

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)



"How to Use the V-Dem Data?", Workshop for Democracy Practitioners, Melanisia, 2015.

KEY FEATURES OF V-DEM

- One of the largest social science databases, with 450 indicators on democracy, human rights, governance, and political systems
- World-wide coverage from 1789 to the present
- Transparent and reliable indicators based on the knowledge of 3,000 international experts
- Free and easy online access
- An independent Institute producing high-quality research on democracy and policy outreach

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) takes a unique approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy. We adopt a multidimensional and disaggregated approach acknowledging the complexity of the concept of democracy as a system of rule that goes beyond the simple presence of elections. The V-Dem distinguishes between seven high-level principles of democracy: *electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, egalitarian, majoritarian and consensual*, and collects data to measure these principles.

The V-Dem database

V-Dem is one of the largest-ever social science data collection efforts with a database containing over 19 million data points. In 2016, V-Dem received the most prestigious award for comparative datasets in political science: the *Lijphart/Przeworski/Verba Best Dataset Award* presented by the American Political Science Association, Comparative Politics Section.

With the 8th version of the data released in April 2018, the dataset now

covers 201 countries from 1789 to 2017. For the very first time, data from 'Historical V-Dem' is integrated – extending the coverage to 228 years of political development, from 1789 to 2017.

The V-Dem dataset is available for download, free of charge. The V-Dem Online Analysis Tools make it easy for users to create and save their own graphs (example in Figure 2).

In addition to the 450 indicators, V-Dem provides over 50 indices designed to measure both the major varieties of democracy, and capture concepts such as *clean elections, women's political empowerment, accountability, and civil society participation*. The database enables highly detailed analysis of virtually all aspects of a country's political system as well as comparisons of countries on the aggregate level.

Governments, development agencies, and NGOs can thus benefit from the nuanced comparative and historical data when researching critical decisions such as selecting country program priorities, informing program design, and monitoring the impact of their programs.

The V-Dem team

The V-Dem project is a truly collaborative international effort that unites thousands of social scientists working in the spheres of democracy and governance. The V-Dem project works with over 3,000 local and cross-national experts from over 170 countries contributing their knowledge on various aspects of democracy. The project is managed by leading scholars in the study of democracy: 6 Principal Investigators, 4 Program & Data Managers, 14 Project Managers and Research Fellows with topical and methodological expertise, more than 30 Regional Managers, almost 170 Country Coordinators, as well as several Assistant Researchers.

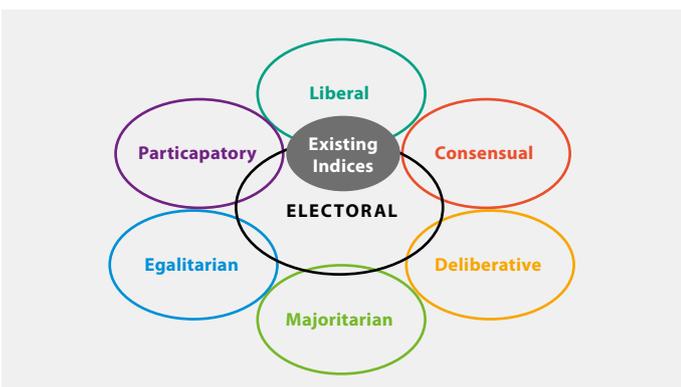


Figure 1. V-Dem High-level Principles of Democracy.

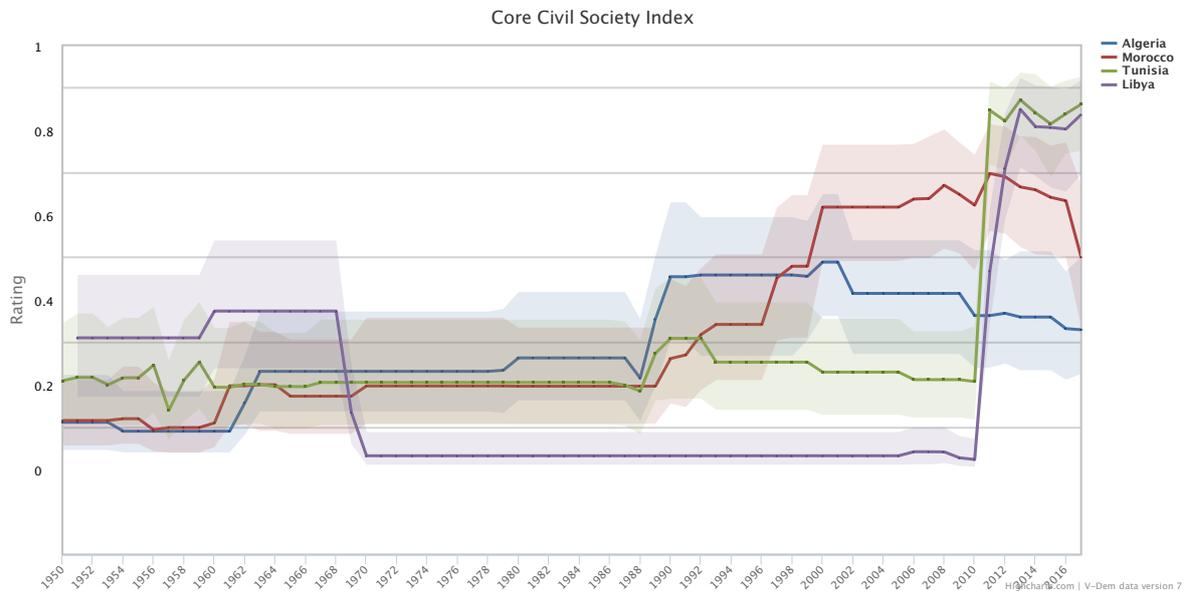


Figure 2. Core Civil Society Index Development in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya (1950 - 2017)

Methodology

V-Dem draws on theoretical and methodological expertise from its worldwide team to produce data in the most objective and reliable way possible. Approximately half of the indicators in the V-Dem dataset are based on factual information obtainable from official documents such as constitutions and government records. The other half consists of assessments by certified academic and other country experts on issues pertaining to *actual* practices and compliance with *de jure* rules. On such issues, a minimum of five experts typically provide ratings.

The V-Dem team includes leading social science research methodologists and we have developed a state of the art measurement model that, to the extent possible, minimizes coder error and addresses issues of comparability across countries and over time using Bayesian latent variable models, bridge- and lateral coding, as well as anchoring vignettes. V-Dem is continually developing new techniques and solicit feedback from experts in the field. V-Dem is thus also at the cutting edge of developing new and improved methods to increase both reliability and comparability of expert survey data.¹ V-Dem also draws on the team’s academic expertise to develop theoretically informed techniques for aggregating indicators into mid- and high-level indices.² The indices not only allow us to revisit familiar research questions but also open up new lines of inquiry about the types of democracy and democratic trajectories throughout the world.

V-Dem research and publications

One of V-Dem’s core activities is producing high-quality research that provides insights on crucial questions such as the relationship between democracy and development, the conditions that make democracies endure, and the dynamics surrounding women’s political empowerment. As of May 2018, 67 Working Papers have been published on the V-Dem website covering a wide range of topics.

In addition to article-length working papers, V-Dem regularly produces a range of publications targeting a wider audience. The Policy Briefs summarize key policy-relevant findings on particular topics such as how to measure accountability and the role of a strong legislature in curbing executive corruption. The V-Dem Country Briefs outline the most important democracy development trends in a specific country.

V-Dem Democracy Network

As part of its policy outreach program, V-Dem is cooperating with a number of international organizations that work in the sphere of democracy and development, thus creating a network of democracy experts both from academia and the policy world. We have published and contributed to a number of publications, organized and participated in conferences, workshops, and capacity-building trainings. Some of these collaborations include:

- V-Dem annual conference: Every year in May, V-Dem organizes a policy dialogue conference to enhance the cooperation between researchers and democracy practitioners. The conference features not only V-Dem researchers, but also counts among its speakers leading experts on democratization, democracy, good government and corruption from over 50 organizations.
- World Bank cooperation: V-Dem data are being used for the World Development Report 2017 and the V-Dem research team authored one background paper to the report. In addition, using the V-Dem infrastructure, a pilot data-collection study was conducted on measuring elite power and interactions. Currently, V-Dem works with the Bank to develop a new set of governance indicators to be piloted in 2018/19.

1. For more details see Pemstein et al (2018). 2. See Coppedge et al (2018).

- UNDP's work with the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 16): V-Dem was included in a Virtual Network aimed at identifying how the new goals should be measured and evaluated. The final proposal includes 60 V-Dem indicators.
- B-Team: Working with the B-Team, V-Dem conducted a study of the relationship between expansion of civil liberties and increasing economic growth and human development.
- Article 19: V-Dem assisted with developing a measurement scheme using V-Dem data for their media freedom index and their annual report.
- International IDEA: V-Dem put together the team and designed their democracy measurement scheme and aggregation for the organization's reporting and evaluation. Also joint production of different types of reports and briefs, joint conferences, publications, consultancies, and outreach as well as dissemination activities.
- Communities of Democracies (CoD): V-Dem is CoD's main partner in constructing a global democracy measure based on their Warsaw Declaration, as well as provision of data for that measure.
- Capacity building events on V-Dem data and statistical analysis for organizations such as International IDEA, DANIDA, EC/DEVCO and EEAS, Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

Regional V-Dem centers

Currently, Regional V-Dem Centers are operating in Estonia, Portugal, Kyrgyzstan, USA and Zambia. The Centers conduct research on democracy with a regional focus; organize academic conferences and policy-oriented workshops.

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ABOUT V-DEM INSTITUTE

V-Dem is a new approach to conceptualization and measurement of democracy. The headquarters – the V-Dem Institute – is based at the University of Gothenburg with 17 staff, and a project team across the world with 6 Principal Investigators, 14 Project Managers, 30 Regional Managers, 170 Country Coordinators, Research Assistants, and 3,000 Country Experts, the V-Dem project is one of the largest ever social science research-oriented data collection programs.



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