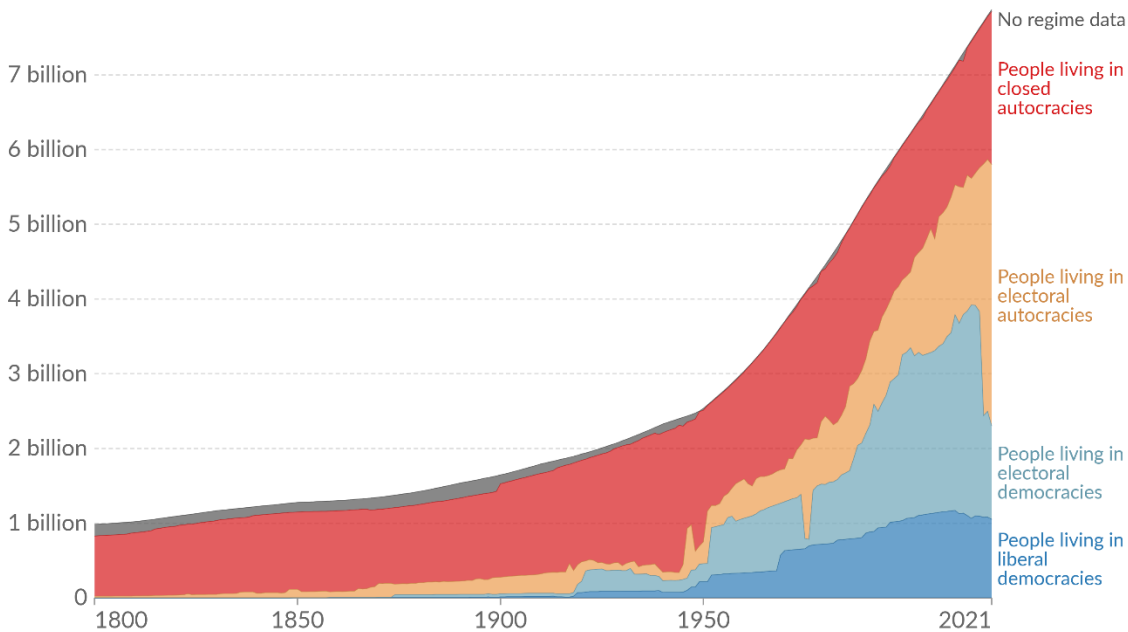


People living in democracies, World

Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Lüthmann et al. (2018) and the assessment by V-Dem's experts.



Source: OWID based on Lüthmann et al. (2018) and V-Dem (v12), Gapminder (v6), HYDE (v3.2), and UN (2019).
OurWorldInData.org/democracy • CC BY

This visualization aims to make the point that almost everyone lacked democratic political rights in the 19th century, but many have gained them since. It classifies each country according to the Regimes of the World (RoW) classification created by political scientists Anna Lüthmann, Marcus Tannenberg, and Staffan Lindberg. It classifies each country according to four types of democracies: closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral democracies, and liberal democracies. The definition of each type of democracy is as follows:

1. In closed autocracies, citizens do not have the right to choose either the government's chief executive or the legislature through multi-party elections.
2. In electoral autocracies, citizens have the right to choose the chief executive and the legislature through multi-party elections. Still, they lack some freedoms, such as the freedoms of association or expression, that make the elections meaningful, free, and fair.
3. In electoral democracies, citizens have the right to participate in meaningful, free, fair, and multi-party elections.
4. In liberal democracies, citizens have further individual and minority rights, are equal before the law, and the executive's actions are constrained by the legislative and the courts.

The conditions used to classify each country into those four types of democracies are as follows.

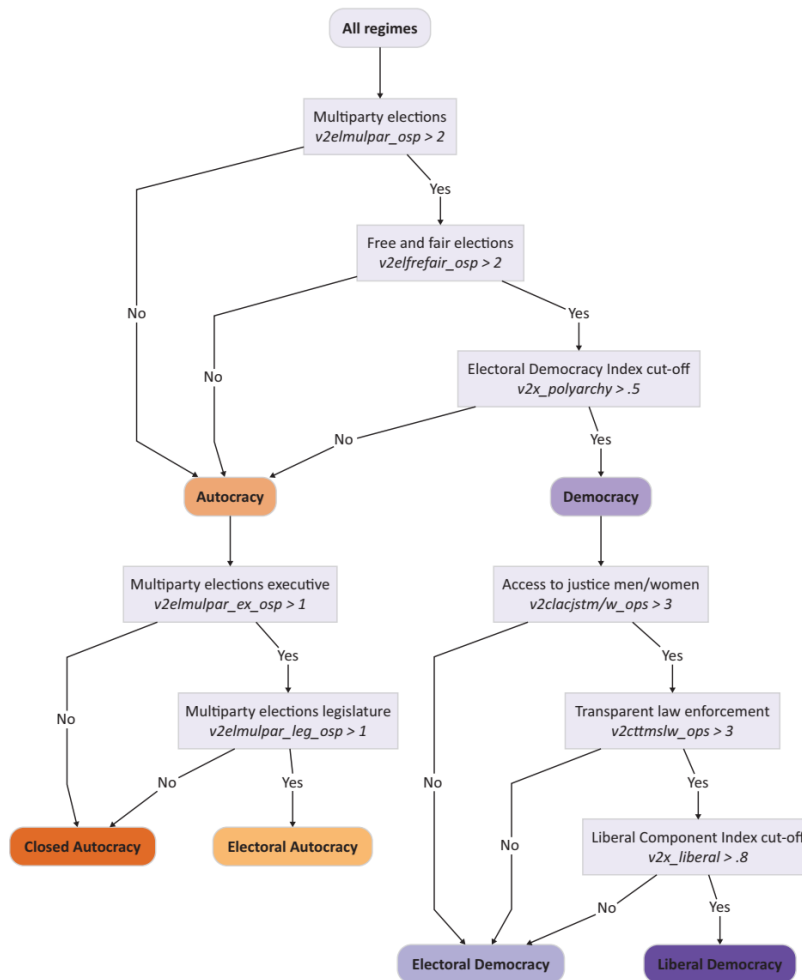
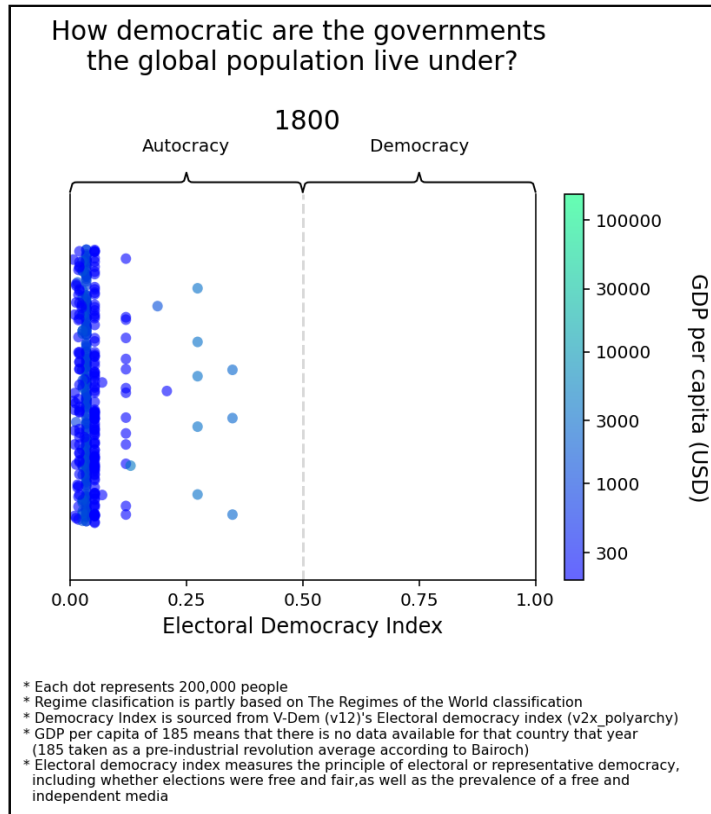


Figure 1. Coding schema for the RoW typologies (for descriptions of variables see Coppedge et al., 2017a).

However, there are several problems that could be caused by visualizing this concept the way OWiD does it. As they decided to box each country into these discrete categories, some subtleties regarding how the reclassification occurs are lost. For example, in situations where there are sharp, sudden changes in the graph, we have no way of knowing whether it is caused by genuine sudden changes like independence or coups or whether it is caused by a gradual change which eventually resulted in the reclassification (an example of this is the Modi government in India in the 2010s).

As such, I decided to revisualize my idea as follows.



By visualizing it continuously, instead of using discrete categories, I was able to correct the issues I had with the original visualization whilst maintaining the borders in which RoW separates autocracies and democracies. I have also decided to add another dimension, GDP per capita, to pose the question of whether democracies are available to all countries or whether it is only available to the rich ones whilst leaving the poor ones with none.

The main conclusion that the author made still holds. Many people have gained democratic political rights since the 19th century. The data shows a general trend towards greater democracy and economic prosperity. However, it can also be observed that democracy has not been equally distributed. The first group of people who have obtained democratic political rights are those who live in a country with a higher GDP per capita. Even now, most of the people who rank the highest in terms of democracy live in a country with a higher GDP per capita. As such, we must not remain complacent and think of democracy as something inevitable. We must also not forget that many people still have few democratic rights. Although we have made substantial progress in a short amount of time, the fight for universal democracy is still far from over.