Comparative Government

Dr Chao-Yo Cheng

Week 2: Organising

Today's plan

- Logistics: Attendance, class duration and etc
- Recap: "Doing Comparative Politics" (30 mins)
- Refresher lecture and Q&A (1-1.5 hr)
  - Last week: Regimes, government and governance
  - Nations, states and nation-states
  - How states vary: State capacity and economic development
- Reading exercise: "Democracy and Varieties of Nationalism" (1 hr)

International

Wednesday, 30 April 2025

Winners in the fight for Africa's democracies are getting hard to find

https://observer.co.uk/news/international/article/winners-in-the-fight-for-africas-democracies-are-getting-hard-to-find

Recap: “Doing Comparative Politics”

- What is this about? Why is the issue/question this news article attempts to "discuss" or "explain?"
- What are the "factors" highlighted by the author? How "convincing" are they?
- What is the comparative method used here?

Question: The “strange” case of democracies in Africa

- Many democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa have "reverted" back to authoritarianism, as illustrated by a rising number of
  - coups
  - rigged elections
  - opposition leaders facing changes or even being "jailed"

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Coups, elections and protests - a difficult year for democracy in Africa

The deadly violence that followed Tanzania's election shocked many

Stewart Maclean

Nairobi

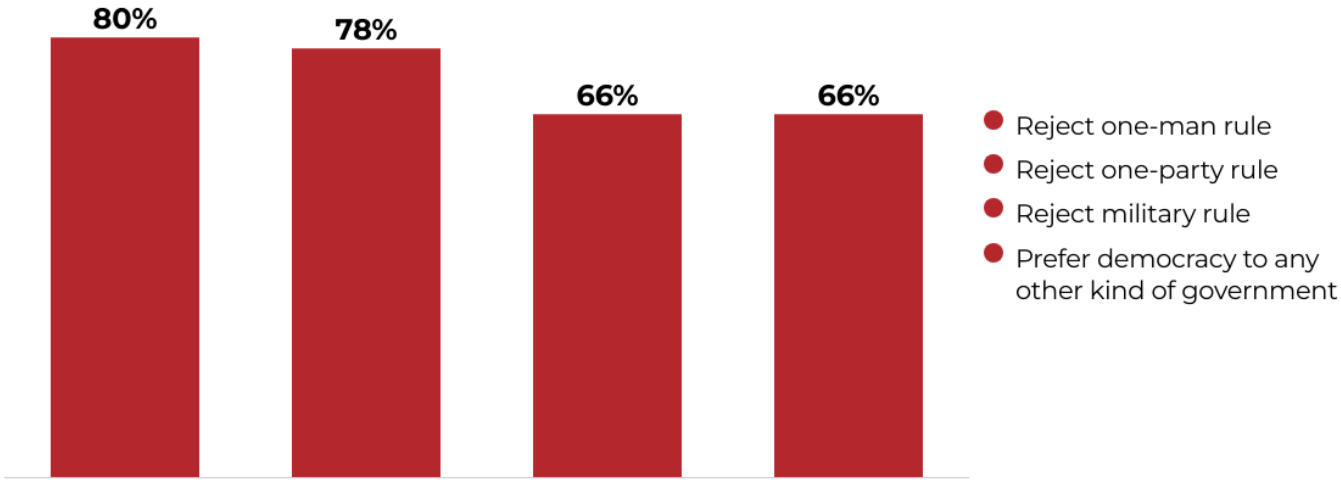
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1lr70jg2zgo

Report: "African insights 2024" (Afrobarometer 2025)

- Support for democracy remains strong but declining
  - 66% prefer democracy; large majorities reject authoritarian alternatives
  - Yet support dropped 7 percentage points over a decade (30 countries), with steep declines in South Africa (-29) and Mali (-23)
- Military rule gaining acceptance
  - Opposition to military rule weakened by 11 percentage points, especially in Mali (-40) and Burkina Faso (-36)
  - 53% would accept military takeover if leaders abuse power
- Mixed signals on support for democratic norms
  - In favor of: accountability, rule of law, term limits, multiparty competition and media freedom
  - Support for elections declined 8 points (though majority still favor)

Support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian rule | 39 African countries | 2021/2023

AFROBAROMETER



https://www.afrobarometer.org/feature/flagship-report/

Trends in support for democratic norms
| 30 African countries | 2011-2023

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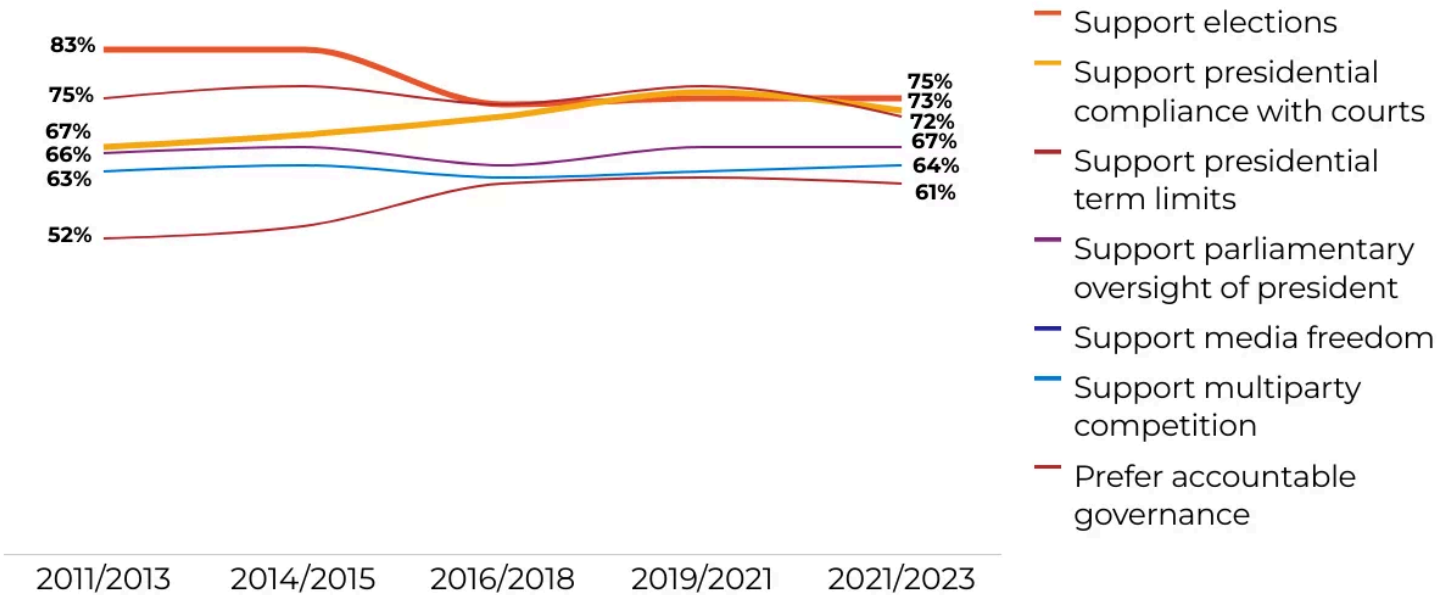

https://www.afrobarometer.org/feature/flagship-report/

Supply of democratic norms, institutions
| 30 African countries | 2011-2023

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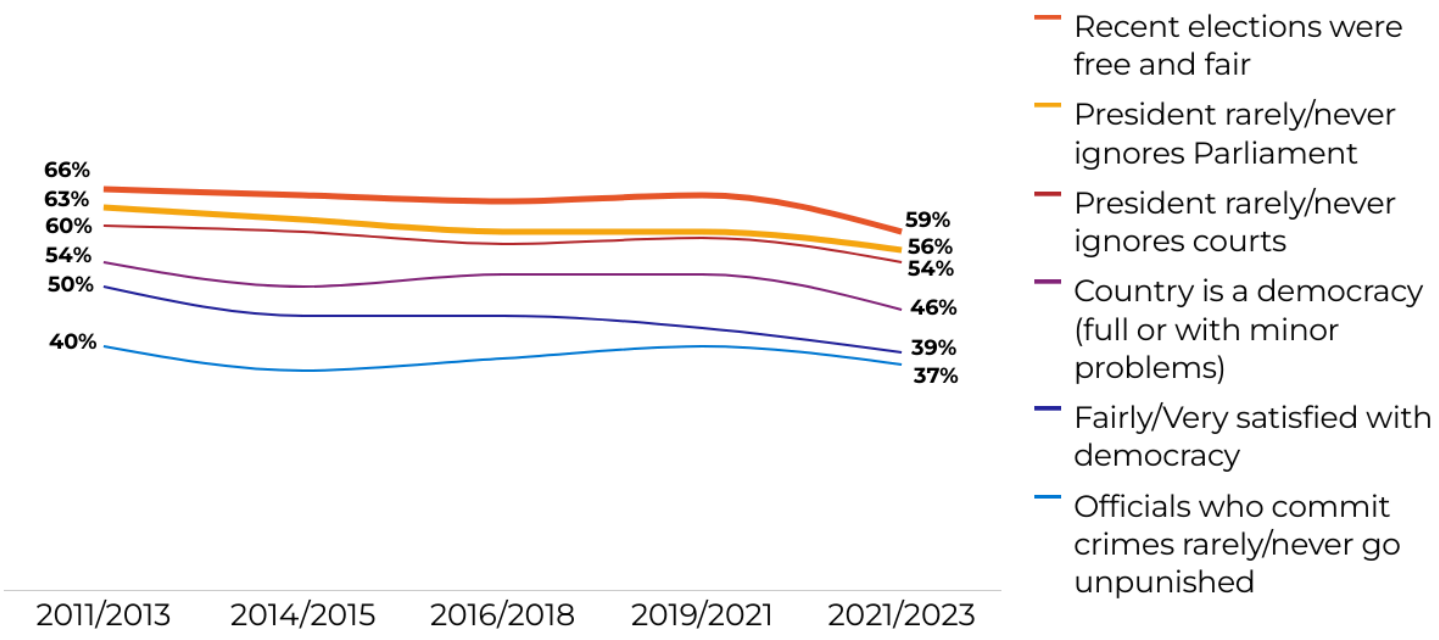


https://www.afrobarometer.org/feature/flagship-report/

Why democracies in Africa are “fragile”

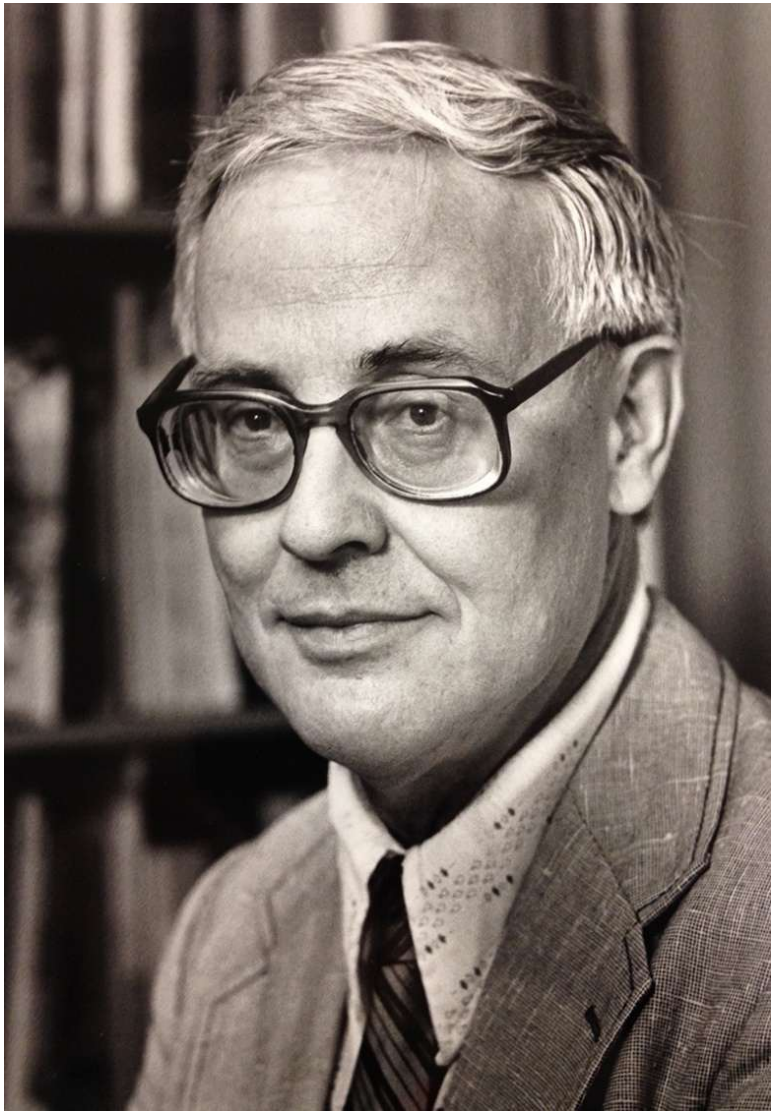
- Worldwide democratic backsliding and the difficult "state" of global economy (inflation and cost of living crisis)
- Weakening of the post-1945 international settlement (and the rise of alternatives)
- African democracies are "young;" democratic institutions are "flimsy"

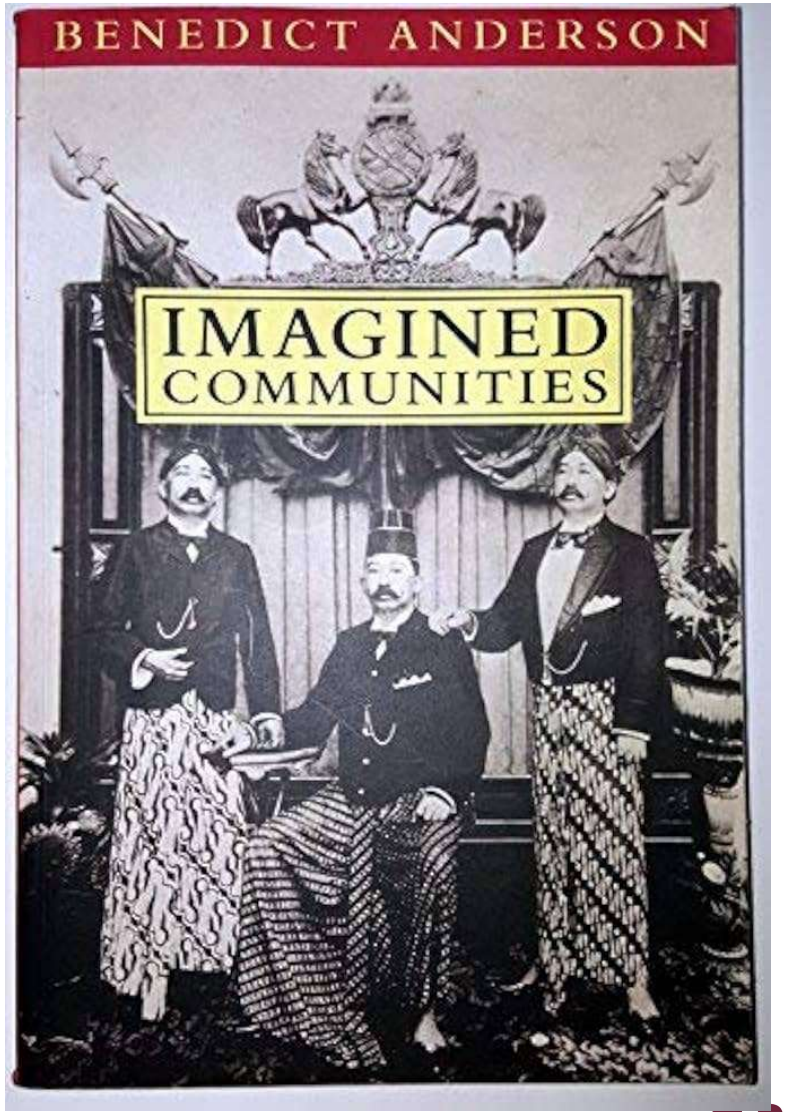
"Refresher" lecture

- Last week: Regimes, government and governance
  - Regime: The principle to rule (institution)
  - Government: The organization to rule (organization)
  - Governance: The action to rule (behavior)
- Nations, states and nation-states
- How states vary: State capacity and economic development

States, nations, and nation-states

- State(s)
  - Components: Sovereignty, territory and people (?)
  - Building of a state: War, political centralization and resource extraction (armed forces and bureaucracy)
  - Different forms of states (look back to history)
- Nation(s)
  - Building of a nation: **Imagined Communities** by Benedict Anderson (1983)
  - Nations versus race and ethnicity
  - Varieties of nationalism: Multiculturalism and populism
- Nation-state(s): Where nations and states meet each other (do they always align? what if they do not?)

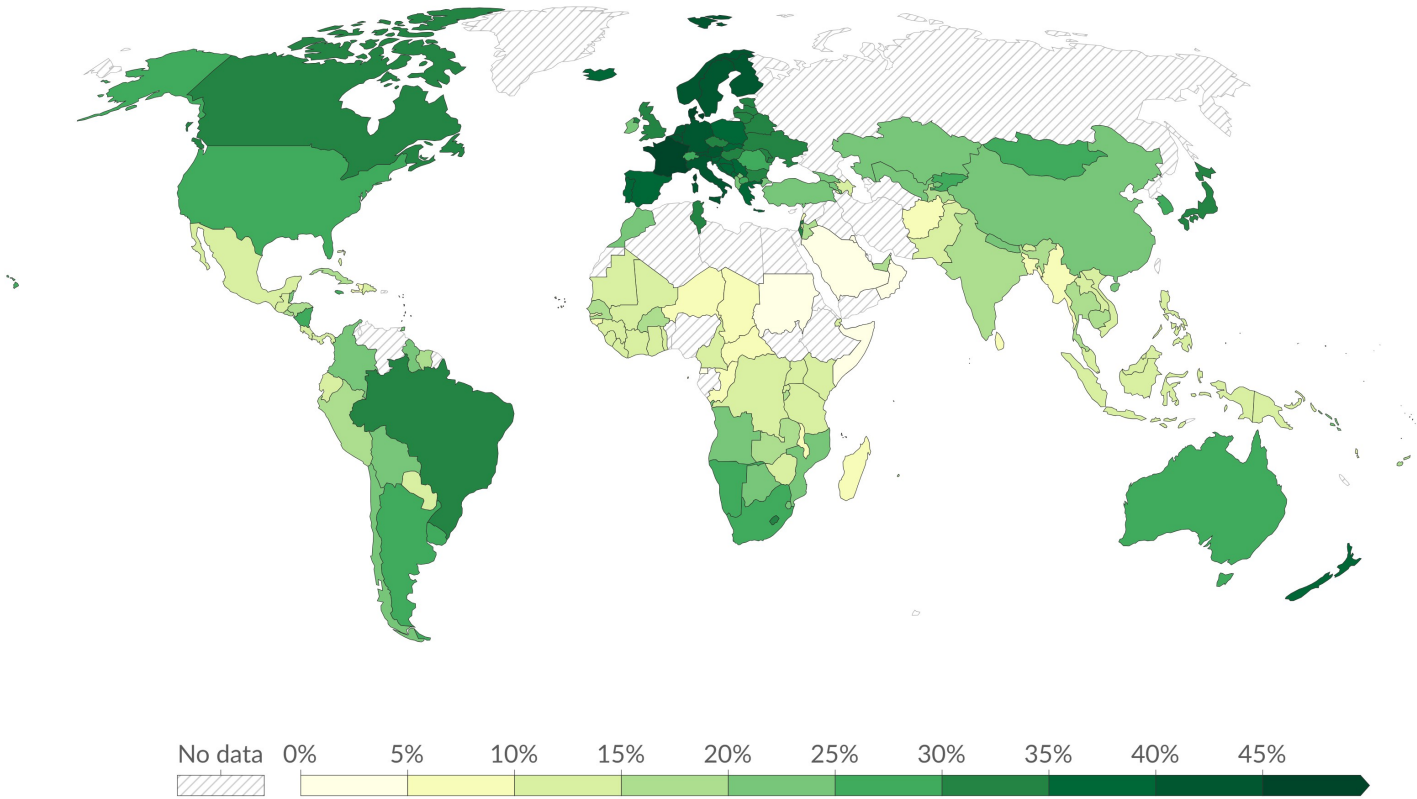



BENEDICT ANDERSON
IMAGINED
COMMUNITIES

Tax revenues as a share of GDP, 2022

Direct and indirect taxes as well as social contributions included.

Our World in Data

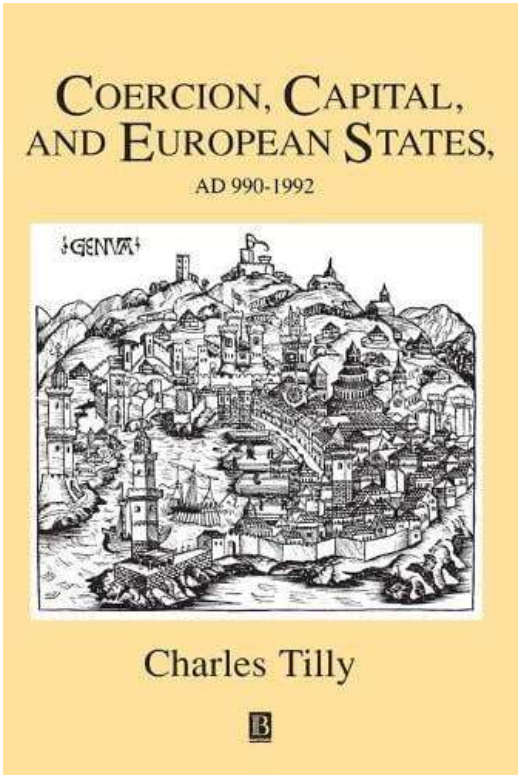


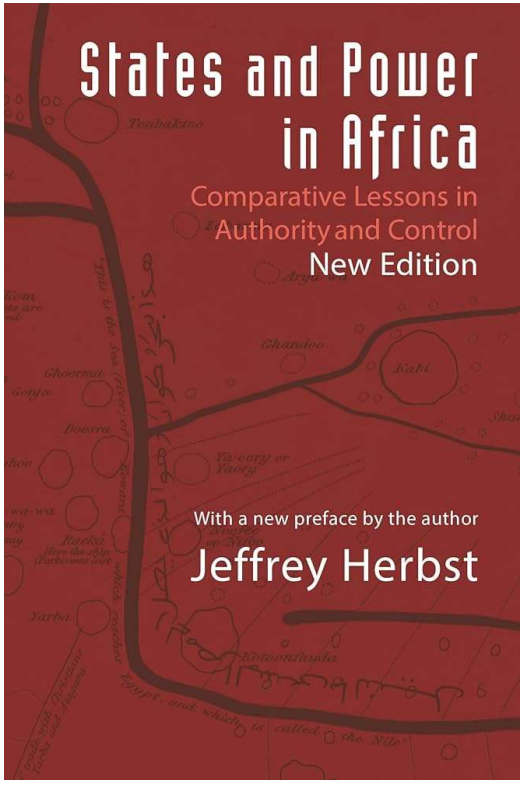
Data source: UNU-WIDER Government Revenue Dataset (2023)

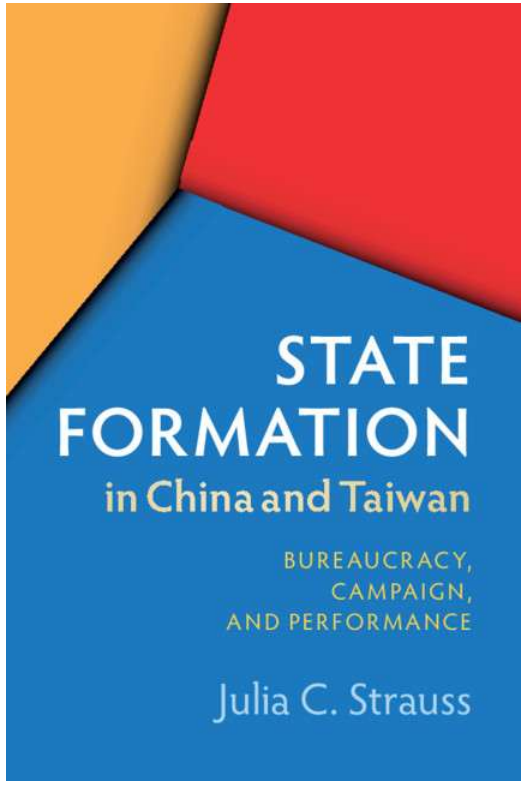
OurWorldinData.org/taxation | CC BY

http://ourworldindata.org/state-capacity

Varieties of states and state-building: Alternative indicators and non-Western experiences



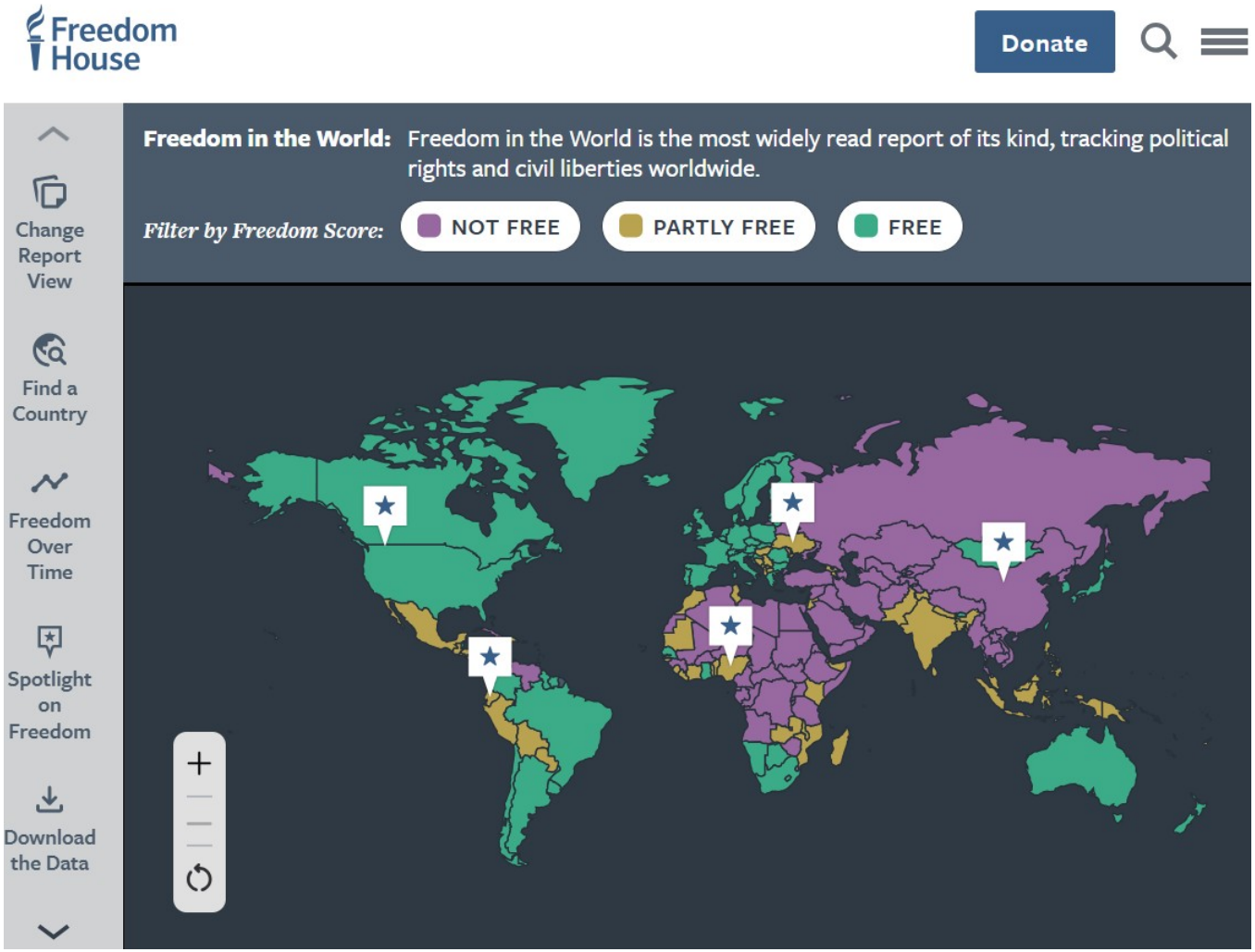




How states vary

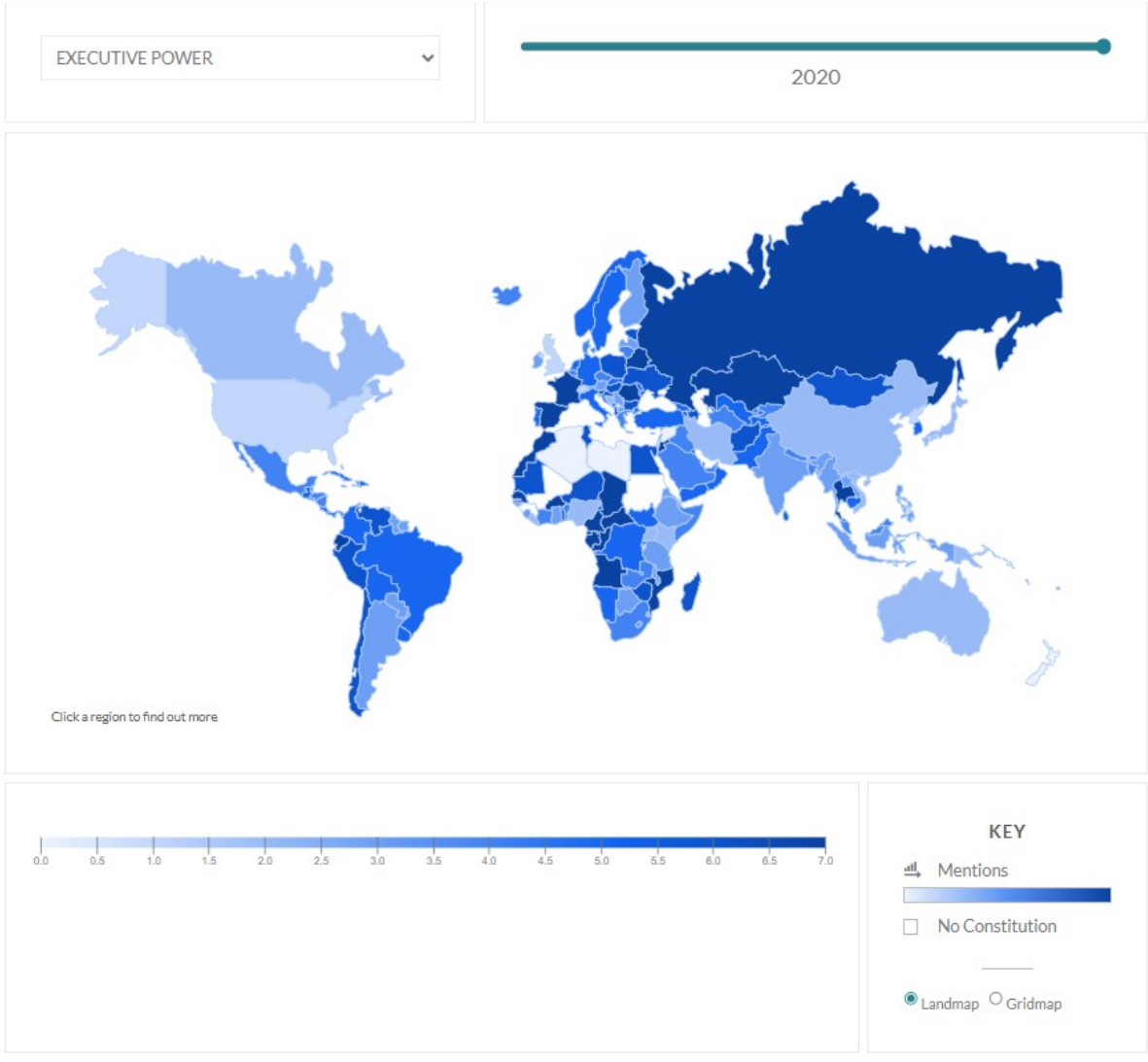
- By political regime: Democracy, anocracy and autocracy (Week 4)
- By constitutional design
  - Judiciary (Week 3): Supreme (or constitutional) courts (or not – not every country has one)
  - Executive (Week 5): Presidential versus parliamentary; bureaucracy (Week 8)
  - Elections (Week 6): Plural/majoritarian versus proportional representation (and mixed-member); political parties (Week 7)
  - Legislature: Unicameral versus bicameral
  - Central-local relations: Federal versus unitary (and "decentralized")
- By level of economic development: Regime versus state?

“Freedom in the World” (Freedom House 2025)



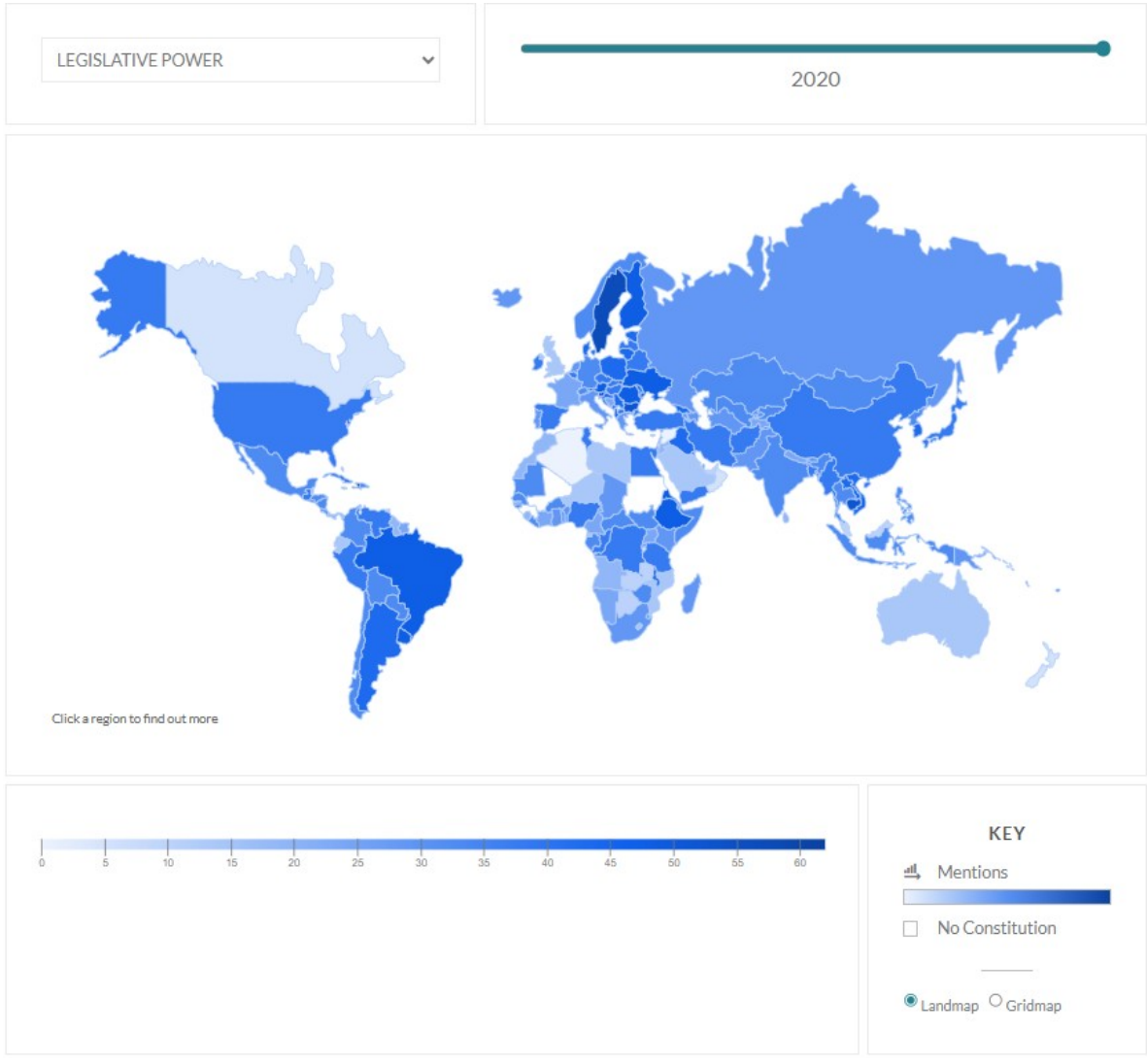
https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map

Constitute Project (executive power)



https://www.constituteproject.org/countries

Constitute Project (legislative power)



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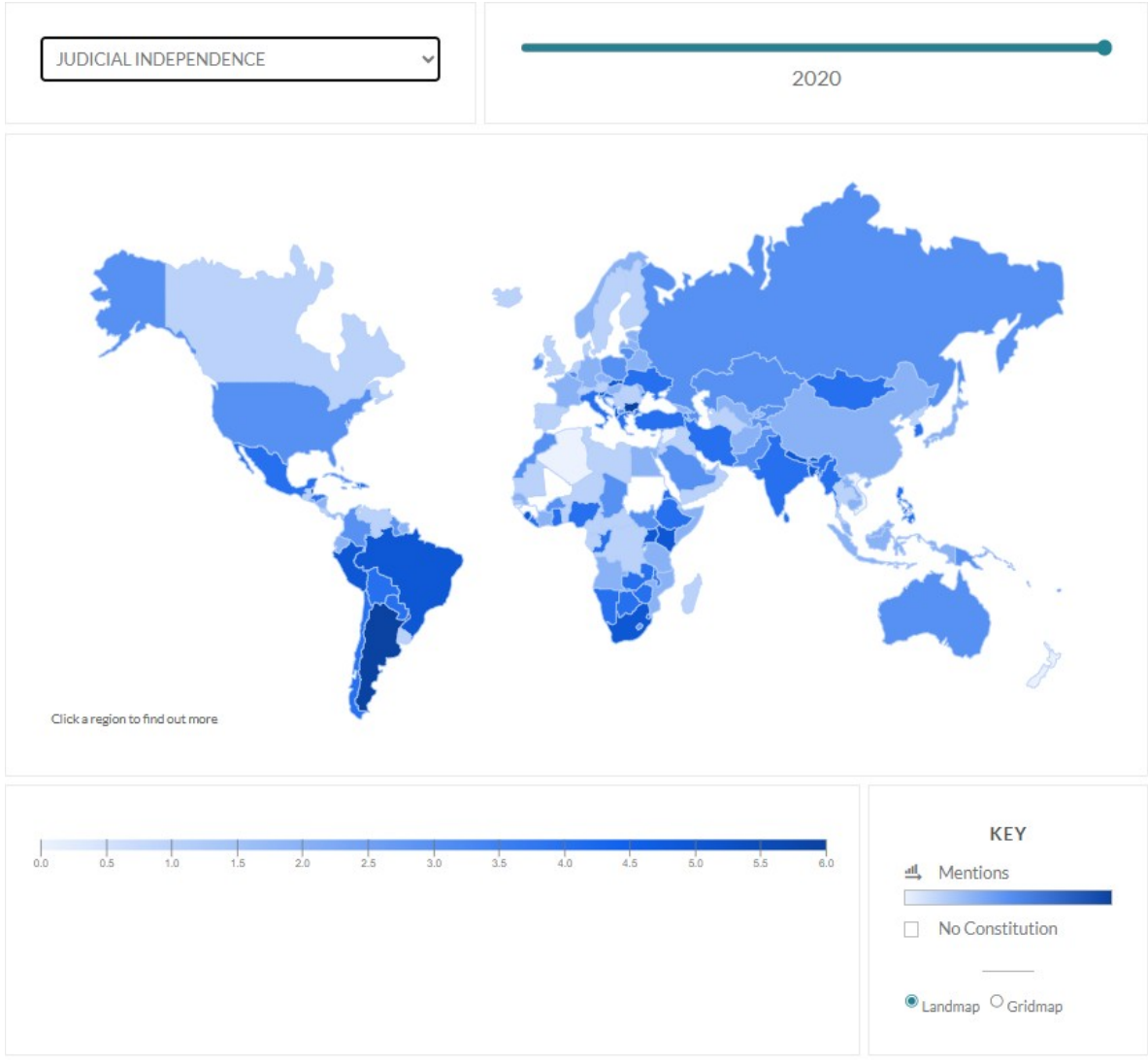
Constitute Project (judicial independence)



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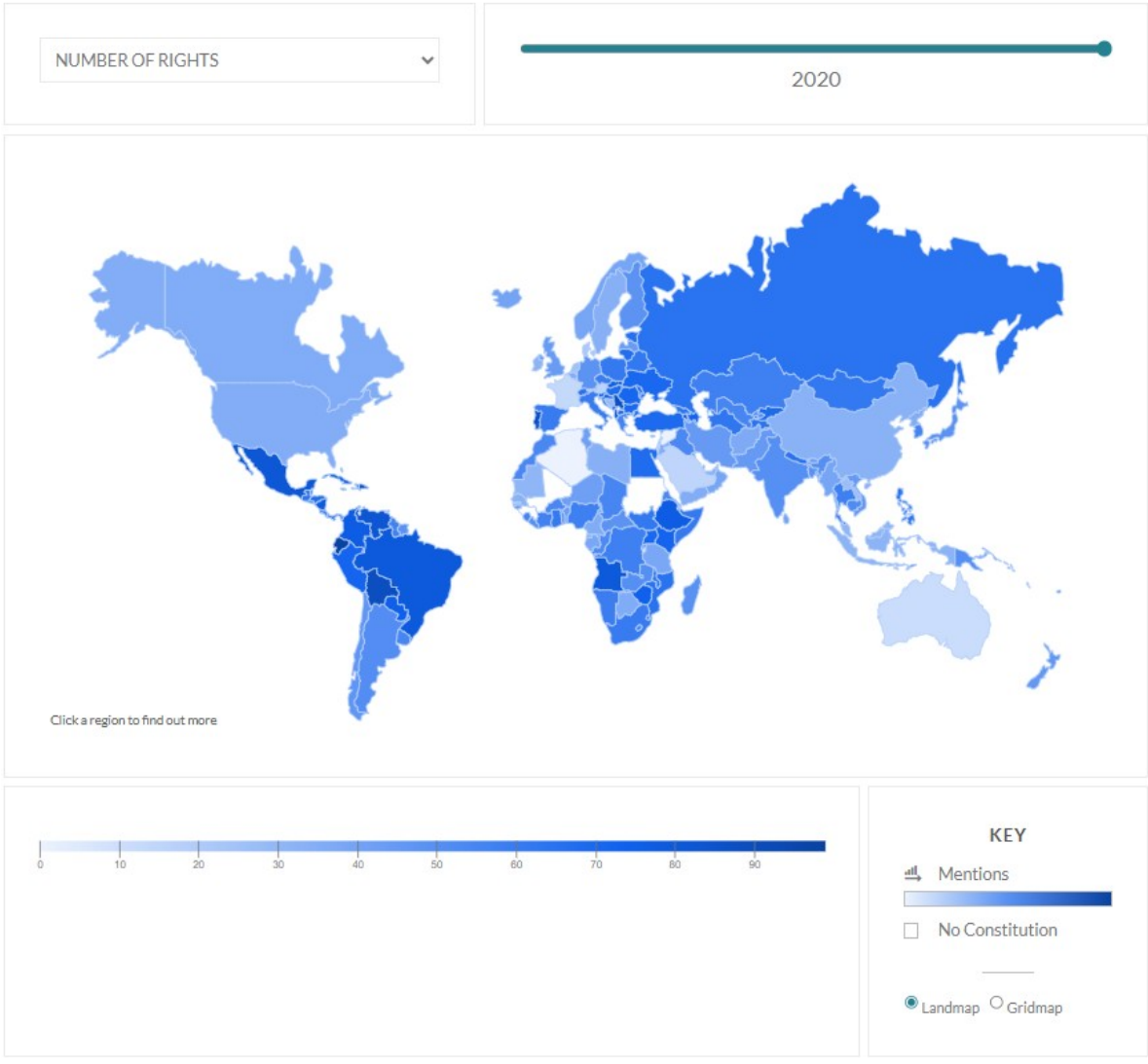
Constitute Project (political rights)



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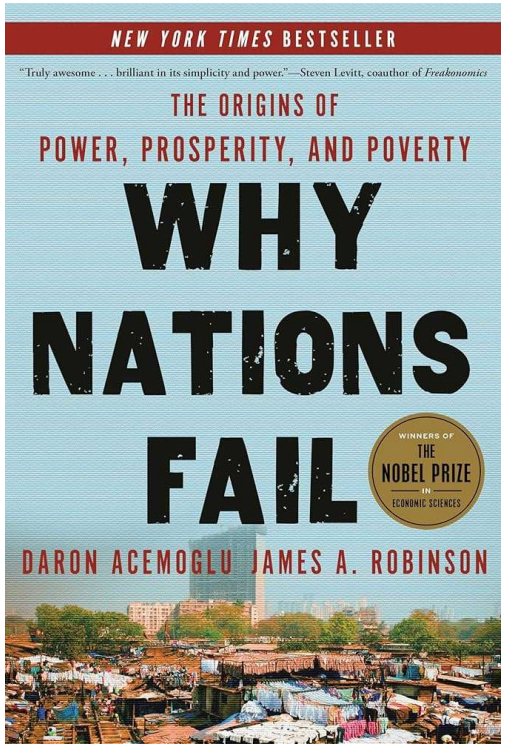
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
"Truly awesome . . . brilliant in its simplicity and power."—Steven Levitt, coauthor of Freakonomics
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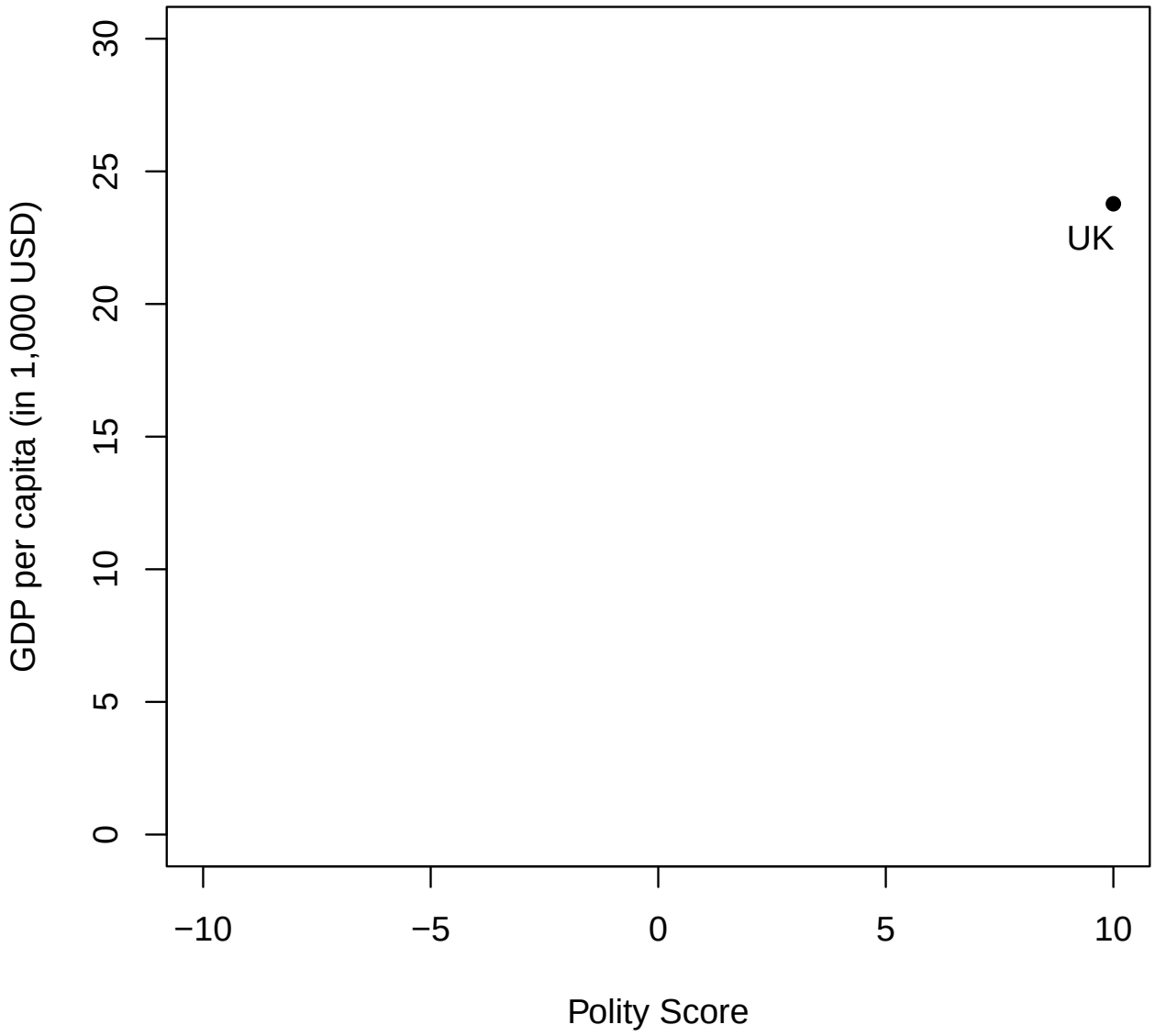
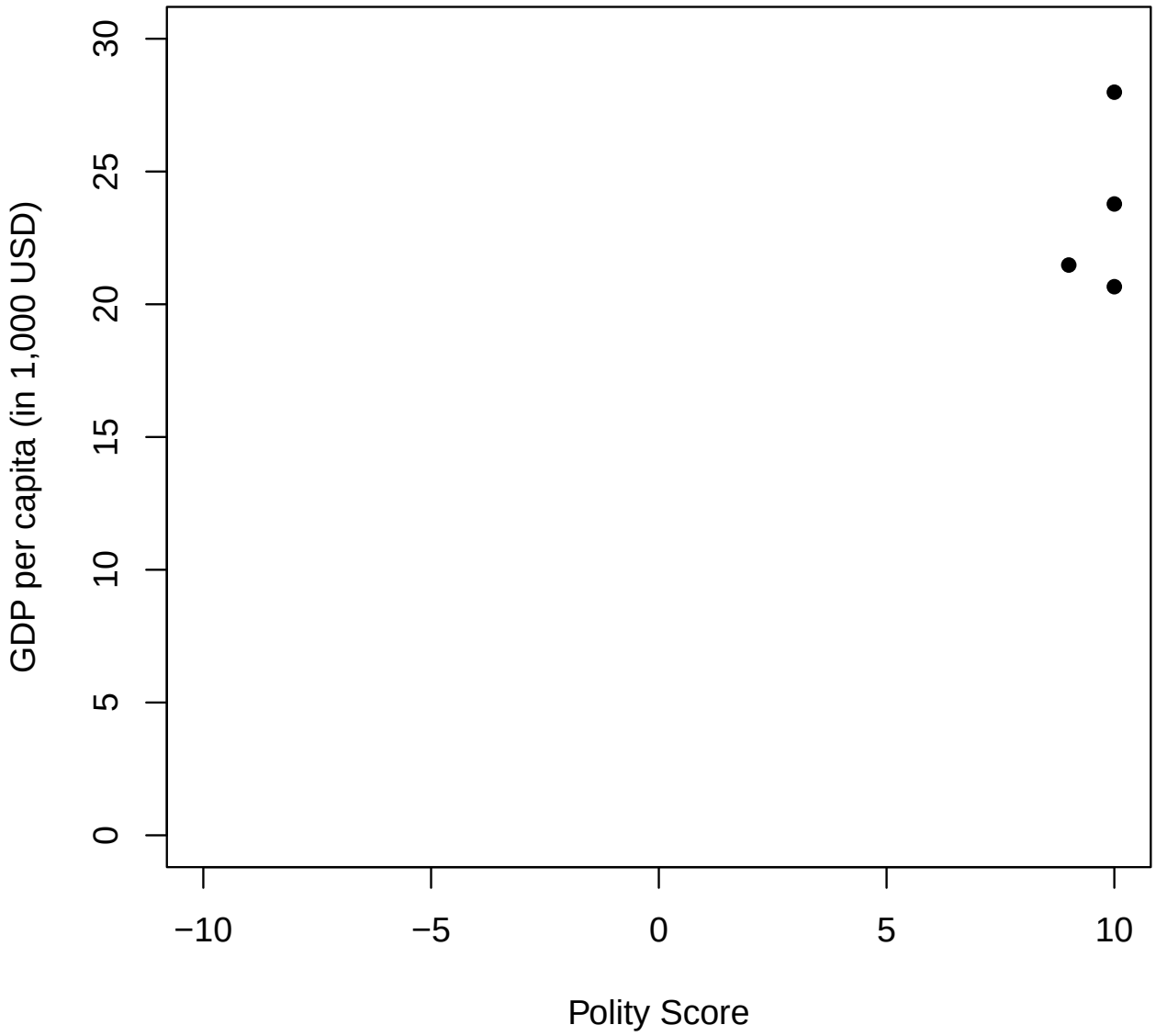
POWER, PROSPERITY, AND POVERTY
WHY NATIONS FAIL
WINNERS OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMIC SCIENCES
DARON ACEMOGLU JAMES A. ROBINSON

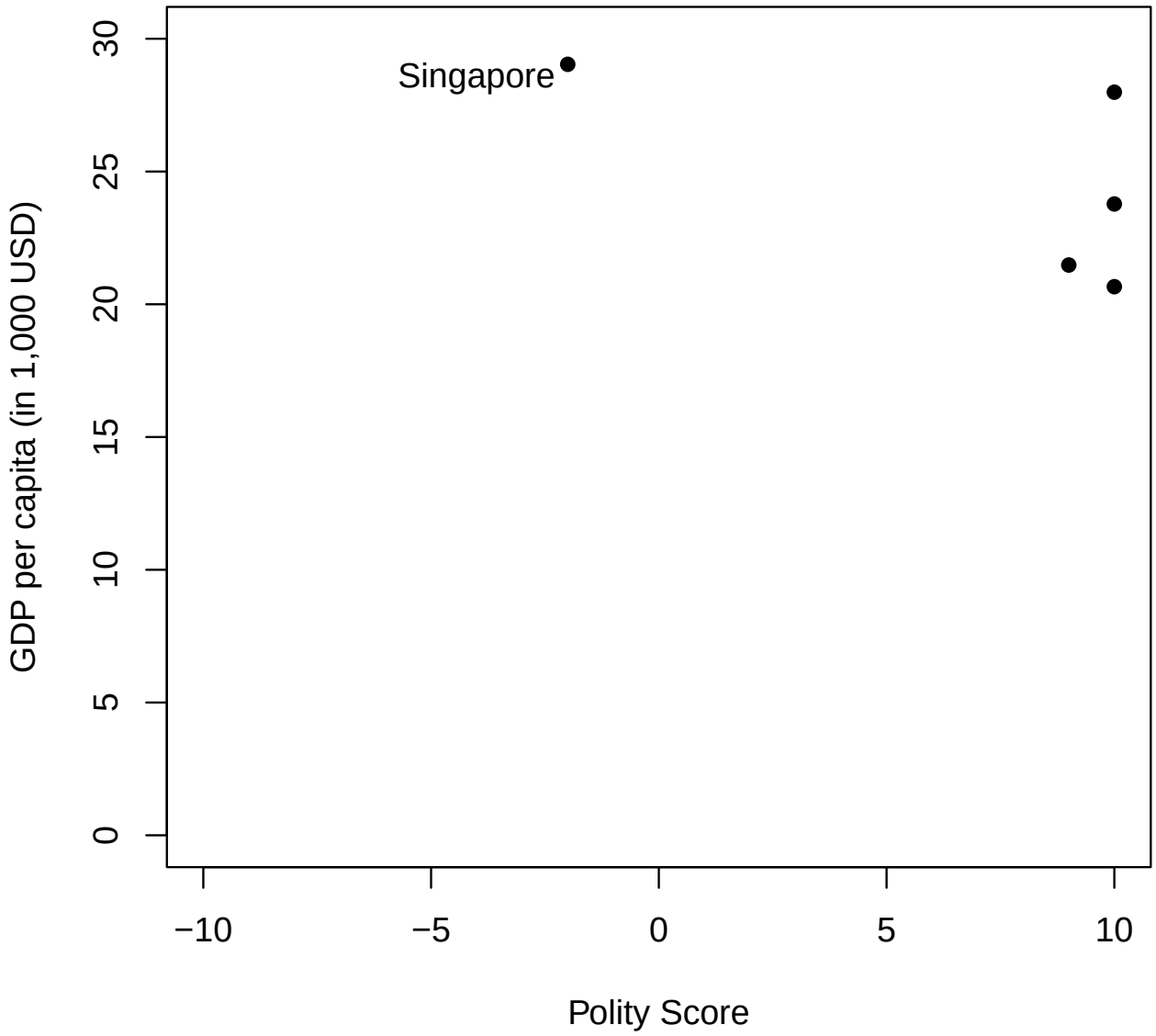
Democracy and development



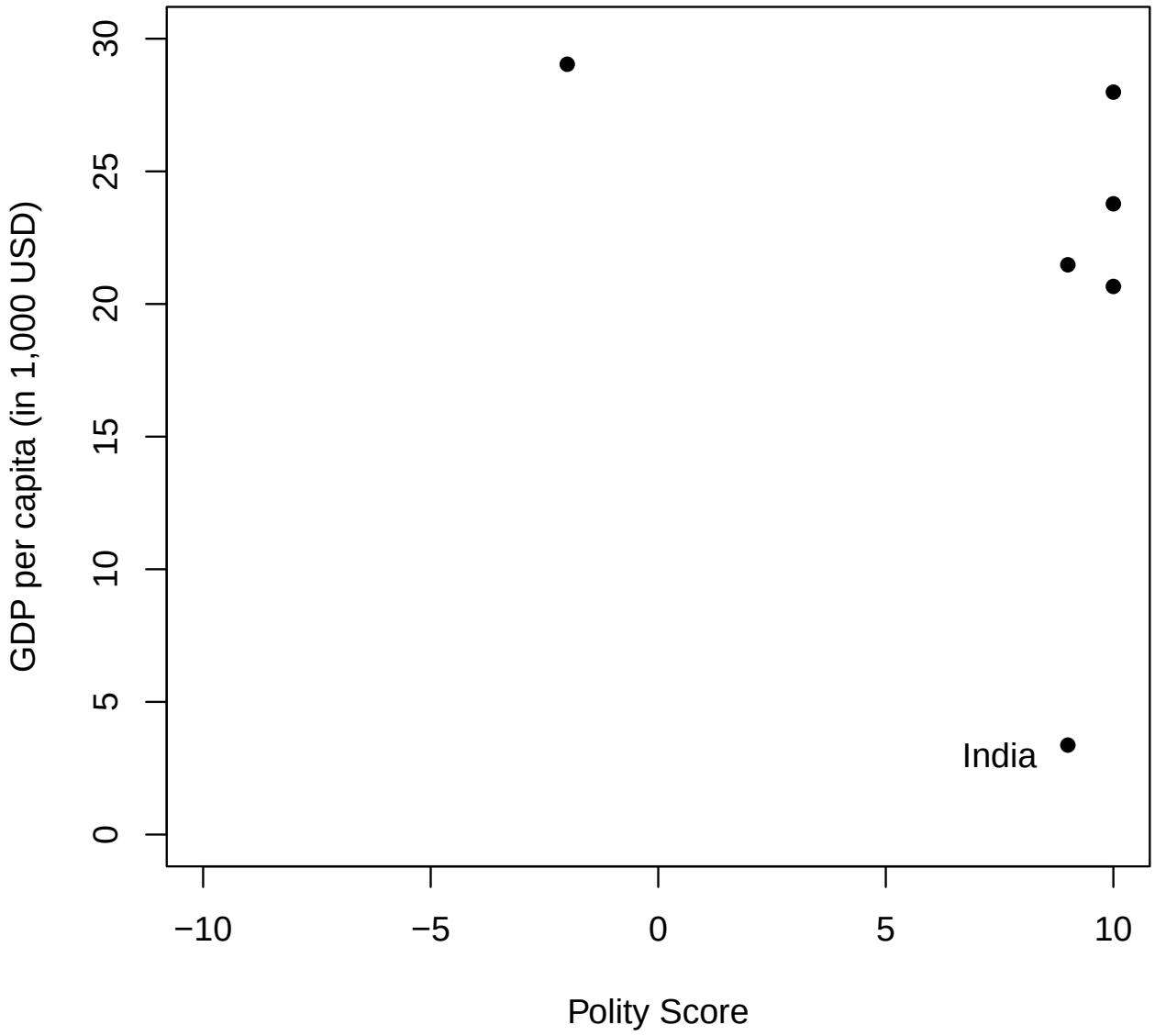
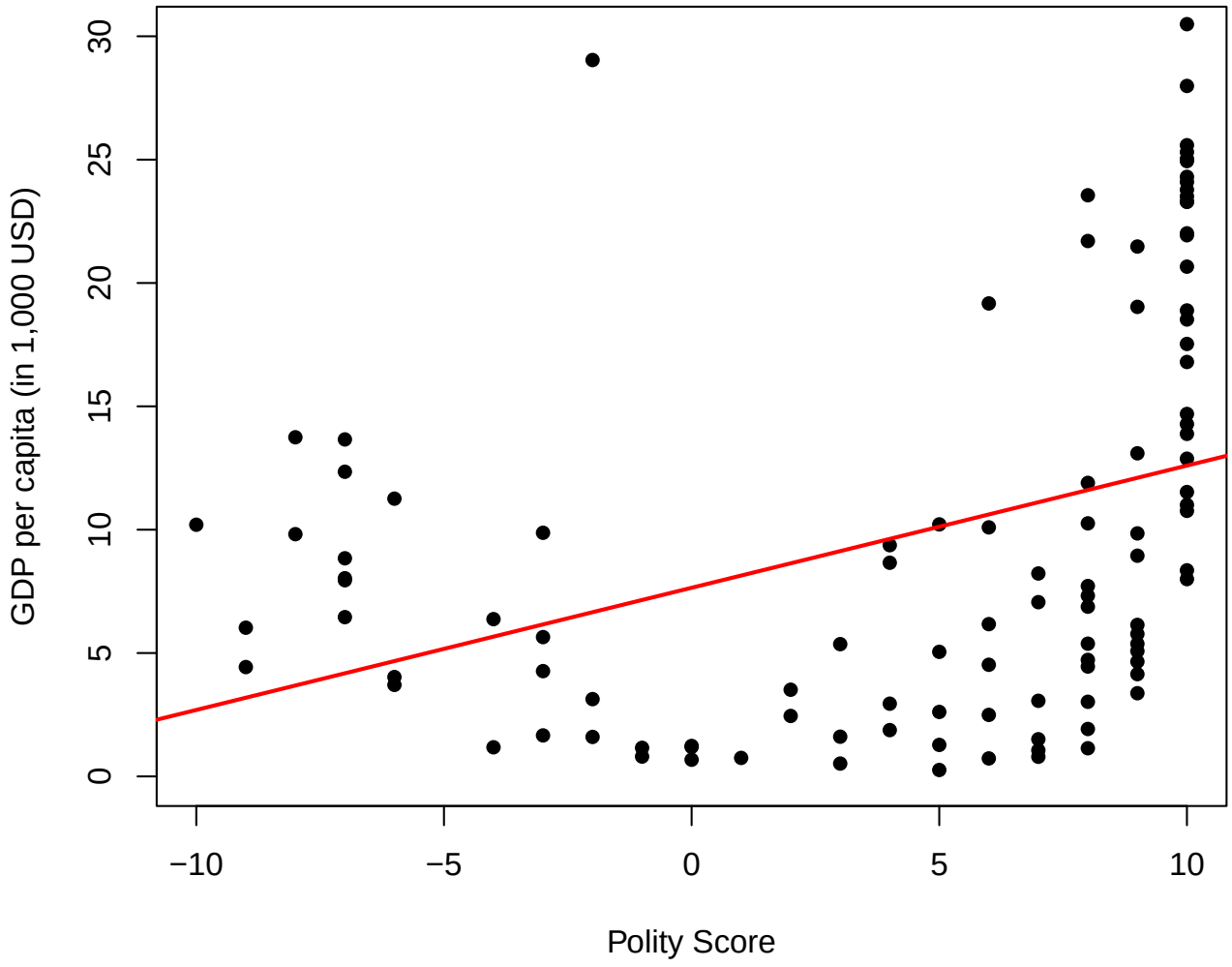
Democracy and development



Democracy and development



Democracy and development



Democracy and development