

# Challenges to Democracy

## Session 5: How to Analyse Democracies

Mirko Wegemann

Universität Münster  
Institut für Politikwissenschaft

12 November 2025

## Event announcement

Next week, we'll have another session of our speaker series on *Understanding Democracies: Challenges and Solutions*.

- Werner Krause (University of Potsdam) will be our first guest
- Presentation on “Parties’ Path to Parliament and the Influential Role of Public Opinion Polls”
- you are all invited to join us next Wednesday, 12-13 in Room GraSP 101

## Last week's session

Last week...

- we discussed whether there is an end of history (Fukuyama 1989)
- and traced the current state of democratization (Boese et al. 2022)

## This week

This week, we will

- brainstorm about potential ideas for your podcast project
- learn about different data sources we can use to analyse democracies

## The idea

- you'll develop a podcast episode on a current challenge to democracy
- a potential structure could be
  1. briefly elaborate how the threat you are investigating refers to democracy → why is it important? why is it a threat?
  2. show/explain global patterns
  3. zoom in on Germany
  4. survey people on the streets about their perception regarding the threat you identified
  5. connect their responses to your expectation → conclude

While deviations from the example structure are possible, you must refer to empirical patterns and interview people on the streets

## An example

Podcast project from last year's course

# Brainstorming

*On your own, think about a potential threat to democracy you are interested in. Write down why you think it's worth studying.*

# Brainstorming

*Find your partner (based on the color of paper): Pitch your idea to each other. Afterwards, discuss why you think it's a good idea or what needs to be refined.*

## Resources

There are many indices trying to assess the quality of government.  
Each come with advantages and disadvantages.

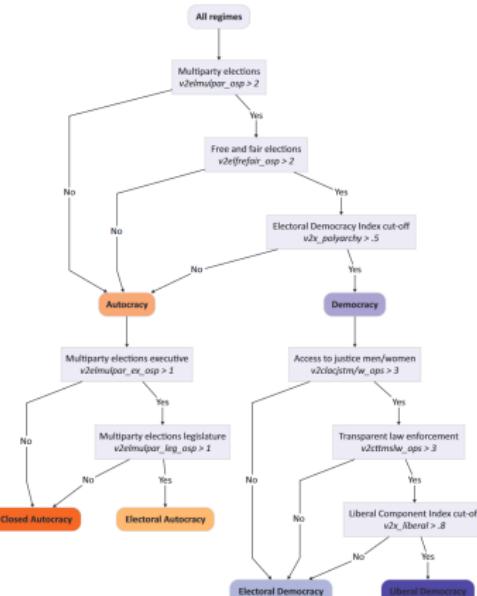
- Today, we learn how to analyse recent developments on democratization around the globe.
- We will do this with online visualization tools provided by the data sources.
- Want to work more on this? Come and learn statistics with us (next term).

## Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

One of the most established source to trace the quality of democracy is **Varieties of Democracy**.

- It's idea and operationalization is outlined in Lindberg et al. (2014)
- Data on five principles: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian components of democracy
- No fixed definition of democracy, instead, everyone can use those indicators they deem important
- Coding of each category by five independent experts (mostly highly educated and nationals) who assign a confidence value for each indicator
- Time coverage: 1789–; Geographic coverage: all (semi-)sovereign states

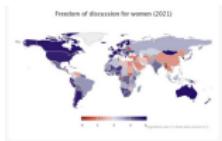
# Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)



**Figure:** Regimes of the World by Lührmann et al. (2018), based on V-DEM

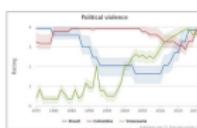
# Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

V-DEM offers several different online tools to visualize trends in the quality of democracy.



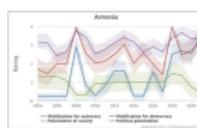
**Mapping Tool**

Interactive tool that visualizes data by creating a color-coded map to view the distribution of scores for an indicator around the world.



**Variable Graph**

Compares multiple countries for one indicator/index. Select one indicator and multiple countries/regions. The data are aggregated by year.



**Country Graph**

Compares multiple variables/indices for one country/region. Select one country and multiple indicators/indices. The data are aggregated by year.



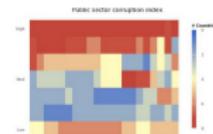
**Country Radar Chart**

This tool displays multiple variables and indices for one country/region in a radar chart. Select one country/region and multiple indicators/indices.



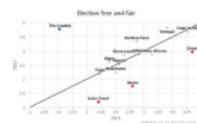
**Variable Radar Chart**

This tool displays multiple countries (three or more) for one indicator/index in a radar chart. Select one indicator/index and multiple countries.



**Heat Map**

This tool displays one indicator/index on a heat map - a graphical representation of data where values are represented by colors.



**Regional Comparison**

This tool displays the development of a V-Dem indicator/index in a region between two selected years.

**Thematic Comparison**

**Thematic Comparison**  
Displays the development of a thematic category between two selected years.

## Freedom House

Freedom House follows a more qualitative approach in their assessment of democracy.

- “Freedom in the World operates from the assumption that freedom for all people is best achieved in liberal democratic societies” (Methodology of Freedom House)
- Core components are **civil rights** and **political liberties** which are further disaggregated into 7 sub-categories
- “an electoral democracy designation requires a score of 7 or better in the Electoral Process subcategory, an overall political rights score of 20 or better, and an overall civil liberties score of 30 or better”
- Assessment by 132 analysts and 40 advisers based on variety of non-academic and academic sources

## Freedom House

- Since 1972, large coverage of states; in 2023, 195 countries covered

# Freedom House

Out of these qualitative reports, Freedom House calculates a 'Freedom Indicator'

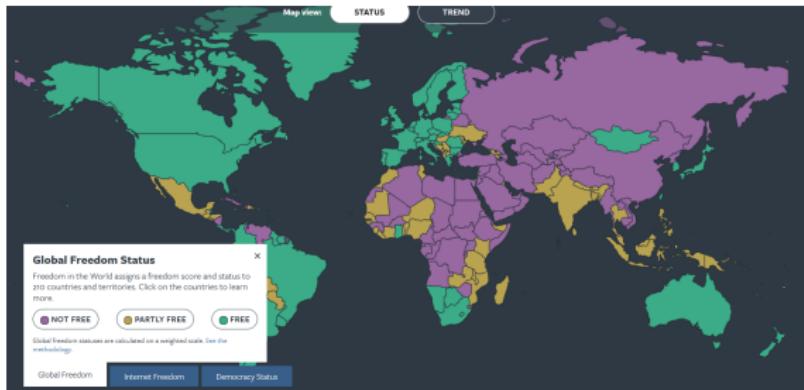


Figure: Global Freedom Status in 2024 by Freedom House

## Quality of Government

Up until now, we mainly dealt with procedural definitions of democracy. The 'Quality of Government' (QoD) project goes into a different direction.

- for a thorough discussion, please refer to Holmberg et al. (2009)
- vast amount of indicators
- broadly defined by three core attributes: impartiality, bureaucratic quality and corruption
  - impartiality: treating citizens equally irrespectively of their characteristics or personal motives

## European Social Survey

The **European Social Survey** (ESS) does not explicitly focus on democracy, but it is a large European cross-country survey.

- it allows you to trace satisfaction with democracy and other aspects of life
- broad array of items on political attitudes and behaviour
- socio-economic background of respondents
- full potential only if used in statistical software but for a start: ESS Data Portal

For a global view on public support for democracy and its principle, you can use the World Values Survey but it's lacking visualization tools.

## Podcast project

Form groups based on your interests.

- Discuss what you could work on in your podcast project.
- Look into the data, is there any indicator tracing the development of that pillar?
- Describe differences between country and over time.
- Do you assume that your indicator correlates with something else? Is there any data, so that you could visualize the association?

## Other sources

- **Polity V:** covers a wide array of countries until 2018 (but has been terminated)
  - captures gradual levels of autocracy/democracy
  - main indicator is the 'Polity Score' which can be used to categorize regimes into autocracies, anocracies (hybrid regimes) and democracies
- **Democracy-Barometer:** translates the concept by Merkel (2004)
  - main pillars: freedom, control and equality

## Conclusion

What we have done today...

- thought about potential podcast projects and formed groups
- learned to access relevant data sources to analyse the current state of democracies

## To prepare for the week after next...

- next week, we'll start the next block of this seminar and engage with the causes of democratic backsliding
  - we start with institutional explanations and with the following readings
    - Bermeo, N. (2016). On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>
    - Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018, January). *How Democracies Die* (1st ed.). Crown or the podcast by Abou-Chadi (n.d.)
- Optional:** Poblete-Cazenave, R. (n.d.). Do Politicians in Power Receive Special Treatment in Courts? Evidence from India. *American Journal of Political Science*, n/a(n/a).  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12804>

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?

## Literature

Abou-Chadi, T. (n.d.). Daniel Ziblatt. How Democracies Die..

<https://soundcloud.com/user-467531770/episode-12-daniel-ziblatt-how-democracies-die>

Bermeo, N. (2016). On Democratic Backsliding. *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 5–19.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0012>

Boese, V. A., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Sato, Y., & Lindberg, S. I. (2022). State of the world 2021: Autocratization changing its nature? *Democratization*, 29(6), 983–1013.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2022.2069751>

Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest*, (16), 3–18. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>

## Literature

Holmberg, S., Rothstein, B., & Nasiritousi, N. (2009). Quality of Government: What You Get. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12(1), 135–161.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-100608-104510>

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018, January). *How Democracies Die* (1st ed.). Crown.

Lindberg, S. I., Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., & Teorell, J. (2014). V-Dem: A New Way to Measure Democracy.

*Journal of Democracy*, 25(3), 159–169.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0040>

## Literature

Lührmann, A., Tannenberg, M., & Lindberg, S. I. (2018). Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes. *Politics and Governance*, 6(1), 60–77.

<https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v6i1.1214>

Merkel, W. (2004). Embedded and defective democracies. *Democratization*, 11(5), 33–58.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304598>

Poblete-Cazenave, R. (n.d.). Do Politicians in Power Receive Special Treatment in Courts? Evidence from India.

*American Journal of Political Science*, n/a(n/a).

<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12804>

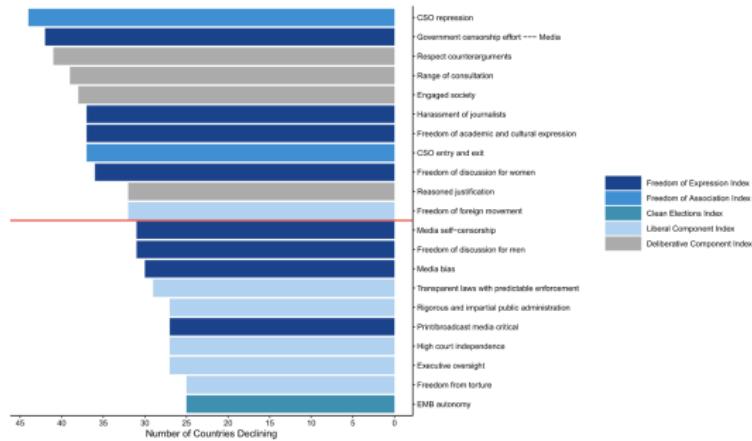


Figure: Declining quality of democracy