

Democracy Index 2023

Age of conflict



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Introduction

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". A full methodology and explanations can be found in the Appendix.

This edition of the Democracy Index examines the state of global democracy in 2023. The global results are discussed in this introduction, and the results by region are analysed in greater detail in the section entitled "Democracy around the regions in 2023" (see page 35). The good news is that the number of countries classified as democracies increased by two, to 74, in 2023. However, measured by other metrics, the year was not an auspicious one for democracy. The global average index score fell to 5.23, down from 5.29 in 2022. This is in keeping with a general trend of regression and stagnation in recent years, and it marks a new low since the index began in 2006. Most of the regression occurred among the non-democracies classified as "hybrid regimes" and "authoritarian regimes". Between 2022 and 2023 the average score for "authoritarian regimes" fell by 0.12 points and that for "hybrid regimes"

by 0.07 points. The year-on-year decline in the average score of the "full democracies" and "flawed democracies" was modest by comparison, falling by 0.01 and 0.03 points respectively. This suggests that non-democratic regimes are becoming more entrenched, and "hybrid regimes" are struggling to democratise.

According to our measure of democracy, almost half of the world's population live in a democracy of some sort (45.4%). Only 7.8% reside in a "full democracy", down from 8.9% in 2015; this percentage fell after the US was demoted from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy" in 2016. More than one-third of the world's population live under authoritarian rule (39.4%), a share that has been creeping up in recent years.

Charting democracy's ups and downs, 2006 to 2023

(Global average Democracy Index score; 0-10 scale)



Table 1
Democracy Index 2023, by regime type

	No. of countries	% of countries	% of world population
Full democracies	24	14.4	7.8
Flawed democracies	50	29.9	37.6
Hybrid regimes	34	20.4	15.2
Authoritarian regimes	59	35.3	39.4

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

Source: EIU.

According to the 2023 Democracy Index, 74 of the 167 countries and territories covered by the model are democracies of some type. The number of "full democracies" (those scoring more than 8.00 out of 10) remained at 24 in 2023, the same as the previous year. The number of "flawed democracies" increased from 48 in 2022 to 50 in 2023. Of the remaining 95 countries in our index, 34 are classified as "hybrid regimes", combining elements of formal democracy and authoritarianism, and 59 are classified as "authoritarian regimes". For a full explanation of the index methodology and categories, see page 63.

The title of this year's Democracy Index report is *Age of Conflict*. The world's democracies seem powerless to prevent wars from breaking out around the globe and less adept at managing conflict at home. In 2023 wars in Africa, Europe and the Middle East caused immense suffering and undermined prospects for positive political change. As US hegemony is increasingly contested, China vies for global influence, and emerging powers such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey assert their interests, the international order is becoming more unstable. Meanwhile, even the world's most developed democracies are struggling to manage political and social conflict at home, suggesting that the democratic model developed during the eight decades after the second world war is no longer working. We explore these developments in an essay in the second section of the report, and examine the relationship between democracy and conflict at home and abroad.

Democracy reversals: across regions and index categories

Three years after the covid-19 pandemic, which led to a rollback of freedoms around the globe, the results for 2023 point to a continuing democratic malaise and lack of forward momentum. Only a minority of countries improved their index score in 2023 (32) and the margin of improvement for most was small and often from a low base. Meanwhile, 68 countries registered a decline in their score, some of which were substantial. The scores for 67 countries stayed the same, painting a global picture of stagnation and regression.

The decline in the overall index score was driven by reversals in every region of the world with the exception of western Europe, whose average index score improved by the smallest margin possible (0.01 points). Every other region registered a decline in its average score, with the biggest regressions occurring in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa. The main results are presented briefly below, and discussed in greater detail in section three of the report (see page 35).

Only western Europe improved its average score in 2023, to 8.37, following an emphatic improvement in 2022. It is the only region whose score has recovered to pre-pandemic levels. However,

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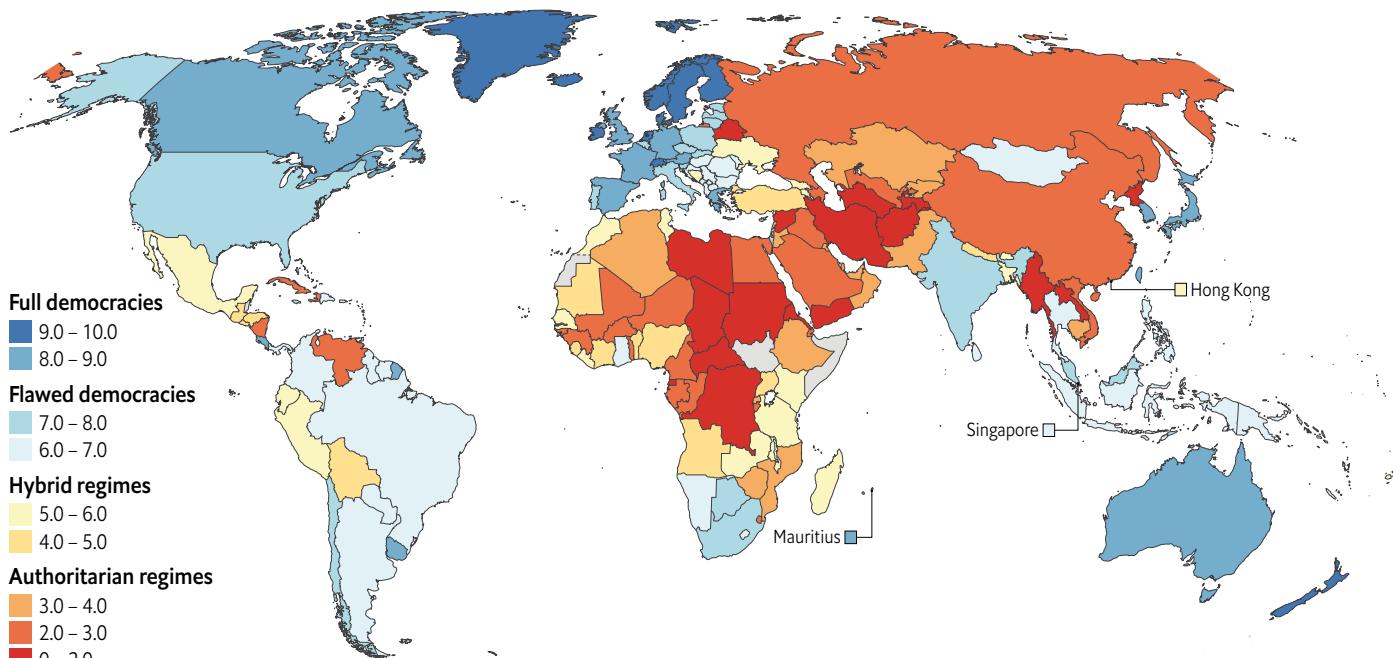
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the region continues to underperform compared with its peak score of 8.61 in 2008. And despite having the highest average score of any region in the world, many citizens in western Europe continue to express dissatisfaction with the political status quo, as evidenced by rising support for populist parties. This suggests that having formal democratic institutions, rule of law and high standards of governance is not sufficient to sustain public support. In addition, democratic institutions and political parties have become unresponsive and unrepresentative even in the best-performing democracies.

This latter diagnosis also applies to the democracies of North America—Canada and the US—where public disaffection with the political status quo is obvious. The deterioration in the average index score for the region, from 8.37 in 2022 to 8.27 in 2023, was driven by developments in Canada, whose score fell by 0.19 points. Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, is unpopular and the country increasingly appears to be suffering from some of the same democratic deficits as its southern neighbour. Canada is nevertheless a “full democracy” with a score of 8.69. The US is classified as a “flawed democracy”; its score of 7.85 remained unchanged in 2023.

Democracy in most parts of the world went into reverse in 2023. The biggest reversals when measured by the decline in the regional average score occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa. It was the eighth successive year of democratic decline for Latin America and the Caribbean, whose average index score fell from 5.79 in 2022 to 5.68 in 2023. Two-thirds of the region's 24 countries (16) registered a decline in their scores, and the scores for five others stagnated, leaving only three countries to record an improvement. The biggest regression occurred in the Central America sub-region, driven by declines in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras.

Democracy Index 2023, global map by regime type



Source: EIU.

The index score for the lowest-ranking region, the Middle East and North Africa, sank to 3.23 in 2023, down from 3.34 in 2022, when the region also recorded a sizeable if smaller decline. A total of eight countries recorded a deterioration in their scores in 2023, with war-torn Sudan suffering the biggest reversal (-0.71), and 11 countries retaining the same score as in 2022. Only one country, the UAE, improved its score. The region's descent into wider war and conflict in 2023, following the atrocities perpetrated against Israelis by Hamas Islamist terrorists on October 7th and Israel's devastating response, drove down the region's score to an all-time low in the Democracy Index.

Sub-Saharan Africa also suffered a significant democratic reversal in 2023, with its regional average score falling from 4.14 in 2022 to 4.04 in 2023. More than 40% of the 44 countries in the region covered by the Democracy Index experienced a decline in their scores (18), while 17 stagnated and nine improved. The greatest and most sustained deterioration in the region's score was driven by developments in West and Central Africa, and in particular by the wave of military coups that have occurred across the Sahel. Surveys suggest that public support for or acquiescence to military takeovers reflects dissatisfaction with political systems and poverty across the continent, trends that we examine in detail in the Democracy Around the Regions section.

Asia and Australasia's score fell by a small margin of 0.05 in 2023, to 5.41, but more than half of the 28 countries in the region recorded a decline in their scores (15), and only eight countries improved their scores. Pakistan suffered the biggest regression in the region—the country's score fell by 0.88, to 3.25, triggering its downgrade from a "hybrid regime" to an "authoritarian regime" and a decline of 11 places in the global ranking.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia suffered the mildest regression of any region, with its average index score declining by 0.02 points, to 5.37. The region's score is now not far below that of Asia and Australasia (5.41). Not many countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia improved their scores in 2023 (five did), but 16 managed to avoid a deterioration in their positions, while seven did not. There is great variation in scores across the various sub-regions. Authoritarian regimes in Central Asia are among the worst-performing countries in the world. By contrast, the EU member states of the Baltics, Central Europe and the Balkans are mostly clustered in the top half of the "flawed democracy" classification. War and conflict in the region continued to drag down the overall performance, with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Ukraine registering a deterioration in their scores.

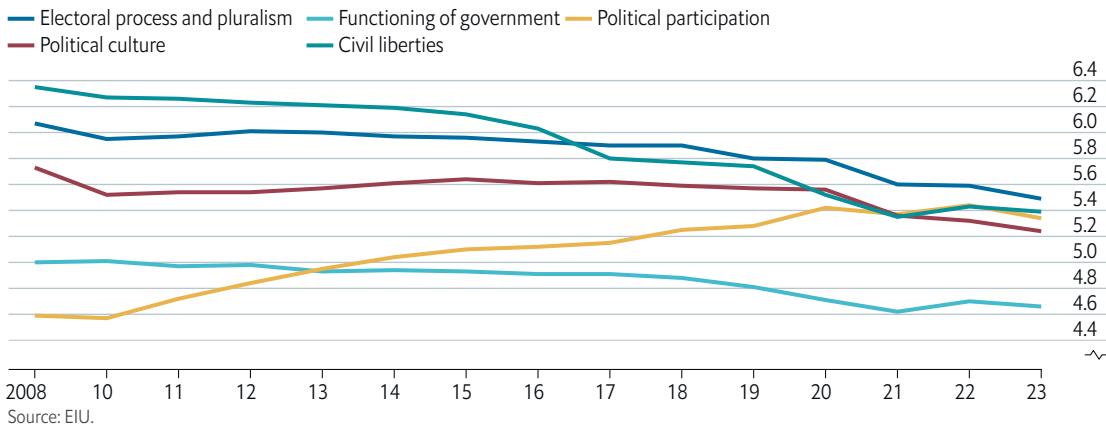
The metrics of decline

The Democracy Index model is a guide to where and how democracy is regressing, not only in terms of regions and countries, but also in terms of particular metrics. 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 7 shows what has happened to the global score across these five categories of the index between 2008—before the onset of the global financial crisis—and 2023. The categories that have recorded the biggest deterioration are *civil liberties* (-0.96 on a 0-10 scale) and *electoral process and pluralism* (-0.58). The scores for *functioning of government* and *political culture* fell by 0.34 and 0.49 respectively. The exception to the general rule of worsening scores between 2008 and 2023 is the performance of the *political participation* measure: despite declines in 2021 and 2023, the score for this category improved

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Democracy Index categories, 2008-23



Source: EIU.

by 0.75 between 2008 and 2023. The improvement reflects an upsurge of popular engagement in politics in developed democracies and waves of political protests in developing economies, providing a counter-narrative to the prevailing narrative of democratic decline.

Below is a breakdown of the global trends by category in 2023. The global average score for *electoral process and pluralism*, declined by 0.10 points in 2023. Holding free and fair elections is a prerequisite of democracy. A system of fixed-term elections is designed to encourage governing parties to deliver on their promises because they will have to return to the people to renew their mandate at the next election. This is how the maximum number of people can play a role in electing a government and exercising leverage over it. This index category has 12 indicators, covering all the ingredients necessary to ensure a level playing field for elections and political pluralism. In 2023 the category scores for the two most democratic regions of the world, North America and western Europe, remained the same, at 9.58 and 9.39 respectively. Eastern Europe and Central Asia's score for this metric improved modestly in 2023 to 6.27, up from 6.24 in 2022. The biggest deterioration occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, whose score declined by 0.19 points to 3.33.

The *functioning of government* category, comprising 14 indicators, registered a 0.04-point decline in 2023. This category has recorded the smallest decline (0.34 points) of any since the launch of the index in 2006 but it is also the lowest-scoring category, at 4.66. Popular trust in democratic institutions has been in decline for many years. Corruption, insufficient transparency and a lack of accountability have undermined confidence in government and political parties. In many countries, powerful interest groups exert significant influence. In turn, citizens increasingly feel that they do not have control over their governments or their lives. This trend is noticeable in both developed and developing economies, as institutional dysfunction, corruption and unrepresentative political parties have led to a crisis of trust that is undermining belief in democracy.

In 2023 the global average *political participation* score declined by 0.10 year on year to 5.34. Following the upsurge of political activity after 2010 in the wake of the global financial crisis, the global average score for *political participation* has declined only once since—in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic. The 2023 decline was driven by reversals in every region except North America, where levels of political engagement remained at 8.89, the highest in the world in a rarely celebrated positive feature

of US democracy. Elsewhere, the regional scores for this category (encompassing nine indicators) fell by between a modest 0.02 points (Asia and Australasia) and a striking 0.22 points (Middle East and North Africa). The latter decline points to deep disenchantment about the possibility of bringing about change in a region that is dominated by authoritarian regimes and riven with conflict. The deterioration in the *political participation* score in 2023 may turn out to be a blip, with the prospect of an upturn in political engagement and protest in 2024, which will be a record election year (see What to watch in 2024).

The *political culture* category, comprising eight indicators, most based on World Values Survey or other survey data and measuring things such as popular support for democracy, the military or expert rule, registered a 0.08-point decline in 2023 compared with 2022. In some countries, in eastern Europe for example, support for strong leaders is rooted in history and tradition. In others, frustration with the functioning of democracy has led increasing numbers of people to embrace non-democratic alternatives. This can take the form of support for technocratic governance or rule by strongmen or even the military. This weakening of popular attachment to democracy and democratic institutions is reflected in the decline in the average global score for the *political culture* category between 2008 and 2023, from 5.73 to 5.24. To reverse this worrying turn away from democracy, governments and political parties need to work hard to restore trust in representative democracy by delivering on the issues that matter to the electorate.

The global average score for the *civil liberties* category declined by 0.04 points in 2023. It has still not recovered from the precipitous decline recorded during the pandemic period of 2020-21, when governments responded to the coronavirus threat with an unprecedented withdrawal of liberties. The regression follows a partial rebound in 2022, when the global average category score improved by 0.08 points. As the covid-19 pandemic has shown, it is much easier to remove civil liberties than to return them. However, the response to the pandemic does not account for the overall regression in this category over the past decade and more. The response to the pandemic led to a 0.39-point fall in the civil liberties score in 2020-21, adding to a 0.61-point regression seen in 2008-2019. This category has 17 indicators, many of them related to freedom of expression and media freedoms, an area in which there has been a significant decline across all regions of the world over the past decade. As highlighted in the 2017 edition of the Democracy Index report, Free Speech Under Attack, freedom of expression and media freedom have been under attack by both state and non-state actors in developed democracies and authoritarian regimes alike. This remains one of the biggest threats to democracy.

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Table 2

Democracy Index 2023

	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
Iceland	9.45	3	0	10.00	9.29	8.89	9.38	9.71
Sweden	9.39	4	0	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41
Finland	9.30	5	0	10.00	9.64	7.78	9.38	9.71
Denmark	9.28	6	0	10.00	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.41
Ireland	9.19	7	1	10.00	8.21	8.33	10.00	9.41
Switzerland	9.14	8	-1	9.58	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.12
Netherlands	9.00	9	0	9.58	8.93	8.33	8.75	9.41
Taiwan	8.92	10	0	10.00	9.29	7.78	8.13	9.41
Luxembourg	8.81	11	2	10.00	8.93	6.67	8.75	9.71
Germany	8.80	12	2	9.58	8.57	8.33	8.13	9.41
Canada	8.69	13	-1	10.00	8.21	8.89	7.50	8.82
Australia	8.66	14=	1	10.00	8.57	7.22	7.50	10.00
Uruguay	8.66	14=	-3	10.00	8.93	7.78	6.88	9.71
Japan	8.40	16	0	9.17	8.93	6.67	8.13	9.12
Costa Rica	8.29	17	0	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	9.71
Austria	8.28	18=	2	9.58	7.50	8.89	6.88	8.53
United Kingdom	8.28	18=	0	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	9.12
Greece	8.14	20=	5	10.00	7.14	7.22	7.50	8.82
Mauritius	8.14	20=	1	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82
South Korea	8.09	22	2	9.58	8.57	7.22	6.25	8.82
France	8.07	23=	-1	9.58	7.86	7.78	6.88	8.24
Spain	8.07	23=	-1	9.58	7.50	7.22	7.50	8.53
Flawed democracy								
Chile	7.98	25	-6	9.58	8.21	6.11	6.88	9.12
Czech Republic	7.97	26	-1	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	9.12
Estonia	7.96	27	0	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.82
Malta	7.93	28	5	9.17	7.14	6.67	8.13	8.53
United States of America	7.85	29	1	9.17	6.43	8.89	6.25	8.53
Israel	7.80	30	-1	9.58	7.50	9.44	6.88	5.59
Portugal	7.75	31=	-3	9.58	6.79	6.67	6.88	8.82
Slovenia	7.75	31=	0	9.58	7.14	7.22	6.25	8.53
Botswana	7.73	33	-1	9.17	6.79	6.67	7.50	8.53
Italy	7.69	34	0	9.58	6.79	7.22	7.50	7.35
Cabo Verde	7.65	35	0	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53
Belgium	7.64	36	0	9.58	8.21	5.00	6.88	8.53

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	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
Cyprus	7.38	37=	0	9.17	5.36	6.67	6.88	8.82
Latvia	7.38	37=	1	9.58	6.43	6.11	6.25	8.53
Lithuania	7.31	39	0	9.58	6.43	6.11	5.63	8.82
Malaysia	7.29	40	0	9.58	7.50	7.22	6.25	5.88
India	7.18	41=	5	8.67	7.86	7.22	6.25	5.88
Poland	7.18	41=	5	9.58	6.07	6.67	6.25	7.35
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	43	-2	9.58	7.14	6.11	5.63	7.35
Slovakia	7.07	44	-1	9.58	6.07	5.56	5.63	8.53
Jamaica	7.06	45=	-3	8.75	6.79	5.00	6.25	8.53
Timor-Leste	7.06	45=	-1	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35
South Africa	7.05	47	-2	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35
Panama	6.91	48	1	9.58	6.07	7.22	3.75	7.94
Suriname	6.88	49	-1	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.00	7.65
Hungary	6.72	50	6	8.75	6.79	4.44	6.88	6.76
Brazil	6.68	51	0	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.00	7.35
Montenegro	6.67	52	9	8.75	7.14	6.67	3.75	7.06
Philippines	6.66	53	-1	9.17	4.64	7.78	4.38	7.35
Argentina	6.62	54	-4	9.17	5.00	7.22	3.75	7.94
Colombia	6.55	55	-2	9.17	6.07	6.11	3.75	7.65
Indonesia	6.53	56	-2	7.92	7.86	7.22	4.38	5.29
Namibia	6.52	57	1	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94
Croatia	6.50	58	1	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76
Mongolia	6.48	59	7	8.75	5.71	6.11	5.63	6.18
Romania	6.45	60	1	9.17	6.43	5.56	3.75	7.35
Dominican Republic	6.44	61	4	9.17	5.36	7.22	3.13	7.35
Bulgaria	6.41	62	-5	8.75	5.71	5.56	4.38	7.65
Thailand	6.35	63	-8	7.00	6.07	7.78	5.00	5.88
Serbia	6.33	64	4	7.83	6.07	6.67	3.75	7.35
Ghana	6.30	65	-2	8.33	5.00	6.67	5.63	5.88
Albania	6.28	66	-2	7.00	6.07	5.00	6.25	7.06
Guyana	6.26	67	0	7.33	6.07	6.11	5.00	6.76
Moldova	6.23	68	1	7.42	5.36	7.22	4.38	6.76
Singapore	6.18	69	1	5.33	7.14	4.44	7.50	6.47
Sri Lanka	6.17	70	-10	6.58	4.64	7.22	6.25	6.18
Lesotho	6.06	71	0	9.17	3.79	5.56	5.63	6.18
North Macedonia	6.03	72=	0	7.83	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.35
Papua New Guinea	6.03	72=	2	6.92	6.07	3.89	5.63	7.65
Paraguay	6.00	74	3	8.75	5.36	6.67	1.88	7.35

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	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
Hybrid regime								
Bangladesh	5.87	75	-2	7.42	6.07	5.56	5.63	4.71
Malawi	5.85	76	0	7.00	4.29	5.56	6.25	6.18
Peru	5.81	77	-2	8.75	5.71	5.00	3.13	6.47
Zambia	5.80	78	0	7.92	3.64	5.00	6.88	5.59
Liberia	5.57	79	7	7.83	2.71	6.11	5.63	5.59
Fiji	5.55	80	3	6.58	5.00	5.56	5.63	5.00
Bhutan	5.54	81	3	8.75	5.93	3.33	5.00	4.71
Tunisia	5.51	82	3	6.17	4.64	6.11	5.63	5.00
Senegal	5.48	83	-4	6.58	5.71	3.89	5.63	5.59
Armenia	5.42	84	-2	7.92	4.64	6.11	3.13	5.29
Ecuador	5.41	85	-4	8.75	5.00	5.56	1.88	5.88
Tanzania	5.35	86	6	4.83	5.36	5.00	6.88	4.71
Madagascar	5.26	87	-7	6.58	3.57	6.11	5.63	4.41
Hong Kong	5.24	88	0	2.75	3.64	5.00	6.88	7.94
Georgia	5.20	89	1	7.00	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.59
Mexico	5.14	90	-1	6.92	4.64	6.67	1.88	5.59
Ukraine	5.06	91	-4	5.58	3.07	7.22	5.00	4.41
Kenya	5.05	92	2	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12
Morocco	5.04	93	2	5.25	4.64	5.56	5.63	4.12
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.00	94	3	7.00	4.00	5.00	3.13	5.88
Honduras	4.98	95	-4	8.75	3.93	4.44	2.50	5.29
El Salvador	4.71	96	-3	6.67	3.21	5.56	3.13	5.00
Benin	4.68	97	7	2.58	5.71	4.44	6.25	4.41
Nepal	4.60	98	3	4.83	5.36	5.00	2.50	5.29
Uganda	4.49	99	0	3.42	3.57	3.89	6.88	4.71
Gambia	4.47	100=	2	4.42	4.29	3.89	5.63	4.12
Guatemala	4.47	100=	-2	5.67	3.93	5.00	1.88	5.88
Turkey	4.33	102	1	3.50	5.00	6.11	5.00	2.06
Sierra Leone	4.32	103	-7	4.83	2.86	3.89	5.00	5.00
Nigeria	4.23	104	1	5.17	3.93	3.89	3.75	4.41
Côte d'Ivoire	4.22	105	1	4.33	2.86	4.44	5.63	3.82
Bolivia	4.20	106	-6	4.33	4.29	5.56	1.25	5.59
Angola	4.18	107	2	4.50	3.21	5.56	5.00	2.65
Mauritania	4.14	108	0	3.50	3.57	6.11	3.13	4.41
Authoritarian								
Kyrgyz Republic	3.70	109	7	4.33	1.86	3.89	3.13	5.29
Algeria	3.66	110	3	3.08	2.50	3.89	5.00	3.82

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Table 2

Democracy Index 2023

	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
Qatar	3.65	111	3	1.50	4.29	3.33	5.63	3.53
Lebanon	3.56	112	3	3.08	0.79	6.67	3.13	4.12
Mozambique	3.51	113	4	2.58	1.43	5.00	5.00	3.53
Kuwait	3.50	114	-3	3.17	3.93	2.78	4.38	3.24
Palestine	3.47	115	-5	1.58	0.14	8.33	3.75	3.53
Ethiopia	3.37	116	6	0.42	3.21	6.11	5.63	1.47
Rwanda	3.30	117	9	1.42	4.64	2.78	5.00	2.65
Pakistan	3.25	118	-11	2.58	4.29	2.78	2.50	4.12
Oman	3.12	119	6	0.08	3.93	2.78	5.00	3.82
Kazakhstan	3.08	120	7	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	2.94
Cambodia	3.05	121	0	0.00	3.21	5.00	5.00	2.06
Comoros	3.04	122=	-2	1.25	2.21	4.44	3.75	3.53
Jordan	3.04	122=	0	2.67	3.21	3.89	2.50	2.94
Zimbabwe	3.04	122=	10	0.00	2.50	4.44	5.00	3.24
United Arab Emirates	3.01	125	8	0.00	4.29	2.78	5.63	2.35
Togo	2.99	126	4	0.92	2.14	3.33	5.63	2.94
Egypt	2.93	127	4	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.76
Iraq	2.88	128	-4	5.25	0.00	6.11	1.88	1.18
Haiti	2.81	129	6	0.00	0.00	2.78	6.25	5.00
Azerbaijan	2.80	130	4	0.50	2.50	3.33	5.00	2.65
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	131	5	0.00	2.50	4.44	3.75	3.24
Eswatini	2.78	132	-3	0.92	1.64	2.78	5.63	2.94
Burkina Faso	2.73	133	-6	0.00	2.50	3.89	3.75	3.53
Djibouti	2.70	134	3	0.00	1.64	3.89	5.63	2.35
Cuba	2.65	135	4	0.00	3.21	3.33	3.75	2.94
Vietnam	2.62	136	2	0.00	3.93	2.78	3.75	2.65
Mali	2.58	137	-18	0.00	0.00	5.00	4.38	3.53
Cameroon	2.56	138	2	0.33	2.14	3.89	4.38	2.06
Bahrain	2.52	139	3	0.42	2.71	3.33	4.38	1.76
Guinea-Bissau	2.45	140	0	4.00	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.35
Niger	2.37	141	-29	0.33	1.14	2.22	3.75	4.41
Venezuela	2.31	142	5	0.00	1.07	5.00	3.13	2.35
Nicaragua	2.26	143	0	0.00	2.14	2.78	3.75	2.65
Russia	2.22	144	2	0.92	2.14	2.22	3.75	2.06
Guinea	2.21	145	0	0.83	0.43	3.33	4.38	2.06
Gabon	2.18	146	-28	0.83	1.14	2.22	3.75	2.94
Burundi	2.13	147	1	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	1.76
China	2.12	148=	8	0.00	3.57	3.33	3.13	0.59

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Table 2

Democracy Index 2023

	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
Uzbekistan	2.12	148=	1	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88
Saudi Arabia	2.08	150	0	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47
Belarus	1.99	151	2	0.00	0.79	3.33	4.38	1.47
Eritrea	1.97	152	0	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	0.29
Iran	1.96	153	1	0.00	2.50	3.33	2.50	1.47
Yemen	1.95	154	1	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88
Tajikistan	1.94	155	1	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	156	2	0.00	0.43	3.33	4.38	1.47
Libya	1.78	157	-6	0.00	0.00	2.78	3.75	2.35
Sudan	1.76	158	-14	0.00	0.07	2.22	5.63	0.88
Laos	1.71	159	0	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.29
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.68	160	2	1.17	0.43	2.78	3.13	0.88
Chad	1.67	161	-1	0.00	0.00	2.22	3.75	2.35
Turkmenistan	1.66	162	-1	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.29
Syria	1.43	163	0	0.00	0.00	2.78	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	0.85	166	0	0.00	0.00	1.11	3.13	0.00
Afghanistan	0.26	167	0	0.00	0.07	0.00	1.25	0.00

Source: EIU.

Democracy Index 2023 Highlights

Democracy equals peace?

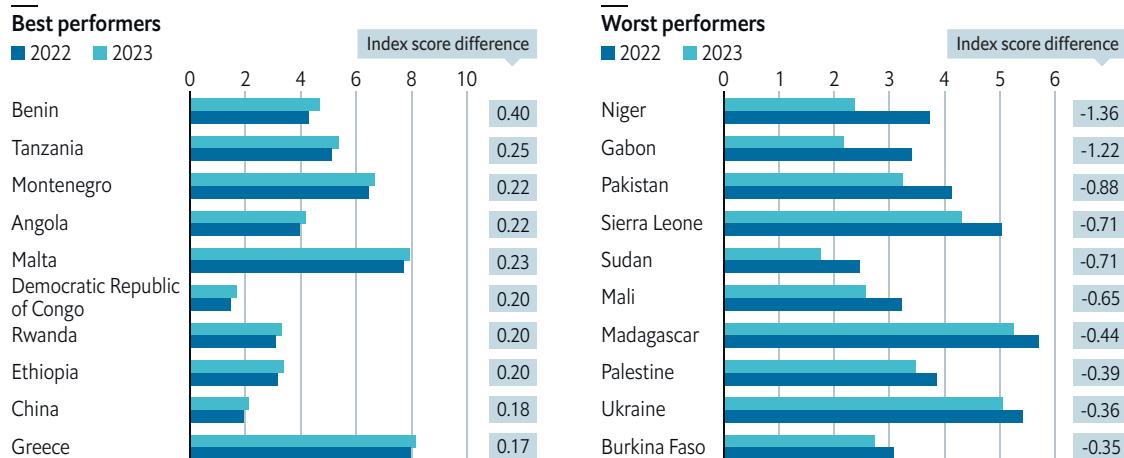
A popular view is that democracies are more peaceful than authoritarian states and that democracies do not go to war against each other. The EU is often cited as an example of democracy as a “peace project”: after the carnage of the second world war, Europe’s leaders set out to create a peaceful club of nations based on free trade. When we look at the places where war and conflict are rife today, it does appear that there is a strong correlation between democracy and peace and non-democracy and conflict. Today’s wars are concentrated in countries where democracy is absent or in trouble. In addition, democracies are said to be better able to keep the peace at home: internal strife appears to be more prevalent in non-democracies than in democracies. However, the data do not tell the whole story and need to be interpreted; there are several caveats to the thesis that democracy equals peace. As the world appears to have entered a new age of conflict, this year’s Democracy Index essay considers whether democracies are really more peaceful and better able to manage conflict at home and abroad (see page 23).

Winners and losers of 2023

There were six changes in regime type in 2023: at the top of the ranking Greece moved up the rankings to become a “full democracy” and Chile was relegated to the “flawed democracy” classification once again. Two countries, Papua New Guinea and Paraguay, moved up the rankings from the “hybrid regime” classification into the lower end of the “flawed democracies” category. Pakistan dropped 11 places in the index, to be reclassified as an “authoritarian regime”, while Angola was upgraded to a “hybrid regime” from an “authoritarian” classification. The biggest losers, when measured by the decline in their index scores in 2023 compared with 2022, were in the Sahel and West Africa.

Top 10 upgrades and downgrades

(Annual change in index score; index scale 0-10)



Source: EIU.

Niger (-1.36), Gabon (-1.22), Sierra Leone (-0.71) and Mali (-0.65) all registered sharp reversals from an already low base as the region slipped further into instability and conflict in 2023. War-torn Sudan, which was already close to the bottom of the index, suffered a stunning regression (-0.71) and fell 14 places in the index. By contrast, improvements were less pronounced among the winners—including Benin, Tanzania, Montenegro, Angola and Malta.

Greece becomes a “full democracy” once again

The birthplace of democracy has cause to celebrate, having returned to the “full democracy” classification in the 2023 Democracy Index. Greece scores top marks (ten out of ten) for *electoral process and pluralism*, an achievement shared by only a dozen others. Despite deficiencies in several areas, including media freedom, Greece has a solid score for *civil liberties* (8.82), for which its score also improved in 2022. Journalists and print media operate with some constraints, but there is rumbustious freedom of expression. In addition, the country’s score for *political participation* improved in 2023, a year of two parliamentary elections, regional elections and political party elections, and citizens became more engaged in the wake of a devastating rail disaster, wildfires and floods. However, Greece lags behind the frontrunners in the index in the categories of *political culture* (7.50), *political participation* (7.22) and *functioning of government* (7.14). Greece’s overall index score improved to 8.14, and the country is ranked in joint 20th place, alongside Mauritius.

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 six spots, with New Zealand claiming second place. 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 western Europe account for eight of the top ten places in the global democracy rankings and more than half (15) of the 24 nations classified as “full democracies”. Western Europe was also the best-performing region in 2023, being the only region to record an increase in its index score.

Ukraine’s democracy in limbo

Almost two years after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian people’s fight to defend their sovereignty is inspiring. Yet the war is taking a toll on the country’s democratic institutions and practices. Ukraine was classified as a “hybrid regime” before the war began, and the government was struggling to improve the state of democracy. Since the start of the war, power has become more concentrated in the hands of the president, Volodmir Zelenskiy, at the expense of the executive branch and the parliament. Corruption remains an issue and martial law has been exercised to the maximum, meaning that media and other democratic freedoms have been circumscribed. As a result, Ukraine’s score fell from 5.42 in 2022 to 5.06 in 2023, and the country dropped four places in the global ranking, from 87th to 91st. Meanwhile, Russia continued its steady slide towards outright dictatorship as the authorities intensified their crackdown on all forms of opposition, be it to the war or the regime of the president, Vladimir Putin. Russia’s already lowly score fell by 0.06, to 2.22, and the country is now ranked 144th out of 167 (below Venezuela and Nicaragua).

What to watch in 2024: an election bonanza

In 2024 countries representing more than half the world's population of 8.1bn will go to the polls to elect new governments, presidents, mayors, governors and municipal representatives. Based on the number of elections and potential voters, 2024 will be the biggest election year since the advent of universal suffrage. According to our calculations, 76 countries will hold scheduled elections in which all voters have the chance to cast their ballot.

Whether this voting extravaganza will bring more democracy is another matter. Elections are a condition of democracy, but are far from being sufficient. The point of elections is to enable people to get control of government. That requires at a minimum that elections are free and fair, and that all sections of society are represented in a competitive party system. When the political system becomes uncompetitive, as it has in many mature democracies in which elections are fully free and fair, people become disenchanted with democracy.

The Democracy Index shows that the condition of fully free and fair elections prevails in only 43 of the 76 countries holding elections in 2024 (27 of these are EU member states). Eight of the ten most populous countries in the world—Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia and the US—are holding nationwide elections in 2024. In half of these, elections are neither free nor fair and many other prerequisites of democracy, such as freedom of speech and association, are absent. Unsurprisingly, elections in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Russia—where opposition forces are subject to state repression—will not bring regime change or more democracy.

Elections in the US, Brazil, India and Indonesia—all classified as “flawed democracies”—at least allow for the possibility of change, although incumbents or anointed successors are likely to win in these too. A country crying out for change is the US. If the election comes down to a contest between the president, Joe Biden, and the former president, Donald Trump, as looks likely, a country that was once a beacon of democracy is likely to slide deeper into division and disenchantment. A lot more than a “get out the vote” campaign is required to inspire voters, including the 80m or so Americans who routinely do not vote. Nothing short of a major change in the agenda of politics, and a new crop of political leaders, will do.

There is less uncertainty about the outcome of the other big elections of 2024, in Brazil, India and Indonesia, where the incumbents are likely to retain power. In India, the ruling BJP—the world’s biggest political party with more than 180m members, led by the president, Narendra Modi—is likely to win even after a decade in power. Mr Modi’s brand of Hindu nationalism has disquieted the country’s large Muslim minority but remains popular among the electorate as a whole. In Indonesia, the most populous country in south-east Asia, the centre-left PDI-P, looks likely to win the legislative and presidential elections, and the outgoing president, Joko Widodo, is set to wield significant influence over the next administration. In Brazil, nationwide municipal elections will be a bellwether of political trends, revealing whether the left-wing Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, the Workers Party) of the president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, can make gains at the expense of the right-leaning Partido Liberal, which dominates congress and is backed by Lula’s right-wing predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro. The elections

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will put the PT's legislative agenda on the backburner in 2024, making it harder for the party to push through unpopular reforms.

The two continents hosting the largest number of elections in 2024, Europe (37) and Africa (18), could not be further apart in terms of their demographic outlooks, income levels and democracy rankings. Some of the poorest countries in the world are in Africa, and are also among the fastest growing by population and the least democratic, an adverse combination that is driving large-scale emigration of people from the continent in search of a better life. Many are heading for Europe, a continent facing increasing labour shortages but also a popular backlash against illegal migration. This is set to be a major factor in the elections to the European Parliament in the 27 EU member states in June 2024. It may contribute to a further shift to the right as many voters opt for parties calling for stricter controls on immigration into the bloc.

An election is not always the sign of a healthy democracy. Ukraine, where a presidential election is due in 2024, is a case in point. Some say that holding an election would be an act of democratic defiance in the face of Russia's war to destroy Ukrainian statehood. However, martial law forbids the holding of elections, and there is a moral as well as legal case for waiting. Such an election could not be conducted according to democratic standards and would certainly not be fair. Four groups of citizens would be disadvantaged—soldiers, refugees, citizens living in occupied territories and internally displaced persons. Given the risk of Russian bombardment, there would be no security for voters. There would also not be a level playing field, given that the presidential office monopolises access to the broadcast media.

Table 3

Democracy Index 2006-23

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Canada	8.69	8.88	8.87	9.24	9.22	9.15	9.15	9.15	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.08	9.07	9.07
US	7.85	7.85	7.85	7.92	7.96	7.96	7.98	7.98	8.05	8.11	8.11	8.11	8.11	8.18	8.22	8.22
average	8.27	8.37	8.36	8.58	8.59	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.63	8.64	8.64
Austria	8.28	8.20	8.07	8.16	8.29	8.29	8.42	8.41	8.54	8.54	8.48	8.62	8.49	8.49	8.49	8.69
Belgium	7.64	7.64	7.51	7.51	7.64	7.78	7.78	7.77	7.93	7.93	8.05	8.05	8.05	8.05	8.16	8.15
Cyprus	7.38	7.38	7.43	7.56	7.59	7.59	7.59	7.65	7.53	7.40	7.29	7.29	7.29	7.29	7.70	7.60
Denmark	9.28	9.28	9.09	9.15	9.22	9.22	9.22	9.20	9.11	9.11	9.38	9.52	9.52	9.52	9.52	9.52
Finland	9.30	9.29	9.27	9.20	9.25	9.14	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.06	9.06	9.19	9.25	9.25
France	8.07	8.07	7.99	7.99	8.12	7.80	7.80	7.92	7.92	8.04	7.92	7.88	7.77	7.77	8.07	8.07
Germany	8.80	8.80	8.67	8.67	8.68	8.68	8.61	8.63	8.64	8.64	8.31	8.34	8.34	8.38	8.82	8.82
Greece	8.14	7.97	7.56	7.39	7.43	7.29	7.29	7.23	7.45	7.45	7.65	7.65	7.65	7.92	8.13	8.13
Iceland	9.45	9.52	9.18	9.37	9.58	9.58	9.58	9.50	9.58	9.58	9.65	9.65	9.65	9.65	9.65	9.71
Ireland	9.19	9.13	9.00	9.05	9.24	9.15	9.15	9.15	8.85	8.72	8.68	8.56	8.56	8.79	9.01	9.01
Italy	7.69	7.69	7.68	7.74	7.52	7.71	7.98	7.98	7.98	7.85	7.85	7.74	7.74	7.83	7.98	7.73
Luxembourg	8.81	8.81	8.68	8.68	8.81	8.81	8.81	8.81	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	8.88	9.10	9.10	9.10
Malta	7.93	7.70	7.57	7.68	7.95	8.21	8.15	8.39	8.39	8.39	8.28	8.28	8.28	8.28	8.39	8.39
Netherlands	9.00	9.00	8.88	8.96	9.01	8.89	8.89	8.80	8.92	8.92	8.84	8.99	8.99	9.53	9.66	

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Table 3

Democracy Index 2006-23

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Norway	9.81	9.81	9.75	9.81	9.87	9.87	9.87	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.93	9.80	9.80	9.68	9.55
Portugal	7.75	7.95	7.82	7.90	8.03	7.84	7.84	7.86	7.79	7.79	7.65	7.92	7.81	8.02	8.05	8.16
Spain	8.07	8.07	7.94	8.12	8.18	8.08	8.08	8.30	8.30	8.05	8.02	8.02	8.02	8.16	8.45	8.34
Sweden	9.39	9.39	9.26	9.26	9.39	9.39	9.39	9.39	9.45	9.73	9.73	9.73	9.50	9.50	9.88	9.88
Switzerland	9.14	9.14	8.90	8.83	9.03	9.03	9.03	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.15	9.02
Turkey	4.33	4.35	4.35	4.48	4.09	4.37	4.88	5.04	5.12	5.12	5.63	5.76	5.73	5.73	5.69	5.70
UK	8.28	8.28	8.10	8.54	8.52	8.53	8.53	8.36	8.31	8.31	8.31	8.21	8.16	8.16	8.15	8.08
average	8.37	8.36	8.22	8.29	8.35	8.35	8.38	8.40	8.42	8.41	8.41	8.44	8.40	8.45	8.61	8.60
Albania	6.28	6.41	6.11	6.08	5.89	5.98	5.98	5.91	5.91	5.67	5.67	5.67	5.81	5.86	5.91	5.91
Armenia	5.42	5.63	5.49	5.35	5.54	4.79	4.11	3.88	4.00	4.13	4.02	4.09	4.09	4.09	4.09	4.15
Azerbaijan	2.80	2.87	2.68	2.68	2.75	2.65	2.65	2.65	2.71	2.83	3.06	3.15	3.15	3.15	3.19	3.31
Belarus	1.99	1.99	2.41	2.59	2.48	3.13	3.13	3.54	3.62	3.69	3.04	3.04	3.16	3.34	3.34	3.34
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.00	5.00	5.04	4.84	4.86	4.98	4.87	4.87	4.83	4.78	5.02	5.11	5.24	5.32	5.70	5.78
Bulgaria	6.41	6.53	6.64	6.71	7.03	7.03	7.03	7.01	7.14	6.73	6.83	6.72	6.78	6.84	7.02	7.10
Croatia	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.57	6.57	6.63	6.75	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.93	6.73	6.81	7.04	7.04
Czech Republic	7.97	7.97	7.74	7.67	7.69	7.69	7.62	7.82	7.94	7.94	8.06	8.19	8.19	8.19	8.19	8.17
Estonia	7.96	7.96	7.84	7.84	7.90	7.97	7.79	7.85	7.85	7.74	7.61	7.61	7.61	7.68	7.68	7.74
Georgia	5.20	5.20	5.12	5.31	5.42	5.50	5.93	5.93	5.88	5.82	5.95	5.53	4.74	4.59	4.62	4.90
Hungary	6.72	6.64	6.50	6.56	6.63	6.63	6.64	6.72	6.84	6.90	6.96	6.96	7.04	7.21	7.44	7.53
Kazakhstan	3.08	3.08	3.08	3.14	2.94	2.94	3.06	3.06	3.06	3.17	3.06	2.95	3.24	3.30	3.45	3.62
Kyrgyz Republic	3.70	3.62	3.62	4.21	4.89	5.11	5.11	4.93	5.33	5.24	4.69	4.69	4.34	4.31	4.05	4.08
Latvia	7.38	7.37	7.31	7.24	7.49	7.38	7.25	7.31	7.37	7.48	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.23	7.37	
Lithuania	7.31	7.31	7.18	7.13	7.50	7.50	7.41	7.47	7.54	7.54	7.54	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.36	7.43
Moldova	6.23	6.23	6.10	5.78	5.75	5.85	5.94	6.01	6.35	6.32	6.32	6.32	6.32	6.33	6.50	6.50
Montenegro	6.67	6.45	6.02	5.77	5.65	5.74	5.69	5.72	6.01	5.94	5.94	6.05	6.15	6.27	6.43	6.57
North Macedonia	6.03	6.10	6.03	5.89	5.97	5.87	5.57	5.23	6.02	6.25	6.16	6.16	6.16	6.16	6.21	6.33
Poland	7.18	7.04	6.80	6.85	6.62	6.67	6.67	6.83	7.09	7.47	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.05	7.30	7.30
Romania	6.45	6.45	6.43	6.40	6.49	6.38	6.44	6.62	6.68	6.68	6.54	6.54	6.54	6.60	7.06	7.06
Russia	2.22	2.28	3.24	3.31	3.11	2.94	3.17	3.24	3.31	3.39	3.59	3.74	3.92	4.26	4.48	5.02
Serbia	6.33	6.33	6.36	6.22	6.41	6.41	6.41	6.57	6.71	6.71	6.67	6.33	6.33	6.49	6.62	
Slovakia	7.07	7.07	7.03	6.97	7.17	7.10	7.16	7.29	7.29	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.35	7.33	7.40
Slovenia	7.75	7.75	7.54	7.54	7.50	7.50	7.50	7.51	7.57	7.57	7.88	7.88	7.76	7.69	7.96	7.96
Tajikistan	1.94	1.94	1.94	1.94	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.89	1.95	2.37	2.51	2.51	2.51	2.51	2.45	2.45
Turkmenistan	1.66	1.66	1.66	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.83	1.83	1.83	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.83
Ukraine	5.06	5.42	5.57	5.81	5.90	5.69	5.69	5.70	5.70	5.42	5.84	5.91	5.94	6.30	6.94	6.94
Uzbekistan	2.12	2.12	2.12	2.12	2.01	2.01	1.95	1.95	1.95	2.45	1.72	1.72	1.74	1.74	1.74	1.85
average	5.37	5.39	5.36	5.36	5.42	5.42	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76

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Democracy Index 2006-23

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Argentina	6.62	6.85	6.81	6.95	7.02	7.02	6.96	6.96	7.02	6.84	6.84	6.84	6.84	6.84	6.63	6.63
Bolivia	4.20	4.51	4.65	5.08	4.84	5.70	5.49	5.63	5.75	5.79	5.79	5.84	5.84	5.92	6.15	5.98
Brazil	6.68	6.78	6.86	6.92	6.86	6.97	6.86	6.90	6.96	7.38	7.12	7.12	7.12	7.38	7.38	
Chile	7.98	8.22	7.92	8.28	8.08	7.97	7.84	7.78	7.84	7.80	7.80	7.54	7.54	7.67	7.89	7.89
Colombia	6.55	6.72	6.48	7.04	7.13	6.96	6.67	6.67	6.62	6.55	6.55	6.63	6.63	6.55	6.54	6.40
Costa Rica	8.29	8.29	8.07	8.16	8.13	8.07	7.88	7.88	7.96	8.03	8.03	8.10	8.10	8.04	8.04	8.04
Cuba	2.65	2.65	2.59	2.84	2.84	3.00	3.31	3.46	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52
Dominican Republic	6.44	6.39	6.45	6.32	6.54	6.54	6.66	6.67	6.67	6.67	6.74	6.49	6.20	6.20	6.20	6.13
Ecuador	5.41	5.69	5.71	6.13	6.33	6.27	6.02	5.81	5.87	5.87	5.87	5.78	5.72	5.77	5.64	5.64
El Salvador	4.71	5.06	5.72	5.90	6.15	5.96	6.43	6.64	6.64	6.53	6.53	6.47	6.47	6.47	6.40	6.22
Guatemala	4.47	4.68	4.62	4.97	5.26	5.60	5.86	5.92	5.92	5.81	5.81	5.88	5.88	6.05	6.07	6.07
Guyana	6.26	6.34	6.25	6.01	6.15	6.67	6.46	6.25	6.05	5.91	6.05	6.05	6.05	6.05	6.12	6.15
Haiti	2.81	2.81	3.48	4.22	4.57	4.91	4.03	4.02	3.94	3.82	3.94	3.96	4.00	4.00	4.19	4.19
Honduras	4.98	5.15	5.10	5.36	5.42	5.63	5.72	5.92	5.84	5.84	5.84	5.84	5.84	5.76	6.18	6.25
Jamaica	7.06	7.13	7.13	7.13	6.96	7.02	7.29	7.39	7.39	7.39	7.39	7.39	7.13	7.21	7.21	7.34
Mexico	5.14	5.25	5.57	6.07	6.09	6.19	6.41	6.47	6.55	6.68	6.91	6.90	6.93	6.93	6.78	6.67
Nicaragua	2.26	2.50	2.69	3.60	3.55	3.63	4.66	4.81	5.26	5.32	5.46	5.56	5.56	5.73	6.07	5.68
Panama	6.91	6.91	6.85	7.18	7.05	7.05	7.08	7.13	7.19	7.08	7.08	7.08	7.08	7.15	7.35	7.35
Paraguay	6.00	5.89	5.86	6.18	6.24	6.24	6.31	6.27	6.33	6.26	6.26	6.26	6.40	6.40	6.40	6.16
Peru	5.81	5.92	6.09	6.53	6.60	6.60	6.49	6.65	6.58	6.54	6.54	6.47	6.59	6.40	6.31	6.11
Suriname	6.88	6.95	6.82	6.82	6.98	6.98	6.76	6.77	6.77	6.77	6.77	6.65	6.65	6.65	6.58	6.52
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	7.16	7.16	7.16	7.16	7.16	7.04	7.10	7.10	6.99	6.99	7.16	7.16	7.21	7.18	
Uruguay	8.66	8.91	8.85	8.61	8.38	8.38	8.12	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.10	8.08	7.96
Venezuela	2.31	2.23	2.11	2.76	2.88	3.16	3.87	4.68	5.00	5.07	5.07	5.15	5.08	5.18	5.34	5.42
average	5.68	5.79	5.83	6.09	6.13	6.24	6.26	6.33	6.37	6.36	6.38	6.36	6.35	6.37	6.43	6.37
Afghanistan	0.26	0.32	0.32	2.85	2.85	2.97	2.55	2.55	2.77	2.77	2.48	2.48	2.48	2.48	3.02	3.06
Australia	8.66	8.71	8.90	8.96	9.09	9.09	9.09	9.01	9.01	9.01	9.13	9.22	9.22	9.22	9.09	9.09
Bangladesh	5.87	5.99	5.99	5.99	5.88	5.57	5.43	5.73	5.73	5.78	5.86	5.86	5.86	5.87	5.52	6.11
Bhutan	5.54	5.54	5.71	5.71	5.30	5.30	5.08	4.93	4.93	4.87	4.82	4.65	4.57	4.68	4.30	2.62
Cambodia	3.05	3.18	2.90	3.10	3.53	3.59	3.63	4.27	4.27	4.78	4.60	4.96	4.87	4.87	4.87	4.77
China	2.12	1.94	2.21	2.27	2.26	3.32	3.10	3.14	3.14	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.14	3.14	3.04	2.97
Fiji	5.55	5.55	5.61	5.72	5.85	5.85	5.85	5.64	5.69	5.61	3.61	3.67	3.67	3.62	5.11	5.66
Hong Kong	5.24	5.28	5.60	5.57	6.02	6.15	6.31	6.42	6.50	6.46	6.42	6.42	5.92	5.92	5.85	6.03
India	7.18	7.04	6.91	6.61	6.90	7.23	7.23	7.81	7.74	7.92	7.69	7.52	7.30	7.28	7.80	7.68
Indonesia	6.53	6.71	6.71	6.30	6.48	6.39	6.39	6.97	7.03	6.95	6.82	6.76	6.53	6.53	6.34	6.41
Japan	8.40	8.33	8.15	8.13	7.99	7.99	7.88	7.99	7.96	8.08	8.08	8.08	8.08	8.08	8.25	8.15
Laos	1.71	1.77	1.77	1.77	2.14	2.37	2.37	2.37	2.21	2.21	2.21	2.32	2.10	2.10	2.10	2.10
Malaysia	7.29	7.30	7.24	7.19	7.16	6.88	6.54	6.54	6.43	6.49	6.49	6.41	6.19	6.19	6.36	5.98

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Democracy Index 2006-23

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Mongolia	6.48	6.35	6.42	6.48	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.62	6.62	6.62	6.51	6.35	6.23	6.36	6.60	6.60
Myanmar	0.85	0.74	1.02	3.04	3.55	3.83	3.83	4.20	4.14	3.05	2.76	2.35	1.77	1.77	1.77	1.77
Nepal	4.60	4.49	4.41	5.22	5.28	5.18	5.18	4.86	4.77	4.77	4.77	4.16	4.24	4.24	4.05	3.42
New Zealand	9.61	9.61	9.37	9.25	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.26	9.19	9.01
North Korea	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	0.86	1.03
Pakistan	3.25	4.13	4.31	4.31	4.25	4.17	4.26	4.33	4.40	4.64	4.64	4.57	4.55	4.55	4.46	3.92
Papua New Guinea	6.03	5.97	6.10	6.10	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.03	6.36	6.32	6.32	6.54	6.54	6.54
Philippines	6.66	6.73	6.62	6.56	6.64	6.71	6.71	6.94	6.84	6.77	6.41	6.30	6.12	6.12	6.12	6.48
Singapore	6.18	6.22	6.23	6.03	6.02	6.38	6.32	6.38	6.14	6.03	5.92	5.88	5.89	5.89	5.89	5.89
South Korea	8.09	8.03	8.16	8.01	8.00	8.00	8.00	7.92	7.97	8.06	8.06	8.13	8.06	8.11	8.01	7.88
Sri Lanka	6.17	6.47	6.14	6.14	6.27	6.19	6.48	6.48	6.42	5.69	5.69	5.75	6.58	6.64	6.61	6.58
Taiwan	8.92	8.99	8.99	8.94	7.73	7.73	7.73	7.79	7.83	7.65	7.57	7.57	7.46	7.52	7.82	7.82
Thailand	6.35	6.67	6.04	6.04	6.32	4.63	4.63	4.92	5.09	5.39	6.25	6.55	6.55	6.55	6.81	5.67
Timor Leste	7.06	7.06	7.06	7.06	7.19	7.19	7.19	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.16	7.22	7.22	7.22	6.41
Vietnam	2.62	2.73	2.94	2.94	3.08	3.08	3.08	3.38	3.53	3.41	3.29	2.89	2.96	2.94	2.53	2.75
average	5.41	5.46	5.46	5.62	5.67	5.67	5.63	5.74	5.74	5.70	5.61	5.56	5.51	5.53	5.58	5.44
Algeria	3.66	3.66	3.77	3.77	4.01	3.50	3.56	3.56	3.95	3.83	3.83	3.83	3.44	3.44	3.32	3.17
Bahrain	2.52	2.52	2.52	2.49	2.55	2.71	2.71	2.79	2.79	2.87	2.87	2.53	2.92	3.49	3.38	3.53
Egypt	2.93	2.93	2.93	2.93	3.06	3.36	3.36	3.31	3.18	3.16	3.27	4.56	3.95	3.07	3.89	3.90
Iran	1.96	1.96	1.95	2.20	2.38	2.45	2.45	2.34	2.16	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.94	2.83	2.93
Iraq	2.88	3.13	3.51	3.62	3.74	4.06	4.09	4.08	4.08	4.23	4.10	4.10	4.03	4.00	4.00	4.01
Israel	7.80	7.93	7.97	7.84	7.86	7.79	7.79	7.85	7.77	7.63	7.53	7.53	7.53	7.48	7.48	7.28
Jordan	3.04	3.17	3.49	3.62	3.93	3.93	3.87	3.96	3.86	3.76	3.76	3.76	3.89	3.74	3.93	3.92
Kuwait	3.50	3.83	3.91	3.80	3.93	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.85	3.78	3.78	3.78	3.74	3.88	3.39	3.09
Lebanon	3.56	3.64	3.84	4.16	4.36	4.63	4.72	4.86	4.86	5.12	5.05	5.05	5.32	5.82	5.62	5.82
Libya	1.78	2.06	1.95	1.95	2.02	2.19	2.32	2.25	2.25	3.80	4.82	5.15	3.55	1.94	2.00	1.84
Morocco	5.04	5.04	5.04	5.04	5.10	4.99	4.87	4.77	4.66	4.00	4.07	4.07	3.83	3.79	3.88	3.90
Oman	3.12	3.12	3.00	3.00	3.06	3.04	3.04	3.04	3.04	3.15	3.26	3.26	3.26	2.86	2.98	2.77
Palestine	3.47	3.86	3.94	3.83	3.89	4.39	4.46	4.49	4.57	4.72	4.80	4.80	4.97	5.44	5.83	6.01
Qatar	3.65	3.65	3.65	3.24	3.19	3.19	3.19	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.18	3.09	2.92	2.78
Saudi Arabia	2.08	2.08	2.08	2.08	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.93	1.82	1.82	1.71	1.77	1.84	1.90	1.92
Sudan	1.76	2.47	2.47	2.54	2.70	2.15	2.15	2.37	2.37	2.54	2.54	2.38	2.38	2.42	2.81	2.90
Syria	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.43	1.74	1.86	1.63	1.99	2.31	2.18	2.36
Tunisia	5.51	5.51	5.99	6.59	6.72	6.41	6.32	6.40	6.72	6.31	5.76	5.67	5.53	2.79	2.96	3.06
UAE	3.01	2.90	2.90	2.70	2.76	2.76	2.69	2.75	2.75	2.64	2.52	2.58	2.58	2.52	2.60	2.42
Yemen	1.95	1.95	1.95	1.95	1.95	1.95	2.07	2.07	2.24	2.79	2.79	3.12	2.57	2.64	2.95	2.98
average	3.23	3.34	3.41	3.44	3.53	3.54	3.54	3.56	3.58	3.65	3.68	3.73	3.62	3.43	3.54	3.53

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Democracy Index 2006-23

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Angola	4.18	3.96	3.37	3.66	3.72	3.62	3.62	3.40	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.32	3.32	3.35	2.41
Benin	4.68	4.28	4.19	4.58	5.09	5.74	5.61	5.67	5.72	5.65	5.87	6.00	6.06	6.17	6.06	6.16
Botswana	7.73	7.73	7.73	7.62	7.81	7.81	7.81	7.87	7.87	7.87	7.98	7.85	7.63	7.63	7.47	7.60
Burkina Faso	2.73	3.08	3.84	3.73	4.04	4.75	4.75	4.70	4.70	4.09	4.15	3.52	3.59	3.59	3.60	3.72
Burundi	2.13	2.13	2.13	2.14	2.15	2.33	2.33	2.40	2.49	3.33	3.41	3.60	4.01	4.01	4.51	4.51
Cabo Verde	7.65	7.65	7.65	7.65	7.78	7.88	7.88	7.94	7.81	7.81	7.92	7.92	7.92	7.94	7.81	7.43
Cameroon	2.56	2.56	2.56	2.77	2.85	3.28	3.61	3.46	3.66	3.41	3.41	3.44	3.41	3.41	3.46	3.27
Central African Republic	1.18	1.35	1.43	1.32	1.32	1.52	1.52	1.61	1.57	1.49	1.49	1.99	1.82	1.82	1.86	1.61
Chad	1.67	1.67	1.67	1.55	1.61	1.61	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.62	1.62	1.52	1.52	1.65
Comoros	3.04	3.20	3.20	3.09	3.15	3.71	3.71	3.71	3.71	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.52	3.41	3.58	3.90
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	2.79	2.79	3.11	3.11	3.31	3.25	2.91	2.91	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.89	2.94	3.19
Côte d'Ivoire	4.22	4.22	4.22	4.11	4.05	4.15	3.93	3.81	3.31	3.53	3.25	3.25	3.08	3.02	3.27	3.38
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.68	1.48	1.40	1.13	1.13	1.49	1.61	1.93	2.11	1.75	1.83	1.92	2.15	2.15	2.28	2.76
Djibouti	2.70	2.74	2.74	2.71	2.77	2.87	2.76	2.83	2.90	2.99	2.96	2.74	2.68	2.20	2.37	2.37
Equatorial Guinea	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.92	1.81	1.70	1.77	1.66	1.77	1.83	1.77	1.84	2.19	2.09
Eritrea	1.97	2.03	2.03	2.15	2.37	2.37	2.37	2.37	2.37	2.44	2.40	2.40	2.34	2.31	2.31	2.31
eSwatini	2.78	3.01	3.08	3.08	3.14	3.03	3.03	3.03	3.09	3.09	3.20	3.20	3.26	2.90	3.04	2.93
Ethiopia	3.37	3.17	3.30	3.38	3.44	3.35	3.42	3.60	3.83	3.72	3.83	3.72	3.79	3.68	4.52	4.72
Gabon	2.18	3.40	3.40	3.54	3.61	3.61	3.61	3.74	3.76	3.76	3.76	3.56	3.48	3.29	3.00	2.72
Gambia	4.47	4.47	4.41	4.49	4.33	4.31	4.06	2.91	2.97	3.05	3.31	3.31	3.38	3.38	4.19	4.39
Ghana	6.30	6.43	6.50	6.50	6.63	6.63	6.69	6.75	6.86	6.33	6.33	6.02	6.02	6.02	5.35	5.35
Guinea	2.21	2.32	2.28	3.08	3.14	3.14	3.14	3.14	3.14	3.01	2.84	2.79	2.79	2.79	2.09	2.02
Guinea-Bissau	2.45	2.56	2.75	2.63	2.63	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.93	1.93	1.26	1.43	1.99	1.99	1.99	2.00
Kenya	5.05	5.05	5.05	5.05	5.18	5.11	5.11	5.33	5.33	5.13	5.13	4.71	4.71	4.71	4.79	5.08
Lesotho	6.06	6.19	6.30	6.30	6.54	6.64	6.64	6.59	6.59	6.66	6.66	6.66	6.33	6.02	6.29	6.48
Liberia	5.57	5.43	5.43	5.32	5.45	5.35	5.23	5.31	4.95	4.95	4.95	4.95	5.07	5.07	5.25	5.22
Madagascar	5.26	5.70	5.70	5.70	5.64	5.22	5.11	5.07	4.85	4.42	4.32	3.93	3.93	3.94	5.57	5.82
Malawi	5.85	5.91	5.74	5.74	5.50	5.49	5.49	5.55	5.55	5.66	6.00	6.08	5.84	5.84	5.13	4.97
Mali	2.58	3.23	3.48	3.93	4.92	5.41	5.64	5.70	5.70	5.79	5.90	5.12	6.36	6.01	5.87	5.99
Mauritania	4.14	4.03	4.03	3.92	3.92	3.82	3.82	3.96	3.96	4.17	4.17	4.17	4.17	3.86	3.91	3.12
Mauritius	8.14	8.14	8.08	8.14	8.22	8.22	8.22	8.28	8.28	8.17	8.17	8.17	8.04	8.04	8.04	8.04
Mozambique	3.51	3.51	3.51	3.51	3.65	3.85	4.02	4.02	4.60	4.66	4.77	4.88	4.90	4.90	5.49	5.28
Namibia	6.52	6.52	6.52	6.52	6.43	6.25	6.31	6.31	6.31	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.24	6.23	6.48	6.54
Niger	2.37	3.73	3.22	3.29	3.29	3.76	3.76	3.96	3.85	4.02	4.08	4.16	4.16	3.38	3.41	3.54
Nigeria	4.23	4.23	4.11	4.10	4.12	4.44	4.44	4.50	4.62	3.76	3.77	3.77	3.83	3.47	3.53	3.52
Rwanda	3.30	3.10	3.10	3.10	3.16	3.35	3.19	3.07	3.07	3.25	3.38	3.36	3.25	3.25	3.71	3.82
Senegal	5.48	5.72	5.53	5.67	5.81	6.15	6.15	6.21	6.08	6.15	6.15	6.09	5.51	5.27	5.37	5.37
Sierra Leone	4.32	5.03	4.97	4.86	4.86	4.66	4.66	4.55	4.55	4.56	4.64	4.71	4.51	4.51	4.11	3.57
South Africa	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.05	7.24	7.24	7.24	7.41	7.56	7.82	7.90	7.79	7.79	7.79	7.91	7.91

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

AGE OF CONFLICT

Table 3

Democracy Index 2006-23

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Tanzania	5.35	5.10	5.10	5.10	5.16	5.41	5.47	5.76	5.58	5.77	5.77	5.88	5.64	5.64	5.28	5.18
Togo	2.99	2.99	2.80	2.80	3.30	3.10	3.05	3.32	3.41	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	2.43	1.75
Uganda	4.49	4.55	4.48	4.94	5.02	5.20	5.09	5.26	5.22	5.22	5.22	5.16	5.13	5.05	5.03	5.14
Zambia	5.80	5.80	5.72	4.86	5.09	5.61	5.68	5.99	6.28	6.39	6.26	6.26	6.19	5.68	5.25	5.25
Zimbabwe	3.04	2.92	2.92	3.16	3.16	3.16	3.16	3.05	3.05	2.78	2.67	2.67	2.68	2.64	2.53	2.62
average	4.04	4.14	4.12	4.16	4.26	4.36	4.35	4.37	4.38	4.34	4.36	4.32	4.32	4.23	4.28	4.24
World average	5.23	5.29	5.28	5.37	5.44	5.48	5.48	5.52	5.55	5.55	5.53	5.52	5.49	5.46	5.55	5.52

Source: EIU.

Age of conflict: democracy, war and peace

Introduction

The great contribution of Carl von Clausewitz to the study of war was his insistence on the centrality of politics. In his seminal work *On War*, Clausewitz argued that “the only source of war is politics”. Whereas previous writers had considered war only from a military perspective, he pointed out that war does not take place in a political vacuum, but is “simply the continuation of policy by other means”. The political causes and objectives of war should be paramount in shaping its conduct, argued Clausewitz, and the same applies to any serious analysis of conflict. That all wars start in the realm of politics is the underlying assumption of this essay. It examines the propensity for war among democratic and non-democratic political regimes, and analyses the geopolitical factors that are driving the world towards war.

The world is immersed in many types of conflict—inter-state, intra-state and non-state—and their causes are varied. Economic issues such as competition for resources underpin many contemporary conflicts, but they are not the only causes and not necessarily the most important ones. And whether economic conflict at the national or international level leads to violent contestation or war is a matter of political choices. Other drivers of conflict include disputes over borders and territorial issues; sectarianism based on religion and ethnicity; suppression of democratic rights and civil liberties; extremist forms of political Islamism; drug cartels and organised crime; and failed states that do not control their territory and cannot provide security for their citizens.

Another source of conflict that arguably presents the greatest danger to world peace lies in the realm of geopolitics. The position of the US as the global hegemon is increasingly contested by rising powers such as China, fuelling instability across the world. Though its predominance has waned, the US retains economic and military primacy and continues to dominate international political and economic decision-making. Meanwhile, the European powers, whose economic weight in the world is greatly diminished compared with the post-war period, continue to enjoy a privileged position in major world institutions. A failure on the part of the Western powers to reorganise the global, multilateral system in conformity with the increasing economic and political importance of emerging economies is generating resentment against the West. The preservation of an antiquated international political system that does not reflect the shift in the global balance of economic power, in particular to Asia, is increasing the risk of tensions spilling over into conflict.

This essay argues that we have entered an era of intensifying great power rivalries, which if left unchecked have the potential to unleash a devastating conflict. Many politicians and commentators in the West argue that the rise in conflict globally is the result of there being a greater preponderance of authoritarian states. According to this perspective, the world is bifurcating between democracies and autocracies, with the former being proponents of peace and the latter being instigators of war. Intuitively, this argument appears to make sense. After all, most of the wars and conflicts taking place today were started by or involve countries run by non-democratic and authoritarian regimes. However, there are many flaws in the democratic peace thesis. In particular, this binary explanation ignores the

sources of conflict emanating from the Western-led international political order. But first we consider whether we really are living in an age of conflict.

War and peace in the 21st century

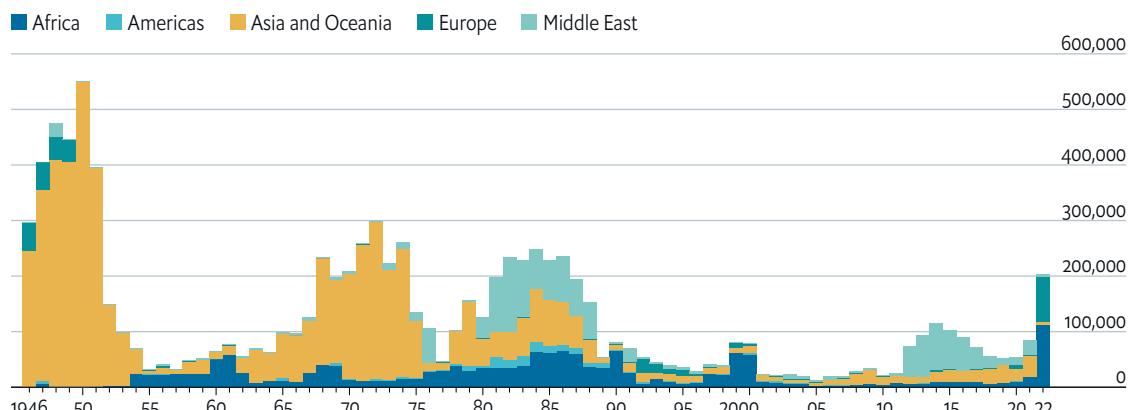
From Russia's war in Ukraine to the Israel-Hamas war, Azerbaijan's military conquest of Nagorno Karabakh, the Guyana-Venezuela crisis, the civil war in Sudan and the Islamist insurgencies in the Sahel in West Africa, the world appears to be engulfed in conflict. The number of inter-state wars, cross-border military incursions, civil wars, Islamist and jihadist insurgencies, violent attacks on military bases and commercial shipping, and threats of war seem to be increasing. As a result, many have drawn the conclusion that we are living in an increasingly conflict-driven world.

However, from a historical perspective, and based on the number of deaths in conflict, 2023 was far from being a particularly deadly year. Deaths in conflict may be an imperfect metric to analyse the underlying dynamics of conflict, but it is probably the best indicator of the intensity of conflict at any given time. Figures from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and the Peace Research Institute Oslo show that the post-cold war period after 1991 has been much more peaceful than the cold war era between 1946 and 1991. And today's world seems far removed from that of 1914-1945, a period encompassing two world wars that killed an estimated 79m-100m people, if both military and civilian casualties, as well as deaths from war-related disease and famine, are included.

The annual death toll from war started to drop after 1950, with an even more pronounced fall following the end of the cold war in 1991. When viewed in relative terms (deaths per 100,000 people in order to take account of the huge increase in population since the second world war), the decline in war-related deaths is even more striking. In Europe, the cold war era was mostly "peaceful". However, there were plenty of wars elsewhere, in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. Big spikes in the

Deaths in state-based conflicts by region

(included are deaths of combatants and civilians due to fighting in interstate*, intrastate†, and extrasystemic‡ conflicts that were ongoing that year)



***Interstate conflict (UCDP and PRIO):** A conflict between states that causes at least 25 deaths during a year. This includes combatant and civilian deaths due to fighting, but excludes deaths due to disease and starvation resulting from the conflict.

†**Intrastate conflict (UCDP and PRIO):** A conflict between a state and a non-state armed group that causes at least 25 deaths during a year. This includes combatant and civilian deaths due to fighting, but excludes deaths due to disease and starvation resulting from the conflict. If a foreign state is involved, it is called "internationalized", and "non-internationalized" otherwise.

‡**Extrasystemic conflict (UCDP and PRIO):** A conflict between a state and a non-state armed group outside its territory that causes at least 25 deaths during a year. This includes combatant and civilian deaths due to fighting, but excludes deaths due to disease and starvation resulting from the conflict.

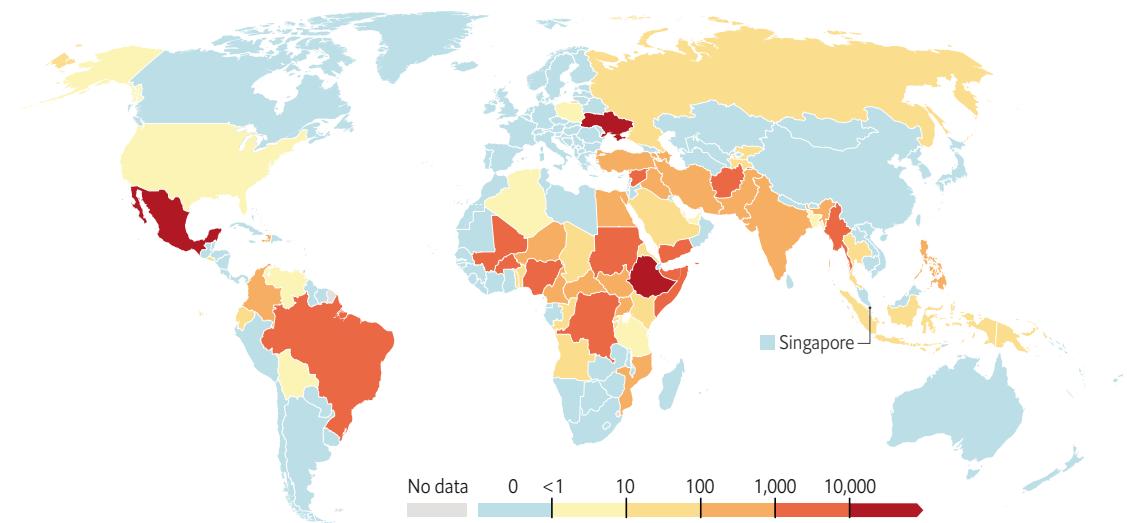
Sources: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2023); Peace Research Institute Oslo (2017). Processed by Our World in Data.

number of war deaths occurred in the civil wars of the immediate post-war period, during the Partition of India (1946-48); in the Korean war (1950-53); in Vietnam during war with the US (1965-73); and in the 1980s, during the Soviet-Afghanistan war (1979-89), the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) and the Salvadoran, Sudanese, Somali, Sri Lankan and other civil wars. The most striking decline in war-related deaths occurred in the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The number of deaths in conflict fell from around 500,000 per year in 1946-55 to around 51,000 per year in the 1990s and to about 20,000 per year in the 2000s.

After a decline in the number of deaths in conflict in the 1990s and 2000s, there was an increase in the 2010s and an even sharper one in the 2020s. Most casualties have been the consequence of intra-state wars (state versus non-state actors, for example in Syria), non-state conflicts (between non-state armed groups, as in drug wars in Latin America) and one-sided violence (armed groups versus civilians, for example the Islamist insurgencies in West Africa). However, over the past decade or so, the number of inter-state wars has been creeping up: Russia-Georgia (2008); Russia-Ukraine (since 2014); Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno Karabakh, 2016, 2020, 2023). The past two years (2022-23) were deadly in terms of combatant deaths in conflict: the combatant death toll in 2022, which surpassed 200,000, was the biggest since the 1980s. People therefore have good reason to think that we are living in an age of conflict and that the world is becoming a more dangerous place.

Deaths in armed conflicts, 2022

(Included are deaths of combatants and civilians due to fighting in armed conflicts* that were ongoing that year)



*Armed conflict (UCDP and PRIO): A disagreement between organized groups, or between one organized group and civilians, that causes at least 25 deaths during a year. This includes combatant and civilian deaths due to fighting, but excludes deaths due to disease and starvation resulting from the conflict.

Sources: Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2023); Natural Earth (2022) – processed by Our World in Data.

What's democracy got to do with it?

The latest edition of the US National Security Strategy says that the most pressing challenge to the US comes from the behaviour of powers that “combine authoritarian governance with a revisionist foreign policy” and pose “a challenge to international peace and stability”. In line with this logic, the

administration of Joe Biden, the US president, has put democracy promotion at the forefront of US foreign policy. Launching his Summit of Democracies initiative in December 2021, Mr Biden described a world divided between democracies that are defending peace and security and autocracies that are instigating war and conflict. Mr Biden's pro-democracy agenda is in keeping with the dominant tradition in modern US foreign policy of Wilsonian internationalism—expounded after the first world war by the then-president, Woodrow Wilson (1913-21), who proposed a values-based US foreign policy that should have as its aim the promotion of democracy and peace. This tradition has appeared to prevail for more than a century over the realist approach that advocates an interest-based, pragmatic foreign policy. In reality, the two traditions are not necessarily antithetical. US foreign policy is usually interest-driven, even when it has appeared to be idealistic.

An interpretation of the source of global conflict that links autocracy with war and democracy with peace finds academic endorsement in what is known as "democratic peace theory". This theory holds that democracies are less likely than non-democracies to go to war with each other, start wars or engage in protracted military conflicts. There is an extensive literature on democratic peace theory, but in summary there are two main arguments supporting the thesis. First, proponents of the theory argue that having representative political institutions makes it more difficult for governments to go to war without the consent of the electorate. Given that the costs and risks associated with war will mostly be borne by citizens, a system based on democratic political accountability favours peace rather than war. Second, the thesis maintains that countries that share a democratic political culture are not only likely to seek peaceful means of resolving conflict at home, but are also predisposed to pursue the same approach in their dealings with other democratic countries. By implication, the democratic peace theory suggests that democracies are superior to other political systems, including all authoritarian models, because they favour reconciliation and peace over confrontation and war.

The empirical evidence appears to support the theory of the democratic peace. There have been no wars between democracies since 1946. As Ajin Choi, a scholar of democracy and international conflict, has argued, the absence of war between democratic states "comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations." When we correlate the incidence of conflict in countries according to their regime classification in the Democracy Index, the results appear to vindicate the democratic peace theory.

Conflict and regime type

Countries experiencing conflict in 2022-23 were concentrated among those classified by the Democracy Index as "authoritarian regimes" (scores less than or equal to 4 on a 0-10 scale) and "hybrid regimes" (scores greater than 4 or equal to 6). To assess whether a country was in a conflict of a greater or lesser magnitude, we applied the following metrics: major war (10,000 or more deaths per year); war (1,000-10,000 deaths per year); limited conflict (up to 1,000 deaths per year); and violent clashes (up to 100 deaths per year). None of the 24 countries ranked as a "full democracy" in 2023 were embroiled in a conflict of any of the above types. In 2023 there were no deaths of security forces in Northern Ireland for the first time since the start of the "Troubles" in 1969. Greece's sovereignty over islands in the eastern Mediterranean is disputed by Turkey, which has engaged in bellicose rhetoric and provocations against its old foe, but the two sides began a rapprochement in 2023 and have not engaged in serious conflict for 50 years. Although South Korea and North Korea never signed a final peace treaty when war

ended with an armistice more than 70 years ago, the two countries are involved in a “frozen conflict” rather than a hot one, despite occasional incidents in border areas. Taiwan’s peace and security are threatened by China, but the two are not in a state of open or violent conflict.

Among the “flawed democracies” there is a greater incidence of both domestic and external conflict compared with the “full democracies”. Israel is engaged in war against Hamas, an Islamist terror group, in Gaza that threatens to ignite conflicts across the wider Middle East region. The world’s biggest democracy, India, has clashed with China along a contested and increasingly militarised border stretching for 2,100 km: there were violent clashes in 2020 and December 2022. India is also suffering from internal conflicts involving secessionist regions and religious minorities, often with communal roots, which have resulted in hundreds of deaths annually in recent years. No other “flawed democracy” was engaged in an inter-state conflict in 2022-23, although several suffer from frozen conflict (Cyprus/Turkey, Moldova/Russia, Serbia/Kosovo). Half a dozen other countries classified as “flawed democracies” are facing internal conflicts, including gang warfare, of greater or lesser severity, including Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Jamaica, the Philippines and Thailand, with the number of deaths annually exceeding 100—by a wide margin in some places.

The incidence and scale of war and conflict are much greater among the “hybrid regimes” and “authoritarian regimes”, and are contributing to a decline in their index scores. According to our calculations, 24 of the 34 “hybrid regimes” and at least 40 of the 59 “authoritarian regimes” were involved in a war, conflict or insurgency of some kind in 2022-23. A few were major inter-state wars, including those between Ukraine and Russia and Armenia and Azerbaijan. Some were inter-state conflicts of a lesser order, such as the border clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and between Afghanistan and Iran. Others were major civil wars that have inflicted a huge toll of death and misery on civilians, including in Ethiopia, Libya, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Many “hybrid” and “authoritarian” states are facing Islamist insurgencies that have killed hundreds of thousands in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. Meanwhile, in Latin America drug trafficking is exacting a heavy death toll among security forces, civilians and drug cartels alike. The Mexican drug war, between the Mexican state and drug cartels, has killed an estimated 200,000-400,000 people since 2006. In Ecuador, the number of homicides has risen rapidly in 2022-23.

Democracy equals peace: the caveats

On the above evidence, the case for democracies being more peaceful than non-democracies seems compelling. However, the empirical evidence does not tell the whole story; it needs to be interpreted after considering other factors such as history, geography and socio-economic development.

The historical timeframe to make a firm judgement on this matter is short. There was a slow “first wave” of partial democratisation in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but there were only about a dozen democracies on the eve of the second world war; a second wave of democratisation occurred in the decades after the war, and a third wave began in the mid-1970s and spread across Asia, southern Europe and Latin America, gaining momentum again in the 1990s after the collapse of communism globally. The point is that democracy in its modern incarnation (based on universal suffrage) does not have a long pedigree. It is not long enough to say conclusively that democracies do not go to war against each other.

A country's history of independent statehood is another crucial factor in its democratic and economic development. Democratisation in countries that were colonies of European powers was not even conceivable until after the third wave of decolonisation that followed the second world war. It was also impossible until much later for those countries that found themselves living under communist rule after 1945: in eastern Europe democratisation began in the 1990s, apart from brief periods in a few countries in the interwar years of the early twentieth century. The absence of a history of independent statehood for many countries in Africa, Asia, eastern Europe, and the Middle East and North Africa has made it difficult to establish the sort of democratic institutions and democratic political culture that developed organically over centuries in the oldest democracies in the world, which include England, France, Sweden, New Zealand and the US.

These matters of history are important because they raise questions about causality. Does democracy bring peace or vice versa? It could be argued that countries that have experienced peace are more predisposed to having open, liberal political systems than those that have experienced invasion and war. And to what extent are democracy and peace influenced by other factors such as a history of independent statehood and levels of socio-economic development? The causality of democracy and socio-economic development is inconclusive, though there seems to be a strong correlation between levels of GDP per head and the quality of democracy. The richest, most developed economies in the world make up most of the "full democracies" classified by our index. The existence of political stability and/or the absence of political instability also appears to be an important determinant of economic growth. It seems that the prevalence of peace and of conflict may depend on many factors other than democracy.

Europe's "cold" peace

The democracy equals peace argument has had particular salience in Europe, where the EU is often held up as a democratic peace project. In 2012 the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU for having "contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe". But was it only democracy that brought peace to Europe in the post-war years or were there other factors at play? According to John Lewis Gaddis, a US historian, it was the existence of the cold war more than anything that ushered in a "long peace" in Europe, a continent that had been ravaged by war in the previous half-century. Through the division of Germany, the cold war froze conflict in Europe and attenuated competition among its great powers.

Other factors, including the decisive role of the US as a security guarantor and aid donor, also contributed to the consolidation of democracy and peace in post-war Europe. The US nuclear umbrella guaranteed the security of Europe and the risk of mutually assured destruction provided a powerful disincentive to start a hot war in Europe. Furthermore, the US Marshall Plan provided US\$13.3bn in aid (equivalent to about US\$175bn today) to rebuild Europe's shattered economies, contributing to a post-war economic boom that laid the foundation for peace and prosperity.

While Europe was enjoying a "cold peace" after 1945, hot wars were raging elsewhere, many of them prosecuted by the world's democracies. This brings us to an important qualifier to the democratic peace thesis. Democracies may not have gone to war against each other in the post-war period, but they have gone to war or intervened against non-democracies, national liberation movements and nascent left-leaning democracies. The theory does not claim that democracies have not waged war

against others, but the frequency with which democracies have intervened against non-democracies puts a different perspective on the general contention that democracies tend to be more peaceful. During the cold war, the US was involved in more than a dozen major wars and interventions around the world, many of them against perceived and actual communist regimes and insurgencies. The biggest of these were the Korean war (1950-53) and the Vietnam war (1965-73). The UK and France, the two main European military powers, were allies of the US in Korea, Vietnam and other wars, and also waged on their own account elsewhere.

The end of the cold war was supposed to usher in a “peace dividend”, but democracies have continued to intervene against non-democracies. During the cold war, the US and its allies justified intervention as necessary to defeat communism. In the post-cold war period, after the defeat of communism, intervention has often been presented as a more positive endeavour aimed at defending democracy and democratic rights. This applied to so-called “humanitarian interventions” in places such as Bosnia & Hercegovina, Somalia, Kosovo and Libya; interventions against dictators such as Saddam Hussein to promote “regime change”; and even the US “war on terror” (2001-) also promoted “regime change” and “state-building”. The often disastrous consequences of these interventions, some of which led to state collapse, region-wide instability and terrorist insurgencies, provoked criticism of the US and its unpopular president, George W Bush (2001-09). However, while some have decried specific interventions, such as that in Iraq, the principle of intervention in general has not been repudiated. Yet all external interventions entail a denial of national sovereignty and agency, while a genuine and lasting democracy can only come from internal processes and movements.

Geopolitical drivers of global conflict

In an age of increasing conflict, the Western democracies are focused on preventing regional wars from becoming global conflagrations. These conflicts are symptoms of an increasingly unstable global order and they point to a growing danger of great power conflict, including between the major democracies and non-democratic regimes. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a direct challenge to the Western-led international order and one that has increased the risk of a wider war involving NATO members. Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, has said that on several occasions that his country is at war with the West. Mr Putin may really believe this, even if in saying so his aim is to rally domestic support for his illegal invasion of Ukraine. Major Western powers, led by the US, are arming Ukraine, but they have been at pains to try to avoid a direct conflict with Russia. The US and its allies have no intention of going to war with Russia, but the risk of that happening either through an accident or miscalculation is not negligible.

Russia is not the only state whose behaviour is defying the rules-based international order. China’s bellicose behaviour in the South and East China Sea and Taiwan Strait, and its threats to assert its sovereignty over Taiwan by force, are generating fears of war in East Asia. Tensions have been ramping up since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which led to intense speculation that China might seize the opportunity to invade Taiwan while the world was distracted by war in Europe. Fears about an invasion have been heightened by China’s frequent military provocations against Taiwan, which usually accompany any pro-independence rhetoric in Taiwan or visits to the island by political delegations from Western countries. The election on January 13th 2024 of a new, independence-leaning Taiwanese president, Lai Ching-te, was a case in point. Following the election and ahead of talks in Thailand

between China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, and the US national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, China sent dozens of planes and ships towards Taiwan in a display of military might. Dismissing Western concerns, China counters that it is Taiwan's talk of independence and Western support for Taiwanese pro-independence leaders that represents the real threat to peace and stability. The US is the main supplier of military aid and training to Taiwan and Mr Biden has said that the US would defend the island in the event of an invasion. Mr Biden has also encouraged other countries to expand their engagement with Taiwan, a move that has enraged the Chinese leadership.

The goal of the US may be to deter China's aggressive approach towards Taiwan, but a hawkish approach could also backfire. By providing military aid and political support for Taiwan, the US government runs the risk of convincing its counterpart in China to attempt a military takeover of the island sooner rather than later. Furthermore, the evolution in recent years of broader US policy towards China may have persuaded the government of China that there is little chance of repairing relations with the US. The Chinese leadership under the president, Xi Jinping, and the Communist Party of China believes that the goal of US policy is to stymie China's ascendancy using all means at its disposal. Some Western commentators, including Edward Luce, the chief US commentator for the Financial Times, have drawn the same conclusion. Mr Luce wrote in October 2022 that the US administration of Joe Biden had launched "a full-blown war on China". The government had just announced a ban not only on exports of US high-end semi-conductor chips to China, but also of any advanced chips made with US equipment anywhere, including in Asia and Europe. Since then, the US has extended its hi-tech war against China to other sectors including artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing.

Containing China through economic, political and military means has become the most important goal of US foreign policy under the presidencies of Barack Obama (2008-16), Donald Trump (2016-20) and Mr Biden (2020-24). It is one of the few policies that enjoys bipartisan support. However, aggressive containment is unlikely to be successful in preventing China's rise—but it will amplify the risk of conflict between the two superpowers.

Will containment lead to conflict?

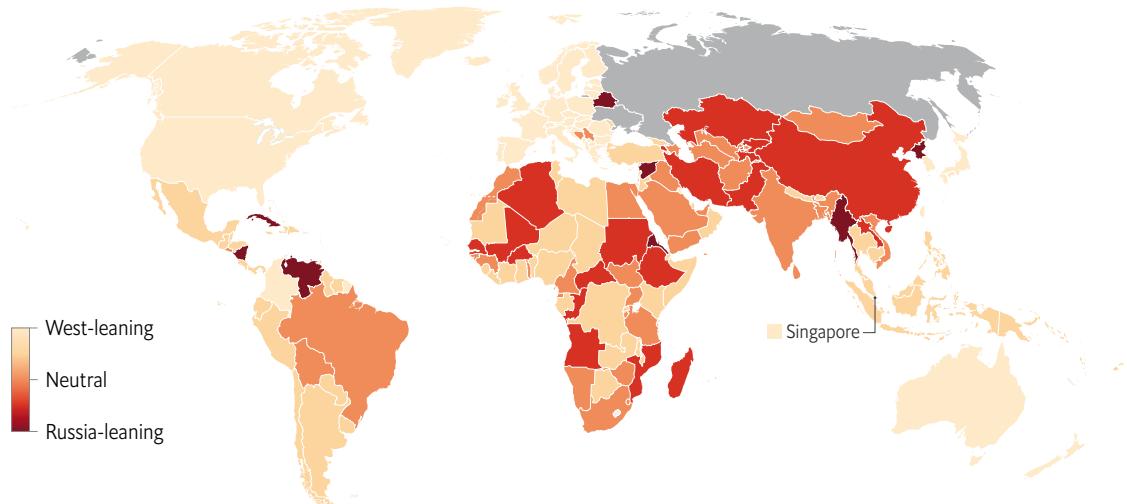
The US containment strategy could succeed in slowing China's growth and development in critical sectors, exacerbating some of the domestic challenges facing the country. However, barring a major economic or political crisis, and despite an inevitable slowdown in Chinese growth rates, by 2050 China will have surpassed the US to become the biggest economic power in the world in nominal US-dollar GDP terms (China is already the world's biggest economy at purchasing power parity). Economic power is not the same as geopolitical power, although history suggests that one leads to the other. But it can take many decades for economic predominance to translate into geopolitical and military pre-eminence. The US had overtaken the UK as the world's most productive economy by 1890, but it did not become the global policeman until after the end of the second world war in 1945. This was a peaceful transition of hegemonic power, accomplished without war between the declining and ascending powers; indeed, the UK and the US fought on the same side in the second world war. Whether the competition between the US and China will be resolved in a similarly peaceful manner looks increasingly in question in 2024.

US policy since 2008 suggests that the government is determined to contain China and maintain its own status as the global hegemon. Meanwhile, China insists that its superpower status be recognised

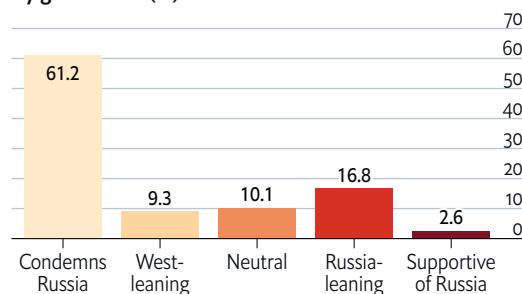
through a reorganisation of international power structures. It has become increasingly resentful of US intransigence and that of the other status quo powers which still dominate international institutions. Under the leadership of Mr Xi, China has pursued an assertive “wolf warrior” diplomacy aimed at strengthening China’s global influence so that it can challenge the US claim to rule the world.

The fight for global hegemony between the US and China is being fought around the world as both compete to win friends and influence. The US is counting on its allies among the developed democracies in Asia, Australasia and Europe, as well as its North American neighbour Canada, and hoping that it can persuade younger democracies in the developing world to take its side. China has not given up on maintaining a working relationship with the EU, but it is devoting most of its diplomatic efforts to building support among developing economies. It is deliberately inciting and playing on hostility towards the US and its Western allies in the developing world to strengthen its own position. Resentment of the Western powers’ domination of international institutions and anger at perceived double standards on the question of non-intervention are powerful sentiments that China can exploit. These grievances were reflected in the refusal of many developing economies to side with the Western powers over Russia’s war in Ukraine. This reluctance to take sides is not a sign of approval of Russia’s violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, but rather reflects their grievances against Western countries. In particular, there is growing frustration that international institutions, such as the IMF and the World

Two-thirds of the world's population live in countries that are neutral or Russia-leaning regarding the war in Ukraine

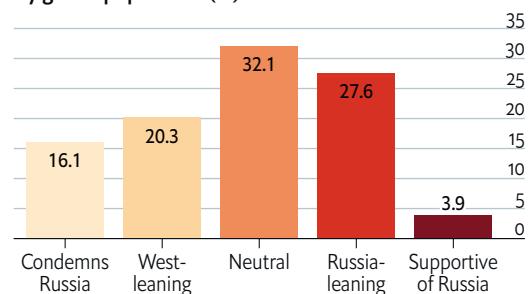


By global GDP (%)



Source: EIU.

By global population (%)



Bank, still mirror the world of 1944—the year of the Bretton Woods agreements—despite the shift in the balance of economic power to the developing economies today. The perennial complaint of politicians from countries such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and South Africa is that they do not have a say in setting the global agenda, which continues to reflect the preoccupations of the major Western powers.

China's meteoric rise over the past four decades is the main driver in the shift in the balance of economic power in the world. However, this shift encompasses other economies in Asia, such as India, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand, four of which already rank among the G20 club of the top 20 richest nations in the world in nominal US-dollar GDP terms. The G20 also includes Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and South Africa. The developed Western economies are now in a minority, which is set to shrink further in coming decades. It is hardly surprising then that the rising non-Western economies should be demanding more of a say in setting the agenda of global affairs, including through representation in the leading international institutions.

The US reluctance to reform the international system to give greater representation to China and other emerging economies was illustrated at the annual meeting of the IMF in October 2023. The result of another failure to reform IMF quotas, which determine voting rights, was to preserve the US monopoly over decision-making at the expense of emerging economies (the US has a 17.4% voting share, which means that it has the final say on every important decision, as these need an 85% majority). The conflict over IMF quotas is only one example of how geopolitical competition is being played out inside the institutions established after 1945 to govern international affairs. In 2020 and 2021 officials at the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank were accused of being too close to China.

The danger for the US of trying to preserve its influence in the world by resisting international institutional change is that it will encourage an increasingly multipolar world to divide into opposing blocs or what Adam Tooze, a historian, calls “polarities”. The fragmentation of the world order finds expression in the regionalisation of production and trade into three blocs led by the US, China and the EU. This is a world in which the US will struggle to assert its authority unless it takes the lead in reshaping global institutions to be more inclusive, in line with new economic realities and power dynamics.

Intra-Western rivalries return

Geopolitical tensions are evident not only in relations between the US and China and between the developed and developing world. There is also a less-noticed trend of increasing economic competition and conflict among the developed economies themselves. Rivalries based on economic and political competition have always existed and, indeed, led to two global wars in the twentieth century. They were suppressed during the cold war years, when the existence of the Soviet Union encouraged European powers to put aside their differences under the US security umbrella. As long as the developing economies were enjoying economic growth during the post-war boom competition for markets did not generate too many frictions. However, economic rivalry has become progressively more intense in recent decades, especially since the global financial crisis of 2008-10.

The developed economies have been suffering a long-term secular trend of slowing growth and productivity, and have lost their competitive edge compared with faster-growing developing countries.

This has encouraged the adoption of protectionist measures by the US and EU, which are also resorting increasingly to state intervention to prop up their economies, in part in response to China's use of massive subsidies to support its industrial base. In recent years, US-EU conflicts have multiplied over trade (steel and aluminium tariffs), data, energy supply (the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, running from Russia to Germany), sanctions (against Iran and to a lesser extent Russia and China), taxation, and other issues. The latest example is the US Inflation Reduction Act which aims to give US businesses an advantage over their European counterparts by providing them with state subsidies. Competition among the developed economies will intensify in future, making it difficult for the US to rally its traditional allies in Europe behind its campaign to isolate China.

Peace is not a given, even for democracies

The world has entered an age of conflict, and the contours of a future major war are already visible. Recent tentative moves by the US and China to engage in dialogue and to promote exchanges in sensitive areas indicate that both would like to prevent competition from developing into confrontation. Competing great powers do not usually intend to go to war to assert their claim to global leadership, but on two occasions in the 20th century this is what occurred. Those global conflagrations were preceded by a series of lesser conflicts that were symptomatic of the underlying great power rivalries. So too in coming years, competition over resources, markets and influence is likely to result in conflict. Advanced new technologies are the arena where rivalry between the US and China is most intense. Both are vying to lead in areas such as robotics, AI, semiconductors and new weapons systems. The danger is that at some point competition will spill over into open conflict and the world will find itself on the brink of war once again. This should give world leaders pause before the dynamic of great power conflict becomes unstoppable.

Making the case for a reordering of the international political system to include rising powers is not an argument for appeasing autocrats. A revamped international order must not reward regimes that violate international law and the sovereign equality of nations. It is important to uphold the values of democracy and freedom and to say what is right and wrong. The world's democracies can best do that through the example they set at home. They can also insist that those who want to become leading stakeholders in the international institutions respect the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination.

Inviting more emerging economies to partake in decision-making should be a positive endeavour aimed at improving international co-operation. However, giving others a seat at the top table will be difficult for the status quo powers. This is because a reordering of the international political system will require them to relinquish their near-monopoly over decision-making at a time when their economies are struggling to compete with the more dynamic countries that they are welcoming to the table. But this may be the best way to reinforce democracy, reduce international tensions and arrest the dynamic towards great power conflict. The US is still the leading global power and, despite its shortcomings, the most important democracy in the world. It therefore has a special responsibility to lead the world towards peace not war.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

AGE OF CONFLICT

Table 4

Democracy across the regions

No. of countries	Democracy index average	Full democracies	Flawed democracies	Hybrid regimes	Authoritarian regimes
North America					
2023	2	8.27	1	1	0
2022	2	8.37	1	1	0
Western Europe					
2023	21	8.37	15	5	1
2022	21	8.36	14	6	1
Eastern Europe & Central Asia					
2023	28	5.37	0	16	4
2022	28	5.39	0	16	4
Latin America & the Caribbean					
2023	24	5.68	2	11	7
2022	24	5.79	3	9	8
Asia & Australasia					
2023	28	5.41	5	10	5
2022	28	5.46	5	9	7
Middle East & North Africa					
2023	20	3.23	0	1	2
2022	20	3.34	0	1	2
Sub-Saharan Africa					
2023	44	4.04	1	6	15
2022	44	4.14	1	6	14
Total					
2023	167	5.23	25	50	34
2022	167	5.29	25	48	36

Source: EIU.

Democracy around the regions in 2023

Introduction

Regression is the story of 2023 as far as the headline Democracy Index score—5.23 out of ten, versus 5.29 in 2022—is concerned. With the exception of western Europe, the only region to improve its score in 2023, every other region registered a decline. In the following pages, we look in detail at developments in all of the regions in 2023, 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 the main changes in the index category scores in every region compared with the previous year.

Table 5**Democracy Index 2006-23 by region**

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2008	2006
Asia & Australasia	5.41	5.46	5.46	5.62	5.67	5.67	5.63	5.74	5.74	5.70	5.61	5.56	5.51	5.53	5.58	5.44
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	5.37	5.39	5.36	5.36	5.42	5.42	5.40	5.43	5.55	5.58	5.53	5.51	5.50	5.55	5.67	5.76
Latin America	5.68	5.79	5.83	6.09	6.13	6.24	6.26	6.33	6.37	6.36	6.38	6.36	6.35	6.37	6.43	6.37
Middle East & North Africa	3.23	3.34	3.41	3.44	3.53	3.54	3.54	3.56	3.58	3.65	3.68	3.73	3.62	3.43	3.54	3.53
North America	8.27	8.37	8.36	8.58	8.59	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.56	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.59	8.63	8.64	8.64
Western Europe	8.37	8.36	8.22	8.29	8.35	8.35	8.38	8.40	8.42	8.41	8.41	8.44	8.40	8.45	8.61	8.60
Sub-Saharan Africa	4.04	4.14	4.12	4.16	4.26	4.36	4.35	4.37	4.38	4.34	4.36	4.32	4.32	4.23	4.28	4.24
World average	5.23	5.29	5.28	5.37	5.44	5.48	5.48	5.52	5.55	5.55	5.53	5.52	5.49	5.46	5.55	5.52

Source: EIU

The developed countries of western Europe dominate among the world's "full democracies", accounting for 15 of the total of 24 in 2023. 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 five "full democracies", including three Asian ones (Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) alongside Australia and New Zealand. Two Latin American countries are classed as "full democracies" (Costa Rica and Uruguay), as is one African country (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" are concentrated in developing economies of eastern Europe (16 in 2023), Latin America (11), Asia (10) and Sub-Saharan Africa (6). Eastern Europe does not have a single "full democracy", despite the preponderance of upper-middle-income countries in the region. This is striking in comparison with other later-developing regions such as Latin America and demands an explanation that takes account of the region's unique experience under the domination of the Soviet Union after 1945 and during its post-Communist transition after 1989. In 2023 several countries in eastern Europe were close to being classified as "full democracies" (which requires a score above 8.00), including Czech Republic (7.97), Estonia (7.96) and Slovenia (7.75). However, they failed to achieve the

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AGE OF CONFLICT

small improvements that would have taken them over the line. The region continues to struggle with weaknesses in institutions and political culture.

“Hybrid regimes” and “authoritarian regimes”, which constitute 93 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 13 of the 28 countries in the region. “Hybrid” and “authoritarian regimes” also constitute almost half the 24 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (11). In Eastern Europe 12 of the region’s 28 countries (43%) 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

For the first time since the launch of the Democracy Index in 2006, western Europe has overtaken North America to become the highest-scoring region in the world in 2023. However, this was accomplished not by any significant positive momentum in Europe, but by the decline in Canada’s

Table 6

Western Europe 2023

	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	18=	12	9.58	7.50	8.89	6.88	8.53	Full democracy
Belgium	7.64	36	19	9.58	8.21	5.00	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Cyprus	7.38	37=	20	9.17	5.36	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Denmark	9.28	6	5	10.00	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.41	Full democracy
Finland	9.30	5	4	10.00	9.64	7.78	9.38	9.71	Full democracy
France	8.07	23=	15	9.58	7.86	7.78	6.88	8.24	Full democracy
Germany	8.80	12	10	9.58	8.57	8.33	8.13	9.41	Full democracy
Greece	8.14	20=	13	10.00	7.14	7.22	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
Iceland	9.45	3	2	10.00	9.29	8.89	9.38	9.71	Full democracy
Italy	7.69	34	18	9.58	6.79	7.22	7.50	7.35	Flawed democracy
Ireland	9.19	7	6	10.00	8.21	8.33	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Luxembourg	8.81	11	9	10.00	8.93	6.67	8.75	9.71	Full democracy
Malta	7.93	28	16	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	7.75	31=	17	9.58	6.79	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Spain	8.07	23=	14	9.58	7.50	7.22	7.50	8.53	Full democracy
Sweden	9.39	4	3	9.58	9.64	8.33	10.00	9.41	Full democracy
Switzerland	9.14	8	7	9.58	9.29	8.33	9.38	9.12	Full democracy
Turkey	4.33	102	21	3.50	5.00	6.11	5.00	2.06	Hybrid regime
United Kingdom	8.28	18=	11	9.58	7.50	8.33	6.88	9.12	Full democracy
Regional score	8.37			9.39	8.01	7.67	8.10	8.67	

Source: EIU.

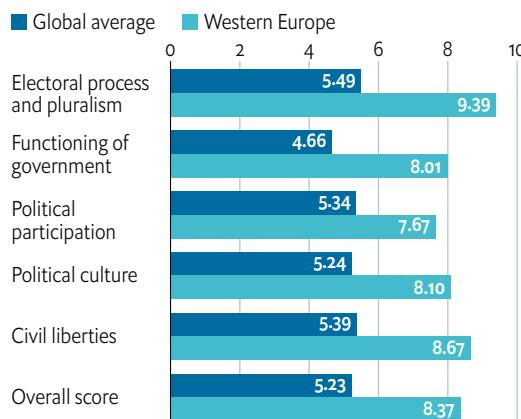
score. Nevertheless, as the sole region to improve its score in 2023, western Europe was a positive outlier. The score rose by the smallest possible margin of 0.01 points, but in a year characterised by regression everywhere else, this was an achievement of sorts. Of the 21 countries in the region covered by the index, five improved their score, 13 retained the same score as in 2022 and three deteriorated. In a significant fillip for the country, after a decade in the political and economic wilderness following the crisis of 2009, Greece was upgraded from a “flawed democracy” to a “full democracy”. It is the only country in western Europe to register a regime classification change and one of only three globally to register an upgrade in classification.

Western Europe boasts the largest number of “full democracies” of any region (15 out of a total of 24 globally) and accounts for eight of the top-ten ranked countries. The Nordics continue to stand out as particularly high-scoring, occupying five of the top six positions in the global rankings. Norway is in first place, followed by New Zealand. The next four countries are all Nordic nations—Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Denmark. These countries boast high scores across all categories, particularly *electoral process and pluralism* and *functioning of government*. All but one of the remaining countries are classified as “flawed democracies”, with almost all of these scoring close to the boundary to qualify as a “full democracy”. The outlier is Turkey, whose score fell slightly in 2023. With a score of 4.33 and a ranking of 102 (of 167), it is close to the bottom of the “hybrid regime” classification.

Western Europe:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

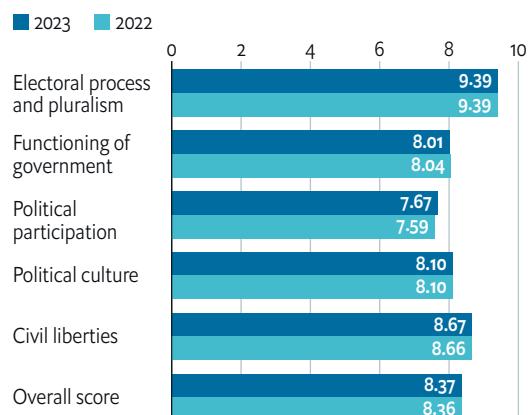
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



The region registered an improvement across two of the five categories of the Democracy Index in 2023—again bucking the general trend of decline in most regions—with the average scores for *political participation* and *civil liberties* rising compared with 2022. The regional score remained unchanged in the *electoral process and pluralism* and *political culture* categories. However, the region’s score for functioning of government declined modestly.

Anti-immigration sentiment boosted support for populists

In 2023 irregular EU border crossings reached the highest number since 2015, when more than 1m migrants entered the EU though the most recent influx was not on the same scale. Civil wars and

economic and political crises elsewhere in the world contributed to a rise in migrant arrivals in Europe in 2023. Anti-immigration sentiment intensified in many countries, helping to boost support for populist parties from the Netherlands to the Nordics. Public perceptions of high levels of illegal migration in 2024 is likely to bring gains for populist parties in the European Parliament elections in June.

The representation in government of right-wing parties such as the Sweden Democrats or the Finns party in government is not in itself detrimental to democracy; indeed the exclusion of such parties that have the support of large sections of the electorate could be construed as anti-democratic. However, more liberal political forces are concerned that far-right parties in the Nordics are undermining democracy by promoting intolerance or passing illiberal legislation. In Finland, following the parliamentary election in April 2023, the National Coalition Party formed a right-wing four-party coalition government with the Finns Party, the centre-right Swedish People's Party and the centre-right Christian Democrats. The government has been rocked by several racism scandals involving members of parliament from the Finns Party. Meanwhile, in Denmark the government implemented tough immigration policies, but also took steps to criminalise the burning of the Quran. Some opposition parties objected to the government's efforts on the grounds that they undermined Danish free-speech protections.

Greece is upgraded to a full democracy

Greece was upgraded from a “flawed democracy” to a “full democracy” in the 2023 Democracy Index, moving five places up the global rankings to 20th position. Greece's score improved from 7.97 in 2022 to 8.14 in 2023, driven by modest improvements in the *political participation* and *civil liberties* categories. Greece had languished in the “flawed democracy” category since 2010, when the Greek sovereign debt crisis led to a prolonged political and economic crisis and social trauma. The crisis led to a side-lining of the traditional systemic parties and a polarisation of Greek politics between extremes of right and left. The election of New Democracy (ND) under prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in 2019 led to an economic recovery and a gradual improvement in levels of public trust in government. This was demonstrated in the return of a second majority ND government in June 2023.

Several factors drove increased engagement in politics in 2023, including two parliamentary elections in May and June, and regional elections in October 2023. The authorities further increased efforts to facilitate the diaspora vote, having changed the law in 2019 to allow those living abroad to vote in their place of residence—previously they had to travel to Greece on election day. Following the resignation of its former leader, Alexis Tsipras, the main leftist opposition party, Syriza, elected a political novice, Stefanos Kassidakis, as leader. The election campaign and process engaged many new and younger members in the party, but alienated many longstanding members who subsequently left and formed a new party. Greek citizens also demonstrated their propensity to engage in protests, mobilising on the streets in response to a deadly train crash in early 2023.

Greece continues to be penalised in the index on some media freedom indicators. There is freedom of expression in Greece and a robust independent media representing a diversity of views. However, there is evidence that journalists are not entirely free to investigate some stories, and they can face criminal penalties if convicted under libel, defamation or slander laws. There is also

censorship on issues related to the police, the army and the church, and journalists have sometimes faced harassment, threats and violence from non-state actors and the police. The Greek government and state is committed to upholding the rights of women, minorities and migrants, but World Values Survey data reveal a negative perception among the public of the degree to which human rights are respected, suggesting that increased oversight of and intervention against abuses by officials is required.

A year of greater stability for the UK

Following a tumultuous 2022 during which the UK appointed three prime ministers, there was greater surface stability in British politics in 2023, although the governing party remained in serious disarray. The prime minister, Rishi Sunak, failed to revive the fortunes of the Conservative Party, which trails the opposition Labour Party in the polls by a double-digit margin as the country gears up for a general election in the autumn of 2024. Recent data from the World Values Survey show that confidence in government, particularly among millennials, has declined. Despite this, the UK's global ranking remained stable at 18th and its overall score was unchanged. There has been a small improvement in the country's score for social cohesion: divisions over Brexit have receded and support for independence in Scotland has declined. Meanwhile the UK's scores for many indicators that measure things such as confidence in government and political parties, citizens' control, and voter turnout are already low and either could not go lower or did not merit being downgraded further.

North America

North America, comprising the US and Canada, remains a top performer in the Democracy Index. However, the region's overall score fell from 8.37 in 2022 to 8.27 in 2023, leading it to fall behind western Europe. This marks the first time that North America has not placed as the world's highest scoring region since the Democracy Index launched in 2006. The weaker performance was driven by downgrades in Canada, reflecting trends of rising polarisation and diminishing confidence in government that have been more typical of the US in recent years.

Canada's overall score dropped from 8.88 in 2022 to 8.69 in 2023, but its placement in our global ranking remains largely unchanged, at 13th position (12th previously). Canada also retains its "full democracy" classification. The US continues to trail Canada, with a score of 7.85, unchanged from 2022. The US rises one spot to 29th position in our global ranking, reflecting changes in other countries, and remains in the "flawed democracy" category, where it has stood since 2016.

Table 7**North America 2023**

	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	13	1	10.00	8.21	8.89	7.50	8.82	Full democracy
United States of America	7.85	29	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 problem of unpopular leaders

North America continues to score strongest 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 dipped slightly during Canada's 2021 parliamentary elections (to 62.3%) compared with the previous poll in 2019 (67.7%), but it remained well above the 50% threshold—meaning that Canada comfortably avoided a downgrade on this indicator. Turnout during the US midterm elections in 2022 was among the highest on record, with nearly half of eligible voters casting ballots. (US midterms traditionally generate low turnout.) This followed record turnout during the 2020 US presidential election, at 66%, the highest rate in more than a century.

US electoral institutions have exhibited considerable strength and resilience in recent years. Despite baseless attempts by some Republicans to overturn the 2020 presidential election results, the change of administrations occurred without incident, and the presidency of Joe Biden, a Democrat, has faced no major disruptions. The subsequent 2022 midterms played out with no systemic irregularities or scandals. A number of “election deniers” (who still dispute the 2020 results without evidence) were elected to Congress, but voters broadly rejected them from key positions in state and federal government, particularly those involving the overseeing of elections.

A trend of unpopular leaders could tarnish North America’s performance in the *electoral process and pluralism* and *political participation* categories in future years, particularly if voter participation wanes and cynicism towards the electoral process rises. The November 2024 US presidential election is likely to be between Mr Biden and his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump, even though both have long suffered from net-negative popularity ratings. Mr Biden continues to face doubts over his age; he would be 82 by the start of his second term. Mr Trump (who would be 78) remains a highly controversial figure, not least owing to the numerous criminal charges and court cases against him (he denies all wrongdoing). National polls consistently indicate that most voters would prefer that neither candidate appeared on the ticket. However, both are likely to secure their party nominations, particularly since neither the Democratic nor Republican parties have made a substantial effort to develop a new generation of leaders.

Canada’s prime minister, Justin Trudeau, similarly faces no serious challenge from within his Liberal Party, despite his waning popularity. Mr Trudeau maintains his plans to lead the Liberals into the next parliamentary election, which is scheduled for October 2025 but could be called sooner, even though his approval rating has plummeted to its lowest point of his eight years in office. Seven in ten Canadians believe that Mr Trudeau should resign in 2024, according to a December 2023 poll by Ipsos, but only three in ten believe that he will. A similarly small share of Canadians (32%) express a “good or great deal” of confidence in the federal parliament, according to a survey published in November 2023 by Statistics Canada, the government’s statistics agency. This has contributed to a deterioration in Canada’s performance in our *functioning of government* category. This score declined from 8.57 in 2022 to 8.21 in 2023—still well above the US score of 6.43.

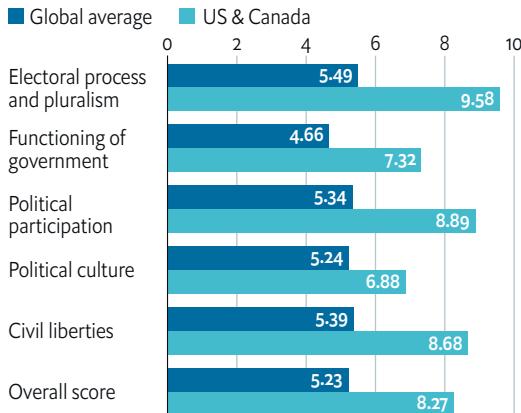
DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

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US & Canada:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

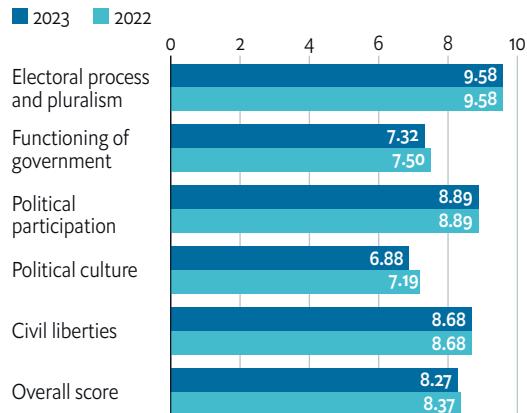
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



US-style polarisation moves north

Political culture remains the lowest-scoring category for North America. The score dropped from 7.19 in 2022 to 6.88 in 2023, and is well below western Europe's score of 8.10. 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 during the past year, including over LGBTQ+ rights, climate policy and reproductive health. These debates have extended beyond the usual set of actors (such as politicians and activists) and now implicate corporate executives as well as primary school teachers and librarians (over lesson plans and books discussing sexuality, gender and racial identity).

The Israel-Hamas war, which erupted in October 2023, has divided public opinion further on issues related to free speech, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, with particular implications for university campuses and administrations. A highly politicised media, including popular TV channels and social media platforms, continue to foment and amplify the country's divisions. 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. These tensions will only intensify ahead of the 2024 elections as both parties stake out positions on culture war issues and frame the elections in existential terms.

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 2023, unchanged from 2022. Pluralism and 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. This trend shows no signs of abating in the current Congress, which began its two-year term in January 2023. Democrats and Republicans each narrowly control a chamber of Congress, presenting structural barriers to the legislative process. Intra-party tensions have created additional obstacles, even on basic legislation

essential for the country's economic stability. In June 2023 lawmakers agreed to a temporary suspension of the federal debt ceiling, thereby avoiding an unprecedented sovereign default. However, this occurred only after down-to-the-wire negotiations yielded a compromise that ultimately led Republicans to oust their own speaker of the House of Representatives (the lower house). Similar dynamics have complicated talks over the federal budget (risking a disruptive government shutdown) and over military assistance to Ukraine and Israel (which traditionally garners bipartisan support). In total, Congress passed only 34 bills in 2023, marking the least productive first-year session in nearly a century. The situation is unlikely to improve in the run-up to the 2024 elections, which will keep partisan and intra-party divisions high.

Polarisation has become a growing feature of Canadian politics, as was particularly evident in 2023. Tensions have increased steadily between the Liberal federal government and the Conservative-led provinces, and this is now one of the biggest risks to Canada's political stability in the run-up to the 2025 parliamentary elections. Disagreements span an array of issues, ranging from the Liberal government's environmental policies (which the oil-producing western provinces staunchly oppose) to the national pension system (which Alberta has recently threatened to exit). Meanwhile, US-style "culture war" topics have become more prominent in Canadian political discourse, animating debates about individual freedoms—including over covid-19 restrictions, gun control, and, more recently, transgender rights and parental rights. They also have increasingly served as reference points for inter-party conflicts at the national level. The Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, accuses Mr Trudeau of advancing a "woke" agenda, while Mr Trudeau frequently alludes to Mr Trump in the US to frame Mr Poilievre as a far-right radical. These dynamics have prompted a downgrade in Canada's performance on the "social cohesion" indicator within our *political culture* category. Canada's score for this category falls from 8.13 in 2022 to 7.50 in 2023, but remains well above the US score (6.25).

Will US democratic institutions reach breaking point?

North America's score in our *civil liberties* category is unchanged at 8.68 in 2023, and remains higher than in any other region. 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 (5.39). 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. The ruling has resulted in an inconsistent patchwork of state-level laws, with some states enacting new blanket abortion bans, others introducing partial restrictions and still others providing additional protections for abortion access. In many states, the future of abortion rights remains up in the air, subject to court challenges or changes in state governments. 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-services 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 pressure in the run-up to and aftermath of the 2024 US presidential election. Mr Trump and his campaign team have spoken openly of using the Justice Department to prosecute political rivals; invoking the Insurrection Act to quell protests against his administration; installing loyalists across the civil service; and introducing

"ideological screenings" of immigrants, including on the basis of religion. If Mr Trump were to win the election his administration would move forward with at least some of these policies. Meanwhile, many in the Democratic Party and the media have presented a second Trump presidency as an existential threat to US democracy. None of this bodes well for the post-election political landscape.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The Democracy Index score for Latin America and the Caribbean underwent its eighth consecutive decline in 2023, with the region's average score falling to 5.68, down from 5.79 in 2022. Despite the decline, the region remains the world's third most democratic region, behind North America and western Europe. Besides these frontrunners, Latin America and the Caribbean has the world's most robust scores for *electoral process and pluralism, political participation and civil liberties*; however, it has the worst score globally for *political culture* and performs poorly in regards to *functioning of government* (see charts below).

The region is home to a few of the world's strongest democracies, such as Uruguay and Costa Rica, but also to a number of long-standing authoritarian regimes such as Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and to a country in a state of collapse, Haiti. Among the 24 countries we measure, 16 recorded a decline in their scores (66.6%), three improved their score and the score was unchanged in five. Little over 1% of the region's population live in a full democracy, a majority (54%) live in a flawed democracy, 35% in a hybrid regime and 9% in an authoritarian regime.

Two countries in the region underwent a classification change in 2023: Chile (from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy") and Paraguay (from a "hybrid regime" to a "flawed democracy"). Chile's downgrade was a result of increased preference for expert rule, according to the latest survey data. The biggest mover downwards was El Salvador (-0.35), whose score deteriorated because of the increasingly authoritarian rule and unconstitutional re-election bid of the president, Nayib Bukele. Paraguay improved its score owing to an increase in female representation in Congress following the 2023 general election.

Table

Latin America and the Caribbean 2023

	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	6.62	54	9	9.17	5.00	7.22	3.75	7.94	Flawed democracy
Bolivia	4.20	106	20	4.33	4.29	5.56	1.25	5.59	Hybrid regime
Brazil	6.68	51	8	9.58	5.36	6.11	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Chile	7.98	25	3	9.58	8.21	6.11	6.88	9.12	Flawed democracy
Colombia	6.55	55	10	9.17	6.07	6.11	3.75	7.65	Flawed democracy
Costa Rica	8.29	17	2	9.58	7.50	7.78	6.88	9.71	Full democracy
Cuba	2.65	135	22	0.00	3.21	3.33	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Dominican Republic	6.44	61	11	9.17	5.36	7.22	3.13	7.35	Flawed democracy
Ecuador	5.41	85	15	8.75	5.00	5.56	1.88	5.88	Hybrid regime

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Table

Latin America and the Caribbean 2023

	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
El Salvador	4.71	96	18	6.67	3.21	5.56	3.13	5.00	Hybrid regime
Guatemala	4.47	100=	19	5.67	3.93	5.00	1.88	5.88	Hybrid regime
Guyana	6.26	67	12	7.33	6.07	6.11	5.00	6.76	Flawed democracy
Haiti	2.81	129	21	0.00	0.00	2.78	6.25	5.00	Authoritarian
Honduras	4.98	95	17	8.75	3.93	4.44	2.50	5.29	Hybrid regime
Jamaica	7.06	45=	5	8.75	6.79	5.00	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Mexico	5.14	90	16	6.92	4.64	6.67	1.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Nicaragua	2.26	143	24	0.00	2.14	2.78	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Panama	6.91	48	6	9.58	6.07	7.22	3.75	7.94	Flawed democracy
Paraguay	6.00	74	13	8.75	5.36	6.67	1.88	7.35	Flawed democracy
Peru	5.81	77	14	8.75	5.71	5.00	3.13	6.47	Hybrid regime
Suriname	6.88	49	7	9.58	6.07	6.11	5.00	7.65	Flawed democracy
Trinidad and Tobago	7.16	43	4	9.58	7.14	6.11	5.63	7.35	Flawed democracy
Uruguay	8.66	14=	1	10.00	8.93	7.78	6.88	9.71	Full democracy
Venezuela	2.31	142	23	0.00	1.07	5.00	3.13	2.35	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.68			7.07	5.04	5.72	4.01	6.54	

Source: EIU.

Security challenges weigh on the region's democracy

The wide variation in the quality of democracy in the region reflects, in part, the impact of security-related challenges that have opened space for authoritarian political projects to take hold. This is the case in Central America, where high levels of crime (largely related to drug trafficking) and the use of state repression in response have led to a consistent decline in the quality of democracy in most countries in the sub-region in recent years. The increasingly authoritarian rule of Mr Bukele in El Salvador is a case in point.

Statistics bear out the security-related challenges that confront the region. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a non-governmental organisation that maps and analyses global crime and conflict data, three of the world's ten most dangerous countries are in the region (Mexico placing third, Brazil sixth and Colombia tenth). Unsurprisingly, concerns about crime and violence in the region are among the highest in the world. According to a December 2023 survey by Ipsos, a pollster, six Latin American countries are in the top ten of the 29 countries polled where people say that crime is their primary concern. Chileans are the most likely in the world to cite crime as their primary concern, with 64% saying so. Punitive measures to deal with crime have also led the region to have some of the world's highest imprisonment rates. El Salvador has the highest imprisonment rate in the world with 1,086 prisoners per 100,000 people as at 2022, according to the World Prison Brief, an online database of prison statistics. Among the top ten jurisdictions in the world, second place goes to Cuba, seventh to Panama and tenth to Uruguay.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

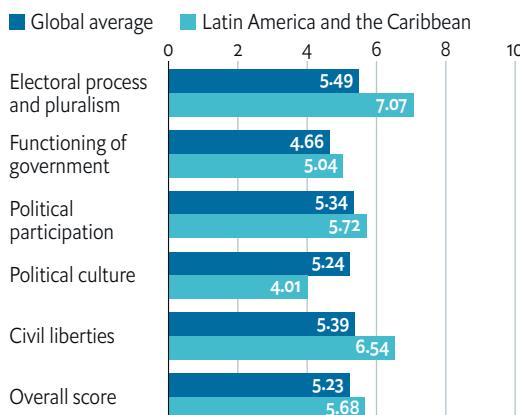
AGE OF CONFLICT

The region has so far avoided inter-state wars that have weighed heavily on democracy in other parts of the world in recent years. The most recent inter-state war to take place in the region was in 1995 when Peru and Ecuador fought a month-long war over contested territory. However, in 2023 the possibility of a war loomed as the beleaguered Venezuelan authoritarian regime of the president, Nicolas Maduro, threatened to invade the long-contested Essequibo territory, under the control of neighbouring Guyana. At the time of writing, tensions remain high, but a war seems unlikely. Nonetheless, the episode illustrates the dangers to regional peace that authoritarian regimes pose.

Latin America and the Caribbean:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Electoral democracy under increased strain

Most presidential elections in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2023 were marred either by political violence, attempted coups or hyper-polarisation. Ecuador's election was characterised by a high level of political violence. The snap election was the result of extreme polarisation and brinkmanship between the former president, Guillermo Lasso, and the opposition-dominated unicameral Congress. Mr Lasso, facing the possibility of being ousted from power, used a constitutional provision to dissolve Congress and call for early elections. The election took place amid a rising wave of homicides related to the growing influence of drug cartels. On August 9th a presidential candidate, Fernando Villavicencio, was assassinated. Mr Villavicencio's murder was only the most high-profile one, with a number of candidates for lower office also being killed.

Ecuadorians elected a centre-right candidate, Daniel Noboa, as president in a second-round runoff. Since coming to office Mr Noboa has proposed building new prison facilities and plans to hold a referendum in March 2024 to get approval to boost the executive's powers, as well as those of the military, to tackle organised crime. On January 9th 2024, amid a wave of gang violence, Mr Noboa declared an internal state of conflict. These measures all pose significant risks to Ecuador's already weak democracy in 2024 (Ecuador is classified as a "hybrid regime").

The difficulties of holding elections in a “hybrid regime” were highlighted by the nearly successful attempts by powerful factions of Guatemala’s elite to reverse the results of the second-round runoff of the country’s presidential election, held in August 2023. Following the unexpected landslide victory of Bernardo Arévalo of the centre-left Movimiento Semilla, Mr Arévalo and his party faced a backlash. Powerful factions of the elite reacted negatively to Mr Arévalo’s promise to tackle widespread corruption. And a number of adverse rulings by members of the judiciary threatened to prevent the democratic transfer of power. The attempt to reverse the election results led to bouts of social unrest and further polarised an already deeply divided society. Efforts to reverse the election appear to have failed, as the Constitutional Court ruled that the new authorities must take office without delay. However, governability will be extremely weak and democracy in Guatemala will remain on a knife’s edge in 2024.

Argentina is no stranger to polarisation, but this reached new levels in the 2023 presidential election. A right-wing libertarian, Javier Milei of the La Libertad Avanza, and the candidate for the governing left-wing Peronist Union por la Patria, Sergio Massa, and their supporters raised the stakes of the election to a fever pitch, arguing that if they were to lose Argentina’s democracy would be at risk. This mirrored the highly polarised Brazilian presidential election of 2022. Political marketing experts who backed Brazil’s president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, in that contest also advised Mr Massa on campaign strategy.

Foreign influence in Argentina’s election extended further, with foreign leaders weighing in. Although Lula did not name Mr Massa, he clearly endorsed his candidacy. The Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, and Colombian president, Gustavo Petro, explicitly endorsed Mr Massa. The Mexican president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, went so far as to call Mr Milei a “fascist”. Despite these broadsides, Mr Milei won in a landslide in the second-round runoff as triple-digit inflation catapulted the outsider into power. Mr Milei has a clear electoral mandate, but his free-market reform agenda will struggle to pass in a fragmented Congress and will face judicial challenges. Moreover, painful austerity measures may trigger social unrest in 2024.

Democratic backsliding intensifies in Central America

Of all the sub-regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, Central America (excluding Mexico) underwent the steepest decline in its Democracy Index score in 2023. Central America is also the least democratic sub-region, with an average score of 5.27 (against the regional average of 5.68). Central America hosts the most authoritarian country in Latin America and the Caribbean (Nicaragua) and the region’s second strongest democracy (Costa Rica). The fall in Central America’s overall score this year was driven by declines in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Honduras.

The most emblematic case of democratic backsliding in the region is El Salvador, whose index score declined for a fourth consecutive year in 2023. This is because of the increasingly authoritarian rule of Mr Bukele. His subordination of the country’s institutions has put him in a strong position to go ahead with his bid to be re-elected as president despite this being unconstitutional. Mr Bukele is popular and therefore looks likely to win the February 2024 election, but his total control of government institutions means that opposition parties have little chance of challenging his re-election. Political reforms passed in June to reduce the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly and the number of municipalities will further constrain the chances of opposition parties to gain power. Media freedoms were under

attack in 2023—a local newspaper, El Faro, left the country, as its journalists faced intensive harassment. Authoritarian rule is likely to be consolidated further in El Salvador in 2024, as Mr Bukele is likely to win another five-year term.

Asia and Australasia

Asia and Australasia is home to five “full democracies”, ten “flawed democracies”, five “hybrid regimes” and eight “authoritarian regimes”. The latter category includes Afghanistan, Myanmar and North Korea,

Table

Asia and Australasia 2023

	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	0.26	167	28	0.00	0.07	0.00	1.25	0.00	Authoritarian
Australia	8.66	14=	3	10.00	8.57	7.22	7.50	10.00	Full democracy
Bangladesh	5.87	75	16	7.42	6.07	5.56	5.63	4.71	Hybrid regime
Bhutan	5.54	81	18	8.75	5.93	3.33	5.00	4.71	Hybrid regime
Cambodia	3.05	121	22	0.00	3.21	5.00	5.00	2.06	Authoritarian
China	2.12	148=	24	0.00	3.57	3.33	3.13	0.59	Authoritarian
Fiji	5.55	80	17	6.58	5.00	5.56	5.63	5.00	Hybrid regime
Hong Kong	5.24	88	19	2.75	3.64	5.00	6.88	7.94	Hybrid regime
India	7.18	41=	7	8.67	7.86	7.22	6.25	5.88	Flawed democracy
Indonesia	6.53	56	10	7.92	7.86	7.22	4.38	5.29	Flawed democracy
Japan	8.40	16	4	9.17	8.93	6.67	8.13	9.12	Full democracy
Laos	1.71	159	25	0.00	2.86	1.67	3.75	0.29	Authoritarian
Malaysia	7.29	40	6	9.58	7.50	7.22	6.25	5.88	Flawed democracy
Mongolia	6.48	59	11	8.75	5.71	6.11	5.63	6.18	Flawed democracy
Myanmar	0.85	166	27	0.00	0.00	1.11	3.13	0.00	Authoritarian
Nepal	4.60	98	20	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	3.25	118	21	2.58	4.29	2.78	2.50	4.12	Authoritarian
Papua New Guinea	6.03	72=	15	6.92	6.07	3.89	5.63	7.65	Flawed democracy
Philippines	6.66	53	9	9.17	4.64	7.78	4.38	7.35	Flawed democracy
Singapore	6.18	69	13	5.33	7.14	4.44	7.50	6.47	Flawed democracy
South Korea	8.09	22	5	9.58	8.57	7.22	6.25	8.82	Full democracy
Sri Lanka	6.17	70	14	6.58	4.64	7.22	6.25	6.18	Flawed democracy
Taiwan	8.92	10	2	10.00	9.29	7.78	8.13	9.41	Full democracy
Thailand	6.35	63	12	7.00	6.07	7.78	5.00	5.88	Flawed democracy
Timor-Leste	7.06	45=	8	9.58	5.93	5.56	6.88	7.35	Flawed democracy
Vietnam	2.62	136	23	0.00	3.93	2.78	3.75	2.65	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.41			5.76	5.52	5.22	5.22	5.32	

Source: EIU.

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

AGE OF CONFLICT

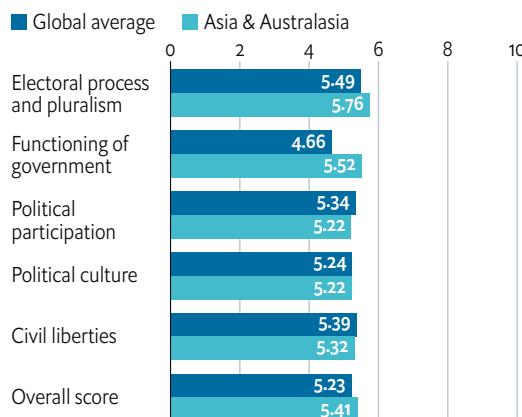
the bottom three countries in the global ranking. After a brief hiatus, Asia and Australasia has resumed a deteriorating trend in democratic governance, with the region's average score in the Democracy Index falling from 5.46 in 2022 to 5.41 in 2023. The region still compares favourably to eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa, but its average score has now reached the lowest point since the Democracy Index was launched in 2006.

The region's deterioration is observed across all five categories of the index in 2023, with the largest declines being registered for *electoral process and pluralism* and *functioning of government*. The outsized political influence of the military in Pakistan and Thailand means that elections are far from being free, fair or competitive. Meanwhile, following Sri Lanka's economic collapse in 2022, government transparency and public trust in government have deteriorated there, resulting in a worsening score for *functioning of government*.

Asia & Australasia:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

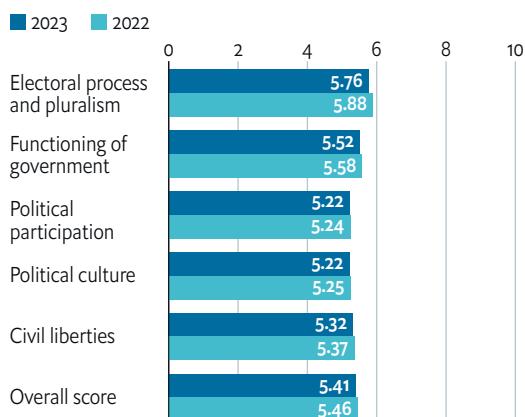
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Of the 28 countries in the region that are included in the index, 15 recorded a decline in their score and only eight registered an improvement. Pakistan registered the greatest deterioration of any country in the region—its score fell by 0.88 to 3.25, resulting in a fall of 11 places in the global ranking table, to 118th. Alongside meddling in the electoral process and government dysfunction, the independence of the judiciary has been severely curtailed. Pakistan is the only Asian country to be downgraded, having been reclassified from a “hybrid regime” to an “authoritarian regime”.

Looking at Asia and Australasia by sub-region reveals big regional disparities in the quality of governance, democratic freedoms and social cohesion. South Asia and Southeast Asia already had the lowest scores of all the continent's sub-regions, and setbacks in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand mean that the two regions have fallen even further behind. The scores for countries in North Asia and Australasia were largely stable.

Improvements are not always what they seem

China and India, the world's most populous countries, recorded the biggest score improvements in the region in 2023. China is an “authoritarian regime” with a very low score (2.12) and rank (148th) in

the Democracy Index, while India is classified as a “flawed democracy” with a fairly high score (7.18) and ranking (41th). In the case of China, the improvement in two indicators—concerning the role of the military in politics and the representation of women in the country’s political institutions—reflects a formal rather than substantive improvement in democratic governance. A tightening of the control held over the armed forces by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was part of a process of consolidation and centralisation of power under the leadership of the president, Xi Jinping. The share of female lawmakers in China’s National People’s Congress (the national parliament)—officially the highest organ of state power, but in practice a rubber-stamp legislature—has increased. However, Chinese women are excluded from the real centre of political power; China’s top decision-making body, the CCP politburo, has no female presence among its 24-strong members.

India’s scores for *functioning of government* and *political culture* improved, but its *civil liberties* score declined. In a positive development, an attempt in March 2023 to disqualify the opposition leader, Rahul Gandhi, from the legislature failed after the Supreme Court demonstrated its independence by restoring his position in the legislature in October. The decline in the *civil liberties* score was due to the state’s failure to protect minority rights amid inter-ethnic violence in the north-eastern state of Manipur between the mainly Hindu Meitei and predominantly Christian Kuki ethnic communities that erupted in May 2023. The state government imposed an internet blackout when the violence began. Meanwhile, an increasingly conformist and self-censoring media paid little attention to what was happening in Manipur, despite mass displacement of people and brutal murders. Media blackouts are also common in regions with secessionist movements, including Kashmir, and regional governments increasingly justify curbs on freedom of speech on the grounds of challenging disinformation and safeguarding national security.

The advantages of incumbency

In many countries in Asia incumbent governments and presidents have a strong advantage at the ballot box, as was demonstrated once again in 2023. Sometimes incumbents win re-election because they have a strong, nationwide organisational capacity and a track record of competent economic management. However, in other places incumbents win because the country is effectively a one-party state or the military wields political influence and the political opposition is marginalised and unable to mount an effective challenge at election time. In these cases, elections are procedural instruments designed to confer legitimacy on the dominant party or political ruler.

In the 2022 Democracy Index, Thailand’s score improved as a result of opposition parties being given more latitude to compete in local and national elections and because of an upsurge in political participation. At the time, we emphasised that progress was provisional, given that the constitution allows the military-dominated Senate (the upper house of parliament) to vote on the selection of the prime minister. In the 2023 general election, the anti-establishment Move Forward Party (MFP) won the most votes, but under the military’s sway parliament failed to endorse the MFP’s leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, as prime minister. The subsequent ruling by the constitutional court to suspend Mr Pita as a member of parliament, on a controversial charge of his share ownership in a media company, dashed the MFP’s hope of forming a government. The rules regarding the democratic transfer of power are clearly not established or accepted in Thailand and the judiciary is not independent.

Pakistan is another country where the military remains an important power broker. It has used its power and influence to undermine the main national opposition, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, led by the former prime minister, Imran Khan. The government led by the ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML Nawaz), indicted Mr Khan on corruption charges related to his term in office, and incarcerated him in August 2023. This impaired his ability to rally his party or be an effective leader despite his popularity, especially among urban Pakistanis. The military suppressed protests over Mr Khan's incarceration and sought to try civilians under martial law for supporting the PTI leader. As a result of official harassment and intimidation of senior PTI members, many defected to the ruling party. In another democratic setback in September, the government ignored the constitution and delayed elections citing the need for a fresh census. The delay will give the government time to try to rally support amid increasing public disenchantment with the ruling party.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Europe and Central Asia's average regional score in the 2023 Democracy Index stands at 5.37, down marginally from 5.39 in 2022. The region's performance can be best summed up as a story of resilience. Central Asia is one of the lowest-scoring sub-regions in the world, and Russia and Ukraine both regressed in 2023. However, results in central Europe, the Baltics and the Balkans helped to prop up the overall regional score. Only seven of the region's 28 countries recorded a decline in their score in 2023, while the scores for five improved and 16 stayed the same.

There are still no "full democracies" in the region, though several of 16 countries classified as "flawed democracies" are close. Among the "flawed democracies" are the 11 eastern EU member states and five EU candidate countries from the western Balkans (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Moldova. There are four "hybrid regimes" (Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine), and eight "authoritarian regimes" (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan).

Table**Eastern Europe and Central Asia 2023**

	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	6.28	66	14	7.00	6.07	5.00	6.25	7.06	Flawed democracy
Armenia	5.42	84	17	7.92	4.64	6.11	3.13	5.29	Hybrid regime
Azerbaijan	2.80	130	23	0.50	2.50	3.33	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Belarus	1.99	151	26	0.00	0.79	3.33	4.38	1.47	Authoritarian
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5.00	94	20	7.00	4.00	5.00	3.13	5.88	Hybrid regime
Bulgaria	6.41	62	12	8.75	5.71	5.56	4.38	7.65	Flawed democracy
Croatia	6.50	58	10	9.17	6.07	6.11	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Czech Republic	7.97	26	1	9.58	6.43	7.22	7.50	9.12	Flawed democracy
Estonia	7.96	27	2	9.58	7.86	6.67	6.88	8.82	Flawed democracy
Georgia	5.20	89	18	7.00	3.57	6.11	3.75	5.59	Hybrid regime
Hungary	6.72	50	8	8.75	6.79	4.44	6.88	6.76	Flawed democracy

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

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Table

Eastern Europe and Central Asia 2023

	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
Kazakhstan	3.08	120	22	0.50	3.21	5.00	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Kyrgyz Republic	3.70	109	21	4.33	1.86	3.89	3.13	5.29	Authoritarian
Latvia	7.38	37=	4	9.58	6.43	6.11	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Lithuania	7.31	39	5	9.58	6.43	6.11	5.63	8.82	Flawed democracy
Moldova	6.23	68	15	7.42	5.36	7.22	4.38	6.76	Flawed democracy
Montenegro	6.67	52	9	8.75	7.14	6.67	3.75	7.06	Flawed democracy
North Macedonia	6.03	72=	16	7.83	5.71	6.11	3.13	7.35	Flawed democracy
Poland	7.18	41=	6	9.58	6.07	6.67	6.25	7.35	Flawed democracy
Romania	6.45	60	11	9.17	6.43	5.56	3.75	7.35	Flawed democracy
Russia	2.22	144	24	0.92	2.14	2.22	3.75	2.06	Authoritarian
Serbia	6.33	64	13	7.83	6.07	6.67	3.75	7.35	Flawed democracy
Slovakia	7.07	44	7	9.58	6.07	5.56	5.63	8.53	Flawed democracy
Slovenia	7.75	31=	3	9.58	7.14	7.22	6.25	8.53	Flawed democracy
Tajikistan	1.94	155	27	0.00	2.21	2.22	4.38	0.88	Authoritarian
Turkmenistan	1.66	162	28	0.00	0.79	2.22	5.00	0.29	Authoritarian
Ukraine	5.06	91	19	5.58	3.07	7.22	5.00	4.41	Hybrid regime
Uzbekistan	2.12	148=	25	0.08	1.86	2.78	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Regional score	5.37			6.27	4.73	5.30	4.80	5.77	

Source: EIU.

War and conflict dragged down the regional score

In 2023 continuing warfare in Ukraine and Nagorno Karabakh depressed the scores of those countries prosecuting the war (Russia and Azerbaijan, respectively) and of those on the receiving end, Ukraine and Armenia. Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine has gone hand-in-hand with a brutal domestic crackdown on dissent. The state has arrested and prosecuted those expressing any form of anti-war sentiment, and encouraged the public to report all displays of disloyalty to the authorities. Meanwhile, Ukraine's democracy has suffered setbacks as wartime conditions and a concentration of power in the presidency have led to a downgrading of democratic institutions, the removal of checks and balances, and a rollback of civil liberties. Azerbaijan's military campaign and takeover of the contested Nagorno Karabakh region, and the expulsion of more than 100,000 Armenians from their homeland, had negative repercussions for the Democracy Index score for both countries.

The criminalisation of dissent by the Russian authorities intensified in 2023. The state adopted new laws and modified others, deliberately using the vaguest terminology to create a dragnet aimed at apprehending every individual expressing opposition to the war in Ukraine. These laws went further than before in criminalising thousands of Russians alleged to have "discredited" the armed forces or spread "false information" about them. The sentences imposed by the courts became increasingly punitive, with typical prison terms for anti-war charges ranging from 36 to 77 months and from 34 to 65 months for internet offences. More political cases led to charges of treason and extremely harsh

sentences: an opposition politician, Vladimir Kara-Murza was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment in April 2023 and transferred to a maximum security prison in Siberia in September. In another case an imprisoned opposition leader, Alexei Navalny, was sentenced to a further 19 years in prison on extremism charges in August 2023, having already been sentenced to 11.5 years, and he was later moved to a penal colony in the Arctic. In 2023 more than 200 individuals and organisations were added to the list of “foreign agents” and 53 organisations were declared to be “undesirables”. In November the Russian Supreme Court designated the “international LGBT movement” as an extremist organisation. Such a movement does not exist, but its criminalisation exposes members of the LGBTQ+ community to persecution by the authorities.

Ukraine’s fragile democratic institutions weakened further as war continued to rage for a second year in 2023. With almost all decision-making power concentrated in the office of the president, Volodmir Zelenskiy, the government, parliament and opposition parties have been diminished. Media freedom is also seriously constrained under martial law conditions. The president continues to receive high popularity ratings, but the military enjoys the highest share of public trust of any institution. Owing to the state of martial law in the country, the parliamentary election scheduled for October 2023 did not take place. Polls indicate that the majority of Ukrainians favour holding elections only after the war has come to an end.

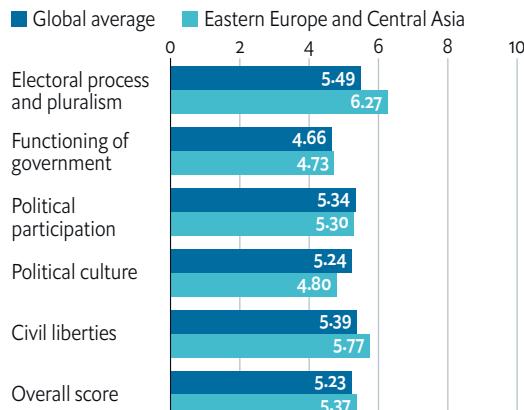
Loss of Nagorno Karabakh weakens Armenian democracy

Azerbaijan’s takeover in September 2023 of the previously de facto independent enclave of Nagorno Karabakh, a goal that the government had pursued since 1991, bolstered the position of the Azeri president, Ilham Aliyev. The political system remains authoritarian and the government systematically suppresses opposition. The loss of Nagorno Karabakh, and the displacement of almost all the remaining Armenian population of just over 100,000, was catastrophic for Armenia and a political disaster for the government, led by the prime minister, Nikol Pashinian. Mr Pashinian’s refusal to respond to Azerbaijani airstrikes and subsequent effective capitulation of the territory to Azerbaijan resulted in a complete collapse of support for him and his government.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

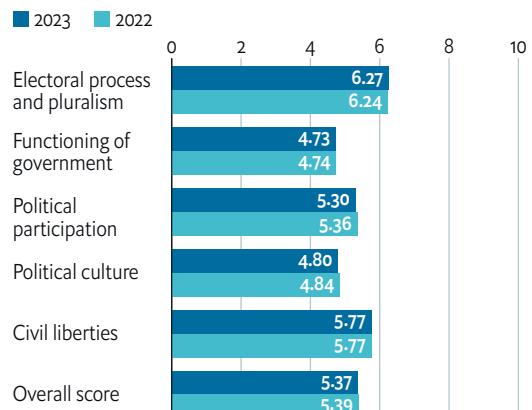
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Broad improvements in the Balkans, but Bulgaria suffers from political paralysis

Montenegro registered the biggest improvement in the eastern Europe region for the second consecutive year, as its score improved from 6.45 in 2022 to 6.67. Montenegro was upgraded from a “hybrid regime” to a “flawed democracy” in 2021 and has managed a difficult transition following the removal via elections of the former ruling Democratic Party of Montenegro and its leader, Milo Djukanovic. This was the first democratic transfer of power since the collapse of the former communist regime after 1990. A competitive parliamentary election in June 2023, which was won by a new centrist party, Europe Now, helped to drive an improvement in the *electoral process and pluralism* score, to 8.75.

Continued political instability drove a sharp fall in Bulgaria’s score, from 6.53 in 2022 to 6.41. A parliamentary election in April 2023 was marred by irregularities and instances of voter fraud. A last-minute decision to remove machine-voting from the political process in the first round and return it for the second-round disrupted the voting process. Prolonged political instability and a pattern of repeat elections have led to declining trust in government and political parties, and low voter turnout (40.6% in the April 2023 election).

Authoritarian Central Asia makes little progress

Turkmenistan remains at the bottom of the regional rankings and five places from bottom in the global rankings. One of the world’s most secretive, closed and authoritarian regimes, the country scores 0.00 for *electoral process and pluralism* and 0.29 for *civil liberties*. In Tajikistan, the president, Emomali Rahmon, retains almost-total control over the political sphere, and there are no meaningful elections. Mr Rahmon, who came to power at the conclusion of the Tajik civil war in 1992, continues to clamp down on political, religious and media freedoms. The regime deploys repression against the restive region of Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. Tajikistan scores particularly badly on *electoral process and pluralism* (0.00) and *civil liberties* (0.88).

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, political reform processes (implemented in response to public unrest in 2022) yielded few results in 2023. A series of constitutional reform referenda and parliamentary and presidential elections took place throughout the year. In Kazakhstan a handful of new parties emerged whose independence from the government is questionable; elections remain unfree and unfair. Uzbekistan trails Kazakhstan in multiple areas of democracy, including political participation, and both nations are firmly in the authoritarian camp.

The Kyrgyz Republic is often referred to as Central Asia’s “island of democracy” due to its robust civil society ecosystem, free media environment, and chaotic yet respected electoral outcomes and transfers of power. However, in 2023 the ruling tandem of the nationalist president, Sadyr Japarov, and the chairman of the State Committee for National Security, Kamchybek Tashiev, sought to consolidate their position at the expense of hard-fought democratic gains. They have invested in the state security apparatus, exchanged a once-strong parliamentary system for a top-down presidential system and clamped down on dissent.

Sub-Saharan Africa

The aggregate index score for Sub-Saharan Africa declined in 2023, falling from 4.14 in 2022 to a historical low of 4.04. Democratic regression in the region in large part reflects the increase in the number military regimes across the continent. A total of 25 of the 54 states in Africa have experienced one or more coups or coup attempts over the past two decades. A military coup in Niger in July completed the military takeover of governments stretching across the Sahel, from Guinea in the West to Sudan (included in the Middle East and North Africa region of the Democracy Index) in the east.

The rise in military rule has in part been facilitated by growing public dissatisfaction with political systems and widespread poverty. The failure of political incumbents to uphold democratic values and deliver good governance and economic progress has discredited electoral democracy for increasing numbers of Africans. Some surveys have shown growing popular approval for military rule in several African countries—as was the case in Gabon and Niger—as trust in purportedly democratic political elites eroded further in 2023.

Table
Sub-Saharan Africa 2023

	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	4.18	107	21	4.50	3.21	5.56	5.00	2.65	Hybrid regime
Benin	4.68	97	15	2.58	5.71	4.44	6.25	4.41	Hybrid regime
Botswana	7.73	33	2	9.17	6.79	6.67	7.50	8.53	Flawed democracy
Burkina Faso	2.73	133	31	0.00	2.50	3.89	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Burundi	2.13	147	39	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
Cabo Verde	7.65	35	3	9.17	7.00	6.67	6.88	8.53	Flawed democracy
Cameroon	2.56	138	34	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	1.67	161	43	0.00	0.00	2.22	3.75	2.35	Authoritarian
Comoros	3.04	122=	26	1.25	2.21	4.44	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Congo (Brazzaville)	2.79	131	29	0.00	2.50	4.44	3.75	3.24	Authoritarian
Côte d'Ivoire	4.22	105	20	4.33	2.86	4.44	5.63	3.82	Hybrid regime
Democratic Republic of Congo	1.68	160	42	1.17	0.43	2.78	3.13	0.88	Authoritarian
Djibouti	2.70	134	32	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	152	40	0.00	2.14	0.56	6.88	0.29	Authoritarian
Eswatini	2.78	132	30	0.92	1.64	2.78	5.63	2.94	Authoritarian
Ethiopia	3.37	116	24	0.42	3.21	6.11	5.63	1.47	Authoritarian
Gabon	2.18	146	38	0.83	1.14	2.22	3.75	2.94	Authoritarian
Gambia	4.47	100=	17	4.42	4.29	3.89	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Ghana	6.30	65	6	8.33	5.00	6.67	5.63	5.88	Flawed democracy
Guinea	2.21	145	37	0.83	0.43	3.33	4.38	2.06	Authoritarian
Guinea-Bissau	2.45	140	35	4.00	0.00	2.78	3.13	2.35	Authoritarian

DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

AGE OF CONFLICT

Table

Sub-Saharan Africa 2023

	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
Kenya	5.05	92	14	3.50	5.36	6.67	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Lesotho	6.06	71	7	9.17	3.79	5.56	5.63	6.18	Flawed democracy
Liberia	5.57	79	10	7.83	2.71	6.11	5.63	5.59	Hybrid regime
Madagascar	5.26	87	13	6.58	3.57	6.11	5.63	4.41	Hybrid regime
Malawi	5.85	76	8	7.00	4.29	5.56	6.25	6.18	Hybrid regime
Mali	2.58	137	33	0.00	0.00	5.00	4.38	3.53	Authoritarian
Mauritania	4.14	108	22	3.50	3.57	6.11	3.13	4.41	Hybrid regime
Mauritius	8.14	20=	1	9.17	7.86	6.11	8.75	8.82	Full democracy
Mozambique	3.51	113	23	2.58	1.43	5.00	5.00	3.53	Authoritarian
Namibia	6.52	57	5	7.00	5.36	6.67	5.63	7.94	Flawed democracy
Niger	2.37	141	36	0.33	1.14	2.22	3.75	4.41	Authoritarian
Nigeria	4.23	104	19	5.17	3.93	3.89	3.75	4.41	Hybrid regime
Rwanda	3.30	117	25	1.42	4.64	2.78	5.00	2.65	Authoritarian
Senegal	5.48	83	11	6.58	5.71	3.89	5.63	5.59	Hybrid regime
Sierra Leone	4.32	103	18	4.83	2.86	3.89	5.00	5.00	Hybrid regime
South Africa	7.05	47	4	7.42	7.14	8.33	5.00	7.35	Flawed democracy
Tanzania	5.35	86	12	4.83	5.36	5.00	6.88	4.71	Hybrid regime
Togo	2.99	126	28	0.92	2.14	3.33	5.63	2.94	Authoritarian
Uganda	4.49	99	16	3.42	3.57	3.89	6.88	4.71	Hybrid regime
Zambia	5.80	78	9	7.92	3.64	5.00	6.88	5.59	Hybrid regime
Zimbabwe	3.04	122=	27	0.00	2.50	4.44	5.00	3.24	Authoritarian
Regional score	4.04			3.44	3.09	4.46	5.14	4.06	

Source: EIU.

The decline in the continent's score was driven by a broad-based deterioration across all five categories of the Democracy Index. A substantial decline in the *electoral process and pluralism* category was driven by the cascade of successful and attempted coups in 2023. The *functioning of government* category—the score for which declined marginally in 2023—is the lowest-scoring category in the region, at 3.09, and the second-lowest score of any region but the Middle East and North Africa. The region's scores for *political participation*, *political culture* and *civil liberties* all declined in 2023.

Eighteen of the region's 44 countries registered a deterioration in their score, with the sharpest declines recorded in Niger (-1.36), Gabon (-1.22), Sierra Leone (-0.71), Mali (-0.65), and Madagascar (-0.44). The scores for nine countries improved—albeit from a low base—with the biggest improvements being in Benin (+0.40), Tanzania (+0.25) and Angola (+0.22). The region continues to have only one “full democracy”—Mauritius—and six “flawed democracies”, the same as in the 2022 index. The number of countries classified as “hybrid regimes” increased to 15, up from 14 in 2022, as Angola improved its score for political participation. As a result, the number of “authoritarian regimes” decreased to 22, but this remains the most prevalent form of government in Africa.

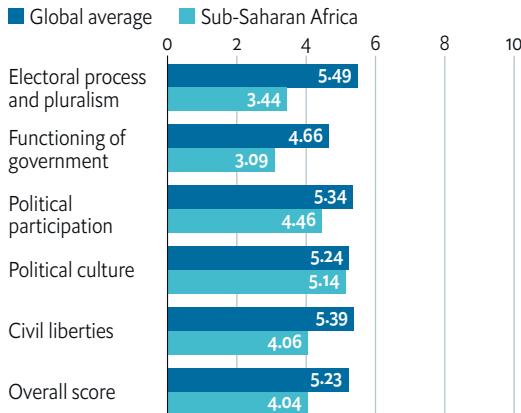
DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

AGE OF CONFLICT

Sub-Saharan Africa:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

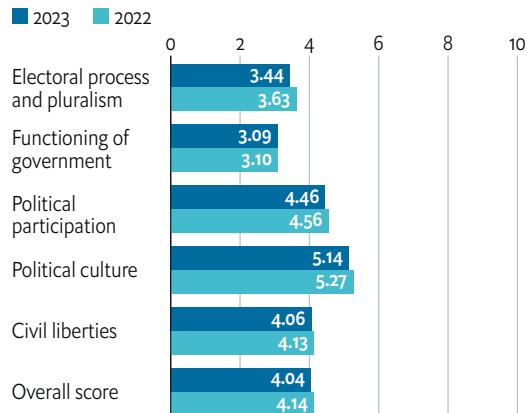
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



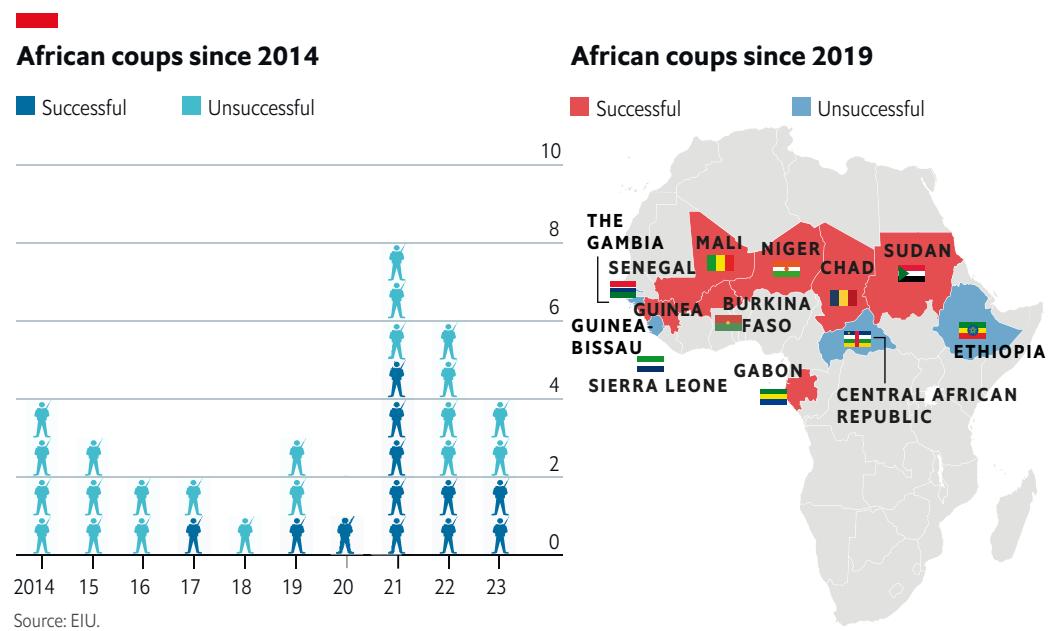
Another year of military coups

The trend of democratic backsliding in West and Central Africa, discussed in recent editions of the Democracy Index report, continued apace in 2023. It was vividly illustrated by military takeovers in Niger in July and Gabon in August. These two countries recorded the biggest declines in the index of any in the African continent, dropping by 1.36 and 1.22 points respectively. On July 26th the presidential guard, with the backing of the Nigerien armed forces, announced that they had overthrown the president, Mohamed Bazoum. The coup received strong popular support owing to widespread domestic dissatisfaction with Mr Bazoum over political, security, economic and social issues.

Riddled with cronyism and corruption, many governments in the region have clung to power by unconstitutional means and also failed to ensure basic security for their citizens in the face of a deadly Islamist insurgency. Popular anger has turned not only against domestic regimes, but also against France, the former colonial power in the region whose armed forces were deployed to bolster security and repel insurgents between August 2014 and November 2022. In Niger, many opponents of Mr Bazoum disliked his close ties with France, which many prefer to blame for the region's problems rather than acknowledge that they are largely homegrown. Mr Bazoum's removal coincided with a growing wave of anti-French sentiment in the Sahel. This trend was especially acute in neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali, which both experienced military coups in 2020-22.

Soon after the coup in Niger, on August 30th a military coup in Gabon brought an end to the rule of the president, Ali Bongo Ondimba. This was followed by the dissolution of the government and the suspension of the constitution. Mr Bongo had just been declared the emphatic victor of the presidential election held a week earlier, and would have served a third term in office—extending the Bongo family dynasty that started back in 1967. However, public support for the dynasty had dwindled amid widespread discontent over corruption, cronyism, dynastic politics and economic mismanagement. In contrast to the negative reaction outside the country, the coup was received

mainly positively in Gabon. This may reflect optimism about the prospects for a return to civilian rule without Mr Bongo, but in the absence of institutional safeguards, an increasingly authoritarian pivot by the putschists is likely.



Source: EIU.

Attempted coups highlight political fragility

Attempted coups were thwarted in Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone. In early December the president of Guinea-Bissau, Umara Sissoco Embaló, once again dissolved the opposition-led parliament. He alleged that opposition leaders had given political support to what Mr Embaló has deemed a failed coup attempt, which took place on November 30th. Mr Embaló's increasingly authoritarian rule in recent years has led to a severe crackdown on all opposition and a centralisation of power around his presidency. Guinea-Bissau had been without a parliament since May 2022, when Mr Embaló had previously dissolved it over differences with parliamentarians. Mr Embaló's increasingly dictatorial rule contributed to a deterioration in Guinea Bissau's *political participation* score, which fell from 3.13 in 2022 to 2.78 in 2023.

In Sierra Leone, the presidential and parliamentary elections in June 2023—in which Julius Maada Bio secured a second five-year term and the Sierra Leone People's Party won an absolute parliamentary majority—were contested by the opposition. International observers cited inconsistencies in the vote-counting process and a lack of transparency in the functioning of the election commission. On November 26th Sierra Leonean authorities declared a nationwide 24-hour curfew after rogue members of the military attacked Wilberforce military barracks and broke into several prisons in the capital, Freetown, in a foiled coup attempt. Sierra Leone's overall score fell from 5.03 in 2022 to 4.32, driven by a significant decline in the *electoral process and pluralism* and *political culture* categories.

Growing electoral restrictions and crackdown on civil liberties

The spread of military rule has severely weakened Sub-Saharan Africa's score in the *electoral process and pluralism* category, which declined further in 2023, from 3.63 in 2022 to 3.44. Military rule became more entrenched in Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Guinea in 2023. The Malian junta announced the postponement of planned elections in February 2024, and the Burkinabè junta leader, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, announced that elections are unlikely to take place in July 2024 because of security issues. Civil liberties have worsened significantly as the regime has cracked down on dissent. With most of northern and central Mali under either jihadist or rebel occupation, there is little consensus about how to return the country to democratic rule. Worryingly, a survey conducted in July 2023 by Afrobarometer, a research organisation, pointed to reduced popular support for democratic rule.

The coups in West and Central Africa have also led to a deterioration in Sub-Saharan Africa's scores for *civil liberties* and *political culture*. The space for independent media and critics of the regime shrank in 2023. In Burkina Faso, several Burkinabè civil society figures and journalists who raised uncomfortable questions about the ruling junta received death threats and were subjected to other forms of intimidation. Mali permanently suspended two French state-owned broadcasters, Radio France International and France24, and Burkina Faso banned their broadcasts. Numerous local radio stations have been shut down in both countries. In Chad, at least 50 people were arrested in the lead-up to a constitutional referendum in December 2023 as the military government sought to weaken political opposition. Internet shutdowns are used increasingly as a means of stifling dissent. Guinea experienced an internet disruption in May, ahead of a highly anticipated two-day anti-government protest. The military regime in Guinea also shut down two radio stations owned by the Afric Vision group, limited access to popular websites and social media, and threatened to close any media that "undermines national unity".

Even the region's self-proclaimed democracies (classified by the Democracy Index as "hybrid" and "authoritarian" regimes) are not averse to using similar tactics. Many adopt the trappings of multiparty systems—allowing opposition party participation in elections, for example—but use their monopoly of institutional power and control of the media to prevent a level playing field and rig the results. Madagascar is such an example. In November 2023 the president, Andry Rajoelina, was re-elected for a third term following a controversial and contested poll. Most of the opposition rejected the results, citing severe restrictions on political activity in the lead-up to the election.

On a positive note, it was a year of fragile reconciliation and peace in Ethiopia following a two-year civil war that pitted federal forces against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a left-wing paramilitary group and former ruling party. The peace deal signed in November 2022 prevailed in 2023, resulting in an improvement in the country's overall score, albeit from a low base, driven by an improvement in the *political culture* category as reconciliation measures in the peace deal were implemented. The federal government removed the TPLF from the terrorist list and approved a TPLF-led transitional government in Tigray.

The Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains firmly at the bottom of the 2023 Democracy Index. The region remains an outlier (alongside Eastern Europe) in having no “full democracies” among its constituent states: only one, Israel, is classed as a “flawed democracy”. With the exception of Tunisia and Morocco, classified as “hybrid regimes”, the rest of the region’s 20 countries are ranked as “authoritarian” regimes. This year, owing to Sudan’s precipitous fall down the rankings following the outbreak of civil war, a total of six countries—more than a quarter of the countries in the region—now rank among the bottom 20 in our global rankings.

The position of MENA as the worst-ranking region has been cemented further this year by a decline in the aggregate score of 0.11 points, to 3.23. This reflects a fall in the scores across all five categories, although the largest by far was in *political participation* which declined by 0.22, reflecting rising apathy.

Table

Middle East and North Africa 2023

	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	3.66	110	4	3.08	2.50	3.89	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Bahrain	2.52	139	14	0.42	2.71	3.33	4.38	1.76	Authoritarian
Egypt	2.93	127	12	1.33	3.21	3.33	5.00	1.76	Authoritarian
Iran	1.96	153	16	0.00	2.50	3.33	2.50	1.47	Authoritarian
Iraq	2.88	128	13	5.25	0.00	6.11	1.88	1.18	Authoritarian
Israel	7.80	30	1	9.58	7.50	9.44	6.88	5.59	Flawed democracy
Jordan	3.04	122=	10	2.67	3.21	3.89	2.50	2.94	Authoritarian
Kuwait	3.50	114	7	3.17	3.93	2.78	4.38	3.24	Authoritarian
Lebanon	3.56	112	6	3.08	0.79	6.67	3.13	4.12	Authoritarian
Libya	1.78	157	18	0.00	0.00	2.78	3.75	2.35	Authoritarian
Morocco	5.04	93	3	5.25	4.64	5.56	5.63	4.12	Hybrid regime
Oman	3.12	119	9	0.08	3.93	2.78	5.00	3.82	Authoritarian
Palestine	3.47	115	8	1.58	0.14	8.33	3.75	3.53	Authoritarian
Qatar	3.65	111	5	1.50	4.29	3.33	5.63	3.53	Authoritarian
Saudi Arabia	2.08	150	15	0.00	3.57	2.22	3.13	1.47	Authoritarian
Sudan	1.76	158	19	0.00	0.07	2.22	5.63	0.88	Authoritarian
Syria	1.43	163	20	0.00	0.00	2.78	4.38	0.00	Authoritarian
Tunisia	5.51	82	2	6.17	4.64	6.11	5.63	5.00	Hybrid regime
United Arab Emirates	3.01	125	11	0.00	4.29	2.78	5.63	2.35	Authoritarian
Yemen	1.95	154	17	0.00	0.00	3.89	5.00	0.88	Authoritarian
Regional score	3.23			2.16	2.60	4.28	4.44	2.69	

Source: EIU.

Eight countries recorded a deterioration in their scores, with Sudan (-0.71), Palestine (-0.39) and Kuwait (-0.33) having the biggest drops. Only one country, the UAE, improved its score, by 0.11 points to 3.01. The country’s *political participation* score received a modest boost from a rise of the

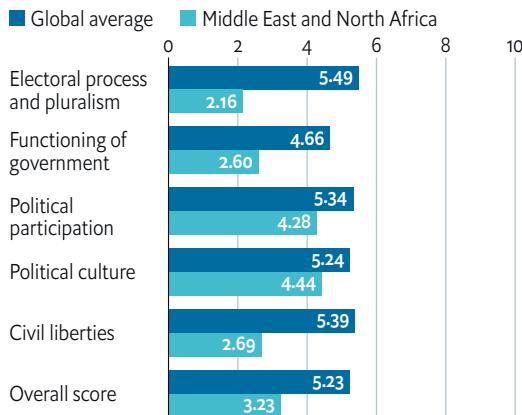
DEMOCRACY INDEX 2023

AGE OF CONFLICT

Middle East and North Africa:

Democracy Index 2023 by category

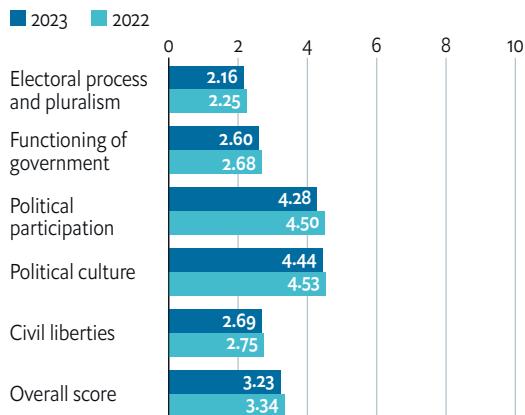
(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



Source: EIU.

Change in category scores 2022-23

(Index score out of 10, 10 being best)



representation of women in the Federal National Council in the October 2023 election, following the adoption of a directive passed in 2019 mandating that women represent 50% of the 20 candidates elected in the 40-member Council, a primarily advisory body.

Conflict continues to weigh heavily on the rankings

Prolonged bouts of conflict and broader political instability have stifled the region's democratic prospects, as well as the security of its citizens, for decades. In early 2023 there was a sense of cautious optimism that progress was finally being made on addressing some of the civil conflicts, insurgencies and geopolitical tensions that have long plagued the region. Steps towards a tentative rapprochement between Iran and the Arab Gulf states, spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, and the resumption of diplomatic dialogue between Iran and the US, appeared to open the way to a cessation of hostilities by some Iranian-backed armed groups. Talks between Saudi Arabia and the Houthi rebels aimed at ending Yemen's eight-year civil conflict intensified; militia attacks in Iraq abated; and the Syrian government secured normalisation agreements with several Arab powers and re-entry into the Arab League (from which it was suspended in 2011).

Hopes of a more peaceful future were dashed as the year progressed—first, by the emergence in April of a fresh civil conflict in Sudan, and later by the outbreak of a new war between Israel and Hamas, a Palestinian Islamist terrorist group with ties to Iran, in Gaza in October. The latter conflict is a threat to regional stability; it quickly led to armed clashes across the region, including between Israel and the US on one side, and Iranian proxies aligned with Hamas on the other. The resurgence of political violence, particularly in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and the Red Sea littoral, has once again postponed any prospect of peace and security—and democracy—in the region.

Backward steps for Israel and Palestine

The rapid descent into war in Gaza, following the deadly incursion by Hamas into Israeli territory and massacre of more than 1,000 Israelis, mostly civilians, on October 7th, led to a deterioration in the

Sudan: aspirations for democratic change shattered by civil war

Sudan ties with Sierra Leone in having the fourth-largest deterioration (-0.71) in its aggregate Democracy Index score in 2023. As a result, the country plunges into the bottom 20 countries in the Democracy Index, falling 14 places to 158th out of 167.

In 2023 Sudan became embroiled in yet another civil conflict, marking the fourth since the 1950s. Fighting began in April following a co-ordinated assault on the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF, a paramilitary group) in two adjacent cities, the capital, Khartoum, and Omdurman. The fighting quickly spread across the country as the two groups, alongside myriad other non-state armed groups, vied for territorial control.

The war has put tentative hopes for a democratic transition after the overthrow in 2019 of the former dictator, Omar al-Bashir, even further out of reach. This was highlighted by the cancellation of the July 2023 general election. Sudanese sovereignty also remains under threat, as the conflict could persist in the form of a protracted and deadly civil war fuelled by the involvement of regional actors in support of either

the SAF or RSF.

With *electoral processes and pluralism* already at the lowest rating of 0.00 in 2022, Sudan experienced a sharp deterioration in its score across three of the five Democracy Index categories in 2023. The civil war has led to a comprehensive breakdown of the state and its institutions as governing authority became fragmented between multiple armed groups. This resulted in a 1.36-point decline in Sudan's *functioning of government* score. The *civil liberties* score also dropped sharply, as the conflict led to a breakdown in order in many parts of the country, including Khartoum. The takeover of territory by armed groups has led to the erosion of property rights, freedom of speech and other civil liberties that had prevailed (to a limited extent) before the civil war.

In contrast, the score for *political culture* improved by 0.63 points. Popular opposition to military rule grew as a result of the civil war, and was expressed through widespread public protests against the SAF-led government before the conflict began. Nevertheless, the war reduced the physical and political space in which these protests could continue, as many urban areas suffered intense fighting. This has led to a deterioration in the *political participation* score of 0.22 points.

scores for Israel and Palestine. Israel is no stranger to political violence, but the scale of the Hamas atrocities, coupled with subsequent attacks on Israeli civilian targets by Iran-aligned groups and Palestinian militants, shattered any illusion that Israelis enjoy a basic level of security.

The devastating Israeli shortcomings in military planning that facilitated the October attack may have been related to the turbulent domestic political situation in 2023. In July 2023 the Knesset (parliament) passed controversial judicial reforms presented by the right-wing coalition government of the prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, granting Israel's legislative body power to override the Supreme Court. Public concerns that these reforms could undermine the separation of powers and the country's established system of checks and balances had fuelled nationwide protests for much of the year. The issue also led to a breakdown of relations between the government and various state institutions, including the military. The Supreme Court subsequently struck down the reforms, but their earlier passage led to a deterioration in the country's *functioning of government* score.

The sharp fall in Palestine's index score was the result of an increasingly dysfunctional and undemocratic polity whose deep flaws have been exacerbated by the Israel-Hamas war. The direct impact of the conflict has been mostly keenly felt in Gaza, but it has also had a negative impact on the West Bank. The conflict in Gaza provided a pretext for the president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmood Abbas, to double-down on his efforts to cling to power long after his mandate expired in 2009. Mr Abbas has resisted holding elections (the most recent were in 2005–06) at a time when popular support for the PA is at rock-bottom levels. Even before the war began, in August 88-year old Mr Abbas sought to consolidate his grip on power by removing 12 of Palestine's 15 regional governors to fend off potential challenges to his rule. This drove a further deterioration in Palestine's score for *electoral process and pluralism*, to 1.58. The PA's failure to advance the cause of Palestinian self-determination and statehood has fuelled support for Hamas and others urging a more assertive leadership, weighing heavily on the *political culture* score.

Popular sentiment sours further amid political stasis

There was a notable decline in several countries in scores for *political participation* and *political culture*. In most cases, this deterioration is the culmination of years of failure by governments across the region to enact meaningful political change and improve the economic wellbeing of their citizens, resulting in increasing cynicism and apathy.

In countries with meaningful elections, voter disaffection has led to a decline in participation rates. Turnout fell to 51% in Kuwait's June election, the country's third since 2020, down from 63% in a November 2022 contest. This reflected a decline in interest in politics after years of policymaking gridlock caused by tensions between the cabinet, led almost exclusively by the royal family, and parliament, which is dominated by opposition representatives. The country's score for *political participation* fell as a result.

Popular attitudes towards democracy continued to deteriorate in Iraq, with surveys showing a growing percentage of the population believing that the country's democratic government has failed to maintain law and order. Many Iraqis associate the country's weak economic performance with its transition to a democratic system following the US-led invasion in the early 2000s. The oil-producing country's fiscal and economic performance has improved in recent years as oil prices have spiked. However, chronic mismanagement at all levels of government, fuelled by corruption and institutional weaknesses, alongside persistent insecurity, has hindered policymaking. The non-oil economy remains dysfunctional and unproductive.

Attitudes towards democracy have also changed for the worse in countries that have experienced stalled political transitions. This is the case in Libya, where a growing number of respondents in opinion surveys express a dwindling interest in politics or willingness to join political demonstrations as the country's transition to a unity government faltered in 2023. Nationwide elections that were meant to be held in December 2021 remained indefinitely postponed.

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 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 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.

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.

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 or equal to 8
3. Hybrid regimes: scores greater than 4, and less than or equal to 6
4. Authoritarian regimes: scores less than or equal to 4

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

Features of The Economist Intelligence Unit's Index

Public opinion surveys

A crucial, differentiating aspect of our measure is that, in addition to experts' assessments, we use, where available, public-opinion surveys—mainly the World Values Survey. Indicators based on the surveys predominate heavily in the *political participation* and *political culture* categories, and a few are used in the civil liberties and functioning of government categories.

In addition to the World Values Survey, other sources that can be leveraged include the Eurobarometer surveys, Gallup polls, Asian Barometer, Latin American Barometer, Afrobarometer and national surveys. In the case of countries for which survey results are missing, survey results for similar countries and expert assessment are used to fill in gaps.

Participation and voter turnout

After increasing for many decades, there has been a trend of decreasing voter turnout in most established democracies since the 1960s. Low turnout may be due to disenchantment, but it can also be a sign of contentment. Many, however, see low turnout as undesirable, and there is much debate over the factors that affect turnout and how to increase it.

A high turnout is generally seen as evidence of the legitimacy of the current system. Contrary to widespread belief, there is, in fact, a close correlation between turnout and overall measures of democracy—that is, developed, consolidated democracies have, with very few exceptions, higher turnouts (generally above 70%) than less established democracies.

The legislative and executive branches

The appropriate balance between these is much disputed in political theory. In our model, the clear predominance of the legislature is rated positively, as there is a very strong correlation between legislative dominance and measures of overall democracy.

The model

I Electoral process and pluralism

1. Are elections for the national legislature and head of government free?
Consider whether elections are competitive in that electors are free to vote and are offered a range of choices.
1: Essentially unrestricted conditions for the presentation of candidates (for example, no bans on major parties).
0.5: There are some restrictions on the electoral process.
0: A single-party system or major impediments exist (for example, bans on a major party or candidate).
2. Are elections for the national legislature and head of government fair?
1: No major irregularities in the voting process.
0.5: Significant irregularities occur (intimidation, fraud), but do not significantly affect the overall outcome.
0: Major irregularities occur and affect the outcome.
Score 0 if score for question 1 is 0.
3. Are municipal elections both free and fair?
1: Are free and fair.
0.5: Are free, but not fair.
0: Are neither free nor fair.
4. Is there universal suffrage for all adults?
Bar generally accepted exclusions (for example, non-nationals; criminals; members of armed forces in some countries).
1: Yes.
0: No.
5. Can citizens cast their vote free of significant threats to their security from state or non-state bodies?
1: Yes.
0: No.
6. Do laws provide for broadly equal campaigning opportunities?
1: Yes.
0.5: Formally, yes, but, in practice, opportunities are limited for some candidates.
0: No.
7. Is the process of financing political parties transparent and generally accepted?
1: Yes.
0.5: Not fully transparent.
0: No.

8. Following elections, are the constitutional mechanisms for the orderly transfer of power from one government to another clear, established and accepted?
 - 1: All three criteria are satisfied.
 - 0.5: Two of the three criteria are satisfied.
 - 0: Only one or none of the criteria is satisfied.
9. Are citizens free to form political parties that are independent of the government?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: There are some restrictions.
 - 0: No.
10. Do opposition parties have a realistic prospect of achieving government?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: There is a dominant two-party system, in which other political forces never have any effective chance of taking part in national government.
 - 0: No.
11. Is potential access to public office open to all citizens?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Formally unrestricted, but, in practice, restricted for some groups, or for citizens from some parts of the country.
 - 0: No.
12. Are citizens allowed to form political and civic organisations, free of state interference and surveillance?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Officially free, but subject to some unofficial restrictions or interference.
 - 0: No.

II Functioning of government

13. Do freely elected representatives determine government policy?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Exercise some meaningful influence.
 - 0: No.
14. Is the legislature the supreme political body, with a clear supremacy over other branches of government?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0: No.
15. Is there an effective system of checks and balances on the exercise of government authority?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Yes, but there are some serious flaws.
 - 0: No.

16. Government is free of undue influence by the military or the security services.
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Influence is low, but the defence minister is not a civilian. If the current risk of a military coup is extremely low, but the country has a recent history of military rule or coups.
 - 0: No.
17. Foreign powers and organisations do not determine important government functions or policies.
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Some features of a protectorate.
 - 0: No (significant presence of foreign troops; important decisions taken by foreign power; country is a protectorate).
18. Do special economic, religious or other powerful domestic groups exercise significant political power, parallel to democratic institutions?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Exercise some meaningful influence.
 - 0: No.
19. Are sufficient mechanisms and institutions in place for ensuring government accountability to the electorate in between elections?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
 - 0: No.
20. Does the government's authority extend over the full territory of the country?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0: No.
21. Is the functioning of government open and transparent, with sufficient public access to information?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
 - 0: No.
22. How pervasive is corruption?
 - 1: Corruption is not a major problem.
 - 0.5: Corruption is a significant issue.
 - 0: Pervasive corruption exists.
23. Is the civil service willing to and capable of implementing government policy?
 - 1: Yes.
 - 0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.
 - 0: No.
24. Popular perceptions of the extent to which citizens have free choice and control over their lives.
 - 1: High.
 - 0.5: Moderate.
 - 0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who think that they have a great deal of choice/control.

1 if more than 70%.

0.5 if 50-70%.

0 if less than 50%.

25. Public confidence in government.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey, Gallup polls, Eurobarometer, Latinobarometer

% of people who have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in government.

1 if more than 40%.

0.5 if 25-40%.

0 if less than 25%.

26. Public confidence in political parties.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who have a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence.

1 if more than 40%.

0.5 if 25-40%.

0 if less than 25%.

III Political participation

27. Voter participation/turn-out for national elections.

(Average turnout in parliamentary elections since 2000. Turnout as proportion of population of voting age.)

1 if above 70%.

0.5 if 50%-70%.

0 if below 50%.

If voting is obligatory, score 0. Score 0 if scores for questions 1 or 2 is 0.

28. Do ethnic, religious and other minorities have a reasonable degree of autonomy and voice in the political process?

1: Yes.

0.5: Yes, but serious flaws exist.

0: No.

29. Women in parliament.

% of members of parliament who are women.

1 if more than 20% of seats.

0.5 if 10-20%.

0 if less than 10%.

30. Extent of political participation. Membership of political parties and political non-governmental organisations.

Score 1 if over 7% of population for either.

Score 0.5 if 4-7%.

Score 0 if under 4%.

If participation is forced, score 0.

31. Citizens' engagement with politics.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who are very or somewhat interested in politics.

1 if over 60%.

0.5 if 40-60%.

0 if less than 40%.

32. The preparedness of population to take part in lawful demonstrations.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who have taken part in or would consider attending lawful demonstrations.

1 if over 40%.

0.5 if 30-40%.

0 if less than 30%.

33. Adult literacy.

1 if over 90%.

0.5 if 70-90%.

0 if less than 70%.

34. Extent to which adult population shows an interest in and follows politics in the news.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of population that follows politics in the news media (print, TV or radio) every day.

1 if over 50%.

0.5 if 30-50%.

0 if less than 30%.

35. The authorities make a serious effort to promote political participation.
- 1: Yes.
0.5: Some attempts.
0: No.
- Consider the role of the education system, and other promotional efforts. Consider measures to facilitate voting by members of the diaspora.
- If participation is forced, score 0.

IV Democratic political culture

36. Is there a sufficient degree of societal consensus and cohesion to underpin a stable, functioning democracy?
- 1: Yes.
0.5: Yes, but some serious doubts and risks.
0: No.
37. Perceptions of leadership; proportion of the population that desires a strong leader who bypasses parliament and elections.
- 1: Low.
0.5: Moderate.
0: High.
- If available, from World Values Survey
% of people who think it would be good or fairly good to have a strong leader who does not bother with parliament and elections.
- 1 if less than 30%.
0.5 if 30-50%.
0 if more than 50%.
38. Perceptions of military rule; proportion of the population that would prefer military rule.
- 1: Low.
0.5: Moderate.
0: High.
- If available, from World Values Survey
% of people who think it would be very or fairly good to have military rule.
- 1 if less than 10%.
0.5 if 10-30%.
0 if more than 30%.
39. Perceptions of rule by experts or technocratic government; proportion of the population that would prefer rule by experts or technocrats.
- 1: Low.
0.5: Moderate.
0: High.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who think it would be very or fairly good to have experts, not government, make decisions for the country.

1 if less than 50%.

0.5 if 50-70%.

0 if more than 70%.

40. Perception of democracy and public order; proportion of the population that believes that democracies are not good at maintaining public order.

1: Low.

0.5: Moderate.

0: High.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who disagree with the view that democracies are not good at maintaining order.

1 if more than 70%.

0.5 if 50-70%.

0 if less than 50%.

Alternatively, % of people who think that punishing criminals is an essential characteristic of democracy.

1 if more than 80%.

0.5 if 60-80%.

0 if less than 60%.

41. Perception of democracy and the economic system; proportion of the population that believes that democracy benefits economic performance.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who disagree with the view that the economic system is badly run in democracies.

1 if more than 80%.

0.5 if 60-80%.

0 if less than 60%.

42. Degree of popular support for democracy.

1: High.

0.5: Moderate.

0: Low.

If available, from World Values Survey

% of people who agree or strongly agree that democracy is better than any other form of government.

1 if more than 90%.

0.5 if 75-90%.

0 if less than 75%.

43. There is a strong tradition of the separation of Church and State.

1: Yes.

0.5: Some residual influence of Church on State.

0: No.

V Civil liberties

44. Is there a free electronic media?

1: Yes.

0.5: Pluralistic, but state-controlled media are heavily favoured. One or two private owners dominate the media.

0: No.

45. Is there a free print media?

1: Yes.

0.5: Pluralistic, but state-controlled media are heavily favoured. There is high degree of concentration of private ownership of national newspapers.

0: No.

46. Is there freedom of expression and protest (bar only generally accepted restrictions, such as banning advocacy of violence)?

1: Yes.

0.5: Holders of minority viewpoints are subject to some official harassment. Libel laws heavily restrict scope for free expression.

0: No.

47. Is media coverage robust? Is there open and free discussion of public issues, with a reasonable diversity of opinions?

1: Yes.

0.5: There is formal freedom, but a high degree of conformity of opinion, including through self-censorship or discouragement of minority or marginal views.

0: No.

48. Are there political restrictions on access to the Internet?

1: No.

0.5: Some moderate restrictions.

0: Yes.

49. Are citizens free to form professional organisations and trade unions?

1: Yes.

0.5: Officially free, but subject to some restrictions.

0: No.

50. Do institutions provide citizens with the opportunity to petition government to redress grievances?

1: Yes.

0.5: Some opportunities.

0: No.

51. The use of torture by the state.

1: Torture is not used.

0: Torture is used.

52. The degree to which the judiciary is independent of government influence.
Consider the views of international legal and judicial watchdogs. Have the courts ever issued an important judgement against the government, or a senior government official?
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
53. The degree of religious tolerance and freedom of religious expression.
Are all religions permitted to operate freely, or are some restricted? Is the right to worship permitted both publicly and privately? Do some religious groups feel intimidated by others, even if the law requires equality and protection?
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
54. The degree to which citizens are treated equally under the law.
Consider whether favoured groups or individuals are spared prosecution under the law.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
55. Do citizens enjoy basic security?
1: Yes.
0.5: Crime is so pervasive as to endanger security for large segments.
0: No.
56. Extent to which private property rights are protected and private business is free from undue government influence
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
57. Extent to which citizens enjoy personal freedoms.
Consider gender equality, right to travel, choice of work and study.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
58. Popular perceptions on protection of human rights; proportion of the population that think that basic human rights are well-protected.
1: High.
0.5: Moderate.
0: Low.
If available, from World Values Survey:
% of people who think that human rights are respected in their country.
1 if more than 70%.

0.5 if 50-70%.

0 if less than 50%.

59. There is no significant discrimination on the basis of people's race, colour or religious beliefs.

1: Yes.

0.5: Yes, but some significant exceptions.

0: No.

60. Extent to which the government invokes new risks and threats as an excuse for curbing civil liberties.

1: Low.

0.5: Moderate.

0: High.

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