

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?



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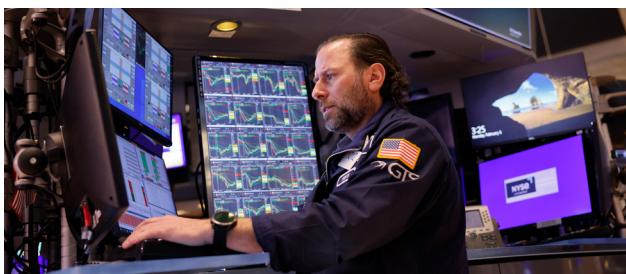
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Overview

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index provides a snapshot of the state of democracy in 165 independent states and two territories. This covers almost the entire population of the world and the vast majority of the world's states (microstates are excluded). Scored on a 0-10 scale, the Democracy Index is based on five

categories: *electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties*. Based on its scores on a range of indicators within these categories, each country is classified as one of four types of regime: "full democracy", "flawed democracy", "hybrid regime" or "authoritarian regime".

Democracy isn't working

This edition of the Democracy Index examines the state of global democracy in 2024. The focus of this year's report is why representative democracy is not working for large numbers of citizens around the world. There is a growing consensus that the democratic model developed over the past century is in trouble, but there is less clarity about why people are so disenchanted with their democracies. In 2024, when countries inhabited by more than half of the global population went to the polls, popular disaffection with the performance of government was expressed in an anti-incumbent backlash and rising support for populist insurgents.

Some may argue that the success at the polls of insurgent parties and the ousting of mainstream parties proves that representative democracy is working well. This is overall a positive phenomenon, but the longevity and scale of the

populist backlash tells us that representative democracy has not been working satisfactorily for some time. Furthermore, the reaction of many mainstream parties and governments has been to do everything in their power to keep the populists out and to present them as illegitimate or even a threat to democracy. As a consequence, the main problem confronting our democracies is often identified as one of populism, rather than the deficiencies of our "representative" systems. With notable exceptions, much of the discussion of democracy problematises populism rather than addressing the underlying issues that have given rise to populist movements.

In our Democracy Index, we can see that there is a dichotomy between the high scores recorded by many countries in the top half of the global rankings—which possess the formal institutions, processes and legal prerequisites of democracy—and the

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low esteem in which many citizens hold their democratic systems. This widespread disaffection with the functioning of democracy is evident in the survey data which the index draws upon across several categories. Paying attention to the survey data is crucial for understanding the sources of popular dissatisfaction with the state of democracy today.

It is clear that having formal democratic institutions is not enough to sustain public support, especially if those institutions have been hollowed out and decision-making is outsourced to non-elected bodies. Governments and political parties in many democracies have become estranged from citizens and as a consequence are no longer responsive to their concerns. The quality of a democracy can be measured by the degree to which governments consult the public on the important issues of the day. However, in many of the advanced democracies, the established practice has been to exclude the public from having a role in debating these questions. Little wonder that large numbers of citizens do not think that democracy, as it is currently organised in many developed democracies, is working for them.

That democracy is not working well in many of the world's democracies has been clear for some time. The rise of populist political alternatives over the past decade is an expression of a problem with the mainstream parties that have been in power for the past 75 years and the political systems they have developed. There is nothing undemocratic about new, anti-establishment parties

challenging the status quo, as long as they do so by democratic means. They may not appear to have all the answers to the pressing issues of our time, but they are at least connecting with marginalised sections of the electorate and meeting a demand for representation from citizens who feel that they do not have a voice.

In our annual "Democracy in focus" essay, we look in depth at the factors that are causing people to lose faith in representative democracy (see page 29). We try to go beyond merely discussing the symptoms of this long-standing democratic malaise, to identify and analyse the underlying drivers of public dissatisfaction with the status quo. In this endeavour we are revisiting a theme we first addressed in our 2016 report, "Revenge of the deplorables", in which we presented a multi-faceted explanation of the events of that year, including the Brexit vote in the UK, the populist insurgency in Europe and the election of Donald Trump in the US. We hope that, eight years later, we can build on that analysis to provide a fuller understanding of the drivers of discontent with democracy around the world.

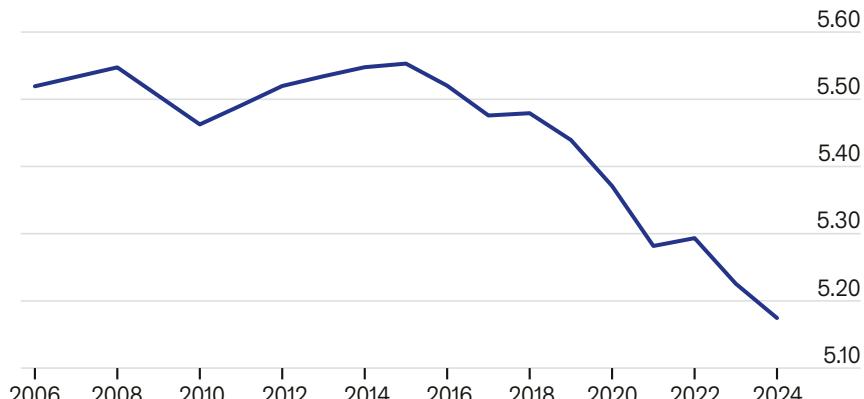
The problems we discuss are not new, but they have arguably reached a tipping point, beyond which it becomes more difficult to resolve them. So our essay also discusses what needs to change to make our political systems truly representative and restore public trust in democracy. A failure to fix our democracies will not only have negative domestic political consequences, it will also embolden autocrats everywhere and demoralise those fighting for democracy around the globe.

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Charting democracy's ups and downs, 2006 to 2024

Global average Democracy Index score out of 10 (10=best)



Source: EIU.

The 2024 index results

Four years after the start of the covid-19 pandemic, which led to a rollback of freedoms around the globe, the 2024 results point to a continuing democratic malaise. Only a minority of countries (37) improved their index score in 2024, and the margin of improvement for most was small and often from a low base. A far larger number (83) registered a decline in their score, and some of these deteriorations were substantial. The scores for the other 47 countries stayed the same. That means that the quality of democracy in 130 countries of the total of

167 covered by the index either worsened or made no improvement.

The number of countries classified as democracies decreased by three compared with 2023, to 71, and the overall index score fell to 5.17, down from 5.23 in 2023. This is a fairly small decline of 0.06 points, on the same scale as that recorded between 2022 and 2023. The average score for the 71 democracies remained the same, which was disappointing given that 2024 was a huge election year which might have been expected

Table 1

Democracy Index 2024, by regime type

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	25	15.0	6.6
Flawed democracies	46	27.5	38.4
Hybrid regimes	36	21.6	15.7
Authoritarian regimes	60	35.9	39.2

Note. "World" population refers to the total population of the 167 geographies (165 countries and 2 territories) covered by the Index. Since this excludes only micro states, this is nearly equal to the entire estimated world population.

Source: EIU.

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to deliver an improvement in the overall index score. However, as in 2023 it is important to note that the regression in the index in 2024 was not driven by the world's democracies. The decline was the result of a further worsening in the average score for the "authoritarian regimes". This trend of recent years appears to confirm that "authoritarian regimes" tend to become even more authoritarian as time goes on. The inclination of autocratic rulers is not to meet popular aspirations for change by democratising aspects of their political systems, but to dig in and crack down harder on any sign of dissent. They also appear to be learning from each other about how best to protect themselves and neutralise opposition.

The entrenchment of authoritarian rule around the world appears to be borne out by the results of the Democracy Index in recent years. According to our index, more than one-third (39.2%) of the world population live under authoritarian rule (see Table 1), a share that has been creeping up in recent years. Sixty countries are now classified as "authoritarian regimes", an increase of one compared with the 2023 index, and up from 52 a decade ago in 2014.

The advance of authoritarianism is mirrored in the retreat of democracy. Today less than half of the world's population live in a democracy of some sort (45%), compared with 48% in 2014. Only 6.6% reside in a "full democracy", down from 12.5% in 2014; since then, the US and several other countries have been downgraded to "flawed democracies". Today, 71 of the 167

countries and territories covered by the Democracy Index are classified as democracies. This is six fewer than in 2014. Of the remaining 96 countries in our index, 36 are classified as "hybrid regimes", combining elements of electoral democracy with authoritarian behaviours.

In 2024, the good news was that the number of "full democracies" (those scoring at least 8.00 out of 10) rose by one to 25. However, the number of "flawed democracies" fell by four, from 50 in 2023 to 46 in 2024. So overall, three fewer countries were classified as democracies in 2024 compared with 2023.

The Democracy Index is a "thick" measure of democracy that assesses each country across five categories—*electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties*. The chart on page 10 shows what has happened to the global average score across these five categories of the index between 2008—before the onset of the global financial crisis—and 2024.

The categories that have recorded the biggest deteriorations since 2008 are *civil liberties* (-1.00 on a 0-10 scale) and *electoral process and pluralism* (-0.66), which are the building blocks of democracy. The scores for *functioning of government* and *political culture* fell by 0.47 and 0.48 respectively during this period. The exception to the general rule of worsening scores is the performance of the *political participation* measure: the global average score for this category improved by 0.74 between 2008 and 2024.

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The improvement reflects an upsurge of popular engagement in politics in developed democracies and waves of political protests in

developing economies, providing a powerful counter-narrative to the narrative of democratic decline.

What were the main drivers of decline in 2024?

In 2024, the two categories that registered the biggest declines were *functioning of government* and *electoral process and pluralism*. The latter score declined by 0.08 compared with 2023, which was especially disappointing given that so many countries went to the polls in 2024. According to our calculations, 75 countries held elections that were national in scope, including eight of the ten most populous countries in the world (Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia and the US). In the section entitled “What’s wrong with representative democracy” we discuss the results of this election extravaganza, which delivered some positive outcomes amid an anti-incumbent backlash. In many countries, voters ejected governments that had not delivered, and long-ruling political parties and

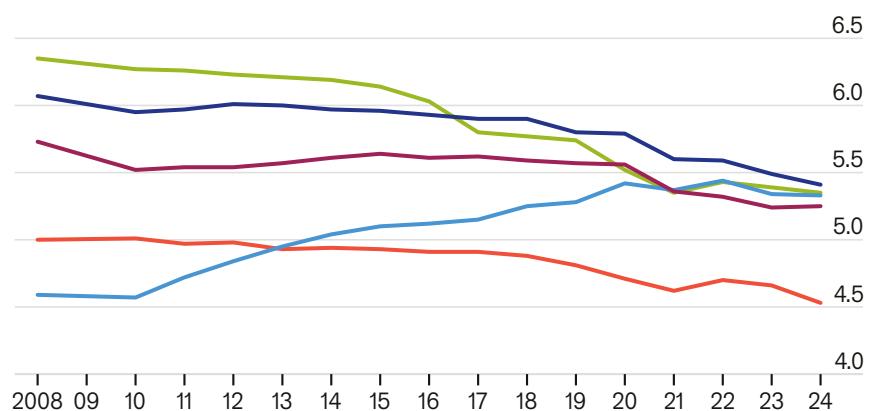
rulers had to make way for political insurgents. However, many elections were not free and fair and other prerequisites of democracy, such as freedom of speech and association, were absent. In some countries, the authorities cancelled scheduled elections without good cause. After a mega election year, the score for *electoral process and pluralism* declined in every region except western Europe and North America.

The *functioning of government* category registered a 0.13-point decline in 2024. This is the lowest-scoring category of the index by some margin, with a global average score of 4.53. This poor performance is the result of core weaknesses afflicting democratic systems, developed and developing alike, which are captured by the 14 indicators in this category of

Democracy Index categories, 2008-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

- Civil liberties
- Electoral process and pluralism
- Functioning of government
- Political culture
- Political participation



Source: EIU.

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the index. Gridlock, dysfunction, corruption, insufficient transparency and a lack of accountability have undermined public confidence in governments, political parties and politicians. In many countries, powerful interest groups and the wealthy exert significant influence. Governments outsource decision-making to non-elected bodies, including central banks and courts. Citizens increasingly feel that they do not have control over their governments. As a result, popular trust in democratic institutions has been in decline for many years and has reached the stage where many question whether democracy is able to deliver good results. North America was the only region to avoid a further decline in its score in this category in 2024. This partly reflects the already low score of 6.43 for the US, which is the lowest-scoring of all the developed democracies in this category.

In 2024 the global average *political participation* score declined by the smallest possible margin of 0.01 to 5.33. However, since 2022 the category score has fallen from an all-time high of 5.44 in that year, pointing to a hiatus in the general trend of increased political participation since 2010. The 2024 decline was not universal across all regions: in eastern Europe and Central Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean the regional score in this category edged up. North America has a *political participation* score of 8.89, a rarely celebrated positive feature of US democracy, and this did not change in 2024. The regional average score in this category fell by a modest 0.02 points in both Asia and Australasia and in western Europe; by 0.03

points in Sub-Saharan Africa; and by 0.06 points in the Middle East and North Africa. The deterioration in the *political participation* score since 2022 may turn out to be a blip, but it may also herald a trend in some places of abstention and disengagement in response to rising disappointment with democracy.

The *political culture* category, comprising eight indicators, mostly based on World Values Survey or other survey data and measuring things such as the degree of popular support for democracy, the military or expert rule, registered a 0.01-point improvement in 2024 compared with 2023. Improvements in this category in Europe, east and west, and to a lesser degree in Sub-Saharan Africa, offset declines of greater to lesser magnitudes in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia and Australasia. In some regions, support for strong leaders is rooted in history and tradition. In others, frustration with dysfunctional political systems has led more people to embrace non-democratic alternatives. This can take the form of support for technocratic governance or rule by strongmen. According to some surveys, there is also increasing evidence of a generational divide, with younger cohorts more open to contemplating non-democratic alternatives. The weakening of popular attachment to democracy is reflected in the decline in the average global score for the *political culture* category between 2008 and 2024, from 5.73 to 5.25.

The global average score for the *civil liberties* category declined by 0.04 points in 2024. There were significant declines in Asia (-0.16)

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and in Latin America (-0.11) and lesser ones in eastern Europe (-0.05) and Sub-Saharan Africa (-0.04). The category score has still not recovered from the precipitous decline recorded during the covid-19 pandemic of 2020-21, when governments responded to the coronavirus threat with national lockdowns and an unprecedented withdrawal of liberties. After a partial rebound in 2022, when the

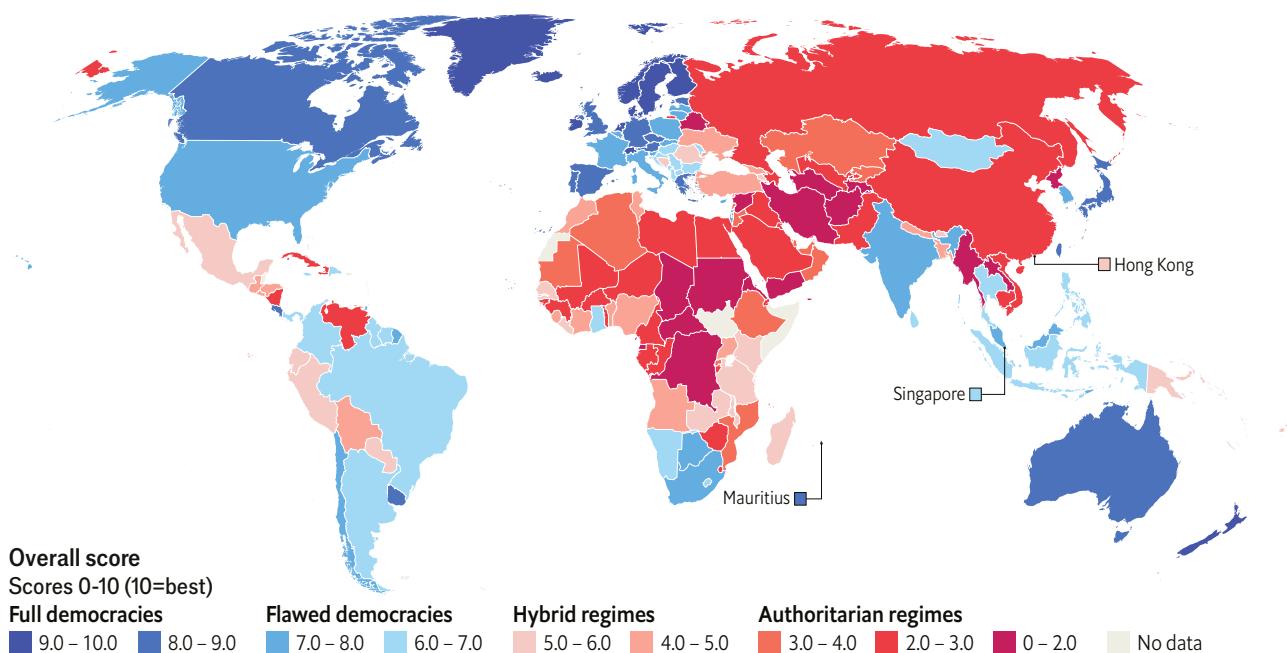
global average score improved by 0.08 points, a downward trend has resumed. The category has 17 indicators, many of them related to freedom of expression, an area in which there has been a significant decline across all regions in recent years. Infringement of free speech and media freedoms, and attempts to censor social media, are among the most serious threats to democracy.

What happened to democracy around the regions in 2024?

The decline in the overall index score was driven by reversals in every region of the world with the exceptions of western Europe, whose average index score improved by the smallest margin possible (0.01

points), and North America, whose score stayed the same. The other five regions registered a decline in their average index score, with the biggest regressions occurring in the Middle East and North Africa

Democracy Index 2024, global map by regime type



Source: EIU.

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(-0.11) and Asia and Australasia (-0.10). The score for Latin America and the Caribbean fell by 0.07, the ninth consecutive year of democratic backsliding in the region. Eastern Europe and Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa registered modest declines in their average index scores, of -0.02 and -0.04 points respectively, after positive developments in some countries were more than offset by negative events elsewhere. The regional results are presented briefly below, and are discussed in greater detail later in the report (see page 39).

Despite being the highest-ranking region in the world, and the only region whose average score has recovered to pre-pandemic levels, western Europe is home to large swathes of discontented citizens who are increasingly turning to anti-mainstream parties. This was amply demonstrated in the many elections that took place across the continent in 2024, which were characterised by a backlash against incumbents and rising support for anti-establishment and populist parties. Only five of the 21 countries covered by the index managed to improve their overall score in 2024, while six regressed and ten stagnated.

Similar problems pertain in North America—comprising Canada and the US—where public disaffection with the political status quo is pronounced. In 2024 the regional score remained unchanged, having slumped in 2023 because of developments in Canada, whose score fell by 0.19 points in that year as trust in government plummeted. Canada's increasingly unpopular prime minister, Justin Trudeau, finally resigned in early 2025 when

his position became untenable. There were positive developments in the US in 2024, not least the high levels of political engagement and the smooth running of the election. However, the political and structural problems that caused the US to be downgraded to a “flawed democracy” in 2016 (a downgrade that pre-dated the inauguration of Donald Trump as president in January 2017) persist. These include low levels of trust in political institutions and the media; institutional gridlock; excessive influence of lobbyists, interest groups and the mega-rich; sharp economic and social inequalities; and an absence of social consensus on core national values.

The decline in the average index score for Latin America and the Caribbean in 2024 was less precipitous than in recent years. However, the health of democracy in the region is in a parlous state. Only five of the 24 countries covered by the index improved their scores, 17 suffered reversals and two stagnated. One of the most worrying developments is increased popular support for rule by strongmen despite their disregard for democratic norms and institutions. Support for politicians such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, who won re-election by a landslide in 2024, shows that voters are prepared to trade democratic standards for security. The region's traditionally weak *political culture*, the index category for which it has the worst score of any region (3.91), suggests that the experience of El Salvador could be repeated in other countries whose *functioning of government* has been in steep decline in recent years.

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Eastern Europe and Central Asia suffered the mildest regression of any region, with its average index score declining by 0.02 points, to 5.35. The region has now overtaken Asia and Australasia (5.31) to become the fourth most democratic region in the world. It was an eventful year in the region, during which 13 countries experienced a deterioration in their index score, ten improved their scores and five registered no change. Two countries were upgraded from “flawed democracies” to “full democracies” (the Czech Republic and Estonia), but Romania was downgraded from a “flawed democracy” to a “hybrid regime”, having been on a downward trajectory for some years.

Asia and Australasia’s average index score declined from 5.41 to 5.31 in 2024, marking a sixth consecutive year of decline or stasis. More than half of the 28 countries in the region recorded a decline in their scores (15), and only seven improved their scores. Bangladesh suffered the biggest regression of any country in the world—its score fell by 1.44 points to 4.44—and Pakistan and South Korea were also among the top ten worst performers in the index in 2024, based on significant downgrades in their index scores. It was a big election year in Asia, with some of the most populous countries in the world—India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Japan, the Philippines and Thailand, accounting for 2.5bn of the world population of 8.2bn—going to the polls. In most cases, incumbents remained in power, despite facing a popular rebuke in some places, with some countries showing worrying signs of perpetuating dynastic power at the

expense of democratic renewal.

Sub-Saharan Africa suffered a minor democratic reversal in 2024, with the average regional score falling by 0.04 points to 4.00. Overall, it was a year of decline and stasis for much of the region. Almost half of its 44 countries recorded a decline in their scores (20) and the scores for 17 stayed the same. Only seven countries improved their index scores. In a welcome change from recent years, there were no coups in the region in 2024, but there was a consolidation of military power in several countries that had experienced military takeovers in recent years. In a big election year, the ballot box delivered some significant transfers of power, including in Senegal, and some examples of incumbents having to share power (South Africa). However, there were also plenty of cases of long-standing rulers continuing to hold on to power, often by anti-democratic means (for example, Mozambique).

The index score for the lowest-ranking region, the Middle East and North Africa, sank to 3.12 in 2024, from 3.23 in 2023. Reversals in Kuwait, Tunisia and Qatar were the main drivers of this 0.11-point decline. Israel is an outlier in the region, classified as a “flawed democracy”, the only one in the region. A dozen of the 20 countries covered by the index recorded a deterioration in their scores in 2024 and five stagnated. Only three countries—Jordan, Libya and the UAE—improved their scores. Experiments in representative democracy are limited and few in the region, and even some of these

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went into reverse in 2024, with Kuwait and Qatar being cases in point. War and conflict continued to take a toll, especially in Sudan, whose score sank lower. There were some positive developments in Libya, with a reduction in militia feuding, improved security and

tentative signs of reconciliation among the military factions. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria towards the end of the year heralded the prospect of political change in that beleaguered country, but for the moment there remains only a power vacuum and political uncertainty.

Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Full democracy								
Norway	9.81	1	0	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.41
New Zealand	9.61	2	0	10.00	9.29	10.00	8.75	10.00
Sweden	9.39	3	1	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41
Iceland	9.38	4	-1	10.00	8.93	8.89	9.38	9.71
Switzerland	9.32	5	3	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.41
Finland	9.30	6	-1	10.00	9.64	7.78	9.38	9.71
Denmark	9.28	7	-1	10.00	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.41
Ireland	9.19	8	-1	10.00	8.21	8.33	10.00	9.41
Netherlands	9.00	9	0	9.58	8.93	8.33	8.75	9.41
Luxembourg	8.88	10	1	10.00	9.29	6.67	8.75	9.71
Australia	8.85	11	3	10.00	8.57	7.22	8.75	9.71
Taiwan	8.78	12	-2	10.00	8.57	7.78	8.13	9.41
Germany	8.73	13	-1	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.41
Canada	8.69	14	-1	10.00	8.21	8.89	7.50	8.82
Uruguay	8.67	15	-1	10.00	9.29	7.78	6.88	9.41
Japan	8.48	16	0	9.58	8.93	6.67	8.13	9.12
United Kingdom	8.34	17	1	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	9.41
Costa Rica	8.29	18	-1	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	9.71
Austria	8.28	19	-1	9.58	7.50	8.89	6.88	8.53
Mauritius	8.23	20	0	9.58	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82
Estonia	8.13	21=	6	10.00	8.57	6.67	6.88	8.53

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Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Spain	8.13	21=	2	9.58	7.50	7.22	7.50	8.82
Czech Republic	8.08	23=	3	9.58	6.43	7.78	7.50	9.12
Portugal	8.08	23=	8	9.58	7.14	6.11	8.75	8.82
Greece	8.07	25	-5	10.00	6.79	7.22	7.50	8.82
Flawed democracy								
France	7.99	26	-3	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24
Malta	7.93	27	1	9.17	7.14	6.67	8.13	8.53
United States of America	7.85	28	1	9.17	6.43	8.89	6.25	8.53
Chile	7.83	29	-4	9.58	7.86	6.67	5.63	9.41
Slovenia	7.82	30	1	9.58	7.50	7.22	6.25	8.53
Israel	7.80	31	-1	9.58	7.50	9.44	6.88	5.59
South Korea	7.75	32	-10	9.58	7.50	7.22	5.63	8.82
Latvia	7.66	33	4	10.00	7.14	6.67	6.25	8.24
Belgium	7.64	34	2	9.58	8.21	5.00	6.88	8.53
Botswana	7.63	35	-2	9.58	6.43	6.11	7.50	8.53
Lithuania	7.59	36	3	10.00	7.14	6.67	5.63	8.53
Cabo Verde	7.58	37=	-2	9.17	6.64	6.67	6.88	8.53
Italy	7.58	37=	-3	9.58	7.14	7.22	6.88	7.06
Poland	7.40	39	2	10.00	6.43	6.67	6.25	7.65
Cyprus	7.38	40	-3	9.17	5.36	6.67	6.88	8.82
India	7.29	41	0	8.67	7.50	7.22	6.88	6.18
Slovakia	7.21	42	2	10.00	6.07	6.11	5.63	8.24
South Africa	7.16	43	4	9.17	6.79	7.78	5.00	7.06
Malaysia	7.11	44	-4	9.58	7.14	6.67	6.25	5.88
Trinidad and Tobago	7.09	45	-2	9.58	6.79	6.11	5.63	7.35
Timor-Leste	7.03	46	-1	9.58	6.07	5.56	6.88	7.06
Panama	6.84	47	1	9.58	5.71	7.22	3.75	7.94
Suriname	6.79	48	1	9.58	5.36	6.67	5.00	7.35

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Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Jamaica	6.74	49	-4	8.75	6.43	5.00	5.00	8.53
Montenegro	6.73	50	2	8.75	7.14	6.67	3.75	7.35
Philippines	6.63	51	2	8.75	4.64	8.33	4.38	7.06
Dominican Republic	6.62	52	9	9.17	5.00	7.22	4.38	7.35
Mongolia	6.53	53	6	8.75	5.71	6.67	5.63	5.88
Argentina	6.51	54=	0	9.17	5.00	6.11	3.75	8.53
Hungary	6.51	54=	-4	8.75	5.71	4.44	6.88	6.76
Croatia	6.50	56	2	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76
Brazil	6.49	57	-6	9.58	5.00	6.11	5.00	6.76
Namibia	6.48	58	-1	7.42	5.36	6.67	5.00	7.94
Indonesia	6.44	59	-3	7.92	6.79	7.22	5.00	5.29
Colombia	6.35	60	-5	9.17	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.65
Bulgaria	6.34	61	1	8.75	5.36	5.56	4.38	7.65
North Macedonia	6.28	62	10	8.75	6.07	6.11	3.13	7.35
Thailand	6.27	63	0	6.50	5.00	8.33	5.63	5.88
Serbia	6.26	64	0	7.83	5.71	6.67	3.75	7.35
Ghana	6.24	65	0	8.33	4.64	6.11	6.25	5.88
Albania	6.20	66	0	7.00	5.71	5.00	6.25	7.06
Sri Lanka	6.19	67	3	7.00	4.29	7.22	6.25	6.18
Singapore	6.18	68	1	5.33	7.14	4.44	7.50	6.47
Guyana	6.11	69	-2	6.92	6.07	6.11	5.00	6.47
Lesotho	6.06	70	1	9.17	3.79	5.56	5.63	6.18
Moldova	6.04	71	-3	6.50	5.36	7.22	4.38	6.76
Hybrid regime								
Romania	5.99	72	-12	8.25	5.36	5.56	3.75	7.06
Papua New Guinea	5.97	73	-1	6.92	6.07	3.89	5.63	7.35
Senegal	5.93	74	9	7.42	5.36	4.44	6.25	6.18
Paraguay	5.92	75	-1	8.33	5.36	6.67	1.88	7.35

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Malawi	5.85	76	0	7.00	4.29	5.56	6.25	6.18
Zambia	5.73	77	1	7.92	3.29	5.00	6.88	5.59
Peru	5.69	78	-1	8.75	5.71	5.00	2.50	6.47
Bhutan	5.65	79	2	8.75	5.93	3.89	5.00	4.71
Liberia	5.57	80	-1	7.83	2.71	6.11	5.63	5.59
Fiji	5.39	81	-1	6.58	5.00	4.44	5.63	5.29
Armenia	5.35	82	2	7.92	4.29	6.11	3.13	5.29
Madagascar	5.33	83	4	6.58	3.93	6.11	5.63	4.41
Mexico	5.32	84	6	6.92	5.00	7.22	1.88	5.59
Ecuador	5.24	85	0	8.75	5.00	5.56	1.88	5.00
Tanzania	5.20	86	0	4.42	5.00	5.00	6.88	4.71
Hong Kong	5.09	87	1	2.75	4.00	3.89	6.88	7.94
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.06	88	6	7.00	3.64	5.00	3.75	5.88
Kenya	5.05	89	3	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12
Honduras	4.98	90	5	8.75	3.93	4.44	2.50	5.29
Morocco	4.97	91	2	5.25	4.29	5.56	5.63	4.12
Ukraine	4.90	92	-1	5.17	2.71	7.22	5.00	4.41
Tunisia	4.71	93	-11	3.42	3.93	5.56	5.63	5.00
Georgia	4.70	94	-5	5.67	3.21	5.56	3.75	5.29
El Salvador	4.61	95	1	6.17	3.21	5.56	3.13	5.00
Nepal	4.60	96	2	4.83	5.36	5.00	2.50	5.29
Guatemala	4.55	97	3	6.08	3.93	5.00	1.88	5.88
Uganda	4.49	98	1	3.42	3.57	3.89	6.88	4.71
Gambia	4.47	99	1	4.42	4.29	3.89	5.63	4.12
Bangladesh	4.44	100=	-25	6.08	2.57	5.00	5.00	3.53
Benin	4.44	100=	-3	1.75	5.36	4.44	6.25	4.41
Sierra Leone	4.32	102	1	4.83	2.86	3.89	5.00	5.00
Bolivia	4.26	103=	3	4.33	3.93	5.56	1.88	5.59

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Turkey	4.26	103=	-1	3.50	4.64	6.11	5.00	2.06
Côte d'Ivoire	4.22	105	0	4.33	2.86	4.44	5.63	3.82
Nigeria	4.16	106	-2	5.17	3.57	3.89	3.75	4.41
Angola	4.05	107	0	4.50	2.86	5.56	5.00	2.35
Authoritarian								
Mauritania	3.96	108	0	3.50	3.21	5.56	3.13	4.41
Lebanon	3.56	109	3	3.08	0.79	6.67	3.13	4.12
Algeria	3.55	110	0	3.08	2.50	3.33	5.00	3.82
Kyrgyz Republic	3.52	111	-2	3.42	1.86	3.89	3.13	5.29
Palestine	3.44	112	3	1.58	0.00	8.33	3.75	3.53
Mozambique	3.38	113	0	1.67	1.43	5.56	5.00	3.24
Rwanda	3.34	114	3	1.42	4.29	3.33	5.00	2.65
Jordan	3.28	115	7	3.08	2.86	4.44	2.50	3.53
Ethiopia	3.24	116	0	0.42	2.86	6.11	5.63	1.18
Qatar	3.17	117	-6	0.00	3.93	2.78	5.63	3.53
Kazakhstan	3.08	118	2	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	2.94
United Arab Emirates	3.07	119	6	0.00	4.29	2.78	5.63	2.65
Oman	3.05	120	-1	0.08	3.57	2.78	5.00	3.82
Togo	2.99	121	5	0.92	2.14	3.33	5.63	2.94
Zimbabwe	2.98	122	0	0.00	2.50	4.44	5.00	2.94
Cambodia	2.94	123	-2	0.00	2.36	5.00	5.00	2.35
Comoros	2.84	124=	-2	0.83	2.21	3.89	3.75	3.53
Pakistan	2.84	124=	-6	0.83	4.29	2.78	2.50	3.82
Azerbaijan	2.80	126=	4	0.50	2.50	3.33	5.00	2.65
Iraq	2.80	126=	2	4.83	0.00	6.11	1.88	1.18
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	128=	3	0.00	2.50	4.44	3.75	3.24
Egypt	2.79	128=	-1	0.42	2.86	3.89	5.00	1.76
Kuwait	2.78	130	-16	0.92	3.21	2.78	3.75	3.24

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Haiti	2.74	131	-2	0.00	0.29	2.78	5.63	5.00
Djibouti	2.70	132	2	0.00	1.64	3.89	5.63	2.35
Vietnam	2.62	133	3	0.00	3.93	2.78	3.75	2.65
Eswatini	2.60	134	-2	0.00	1.64	2.78	5.63	2.94
Cuba	2.58	135	0	0.00	2.86	3.33	3.75	2.94
Cameroon	2.56	136	2	0.33	2.14	3.89	4.38	2.06
Burkina Faso	2.55	137	-4	0.00	2.14	3.33	3.75	3.53
Bahrain	2.45	138	1	0.42	2.36	3.33	4.38	1.76
Mali	2.40	139	-2	0.00	0.00	5.00	4.38	2.65
Libya	2.31	140	17	1.25	0.00	3.89	3.75	2.65
Niger	2.26	141	0	0.33	1.14	1.67	3.75	4.41
Venezuela	2.25	142	0	0.00	1.07	5.00	3.13	2.06
Gabon	2.18	143	3	0.83	1.14	2.22	3.75	2.94
Burundi	2.13	144	3	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	1.76
China	2.11	145	3	0.00	3.21	3.33	3.13	0.88
Uzbekistan	2.10	146	2	0.00	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88
Nicaragua	2.09	147	-4	0.00	2.14	2.78	3.75	1.76
Saudi Arabia	2.08	148	2	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47
Guinea	2.04	149	-4	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	2.06
Guinea-Bissau	2.03	150=	-10	2.17	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.06
Russia	2.03	150=	-6	0.00	2.14	2.22	3.75	2.06
Belarus	1.99	152	-1	0.00	0.79	3.33	4.38	1.47
Eritrea	1.97	153	-1	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	0.29
Iran	1.96	154	-1	0.00	2.50	3.33	2.50	1.47
Yemen	1.95	155	-1	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.92	156=	4	2.08	0.43	2.78	3.13	1.18
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	156=	0	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47
Chad	1.89	158	3	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.75	2.35

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 2

Democracy Index 2024

	Overall score	Rank	Change in rank from previous year	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties
Tajikistan	1.83	159	-4	0.00	2.21	1.67	4.38	0.88
Laos	1.71	160	-1	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.29
Turkmenistan	1.66	161	1	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.29
Sudan	1.46	162	-4	0.00	0.00	1.11	5.63	0.59
Syria	1.32	163	0	0.00	0.00	2.22	4.38	0.00
Central African Republic	1.18	164	0	0.00	0.00	1.67	1.88	2.35
North Korea	1.08	165	0	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00
Myanmar	0.96	166	0	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.13	0.00
Afghanistan	0.25	167	0	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.25	0.00

Source: EIU.

2024 highlights

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Over the past decade, a consensus has formed that the world is experiencing what US democracy scholar Larry Diamond called a “democracy recession”, that began in around 2007 and has persisted ever since. This impression is borne out by the results of the Democracy Index since its launch in 2006. The overall index score has fallen from 5.52 (on a 0-10 scale) in 2006 to 5.17 in 2024. The number of countries classified by our model as democracies has fallen by eight from 79 in 2006 to 71 today. Correspondingly, the number of “authoritarian regimes” has risen from 55 in 2006 to 60; and the number of “hybrid regimes”, which occupying a “grey zone” between democracy and autocracy, has risen from 33 in 2006 to 36 in 2024. There is a rich literature

analysing this dramatic shift in the political landscape, some of which we reference in the Further Reading section of the Appendix to this report (page 84). The drivers of the democracy recession are manifold—geopolitical, economic, political, cultural and social and their interaction is complex. In this year's Democracy Index essay, we discuss the factors that have fuelled popular disaffection with political systems over the past two decades and have led to the rise of anti-establishment parties in some countries and to a more pronounced shift away from democracy in others (see page 29). The essay also considers what needs to change to restore popular confidence in representative democracy and bring an end to the “democratic recession”.

Regime changes: more than usual

It was an eventful political year and this was reflected in the index by nine changes in regime type, more than has been the case for many years. The Czech Republic, Estonia and Portugal moved up the rankings to become “full democracies”. France and South Korea, by contrast, were relegated to the “flawed democracy” classification. Two countries that

moved up from the “hybrid regime” classification into the very bottom of the “flawed democracies” category in 2023, Papua New Guinea and Paraguay, dropped back down in 2024. They were joined by Romania, which fell 12 places in the rankings after controversially cancelling a presidential election, which just edged the Balkan state into the

"hybrid regime" grouping with a score of 5.99. Finally, Mauritania dropped out of the grey zone at the bottom of the "hybrid regime" classification into the ranks of the

authoritarians, after its score fell from 4.14 to 3.96, following low turnout in the presidential election in June 2024 and a downward revision of the country's corruption score.

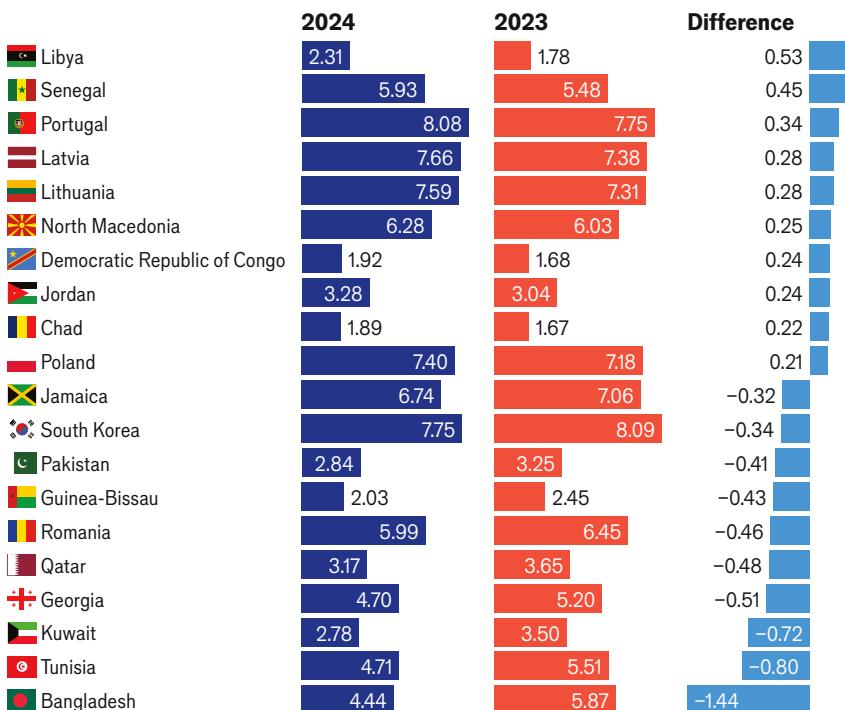
The biggest score changes: more bad than good

There were more deteriorations than improvements in countries' index scores in 2024 (see chart, Top ten upgrades and downgrades). Unsurprisingly, the biggest changes tend to occur in the bottom half of the index rankings, among the "hybrid regimes" and "authoritarian regimes". The recent trend among the latter has been for downward

movements in scores, as autocracies dig in and become more entrenched. The tendency among countries occupying what we might call a "grey zone" between democracy and authoritarianism—the "hybrid regimes"—is to oscillate as they are pulled in two directions between pressure to democratise and forces pushing against this.

Top ten upgrades and downgrades

Index score out of 10 (10=best)



Source: EIU.

Bangladesh registered the biggest score change of any country in 2024, a negative 1.44 points on the 0-10 index scale, following a rigged election, the ousting of the prime minister and political unrest. It dropped 25 places in the rankings to joint 100th out of 167. It remains a “hybrid regime” but is much closer to the lower end of the classification now. Tunisia, once a democracy bright-spot in the Middle East and North Africa region in the wake of the Arab spring of 2010-12, registered the second-largest deterioration in 2024. Its overall index score fell by 0.80 points, to 4.71, and it dropped 11 places in the global rankings and now sits closer to the bottom than the top of the “hybrid regimes” classification. This was the result of more democratic backsliding under the presidency of Kais Said, who effectively disbarred any genuine challengers to his rule in the October 2024 presidential election. Other countries whose

scores slumped in 2024 included Kuwait, Georgia, Qatar, Romania, Pakistan and Guinea-Bissau.

By contrast, improvements in country scores in 2024 compared with 2023 were much more modest. As inter-factional fighting receded somewhat, Libya recorded the biggest improvement, of 0.53 points, but from a very low base. Opposition victories in parliamentary and presidential elections in Senegal led to a 0.45-point improvement in the country’s index score, to 5.93, taking it closer to the threshold of 6.00 to qualify as a “flawed democracy”. Score changes were more modest among other improvers such as Portugal, Latvia and Jordan, but were sufficient to move Portugal into the “full democracy” classification. Detailed analysis of country and regional developments can be found in the section entitled “Democracy around the regions” (page 39).

Glass half full? What happened in the 2024 “votequake”?

In 2024 countries inhabited by around 4.2bn people, more than half the world’s population, held elections. With more than 70 countries going to the polls—among them eight of the ten most populous countries in the world (Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia and the US)—it was the biggest election year since the advent of universal suffrage. So did this election extravaganza strike a blow for democracy globally? About half a dozen elections were

cancelled, including in Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Kuwait, Mali and Romania, and there were dozens of examples of elections being unfree and unfair. There was no shortage of ballot-rigging in countries that call themselves democracies but have all the hallmarks of autocracies. In many of these, including Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Iran, Mozambique, Pakistan, Russia and Venezuela, authoritarian regimes used every tool at their disposal to remain in power. However, there

were also dozens of elections that showed the potential of electoral democracy to bring about change according to the will of voters. The most striking theme of this mega election year was a voter backlash against incumbents. Many incumbents were voted out of office or lost vote share, forcing them into coalitions. Some have interpreted this in a negative light, especially because many elections strengthened populist and radical anti-establishment parties. However, insofar as voters expressed their dissatisfaction with

the performance of incumbents by voting for insurgent parties, the ballot box is acting as a safety valve and electoral democracy is surely doing what it should be doing. The real problems go much deeper and relate to the persistent failure of the mainstream political parties in many democratic countries to satisfy their citizens on key issues of the economy, immigration, education, health, infrastructure and more. These issues are explored in more depth in the essay “What’s wrong with representative democracy?” on page 29.

Nordics lead the field

The Nordic countries (Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Denmark) continue to dominate the Democracy Index rankings, taking five of the top seven spots, with New Zealand claiming second place and Switzerland moving up to fifth. Norway remains the top-ranked country in the Democracy Index, thanks to high scores across all five categories of the index, especially *electoral process and*

pluralism, political culture, and political participation. Countries in Europe account for nine of the top ten places in the global democracy rankings and 17 of the 25 nations (68%) classified as “full democracies”. Western Europe has the highest index score of any region, at 8.38, and was the only one to improve its overall score in 2024, albeit marginally.

After a decade-long drought, eastern Europe gains two full democracies

Not since the Czech Republic was demoted to a “flawed democracy” in 2014 has eastern Europe and Central Asia had a “full democracy”. Now it has two, after the Czech

Republic and Estonia moved up the rankings into the “full democracy” camp. Slovenia is the next closest east European country in the global rankings, with a score of

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

7.82, putting it in 30th position, among the better-performing “flawed democracies”. The addition of two of its countries to the “full democracies” puts eastern Europe on a par with Latin America, which also has only two countries in this grouping. These regions are, respectively, the fourth- and third-best performers in the Democracy Index. Both are home to a large number of “flawed democracies” (sometimes referred to as non-consolidated democracies): 13 and ten respectively. Compared with the better-performing democracies

of western Europe, both regions perform far less well in terms of *functioning of government* and *political culture*. These weaknesses are difficult to address and have tended to become more acute in recent years, preventing more countries from these regions moving up the rankings. The pattern often has been for countries to take “one step forward” in one year, and then “two steps back” the next, confirming that democratisation in non-consolidated democracies is seldom a linear process.

What to watch in 2025

Positive watch

Argentina: Libertarian president Javier Milei will want to strengthen his government's position in Congress in the mid-term elections in October. If he succeeds in delivering on the economy and living standards, public confidence in government may improve, but risks abound.

Bangladesh: Interim government under pressure to hold elections, but first wants to pass reforms to restore democratic institutions, following the departure of long-time ruler Sheikh Hasina in 2024, which may mean elections will be delayed beyond 2025.

Canada: An election must be held by October, but will probably be held much earlier, with the opposition Conservative Party likely to return to power. Chance to reverse the trend of plummeting public trust in government after a decade of Liberal Party rule under Justin Trudeau.

Germany: Federal election in February; chance to replace the stuttering SPD-FDP-Green coalition and elect a new government that can

address voter concerns on issues such as lacklustre growth, flagging competitiveness, deindustrialisation, immigration and terrorist attacks.

Senegal: A strong mandate for new president Bassirou Diomaye Faye improves the prospects for political stability and institutional reform to reduce the power of the president, strengthen the role of the government and parliament, and improve the independence of the judiciary.

Syria: Chance for a democratic transition if the country's interim rulers can reconcile Syria's many ethnic, political and sectarian groups via a new constitution and representative elections. Risk of internal conflict and violence.

US: Now that one party controls the presidency and both chambers, Congress may overcome recent gridlock and be more effective. But the Republican majority in the House of Representatives is thin and divisions in the Trump camp may grow.

Negative watch

Central and west Africa: Of the elections in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Seychelles, Tanzania and Togo, many are likely to be stage-managed to keep incumbents in power or give legitimacy to regimes that seized power in military coups, and some will be subject to Russian influence campaigns. The election in Côte d'Ivoire is likely to be more open.

Ecuador: Suffering from high levels of voter dissatisfaction and a weak political culture, the country will hold legislative elections in February (with a second round in April, if necessary). Potential for polarisation, violence and emergence of strong-arm leader.

Moldova: Russian interference in the parliamentary elections, to be held by July, is to be expected, in the form of a disinformation campaign, vote-buying and encouragement of social unrest, putting further strain on a frontline country polarised between East and West.

Romania: With the presidential election cancelled in late 2024

in murky circumstances, the rescheduled election in May will come under close scrutiny. The incoming government has already been criticised for trying to manage the threat of a vote against the ruling parties by changing the rules regarding diaspora voting and the regulation of social media during an election campaign.

South Korea: Fallout from Yoon Suk-Yeol's attempt to impose martial law in 2024 is likely to persist in 2025, in the form of heightened polarisation and tension in parliament and among the population. The courts are increasingly politicised and the law employed as a tool to attack political opponents. Public dissatisfaction with South Korea's democracy could increase.

US: Risk of the president seeking retribution, using the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to go after political enemies, which would also erode checks and balances. Civil liberties of immigrants, migrants, other minorities and protesters also at risk.

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Introduction

Public dissatisfaction with democracy has been rising globally, despite broad support for democratic values. Surveys from polling institutions such as the Pew Research Center and Gallup indicate that while most people prefer democracy as a system of government, they are increasingly frustrated with how it functions in practice. This dissatisfaction, we believe, has three main causes: declining trust in government, the failure of politicians and political parties to represent voters effectively, and a civic and representation deficit. These factors have led to disillusionment with democratic

institutions and contributed to rising populism, political disengagement and increasing political polarisation.

We begin our investigation by examining the evidence from the survey data and recent electoral trends. These confirm that citizens are unhappy with the functioning of democracy. However, the more difficult task is to identify the causes of popular disaffection. This essay identifies several democratic deficits that are contributing to public dissatisfaction with governments and political systems.

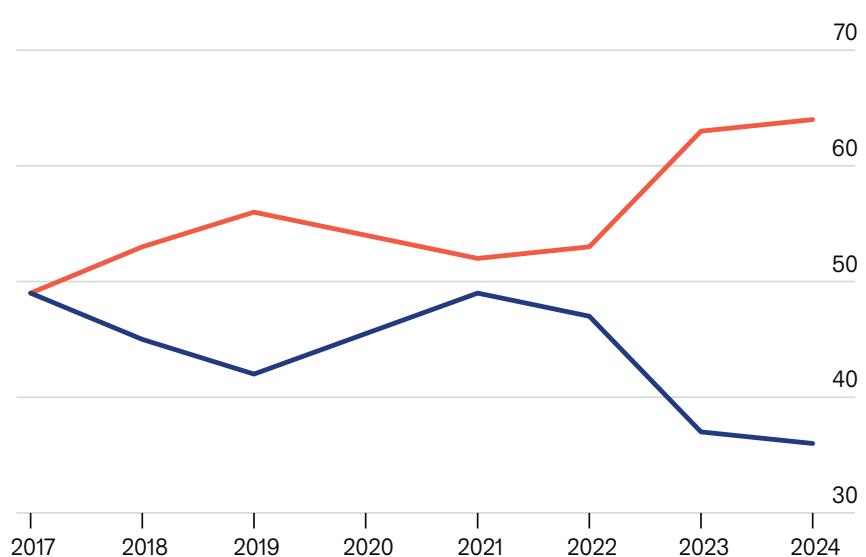
Satisfaction with democracy across 12 high-income, democratic countries is down in recent years

Median % who are satisfied with the way democracy is working in their country

- Satisfied
- Dissatisfied

Note: Percentages are medians across 12 advanced economies: Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. Starting in 2021, U.S. data is from Pew Research Center's online American Trends Panel; older data is from telephone surveys.

Source: Pew Research Center.

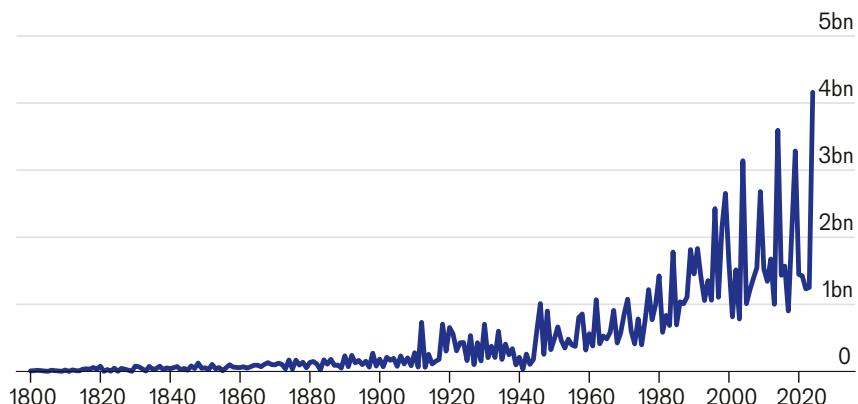


Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

2024: the biggest election year in history

Population of countries holding an election that year



Source: EIU.

Who says that democracy is not working?

Global attitude surveys such as those conducted by the World Values Survey (WVS) tell us that democracy as a value retains widespread appeal. A large survey by the US-based Pew Research Center in 2017 showed that a median of 78% of people across the 38 countries polled said that representative democracy was a good way to govern. A Gallup International survey published in June 2024 found that 59% of people in 43 countries, representing half of the global population, agreed that democracy was the best form of government. The Gallup survey included many non-democracies, such as China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan and Pakistan, where support for democratic systems is low, which brought down the average score.

However, a large number of citizens in countries that EIU ranks as “full democracies” or “flawed democracies” are also saying that democracy is not working for

them. A 2024 Pew survey found that dissatisfaction with the state of democracy had risen in recent years in high and middle-income democracies (Richard Wike and Janell Fetterolf, June 18th 2024). The median of dissatisfied citizens in 12 high-income countries (Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the US) rose from 49% of those surveyed in 2017 to 64% in 2024. The sharpest declines in level of satisfaction were in the UK, South Korea and Canada. Among middle-income countries, the median of dissatisfied citizens was 66% in Chile, 71% in South Africa, 77% in Colombia and 89% in Peru, 71% in South Africa and 58% in Sri Lanka. Citizens have a low opinion of their country's leaders, political parties and the overall state of democracy, providing “a relatively grim picture of the political mood in many nations”, according to Pew.

Similarly, a report published in 2020 by the Centre for the Future of Democracy at the Bennett Institute for Public Policy at the University of Cambridge found that dissatisfaction with democracy had risen significantly in recent decades

(Collins, R; Foa, RS; Klassen, A; Rand, A; and Slade, M; 2020). The researchers used a new dataset combining more than 25 data sources, 3,500 country surveys, and 4m respondents between 1973 and 2020 that asked citizens whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with democracy in their countries. Using a time series of 50 years for western Europe and 25 years for the rest of the world, they

found that since the mid-1990s dissatisfaction with democracy had risen by about 10 percentage points globally to 57.5% on average. The rise in dissatisfaction has been especially sharp since 2005, when the proportion of dissatisfied citizens was much lower, at 38.7%. The authors noted that this increase had been particularly pronounced in developed democracies.

Trust in government is falling

One of the primary reasons for dissatisfaction with democracy is declining trust in government. Surveys show that citizens increasingly believe that their governments favour elite interests over those of ordinary people. Frustrations with the political system seem to dovetail with concerns about the state of the economy and, in particular, widening economic and social inequalities. According to Pew's Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey, a median of 64% of respondents across 34 countries said that the economic situation in their country was bad. Meanwhile, a median of 54% of respondents across 31 countries said that they were dissatisfied with the way that democracy was working in their country.

are concerned not only with high inflation and economic stagnation, but also with economic and social inequality, and with the prospects for future generations. They believe that the system is weighted in favour of the wealthy and the educated, who make up the professional, business and political classes.

These economic concerns, among others, drove the anti-incumbency voting wave of 2024. In the biggest election year globally since mass enfranchisement, with more than 70 countries going to the polls, voters around the world expressed their dissatisfaction with economic conditions, higher inflation and other perceived failings of governments by casting their ballots against incumbents. It was the most emphatic rebuke to incumbent parties, governments and presidents since voting records began. In Botswana, Ghana, Panama, Portugal, Senegal, the UK, Uruguay and the US, incumbents were ousted from office. In numerous other elections, incumbents lost vote share, and in some cases their majorities; this

An equality deficit

Survey data show that many people perceive there to be a lack of equality and fairness in both economics and politics. Voters

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was the fate of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan.

Higher consumer price inflation in the post-pandemic period, which tends to disproportionately affect lower-income households, exacerbated dissatisfaction with politicians in both developed and developing countries. Work by two academics, Thomas Piketty and Branko Milanovic, has shown that income inequality has risen significantly in democratic countries in recent decades, led by the growing returns on capital and the erosion of progressive taxation. In turn, Messieurs Piketty and Milanovic have argued, the concentration of wealth at the top of society leads to political systems becoming more susceptible to the influence of the wealthiest, leading to policies that tend to disproportionately benefit these same groups. Lobbyists are dominated by the wealthy and by businesses, who have the resources

to make their voices heard and who act to protect the interests of the few. When special interest groups exert undue influence over the political process, they end up undermining majority rule.

Inequality is a major source of conflict and a natural issue for parties to contest in the public realm. The smooth functioning of democratic political systems is probably not compatible with extremes of social and economic inequality.

Corruption concerns

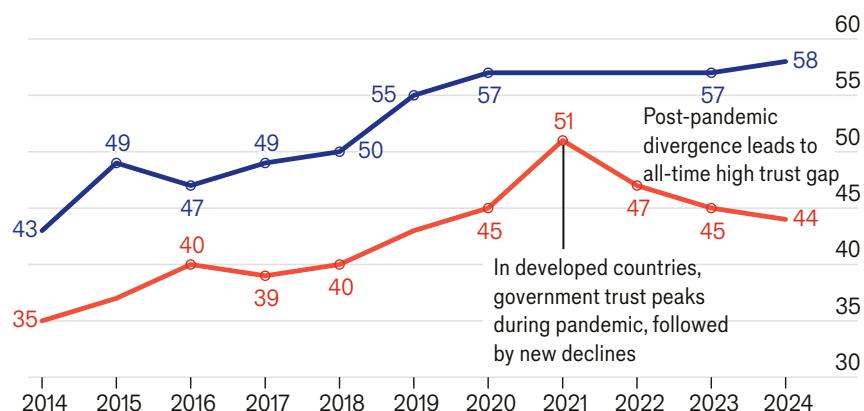
It is hardly surprising that corruption is often mentioned by survey respondents who are dissatisfied with their democratic political systems. Corruption serves as a visible reminder to voters of economic inequality. Transparency International's multi-year Corruption Perceptions Index has pointed to corruption remaining a persistent issue, even in stable democracies.

Developed countries mired in government distrust

Percent who say I trust government to do what is right

— Developing countries
— Developed countries

Source: 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Analysis: Trust and Government.



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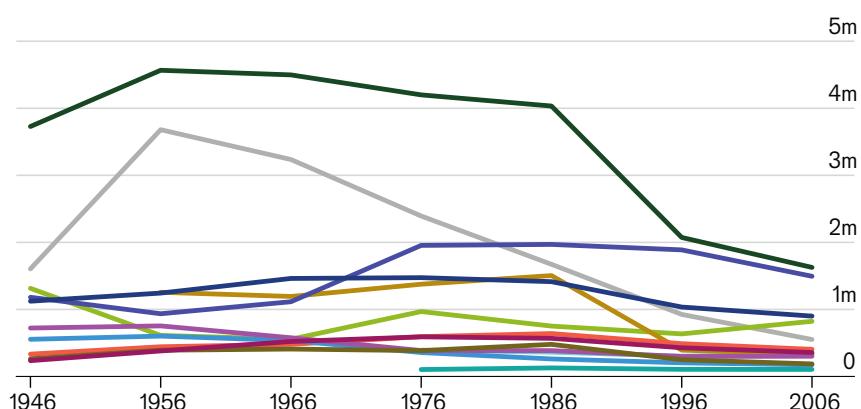
Corruption scandals are not confined to developing countries; in recent years there have been many examples of bribery, corruption and insider dealing in developed democracies including France, Germany and the UK. A spate of corruption cases mired US politics in 2024, with several senior

politicians indicted on corruption-related charges and one former senator, Robert Menendez, found guilty of bribery and other offences in January 2025. The Gallup 2024 survey found that trust in the US Congress was at 35%, down from 75% in the 1970s.

Party membership

- Austria
- Belgium
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom

Source: Delwit, Pascal. (2011). Still in Decline? Party Membership in Europe.



Politicians are failing

Another major driver of democratic dissatisfaction is the failure of politicians and political parties to represent voters adequately and address their concerns. This failure manifests in three key areas: the disconnection between parties and their historical voter bases, the lack of genuine political choice, and a deficit of new political ideas and problem-solving capabilities.

A party deficit

Until the 1980s, voters' collective identities and attachments to political parties were remarkably stable. The process by which political parties began to disconnect

from and eventually lose touch with their original social constituencies was a gradual one. The dissociation has been particularly striking for social democratic and labour parties. Their relations with the working class began to come under strain during the upsurge of labour militancy that accompanied the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s.

Other factors played a part too; the parties became more professionalised and began to move closer to the state, from which they derived their resources and status. Party leaders came to depend less on their party base for support than on external institutions that provided public office and the resources to go with it.

In addition, the core social constituencies of the main parties began to decline and fragment. Economic, social and cultural change led to a decline in the relative weight of the traditional working class. The weakening appeal of organised religion also affected the core constituencies of traditional conservative parties. This resulted in the erosion of collective political identities and attachments, and increased voter fluidity. Parties began to appeal to voters across the usual class and social lines, reinforcing the trend towards non-partisanship. More recently, culture war issues such as identity politics, history and national identity and free speech have also weakened voter attachments to their old parties and contributed to the rise of the populists.

Party politics is an essential underpinning of representative democratic systems. Without political parties, there is no possibility of genuine popular representation or representative government. The role of representative parties is to embed themselves in civil society, engage with voters, learn from them and mobilise them. This type of political organisation is not only capable of creating majorities to elect a government, but is likely to be more accountable to people for what it does in office.

A choice deficit

Dissatisfied citizens often say that political parties are “all the same”. Competing political parties with clear policy alternatives provide

the foundations of representative government. Without such alternatives, the people cannot make choices and have less power to influence government. Many citizens feel that mainstream parties have converged towards the political centre, offering little meaningful choice. The Pew Research Center (2024) found that 42% of respondents said no political party represented their views.

Until the 1990s this had not been the case. The dividing lines between the main political protagonists were clear. The existence of two alternative political visions of how society should be organised defined the main cleavage in party politics for much of the 20th century. In most democratic countries, there was at least one party that represented the interests of the conservative business elites and middle classes (Christian democratic and conservative parties) and one that claimed to represent the interests of the working class (social democratic and labour parties).

The ideologies of right and left, in a watered-down form, continued to define the political landscape up to the 1990s. However, in recent decades a number of factors have erased this dividing line and encouraged a political convergence to the centre. These factors include the collapse of communism, the end of class contestation, the discrediting of alternative models and of the left, the growing influence of theories of global governance, the expansion of the EU project, and the enhanced role in national policymaking of international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF.

It should not be difficult for political parties to develop policy alternatives that distinguish them from their political rivals. That is because public policy alternatives arise naturally out of conflict over specific issues. The job of representative political parties is to define and shape the alternatives on issues of contention. However, today's mainstream centrist parties have at times struggled to present coherent alternatives to the electorate in ways that allow them to endorse or reject programmes and leaders.

The exceptions have been in places where populist leaders have challenged the traditional parties, such as in the US, where there was a clear contrast in policy and leadership in the three most recent presidential elections. In Latin America, clear ideological divergence has also opened up between the likes of the libertarian Argentinian president, Javier Milei, and Brazil's left-wing president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. These are signs that these developments could preview future changes in politics in Europe.

of the old certainties and political identities, political parties seemed to be on a mission to find "the next big idea". Having lost their close connections with their former electoral base, they turned to focus groups in a bid to find policy inspiration. Eventually, enough politicians realised that they could do without "the vision thing". Some political leaders in some countries made a virtue out of having no big ideas and being "apolitical". This was in part a reaction to the highly partisan and adversarial politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Tony Blair's "New Labour" UK government (1997-2007) backed a "third way" that was an explicit repudiation of a traditional ideological approach.

The managerial trend has led not only to the depoliticisation of the centre, but also to the depoliticisation of government itself. Independent central banks have taken responsibility for inflation management and monetary policy away from politicians and handed it to economists and technocrats. There were arguments for this, including the policy mistakes of the earlier era and because politicisation makes the central bank's function as a check on fiscal excess less effective. However, it nevertheless reduced areas of direct responsibility from politicians. This model has now extended into other policy areas, so that the body politic perceives that decisions on health, government budgets, the welfare system and other matters of public interest are often taken by unelected experts rather than elected politicians. The backlash, rightly or wrongly, is dissatisfaction with experts and politicians alike.

An ideas deficit

As governments have become more technocratic, they have struggled to advance a meaningful vision of the future for their citizens; instead, it is usually a short-term vision, and the policy emphasis is on combating crisis rather than on economic and social transformation.

For a few years after the end of the cold war, confronted with the end

A citizenship deficit

In surveys on attitudes towards democracy, people not only demand more of their politicians, but would also like more to be demanded of themselves. In other words, they would like to be treated as citizens, not as stakeholders. As political life has become less ideological, people have retreated from the public realm.

When politicians talk about a crisis of democracy, they are more concerned with the status of political institutions than with the role of the public. For many advocates of liberal democracy, the priority is to defend their countries' institutions and the constitutional order, especially in the face of populist demands for the balance to be shifted in the direction of popular sovereignty. An alternative view is that the quality of democracy is also defined by the character of its citizens and the standard of their participation in the democratic life of the nation. Insofar as we define democracy operationally as a set of governing institutions and processes, its legitimacy and effectiveness ultimately depends on how representative of the nation's citizens it really is.

This citizen-centric conceptualisation of democracy is incorporated in our Democracy Index, which measures not only electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government and civil liberties, but also political participation and political culture. That is because the substance or quality of a democracy is measured above all by the involvement of citizens in the political process and their attitudes towards it.

The notion that participation in politics requires some kind of intellectual or educational qualification contradicts the principle of equality underpinning democracy. Democracy has a moral as well as an institutional dimension: it makes no distinctions based on title, wealth, gender, race, education or intelligence. Apart from citizenship, no qualification is necessary to vote or play a role in the political life of a democracy. Nor is any expert knowledge required of citizens, who vote into power political representatives whose role it is to develop policies, present them to the public and implement them in government. Citizens need only acquaint themselves with the policies being propounded, so that they can make an informed choice about which party or candidate to vote for at an election.

Yet citizens have in the past aspired to play more of a role in political life than simply putting a cross on a ballot paper every four or five years. Historically, the great political parties and movements emerged out of the struggles of ordinary men and women to shape their destinies. Today, those historical parties, and the political systems in which they operate, can no longer be described as properly representative. But conflict persists, dividing society on the basis of competing interests, and this is what creates the need for political representation. How long such a need can be ignored without creating a revolt on the part of citizens is not clear, but a citizen awakening is likely to come at some point—and it is likely that new parties will emerge to give it a new political identity.

Conclusion

This essay has highlighted evidence that dissatisfaction with democracy is being driven by a combination of declining trust in government to deliver economically and in other areas, the failure of politicians and political parties to offer clear choices and ideas, and growing civic disengagement. Inequality and corruption have eroded faith in the ability of democratic institutions to deliver for voters. Political parties have become disconnected from voters, offering fewer meaningful choices and failing to address major societal challenges. At the same time citizens feel excluded from decision-making processes. The rise of populist political movements is one reaction to these trends.

The response to the challenges faced by representative democracy

is not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. The task is to renew and reinvigorate it by bringing real issues back into the arena of public debate. It means having genuine contestation over policy between competing parties. And it means (re) building relations between parties and the electorate. Democracy is hard work—it demands new ideas, clear policies, engaging with voters, winning the arguments with them and mobilising them to create a majority that can win elections. Only such representative organisations based on the grassroots are likely to be able to carry through their programmes in government—because they will really be accountable to the people who elected them—and capable of restoring trust in democracy.

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Table 3

Democracy across the regions

No. of countries	Democracy index average	Full democracies	Flawed democracies	Hybrid regimes	Authoritarian regimes
North America					
2024	2	8.27	1	1	0
2023	2	8.27	1	1	0
Western Europe					
2024	21	8.38	15	5	1
2023	21	8.37	15	5	1
Eastern Europe & Central Asia					
2024	28	5.35	2	13	5
2023	28	5.37	0	16	4
Latin America & the Caribbean					
2024	24	5.61	2	10	8
2023	24	5.68	2	11	7
Asia & Australasia					
2024	28	5.31	4	10	6
2023	28	5.41	5	10	5
Middle East & North Africa					
2024	20	3.12	0	1	2
2023	20	3.23	0	1	2
Sub-Saharan Africa					
2024	44	4.00	1	6	14
2023	44	4.04	1	6	15
Total					
2024	167	5.17	25	46	36
2023	167	5.23	24	50	34

Source: EIU.

Democracy around the regions

Regression is the story of 2024 as far as the headline Democracy Index score—5.17 out of 10, down from 5.23 in 2023—is concerned. With the exception of western Europe, which was also the only region to improve its score in 2023, every other region registered a decline or, in the case of North America, stagnated. In the following pages, we look in detail at developments in all of the regions in 2024, in order from the highest ranking to the lowest. The accompanying charts illustrate where each region stands across key metrics in relation to the global average, and compared with the previous year.

The developed countries of western Europe predominate among the world's "full democracies", accounting for 15 of the total of 25 in 2024. Canada is the sole "full democracy" in North America, as the US continues to languish as a "flawed democracy", a classification to which it was relegated in 2016.

The Asia and Australasia region has four "full democracies" (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Taiwan), down from five in 2023 following South Korea's downgrade to a "flawed democracy". Two Latin American countries are classed as "full democracies" (Costa Rica and Uruguay), as are two in eastern Europe (Czech Republic and Estonia). There is one "full democracy" in Africa (Mauritius). The predominance of OECD

countries among those classified as "full democracies" suggests that the level of economic development can be a significant, if not binding, constraint on democratic development. Other factors that are important in determining the quality of democracy are a history of independent statehood and the quality of state institutions.

"Flawed democracies", of which there are 46, are concentrated in developing economies of eastern Europe (13), Latin America (ten), Asia (ten) and Sub-Saharan Africa (six). "Hybrid regimes" and "authoritarian regimes", which constitute 96 of the 167 countries and territories covered by the Democracy Index, are concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. They comprise 37 of the 44 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (84%) and 19 of the 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (95%). Asia and Australasia has its fair share of non-democratic regimes, which make up exactly half of the 28 countries in the region. "Hybrid" and "authoritarian regimes" also constitute half the 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. In eastern Europe, 13 of the region's 28 countries (46%) are classified in this way. They are concentrated in the far east of the region, among the countries of the former Soviet Union. Typically, there is little change from year to year in the index scores for "authoritarian regimes".

Western Europe

Western Europe is the highest-scoring region in the world in the 2024 Democracy Index, remaining above North America for a second consecutive year. North America's score remained unchanged in 2024, at 8.27, whereas that for western Europe increased slightly compared with 2023, from 8.37 to 8.38. The improvement is barely noticeable, but it nevertheless makes the region a positive outlier, given that every other region recorded a decline or, in the case of North America, no change. In a year characterised by regression everywhere else, this was an achievement of sorts. It does not mean to say, however, that all is well with democracy even in the highest-ranking countries in the region. There is considerable voter dissatisfaction with the workings of democracy among the high-performing Nordics as well as in lower-ranking countries such as

France and Belgium.

Of the 21 countries in the region covered by the index, five (Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK) improved their score, ten retained the same score as in 2023 and six (France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy and Turkey) deteriorated. The change in regime classification is noteworthy for two countries in western Europe, France and Portugal. After a decade in the political and economic wilderness following the crisis of 2009, and having improved its score on several counts since the covid-19 pandemic, Portugal was upgraded from a "flawed democracy" to a "full democracy". However, political instability led France to be downgraded to a "flawed democracy" after its score fell to 7.99 (below the threshold of 8.00).

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Table 4

Western Europe 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Austria	8.28	19	12	9.58	7.50	8.89	6.88	8.53	Full democracy
Belgium	7.64	34	18	9.58	8.21	5.00	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Cyprus	7.38	40	20	9.17	5.36	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Denmark	9.28	7	6	10.00	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.41	Full democracy
Finland	9.30	6	5	10.00	9.64	7.78	9.38	9.71	Full democracy
France	7.99	26	16	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	8.24	Flawed democracy
Germany	8.73	13	10	9.58	8.21	8.33	8.13	9.41	Full democracy
Greece	8.07	25	15	10.00	6.79	7.22	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
Iceland	9.38	4	3	10.00	8.93	8.89	9.38	9.71	Full democracy
Italy	7.58	37=	19	9.58	7.14	7.22	6.88	7.06	Flawed democracy
Ireland	9.19	8	7	10.00	8.21	8.33	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Luxembourg	8.88	10	9	10.00	9.29	6.67	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Malta	7.93	27	17	9.17	7.14	6.67	8.13	8.53	Flawed democracy
Netherlands	9.00	9	8	9.58	8.93	8.33	8.75	9.41	Full democracy
Norway	9.81	1	1	10.00	9.64	10.00	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Portugal	8.08	23=	14	9.58	7.14	6.11	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Spain	8.13	21=	13	9.58	7.50	7.22	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
Sweden	9.39	3	2	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Switzerland	9.32	5	4	9.58	9.29	8.33	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Turkey	4.26	103=	21	3.50	4.64	6.11	5.00	2.06	Hybrid regime
United Kingdom	8.34	17	11	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	9.41	Full democracy
Regional score	8.38			9.39	7.98	7.65	8.18	8.70	

Source: EIU.

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Western Europe boasts the largest number of “full democracies” of any region (15 out of a total of 25 globally) and accounts for nine of the top ten ranked countries, with Luxembourg overtaking Australia in tenth position. The Nordics continue to stand out as particularly high-scoring, occupying five of the top seven positions in the global rankings. Norway is in first place, followed by New Zealand. Four of the next five countries are Nordic nations—Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Denmark. These countries boast high scores across all index categories, particularly *electoral process and pluralism* and *civil liberties*. The regional outlier is

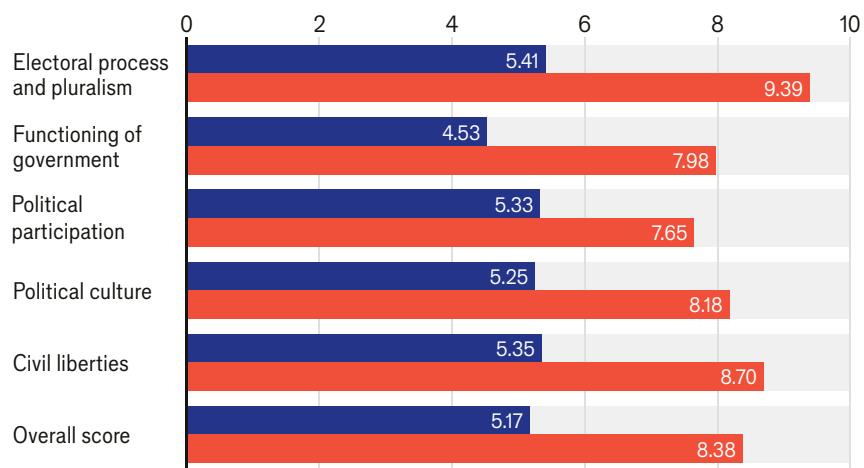
Turkey, whose score fell slightly in 2024 to 4.26, from 4.33 in 2023. This score puts the country close to the bottom of the “hybrid regime” classification, and it is ranked 103rd out of 167.

The region registered an improvement across two of the five categories of the Democracy Index in 2024—again bucking the general trend of decline in most regions—with the average scores for *political culture* and *civil liberties* rising compared with 2023. The regional score remained unchanged in the *electoral process and pluralism* category in what was a big election year in Europe. However, the average

Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ Global average
■ Western Europe

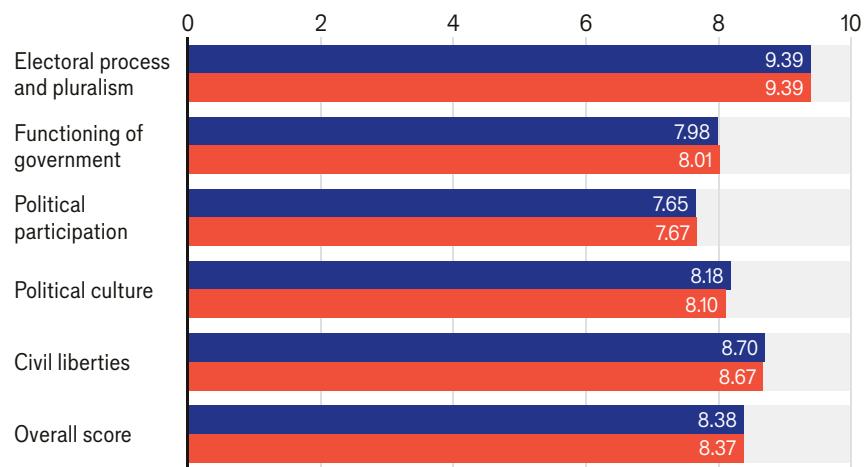


Source: EIU.

Western Europe: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10 being best)

■ 2024
■ 2023



Source: EIU.

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scores for *functioning of government* and *political participation* fell slightly, owing to declining trust in political parties and governments and a lower election turnout in 2024.

Portugal is upgraded to a “full democracy”

Portugal was upgraded to a “full democracy” in the 2024 Democracy Index, moving eight places up the global rankings to joint 23rd position. Portugal’s score improved from 7.75 in 2023 to 8.08 in 2024, driven by improvements in the *functioning of government* and *political culture* categories. The country was downgraded to a “flawed democracy” in 2011 and first recovered the status of a “full democracy” in 2019. However, the limitations on personal freedom resulting from the covid-19 pandemic meant that Portugal was again downgraded to a “flawed democracy” in 2020.

The indicator score assessing the degree to which Portugal’s citizens believe democracy is good for the economy, based on World Values Survey (WVS) data, improved from 0.5 to 1 in 2024. The WVS data suggest that a larger portion of the population now believes that a strong democratic system is also beneficial to economic performance. Furthermore, support for government, according to the Eurobarometer survey for autumn 2024, increased to 45%, above the EU average of 33%. This ties in well with the stronger economic performance that Portugal has been experiencing in the past few years. The country has managed to reduce

its state debt by 35 percentage points of GDP since 2012, which has helped to improve financial stability and has allowed for increasing government spending. The tourism sector has also been performing very well, boosting Portugal’s economic growth. Portugal is currently running a fiscal surplus (albeit a small one). This has enabled it to avoid the fractious political battles over budget cuts that have eroded public support for governments in other countries.

Political stability remains fragile, but the minority government, led by Luis Montenegro, managed to avoid another snap election while passing the 2025 budget. Portugal is also respecting EU timelines and meeting targets to spend the disbursements from the Resilience and Recovery Facility (RRF). Portugal’s citizens demonstrated a willingness to engage in protests in 2024, to demand fairer housing conditions in September and against police violence in October. However, WVS data reveal a low interest in politics, suggesting that political participation in Portugal is not as strong as it could be.

Political strife and public disaffection are the undoing of France

France has been downgraded from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy”, as the domestic political scene became increasingly fractious in 2024. France has long been on the cusp, sitting close to the threshold score of 8.00 that separates “full democracies” from

"flawed democracies". It has been classified as a "flawed democracy" in the past (including in 2010-13, 2015-18 and 2020-21), during periods of political turbulence in which the administration has faced widespread social unrest and/or internal divisions over policy, which undermined governance.

France's downgrade reflects a deterioration in the score for confidence in government, which has been sufficient to push its underlying score from 8.07 in 2023 to 7.99 in 2024. The president, Emmanuel Macron, has become an increasingly unpopular figure and his decision in June 2024 to dissolve

parliament and hold snap elections backfired. His Renaissance party lost significant ground and no single party or bloc emerged with a legislative majority. It has been very difficult to form a government since then: following several months of talks, Mr Macron finally appointed a new prime minister (Michel Barnier) in September, but his minority government collapsed three months later, after it failed to secure enough support to pass the 2025 budget. Growing public frustration with the government has boosted support for political insurgents, particularly Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National (RN).

North America

North America, comprising the US and Canada, remains a top performer in the Democracy Index. The region's overall score stands at 8.27 in 2024, unchanged from 2023, putting it just behind western Europe at 8.38. Canada retained its overall score of 8.69 in 2024, maintaining its "full democracy" classification and leaving its placement in our global ranking almost unchanged, at 14th position

(13th previously), after recording a significant decline in its score in 2023. The US continues to trail Canada, with a score of 7.85 in 2024, unchanged from 2023. The US rose one spot to 28th position in our global ranking, reflecting changes in other countries, but it remains in the "flawed democracy" category, where it has stood since 2016.

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Table 5
North America 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Canada	8.69	14	1	10.00	8.21	8.89	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
United States of America	7.85	28	2	9.17	6.43	8.89	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Regional score	8.27			9.58	7.32	8.89	6.88	8.68	

Source: EIU.

A tale of unpopular leaders

North America continues to score most strongly in *electoral process and pluralism* (9.58) and *political participation* (8.89). Both scores are unchanged since 2022 and remain higher than in any other region. Voter engagement has stayed strong in the latest national elections. Turnout at the US presidential election in November 2024 was 64%, the second-highest level in over a century; it was surpassed only by turnout in the 2020 presidential election (66%). The US midterm elections in 2022 also had one of the highest turnout rates on record, with nearly half of eligible voters casting ballots. Turnout at Canada's most recent general election, held in 2021, was slightly lower (62.3%) than in the previous poll, in 2019 (67.7%). However, this remained at the high end of the range (50-70%), meriting a score of 0.5 for this indicator.

US electoral institutions continue to exhibit considerable resilience. The 2024 presidential election concluded without controversy,

and Congress certified the results with no disruptions. This contrasted sharply with the 2020 election, which was marred by controversy, baseless voter fraud claims and an attack on the US Capitol. The subsequent smooth transition between administrations of different parties is a positive sign.

However, this is qualified by the fact that a different election result may well have generated a more tumultuous outcome. Democratic Party leaders have long stressed the importance of a peaceful transfer of power. By contrast, during the campaign, the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, insisted that he would accept only an election victory; he and his affiliates readied more than 100 lawsuits in battleground states to challenge a loss pre-emptively, citing unfounded claims, including over non-citizens voting. The implication is that election denial has not fully exited the US electoral system. The trend could reappear at the midterm elections in 2026, halfway through Mr Trump's term, if Republicans underperform at these polls, as often happens to the incumbent party.

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One problem that could become acute if it persists is the current crop of unpopular leaders. This could end up undermining North America's performance in the *electoral process and pluralism* and *political participation* categories, especially if cynicism towards the electoral process rises and voter participation wanes. Some of these dynamics were already visible in the 2024 US election. Overall turnout approached record levels, but close to 90m eligible voters did not cast their ballots, a 10% increase from the 2020 race. A key feature of the 2024 election was that both mainstream parties fielded highly unpopular presidential candidates. Democratic Party candidate Kamala Harris had a 48% favourability rating and Mr Trump had a 50% favourability rating, according to a 10-point favourability scale that Gallup has used for presidential nominees dating back to 1956, putting them close to the bottom of the scale historically.

Both parties also bypassed standard electoral norms during the candidate selection process and the subsequent election campaign. Facing several Republican challengers, Mr Trump refused to participate in any primary debates, which normally function to inform voters of their candidate choices. Given his popularity among Republican voters, Mr Trump was always the front-runner despite the misgivings of many senior Republicans. Mr Trump became the presumptive nominee in March and the official candidate in July, together with his vice-presidential running mate JD Vance. He declined subsequent presidential debates after Ms Harris was widely agreed

to have bested him in their only matchup.

The Democratic primary was equally unconventional. No competitive candidates challenged the incumbent president, Joe Biden, despite widespread misgivings about his advanced age and suitability for office. When Mr Biden belatedly withdrew his candidacy on July 21st, he endorsed his vice-president, Ms Harris, who was also unpopular, and the Democratic Party quickly rallied behind her. This closed off the option for an "open convention" to select Mr Biden's replacement.

Mr Biden's late exit meant that Ms Harris had only three months to campaign before election day. That left her with little time to assemble and communicate a compelling platform, which typically takes place over the course of at least a year. Ms Harris also faced the challenge of having to frame herself as both a "continuity" and a "change" candidate, owing to polarised public attitudes about Mr Biden and his administration's track record. The result was a campaign that was light on details and often contradictory in its messaging. This made it more difficult for Ms Harris to connect with voters, and allowed Mr Trump to set public perceptions about her candidacy.

Ms Harris wound up underperforming in what opinion polls had suggested would be an extremely close election, especially considering her opponent's controversial public profile. Mr Trump won the popular and electoral votes, swept all seven battleground states and his

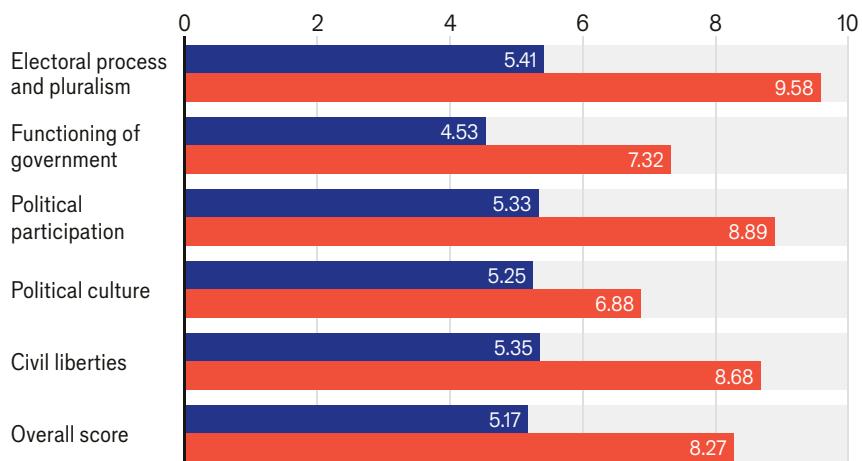
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Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ Global average
■ Canada & US

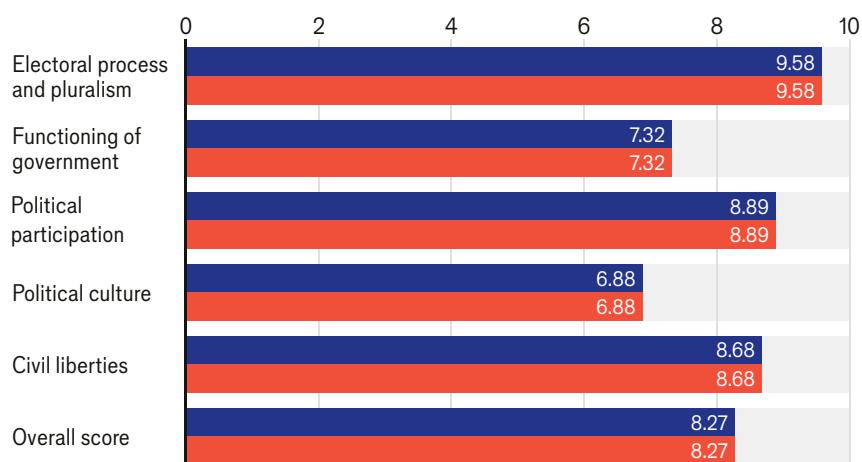


Source: EIU.

US & Canada: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ 2024
■ 2023



Source: EIU.

party took control of both houses of Congress. Disengagement by Democratic voters played a key role in this result. Turnout among Democrats was lower than in 2020. Ms Harris also failed to win over traditionally Democrat-voting, strategically important voters, including women and non-white voters, particularly Hispanics, and key electoral constituencies in large urban areas and the suburbs.

Similar trends have emerged in Canada's political system. The prime minister, Justin Trudeau, held on to power despite years of plummeting approval ratings and encouragement from elements

within his Liberal Party to step aside. Mr Trudeau finally announced his resignation in January 2025 after losing support from his cabinet and allies in parliament. However, this has left his party with little time to regroup, select a new leader and win over voters ahead of the next general election, which must be called by October 2025 but now seems inevitable by the spring. The opposition Conservatives have a double-digit polling lead and appear best placed to win the election. This in part reflects the success of the Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, at targeting public discontent over issues such as high living costs and immigration, which voters accuse

Mr Trudeau of neglecting.

Another consequence of Mr Trudeau's late resignation is that it has prevented the government from tackling urgent issues, including the future of US-Canada relations, which Mr Trump has threatened to upend. Mr Trudeau suspended parliament until March 2025 to accommodate his party's leadership election, and the subsequent general election will further delay the moment that parliament can resume usual business. These events have put additional pressure on Canada's performance in our *functioning of government* category, which we had already downgraded in 2023 (to 8.21), although Canada still bests the US's much lower score (6.43).

Israel-Hamas war. These debates have continued to extend beyond the usual set of actors (such as politicians and activists) and now encompass corporate executives, librarians, school teachers and universities. These issues also featured prominently in the 2024 elections, occasionally dividing the mainstream parties and often driving their attacks against one another.

A highly politicised media, including popular TV channels and print publications, continue to foment and amplify divisions across the US electorate. Non-traditional media, such as independent podcasts, have played an increasingly large role. Self-reinforcing social media algorithms have contributed to a hardening of opinions, including radical and misinformed ones.

According to the Pew Research Center, more than half of Republicans (62%) and Democrats (54%) held "very unfavourable" views of the other party in 2022. Little appears to have changed in the subsequent two years. High-profile acts of political violence have become more common, including two unsuccessful assassination attempts on Mr Trump and the killing of a healthcare executive in 2024 alone.

Partisan rhetoric intensified during the 2024 election campaign, with Mr Trump and Ms Harris frequently characterising one another as existential threats to the country. According to an AP-NORC survey conducted in December 2024, a month after Mr Trump's election victory, Americans are sharply divided by party affiliation in their feelings about the future direction of their country. Nearly three-quarters

North America's polarisation problem

Political culture remains the lowest-scoring category for North America. At 6.88 in 2024, the score is unchanged from 2023 and remains well below that for western Europe, which improved slightly to 8.18 this year. North America's performance continues to be weighed down by intense political and cultural polarisation in the US. Social cohesion and consensus have collapsed in recent years as disagreements over an expanding list of issues have fuelled the country's "culture wars". Alongside the covid-19 pandemic, election outcomes and racial equity issues, additional fault lines have emerged and deepened, including over LGBT+ rights, climate policy, reproductive health and the

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(71%) of Republicans surveyed expected “things to improve” in the coming year, compared with only 7% of Democrats. This marked a near reversal of the results in 2020, when Democrats won the election.

Polarisation has long compromised the *functioning of government* in the US, and the country’s score for this category remains at a low of 6.43 in 2024, unchanged from 2023. Competing alternatives are essential for a functioning democracy, but differences of opinion in the US have hardened into political sectarianism and almost permanent institutional gridlock. The previous Congress, whose two-year term ended in early January 2025, was the least productive since the 1980s in terms of bills successfully passed into law. This in large part reflected the fact that power was divided; Democrats and Republicans each controlled a chamber of Congress, and by thin majorities, which presented structural barriers to the legislative process. The new Congress that has just taken office has a chance to be more effective, as a single party controls both chambers and the presidency. However, the Republican majority in the House of Representatives (the lower house) is the slimmest in nearly a century, and intra-party disagreements are already emerging over how to pass Mr Trump’s agenda.

Polarisation has become a growing feature of Canadian politics, including in relations between the federal and provincial governments. Disagreements span an array of issues, ranging from the Trudeau government’s environmental policies (which the oil-producing western provinces staunchly oppose) to the

national pension system (which Alberta has threatened to exit). Meanwhile, US-style “culture war” topics have become more prominent in Canadian political discourse, animating debates about individual freedoms, including over previous covid-19 restrictions, gun control and, more recently, transgender and parental rights. They also have increasingly served as reference points for inter-party conflicts at the national level. Mr Poilievre frequently accuses Mr Trudeau’s Liberals of advancing a “woke” agenda, while Mr Trudeau has alluded to Mr Trump in the US in an attempt to frame Mr Poilievre as a far-right radical. The result has been an increasing divisiveness in Canadian political rhetoric, which could intensify ahead of the upcoming general election. According to a September 2024 survey published by the Angus Reid Institute, more than a third (36%) of Canadians consider themselves “political orphans” and believe that the country’s parties have become “too extreme”. These dynamics had already prompted us to downgrade Canada’s performance in our *political culture* category in 2023. However, the score, which is unchanged at 7.50 in 2024, remains well above the US score of 6.25.

What impact will Trump 2.0 have on US democracy?

North America’s score in our *civil liberties* category is unchanged at 8.68 in 2024. However, North America loses its spot as the world’s highest-scoring region to western Europe, whose score in this category

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improved slightly this year to 8.70. Some issues continue to weigh on the individual scores for the US (8.53) and Canada (8.82), but the overall category scores for both still far exceed the global average (5.35). In the US, these issues include the ambiguous status of abortion rights, following a 2022 ruling by the Supreme Court that eliminated the federal constitutional right to an abortion. Meanwhile, the marginalisation of Canada's Indigenous population continues to hold down Canada's score, despite the federal government's efforts to prioritise Indigenous rights. Quebec's ban on wearing religious symbols in certain public-service jobs, which led to a downgrade in Canada's score in 2021, has had a similar effect.

The US score for *civil liberties*, as well as other categories, may come under considerable pressure during Mr Trump's second term as US president. He and his team have spoken openly of their plans to expand the role of the military into domestic law enforcement, including to conduct mass deportations of undocumented migrants and to quell protests. Mr Trump has also threatened to introduce "ideological screenings" of immigrants, such as on the basis of religion. Women's reproductive rights could come further under threat if Republicans seek to enact a national abortion ban; Mr Trump's own position on the issue is ambiguous, given that he once supported such restrictions but more recently stepped back from this.

Mr Trump has threatened to weaponise the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to go after his

political enemies. If he does indeed seek retribution in this manner, the effects would be highly polarising and damaging. The politicisation of the legal system and intelligence services over the past decade is a deeply disturbing trend and one that threatens to undermine the political order in the US. Both parties are guilty on this count. Most egregiously, Mr Trump and his supporters accused the Democrats of "stealing" the 2020 election and tried to contest the result through the courts. State and federal judges rejected more than 50 lawsuits brought by Mr Trump and his allies based on these baseless allegations. But in bringing his lawsuits, Mr Trump had cast doubt on the integrity of the election process and encouraged his supporters to believe that he had been robbed of the presidency. The mob attack on the Capitol in January 2021, in an attempt to prevent Congress from formalising the election of Mr Biden, was a consequence.

Earlier, after Mr Trump had won the Republican nomination to stand in the 2016 presidential election, Democrats mobilised their supporters in the civil service to speak out against Mr Trump. In a break with traditional norms of behaviour of intelligence officers, former and actual members of the CIA and other agencies attacked Mr Trump as being unfit for presidential office. The FBI launched an investigation into alleged collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. The various "Russiagate" investigations of collusion, which continued through 2016-19, found no evidence of any such collusion. The attempt to smear Mr Trump by association with the Russian regime

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of Vladimir Putin did not prevent him from being elected in 2016, though it may have undermined popular support for him. However, the ethic of apolitical public service was seriously undermined by intelligence officers adopting a political position on a candidate in a presidential election (Gentry, 2023).

Whatever the merits or defects of the many legal cases brought against Mr Trump in recent years, the Democrats may come to regret their “lawfare” against him, not only because it backfired by strengthening support for him among his base. It may also encourage Mr Trump to pursue his political enemies through the courts during his second administration. In a bid to pre-empt the retribution that Mr Trump has threatened, before leaving office Mr Biden not only granted a sweeping pardon to his son for gun and tax convictions, but also dispensed pre-emptive pardons to numerous members of his wider family as well as his political associates.

Mr Trump moved quickly to install loyalists to key cabinet positions, raising concerns that some candidates with limited qualifications could compromise the independence and functioning

of federal agencies. Congress must first approve these nominees, but Mr Trump put pressure on Republican lawmakers to rush through the process. He has also rewarded large donors, including family members, with appointments in his administration. A prime example is billionaire Elon Musk, who bankrolled the new president’s campaign while using his ownership of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to amplify Mr Trump’s public profile. Mr Musk’s role in the administration potentially presents a conflict of interests; he is set to manage an ill-defined commission intended to shape the functioning of government agencies and rules that also regulate his businesses. Similar issues concern the recent rush of corporate executives donating to Mr Trump’s inauguration fund following his election victory, presumably to curry favour and avoid being targeted by him. Some have even changed their company policies to align with Mr Trump’s preferences on issues such as climate change and sustainability, diversity and inclusion, and information moderation.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The quality of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean declined for a ninth consecutive year in 2024. The average regional index score fell from 5.68 in 2023 to 5.61. The region remains the world's third most democratic after North America and western Europe. It ranks above eastern Europe, Asia and Australasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa. Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean has its strengths and weaknesses: the region performs above the global average on *electoral process and pluralism*, *political participation* and *civil liberties*, as well as for *functioning of government* (although its score in the latter category is quite low); However, it is the worst-performing region for *political culture*.

Of the 24 countries in the region covered by the Democracy Index, 17 registered a decline in their score in 2024, five improved their scores and two countries recorded no change. Jamaica, Colombia and Brazil experienced the biggest reversals this year, while the Dominican Republic and Mexico made the biggest improvement. Paraguay was demoted to a "hybrid regime" after briefly entering the "flawed democracy" classification in 2023. Paraguay's downgrade was

the result of a new law that curtails the freedom of action for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Uruguay and Costa Rica remain the region's only "full democracies". Haiti, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua are all classified by the index as "authoritarian regimes".

The decline in the quality of democracy in the region is the result of both long-standing and novel social and political challenges. The region's income distribution is the most unequal in the world, and anaemic economic growth in recent years has led to public frustration with the political establishment and has fuelled political polarisation. Latin America and the Caribbean is the most violent region in the world. According to the IMF, the region accounts for a third of global homicides and its homicide rate is three times the global average. Countries in the region are also grappling with the effects of the widespread usage of social media and some have reacted in a heavy-handed manner that threatens freedom of expression. The region's weak political culture is often expressed in support for iron-fisted leaders who promise simple solutions to complex problems and, in the process, weaken institutional checks and balances.

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Table 6
Latin America 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Argentina	6.51	54=	9	9.17	5.00	6.11	3.75	8.53	Flawed democracy
Bolivia	4.26	103=	20	4.33	3.93	5.56	1.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Brazil	6.49	57	10	9.58	5.00	6.11	5.00	6.76	Flawed democracy
Chile	7.83	29	3	9.58	7.86	6.67	5.63	9.41	Flawed democracy
Colombia	6.35	60	11	9.17	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.65	Flawed democracy
Costa Rica	8.29	18	2	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	9.71	Full democracy
Cuba	2.58	135	22	0.00	2.86	3.33	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Dominican Republic	6.62	52	8	9.17	5.00	7.22	4.38	7.35	Flawed democracy
Ecuador	5.24	85	16	8.75	5.00	5.56	1.88	5.00	Hybrid regime
El Salvador	4.61	95	18	6.17	3.21	5.56	3.13	5.00	Hybrid regime
Guatemala	4.55	97	19	6.08	3.93	5.00	1.88	5.88	Hybrid regime
Guyana	6.11	69	12	6.92	6.07	6.11	5.00	6.47	Flawed democracy
Haiti	2.74	131	21	0.00	0.29	2.78	5.63	5.00	Authoritarian
Honduras	4.98	90	17	8.75	3.93	4.44	2.50	5.29	Hybrid regime
Jamaica	6.74	49	7	8.75	6.43	5.00	5.00	8.53	Flawed democracy
Mexico	5.32	84	15	6.92	5.00	7.22	1.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Nicaragua	2.09	147	24	0.00	2.14	2.78	3.75	1.76	Authoritarian
Panama	6.84	47	5	9.58	5.71	7.22	3.75	7.94	Flawed democracy
Paraguay	5.92	75	13	8.33	5.36	6.67	1.88	7.35	Hybrid regime
Peru	5.69	78	14	8.75	5.71	5.00	2.50	6.47	Hybrid regime
Suriname	6.79	48	6	9.58	5.36	6.67	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy

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Table 6
Latin America 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Trinidad and Tobago	7.09	45	4	9.58	6.79	6.11	5.63	7.35	Flawed democracy
Uruguay	8.67	15	1	10.00	9.29	7.78	6.88	9.41	Full democracy
Venezuela	2.25	142	23	0.00	1.07	5.00	3.13	2.06	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.61			7.03	4.92	5.74	3.91	6.43	

Source: EIU.

Challenges to representative democracy are on the rise

Almost 85m votes were cast in the five general elections held in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2024. The most brazen example of anti-democratic behaviour occurred in Venezuela, where the authoritarian regime of the president, Nicolás Maduro, engaged in blatant fraud to deny opposition candidate Edmundo González the presidency. In El Salvador, the incumbent president, Nayib Bukele, secured a landslide victory, winning almost 85% of the vote. Mr Bukele is extremely popular and he won a clear mandate, but his election was made possible by a politicised judiciary that overruled constitutional term limits to allow him to stand for a second term. In Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum of the governing left-wing Morena also won decisively by riding on the coat-tails of the popular former president, Andrés Manuel López

Obrador. However, the election was marred by high levels of violence, with 37 politicians murdered in the course of the campaign. By contrast, elections in the Dominican Republic and Uruguay were free and fair.

The landslide victories of Mr Bukele and Ms Sheinbaum in 2024 seem to suggest that many voters in Latin America appear willing to trade the checks and balances of representative democracy in return for tangible improvements in living standards and personal security delivered by strong-arm rulers.

Since Mr Bukele took office in 2019, El Salvador's global ranking has fallen 24 places to 95th, with a 1.54-point decline in its index score during this period. Since 2020, El Salvador has been classified as a "hybrid regime" rather than a "flawed democracy". However, Mr Bukele is the most popular elected president in the world, having reduced the previously high homicide rate in the country to unprecedented lows. Many voters have accepted the erosion of checks and balances and civil liberties in return for greater basic security.

Salvadoreans express a growing sense of confidence and satisfaction with their democracy and their lives. An impressive 72% say that their country is going in a positive direction (the regional average is 28%), according to the latest Latinobarómetro survey. When asked how democratic their country is, Salvadoreans give it a score of 7.1 out of 10, behind only the full democracies of Costa Rica and Uruguay. And 62% say that they are satisfied with how their democracy functions, only just behind Uruguay (63%).

The situation is similar in Mexico, where the institutional underpinnings of democracy have been weakened by Mr López Obrador. Under his watch, Mexico was also reclassified as a “hybrid regime”, having previously been a “flawed democracy”. The former president’s attacks on the media, efforts to subvert independent electoral, judicial and watchdog institutions and, most worryingly, his enabling of a greater role for the armed forces all weighed on Mexico’s score. Even so, his approval rating hit 74% in September 2024, according to local polling aggregator Oraculus. Mexicans rate the quality of their democracy at 6.5 out of 10, above the regional average of 6.1. Polling showing a relatively high level of confidence in the government was a factor behind Mexico’s improved score this year.

Mr López Obrador’s popularity, in part, reflects his policies to boost the incomes of the poorest. The real minimum wage nearly doubled during his tenure; as a result, the poverty rate fell to 37.8% in the first half of 2023 compared to 40.4% in the first half of 2018, according

to the national council for the evaluation of social development policy (Coneval). Looking ahead, the outlook for the institutions of Mexico’s democracy appears bleak: Mr López Obrador introduced last-minute constitutional reforms that will require the election of all judges, which is likely to politicise the judiciary in a manner favourable to Morena.

The cases of El Salvador and Mexico illustrate how voters’ attitudes towards their democracies are becoming disconnected from the status of representative democratic institutions. It appears that many citizens are prepared to accept an erosion of institutional democracy at the hands of strong-arm leaders in return for higher incomes and less crime. These examples show the path that other countries in the region with low levels of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and a weak political culture might take if they do not resolve their economic problems and governance challenges in a democratic fashion. Countries in the region that are most at risk of electing strong-arm leaders are those bedevilled by high levels of corruption, organised crime and violence, such as Ecuador and Honduras, both of which are classified as “hybrid regimes”.

Heightened polarisation threatens political stability

Partisan divisions in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have grown more intense in recent years. This partly reflects the growing reach of social media platforms that tend to amplify polarisation

Democracy Index 2024

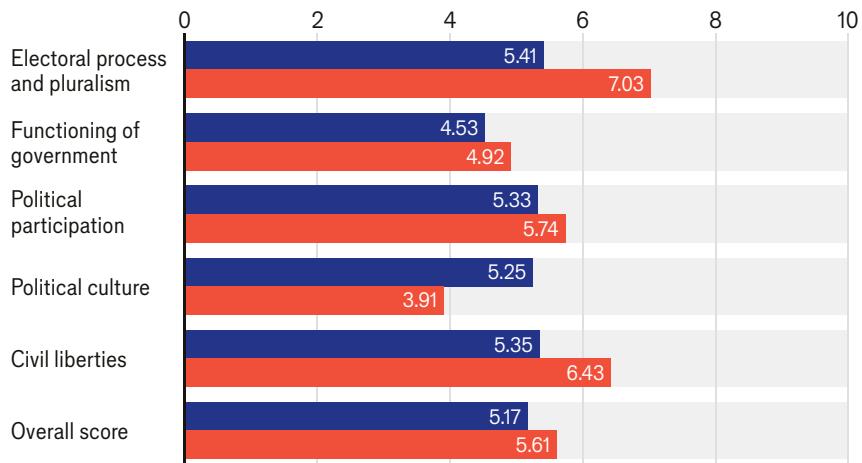
What's wrong with representative democracy?

Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ Global average

■ Latin America and the Caribbean



Source: EIU.

Latin America and the Caribbean: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ 2024

■ 2023



Source: EIU.

by using algorithms to reinforce biases and create echo chambers. Partisan and ideological divisions intensified during the first year in office of Argentina's libertarian president, Javier Milei. Mr Milei, a political outsider whose influence was magnified by social media, was elected on a staunchly anti-establishment platform. As president, he has continued to attack the media and opposition political figures, which has accentuated political

polarisation and has had a chilling effect on dissenting voices. Improved scores for respecting private property and a higher level of confidence in government have partly offset a decline in index scores related to freedom of expression and the media. The example of Brazil (see below) shows the potentially negative consequences of heightened polarisation on political stability and democratic institutions.

Brazil's democracy at risk

The negative impact of political polarisation is acute in the region's largest democracy, Brazil. Brazil's score underwent a sharp decline in 2024 and the country fell six places in the global ranking, to 57th. Political polarisation has risen over the past decade, and today 80% of Brazilians say that conflict between those who support different political parties is either strong or very strong, according to a 2024 survey by Pew. Elevated levels of partisan polarisation have led to the emergence of zero-sum politics, leading to the politicisation of Brazilian institutions and the rise of political violence.

Managing the impact of social media platforms in Brazil's democracy has been problematic and in 2024 the country's Supreme Court overstepped the mark. Since 2019 the court has been conducting controversial investigations into the propagation of alleged misinformation attacking Brazil's electoral and democratic institutions, and into threats against Supreme Court justices, mostly by online far-right activists as part of their political discourse.

Matters came to a head in August 2024 when the Supreme Court ordered the blocking of access to US-based social media company X, as the company had not complied with the court's orders to shut down accounts that it deemed to be spreading "massive dissemination of Nazi, racist, fascist, hateful and anti-democratic" speech and had withdrawn its representative from Brazil (which companies need to have for legal reasons). The court argued that X posed a "direct threat to the integrity of the democratic process" ahead of the nationwide October 2024 local elections. The court also threatened to impose hefty fines on those who used virtual private networks (VPNs) to access X. It imposed fines on Starlink, a firm that is owned by X's owner, Elon Musk, but that is legally distinct. The ban on X lasted two months and affected tens of millions of users' access to one of the most widely used social media sites in Brazil; it was lifted once X appointed a representative, paid its fines and agreed to block certain users.

Restricting access to a major social media platform in this way for several weeks has no parallel among democratic countries. The censorship of a group of users overstepped the bounds of what can be considered reasonable restrictions on freedom of speech, especially in the middle of an election campaign. Making certain speech illegal, based on vague definitions, is an example of the politicisation of the judiciary. The ruling not only has a chilling effect on freedom of speech, but also sets a precedent for the courts to censor political discourse, which could unduly influence political outcomes.

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Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that when Brazilians are asked if they believe that the freedom of speech is guaranteed in their country, almost 64% say it is poorly or not at all guaranteed, according to 2023 Latinobarómetro data. This is substantially higher than the regional average of 45%. Moreover, 62% of Brazilians say that they do not express their opinions about the problems facing the country, according to the 2024 Latinobarómetro survey. This is second only to El Salvador, and well above the regional average of 44%.

Brazil's score was also negatively affected by new details of an alleged attempted coup plot in 2022 against the then president-elect, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the leftist Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) and members of the Supreme Court. The case alleges that the coup plotters sought to kill Lula and also Supreme Court justices. Supposedly, the coup was organised by the far-right former president, Jair Bolsonaro, as well as high-level members of the armed forces (they all deny wrongdoing). The case suggests that Brazil's military continues to have a low opinion of civilian rule, some 40 years after the end of the military dictatorship. The coup plot also suggests there is a disturbing tolerance for political violence in Brazil that is absent in more consolidated democracies. The growing threat of political violence was illustrated by an attack by a far-right suicide bomber on the Supreme Court in November 2024.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Eastern Europe and Central Asia's average regional score edged down marginally for a second consecutive year, from 5.37 in 2023 to 5.35 in 2024. In an eventful, election-filled year, there was significant change in the region: the scores for only five countries stayed the same, but ten countries improved their scores and 13 experienced a decline.

At 7.43, the average index score for the countries of central Europe (Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) significantly exceeded the overall regional average, which is weighed down by the "authoritarian regimes" that predominate further east. Two countries from these better-performing sub-regions improved their scores sufficiently to be upgraded to "full democracies". The Czech Republic and Estonia registered relatively small improvements to take their scores to 8.08 and 8.13 respectively, putting them at the lower end of the "full democracy" classification.

Among the region's "flawed democracies" are eight EU member states and five EU candidate countries; four of the aspiring EU members are in the western Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and the other is Moldova. Romania's score fell by 0.46 points, to 5.99, putting it just within the threshold to qualify as a "flawed democracy": it fell 12 places in the rankings to join the region's four other "hybrid regimes" (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Georgia and Ukraine). The number of "authoritarian regimes" remained unchanged from 2023, at eight: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. There were no improvements in the overall index scores for these regimes: the scores for half of the countries declined and stayed the same for the remainder.

Repression and war continue to impact Russia and Ukraine

The Russia-Ukraine war continued for a third year in 2024, having a further negative effect on the Democracy Index scores of both countries, especially those of Russia. State repression continued unabated in Russia, where the death of opposition activist Alexei Navalny in prison in suspicious circumstances in February was testament to the brutality meted out to opponents of the regime. In 2024, the most prosecuted crime in the country became the catch-all "justification of terrorism", replacing "discrediting the Russian army" as the government's weapon of choice in its campaign to stifle domestic dissent and criticism of the war. The proportion of prison sentences handed down at trial continued to tick up, from 50% in 2023 to 55% of all sentences, with the average duration of the prison term in "anti-war" cases also rising slightly. The presidential election in March, in which Vladimir Putin was able to

Democracy Index 2024

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Table 7

Eastern Europe & Central Asia 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Albania	6.20	66	14	7.00	5.71	5.00	6.25	7.06	Flawed democracy
Armenia	5.35	82	17	7.92	4.29	6.11	3.13	5.29	Hybrid regime
Azerbaijan	2.80	126=	23	0.50	2.50	3.33	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Belarus	1.99	152	26	0.00	0.79	3.33	4.38	1.47	Authoritarian
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.06	88	18	7.00	3.64	5.00	3.75	5.88	Hybrid regime
Bulgaria	6.34	61	11	8.75	5.36	5.56	4.38	7.65	Flawed democracy
Croatia	6.50	56	10	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Czech Republic	8.08	23=	2	9.58	6.43	7.78	7.50	9.12	Full democracy
Estonia	8.13	21=	1	10.00	8.57	6.67	6.88	8.53	Full democracy
Georgia	4.70	94	20	5.67	3.21	5.56	3.75	5.29	Hybrid regime
Hungary	6.51	54=	9	8.75	5.71	4.44	6.88	6.76	Flawed democracy
Kazakhstan	3.08	118	22	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Kyrgyz Republic	3.52	111	21	3.42	1.86	3.89	3.13	5.29	Authoritarian
Latvia	7.66	33	4	10.00	7.14	6.67	6.25	8.24	Flawed democracy
Lithuania	7.59	36	5	10.00	7.14	6.67	5.63	8.53	Flawed democracy
Moldova	6.04	71	15	6.50	5.36	7.22	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Montenegro	6.73	50	8	8.75	7.14	6.67	3.75	7.35	Flawed democracy
North Macedonia	6.28	62	12	8.75	6.07	6.11	3.13	7.35	Flawed democracy
Poland	7.40	39	6	10.00	6.43	6.67	6.25	7.65	Flawed democracy
Romania	5.99	72	16	8.25	5.36	5.56	3.75	7.06	Hybrid regime
Russia	2.03	150=	25	0.00	2.14	2.22	3.75	2.06	Authoritarian
Serbia	6.26	64	13	7.83	5.71	6.67	3.75	7.35	Flawed democracy

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 7

Eastern Europe & Central Asia 2024

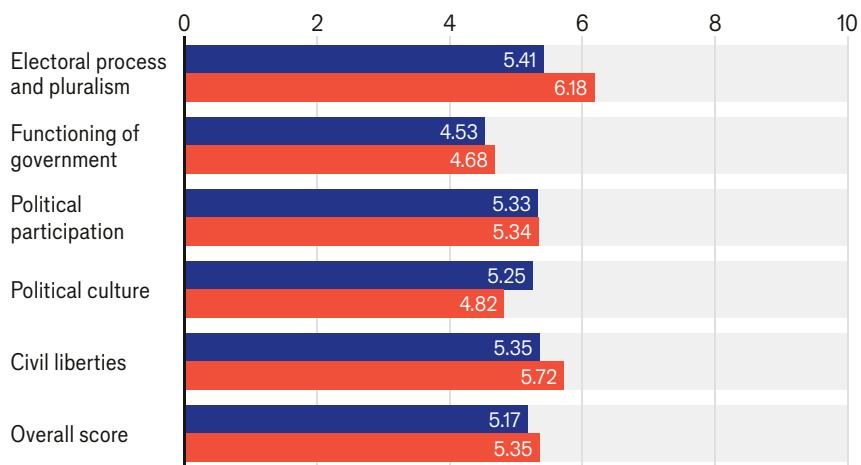
	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Slovakia	7.21	42	7	10.00	6.07	6.11	5.63	8.24	Flawed democracy
Slovenia	7.82	30	3	9.58	7.50	7.22	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Tajikistan	1.83	159	27	0.00	2.21	1.67	4.38	0.88	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	1.66	161	28	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.29	Authoritarian
Ukraine	4.90	92	19	5.17	2.71	7.22	5.00	4.41	Hybrid regime
Uzbekistan	2.10	146	24	0.00	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.35			6.18	4.68	5.34	4.82	5.72	

Source: EIU.

Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

- Global average
- Eastern Europe & Central Asia

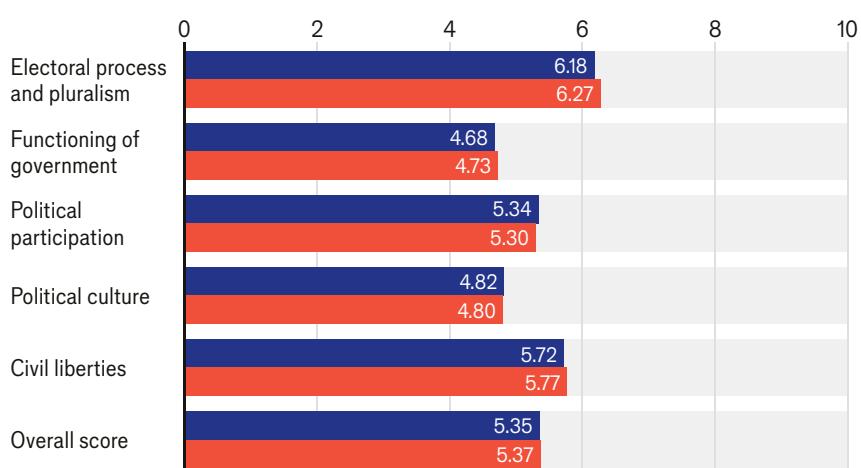


Source: EIU.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

- 2024
- 2023



Source: EIU.

stand for a fifth term following the constitutional change of 2020, was neither free nor fair. The incumbent stood more or less unchallenged, after numerous potential opponents were barred from standing, including Mr Navalny (who died a few weeks before the poll) and “anti-war” candidate Boris Nadezhdin. The election was marred by the now familiar intimidation and widespread fraud that accompany modern Russian voting. Mr Putin was re-elected with 88% of the vote, the highest percentage in post-Soviet Russia, in what was a foregone conclusion.

Ukraine’s overall index score continued to deteriorate in 2024. The centralisation of power in the office of the president, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, and the sidelining of government, parliament, the media and the opposition, has been implemented alongside a robust interpretation of martial law, sparking criticism that the law is being used to insulate the presidency from political pressure and extend the power of the office of the president. Mobilisation efforts have run into problems as the death count rises and demoralisation creeps in, and the state has resorted to using roaming conscription gangs to drag men off the streets and into the army. Exhaustion and frustration with progress in the war have undermined public confidence in the state and in Mr Zelenskyi personally. Presidential elections which would normally have taken place in March or April 2024 were suspended along with the legislative polls, according to martial law. Organising free and fair elections in present circumstances would be impossible: 20% of Ukraine’s

territory, inhabited by more than 3m Ukrainians, is under occupation by Russia; more than 6m Ukrainians are living as refugees in Europe; it is impossible to guarantee the security of voters; and there would be no level playing field for all political parties. However, surveys indicate that if a vote was held today, the president would lose.

Russia's influence on politics extends beyond its borders

Russia’s influence loomed large over several elections in the region in 2024. Nowhere was this more evident than in Moldova, which held a presidential election in October 2024 and a constitutional referendum in November. Allegations of Russian interference included the dissemination of misinformation, direct financial transfers to voters, and intimidation and threats against those supporting the country’s EU membership. Moldova’s overall index score fell from 6.23 in 2023 to 6.04 in 2024, and hence it just managed to retain its classification as a “flawed democracy”. The main driver of the deterioration in the country’s overall score was a sharp decline in the *electoral process and pluralism category*, the score for which declined from 7.42 in 2023 to 6.50. The European election monitoring organisation, the OSCE, assessed the polls themselves as well run, while noting biased media coverage and legal deficiencies. However, the undisputable intervention of a foreign power in an attempt to influence the outcome led to downgrades for several indicators.

Russian interference failed to prevent either the re-election of Moldova's president, Maia Sandu, or the passing of the constitutional referendum, but the narrow margin of victory, secured in large measure by the votes of the Moldovan diaspora, underlines the deep divisions in the country. These divisions are real, based on disagreement over the future orientation of the country and dissatisfaction with economic conditions, and provide Russia with fertile ground to try to influence voters. Moscow will no doubt seek to exploit these fractures as Moldova heads into a legislative election in 2025.

Russia also played a significant role in Georgia's politics in 2024, albeit indirectly rather than through direct intervention. Georgia recorded the steepest deterioration of any country in the region in 2024: its index score fell from 5.20 in 2023 to 4.70. The controversial passage of the transparency and foreign influence bill, dubbed the "foreign agents' law" by the opposition after the Russian law of a similar name, prompted huge protests in the spring. Legislative elections in October became a contest between two opposing views of Georgia's future direction, either towards Russia or the EU, as represented by contending political forces in the government and opposition. The vote itself was marred by abnormalities, including pressure on journalists and NGOs and allegations of vote buying and ballot stuffing. The opposition raised concerns about the influence of the governing Georgian Dream party over bodies tasked with electoral oversight. The incumbent ruling party won the election, and

the year ended with large street protests.

Murky decisions lead to Romanian downgrade

Romanian citizens responded with a mixture of anger and relief to the decision of the Constitutional Court to annul the results of the first round of the presidential election on November 24th and to cancel the second round due on December 8th. In a flimsy ruling, without producing hard evidence to support its decision, the court alleged that a foreign influence operation on social media had influenced the election outcome. The first round had been won by two anti-mainstream candidates, who edged out the candidates from the ruling parties, which have become extremely unpopular. The court's decision to cancel the election, based on murky intelligence reports of Russian election interference, is an extraordinary measure, as the evidence was, at best, questionable. The claim that voters for right-wing outsider Calin Georgescu were widely influenced by a TikTok campaign strains credibility, especially given the social composition of Mr Georgescu's supporters, many of whom are older rural voters who consume their news from television (which is dominated by the ruling parties). Evidence subsequently emerged that one of the ruling parties, the National Liberal Party (PNL), provided funding for the social media campaign in support

of Mr Georgescu, in a tactical move that backfired. The debacle will only undermine further Romanian citizens' extremely low levels of trust in government and political parties.

Romania was ranked at the lower end of the “flawed democracy” classification and so the decline in its overall score of 0.46 points (from 6.45 to 5.99) in 2024 was enough to result in its downgrade to a “hybrid regime”. The election annulment adversely affected the country’s score for *electoral process and pluralism*, but downgrades to other scores would have occurred even without the end-of-year debacle. Survey data confirmed that public trust in political parties and government has fallen even lower over the past year, resulting in several downgrades for indicator scores in the *functioning of government category*. In line with a global benchmarking exercise, Romania’s score for the prevalence of corruption was also downgraded. There is a risk that Romania’s score could fall further in 2025, depending on how it handles the re-run of the presidential election, and on what else emerges about the original basis for cancelling the election. Moves by the government to change the electoral rules governing the conduct of social media in elections and by the ruling parties to stymie the chances of victory for an anti-establishment candidate do not bode well for the health of democracy in Romania.

Small gains for the Baltic states and central European countries, mixed results in the western Balkans

The reclassification of the Czech Republic and Estonia as “full democracies” is a big step forward for the region, which had not had a top-ranked country since 2013, as the Czech Republic lost its “full democracy” status the following year. Estonia has never previously scored 8.00 or more in the Democracy Index. An improvement in the *political participation* score for the Czech Republic, following government efforts to engage voters, lifted its overall score from 7.97 to 8.08. In Estonia, an improvement in the *functioning of government* score was the result of consistently strong e-government initiatives, which have improved transparency.

Small adjustments of this sort were repeated in most EU countries in the region, with only Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania registering a deterioration in their index scores. In Hungary, a decline in public confidence in government and political parties and a downgrade in the country’s corruption score resulted in a worsening of the *functioning of government* score from 6.79 in 2023 to 5.71 in 2024.

Bulgaria's corruption score also worsened, resulting in a minor decline in its overall score. The country continues to suffer from intense political fragmentation and instability, but this was already captured in the index in previous years. Croatia had the distinction of being the only EU country in central Europe to register no change in its score. It continues to rank fairly low in the "flawed democracy" classification, in 56th place in the rankings with a score of 6.50. Its low scores for *political culture, functioning of government, political participation* and *civil liberties* contrast with a high score for *electoral process and pluralism*, and suggest that the substance or quality of democracy leaves a lot to be desired, despite the existence of the formal institutions and processes.

The index results for the EU candidate countries in the western Balkans were mixed in 2024. Among the improvers, North Macedonia's overall score rose from 6.03 to 6.28 following a generally free and fair election which led to a change of government in the second quarter. Montenegro's pace of improvement slowed following bigger gains in previous years, but its index score still rose from 6.67 to 6.73 following a small increase in its civil liberties score. Bosnia and Herzegovina's score rose from 5.00 to 5.06, as an improvement in its *political culture* score was almost cancelled out by a lower score for *functioning of government*. Downgrades to their corruption scores meant that Albania and Serbia both lost 0.07 points, affecting their functioning

of government and overall index scores, keeping them close to the bottom of the "flawed democracy" classification.

Entrenching authoritarian rule in Central Asia

The score for every country in Central Asia either declined or stayed the same. Turkmenistan remains the bottom-ranked country in the region, in 161st place, with a score of 1.66 that has not changed since 2020. Tajikistan's score slipped from 1.94 in 2023 to 1.83, after downgrades to the score for *political participation*, as the president, Emomali Rahmon, retains total control over the political sphere. Uzbekistan's score also fell in 2024, from 2.12 to 2.10, but it rose two places to 146th in the index ranking as a result of bigger negative movements in other countries.

Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic are ranked higher up the index, in 118th and 111th places respectively, but they are far from being upgraded from the "authoritarian regime" grouping. Kazakhstan's scores were unchanged, but the Kyrgyz Republic's score for *electoral process and pluralism* fell from 4.33 to 3.42. The Kyrgyz regime also instigated a crackdown on the media in 2024, as the president, Sadyr Japarov, and the chairman of the State Committee for National Security, Kamchybek Tashiev, moved to quash dissent.

Asia and Australasia

The democratic landscape in this region presents a complex picture. Although home to some of the world's most vibrant democracies, in recent years there has been a gradual drift away from representative democracy. This continued in 2024, when the average index score for the Asia and Australasia region fell from 5.41 in 2023 to 5.31. Of the 28 countries in the region covered by the Democracy Index, only seven improved their score in 2024, while 15 registered a deterioration. Bangladesh, South Korea and Pakistan were the worst performers, falling in the global rankings by 25, ten and six places respectively.

The region now hosts fewer “full democracies” compared to previous years, with the number falling to four from five in 2023, as a result of the problematic developments in South Korea, which resulted in the country’s demotion to the “flawed democracy” classification. Democratic backsliding has not been universal across the region, however, as countries such as Australia, India and Japan improved their scores in 2024. Nevertheless, the protracted nature of the decline in democratic standards, now spanning five years, has resulted

in the region’s average index score falling below that of eastern Europe and Central Asia. The region now outperforms only Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa.

The deterioration in the region’s overall performance occurred across four of the five categories of the index in 2024, with the largest decline coming in the *functioning of government* (-0.33) category. There were also notable declines in the *civil liberties* (-0.16) and *electoral process and pluralism* (-0.12) categories. Previously one of the relative strengths of the region, *functioning of government* is now the weakest category, with an aggregate score of 5.19. The region also performs poorly on *political participation*, with the aggregate score of 5.20, below the global average of 5.33. In 2024, large-scale political unrest and the increased role of the military badly dented some of these category scores. The declaration of martial law in South Korea and the subsequent political stand-off led to downgrades in the country’s scores for *functioning of government* and for *political culture*.

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 8

Asia & Australasia 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Afghanistan	0.25	167	28	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.25	0.00	Authoritarian
Australia	8.85	11	2	10.00	8.57	7.22	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Bangladesh	4.44	100=	20	6.08	2.57	5.00	5.00	3.53	Hybrid regime
Bhutan	5.65	79	16	8.75	5.93	3.89	5.00	4.71	Hybrid regime
Cambodia	2.94	123	21	0.00	2.36	5.00	5.00	2.35	Authoritarian
China	2.11	145	24	0.00	3.21	3.33	3.13	0.88	Authoritarian
Fiji	5.39	81	17	6.58	5.00	4.44	5.63	5.29	Hybrid regime
Hong Kong	5.09	87	18	2.75	4.00	3.89	6.88	7.94	Hybrid regime
India	7.29	41	6	8.67	7.50	7.22	6.88	6.18	Flawed democracy
Indonesia	6.44	59	11	7.92	6.79	7.22	5.00	5.29	Flawed democracy
Japan	8.48	16	4	9.58	8.93	6.67	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
Laos	1.71	160	25	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.29	Authoritarian
Malaysia	7.11	44	7	9.58	7.14	6.67	6.25	5.88	Flawed democracy
Mongolia	6.53	53	10	8.75	5.71	6.67	5.63	5.88	Flawed democracy
Myanmar	0.96	166	27	0.00	0.00	1.67	3.13	0.00	Authoritarian
Nepal	4.60	96	19	4.83	5.36	5.00	2.50	5.29	Hybrid regime
New Zealand	9.61	2	1	10.00	9.29	10.00	8.75	10.00	Full democracy
North Korea	1.08	165	26	0.00	2.50	1.67	1.25	0.00	Authoritarian
Pakistan	2.84	124=	22	0.83	4.29	2.78	2.50	3.82	Authoritarian
Papua New Guinea	5.97	73	15	6.92	6.07	3.89	5.63	7.35	Hybrid regime
Philippines	6.63	51	9	8.75	4.64	8.33	4.38	7.06	Flawed democracy
Singapore	6.18	68	14	5.33	7.14	4.44	7.50	6.47	Flawed democracy
South Korea	7.75	32	5	9.58	7.50	7.22	5.63	8.82	Flawed democracy

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 8

Asia & Australasia 2024

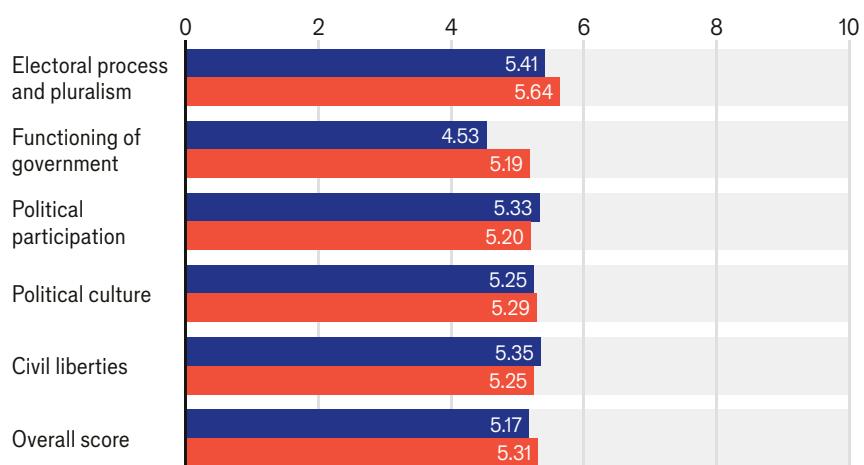
	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Sri Lanka	6.19	67	13	7.00	4.29	7.22	6.25	6.18	Flawed democracy
Taiwan	8.78	12	3	10.00	8.57	7.78	8.13	9.41	Full democracy
Thailand	6.27	63	12	6.50	5.00	8.33	5.63	5.88	Flawed democracy
Timor-Leste	7.03	46	8	9.58	6.07	5.56	6.88	7.06	Flawed democracy
Vietnam	2.62	133	23	0.00	3.93	2.78	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.31			5.64	5.19	5.20	5.29	5.25	

Source: EIU.

Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

- Global average
- Asia & Australasia

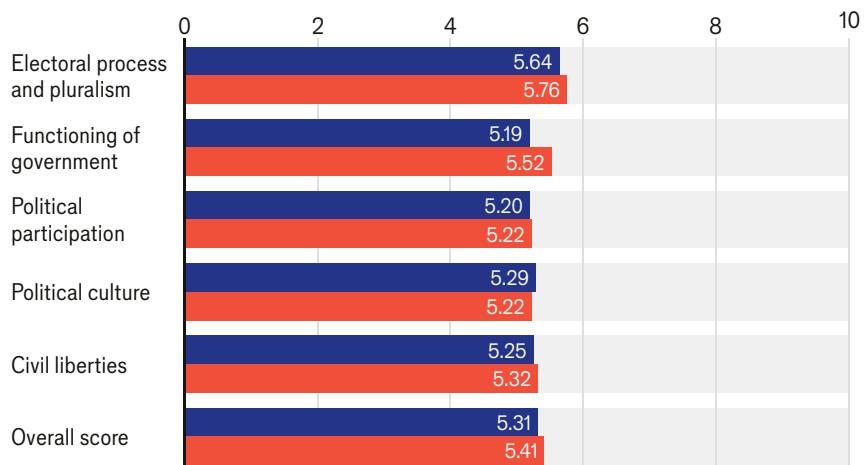


Source: EIU.

Asia & Australasia: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

- 2024
- 2023



Source: EIU.

Dynastic politics and democratic backsliding in Southeast Asia

There were some troubling developments in Southeast Asia in 2024. One cause for concern is a trend towards dynastic politics across the sub-region. The emergence of descendants of former leaders as political players raises concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of a few prominent political-economic families and the creation of patronage networks that undermine the functioning of democratic institutions.

This trend is particularly evident in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, and could undermine the electoral process and political pluralism if it becomes entrenched. In Thailand, the enduring influence of former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra's family illustrates the resilience of political dynasties. Almost two decades after his ousting, his daughter, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, became the country's youngest prime minister in August 2024. This example shows how political families leverage historical political capital to play a contemporary political role.

It is a similar story in the Philippines, where prominent families continue to dominate the political landscape. The son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos and the daughter of former president Rodrigo Duterte have both secured positions of power. This has the effect of reinforcing established power structures and

limiting opportunities of entry for new political leaders from different backgrounds.

Such concentrations of political power among a few family dynasties do not only lead to the accumulation of immense personal wealth. These dynasties exert enormous influence over public institutions and limit broader democratic participation. They also tend to be change-averse and stymie efforts to reform the system. The quality of governance suffers as dynastic politicians are more likely to engage in rent-seeking behaviour, working with special interest groups and allocating public resources for personal gain rather than the public good.

Elsewhere in the sub-region in 2024, democratic backsliding undermined representative democracy, weakened institutional accountability and strained social cohesion. In Indonesia, a presidential election brought to power Prabowo Subianto, a former military general with a controversial past, who had the tacit support of former president Joko Widodo. Mr Prabowo's alliance with his predecessor has raised fears about a centralisation of power and a lack of checks and balances. The appointment of Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as vice-president—a move enabled by a controversial ruling from the Constitutional Court—seemed to confirm suspicions that the past and present presidents were in cahoots to their mutual benefit. A change in the Constitutional Court law in Indonesia has also undermined the independence of the judiciary.

Thailand experienced similar democratic backsliding in 2024,

with the judiciary playing a role in influencing electoral outcomes. The Constitutional Court banned the Move Forward Party, a progressive party that had won the most seats in the 2023 general election but had been unable to form a government. The court's decision confirmed that the conservative establishment is still able under the current constitution to thwart democratic aspirations by managing the electoral process and its outcomes. These developments raise questions about the future of representative governance and political stability in the region.

South Asia had a tumultuous year in 2024

A series of dramatic events in South Asia in 2024 casts significant doubt over the future democratic trajectory of the sub-region. Countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have faced significant challenges to their democratic processes, including electoral manipulation, divisive politics and political unrest. However, there are also signs of increased civic engagement and grassroots movements that point to the potential for more democratisation.

Elections in South Asia in 2024 were marred by fraud and violence. In Bangladesh, which held a general election in January, there were widespread allegations that the ruling party suppressed dissent and curtailed media freedoms. The government was accused of intimidating opposition candidates

and manipulating the election result. Similarly, in Pakistan's general election in February, there were allegations of political repression and interference by the authorities. Elections in India were generally judged to be free and fair, but the ruling party's dominant influence over news media allowed it to shape the political narrative.

In Sri Lanka, there was a major political shift in 2024, with the unexpected victory of the left-leaning National People's Power (NPP) in both the presidential and parliamentary elections. The outcome was a rebuke to the long-ruling political establishment, reflecting strong public demand for change and accountability. Similarly, India's election resulted in an important political change: the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost its single-party parliamentary majority for the first time since 2014. Voters prioritised economic concerns such as unemployment and living costs over the BJP's divisive religious rhetoric. Despite the rigging of the election in Bangladesh, grassroots movements emerged as agents for change. Youth-led initiatives helped to foster a sense of agency among younger generations who are increasingly disillusioned with the established political parties.

Despite these positive developments, divisions based on religious and caste identities are used by ruling elites to shape national political narratives and sway voters. In Bangladesh, the protests that ousted long-serving prime minister Sheikh Hasina revealed the intersection of political unrest and sectarian violence. The protests were not merely

directed against Sheikh Hasina's autocratic governance, but also revealed a strong undercurrent of anti-Hindu sentiment. Following the resignation of the prime minister in August 2024, violent communal attacks targeted individuals from minorities and their properties. In India, the BJP has stoked religious sectarianism and fostered an environment in which anti-Muslim sentiment is not only tolerated but often encouraged by political elites. The increasing resort to identity politics by political actors looking to build support is having a negative impact on social cohesion.

The prospects for democracy in South Asia remain uncertain. The democratic reversal in Bangladesh in 2024 may prove temporary if forthcoming elections are conducted freely and fairly. In Sri Lanka, the political landscape remains unpredictable and democratic institutions are fragile. Further democratisation will depend largely on the ability of civil societies to sustain pressure for reforms and the willingness of political institutions to embrace greater pluralism and inclusivity.

South Korea's democracy wobbles

South Korea's overall index score declined in 2024 to 7.75, from 8.09 in 2023, resulting in its reclassification as a "flawed democracy". On December 3rd 2024, South Korea's conservative president, Yoon Suk-Yeol,

declared martial law, accusing the opposition-led parliament of "anti-state acts". Martial law was lifted a few hours later, after parliament voted to revoke it with the support of legislators from across the political spectrum. Yoon Suk-Yeol was subsequently stripped of presidential power as the National Assembly (the unicameral parliament) passed an impeachment motion with a constitutionally required two-thirds majority amid public protests and strikes demanding the president's removal.

Although South Korea's parliament and the general public demonstrated the widespread respect for democratic institutions in the country, the episode served as a reminder of the comparatively short track record (37 years) and relative frailty of democracy in South Korea. It refocused attention on the historical incidence of declarations of martial law (17 since 1948).

The president's attempt to impose martial law exposed some of the institutional and behavioural weaknesses of South Korea's political system. For example, the president's authority to declare martial law (in a state of emergency) is enshrined in the constitution. The deep-rooted acrimony between political parties and an unwillingness to compromise makes the political system more unstable than it might first appear. Finally, the extreme political polarisation that characterises the country's polity increases the risk of political violence and social unrest.

Sub-Saharan Africa

The Democracy Index score for Sub-Saharan Africa declined for a second consecutive year in 2024. The regional average score dropped from 4.04 in 2023 to a record low of 4.00. The deterioration over the past decade, from a regional high of 4.38 in 2015, is the result of several factors. A significant contributor to this decline is the rise of military rule within the region's "coup belt", stretching from Guinea in the west to Sudan in the east. Additionally, authoritarian rulers have maintained their grip on power through elections that lack fairness and transparency. Furthermore, inadequate state capacity has led to the emergence of armed militias that operate independently or in the service of specific political agendas. These governance failures have fostered growing disillusionment with governments across the continent, leading to increased political instability and, at times, violent social unrest.

A lack of state capacity and government dysfunction are derailing democracy

The decline in the region's overall index score was driven by a broad-based decline across four of the five index categories. The score for *functioning of government*

registered by far the biggest decline of 0.11 points. This is a consequence of government inefficiency and a growing lack of trust among citizens in governments' capacity to improve living conditions. This remains the weakest category in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a score of 2.98. On this metric, Mauritius is the best-performing country, scoring 7.86, while the five worst-performing (Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea-Bissau and Mali) score 0.00.

The region also recorded slight declines in the average scores for *electoral process and pluralism* (3.41), *political participation* (4.43) and *civil liberties* (4.02). Notably, the score for *electoral process and pluralism* remains significantly below the global average of 5.41. The only area that showed any improvement was *political culture*, the score for which increased marginally by 0.02 points, owing to positive changes in a few countries, including Senegal.

Of the region's 44 countries covered by the Democracy Index, 20 registered a deterioration in their score, with the sharpest drops recorded in Guinea-Bissau (-0.43), Benin (-0.24), Comoros (-0.20) and Burkina Faso, Eswatini, Mali and Mauritania (-0.18). The scores for seven countries improved—albeit from a low base—with the biggest improvement in Senegal (+0.45).

Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Table 9

Sub-Saharan Africa 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Angola	4.05	107	21	4.50	2.86	5.56	5.00	2.35	Hybrid regime
Benin	4.44	100=	17	1.75	5.36	4.44	6.25	4.41	Hybrid regime
Botswana	7.63	35	2	9.58	6.43	6.11	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Burkina Faso	2.55	137	33	0.00	2.14	3.33	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Burundi	2.13	144	37	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
Cabo Verde	7.58	37=	3	9.17	6.64	6.67	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Cameroon	2.56	136	32	0.33	2.14	3.89	4.38	2.06	Authoritarian
Central African Republic	1.18	164	44	0.00	0.00	1.67	1.88	2.35	Authoritarian
Chad	1.89	158	43	0.00	0.00	3.33	3.75	2.35	Authoritarian
Comoros	2.84	124=	28	0.83	2.21	3.89	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	128=	29	0.00	2.50	4.44	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Côte d'Ivoire	4.22	105	19	4.33	2.86	4.44	5.63	3.82	Hybrid regime
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.92	156=	42	2.08	0.43	2.78	3.13	1.18	Authoritarian
Djibouti	2.70	132	30	0.00	1.64	3.89	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	156=	41	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47	Authoritarian
Eritrea	1.97	153	40	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	0.29	Authoritarian
Eswatini	2.60	134	31	0.00	1.64	2.78	5.63	2.94	Authoritarian
Ethiopia	3.24	116	25	0.42	2.86	6.11	5.63	1.18	Authoritarian
Gabon	2.18	143	36	0.83	1.14	2.22	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Gambia	4.47	99	16	4.42	4.29	3.89	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Ghana	6.24	65	6	8.33	4.64	6.11	6.25	5.88	Flawed democracy
Guinea	2.04	149	38	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	2.06	Authoritarian
Guinea-Bissau	2.03	150=	39	2.17	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.06	Authoritarian
Kenya	5.05	89	14	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime

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Table 9

Sub-Saharan Africa 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Lesotho	6.06	70	7	9.17	3.79	5.56	5.63	6.18	Flawed democracy
Liberia	5.57	80	11	7.83	2.71	6.11	5.63	5.59	Hybrid regime
Madagascar	5.33	83	12	6.58	3.93	6.11	5.63	4.41	Hybrid regime
Malawi	5.85	76	9	7.00	4.29	5.56	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Mali	2.40	139	34	0.00	0.00	5.00	4.38	2.65	Authoritarian
Mauritania	3.96	108	22	3.50	3.21	5.56	3.13	4.41	Authoritarian
Mauritius	8.23	20	1	9.58	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Mozambique	3.38	113	23	1.67	1.43	5.56	5.00	3.24	Authoritarian
Namibia	6.48	58	5	7.42	5.36	6.67	5.00	7.94	Flawed democracy
Niger	2.26	141	35	0.33	1.14	1.67	3.75	4.41	Authoritarian
Nigeria	4.16	106	20	5.17	3.57	3.89	3.75	4.41	Hybrid regime
Rwanda	3.34	114	24	1.42	4.29	3.33	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Senegal	5.93	74	8	7.42	5.36	4.44	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Sierra Leone	4.32	102	18	4.83	2.86	3.89	5.00	5.00	Hybrid regime
South Africa	7.16	43	4	9.17	6.79	7.78	5.00	7.06	Flawed democracy
Tanzania	5.20	86	13	4.42	5.00	5.00	6.88	4.71	Hybrid regime
Togo	2.99	121	26	0.92	2.14	3.33	5.63	2.94	Authoritarian
Uganda	4.49	98	15	3.42	3.57	3.89	6.88	4.71	Hybrid regime
Zambia	5.73	77	10	7.92	3.29	5.00	6.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Zimbabwe	2.98	122	27	0.00	2.50	4.44	5.00	2.94	Authoritarian
Regional score	4.00			3.41	2.98	4.43	5.16	4.02	

Source: EIU.

The continent has only one full democracy (Mauritius) and six “flawed democracies”, unchanged from the 2023 index. The number of countries classified as “hybrid regimes” has decreased to 14, from

15 in 2023, owing to a downgrade of Mauritania to an “authoritarian regime”. This was driven by a decline in the voter turnout in the June 2024 presidential election and in the degree of political participation

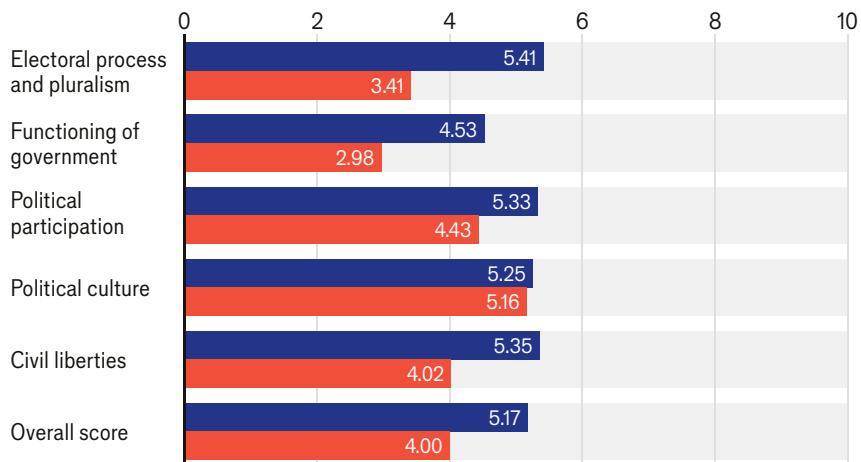
Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ Global average
■ Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: EIU.

Sub-Saharan Africa: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ 2024
■ 2023



Source: EIU.

generally. As a result, the number of “authoritarian regimes” increased to 23, making this the most prevalent form of government in Africa.

political turmoil and problematic electoral processes. Some ruling parties maintained their hold on power, including through fraudulent and violent means, while in other instances, incumbents were ousted by opposition forces. The peaceful transfer of power in Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius and Senegal, and the loss of the ruling party’s majority in South Africa, demonstrated the strength of democratic institutions and citizens’ aspirations for political change. Economic hardship and corruption fuelled widespread dissatisfaction and anti-incumbent sentiment in many elections. In Senegal, citizens demanded accountability and took to the streets to express their frustrations,

A big election year delivered mixed results

More than a dozen elections took place across the continent in 2024, highlighting the diversity of electoral systems and political pluralism. Although some countries exhibited impressive resilience and managed to facilitate peaceful transitions of power, others grappled with

and ultimately achieved a change in government through the electoral process. In contrast, Mozambique's long-standing Frelimo regime proved resistant to change, resorting to a violent crackdown on protesters. In the ensuing unrest, hundreds of civilians died at the hands of the security forces.

Entrenchment of military rule continues

In 2024, there were no military coups, which provided a welcome relief after the region had suffered seven coups since 2020. However, military authority became further entrenched in various countries across west and central Africa. In the Sahel region, elections in Burkina Faso and Mali, originally scheduled for July as part of their respective political transitions, were indefinitely postponed, prolonging military rule in these nations. As a result, Burkina Faso's overall score fell from 2.73 to 2.55. The military junta in Niger has yet to announce any plans for a transition since taking control in July 2023, aligning itself with Mali and Burkina Faso. In July 2024, these three junta-led nations established an alliance known as the Confederation of Sahel States, signalling their intention to work together to maintain their grip on power. In Chad, Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno, who assumed the country's leadership in an internal coup after his father's death in April 2021, was declared the victor in the May 2024 presidential election. However, the election was marred by the military's control of the political landscape, rendering it neither free nor fair, despite a relatively

high voter turnout of around 76%. Leading opposition candidates, from the Parti socialiste sans frontières, were arrested in the run-up to the election and two members of the party were killed during a police operation at their offices.

Rigged elections keep authoritarian leaders in power

Numerous countries in Sub-Saharan Africa call themselves democracies, but are classified as "hybrid regimes" or "authoritarian regimes" in our index. They tend to have tightly controlled electoral systems. For instance, they may maintain multiparty systems that allow opposition parties to participate in elections. Nonetheless, these regimes impose severe restrictions on the activities of opposition groups, tightly control the electoral process, and may resort to outright election manipulation when they deem it necessary. They exert influence over critical institutions, including the judiciary and the media, and dispense patronage to secure loyalty and support. In countries such as Chad, Comoros and Mozambique, ruling parties have resorted to tactics such as voter intimidation, suppression of dissent and blatant vote-rigging, which have often led to violent unrest at election time.

Mozambique's Frelimo party has maintained its grip on power since the nation gained independence from Portugal in 1975. In presidential and legislative elections held in October, the party's new leader,

Daniel Chapo, achieved a decisive victory amid significant competition. Meanwhile, the presidential election in Comoros in January had a record-low voter turnout of 16.3%, a sharp drop from 53.8% in 2019. This record abstention points to growing disillusionment among the public about the prospects for achieving political change at the ballot box. The opposition has raised concerns over the re-election of the incumbent president, Colonel Azali Assoumani, who heads the ruling party, Convention pour le renouveau des Comores, alleging widespread electoral fraud. Consequently, Comoros's *political participation* score has fallen to 3.89, from 4.44 in 2023.

In Guinea-Bissau, the president, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, has postponed the parliamentary election originally slated for November, without providing a new date. He cited insufficient financial resources and technical challenges faced by the electoral commission as reasons for the delay. This announcement followed Mr Embaló's controversial dissolution of an opposition-led parliament in December 2023, a move widely interpreted as an effort to silence opposition voices within the legislature. Additionally, he has pushed the presidential election back from December 2024 to at least the first half of 2025, extending his term beyond the official limits. As a result, the country's overall index score declined to 2.03 in 2024, from 2.45 in 2023.

Across the region, an increasing number of governments have resorted to internet shutdowns

and restrictions on political demonstrations as a means to suppress dissent. This trend has driven a decline in the *civil liberties* category, the regional score for which fell to 4.02 in 2024, from 4.06 previously. In Mozambique, after the general election on October 9th, the authorities intermittently cut off internet access across all mobile networks to curb the flow of information related to anti-government protests. Other countries that experienced internet shutdowns in 2024 included Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. Meanwhile, Angola enacted a new law in August 2024 that criminalises violent protests and the destruction of public property. Individuals participating in protests that involve any form of vandalism could face up to 25 years in prison if convicted. This legislation also prohibits the filming or photographing of public services, including documenting actions against protesters, further eroding freedom of expression and assembly.

Elsewhere, the opposition took power through the ballot box

Despite the challenges, the election year 2024 ushered in notable political transformations across several countries in southern and west Africa, reflected by improved index scores. In a significant event in South African politics, the long-ruling African National Congress (ANC) retained power but lost its majority for the first time since the end of apartheid in 1994, demonstrating the reasonably

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free and fair nature of the May election as well as anti-incumbency sentiment. The ANC's historic loss of its legislative majority prompted the party to form national-level power-sharing agreements for the first time. In an effort to enhance political stability, the ANC established the Government of National Unity (GNU), which includes centrist parties such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). As a result, South Africa's overall score improved to 7.16, from 7.05 in 2023. Similarly, Botswana experienced a momentous political change at the October election, when the opposition party Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC), led by Duma Boko, ended nearly six decades of rule by the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). The peaceful transfer of power affirmed Botswana's commitment to democratic principles, as it began a new phase in its political history.

Several west African countries also experienced significant political shifts as opposition parties ousted incumbents in elections. In Ghana, the opposition candidate, John Mahama, representing the National Democratic Congress (NDC), achieved a sweeping victory in the December presidential and legislative elections, owing to widespread public frustration with the economic situation, including a cost-of-living crisis and issues related to debt default.

In Senegal, anti-establishment leader Bassirou Diomaye Faye, of the opposition Patriotes africains pour le travail, l'éthique et la fraternité (Pastef) party, became Africa's youngest president at the age of 44 in the March presidential

election. His mandate was further solidified when Pastef secured an absolute majority, with 130 out of 165 seats in the November parliamentary election. This was achieved against a backdrop of widespread public unrest over attempts by the former president, Macky Sall, to extend his tenure by delaying the presidential poll (initially scheduled for February) and using intimidation tactics to exclude opposition candidates. Both Mr Faye and Ousmane Sonko, a popular leader within Pastef, who was barred from running, were incarcerated just months before their electoral success.

In Mauritius, the opposition Alliance for Change, led by Navin Ramgoolam, won a landslide victory in the November elections. The smooth and peaceful transfer of power illustrated the strength of the democratic system in the country, recognised as the region's only "full democracy" and ranked 20th in the index. This political shift was driven by public dissatisfaction with persistent corruption and economic challenges under the previous administration of Pravind Jugnauth.

The 2024 Democracy Index presents a complex picture of Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the overall trend is one of a decline in democracy across the region, the electoral successes in Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal and South Africa offer reasons for optimism. Amid repression, particularly in areas under military rule, civil society movements and political opposition continue to organise, reflecting strong popular aspirations for political change and greater democracy.

The Middle East and North Africa

It was another miserable year for democracy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2024. The regional score fell for the sixth consecutive year, to 3.12 points, from 3.23 in 2023. The MENA region remains at the bottom of our regional rankings, with a score that is substantially below those of the other six, including the second-lowest-ranking region, Sub-Saharan Africa, which has an average score of 4.00. The MENA region is now the only one without a “full democracy”, as two countries in eastern Europe (the Czech Republic and Estonia) were upgraded from “flawed democracies” in 2024. Indeed the MENA region is even more of an outlier in having only one country that is classified as a democracy: Israel, a “flawed democracy”, is the only country in the MENA region to rank in the top half of the Democracy Index. Israel has a score of 7.80 and is ranked 31st out of 167.

Of the 20 countries in the region covered by the index, 12 registered a decline in their overall score in 2024 compared with 2023. Tunisia (-0.80), Kuwait (-0.72) and Qatar (-0.48) recorded the biggest declines in 2024. Three countries improved their scores: the UAE (for a second consecutive year), Jordan and Libya. The last of these made a substantial gain of 0.53 points, bringing its index score to a still paltry 2.31, but nevertheless reflecting a tangible improvement in the country’s security outlook as militia infighting diminished and the rival political authorities took tentative steps towards reconciliation.

The erosion of the few examples of partially representative democracy

Representative democracy is scarce in MENA, practised in full only in Israel. Most regimes provide only limited elements of political representation in an effort to appease popular demands for democratisation while maintaining heavily centralised control. Examples of superficial democratic facades include Iraq and Lebanon’s rigid confessional systems, as well as Jordan and Morocco’s constitutional monarchies, which are heavily skewed in favour of the palace, and rubber-stamp parliaments in republican and royal autocracies elsewhere, including in Egypt, Oman and Saudi Arabia. Unsurprisingly, the region’s weakest category score in the index is for *electoral process and pluralism*.

Nevertheless, developments in 2024 led to a further deterioration in this category, with the region’s average score declining from 2.16 in 2023 to 1.85 in 2024. Even the highly undemocratic MENA region is not immune to the erosion of representative democracy that is occurring globally. The biggest fall in this category was recorded by Tunisia, whose score for *electoral process and pluralism* fell by 2.75 points to 3.42. This was the result of intensified democratic backsliding under the presidency of Kais Said. Following in the footsteps of fellow North African strongmen

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Table 10
Middle East 2024

	Overall score	Global Rank	Regional rank	I Electoral process and pluralism	II Functioning of government	III Political participation	IV Political culture	V Civil liberties	Regime type
Algeria	3.55	110	5	3.08	2.50	3.33	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Bahrain	2.45	138	14	0.42	2.36	3.33	4.38	1.76	Authoritarian
Egypt	2.79	128=	12	0.42	2.86	3.89	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
Iran	1.96	154	17	0.00	2.50	3.33	2.50	1.47	Authoritarian
Iraq	2.80	126=	11	4.83	0.00	6.11	1.88	1.18	Authoritarian
Israel	7.80	31	1	9.58	7.50	9.44	6.88	5.59	Flawed democracy
Jordan	3.28	115	7	3.08	2.86	4.44	2.50	3.53	Authoritarian
Kuwait	2.78	130	13	0.92	3.21	2.78	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Lebanon	3.56	109	4	3.08	0.79	6.67	3.13	4.12	Authoritarian
Libya	2.31	140	15	1.25	0.00	3.89	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Morocco	4.97	91	2	5.25	4.29	5.56	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Oman	3.05	120	10	0.08	3.57	2.78	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Palestine	3.44	112	6	1.58	0.00	8.33	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Qatar	3.17	117	8	0.00	3.93	2.78	5.63	3.53	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	2.08	148	16	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Sudan	1.46	162	19	0.00	0.00	1.11	5.63	0.59	Authoritarian
Syria	1.32	163	20	0.00	0.00	2.22	4.38	0.00	Authoritarian
Tunisia	4.71	93	3	3.42	3.93	5.56	5.63	5.00	Hybrid regime
United Arab Emirates	3.07	119	9	0.00	4.29	2.78	5.63	2.65	Authoritarian
Yemen	1.95	155	18	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Regional score	3.12			1.85	2.41	4.22	4.41	2.74	

Source: EIU.

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, president of Egypt, and Algeria's Abdelmadjid Tebboune, Mr Said effectively barred any genuine competition for his position ahead of the October 2024 presidential election. The regime

arrested one contender on what are widely considered to be fictitious charges after the contest took place.

Jordan was a notable exception to this trend, taking a modest

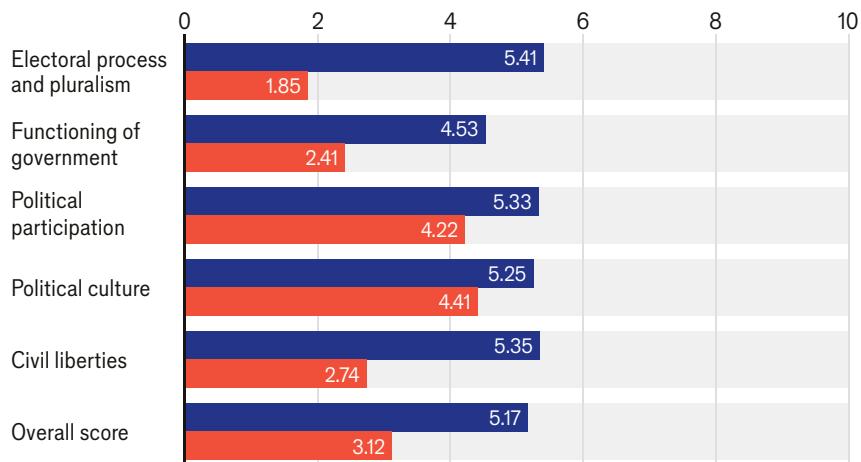
Democracy Index 2024

What's wrong with representative democracy?

Democracy index 2024 by category

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ Global average
■ Middle East and North Africa

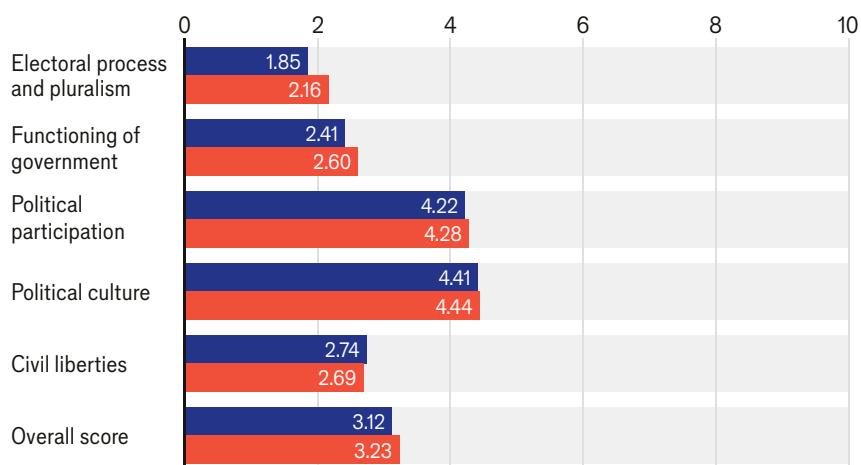


Source: EIU.

Middle East and North Africa: change in category scores 2023-24

Index score out of 10 (10=best)

■ 2024
■ 2023



Source: EIU.

step towards more representative democracy in 2024. Ahead of the September parliamentary election, political parties were granted additional freedoms to form, campaign and compete, introducing greater plurality. Whether these changes result in parties achieving tangible political influence remains to be seen. There is reason to be sceptical, given that King Abdullah II retains firm control over the appointment of government, and the post-election cabinet is dominated by pro-establishment figures and affiliates of the royal family.

Democratic institutions under particular pressure in the Gulf

Contributing heavily to the decline in the region's *electoral process and pluralism* score were developments in two Gulf countries: Kuwait and Qatar. In Qatar, an experiment with popular elections to select 30 of the 45 members of the Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura) was in its infancy, with the first elections

having been held in 2021. However, a constitutional referendum in November 2024 returned a strong majority of 90.6% (with a voter turnout of 84%) in favour of cancelling popular elections and returning the Advisory Council to a wholly appointed body. This decision reflected voter concerns about the upsurge of tribal and political divisions that rose to the surface during the 2021 contest.

By contrast, the cancellation in May 2024 of elections in Kuwait, and the dissolution of the National Assembly for a period of “up to four years”, was a top-down initiative. The emir has centralised political authority and will rule by decree. The move marks a dramatic cessation of the country’s long-standing democratic tradition of relatively free and fair parliamentary elections, which had made Kuwait an outlier in the otherwise heavily autocratic Gulf. The decision to revoke democratic voting rights was met with a high degree of public support. Frustration with perennial parliamentary gridlock had been building for years as populist opposition MPs who dominated the Assembly repeatedly blocked legislation deemed to be critical to the country’s economic development. Opinion polls conducted after the change showed high levels of public support for the suspension of elections and of parliament, on the grounds that centralised political control would catalyse policymaking. As a result, Kuwait’s *political culture* score declined by 0.63 points, to 3.75.

Mixed fortunes in the MENA war zones

Conflict continues to weigh heavily on index scores for a number of MENA countries. Insurgencies, civil wars and inter-state conflicts have long undermined territorial integrity and sovereignty, threatened the security of citizens, disrupted free and fair elections and prevented the growth of civic space. War-torn Sudan remained on a downward trajectory in 2024, following a sharp fall in the 2023 Democracy Index, stemming from the outbreak of its most recent, and deadliest, civil conflict. In 2024 the situation deteriorated further, and the intervention of an array of external actors including Russia, Ukraine, the UAE and Egypt threatens to make the war increasingly intractable and bodes ill for Sudanese sovereignty in the long term. The unravelling of civil society and the indefinite suspension of democratic processes led to Sudan’s index score falling by a further 0.30 points in 2024. Sudan fell four places in the global democracy rankings, to 162nd out of 167.

Elsewhere in the region, there were glimmers of hope that some long-running civil conflicts might be ebbing. Libya’s score improved by 0.53 points, driven by improvements in the *electoral process and pluralism, political participation and civil liberties* categories. The country held the first round of municipal elections in

late 2024; these were notable for an absence of political violence and a rare level of co-ordination between the rival governing authorities. In a less febrile political and security environment, popular faith in political participation has strengthened, according to opinion polls. There is an increased willingness to engage with politics, including through demonstrations and party membership. The real test is likely to come later at the national level: moves to unify divided institutions and hold UN-sponsored elections will reveal whether Libya's rival authorities will surrender control and cede the levers of government to a civilian body.

Syria: a late contender for a democratic awakening?

War-torn Syria has sat near the bottom of the global rankings for many years. Its score declined by 0.11 points in 2024, to 1.32, because of developments that occurred before the rebel takeover and regime change at the end of the year. There was a deterioration in the *political participation* category after the July elections returned only 9% of female parliamentary representatives. Furthermore, the toppling by jihadist-led rebels of longstanding dictator Bashar al-Assad in December meant that there was no longer a national parliament. The fall of the regime came too late to result in an improvement in any of the index scores, given that the country now faces a power vacuum and a

period of heightened uncertainty.

Nevertheless, the fall of the 61-year old Ba'athist regime presents a rare opportunity for a democratic opening in the country. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Islamist group that spearheaded the overthrow of the regime, is trying to shed its Salafi Islamist credentials in an effort to unify the country. It has pledged to reconcile Syria's myriad ethnic, political and sectarian groups via a new constitution and representative elections. Should it succeed, Syria has the potential to become a rare regional success story, as was Tunisia in the wake of the 2011 Arab spring. However, as in the case of Tunisia, there is a risk that Syria's new authorities will prove unable to sustain a path towards democratisation.

After almost 14 years of civil war, it is far from certain that HTS can make good on its promise of democratic inclusivity and equality to all the country's ethnic, religious and political groupings. The early signs are not reassuring: the group has filled interim government positions with old-guard personnel. Meanwhile, latent conflict continues, including an Islamic State insurgency in Syria's eastern deserts and clashes between Kurdish and Turkish-backed factions in the north, threatening to destabilise the state. External powers such as Iran and Russia will also be meddling in an attempt to recoup political influence lost with the fall of the Assad regime. With risks tilting to the downside, Syria's future path remains precarious.

Appendix

Defining and measuring democracy

There is no consensus on how to measure democracy. Definitions of democracy are contested, and there is a lively debate on the subject. The issue is not only of academic interest. For example, although democracy promotion is high on the list of US foreign-policy priorities, there is no consensus within the US government as to what constitutes a democracy. As one observer put it: "The world's only superpower is rhetorically and militarily promoting a political system that remains undefined—and it is staking its credibility and treasure on that pursuit," (Horowitz, 2006, p. 114).

Although the terms "freedom" and "democracy" are often used interchangeably, the two are not synonymous. Democracy can be seen as a set of practices and principles that institutionalise, and thereby, ultimately, protect freedom. Even if a consensus on precise definitions has proved elusive, most observers today would agree that, at a minimum, the fundamental features of a democracy include government based on majority rule and the consent of the governed; the existence of free and fair elections; the protection of minority rights; and respect for basic human rights. Democracy presupposes equality before the law, due process and political pluralism. A question arises as to whether reference to these

basic features is sufficient for a satisfactory concept of democracy. As discussed below, there is a question as to how far the definition may need to be widened.

Some insist that democracy is, necessarily, a dichotomous concept: a state is either democratic or not. But most measures now appear to adhere to a continuous concept, with the possibility of varying degrees of democracy. At present, the best-known measure is produced by the US-based Freedom House organisation. The average of its indexes, on a 1 to 7 scale, of political freedom (based on 10 indicators) and of civil liberties (based on 15 indicators) is often taken to be a measure of democracy.

The Freedom House measure is available for all countries, and stretches back to the early 1970s. It has been used heavily in empirical investigations of the relationship between democracy and various economic and social variables. The so-called Polity Project provides, for a smaller number of countries, measures of democracy and regime types, based on rather minimalist definitions, stretching back to the 19th century. These have also been used in empirical work.

Freedom House also measures a narrower concept, that of "electoral

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democracy". Democracies in this minimal sense share at least one common, essential characteristic. Positions of political power are filled through regular, free and fair elections between competing parties, and it is possible for an incumbent government to be turned out of office through elections. Freedom House's criteria for an electoral democracy include:

1. A competitive, multi-party political system.
2. Universal adult suffrage.
3. Regularly contested elections conducted on the basis of secret ballots, reasonable ballot security and the absence of massive voter fraud.
4. Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning.

The Freedom House definition of political freedom is more demanding (although not much) than its criteria for electoral democracy—that is, it classifies more countries as electoral democracies than as “free” (some “partly free” countries are also categorised as “electoral democracies”). At the end of 2015, 125 out of 193 states were classified as “electoral democracies”; of these, on a more stringent criterion, 89 states were classified as “free”. The Freedom House political-freedom

measure covers the electoral process and political pluralism and, to a lesser extent, the functioning of government and a few aspects of participation.

A key difference in measures is between “thin”, or minimalist, and “thick”, or wider, concepts of democracy (Coppedge, 2005). The thin concepts correspond closely to an immensely influential academic definition of democracy, that of Dahl's concept of polyarchy (Dahl, 1970). Polyarchy has eight components, or institutional requirements: almost all adult citizens have the right to vote; almost all adult citizens are eligible for public office; political leaders have the right to compete for votes; elections are free and fair; all citizens are free to form and join political parties and other organisations; all citizens are free to express themselves on all political issues; diverse sources of information about politics exist and are protected by law; and government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.

The Freedom House electoral democracy measure is a thin concept. Its measure of democracy based on political rights and civil liberties is “thicker” than the measure of “electoral democracy”. Other definitions of democracy have broadened to include aspects of society and political culture in democratic societies.

The Economist Intelligence Unit measure

The Economist Intelligence Unit's index is based on the view that measures of democracy which reflect the state of political freedoms and civil liberties are not thick enough. They do not encompass sufficiently, or, in some cases, at all, the features that determine how substantive democracy is. Freedom is an essential component of democracy, but not, in itself, sufficient. In existing measures, the elements of political participation and functioning of government are taken into account only in a marginal and formal way.

Our Democracy Index is based on five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. The five categories are interrelated and form a coherent conceptual whole. The condition of holding free and fair competitive elections, and satisfying related aspects of political freedom, is clearly the sine qua non of all definitions.

All modern definitions, except the most minimalist, also consider civil liberties to be a vital component of what is often called "liberal democracy". The principle of the protection of basic human rights is widely accepted. It is embodied in constitutions throughout the world, as well as in the UN Charter and international agreements such as the Helsinki Final Act (the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe). Basic human

rights include freedom of speech, expression and of the press; freedom of religion; freedom of assembly and association; and the right to due judicial process. All democracies are systems in which citizens freely make political decisions by majority rule. But rule by the majority is not necessarily democratic. In a democracy, majority rule must be combined with guarantees of individual human rights and the rights of minorities. Most measures also include aspects of the minimum quality of functioning of government. If democratically-based decisions cannot be or are not implemented, then the concept of democracy is not very meaningful.

Democracy is more than the sum of its institutions. A democratic political culture is also crucial for the legitimacy, smooth functioning and, ultimately, the sustainability of democracy. A culture of passivity and apathy—an obedient and docile citizenry—is not consistent with democracy. The electoral process periodically divides the population into winners and losers. A successful democratic political culture implies that the losing parties and their supporters accept the judgment of the voters and allow for the peaceful transfer of power.

Participation is also a necessary component, as apathy and abstention are enemies of democracy. Even measures that focus predominantly on the processes of representative, liberal democracy include (albeit inadequately or insufficiently) some aspects of participation. In a democracy, government is only one element in a social fabric of many and varied institutions, political

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organisations and associations. Citizens cannot be required to take part in the political process, and they are free to express their dissatisfaction by not participating. However, a healthy democracy requires the active, freely chosen participation of citizens in public life. Democracies flourish when citizens are willing to participate in public debate, elect representatives and join political parties. Without this broad, sustaining participation, democracy begins to wither and become the preserve of small, select groups.

At the same time, even our thicker, more inclusive and wider measure of democracy does not include other aspects—which some authors argue are also crucial components of democracy—such as levels of economic and social wellbeing. Therefore, our Index respects the dominant tradition that holds that a variety of social and economic outcomes can be consistent with political democracy, which is a separate concept.

The category indexes are based on the sum of the indicator scores in the category, converted to a 0 to 10 scale. Adjustments to the category scores are made if countries do not score a 1 in the following critical areas for democracy:

1. Whether national elections are free and fair.
2. The security of voters.
3. The influence of foreign powers on government.
4. The capability of the civil service to implement policies.

If the scores for the first three questions are 0 (or 0.5), one point (0.5 point) is deducted from the index in the relevant category (either the electoral process and pluralism or the functioning of government). If the score for 4 is 0, one point is deducted from the functioning of government category index.

The index values are used to place countries within one of four types of regime:

1. Full democracies: scores greater than 8
2. Flawed democracies: scores greater than 6, and less than 8
3. Hybrid regimes: scores greater than 4, and less than 6
4. Authoritarian regimes: scores less than 4

Full democracies: Countries in which not only basic political freedoms and civil liberties are

Methodology

The Economist Intelligence Unit's index of democracy, on a 0 to 10 scale, is based on the ratings for 60 indicators, grouped into five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Each category has a rating on a 0 to 10 scale, and the overall Index is the simple average of the five category indexes.

respected, but which also tend to be underpinned by a political culture conducive to the flourishing of democracy. The functioning of government is satisfactory. Media are independent and diverse. There is an effective system of checks and balances. The judiciary is independent and judicial decisions are enforced. There are only limited problems in the functioning of democracies.

Flawed democracies: These countries also have free and fair elections and, even if there are problems (such as infringements on media freedom), basic civil liberties are respected. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture and low levels of political participation.

Hybrid regimes: Elections have substantial irregularities that often prevent them from being both free and fair. Government pressure on opposition parties and candidates may be common. Serious weaknesses are more prevalent than in flawed democracies—in political culture, functioning of government and political participation. Corruption tends to be widespread and the rule of law is weak. Civil society is weak. Typically, there is harassment of and pressure on journalists, and the judiciary is not independent.

Authoritarian regimes: In these states, state political pluralism is absent or heavily circumscribed. Many countries in this category are outright dictatorships. Some formal institutions of democracy may exist, but these have little substance.

Elections, if they do occur, are not free and fair. There is disregard for abuses and infringements of civil liberties. Media are typically state-owned or controlled by groups connected to the ruling regime. There is repression of criticism of the government and pervasive censorship. There is no independent judiciary.

The scoring system

We use a combination of a dichotomous and a three-point scoring system for the 60 indicators. A dichotomous 1-0 scoring system (1 for a yes and 0 for a no answer) is not without problems, but it has several distinct advantages over more refined scoring scales (such as the often-used 1-5 or 1-7). For many indicators, the possibility of a 0.5 score is introduced, to capture “grey areas”, where a simple yes (1) or no (0) is problematic, with guidelines as to when that should be used. Consequently, for many indicators there is a three-point scoring system, which represents a compromise between simple dichotomous scoring and the use of finer scales.

The problems of 1-5 or 1-7 scoring scales are numerous. For most indicators under such systems, it is extremely difficult to define meaningful and comparable criteria or guidelines for each score. This can lead to arbitrary, spurious and non-comparable scorings. For example, a score of 2 for one country may be scored a 3 in another, and so on. Alternatively, one expert might score an indicator for a particular country in a different way to another

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expert. This contravenes a basic principle of measurement, that of so-called reliability—the degree to which a measurement procedure produces the same measurements every time, regardless of who is performing it. Two- and three-point systems do not guarantee reliability, but make it more likely.

Second, comparability between indicator scores and aggregation into a multi-dimensional index

appears more valid with a two- or three-point scale for each indicator (the dimensions being aggregated are similar across indicators). By contrast, with a 1-5 system, the scores are more likely to mean different things across the indicators (for example, a 2 for one indicator may be more comparable to a 3 or 4 for another indicator). The problems of a 1-5 or 1-7 system are magnified when attempting to extend the index to many regions and countries.

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