

Democracy and How We Measure It

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Democracy

- Demos = people
- -cracy = “rule”
- AKA rule by the people...
- Democracy gets its legitimacy from active participation of the “demos”



Different conceptions of democracy:

Procedural

- Focus on process and rules that make up governing institutions
- Means by which representation, accountability, and legitimacy are assured
- *How* decisions are made, rather than *what* decisions are made
- When we talk about democratization, we usually think about implementing certain democratic processes and rules
- Can be minimalist = multi-candidate/party, competitive elections
- Or complex = requiring additional institutions or legal liberty protections

Different conceptions of democracy:

Procedural

Limitations

- Do elections = democracy?
- A country may have free and fair elections, but lack rule of law or civil liberties → “illiberal democracies”
 - Everyone has the right to vote, but human rights or individual liberties are not properly protected
 - Freedom of the press and media access for opposition parties may be restricted
 - Political opponents may be imprisoned without due process
- Examples: Russia and Nigeria

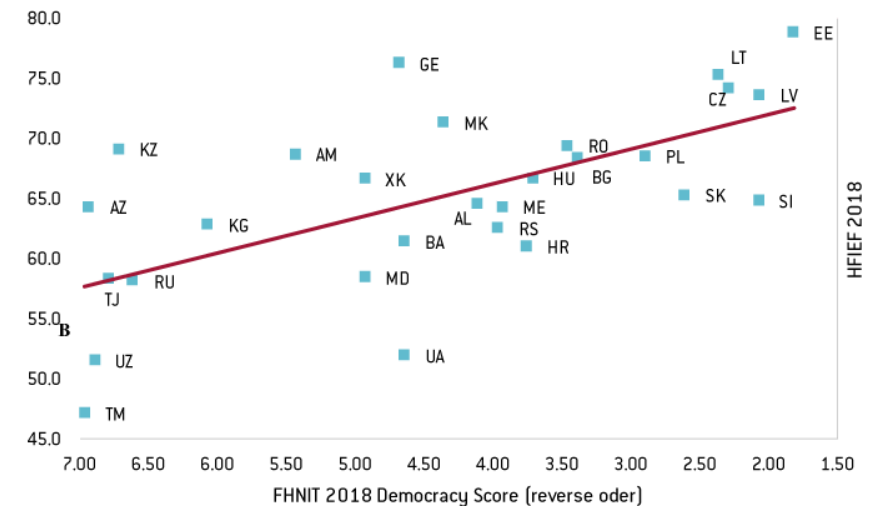
Different conceptions of democracy:


Substantive

- Democracy is evaluated based on the political outcomes and their representativeness
- Democracy which has competitive, fair elections, **as well as** full civil liberties and rights
- Often considered a consolidated democracy
 - Elites and citizens have accepted the “rules of democracy”
 - Rule of law is respected
- Examples: UK, US, Canada, Japan

Does democracy mean...

- More orderly, stable, peaceful, and consensual than nondemocracy? More equal?
 - Not necessarily!
- More economically prosperous, efficient, capitalistic?
 - Also not necessarily!
 - Want to know more? Take POL 174!
- Majority rule?
 - Again, no! "This is a democracy!" argument is somewhat flawed
 - All democracies have some means of aggregating the preferences of individuals, but not always majority wins
 - Think US popular vote and electoral college



A black and white portrait of Winston Churchill, showing him from the chest up. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a dark bow tie. His expression is serious, and he is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is dark and out of focus.

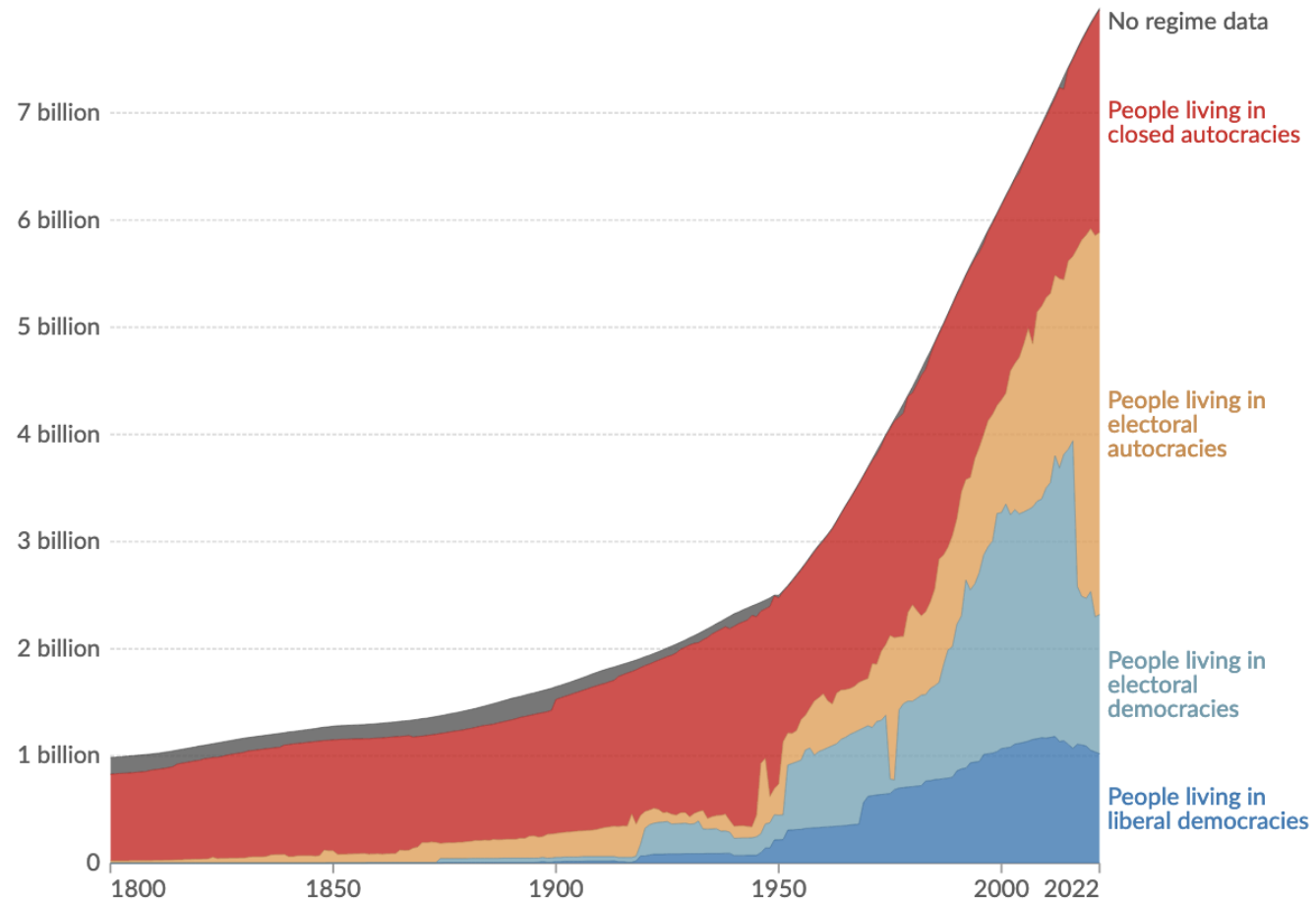
**Democracy is the worst
form of government
except for all
the others**

~ Winston Churchill ~

Many more people live in democracies now than 200 years ago

Political regimes are based on the [classification](#) by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the estimates by V-Dem's experts.

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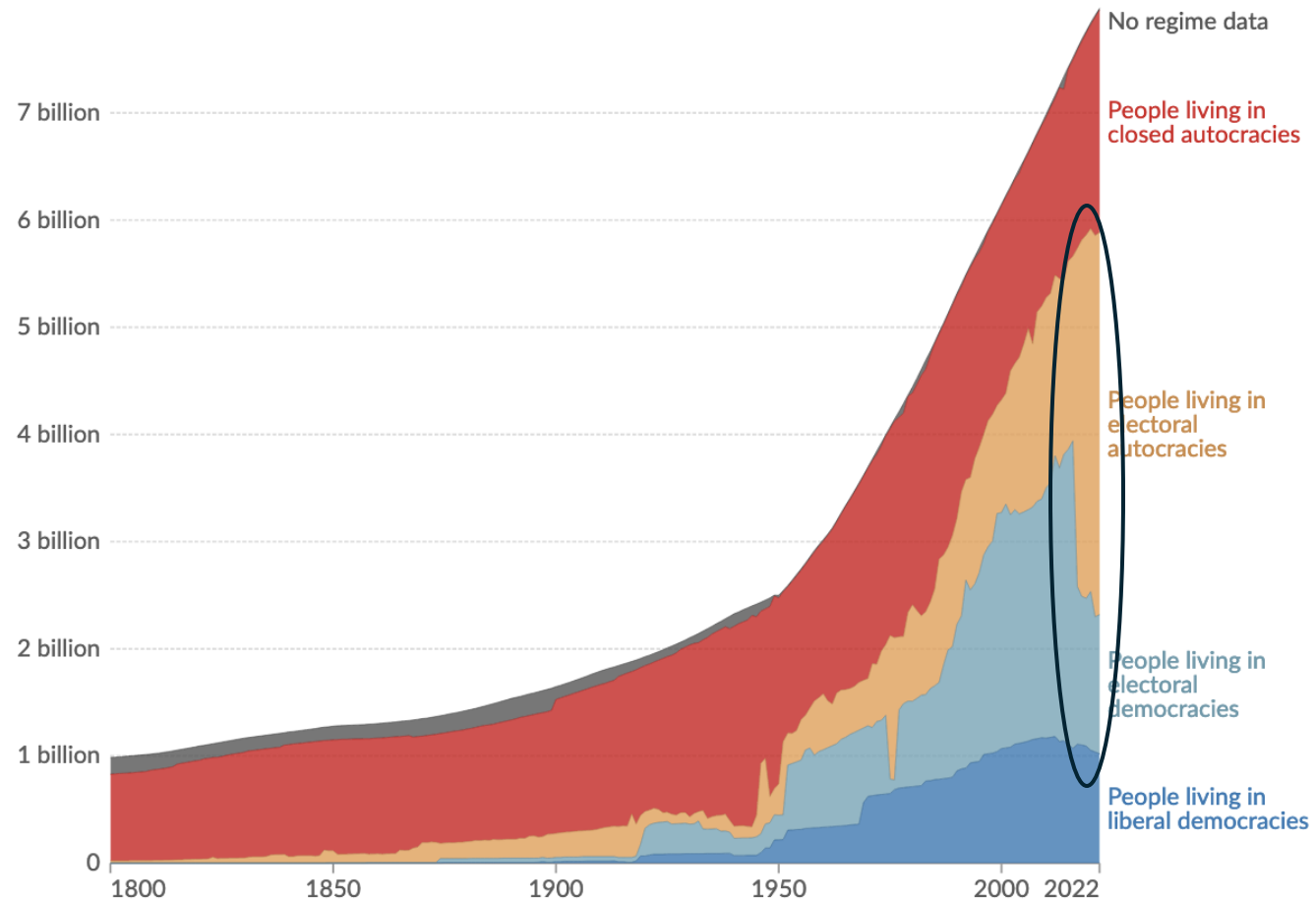


Explore the data →

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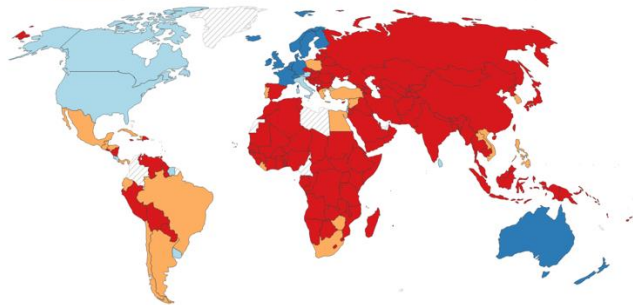
Explore the data →

Political regime, 1950

Based on the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the estimates by V-Dem's experts.

Table Map Chart

World



No data Closed autocracy Electoral autocracy Electoral democracy Liberal democracy

1789 2022

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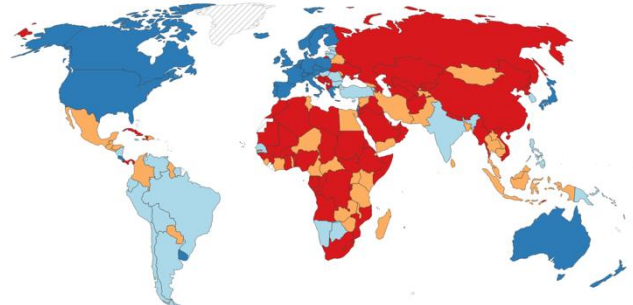
Note: The Chart tab uses numeric values, ranging from 0 for closed autocracies to 3 for liberal democracies.
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Political regime, 1990

Based on the classification by Lührmann et al. (2018) and the estimates by V-Dem's experts.

Table Map Chart

World



No data Closed autocracy Electoral autocracy Electoral democracy Liberal democracy

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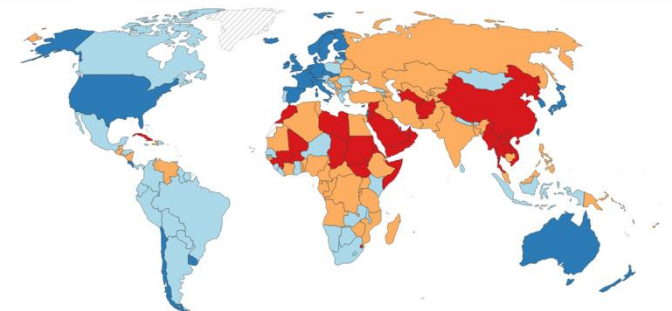
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Political regime, 2022

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Table Map Chart

World

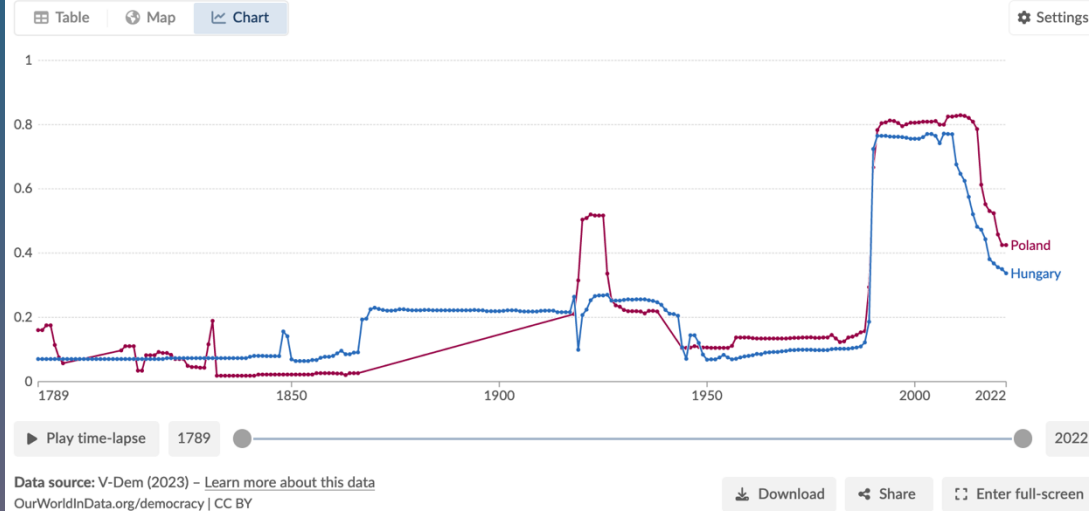


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1789 2022

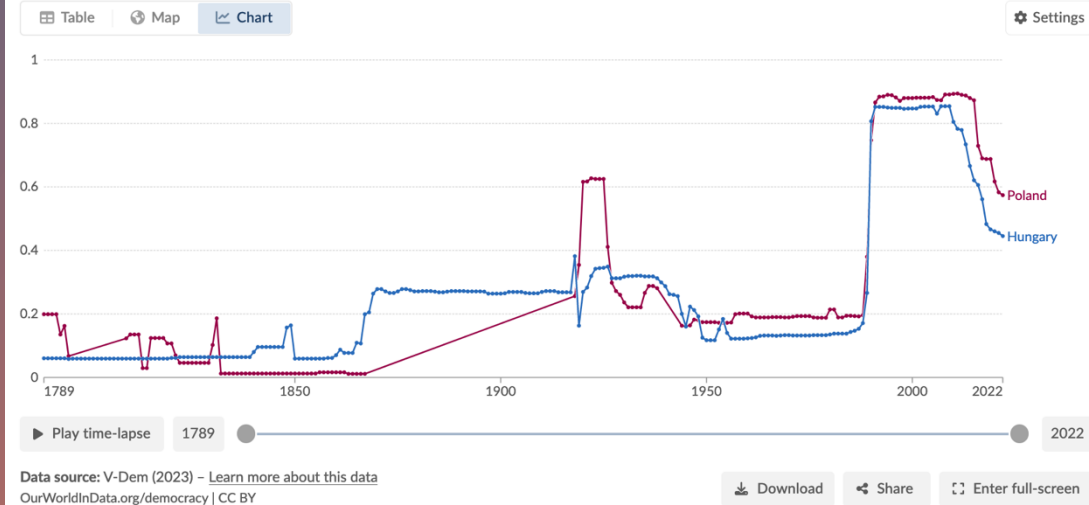
Liberal democracy index, 1789 to 2022

Based on the expert estimates and index by V-Dem. It combines information on voting rights, the freedom and fairness of elections, freedoms of association and expression, civil liberties, and executive constraints. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).



Electoral democracy index

Based on the expert estimates and index by V-Dem. It captures to which extent political leaders are elected under comprehensive voting rights in free and fair elections, and freedoms of association and expression are guaranteed. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).

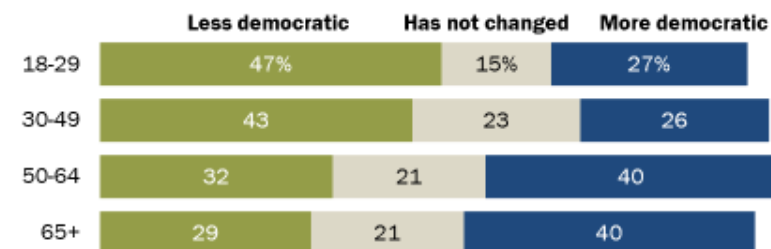


Hungary vs. Poland

- Both former communist states that had been occupied by Soviet Union
 - 1989 – communist regime formally abolished, leading to sharp change in political regime
 - 1991 – Soviet military occupation ends
- Different outcomes today
 - Poland has had a less prominent and continuing decline in democracy in recent years than Hungary
 - Poland's democracy somewhat stagnant today
- As of 2022, according to V-Dem, Poland classified as an **electoral democracy**, while Hungary classified as **electoral autocracy**

Young Hungarians more likely than older ones to say democracy has declined under Orban

% who say Hungary has become ___ since Viktor Orban became prime minister



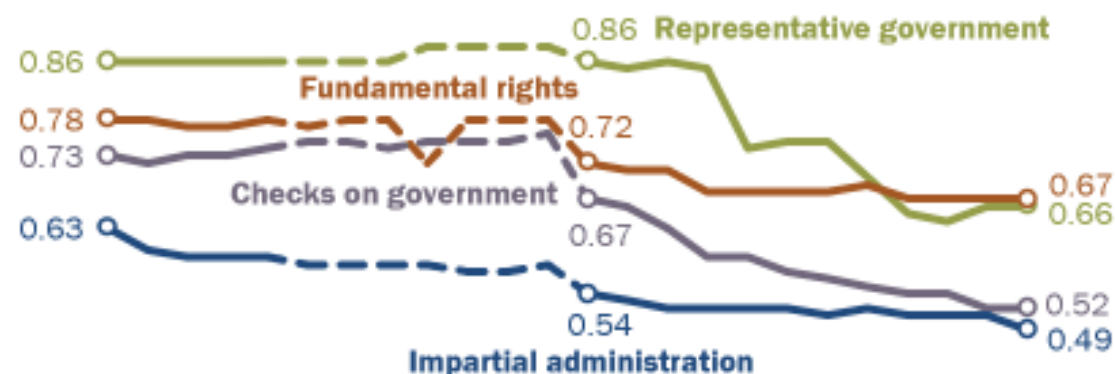
Note: Those who did not answer not shown.
Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey, Q36.

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Indicators show decline in Hungarian democracy

Rating of Hungarian democracy on measures of ...

1



— Viktor Orban was PM
- - Viktor Orban was opposition leader

0 1998 2002 2007 2012 2017 2021

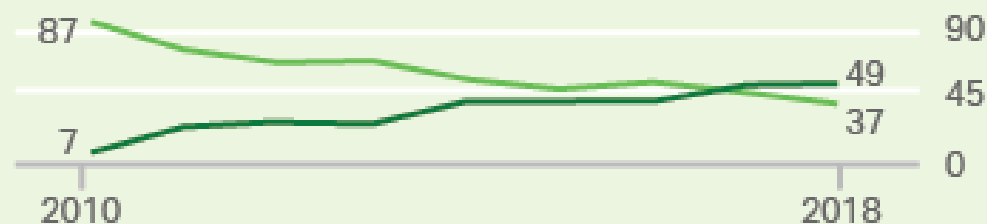
Note: Viktor Orban served as prime minister from 1998 to 2002 and again from 2010 to present.

Source: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

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Media Freedom Drops to Record Low in Hungary

% Yes, have a lot of freedom % No, do not



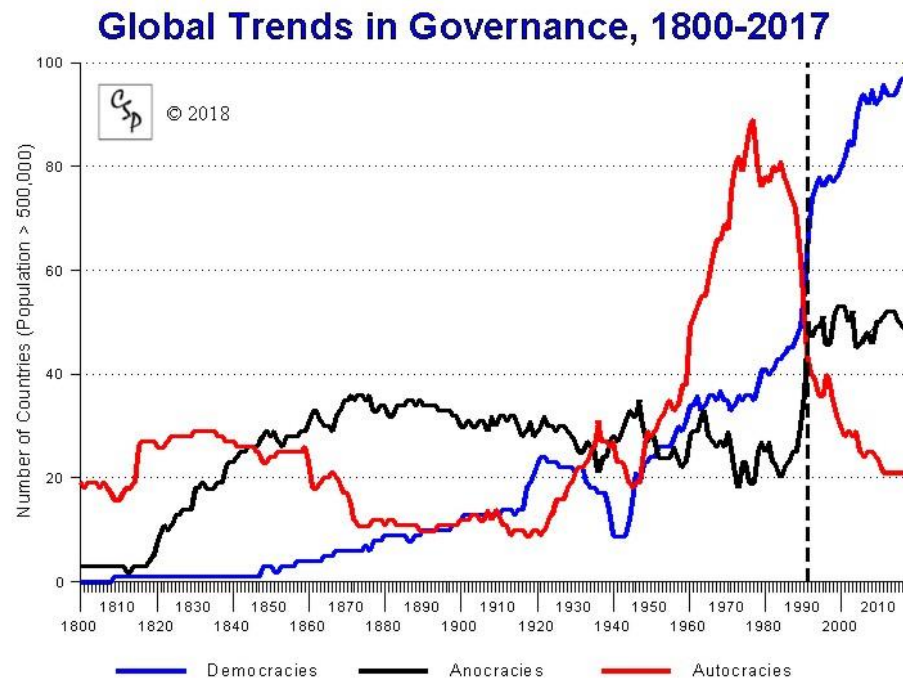
GALLUP WORLD POLL

Why measure democracy?

- Researchers and policy makers frequently need information about how democratic countries are, or whether a country is democracies or not
- Academics: Need it to test research claims. For example, do countries that are (more) democratic have...
 - Less war?
 - More equality?
 - Greater economic prosperity?
- Policymakers: Allocation of aid may be conditional on democratic performance
 - Objective of policy may also relate to improving democratic indicators, so it needs to be measurable
- Key criteria of concept measurement: **validity** and **reliability**!

How do different measures score democracy?

- **Continuous** = Not separated by distinct categories (i.e., can be 80% democratic)
- **Dichotomous** = 2 or more distinct values or categories (either is or is not)
- Democratization → becoming “more” democratic (**continuous**) or becoming democratic (**dichotomous**)?



Figured based on Polity, where -10 to -6 = **autocracy**, -5 to +5 = **anocracy**, +6 to +10 = **democracy**

Democracy Measurement How they score democracy

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) On a spectrum: 0 (highly undemocratic) to 1 (highly democratic)

Polity On a spectrum: -10 to 10, hereditary monarchy to consolidated democracy
Also as a classification: **autocracy** (-10 to -6) < **anocracy** (-5 to +5) < **democracy** (+6 to +10)

Freedom House As a classification: (1) not free < partly free < free and (2) non-democracy < electoral democracy

Regimes of the World As a classification: closed autocracy < electoral autocracy < electoral democracy < liberal democracy

Conceptualizing and measuring democracy

- Do we measure democracy in a narrow or a broader sense?
 - Narrow
 - Are the basic principles of democracy met?
 - Is the electoral political system is one in which citizens get to participate in free and fair elections?
 - Is it "liberal" so citizens have additional civil rights and are protected from the state?
 - Is there media freedom to allow citizens to make decisions?
 - Broader (in addition to basic principles...)
 - Is it participatory and deliberative?
 - Citizens should be *engaging* in elections, civil society should be active
 - Public discourse should be unrestrained
 - Is it effective?
 - Government should be able to successfully act on citizens' behalf

Democracy Measurement	How fine-grained is the measurement?
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)	Captures big to very small differences
Polity	Captures big to medium differences
Freedom House	Captures big differences
Regimes of the World	Captures big differences

How fine-grained is the measurement?

Democracy Measurement	How are democracy's characteristics assessed?
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)	Mostly through evaluations by experts. Then weighted for sub characteristics.
Polity	Mostly through evaluations by researchers themselves (based on academic literature and news reports). Then weighted for sub characteristics.
Freedom House	Mostly through evaluations by country and regional experts and researchers themselves (based on different sources). Then weighted for sub characteristics and whether necessary characteristics are present or not.
Regimes of the World	Mostly through evaluations by experts, some easy-to-observe characteristics evaluated by researchers themselves. Then weighted for sub characteristics and whether necessary characteristics are present or not.

How are democracy's characteristics assessed?

Democracy Measurement	How do they make evaluations precise and accurate across experts/researchers?
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)	5 or more experts per country, year, and characteristic, often 25 per country
Polity	Several researchers used
Freedom House	More than 100 experts and researchers used Rely on lots of different sources, including academic research, news, NGO reports, personal conversations, and on-the-ground research
Regimes of the World	5 or more experts per country, year, and characteristic, often 25 per country

How are measurements made to be precise and accurate?

Conceptual Overloading?

- The Freedom House Index has been criticized for overloading the concept of democracy with a bunch of characteristics that are really capturing political liberalism, social justice, and security (Schneider and Schmitter 2004)
- Other times measures are criticized for demanding "too little" of democracy, ignoring the different degrees to which electoral participation and party competition effectively render political leaders accountable to citizens
- **Different measures = different conceptualization.**
 - Freedom House, for example, does not account for executive restraint in its democracy scoring, while Polity weighs executive restraint heavily in its score



- Builds on Robert Dahls' concept of polyarchy
 - 2 dimensions are necessary for democratic government: high levels of **political participation** (inclusiveness) and **political contestation** (liberalization)
 - More realistic and attainable than “ideal democracy”
1. Elected officials
 2. Free and fair elections
 3. Inclusive suffrage (right to vote)
 4. Right to run for public office (and compete for votes)
 5. Freedom of expression
 6. Alternative sources of information (essentially media/press freedom)
 7. Associational autonomy (freedom to join associations, including parties)

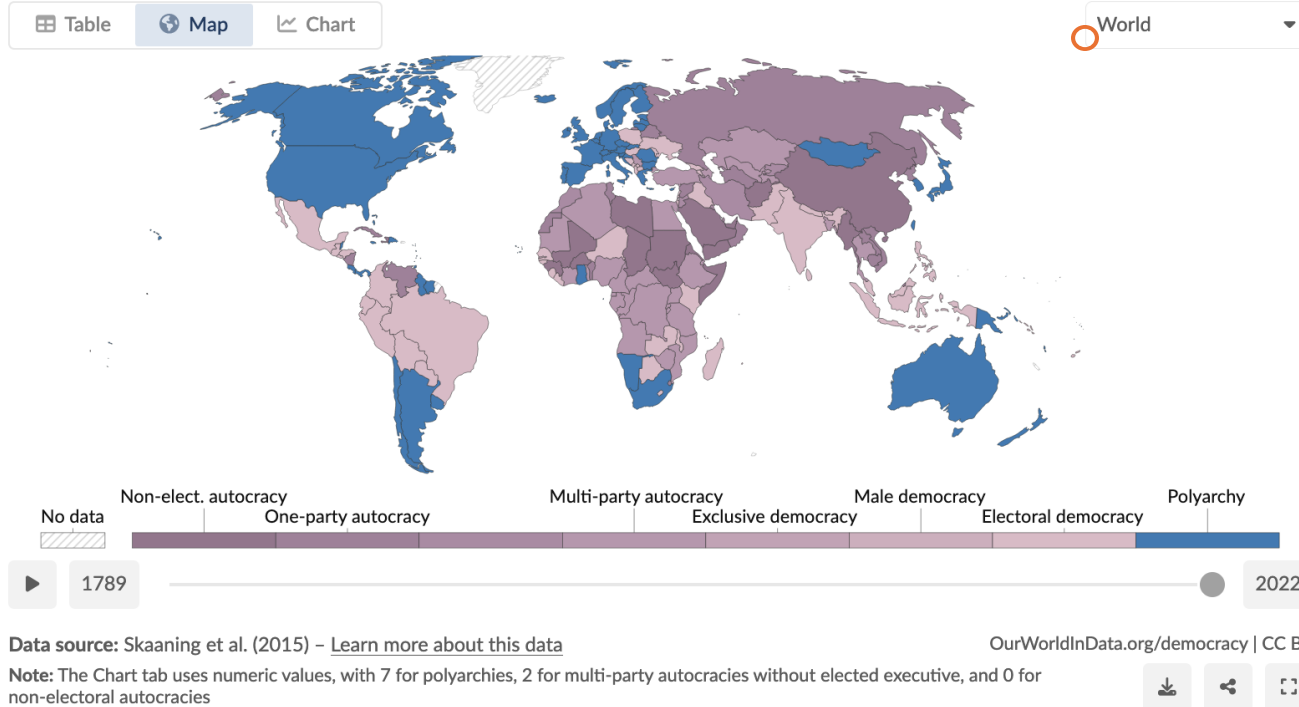
V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) and Polyarchy

Institutional Guarantee (Dahl)	EDI Component (V-Dem)
Freedom to form and join organizations	Freedom of Association Index
Freedom of expression	Freedom of Expression and Alternative Sources of Information
Alternative sources of information	
Right to vote	Share of population with suffrage
Free and fair elections	Clean Elections Index
Right of political leaders to compete for support [in the form of votes]	Elected Officials Index
Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference	
Eligibility for public office	

Polyarchy, 2022

Political regimes based on the classification and estimates by Skaaning et al. (2015). Polyarchies are understood here as political systems in which citizens have the right to choose the chief executive and the legislature in multi-party, uncertain elections, and enjoy freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.

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- V-Dem Polyarchy regime classification based on “Lexical Index of Electoral Democracy”
- 0: Non-electoral autocracy: Where citizens do not have the right to elect the chief executive or the legislature
- 3: Multi-party autocracy: Citizens have more than one choice, but election outcome is certain
- 6: Electoral democracies: mature democracies that have comprehensive suffrage for all
- 7: Polyarchy: electoral democracies that also protect the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association

Political Regime Classifications

V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index

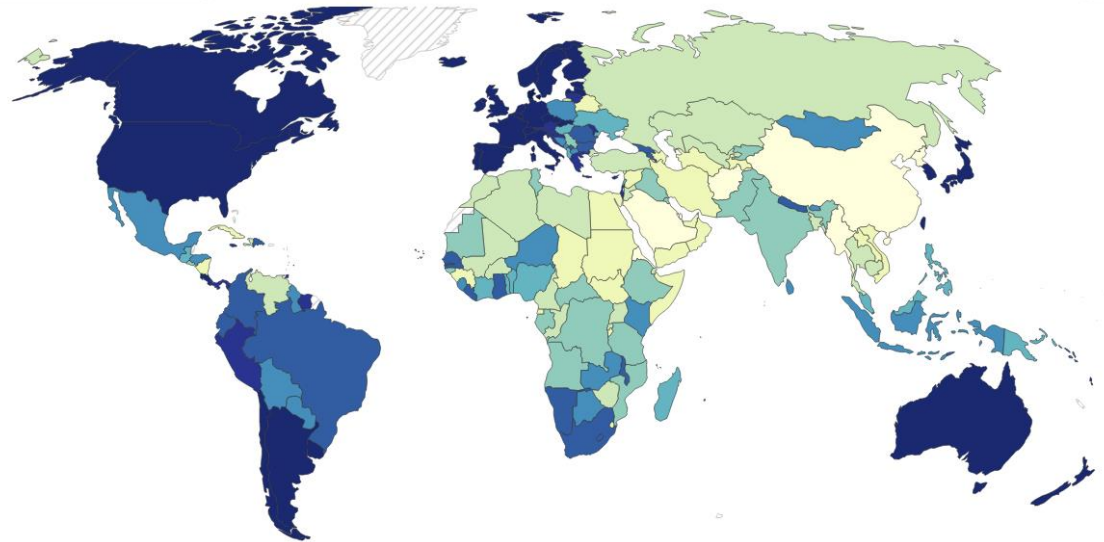
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World



2022



1789



2022

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V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index

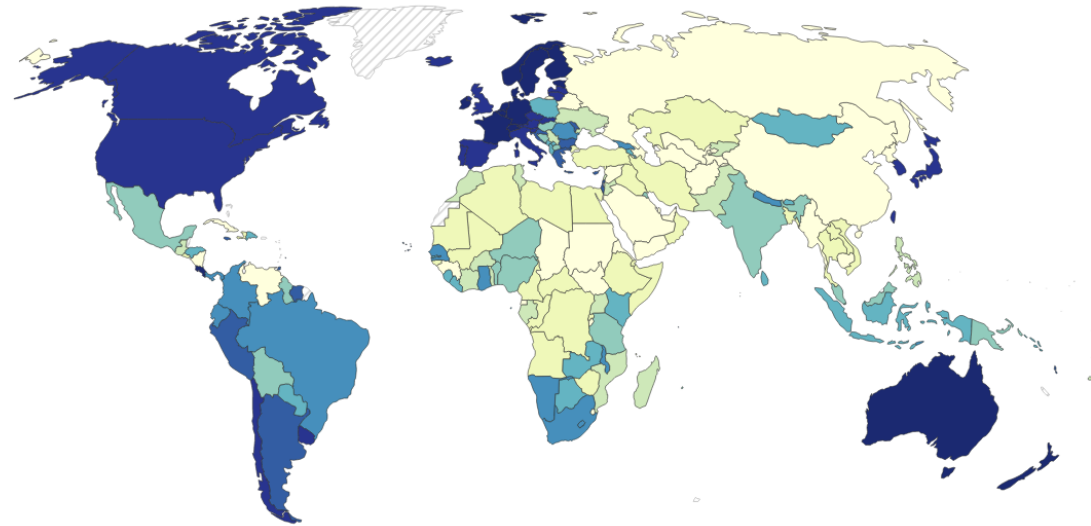
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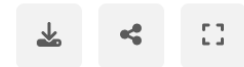
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Let's compare. Notice any differences in scores for liberal democracy vs. electoral democracy?

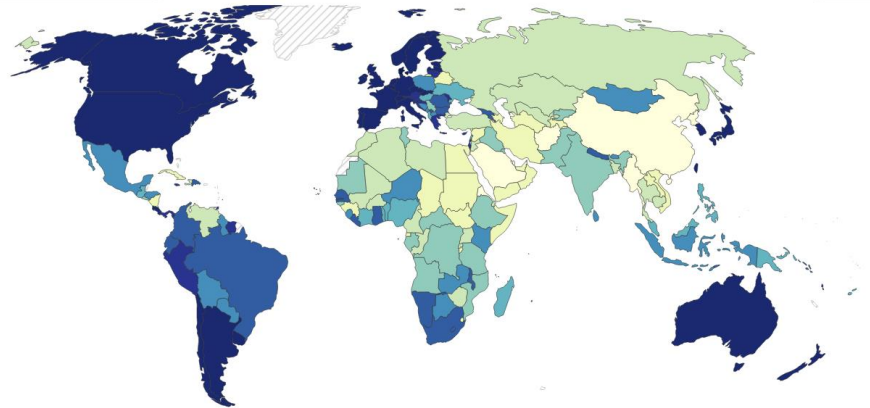
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2022

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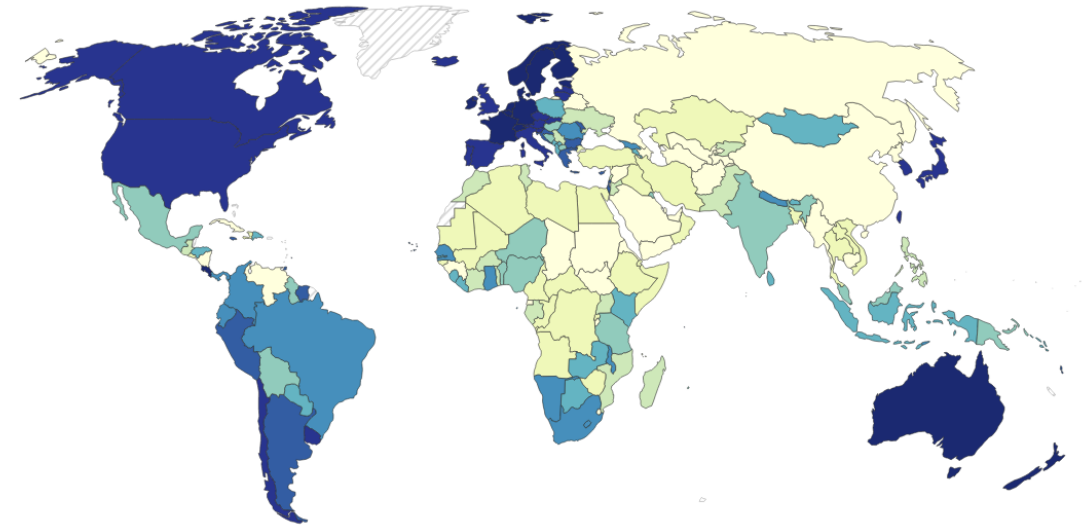
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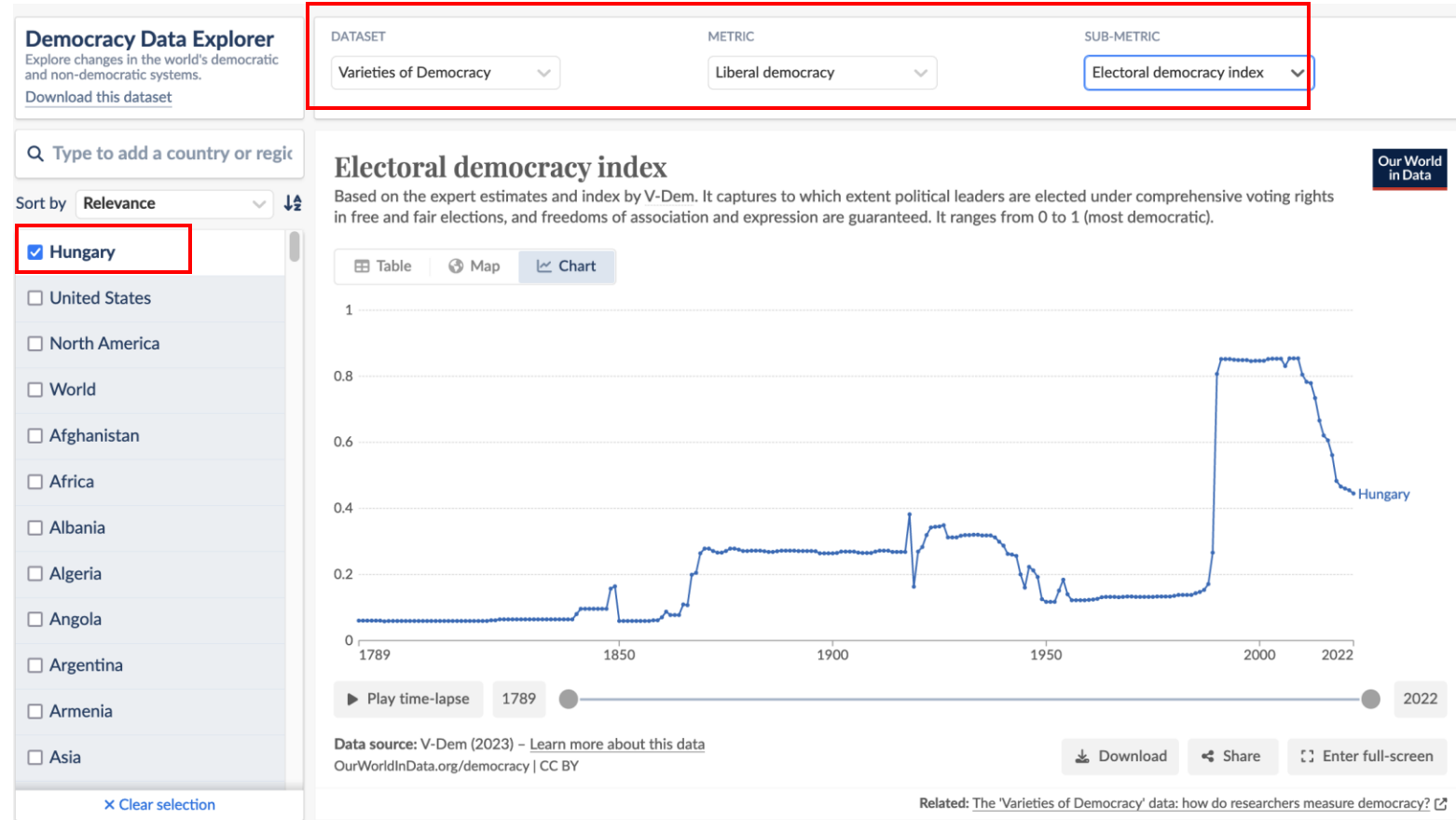
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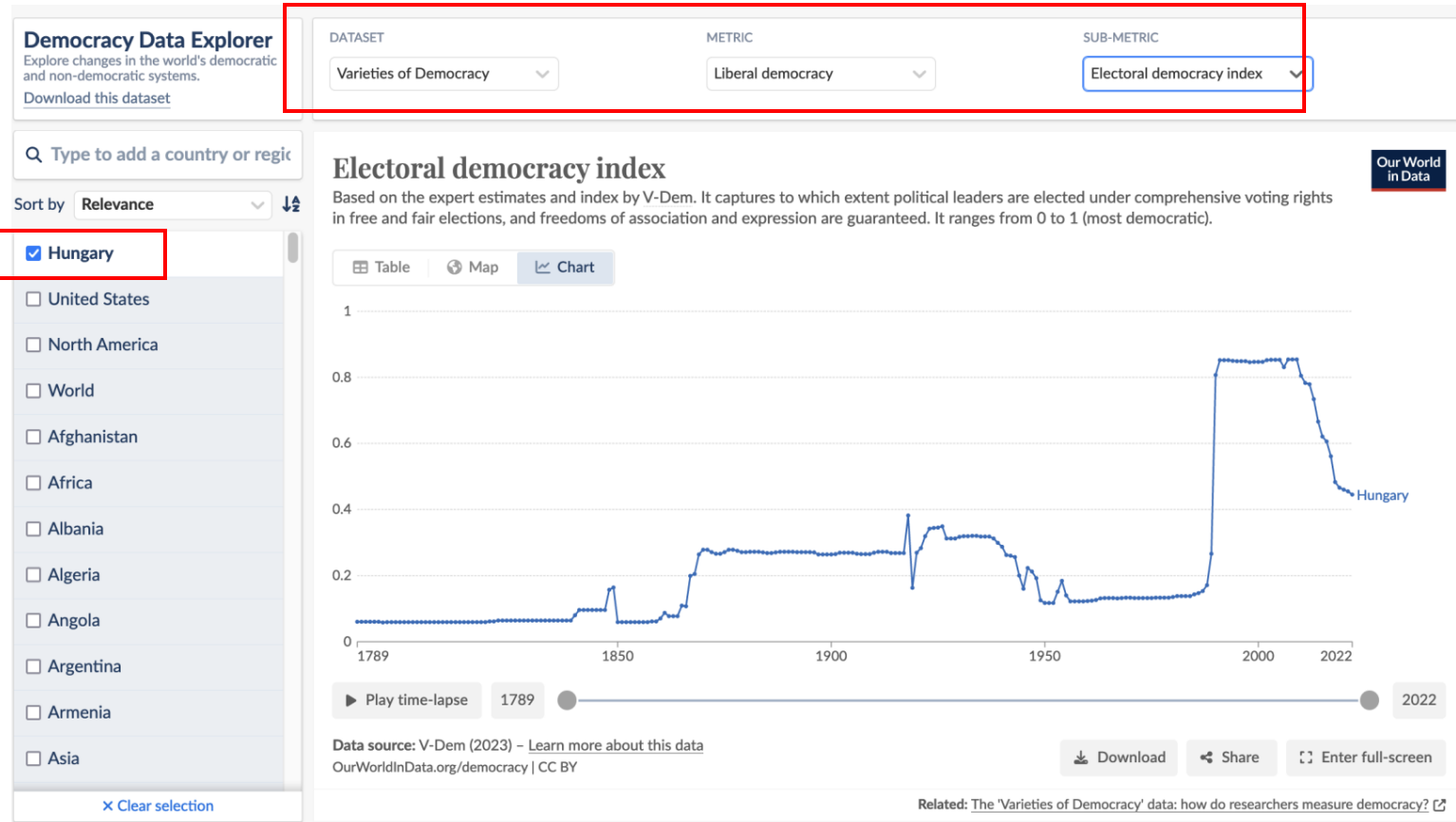
V-Dem Activity

- Get into pairs and pick a country that is of interest to both of you!
- Follow this link:
<https://ourworldindata.org/democracy#explore-data-on-democracy>
- Restrict to only your country in the left-hand menu
- Select “Dataset” = “Varieties of Democracy” at the top
- Explore different metrics and sub metrics for your country
- You can compare metrics with another country by selecting a 2nd country in the left-hand menu (try comparing with US!)



V-Dem Activity

1. What is your main observation about the level of democracy in your country today?
 1. Are there differences if you look at “electoral democracy” versus “liberal democracy”?
2. What is the main trend over time when it comes to the level of democracy in your country?
 - a. Has it changed a lot over time?
 - b. If so, are most of the changes recent or older?
 - c. Are the changes positive (democratization) or negative (democratic backsliding)?
3. Compared to another country, what are some similarities or differences in the characteristics of democracy in your country? For example, one country may be stronger in one metric than another.
4. What is something that surprised you about the metrics you found?



Summary

- Democracy gets its legitimacy from active participation of the "demos"
- Different conceptions of democracy emphasize procedural or substantive aspects → both are generally important!
- We measure democracy so we can study its causes and consequences!
- Every measure does things a little differently

