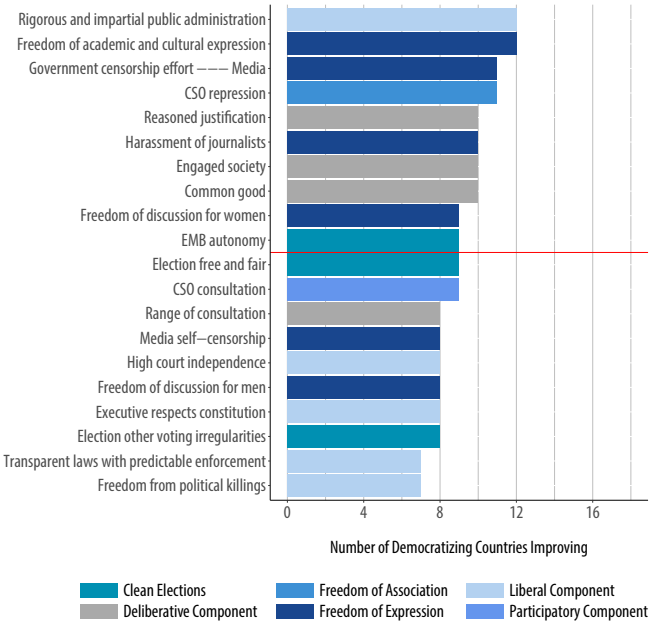


Figure 21 plots the top 20 indicators that improve significantly and substantially in the largest number of democratizing countries. The red line marks the top 10 indicators. The indicator is improving substantially and significantly if its 2025 value is at least 0.5 points higher than its value at the start of the democratization episode, on a scale from 0 to 4 (for most indicators) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

Rigorous and impartial public administration is at the top of the list and is improving in twelve democratizing countries (67%). The Gambia, Timor-Leste, The Seychelles, and Sri Lanka show the most notable improvements. Other indicators from the Liberal Component appear at the end of the top 20 list. **High court independence** and **executive respects constitution** are becoming better in eight countries, with Fiji, The Gambia, Guatemala, and Poland improving on both. **Transparent laws with predictable enforcement** and **freedom from political killings** are progressing in seven countries, including Brazil and Sri Lanka.

Freedom of Expression is the component that suffers the most during autocratization, but it typically also improves substantially and often early during (re-)democratization. **Freedom of academic and cultural expression** is expanding in twelve countries (67%), with Fiji, The Gambia, Mauritius, and Timor-Leste registering the most substantial improvements. **Freedom of discussion** is improving for women (nine countries) and men (eight countries), for example, in Benin, Brazil, The Seychelles, and Thailand.

Mending of media-related rights are also key aspects in democratization processes: **government censorship efforts** are subsiding in eleven countries, including Guatemala, Montenegro, Poland, and Zambia; **harassment of journalists** is lessening in ten countries, for example, in the Dominican Republic, Mauritius, Poland, and Zambia; and **media self-censorship** is diminishing in eight countries, with The Gambia, Poland, and Timor-Leste showing the most substantial improvements.

CSO repression – the only one aspect of Freedom of Association on the top 20 list – is occurring less frequently in eleven democratizing countries (61%), with Guatemala, Poland, Sri Lanka, and Zambia showing notable improvements.

Almost all (four out of five) indicators from the Deliberative Component are on the top 20 list, with three of them among the top 10 and improving in more than half of all democratizing countries. This suggests that public reasoning is getting more inclusive during democratization and so is the justification of policy with the common good. **Reasoned justification**, **engaged society**, and **common good** are improving in ten countries each. Guatemala, Poland, and Thailand, for example, improve in the extent to which their governments provide **reasoned justification** for their actions. In The Gambia, Sri Lanka, and Zambia **society is engaged** in deliberation on policy. And in the Dominican Republic, Montenegro, and Timor-Leste politicians are increasingly justifying their positions in terms of **common good**. Finally, **range of consultation** is improving in eight countries, with The Seychelles being at the top of the list.

The quality of elections is improving in half of all democratizing countries. The **EMB autonomy** is increasing in nine countries, such as Fiji, Montenegro, and Thailand. **Free- and fairness of elections** is rising in nine countries, including Botswana, Mauritius, The Seychelles, and Thailand. And **voting irregularities** are now less frequent in eight countries, including Benin, Mauritius, and Solomon Islands.

Finally, **CSO consultation** – the only aspect of the Participatory Component in the top 20 – is improving in nine democratizing countries. Fiji, Guatemala, and Timor-Leste register the most substantial improvements in civil society engagement in the decision-making processes. ■

43 freedomhouse.org/country/thailand/freedom-world/2024
44 commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10141/
45 www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thai-prime-minister-removed-by-court-triggering-power-scramble-2025-08-29/

5 | In Focus: Autocratization in the USA

- **Under Trump's presidency, the level of democracy in the USA has fallen back to the same level as in 1965.**
- **Yet the situation is fundamentally different than during the Civil Rights era. In 2025, the derailment of democracy is marked by executive overreach undermining the rule of law, along with far-reaching suppression and intimidation of media and dissenting voices.**
- **The speed with which American democracy is currently dismantled is unprecedented in modern history.**
- **Legislative Constraints – the worst affected aspect of democracy – is losing one-third of its value in 2025 and reaching its lowest point in over 100 years.**
- **Civil Rights and Equality before the Law are also rapidly declining, falling to late 1960s levels.**
- **Freedom of Expression is now at its lowest level since the end of WWII.**
- **Electoral components of democracy remain stable. Election-specific indicators are re-assessed only in electoral years, and the 2025 scores are based on the quality of the 2024 elections.**

FIGURE 22. USA VS. REGIONAL AVERAGE, 1955–2025

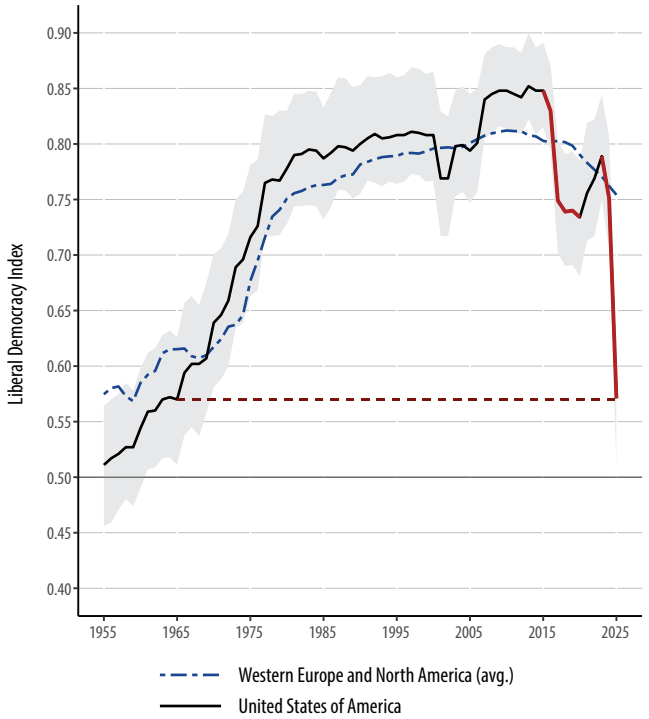


Figure 22 compares the LDI level in the USA from 1955 to 2025 to the regional average for Western Europe and North America. Confidence intervals are indicated by the grey shaded area, while periods of democratic decline under Trump 1.0 and Trump 2.0 are marked in red. The dotted horizontal line traces the 2025 level back in time.

The scale and speed of autocratization under the Trump administration are unprecedented in modern times. Within one year, the USA's LDI score has declined by 24%; its world rank dropped from 20th to 51st place out of 179 nations. The level of democracy on the LDI is dwindling to 1965 level – the year that most regard as the start of a real, modern democracy in the USA.

Yet the deficiencies of American democracy today are fundamentally different from that of the Civil Rights era. As the V-Dem data and other evidence below show, the autocratization now is marked by executive overreach, alongside attacks on the press, academia, civil liberties, and dissenting voices.

The Most Dramatic Decline in American History

In 2023, the USA scored 0.79 on the LDI – shortly before the 2024 election year when first deteriorations were registered. The scores plummeted to 0.57 in 2025 (Figure 22). With such a sharp drop on the LDI, the level of democracy at the end of 2025 is back to the 1965 level. Symbolically, that is the year that most analysts consider the USA began its transition to a real democracy.[1] *Democracy in the USA is now at its worst in 60 years.*

We are not alone in this assessment. Professor Steven Levitsky at Harvard University says the regime in the USA is now some type of authoritarianism.[2] The *Century Foundation* argues that "American democracy is already collapsing."[3] The *Steady State*, an organization of over 300 former national security and intelligence professionals, concluded in its report that the USA is moving into competitive authoritarianism, pointing to executive overreach and erosion of judicial and legislative checks.[4]

The *Trump Action Tracker*, led by Professor Christina Pagel, documents actions and statements of President Trump and his administration echoing those of authoritarian regimes. They report 2,651 instances: 704 directly undermining democracy, 459 weakening civil rights, 689 suppressing dissent, and 172 "hollowing the state."[5]

Perhaps the most illustrative example is the President's own declaration that the only limits to his powers are "his own morality" and that only the courts – not Congress – have power to restrict his domestic agenda "under certain circumstances."[6] Yet when the Supreme Court imposed restrictions, he called the ruling "terrible" and lambasted the justices as "fools" and "lapdogs" beholden to foreign countries.[7] President Trump then imposed a new 10% global tariff under a different legal provision, in effect circumventing the court.

BACK TO 1965 – BUT NOT TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT ERA

The "symbolic" 1965 was the year of the Voting Rights Act prohibiting racial discrimination in voting, signed by President Johnson in →

1 By any modern definition of democracy, legal or de facto exclusion of large portions of the population from the right to vote is incompatible with democracy, see e.g. Dahl, RA. 1971. *Polyarchy*. New Haven: Yale UP.
2 www.nytimes.com/2025/03/06/us/politics/trump-democracy.html; and Langfitt, F. "Heard on All Things Considered," *National Public Broadcasting*, February 16, 2026.
3 tcf.org/content/report/centurys-new-democracy-meter-shows-america-took-an-authoritarian-turn-in-2025/
4 https://steadystate1.substack.com/p/accelerating-authoritarian-dynamics
5 profiles.ucl.ac.uk/4185; https://www.trumpactiontracker.info/
6 www.nytimes.com/2026/01/08/us/politics/trump-interview-power-morality.html
7 www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8146l0n55o;www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/feb/21/trump-tariffs-ruling-supreme-court

the presence of Martin Luther King. It was also shortly after the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 ending legalized racial – and gender – segregation.[8]

Does this mean that the USA is now back to the Civil Rights Movement era? Definitely not. The faults that plagued American democracy during the Civil Rights Movement era mainly concerned legal provisions of suffrage and other political and civil rights for all. The grave deficiencies forged under the Trump administration are profoundly different.

TRUMP 1.0 LAYING A FOUNDATION

By magnitude of decline on the LDI, the 2025 plunge is the largest one-year drop in American history going back to 1789 – that is, in the entire period covered by V-Dem data. Only Trump 1.0 compares,[9] when the LDI in the USA fell from 0.85 to 0.73 in four years, bringing the country back to its 1976 level and far below the regional average (Figure 22). American democracy survived Trump 1.0 but did not recover fully.

One notable shift is the transformation of the Republican Party to endorsing a far-right, nationalist, and anti-pluralist agenda.[10] Nationalist, anti-liberal, far-right parties and leaders have largely driven the "third wave of autocratization."[11] Yet the USA stands out as the only case where such movement seized control over one party in a rigid two-party system.

FIGURE 23. USA VS. PROMINENT AUTOCRATIZERS OF THE "THIRD WAVE"

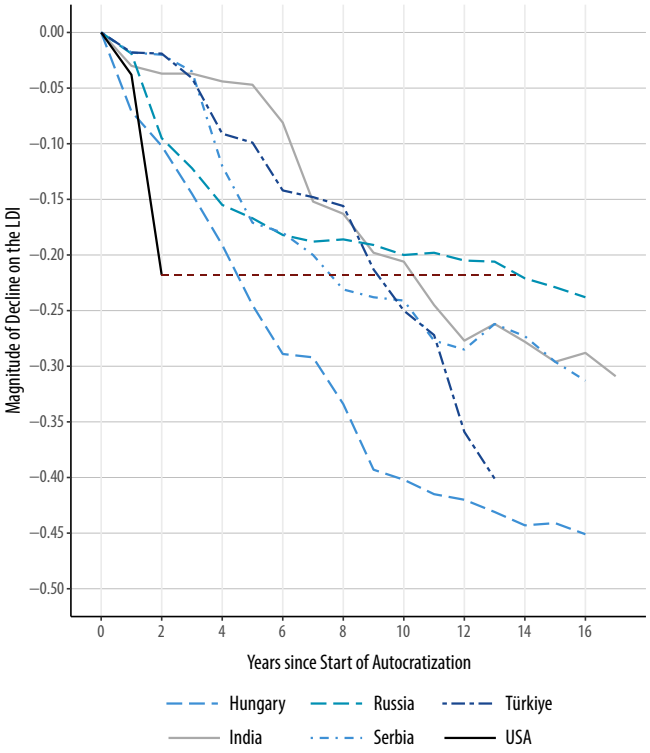


Figure 23 compares the speed of autocratization in the USA to similar processes in five prominent autocratizers of the last 25 years. Lines on the graph show the cumulative magnitude of decline on the LDI. Note that the episode in the USA starts in the 2024 election year.

The Most Rapid "Executive Aggrandizement" in Modern History

Typically, processes of autocratization during the "third wave" are incremental and often inconspicuous, spanning years or even decades.[12] In terms of the speed of autocratization, Trump 2.0 outpaces not only Trump 1.0 but also the most prominent autocrats of the last 25 years.

Figure 23 provides evidence by comparing the USA's speed of decline on the LDI to the early stages of autocratization under five prominent autocratizers of the last 25 years. The dramatic decline under Donald Trump took Hungary's Viktor Orbán over four years, Serbia's Aleksandar Vučić eight years, and both India's Narendra Modi and Türkiye's Rečep Tayyip Erdoğan about a decade.[13]

The 2025 level of the LDI is not collapsing further primarily due to the electoral components. Election-specific indicators are evaluated only in election years, meaning that the 2025 scores for the quality of elections are based on the characteristics of the 2024 elections, which were free and fair. As election-specific indicators figure quite heavily in the EDI (which is part of the LDI), there is a limit to how much the USA can drop on the LDI in 2025. This also makes the 2026 midterms decisive (see discussion below).

In the following, we first discuss the three aspects of democracy that are part of the Liberal Component of the LDI: Judicial and Legislative Constraints on the executive (Checks and Balances); and Individual Liberties (Civil Rights) and Equality before the Law.

Then follow sections analyzing the five aspects constituting the EDI-portion of the LDI: Freedom of Expression and Media; Freedom of Association; and Clean Elections, Suffrage, and Elected Officials. We end with a few notes on what research says it would take to turn things around in the USA.

Dismantling Checks and Balances – Concentrating Power

- **Trump's second term can be summarized as a *rapid and aggressive concentration of powers in the presidency.***

Checks and balances limiting the powers of the executive are at the core of both republican thinking and liberal democracy.[14] To prevent tyranny, other branches must have co-equal powers to check an executive seeking dominance. Unsurprisingly, checks and balances are among the first targets during autocratization.[15]

Checks and balances are largely captured by the LDI components **Legislative** and **Judicial Constraints**. By the end of 2025, both show marked declines, with the **Legislative Constraints** experiencing the steepest drop from 0.86 to 0.61 – a loss of one-third of its 2024 value (Figure 24, left panel). This is by far the largest single-year drop in the US history, and 2025 is the lowest level in over 100 years. Decline on the **Judicial Constraints** is smaller – from 0.90 to 0.84 – but it is also the lowest level since 1900.

CONGRESS ABDICATING POWERS TO THE PRESIDENT

The Republican-controlled Congress seems to have abdicated its constitutional role in favor of the executive branch, ceding significant legislative, fiscal, and oversight powers during 2025.

8 www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act
9 According to the ERT, autocratization in the USA starts in 2024, with a 0.04-decline on the LDI. From 2024 to 2025, the USA dropped by a total of 0.18 on the LDI. For consistency with the rest of the *Democracy Report*, we stay with the ERT definition of "episode of autocratization" in Section 5, and therefore use 2023 as a reference year. Note that 2023 is a pre-episode year.
10 Medzihorsky, J., S.I. Lindberg. 2023. "Walking the Talk: How to Identify Anti-Pluralist Parties." *Party Politics 30*(3).
11 Levitsky, S., Ziblatt, D. 2025. "When Should the Majority Rule?" *Journal of Democracy 36*(1).
12 E.g., Lührmann, A., and S.I. Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here." *Democratization 26*(7).
13 We are again not alone with the assessments that the current democratic decline in the USA is the most rapid in modern history. See, for example, McKenzie C, and T. Carothers. 2025. The US Democratic Backsliding in Comparative Perspective. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Burn-Murdoch, J. 2026: "How Steep is Trump's Democratic Backsliding?" *Financial Times*, 31.01.2026; Schenkkan, N., and T. Cambanis. 2026. "Century's New Democracy Meter Shows America Took an Authoritarian Turn in 2025" The Century Foundation.
14 O'Donnell, G. 1998. "Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies." *Journal of Democracy 9*(3).
15 Bermeo, N. "On Democractic Backsliding." *Journal of Democracy 27*(1); Sato, Y., et al. "Institutional Order in Episodes of Autocratization." V-Dem Working Paper 133.

Figure 25 shows how indicators of the legislative constraints on the executive are among the most rapidly deteriorating. Congressional oversight of the executive branch (indicators labelled as "executive oversight" and "legislature investigates in practice") have decreased from 3.2 and 3.7 in 2023 to 1.4 and 2.3 in 2025, respectively (on a scale from 0 to 4). In substantive terms, they reflect that Congress is now unlikely to question or investigate any unconstitutional, illegal, or unethical activity of the executive.

The Trump administration has *de facto* repeatedly taken over the Congressional "power of the purse" – enshrined in the Constitution[16] and in the 1974 Impoundment Control Act – unilaterally cancelling or reallocating federal funding. The Supreme Court has also contributed to broadening the executive authority to control federal spending.[17]

The Senate frequently failed to provide confirmation checks on numerous appointments made by the President,[18] allowing posts in federal agencies with hand-picked loyalists "with no relevant qualifications" and sometimes "clearly unqualified and even dangerous."[19] In effect, Congress has allowed the Trump administration to sideline its authority.[20]

Illustrating this executive dominance, President Trump signed 225 Executive orders in 2025 covering a series of *major* issues like "reevaluating" US foreign aid thereby effectively eliminating a series of agencies and institutes created by Congress.[21]

Meanwhile, the Republican-controlled Congress passed 49 laws and almost all on minor issues such as "To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the rules for postponing certain deadlines by reason of disaster" (HB517; Public Law No: 119-29).[22]

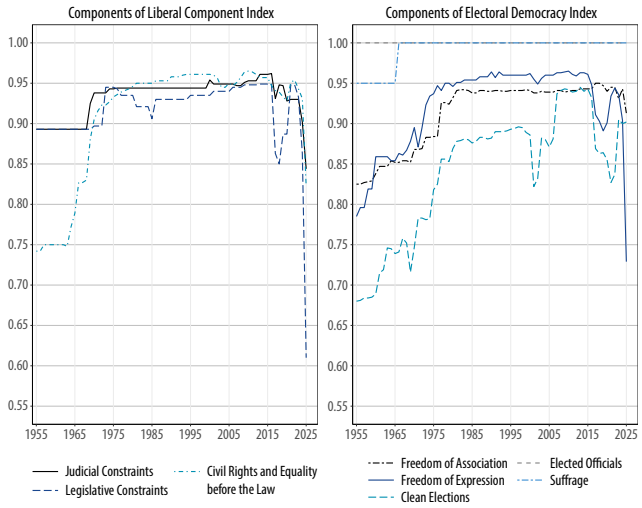
The list of legal cases involving claims to unconstrained use of executive power is long. *Court Watch* lists over 600 lawsuits directed at the Trump administration, including almost 200 cases in federal courts of appeal.[23] The Trump administration has filed nearly 40 lawsuits in response, mostly directed at jurisdictions governed by Democrats.[24]

UNDOING CONSTRAINTS IN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Removing constraints in the executive includes purging perceived opponents, politicizing of civil service, and removing of oversight by independent agencies and auditors. Research shows that these are common tactics for silencing dissent,[25] as well as for "weaponizing" the bureaucracy.[26]

For example, the Trump administration expunged higher levels of the Department of Defense,[27] the Justice Department,[28] the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of State, and the FBI of those not personally loyal to him.[29] Trump also fired independent Inspector Generals across at least 17 agencies,[30] as well as the Senate-confirmed head of the Office of Special Counsel.[31] The creation of the (already dissolved) Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) was a special case.[32] DOGE initiated mass layoffs and voluntary exits from the federal bureaucracy, with estimates suggesting that more than 300,000 federal employees left the government in 2025.[33]

FIGURE 24. COMPONENTS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX IN THE USA, 1955–2025



Left panel shows indices that go into the Liberal Component Index, while right panel shows indices that go into the Electoral Democracy Index. Both Liberal Component Index and Electoral Democracy Index are part of the Liberal Democracy Index.

CONTEMPT FOR THE JUDICIARY – BELITTERING THE RULE OF LAW

Undermining of the judicial system under the Trump administration is evidenced by three of the five indicators that go into the Judicial Constraints index, which register substantial declines in 2025 (see Figure 25): compliance with the judiciary, compliance with high court, and high court independence.

On his first day in office, President Trump pardoned[34] 1,500 criminals convicted for the January 6 Capitol Hill assault, thereby undermining the legitimacy of courts and possibly giving a tacit endorsement of future violence.[35]

The administration has filed impeachment resolutions[36] and misconduct complaints[37] against district court judges who ruled against the administration,[38] accompanied by aggressive rhetoric such as regular "judicial insurrection" by Deputy Chief of Staff.[39] President Trump even targeted the Supreme Court justices in early 2026 with verbal attacks.[40] His administration has refused to follow court orders,[41] and Trump himself claimed that "He who saves his country does not violate any law."[42] →

16 www.npr.org/sections/planet-money/2025/02/18/g-s1-49220/trump-ignore-congress-spending-laws-impoundment
17 www.citizen.org/news/supreme-court-allows-administration-to-flout-congresss-power-of-the-purse/; https://bylinetimes.com/2026/01/22/trump-has-already-rigged-the-2028-presidential-election-us-defence-insider/
18 Driesen D.M. 2025. "Donald Trump's Unitary Executive: Overcoming the Constitution." *Constitutional Studies 11*(2).
19 ibid, p. 407.
20 hls.harvard.edu/today/is-the-u-s-experiencing-a-constitutional-crisis/
21 www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders/donald-trump/2025
22 www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/12/24/congress-republicans-legislation-trump-2025/
23 www.lawfaremedia.org/projects-series/trials-of-the-trump-administration/tracking-trump-administration-litigation; https://www.courtwatch.news/p/lawsuits-related-to-trump-admin-executive-orders
24 www.courtwatch.news/p/lawsuits-related-to-trump-admin-executive-orders; https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-sanctuary-cities-crackdown-results/
25 Svolik, M. 2012. The Politics of Authoritarian Rule. Cambridge University Press.
26 Levitsky, S., and L.A.Way. 2025. "The Path to American Authoritarianism." *Foreign Affairs*, 11.02.2025
27 theweek.com/politics/trump-purging-pentagon
28 apnews.com/article/trump-inspectors-general-firing-justice-department-902d19ae20bcd10c2d11e92dd902d85e
29 www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/02/08/trump-administration-job-candidates-loyalty-screening/;edition.cnn.com/2025/01/30/politics/senior-fbi-leaders-demoted-wray/index.html
30 campaignlegal.org/update/significance-firing-inspectors-general-explained
31 www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/trump-administrations-undercutting-of-oversight-hurts-taxpayers-and
32 www.npr.org/2025/02/07/nx-s1-5288988/doge-elon-musk-staff-trump;www.reuters.com/world/us/what-is-elon-musks-doge-how-much-money-has-it-saved-us-taxpayers-2025-03-04/
33 eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/12/31/317000-federal-employees-left-us-government-2025/87970708007/
34 apnews.com/article/what-has-trump-done-trump-executive-orders-f061fbe7f08c08d81509a6af20ef8fc0
35 www.justsecurity.org/107288/nine-experts-pardons-january-6/
36 www.npr.org/2025/03/18/nx-s1-5332086/trump-lawsuits
37 thedailyrecord.com/2026/02/02/federal-judge-dismisses-doj-misconduct-complaint-deportations/
38 www.npr.org/2025/03/18/nx-s1-5332086/trump-lawsuits
39 time.com/7324353/trump-judges-stephen-miller-musk/
40 www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/his-own-words-presidents-attacks-courts
41 www.nytimes.com/2025/02/10/us/trump-unfreezing-federal-grants-judge-ruling.html
42 www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-if-it-saves-country-its-not-illegal-2025-02-16/

In April 2025, federal and Supreme Court judges who ruled against Trump were receiving pizza "doxings" (hoax deliveries) as warnings in the name of US District Judge Esther Salas' son Daniel - who was killed in 2020 by a gunman posing as a pizza delivery driver.[43]

Beyond the federal court system, President Trump used a series of executive orders to target law firms who had been representing Trump's political opponents. Eventually, four federal judges ruled that the orders violated the firms' free speech rights and other protections under the Constitution.[44] The DOJ, however, appealed the decision.[45]

The American Bar Association (ABA) has issued several statements on the need to protect the rule of law and respect the courts saying that the administration's actions *"knowingly undermine the division of powers between the executive and congressional branches set out within the US Constitution."*[46]

PROJECT 2025 HALFWAY ALREADY

Much of what is portrayed above fits into the Project 2025 plan by the Heritage Foundation and Claremont Institute to materialize the *'Unitary Executive theory'* – a fringe constitutional doctrine asserting that the President must hold sole authority. According to the *Project 2025* Tracker, by early 2026, roughly 52% of the 320 objectives have been achieved.[47]

Undoing Civil Rights and Equality before the Law

- **The first year of Trump's second term is marked by offensives on long-standing civil rights protections.**

Targeting civil rights of specific groups helps autocratizers consolidate their loyal power base, weaponize social issues, justify repressive measures as necessary for national security, and manipulate the electoral playing field in their favor.[48]

The LDI component for **Civil Rights and Equality before the Law**[49] dropped from 0.94 in 2023 to 0.82 in 2025, becoming the third most severely affected (Figure 24, left panel). This brings the 2025 level back to the late 1960s, almost identical to the overall Liberal Democracy Index.

REMOVING FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS

The Trump administration is targeting some of the civil liberties of the Civil Rights Movement era. As one example, Trump signed an executive order labeling the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs' (OFCCP) efforts illegal. The OFCCP was created in 1965 in an executive order by President Johnson to strengthen nondiscriminatory laws and regulations. Trump's acting secretary of labor ordered the OFCCP to "immediately cease and desist all investigative and enforcement activity" and then proposed slashing staff by 90 percent.[50]

In extension of this, the Trump administration nullified DEI initiatives across the federal government and programs.[51] Sweeping changes were also made to the DOJ's Civil Rights Division which changed its priorities from protecting marginalized groups to combating DEI initiatives, investigating voter fraud and "anti-white" discrimination,[52] after which some 70% of attorneys left.[53]

CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS ROLLBACKS

The indicators freedom from political killings and freedom from torture have registered the most substantial deteriorations (see Figure 25). *The Human Rights Watch* (HRW) concluded in their *World Report 2026* that President Donald Trump's second term has been marked by widespread human rights violations.[54]

This includes suppression of antigovernment demonstrations[55] and threats to use 'very big force' against future protesters.[56] The tactics were employed in major cities across the country,[57] continuing into 2026 when the Twin Cities in Minnesota became a focal point with over 4,000 arrests and two fatal shootings by ICE officers.[58] ICE launched a deportation campaign leading to thousands of legal cases filed for violation of due process[59] and at least 32 people died in custody in 2025.[60]

Trump also issued the National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM)-7[61] authorizing federal agencies to target organizations and individuals based on "anti-American", "anti-Christian", or "anti-capitalist" views. NSPM-7 could be used as a tool for criminalizing political dissent and is a serious threat to human rights.[62]

Finally, freedom of religion is also declining (see Figure 25). The federal government is now integrating Christian imagery, Bible verses, and regular prayer services directly into the daily operations of major departments,[63] in disregard of a secular government.

WEAKENED EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW

Equality before the law is also weakening. Its indicators – access to justice, transparent laws with predictable enforcement, and rigorous and impartial public administration – declined significantly, reflecting the situation (see Figure 25).

As discussed above, the politicization of justice, mass departures and purges of civil servants, dismantling of internal accountability systems, elimination of DEI initiatives, and bypassing due process – all reduce access to justice and the impartiality of the public administration, while increasing its unpredictability.[64]

43 fox56news.com/ap-feeds/ap-us-headlines/ap-federal-judges-detail-rise-in-threats-pizza-doxxings-as-trump-ramps-up-criticism/; see also news.bloomberglaw.com/us-law-week/judge-describes-alarming-pizza-delivery-as-threats-increase
44 www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/trump-administration-reverses-course-seeks-continue-battle-law-firms-rcna261546
45 www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-drop-defense-law-firm-sanctions-wsj-reports-2026-03-02/
46 www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2026/02/aba-statement-re-personal-attacks-on-scotus-justices/;www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2025/03/aba-rejects-efforts-to-undermine-courts-and-legal-profession/;www.jurist.org/news/2025/02/aba-reaffirms-support-for-rule-of-law-following-trump-executive-orders/
47 www.project2025.observer/en
48 Oder, B.E. 2026. "Democratic Resistance under Populist Autocratization: Repression, Civil Society, and Strategies." *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 26(2).
49 The official name of the index is Equality before the Law and Individual Liberties.
50 www.nytimes.com/2025/06/27/magazine/trump-civil-rights-law-discrimination.html
51 www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly1n7jz587o
52 ibid
53 www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/trump-upends-dojs-civil-rights-division-sparking-bloodbath-senior-rank-rcna202622
54 www.hrw.org/news/2026/02/04/us-trump-administrations-pervasive-attacks-on-rights
55 www.amnestyusa.org/blog/militarization-and-suppression-of-protests-in-the-age-of-trump/
56 www.article19.org/resources/un-repression-of-protests-across-the-americas/
57 capitalbnews.org/trump-national-guard-city-updates/
58 www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/a-timeline-of-trumps-immigration-crackdown-in-minnesota
59 www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/migrants-face-dire-conditions-and-prolonged-waits-in-u-s-detention-centers
60 www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/jan/04/ice-2025-deaths-timeline
61 www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/09/countering-domestic-terrorism-and-organized-political-violence/
62 www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/26/us-trump-targets-opponents-in-sweeping-memorandum; www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/trumps-orders-targeting-antifascism-aim-criminalize-opposition
63 edition.cnn.com/2026/02/15/politics/trump-religious-liberty-commission-church-state-separation
64 www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/mar/05/trump-justice-department-politicization

Seeking to Silence Media, Dissenting Voices, and Academia

- **Freedom of Expression is falling to its lowest level since the end of WWII. The decline is driven by a range of documented attacks – from censorship and financial coercion, to legal intimidation and suppression.**

Freedom of expression is at the core of democracy and therefore is the most common target among autocratizing leaders over the past 25 years (see Figure 17, Section 3).

Figure 24 (right panel) shows that the LDI component for **Freedom of Expression**[65] plunges from 0.94 in 2023 to 0.73 in 2025 and reaching its lowest point since the end of WWII.

TRUMP AGAINST THE MEDIA: FROM RHETORIC TO ACTIONS

Already during the 2024 campaign, President Trump was aggressive toward unfavorable media reporting, frequently stamping media as "enemies of the American people"[66] and ramping up intimidation by threatening to cancel broadcasting licenses over coverage he deemed "unfair."[67] *The Washington Post* owner Jeff Bezos incidentally prevented the newspaper from endorsing Kamala Harris,[68] and subsequently announced a "refocusing" of its editorial stance.

These and other events are likely behind the lowering of the score, starting already in 2024 (Figure 24, right panel). *All* indicators measuring freedom of expression register substantial declines in 2025 (see Figure 25).

The three most rapidly worsening indicators are government censorship efforts of the media, harassment of journalists, and print/broadcast media critical.

The declines reflect derogatory rhetoric, legal, financial, and regulatory actions. The *Trump Action Tracker* lists 689 actions and statements under Trumps administration to suppress dissenting voices and 339 controlling media and information.[69]

Examples include the White House deciding which reporters are allowed to cover the president;[70] President Trump suing *The Wall Street Journal* for its reporting on his ties to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein[71] and *The New York Times* for its reporting on his finances and the 2024 election;[72] the Department of Defense requiring reporters to only publish "authorized" information; and Trump suggesting that being anti-Trump is "probably illegal."[73]

The non-profit organization *Reporters without Boarders* (RSF) lists numerous actions undermining freedom of expression and the media under President Trump, ranging from eliminating government monitoring of disinformation; assaulting and detaining hundreds of journalists; purging government information; to cutting funding for public broadcasting. The RSF testifies that the *"…increasingly repressive US president is on track to join ranks of world's worst press freedom predators."*[74]

FIGURE 25. USA – INDICATORS WITH SIGNIFICANT CHANGES, 2025

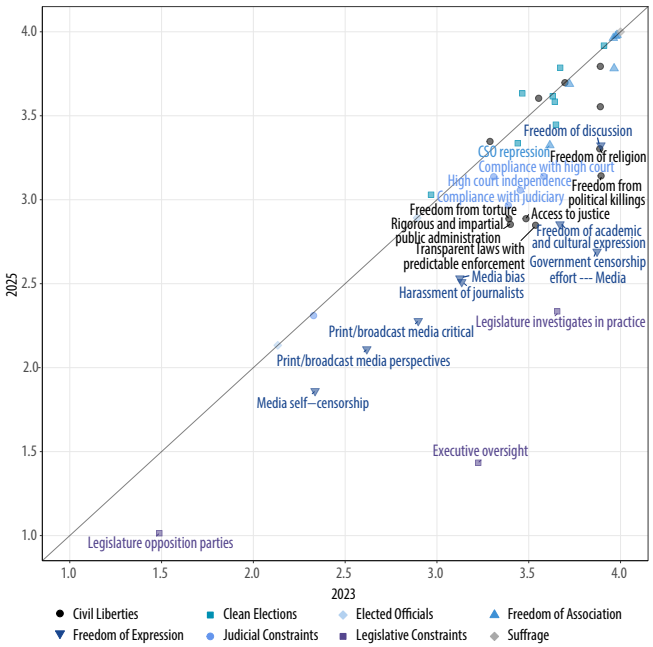


Figure 25 shows indicators with substantial and statistically significant changes since the start of autocratization. Colors indicate which subcomponent of the Liberal Democracy Index the indicators belong to. Indicators with insignificant changes are represented with unlabeled markers.

SUPPRESSION OF DISSENTING VOICES

Freedom of expression is also derailed for individuals in the USA as shown by the indicator for freedom of discussion (Figure 25).

Both *Amnesty International*[75] and the *American Civil Liberties Union* (ACLU),[76] have raised alarm regarding the suppression of dissenting voices. Widely noted, National Guard and Marine units deterred civilian demonstrations, especially in Democrat-governed cities,[77] and President Trump threatened to use "very big force" against protesters.[78]

Yet 7 million people showed up for the 2,700 rallies on "No Kings Day" on October 18 to protest what organizers describe as President Trump's "authoritarian" agenda.[79] This is a sign of resistance to autocratization. →

65 The full name of the index is Freedom of Expression and Alternatives Sources of Information.
66 www.nytimes.com/2017/02/17/business/trump-calls-the-news-media-the-enemy-of-the-people.html
67 edition.cnn.com/2024/10/22/media/trump-strip-tv-station-licenses-punish-media/index.html
68 roberthubbell.substack.com/p/we-are-engaged-in-the-serious-business
69 https://www.trumpactiontracker.info/
70 www.huffpost.com/entry/white-house-kicks-out-huffpost-reporter-from-press-pool_n_67be9224e4b0d509934aa224;edition.cnn.com/2025/02/25/media/white-house-correspondents-pool/index.html
71 www.nytimes.com/2025/07/18/business/media/trump-sues-wall-street-journal-epstein.html
72 www.nytimes.com/2025/10/17/business/media/trump-lawsuit-new-york-times.html
73 www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-seth-meyers-truth-social-rant-b2856783.html
74 rsf.org/en/one-year-trump-s-second-term-increasingly-repressive-us-president-track-join-ranks-world-s-worst
75 www.amnestyusa.org/reports/ringing-the-alarm-bells-rising-authoritarian-practices-and-erosion-of-human-rights-in-the-united-states/
76 www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/rights-protesters/repression-peaceful-protest/
77 capitalbnews.org/trump-national-guard-city-updates/
78 www.aclu.org/news/human-rights/the-targeted-chaos-of-trumps-attacks-against-international-human-rights-law-and-justice
79 edition.cnn.com/politics/live-news/no-kings-protests-trump-news-10-18-25

INCREASING CONTROL OF ACADEMIA

V-Dem data shows a substantial drop in the freedom of academic and cultural expression (Figure 25). The current administration's offensive against academia includes the reduction of autonomy, the restriction of the freedom to research and teach, the politicization of educational content, and the weaponizing of federal funding.[80]

In particular, the Trump administration has leveraged federal funding and accreditation to force universities to dismantle DEI programs and to restrict pro-Palestine activities,[81] and is seeking to fundamentally reshape admission, hiring, and protest management.[82] A series of universities have settled with the administration to restore financial stability.[83]

Associations Free – But not from Acts of Suppression

- **There are no official restrictions on political parties or civil society organizations (CSOs), but the government is pursuing an offensive against organizations that oppose its agenda.**

Freedom of association ensures that political parties can form, operate, and participate in elections, and that CSOs can form, operate, and seek funding freely.

The overall **Freedom of Association** index registers a small change in 2025, falling from 0.94 in 2024 to 0.91 in 2025 (Figure 24, right panel). The decline is driven by a worsening of the indicator measuring repression of civil society (Figure 25).

SUPPRESSION OF CIVIL SOCIETY INCREASES

Repression of CSOs is increasing (Figure 25). The White House has threatened to "go after" liberal or left-leaning groups,[84] labeled Antifa as a terrorist organization,[85] and accused lawmakers from the Democratic Party of seditious behavior "punishable by death."[86] Federal regulatory and spending powers are increasingly used to force civil society to align with government goals.[87]

In early 2025, President Trump revoked President Lyndon Johnson's landmark Civil Rights-era executive order,[88] replacing it with a ban on DEI initiatives for federal contractors – labelled as "race-based discrimination". The administration is reversing the fundamental meaning of civil rights and pressuring organizations – including the American Bar Association – to roll back inclusion practices.[89]

The government took over the US Institute of Peace (USIP) despite USIP claiming independent non-governmental status.[90] Finally, the dismantling of the USAID by the Trump administration and the termination of over 90% of its contracts in early 2025[91] led to operational and financial crises for many US-based civil society organizations.[92]

Elections Remain Largely Unaffected – For Now

- **Electoral aspects of democracy in the USA do not change in 2025 as they are re-assessed only in election years, but there are signs of threats to the integrity of the 2026 midterm elections.**

The electoral component of the LDI includes suffrage, elected officials, and clean (free, fair and uncompromised) elections. Suffrage and Elected Officials Index have been unchanged over 50 years. The Clean Elections Index is nearly entirely composed of election-specific indicators that are evaluated only in election years, so they did not change since the 2024 elections (see Figure 24, right panel). Hence, the USA remains stable on quality of elections by the end of 2025, which prevents the LDI from falling further.

However, given the worsening quality of elections under Trump 1.0 (see Figure 22), electoral aspects of democracy deserve a closer assessment.

ELECTIONS UNDER TRUMP 1.0

During Trump's first term in office, indicators for electoral violence, election government intimidation, voting irregularities, and electoral management body autonomy worsened.

Trump and his allies challenged the legitimacy of the 2020 results with unsubstantiated claims of fraud;[93] pressured election officials to "find" votes or refuse to certify results;[94] and filed dozens of lawsuits in swing states challenging the elections results, nearly all of which were dismissed for lack of evidence.[95] On January 6 thousands of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol seeking to prevent Congress from certifying President-elect Joe Biden's victory, ultimately failing to do so.[96]

TRUMP 2.0 SEEKING CONTROL OVER ELECTIONS

Actions taken in 2025 raise concerns regarding the integrity of the 2026 midterms. This primarily concerns attempts to assert federal control over election processes, which must be decentralized and state-run, according to the Constitution.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has requested election records and voter registration lists from nearly every state and sued the 24 that refused to comply.[97] The FBI executed a search warrant at the elections warehouse of a Georgia's Fulton County[98] – the center of election fraud claims in January 2021 after Trump tried to persuade Georgia's Secretary of State to "find" enough votes.[99] The FBI action in this county is another worrying sign ahead of the midterm elections.[100]

In March 2025, Trump signed an executive order on election integrity that mandated proof of citizenship for registration, federal reviewing of

80 www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/06/political-interference-us-education-undermines-academic-freedom-and
81 www.nytimes.com/article/trump-university-college.html
82 www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/21/columbia-university-funding-trump-demands
83 ibid
84 www.reuters.com/legal/government/trumps-war-left-inside-plan-investigate-liberal-groups-2025-10-09/
85 www.dw.com/en/trump-labels-antifa-as-domestic-terrorist-organization/a-74102698
86 www.politico.com/live-updates/2025/11/20/congress/trump-democratic-lawmakers-sedition-00661504
87 lawreview.law.miami.edu/recap-attacks-on-civil-society-professor-genevieve-lakier/
88 www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity/
89 lawreview.law.miami.edu/recap-attacks-on-civil-society-professor-genevieve-lakier/; www.highereddive.com/news/aba-faces-doj-wrath-over-law-school-diversity-requirements/742091/
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91 www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/28/us-trump-administration-guts-foreign-aid
92 www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/20/03/2025/consequences-and-implications-international-development-assistance-sector-closure
93 www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-indicted-for-efforts-to-undermine-the-2020-election/
94 www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/03/trump-georgia-raffensperger-call-biden-washington-post/
95 eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2024/09/10/donald-trump-2020-election-claims-fact-check/75168089007/
96 www.nytimes.com/live/2021/01/06/us/electoral-vote/
97 www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/tracker-justice-department-requests-voter-information
98 www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/jan/28/fbi-search-warrant-fulton-county-georgia/
99 www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-raffensperger-call-transcript-georgia-vote/2021/01/03/2768e0cc-4ddd-11eb-83e3-322644d82356_story.html
100 www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2026-01-31/fbi-georgia-ballot-raid-is-about-2026-not-the-2020-election/

electronic voting machines, and restricted mail-in voting – all without Congress approval.[101] Observers claim the order disregards the Constitution.[102] Many provisions of this order have been blocked and others are still being challenged in federal courts.[103] However, the Republican Party is pushing in Congress for the changes Trump is seeking.[104]

There is also evidence that election officials are facing harassments and 40% of the country's election officials have left since the 2020 election,[105] with some of them raising concerns over the conduct of the 2026 midterms.[106]

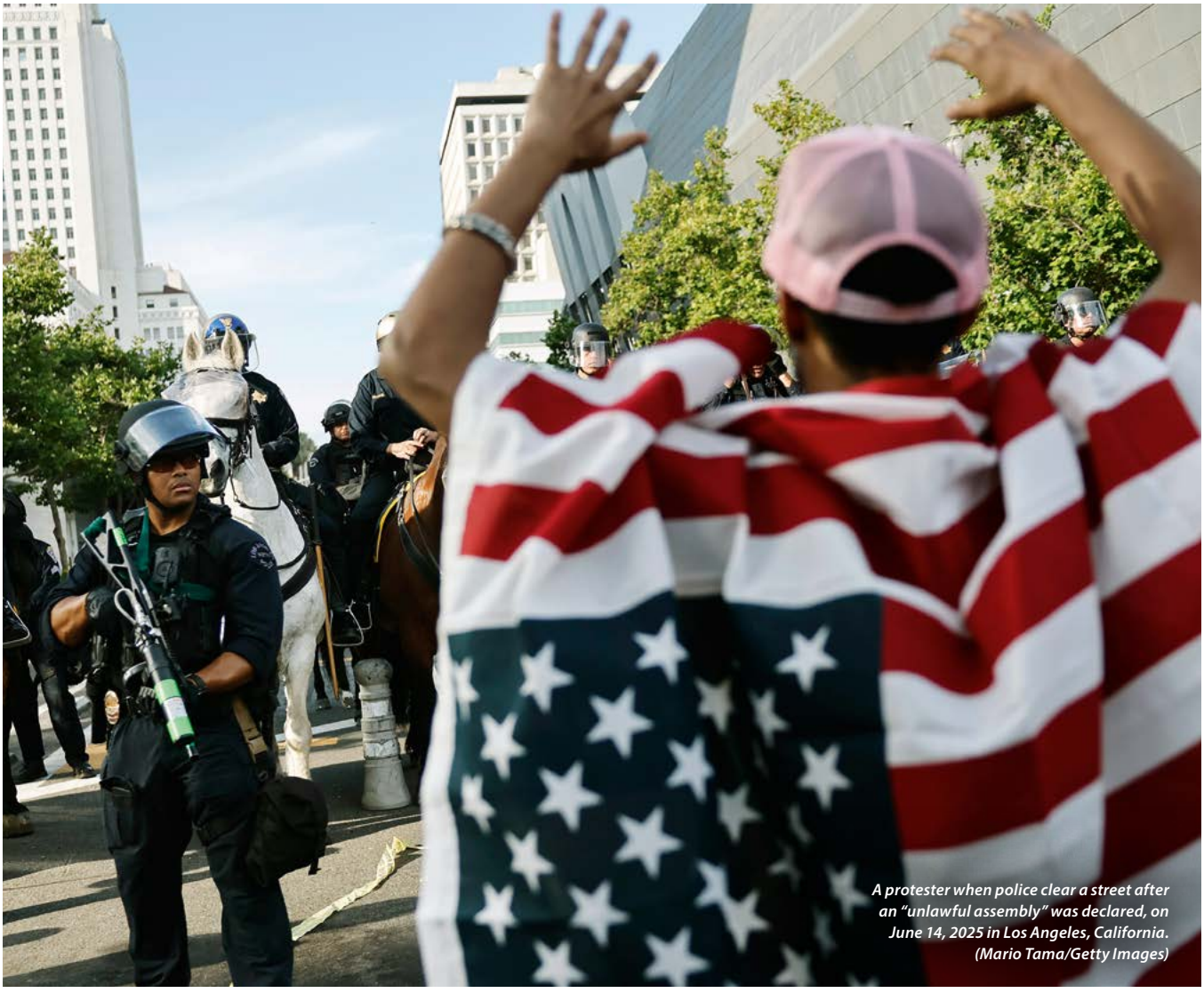
Finally, some observers fear that the midterms may be losing significance: Important legislation is almost exclusively driven by the President, while the Supreme Court has on more than one occasion allowed the executive branch to bypass Congress.[107]

What Would It Take for a U-Turn?

What would it take to stop autocratization in the USA, and turn it around? Roughly 70% of all "third wave" episodes of autocratization have been reversed, making U-turns.[108] Elections were often pivotal windows of opportunity, and the first electoral cycle was often decisive.

Research shows that there is no unique recipe for making a U-turn but a combination of three key factors seem to be important: (i) **strong institutional safeguards** acting as the "brakes" of autocratization: electoral integrity, judiciary constraints, and legislative constrains; (ii) **robust societal action** serving as the "engine" of democratic revival: unified opposition, robust and active civil society, independent media, and sustained non-violent mass pro-democracy protests; and (iii) **acting early** since most U-turns happen around the end of the first electoral cycle.[109]

In the USA, the judicial system – and in the end, the Supreme Court – is likely to be vital in stopping Trump's administration autocratic advances. And federal structures – state governments and state judiciaries – can function as checks on the federal government, particularly on the administration of federal elections. ■



A protester when police clear a street after an "unlawful assembly" was declared, on June 14, 2025 in Los Angeles, California. (Mario Tama/Getty Images)

101 www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/preserving-and-protecting-the-integrity-of-american-elections/
102 www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/trump-administrations-campaign-undermine-next-election
103 www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/status-trumps-anti-voting-executive-order/
104 thehill.com/homenews/house/5712698-house-republicans-election-reform-bill/
105 www.npr.org/2025/08/20/nx-s1-5503954/turnover-election-officials-trump/
106 edition.cnn.com/2025/08/02/politics/trump-elections-pressure-campaign/
107 bylinetimes.com/2026/01/22/trump-has-already-rigged-the-2028-presidential-election-us-defence-insider/
108 Nord, M., et al. 2025. "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900." *Democratization* 32(5).
109 Nord, M., and S.I. Lindberg. 2025. "U-Turns – The Hope for Democratic Resilience." V-Dem Institute Policy Brief 42.

V-Dem in Numbers

WHERE IS V-DEM DATA USED?

The V-Dem dataset has been downloaded by users **445,000 times** in **200+ countries** since 2016.

≈400,000 downloads of the *Democracy Report 2025*

37 million graphs created using the online tools by users in **200+ countries** since 2016.

Global Standards, Local Knowledge: 61% of the expert coders are born or residing in the main country they code.

V-DEM IS AN INTERNATIONAL EFFORT COMPRISED OF

23
PROJECT MANAGERS

26
REGIONAL MANAGERS

134
COUNTRY COORDINATORS

4,200+
COUNTRY EXPERTS

8
PERSONNEL AT THE V-DEM INSTITUTE

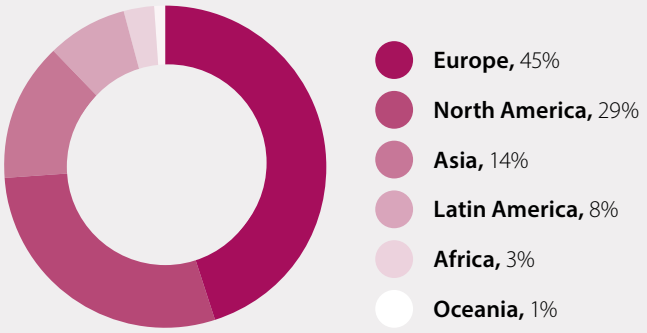
5
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

ALL WORKING TOGETHER TO PRODUCE

31,000,000
DATA POINTS IN THE V16 DATASET

DATASET DOWNLOADS (2016–2025)

445,000



EXPERT CODERS BORN IN 186 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

4,200+

Average years spent in country coded: 30

Percentage of coders with a PhD: 77%

Mean Age: 51 years

Gender: 70% Male, 30% Female

V-DEM PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS TO ACADEMIC AND POLICY COMMUNITIES

10
DEMOCRACY REPORTS

43
POLICY BRIEFS

1,030+
PRESENTATIONS across the world by V-Dem scholars since 2007

231
JOURNAL ARTICLES

154
WORKING PAPERS

130+
VISITING SCHOLARS presented at the V-Dem Institute since 2014

Democracy Report 2026 Watchlist

- **8 countries are on the Watchlist as potential autocratizers.**
- **3 countries are on the Watchlist as potential democratizers.**

The *Democracy Report* **Watchlist** initiative identifies countries that the international community could decide to pay special attention. These are countries exhibiting clear portents of becoming autocratizers or democratizers – they have come at least *three-quarters* of the way (0.075) towards the ERT threshold of 0.1 on the EDI to be officially in an episode. Such countries are marked with dark red and dark blue shaded areas in Figure A1.

The eight countries that are very close to becoming autocratizers are: **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Namibia**, **Portugal**, **Russia**, **Sierra Leone**, **Sudan**, and **Vanuatu**. Three of the eight countries are new on the Watchlist this year: Bulgaria, Portugal, and Vanuatu. Of them, Vanuatu experienced the second-largest one-year drop in 2025 (after the USA). Sierra Leone and Sudan were listed as autocratizers last year and are only marginally below the threshold now. Cyprus, Namibia, and Russia were on the Watchlist already last year (see *Democracy Report 2025*).

Three countries that are bordering to becoming democratizers are: **Chad**, **Gabon**, and **South Korea**. All three countries are potential U-turns. Of those, South Korea is the closest one to qualify as a democratizer after featuring as an autocratizer only one year ago. Chad and Gabon have re-installed elections and civilian-led governments after military coups in 2021 and 2023, respectively.

The Watchlist additionally identifies so-called **"near misses"** – countries that are at least *halfway* towards becoming autocratizers or democratizers (changes are between 0.05 and 0.1 on the EDI scale from 0 to 1). "Near miss" autocratizers are marked with the red shaded area and "near miss" democratizers with the blue shaded area (see Figure A1).

There are 24 "near misses" of autocratization and eight "near misses" of democratization, in 2025. ■

FIGURE A1. WATCHLIST 2026: POTENTIAL AUTOCRATIZERS AND DEMOCRATIZERS

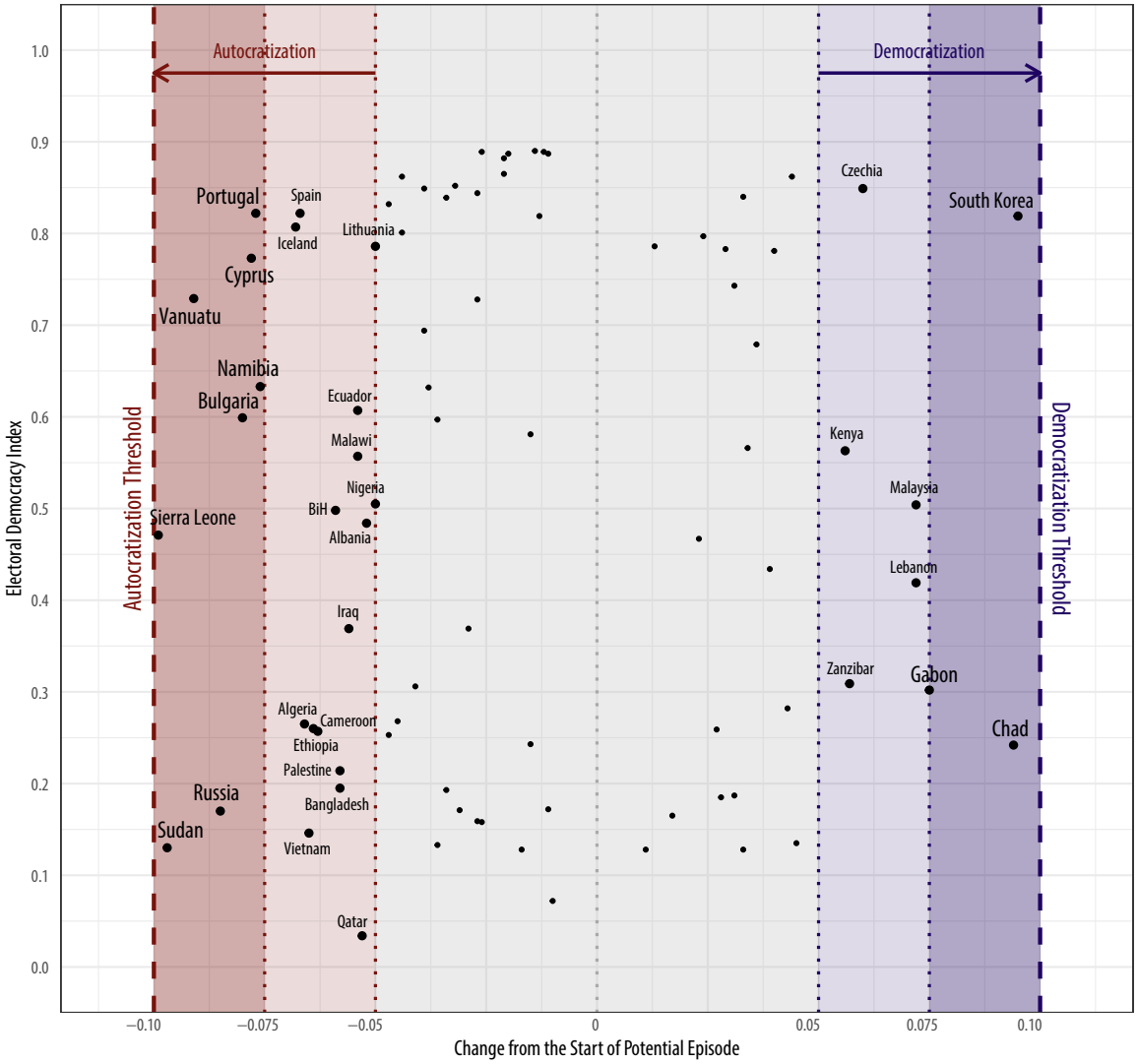


Figure A1 plots countries that are identified as potential autocratizers (red) or potential democratizers (blue), as of 2025. Light red and light blue areas mark all "near miss" cases, whereas dark red and dark blue areas mark countries that are on the Democracy Report Watchlist. "Near-misses" are identified by using the standard ERT methodology but with a lower threshold (i.e., 0.05 instead of 0.1 on the EDI), while Watchlist is reserved for countries that are above 0.075 threshold. Changes below 0.05 on the EDI (grey area) are treated as noise in data.

V-Dem Co-Principal Investigators: Commentary on the Democracy Report

Authors: Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Jan Teorell

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) brings together researchers and country experts working at institutions around the world. The V-Dem dataset is the main output. Since 2017, the V-Dem Institute in Gothenburg has published an annual Democracy Report (DR). Since 2024, we—four of V-Dem's five principal investigators—have written a short commentary to each DR.

Let's start with the obvious: there are many ways to parse the V-Dem data, and each is likely to suggest somewhat different conclusions about the state of democracy in the world. As in past commentaries, we do not challenge the quality of V-Dem data, which we believe is very high. We also stand behind much of the DR authors' analysis. However, we do question some choices—pertaining to the use of particular aggregation procedures, lack of attention to uncertainty, and inflated language—which lead to some interpretations that we do not endorse. To put it crudely, we find certain conclusions, e.g., about the extent of the recent decline in democracy globally, to be overstated and lacking in nuance.

Some more specific issues we have elaborated on in previous commentaries are still relevant. The DR emphasizes average global trends, often population-weighted. Hence, very large countries such as India or the US may be driving much of the reported trend.

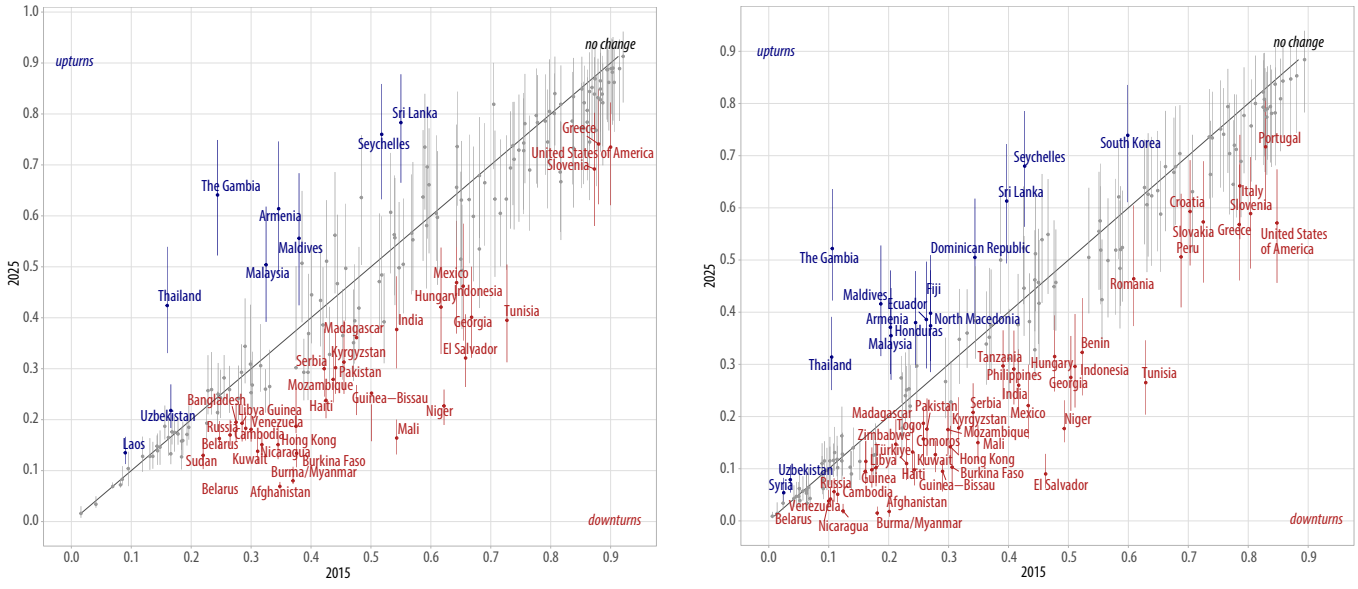
The DR emphasizes movement across categories in the Regimes of the World scheme, created by Lührmann et al (2018). Since these categories are based on continuous indices (V-Dem's Electoral and Liberal Democracy indices), the breakpoints are arbitrary. Countries grouped together (e.g., as "Electoral democracies") may be quite dissimilar, and countries grouped into different categories may be quite similar. We refer to our commentary in last year's DR for a more detailed discussion of the pitfalls of this approach.

The DR devotes considerable attention to "episodes" of regime change. Rather than comparing all countries across a fixed time-span (as we do below), it identifies specific starting and ending points for each country that are in many respects arbitrary and which may also influence interpretations of, e.g., recent or ongoing democratic developments.

We generally prefer a more disaggregated approach that weights each country equally and takes uncertainty into account. Note that V-Dem generates hundreds of indicators for every country-year. This wealth of information means we can learn from assessing the components and subcomponents of democracy, which are often informative about the ways in which regimes are transforming, and what might be the causes, revealing a more complex picture of democratic developments across the world than is apparent from the aggregated indices.

Disaggregating global trends into country-specific ones also reveals important insights In Figure 1, we plot all country scores for 2015 and 2025, labeling those with strong positive (blue) or negative

FIGURE 1. COMPARISON OF SCORES IN 2015 AND 2025 FOR V-DEM'S ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LEFT PLOT) AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (RIGHT PLOT).



Bars represent 95% credibility intervals for 2025.

Countries below the diagonal line have lower scores in 2025 than 2015; countries above the diagonal have higher scores. Vertical lines represent uncertainty (95% credibility intervals) for 2025 scores.

(red) changes in V-Dem's Electoral Democracy index (EDI). This figure captures the very real changes that occurred across the past decade – more in the red than the blue – while reminding us that most countries did not experience significant changes.

From 2024 to 2025, the global average on V-Dem's Electoral Democracy index (EDI) fell from 0.485 to 0.483 while the Liberal Democracy index (LDI) average fell from 0.374 to 0.372. These are relatively small changes, and it is worth emphasizing that the LDI scores for 175 out of 179 countries did not change in a statistically significant manner.

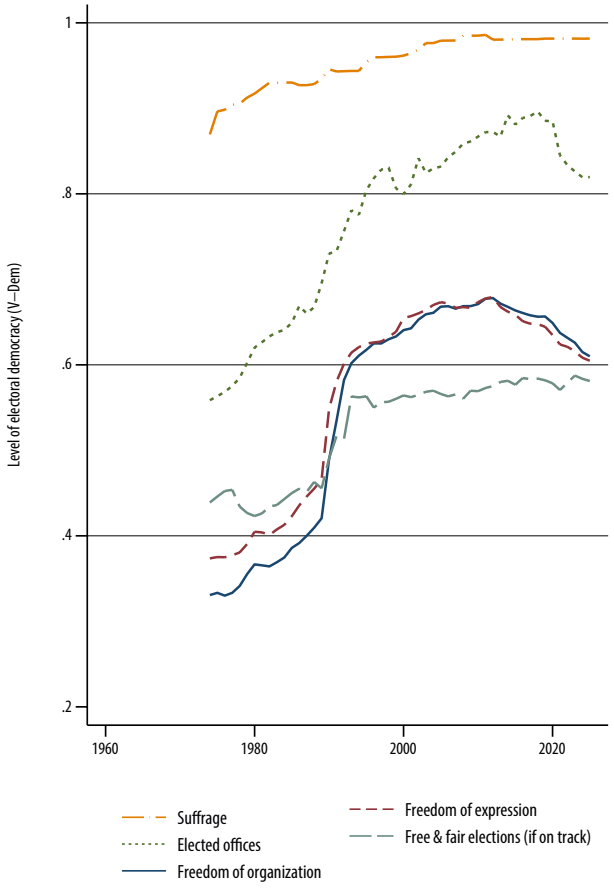
The big story is that the United States fell from .84 to .74 on the Electoral democracy index (EDI), and from 0.75 to 0.57 on the Liberal Democracy index (LDI)—the largest annual decline in US history. This is mostly due to a decline in media freedom as well as Congress's failure to hold the executive accountable, combined with some loss of independence of the judiciary as well as weakened rule of law and protection of civil liberty. Other indicators pertaining to the quality of elections, freedom of association, elected officials, or suffrage did not change during the year, which is also part of the reason why the EDI fell less than the LDI.

We end by providing an example of how V-Dem's specific measures may generate insights into recent democratic developments, with potential implications for evaluations about the resilience of democracy. In Figure 2, we disaggregate the EDI into its constituent components and show global averages for each component over the last 50 years. We introduce one important tweak: For the Clean Elections index, the sample is limited to countries where elections are on course (v2x_elecreg=1).

Zooming in on the most recent developments, three things stand out from Figure 2. First, the recent global decline in democracy is not about suffrage restrictions, nor is it about a drop in electoral integrity in the places where elections are actually held. Second, the downward trend starts with a decrease in the two components of electoral democracy that are not directly tied to the execution of elections, that is, freedom of expression and organization. A decrease in these freedoms is mainly about a decline in the quality of democracy where elections are still in place. The process underlying this part of the downward trend can very well be captured with what Nancy Bermeo termed "executive aggrandizement" (Bermeo 2016); typically, the incumbent leader or party attacks democratic freedoms from within the political system. Yet, and notably, the flat trend for the Clean Elections index in Figure 1 suggests that such processes have not led to a significant decrease in electoral integrity—on average, globally—over the last decade.

The third and more recent trend in the decline of democracy, which tends to be brushed over with too much focus on what is going on in higher-profile countries such as the US, is a decline in the extent to which a country is ruled by elected officials. The drop in this index is more recent and largely reflects the return of coups d'états (not necessarily but oftentimes by the military), that is, executive takeovers from the outside that replace elected officials and cancel elections completely. The relevant countries are, however, located outside of Europe or North America. More specifically, they are in the Sahel (Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso and Niger) or in South or Southeast Asia (Myanmar and Afghanistan). This is a decline in democracy that is very distinct from incumbent-led executive aggrandizement, and that warrants more attention and scrutiny in the future.

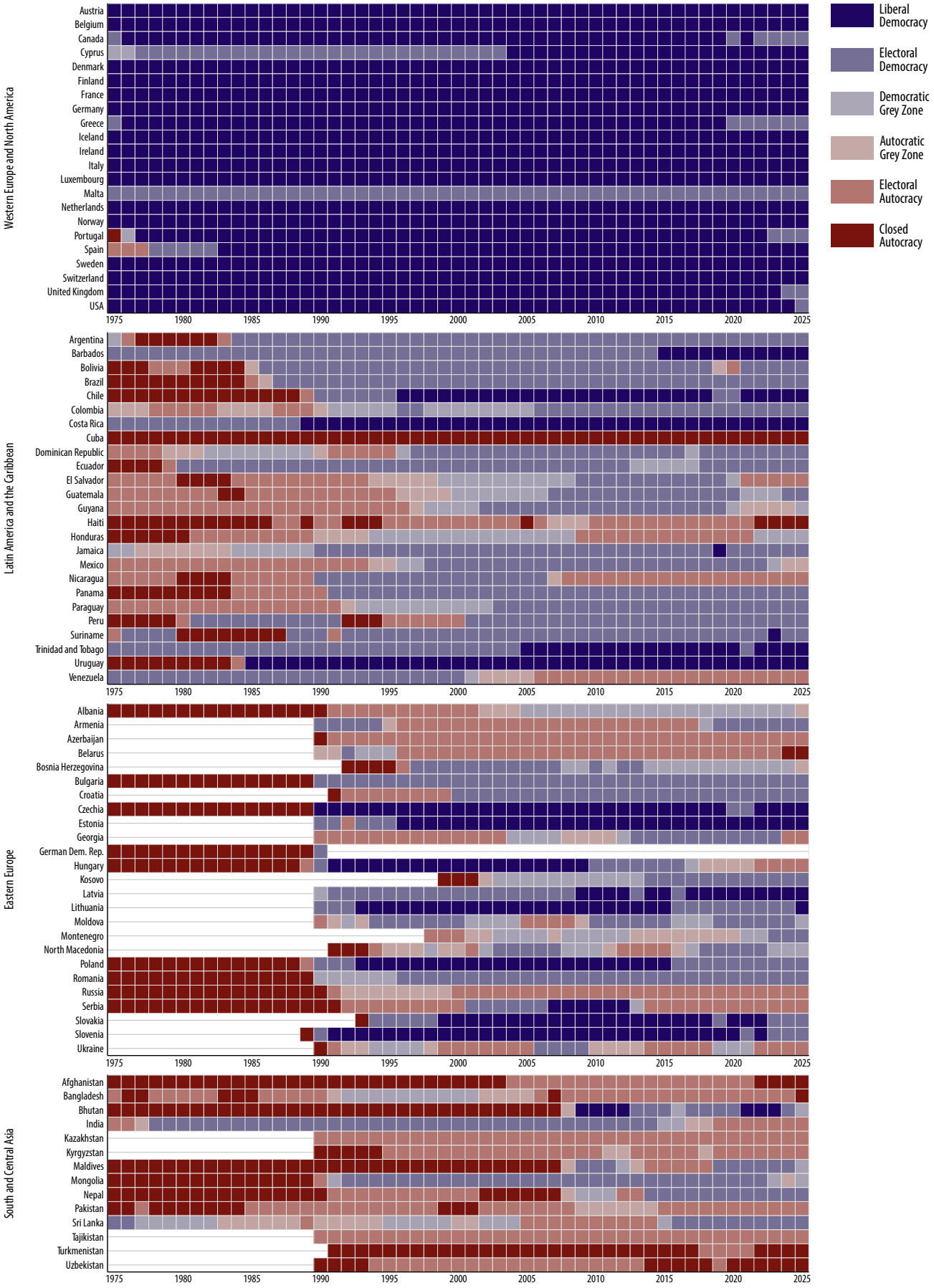
FIGURE 2. SCORES ON THE SUB-COMPONENTS OF THE ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX.



We close by noting that V-Dem data covers what has already occurred. Version 16 of the dataset ends with the calendar year 2025. What lies ahead is unknown. We do not know whether elections in the U.S. will continue to be free and fair, or whether Bangladesh will complete a transition to a high-quality democracy. The past is not always prologue to the future. This is an important point because current trends are often extrapolated and over-interpreted. Of course, there is nothing wrong with prognosticating; we must anticipate the future if we are to chart a course of action in the present. But that is not our job here. In releasing the current dataset our goal is to provide the best possible data. This may provide fodder for prognostication, but that is beyond our remit in this short report. The present course of democracy must be distinguished from its future course. ■

TABLE A1. HISTORY OF REGIMES OF THE WORLD BY COUNTRY-YEAR, 1975–2025

Countries are divided into political regions. Regions with higher density of population living in democracies are placed in higher position. The figure shows the history of Regimes of the World (RoW) in the last 50 years, 1975–2025, for each country. Each tile corresponds to one year and we use the PanelView R package developed by Mou, Liu, and Xu (2022) to visualize the history of RoW. The typology is published in Lührmann et al. 2018. Regimes of the World (RoW), Politics and Governance 6(1).



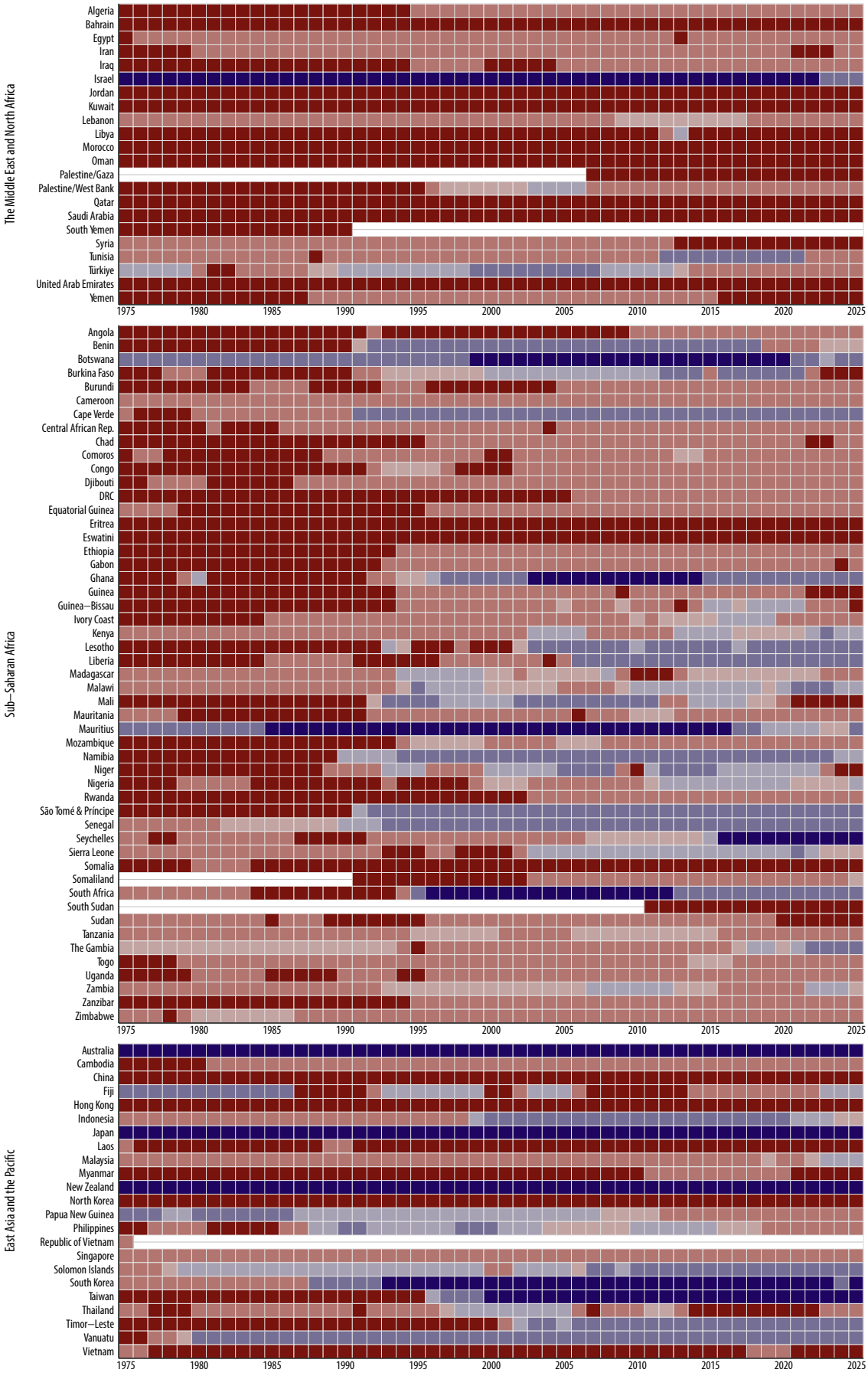
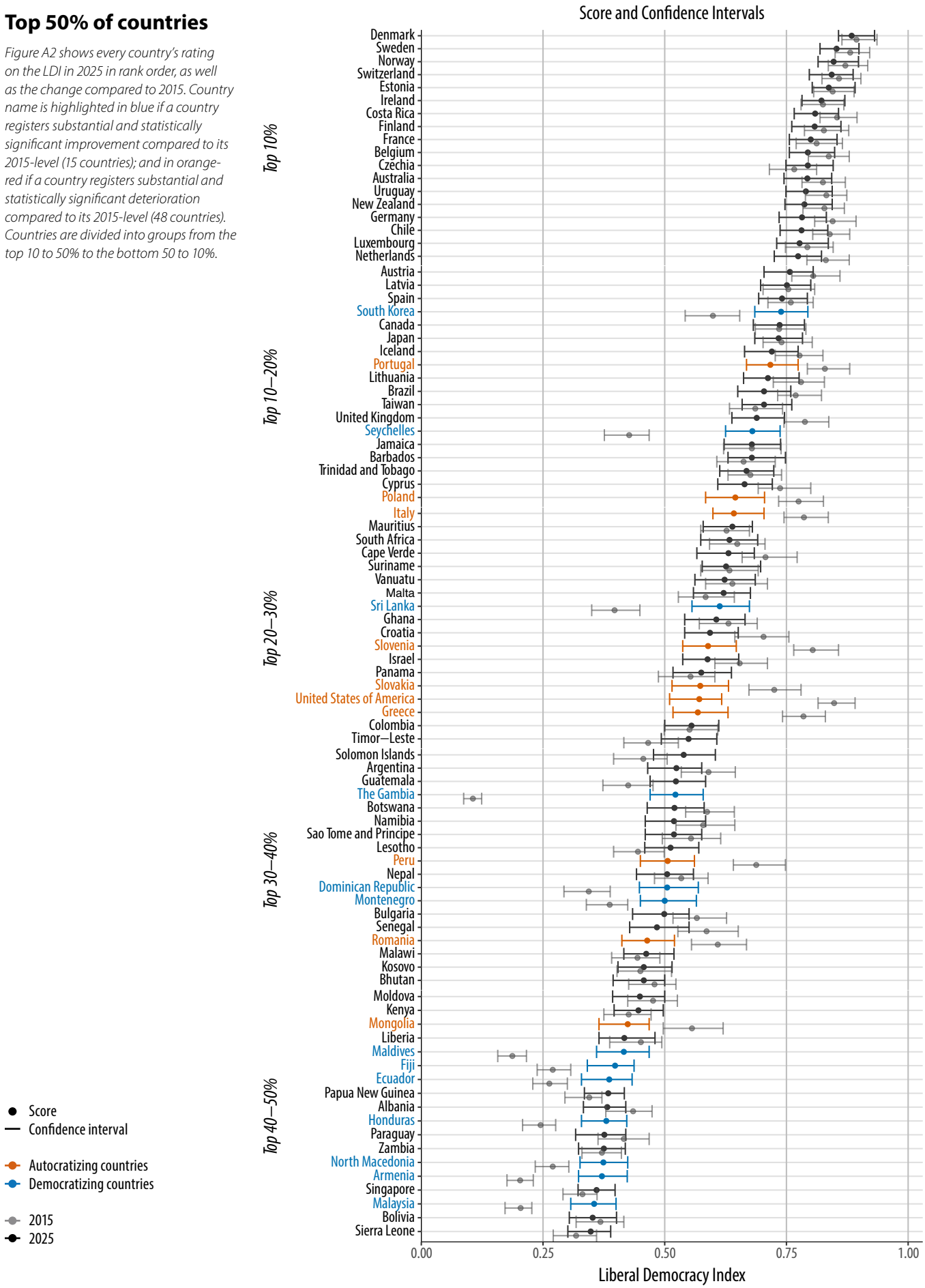

The Middle East and North Africa
Algeria
Bahrain
Egypt
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Jordan
Kuwait
Lebanon
Libya
Morocco
Oman
Palestine/Gaza
Palestine/West Bank
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
South Yemen
Syria
Tunisia
Türkiye
United Arab Emirates
Yemen
1975
1980
1985
1990
1995
2000
2005
2010
2015
2020
2025
Sub–Saharan Africa
Angola
Benin
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Rep.
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Djibouti
DRC
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Eswatini
Ethiopia
Gabon
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea–Bissau
Ivory Coast
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Niger
Nigeria
Rwanda
São Tomé & Príncipe
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Somaliland
South Africa
South Sudan
Sudan
Tanzania
The Gambia
Togo
Uganda
Zambia
Zanzibar
Zimbabwe
1975
1980
1985
1990
1995
2000
2005
2010
2015
2020
2025
East Asia and the Pacific
Australia
Cambodia
China
Fiji
Hong Kong
Indonesia
Japan
Laos
Malaysia
Myanmar
New Zealand
North Korea
Papua New Guinea
Philippines
Republic of Vietnam
Singapore
Solomon Islands
South Korea
Taiwan
Thailand
Timor–Leste
Vanuatu
Vietnam
1975
1980
1985
1990
1995
2000
2005
2010
2015
2020
2025

FIGURE A2. COUNTRIES BY SCORE ON V-DEM'S LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI), 2015 COMPARED TO 2025

Top 50% of countries

Figure A2 shows every country's rating on the LDI in 2025 in rank order, as well as the change compared to 2015. Country name is highlighted in blue if a country registers substantial and statistically significant improvement compared to its 2015-level (15 countries); and in orange-red if a country registers substantial and statistically significant deterioration compared to its 2015-level (48 countries). Countries are divided into groups from the top 10 to 50% to the bottom 50 to 10%.



Bottom 50% of countries

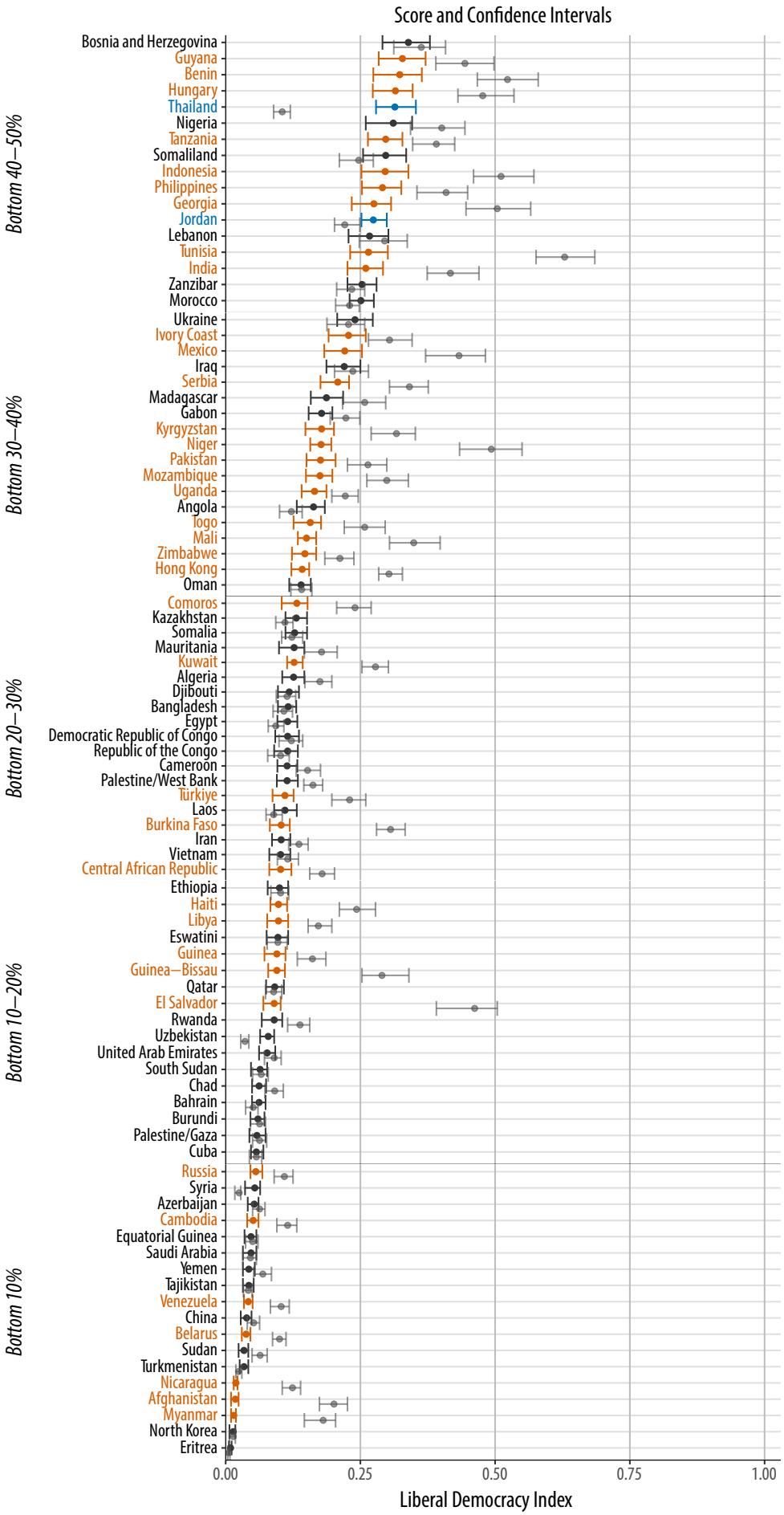


TABLE A2. COUNTRY SCORES FOR THE LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI) AND ALL COMPONENTS INDICES, 2025

↑ *Indicates that the country's score has improved over the past 10 years, substantially and at a statistically significant level*

↓ *Indicates that the country's score has decreased over the past 10 years, substantially and at a statistically significant level*

SD+/– reports the standard deviation to indicate the level of uncertainty

	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI)			ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI)			LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI)			EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI)			PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI)			DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI)		
COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–
Denmark	1	0,88	0,039	1	0,91	0,035	1	0,98	0,014	1	0,97	0,025	7	0,71	0,019	5	0,96	0,037
Sweden	2	0.85	0.043	4	0.89	0.040	2	0.98	0.015	11	0.9	0.048	14	0.65	0.025	10	0.93	0.053
Norway	3	0.85	0.043	2	0.89	0.039	6	0.96	0.019	2	0.96	0.029	15	0.65	0.019	1	0.99	0.018
Switzerland	4	0.84	0.047	7	0.88	0.042	3	0.97	0.019	6	0.94	0.038	1	0.88	0.017	2	0.98	0.019
Estonia	5	0.84	0.046	5	0.89	0.041	8	0.95	0.024	9	0.92	0.047	30	0.63	0.034	36	0.84	0.082
Ireland	6	0.82	0.046	6	0.89	0.041	15	0.93	0.029	24	0.87	0.057	31	0.63	0.038	17	0.91	0.056
Costa Rica	7	0.81	0.046	10	0.86	0.042	9	0.95	0.022	17	0.88	0.055	26	0.64	0.039	13	0.92	0.054
Finland	8	0.81	0.052	12	0.85	0.048	5	0.96	0.019	33	0.81	0.064 ↓	27	0.64	0.029	20	0.9	0.063
France	9	0.80	0.051	9	0.86	0.045	14	0.94	0.027	32	0.81	0.065	32	0.63	0.041	9	0.93	0.053
Belgium	10	0.79	0.047	3	0.89	0.038	28	0.89	0.042	7	0.93	0.039	16	0.65	0.027	30	0.86	0.073
Czechia	11	0.79	0.051	13	0.85	0.046	10	0.95	0.026	10	0.91	0.048	51	0.59	0.047	45	0.81	0.089
Australia	12	0.79	0.050	15	0.84	0.046	7	0.96	0.023	26	0.85	0.057	6	0.73	0.028 ↑	11	0.93	0.051
Uruguay	13	0.79	0.048	11	0.86	0.043	16	0.93	0.032	42	0.77	0.077	2	0.81	0.043	12	0.93	0.058
New Zealand	14	0.79	0.050	14	0.85	0.045	13	0.94	0.030	27	0.85	0.064	42	0.61	0.056 ↓	69	0.72	0.111
Germany	15	0.78	0.049	21	0.83	0.047	4	0.97	0.019	5	0.94	0.035	10	0.66	0.016	3	0.98	0.022
Chile	16	0.78	0.050	18	0.84	0.047	11	0.95	0.023	55	0.73	0.081	36	0.62	0.048	8	0.93	0.048
Luxembourg	17	0.78	0.053	8	0.87	0.045	27	0.89	0.044	3	0.95	0.041	75	0.56	0.070 ↓	4	0.97	0.031
Netherlands	18	0.77	0.049	20	0.83	0.045	12	0.94	0.025	14	0.89	0.051	50	0.59	0.047	18	0.9	0.067
Austria	19	0.76	0.051	17	0.84	0.046	19	0.91	0.035	25	0.86	0.057	29	0.63	0.036 ↓	29	0.87	0.070
Latvia	20	0.75	0.053	19	0.83	0.047	23	0.91	0.040	21	0.87	0.054	11	0.66	0.034 ↓	49	0.81	0.092
Spain	21	0.74	0.051	22	0.82	0.045	20	0.91	0.040	30	0.84	0.064	28	0.64	0.033	39	0.83	0.09
South Korea	22	0.74	0.056 ↑	25	0.82	0.053 ↑	18	0.91	0.034	23	0.87	0.059	44	0.61	0.043	7	0.94	0.048 ↑
Canada	23	0.74	0.053	16	0.84	0.047	31	0.87	0.044	62	0.7	0.080	25	0.64	0.027	52	0.79	0.100
Japan	24	0.73	0.051	24	0.82	0.047	24	0.9	0.038	4	0.94	0.036	67	0.56	0.052	21	0.9	0.058
Iceland	25	0.72	0.055	26	0.81	0.051	26	0.9	0.042	8	0.92	0.047	18	0.65	0.037	27	0.88	0.072
Portugal	26	0.72	0.054 ↓	23	0.82	0.050	33	0.87	0.041 ↓	61	0.7	0.082 ↓	62	0.57	0.054 ↓	37	0.84	0.083
Lithuania	27	0.71	0.058	30	0.79	0.058	17	0.92	0.031	20	0.88	0.050	9	0.67	0.045	34	0.84	0.084
Brazil	28	0.70	0.055	32	0.78	0.054	22	0.91	0.031	81	0.64	0.084	37	0.62	0.040	15	0.92	0.056
Taiwan	29	0.70	0.052	28	0.8	0.049	29	0.89	0.042	19	0.88	0.054	3	0.8	0.032 ↑	32	0.86	0.076
United Kingdom	30	0.69	0.054	37	0.77	0.054	25	0.9	0.033	38	0.78	0.078	24	0.64	0.036	31	0.86	0.072
Seychelles	31	0.68	0.056 ↑	39	0.76	0.057 ↑	21	0.91	0.036 ↑	31	0.83	0.074	138	0.32	0.046	6	0.95	0.041 ↑
Barbados	32	0.68	0.059	29	0.8	0.056	41	0.85	0.047	28	0.85	0.062	144	0.3	0.032	16	0.92	0.058
Jamaica	33	0.68	0.059	27	0.8	0.056	44	0.84	0.047	35	0.81	0.070	55	0.58	0.053	28	0.87	0.079
Trinidad and Tobago	34	0.67	0.056	31	0.79	0.053	42	0.85	0.049	29	0.84	0.064	60	0.57	0.045	66	0.74	0.102
Cyprus	35	0.66	0.056	36	0.77	0.053	35	0.86	0.048	13	0.9	0.052	66	0.56	0.051	57	0.78	0.110
Poland	36	0.64	0.060 ↓	38	0.77	0.058 ↓	45	0.83	0.050	16	0.88	0.051	34	0.62	0.050	33	0.85	0.079
Italy	37	0.64	0.054 ↓	41	0.74	0.053 ↓	34	0.87	0.046	15	0.89	0.051	4	0.74	0.037	43	0.82	0.092
Mauritius	38	0.64	0.051	44	0.74	0.051	30	0.87	0.042	46	0.76	0.079	49	0.59	0.049	14	0.92	0.062
South Africa	39	0.63	0.059	42	0.74	0.060	36	0.86	0.047	77	0.65	0.086	65	0.56	0.046	24	0.9	0.076
Cape Verde	40	0.63	0.059	40	0.74	0.059	43	0.84	0.048	56	0.72	0.079	86	0.54	0.059	80	0.69	0.114
Suriname	41	0.63	0.061	35	0.78	0.058	55	0.78	0.058	51	0.74	0.072	53	0.58	0.049	56	0.78	0.093
Vanuatu	42	0.62	0.062	49	0.73	0.064	37	0.86	0.048	48	0.75	0.078	140	0.32	0.043 ↓	99	0.58	0.158
Malta	43	0.62	0.059	34	0.78	0.056	58	0.77	0.06	12	0.9	0.057	40	0.62	0.052	47	0.81	0.091
Sri Lanka	44	0.61	0.059 ↑	33	0.78	0.055 ↑	67	0.76	0.062	58	0.71	0.08	46	0.61	0.049	53	0.78	0.103
Ghana	45	0.61	0.062	51	0.71	0.064	38	0.86	0.050	79	0.64	0.084	123	0.4	0.052	42	0.82	0.097
Croatia	46	0.59	0.054	56	0.69	0.057 ↓	32	0.87	0.045	41	0.78	0.078	39	0.62	0.054	78	0.7	0.110
Slovenia	47	0.59	0.055 ↓	54	0.69	0.057 ↓	39	0.85	0.048	18	0.88	0.053	8	0.7	0.040	19	0.9	0.059
Israel	48	0.59	0.056	53	0.69	0.059	40	0.85	0.048	39	0.78	0.077	48	0.6	0.042	73	0.71	0.108
Panama	49	0.58	0.060	50	0.73	0.060	57	0.77	0.061	106	0.55	0.099	90	0.53	0.061	61	0.76	0.104
Slovakia	50	0.57	0.058 ↓	48	0.73	0.056 ↓	65	0.76	0.061 ↓	49	0.75	0.077	23	0.64	0.053	134	0.37	0.123 ↓
USA	51	0.57	0.054 ↓	47	0.74	0.052 ↓	69	0.75	0.06 ↓	94	0.57	0.093 ↓	20	0.64	0.020	91	0.61	0.126 ↓
Greece	52	0.57	0.058 ↓	43	0.74	0.056 ↓	75	0.74	0.064 ↓	22	0.87	0.059	45	0.61	0.048	41	0.82	0.080
Colombia	53	0.56	0.056	57	0.68	0.059	51	0.81	0.051	111	0.52	0.091	22	0.64	0.042	87	0.62	0.129
Timor-Leste	54	0.55	0.058	45	0.74	0.059	80	0.71	0.065	92	0.58	0.089	69	0.56	0.056	76	0.7	0.112
Solomon Islands	55	0.54	0.063	52	0.7	0.066	68	0.76	0.060	96	0.57	0.082	77	0.55	0.057	117	0.48	0.126
Argentina	56	0.52	0.056	55	0.69	0.059	77	0.74	0.061	67	0.69	0.082	71	0.56	0.053	113	0.52	0.124
Guatemala	57	0.52	0.057	63	0.64	0.066	50	0.81	0.045 ↑	131	0.44	0.094	43	0.61	0.054	71	0.72	0.115
Gambia	58	0.52	0.056 ↑	62	0.64	0.061 ↑	52	0.81	0.054 ↑	72	0.67	0.083 ↑	57	0.58	0.053 ↑	65	0.74	0.101 ↑
Botswana	59	0.52	0.059	59	0.66	0.062	62	0.76	0.062 ↓	68	0.69	0.082	109	0.47	0.071	127	0.43	0.135 ↓
Namibia	60	0.52	0.063	65	0.63	0.069	48	0.81	0.061	125	0.46	0.099	108	0.47	0.064	77	0.7	0.115
S.Tomé & P.	61	0.52	0.059	67	0.63	0.066	49	0.81	0.052	71	0.67	0.084	76	0.55	0.056	94	0.6	0.118
Lesotho	62	0.51	0.057	60	0.66	0.060	64	0.76	0.062	57	0.72	0.083	82	0.55	0.063	74	0.71	0.110
Peru	63	0.51	0.056 ↓	58	0.67	0.060 ↓	76	0.74	0.064	114	0.50	0.095	33	0.62	0.052	120	0.48	0.129 ↓
Dominican Republic	64	0.50	0.060 ↑	46	0.74	0.061 ↑	92	0.63	0.068	124	0.46	0.086	52	0.58	0.049	22	0.9	0.066 ↑
Nepal	65	0.50	0.059	61	0.66	0.064	72	0.75	0.061	91	0.58	0.086	41	0.62	0.041 ↑	107	0.54	0.141
Montenegro	66	0.50	0.058 ↑	64	0.64	0.066 ↑	59	0.77	0.058	40	0.78	0.077	59	0.57	0.053	44	0.81	0.091
Bulgaria	67	0.50	0.058	73	0.6	0.067	46	0.83	0.053	59	0.71	0.081	38	0.62	0.066	55	0.78	0.099
Senegal	68	0.48	0.062	66	0.63	0.070	73	0.74	0.064	66	0.69	0.079	56	0.58	0.056	26	0.89	0.067
Romania	69	0.46	0.055 ↓	72	0.6	0.063	71	0.75	0.063	76	0.66	0.085	17	0.65	0.061	130	0.38	0.121 ↓
Malawi	70	0.46	0.052	79	0.56	0.064	47	0.82	0.051	117	0.49	0.085	47	0.6	0.041	38	0.84	0.089
Bhutan	71	0.46	0.052	76	0.57	0.063	54	0.79	0.056	34	0.81	0.072	78	0.55	0.054	23	0.9	0.064
Kosovo	72	0.46	0.057	68	0.63	0.064	84	0.69	0.071	65	0.69	0.085	112	0.46	0.060	105	0.56	0.119
Moldova	73	0.45	0.054	81	0.55	0.065	53	0.79	0.062	43	0.77	0.076	12	0.66	0.051	54	0.78	0.106
Kenya	74	0.45	0.051	77	0.56	0.062	60	0.77	0.057	105	0.55	0.089	94	0.52	0.056 ↓	51	0.79	0.096
Mongolia	75	0.42	0.052 ↓	82	0.54	0.064 ↓	63	0.76	0.060	75	0.66	0.090	117	0.43	0.065	40	0.83	0.087
Liberia	76	0.42	0.059	74	0.6	0.069	88	0.65	0.075	90	0.59	0.084	113	0.46	0.040	48	0.81	0.097
Maldives	77	0.42	0.053 ↑	80	0.56	0.065 ↑	79	0.72	0.07 ↑	85	0.61	0.092	102	0.49	0.069	72	0.72	0.114 ↑
Fiji	78	0.40	0.050 ↑	85	0.51	0.064 ↑	70	0.75	0.064 ↑	69	0.68	0.092	116	0.43	0.047	59	0.77	0.104
Ecuador	79	0.39	0.053 ↑	70	0.61	0.061	100	0.57	0.074 ↑	153	0.33	0.093 ↓	5	0.74	0.053 ↑	110	0.53	0.134
Papua New Guinea	80	0.38	0.044	94	0.47	0.056	56	0.78	0.056	134	0.43	0.091	98	0.51	0.057	128	0.43	0.118
Albania	81	0.38	0.045	91	0.48	0.057	74	0.74	0.061	73	0.67	0.084	96	0.52	0.057	131	0.38	0.119
Honduras	82	0.38	0.047 ↑	84	0.51	0.060	83	0.69	0.064 ↑	140	0.4	0.098	72	0.56	0.061	84	0.64	0.121
Paraguay	83	0.38	0.051	75	0.58	0.064	97	0.59	0.074	158	0.29	0.087	97	0.52	0.059	122	0.45	0.120
Zambia	84	0.38	0.049	89	0.50	0.059	81	0.71	0.070	129	0.44	0.090	19	0.65	0.034	50	0.81	0.102 ↑
North Macedonia	85	0.37	0.050 ↑	78	0.56	0.062	94	0.61	0.069	86	0.61	0.089	64	0.56	0.056	90	0.61	0.116
Armenia	86	0.37	0.050 ↑	69	0.61	0.063 ↑	106	0.53	0.066	37	0.78	0.074	118	0.42	0.090	106	0.55	0.124
Singapore	87	0.36	0.039	97	0.43	0.051	61	0.77	0.06	36	0.79	0.075	167	0.14	0.056	63	0.75	0.101
Malaysia	88	0.36	0.048 ↑	87	0.5	0.059 ↑	90	0.64	0.068 ↑	60	0.71	0.083	92	0.53	0.053	82	0.66	0.112
Bolivia	89	0.35	0.048	71	0.6	0.060	110	0.51	0.069	87	0.6	0.077	21	0.64	0.044 ↓	149	0.27	0.115 ↓
Sierra Leone	90	0.35	0.045	92	0.47	0.057	85	0.67	0.071	78	0.65	0.091	54	0.58	0.054	25	0.9	0.066 ↑

COUNTRY	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI)			ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI)			LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI)			EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI)			PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI)			DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI)		
	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–
BiH	91	0.34	0.045	88	0.5	0.059	93	0.62	0.067	74	0.66	0.082	93	0.52	0.055	96	0.59	0.124
Guyana	92	0.33	0.045	83	0.52	0.059	102	0.57	0.066	63	0.7	0.079	111	0.46	0.075	133	0.37	0.123
Benin	93	0.32	0.046	90	0.49	0.062	96	0.59	0.069	50	0.74	0.076	104	0.49	0.065	111	0.53	0.119
Hungary	94	0.32	0.039	99	0.42	0.052	86	0.67	0.066	84	0.62	0.088	84	0.54	0.059	142	0.3	0.104
Thailand	95	0.31	0.037	98	0.42	0.052	87	0.67	0.058	119	0.49	0.087	137	0.33	0.066	138	0.35	0.128
Nigeria	96	0.31	0.045	86	0.5	0.059	105	0.54	0.073	104	0.56	0.087	58	0.58	0.047	85	0.63	0.116
Somaliland	97	0.30	0.040	96	0.44	0.053	98	0.58	0.073	154	0.32	0.088	95	0.52	0.063	95	0.6	0.124
Tanzania	98	0.30	0.033	108	0.36	0.047	82	0.7	0.066	45	0.76	0.073	70	0.56	0.064	81	0.68	0.118
Indonesia	99	0.30	0.045	95	0.46	0.059	103	0.56	0.078	126	0.45	0.095	61	0.57	0.052	67	0.74	0.106
Philippines	100	0.29	0.037	104	0.39	0.047	91	0.64	0.075	156	0.31	0.091	68	0.56	0.053	109	0.54	0.134
Georgia	101	0.28	0.037	101	0.4	0.049	95	0.59	0.073	64	0.69	0.085	105	0.48	0.062	70	0.72	0.108
Jordan	102	0.27	0.024	123	0.28	0.024	66	0.76	0.064	102	0.56	0.095	143	0.31	0.072	68	0.74	0.114
Lebanon	103	0.27	0.039	100	0.42	0.052	104	0.54	0.075	113	0.5	0.093	119	0.42	0.071	60	0.76	0.110
Tunisia	104	0.26	0.036	102	0.4	0.048	101	0.57	0.074	54	0.73	0.078	100	0.51	0.064	62	0.75	0.104
India	105	0.26	0.034	106	0.38	0.046	99	0.58	0.071	138	0.41	0.091	83	0.54	0.052	100	0.57	0.119
Zanzibar	106	0.25	0.028	115	0.31	0.033	89	0.65	0.070	83	0.62	0.094	122	0.4	0.084	103	0.56	0.120
Morocco	107	0.25	0.023	129	0.26	0.024	78	0.72	0.064	101	0.56	0.094	125	0.39	0.073	46	0.81	0.093
Ukraine	108	0.24	0.036	105	0.39	0.048	108	0.52	0.073	70	0.68	0.089	81	0.55	0.059	64	0.75	0.106
Ivory Coast	109	0.23	0.035	103	0.39	0.052	114	0.47	0.073	116	0.49	0.095	63	0.57	0.057	116	0.5	0.134
Mexico	110	0.22	0.036	93	0.47	0.055	126	0.36	0.066	121	0.47	0.085	13	0.65	0.057	129	0.43	0.119
Iraq	111	0.22	0.033	107	0.37	0.046	112	0.48	0.072	139	0.41	0.092	103	0.49	0.060	89	0.62	0.128
Serbia	112	0.21	0.027	119	0.30	0.034	107	0.52	0.071	53	0.73	0.081	80	0.55	0.058	114	0.52	0.126
Madagascar	113	0.19	0.030	109	0.36	0.040	123	0.39	0.071	148	0.34	0.087	106	0.47	0.071	136	0.36	0.119
Gabon	114	0.18	0.023	117	0.3	0.031	119	0.43	0.059	80	0.64	0.093	35	0.62	0.061	98	0.58	0.127
Kyrgyzstan	115	0.18	0.027	114	0.31	0.037	121	0.42	0.068	88	0.59	0.091	129	0.37	0.072	139	0.32	0.112
Niger	116	0.18	0.020	137	0.23	0.018	109	0.51	0.063	82	0.64	0.074	73	0.56	0.068	58	0.77	0.102
Pakistan	117	0.18	0.028	118	0.30	0.033	120	0.42	0.076	165	0.26	0.077	107	0.47	0.062	126	0.43	0.137
Mozambique	118	0.17	0.025	124	0.28	0.027	115	0.45	0.070	118	0.49	0.078	88	0.53	0.059	125	0.44	0.124
Uganda	119	0.16	0.024	131	0.25	0.027	117	0.44	0.071	147	0.36	0.094	120	0.41	0.068	83	0.65	0.117
Angola	120	0.16	0.026	111	0.34	0.044	131	0.34	0.062	170	0.24	0.076	158	0.16	0.059	135	0.37	0.118
Togo	121	0.16	0.027	110	0.35	0.045	136	0.32	0.063	103	0.56	0.096	85	0.54	0.062	75	0.71	0.112
Mali	122	0.15	0.017	154	0.16	0.018	111	0.49	0.06	98	0.56	0.084	87	0.54	0.066	79	0.7	0.111
Zimbabwe	123	0.15	0.023	125	0.27	0.029	124	0.37	0.066	151	0.33	0.088	79	0.55	0.056	93	0.6	0.120
Hong Kong	124	0.14	0.017	158	0.15	0.020	113	0.47	0.061	47	0.75	0.077	170	0.13	0.055	161	0.16	0.084
Oman	125	0.14	0.019	149	0.17	0.017	116	0.44	0.068	99	0.56	0.080	130	0.37	0.069	155	0.21	0.094
Comoros	126	0.13	0.025	121	0.29	0.034	139	0.3	0.067	93	0.58	0.097	99	0.51	0.064	148	0.28	0.108
Kazakhstan	127	0.13	0.021	128	0.26	0.031	133	0.33	0.059	97	0.56	0.091	148	0.25	0.063	115	0.5	0.132
Somalia	128	0.13	0.02	153	0.16	0.019	122	0.41	0.071	157	0.3	0.088	145	0.29	0.061	86	0.63	0.133
Kuwait	129	0.13	0.015	163	0.14	0.012	118	0.43	0.054	89	0.59	0.082	161	0.15	0.056	92	0.6	0.142
Mauritania	130	0.13	0.025	112	0.33	0.043	146	0.25	0.062	159	0.29	0.082	89	0.53	0.076	104	0.56	0.136
Algeria	131	0.13	0.022	126	0.26	0.031	138	0.30	0.062	95	0.57	0.085	154	0.2	0.057	119	0.48	0.133
Djibouti	132	0.12	0.02	133	0.25	0.027	140	0.29	0.059	109	0.54	0.088	128	0.37	0.073	132	0.38	0.115
Bangladesh	133	0.12	0.017	140	0.2	0.019	130	0.34	0.057	150	0.33	0.088	147	0.28	0.066	118	0.48	0.128
DRC	134	0.12	0.023	116	0.31	0.035	149	0.23	0.061	146	0.36	0.102	101	0.49	0.060	108	0.54	0.146
Congo	135	0.12	0.022	134	0.24	0.025	141	0.29	0.070	163	0.26	0.083	91	0.53	0.063	124	0.45	0.122
Egypt	136	0.12	0.018	143	0.19	0.017	129	0.34	0.063	155	0.31	0.086	152	0.21	0.053	137	0.36	0.118
Cameroon	137	0.11	0.019	127	0.26	0.025	144	0.27	0.056	120	0.48	0.088	153	0.2	0.063	154	0.22	0.102
Palestine/West Bank	138	0.11	0.019	139	0.21	0.019	137	0.31	0.064	100	0.56	0.095	114	0.44	0.092	159	0.17	0.106
Laos	139	0.11	0.020	164	0.14	0.014	125	0.36	0.075	144	0.38	0.100	124	0.4	0.052	158	0.18	0.099
Türkiye	140	0.11	0.020	122	0.29	0.032	151	0.23	0.056	110	0.54	0.091	121	0.4	0.064	164	0.13	0.073
Burkina Faso	141	0.10	0.018	165	0.13	0.017	128	0.34	0.067	108	0.54	0.086	134	0.34	0.091	163	0.14	0.080
Iran	142	0.10	0.018	156	0.16	0.017	135	0.32	0.062	115	0.5	0.092	173	0.1	0.05	146	0.28	0.121
CAR	143	0.10	0.022	120	0.29	0.031	153	0.21	0.061	169	0.24	0.078	146	0.29	0.065	144	0.29	0.126
Vietnam	144	0.10	0.019	161	0.15	0.018	132	0.33	0.069	107	0.55	0.097	74	0.56	0.056	88	0.62	0.120
Ethiopia	145	0.10	0.020	130	0.26	0.031	150	0.23	0.056	135	0.43	0.094	139	0.32	0.067	112	0.52	0.127
Haiti	146	0.10	0.016	136	0.24	0.017	148	0.24	0.051	176	0.17	0.069	141	0.31	0.060	102	0.56	0.125
Libya	147	0.10	0.020	141	0.19	0.019	142	0.28	0.068	145	0.36	0.089	149	0.24	0.066	35	0.84	0.093
Eswatini	148	0.10	0.020	169	0.13	0.016	134	0.32	0.074	167	0.25	0.081	131	0.37	0.067	156	0.2	0.099
Guinea	149	0.10	0.020	144	0.19	0.019	143	0.27	0.067	123	0.46	0.090	132	0.36	0.078	150	0.27	0.118
Guinea-Bissau	150	0.10	0.016	132	0.25	0.019	152	0.22	0.051	122	0.47	0.089	136	0.33	0.057	140	0.32	0.117
Qatar	151	0.09	0.016	178	0.03	0.005	127	0.35	0.065	142	0.39	0.067	171	0.13	0.044	121	0.47	0.134
Rwanda	152	0.09	0.020	142	0.19	0.020	147	0.25	0.066	112	0.51	0.100	127	0.39	0.092	101	0.57	0.123
El Salvador	153	0.09	0.017	113	0.32	0.039	163	0.14	0.041	168	0.25	0.078	133	0.35	0.091	151	0.25	0.112
Uzbekistan	154	0.08	0.014	138	0.22	0.022	156	0.19	0.042	130	0.44	0.092	155	0.2	0.056	123	0.45	0.122
UAE	155	0.08	0.016	172	0.1	0.017	145	0.26	0.058	128	0.44	0.073	176	0.09	0.056	143	0.29	0.116
South Sudan	156	0.06	0.016	166	0.13	0.013	154	0.2	0.058	178	0.08	0.048	168	0.14	0.066	170	0.1	0.076
Bahrain	157	0.06	0.013	162	0.14	0.017	155	0.19	0.047	133	0.43	0.074	160	0.16	0.069	157	0.18	0.083
Chad	158	0.06	0.014	135	0.24	0.026	169	0.11	0.042	174	0.18	0.071	135	0.34	0.068	141	0.32	0.117
Burundi	159	0.06	0.014	145	0.18	0.017	160	0.15	0.046	161	0.28	0.081	115	0.44	0.074	160	0.17	0.092
Palestine/Gaza	160	0.06	0.015	168	0.13	0.018	158	0.18	0.055	141	0.4	0.091	151	0.22	0.082	165	0.13	0.084
Cuba	161	0.06	0.012	148	0.18	0.015	162	0.15	0.040	52	0.74	0.077	169	0.13	0.047	145	0.29	0.111
Russia	162	0.06	0.011	152	0.17	0.013	161	0.15	0.039	136	0.41	0.084	126	0.39	0.057	162	0.16	0.084
Syria	163	0.05	0.014	170	0.13	0.013	159	0.17	0.051	132	0.43	0.097	157	0.18	0.068	97	0.59	0.136
Azerbaijan	164	0.05	0.011	151	0.17	0.014	165	0.13	0.037	143	0.39	0.082	175	0.10	0.036	172	0.07	0.054
Cambodia	165	0.05	0.011	146	0.18	0.015	167	0.12	0.038	171	0.23	0.075	162	0.15	0.066	153	0.22	0.091
Equatorial Guinea	166	0.05	0.012	150	0.17	0.014	168	0.11	0.041	152	0.33	0.084	177	0.09	0.043	169	0.11	0.064
Saudi Arabia	167	0.05	0.013	179	0.02	0.006	157	0.18	0.051	127	0.45	0.084	174	0.10	0.056	147	0.28	0.117
Tajikistan	168	0.04	0.011	157	0.16	0.012	170	0.11	0.039	175	0.17	0.066	159	0.16	0.056	166	0.12	0.067
Yemen	169	0.04	0.012	171	0.13	0.015	166	0.12	0.043	177	0.09	0.045	150	0.23	0.062	168	0.11	0.070
Venezuela	170	0.04	0.009	147	0.18	0.014	172	0.09	0.030	172	0.22	0.084	110	0.46	0.063	178	0.02	0.023
China	171	0.04	0.011	175	0.07	0.004	164	0.14	0.041	160	0.29	0.081	172	0.12	0.055	152	0.23	0.103
Belarus	172	0.04	0.009	155	0.16	0.014	173	0.09	0.030	44	0.77	0.074	165	0.14	0.047	173	0.06	0.053
Sudan	173	0.03	0.010	167	0.13	0.016	171	0.09	0.035	166	0.25	0.085	163	0.15	0.064	175	0.04	0.046
Turkmenistan	174	0.03	0.009	160	0.15	0.009	174	0.08	0.032	162	0.27	0.075	178	0.08	0.041	174	0.06	0.048
Nicaragua	175	0.02	0.005	159	0.15	0.010	178	0.02	0.016	164	0.26	0.078	142	0.31	0.049	179	0.02	0.020
Afghanistan	176	0.02	0.008	176	0.07	0.003	175	0.06	0.032	179	0.05	0.032	156	0.18	0.026	176	0.03	0.036
Myanmar	177	0.01	0.005	174	0.08	0.007	176	0.04	0.019	173	0.2	0.076	166	0.14	0.079	167	0.12	0.070
North Korea	178	0.01	0.007	173	0.08	0.010	177	0.03	0.027	149	0.34	0.085	164	0.15	0.034	177	0.02	0.024
Eritrea	179	0.01	0.003	177	0.07	0.003	179	0.02	0.013	137	0.41	0.103	179	0.02	0.019	171	0.08	0.053

demscore

50+
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A fully normalized, joint PostgreSQL database, sophisticated programming, and a web-based interface enable the selection of variables from all six partnering data infrastructures. This results in a custom-designed dataset and codebook generated automatically in a matter of seconds, making Demscore an enormously time-efficient resource compared to merging several datasets manually.

Explore our Thematic Datasets

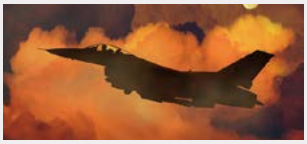
Demscore's Thematic Datasets assemble a wide range of variables from datasets across all partnering Modules related to a selected topic.



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Publications from the V-Dem Team

Featured Publication

Fifty years of the third wave(s): from democratization to autocratization
Staffan I. Lindberg
2026 | Democratization, 1–24.
▶ The article takes stock of the 50 years of the "third wave of democratization" that transformed many dictatorships into democracies. Between 1970 and 2024, 149 democra tization episodes occurred in 110 nondemocratic countries. Yet, over the past 25 years, it came to overlap with a growing "third wave of autocratization" with a tally of 105 autocratization episodes in 75 countries. This current wave of autocratization is unprecedented in length, scope, and magnitude – and shows no sign of cresting.

Publications 2025

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