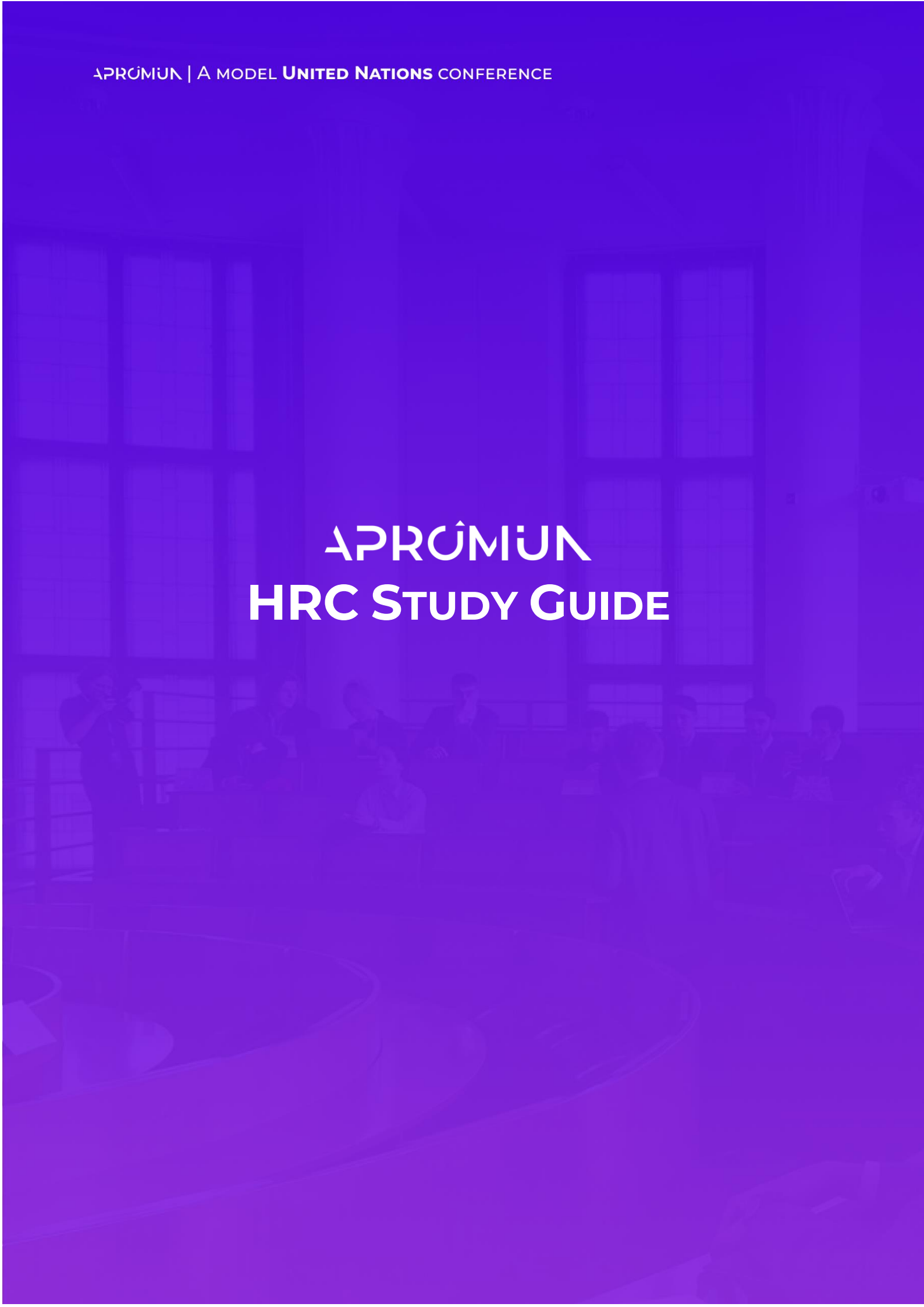


APRÓMÚN HRC STUDY GUIDE



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II. Letter from the Chairs

Esteemed delegates!

It is with great honor that we welcome you to the **AproMUN's 2023** United Nations Human Rights Council (**UNHRC**).

Our **expectations** of this committee **are high**. We have chosen quite an unusual topic for you, because we find the variety of possible routes that can be taken as a great adventure and it is our utmost pleasure to share this experience with all of you who have decided to take a part in our council. For new and experienced delegates alike, we see it as a fantastic opportunity to learn how to tackle such a complex issue by utilizing **effective debate and diplomacy** when dealing with problems which truly matter.

Today, our society is facing a major challenge concerning growing threats to all democratic principles. It is up to you, dear participants, to cooperate in reaching a consensus which will lead to the protection of pillars built by generations before us. Hopefully, the controversial grounds will yield **interesting debates**, therefore we are excited to see you all in action.

Please, make sure you understand the topic well and prepare a thoroughly written **Policy Statement** that covers all the necessary information regarding your respective countries. This study guide serves solely as an introduction to the topic, and, therefore, we request you to conduct **your own research** as well.

Best of luck and we wish you all a conference filled with fruitful debate and a platform where you can fully **unleash your creativity!**

Alex & Matej :)

III. Introduction to the Committee

The **Human Rights Council** (UNHRC) is a prominent body of the United Nations (UN) whose mission is the universal protection and cultivation of human rights worldwide. According to the UN, human rights include “the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.” These ideals have been an integral part of the organization ever since its inception in 1945, serving as a core subject in both the UN Charter, as well as the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, created in 1945 and 1948 respectively.

Prior to the founding of the UNHRC, the UN relied upon a subsidiary of the Economic and Social Council—the Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR)—to implement principles of human rights worldwide. However, due to criticism of unconstructive diplomacy regarding human rights issues, bias towards certain UN Member States, as well as controversial, careless resolutions in 2006, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly voted in favour of replacing the UNCHR with the newly founded UNHRC.

The Council consists of **47 members**, which are elected yearly by the General Assembly in staggered terms, meaning only certain positions are being voted upon at any given election. This is divided between 13 seats for the African Group, 13 for the Asia-Pacific Group, 6 for the Eastern European Group, 8 for the Latin American and Caribbean Group and finally 7 for the Western European and Others Group. While structurally more reasonable than its predecessor, the UNHRC, too, has received its fair share of criticism for allowing UN Member States with a track record of human rights violations to be members of the Council.

Today, the UNRC is responsible for “strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations.” The Human Rights Council, however, faces countless

challenges every year. As delegates of this council at AproMUN 2023, you will see yourself trying to solve the difficult question of **democratic backsliding**, a phenomenon which has seen fundamental human rights of people worldwide being jeopardized, with the goal of crafting a satisfactory, multilateral resolution to satisfy all parties.

IV. Introduction to the Topic

From its very first interpretations—ranging all the way back to the epoch of flourishing classical, Athenian antiquity—democracy has universally embodied the values of unity and freedom of expression. Surviving stern suppression throughout history, its core however survived the many attempts at its destruction from authoritarianism and autocracy, allowing it to thrive once more. Today, billions of people can proudly call themselves citizens of democratic states, where the power is vested only in them to freely affiliate in politics to implement social ideas without constraints. This system bestows unparalleled freedom upon the individual, allowing one to embrace equity rather than extremism all the while living in a state with greater opportunities for growth, prosperity and peace compared to its autocratic counterparts. Even though democracy—as any other political ideology—has its inherent flaws, according to the United Nations it, however, unquestionably "provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of people is exercised." Certain states nevertheless stray from these ideals, in a movement known as democratic backsliding.

Over the last couple of years, this concept has become a defining trend in global politics, referring to "the state-led debilitation or elimination of the political institutions sustaining an existing democracy." It is, therefore, essentially the reversal of the positive progress a state has made in maintaining a prosperous democracy, fundamentally not only harming the aforementioned principles that democracy thrives upon but also thereby restricting the liberties of the citizen. Democratic backsliding tends to be gradual and may not lead to the complete overthrow of democracy. Rather, it can occur incrementally, with leaders and governments taking legal and administrative measures to undermine democratic norms and institutions. This could be cause for concern because it could lead to the consolidation of authoritarian or illiberal regimes without the dramatic events that usually accompany coups or revolutions.

Figure 1. Democratic Backsliders Since 2005



Figure 1: Countries seen as Democratic Backsliders since 2005

After a global wave of democracy facilitated the ideology's prospering in the 1980s and later at the end of the Cold War, it has been steadily declining since the mid-2000s, where now, more than half of the world's democracies are in structural decline—even its most secure fortresses in Europe and the United States of America. Encompassing problems from restrictions on freedom of expression to distrust in the legitimacy of elections, leaders of the free world, unfortunately, find themselves facing unprecedented challenges and consequences ranging “from Russia’s war in Ukraine, cost of living crises, a looming global recession and climate change” according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. All of these variables provide a thriving environment for democratic backsliding to foster. Yet, despite being a phenomenon experienced worldwide, the motives for administrative officials and governments to develop anti-democratic principles are often unique due to the phenomenon's unpredictable nature.

The opinions of political scientists vary and were one to ask them why democratic backsliding occurs, one would hear a range of answers, lacking any clear consensus. Hence, it is necessary to not only consider the facts we are

provided with but to further utilize careful critical and analytical thinking to get to the root of the problem. One such possibility rests in analyzing the events that led up to democratic backsliding trends in certain states around the world, as a set of distinct reasons for its eventuality have been identified. These are divided into, so-called, internal and external drivers. They serve as partial explanations for the concept, and one of the best resources we have to carefully analyze the problem.

V. External Drivers

1. Russia and China

Many experts attribute the problem of democratic backsliding in certain countries to the influence authoritarian, pseudo-democratic countries such as the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China exert both upon their neighbours, as well as states lacking affiliation in an increasingly bipolar world order. Undoubtedly, the growing power and assertiveness of Russia and China have been detrimental to the worldwide fortunes of democracy. These nations actively seek to undermine shared norms and are willing to employ or threaten force to destabilize governments that have been democratically elected, as illustrated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These efforts encompass a spectrum of strategies, ranging from military and paramilitary actions to economic incentives and interference in electoral processes. Their influence is not the only factor one can consider, however. In India, Poland, Turkey, Brazil or Tunisia, for example, domestic affairs were responsible for the degradation of democracy, not the work of the dragon and the bear slashing their claws at democracies in their vicinity.

2. Social Media and Technology

With the advancement of technology at the dawn of the century, a new era of political propaganda and oft-times its evil machinations of misinformation and falsity carefully enveloped the masses. Many experts believe that social media, fundamentally controlled not by traditional media gatekeepers, but rather by international technology companies, "disproportionately benefits outsiders and extremist candidates." The unrestrained ability to share information publicly allows for the unfortunate widening of polarization in society. The breeding of animosity and distrust amongst individuals of different political beliefs further fundamentally affects the functioning of an effective democracy. This fact is extensively utilized by radicals to promote their agenda and campaign of hate. In nations where the general public is exposed to hoaxes and disinformation the most, the danger posed to democracy cannot be understated, as highlighted in

“Hungary, Turkey, and the Philippines that seek to stabilize and reinforce their new electoral authoritarianism at home.”

VI. Internal Drivers

1. Product of Populism

A common academic opinion about democratic backsliding suggests, that populist policies of a leader conform with the degradation of democracy in the states where it dictated the rule of law. Cited examples include the rise to power of Donald Trump—subsequently leading to a decrease in many democracy indexes—President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India, President Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, and President Nayib Bukele in El Salvador to name a few. On the other hand, however, the political agenda of populism may not necessarily have a direct impact on democratic backsliding, as compared to the autocratic and authoritarian tendencies exhibited by some leaders who promote it. While populism can serve as a means of rallying discontented citizens and amplifying their voices within the political landscape, the crucial factor lies in the manner in which leaders employ this rhetoric and the tactics they utilize for governance. When populist leaders undermine democratic institutions, curtail checks and balances, restrict freedoms, and concentrate power in their hands, it is these autocratic tendencies that pose a more significant threat to democratic backsliding, not populism. It is therefore imperative to analyze all variables of the equation, and to scrutinize such leaders to protect the increasingly more fragile integrity of democracy worldwide.

2. The Failure of Democracy

Another prominent argument to explain the tendency to swerve towards democratic backsliding lies in the apparent failure citizens attribute to democracy in their states. Widespread economic disparity, poverty and wealth inequality in society subsequently lead to frustration amongst the general populace, for instance. Examples of illiberal figures gaining power in the face of economic crises include Bolsonaro, Orbán, and Erdoğan, nations whose democratic solidity has slowly crumbled since. Furthermore, a political landscape dominated by corruption, ineffective governance or even political

gridlock fuels a fire, which, in certain states, spread engulfed everything in its path.

This omnipresent dissatisfaction from the citizens of a nation that become disillusioned with democracy due to perceived failures or ineffectiveness, become the ideal ground for authoritarian leaders to exploit this discontent by promising quick and often simplistic solutions to their grievances. They skillfully place blame on democratic structures for allegedly creating the very conditions that have given rise to these grievances. Interestingly, the grievances at the heart of this illiberal drive encompass a wide array of issues, extending beyond just mere economic concerns. They include deeply-rooted societal frustrations such as racial, religious, and ethnic marginalization, as well as public discontent over pervasive corruption, escalating crime rates, or perceived ineffectual governance, all carefully harnessed by leaders wishing to turn public outrage into their favour. These individuals often present themselves as strong figures who can "fix everything" through decisive actions, offering an alternative vision that may appeal to those disenchanted with the complexities and perceived inefficiencies of democratic processes.

VII. Conclusion

Democracy embodies a stronghold of solidarity amongst man; a historical pledge to not return to the times of destruction and war that were fueled by the greed of autocracy. As the world descends into an epoch dominated by economic downturn, a jeopardized geopolitical landscape and the global effects of war, this fortress has begun to crumble. One by one the beacons in the night are dying out, and if nothing is done, soon we will all be left in the dark. Universal democratic backsliding still can, however, be averted. While not ubiquitous, the causes of the phenomenon as well as its consequences are known, and it is crucial to commence effective diplomacy and debate on this topic to save liberty, to save unity and to save peace.

VIII. Possible Issues Regarding the Topic

Various possible threats may be the subject of discussion, yet democracy has been defined as a multidimensional, complex concept. The most common conceptualization throughout the international space is based on electoral, majoritarian, egalitarian, and liberal processes that lead the communities to governments by the people and for the people.

1. Attacks on Press Freedom

A functional democracy requires a free and independent media. Governments with autocracy tendencies entail attempts to manipulate or directly control the media. These efforts often include:

2. Censorship

Autocrats tend to maintain their power by media repression because they believe that gaining control over the flow of information means a guarantee over the system as its whole.

3. Harassment of Journalists

Last year, 86 journalists were murdered as a result of their impartial efforts to inform the general public about ongoing matters, mainly regarding internal and external affairs in the country of their residence. Since the onset of the digital era and artificial intelligence has altered every aspect of the information landscape, independent journalism is needed more than ever. This era has not only determined the journey of development of our society but has also triggered an avalanche of disinformation and propaganda. Thus, the role of governments to provide a suitable and safe environment for journalists is breaking down.

4. Erosion of Political Rights

Backsliding often involves the curtailment of the political rights and civil liberties of each individual. The ways in which people participate in political power have been enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Democratic backsliding can be seen as:

5. Electoral Fraud

This may occur as a way to acquire supremacy over the electoral process where a political candidate interferes illegally either by manipulation of the vote share in favour of the political candidate or against his rival candidates.

6. Suppression of the Opposition, of the Freedom of Speech and Restrictions of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

The NGO Human Rights Watch has pointed out that for instance, Erdogan's rule has become increasingly authoritarian. They brought up the limits and persecutory practices imposed on social networks. The Government has implemented measures that increase its capacity to monitor opposition points of view across social media and channels. If such content is not taken down, the Turkish government has the right to do it on its own or even punish websites containing opposition content. The enactment of restrictive laws raises international concerns, since in many cases, these laws are directly threatening pillars of human rights.

7. Discriminatory Policies

In a system supporting actions of autocracy, it is always visible how the partisan government is trying to achieve a seamless society where each individual is expected to behave in order to fulfill the vision of the leader. Therefore, the government is taking violent measures to repress minorities and their culture. Such an example of violence against minorities can be seen in the People's Republic of China, where the Chinese government has committed various human rights abuses against Uyghurs for their ethnic and religious differences. Since 2014, the Chinese Communist Party has imprisoned more than one million Uyghurs in Xinjiang internment camps, so-called "vocational education and training centers"

8. Concentration of Power

A common feature of democratic backsliding is the concentration of authority in the hands of a single leader or ruling party, as is the case of the Communist Party in the People's Republic of China, but also in countries such as Hungary,

Russia or Turkey where the power is concentrated in one person or one party even though they formally have established a multi-party system.

IX. Points to Consider

- What are the early warning signs of democratic backsliding, and how can we contain it before it gets out of control?
- How can we strengthen democratic principles in states to prevent the rise of polarization and backsliding?
- What measures can both individuals and states alike take to limit the consumption and spread of disinformation on social media platforms to restrict the rise of extremism?
- How can we reinforce the rule of law in nations with democratic backsliding backgrounds and ensure that it remains a pillar of governance for member states?
- How can governments and leaders alike be encouraged to prioritize democratic values and good governance practices?
- What measures can be implemented to ensure the integrity and fairness of elections, particularly against potential manipulation or interference?

X. Research

Please keep in mind that this document is only a guide to your research of the topic, which should direct you to what is being discussed. The majority of the research, however, should be done by you. When researching, make sure you keep in mind these recommendations:

- Make sure you know basic information about your assigned country/group – leader, population, political system, foreign relations (especially with other members of the committee), etc.
- Check your country's policies and approach to drug trafficking, how it tries to stop it, or does not try to stop it. Find out how effective these measures have proven.
- Find out how the topic specifically affects your country. Does it provide supply or demand? Is your country on the trafficking path?
- It is recommended to familiarize yourself with the policies of other countries in the committee.

XI. Position Paper

The position paper should be at least a half-page document, but one page is the standard, outlining your country's involvement and stance on the topic. It should cover these points:

- Present your country's approach to the agenda topic.
- Describe your country's past and present actions undertaken regarding the agenda topic, highlighting their effectiveness or lack of it.
- Introduce ideas for the resolution.
- Make sure your position paper, as well as your statements during the debates, correspond with the country's policy.
- Including factual knowledge, such as charts and statistics is highly recommended.

XII. Further Reading

More compact look at the issue

<https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/democracy>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/half-worlds-democracies-decline-intergovernmental-watchdog-2022-11-30/>

For an extensive overview of the problem

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/20/understanding-and-responding-to-global-democratic-backsliding-pub-88173>

[https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/laboratories-of-democratic-](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/laboratories-of-democratic-backsliding/0742F08306EFDD8612539F089853E4FE)

[backsliding/0742F08306EFDD8612539F089853E4FE](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/laboratories-of-democratic-backsliding/0742F08306EFDD8612539F089853E4FE)

<https://academic.oup.com/isr/article/25/2/viad019/7194243>

<https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/on-democratic-backsliding/>

To gather data

<https://ourworldindata.org/democracy?insight=two-centuries-ago-everyone-lacked-democratic-rights-now-billions-of-people-have-them#key-insights>

<https://ourworldindata.org/democracies-measurement>

XIII. Additional Images

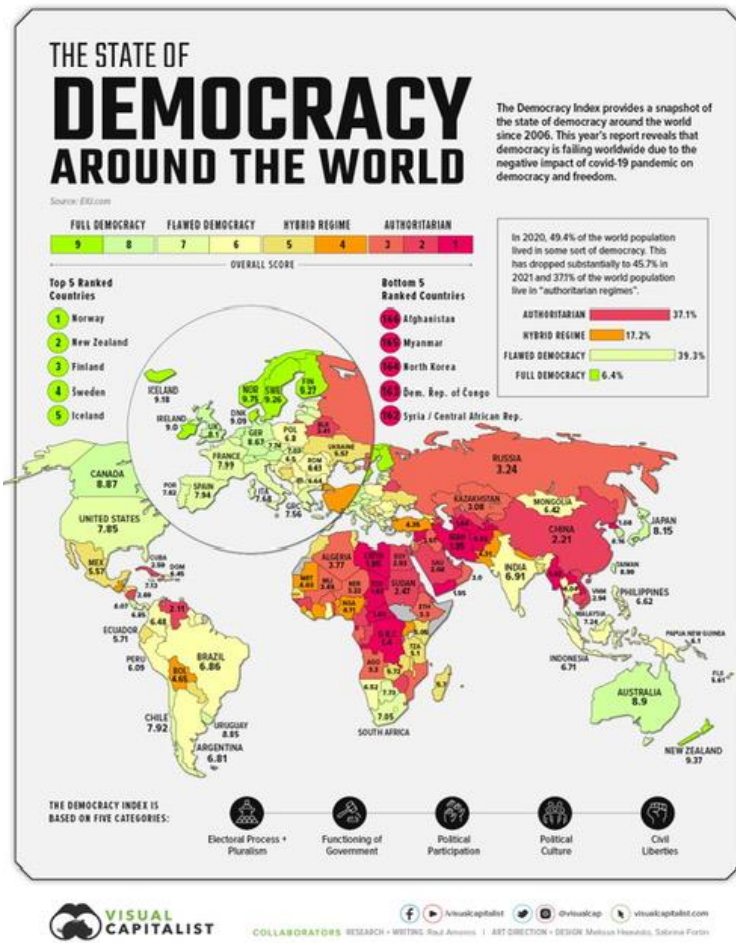
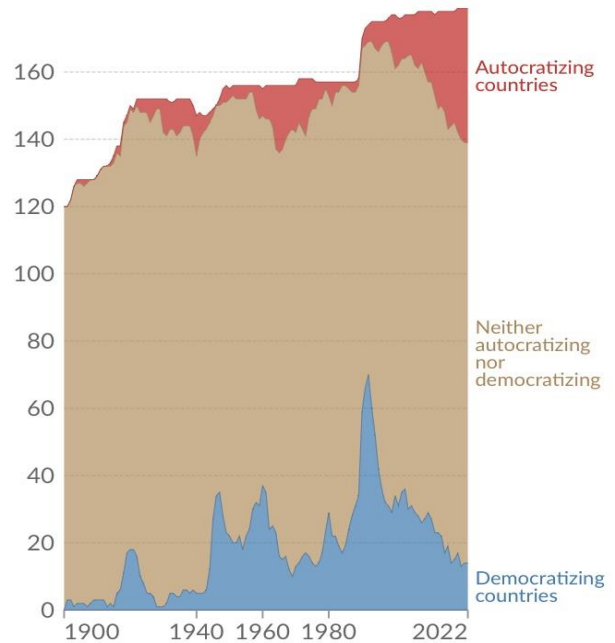


Figure 2: Democracy Index around the world

More countries are autocratizing recently

Political regimes based on the criteria of the classification by Episodes of Regime Transformation and the assessment by V-Dem's experts.

Our World in Data



Source: OWID based on Episodes of Regime Transformation (v13)
OurWorldInData.org/democracy • CC BY

CHART

SOURCES

Figure 3: Countries seen as autocratizing over the last century