

DEMOCRACY REPORT 2024

Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot



V-Dem is a unique approach to measuring democracy – historical, multidimensional, nuanced, and disaggregated – employing state-of-the-art methodology.

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) produces the largest global dataset on democracy with over 31 million data points for 202 countries from 1789 to 2023. Involving over 4,200 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures over 600 different attributes of democracy.

We gratefully acknowledge our funders' support over the years. To learn more about our funders, please visit: <https://v-dem.net/about/funders/>

The Democracy Report is a signature publication of the V-Dem Institute and the views and opinions expressed herein do not reflect an official position of the larger V-Dem Project or the V-Dem Steering Committee.



Produced by the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg

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Cover Photo: A woman placing her vote into a ballot box at a polling station on election day in Funafuti, the capital of the south Pacific nation of Tuvalu, Jan 25, 2024. (Sam Pedro/AFP via Getty Images)

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V-Dem in Numbers

WHERE IS V-DEM DATA USED?



The V-Dem dataset has been downloaded by users **360,000 times** in **200+ countries** since 2016.



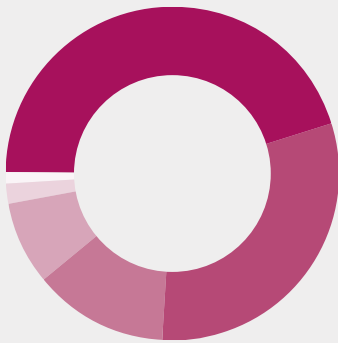
23 million graphs created using the online tools by users in **200+ countries** since 2016.



Global Standards, Local Knowledge: more than 63% of the data is provided by local experts born in/residing in the country they are coding.

DATASET DOWNLOADS (2016–2023)

360,000



- Europe, 45%
- North America, 30%
- Asia, 13%
- Latin America, 8%
- Africa, 3%
- Oceania, 1%

V-DEM IS AN INTERNATIONAL EFFORT COMPRISED OF

18

PERSONNEL AT THE V-DEM INSTITUTE

33

REGIONAL MANAGERS

23

PROJECT MANAGERS

134

COUNTRY COORDINATORS

5

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

4,200+

COUNTRY EXPERTS

ALL WORKING TOGETHER TO PRODUCE

31,000,000

DATA POINTS IN THE V14 DATASET

EXPERT CODERS BORN IN 185 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

4,200+



Average years spent in country coded:
39



Percentage of coders with a PhD:
73%



Mean Age:
47 years



Gender:
73% Male, 27% Female

V-DEM PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS TO ACADEMIC AND POLICY COMMUNITIES

8

DEMOCRACY REPORTS

39

POLICY BRIEFS

870+

PRESENTATIONS across the world by V-Dem scholars since 2007

180

JOURNAL ARTICLES

147

WORKING PAPERS

120+

VISITING SCHOLARS presented at the V-Dem Institute since 2014

A Word from the Team

WE ARE PLEASED TO PRESENT the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute's 8th annual *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot*. The V-Dem Institute is hosted by the Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg. It serves as the headquarters for the international V-Dem project with the main responsibility of running the annual data collection, but also pursues several independent projects.

THE DEMOCRACY REPORT is an endeavor by the Institute and only the author group at the Institute is responsible for its contents. We hope that you will find the *Democracy Report 2024* useful. Later this year, both Spanish and Portuguese editions are planned to be released, thanks to Professor David Altman, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the Regional Center for Latin America, and Professor Tiago Fernandes, University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE) and the Regional Center for Southern Europe.

THE 2024 REPORT shows that autocratization continues to be the dominant trend, as we have reported in previous Democracy Reports. New for this year is a systematic look at more fine-grained regime changes – countries that are experiencing democratic declines despite having recently improved (what we call Bell-turns), and inversely countries that are improving despite having recently been in a period of decline (what we call U-turns). This volatility is often masked when simply taking the difference between countries' present democracy levels and ten years ago, as done in previous Democracy Reports. Yet, countries' democratic volatility is of substantial interest. Not least, examples of countries that have stopped and reversed autocratization are critical for pro-democratic actors to learn from. Likewise, examples of countries where democratization has in short order been reversed are tales of caution in how democratization can fail to take a permanent foothold. We think this new analysis provides a more nuanced depiction of trends of regime change and informs the reader on how both democratization and autocratization can be stopped and reversed.

SINCE 2019, the V-Dem Institute has also been the host of the newly established (inter)national infrastructure DEMSCORE, which brings together some of the world's leading research infrastructures and contextual databases. More information can be found at <https://www.demscore.se>. Additionally, over the past year, V-Dem has continued to expand on existing collaborations and entered new ones.

VARIETIES OF DEMOCRACY is an international collaboration involving more than 4,200 scholars from over 180 countries. Including the tremendous support and contributions of Country Experts, Country Coordinators, Regional Managers, and Project Managers. Without all of you, V-Dem would not be possible. The new version 14 of the V-Dem dataset contains 31 million data points and covers 202 countries from 1789 to 2023. We invite you to visit <https://www.v-dem.net>, download the data, try out the innovative graphing tools, and use the additional resources such as policy briefs, country- and thematic reports, as well as our academic working paper series.

The V-Dem Institute Team



Back row: Linnea Fox, Oskar Rydén, Melina Liethmann, Valeriya Mechkova, Fabio Angiolillo. **Front row:** Hennie Refstad Steinveg, Sara Haug Andersson, Martin Lundstedt, Marina Nord, Staffan I Lindberg, Anna Good God, Cecilia Borella, Natalia Natsika. **Not pictured:** Susanna Burmeister, Lisa Gastaldi, Sandra Grahn, Evie Papada, Josefine Pernes, and Maria Verkhovtseva.

The Democracy Report 2024 will soon be available in Spanish and Portuguese

Spanish Version

*Reporte de la democracia:
Democracia ganando y perdiendo
en las urnas*

Translation and Production by V-Dem Regional Center in Latin America, led by Professor David Altman.

Portuguese Version:

*Relatório da democracia:
A Democracia a ganhar e a perder
nas urnas*

Translation and Production by V-Dem Regional Center in Southern Europe, led by Associate Professor Tiago Fernandes.

Executive Summary

1. Democracy in the World

- The level of democracy enjoyed by the average person in the world in 2023 is down to 1985-levels; by country-based averages, it is back to 1998.
- Since 2009 – almost 15 years in a row – the share of the world’s population living in autocratizing countries has overshadowed the share living in democratizing countries.
- The decline is stark in Eastern Europe and South and Central Asia.
- Latin America and the Caribbean goes against the global trend: Democracy levels increase, and large countries are more democratic than smaller ones.

Autocracies and Democracies

- The world is almost evenly divided between 91 democracies and 88 autocracies.
- But 71% of the world’s population – 5.7 billion people – live in autocracies – an increase from 48% ten years ago.
- Electoral autocracies have by far the most people – 44% of the world’s population, or 3.5 billion people.
- 29% of the world’s population – 2.3 billion people – live in liberal and electoral democracies.
- Israel falls out of the liberal democracy category for the first time in over 50 years.

Freedom of Expression and Elections Getting Worse

- Almost all components of democracy are getting worse in more countries than they are getting better, compared to ten years ago.
- Freedom of expression remains the worst affected component of democracy and is worsening in 35 countries in 2023.
- Clean elections is now the second – deteriorating in 23 countries and improving in 12. This core institution of democracy used to be relatively unaffected.
- Freedom of association, including civil society, is the third most deteriorating component – 20 countries are restricting this right while only 3 are expanding it.

COUNTRIES HOLDING ELECTIONS IN 2024 THAT ARE DECLINING OR IMPROVING ON DEMOCRACY LEVELS



2. Trends of Regime Change

- A total of 60 countries are in episodes of regime transformation – autocratizing or democratizing.
- The wave of autocratization is notable. Autocratization is ongoing in 42 countries, home to 2.8 billion people, or 35% of the world’s population. India, with 18% of the world’s population, accounts for about half of the population living in autocratizing countries.
- There may be signs that the autocratization wave is slowing down but one should be cautious with that interpretation.
- Democratization is taking place in 18 countries, harboring only 400 million people, or 5% of the world’s population. Brazil makes up more than half of this, with its 216 million inhabitants.

3. Autocratizing Countries

- 42 countries are currently in ongoing episodes of autocratization.
- 28 of the 42 autocratizers were democracies at the start of their episode. Of these 28 only about half, or 15, remain democracies in 2023.
- Of the 42 ongoing episodes, 23 are “stand-alone” processes and 19 are “bell-turns” where democratization failed and turned into autocratization.
- 8 of the top 10 “stand-alone” autocratizers were liberal or electoral democracies. In 2023, none are liberal democracies, and only 2 can be considered electoral democracies.
- 8 of the top 10 “bell-turn” autocratizers were democracies at some point after democratization. Only 3 remain democracies after autocratization set in, illustrating that democratization processes are fragile and are often reverted.
- Notably, elections are now increasingly undermined. EMB autonomy is weakening substantially in 22 of the 42 autocratizing countries.

4. Democratizing Countries

- 7 out of 9 “stand-alone” democratizers have transitioned away from autocracy.
- The 9 “stand-alone” democratizers harbor only 30 million people, and 5 of the 9 are island states. These facts reflect the smaller impact of current democratization in the world.
- 3 “U-turn” democratizers have restored their initial levels of democracy, but the other 6 are still at lower levels than at the beginning of the episode.
- Freedom of expression and the media are typical areas of improvement – increasing substantially in more than half of all democratizing countries.

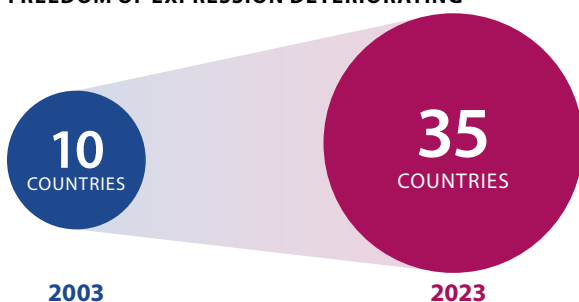
5. Windows to the Future

- 25 countries are “near misses” of autocratization, meaning that they show signs of deterioration. If developments continue, several could join the list of autocratizers in the near future.
- 9 countries are “near misses” of democratization and thus potential upcoming “bright spots”.
- 60 countries are holding national elections this year. Of these, 31 are worsening on their democracy levels, while only 3 are improving.
- Elections are “critical events” that can either trigger democratization, enable autocratization, or aid stabilization of autocratic regimes.

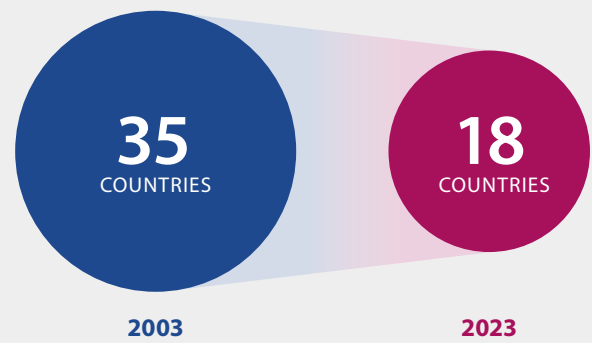
QUALITY OF ELECTIONS DETERIORATING



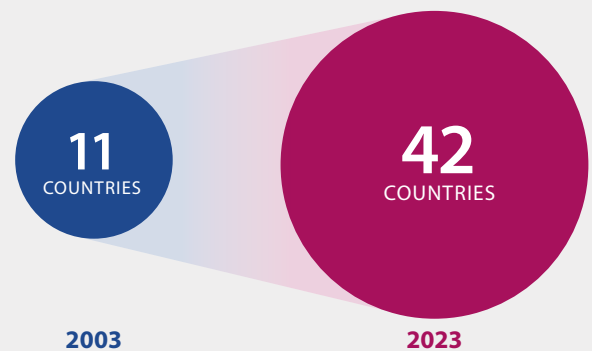
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DETERIORATING



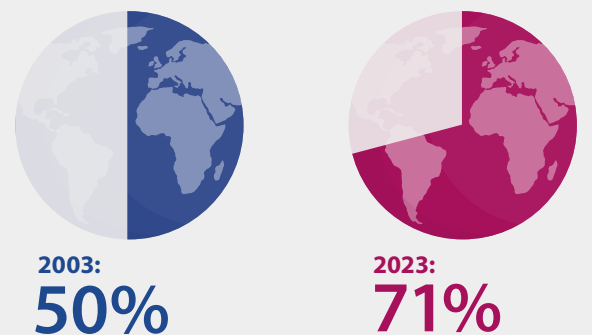
NUMBER OF COUNTRIES DEMOCRATIZING



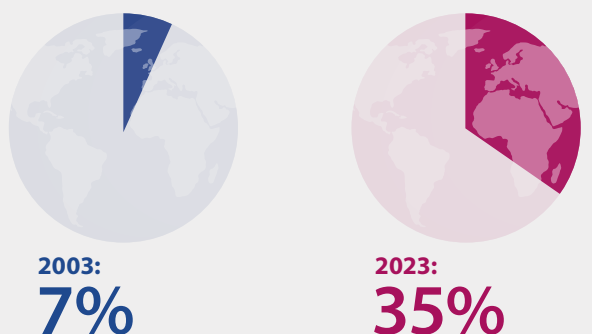
NUMBER OF COUNTRIES AUTOCRATIZING



SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRACIES



SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES





Aerial view of a pedestrian bridge that reads "Democracy" in downtown Sao Paulo, Brazil. (Nelson Almeida/AFP via Getty Images)

1 | Democracy in the World

- **The level of democracy enjoyed by the average person in the world in 2023 is down to 1985-levels; by country-based averages, it is back to 1998.**
- **Since 2009 – almost 15 years in a row – the share of the world’s population living in autocratizing countries has overshadowed the share living in democratizing countries.**
- **The decline is stark in Eastern Europe and South and Central Asia.**
- **Latin America and the Caribbean goes against the global trend: Democracy levels increase, and large countries are more democratic than smaller ones.**

The world map in Figure 1 shows the state of democracy in 2023 based on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI).¹ Democracy is more prevalent in Western Europe and North America, as well as in parts of East Asia and the Pacific, and South America. More autocratic countries are concentrated in Central America, East Asia, South and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Democracy for the Average Person in the World is Back to 1985

Democracy across the world is in decline. All metrics used below in Figure 2 show a rollback of democratic rights and institutions: the country-based averages (panel A), the population-weighted (panel B), the territory-weighted (panel C), and the GDP-weighted averages (panel D).

The level of democracy in 2023 was last seen in 1998 by **country-based averages** (red line in panel A). Yet, this decline is within

Box 1. Democracy

Is it possible to measure democracy? V-Dem is a unique approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy distinguishing between multiple core principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. The main V-Dem dataset includes over 60 indices and 500 indicators. On the website, you also find other datasets from associated projects such as the Varieties of Parties (V-Party), the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT), the Digital Society Project (DSP), and the Varieties of Indoctrination (V-Indoc).

The V-Dem Institute’s Democracy Report centers on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI). It combines the “core” institutions of electoral democracy with the liberal dimension: constraints on the executive by the legislature and the judiciary, and the rule of law ensuring respect for civil liberties.

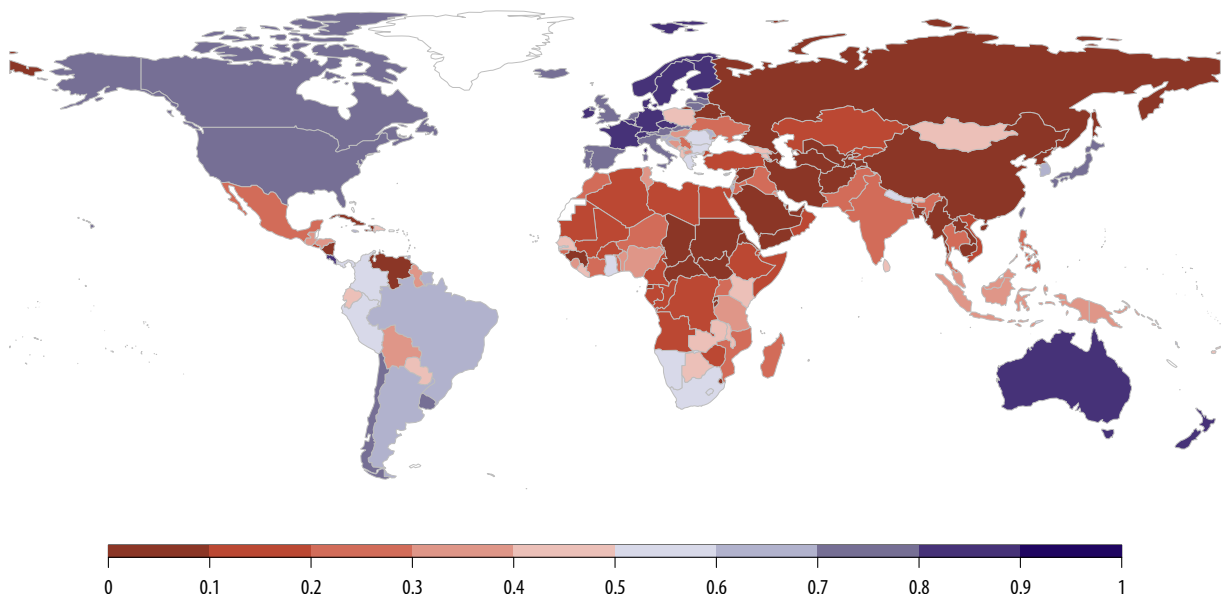
In the Democracy Report, we often weigh levels of democracy by population size (as different from simple averages across number of countries). This is because democracy means rule by and for the people. How many people in the world enjoy democratic freedoms and rights is therefore critical when describing trends.

Visit the website and explore the data, for example, by using our online graphing tools: <https://v-dem.net>

the confidence intervals, meaning that we cannot be certain to what extent a change has occurred. One should therefore be cautious in drawing too strong conclusions.

The level of democracy enjoyed by the average person worldwide in 2023 is down to levels last seen in 1985 – almost 40 years ago. The

FIGURE 1. STATE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY (LDI), 2023



¹ The Democracy Report 2024 is based on V-Dem dataset v14. With each annual update, V-Dem improves the quality of the data and engages a large number of experts, which may lead 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, including the quality of elections, individual rights, as well as freedoms of expression, the media, and association. The Liberal Component Index (LCI) captures the liberal aspects including checks and balances on the executive, respect for civil liberties, the rule of law, and the independence of the legislature and the judiciary. Dahl, R.A. 1971. Polyarchy: participation and opposition. New Haven: Yale University Press.

red line in panel B traces the 2023 **population-weighted level** of democracy back in time to show this. To put this into perspective, 1985 marked the end of the military dictatorships in Brazil and Uruguay, as the third wave of *democratization* was beginning to gain momentum. Mikhail Gorbachev emerged as the leader of the Soviet Union and met with United States President Ronald Reagan for the first time at the Geneva Summit as an early sign to the coming end of the Cold War.

By **territory-weighted averages**, the level of democracy is now back to the levels last seen in 1987 – the year of the crisis between India and Pakistan followed by the 1987 Pakistan atomic alert, which had a major impact on the region.

The level of **democracy measured by the relative size of the economy** stands out, marking the most dramatic change. The world is already below where it was in 1973 – which was *before* the start of the third wave of *democratization* beginning with Portugal's carnation revolution in 1974.

Why are there such stark differences between the country-based and other weighted averages? It is quite simple. Large countries with big populations and large economies such as India, Mexico, The Philippines, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, and Türkiye have declined significantly on democracy. Countries that are advancing are typically small countries with lesser populations such as The Seychelles, Timor-Leste, and Lesotho. Brazil joined the advanced group this year leading to a slight change in the overall picture.

Since 2009 – almost 15 years in a row – the share of the world's population living in autocratizing countries has overshadowed the share living in democratizing countries. Many autocratizing countries are also economic and military regional and global powers.

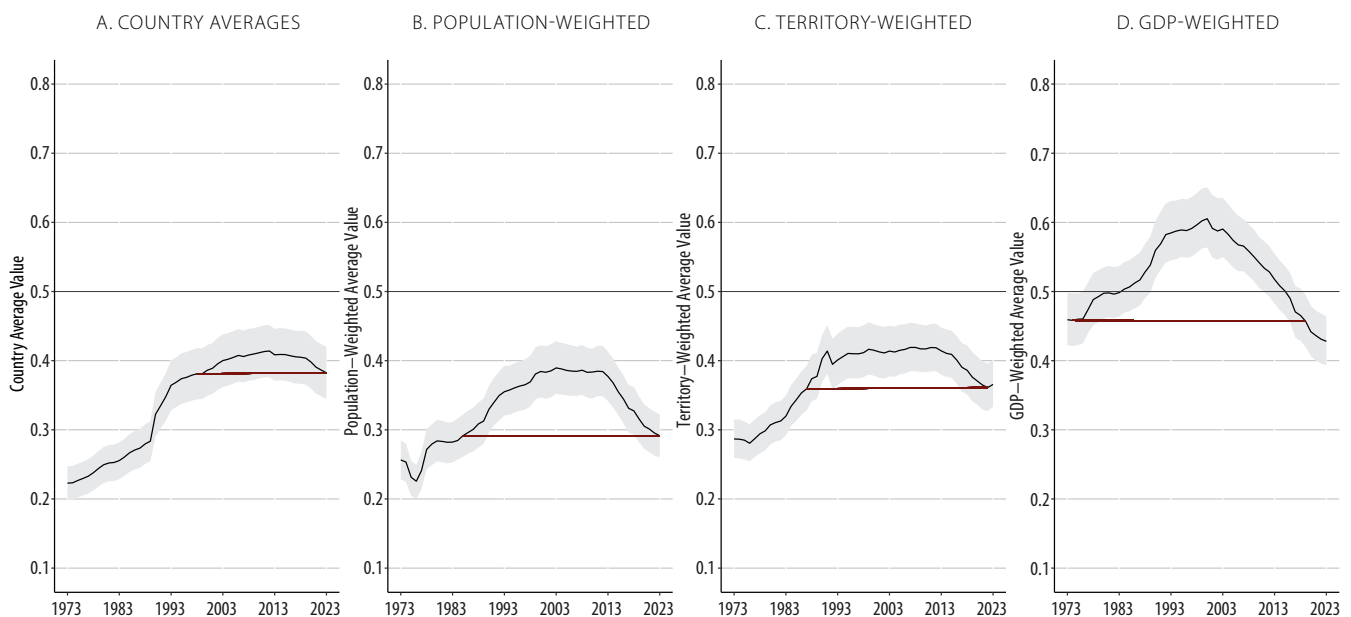
Ignoring the role of population size and economic size of countries in determining the future of global democracy would be naïve. There is an abundance of research on the decisive role of global and regional powers for peace and security, human rights, and democratic freedoms. We analyzed shifts in the balance of economic power between democracies and autocracies in Section 5 of *Democracy Report 2023*.

LATIN AMERICA STANDS OUT

In sharp contrast to all other regions of the world, the democracy enjoyed by the average person in Latin America and the Caribbean increased in the past year. This is primarily a result of recent improvements in Brazil, the most populated country in the region with 216 million citizens. Smaller countries like Bolivia and Honduras also contribute to this change of direction. Yet, the left panel in Figure 3 portrays a different picture based on country-averages. By this measure, the trend for democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean is leveling out. The region stands out compared to the rest of the world in that a large country is democratizing while more of the smaller countries are autocratizing. It is also noticeable that the population-weighted level has been a lot higher than the country-based for most of the time. In other words, large countries in Latin America are on average more democratic than the smaller ones and have been so for quite some time.

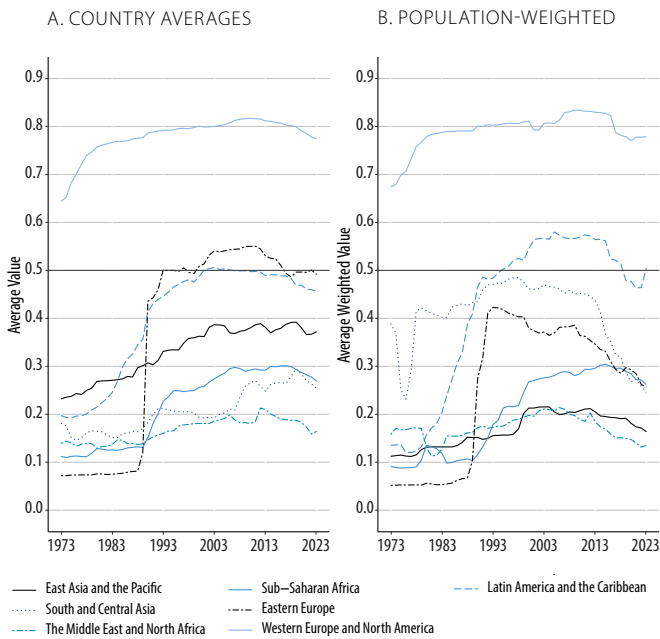
Democracy declines the most in **Eastern Europe** when going by population-weighted averages (Figure 3, right panel). The level of democracy enjoyed by the average person in Eastern Europe has gradually declined to levels last recorded in 1990, *before* the collapse of the Soviet Union. Belarus and Russia are two prominent examples of post-Soviet consolidation of autocracy in the region and their large populations weigh down the average. Hungary and Serbia are also driving this trend in recent years, as well as Croatia and Romania. The country-based averages in the right panel show a different picture demonstrating that democracy was declining between 2010 and 2018 but has stayed relatively stable since then. This in part reflects recent improvements in less populated countries, such as Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. The overall difference between the population-weighted and the country-based measures is stark. In Eastern Europe, the large and populous countries are on average much more autocratic than the smaller ones – the exact opposite to Latin America.

FIGURE 2. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY BY COUNTRY AVERAGES, POPULATION, TERRITORY, AND GDP WEIGHTS, 1973–2023



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 levels of democracy weighted by population, territory, and GDP, respectively. The data for the latter three figures are drawn from the World Bank and Fariss et al. (2021), both included in the v14 of the V-Dem dataset.

FIGURE 3. REGIONAL LEVELS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY, 1973–2023



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 v14 of the V-Dem dataset.

The level of democracy is in steep decline also in **South and Central Asia**, especially by the population-weighted measure. The level of liberal democracy enjoyed by the average human in the region is now down to levels last seen in 1975 - almost half a century ago. That was when the Vietnam War ended and when Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in India. The population-weighted level of democracy is affected by recent deteriorations of democracy in India with 1.4 billion citizens. Going by country-based averages (Figure 3, left panel), the decline is less marked. By 2023, the region's level of democracy by population-weighted measure is now roughly at the same level as by country averages: During the last decades, smaller countries were gradually improving, while larger countries gradually declining on their democracy levels.

Democracy is now at levels equivalent to around the year 2000 in **Sub-Saharan Africa** and there are no stark differences between the population-weighted and country-based measures of democracy, as shown in Figure 3. There were deteriorations occurring in the region during the last five years, in part due to *coups d'état* in Gabon and Niger in 2023 and military takeovers in five other countries in the region since 2020 – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Sudan, and Chad.

Levels of democracy in **East Asia and the Pacific**, **The Middle East and North Africa**, and **Western Europe and North America** remain relatively stable during the last two years, but the declines on the population-weighted measures over the past decade or so, are noticeable. Looking at it from the perspective of country-based averages, East Asia and the Pacific has fluctuated around the same level of democracy over the past two decades. The Middle East and North Africa has gradually declined since the Arab Spring. Western Europe and North America has equally been on a slow but steady decline since around 2010.

Autocracies and Democracies

- The world is almost evenly divided between 91 democracies and 88 autocracies.
- But 71% of the world's population – 5.7 billion people – live in autocracies – an increase from 48% ten years ago.
- Electoral autocracies have by far the most people – 44% of the world's population, or 3.5 billion people.
- 29% of the world's population – 2.3 billion people – live in liberal and electoral democracies.
- Israel falls out of the liberal democracy category for the first time in over 50 years.

By our best estimate using the *Regimes of the World* (RoW) measure,² the world is almost evenly divided between 91 **democracies** (liberal and electoral) and 88 **autocracies** (electoral and closed) at the end of 2023 – very similar to our reporting in the last few years. Figure 4 (left panel) provides the exact count by regime category over the past 50 years using the RoW measure (see Box 2 for details). RoW is based on the same V-Dem data that goes into the LDI and this fourfold categorization captures some broader global trends in terms of autocracy and democracy.

Naturally, categorical classifications like the RoW measure sacrifice some nuances and risk misclassifying countries when the underlying data puts them at, or very close to, thresholds. Some uncertainty therefore remains about regimes that are close to the threshold between democracy and autocracy. Figure 4 (right panel) shows that there are 18 countries that could be misclassified due to such measurement uncertainty as they are either in the “lower bound” of electoral democracies (N=13) or in the “upper bound” of electoral autocracies (N=5).³ We treat them as “grey zone” regimes.

Taking this uncertainty into account, we are confident that there are at least 78 democracies and 83 autocracies in the world, while we list

FIGURE 4. REGIME TYPES BY NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, 1973–2023

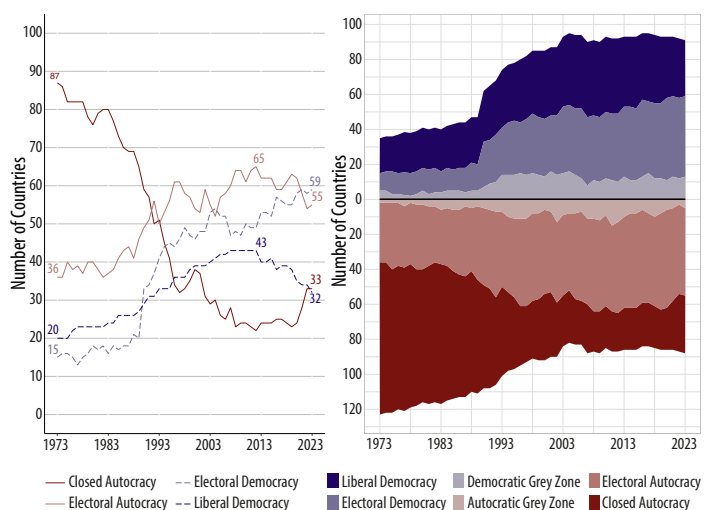


Figure 4 plots the number of countries (left panel) by regime type. The right panel takes into account measurement uncertainty, highlighting the number of “grey zone” countries above or below the line, distinguishing between democracies and autocracies. The “grey zone” estimates are based on the version of the RoW measure that includes uncertainty (v2x_regime_amb in the V-Dem codebook, v14).

2 Lüthmann, A. et al. 2018. “Regimes of the world (RoW).” *Politics and Governance* 6(1).

3 There is a variant of the RoW-measure that models uncertainty and identifies countries close to thresholds, see the variable v2x_regime_amb in the V-Dem codebook, v14.

Box 2. Regimes of the World – Democratization and Autocratization

Democratization means that a country is making moves towards more democracy, regardless of starting point. **Autocratization** is the opposite (see Figure 1).

Democratization can start in an autocracy (liberalization) or a democracy (deepening), and inversely, autocratization in a democracy (backsliding) or an autocracy (regression).

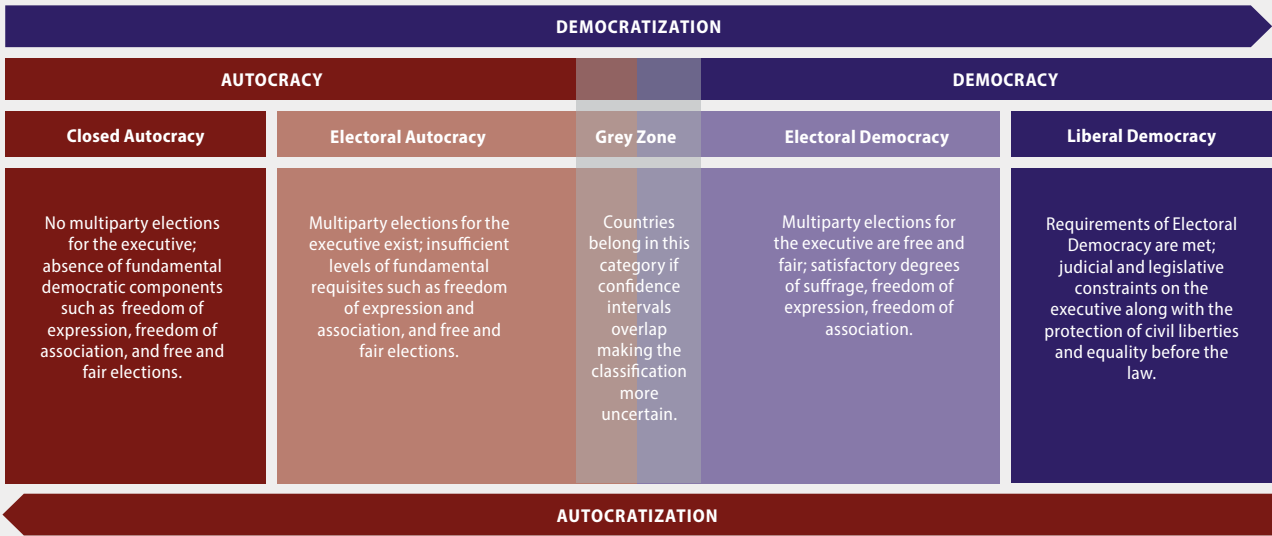
We distinguish between four **types of regimes**: Closed and Electoral Autocracies, and Electoral and Liberal Democracies. For this, we use the *Regimes of the World (RoW)* measure (v2x_regime). There is also a version

of the RoW measure taking uncertainty into account (v2x_regime_amb). We use this to show “grey zone” cases where confidence intervals in the data overlap making the classification more uncertain. They are classified as either upper bound electoral autocracies (“EA+”) or as lower bound electoral democracies (“ED-”).

RoW builds on V-Dem data as well as V-Dem’s liberal and electoral democracy indices but is not officially endorsed by the V-Dem Steering Committee.

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

FIGURE 1. REGIMES AND REGIME CHANGE



grey zone regimes in Table 1, along with a more nuanced categorization of all countries. Thus, the number of democracies could range from 78 to 96, with 91 being our best estimate, while the number of autocracies might range from 82 to 101 countries, with 88 being our best estimate.

The left panel of Figure 4 shows that the number of **liberal democracies** declines from a peak of 43 in 2007–2012 to 32 in 2023. By contrast, the number of closed autocracies is going up from a low of 22 in 2012 to 33 in 2022–2023. The world now harbors more closed autocracies than liberal democracies. The last time this was the case in 1995.

Six countries descended into **closed autocracies** in just the last two years: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Haiti, and Turkmenistan. This is another reminder of how the present global wave of autocratization is affecting autocracies. It is not only, or perhaps not even mainly, about “democratic backsliding.” A significant portion of changes for the worse in the world comes from autocracies becoming more autocratic.

The number of **electoral autocracies** has been growing markedly in numbers over the past 50 years, from 36 in 1973 to peak at 65 in 2012, and we count 55 in 2023. Much of this upward trend is explained by many closed autocracies liberalizing in the 1980s and 1990s and starting to hold multiparty elections. Some became democracies, but many stalled as electoral autocracies, for example, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Mozambique, Pakistan, and Uganda.

For the past 30 years, electoral autocracy has dominated as the most common regime type in the world. We now see a possible shift.

FIGURE 5. REGIME TYPES BY WORLD POPULATION, 1973–2023

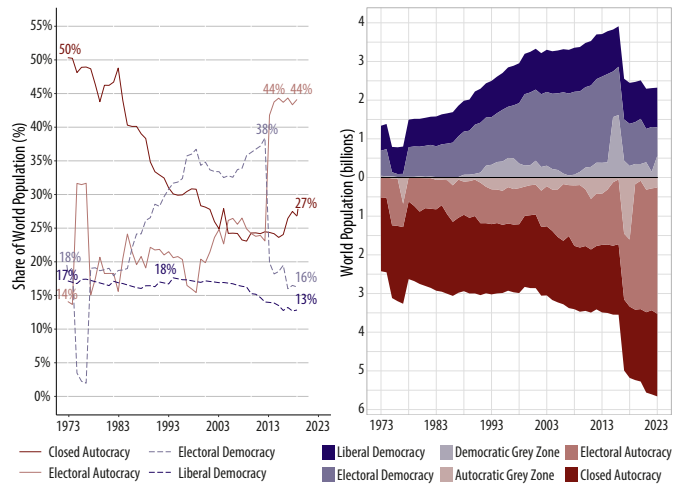


Figure 5 plots the share of the world’s population (left panel) by regime type. The right panel takes into account measurement uncertainty, highlighting the number of “grey zone” countries above or below the line, distinguishing between democracies and autocracies.

Electoral democracies not only outnumber electoral autocracies making it the most common regime type for the third year in a row, but in 2023, their numbers also repeated the record of 59 set in 2021. While there are not many positive signs for democracy in the world today, this may be one to take note of. The only fly in the ointment



is that this recent prominence of electoral democracies is partly a consequence of liberal democracies backsliding.

MOST PEOPLE LIVE IN AUTOCRACIES

According to the RoW classification drawing on V-Dem data, 71% of the world's population – 5.7 billion people – live in **electoral or closed autocracies** in 2023.⁴ That is an increase from 48% of the world population ten years ago. This fact captured in Figure 5 (left panel), is another reminder of how the world is affected by the unfolding wave of autocratization.

A plurality – 44% of the world's population, or 3.5 billion people – reside in **electoral autocracies**, which include populous countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia, The Philippines, and Türkiye.

Closed autocracies with sizeable populations include China, Iran, Myanmar, and Vietnam. This regime type accounts for 27% of the world's population, or 2.2 billion people.

By contrast and despite being the most common regime type in the world, 59 **electoral democracies** host only 16% of the world's population. Some of the more populous countries in this category include Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa.

The 32 **liberal democracies** are home to 13% of the world's population. The United States of America is by far the biggest liberal democracy, making up 4% of the world's population and about a third of the total population residing in liberal democracies.

Taking uncertainty into account, countries in the "grey zone" that could be misclassified have a population share of 10% – 3% in electoral autocracies in the "upper bound," and 7% in electoral democracies in the "lower bound." This means that if all of them are in fact misclassified, the share of the world's population living in autocracies could be as high as 78% or as low as 68%.

Box 3. Why Population-Weighted Measures?

Since democracy is rule by the people, it matters how many people enjoy democratic rights and freedoms around the world. The population-weighted metric is therefore more indicative of 'how much' of the world lives in a democracy than simple averages across countries. Country-averages give the same weight to advances in a small country like the Seychelles (one of the top performers) as to declines in a huge country like India (one of the worst autocratizers lately). When speaking about how much of the world is undergoing a democratic decline, we do not think that advances in a small country compensate for declines in a large one. That is why we focus more on population-weighted metrics while also reporting the averages that give equal weight to all countries.

⁴ Percentages are rounded throughout the Report. The 71% mentioned here builds aggregating rounded figures for liberal and electoral autocracies in Figure 4. Population data come from the World Bank included in v14 of the V-Dem dataset.

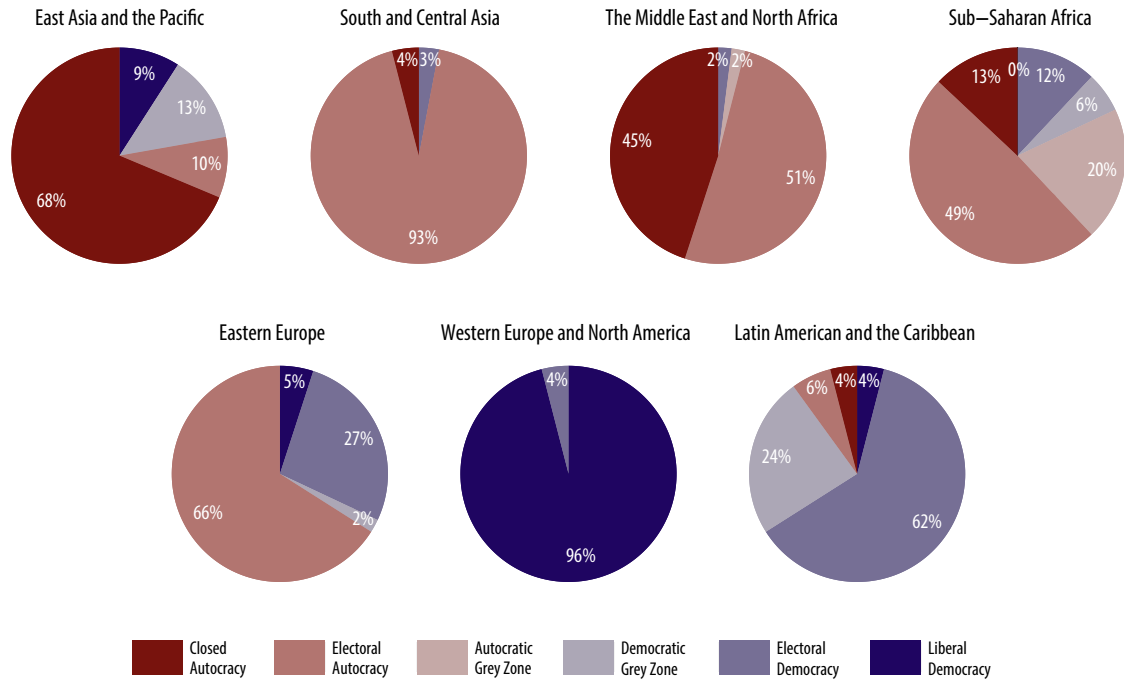
FIGURE 6. REGIONAL SHARES OF POPULATION BY REGIME TYPE, 2023

Figure 6 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.

LARGE REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

There is significant variation across regions in the share of the population that enjoys freedoms and rights in democracies or is subjected to oppression in autocracies. Figure 6 shows the situation at the end of 2023 across seven regions of the world.

In **East Asia and the Pacific**, 78% of the population reside in autocracies and are denied some or all democratic rights and freedoms. This includes closed autocracies such as China and Vietnam, and electoral autocracies like Singapore and The Philippines. Only 9% of the regional population live in liberal democracies like Japan and Australia. There are no countries in the region that are certain to be electoral democracies, but 13% of the population live in “grey zone” electoral democracies where the uncertainty bounds overlap with thresholds for electoral autocracy. Indonesia and Malaysia are two prominent examples by 2023. Thailand moved on the RoW classification from a closed to an electoral autocracy, while Malaysia – for the first time in its history – moved from a “grey zone” electoral autocracy to a “grey zone” electoral democracy in 2023.

South and Central Asia is now the second most autocratic region in the world. More than nine out of ten people, or 93% of the population reside in electoral autocracies like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan. Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are closed autocracies, accounting for 4% of the regional population. A mere 3% reside in electoral democracies, including countries like Armenia, and Georgia, while only one country, Bhutan, is a liberal democracy. In 2023, only Mongolia descended from an electoral democracy regime type to the democratic “grey zone”.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains the most autocratic region in the world, with 98% of its population residing in autocracies. A large share (45%) lives in closed autocracies such as Iran, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, but 53% live in electoral autocracies, such as Türkiye and Iraq. 2% of the region’s population reside in Tunisia, which is in the “grey zone” electoral autocracy category. The remaining 2% live in Israel. Notably, Israel lost its long-time status as

liberal democracy in 2023. It is now classified as an electoral democracy – for the first time in over 50 years. This is primarily due to substantial declines in the indicators measuring the transparency and predictability of the law, and government attacks on the judiciary. Among other things, Israel’s Knesset passed a bill in 2023 stripping the Supreme Court of the power to declare government decisions unreasonable. Indicators that are in substantive decline also include freedom from torture.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, the vast majority of people (82%) reside in electoral and closed autocracies like Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. This makes it the third most autocratic region worldwide. However, 20% reside in the four “grey zone” electoral autocracies Benin, Mauritius, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Most of these four, however, lean towards qualifying as certain autocracies. Meanwhile, 18% live in electoral democracies such as Ghana and South Africa, out of which 6% are found in three “grey zone” electoral democracies: Botswana, Kenya, and Zambia. The Seychelles remains the only liberal democracy in the region. Four of the region’s countries have lost the status of liberal democracy in the last decade: South Africa in 2013, Mauritius in 2014, Ghana in 2015, and Botswana in 2021. Four countries in this region also changed regime type in 2023. Three of those – Niger, Mauritius, and Sierra Leone – from electoral democracy to electoral autocracy, and one, Burkina Faso, from electoral autocracy to closed autocracy.

In **Eastern Europe**, 66% of the population live in electoral autocracies like Hungary, Russia, and Serbia. Electoral democracies host 29% of the population in countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania. Of these, 2% live in the ambiguous “lower bound” electoral democracies – Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only 5% reside in liberal democracies Czechia, Estonia, and Latvia. Slovenia is the only country in this region that deteriorated on regime type in 2023, from liberal to electoral democracy, while North Macedonia and Montenegro improved from “grey zone” electoral democracy to non-ambiguous electoral democracy status.

Western Europe and North America remains the most democratic region of the world, and most of its inhabitants (96%) live in liberal democracies. The remaining 4% reside in electoral democracies. Cyprus and Portugal fell from liberal to electoral democracy in 2023, while Austria and Greece made the same transition in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

The vast majority of **Latin Americans** (86%) live in electoral democracies such as Argentina and Brazil, and 4% live in liberal democracies like Chile and Uruguay. However, Latin America is also the region with the largest share of the population living in “grey zone” regimes. No less than 24% of people reside in Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, and Mexico – countries in the lower bound of electoral democracies that qualify as democracies only with a certain degree of uncertainty. Autocracies in the region are comparatively smaller countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, making up 10% of the region’s inhabitants. The only country to decidedly change regime type in 2023 was Suriname, moving from electoral to liberal democracy, while autocratizing Mexico deteriorated from electoral democracy to “grey zone” electoral democracy.

Freedom of Expression and Elections Getting Worse

- Almost all components of democracy are getting worse in more countries than they are getting better, compared to ten years ago.
- Freedom of expression remains the worst affected component of democracy and is worsening in 35 countries in 2023.
- Clean elections is now the second – deteriorating in 23 countries and improving in twelve. This core institution of democracy used to be relatively unaffected.
- Freedom of association, including civil society, is the third most deteriorating component – 20 countries are restricting this right while only three are expanding it.

Most components of democracy are now declining in more countries than they are improving – a stark contrast to a decade ago when the opposite was true. Figure 7 provides evidence of how extensive the changes are. The left panel shows the total number of countries in which different aspects of democracy improved or deteriorated by 2013 compared to 2003, while the right panel shows the same for the last ten years, 2023 compared to 2013.

Freedom of Expression remains the worst affected aspect of democracy and is deteriorating in 35 countries in 2023 (right panel), while improving in only eleven. This includes media freedom, freedom of citizens to discuss political issues, as well as freedom of academic and cultural expression. Ten years ago, only eleven countries were limiting freedom of expression, while twelve were expanding it.

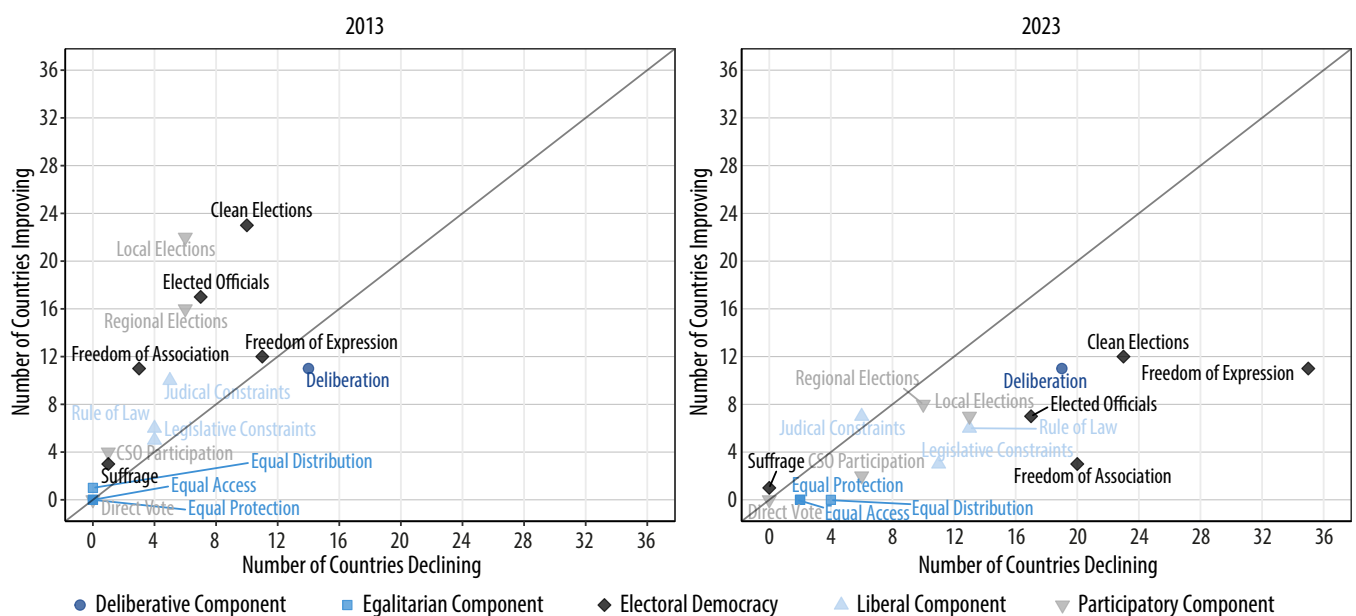
The **Clean Elections Index** assesses the extent to which elections are free and fair. This core aspect of democracy – the freedom, fairness, and integrity of elections – was deteriorating in ten countries back in 2013, while improving in 23 countries. In 2023, the data indicates a complete reversal: the quality of elections is worsening in 23 countries and improving in twelve.

Freedom of Association is the third most affected component of democracy in 2023, deteriorating in 20 countries and improving in only three. In 2013, it was declining in three countries and improving in eleven. This aspect of democracy captures the extent to which parties are allowed to form and to participate in elections, and the extent to which civil society organizations can form and operate freely.

Deliberation is the only component worsening in both panels. It is declining in 19 countries in 2023, compared to 14 in 2013, while improving in eleven countries both in 2013 and 2023. The deliberative component measures respect for opposition, pluralism, and counterarguments with several different indicators and is central to the democratic process.

Two aspects of the **Liberal Component** have weakened substantially in the past ten years. Rule of law is declining in 13 countries in

FIGURE 7. DEMOCRATIC ASPECTS IMPROVING AND DECLINING, 2013 AND 2023



For indices measuring components of democracy, Figure 7 shows the number of countries improving and declining significantly and substantially. An index is declining substantially and significantly if its 2023 value is at least 0.05 points lower than its 2013 value on a scale ranging from 0 to 1, and the confidence intervals do not overlap. The left panel shows changes in 2013 compared to 2003, and the right panel shows changes in 2023 compared to 2013.

2023, while ten years back it was only four. Similarly, legislative constraints are deteriorating in eleven countries in 2023, which is almost three times higher than in 2013, when it was only four.

MOST OFTEN UNDER ATTACK: MEDIA, ELECTIONS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Each component of democracy discussed in the analysis above is measured with an index that aggregates up to 20 individual indicators. Those individual indicators capture specific aspects of the core democratic principles. With the V-Dem data, we can drill down into these details, and provide a more nuanced picture of what specifically is under attack.

Figure 8 displays the top 20 indicators that declined in most countries over the past ten years. It reveals a growing trend of threats against freedom of expression, free and fair elections, and civil society organizations. The list of indicators also testifies to a worsening of the space for deliberation and undermining of the rule of law, that manifest through “executive aggrandizement.”⁵ Note that only substantial and statistically significant changes are included.

Freedom of expression including freedom of the media is what “aspiring autocrats” attack most often and to the greatest degree. **Government censorship of the media** takes a dubious first place on the top 20 list. It worsened in 45 countries over the past ten years. Among the worst government offenders when it comes to increasing their efforts to censor the media are El Salvador, India, and notably Mauritius. The latter island nation is a long-standing democracy where several rights and freedoms have deteriorated significantly in the last few years.

FIGURE 8. TOP-20 DECLINING INDICATORS, 2013–2023

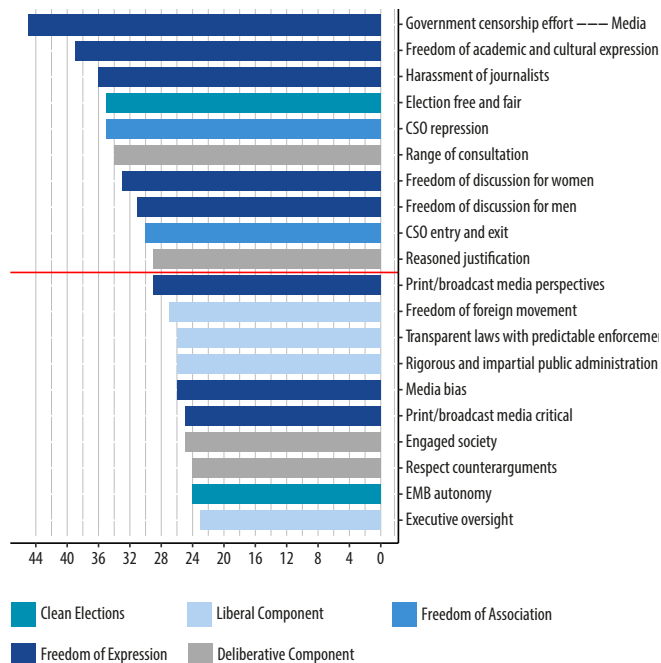


Figure 8 plots the top 20 indicators that decline significantly and substantially in the largest number of countries between 2013 and 2023. The red line marks the top 10 indicators. An indicator is declining substantially and significantly if its 2023 value is at least 0.5 points lower than its 2013 value on a scale from 0 to 4 (for most indicators) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

Harassment of journalists is increasing in 36 countries, for example, Algeria, Hungary, and Poland. **Media bias**, or discrimination of opposition parties and candidates in favor of incumbent governments, is deteriorating in 26 countries. Nicaragua, South Africa, and Pakistan are examples of countries where media bias is becoming increasingly common and undermines democratic institutions.

Freedom of expression means an open space not only for the media, but also for whole societies. **Academic and cultural expression** is declining in 39 countries. Russia and The Philippines are among the countries where this forum for “speaking truth to power” is declining the most. Freedom of discussion for women and men is declining in 33 and 31 countries, respectively. For women, this freedom has declined notably in Indonesia, while for men in Tajikistan and Yemen, to name just some examples.

Notably, the quality of elections is now worsening across the world. The data shows that 35 countries are declining on the **free and fair election-indicator** of this core institution of democracy. This is a substantial increase from 30 countries in last year’s *Democracy Report*, and in 2019, the number was only 16. The **Election Management Body’s (EMB) autonomy** is under attack by governments in 24 countries – a substantial increase from last year. These numbers demonstrate that democratic elections are now increasingly undermined by governments. Bangladesh, Egypt, and Venezuela are examples of countries where the last held elections were significantly less free and fair than before. We provide further perspectives on the 2024 “record year” of elections in Section 5.

Freedom of association for civil society is also under pressure. In 35 countries, governments are **repressing civil society organizations (CSOs)** more actively than ten years ago. **Control over CSOs’ existence** (‘entry and exit’) is tightening in 30 countries. Civil society constitutes a fundamental defense against autocratic rule because of its capacity to mobilize people in protests and demonstrations. This underscores why infringements on the rights of CSOs are so perilous. Countries where conditions for civil society have become significantly worse in the last ten years include a diverse set of countries from Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, and The Philippines, to Hungary, and Türkiye.

Space for democratic deliberation is another area that governments restrict. The **range of consultation** by government is worsening in 34 countries, while the extent to which governments provide **reasoned justification** for their actions is declining in 29 countries. The extent to which society is engaged in **deliberation on policy** and the level of **respect for counterarguments** are worsening in 25 and 24 countries, respectively. These aspects have become significantly worse in countries like Botswana, Mexico, and Thailand.

Finally, liberalism and executive oversight are undermined by many governments. A total of 26 countries have undermined **transparent laws with predictable enforcement**, 25 have infringed more on the **impartiality of the administration**, and **freedom of movement** between countries, while **executive oversight** is worsening in more than 20 countries compared to ten years ago. Among the worst offenders are Nicaragua, Central African Republic, Guatemala, and Türkiye.

⁵ Executive aggrandizement is a process that contains a series of institutional changes by the elected executives, impairing the ability of the political opposition to challenge the government and hold it to account. See: Bermeo, N. 2016. “On democratic backsliding.” *Journal of Democracy* 27(1).

TABLE 1. REGIMES OF THE WORLD, 2023

Table 1 presents the classification of countries according to the Regimes of the World measure. The countries are sorted by regime type in 2023, 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 Lüthmann 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 2023
 - ↗ In an episode of democratization, as of 2023
- Grey zone democracies/autocracies are marked

LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2023	CHANGE FROM 2013	ERT EPISODE 2023
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		
Seychelles	LD	+	↗
Spain	LD		
Sweden	LD		
Switzerland	LD		
Taiwan	LD		
USA	LD		
Barbados	LD-	+	
Bhutan	LD-	+	
Canada	LD-		
Chile	LD-		
France	LD-		
Italy	LD-		
Norway	LD-		
South Korea	LD-		↘
Suriname	LD-	+	
United Kingdom	LD-		
Uruguay	LD-		

ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2023	CHANGE FROM 2013	EPISODE
Austria	ED+	↕	
Cyprus	ED+	↕	
Greece	ED+	↕	↘
Israel	ED+	↕	
Jamaica	ED+		
Lithuania	ED+	↕	
Malta	ED+		
Moldova	ED+		
Montenegro	ED+	+	↗
Namibia	ED+		
Portugal	ED+	↕	
Slovenia	ED+	↕	
Trinidad and Tobago	ED+	↕	
Vanuatu	ED+		
Argentina	ED		
Armenia	ED	+	↘
Bolivia	ED		↗
Brazil	ED		↗
Bulgaria	ED		
Cape Verde	ED		
Colombia	ED		
Croatia	ED		↘
Dominican Republic	ED		↗
Ecuador	ED		
Gambia	ED	+	↗
Georgia	ED		
Ghana	ED	↕	↘
Kosovo	ED		↗
Lesotho	ED		↗
Liberia	ED		
Malawi	ED		
Maldives	ED	+	↗
Nepal	ED	+	
North Macedonia	ED	+	↗
Panama	ED		
Paraguay	ED		
Peru	ED		↘
Poland	ED	↕	↘
Romania	ED		↘
S.Tomé & P.	ED		
Senegal	ED		↘
Slovakia	ED	↕	
Solomon Islands	ED		↗
South Africa	ED		
Sri Lanka	ED	+	
Timor-Leste	ED		↗
Albania	ED-		
BiH	ED-		
Botswana	ED-	↕	↘
Fiji	ED-	+	↗
Guatemala	ED-		↘
Guyana	ED-		↘
Honduras	ED-	+	↗
Indonesia	ED-		↘
Kenya	ED-		
Malaysia	ED-	+	
Mexico	ED-		↘
Mongolia	ED-		↘
Zambia	ED-	+	↗

ELECTORAL AUTOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2023	CHANGE FROM 2013	ERT EPISODE 2023
Benin	EA+	↕	↗
Mauritius	EA+	↕	↘
Nigeria	EA+	↕	
Sierra Leone	EA+	↕	
Tunisia	EA+	↕	↗
Algeria	EA		
Angola	EA		
Azerbaijan	EA		
Bangladesh	EA		
Belarus	EA		↘
Burundi	EA		
CAR	EA		↘
Cambodia	EA		↘
Cameroon	EA		
Comoros	EA	↕	↘
Congo	EA		
DRC	EA		↘
Djibouti	EA		
Egypt	EA	+	
El Salvador	EA	↕	↘
Equatorial Guinea	EA		
Ethiopia	EA		
Gabon	EA		
Guinea-Bissau	EA	+	
Hungary	EA	↕	↘
India	EA	↕	↘
Iraq	EA		
Ivory Coast	EA		
Kazakhstan	EA		
Kyrgyzstan	EA		↘
Lebanon	EA		↘
Madagascar	EA		
Mauritania	EA		↘
Mozambique	EA		
Niger	EA	↕	↘
Pakistan	EA		↘
Palestine/West Bank	EA		
Papua New Guinea	EA		
Philippines	EA	↕	↘
Russia	EA		
Rwanda	EA		
Serbia	EA	↕	↘
Singapore	EA		
Somaliland	EA		
Tajikistan	EA		
Tanzania	EA		
Thailand	EA		↗
Togo	EA		
Türkiye	EA		
Uganda	EA		
Ukraine	EA		↘
Venezuela	EA		
Zanzibar	EA		
Zimbabwe	EA		
Nicaragua	EA-		↘

CLOSED AUTOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2023	CHANGE FROM 2013	ERT EPISODE 2023
Kuwait	CA+		
Turkmenistan	CA+		
Uzbekistan	CA+	↕	
Afghanistan	CA	↕	↘
Bahrain	CA		
Burkina Faso	CA	↕	↘
Chad	CA	↕	↘
China	CA		
Cuba	CA		
Eritrea	CA		
Eswatini	CA		
Guinea	CA	↕	↘
Haiti	CA	↕	↘
Hong Kong	CA		↘
Iran	CA	↕	
Jordan	CA		
Laos	CA		
Libya	CA	↕	↘
Mali	CA	↕	↘
Morocco	CA		
Myanmar	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	↕	



Dozens of indigenous Mayan weavers demanded the resignation of the Guatemalan prosecutor in a protest accusing her of "weaving corruption", outside the Public Ministry in Guatemala City Aug 20, 2023. (Johan Ordonez/AFP via Getty Images)

Box 4. ERT Methodology (Episodes of Regime Transformation)

The V-Dem Institute's Democracy Report 2024 switches to the sophisticated ERT method (Maerz et al. 2023) to identify countries that are democratizing or autocratizing. This more 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 previous editions.

A large team at the V-Dem Institute developed the ERT method over several years. It has now been vetted by extensive peer review in the scientific community and 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. 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 previous Democracy Reports that simply took the difference between scores ten years ago and the last year. The most important is that the sophisticated, multilayered, and tested decision-rules for coding in the ERT, ensures 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 India; from those that 2) recently ended but still amount to being among the "worst offenders" in the last ten years, such as Türkiye's descent into electoral autocracy. We make use of that feature in this year's Democracy Report.

In the Democracy Report, we use the ERT on the EDI to identify start- and endpoints for ongoing episodes, including a couple of smaller methodological adjustments of the method introduced with this year's ERT release. In the Democracy Report we, however, display countries' scores on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) as in previous year's reports (and the EDI is one of the two main components of the LDI).

Featured Article:

Maerz, Seraphine F., Amanda Edgell, Matthew C. Wilson, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2023. "Episodes of Regime Transformation." *Journal of Peace Research* online first.

Codebook:

Edgell, Amanda B., et al. 2023. *Episodes of regime transformation dataset and codebook*, V4. V-Dem Institute.

Data, Code & Codebook Repository:

<https://github.com/vdem institute/ERT>

Shiny App for Visualizations:

<https://episodes.shinyapps.io/validation/>

2 | Trends of Regime Change

- **A total of 60 countries are in episodes of regime transformation – autocratizing or democratizing.**
- **The wave of autocratization is notable. Autocratization is ongoing in 42 countries, home to 2.8 billion people, or 35% of the world’s population. India, with 18% of the world’s population, accounts for about half of the population living in autocratizing countries.**
- **There may be signs that the autocratization wave is slowing down, but one should be cautious with that interpretation.**
- **Democratization is taking place in 18 countries, harboring only 400 million people, or 5% of the world’s population. Brazil makes up more than half of this, with its 216 million inhabitants.**

In this part of the *Democracy Report 2024*, we focus on countries that are in change, and on the direction of change – towards more democracy or more autocracy? How many countries are democratizing and autocratizing, and how much?

This focus is different from the analyses in Section 1 that looked at the state of democracy in terms of average levels of democracy, and regime types over time.

The world map in Figure 9 shows which countries are now in an ongoing period of democratization (blue) or autocratization (red) according to the ERT methodology (see Box 4). The intensity of colors indicates the magnitude of change.

With the new ERT methodology, we can identify exactly which countries are in a period of continued change. The ERT methodology is different from the methodology used in previous year’s *Democracy*

Reports, where we focused on countries that have changed the most in the last ten years only. A country which autocratized a lot during the decade or so but has already stabilized, for example an electoral autocracy like **Türkiye**, no longer shows up as an ongoing autocratizer using the more scientific ERT methodology. By contrast, a country which democratized a lot during the last decade but is now in the period of autocratization, for example an electoral democracy like **Armenia**, shows up as an ongoing autocratizer in 2023 – despite previous positive changes – because of its *present* (ongoing) direction of change. The ERT gives the analyses more precision and reliability than before, and improves the validity of conclusions.

The World Continues to Become More Autocratic

42 countries are currently undergoing autocratization as identified using the new ERT methodology. The number of autocratizing countries in 2023 remains near an all-time high of 47 countries registered in 2021. Figure 10 shows that the number of countries entering episodes of autocratization has been increasing dramatically over the last 30 years.

The noticeable decline in the number of autocratizing countries and the slight uptake in the number of democratizing countries in the last two years is good news. It *could* indicate that the current wave of autocratization has crested and would be waning going forward. Yet, one should be careful not to immediately draw that conclusion.

The ERT method forces us to be cautious with declaring that a country has entered a period of change (see Box 4 for details). The data for 2023 shows that 25 countries register decline in democracy levels that qualify as “potential” episodes of autocratization, but the criteria for declaring them “manifest autocratizers” are not yet completely fulfilled. If deteriorations in these countries continue in the coming years, the number 42 for 2023 could increase substantially post-fac-

FIGURE 9. COUNTRIES AUTOCRATIZING VS. DEMOCRATIZING, 2023

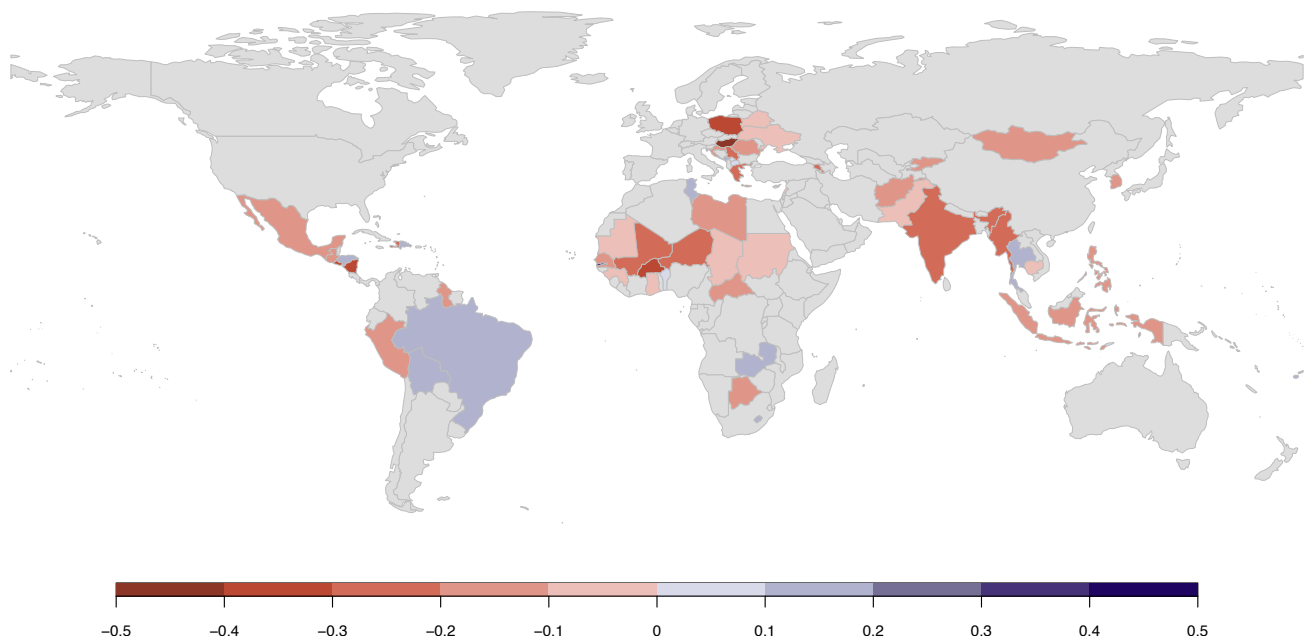


Figure 9 shows countries in which the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) has improved (blue) or declined (red) by at least 0.1 (or 10 percent of the possible range of the variable) by 2023, according to the ERT methodology (see Box 4). Color intensity indicates the magnitude of change since the start of regime transformation. Countries in grey are not in change as of 2023.

FIGURE 10. AUTOCRATIZING VS. DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 1973–2023

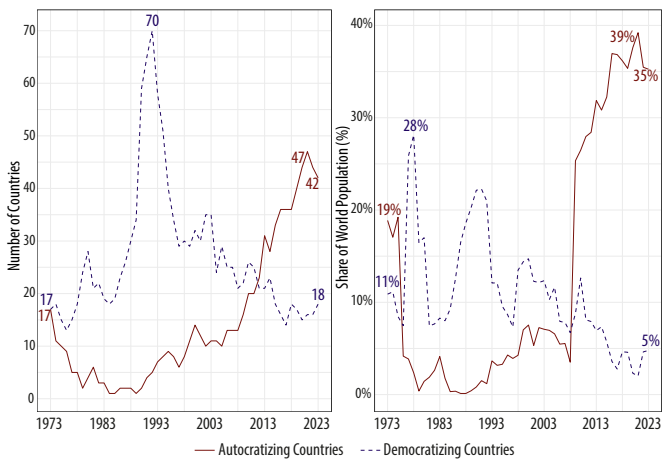


Figure 10 shows patterns of democratization and autocratization over the last 50 years. The left panel displays the number of countries in each category, and the right panel shows the share of the world's population living in autocratizing or democratizing countries.

tum (since the beginning of these “censored” cases of potential episodes was in or even before 2023).

Figure 10 presents the global patterns of autocratization and democratization over the last 50 years. The red line in the left panel shows that autocratizing countries declined gradually from 17 in 1973 to 1 in 1989. By 1990, the trajectory reversed, and the numbers were slowly increasing up to 13 autocratizing countries in 2008. Since 2009, the numbers rise steeply and hit a record of 47 countries in 2021.

The development over time for democratizing countries is inverse to the autocratizing over this 50-year period. The dashed blue line in the left panel of Figure 10 shows that there are 18 democratizers in 2023 – one more than the 17 in 1973, at the eve of the third wave of democratization. The number of democratizers skyrocketed after 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall reaching its peak in 1992, when 70 countries were democratizing at the same time. The number then plummeted to 29 in 1997 sliding down to 14 by 2017, which was the lowest point in 50 years. In 2023, there are a few more – 18 countries – in an ongoing episode of democratization. Note that the caveats about the numbers of episodes for the last two-three years discussed above also apply to democratizers. The numbers could therefore increase post-factum in the coming years if countries that now qualify as “potential” democratizers continue to improve, and democratization episodes become “manifest.”

The ERT method is superior in increasing precision for identifying which countries are in ongoing episodes of change, which countries have ended such processes of change, and determining start and end dates of these transformation episodes. It introduces a precautionary 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.

OVER ONE-THIRD OF THE POPULATION IN AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES

Autocratizing countries host more than one third of the world’s population in 2023 (right panel of Figure 10). The share has receded slightly in the last two years, from a peak of 39% in 2021. Yet, the share remains near an all-time high. For comparison, 19% of the world’s population lived in autocratizing countries in 1973, and only 0.1% in 1987-1988.

Fewer people live in democratizing countries in 2023, as shown by the dashed blue line in the right panel of Figure 10. The share of the world population living in democratizing countries has remained below 10% since 2011 and reached 5% by 2023 – about 400 million people.

FIGURE 11. DEMOCRATIZERS VS. AUTOCRATIZERS, BY POPULATION SIZE, 2023

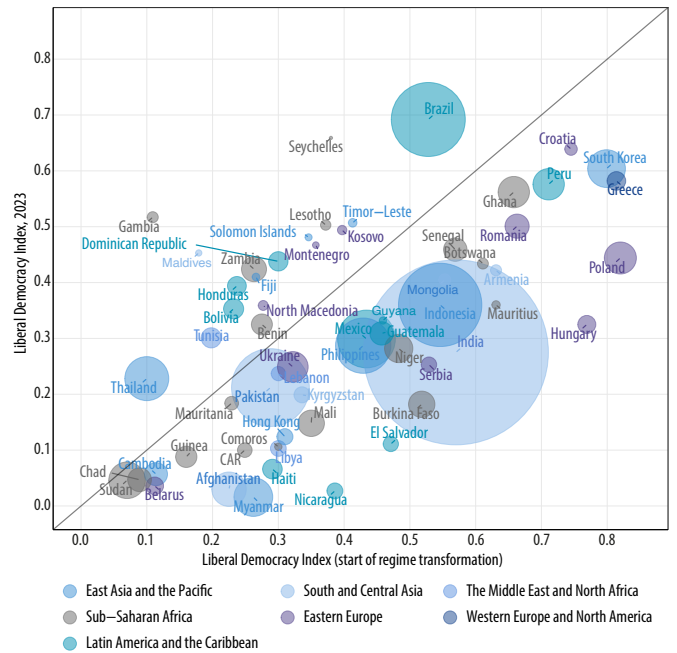


Figure 11 displays country scores on the LDI in 2023 (y-axis) and at the start of autocratization / democratization episodes (x-axis), as identified by the ERT methodology. The starting year of change varies across countries. Size of the bubbles reflects population size. Countries above the diagonal line have become more democratic whereas countries below the diagonal line have become more autocratic. The graph only includes countries that are in an episode of regime transformation in 2023 as identified by the ERT methodology.

Many of the autocratizing countries are influential regional and global powers that have large populations, such as **India**, **Mexico**, and **South Korea**, as illustrated in Figure 11. Other populous countries that are autocratizing include **Indonesia**, **Myanmar**, **Pakistan**, and **The Philippines**. Autocratization is also manifest within the European Union, affecting **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Poland**, and **Romania**. This adds to the left of the current wave of autocratization when influential countries with large economies can be expected to impact on other countries.

The democratizing countries are typically smaller in size, economy, and population, for example **The Gambia**, **The Maldives**, and **The Seychelles**. The recent addition of **Brazil** to the list of democratizers is an important exception. With its 216 million population and large economy, it is an important regional as well as global power.

60 Countries in Episodes of Change – Across Regions

The 42 autocratizing and the 18 democratizing countries are distributed across all regions of the world, as shown in Figure 12.

Four countries (or 17% of the region) in the **East Asia-Pacific** are in episodes of democratic progress that are ongoing as of 2023: Fiji, Solomon Island, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. However, six (26% of the region) are in a substantial decline: Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea, and The Philippines.

Only one country with a tiny population of some 526,000 (The Maldives) is democratizing in **South and Central Asia**. The same number as in East Asia-Pacific – six countries (35% of countries in the region) are autocratizing: Afghanistan, Armenia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Pakistan. India with 1.4 billion and Pakistan with almost 250 million are two of the most populated countries in the world. Their autocratization contributes greatly to the high share of the world population living in both autocracies and autocratizing countries.

In the **MENA region**, with the lowest overall level of democracy in the world, there is only one democratizer (Tunisia) while two countries (10% of the region) are autocratizing: Libya and Lebanon.

The region with the largest number of countries progressing on democracy is **Sub-Saharan Africa**. Five countries (or 10% of the region) are democratizing: Benin, Lesotho, The Gambia, The Seychelles, and Zambia. Yet, the region also has the largest number of autocratizers – thirteen (25% of the region): Botswana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, The Comoros, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Senegal, and Sudan.

Three democratizing countries are in **Eastern Europe**, which makes 14% of the region: Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. More than double (32%, or seven countries) are in processes of substantial decline: Belarus, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. Ukraine's regression is largely a consequence of Russia's illegal invasion that put one-third of the territory under harsh authoritarian rule and forced the Ukraine government to impose state of emergency and restrict media freedom and related aspects.



No country across **North America and Western Europe** is substantially improving on democracy levels, while Greece experiences a democratic decline.

Finally, in **Latin America and the Caribbean**, 16% of countries – four – are in episodes of democratization: Bolivia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, and Honduras. Among these, Bolivia and Brazil are successfully reversing an autocratization course from previous years (see further below). Yet, almost double the share of countries in the region (28%) – seven – are currently regressing: El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru.

FIGURE 12. AUTOCRATIZATION VS. DEMOCRATIZATION ACROSS REGIONS, 2023

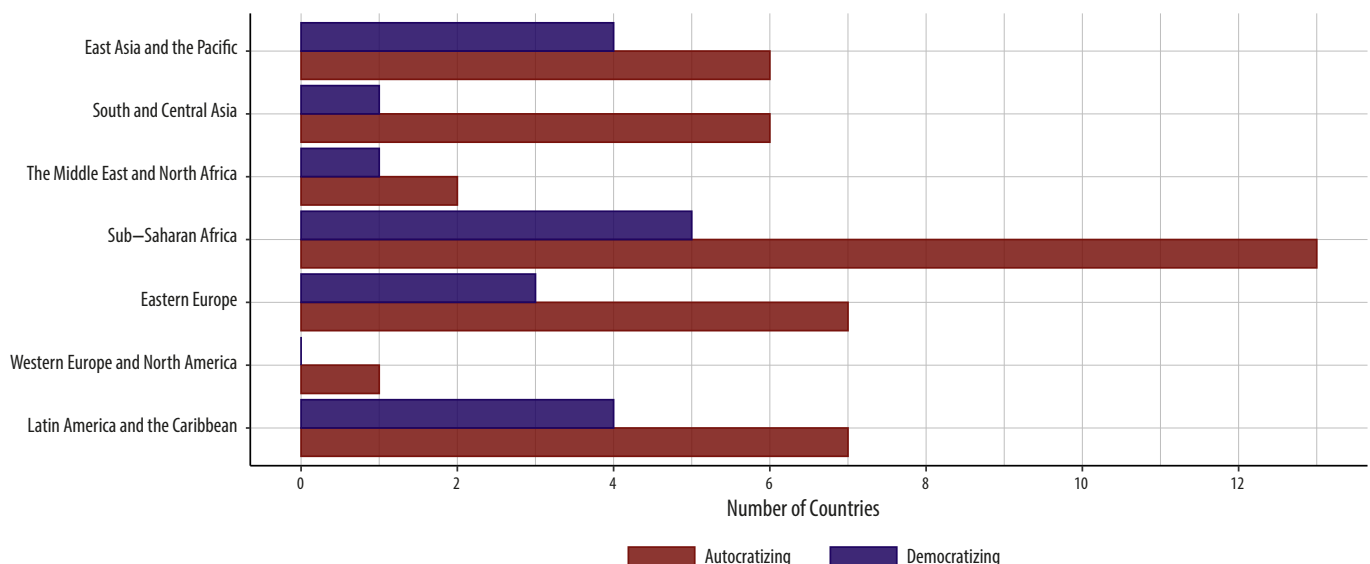


Figure 12 plots the number of countries that are democratizing and autocratizing in each region.



Protest against the far-right on January 20, 2024 in Wuppertal, Germany. (Hesham Elsherif/Anadolu via Getty Images)

3 | Autocratizing Countries

- 42 countries are currently in ongoing episodes of autocratization.
- 28 of the 42 autocratizers were democracies at the start of their episode. Of these 28 only about half, or 15, remain democracies in 2023.
- Of the 42 ongoing episodes, 23 are “stand-alone” processes and 19 are “bell-turns” where democratization failed and turned into autocratization.
- 8 of the top 10 “stand-alone” autocratizers were liberal or electoral democracies. In 2023, none are liberal democracies, and only two can be considered electoral democracies.
- 8 of the top 10 “bell-turn” autocratizers were democracies at some point after democratization. Only 3 remain democracies after autocratization set in, illustrating that democratization processes are fragile and are often reverted.

- Notably, elections are now increasingly undermined. EMB autonomy is weakening substantially in 22 of the 42 autocratizing countries.

Taking advantage of the new, peer-review vetted ERT methodology, *Democracy Report 2024* can for the first time show the trajectories of the countries with currently ongoing processes of autocratization. There are two types: “Stand-alone” autocratization where the process of deterioration starts independently, after a period of relative stability, and “bell-turns” where autocratization follows shortly after, and is connected to, a period of democratization. The complete list of the 42 autocratizing countries grouped into the 23 stand-alone and 19 bell-turn processes is presented in Figure 13. Countries are ordered according to their levels on the LDI at the onset of autocratization. The LDI score for 2023 reveals the total magnitude of deterioration by the end of 2023. Note that all these autocratization episodes are still ongoing.

Of the 42 autocratizers, 28 were democracies at the start of their episode. 13 of these are now autocracies. Other 14 were already autocracies when they started to deepen even further. Seven of them are

FIGURE 13. ALL 42 CASES OF ONGOING AUTOCRATIZATION, 2023

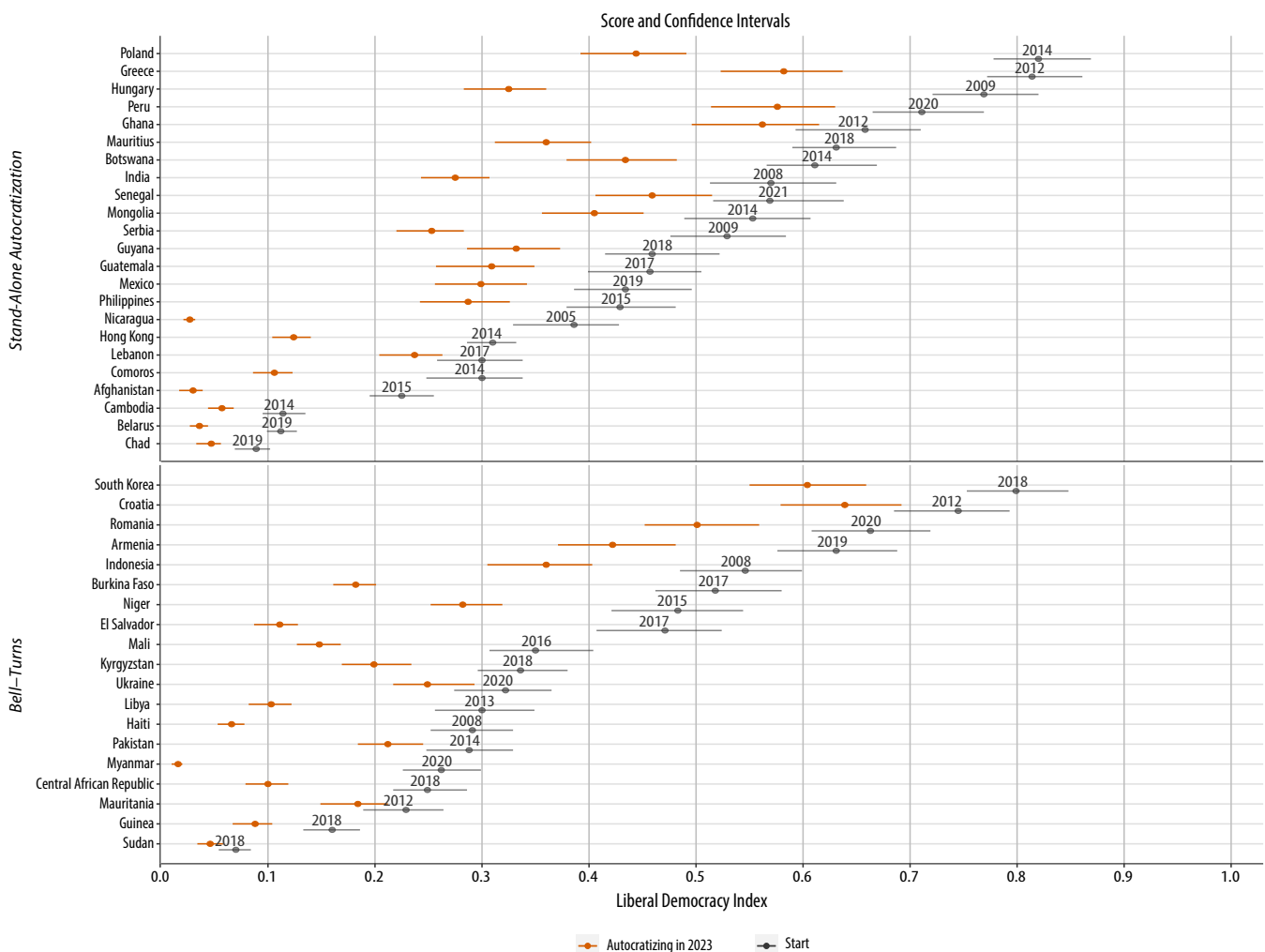


Figure 13 shows the LDI scores and confidence intervals at the start of autocratization. By the ERT methodology, these are technically “pre-episode” in the sense that the year after was the first recording a decline. The values in 2023 are highlighted in orange and reveal the total magnitude of change. The ERT is based on the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for identifying episodes, and we follow that but display countries’ 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).

closed autocracies by the end of 2023. This shows the breadth of the current wave of autocratization, affecting citizens in both democracies and autocracies.

“Stand-Alone” Autocratization

Figure 14 shows the top 10 out of the 23 countries with ongoing “stand-alone” episodes of autocratization, and details their trajectories on the LDI from the start of each country’s episode to the end of 2023. Table 2 shows the “worst offenders” by ranking countries by the total magnitude of decline.

FIGURE 14. TOP 10 “STAND-ALONE” AUTOCRATIZERS, 2023

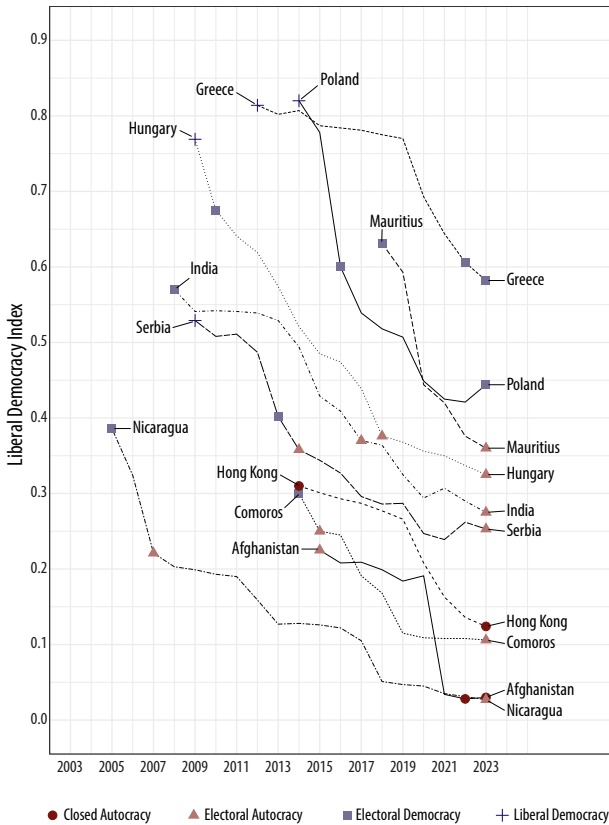


Figure 14 plots the LDI values for the top 10 “stand-alone” autocratizing countries. “Stand-alone” means that autocratization in these countries started after a period of relative stability (i.e., no substantial change on the EDI levels). This is different from bell-turn episodes of autocratization (see below). Note that the first year on the graph is technically a “pre-episode” year in the sense that the year after was the first one recording a decline by the ERT methodology. The plot visualizes the total magnitude of change during autocratization.

Eight out of ten countries in this group were democracies before the start of autocratization. Democracy broke down in six of those eight cases – **The Comoros, Hungary, India, Mauritius, Nicaragua, and Serbia**. Only **Greece and Poland** remain democracies in 2023. This frequency of democratic breakdown matches with a recent study showing that 80% of democracies break down if they start autocratizing.⁶

Two countries among the top “stand-alone” autocratizers already started out as autocracies. **Afghanistan** is going from an electoral to a closed autocracy during the process, while the initially low level

of democracy in **Hong Kong**’s closed autocracy continues to depreciate further in 2023.

We start with discussing the two countries that remain democracies in 2023.

Most observers of **Greece** perhaps associate its democratic troubles with the recent past. Yet, the descent can be traced back all the way to 2012 with the ERT. In the first seven years, changes were incremental, and the process was very slow, in the archetypical pattern for autocratization in the “third wave.”⁷ The steeper downward trajectory begins in 2016 driven by a weakening of institutional checks and

TABLE 2. RANK ORDER BY MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE, FIGURE 14

Rank	Country	Change on LDI
1	Hungary	-0.444
2	Poland	-0.376
3	Nicaragua	-0.359
4	India	-0.295
5	Serbia	-0.276
6	Mauritius	-0.271
7	Greece	-0.232
8	Afghanistan	-0.195
9	The Comoros	-0.194
10	Hong Kong	-0.186

balances as well as encroachments on the freedom of expression and the media. A recent wiretapping scandal involved Prime Minister Mitsotakis and the National Intelligence Service in 2022. The government was tapping in on opposition leaders, journalists, and even other members of the government.⁸ The European Parliament Special Committee of Inquiry (PEGA) officially declared a breach of EU laws and issued a call requiring Greece to revoke laws undermining the rule of law in 2023.⁹ Mitsotakis and his New Democracy party got an absolute majority of the vote share in the elections in the same year, and three new nationalist far-right parties (Spartans, Greek Solution, and Victory) got a total of 34 seats. The European Parliament raised an alarm over serious threats to democracy in Greece in February 2024.¹⁰ Greece remains a democracy but no longer qualifies as a liberal democracy by the end of 2023.

Poland is another case of a liberal democracy autocratizing sub-stantially. The Law and Justice (PiS) party ascended to power in 2015 and has weakened democratic rights and freedoms since then, for instance by cracking down on media freedom and undermining the rule of law.¹¹ The 2023 elections led to the defeat of Prime Minister Morawiecki and the PiS. A coalition government consisting of the Civic Coalition, Third Way, and The Left is led by the new Prime Minister Tusk. Notably, 2023 shows a small but statistically insignificant uptick in the LDI levels. As of 2023, Poland is an electoral democracy.

In six countries that started as democracies autocratization led to electoral or closed autocracy:

The Comoros only just fulfilled the criteria for an electoral democracy when an autocratization process started in 2014. The 2016 elections were marred by violence and irregularities that further deepened the process of autocratization. In 2018, President and former army official Assoumani used a constitutional referendum – that was boycotted by the opposition – to extend presidential term limits that would disrupt the presidential rotation between the three main is-

6 Boese, V. et al. 2021. How democracies prevail: Democratic resilience as a two-stage process. *Democratization* 28(5).
 7 Lührmann, A. and S. Lindberg. 2019. A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here. *Democratization* 26(7).
 8 <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/20/world/europe/greece-spyware-hacking-meta.html>
 9 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/pega/about> and https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/PEGA-RD-740554_EN.pdf
 10 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17312/parliament-concerned-about-very-serious-threats-to-eu-values-in-greece> ; https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0069_EN.html
 11 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/12/poland-targets-tv-channel-limits-press-freedom-and-pluralism>

lands.¹² Protests were repressed by the army and Assoumani won a third term in the 2019 elections, and a fourth one in January 2024.¹³ The Comoros is classified as an electoral autocracy since 2015.

Hungary ranks first among all 42 ongoing episodes of autocratization in terms of the magnitude of change (see Table 2). Figure 14 shows that it was a liberal democracy in 2009 and details its trajectory until 2023, which is one of the steepest in the world in recent times. When Viktor Orbán and his anti-pluralist,¹⁴ Christian-nationalist Fidesz party came to power in 2010, they initiated incremental reduction of checks and balances. A series of well-documented derailments of democracy over the years¹⁵ led to downgrading of Hungary to electoral autocracy in 2019. The European Parliament declared that Hungary is no longer a democracy in 2022.¹⁶ With its majority in the legislature, Fidesz passed the “Protection of Sovereignty Act” in 2023, which opens for arbitrary scrutiny, giving virtually unlimited access to personal data, and comes with its own Office for the Protection of Sovereignty.¹⁷ Hungary remains an electoral autocracy as of 2023.

India’s process of autocratization begins in earnest from 2008 and characteristically proceeded in the incremental, slow-moving fashion of the “third wave”. Over the years, India’s autocratization process has been well documented, including gradual but substantial deterioration of freedom of expression, compromising independence of the media, crackdowns on social media, harassments of journalists critical of the government, as well as attacks on civil society and intimidation of the opposition. The ruling anti-pluralist, Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with Prime Minister Modi at the helm has for example used laws on sedition, defamation, and counterterrorism to silence critics.¹⁸ The BJP government undermined the constitution’s commitment to secularism by amending the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in 2019. The Modi-led government also continues to suppress the freedom of religion rights. Intimidation of political opponents and people protesting government policies, as well as silencing of dissent in academia are now prevalent.¹⁹ India dropped down to electoral autocracy in 2018 and remains in this category by the end of 2023.

Mauritius is the top “stand-alone” autocratizer with the most recent autocratization beginning from 2018. Once hailed as the only liberal democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mauritius recently introduced several regulations that restrict the work of broadcasting companies and journalists, while government media censorship efforts have increased significantly since 2019.²⁰ The series of actions undermining democracy led to a declassification of Mauritius to electoral autocracy in 2023.

Nicaragua is the country with the longest still ongoing process of “stand-alone” autocratization. A period of democratic deterioration can be traced back to 2005, but a relatively swift downgrading to electoral autocracy occurred in 2007 with the return to power of Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Under the FSLN government, the quality of elections declined, and presidential term limits were abolished. The government also eliminated opposition parties from serious contention and used legal reforms to undermine checks on executive power. Virtually all democratic improvements the country achieved since 1990 were unmade. In two decades, Nicaragua has dropped from an electoral democracy to the bottom rung of ranks on the LDI.

Serbia is yet another case of protracted, incremental backsliding, typical for the “third wave.” The process started in 2009, and by 2014, Serbia slid into an electoral autocracy. Since then, democracy levels continued to regress further, for example due to harassment of the opposition, increasing election irregularities, and undermining of media freedom. Figure 14 reveals signs of authoritarian stabilization in the last three-four years. The 2023 elections included intimidation against opposition candidates, and electoral fraud leading the incumbent right-wing government led by Deputy Prime Minister Vučević and his SNS coalition to a new victory.²¹

Two countries were already autocracies when autocratization started.

In **Afghanistan**, the first signs of deterioration can be traced back to 2015. Yet, its score on the LDI plummeted after the Taliban entered Kabul on August 15, 2021 in a re-conquering of power after 20 years. The country went through a sharp curtailment of freedoms within less than 12 months. The Sharia law was imposed, women’s rights revoked, and universities systematically shut down in short order, making Afghanistan one of the most repressive closed autocracies in the world by 2023.

In **Hong Kong**, deterioration of democracy levels can be traced back to 2014. Yet, autocratization intensified in 2019, when the Hong Kong government introduced a bill allowing extraditions to mainland China. The 2019–2020 anti-government protests touched millions of people for almost a year. They were eventually curbed with repression and mass arrests directed by the central government in Beijing. Xi Jinping and Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam adopted the “National Security Law,” which allows the Chinese authorities to investigate and arrest anyone in Hong Kong suspected of serving for foreign interests either in Chinese territory or abroad.²² Hong Kong, which has always been a closed autocracy, has lost most of its freedoms by 2023.

“Bell-Turn” Autocratization

Figure 15 shows trajectories on the LDI for the top 10 episodes of “bell-turn” autocratization. Countries’ ranking in terms of the total magnitude of decline by the end of 2023 is presented in Table 3.

Box 5. Bell-Turns and U-Turns

Bell-turns are episodes where democratization is closely followed by autocratization. Inversely, U-turns are episodes of change in a country 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 U-turn. This comes from the recently published academic working paper “[When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds since 1900.](#)”

Simply put, Bell-turns are episodes where democratization turns into autocratization *within maximum five years* after the end of democratic advances. U-turns are episodes where autocratization transmutes into democratization within an equivalent period.

12 <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN1KK11D/>

13 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68002934>

14 Medzhorsky, J., and St. Lindberg. 2023. Walking the Talk: How to Identify Anti-Pluralist Parties. Party Politics. Online first.

15 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0217_EN.html

16 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220909IPR40137/meps-hungary-can-no-longer-be-considered-a-full-democracy>

17 <https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/en/2023-88-00-00>

18 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-56111289>; <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/openindia/india-turning-colonial-era-laws-silence-journalists/>

19 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/india>; <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Scholars-at-Risk-Free-to-Think-2020.pdf>

20 <https://rsf.org/en/country/mauritius>

21 <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17327/serbia-did-not-fulfil-its-commitments-to-free-and-fair-elections-say-meps>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/serbian-elections-marred-by-presidents-involvement-vote-buying-observers-2023-12-18/>

22 <https://www.cfr.org/background/hong-kong-freedoms-democracy-protests-china-crackdown>; <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/rw/R46473.pdf>

FIGURE 15. TOP 10 “BELL-TURN” AUTOCRATIZERS, 2023

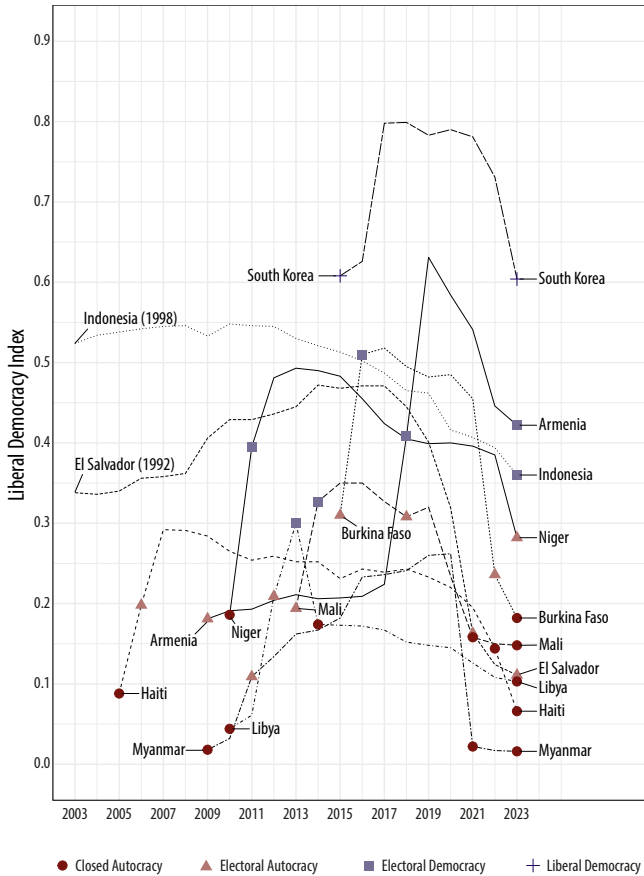


Figure 15 plots the LDI values for the top 10 “bell-turn” autocratizing countries. “Bell-turn” means that autocratization in these countries follows shortly after, and is connected to, a period of democratization (i.e., substantial improvement on the EDI levels). Note that the first year on the graph is technically a “pre-episode” year in the sense that the year after was the first one recording a change by the ERT methodology. The plot visualizes the total magnitude of change during a “bell-turn” episode.

“Bell-turns” can be thought of as cases of “failed democratization,” or re-autocratization. They are perhaps of particular interest for understanding vulnerabilities of democratization processes and could be studied in-depth for that purpose. We provide only brief descriptions of these cases here.

Eight of the top 10 “bell-turn” autocratizers were democracies at some point during their episode: **Armenia, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Indonesia, Libya, Mali, Niger, and South Korea**. After autocratization set in, only three of them – Armenia, Indonesia, and South Korea – remain democracies as of 2023. Out of the five where democracy broke down, three – Burkina Faso, Libya, and Mali – have become closed autocracies. The “survival rate” among democracies undergoing the bell-turn type of autocratization turns out to be about the same as for the stand-alone autocratization processes discussed above.

Two countries – **Haiti and Myanmar** – were at best electoral autocracies after short periods of improvements in the mid-2000s and early 2010s, respectively. For both, the autocratization process has led to closed autocracy by the end of 2023.

It is worth noting that five of the “bell-turn” countries – **Armenia, Burkina Faso, Libya, Myanmar, and Niger** – were among the top 10 *democratizers* of the last decade. **South Korea** – a country that

TABLE 3. RANK ORDER BY MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE, FIGURE 15

Rank	Country	Change on LDI
1	El Salvador	-0,360
2	Burkina Faso	-0,336
3	Myanmar	-0,246
4	Haiti	-0,225
5	Armenia	-0,209
6	Mali	-0,202
7	Niger	-0,201
8	Libya	-0,197
9	South Korea	-0,195
10	Indonesia	-0,186

was featured as a rare case of democracies that are bouncing back in last year’s *Democracy Report* – has recently reversed back to its pre-democratization episode levels. **El Salvador** and **Indonesia** went through very slow but steady episodes of democratization for more than a decade before the reversals. In other words, these were promising cases and their reversals into bell-turns point to the uncertainty of holding on to democratic gains across very different contexts.

Among the three countries where democracy still survives, **Armenia** democratized gradually beginning from 2009 and then made marked progress with the 2018 Velvet Revolution. A corrupt government was replaced with a democratically elected one,²³ and Armenia was ranked as one of the world’s top ten democratizers in the *Democracy Report* for several years. Yet, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict intersected Armenia’s path. The government under Prime Minister Pashinyan restricted civil liberties and the right to freedom of information, introduced a new censorship law, and outlawed government criticism.²⁴ Azerbaijan’s victory in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 adds to the uncertainty about the future in Armenia. Yet, it remains an electoral democracy as of 2023.

Indonesia’s gradual democratization process dates from the resignation of the authoritarian President Suharto in 1998 until the mid 2000s. The bell-turn process started in 2009 leading to an episode of slow-moving democratic decline into 2023. Increasing societal polarization and the rise of populism since 2014 are central to Indonesia’s fifteen-year-long autocratization. Re-elected in 2019, Widodo’s government issued a crackdown on Islamist opposition figures and forbade civil servants from engaging in “hate speech” against the government, including on social media.²⁵ President Widodo remained a popular president despite weakening civil liberties and dismantling checks and balances on the excuse that he was protecting democracy.²⁶ The scores on V-Dem’s indicators mean that Indonesia keeps its status of electoral democracy – however only barely so as indicated by its placement in the “grey zone” of electoral democracies as of 2023. In February 2024, Indonesia held general elections and elected a new President, former army general Prabowo Subianto (see Section 5).

South Korea’s episode started with advances on the LDI after a corruption scandal leading to mass mobilization by civil-society organizations, large-scale protests with millions of citizens on the streets, and President Park Geun-hye’s departure in 2016. The next President Moon Jae-in was a human rights activist during the previous military dictatorship. He turned South Korea back to its pre-Park LDI levels. Yet, South Korea’s presidents can serve only one five-year term, and the following elections in 2021 brought the right-wing and conservative Yoon Suk-yeol to power. His recent professional history already showed abuse of power.²⁷ The change of president set South Ko-

23 Lanskoj, M., and E. Suthers. 2019. Armenia’s Velvet Revolution. *Journal of Democracy* 30(2).

24 <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/democracy-in-armenia-one-step-forward-two-steps-back/>

25 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/08/18/deepening-polarization-and-democratic-decline-in-indonesia-pub-82435>

26 Mujani, S., and RW. Liddle. 2021. Indonesia: Jokowi Sidelines Democracy. *Journal of Democracy* 32(4).

27 http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/11/356_299941.html

rea back on a downward slope. President Yoon Suk-yeol's coercive measures to punish members of the former Moon administration,²⁸ along with attacks on gender equality,²⁹ set South Korea to decrease its LDI levels, forming a bell-turn. Although South Korea remains a liberal democracy at the end of 2023, Moon's efforts have been virtually neutralized.

There are five bell-turn cases that first became democracies but then democracy broke down.

Among them, **Burkina Faso's** democratization followed after the 2015 military coup and general elections. It swiftly became a process of bell-turn autocratization in 2018. After two coups in 2022 and clashes with Jihadists, the military junta mandated French forces out of the country, reconnected diplomatically with North Korea, and curbed freedom of expression further. A decree issued on April 13, 2023 empowers the military to curtail civil liberties during counter-terrorism operations, including silencing of civil society and the media.³⁰ The 2024 elections are postponed indefinitely.³¹ Burkina Faso moved from an electoral democracy to a closed autocracy within just two years and now ranks second among the bell-turns based on the magnitude of deterioration.

El Salvador was democratizing very slowly from 1992, gained the status of electoral democracy in 1998, and continued advancing until around 2014. The bell-turn reversal began in 2018, and the country now holds the first place in terms of magnitude of decline on the LDI among the "bell-turn" episodes of autocratization (see Table 3). Almost all democratic gains of the last two decades are gone by the end of 2023 – within only five years of President Bukele's rule. Actions include executive- and legislature-mandated arbitrary arrests under the pretext of fighting gang violence, targeting of civil society actors, journalists, judges, academics, and human rights defenders,³² and maneuvering re-election rules.³³ Dismantling of the judiciary in May 2021 tipped El Salvador over to electoral autocracy, which is the status the country retains by the end of 2023. President Bukele won a landslide re-election in El Salvador in February 2024.

The 2011 revolution in **Libya** that toppled the regime of Colonel Gaddafi also ushered in the National Transitional Council governing over the 2012 general elections. They were largely viewed as free and fair,³⁴ and for one year (2013) Libya was classified as an electoral democracy. Since 2014, however, Libya has been mired in a civil war between two rival governments, each supported by an array of militias. The bell-turn came quickly, and as of 2023, Libya is a closed autocracy.

Mali's bell-turn began with significant upward gains in 2014 to become an electoral democracy after the 2013 presidential elections that returned civilian control of the government. During the ongoing conflict in northern Mali between the government and rebel groups backed by Islamist militants, Mali's fledgling democracy was supported by numerous foreign assistance and military peacekeeping interventions. Yet, the autocratization-part of the bell-turn began in 2017 and the next year Mali became an electoral autocracy amid increasing instability. The 2020 and 2021 military coups led to a closed autocracy – the status it holds as of 2023.

Niger is another example of a bell-turn autocratization following a military takeover in the context of insurgent attacks from Jihad-

ist groups. The 2011 general election led to a status of electoral democracy. Yet, tensions and conflicts in Mali started to spill over into neighboring countries by 2016, and Niger's government went on to impose restrictions on freedom of expression.³⁵ The 2020-2021 general elections marked Niger's first-ever democratic transition of power, but the elected government was overthrown by a military junta in July 2023. Niger is a closed autocracy by the end of 2023.

Of the two "bell-turn" autocratizers that never became a democracy, **Myanmar's** 2021 military coup ended a fragile political liberalization going on since 2009. The coup led to civil war, humanitarian crisis, more than 3,000 protestors killed, and 20,000 people arrested.³⁶ The military junta postponed the August 2023 general elections and extended the state of emergency rule. At the end of 2023, Myanmar ranks 177 on the LDI, just above North Korea and Eritrea, indicating that it is one of the most repressive closed autocracies in the world.

After a short period of democratic improvements in 2006-2008 that turned **Haiti** into an electoral autocracy, the country has been in a long and protracted period of autocratization. Haiti has been in the abyss of ungovernability after the 2010 earthquake, and criminal gangs with their political patrons dominate the scene.³⁷ After the assassination of President Moïse in July 2021 and the expiration of congressional terms, Haiti became a closed autocracy in 2022. As of February 2024, no new date has been set for elections due to security concerns.

Elections Now Also Under Attack by Autocrats

Drilling down to the individual indicators of the components analyzed above, Figure 16 reveals further details about the process of autocratization. For this analysis, we include all indicators that go into any of the democracy indices (similar to Figure 8), but only indicators from the electoral and liberal indices show up among the top 20 most affected indicators. All 42 autocratizing countries (both "stand-alone" and "bell-turn" types) are included in the analysis. The comparison is between their levels at the end of 2023 and each country's onset year of autocratization (which are shown in Figure 13).

The most notable change from our reporting in earlier years' *Democracy Reports* is that **elections** are now increasingly undermined in autocratizing countries. In the 2022 report, for example, **only one** of the indicators in the Clean Elections Index was found among the top 20 declining indicators. That was the **Election Management Body (EMB) autonomy**, and it is again on the top list in this year's report. Data shows that governments are curbing this key institution's autonomy in 22 of the 42 autocratizing countries. Among the offenders we even find relatively democratic countries like Ghana who last held elections in 2020 and has upcoming ones scheduled for December 2024. But there are also more troubled electoral democracies verging on the threshold towards autocracy like Mexico where the most recent elections were held in 2018 and the next ones are scheduled for 2024.

This year, two additional indicators that go into the Clean Elections Index appear on the top 20 list of aspects that are undermined in the largest number of autocratizing countries. The indicator for **free- and fairness of elections** deteriorated substantially and signifi-

28 <https://www.9dashline.com/article/evaluating-south-koreas-democratic-backsliding>

29 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/07/outcry-as-south-korean-president-tries-to-scrap-gender-equality-ministry-to-protect-women#:~:text=South%20Korea%27s%20president%2C%20Yoon%20Suk,an%20improvement%20in%20women%27s%20rights>

30 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/burkina-faso>

31 <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2024-elections/burkina-faso/>

32 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/el-salvador-president-bukele-human-rights-crisis/>

33 <https://elfaro.net/en/202312/opinion/27182/Fraud-upon-Fraud-Bukele-Is-Not-on-Presidential-Leave.htm>

34 <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/220578.pdf>

35 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/niger/report-niger/>

36 <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/news/east-west-wire/understanding-military-coup-myanmar-two-years-later>

37 <https://latinoamerica21.com/en/haiti-hostage-of-criminal-organizations/>

cantly in 18 countries, including the EU-member Hungary, the most populous country in the world India, and The Philippines. **Government intimidation** during election periods increased substantially in 16 autocratizing countries, among them in the African island state of The Comoros and in one of Europe's worst autocratizers of the last decades, Serbia.

These findings give further weight to the analysis presented in part one of the report and the results from Figure 7, which demonstrates that the overall global trend for election quality has been reversed over the last decade: 23 countries were still improving on the quality of elections in 2013, but by 2023 the situation was turned upside down with 23 countries registering substantial and statistically significant backsliding. As late as in the 2021 *Democracy Report*, we showed that elections tended to come late in the autocratization process, after a series of other aspects of democracy have first been derailed. The data shown in Figure 16 *could* indicate that many of the current autocratizers have advanced so far in the process that they now feel confident enough to attack and undermine democracy's core institution.

Meanwhile, the results shown in Figure 16 also demonstrate that freedom of expression and the media and freedom of association are the democratic freedoms that are under the most frequent attack during autocratization. Almost half of the top 20 declining indicators in Figure 16 belong to these two critical components of democracy. **Media censorship** is what rulers in autocratizing countries engage

in most frequently and to the greatest degree. It is closely followed by restrictions on **academic and cultural expression** and the **repression of civil society organizations (CSOs)**. These three core institutions worsened substantially in more than 20 autocratizing countries. Governments' censorship of the media, for instance, worsened the most in Nicaragua, closely followed by Afghanistan, Hong Kong, and Myanmar. Ortega's comeback to power in Nicaragua set the stage for a rapid decline on this indicator. Afghanistan experienced rapid declines on this indicator after the Taliban takeover. In Hong Kong, a crackdown on media freedom including the arrest of media tycoon and owner of more liberal newspapers Jimmy Lai in 2023, followed the enactment of the National Security Law in 2021. In Myanmar, the military introduced several digital restrictions and internet blackouts after the 2021 coup.³⁸ However, freedom of expression and the media and repression of civil society worsen also in less repressive states like Croatia, Peru, and Senegal, showcasing that this is far from a phenomenon only taking place in the most autocratic settings.

The indicators showing declines in media freedom are often related. **Government censorship efforts** that decline substantially in 27 countries, are frequently targeting **printed and broadcasted media critical of the government**, which is waning noticeably in 20 countries. Another mean of repression of freedom of expression is increasing levels of **media self-censorship**. This indicator shows that such more elusive expressions of repression are getting worse in 20 countries. Efforts by governments to curtail the media's freedom and independence commonly coincide with and works through **harassment of journalists**, and it is therefore no surprise to find that this indicator is deteriorating in 19 countries. Greece and South Korea are examples that also demonstrate that undermining of freedom of expression and the media are far from reserved for countries that are becoming harsh autocracies. The data for the past decades across the world demonstrates that media freedom is also undermined in still relatively liberal and somewhat democratic countries at early stages of autocratization, such as in Hungary beginning in 2009 when it was still a democracy and Türkiye around the same time. The data also shows substantial and statistically significant deterioration in **freedom of discussion for men** as well as for **women** in 21 and 20 countries, respectively.

The liberal aspects of democracy are also increasingly under assault. Only four of the 23 indicators that go into the Liberal Component Index appeared on the top 20 list last year. Now there are six. Governments in 19 autocratizing countries are curbing **legislatures' ability to investigate** wrongdoings by the government; the indicator for **executive oversight** worsened considerably in 18 countries; while the **impartiality of public administration, opposition parties' capacity to leverage the legislature to investigate the government, governments' respect for the constitution, and governments' compliance with the high court** are declining significantly and substantially in 16 countries. Countries that have declined on several of these indicators on the liberal component include Botswana and Indonesia. This is evidence of an increasingly aggressive incursion by autocratic-minded leaders to achieve "executive aggrandizement."³⁹

FIGURE 16. TOP 20 DECLINING INDICATORS, AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2023

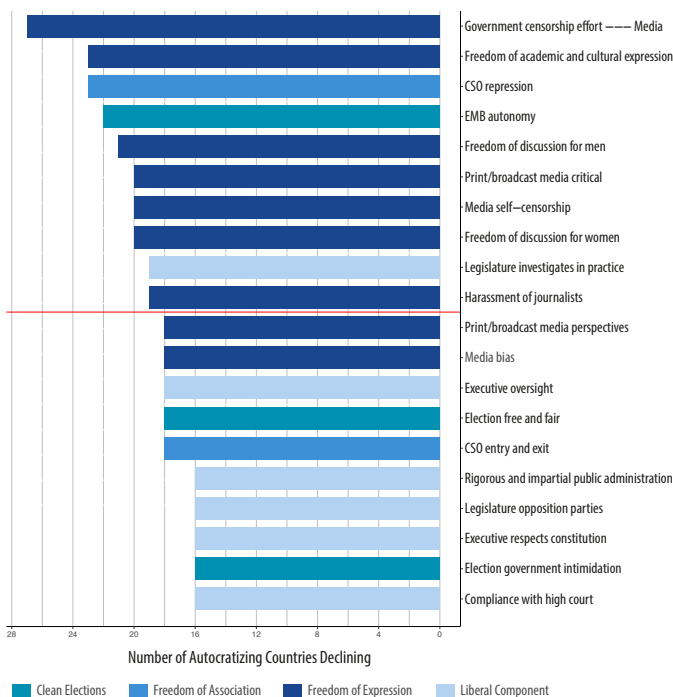


Figure 16 plots the number of autocratizing countries declining significantly and substantially on the top 20 most affected indicators. The red line marks the top 10 indicators. An indicator is declining substantially and significantly if its 2023 value is at least 0.5 points lower than the value at the start of the autocratization episode, on a scale ranging from 0 to 4 (for most variables) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

³⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/myanmar-un-experts-condemn-military-digital-dictatorship>

³⁹ Bermeo, N. 2016. *On Democratic Backsliding*. *Journal of Democracy* 27(1); see also Khaitan, T. 2019. *Executive aggrandizement in established democracies: A crisis of liberal democratic constitutionalism*. *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 17(1).

Box 6. BRICS Expansion and the Future of Global Democracy

Five countries (Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) joined the group of top emerging economies – BRICS – earlier this year. The resulting BRICS+ assembly with ten members harbors 46% of the world's population, encompasses 34% of the world's land surface, and generates 29% of the world's real GDP.

The expansion into BRICS+ sends a message about a shifting balance of global power and an emergence of a multipolar world. The weakening of democracies' relative economic power also poses questions about prospects for human rights and democratic freedoms around the world.

BRICS+ Counterposing G7

The BRICS+ trajectory in terms of economic growth has been truly remarkable. Figure 1 shows that the group's total share of global real GDP has more than tripled during the last 30 years – from 9% in 1993 up to 29% in 2023 (left panel). At the same time, G7's share of world real GDP has shrunk from 68% in 1993 to 44% in 2023.

Even before adding new members, the original founding BRICS nations surpassed the G7 group when measured by share of global GDP based on purchasing power parity (Figure 1, right panel). By this measure, BRICS+ countries now account for 37% of global GDP, while the share of G7 countries is down to 30%.

The relative success of BRICS is all the more remarkable when taking into account that ideologically different autocracies China and Russia and now electoral autocracy India managed to work pragmatically together with still democratic Brazil and South Africa for many years. Even the Sino-Indian border dispute, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the following sanctions did not break up the block.

The addition of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE adds important economic heft to the group. BRICS+ now includes three of the world's largest oil exporters as well as Russia – giving it a relevance in the geopolitics of the global oil market. As energy sanctions have become more prevalent, the expansion of BRICS is also a sign that countries are exploring ways to reduce their dependence on the US dollar.

BRICS+ as a Club of Autocracies

With the admission of five new members, the bloc's average LDI score dropped from an already low 0.33 to 0.21 (Figure 2). India's descent from a relatively decent democracy ten years ago to today's increasingly oppressive electoral autocracy had contributed to the LDI decline even before the enlargement. BRICS+ is now firmly established as a club where nations that respect human rights, democratic freedoms, and the rule of law are in a clear minority.

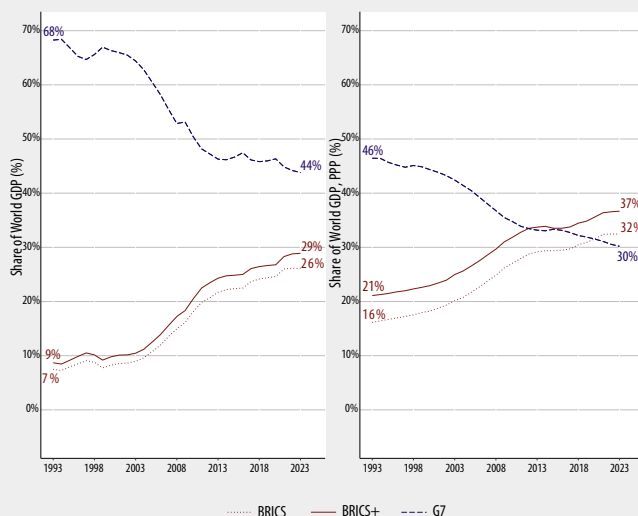
Obviously, civil liberties, democratic norms, and human rights are not among the entry criteria in the BRICS assembly. Three of the five new members – Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia – are some of the worst human rights abusers in the world.¹ The UAE also routinely ranks near the bottom on many measures for human rights, freedom of speech and freedom of the media, while situation in Ethiopia has deteriorated seriously since the outbreak of conflict in the Tigray region.

Among the original founding members of BRICS, China and Russia have become increasingly more repressive in recent years. China has tightened control over all aspects of private life and has increased the use of media surveillance and censorship apparatus. Russia has virtually eradicated political opposition and independent media, while political repression is so harsh that it is leaving virtually no corner of the society untouched. Indian authorities have also intensified their crackdowns on journalists, activists, and critics of the regime.

BRICS' two remaining democracies – South Africa and Brazil – are now a small minority in the expanded bloc. Additionally, they have problems with democracy of their own. South Africa is now experiencing a democratic decline caused by endemic corruption and violation of human rights (see Section 5), while Brazil – despite being a recent U-turn democratizer (see section 4) – still struggles with the legacy of polarization in the society left by ex-President Jair Bolsonaro.²

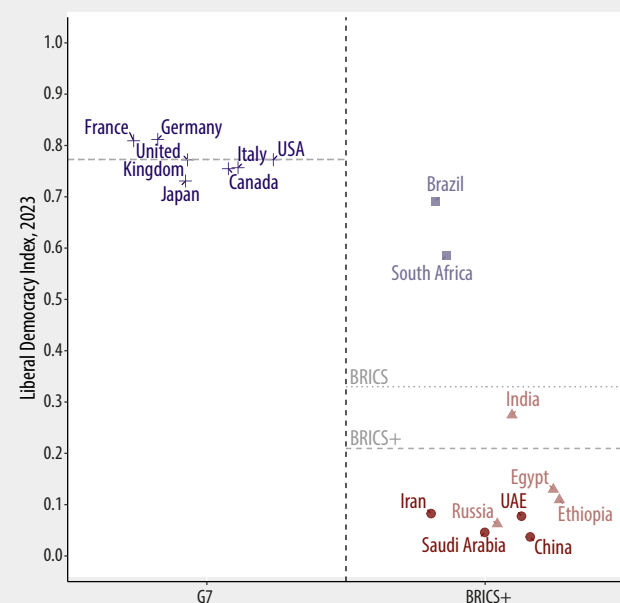
With the expansion, BRICS+ is not only consolidating its status as the voice of the Global South but is also bringing more weight to bear on international politics. Given the blighted autocratic records of BRICS+ members, the expansion of the bloc now also raises fundamental questions about the future of global democracy.

FIGURE 1. SHARE OF WORLD GDP, BRICS+ VS. G7, 1993–2023



The data on real GDP and GDP/ppp come from the World Bank.

FIGURE 2. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX, G7 VS. BRICS+, 2023



1 <https://web.uri.edu/artsci/wp-content/uploads/sites/1132/2023-Human-Rights-report-PDF-Final.pdf>
 2 <https://clas.osu.edu/news/january-8th-political-polarization-brazil>



The 2023 general election of Thailand in the part of Chanthaburi Municipality, Mueang Chanthaburi District, Chanthaburi Province, May 14, 2023. (Adirach Toumlamoon/Pacific Press/Shutterstock)

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4 | Democratizing Countries

- **7 out of 9 “stand-alone” democratizers have transitioned away from autocracy.**
- **The 9 “stand-alone” democratizers harbor only 30 million people, and 5 of the 9 are island states. These facts reflect the smaller impact of current democratization in the world.**
- **3 “U-turn” democratizers have restored their initial levels of democracy, but the other 6 are still at lower levels than at the beginning of the episode.**
- **Freedom of expression and the media are typical areas of improvement – increasing substantially in more than half of all democratizing countries.**

Using the ERT methodology (see Box 4), we show the trajectories of the countries with currently ongoing processes of democratization. We distinguish between two types, just like for autocratizers. “Stand-alone” democratization is a process of improvement that starts independently after a period of relative stability. In “U-turns”, a period of democratization follows shortly after, and is connected to, a period of autocratization.⁴⁰ The complete list of the 18 democratizing countries grouped into the nine stand-alone and nine U-turn processes is presented in Figure 17. Countries are ordered according to their levels on the LDI at the onset of democratization. The LDI score for 2023 reveals the total magnitude of democratic improvement by the end of 2023. All 18 democratization episodes are still ongoing.

Of the 18 democratizers, 14 were autocracies at the start of their episode. By 2023, 15 of the 18 are democracies. Four other countries were already democracies, and thus experienced further democratic deepening. This overview shows that democratization can take off

in different circumstances, which is reflected by the distribution of starting levels on the LDI in Figure 17.

“Stand-Alone” Democratization

Figure 18 shows the nine countries going through “stand-alone” democratization processes and details their trajectories on the LDI from the start of each country’s episode of democratization to the end of 2023. Table 4 shows which are the “best improvers” by ranking countries by the total magnitude of increase.

The “stand-alone” democratizers are not only a small group but are also small countries in general. This speaks to the dominance of autocratization as a much more influential global trend. The nine countries combined hold a population of about 30 million people, with 70% of those residing in **Dominican Republic** (11 million) and **Honduras** (10 million). The 30 million corresponds to a mere 0.38% of the world population. This fact, of course, does not undermine the positive developments within these countries.

Seven out of nine “stand-alone” democratizers were autocracies before the start of democratization – only **Dominican Republic** and **Kosovo** began their episodes as democracies to improve further. All nine countries are democracies in 2023, but only **The Seychelles** has developed into a liberal democracy so far.

Fiji, The Gambia, Honduras, Montenegro, Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste were electoral autocracies by the start of their episodes – all have transitioned into electoral democracies by 2023.

Fiji is the most recent case of stand-alone democratization, which started only two years ago. The 2022 elections led to a change of leadership. Sitiveni Rabuka from the People’s Alliance became Prime Minister, defeating the incumbent Frank Bainimarama from the Fiji

FIGURE 17. ALL 18 CASES OF ONGOING DEMOCRATIZATION, 2023

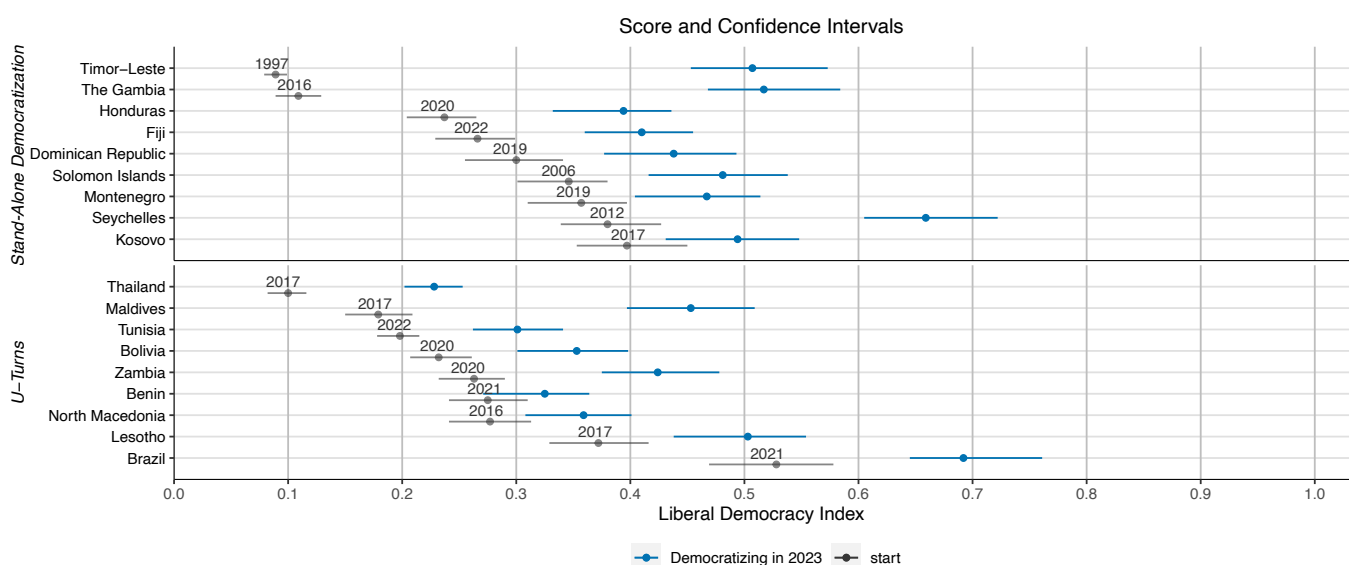


Figure 17 shows the LDI scores and confidence intervals at the start of democratization. By the ERT methodology, these are technically “pre-episode” in the sense that the year after was the first recording an increase. The values in 2023 are highlighted in blue and reveal the total magnitude of change. The ERT is based on the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for identifying episodes, and we follow that but display countries’ 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).

40 Nord, M. et al. 2024. “When autocratization is reversed.” V-Dem Institute: V-Dem Working Paper 147.

FIGURE 18. ALL 9 “STAND-ALONE” DEMOCRATIZERS, 2023

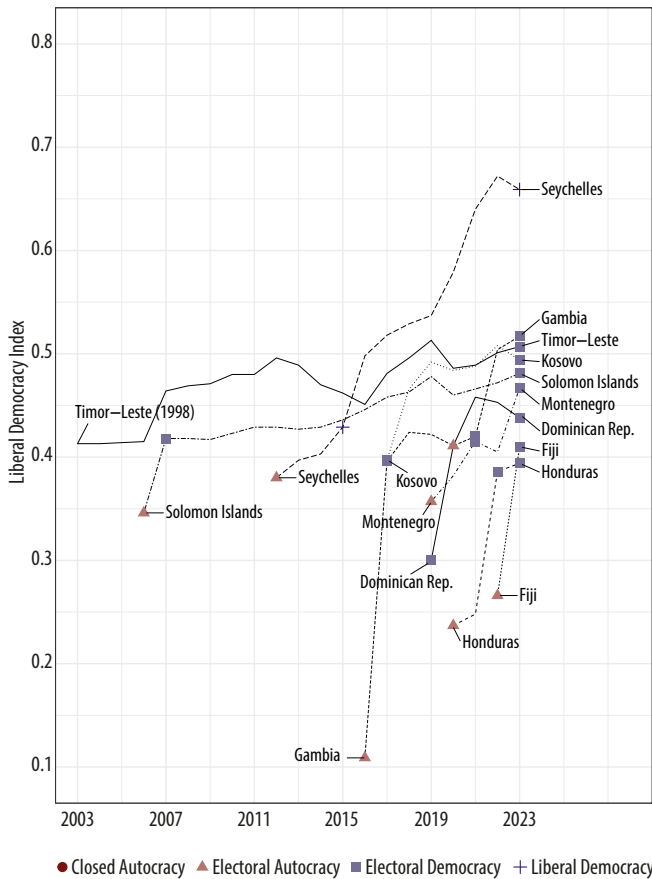


Figure 18 plots the LDI values for the nine “stand-alone” democratizing countries. Timor-Leste’s episode started in 1998 and the trajectory of the first five years is not shown on the graph. Note that the first year on the graph is technically a “pre-episode” year in the sense that the following year was the first one recording an increase by the ERT methodology. The plot visualizes the total magnitude of change during democratization.

First party and ending his 16-year rule.⁴¹ The new government has enacted some reforms that led to higher LDI scores, such as repealing a media law that threatened freedom of expression.⁴²

The Gambia’s democratization began from electoral autocracy in 2016, with the lowest LDI levels among all stand-alone democratizers. The 2017 presidential elections led to the first democratic transfer of power by popular elections since the 1994 military coup led by Yahya Jammeh. At first, President Jammeh refused to step down. President-elect Adama Barrow was sworn in only after an international military intervention by members of the Economic Community of West African States. Barrow’s reforms included the release of political prisoners⁴³ and the promotion of freedom of expression.⁴⁴

Honduras was an electoral autocracy in 2020 but progressed to electoral democracy after the 2021 elections. Part of the advances are due to improvement in the quality of elections. After years of polls marked by electoral violence and fraud, the 2021 elections were relatively peaceful and inclusive, had record turnout, and resulted in

TABLE 4. RANK ORDER BY MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE, FIGURE 18

Rank	Country	Change on LDI
1	The Gambia	0.408
2	The Seychelles	0.279
3	Honduras	0.157
4	Fiji	0.144
5	Dominican Republic	0.138
6	Solomon Islands	0.135
7	Montenegro	0.110
8	Kosovo	0.097
9	Timor-Leste	0.094

the first woman president, Xiomara Castro.⁴⁵ Since 2021, Honduras has notably advanced on civil liberties and somewhat improved on freedom of expression, although there is still significant room for improvements.⁴⁶

Montenegro became an electoral democracy after the 2020 elections that brought an opposition coalition to power and ended three decades of rule by the Democratic Party of Socialists. The 2020 elections took place amidst the “envelope affair” corruption scandal, that revealed recordings and documents implicating members of government in bribery.⁴⁷ Montenegro’s trajectory was somewhat troubled in 2021-2022 by the President’s alleged violations of the constitution and a conflict about responsibilities.⁴⁸ However, the 2023 elections were largely free and fair, and Montenegro remains an electoral democracy as of 2023.

Solomon Islands is another example of elections leading to democratization. The 2006 elections led to a change of leadership, with a new prime minister elected under a coalition of opposition parties. Subsequent elections have improved further in quality, along with freedom of association. Despite some weakness in the rule of law and problems with corruption, democratic rights and freedoms are generally respected in Solomon Islands.⁴⁹ It remains electoral democracy since 2007.

Timor-Leste is one of the youngest countries in the world. An independence referendum in 1999 led to the separation from Indonesia and initiated a three-year transition period under a UN administration.⁵⁰ The first ever legislative elections in independent Timor-Leste were held in 2001, and the first presidential elections followed in 2002.⁵¹ Thus, the onset of the East Timorese democratization coincides with its independence. Since formally becoming an independent state in 2002, Timor-Leste has been slowly but consistently improving on the LDI.

The democratization process in **The Seychelles** can be traced back to 2012, when it was an electoral autocracy and quickly developed to a liberal democracy after substantial improvements in most democratic aspects measured by the LDI. In 2015, The Seychelles took several steps to improve its legal framework including revisions of its electoral code,⁵² and opposition parties won the parliamentary elections in 2016. Opposition leader Wavel Ramkalawan won the presidential election in 2020 leading to the first

41 <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/fiji-lawmakers-vote-install-sitiveni-rabuka-next-prime-minister-2022-12-24/>
 42 <https://monitor.civics.org/explore/fiji-repeal-of-restrictive-media-law-reverse-of-travel-bans-and-other-reform-commitments-a-positive-signal-for-civic-freedoms/>
 43 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/2/20/president-adama-barrow-orders-release-of-171-prisoners>
 44 <https://rsf.org/en/we-re-ready-help-gambia-do-more-promote-journalism-rsf-tells-barrow>
 45 <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/es/content/success-story-honduras>
 46 <https://srfreedex.org/statement-by-irene-khan-on-her-visit-to-honduras-16-27-october-2023/>
 47 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/montenegro/freedom-world/2020>
 48 <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/11/02/montenegrin-parliament-criticized-for-law-restricting-presidents-powers/>
 49 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/solomon-islands/freedom-world/2023>
 50 <https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unmiset/>
 51 <https://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/63/>
 52 <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/freehou/2016/en/111996>

peaceful transfer of power to the opposition since independence in 1976. As of 2023, The Seychelles remains the only liberal democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Dominican Republic and **Kosovo** started their democratization processes as (electoral) democracies and are now further improving, or deepening, the quality of their democratic institutions. In Dominican Republic, democratization followed the election of Luis Abinader as president in 2020. In Kosovo, the process started with the 2017 parliamentary election after a vote of no confidence on the previous parliament.

“U-Turn” Democratization

Figure 19 displays trajectories on the LDI for the nine countries that recently were in an episode of autocratization and are currently democratizing – episodes of U-turn democratization. U-turns can be thought of as cases of “reversed autocratization,” or democratic turnaround.⁵³ They could be of particular interest for understanding why and how some countries successfully halt and revert autocratization. The *Democracy Report* does not provide answers to such questions but identifies the cases and describes them briefly. We encourage other analysts to probe and rejoin with in-depth analyses of what helps to turn autocratization into processes of democratization. All

the nine cases also seem potentially important for the international democracy community to pay attention to.

Three of the nine U-turns have by 2023 restored levels of democracy they had before the start of autocratization – **Lesotho, The Maldives, and Zambia**. The other six – **Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, North Macedonia, Thailand, and Tunisia** – are still at lower levels in 2023, and some substantially so. Since we focus on *ongoing* U-turn democratization episodes, we still do not know final outcomes of these episodes, meaning that there is still a possibility that their trajectories continue upwards.

Two countries – **Brazil** and **Lesotho** – managed to halt autocratization before a democratic breakdown and are now “bouncing back.” Four countries – **Bolivia, The Maldives, North Macedonia, and Zambia** – went through democratic breakdowns but the U-turns are turning them back to democracies.

Two countries – **Benin** and **Tunisia** – suffered democratic breakdowns, and while their LDI levels are improving, they remain quite distant from regaining democracy. **Thailand** is recovering from an authoritarian regression into a closed autocracy. We briefly review these nine cases below.

FIGURE 19. ALL 9 “U-TURN” DEMOCRATIZERS, 2023

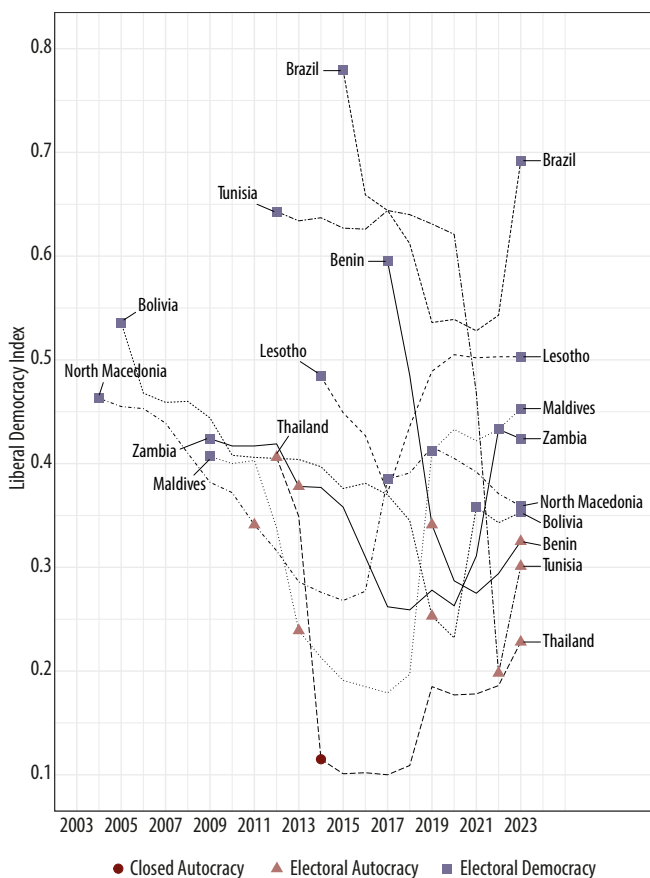


Figure 19 plots the LDI values for the nine countries currently in a U-turn episode. Note that the first year on the graph is technically a “pre-episode” year in the sense that the following year was the first recoding a change by the ERT methodology. The plot visualizes the total magnitude of change during a “U-turn” episode.

TABLE 5. RANK ORDER BY MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE, FIGURE 19

Rank	Country	Change on LDI
1	The Maldives	0,274
2	Brazil	0,164
3	Zambia	0,161
4	Lesotho	0,131
5	Thailand	0,128
6	Bolivia	0,121
7	Tunisia	0,103
8	North Macedonia	0,082
9	Benin	0,050

Out of the two cases that halted autocratization before breakdown, **Brazil** took a turn down in 2016 when former President Rousseff was removed from office in a process that polarized Brazilian voters and Bolsonaro was elected president two years later. His presidency was marked by attacks on the media,⁵⁴ restrictions to academic freedom,⁵⁵ attempts to undermine the electoral system,⁵⁶ and conflicts with the legislative and judiciary powers. “Lula” da Silva defeated Bolsonaro in the polls in 2022 and took office on January 1, 2023, leading to a year of refutation of Bolsonaro’s policies and ceasing of his transgressions. Bolsonaro was convicted of abusing his office to discredit the electoral system and is ineligible to seek or hold public office until 2030.⁵⁷ (Also see Box 8).

Lesotho also managed to turn autocratization around before democratic breakdown. A collapse of the coalition government resulted in three elections between 2012 and 2017 under contested circumstances, a weakening of rule of law, polarization between ruling elites, and an attempted coup d’état.⁵⁸ Prime Minister Thabane was eventually forced to resign by his own party. This opened a period of reforms beginning in 2019 and significant liberalization. While Lesotho continues to be troubled by political instability, its record is improving, and the 2022 elections were generally free and fair.⁵⁹

53 Nord, M. et al. 2024. “When autocratization is reversed.” V-Dem Institute: V-Dem Working Paper 147.
 54 <https://rsf.org/en/bolsonaro-family-vents-more-anger-ever-brazil-s-media>
 55 https://gppi.net/media/GPPI_LAUT_2020_Academic_Freedom_in_Brazil.pdf
 56 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/10/25/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-misinformation.html>
 57 <https://apnews.com/article/brazil-bolsonaro-ineligible-court-ruling-vote-99dee0fe4b529019ccb65c9636a9045>
 58 <https://au.int/en/documents/20190514/report-african-union-election-observation-mission-3rd-june-2017-national-assembly>
 59 <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU%20EOM%20LSO%202022%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Box 7. Nearly Half of Autocratization Episodes are Turned Around

A new Working Paper from the V-Dem Institute offers a first systematic empirical overview of patterns and developments of U-turns from 1900-2022. The analysis shows:

- 98 episodes of U-turns spread out over 65 countries, 1900-2022.
- 48% of all episodes of autocratization become U-turns.
- 70% of autocratization cases are turned around in the last 30 years.
- 93% of U-turns end with levels of democracy higher than, or similar to, those found before autocratization, while only 7% end up being less democratic.
- Of the 44 episodes that start in democracies, 39 countries saw their democracy break down before returning to democracy.

Nord, M., et al. 2024. "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds since 1900." University of Gothenburg, V-Dem Institute: Working Paper No. 147.



Lesotho's LDI score is now back to the equivalent level it had when the process started ten years ago.

Among the cases where democracy broke down for a short while, **Bolivia's** process started with President Morales ascending to power in 2006. He set Bolivia on a slow path of gradual autocratization, typical for the "third wave". Accusations of electoral fraud provoked mass mobilization, international pressure,⁶⁰ and loss of the army's support forced Morales to resign in 2019, and turned Bolivia into an electoral autocracy.⁶¹ After a tumultuous year, the turnaround came with the much cleaner 2020 general elections and Bolivia regained a status of electoral democracy in 2021. However, there has not been much progression since then and Bolivia remains at a far lower LDI level than before the start of autocratization.

Likewise, **The Maldives** went through a period of substantial autocratization starting in earnest in 2009. The process led to an electoral autocracy in 2013 when President Yameen was responsible for violations of civil liberties and executive overreach.⁶² Facing mounting dissatisfaction, Yameen lost the 2018 presidency to Ibrahim Solih. The reduced repression, along with the free and fair parliamentary elections in 2019 won by President Solih's Maldivian Democratic Party,⁶³ led to the regaining of status as electoral democracy. The Maldives continues its upward trajectory, and the 2023 presidential elections were also free and fair.⁶⁴ The new government formed by the opposition is led by Mohamed Muizzu.⁶⁵ The Maldives is now at democracy levels slightly above those before the start of autocratization.

North Macedonia's process of autocratization can be traced back to 2004, but a relatively swift deterioration started in 2007 when Prime Minister Gruevski's government started to shrink the freedom for media and civil society organizations.⁶⁶ The country became an electoral autocracy in 2011. The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) decided to boycott the parliament after the 2014 election.⁶⁷ The SDSM and an alliance of civil society organizations then instigated widespread mobilization in 2015, following disclosure of a massive illegal wiretapping campaign by the government.⁶⁸ Prime Minister Gruevski's resignation, a parliamentary crisis, and the 2016 elections set North Macedonia on a U-turn path. However, a slight decline on the LDI since 2019 follows renewed polarization between the elites and concerns about the rule of law.⁶⁹ By the ERT methodology, it is too early to claim that the U-turn episode has ended. As of 2023, North Macedonia is above its pre-autocratization LDI levels and qualifies as an electoral democracy.

Zambia seemed like an unlikely case to make a U-turn after autocratization started in earnest in 2009 and it became an electoral autocracy in 2013. The regression deepened with the election of President Lungu from the Patriotic Front (PF) in 2014. His tenure was characterized by severe restrictions on freedoms of expression and the media, and assembly.⁷⁰ Eventually, civil society groups reacted with pro-democratic mobilization and opposition leaders united in resisting Lungu's attempts to make constitutional amendments. This resulted in a 2021 electoral victory for the opposition leader from the United Party for National Development (UPND), Hakainde Hichilema.⁷¹ As of 2023, Zambia restored the LDI levels it had before autocratization, returned to electoral democracy, and repression has largely ceased.

Benin is one of the two cases where breakdown of democracy has been followed by some improvements which are however not enough to restore an electoral democracy. The process of autocratization took hold under President Talon, who was elected in largely free and fair democratic elections in 2016. Within less than five years, the government eroded judicial independence, undermined political competition, harassed political opponents and critical journalists, and conducted elections with severe irregularities.⁷² Only parties supporting President Talon were allowed to compete in the 2019 parliamentary elections. During the 2021 presidential election, all main opponents were either disqualified, under arrest, or in exile and President Talon won a second term.⁷³ An incremental liberalization process led up to the parliamentary elections in 2023. Opposition parties were allowed to compete, and the main opposition (the Democrats) won 24% of the seat share.⁷⁴ While still in a U-turn process, Benin remains an electoral autocracy and its 2023 LDI score is substantially lower than before the start of autocratization.

Tunisia – the success story of the Arab spring – is the other case where democracy broke down and has not returned, despite some improvements. It was an electoral democracy until President Saied dissolved parliament in 2021, postponed elections indefinitely, and in effect started ruling by decree.⁷⁵ Attacks on civil liberties followed

60 Lehoucq, F. (2020). Bolivia's Citizen Revolt. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3).

61 https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-bolivian-government-is-on-a-lawless-course-its-democracy-must-be-preserved/2021/03/18/3b816a4e-880b-11eb-8a8b-5cf82c3dffe4_story.html

62 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-maldives-election-idUSBRE9AG09L20131117>

63 https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/documents/MaldivesFinalReport_13-06-19.pdf?VersionId=_z_LyIxtXReilJgvhIQCKL5HPgQtX6f

64 <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/Final%20Report%20-%20EU%20EOM%20Maldives%202023%20-%209%20January%202024.pdf>

65 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/01/pro-china-candidate-mohamed-muizzu-wins-maldives-presidency-upending-relationship-with-india>

66 <https://www.boell.de/en/2016/12/14/macedonia-captured-society-1>

67 Tomini, L., Gibril, S., and Bochev, V. 2023. Standing up against autocratization across political regimes. *Democratization* 30(1).

68 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32771233>

69 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2023>

70 https://www.eods.eu/library/eu_eom_zambia_2021_-_final_report.pdf

71 https://www.eods.eu/library/eu_eom_zambia_2021_-_final_report.pdf

72 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/benin/freedom-world/2022>

73 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/benin/freedom-world/2022>

74 <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/benin-opposition-party-wins-seats-parliament-after-more-open-election-2023-01-11/>

75 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/14/thousands-protest-against-tunisian-president-kais-saied-seizure-of-near-total-power>

FIGURE 20. TOP 20 IMPROVING INDICATORS, DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2023

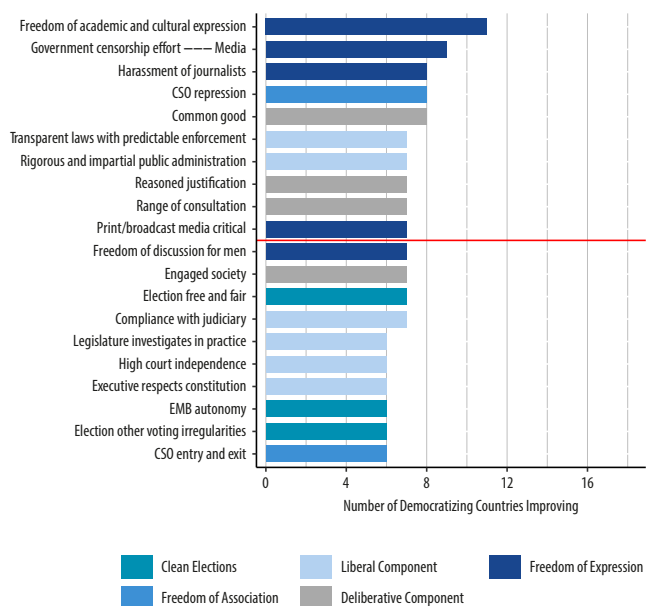


Figure 20 plots the number of democratizing countries improving significantly and substantially on the top 20 most affected indicators. The red line marks the top 10 indicators. An indicator is declining substantially and significantly if its 2023 value is at least 0.5 points higher than the value at the start of the democratization episode, on a scale ranging from 0 to 4 (for most variables) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

as people opposed the draconian measures.⁷⁶ The return of elections in 2022–23 and the reinstatement of parliament led to an uptick in the LDI level, but the elections seemed a façade to legitimate Saied’s rule. The main opponents boycotted, and only 11% of the electorate turned out to vote.⁷⁷ By the end of 2023, Tunisia remains an electoral autocracy with the LDI score substantially lower than at its peak in 2012.

Thailand is the only U-turn case that turned into a closed autocracy in the process. The 2014 coup led to five years of military rule. The 2019 flawed elections resulted in some liberalization under the military-backed government.⁷⁸ The 2023 elections were cleaner,⁷⁹ and resulted in a surprise win of the Move Forward party and the resignation of Prime Minister and former 2014 coup-leader Chan-ocha.⁸⁰ Yet, the Pheu Thai party went into a coalition with military-backed parties to elect Thavisin as the new Prime Minister, leaving The Move Forward Party out of the government.⁸¹ Despite some liberalization, Thailand remains an electoral autocracy with the LDI score substantially lower than before the military rule.

Freedom of Expression and the Media are the Most Common to Improve

Figure 20 reveals further details about the process of democratization by displaying the top 20 indicators that improve in the greatest number of countries across the 18 “stand-alone” and “U-turn” democratizers. Similar to Figures 8 and 16, we include all indicators that go into any of the democracy indices into analysis. The comparison is between the end of 2023 and each country’s onset year of democratization (which are shown in Figure 17).

The most notable finding is that aspects of **freedom of expression and the media** are the most common to improve among democratizing countries. Five indicators (20%) that go into the Freedom of Expression Index appear on the top 20 list of aspects that improve in the largest number of democratization countries. Three of them occupy the top spots. It shows how critical this core area of democracy is, also when it comes to opening up and initiating a process of democratization.

Among these indicators, **freedom of academic and cultural expression** is improving in the greatest number of democratizers – eleven out of 18. The Gambia, The Seychelles, and Timor-Leste are making especially striking gains on this indicator. Second on the top 20 list is **government censorship efforts**, which is declining substantially in nine countries, and The Maldives and Zambia are among them. Other encouraging improvements are the significant declines of **harassment of journalists** in eight countries placing this indicator third on the top 20 list. Noticeable improvements in the extent of **critical media** and **freedom of discussion for men** in seven countries each adds to the picture of how central freedom of expression is to democracy.

The liberal component of democracy is the area with the most indicators on the top 20 list (six). Most notably, **transparent laws with predictable enforcement**, **rigorous and impartial public administration**, and **compliance with the judiciary** improve substantially in seven countries each. **Legislative investigations**, **executive respect for the constitution**, and **high court independence** increase in six countries each. Two countries, The Gambia and The Maldives, improve on all of these indicators.

The deliberative aspect of democracy capturing the quality of debate and respect for opponents, is improving in more than one third of the democratizing countries. Four of the indicators capturing the deliberative component of democracy (80%) make it to the top 20 list, and three of those are in the upper half. While not part of the components that go into the LDI, this demonstrates the importance of the deliberative democratic practices for democratic progress. The extent to which politicians justify their positions in terms of the **common good** increase considerably in eight countries, for example Brazil, Dominican Republic, and Montenegro. The extent to which politicians provide **reasoned justification** for their positions, the **range of consultation** in policy making, and the extent of **public deliberation** – all increase significantly and substantially in seven countries each.

Three indicators measuring election qualities are also found on the top 20 list. That seems natural since without this key institution of democracy functioning adequately, it is hard to imagine that a process of democratization can really take hold. The extent to which elections are **free and fair** is substantially improving in seven countries, such as Honduras, Lesotho, and Thailand. Considerable reduction in **voting irregularities** and strengthening of the **Election Management Body (EMB) autonomy** take place in six countries each.

Finally, freedom of association is another core area of democracy where several democratizing countries register significant and substantial advances. **CSO repression** is declining considerably in eight countries, while **CSO entry and exit** are improving in six. North Macedonia, Timor-Leste, and Zambia are examples of countries that have seen striking improvements on both indicators.

76 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2022>

77 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/30/tunisian-election-records-11-turnout-in-rejection-of-presidents-reforms>

78 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/26/thai-election-process-deeply-flawed-independent-observers>

79 <https://anfrel.org/2023-thai-general-election-democracy-at-a-crossroads/>

80 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/11/thai-pm-retire-politics-nine-years-power-coup-prayuth-chan-ocha>

81 <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/08/23/asia/thailand-explainer-election-prime-minister-intl-hnk/index.html>

BOX 8. LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE FROM BRAZIL?



Lula's final campaign rally ahead of the runoff presidential election in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Oct. 29, 2022. (Tuane Fernandes/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

Autocratization was not only halted in Brazil but also turned around into a definitive U-turn case. What made Brazil turn around and what guidance can it offer?

Brazil's process shows the importance of using elections as "critical events" to halt autocratization. This both resonates with findings based on the eight U-turn cases discussed in last year's *Democracy Report* and carries an important message for the 2024 "record year of elections". A majority of the elections in 2024 take place in autocratizing contexts and whether elections will be used to turn autocratization around, or not, could be defining for democracy in the world (see Section 5). Below are factors that significantly contributed to making Brazil a U-turn before, during, and after the elections in October 2022.

PRE-ELECTION:

- **Countering Dis- and Misinformation:** Jair Bolsonaro fueled distrust in the electoral system.¹ Disinformation used to attack candidates and delegitimize the elections was a challenge during the 2022 electoral period.² In response, the Electoral Justice, Brazil's Electoral Management Body, created a website to fact-check information disseminated on social media³ and to disavow fake news about the electoral process.⁴ The Supreme Federal Court started an investigation about "digital militias", or online criminal groups that work against democracy and the

democratic state.⁵ The importance of Brazil's efforts to counter disinformation is also evidenced in analyses in last year's *Democracy Report* showing that democratization is very clearly associated with decreasing levels of disinformation.

- **Pro-Democracy Opposition Alliance:** A broad coalition of nine opposition parties joined Lula in his election bid to defeat Bolsonaro.⁶ Lula's vice president Geraldo Alckmin was his political adversary for decades but decided to join the alliance "to save democracy".⁷ A unified opposition alliance again echoes findings in last year's report and seems to be an important factor to successfully turn autocratization into a U-turn democratization.
- **Judicial Independence:** Investigations by the Supreme Federal Court on sources of online disinformation campaigns underlying attacks on democracy pointed to Bolsonaro and his allies. The former president lashed out against the court and especially Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who also presides over the Supreme Electoral Court. Bolsonaro went as far as declaring that he would no longer oblige by Moraes' and the court's rulings.⁸ However, the judiciary withstood the pressure. In the words of the president of the Electoral Court: "Democracy won".⁹

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/10/25/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-misinformation.html>

2 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2022/09/fake-news-sobre-urnas-pesquisas-e-tse-dominam-eleicao-de-2022.shtml>

3 <https://www.justicaeleitoral.jus.br/fato-ou-boato/#>

4 <https://www.tre-go.jus.br/comunicacao/noticias/2022/Outubro/fato-ou-boato-justica-eleitoral-desmentiu-as-principais-fake-news-sobre-o-processo-eleitoral-em-2022>

5 <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2021/07/16/pf-abre-inquerito-sobre-atuacao-de-milicia-digital-contra-a-democracia.ghtml>

6 <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2022/08/06/lula-maior-alianca-nove-partidos-eleicoes-2022.htm>

7 <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/unidade-entre-lula-e-alkmin-existe-para-defender-a-democracia-diz-presidente-do-psb/>

8 <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2021/09/07/bolsonaro-ataca-alexandre-de-moraes-e-diz-que-ministro-tem-tempo-para-se-redimir-ou-se-enquadra-ou-pede-para-sair.ghtml>

9 <https://www.tse.jus.br/comunicacao/noticias/2024/Janeiro/201ca-democracia-venceu201d-afirma-presidente-do-tse-em-evento-que-marca-um-ano-dos-ataques-antidemocraticos>

ELECTION CONDUCT:

- **Resilient Electoral Management:** Bolsonaro tried to change the electoral system for the 2022 elections, questioning the reliability of electronic voting machines. He sought to have them replaced with paper ballots,¹⁰ and orchestrated a parade of military vehicles in a perceived intimidation attempt on the day congress voted on the issue. Yet, the proposal was defeated.¹¹ The Supreme Electoral Court also acted removing election disinformation online, forbade the use of inaccurate information in campaigns, and ordered media houses to remove content with false information related to the elections.
- **Diplomatic Support:** Bolsonaro held a meeting with foreign diplomats to try and discredit the electoral system without any supporting evidence.¹² In response, ambassadors from France, Germany, and the United Kingdom publicly praised the Brazilian electoral system.¹³ The United States' Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs said that Brazil has one of the most reliable and transparent electoral systems in the Southern hemisphere.¹⁴ This support seems to have been critical to unite the international community behind endorsing the legitimacy of the elections displacing Bolsonaro.
- **Free and Fair Elections:** The free- and fairness of the elections were evidenced by reports from both national and international election observers,¹⁵ including the Organization of American States, the Carter Center, and the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB). In fact, no fraud has been shown since the introduction of electronic voting machines in 1996,¹⁶ but electoral violence increased in the 2022 elections despite the Supreme Electoral Court's attempts to prevent it by banning firearms on and around the election day.¹⁷ Nonetheless, ensuring a clean election that produces a legitimate result which the general public trusts, seems critical to turning around a process of autocratization.
- **Institutional Backing:** Representatives of key Brazilian institutions also recognized the opposition's victory directly after the elections. The presidents of the chambers in the National Congress, the Attorney General, and Supreme Court justices for example, recognized the victory immediately and discarded the possibility of fraud.²⁰ This was probably key to that several political allies of Bolsonaro soon also publicly accepted defeat without questioning the election results.²¹
- **Military Staying in Barracks:** Bolsonaro frequently praised the military dictatorship in Brazil²² and kept members of the armed forces in his government.²³ Large groups of Bolsonaro supporters also rallied behind the idea of a military intervention.²⁴ Investigations show that some high-level members of the military were in favor of a military intervention after the 2022 elections.²⁵ Yet, they did not act on it, perhaps in part because of the swift endorsement of the results by both the international community and domestic institutions. Moreover, the Ministry of Defense observed the elections and neither reported evidence of electoral fraud nor contested the results.²⁶ That the military stayed in the barracks was probably critical to the turnaround.
- **Ensuring Transition of Power:** After the confirmation of the election result, Bolsonaro supporters took to the streets to protest against the election results with claims of electoral fraud.²⁷ Pro-Bolsonaro groups promoted a rigged election narrative on social media, blocked roads, and called for a military coup.²⁸ A Bolsonaro supporter attempted a bombing in Brasilia to "create chaos".²⁹ The transfer of power could be ensured on January 1, 2023 with the swearing in of President Lula and Vice President Alckmin. Even so, Bolsonaro supporters stormed the buildings of Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Presidential Palace on January 8 but the military did not support them, and the leaders of the three government branches³⁰ and the state governors³¹ in unison condemned the riots. The Supreme Federal Court played a critical role ordering the dissolution of blockages and camps, the arrest of those involved in the riots, and the suspension of their social media accounts.³² The day after, thousands of people demonstrated against the riots and in favor of democracy.³³ Later, Bolsonaro was convicted of abusing his office and declared ineligible to seek or hold public office for 8 years.³⁴

POST-ELECTORAL:

- **Swift International Endorsement:** World leaders congratulated Lula as soon as the results came out, recognizing the electoral outcome.¹⁸ Among others, this seems to have affected Bolsonaro's vice president, General Mourão, who said after the elections that a military coup would leave Brazil in a "difficult position towards the international community". In another show of support, high level representatives from several countries were in Brasilia for Lula's inauguration.¹⁹ This also tallies with our conclusions in the *Democracy Report* last year. The international community can play an important role in putting strong pressure on incumbents to refrain from unconstitutional actions, (reluctantly) accept defeat, and hand over power peacefully.

10 <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/lembra-vezes-em-que-jair-bolsonaro-questionou-o-sistema-eleitoral/>

11 <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/brazil-military-parade-presidential-palace-rattles-politicians-2021-08-10/>

12 <https://apnews.com/article/jair-bolsonaro-elections-caribbean-voting-brazil-8ac78e1e58650424b1dec4efc35ce4>

13 <https://www.estadao.com.br/politica/embaxadores-do-reino-unido-e-alemanha-parabenizam-processo-eleitoral-brasileiro/>

14 <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/eua-confiam-nos-sistema-eleitoral-brasileiro-diz-subsecretaria-de-assuntos-politicos-de-biden/>

15 <https://www.tse.jus.br/eleicoes/eleicoes-2022/missoes-de-observacao-eleitoral>

16 <https://noticias.uol.com.br/confere/ultimas-noticias/2021/07/08/eleicoes-brasil-fraude.htm>

17 <https://noticias.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2022/10/02/eleicao-escalada-de-violencia.htm>

18 <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-63451626>

19 <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-64122354>

20 <https://www.brasildéfato.com.br/2022/10/30/moraes-lira-pacheco-e-rosa-weber-o-que-disseram-autoridades-sobre-vitoria-de-lula>

21 <https://www.estadao.com.br/politica/aliados-de-bolsonaro-reconhecem-vitoria-de-lula-presidente-se-mantem-em-silencio/>

22 <https://oglobo.globo.com/epoca/brasil/oito-vezes-em-que-bolsonaro-defendeu-golpe-de-64-24949762>

23 <https://www.estadao.com.br/politica/presenca-de-militares-em-cargos-de-confianca-cresce-193-no-governo-bolsonaro/>

24 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/22/brazil-bolsonaro-militants-leftist-lula-president>

25 <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/articles/cg6d2gv3np1o>

26 <https://g1.globo.com/politica/eleicoes/2022/noticia/2022/11/09/ministerio-da-defesa-entrega-relatorio-sobre-o-sistema-eleitoral.ghtml>

27 <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-63479345>

28 <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2022/10/grupos-bolsonaristas-reagem-a-derrota-com-fraude-nas-urnas-e-apelo-por-golpe-das-forcas-armadas.shtml>

29 <https://g1.globo.com/dfi/distrito-federal/noticia/2022/12/26/bolsonarista-presos-por-montar-explosivo-em-brasilia-o-que-se-sabe-e-o-que-falta-saber.ghtml>

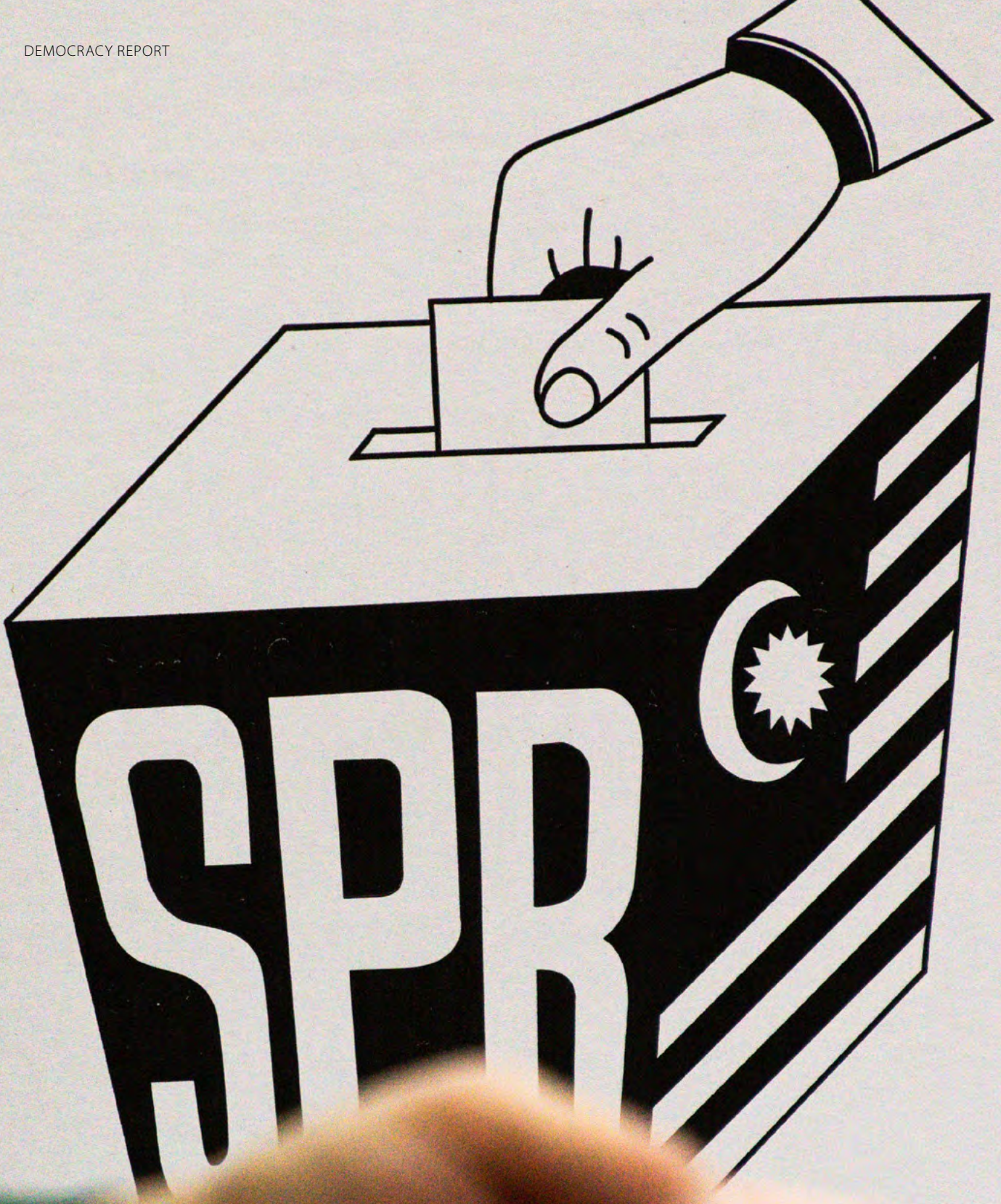
30 <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/acompanhe-o-planalto/noticias/2023/01/nota-em-defesa-da-democracia>

31 https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2023/01/09/interna_politica,1442841/lula-e-os-27-governadores-caminham-do-palacio-do-planalto-ate-o-supremo.shtml

32 <https://www.stf.jus.br/arquivo/cms/noticiaNoticiaStf/anexo/DECISA7710Afastagovernadoreoutrasmedidas2.pdf>

33 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-64219119>

34 <https://apnews.com/article/brazil-bolsonaro-ineligible-court-ruling-vote-99dee0fe4b529019ccbb65c9636a9045>



Malaysia General Election 2022.
Kuala Lumpur, Nov. 19, 2022
(Afif Abd Halim/NurPhoto/
Shutterstock)

5 | Windows to the Future

- **25 countries are “near misses” of autocratization, meaning that they show signs of deterioration. If developments continue, several could join the list of autocratizers in the near future.**
- **9 countries are “near misses” of democratization and thus potential upcoming “bright spots”.**
- **60 countries are holding national elections this year. Of these, 31 are worsening on their democracy levels, while only 3 are improving.**
- **Elections are “critical events” that can either trigger democratization, enable autocratization, or aid stabilization of autocratic regimes.**

Smaller changes and focal events such as elections can, sometimes, form the future of countries. This section first highlights countries that have experienced recent declines or improvements in their democracy levels. These changes may potentially translate into manifest episodes of autocratization or democratization in the coming year(s). These are countries the international community could therefore decide to pay increasing attention to.

Second, 2024 is “the biggest election-year” in over a century, and several billion people are called to cast their votes in an uncertain political environment worldwide. This might translate into a make-or-break year for democracy in the world. We show below that over 52% of elections in 2024 are held in countries where democratic levels are in decline. Only 5% take place in the context of democratization. This puts the specter of the current wave of autocratization into perspective.

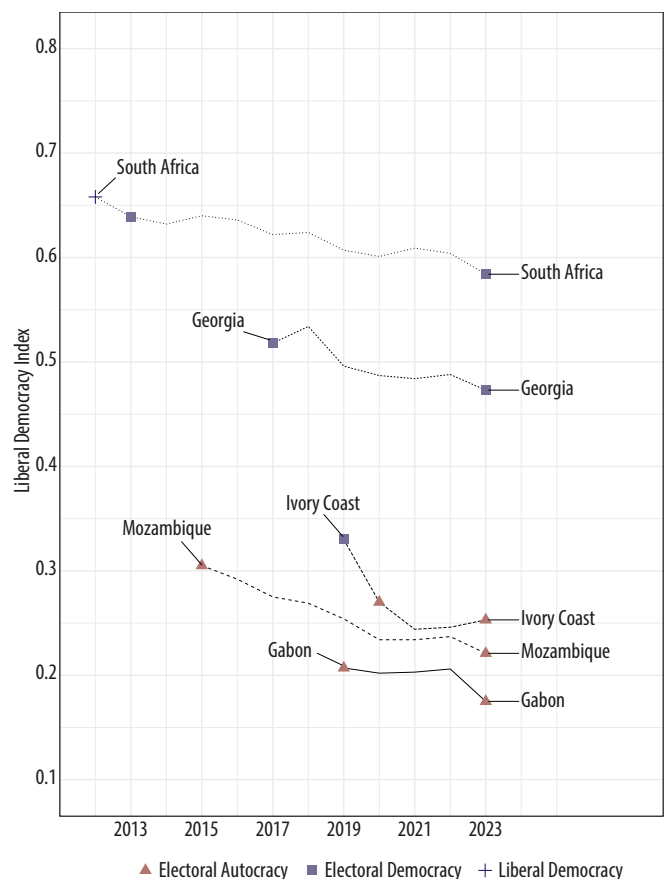
25 “Near Misses” of Autocratization

The previous sections of the *Democracy Report 2024* focus on countries that are in ongoing episodes of positive (democratizing) or negative (autocratizing) changes in democracy levels that are *substantial* according to the ERT methodology. The ERT thresholds deliberately exclude smaller changes because they could stem from measurement uncertainty in the underlying indicators. Yet, the larger such “non-significant” changes are, the more likely they are indicating a real change on the ground. This can sometimes be useful for detecting potential upcoming autocratizers and democratizers. This section turns to countries where we already see improvements or declines in democracy that are close enough to substantial levels to call them “near misses”.⁸²

There are no less than 25 countries that can be labeled as “near misses” of autocratization. A few of them are very close to the bottom on the democracy levels and are therefore unlikely to show up as autocratizers in the next years due to the “floor effect”. Even discounting those, we might register anything up to 20 or so autocratizers in the next few years if the declines in these countries continue. Figure 21 shows the trajectories of five countries that are at the very top of the list of “near misses” in terms of magnitude of deterioration.

Starting from the top in the figure, **South Africa** has been on a slow decline since 2012, moving from a liberal to electoral democracy by 2013. The main feature of this relative deterioration has been the growing corruption of the governing party African National Congress (ANC), undermining the rule of law and state institutions.⁸³ In 2023, concerns have been raised related to elections, intimidation of opposition activists and journalists, and protection of human rights.⁸⁴

FIGURE 21. TOP 5 “NEAR MISSES” OF AUTOCRATIZATION, 2023



“Near misses” are cases that are very close to qualify as autocratizers by the ERT methodology. Their magnitude of change falls between 0.05 and 0.10 on the EDI. All top five “near-miss” countries lie within only 0.02 points on the EDI from the standard ERT threshold. Note that we use the EDI to identify episodes of autocratization and democratization. A country may change more on the EDI than on the LDI, which is particularly true for countries that have lower democracy levels.

Georgia is in regression since 2017 but remains an electoral democracy in 2023. The greatest flaws are in Georgia’s electoral processes. The 2018 presidential elections were marred by misuse of state funds and concerns over voter intimidation.⁸⁵ The 2020 parliamentary election involved mismanagement that led the opposition to accuse the electoral process of being fraudulent and to boycott the runoff,⁸⁶ setting off a political crisis in Georgia. The government is also accused of infringing on civil society and independent media.⁸⁷

⁸² We identify “near misses” by using the standard ERT methodology but with a lower threshold, i.e., 0.05 instead of 0.1 on the EDI. Countries are then ranked by their total magnitude of change, and the top five closest to the 0.1 threshold are selected. All top five “near-miss” autocratizers lie within only 0.02 points on the EDI from the standard ERT threshold.

⁸³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-africa/freedom-world/2023>

⁸⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/11/southern-africa-backsliding-democracy-jeopardizes-rights>

⁸⁵ https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/4/412724_2.pdf

⁸⁶ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf>

⁸⁷ <https://www.justsecurity.org/85699/backsliding-georgias-crackdown-on-civil-society-may-be-just-a-start/>

Ivory Coast has been declining since 2019 and lost the status of electoral democracy after the 2020 presidential elections, which saw restrictions on competition and opposition boycotts, along with limitations on civil liberties, and political unrest.⁸⁸ In the aftermath of the election results, widespread protests broke out. They were met with repression by the police leaving more than 50 dead,⁸⁹ hundreds arrested, and thousands fleeing to neighboring countries.⁹⁰

Mozambique has been on a slow decline since 2015, remaining an electoral autocracy throughout. A poorly run 2019 election that saw violence and mismanagement,⁹¹ and an increasingly repressive media environment⁹² are contributing to this decline. The next general election in Mozambique is scheduled for October 2024.

Gabon was on a path of a slow decline between 2019 to 2023. However, the decline accelerated after the August 2023 elections which were followed by a military coup that installed General Nguema as transitional president.⁹³ New elections have been scheduled for 2025, and the military will hold on to power in the meantime.⁹⁴

9 “Near Misses” of Democratization

There are nine “near misses” of democratization currently.⁹⁵ These are countries that could come to qualify as democratizers in the next few years should their positive developments continue. From an international democracy support perspective, these *potential* “bright spots” could be taken as cases especially worthy of attention and support by the international community.

Figure 22 shows the trajectories of five countries that are at the top of the list of “near misses” in terms of magnitude of improvement.

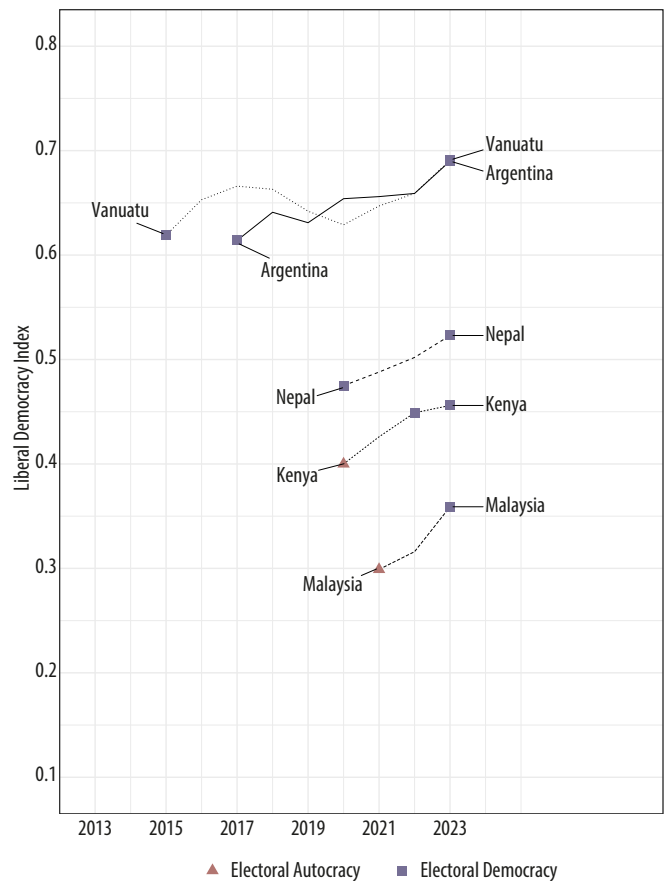
Starting from the top in the figure, **Vanuatu** is an electoral democracy that has gradually improved its democratic track record since 2015. For example, the largely independent judiciary and the Supreme Court have increasingly shown their capacity to hold the legislative and the executive power to account.⁹⁶ The country also has an increasingly free and pluralistic media.⁹⁷

Argentina has gradually improved its democratic track record after holding well-run elections in 2019 and 2023 and strengthening its protection of freedom of expression and the media. Javier Milei’s win in the 2023 presidential election perhaps reflects popular dissatisfaction with the highest inflation in over 30 years. Whether Argentina’s upward trajectory will continue under newly elected President Milei remains to be seen, but his election campaign included criticism of some of the most recent Argentinian political developments.⁹⁸

Nepal is on a gradual path of improvement as an electoral democracy. Examples of this development include the Supreme Court being able to independently handle a constitutional crisis in 2021,⁹⁹ and 2022 national elections that were well-run.¹⁰⁰

Kenya has transitioned from an electoral autocracy in 2020 to electoral democracy by 2023. This is mainly the result of the 2022 elections, which, due to effective measures of conflict prevention, were

FIGURE 22. TOP 5 “NEAR MISSES” OF DEMOCRATIZATION, 2023



“Near misses” are very close to qualify as democratizers by the ERT methodology. Their magnitude of change falls between 0.05 and 0.10 on the EDI. Note that we use the EDI to identify episodes of autocratization and democratization. A country may change more on the EDI than on the LDI, which is particularly true for countries that have lower democracy levels.

not marred by violence and systematic mismanagement that has been prevalent in Kenya’s history.¹⁰¹

Malaysia continues its slow upward path and is categorized in 2023 as an electoral democracy - for the first time in its history. This development follows the incumbent Barisan Nasional coalition losing their six-decade hold on power after the 2018 elections, and the 2022 national elections that led to yet another peaceful transfer of power.¹⁰² Legal reforms such as the Freedom of Information Act passed in 2023, are also somewhat assuring.¹⁰³

2024 – The Year of Elections

Citizens in 60 countries go to the polls in 2024.¹⁰⁴ Countries holding elections make up nearly half of the world’s population (45%) since the

88 <https://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/2020/cote-divoire-110220.html>

89 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/02/cote-divoire-post-election-violence-repression>

90 <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/cote-divoire/>

91 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eueom_moz2019_final_report_en.pdf

92 <https://rsf.org/en/country/mozambique>

93 <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230904-gabon-coup-leader-general-oligui-to-be-sworn-in-as-transitional-president>

94 <https://www.africanews.com/2023/11/13/gabon-military-authorities-announce-elections-for-august-2025/>

95 The threshold for “near misses” of democratization is the same as for “near misses” of autocratization, i.e., between 0.05 and 0.1 on the EDI. Countries are ranked by their total magnitude of change, and the top five closest to the 0.1 threshold are selected.

96 <https://freedomhouse.org/country/vanuatu/freedom-world/2023>

97 Veenendaal, W. 2021. “How instability crates stability.” *Third World Quarterly*, 42(1).

98 <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/elections/why-did-argentina-just-elect-a-radical-right-wing-political-outsider/>

99 <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/nepals-supreme-court-reinstates-parliament-orders-new-pm-be-appointed-2021-07-12/>

100 <https://anfrel.org/2022-nepalese-federal-and-provincial-elections-achieving-maturity/>

101 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU_EOM_Kenya_2022_EN.pdf

102 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/24/anwar-ibrahim-appointed-malaysian-prime-minister-after-unprecedented-hung-parliament>

103 <https://www.article19.org/resources/malaysia-slow-progress-on-reforms/>

104 We discuss the 60 countries for which data is available in the V-Dem dataset v14. Four additional countries also hold national elections in 2024: Kiribati, Palau, Tuvalu, and San Marino. Additionally, V-Dem does not code elections to the European Union Parliament, so countries holding only those elections during 2024 are also excluded.

list includes seven of the world's ten most populous countries: Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States.

Figure 23 groups the 60 countries that hold elections in 2024 into declining (autocratizers and “near misses”), improving (in practice only U-turn democratizers), and a category of “Others”.¹⁰⁵

More than half – 31 countries – are in periods of decline on democracy. Eleven of them are “stand-alone” episodes of autocratization, nine are “bell-turn” autocratizers, and eleven are “near-misses”.

Only 5%, or three out of the 60 countries holding elections in 2024, are improving, and all three are processes of U-turn democratization, meaning that they are recovering from previous decline. Finally, 26 countries fall into the “other” category, without substantial and ongoing improvements or declines in their democracy levels.

FIGURE 23. ELECTIONS IN 2024

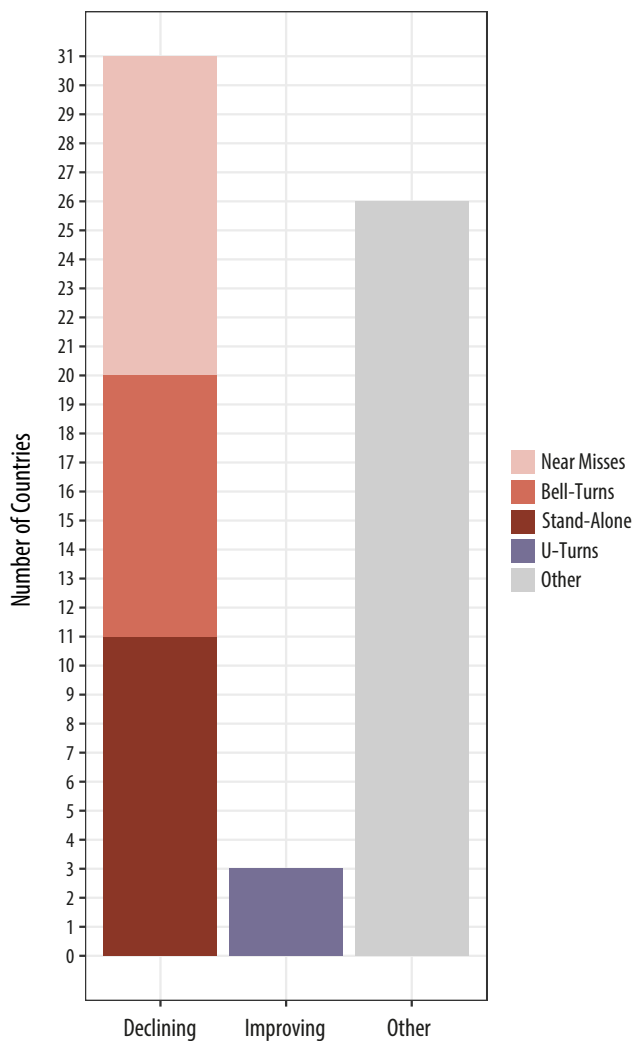


Figure 23 shows the number of countries holding elections in 2024 for which V-Dem data is available. Countries are grouped into declining, improving, and other regimes. Note that in this figure we include “near misses” in both categories of changing regimes.

Why is this perspective important? Elections in autocratizing countries are critical events that can shape the future of the country's political regime. Brazil is a recent example of the key role of elections in upending autocratization (see Box 8). Last year's *Democracy Report* shows that this is a common pattern in recent cases of U-turn democratization.¹⁰⁶ Surprise victories for a democratic opposition in critical elections can lead to the ousting of an incumbent, even in autocratic settings. The Maldives and Zambia are two recent examples of this.

Contrastingly, elections can also serve as powerful instruments of legitimization and spur further autocratization when challengers fail,¹⁰⁷ such as in Hungary and Türkiye in recent times. The fact that *a majority* of elections during the “record election-year” 2024 take place in such contested spaces makes this year likely to be critical for the future of democracy in the world.

Table 6 below provides a full list of countries that hold elections in 2024. Among the **eleven “stand-alone” autocratizers**, we find India, Mexico, and Senegal. In India, Prime Minister Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to win a third consecutive term. This could lead to further autocratization given the already substantial democratic decline under Modi's leadership and the enduring crackdown on minority rights and civil society.¹⁰⁸ Mexico has elections scheduled for June 2024, and tensions are high amid the gradual autocratization under President Obrador and the MORENA party. President Obrador is now accused of trying to rig the system in favor of his successor Claudia Sheinbaum. Large crowds are turning out to protest and to protect the independence of the electoral authority.¹⁰⁹ In Senegal, President Sall of the Alliance for the Republic postponed the elections initially scheduled for February 25, but the Constitutional Council recently annulled the postponement and ruled that the President cannot stay in power beyond the end of his term that ends on April 2.¹¹⁰ Other “stand-alone” autocratizers that are due to hold elections in 2024 are Botswana, Cambodia, Chad, Comoros, Ghana, Mauritius, and Mongolia. There were no surprises in parliamentary elections in Belarus held on February 25, and President Lukashenko has already announced that he will stand for re-election in 2025.

Nine “bell-turn” autocratizers are holding elections in 2024, including El Salvador, Indonesia, and Pakistan who held elections earlier in February this year. In El Salvador, President Bukele was re-elected for a second term despite the constitutional ban on re-election. El Salvador has been autocratizing during his term due to increasing human rights violations, the undermining of the judicial independence, and changes to the electoral system.¹¹¹ In Indonesia, the presumable win of Prabowo Subianto makes Indonesia's democratic path and commitment to human rights and accountability uncertain.¹¹² He is a former army general with alleged involvement in torture and disappearances under the Suharto dictatorship.¹¹³ In Pakistan, elections took place in a tense political environment. The leader of the opposition and former President Khan is in prison. Allegations of rigging and irregularities across the country led to violent protests.¹¹⁴ In a major upset, Kahn's party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won a plurality of seats, but incumbent Prime Minister Sharif is forming a new coalition government without the PTI. The military's role in politics also sheds a shadow over the possibility for democrat-

¹⁰⁵ “Other” refers to countries that do not reveal any ongoing substantial changes in democracy levels according to the ERT rules. The most prominent country in this category is the United States of America.

¹⁰⁶ See *Democracy Report 2023* for further details.

¹⁰⁷ Knutsen, C.H., et al. 2017. “Autocratic elections.” *World Politics* 69(1).

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/31/bjp-modi-india-general-election-2024>; <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/07/decoding-india-s-2024-election-contest-pub-91178>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexicans-turn-out-drove-protect-democracy-ahead-elections-2024-02-18/>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68326782>

¹¹¹ <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/elections/how-the-worlds-most-popular-dictator-wins/>

¹¹² <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/why-indonesias-democracy-is-in-danger/>

¹¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/15/indonesia-presidential-election-results-prabowo-subianto-likely-victory>

¹¹⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/09/asia/pakistan-election-nawaz-sharif-intl/index.html>

ic improvements.¹¹⁵ The other “bell-turns” to hold elections in 2024 are Croatia, Mali, Mauritania, Romania, South Korea, and Ukraine.

Elections in the **eleven countries who are “near misses” of autocratization** are expected to be consequential. If the incumbents win the elections and stay in power, it seems reasonable to expect that further deteriorations can follow. In other cases, the undermining of democracy can be traced to radical opposition parties who may get a seat in government. South Africa might see its position as a leading light of democracy in the region fade if the corruption and undermining of state institutions by the ruling ANC continues for another term. In already highly autocratic Russia, the recent death of the most prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalny ahead of the March presidential election emphasizes the control Putin exerts over Russia’s politics. Putin is expected to win his fifth term in office having thoroughly manipulated the electoral and political system in his favor for decades, including the amendment of the presidential term limits in 2020.¹¹⁶ Other “near misses” of autocratization to hold elections in 2024 are Algeria, Bhutan, Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Mozambique, Namibia, Portugal, and Uruguay.

Only **three countries holding elections in 2024 are democratizers**, and all of them are “U-turn” processes: North Macedonia, The Maldives, and Tunisia. North Macedonia is showing some worrying signs of a reversal of democracy in part due to the increasing political polarization. The 2024 elections may well be decisive for whether North Macedonia continues to be a U-turn democratizer or not. If The Maldives’s parliamentary election follow the trend of the last years, it would be good news. The 2018 presidential and 2019 parliamentary elections were instrumental for the U-turn, and the 2023 presidential elections were considered free and fair,¹¹⁷ despite

some concerns about freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the pre-election months.¹¹⁸ Finally, Tunisia remains an electoral autocracy whose recent gains on the index are marginal relative to the previous precipitous decline under the current President Saïed. The 2024 presidential elections will be the first for executive office since President Saïed’s 2021 self-coup.¹¹⁹

26 countries lacking notable declines or improvements in democracy levels in recent years, are holding elections in 2024. The election in the United States is likely to be highly consequential. The expected Republican nominee and former President Donald Trump undermined American democracy substantially during his previous tenure, not least regarding media freedom, judicial independence, and executive oversight. Among the innumerable anti-democratic statements, Trump has called his opponents “vermin” during campaign speeches, declared he wants to purge the Department of Justice and dismantle the FBI, pardon himself of federal crimes, and have journalists arrested.¹²⁰ A second presidential term for Trump could have significant ramifications also for democracy internationally given the United States’ key role in world affairs and the affinity for autocrats Trump sported during his first term. Other liberal democracies holding elections include Belgium, Finland, and the United Kingdom. Relatively stable electoral autocracies are also on the list. For example, Bangladesh held general elections on January 7. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her party the Awami League secured a majority of parliamentary seats in a controversial contest. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party boycotted the poll and many of its leaders and supporters were under arrest.¹²¹ Finally, a few closed autocracies like Iran and North Korea hold their version of elections where no upsets are expected.

TABLE 6. ALL 60 COUNTRIES HOLDING ELECTIONS IN 2024, BY REGIME TYPE

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
 Grey zone democracies/autocracies are marked

LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES			ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES			ELECTORAL AUTOCRACIES			CLOSED AUTOCRACIES		
COUNTRY	ELECTION DATE	RoW	COUNTRY	ELECTION DATE	RoW	COUNTRY	ELECTION DATE	RoW	COUNTRY	ELECTION DATE	RoW
Belgium	June 9	LD	Austria	Sept. 29	ED+	Mauritius	Nov. 30	EA+	Uzbekistan	Oct.-Dec.	CA+
Finland	Jan. 28	LD	Lithuania	Pres. May 12; Parl. Oct. 13	ED+	Tunisia	Fall	EA+	Chad	October	CA
Iceland	June 1	LD	Moldova	November	ED+	Algeria	December	EA	Iran	March 1	CA
Taiwan	Jan. 13	LD	Namibia	November	ED+	Azerbaijan	Feb. 7	EA	Jordan	November	CA
USA	Nov. 5	LD	Portugal	March 10	ED+	Bangladesh	Jan. 7	EA	Mali	Feb., postponed	CA
Bhutan	Jan. 9	LD-	Croatia	Presidential Dec; parliamentary TBD	ED	Belarus	Feb. 25	EA	North Korea	April 10	CA
South Korea	April 10	LD-	Dominican Republic	May 19	ED	Cambodia	Feb. 25	EA	South Sudan	December	CA
United Kingdom	Expected 2024	LD-	Georgia	Parliamentary Oct. 26; presidential TBD	ED	Comoros	Jan. 14	EA	Syria	TBD	CA
Uruguay	Oct. 27	LD-	Ghana	Dec. 7	ED	El Salvador	Feb. 4	EA			
			Maldives	March 17	ED	Guinea-Bissau	TBD	EA			
			North Macedonia	May 24	ED	India	April–May	EA			
			Panama	May 5	ED	Madagascar	May	EA			
			Romania	Nov–Dec	ED	Mauritania	June 22	EA			
			Senegal	Dec. 15	ED	Mozambique	Oct. 9	EA			
			Slovakia	March 23	ED	Pakistan	Feb. 8	EA			
			Solomon Islands	April 17	ED	Russia	March 17	EA			
			South Africa	May–August	ED	Rwanda	July 15	EA			
			Sri Lanka	TBD	ED	Somaliland	Nov. 13	EA			
			Botswana	October	ED-	Togo	April 13	EA			
			Indonesia	Feb. 14	ED-	Ukraine	March 31	EA			
			Mexico	June 2	ED-	Venezuela	December	EA			
			Mongolia	June	ED-						

* Countries that are holding elections in 2024 but are not included in the V-Dem dataset: Kiribati (TBD), San Marino (December), Palau (Nov. 12), and Tuvalu (Jan. 26).

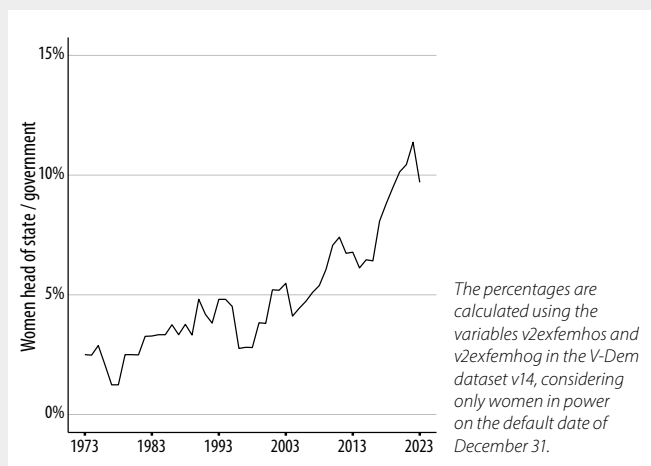
115 <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/understanding-pakistans-election-results>
 116 European Parliament Research Service, May 2020. Briefing: Constitutional change in Russia. More Putin or Preparing for post-Putin?
 117 EU Election Observation Mission. 2024. Presidential Election Maldives 2023.
 118 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/maldives>
 119 <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2024-elections/tunisia/>
 120 See, for example, <https://www.spj.org/news.asp?ref=2985>
 121 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67889387>

Box 9. Women are Still Underrepresented in Political Positions

The world is still far from achieving gender parity in politics. Women remain underrepresented. Men lead 90% of countries and hold on average 74% of seats in legislatures worldwide. The term “glass ceiling effect” is often used to capture the obstacles hindering women’s advancement into these leadership positions.¹

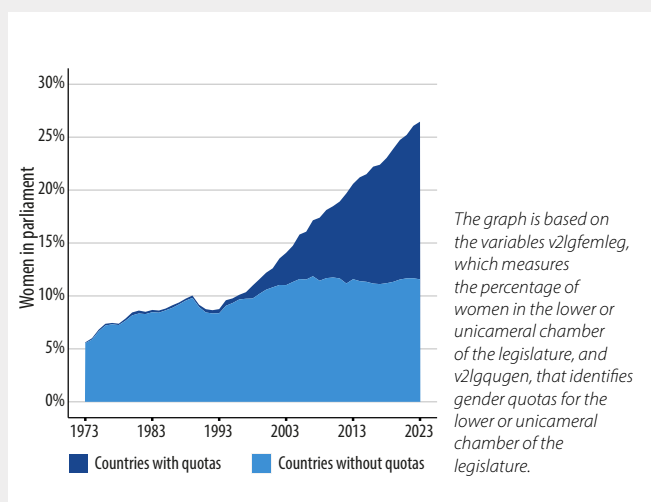
Figure 1 shows the evidence for this over the last 50 years, using factual variables from the V-Dem dataset. There were three female heads of state and three female heads of government in 1973, but 17 and twelve respectively by 2023. This corresponds to an increase from three to ten percent in female heads of state and government. On the positive side, several countries elected a woman head of state or government for the first time in this period. For example, Chile elected its first woman president, Michelle Bachelet, in 2005, and Victoire Tomegah-Dogbé became Togo’s first female prime minister in 2020.

FIGURE 1. PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WORLD LEADERS, 1973–2023



Women have greater success in entering the legislative branch, especially in the last 30 years, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Around 26% of legislators in lower or unicameral chambers worldwide are women in 2023, compared to six percent in 1973.

FIGURE 2. PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT, 1973–2023



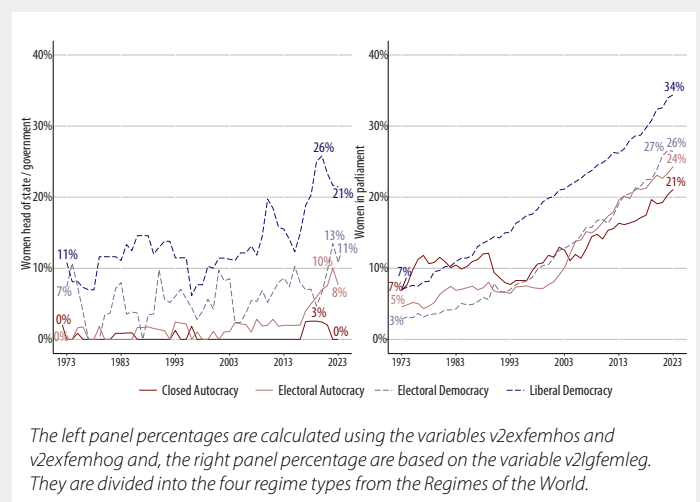
In 1973, almost all women elected to parliament did so without any type of quota. By 2023, the number of women in parliament is four times higher than in 1973. This substantial growth is mainly driven by the adoption of gender quotas. Figure 2 visualizes the difference gender quotas have made. The sharp growth since 1993 suggests that the adoption of gender quotas has improved gender representation. More than half of women legislators are elected in the 86 countries with some type of quota in place for legislative elections by 2023. Recently, Sierra Leone,² India,³ and Mongolia⁴ passed gender quota laws to improve women representation in the legislature. After the June 2023 election, Sierra Leone’s new parliament includes 42 women, more than twice the 19 representatives in the previous legislature.

However, de jure gender quotas do not tally with de facto political influence of women.⁵ Many countries, not least several autocracies, have adopted “paper tiger” laws to improve gender balance without actually improving women’s power to influence politics. In Figure 3 we therefore split women’s representation by regime type over the last 50 years. Overall, liberal democracy seems to be critical for better gender equality.

For top executive offices, women have consistently performed better in liberal democracies and doubled their presence as heads of state or government in the last 50 years, from eleven to 21%. In electoral democracies women’s share advanced only four percent since 1973. Electoral autocracies had no woman leaders in 1973 but increased significantly in the last decade to a total of eight percent in 2023. Closed autocracies have had either very few or no women in executive power during the last 50 years. Over the past decade, electoral autocracies seem to have detached from closed autocracies in a more distinctive way, and both electoral democracies and autocracies significantly increased the share of women in power.

Liberal democracies also have the highest number of women in parliament in 2023 (34%), but the values for electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies are very similar (26%, 24%, and 21%, respectively). Although these values increased consistently from the values between three and seven percent in 1973, women in parliament in electoral democracies in 1973 (three percent) were less than half than in closed autocracies (seven percent, same as liberal democracies). This trend only changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union. By 2004, electoral democracies had a higher percentage of women in parliament than closed autocracies.

FIGURE 3. PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN HEAD OF STATE OR GOVERNMENT AND IN PARLIAMENT BY REGIME TYPE, 1973–2023



1 Folke, O., & Rickne, J. 2016. The Glass Ceiling in Politics: Formalization and Empirical Tests. *Comparative Political Studies* 49(5).
 2 <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2023-07/record-number-women-mps-elected-in-sierra-leone>
 3 <https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/india/september-2023?pid=4606>
 4 <https://thediplomat.com/2023/07/can-recent-constitutional-reforms-augment-womens-role-in-mongolias-democracy/>
 5 Bjarnegård, E., Zetterberg, P. 2022. How Autocrats Weaponize Women’s Rights. *Journal of Democracy* 33(2).

Digital Society Project: Digital Technology as a Tool for Repression

Authors: Valeriya Mechkova, Daniel Pemstein, Brigitte Seim, and Steven Wilson from the Digital Society Project. Empirical analysis and graphs by courtesy of Dr. Marina Nord.

While the early days of the internet and social media initially sparked hope as potential ways to provide wider forums for deliberation and thereby bolster democracy, there has been a notable shift in perspective. Today, the internet and social media platforms are often identified as serious threats to democracy. Notably, disinformation and hate speech proliferate on social media, fueling growing polarization, while autocratizing governments have used information technologies as yet another tool for repression. What are the most notable trends when it comes to internet and democracy in 2023?

In this box, we look at four specific strategies, all of which have been increasingly used by governments as tools for repression. These are the censoring of political content on social media; government shut-downs of the internet; and the spread of disinformation both from the domestic government and from foreign governments.

CENSORSHIP OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Figure 1 plots the changes taking place over the past ten years, between 2013 and 2023 on the indicator capturing the extent to which governments censor political content on social media, (for example, deleting or filtering specific posts for political reasons). A score of

0 indicates that censorship is minimal, while 4 corresponds to total ban of social media. The vertical axis plots scores for 2023 while the horizontal axis shows scores from 2013. The plot only shows countries that have improved or declined to a substantial degree, with changes surpassing the confidence intervals between 2013 and 2023. Countries below the diagonal line have improved over the last ten years, while countries above the diagonal have significantly worsened in their censorship of social media.

Scores have improved for only three countries – DRC, The Gambia, and The Maldives. On the other hand, censorship of social media has substantially increased in 14 countries over the last decade.

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Guinea, Nicaragua, Myanmar, and Russia are all countries with scores higher than 2 for 2023, indicating the successful censorship of most targeted political content on social media. Belarus, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan, India, Montenegro, Tanzania, Ukraine, and Yemen are among those where social media content has been increasingly controlled, though not at as significant an overall level.

INTERNET SHUTDOWNS

Governments are increasingly resorting to shutting down the internet either nationally or regionally to control the flow of information,

FIGURE 1. COUNTRIES WITH CHANGES OUTSIDE OF CONFIDENCE INTERVALS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CENSORSHIP, 2013–2023

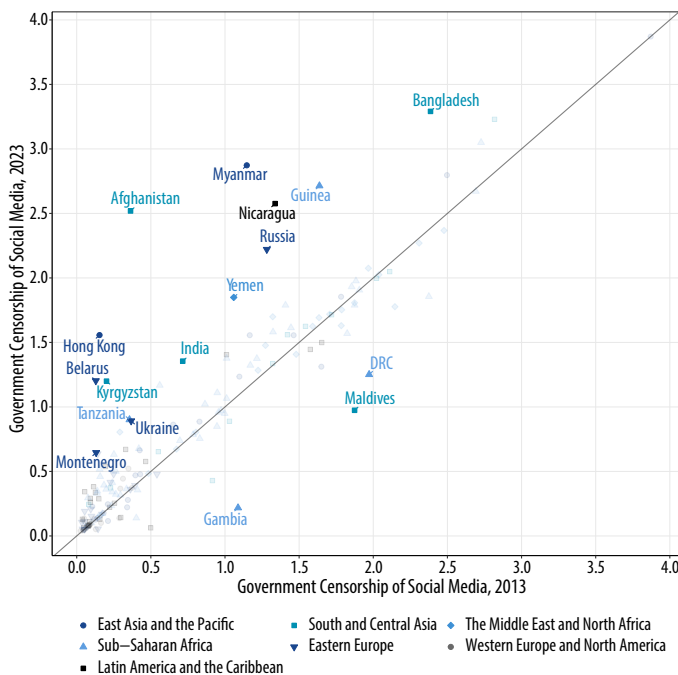
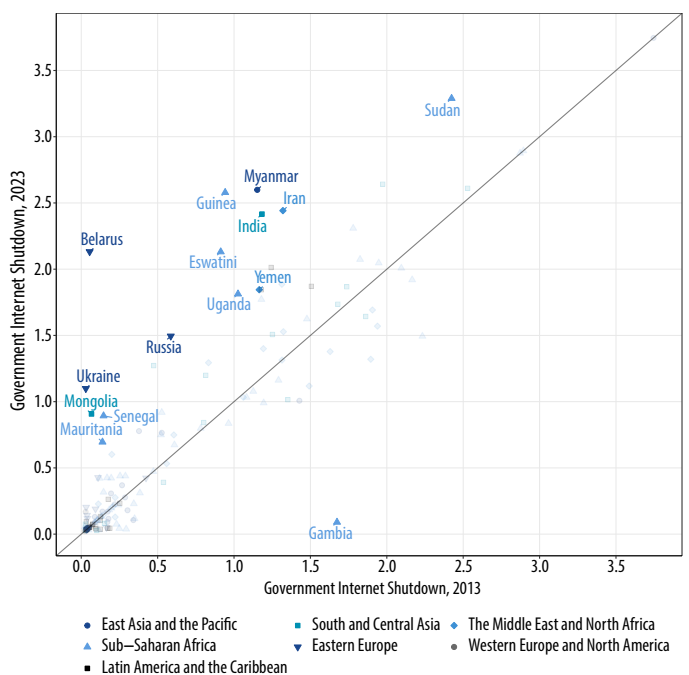


FIGURE 2. COUNTRIES WITH CHANGES OUTSIDE OF CONFIDENCE INTERVALS FOR INTERNET SHUTDOWN, 2013–2023



often as an attempt to address a specific problem. Scores in this figure have improved significantly between 2013 and 2023 only for The Gambia.

By contrast, 14 countries have seen a significant decline over the last ten years on this indicator. The scores above two for Belarus, Eswatini, Guinea, India, Iran, Myanmar, and Sudan indicate that in 2023, these governments shut down the internet multiple times during the year.

DISINFORMATION AND DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

One of the biggest challenges of social media is that it relies on user-generated, and crucially, unchecked information, which can be spread with great speed. This has resulted in scholars announcing that disinformation - intentionally false, inaccurate, or misleading information intended to cause harm - has become the most important communication issue of our times.¹

But to what extent does the spread of disinformation correlate with declining quality of democracy? Figure 3 focuses on two indicators: How often government and its agents use social media to disseminate misleading viewpoints or false information to influence its own population (left panel), and the frequency of foreign governments spreading disinformation in the country (right panel). The vertical axis marks the scores for 2023, and the horizontal axis notes the scores on disinformation at the onset of autocratization or democratization respectively. In Figure 3, we compare the levels of disinformation only for countries which have experienced decline or improvement in their levels of electoral democracy as captured by the ERT methodology. Countries depicted with red dots have autocratized, and countries marked with blue square have democratized.

As with previous graphs, the countries that lie below the diagonal line have improved in terms of disinformation, meaning they have

used this tactic less, while the countries above the line have engaged more often with this tactic in 2023 than previously.

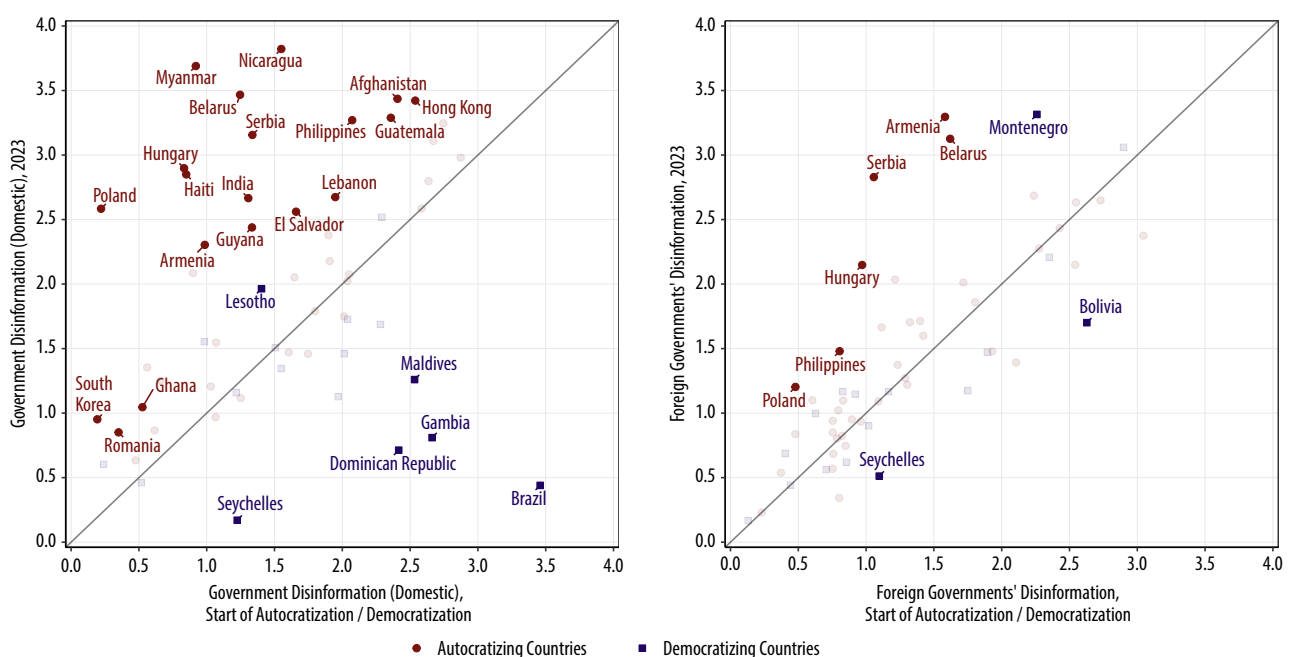
The most important finding that comes out of Figure 3 is that the countries that have autocratized, as marked with red dots, are also those that have worsened in their scores on disinformation frequency. Focusing on domestic disinformation (left panel), Afghanistan, Belarus, Hong Kong, Hungary, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Poland, and Serbia are all countries where V-Dem registers high levels of disinformation and are also some of the most prominent cases of democratic backsliding. While we cannot draw any causal conclusions from this descriptive graph, we can conclude that spreading disinformation is one of the tools autocratizing governments have used.

By contrast, democratizers – Brazil, Dominican Republic, The Gambia, The Maldives, and The Seychelles have improved both in terms of spreading less disinformation and achieving higher quality democracy.

When it comes to disinformation from foreign governments (right panel), we note that there are fewer countries that have substantively higher or lower scores on this measure that coincide with changes in levels of democracy. Yet, there are several prominent examples. Armenia, Belarus, Hungary, and Poland are all countries that have been exposed to massive disinformation campaigns from Russia at substantively higher levels when comparing 2023 to the year when the specific autocratization period started for that country. By contrast, Bolivia, and The Seychelles democratized at the same time as disinformation from abroad declined.

Note that Lesotho and Montenegro democratized despite seeing higher levels of disinformation from foreign and domestic sources respectively, meaning the democratic quality in these countries did not decline even if disinformation was spread more widely.

FIGURE 3. GOVERNMENT AND FOREIGN SOURCES OF DISINFORMATION, 2023



¹ Freelon, D., & Wells, C. (2020). Disinformation as political communication. *Political communication*, 37(2), 145-156.

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

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

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project involves numerous researchers worldwide, with the comprehensive and annually updated V-Dem dataset as its main output. The project includes five principal investigators (PIs), a steering committee, and the V-Dem Institute (based in Gothenburg and led by Staffan I. Lindberg). The Institute publishes the annual Democracy Report (DR). Recognizing differences of opinions among the PIs about the DR, the DR authors graciously allowed us (four of V-Dem's five PIs) to offer commentary.

Our commentary does not challenge the quality of V-Dem data, which we believe is very high. We also stand behind much of the DR's analysis. However, we do question some choices, which lead to interpretations that we disagree with. We consider three elements of the DR problematic: (a) interpretations of trends based on population-weighted measures, (b) use of crisp categories, and (c) insufficient attention to measurement uncertainty. Considering these factors, we find a less alarmist view of recent backsliding than presented in several issues of the DR.

POPULATION WEIGHTING AND TRENDS

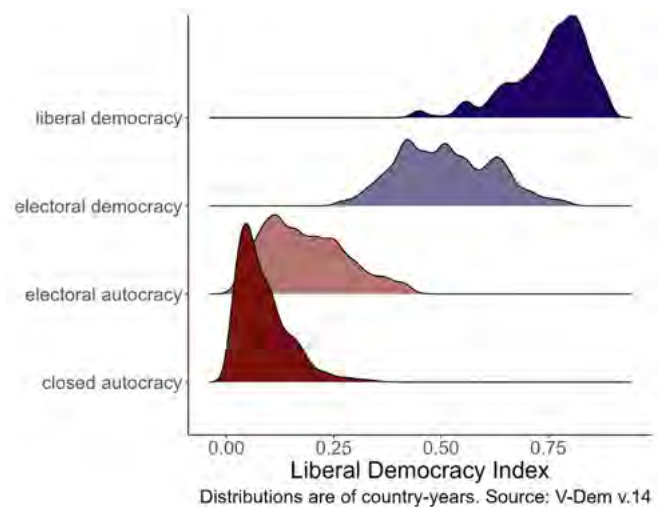
In the DR, global data are sometimes weighted by population; a few large countries are thus responsible for much of the variation (see Figure 11). Weighting by population is appropriate for describing trends in the experiences of the "average global person". However, it may give misleading impressions if used to describe or interpret systematic global trends. It is misleading to suggest that global democracy has declined in a dramatic fashion largely because India is backsliding. From 2012 to 2022, the mean Electoral Democracy index score fell by 0.03, from 0.53 to 0.50, when weighting all countries equally. Weighted by population, however, it fell by 0.13 points, from 0.54 to 0.41. Weighed by population, *but excluding India*, it fell only 0.05, from 0.46 to 0.41. Hence, developments in India drive many of the most dramatic developments depicted in different DR figures (e.g. Figure 10, showing that 35% of global population living in autocratizing countries), and this insight is important for interpreting global trends.

CRISP CATEGORIZATIONS

The DR also relies heavily on crisp categories. For example, it reports that 88 of 179 countries are "autocracies" and only 13 percent of the global population live in "liberal democracies." Specifically, the DR draws heavily on the Regimes of the World (RoW) typology (which is not an official V-Dem index).¹ RoW uses (cut-offs on) several continuous V-Dem measures to arrive at four categories: closed autocracy, electoral autocracy, electoral democracy, and liberal democracy. The bars RoW sets for categorizing countries as, for instance, "liberal democracies" are very high. Hence, when the DR describes Austria or Portugal in 2023 as mere "electoral democracies", this largely reflects RoW's arbitrary but very demanding threshold criteria.

Categorical measures can be useful. However, when constructed by imposing cutoffs on continuous indices, categories are inevitably arbitrary. Figure 1 demonstrates that countries coded within the same RoW-category are highly diverse; their scores on the underlying indices span broad ranges. Similarly, countries falling just above and below each cutoff are quite similar; it is only by chance that countries close to a threshold are placed in different categories. Indeed, slight movements upward or downward – which may be artifacts of measurement uncertainty or arcane classification rules – could re-categorize countries. For example, Canada is classified as an Electoral Democracy for 2022 with a Liberal Democracy Index score of 0.759; yet it is classified as a Liberal Democracy in 2023 although its score was basically unchanged at 0.755.

FIGURE 1. DISTRIBUTIONS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX SCORES FOR ROW CATEGORIES



The DR also leans heavily on the Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) classification to categorize countries that are transitioning (e.g., "autocratizing").² Twenty-one transition types (including classifications and sub-classifications) are proposed based on the direction, extent, and duration of year-to-year changes in V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index and whether those changes pass thresholds specified in RoW. Readers should note that the rules defining the various transition types are very complex and – since they are based on continuous indicators – inevitably arbitrary. Conclusions based on the ERT, such as whether a particular country is "autocratizing" or not, might thus turn out differently if different – equally plausible – choices were adopted.

1 Lührmann, Anna, Marcus Tannenberg, Staffan I. Lindberg. 2018. "Regimes of the world (RoW): Opening new avenues for the comparative study of political regimes." *Politics and Governance* 6(1):60-77.

2 Maerz, Seraphine F., Amanda B. Edgell, Matthew C. Wilson, Sebastian Hellmeier, Staffan I. Lindberg. 2023. "Episodes of regime transformation." *Journal of Peace Research* OnlineFirst:1-18.

UNCERTAINTY CONSIDERATIONS

All measurement is subject to error. Expert-based measures of democracy, which are critical to most indices (including V-Dem's), can, for example, be sensitive to differences in how experts interpret question formulations and use scales.

A principal benefit of V-Dem stems from our coding procedure by which each indicator receives ratings from multiple country experts, working independently. Measurement reliability can therefore be assessed, e.g., by degree of agreement across coders for each indicator.

Unfortunately, this aspect of V-Dem has received short shrift in the DR. Trends are often presented without confidence intervals (obscuring that small changes through time might reflect measurement error) and, more generally, interpreted without highlighting uncertainty.

BACKSLIDING

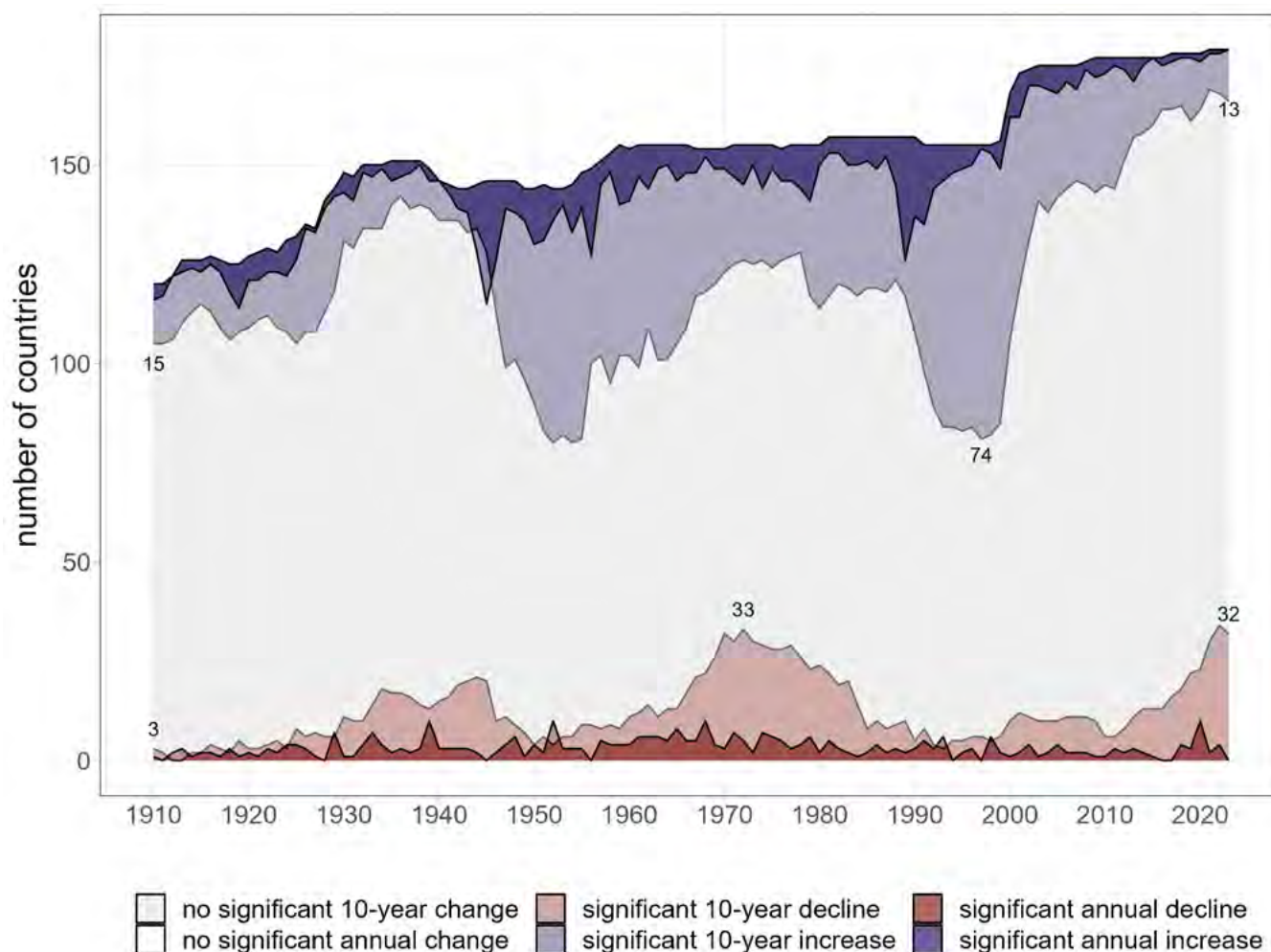
Given these considerations, one should be careful about interpreting global trends in democracy. If one calculates a global average score on V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index, weighting each country equally, a trend in an autocratic direction begins after the peak of 0.53 in 2012. This decline of 0.03 points over 10 years to a global mean of 0.50 in 2023, although statistically significant (95% level) since 2020, is fairly modest.

Another under-communicated fact is that the vast majority of countries have had fairly stable democracy scores, even recently, as shown in Figure 2. In yet other (though far fewer) cases, regimes have moved in a democratic direction. Discussions of democratic backsliding, globally, concern a minority of countries whose democratic status has deteriorated.

Short-term changes are often difficult to interpret as they are happening. Naturally, we are concerned with adverse democracy trends in several countries, including large ones such as India, and what lies ahead. However, recent trends are not forecasts: they say nothing about what is likely to happen in coming years. What we can say with confidence is that the momentous expansion of democracy that began in the 19th- and continued for much of the 20th century, has at least paused in the 21st century. In this light, apprehension about the future is understandable. But we do not want to read more into current trends than is warranted.

We sincerely appreciate many aspects of the DR, which reaches a broad audience. Yet, given the concerns outlined here, we would have wished it adopted a more measured tone on the current state, and future prospects, of democracy globally.

FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT CHANGES ON ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX OVER 1 OR 10 YEARS



The widths of the color bands represent the number of countries in each category. Categories reflect changes over 1 or 10 years that exceeded their country's 95% HPD confidence bounds.

V-Dem Methodology: Aggregating Expert Assessments

Author: Kyle L. Marquardt

V-DEM USES INNOVATIVE METHODS TO aggregate expert judgments and thereby produce estimates of important concepts. We use expert judgement because many key features of democracy are not directly observable. For example, it is easy to observe whether or not a legislature has the legal right to investigate an executive. However, assessing the extent to which the legislature actually does so requires extensive conceptual and case knowledge.

V-Dem typically gathers data from five experts per country-year observation, using a pool of over 4,300 country experts who provide judgment on different concepts and cases. Experts hail from almost every country in the world, allowing us to leverage diverse opinions.

Despite their clear value, expert-coded data pose multiple problems. Rating concepts requires judgment, which varies across experts and cases; it may also vary systematically across groups of experts. We address these concerns by aggregating expert-coded data with a measurement model, allowing us to account for uncertainty and potential biases.

The logic of the V-Dem measurement model is that unobserved concepts exist (e.g. a certain level of academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression) but we only see imperfect manifestations of these concepts. That is, experts report their judgments about these concepts as applied to specific cases using rough ordinal categories. Our model then converts these expert ratings to a single continuous latent scale and thereby estimates values of the concept.

In the process, the model algorithmically estimates both the degree to which an expert is reliable relative to other experts, as well as the degree to which their perception of the response scale differs from other experts. Similarly, we use patterns of overlapping coding – both from experts who code multiple countries and experts who code hypothetical cases – to estimate the degree to which differences in scale perception are systematic across experts who code different sets of cases. Given the iterative nature of the estimation process, these estimates of reliability and scale perception weight an expert's contribution to the estimation of the unobserved concept.

In the resulting V-Dem dataset, we present users with a best estimate of the value for an observation (the point estimate), as well as an uncertainty estimate (credible regions, a Bayesian corollary of confidence intervals). More precisely, the output of the measurement model is an interval-level point estimate of the latent trait that typically ranges in value from –5 to 5, and its associated measurement error. These estimates are the best version of the data to use in statistical analysis.

However, the interval-level estimates are difficult for some users to interpret substantively. We therefore also provide interval-level point estimates that we have linearly transformed back to the coding scale that experts originally used to code each case. These estimates typically run from 0 to 4 (the modal scale range); users can refer to the V-Dem codebook to substantively interpret them. Fi-

nally, we provide ordinal versions of each variable for applications in which users require ordered categorical values. Each of the latter two data versions are also accompanied by credible regions.

VERSIONS OF THE V-DEM INDICATORS

Suffix	Scale	Description	Recommended use
None	Interval	V-Dem measurement model estimates	Regression analysis
_osp	Interval	Linearized transformation of the model estimates on the original scale	Substantive interpretation of graphs and data
_ord	Ordinal	Most likely ordinal value of model estimates on the original scale	Substantive interpretation of graphs and data
_codelow / _codehigh	Interval	One standard deviation above (<i>_codehigh</i>) and below (<i>_codelow</i>) a point estimate	Evaluating differences across units and over time within units
_sd	Interval	Standard deviation of the interval estimate	Creating confidence intervals based on user needs

The final V-Dem dataset thus includes a set of versions of indicators of democratic institutions and concepts, which allow academics and policymakers alike to understand the different features of a polity. The text box summarizes the output with which we provide users.

Key Terms

Point Estimate: A best estimate of a concept's value.

Confidence Intervals: Credible regions for which the upper and lower bounds represent a range of probable values for a point estimate. These bounds are based on the interval in which the measurement model places 68 percent of the probability mass for each score, which is generally approximately equivalent to the upper and lower bounds of one standard deviation from the median.

Significant Differences or Changes: When the upper and lower bounds of the confidence intervals for two point estimates do not overlap, we are confident that the difference between them is not a result of measurement error.

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47
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Publications from the V-Dem Team



Democratic Quality in Southern Europe

Tiago Fernandes (Ed.)
2024 | University of Notre Dame Press

► Fueled by new data from the Varieties of Democracy project, *Democratic Quality in Southern Europe* takes a close look at the democratic trajectories of France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain over the past fifty years. Despite similar beginnings, the five countries have experienced significant variations in the way their democracies have evolved. The book combines new data with classical methodologies to create fresh, convincing hypotheses on the development, quality, and depth of democracy in this critical region.

Editor Tiago Fernandes expertly draws together a collection of essays that look beyond the impact of socioeconomic development in these five countries, exploring innovative and nuanced explanations for their diverging paths.

Featured Publications

Episodes of Regime Transformation

Seraphine F. Maerz, Amanda B. Edgell, Matthew C. Wilson, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Staffan I. Lindberg
2023 | *Journal of Peace Research* 0(0).

► This article provides a new conceptualization of regime transformation that allows scholars to address democratization and autocratization as related but obverse processes. It introduces a dataset that captures 680 episodes of regime transformation (ERT) from 1900 to 2019 and offers novel insights into regime change over the past 120 years. Previously V-Dem Working Paper 113.

Academic Freedom and the Onset of Autocratization

Lars Pelke
2023 | *Democratization*, 30(6): 1015-1039.

► This article presents the first systematic investigation of the influence of academic freedom on the onset of autocratization. In particular, it reveals how academic freedom protects regimes from an onset of autocratization and argues that more academic freedom reduces the risk of autocratization by imprinting a pro-democracy bias on students and researchers.

2023

David Altman, Sergio Huertas-Hernández, and Clemente T. Sánchez. **Two paths towards the exceptional extension of national voting rights to non-citizen residents.** *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 49(10): 2541-2560.

Fabio Angiolillo. **Authoritarian Ruling Parties' Recruitment Dilemma: Evidence from China.** *Journal of East Asian Studies*. 23(3): 491-515.

Fabio Angiolillo. **Introducing the One-Party Membership Dataset: A dataset on party membership in autocracies.** *Journal of Peace Research*. 0(0).

Larry M. Bartels, Ursula E Daxecker, Susan D Hyde, Staffan I Lindberg, Irfan Nooruddin. (2023). **The Forum: Global Challenges to Democracy? Perspectives on Democratic Backsliding.** *International Studies Review*. 25(2).

Vanessa A. Boese, and Charles M. Wilson. (2023). **Contestation and participation: Concepts, measurement, and inference.** *International Area Studies Review*. 26(2): 89-106.

Sebastian Hellmeier, and Michael Bernhard. (2023). **Regime Transformation From Below: Mobilization for Democracy and Autocracy From 1900 to 2021.** *Comparative Political Studies*. 0(0).

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Kyle L. Marquardt, and Daniel Pemstein. **Estimating latent traits from expert surveys: an analysis of sensitivity to data-generating process.** *Political Science Research and Methods*. 11(2):384-393.

Valeriya Mechkova, and Amanda B. Edgell. **Substantive Representation, Women's Health, and Regime Type.** *Comparative Political Studies*. 0(0).

Juraj Medzihorsky, and Staffan I. Lindberg. **Walking the Talk: How to Identify Anti-Pluralist Parties.** *Party Politics*. 0(0). (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 116.)

Lars Pelke. **Reanalyzing the Link between Democracy and Economic Development.** *International Area Studies Review*. 26(4): 361-383.

Yi-ting Wang. **Supporting democracy when other democracies prosper?** *Democratization*. 30(7): 1240-1263.

Felix Wiebrecht. **Corruption, Elite Contestation, and Parliaments: Why Do Legislatures Become Stronger in Authoritarian Regimes?** *Political Research Quarterly*. 0(0).

Felix Wiebrecht, Yuko Sato, Marina Nord, Martin Lundstedt, Fabio Angiolillo & Staffan I. Lindberg (2023) **State of the world 2022: defiance in the face of autocratization.** *Democratization*. 30(5): 769-793.



Democratization and Autocratization: Concepts, Currents, Causes, Consequences, and Challenges

Jørgen Møller and Svend-Erik Skaaning
2024 | Abingdon: Routledge

► This book provides balanced, critical, and comprehensive coverage of the theories and realities of autocratization and democratization. It sketches developments in the conceptions of democracy, discusses how to distinguish between different forms of political rule, and maps the development of democracy and autocracy across space and time.

The book reviews the major debates and findings about domestic and international causes and consequences of democratization and autocratization. It synthesizes theoretical models and empirical relationships based on an explicit comparative perspective which focuses on similarities and differences across countries and historical periods.

V-Dem Working Papers and Reports

V-Dem Working Papers

2023

Fabio Angiolillo and Felix Wiebrecht. (2023). **From Individual Parties to Party Systems: A New Approach to Calculate Party Systems' Variables.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 146.

Amanda B. Edgell, Jean Lachapelle, and Seraphine F. Maerz. (2023). **Achieving Transparency, Reproducibility, and Readability with Hard-Coded Data: A Review.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 145.

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Fabio Angiolillo, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg. (2023). **Democratic-Autocratic Party Systems: A New Index.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 143.

Lars Pelke and Janika Spannagel. (2023). **Quality Assessment of the Academic Freedom Index: Strengths, Weaknesses, and How Best to Use It.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 142.

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Carl Henrik Knutsen, Kyle L. Marquardt, Brigitte Seim, Michael Coppedge, Amanda Edgell, Juraj Medzihorsky, Daniel Pemstein, Jan Teorell, John Gerring, and Staffan I. Lindberg. (2023). **Conceptual and Measurement Issues in Assessing Democratic Backsliding.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 140.

Kelly M. McMann and Daniel J. Tisch. (2023). **How Lower Levels of Corruption in Democracies Prevented COVID Deaths.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 139.

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Marcus Tannenbergh. (2023). **Legitimacy as Congruence: Matching Expert-Coded and Public Opinion Data.** *V-Dem Working Paper*, 134.

V-Dem Reports and Policy Briefs

2023

Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht, Vanessa Boese-Schlosser, Kelly Morrison, Natalia Natsika, Marina Nord, Evie Papada, Yuko Sato, and Staffan I. Lindberg. (2023). **Case for Democracy Report.** *University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute Report*.

Abhik Pramanik and Brigitte Seim. (2023). **Comparing PRC and U.S. Foreign Assistance Approaches.** *University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Policy Brief*, 38.

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Agnes Cornell, Jørgen Møller, and Svend-Erik Skaaning (2023). **"Political Regimes"**. Pp. 166-188 in Andrew Denning & Heidi Tworek (eds.), *The Interwar World*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lasse E. Leipziger, Svend-Erik Skaaning, and Matilde Thorsen (2023). **"Does Economic Inequality Harm Democratic Quality: No, but Yes."** Pp. 187-201 in Christoffer Green-Pedersen; Carsten Jensen & Barbara Vis (eds.), *No Normal Science*. Aarhus: Politica.

V-Dem Indices

The Liberal Democracy Index

The V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) captures both liberal and electoral aspects of democracy based on the 71 indicators included in the Liberal Component Index (LCI) and the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI). The EDI reflects a relatively ambitious idea of electoral democracy where a number of institutional features guarantee free

and fair elections such as freedom of association and freedom of expression. The LCI goes even further and captures the limits placed on governments in terms of two key aspects: The protection of individual liberties, and the checks and balances between institutions.

FIGURE A1.1. THE V-DEM LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX: WORLD AND REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1900/1960–2023

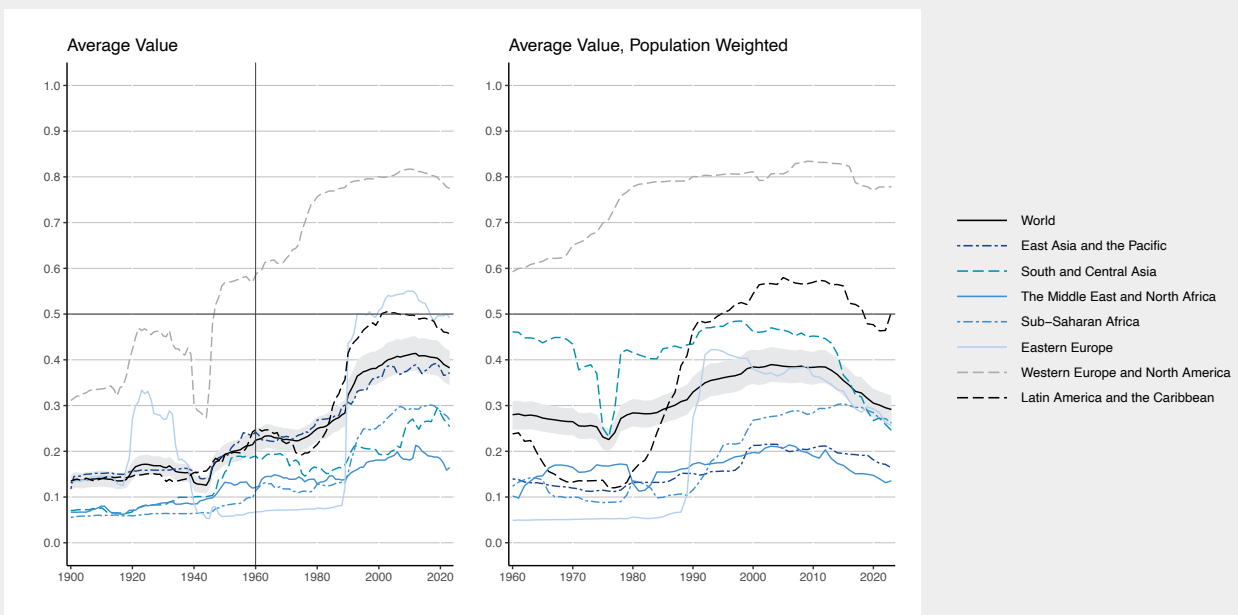
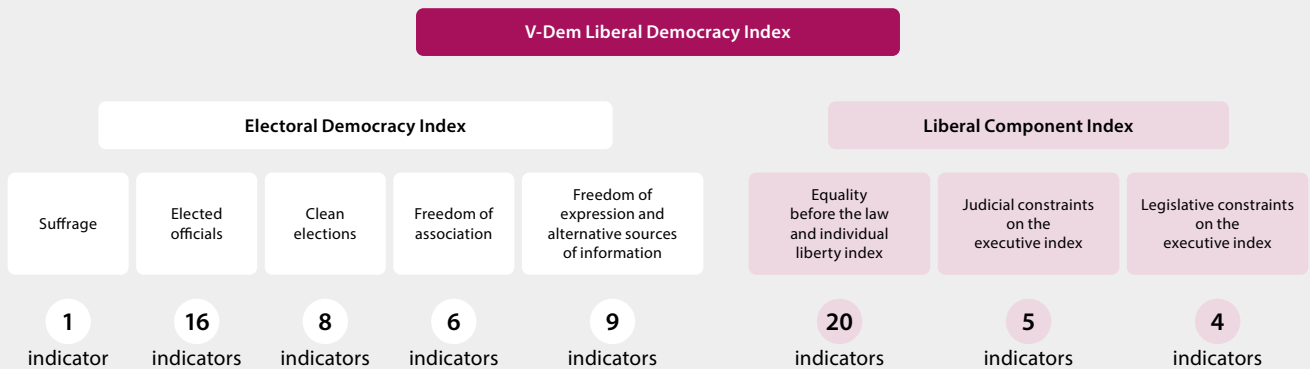


FIGURE A1.2. EXPLANATION OF THE V-DEM LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX



The Electoral Democracy Index

For several decades, scholars and practitioners alike depicted democracy in the world as though the extant measures really captured what is meant by the concept “electoral democracy”. Yet, we have all known that they did not. V-Dem is the first systematic effort to measure the *de facto* existence of all the institutions in Robert Dahl’s famous articulation of “polyarchy” as electoral democracy. The V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) captures not only the

extent to which regimes hold clean, free and fair elections, but also their actual freedom of expression, alternative sources of information and association, as well as male and female suffrage and the degree to which government policy is vested in elected political officials.

FIGURE A2.1. THE V-DEM ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX: WORLD AND REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1900/1960–2023

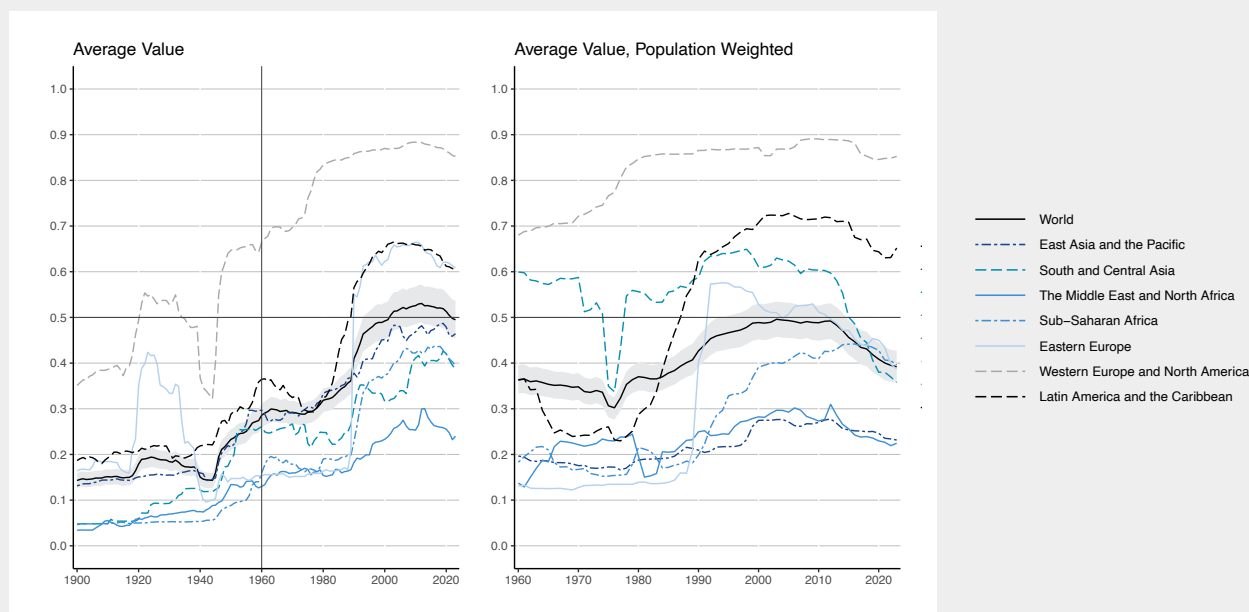
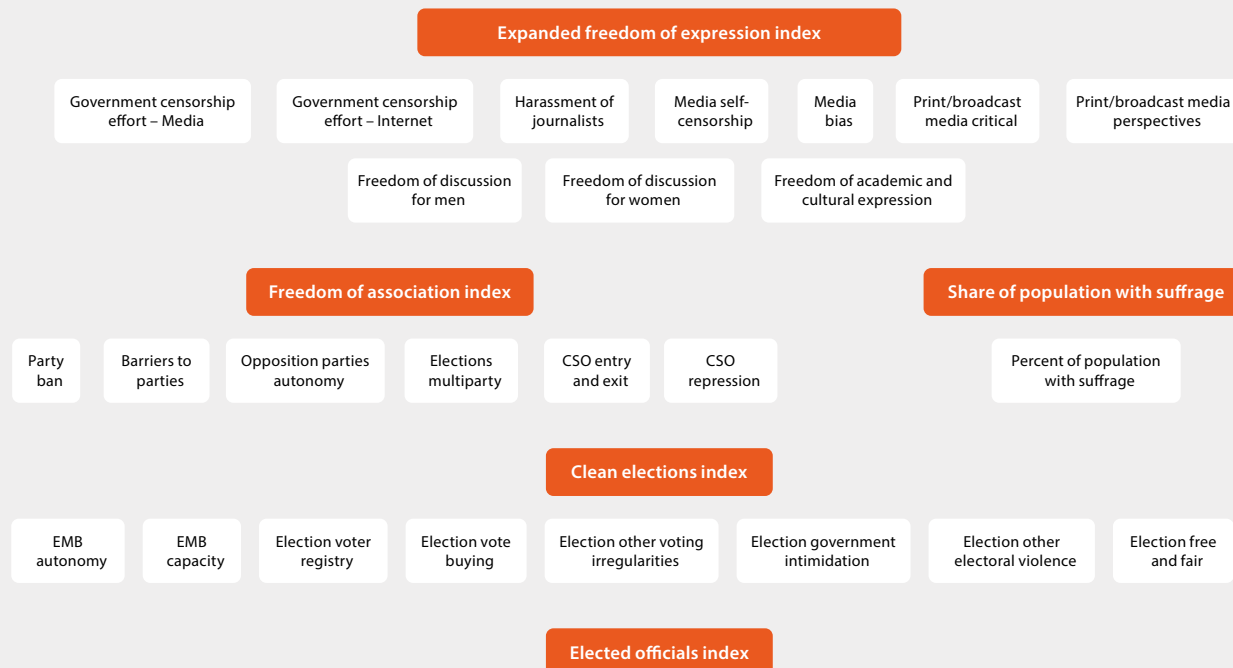


FIGURE A2.2. THE V-DEM ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI)



The Liberal Component Index

In V-Dem’s conceptual scheme the liberal principle of democracy embodies the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against both the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. It also captures the “horizontal” methods of accountability between more or less equally standing institutions that ensure the effective checks and balances between institutions and in particular limit the exercise of executive power. This is achieved by strong rule of law and constitutionally protected civil liberties, independent judiciary and strong parliament that are able to hold

the executive to account and limit its powers. The three indices that capture these dimensions are: the equality before the law and individual liberties (v2xcl_rol), judicial constraints on the executive (v2x_jucon), and legislative constraints on the executive (v2xlg_legcon). Taken together they measure the V-Dem Liberal Component Index (v2x_liberal).

FIGURE A3.1. THE V-DEM LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX: WORLD AND REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1900/1960–2023

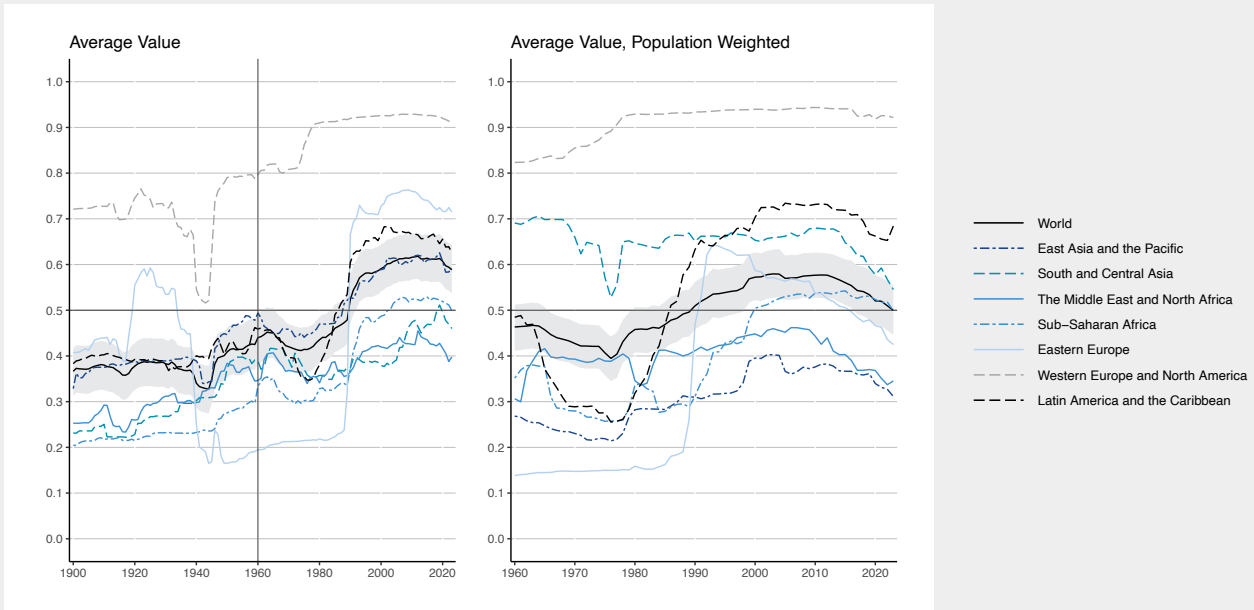
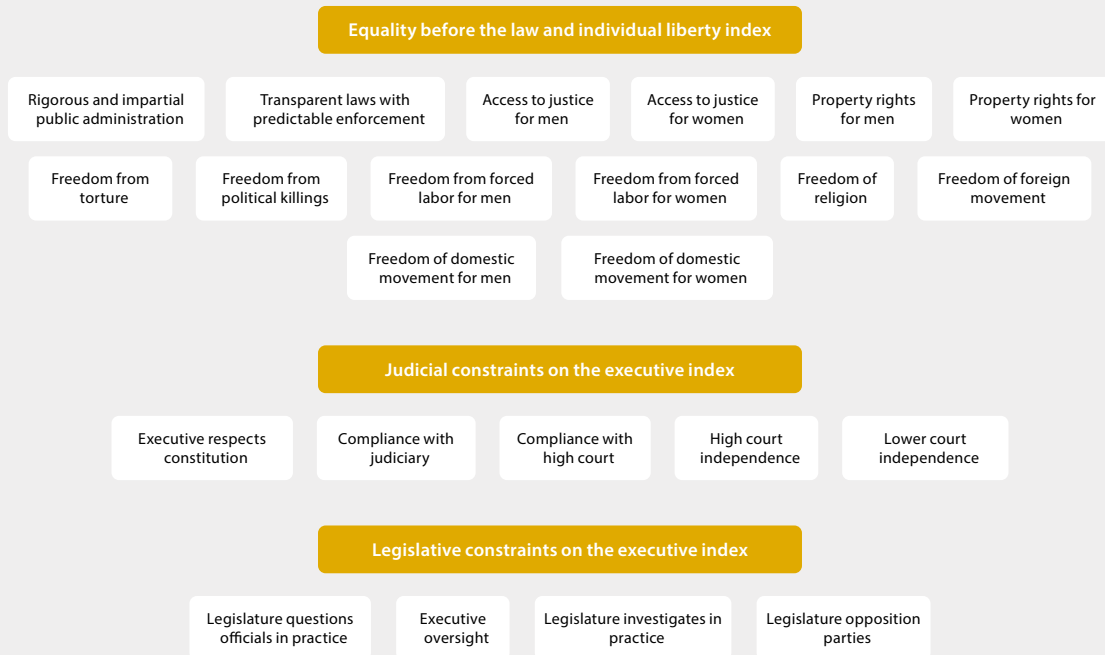


FIGURE A3.2. THE V-DEM LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI)



The Egalitarian Component Index

The egalitarian principle of democracy measures to what extent all social groups enjoy equal capabilities to participate in the political arena. It relies on the idea that democracy is a system of rule “by the people” where citizens participate in various ways, such as making informed voting decisions, expressing opinions, demonstrating, running for office or influencing policy-making in other ways. The

egalitarian principle of democracy is fundamentally related to political participation, as systematic inequalities in the rights and resources of citizens of specific social groups limit capabilities to participate in the political and governing processes. Therefore, a more equal distribution of resources across groups results in political equality and hence democracy.

FIGURE A4.1. THE V-DEM EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX: WORLD AND REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1900/1960–2023

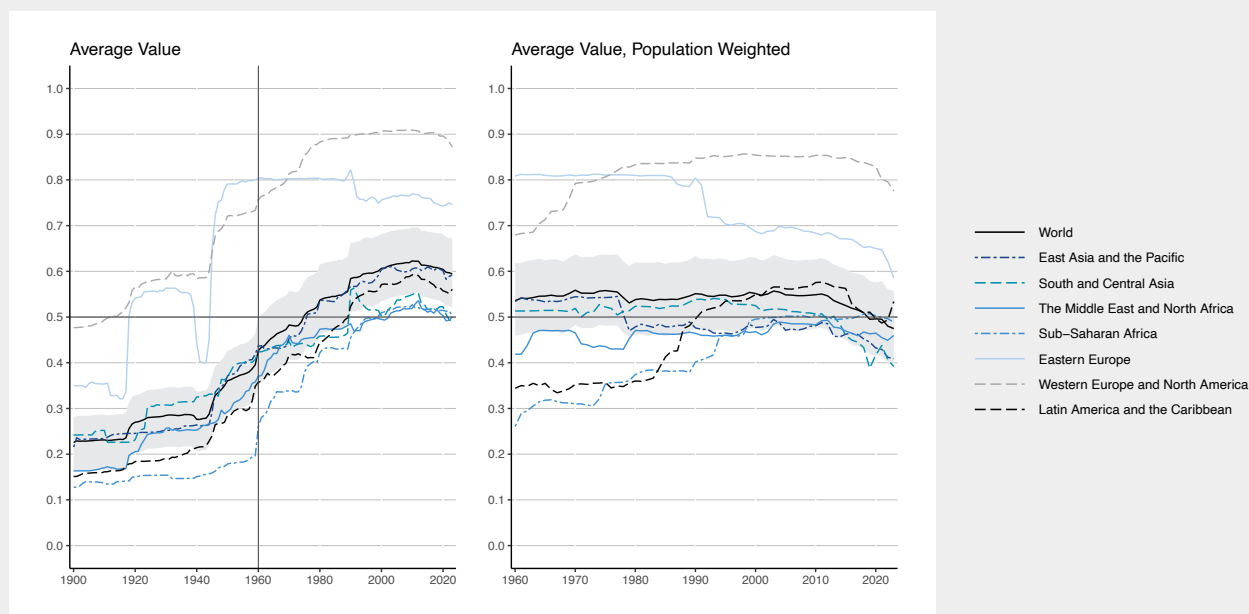
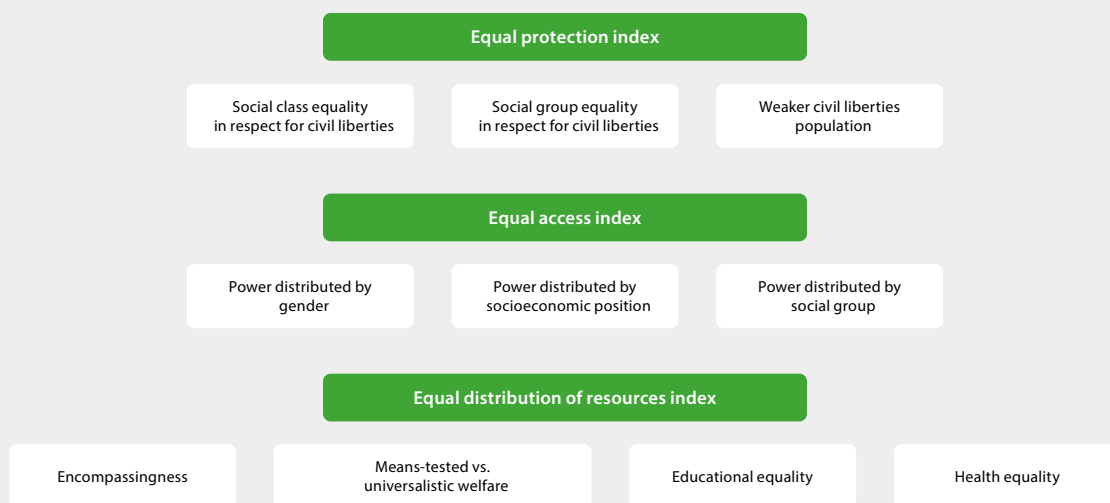


FIGURE A4.2. THE V-DEM EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI)



The Participatory Component Index

The participatory principle of democracy emphasizes active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral. This principle prefers direct rule by citizens as practicable. The V-Dem Participatory Component Index (PCI) takes into account four important aspects of citizen participation: civil society organiza-

tions, mechanisms of direct democracy, and participation and representation through local and regional governments. Four different V-Dem indices capture these aspects and are the basis for the PCI.

FIGURE A5.1. THE V-DEM PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX: WORLD AND REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1900/1960–2023

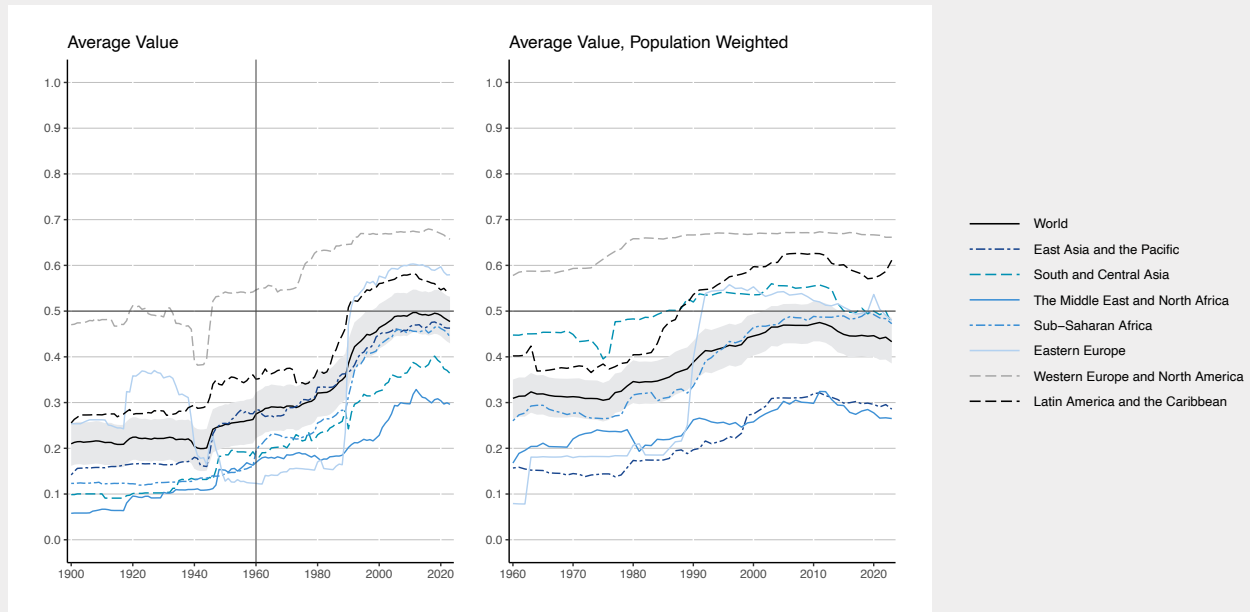
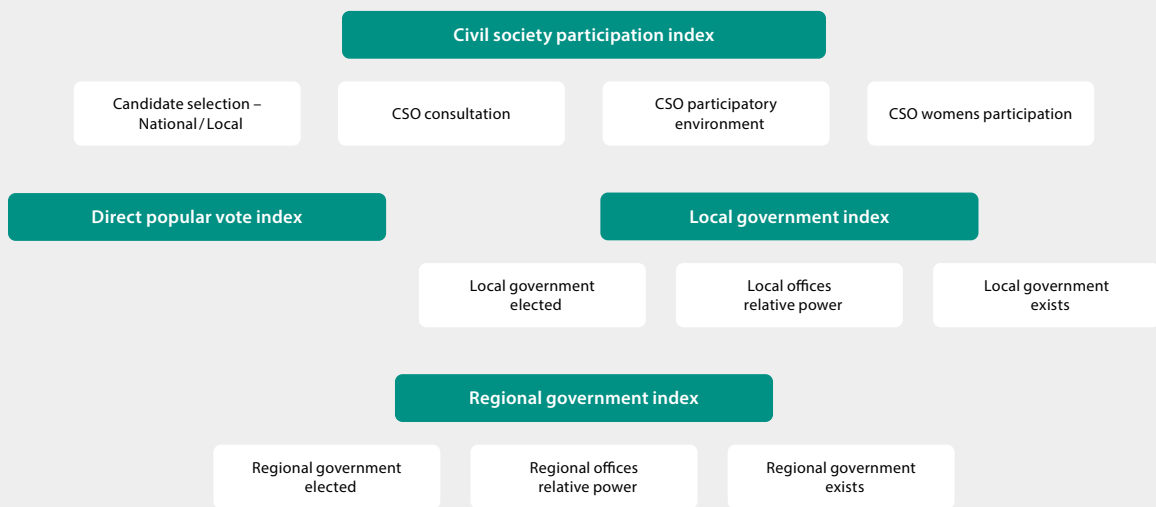


FIGURE A5.2. THE V-DEM PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI)



The Deliberative Component Index

The V-Dem Deliberative Component Index (DCI) captures to what extent the deliberative principle of democracy is achieved. It assesses the process by which decisions are reached in a polity. A deliberative process is one in which public reasoning, focused on the common good, motivates political decisions – as contrasted with emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests

or coercion. According to this principle, democracy requires more than an aggregation of existing preferences. There should also be respectful dialogue at all levels – from preference formation to final decision – among informed and competent participants who are open to persuasion.

FIGURE A6.1. THE V-DEM DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX: WORLD AND REGIONAL AVERAGES, 1900/1960–2023

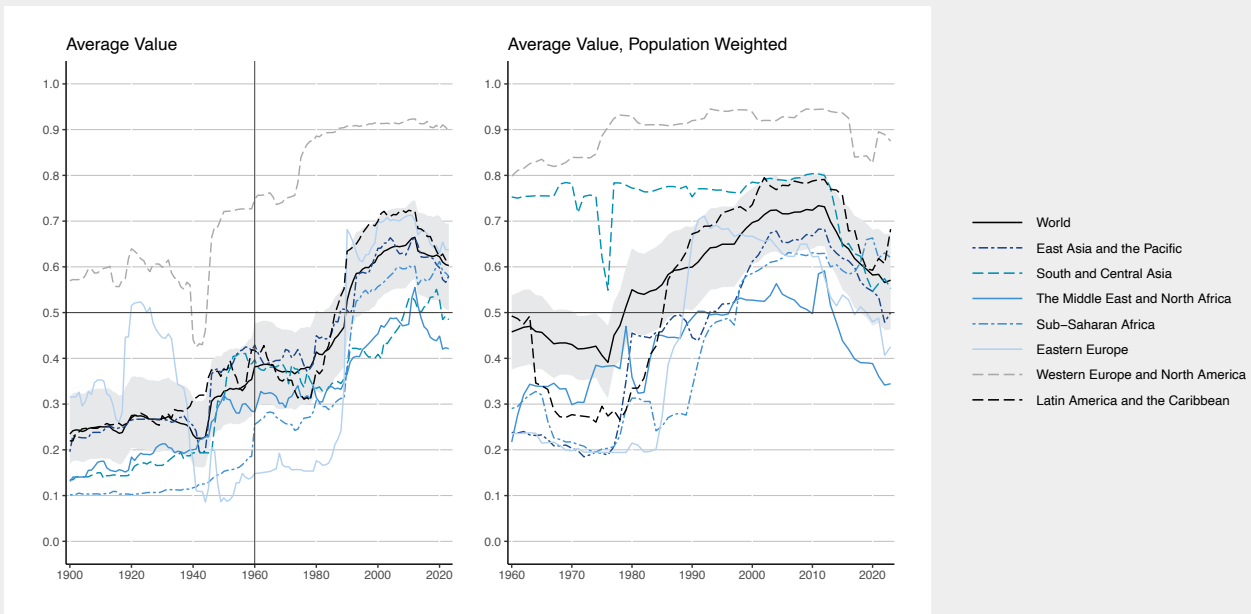


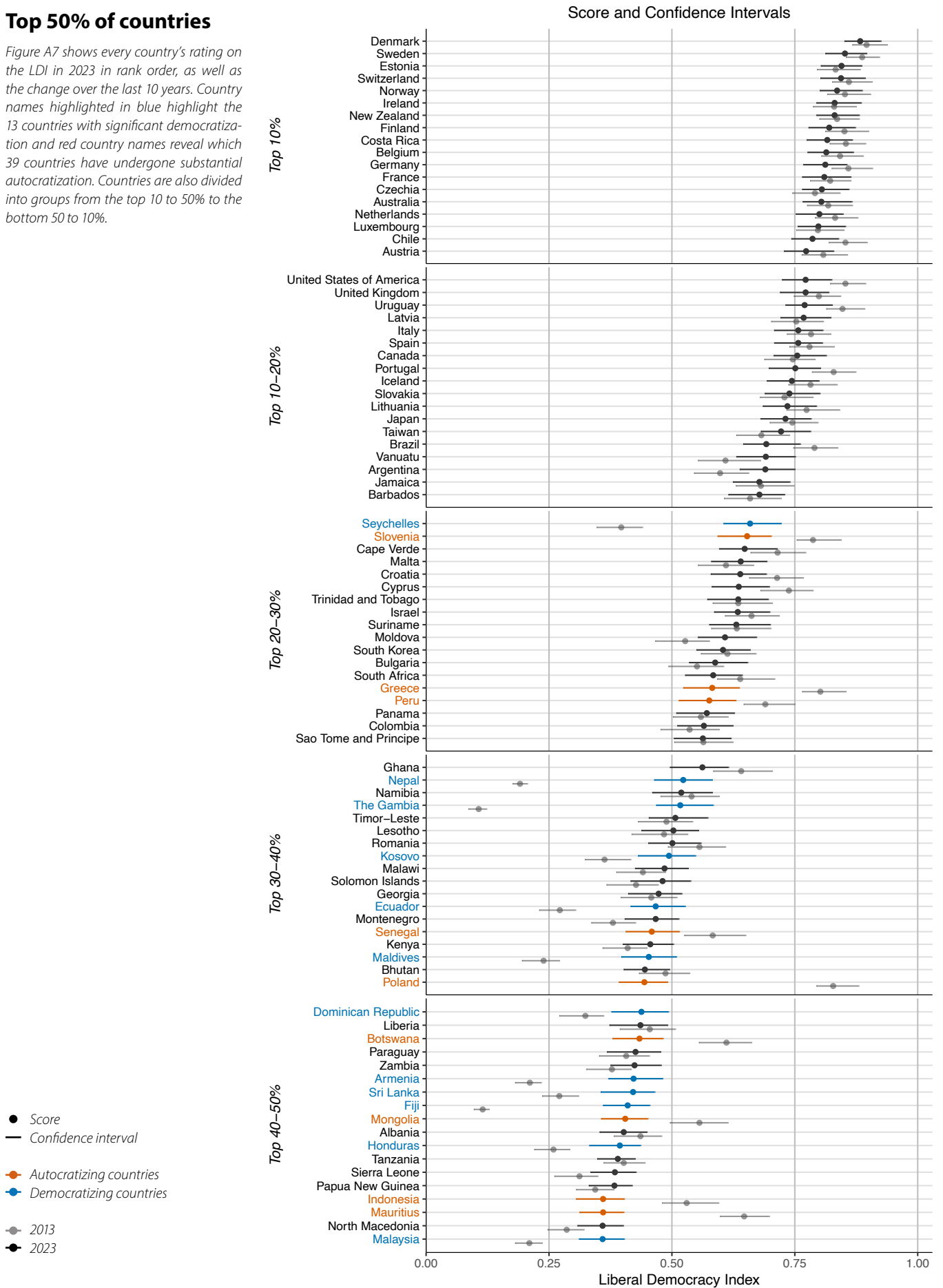
FIGURE A6.2. THE V-DEM DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI)



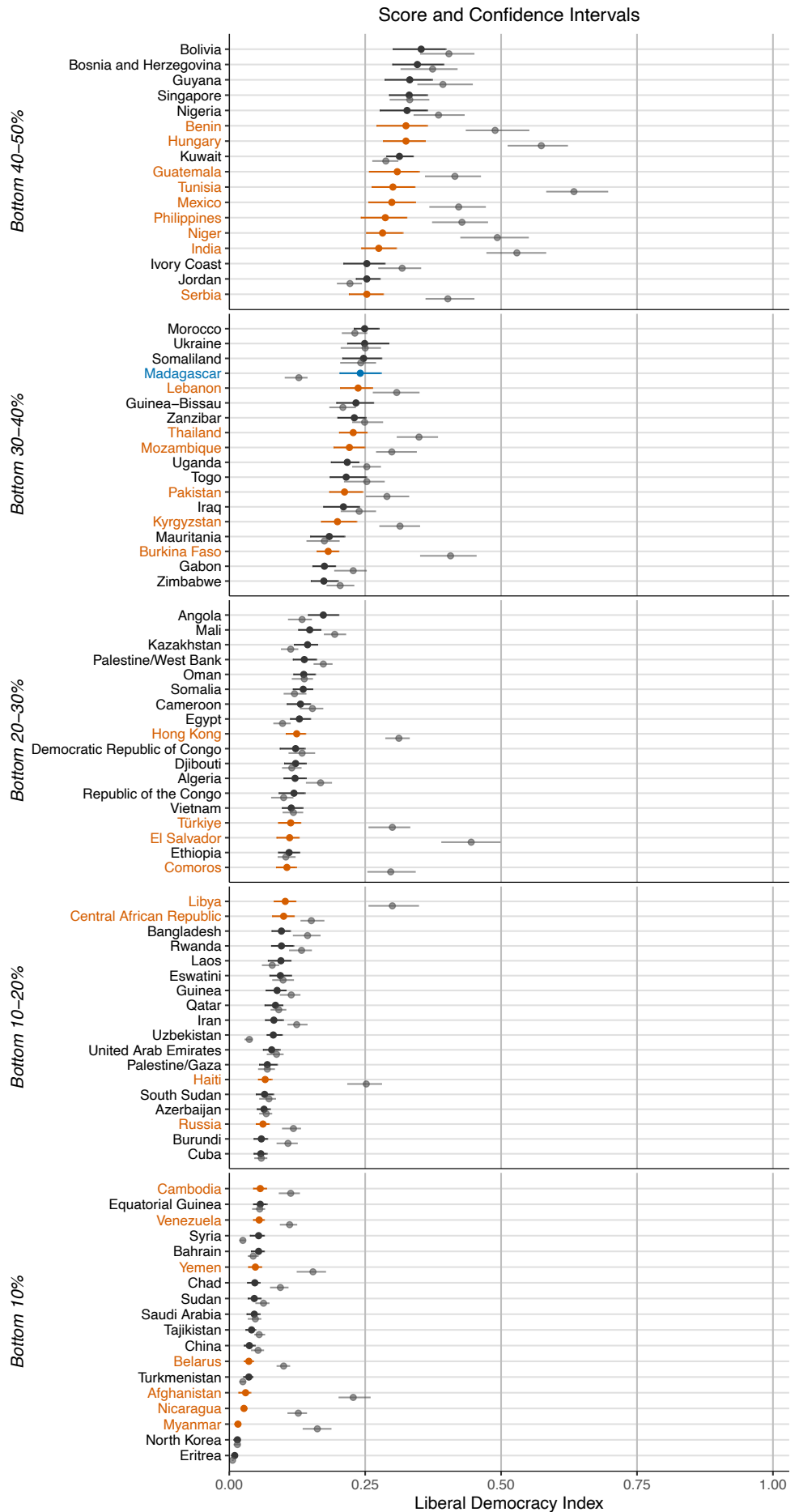
FIGURE A7. COUNTRIES BY SCORE ON V-DEM'S LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI), 2013 COMPARED TO 2023

Top 50% of countries

Figure A7 shows every country's rating on the LDI in 2023 in rank order, as well as the change over the last 10 years. Country names highlighted in blue highlight the 13 countries with significant democratization and red country names reveal which 39 countries have undergone substantial autocratization. Countries are also divided into groups from the top 10 to 50% to the bottom 50 to 10%.



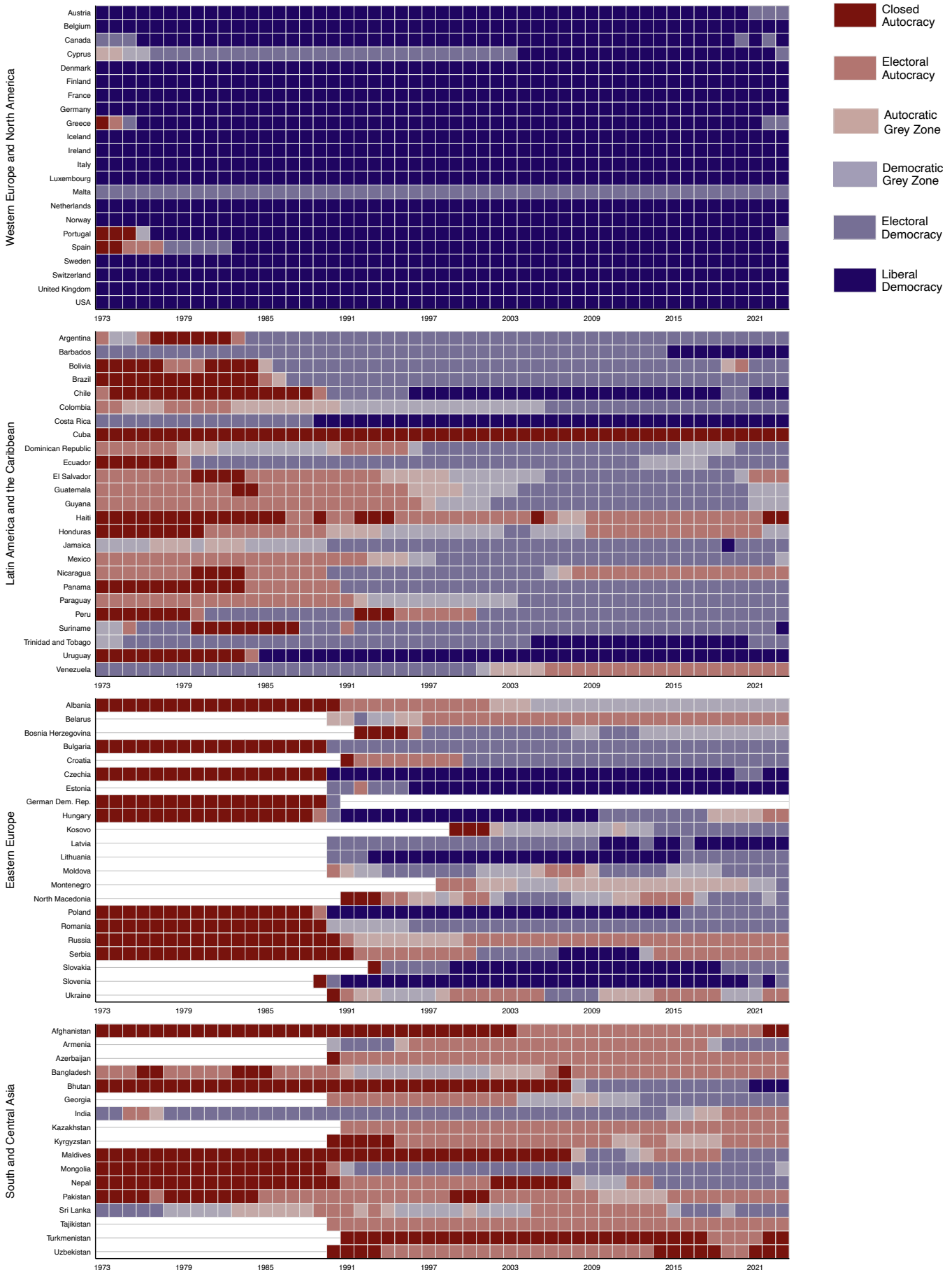
Bottom 50% of countries

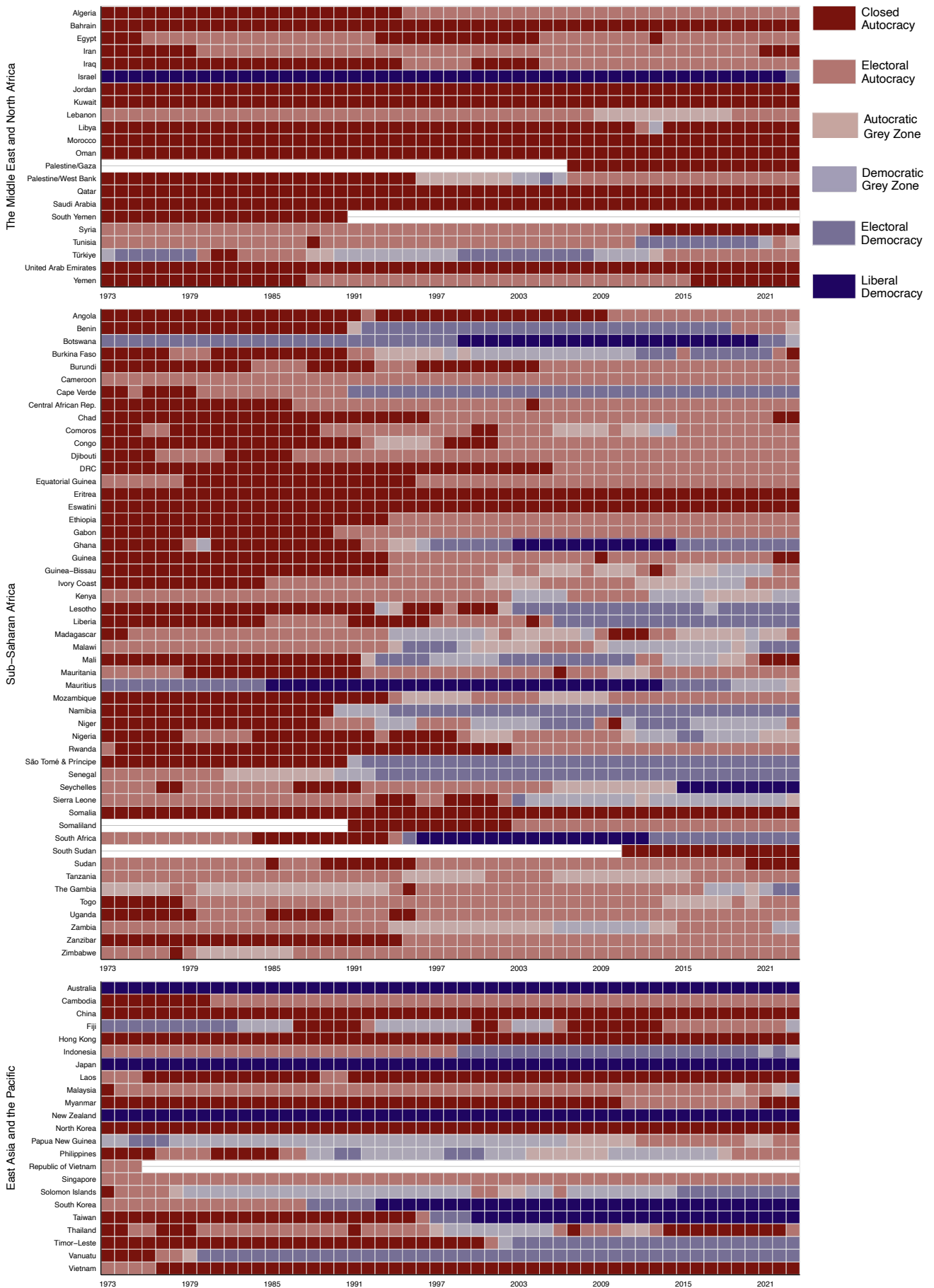


- Score
- Confidence interval
- Autocratizing countries
- Democratizing countries
- 2013
- 2023

TABLE A1. HISTORY OF REGIMES OF THE WORLD BY COUNTRY-YEAR, 1973–2023

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, 1973–2023, 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 Lüthmann et al. 2018. *Regimes of the World (RoW), Politics and Governance* 6(1).





Global Standards, Local Knowledge

V-Dem Regional Centers

The Regional Centers aim to further enhance regional research and the involvement of regional scholars in the V-Dem Project



Balkans



Central Asia



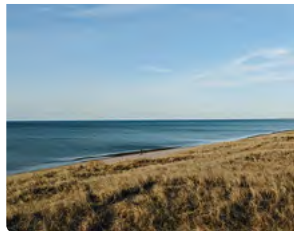
East Asia



**Eastern Europe
& Russia**



Latin America



North America



Southern Africa



Southern Europe



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